

DOCTORAL EDUCATION

IN HUNGARY:

PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE



Doctoral Education in Hungary: Past, Present and Future

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Dear Reader,

Today, scientific and innovation performance plays a crucial role in the competitiveness of economies. This is why developing the broadest possible opportunities for the next generation of researchers is a strategic priority: it determines whether we can provide talented young people with the space and opportunity to thrive in scientific and innovation careers.

The comprehensive reform of Hungarian doctoral education also serves this goal. Following the legislative amendments adopted in June 2025, a new doctoral education system based on three pillars was launched in Hungary in September 2025, offering targeted career opportunities for various paths within the research profession. The measure was preceded by extensive professional consultations, and the reform was developed in agreement with the stakeholders involved: the Hungarian Rectors' Conference, the Association of Hungarian PhD and DLA Candidates, the National Conference of Student Governments, the Hungarian Doctoral Council and other partners all supported the changes.

The new structure is based on three tracks: research excellence, cooperative and traditional doctoral programmes. Research excellence doctoral education is designed for doctoral students who envision their future in a scientific research career. Those who choose this track can work on frontier scientific projects under the supervision of leading researchers. Cooperative doctoral education serves a dual purpose: it ensures the supply of future university educators and researchers, while also strengthening the links between universities and the economy. Doctoral students in this track work at universities, hospitals or research and development organisations alongside their studies. Additionally, traditional doctoral education remains available for young people.

This publication aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the reformed doctoral education system, as well as the professional assessment behind the reform and the defined objectives. The primary goal of the reformed doctoral system is to offer a more attractive and predictable career path for doctoral students, thereby attracting more talent to scientific and innovation careers, while also increasing the number of successful degree completions in Hungary, particularly in the life and physical sciences, which are crucial for innovation. Increased stipends, new tracks and strengthened university autonomy all aim to ensure that doctoral education more effectively supports the development of young talent.

I trust that the reform of doctoral education will encourage more talented young people to pursue careers in research, development and innovation, strengthening Hungary's scientific and innovation performance and, in turn, our country's social and economic competitiveness.

BÓDIS László

Deputy State Secretary for Innovation
Ministry of Culture and Innovation

Dear Reader,

The publication *Doctoral Education in Hungary: Past, Present and Future* aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the historical development of doctoral education in Hungary, its current state, and the ongoing transformation processes that will shape its future. Since its founding 32 years ago, the Association of Hungarian PhD and DLA Candidates (DOSZ) has been working to ensure that the interests of Hungarian doctoral students are represented in an organised, professionally grounded and credible manner within Hungary's higher education and research landscape.

The second chapter of the publication therefore presents the history and role of doctoral student representation: the journey from early initiatives to today's active, nationwide professional advocacy. The third section of the document provides a detailed overview of the current state of doctoral education. It analyses the social and professional situation of doctoral students in Hungary, their career prospects, and the systemic challenges that will shape the long-term future of Hungary's next generation of researchers. This exploratory work laid the foundation for clearly identifying the areas where doctoral education requires modernisation and structural strengthening. Building on the findings and collaborative work with the sector, the fourth part of the publication presents one of the most significant transformations in the history of doctoral education: the introduction of a three-pillar, differentiated structure for education and funding.

The new system introduces cooperative doctoral education and research excellence doctoral education alongside the traditional form, creating opportunities for young researchers to develop in support structures and work environments suited to their individual strengths and career goals. The chapter also discusses the related legislative changes in detail. DOSZ remains committed to ensuring that the future of doctoral education in Hungary is strong, transparent and internationally competitive. I hope this publication will serve as a useful guide for all its readers!

Dr. VÁMOSI Péter

President
Association of Hungarian PhD and DLA Candidates

Dear Reader,

The future of research, development and innovation careers is fundamentally shaped by the ability of the system for developing the next generation of researchers to renew itself and meet the challenges of the 21st century. Doctoral education plays a key role in this, as it is fundamental to establishing research and innovation careers.

This joint publication by the Association of Hungarian PhD and DLA Candidates and the National Innovation Agency focuses on the reform of doctoral education in Hungary. We aimed to present the development of doctoral education in Hungary to date, provide a comprehensive overview of the current situation, and highlight the opportunities offered by the new system. The changes and new approaches presented contribute to making doctoral education more effective, more flexible and aligned with international expectations, while strengthening the appeal of research and innovation careers.

