

# *Guidelines for the evaluation of doctoral degrees at the University of Tromsø – the Arctic University of Norway (UiT)*

The guidelines are based on <i>Guidelines for the Evaluation of Candidates for Norwegian Doctoral Degrees</i> recommended by the Norwegian Association of Higher education 23 March 2007 and are set up within the framework of UiT's doctoral regulations.		
Stipulated by	The University Director	15 August 2018
Replacing	Guidelines for the evaluation of candidates for doctoral degrees at the University of Tromsø last updated 18 August 2011 (2011/4064-2)	
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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 doctoral regulations, the regulations have priority.*

## **1. Purpose**

The purpose of the guidelines is giving evaluation committees information about the assessment of a doctoral thesis, on how the report should be written and about assessment of the trial lecture and the defence. The guidelines are set up within the framework of UiT's regulations, and describe the norms and procedures which are assumed to be common to all Norwegian doctoral degrees. They are general and must be read with reservation for any special norms that might apply to the particular programmes.

## **2. Regulations and supplementary provisions**

The evaluation of scientific theses submitted for doctoral degrees is regulated by:

- Act relating to universities and university colleges, section 3-9.
- Regulations concerning the degree of Philosophiae Doctor (PhD) at the University of Tromsø - The Arctic University of Norway (UiT).
- Regulations concerning the degree of Doctor Philosophiae (Dr.Philos.) at the University of Tromsø - The Arctic University of Norway (UiT).
- The faculties' supplementary regulations.

## **3. The duties of the committee leader** (PhD section 27 / Dr.Philos. section 11)

The committee leader is responsible for organizing the committee's work, including ensuring that the process is started quickly and that the schedule for the work is kept. The leader is to help coordinate the report and distribute the tasks among the committee members during the defence.

As a general rule, one of the members of the committee is appointed as leader. He / she is to participate in the academic assessment of the thesis together with the other members.

In special cases – for example if none of the committee members are internal and no-one can undertake leadership – the faculty appoints an administrative leader. An administrative leader shall not participate in the academic assessment of the thesis.

## **4. The committee's evaluation report** (PhD section 31/ Dr.Philos. section 15)

### *4.1 Deadline* ((PhD section 30 / Dr.Philos. section 14)

Normally, the committee is to deliver the report no later than three months after the committee members received the thesis.

### *4.2 Description of the thesis*

The report must contain a short description of the format of the thesis (monograph/collection of articles), type of work (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.

#### 4.3 Evaluation of the thesis

The requirements for a doctoral thesis are stated in section 19 of the PhD regulations and in section 8 of the Dr.Philos. regulations.

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 degree) and the Dr.Philos. degree, which is a free degree, 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 instruction component. 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, 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 postulated are valid.

According to the principles of *The San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA)*, emphasis shall be on the thesis' quality, relevance and importance and not on basis of the journal in which any part of the thesis is published.

The thesis must contribute new knowledge to the discipline and be of an academic standard appropriate for publication as part of the scientific 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 – the thesis summary - by summing up 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, declaration from co-authors including his/her/their consent to use the work as part of the thesis must follow 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 part of the thesis. The introduction to the 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.

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 one individual. Each of the candidates must, as far as possible, be evaluated and tested in accordance with the requirements for the evaluation of work submitted by one person.

#### 4.4. Obtaining supplementary information (PhD section 29 / Dr.Philos. section 13).

The committee may ask the candidate to submit the source material and supplementary or clarifying additional information. The committee may also call a PhD candidate's supervisor in to a meeting to account for the supervision and the work on the thesis.

#### *4.5 The conclusion*

The conclusion should comprise an evaluation and a discussion of the strong and weak points of the thesis. This leads to a conclusion as to whether the committee finds the thesis worthy for public defence (is passed), or recommends that the thesis should be rejected (not passed).

If the committee finds that the work should not be approved for defence in its present form, but that the thesis with a certain degree of revision could be brought up to a satisfactory level within a deadline of up to three months, it may recommend that the candidate is permitted such revision. In such cases, the committee should give clear indications as to which parts of the thesis need revision (e.g. methodology, relationship between material and conclusion, use of concepts, clarity of issues raised), but not in such a way that the recommendation may be read as an assurance of approval after revision. It is for the faculty to determine whether the candidate is to have the opportunity to undertake such revision (PhD section 32 third paragraph / Dr.Philos. section 16 third paragraph).

