

# **Guidelines for the Evaluation of Candidates for Norwegian Doctoral Degrees**

Recommended by the Norwegian Association of Higher Education Institutions  
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## **1. Regulations and supplementary provisions**

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

- the regulations of the respective institutions for the degree of Philosophiae Doctor (PhD) and supplementary provisions to these regulations;
- the regulations of the respective institutions for the degree of Dr. philos.

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 particular 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. Consequently, the guidelines are general in nature and are intended to complement the specifications for the respective institutions or degrees, as stated in the supplementary provisions of the institution in question.

## **2. Preparatory procedures**

### *2.1 Appointment of an evaluation committee*

The responsible academic unit (e.g. faculty, department) appoints an evaluation committee consisting of no less than three members, on the recommendation of the academic staff in the discipline concerned, and subject to the approval of the governing body or the Rector of the relevant institution where this is laid down in the regulations. 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 genders 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 responsible academic unit of any problems of partiality or other matters of significance.

To ensure satisfactory progress in the evaluation procedure, the responsible academic unit appoints a chairperson from among the members of the evaluation committee. The chairperson should preferably be a member of the institution. Under special circumstances, the responsible academic unit may instead appoint an administrative chairperson from its academic staff who does not participate in the evaluation of the thesis.

The chairperson 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 chairperson is responsible for coordinating the compilation of the committee's report on the thesis and for distributing tasks among the committee members in connection with the public defence.

For doctoral degrees that require participation in an organised research programme, the thesis must be submitted to the committee along with an account of where the training was carried out and the name of the candidate's supervisor(s). Documentation must be provided of the approved research training programme in which the candidate has participated. As the training programme has already been approved, the purpose of submitting this information to the committee is not to obtain its approval, but rather to aid the committee's formulation of the prescribed topic of the trial lecture.

In cases where a revised version of a thesis is submitted for re-evaluation, the new evaluation committee must 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 errors of a formal nature after submission of the doctoral thesis*

A thesis that has been submitted may not be withdrawn. 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 responsible academic unit no later than one month prior to the public defence. No other corrections may be made to work which has been submitted for evaluation.

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

On appointing the evaluation committee, the responsible academic unit stipulates a time frame for the period from the submission of the thesis to the holding of the public defence, which normally should not be longer than three months. The date for the presentation of the Committee's evaluation report must be agreed on in relation to this period.

#### *3.1 Description of the thesis*

The report must contain a short description of the format of the thesis (monograph/collection of articles), 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 programme (PhD) and degrees with no such requirements (Dr. philos.) are regarded

as being of an equal standard. This principle of equivalence refers to the academic standard and quality of the work submitted, not merely its volume. In the organised research 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 programme, the preparatory work (e.g. the collection of data) and the thesis itself may be expected to be more extensive than for degrees with an organised research programme. Irrespective of the kind of degree, the candidate must satisfy the *minimum requirements* to qualify as a researcher – demonstrated through requirements related to the formulation of research questions, 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 research questions, methodological, theoretical and empirical basis, documentation, treatment of the literature and 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 scientific literature in the field.

If the thesis consists of several interrelated minor works, 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 by not only summarising but also comparing the research questions and conclusions presented 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 a joint publication, 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 and whether the candidate is responsible for a sufficient portion of the thesis. The abstract of the thesis must be written solely by the candidate. If the documentation submitted by the candidate is insufficient, the committee may take steps to obtain further information.

In special cases, the committee may require the submission of source material and supplementary or clarifying 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 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 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*

The committee's report is to be submitted to the responsible academic unit. It is preferred that the committee 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.

In cases in which the committee concludes that the thesis should be approved for public defence, the committee should formulate a relatively brief recommendation. If the committee's recommendation is to reject the thesis, it is reasonable to include more details of the reasons for the decision.

If the conclusion of the committee is 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, a recommendation to this effect should be made. The committee should only recommend the submission of a revised version of the thesis if the committee considers it probable that a satisfactory standard of a revision can be achieved within a six-month period. In such cases, the committee should give some indication as to which parts of the thesis are in need of revision (methodology, relationship between material and conclusion, use of concepts, clarity of questions 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, hypotheses, material and/or methodology are necessary before a thesis can be recommended for public defence, the committee should not recommend revision of the same thesis.

## **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 then submitted to the responsible academic unit for forwarding to the doctoral candidate as soon as possible. Any comments from the doctoral candidate must be submitted in writing within two weeks to the responsible academic unit, which will then forward these to the committee members. Any reply from the committee must be sent to this same unit. The decision lies with the responsible academic unit as to whether the thesis is to be approved for public defence and the candidate may 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)*

The objective of the trial lecture(s) is to document the doctoral candidate's ability to impart to others the 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 of study in the academic field.

For degrees/programmes for which a lecture on a self-chosen topic is required, the doctoral candidate must forward the title of the chosen topic to the responsible academic unit no later than one month before the public defence.

The theme of the prescribed topic should not be selected from the central research questions covered by the doctoral candidate's degree work. The candidate must be informed of the prescribed topic at least 10 working days 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 degree examination and must be approved prior to the public defence. For degrees requiring two trial lectures, these are to be evaluated jointly. If the trial lecture(s) is/are not satisfactory, a second attempt at the trial lecture(s) and public defence may be made after six months have elapsed.

### *5.2 Public defence*

The public defence is headed by the Dean or a person authorised by the Dean. The opponents are appointed by the responsible academic unit or the evaluation committee. Care must be taken to select opponents who will ensure that critical views of the thesis are not repressed. 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 chairperson of the public defence of their desire within the time limit determined by the chairperson 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 will decide how the public defence is to be conducted. If the doctoral candidates will 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 research questions raised, the methodological, empirical and theoretical sources, documentation and form of presentation. A primary objective 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 chairperson 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 chairperson of the public defence will declare the public defence closed. The chairperson 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*

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. Should the main conclusions of the thesis prove to be untenable 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 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, the evaluation committee submits a report on whether the trial lecture(s) and the public defence have been deemed worthy of recommendation.

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 which create uncertainty among the committee members and 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**

The committee's report on the result of the trial lecture(s) and the public defence is submitted to the responsible academic unit and then forwarded to the governing body of the institution for further consideration. In principle, both academic entities are at liberty to draw their own conclusions. However, it is extremely rare for the responsible academic unit or governing body to reject a unanimous recommendation from the evaluation committee except for extraordinary reasons. Such reasons could be, for instance, obvious misinterpretation by the evaluation committee of the institution's quality requirements, or new information which comes to light after the committee's report has been finalised (e.g. cheating) and which may have a bearing on the final decision.

If the responsible academic unit and governing body of the institution approve the public defence, the governing body of the institution will confer the doctoral degree on the candidate.

If the trial lecture(s) or public defence is/are rejected, the doctoral candidate may make a second attempt after six months have elapsed.

### **7. Appeal**

Provisions relating to the right to appeal the rejection of a thesis, public defence or trial lecture(s) are laid down in the institution's regulations for each type of degree.