Securing the next generation of researchers is a key issue that will determine the long-term competitiveness of Hungarian research and innovation. Interest in and motivation for research and innovation careers develop during the school years, which is why particular attention must be paid to fostering interest in science during this period. The National Innovation Agency considers it particularly important to engage the future generation of researchers and innovators at a young age. The Selye János Student Lab Network plays a key role in this, with the aim of promoting research careers among students. Our goal is to inspire students to pursue scientific and innovation careers through interactive, experience-based and practice-oriented extracurricular activities that go beyond school education, with a particular focus on STEM fields. In recent years, more than 70,000 young people have participated in student lab activities, and more than 23,000 contact hours of science programmes have been delivered. These activities bring science closer to students and help young people find their place in the world of research, development and innovation careers.

The researchers and innovators of the future are not shaped at a single level of education, but within a progressive system that extends from initial inspiration, through doctoral education, to careers in research, development and innovation. It is our shared responsibility to deliberately strengthen this system. I trust that the experiences and directions for development presented in this publication will contribute to further strengthening doctoral education in Hungary, making it an ever more important setting for nurturing talent and advancing scientific and innovation excellence.

MOLNÁR Dániel

Director of Research Talent Development
Hungarian Innovation Agency

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1. BACKGROUND

Doctoral (PhD/DLA) education in Hungary was first established with the adoption of Act LXXX of 1993 on Higher Education. In November 1993, doctoral students at Budapest University of Technology and Eötvös Loránd University decided to establish a national body for doctoral student representation. This became what is known today as the Association of Hungarian PhD and DLA Candidates (DOSZ). Initially, DOSZ was integrated into the organisational structure of the already existing National Conference of Student Governments (HÖÖK), the national representative body of undergraduate students. This integration meant that DOSZ could delegate two members to HÖÖK's ten-member executive board.

The next milestone in DOSZ's organisational development came at the beginning of the new millennium, when Parliament adopted Act XCVII of 2000, which entered into force on 2 July 2000. **Under this provision, students enrolled in doctoral education at higher education institutions, that is, doctoral students, are represented by the Association of Hungarian PhD and DLA Candidates.** Under the amendment, the organisation was granted the right to express opinions and make proposals to the administrative and other bodies governing higher education on issues affecting the specific situation of doctoral students arising from their research and teaching duties. As a result, DOSZ separated from HÖÖK's organisational framework and continued to operate as an independent organisation.

In 2005, Parliament once again amended the regulation of higher education. It was then that Act CXXXIX of 2005 on Higher Education was adopted. An important innovation of the law was the inclusion of a new right for DOSZ, under which a representative of DOSZ may attend meetings of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee for Higher Education as a non-voting member when agenda items related to doctoral education are discussed. DOSZ was granted a similar right with regard to the Hungarian Rectors' Conference. The law also placed DOSZ's financing on a new footing: under the legislation, the Ministry of Education could provide funding to DOSZ, with the planned annual allocation set at 0.65% of the national framework for annual per capita doctoral student funding. In practice, this amounted to 0.1% as actual annual funding. **These amendments established a stable foundation for the organisation's operations, enabling it to contribute as a reliable partner both in civil society and in shaping doctoral education within Hungarian higher education.**

In 2011, the legislature placed Hungarian higher education on a new footing by adopting Act CCIV of 2011 on National Higher Education. The Act defined DOSZ's operations in a quasi-public body form: it is an independent legal entity headquartered in Budapest, represented by its president, governed by its own statutes, and registered by the Education Office.

Following the amendments, DOSZ not only retained but further strengthened the rights it had acquired. DOSZ's reconstitution as a quasi-public body took place on 9 December 2012 at the Faculty of Humanities of Eötvös Loránd University.

As a broader observation, it is worth noting that the Higher Education Act of 2005 already made it mandatory to ensure doctoral student representation at the institutional level; however, at the time, doctoral student governments similar to the existing student self-governments were not established. The first doctoral student governments in Hungary were established under the National Higher Education Act. In 2012, doctoral student governments were established at 12 of a possible 27 institutions, with the University of Pécs being the first among them. The histories of DOSZ and the institutional self-governments intersect at this point: following DOSZ's 2011 organisational changes, the previous optional membership was replaced by mandatory membership of institutional doctoral student governments. Since then, DOSZ has remained committed to supporting the operation of doctoral student governments. Today, a total of 29 institutional doctoral student governments operate in Hungary.

