

## Evaluation of Candidates for Norwegian Doctoral Degrees

<b>Guidelines for the evaluation of candidates for doctoral degrees at the University of Tromsø</b>	
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*This is a translation. The Norwegian version is the official one. Norwegian version of this document  
In case of conflict between this document and the PhD regulations, the regulations have priority.*

### 1. Regulations and supplementary provisions

The evaluation of scientific theses submitted for doctoral degrees at Norwegian universities and university colleges is regulated by:

- the regulations of the respective institutions in charge of degrees which incorporate an organised research programme, at UiT the regulations adopted on 19<sup>th</sup> November 2009 for the degree of Philosophiae Doctor (PhD) together with any supplementary provisions to these regulations.
- the regulations of the respective institutions for the degree of Dr. philos., at UiT the regulations of 19<sup>th</sup> December 2005 for the degree of Doctor philosophiae (dr.philos.) at the University of Tromsø.

The regulations and supplementary provisions for the degree in question must be made known to all those involved in the evaluation of candidates for doctoral degrees at each institution. The following guidelines are derived from and formulated within the parameters of these regulations, with special focus on the process of evaluation. The aim of these guidelines is to provide a supplementary discussion of the norms and procedures, which are assumed to be common to all Norwegian doctoral degrees. The guidelines are general, and are intended to complement the specifications for the respective degrees and any supplementary provisions.

### 2. Preparatory procedures

#### 2.1 Appointment of an evaluation committee (PhD regulations, Section 27/Dr.philos. regulations, Section 6)

The Faculty appoints an evaluation committee consisting of no less than three members with a PhD or equivalent, on the recommendation of the relevant institute. At least one committee member should have professor-level competence (or equivalent). The recommendation should list the relevant qualifications that the individual members represent, and how the committee as a whole covers the subject matter of the thesis. At least one member should be a person with no connection to the institution. If possible, at least one member should be from a foreign educational institution. As far as possible, both sexes should be represented on the committee. If this is not possible, the reason must be stated.

The doctoral candidate must be informed of the composition of the committee. The candidate may comment on the composition of the committee, informing the Faculty of any problems of partiality or other matters of significance.

To ensure satisfactory progress in the evaluation procedure, the Faculty appoints a chairman from

among the members of the evaluation committee. The chairman should preferably be a member of the institution. Under special circumstances the Faculty may appoint an administrative chairman from the Faculty's academic staff who is not a member of the evaluation committee and who does not participate in the evaluation of the thesis.

The chairman of the committee is responsible for the organisation of the committee's work, including ensuring satisfactory progress from the start and observing the deadline set for the completion of the committee's work. The chairman is responsible for coordinating the compilation of the committee's report on the thesis and for distributing tasks in connection with the public defence among the committee members.

For the degree of PhD, the thesis must be submitted to the committee together with an account of where the training has been carried out and the name of the candidate's supervisor(s). Documentation must be provided of the research training programme - the academic training component - followed by the candidate. The academic training component has already been approved and the purpose of submitting this information to the committee is not for their approval, but rather to aid the committee's formulation of the prescribed topic for the trial lecture(s).

In cases where a revised version of a thesis is submitted for re-evaluation, the new evaluation committee ought to contain at least one member of the original committee.

If a candidate who has previously submitted a thesis which was subsequently rejected submits an entirely new thesis for evaluation, a new evaluation committee may be appointed.

## **2.2 Correction of formal errors after submission of the doctoral thesis**

A thesis that has been submitted may not be withdrawn (PhD regulations, Section 28/Dr.philos regulations, Section 5, final paragraph). However, the doctoral candidate is entitled to make minor corrections of a formal nature. These must be submitted in the form of an errata sheet enclosed with the copies of the thesis submitted to the Faculty no later than one month prior to the public defence. No other corrections may be made to work which has been submitted for evaluation. Exceptionally the faculty may grant candidates the possibility to implement revisions to the thesis on the recommendation of the committee, as provided by Section 32 (paragraph 3) or Section 33 (paragraph 4, point 2).