#### *4.6 The committee's recommendation* (ph.d. §§ 31 and 32/dr.philos §§ 15 and 16)

The committee submits a report to the faculty. Grounds are to be given for the recommendation and any dissenting points of view. Individual statements can be attached.

When the committee concludes to approve the thesis for defence, the reasons for decision may be stated relatively brief. The committee should in these cases aim to provide the recommendation in a general and concise form. In cases where the committee concludes that the thesis should not be approved, it will be natural to provide the grounds somewhat more detailed. The same applies if the committee finds reason to recommend that the candidate undertake revisions of the thesis before final decision is made.

### **5. The faculty's processing of the report** (PhD sections 31 and 32 / Dr.Philos. sections 15 and 16)

The Faculty forwards the report to the candidate. When the recommendation is unanimously positive, the defence is carried through without any decision at the faculty. If the committee is split or the recommendation is unanimously negative, the candidate is entitled to give written comments to the faculty within a deadline of ten working days. The same applies if the committee recommends a revision before their final recommendation. If the faculty find it necessary, to enlighten the case, the comments may be forwarded to the committee, with a short deadline for return comments. Then the faculty decides whether the thesis is worthy of defense (passed) or whether it is not approved for defence (not passed).

If the dissertation is assessed to not pass, the candidate receives information about the right to resubmit and about the right to appeal against the decision.

### **6. The committee's evaluation of the trial lecture and public defence**

#### *6.1 Trial lecture* (PhD section 34 / dr.philos section 18)

The objective of the trial lecture is for the candidate to document the ability to impart to others knowledge gained through his/her research. Trial lectures should be structured to be accessible to an audience with knowledge to the subject equivalent to what one would expect to find amongst advanced students (at least one year's study at university level).

The committee determines the title of the lecture. It should not be directly related to the topic of the thesis. The faculty gives the title to the candidate ten working days before the defence.

In the evaluation of the trial lecture, emphasis should be placed on both the academic content and the candidate's ability to impart knowledge. The trial lecture is part of the doctoral examination and must

have the committee's approval prior to the public defence. If the trial lecture is not satisfactory, the candidate may present him-/herself for a new lecture and defence.

#### *6.2 The defence (PhD section 35 / Dr.Philos. section 19)*

The opponents are appointed by the faculty. Care must be taken to select opponents who will be sure to initiate a critical discussion on the subject of the thesis. The defence is chaired by the Dean or person authorised by the Dean. Depending on the faculty's rules, the candidate or the first opponent shall give an account of the objectives and the results of the research. The 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 this within the time limit determined by the chairman and announced at the start of the proceedings. Further details of how the defence is organised may be found in the regulations, supplementary regulations and any traditions and customary practice applying to the defence for the particular programme.

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

The 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 defence is to test the validity of the central conclusions drawn by the candidate in the 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 – as far as possible – allows those unfamiliar with the contents of the thesis or the subject area to follow the discussion.

The leader of the defence is responsible for ensuring that the time available is used effectively and that the discussion is concluded within the given time limit. The leader declares the defence closed. The leader is however not to give an evaluation of the public defence, but merely refer to the fact that the committee after the defence will assess whether it is passed / not passed.

#### *6.3 Evaluation of the defence (PhD 36 / Dr.Philos. section 20)*

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. However, if the main conclusions of the thesis prove unsatisfactory through factors which come to light during the defence, the committee must evaluate the defence as unsatisfactory. The same applies if, during the defence, reprehensible factors come to light, which may be crucial in the evaluation of the work, such as violation against ethical norms in research or against sound academic practice.

#### *6.4 The committee's report*

After the defence, the evaluation committee issues a statement on whether the defence is approved or not. If new issues arise during the defence that cause uncertainty in the committee and cannot be resolved during the defence, the committee should clarify and assess the possible consequences of these factors before it announces its final assessment. When a majority of the committee has approved the thesis, the doctoral candidate has been awarded the degree (er kreert), and the faculty writes a diploma.