The above clearly demonstrates that over the past more than 30 years, DOSZ has consistently been a stable pillar in shaping doctoral education in Hungary, contributing to the representation and advocacy of the interests of those enrolled in doctoral programmes. Over recent years, DOSZ has continuously developed proposals for legislative amendments and conducted consultations with representatives of successive Hungarian governments to ensure that legislative changes affecting higher education clearly benefit doctoral students. DOSZ actively participated in the 2016 systemic reform of doctoral education, when the previous doctoral path consisting of a three-year education period followed by a two-year doctoral candidacy period was replaced by a unified four-year doctoral programme. As discussed in detail below, DOSZ also contributed to achieving the best possible outcomes during the most recent reforms of doctoral education. This work is exemplified by the fact that in 2022, DOSZ signed a strategic cooperation agreement with the Ministry of Culture and Innovation, the governing body of the sector. Under the agreement, the parties cooperate to achieve short-, medium- and long-term objectives, all of which relate to the development of doctoral education.

STRATEGIC COMMITMENTS

IMPLEMENTED MEASURE

Expanding stipends for graduate and doctoral students

The University Research Scholarship Programme (EKÖP) has been launched, along with supplementary stipends at model-change institutions and the Doctoral Excellence Scholarship Programme (DKÖP) at state-maintained institutions.

Linking universities and businesses

- “A patent is worth a doctorate”
- Continuation of the Cooperative Doctoral Programme
- Extending social contribution tax relief for employees enrolled in doctoral programmes
- Tuition matching fund

Expanding doctoral programmes

Doctoral enrolment quotas have been opened up primarily in the expanded STEM fields

Service period (pension)

Pensionable service matching fund (50%)

Supporting talent

Doctoral entry after undergraduate degree for the most talented students

Establishing creditworthiness

In cooperation with the National Bank of Hungary, banks may accept doctoral stipends as income for lending purposes

Benefits for mothers

Extending deferral provisions for young researchers who become mothers during their doctoral studies

As a result of this cooperation agreement, a new scheme was introduced under which doctoral students currently enrolled in doctoral programmes can acquire pensionable service required for old-age pension eligibility during their doctoral studies, based on the principle of shared contribution. In all cases, the foundation for this is provided by the higher education institutions themselves. So far, Semmelweis University has taken advantage of this opportunity, where this new programme is already available as an established model.

This cooperation also provided the policy framework for establishing the creditworthiness of Hungarian state doctoral stipends, among other things. Today, banks are required to accept certificates issued by higher education institutions concerning doctoral stipends, provided that these certificates contain all the data necessary to establish the stipend as verified monthly net income, confirm the existence of the doctoral student status, and are dated no more than 12 months prior. This is based on point 10(a) of Section 2 of Decree No. 32/2014 (IX. 10.) of the National Bank of Hungary on the regulation of income-based instalments and loan-to-value ratios. Also as a result of this cooperation, the National Higher Education Act was amended so that during the degree acquisition procedure, that is, the phase of doctoral education following the complex examination, deferral of student status may be extended to up to six semesters in consideration of childbirth and in accordance with the doctoral regulations, instead of the general maximum of two semesters. It should be noted in connection with this amendment that previously, this preferential provision did not include the possibility of extending the deadline for the submission of the doctoral dissertation. In practice, this made it impossible to genuinely benefit from the deferral provision granted in consideration of childbirth. In connection with this, the law was amended so that the deadline for the submission of the doctoral dissertation may be extended by three academic years in consideration of childbirth, in cases deserving special consideration and in accordance with the doctoral regulations. With regard to the interpretation of the above, it should be highlighted that this provision does not apply to all doctoral students raising children, but only to those who gave birth or will give birth during their doctoral studies. The deadline for the submission of the doctoral dissertation is not automatically extended either: higher education institutions may decide on its extension in cases deserving special consideration, in accordance with their own regulations, upon the student's request. The extent of the extension is also determined by the institutions, ranging from one to six semesters, that is, up to the maximum of three academic years permitted by law. Accordingly, the amendment does not extend this provision to male doctoral students, which also highlights further advocacy work for the future.

Another recent positive change is that the home care allowance has also become available to doctoral students. This allowance is granted to biological or adoptive parents who care for a child incapable of self-care due to severe disability or chronic illness.

Eligibility was made possible by an amendment to Section 39/B of Act III of 1993 on Social Administration and Social Benefits, according to which students enrolled in full-time doctoral programmes are entitled to this support, unlike other full-time students in higher education, who remain ineligible for this benefit.