## **3. The committee's evaluation report**

On appointing the evaluation committee, the Faculty sets a deadline for the submission of the committee's evaluation report, normally no later than three months after the committee members received the thesis (PhD regulations, Section 30/Dr.philos. regulations, Section 7).

### **3.1 Description of the thesis**

The report must contain a short description of the format of the thesis (monograph/collection of articles), as well as the type of work involved (i.e. theoretical/empirical) and the length of the thesis. The report must also include a discussion of the scientific significance of the thesis and central factors concerning its theoretical framework, hypotheses, material, methodology and findings.

### **3.2 Evaluation of the thesis**

A Norwegian doctoral degree is awarded as proof that the candidate's research qualifications are of a certain standard. Degrees incorporating a specified schedule and an organised research training programme (PhD) and degrees with no such requirements (Dr. philos. and equivalent degrees) are regarded as being of an equal standard. This principle of equivalence refers to the academic standard and quality of the work submitted, and not merely its volume. In the organised doctoral training programmes, qualifications may be documented through tests and participation in various activities within the training programme. Since the degree of Dr. philos. does not include an

organised research training programme, the preparatory work (e.g. the collection of data) and the thesis itself may be expected to be more extensive than in degrees with an organised research training programme. Irrespective of the kind of degree, the candidate must satisfy the minimum requirements to qualify as a researcher – demonstrated through the formulation of issues, precision and logical stringency. The candidate must also demonstrate originality and a good command of current methods of analysis and be able to reflect on their possibilities and limitations. He/she must also demonstrate knowledge of, understanding of and a reflective attitude towards other research in the field.

When evaluating a thesis, special consideration should be given to whether the thesis represents an independent and comprehensive piece of scientific work of high academic standard with regard to the formulation of problem issues, methodological, theoretical and empirical basis, documentation, treatment of literature and chosen form of presentation. It is especially important to consider whether the material and methods applied are relevant to the questions raised in the thesis, and whether the arguments and conclusions posited are tenable. The thesis must contribute new knowledge to the discipline and be of an academic standard appropriate for publication as part of the serious literature in the field.

If the thesis consists of several papers, the evaluation committee must assess whether the content of the individual works forms a whole. In such cases, the candidate must document the integrated nature of the work in a separate section – an introduction - by summarising and comparing the issues and conclusions in the separate works. This part of the thesis is of vital importance both for the doctoral candidate and for the committee's evaluation of the work submitted.

If the thesis includes joint publications, the doctoral candidate must obtain declarations from his/her co-author(s), including their consent to use the work as part of the thesis. The committee must consider to what extent the candidate's contribution to the joint publication can be identified. The committee must also consider whether the candidate is responsible for a sufficient portion of the thesis. The introduction to the collection of papers must be written by the candidate alone. If the documentation submitted by the candidate is insufficient, the committee may take steps to obtain further information.

The committee may call the supervisor in to a meeting to account for the supervision and the work on the dissertation (Section 29, first paragraph). The committee may also require the submission of source material and supplementary information for clarification (Section 29, second paragraph).

If the thesis is submitted as a joint publication, it is reasonable to expect the scope of the research project and/or thesis to be more extensive than that of the work of an individual. Each of the doctoral candidates must, as far as possible, be evaluated and tested in accordance with the requirements for the evaluation of work submitted by one person.

### **3.3 The conclusion**

The conclusion should comprise an evaluation and a discussion of the strong and weak points of the thesis. This evaluation leads to a conclusion as to whether the committee finds the thesis worthy for public defence, or whether the committee recommends that the thesis should be rejected. If there is dissent among the members of the committee, the reasons for dissent must be stated.

