

SCIENCE WITHOUT BORDERS

The Fifth International PhD Students' Conference at the University of Life Sciences in Lublin

International exchange of experience, presentation of young researchers' findings, and development of the skills needed in contemporary science were the main goals of the 5th International PhD Students' Conference: Environment–Plant–Animal–Product, organised by the Doctoral School of the University of Life Sciences in Lublin. This year's edition combined a scientific conference with two days of international workshops delivered under the STER NAWA project.

On 22–24 April 2026, the University of Life Sciences in Lublin became, for the fifth time, a meeting place for doctoral students, early-career researchers and established scholars representing various fields of science. On the first day, the University's Congress Centre hosted the 5th International PhD Students' Conference: Environment–Plant–Animal–Product. On 23 and 24 April, participants moved to Nałęczów for the International Workshops at the University of Life Sciences in Lublin.

An international meeting of young researchers

The scale of the fifth edition confirmed that the conference organised by the University's Doctoral School has become a recognised forum for young researchers to exchange experience. Around 320 people attended, representing 14 countries, including Portugal, Colombia, Romania, China, Spain, Ukraine, Germany, Czechia, Slovakia, Hungary, Serbia, Türkiye, Lithuania and Poland. Presentations by young researchers were at the heart of the conference. Participants shared their findings through oral presentations and posters, with proceedings organised into six parallel sessions: Food Quality, Animal Sciences, Plant Sciences, Environmental Sciences, Technology, and Health and Basic Sciences. This broad range of topics reflected the interdisciplinary nature of contemporary research in the natural, agricultural, technological and health sciences. It also brought together researchers from different disciplines and allowed the issues presented to be considered from several perspectives.

From biodiversity to the future of food systems

Lectures by invited experts from research institutions abroad were an important part of the programme. Their topics demonstrated the breadth of the challenges facing the life sciences today.

Dr **Eduardo Ferreira** from Universidade de Aveiro in Portugal presented the potential of non-invasive genetic sampling and environmental DNA (eDNA) for monitoring wildlife and biodiversity. Dr **Monica Florescu** from Transilvania University of Braşov in Romania discussed the use of nanomaterials for molecular detection and controlled transport, highlighting their potential in diagnostics and biotechnology. Dr **João Carvalho** from Universidade de Aveiro explored the relationships between human activity and changes in Mediterranean ecosystems. Dr **Augusto Carlos Castro-Nunez** from the International Center for Tropical Agriculture in Colombia focused on ways to reduce the climate impact of food systems. Associate Professor **Francisco Ceacero Herrador** from the Czech University of Life Sciences Prague addressed a related issue, presenting the effects of climate change on agricultural production and the potential use of alternative animal species. The lectures shared a common theme: scientific responses to problems that increasingly require collaboration across traditional disciplinary boundaries, including climate change, biodiversity conservation, food security, new technologies and sustainable production.

Six fields of science – a shared forum for discussion

The main part of the conference consisted of six parallel thematic sessions: Environmental Sciences, Plant Sciences, Animal Sciences, Technology, Food Quality, and Health and Basic Sciences. Each opened with a short expert presentation introducing the subject area, followed by doctoral students and young researchers presenting their own findings. Experienced academics from the University of Life Sciences in Lublin oversaw the scientific quality and smooth running of each session.

The Environmental Sciences session was chaired by Associate Professor **Sławomir Ligeza**, with an introductory presentation by Dr habil. **Viktor Korzun**. The same speaker also opened the Plant Sciences session, chaired by Dr **Joanna Sender**. The Animal Sciences session was chaired by Associate Professor **Mariola Bochniarz**, with introductory presentations by Dr **Karina Savvulidi Vargova** and Assistant Professor **Filipp Georgijevič Savvulidi**, Ing., PhD. The Technology session was chaired by Associate Professor **Maciej Combrzyński**, and its introductory lecture was delivered by Dr **Emilia Osmólska**. The Food Quality session was chaired by Associate Professor **Monika Sujka**, with an introduction by Dr habil. **Maciej Nastaj**. The Health and Basic Sciences session was chaired by Associate Professor **Marta Wójcik**, with an introduction prepared by Dr **Monica Florescu**.

This programme structure brought young researchers' presentations together with the experience of experts from the respective disciplines. The six sessions highlighted the interdisciplinary nature of the conference, covering environmental and plant sciences, animal sciences and technology, food quality, basic sciences and health-related issues. For doctoral students, the event offered an opportunity to present their findings, discuss them, receive valuable feedback and consider their research questions from the perspectives of other disciplines.

Other participants included Professor **Oleg Melnyk** from the National University of Life and Environmental Sciences of Ukraine in Kyiv, Ukraine; Professor **Paulius Matusevičius** from the Lithuanian University of Health Sciences in Kaunas, Lithuania; and the Dean of the Doctoral School, Professor **Murat Kanbur**, from the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine at Erciyes University, Türkiye.