In addition to the positive results outlined above, mention should also be made of Hungary's new innovation strategy, the John von Neumann Program, adopted in 2023. This programme identified the support of doctoral education as a priority area. For example, it formulated the principle that "a patent is worth a doctorate", meaning that the state encourages innovation capacity and activities in both scientific advancement and doctoral education. The John von Neumann Program also set the objective of significantly increasing the proportion of those entering doctoral education, thereby raising the number of researchers per million inhabitants to 9,000. To this end, the legislature introduced measures such as expanding social contribution tax relief for the employment of doctoral students, providing supplementary support covering half of the tuition costs assumed by employers when their employees enrol in doctoral education, and covering half of the pension contributions for institutions that introduce the above-mentioned pension eligibility scheme for their doctoral students. The Program also emphasised the importance of research utilisation in scientific advancement and, consequently, in doctoral education.

In summary, it can be concluded that over the past 30 years, doctoral education has been fully or partially transformed at various intervals. Throughout this transformation process, the Association of Hungarian PhD and DLA Candidates has been present at every stage, consistently representing doctoral students and advocating for the fullest possible realisation of their interests. The developments of recent years confirm that the good relationship with the governing ministry has brought fruitful outcomes for all those enrolled in doctoral education. While these amendments represent significant progress, the continuous improvement of doctoral education and the situation of doctoral students will remain a key responsibility of both DOSZ and the governing ministry in the future.

2. THE STATE OF DOCTORAL EDUCATION IN HUNGARY

In order for the 2025 reform of the doctoral education system to be clearly understood, it is essential to present an overview of the current state of doctoral education in Hungary.

Number of doctoral students and degree holders

First, it should be noted that the number of those admitted to doctoral education and those obtaining doctoral degrees has gradually increased over the past 15 years. While in 2010, 2,233 students began their doctoral studies, only 1,275 obtained a doctoral degree in the same year. By contrast, in 2024, there were 2,927 new entrants and 2,033 degree holders. Accordingly, the number of new entrants increased by 31%, while the degree completion rate rose by 59.45%. In recent years, the number of new entrants has exceeded 3,000 on several occasions; however, it appears that this figure has approached the maximum achievable under the current system.

Proportion of degree holders in STEM fields

Examining the data from the past three years, it can also be observed that the proportion of degree holders in STEM and expanded STEM fields has remained stagnant despite the increase in the overall number of degree holders (ranging between 63% and 65% from 2022 to 2024). Given that Hungary currently lags behind the EU average in the proportion of doctoral degree holders in STEM fields in the 25–34 age group (0.4 per thousand in Hungary compared to the EU average of 0.8), progress in this area remains an important objective.

Degree completion rate

For doctoral students, it can be observed that only 5 to 6 out of 10 obtain a degree within 7 to 8 years of starting their studies, and even fewer within the 4-year period stipulated by law.

DOSZ survey on the state of doctoral education (February–March 2025)

The above data clearly indicate positive trends in doctoral education; however, the degree completion rate still falls short of the expected level. To explore the reasons for this, the Association of Hungarian PhD and DLA Candidates conducted a national survey among doctoral students in Hungary between 19 February and 2 March 2025. Through this survey, DOSZ sought to gain a comprehensive picture of the current situation of doctoral students, their challenges, and opportunities for improving doctoral education. A further aim of the research was to map doctoral students' experiences with their education, their motivations, and their professional and career prospects.

The survey can be considered successful, as a total of 1,312 Hungarian and international doctoral students from 26 higher education institutions completed it.

Motivations of doctoral students

Based on the question regarding the motivations of doctoral students, it was found that they apply to doctoral programmes due to professional interest, research opportunities, professional and academic careers, and the prospect of independent research work in the future.

The role of supervisors

The research also highlighted that, according to doctoral students, the professional competence of supervisors plays a decisive role in doctoral education. This is supported by the numerous enquiries received by the Legal Aid Service of the Association of Hungarian PhD and DLA Candidates from various higher education institutions. Among these enquiries, issues concerning supervisors (difficulties and shortcomings) account for a considerable proportion of all incoming questions. This area can therefore clearly be identified as one requiring change and further progress in the future. Without active, supportive and professional supervision, no meaningful increase in the degree completion rate is conceivable.

Post-degree career paths

Among the doctoral students who completed the Hungarian-language questionnaire, the largest group (41.6%) would like to remain in higher education in a university teaching and research career after obtaining their doctoral degree. 16% of respondents envision their future in industrial or corporate research and development, while 15.5% are considering a research career at research institutes. 6.8% of respondents plan to start or run their own business.