### **3.4 The committee's report** (PhD regulations, Sections 31-33/Dr.philos. regulations, Section 7)

The committee's report is to be submitted to the Faculty. The committee is required to issue a joint report, with any individual statements enclosed. Grounds for dissent among the members of the committee must always be stated. Individual statements may be enclosed with the report even if the committee's conclusion is unanimous. If the committee concludes that a PhD dissertation is not recommendable for public defence in its present form, but that a satisfactory standard may be

reached by revising the submitted dissertation within three<sup>1</sup> months, a recommendation to this effect should be made. In such case the committee should give clear indications as to which parts of the thesis are in need of revision (e.g. methodology, relationship between material and conclusion, use of concepts, clarity of issues raised). This type of indication should not give the impression that a new evaluation necessarily will lead to approval of the thesis. It is for the faculty to determine whether the candidate is to have the opportunity to undertake such revisions, cf. Section 32, paragraph 3, and Section 33, paragraph 4, point 2.

For both the PhD and Dr.philos. degrees the following applies: if the committee concludes that the thesis should not be recommended for public defence in its present form, but that a satisfactory standard may be reached by revising the submitted thesis within reasonable time after six months, a recommendation to this effect should be made to give the candidate a basis for evaluating whether he/she should resubmit the thesis. In such case the committee should give some indication as to which parts of the thesis are in need of revision (i.e. methodology, relationship between material and conclusion, use of concepts, clarity of issues raised, etc.). This type of indication should not give the impression that a new evaluation will necessarily lead to approval of the thesis. If the committee concludes that fundamental changes to theory, hypothesis, material and/or methodology are necessary before a thesis can be recommended for public defence, it should be clear from the committee's report that submission of a revised version of the same thesis is not recommended.

Where the committee approves the dissertation for defence, the reasons for the committee's decision may be stated succinctly and the committee should aim to state its recommendation accordingly. In cases where the committee is unable to recommend the dissertation for public defence, it will be natural to provide a more detailed justification. The same applies if the committee finds grounds to recommend that the candidate undertake revisions of the thesis before a final decision is made; see Section 32, paragraph 3, and Section 33, paragraph 4, point 2.

For the record, the candidate has the right to resubmit the dissertation pursuant to Section 34 even if it is resubmitted pursuant to section 32 paragraph 3/33 paragraph 4 point 2.

#### **4. Treatment of the committee's report on the thesis**

The committee's written report and conclusion as to whether the thesis is to be recommended for public defence is to be submitted to the Faculty for forwarding to the doctoral candidate as soon as possible. Any comments from the doctoral candidate must be submitted to the Faculty in writing within two weeks, to be forwarded to the members of the committee (PhD regulations, Section 31, second paragraph/Dr.philos. regulations, Section 7, second paragraph). Any reply from the committee is to be addressed to the Faculty. The decision lies with the Faculty as to whether the thesis is to be approved for public defence allowing the candidate to appear for the doctoral degree examination, or whether the thesis is to be rejected (including whether a recommendation should be given for the thesis to be resubmitted in a revised version).

#### **5. The committee's evaluation of the trial lecture(s) and public defence**

##### **5.1 Trial lecture(s)** (PhD regulations, Section 35/Dr.philos. regulations, Section 8, paragraphs 1-4)

The objective of the trial lecture(s) is to document the doctoral candidate's ability to impart to others knowledge gained through his/her research. Trial lectures should be structured so as to be accessible to an audience with knowledge of the subject equivalent to one year's study at university level.

For degrees for which a lecture on a self-chosen topic is required, the doctoral candidate should

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<sup>1</sup> Applies from 1 January 2013.

forward the title of the chosen topic to the Faculty no later than one month before the public defence.

The theme of the prescribed topic should not be selected from the central topics covered by the doctoral candidate's degree work. The candidate should be informed of the prescribed topic no later than two weeks before the public defence. A trial lecture on a chosen topic must not be a summary of the thesis and findings therein, but must represent an independent academic contribution to the field.

