

Guidelines for the Evaluation of Candidates for Doctoral Degrees at Western Norway University of Applied Sciences

This document is available in both Norwegian and English. In case of doubt about the meaning of the English translation, the original Norwegian document will be regarded as the authoritative version.

1. Regulations and supplementary provisions

The evaluation of scientific theses submitted towards doctoral degrees at Western Norway University of Applied Sciences is regulated by:

- Regulations for the Doctor of Philosophy Degree (PhD) at Western Norway University of Applied Sciences and supplementary provisions

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 HVL.

The following guidelines are derived from and formulated within the parameters of these regulations/the quality assurance system, 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 doctoral degrees at HVL.

2. Preparatory procedures

2.1 Appointment of an evaluation committee

The Dean appoints an evaluation committee consisting of no less than three members, on the recommendation of the programme committee. 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 dean of any problems of partiality or other matters of significance.

To ensure satisfactory progress in the evaluation procedure, the Dean appoints a chairperson from among the members of the evaluation committee on recommendation from the programme committee. The chairperson should be a member of the institution. Under special circumstances, the Dean 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.

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), and documentation 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. Application for application to correct formal errors may be submitted no later than 2 months after the candidate has submitted the thesis. 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 Dean 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 5 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

The doctoral degree is awarded as proof that the candidate's research qualifications are of a certain standard. In addition to the thesis' academic standard and quality of the work submitted, qualifications may be documented through tests and participation in various activities within the training programme. 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, 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 summarizing 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 publication with co-authors, 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.

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 programme committee. 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.

3.5 Revision of submitted thesis

The evaluation committee may, on the basis of the submitted doctoral thesis and any additional material, recommend that the programme committee permit the candidate to make minor revisions to the thesis before the committee submits its final report. This must only be minor revisions of a non substantial character for the thesis, that will lift the thesis to a higher level. This is not the standard procedure, and 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 3 month period. The committee must provide a written list of the specific items that the candidate must rework. It should say something about which part of the thesis that needs to be revised (methodology, relationship between material and conclusion, use of concepts, clarity of questions raised, etc.), without giving the impression that a new evaluation necessarily will 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.

If the programme committee allows minor revisions to the thesis, a deadline normally not exceeding three (3) months will be set for completing such revisions. A new deadline for submission of the committee's final report will also be set. The institution's decision pursuant to this paragraph may not be appealed by the PhD candidate.

The possibility to make minor revisions must not be considered as a new evaluation, but lead to a postponement of the evaluation. Hence, it will not interfere with the possibility for a resubmission of the thesis is rejected.

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 programme committee for forwarding to the doctoral candidate as soon as possible. Any comments from the doctoral candidate must be submitted in writing within 10 days to the programme committee, which will then forward these to the committee members. Any reply from the evaluation committee must be sent to the Dean, together with the evaluation committee's report and the candidate's comments.

The decision lies with the Dean 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 and public defence

5.1 Trial lecture

The objective of the trial lecture is to document the doctoral candidate's ability to impart to others the knowledge gained through his/her research. Trial lecture 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.

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 of the trial lecture 10 working days before it takes place.

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 degree examination and must be approved prior to the public defence. If the trial lecture is not satisfactory, a new trial lecture must be held no later than six months after the first attempt.

5.2 Public defence

The public defence is headed by the Dean or a person authorised by the Dean. The opponents must be external members of the evaluation committee and will be appointed by the Dean. Care must be taken to select opponents/evaluation committee 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.

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 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 and the public defence is submitted to the Dean for consideration. In principle, the Dean is 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 Dean approve the public defence, rector will confer the doctoral degree on the candidate.

7. Appeal

Provisions relating to the right to appeal the rejection of a thesis, public defence or trial lecture are laid down in the institution's regulations for the doctor of philosophy degree, section 6-3.