

# Guidelines for the Evaluation of Norwegian Doctoral Degrees

*Adopted by the Central Research Education Committee at the UiS on 22 June 2007, adapted to the revised PhD Regulations and revised regulations for the degree of dr. philos. on 6 April 2020.*

## 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 on the degree of philosophiae doctor (PhD) and any supplementary provisions to these regulations
- the regulations of the respective institutions on the degree of dr. philos.

The regulations and supplementary provisions for the degree in question shall be made known to all those involved in the evaluation of candidates for doctoral degrees at each institution. These guidelines have been derived from and formulated within the parameters of these regulations, with particular focus being placed on evaluation, and they provide a supplementary discussion of the norms and procedures which are assumed to be common to all Norwegian doctoral degrees. Consequently the guidelines are general in nature and must be read subject to the specifications of the individual institutions concerned as stated in the supplementary provisions relating to the degree of the institution in question.

## 2. Preparatory procedures

### 2.1 Appointment of an evaluation committee

The Doctoral Committee appoints a committee of experts consisting of at least three members who possess the relevant expertise required and where the committee collectively covers the subject of the thesis in question. Please also refer to Section 7-4 of the PhD Regulations about the appointment of an evaluation committee.

To ensure satisfactory procedural progress the Doctoral Committee appoints an administrator from among the members of the committee. The administrator should be a representative of the institution in question. When dictated by special reasons, the Doctoral Committee can instead appoint an administrator from among its own scientific employees who is not involved in the academic evaluation of the thesis in question.

The administrator of the committee is responsible for the organisation of the committee's work, including making sure that work commences quickly and that the timeframe for the committee's work is complied with. The administrator shall help to coordinate the committee's report on the thesis and clarify the division of the work carried out by the committee members during the public defence.

For doctoral degrees with an organised research programme, the doctoral thesis shall be sent to the committee with details about where the work was carried out and the name of the supervisor(s), along with documentation about the approved research training programme which the candidate followed. Completion by the candidate of the training component will already have been approved and does not need to be approved again by the committee, but it should be forwarded as information in order to support the committee's formulation of the prescribed topic of the trial lecture.

In cases where a revised version of the same thesis is submitted for evaluation in line with Section 7-6 of the PhD Regulations, at least one member of the original evaluation committee shall be involved in formulating and completing the final report on the thesis.

If this concerns a candidate whose thesis has previously been rejected and who submits a new thesis for evaluation, a completely new committee may be appointed (cf. Section 7-10 of the PhD Regulations).

### 2.2 Formal correction, etc. of doctoral theses after submission for evaluation

A thesis that has been submitted for evaluation cannot be withdrawn before a final decision has been made about whether or not it merits a public defence. The candidate may apply to the faculty for permission to correct any formal errors in his/her thesis after submission. Applications shall include a full list of errors (errata) which the candidate wishes to correct. Applications for the correction of formal errors must be submitted by no later than four weeks before the committee's deadline for delivering its report and can only be submitted once (cf. Section 7-7 of the PhD Regulations).

### 3. The Evaluation Committee's evaluation of a thesis

When appointing the Evaluation Committee, the Doctoral Committee specifies a deadline for the period, from the submission of a thesis and until the public defence is held, something which should not normally take longer than five months for PhD theses and six months for dr. philos. theses. The deadline for the committee's evaluation – in the form of a reasoned report – must be agreed in advance.

#### 3.1 Description of the work

The report shall contain a brief description of the thesis format (monograph/collection of articles), type (e.g. theoretical/empirical work) and size. It shall also include a discussion of the scientific significance of the thesis and its most important aspects relating to theory, hypotheses, material, methods and findings.

#### 3.2 Evaluation of the thesis

A Norwegian doctoral degree is a certificate providing proof of research competence at a specific level. This level of competence is assumed to be the same for degrees *with* a timeframe and requirements relating to organised research programmes (PhDs) and degrees *without* a timeframe and requirements relating to organised research programmes (dr. philos. degrees). The principle of equivalence refers to the academic *standard* and *quality of the work submitted*, not merely its *volume*. In organised research programmes, competence may also be documented by tests and participation in various activities associated with the training component. It should be expected that the absence of any training requirements for the dr. philos. degree will be compensated for by the fact that the actual work on the thesis in this respect is slightly more comprehensive than would be expected for organised research education programmes (e.g. collecting one's own data). Irrespective of the kind of degree, doctoral candidates shall satisfy the *minimum requirements in respect of research competence* – demonstrated through requirements relating to the formulation of questions, precision, logical stringency, originality, a good command of current analysis methods and reflection on their options and limitations. They shall also demonstrate knowledge and understanding of and adopt a reflective attitude towards other research in the field.