The winners of the individual sessions were:

- **Animal Sciences** – Aleksandra Ziótek: *Insect colonization of submerged substrates and carcasses in a river habitat*;
- **Food Quality** – Robert Wraczewski: *Physicochemical properties of gelatin and vegan jelly candy enriched with dietary fiber*;
- **Plant Sciences** – Dawid Świstak: *From seed microbiome to plant performance: plant growth-promoting traits of endophytes isolated from crambe seeds*;
- **Technology** – Burcu Aykanat: *Application of cocoa fiber as a by-product of cocoa processing in pasta production*;
- **Environmental Sciences** – Anna Gryboś: *Flupyradifuron, a new-generation pesticide, versus honeybees*;
- **Health and Basic Sciences** – Krystian Siwek: *Friend or foe? Application of the transient matrix effect in blood opioid analysis*.

Poster Session distinctions were awarded to **Poovathingal Kurian Athul**, **Zuzanna Tarasek**, **Michał Arciszewski** and **Kamila Górka**.

The Polish Society of Food Technologists also presented an award, which went to **Aleksandra Saweczko**.

The conference as a setting for doctoral students' development

For doctoral students, taking part in an international conference means much more than presenting their own research findings. It also provides practical preparation for working in an international academic environment. Presenting results in English, discussing them with experts, answering participants' questions and comparing one's findings with research conducted at other institutions are important steps towards scientific independence. Equally valuable is the opportunity to establish contacts that may lead to joint publications, projects, research placements and further research initiatives. The conference also brought doctoral students together with experienced representatives of academia, research institutions, national parks, doctoral student organisations, and the wider social and economic community. The diversity of participants underlined that contemporary doctoral education extends beyond an individual research project.

Recognising research achievement and promoting science communication

Recognising doctoral students' achievements and research activity was another important part of the conference programme. IDUB research excellence awards were presented by Associate Professor **Alina Anna Kowalczyk-Juśko** together with Professor **Andrzej Jakubczak**, Director of the Doctoral School of the University of Life Sciences in Lublin. The IDUB programme is an important element of the University's efforts to systematically improve the quality of its research under the "Excellence Initiative – Research University" programme. In research, particular emphasis is placed on improving quality and international visibility, developing publication excellence and supporting the internationalisation of research conducted within the Doctoral School. Funding excellence scholarships for outstanding doctoral students is also an important element of academic staff development. Presenting the awards during an international doctoral conference gave the occasion particular significance. It recognised young researchers' achievements while highlighting the importance of research quality, publication activity and doctoral students' contribution to the University's scientific development. In line with the Development Strategy of the University of Life Sciences in Lublin, excellence scholarships were awarded under the "Excellence Initiative – Research University" (IDUB) for scientific publications in the top quartile (Q1). The recipients were current doctoral students and graduates of the University's Doctoral School who met the scholarship criteria in 2025.

Scholarships for Q1 publications were awarded to 25 young researchers at different career stages, from first-year doctoral students to Doctoral School graduates now employed by the University. The recipients were: **Anna Gryboś, Athul Kurian, Angelika Śliwka, Kinga Zdybel, Paweł Grychnik, Kamila Kaszycka, Paulina Kawecka, Agata Michalska, Anastasiya Ramankevich, Klaudia Rząd, Karolina Sokal, Kaja Ziółkowska-Twarowska, Mikołaj Feculak, Aleksandra Marzec, Szymon Milewski, Julia Fabjanowska, Dorota Gajowniczek-Ałasa, Aleksandra Garbacz, Radosław Smagieł, Karolina Wengerska and Karolina Różaniecka-Zwolińska**, as well as Doctoral School graduates and University staff members **Agata Hahaj-Siembida, Julia Wójcik-Madej, Maciej Bryś and Adam Staniszewski**.

The excellence support measures also recognised doctoral students' success in securing research funding. **Kamila Kaszycka** and **Jordan Wilk** received distinctions for leading externally funded projects. This type of activity is particularly important in the training of young researchers, as it develops their research independence and prepares them to apply successfully for funding for their own projects.

Including the IDUB awards ceremony in the conference programme symbolically brought together two important aspects of a young researcher's development: presenting research in an international setting and recognising high-quality work and exceptional scientific activity. The conference thus became a forum for exchanging knowledge and experience and for promoting good practice and the achievements of young researchers at the University of Life Sciences in Lublin.

Research excellence awards are one of the tools used to support the most scientifically active doctoral students and form part of the University's efforts to improve research quality and build a culture of scientific excellence. Their purpose is to recognise results already achieved and to motivate young researchers to continue developing, pursue ambitious research topics, publish more actively and take part in national and international research collaboration.