The responses of international doctoral students, that is, those who completed the English-language questionnaire, show a similar distribution: 58.5% would remain in higher education in a teaching and research career, 18.6% would seek employment in corporate or industrial research and development, 11.1% would work at a research institute, while 4.7% plan to start or run their own business.

Conclusions

Based on the responses, it is clear that there is a need for strengthening doctoral education and developing a transparent, predictable research career model that offers professional and financial recognition as well as clear career opportunities for doctoral students.

In response to these challenges, the governing ministry, together with its strategic partners including DOSZ, identified five priority areas and objectives for the reform of doctoral education. These are as follows:

1. Strengthening the role of doctoral positions created in research programmes
2. Strengthening the role of (expanded) cooperative doctoral education
3. Encouraging degree completion and increasing the proportion of degree holders
4. Further strengthening of expanded STEM fields within the internal structure of doctoral education
5. Further strengthening of university autonomy

To achieve the above objectives, numerous legislative amendments have been implemented recently, a summary of which is provided in the following chapter.

3. THE NEW SYSTEM OF DOCTORAL EDUCATION

Based on the findings mentioned above, the governing ministry and the legislature recognised the need to reform the doctoral education system. As a result of the amendments, the previously more or less unified doctoral education system has been transformed into a three-pillar structure. It is important to note that doctoral education remains a higher education student status; however, new forms of support are being introduced, aimed at increasing the professional and financial recognition of doctoral students. The new financing and employment structures entail specific rules, leading to a fragmentation of the doctoral education system.

Traditional doctoral education (1) remains in place, while cooperative doctoral education (2) has been formally introduced into the system, and research excellence doctoral education (3) has been established.

TRADITIONAL DOCTORAL EDUCATION	COOPERATIVE DOCTORAL EDUCATION	RESEARCH EXCELLENCE DOCTORAL EDUCATION
Employment is not required to begin the programme	Employment at a higher education institution, healthcare provider, or another body specified in government decree (see section 4.8)	Doctoral position within an excellence research programme (e.g. National Research, Development and Innovation Office grant)
Student status	Employment and student status simultaneously	Employment and student status simultaneously
Stipend ranging from HUF 140,000 to 180,000	State-funded programme: HUF 250,000 / month	Self-funded programme that can be covered by the project
Students may be employed both within and outside the institution	Salary according to general regulations	Salary of at least twice the minimum wage

A novelty in all types of doctoral education, including for doctoral students in **traditional doctoral education**, is that the exclusivity of the credit system in performance assessment has been abolished. Additionally, a new option has been introduced whereby doctoral students receive the full stipend for the entire duration of the programme even if they complete their doctoral studies earlier than planned. These changes also apply to students in categories 2 and 3.

Cooperative doctoral education is available to doctoral students who, alongside their studies, work at least 20 hours per week in a teaching and research position at a higher education institution, at a healthcare provider, or at a company engaged in research and development, under some form of employment relationship. For these students, the legislature significantly increased the doctoral stipend to a net amount of HUF 250,000 per month, so that the stipend and salary together amount to a monthly net income of at least HUF 400,000. It is important to note that henceforth the Hungarian Doctoral Council (ODT) will make proposals regarding cooperative and non-cooperative doctoral positions to the minister responsible for higher education. The precursor to cooperative doctoral education was the Cooperative Doctoral Program (KDP), launched in 2020 under a grant-based structure, which was primarily intended to promote synergies between companies and higher education institutions. This subsequently evolved into cooperative doctoral education and became integrated at the system level into Hungarian doctoral education.

In **research excellence doctoral education**, doctoral students begin their doctoral studies by joining a research programme at a university or at the Hungarian Research Network (HUN-REN), while simultaneously pursuing their doctoral education. The aim behind the creation of this category, based on international practice, primarily from Western Europe and the United States, is that excellence research programmes carefully selected by the research funding agency (in Hungary, the National Research, Development and Innovation Office) should play a significantly greater role in training the next generation of researchers in the future. In this form of education, doctoral students therefore work full-time as researchers on a research project, through which they acquire the knowledge necessary for conducting independent research. Accordingly, in research excellence doctoral education, doctoral students are formally enrolled in self-funded programmes (where the tuition is covered by the state funding provided for the research project and may not exceed HUF 500,000 per semester), and thus they receive a salary instead of a stipend. The doctoral student's salary is also funded by the grant. The renewed National Research Excellence Programme (NKKP) plays a defining role in research excellence doctoral education. This flagship research grant, with an annual budget of HUF 40 billion, will from 2026 require successful applicants to create at least one doctoral position within their research project, with the doctoral student receiving a salary equivalent to at least twice the minimum wage for the given year (in 2026, this means a gross monthly salary of at least HUF 645,000). As a result, 300 to 350 new doctoral positions with attractive financial incentives for doctoral students may be created annually within the NKKP alone. Doctoral students who obtain their degree in these programmes may become key figures in the next generation of (academic) researchers. This form of education can be organised in a fully flexible manner, given that the legislature has allowed for deviations from the prevailing rules of the doctoral school based on an agreement between the doctoral student and the doctoral school.