In the evaluation of the trial lecture(s), emphasis should be placed on both the academic content and the candidate's ability to impart knowledge. The trial lecture(s) is/are part of the doctoral examination and must have the committees approval prior to the public defence (PhD regulations, Section 35, paragraph 4/Dr.philos. regulations, Section 8, paragraph 3). For degrees requiring two trial lectures these are evaluated jointly. If the trial lecture(s) is/are not satisfactory, a second attempt may be made six months after the first public defence. The final dates may be found in the PhD regulations, Section 35, last paragraph, and Dr.philos. regulations, Section 8, last paragraph.

### **5.2 Public defence** (PhD regulations, Section 36/Dr.philos. regulations, Section 8, paragraphs 4 onwards)

The opponents are appointed by the Faculty or the evaluation committee (Section 36, paragraph 3/Section 8, paragraph 5). Care must be taken to select opponents who will be sure to initiate a critical discussion on the subject of the thesis. The public defence is chaired by the Dean or person authorised by the Dean. Depending on the Faculty's rule, the candidate or the first opponent shall give an account of the objectives and the results of the research (Section 36, paragraph 4/Section 8, last paragraph). The public defence is opened by the first opponent and concluded by the second opponent. Other persons present wishing to take part in the discussion *ex auditorio* must notify the chairman of the public defence of their wish within the time limit determined by the chairman and announced at the start of the proceedings. Further details of how the public defence is organised may be found in the regulations and supplementary provisions for doctoral degrees. Any traditions and customary practice in public defences for a particular degree should be taken into account.

If the thesis as a whole was submitted as a joint publication, the evaluation committee decides how the public defence is to be conducted. If the doctoral candidates defend their thesis in a joint public defence, the opponents must ensure that each candidate is tested to a sufficient extent.

The public defence is an academic discussion between the opponents and the doctoral candidate concerning the formulation of issues raised, methodological, empirical and theoretical sources, documentation and representation. A central objective of the public defence is to test the validity of the central conclusions drawn by the candidate in his/her work. The questions that the opponents choose to pursue need not be limited to those mentioned in the committee's report. The opponents should seek to give the discussion a form which allows those unfamiliar with the contents of the thesis or the subject area to follow the discussion.

The chairman of the public defence is responsible for ensuring that the time available is used effectively and that the discussion is concluded within the given time limit. At the end of the proceedings the chairman of the public defence declares the public defence closed. The chairman does not give an evaluation of the public defence, but merely refers to the evaluation that will be given in the committee's report.

### **5.3 Evaluation of the public defence** (PhD regulations, Section 36, paragraphs 5-6/Dr.philos. regulations, Section 8, paragraphs 7-8)

If a thesis is found to be satisfactory for public defence this will normally lead to approval of the thesis and its defence for the doctoral degree. Should the main conclusions of the thesis prove unsatisfactory through factors which come to light during the course of the public defence, the committee must evaluate the public defence as unsatisfactory. This is also the case if reprehensible

factors come to light during the public defence, which may be crucial in the evaluation of the work, such as offences against ethical norms in research or sound academic practice.

#### **5.4 The committee's report**

After the public defence, the evaluation committee delivers a report on whether the trial lecture(s) and the public defence have been deemed worthy of recommendation (PhD regulations, Section 36, paragraphs 5-6/Dr.philos. regulations, Section 8, paragraphs 7-8).

It is the responsibility of the committee to decide whether or not to recommend the public defence for approval. Should new factors come to light during the course of the public defence creating uncertainty among the committee members, which cannot be resolved during the public defence, the committee should assess the possible consequences of these factors before giving a final evaluation in the report.

#### **6. Concluding procedures**

See PhD regulations, Section 37/Dr.philos. regulations, Section 9.

#### **7. Appeal**

See PhD regulations, Section 40/Dr.philos. regulations, Section 10.