

## National Doctoral Education Pilot: Executive Summary of the Progress Report

The National Doctoral Education Pilot is an initiative funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture (OKM) for the period 2024–2027 and implemented by universities. It aims to expand doctoral training by funding 1,000 new fixed-term doctoral researcher positions and partially supporting related supervision. This large-scale national investment seeks to strengthen Finland's research capacity and ensure a steady supply of highly trained professionals in various fields.

To assess the progress and effectiveness of the pilot, the Ministry of Education and Culture has commissioned a research and expert group formed by the Tampere University and the University of Jyväskylä. The task is to monitor and evaluate the pilot as part of the broader development of doctoral education in Finland. The evaluation project began in August 2024 and will conclude in spring 2028. Progress reports will be published annually in 2025, 2026, and 2027, while a final evaluation report will be released in April 2028. This document represents the summary of the first progress report, focusing on the initial phase of the pilot, including its launch and early results.

The National Doctoral Education Pilot was launched at a fast pace, encompassing key steps such as planning, funding applications, selection of pilot projects, and recruitment of doctoral researchers. Recruitment efforts have proceeded well, with 80% of the allocated doctoral positions established by the end of 2024, and over half of the doctoral researchers already starting their work. The funded positions are primarily 36-month full-time contracts, ensuring financial stability for doctoral candidates as they pursue their research.

A major goal of the pilot is to increase the number of doctoral degrees to enhance Finland's security of supply in knowledge. While it is still too early to evaluate the direct impact on graduation rates, a significant rise in completed doctorates is expected in 2027–2028. Additionally, the pilot has prompted universities to modernize their doctoral education, which may result in shorter completion times and greater efficiency in the future.

However, the concept of security of supply in knowledge has not been clearly defined, making it difficult to measure the pilot's success in this regard. Although the majority of doctoral positions have been allocated to key strategic fields, the pilot has not specifically prioritized traditional sectors of national security. This lack of clear criteria allows for flexible interpretations but also complicates the evaluation process.

A significant proportion of the recruited doctoral researchers come from outside Finland. While this contributes to the internationalization of Finnish research and brings diverse perspectives, it also presents challenges in terms of national security of supply in knowledge. If international doctoral graduates struggle to integrate into Finnish society and the domestic job market, their expertise may not fully benefit Finland. Therefore, it is essential to support language learning and employment pathways during doctoral studies to ensure that foreign-trained professionals contribute effectively to the Finnish economy.

Most doctoral researchers aim to complete their degrees within three years, facilitated by secure three-year funding, full-time research positions, and strengthened supervision. The quality of supervision is generally perceived as good quality, although resources are sometimes insufficient to meet the growing demand.

To further accelerate completion rates, universities have reduced coursework requirements in terms of required ECTS credits and streamlined their administrative processes. However, some challenges

remain. While many researchers are optimistic about finishing on time, 20% of doctoral candidates doubt they will meet the deadline of graduating in three years, and 50% consider the timeline challenging. These concerns highlight the need for ongoing support and flexibility to ensure the successful completion of doctoral degrees.

Another key objective of the pilot is to increase the mobility of doctoral graduates across different sectors and promote diversity in their career paths. While early results indicate strong international collaboration, mobility between academia, industry, and public administration remains an area for improvement. Strengthening mentorship programs and mobility initiatives at the start of doctoral studies could help researchers transition more smoothly between sectors.

Doctoral researchers and supervisors have also recommended that completion timelines should be guided by target goals rather than rigid deadlines. The regulation of doctoral study durations and potential changes in doctoral training structures will be examined more detail in future reports.

Maintaining the high quality of doctoral education is a central concern for both researchers and supervisors. Some fear that lowering academic standards to promote faster graduation could have long-term negative effects on Finland's research reputation. A well-structured doctoral education system is crucial for maintaining Finland's competitiveness in global research and innovation, as highly skilled doctorates are valued in the job market.

One unintended consequence of the tightened completion schedule is a shift in research topic selection. Many doctoral researchers are choosing low-risk dissertation topics to ensure they graduate on time. While this strategy may help researchers complete their degrees more efficiently, it could also stifle innovation and scientific breakthroughs in the long run. If research becomes too conservative, it may fail to produce groundbreaking discoveries or drive technological advancements. This could ultimately slow down the rate of scientific and industrial progress, affecting Finland's long-term research and development landscape.