The reform does not establish a hierarchy among doctoral students, but rather aligns the different forms of doctoral education with the varying strengths and career goals of young researchers. Doctoral students oriented towards university teaching and research or the industrial sector may choose cooperative education, while research excellence education offers a competitive alternative for those who plan their future as researchers. Meanwhile, for those who do not closely identify with either direction, the option remains to choose type 1, that is, traditional doctoral education, at a pace and in a manner suited to their own needs.

The reform of the doctoral system has been embodied in numerous legislative amendments, which can be summarised as follows. First, it should be noted that the legislative changes can be divided into two main groups: on the one hand, changes at the level of acts, and on the other hand, changes at the level of government decrees. Of these, we will first review the changes at the level of acts.



3.1 Reform of the credit system

The Hungarian doctoral education system operated on the basis of a credit system until the 2025 reform. This meant that the National Higher Education Act prescribed for all students and higher education institutions how many credits had to be completed in doctoral education in order to obtain the pre-degree certificate. The mandatory number of credits to be completed in doctoral education was 240. In addition, Hungarian higher education law recognised other credit-based requirements that were generally applicable, such as the mandatory number of credits (90) required for admission to the complex examination, as prescribed by the Hungarian Doctoral Council. It should be noted that this rule is still in force today, and it would therefore be advisable for the Hungarian Doctoral Council to review its rules on admission to the complex examination.

The amendment and its impact

The increase in higher education autonomy

The doctoral schools of higher education institutions may decide whether to retain the credit system or phase it out and organise doctoral education without it. As a result, the scope and responsibility of higher education institutions and doctoral schools in defining the requirements for doctoral students is further strengthened, which, based on international examples, can be operated effectively.

Obtaining the pre-degree certificate

If higher education institutions do not retain the credit system, they will also need to modify the conditions for obtaining the pre-degree certificate and link them to precise professional performance requirements.

Timing of the complex examination

A logical consequence of the amendment is that the complex examination is no longer tied to the end of the fourth semester of the programme, but may be completed at any time following the acquisition of the theoretical knowledge.

Requirements for individual preparation

The amendments affecting the credit system and thus the complex examination also had an impact on the rules for individual preparation. In the case of individual preparation, the legislature decided that the required achievements may be determined by higher education institutions and are no longer linked to the complex examination.

APPLICABILITY

1 September 2025

3.2 Abolition of mandatory class hours

Under the previously applicable legislation, full-time doctoral education consisted of at least 40 class hours per semester. The amendment abolished this requirement.

The amendment and its impact

The increase in higher education autonomy

Higher education institutions now can have greater flexibility, as the mandatory requirement of 40 contact hours per semester has been abolished. On this basis, institutions – following decisions taken by their doctoral schools – may retain their previous system of organising teaching, or they may adopt alternative arrangements in place of scheduled contact hours. Consequently, the compulsory number of contact hours may be reduced to zero.

APPLICABILITY

1 September 2025



3.3 Work within the framework of doctoral education

Since the 2016 reform of doctoral education, the applicable rule was that higher education institutions could require doctoral students to work one day per week on teaching or research.

The amendment and its impact

The increase in student autonomy

As a result of the amendment, higher education institutions may no longer require doctoral students to work at all within the framework of their education. Naturally, work alongside studies is an integral part of cooperative and research excellence doctoral education, but this is carried out on a contractual basis, closely linked to the doctoral student's research topic, rather than being based on obligations arising from the student status.

Work alongside studies at institutions

Doctoral students may continue to work within the institution if the higher education institution and the doctoral student agree on this, for appropriate payment, under a student employment contract. However, in this case, the work may not exceed 50% of the weekly full-time working hours on average per semester, that is, 20 hours. It is important to note that this rule does not apply to students in research excellence and cooperative doctoral education.

It should also be highlighted that institutions may still employ doctoral students under traditional employment contracts or public service agreements. The above rules do not apply to these cases.