When evaluating a thesis, special emphasis is placed on whether or not the thesis is an independent, comprehensive piece of scientific work with a high academic standard with regard to the formulation of research questions, its methodological, theoretical and empirical basis, treatment of the literature and form of presentation. It is especially important to consider whether or not the material and methods applied are relevant to the questions raised in the thesis, and whether or not the arguments and conclusions posited are tenable. The thesis must contribute towards new academic knowledge and be of an academic standard that is suitable for publication as part of the scientific literature in the field.

If the thesis consists of several individual pieces of work, this must be documented and assessed to see whether or not their content constitutes a complete work. In such cases, the doctoral candidate shall document the continuity of the thesis in a separate part of the thesis (abstract), not only by summarising the questions and conclusions which are presented in the separate works, but also by comparing them from an overall perspective.

If the thesis is a joint piece of work, the doctoral candidate shall obtain statements from his/her co-author(s), including their consent to use the work as part of a doctoral thesis. The committee shall consider whether or not the candidate's contribution to the work(s) in question can be identified and whether or not the doctoral candidate is primarily responsible for a sufficiently high percentage of the thesis. The abstract of the thesis shall be formulated solely by the doctoral candidate. If the doctoral candidate's own documentation is not adequate, the committee may obtain further information.

The Evaluation Committee may require presentation of the candidate's source material and additional information for the purpose of supplementation or clarification. The Evaluation Committee may ask academic supervisors to provide information about the supervision carried out and the work involved in the thesis.

If the whole thesis is submitted as a joint work, it is reasonable to expect that the research project and/or the thesis will be more comprehensive than one might otherwise expect from an individual work. Wherever possible each of the doctoral candidates shall be assessed and tested in accordance with the same requirements that apply when the work has been carried out by one person.

#### 3.3 Conclusion

The conclusion shall comprise an assessment and weighing up of the strengths and weaknesses of the thesis. This leads to a conclusion about whether or not the committee deems the thesis to be worthy for public defence, or whether or not the committee recommends that the thesis cannot be approved for public defence.

#### 3.4 The committee's report

The committee provides the faculty with a reasoned report. By preference the committee shall prepare a joint statement, with any individual statements attached. Any dissent shall always be explained. When the committee agrees about the conclusion, it may also be a good idea to attach individual statements.

When the committee concludes that a thesis shall be approved for public defence, it shall formulate a relatively brief explanation. The committee shall then strive to produce a general brief report. When the committee recommends rejection of a thesis, it will be natural to provide a more detailed explanation.

If the committee concludes that a thesis should not be approved for public defence, but at the same time deems that some minor revisions would bring it up to a satisfactory standard, it may make recommendations to this effect. The committee shall only recommend the submission of a revised version of the same thesis for evaluation if it believes that a revised version would be able to achieve satisfactory results within a period of approx. 3 months (cf. Section 7-6 of the PhD Regulations). In such cases the committee should provide some guidelines about which parts of the thesis need to be revised (*e.g. methodology, relationship between the material and the conclusion, use of concepts, clarity of questions raised, etc.*) without their recommendations being perceived as assurance of approval being given after re-assessment. If the committee finds that extensive changes relating to the theory, hypothesis, material and/or methods used in the thesis are needed in order to deem the thesis worthy of public defence, the committee shall reject the thesis.

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

The committee's written report and conclusion on whether or not the thesis shall be recommended for public defence is sent to the Doctoral Committee/faculty and shall be sent to the doctoral candidate as soon as possible. Any comments from the doctoral candidate shall be forwarded in writing within 10 days to the faculty which adopts decisions about the matter in accordance with Sections 7-8 and 7-9 of the PhD Regulations.

#### **5. The committee's evaluation of trial lectures and public defence**

##### *5.1 Trial lecture(s)*

The purpose of trial lectures is to enable doctoral candidates to document their ability to present research-based knowledge. Lectures should normally be structured to benefit an audience which has prior knowledge equivalent to that which one would expect to find among advanced students (those with at least one year of education in the subject concerned).