Science beyond the University's walls

The conference also provided a space for science communication and for presenting research in a form accessible to audiences beyond narrow specialist fields. This was supported by the **Academic Lublin initiative**, represented by Wiktoria Herun and Joanna Kot, together with the **"Skrót Myślowy – Lubelska Scena Nauki"** ("Mental Shortcut – The Lublin Science Stage") project, represented by Kamila Kaszycka and Jordan Wilk.

The presence of science communication initiatives was well aligned with the conference's aims. Today's researchers need to conduct research and publish their findings, while also being able to communicate the significance of their work to a broad audience. Bringing academia together with outreach initiatives encourages dialogue between science and society and demonstrates that research findings can be presented accurately, clearly and engagingly.

Both elements – recognising doctoral students' achievements through IDUB research excellence awards and including science communication initiatives – added an important institutional and social dimension to the conference's scientific programme. They also illustrated the wider role of the Doctoral School and the University of Life Sciences in Lublin: creating conditions for high-quality research, supporting young researchers' development, recognising their achievements and preparing them to communicate knowledge responsibly.

From knowledge to skills – International Workshops

The international workshops held in Nałęczów on 23–24 April were a natural continuation of the conference. They were delivered under the STER NAWA project "Actions towards the internationalization of the Doctoral School of the University of Life Sciences in Lublin (I-SDUPL)". The programme was designed to develop skills extending beyond specialist research methods. Doctoral students explored how to deliver engaging university classes, communicate science, apply neurodidactics, work in intercultural settings and address complex social and environmental problems. In his workshop "From Information to Engagement – How to Conduct Memorable Classes", **Mirek Urban** demonstrated how to move from simply conveying information to engaging an audience and building narratives that help people remember content. In "Neurodidactics in University Classes", **Agnieszka Mądrakiewicz-Stanek** introduced ways to apply knowledge about memory, concentration and learning processes when designing university classes. The international dimension of education was particularly evident during the online workshop led by **Gugulethu Tshabalala** from the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. Participants explored the importance of communication and intercultural competence in research. Dr **Małgorzata Anielka Pieniżek** from the UCL Institute of Education in the United Kingdom, in her workshop "You Have Knowledge... Now What? Skills and Values for Navigating Complex Environmental Challenges", highlighted the role of critical thinking,

social responsibility and interdisciplinary collaboration in addressing contemporary environmental problems.

Combining the scientific conference with workshops therefore enabled participants to move from presenting research findings to developing the skills needed to communicate knowledge effectively, teach others and collaborate in international teams.

There is more to doctoral life than research

During the Fifth International PhD Students' Conference at the University of Life Sciences in Lublin, held on 22–24 April 2026, participants also had the opportunity to attend distinctive artistic events. The programme included a humorous and spontaneous improvised stand-up performance by **“Poławiacze Pereł – Improv Teatr”** and the **“Klasyczni w Rocku”** concert, featuring well-known classical pieces in contemporary rock arrangements. These events complemented the scientific programme, helped participants get to know one another and brought science together with culture and the arts.

Lublin as a meeting place for international scientific dialogue

The importance of the event was underlined by the presence of representatives of the University authorities, the Council of Scientific Excellence, the Polish National Association of Doctoral Candidates, universities and research institutions in Poland and abroad, national parks, public administration, and the wider social and economic community. The conference was also supported by numerous honorary patrons, partners and media partners. Coverage appeared in regional, academic and specialist media, as well as through the communication channels of the University, the Doctoral School and partner institutions. The hybrid format of the first day further extended the conference's reach. Live streaming and online participation enabled experts and audiences who could not travel to Lublin to take part.

Five editions – a shared direction

The fifth edition of the International PhD Students' Conference: Environment–Plant–Animal–Product demonstrated that this recurring event, organised by the University's Doctoral School, serves several complementary purposes. It is a forum for presenting research findings, discussing science and bringing young researchers together, as well as a means of internationalising doctoral education. A particular strength of the event is the opportunity for young researchers from different disciplines, countries and research traditions to meet in person. Such meetings establish contacts that may lead to further projects, publications, research mobility and lasting collaboration between institutions.

Combining the conference with the International Workshops delivered under the STER NAWA project further broadened the traditional conference format. Alongside research skills, participants developed communication, teaching, social and intercultural skills. This appears to be one of the event's most important outcomes: young researchers should be able to conduct valuable research, communicate it, collaborate across disciplinary and national boundaries, and use their knowledge responsibly to address the challenges of the contemporary world.

The fifth edition also reaffirmed the role of the University of Life Sciences in Lublin as a place open to international scientific exchange and interdisciplinary training for young researchers. For the Doctoral School, it marks another step towards building an environment in which doctoral students can develop as specialists in their disciplines and, above all, as independent researchers prepared to work within the international research community.