This means that in traditional doctoral education, for employment not exceeding half of full-time working hours, doctoral students may be employed under student employment contracts or traditional employment contracts (e.g. assistant lecturer or research assistant appointments). However, if the institution wishes to employ the doctoral student full-time, as a general rule only traditional employment contracts or public service appointments are available.

By contrast, in cooperative and research excellence doctoral education, employment may take place under both student employment contracts and traditional employment contracts.

Work alongside studies outside the institution

It remains possible for doctoral students to maintain employment outside the higher education institution while completing their studies. This is not excluded by legislation; however, higher education institutions may decide to exclude this option for their students, though this may only be applied on a phased basis.

APPLICABILITY

1 September 2026

3.4 Reclassification to self-funded doctoral education

Under the previously applicable regulations, there was no possibility of reclassification between forms of education in doctoral studies. This meant that a high-performing self-funded doctoral student had no opportunity to apply for Hungarian state scholarship status, and conversely, higher education institutions were not entitled to reclassify underperforming doctoral students to self-funded status.

The amendment and its impact

The increase in student autonomy

Self-funded doctoral students are given the opportunity to be reclassified to Hungarian state scholarship status if they perform adequately and such an opportunity arises.

The increase in higher education autonomy

Higher education institutions are given the opportunity to reclassify underperforming doctoral students to self-funded education, thus allowing clear feedback on the doctoral student's work to be provided outside of the complex examination as well.

Stipend increase

The Hungarian state stipend for participants in cooperative doctoral education is uniformly HUF 250,000 per month, regardless of the stage of education.

APPLICABILITY

1 September 2025

3.5 Limited repayment obligation

In the Hungarian doctoral education system, there is no, and has never been, a general repayment obligation for Hungarian state scholarships.

The amendment and its impact

Incentive for timely degree completion

For doctoral students in cooperative doctoral education, a 10% repayment obligation has been introduced alongside the significant stipend increase. This applies if the doctoral student does not obtain a doctoral degree within 6 years of establishing their student status. In terms of amount, this means 1/10 of the stipend received, adjusted for inflation. The repayment obligation is not necessarily a lump sum, as instalment payments over 15 years may also be authorised upon the student's request.

No general repayment obligation

The rule that there is no general repayment obligation in doctoral education remains in force. This means that if a doctoral student does not obtain a doctoral degree within the deadline specified by law, this does not entail an obligation to repay the received stipend. However, participants in cooperative doctoral education are subject to the limited repayment obligation mentioned above.

APPLICABILITY

1 September 2025

3.6 Eligibility for the full stipend

Although not common, it is nonetheless an existing phenomenon among Hungarian doctoral students to extend their studies to the end of the programme duration, that is, four years, solely in order to receive the Hungarian state stipend for the full 4-year period, even though this would not be necessary for their academic progress.

The amendment and its impact

The increase in student autonomy

As a result of the amendment, doctoral students receive the full stipend for the entire four years even if they obtain their doctoral degree in less than four years after starting their studies. In such cases, the institution also becomes entitled to the full amount of institutional normative funding for the doctoral student for the entire programme duration.

APPLICABILITY

Applicable from 20 June 2025, including for students already enrolled

3.7 Stipend increase for participants in cooperative doctoral education

It should be noted that the Cooperative Doctoral Programme previously involved re-search at a private employer (typically a research and development company) in expanded STEM fields, alongside traditional doctoral education at a higher education institution. This has changed as a result of the structural reforms, so that this programme now represents type 2 doctoral education, that is, where the doctoral student works at least part-time as a teacher or researcher at a higher education institution, a healthcare provider, or another employer specified in a government decree, alongside their doctoral studies. Prior to the structural reform, in the doctoral education launched in September 2016 and now considered traditional, all doctoral students were uniformly entitled to a monthly stipend of HUF 140,000 and HUF 180,000, respectively, in the two stages of the programme.

Stipend increase

The Hungarian state stipend for participants in cooperative doctoral education is uniformly HUF 250,000 per month, regardless of the stage of education.