For degrees/programmes where this applies, the doctoral candidates shall have sent the title of a self-selected topic to the Doctoral Committee by no later than one month before the planned date of their public defence (cf. Section 16-1 of the PhD Regulations).

The subject of the selected topic shall not be directly related to the subject of the thesis, but shall serve to document the breadth of the doctoral candidate's academic skills within the chosen doctoral programme/academic field.

The doctoral candidate shall be informed about the prescribed topic of his/her trial lecture 10 working days before the trial lecture. Any trial lectures on a self-selected topic shall not be a summary of the thesis and any findings, but shall be an academic contribution which stands for itself.

When evaluating trial lectures, emphasis shall be placed on both the academic content and the candidate's ability to present the material. Trial lectures are part of the doctoral degree examination and must be approved prior to the public defence. Degrees requiring two trial lectures shall be approved collectively. If trial lectures are not approved, the doctoral candidate may make a second attempt at the trial lecture(s) and public defence after 6 months have elapsed.

##### *5.2 Public defence*

The public defence is chaired by the dean, or by a deputy approved by the dean. The opponents are appointed by the faculty. Care shall be taken to select opponents who will ensure that any critical views of the thesis are not suppressed. The first opponent shall start the discussion and the second opponent shall conclude the opposition. Anyone else present who wishes to participate in the discussion *ex auditorio* must, during the defence, give notice of such to the chair of the defence within the time limit specified and announced by the chair at the start of the defence. Further details about how the public defence is organised may be found in the regulations, supplementary provisions and procedures relating to doctoral degrees.

If the thesis as a whole is submitted as a joint piece of work, the committee shall decide how the public defence is to be conducted. If the doctoral candidates have the opportunity to defend their theses in a joint public defence, the opponents shall ensure that each doctoral candidate is adequately tested individually.

The public defence shall be an academic discussion between opponents and the doctoral candidate concerning the questions raised, the methodology, the empirical and theoretical sources, the documentation and the form of presentation. Special emphasis should be placed on testing the validity of important conclusions drawn by the doctoral

candidate in his/her work. The questions that the opponents choose to pursue do not need to be limited to those mentioned in the committee's report. The opponents should strive – whenever possible – to give the discussion a form which also allows anyone who has not read the thesis or is not thoroughly familiar with the academic field concerned to follow the discussion.

The chairperson is responsible for ensuring proper use of the time taken to conduct the various parts of the public defence, within the set time limit. The conclusion of the public defence will be declared by the chairperson. In this respect the chairperson shall not give an evaluation of the public defence, but state that the committee's evaluation of the public defence will be provided in the committee's report.

### *5.3 Evaluation of the public defence*

If a thesis is found to be worthy of public defence, this will normally lead to approval of the thesis and its defence for the doctoral degree. However, should the main conclusions of the thesis indeed prove to be untenable due to factors which come to light during the course of the public defence, the Evaluation Committee must evaluate the public defence as being unapproved. The same applies if blameworthy factors come to light during the public defence which may be crucial in the evaluation of the work, such as a breach of ethical norms in research or sound academic practice.

### *5.4 The committee's report*

After the public defence has been held the Evaluation Committee submits a report on a set form about whether or not the trial lecture(s) and the public defence have been approved.

The committee is responsible for making recommendations about approval or non-approval of the public defence. Should new factors come to light during the course of the public defence which create uncertainty among the committee members and which cannot be resolved during the actual public defence, the committee should clarify and assess the possible consequences of these factors before providing their final evaluation in their report.

## **6. Concluding procedures**

The committee's reports on the result of the trial lecture(s) and the public defence is submitted to the faculty. The faculty adopts a decision about approval of the public defence on the basis of the evaluation committee's report. In principle, both academic entities are at liberty to make their own decisions, but it will only be possible to reject a unanimous committee report if there are extraordinary important reasons for doing so. Such reasons could include, for example, obvious misinterpretation by the evaluation committee of the institution's quality requirements, or new information coming to light which may have an impact on the issue of approval (e.g. the disclosure of "cheating").

If the faculty, c/o of the dean, approves the public defence, the rector will confer the doctoral degree on the candidate.

## **7. Appeals**

Please refer to the provisions contained in the institution's regulations relating to the degree in question.