APPLICABILITY

1 September 2025

3.8 Rules at the level of government decrees

The above amendments at the level of acts are supplemented by amendments to Government Decree No. 387/2012 (XII. 19.) on doctoral schools, the procedure for doctoral degrees and habilitation. These amendments are summarised in the following points:

- In research excellence doctoral education, the student and the institution conclude a detailed contract (supervisor, research topic, tuition, obligations, etc.), in which they may deviate from the rules of the given doctoral school, thereby ensuring that research excellence doctoral education operates in a fully flexible regulatory environment and can thus be flexibly adapted to the structure of the given research project.
- In cooperative doctoral education, the government defines which organisations may act as employers, that is, organisations that:
 - a. hold a research and development qualification certificate issued under Act LXXVI of 2014 on Scientific Research, Development and Innovation, dated no more than three years prior to the start of the doctoral programme, or
 - b. have participated or are participating as employers in the Cooperative Doctoral Programme announced by the National Research, Development and Innovation Office or in the Cooperative Doctoral Programme of the University Research Scholarship Programme, or
 - c. have received research and development funding from the National Research, Development and Innovation Office no more than three years prior to the start of the doctoral programme.

- Time acquired as a resident or central trainee in healthcare vocational training becomes creditable.
- Individual preparation candidates must demonstrate their suitability through publications or artistic achievements.
- Individual preparation candidates must submit their dissertation within five years of establishing their student status.

These provisions are to be applied on a phased basis, first to doctoral students admitted on 1 September 2025.

It is also important to highlight that, pursuant to the amendment of Government Decree No. 162/2015 (VI. 30.) on the healthcare specialty training system, the scholarships of the Resident Support Programme, and the support for young specialist doctors, resident positions may be split, meaning that two part-time (cooperative) doctoral students may be admitted to a single resident position.

3.9 Summary

In summary, it can be concluded that the legislature's 2025 amendments affecting doctoral education have brought the most significant changes to Hungarian doctoral education since the 2016 reform. Through these amendments – particularly the expansion of doctoral positions and the increase in the professional and financial recognition of doctoral students – an important step has been taken towards addressing the challenges outlined in the assessment of the current situation and achieving the defined objectives.

However, it should also be emphasised that a higher education structure can never be considered complete; it must be continuously monitored so that good practices and practices requiring improvement that emerge in actual implementation as a result of legislative intent become visible, and if necessary, further intervention may be required in order to achieve the original objectives.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The comprehensive amendments of recent times represent a milestone in the reform of Hungarian doctoral education. The Association of Hungarian PhD and DLA Candidates, in cooperation with the governing Ministry of Culture and Innovation, has worked to ensure that the structure of doctoral education can function more flexibly, more modernly and in line with real professional needs. With the establishment of the three-pillar system, comprising traditional, cooperative and research excellence doctoral education, every young researcher can find the path that best suits their interests, career goals and professional strengths.

The changes introduced do not create a hierarchy among doctoral students, but rather expand the range of choices: whether in university teaching, industrial research or specifically in a scientific research career path, the system offers everyone a clearer, more predictable and better supported trajectory. The increasing autonomy, greater flexibility of performance-based regulation, higher stipends and salaries, and new schemes promoting mobility all serve the goal of genuinely increasing the professional and financial recognition of doctoral students.

For DOSZ, it is of particular importance that an environment is created for young talents where research work represents real value and where doctoral students can plan for the long term. The current reforms point in this direction: a stable, transparent career model, expanding research opportunities and institutional diversity increase Hungary's scientific performance and strengthen its economic competitiveness. Since its founding more than 30 years ago, the Association of Hungarian PhD and DLA Candidates remains committed to ensuring that the interests of those enrolled in doctoral education are upheld and that the developments undertaken effectively serve the future of Hungarian research in practice.

5. ABBREVIATIONS

- Doctoral Government Decree – Government Decree No. 387/2012 (XII. 19.) on doctoral schools, the procedure for doctoral degrees and habilitation
- DOSZ – Association of Hungarian PhD and DLA Candidates
- HÖÖK – National Conference of Student Governments
- STEM – science, technology, engineering and mathematics
- Expanded STEM – science, technology, engineering and mathematics, agricultural sciences, medical and health sciences, and arts
- National Higher Education Act – Act CCIV of 2011 on National Higher Education
- NKFIH – National Research, Development and Innovation Office
- ODT – Hungarian Doctoral Council

6. REFERENCES

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- Kis Kelemen, Bence and Pónusz, Róbert: The history of doctoral student self-governance in Hungary. In: Kis Kelemen, Bence (ed.): *Studia Doctorandorum Excellentiae – The Past, Present and Future of Doctoral Education*. PTE DOK – Publikon Publishing, Pécs, 2019.

7. USEFUL LINKS

- [Doctoral Government Decree](#)
- [DOSZ](#)
- [DOSZ Legal Aid Service](#)
- [National Higher Education Act](#)
- [ODT](#)

