

# Guidelines for the Assessment of Candidates for Norwegian Doctoral Degrees

Recommended by Universities Norway (formerly known as the Norwegian Association of Higher Education Institutions) on 22 March 2007. Revised in accordance with the Regulations concerning the degree of Philosophiae Doctor (PhD) and Philosophiae Doctor (PhD) in artistic research at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) adopted by the Board of NTNU on 5 December 2018. Approved by Rector, 27.08.2019

## 1. Regulations and supplementary provisions

The assessment of doctoral theses at Norwegian universities and university colleges is governed by:

- NTNU's Regulations concerning the degrees of Philosophiae Doctor (PhD) and Philosophiae Doctor (PhD) in artistic research
- NTNU's regulations concerning the Dr. Philos. degree

The regulations and supplementary provisions for the degree in question must be made known to participants in the assessment of candidates for doctoral degrees at NTNU.

The guidelines on the assessment of Norwegian doctoral degrees supplement national regulations<sup>1</sup> as well as NTNU's internal regulations and supplementary provisions. These guidelines focus on assessment and must be read in the light of the specifications in NTNU's regulations and supplementary provisions for the degrees.

## 2. Preparatory procedures

### 2.1 Appointment of an assessment committee

The Faculty appoints an expert committee with an administrator according to the applicable regulation<sup>2</sup> and informs the candidate of the committee's composition. The candidate may submit a written comment within a week after being informed of the committee's composition. This is one of several measures to identify possible partiality or other significant issues among the committee's members.

The administrator may be appointed from among the committee members. If the committee only has external members, the administrator can be appointed from among academic staff at NTNU who do not participate in the academic assessment of the thesis.

The administrator's responsibility is to

- organize the committee's work, including ensuring that the work starts quickly and that the schedule for the committee's work is met;
- coordinate the compilation of the committee's report on the thesis and clarify the allocation of tasks among the committee members during the public defence.

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<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Education: Forskrift om kvalitetssikring og kvalitetsutvikling i høyere utdanning og fagskoleutdanning [Regulations on quality assurance and quality enhancement in higher education and vocational education] <https://lovdata.no/dokument/SF/forskrift/2010-02-01-96>, Universities Norway (UHR): Doktorgrad – veiledninger og retningslinjer <https://www.uhr.no/ressurser/forskrifter-utredninger-og-rapporter/doktorgrad-veiledninger-og-retningslinjer/>

<sup>2</sup> See Section 14 of NTNU's PhD Regulations and Section 6 of the Dr. Philos. Regulations

The Faculty submits the doctoral thesis or work to the committee with the following information:

- Where the thesis and/or work was done and who the supervisors were.
- Summary of the required coursework for the doctoral programme for which the candidate has received approval. The committee does not need to approve the coursework again, but can emphasize the coursework in its formulation of the topic specified for the trial lecture.
- For joint authorship, declarations from co-authors are also submitted.

For the PhD in artistic development work, the following is also to be submitted:

- The candidate's application for assessment, with an account of what is to provide the basis for the assessment, including a plan for public presentation of the artistic result and the form of the critical reflection.
- No later than three weeks after the public presentation, material documenting the critical reflection is to be submitted.

For the Dr. Philos. degree, only the thesis and any declarations from co-authors are submitted to the committee.

If the thesis consists of a monograph, declarations from co-authors must be obtained when parts of the monograph are based on one or more articles with co-authors.

For the appointment of a new committee in connection with resubmission, see the respective Regulations<sup>3</sup>.

## *2.2 Correction of errors of a formal nature after submission of the doctoral work*

A piece of work that has been submitted may not be withdrawn or altered. The candidate may only make corrections of a formal character in the work, provided that the candidate prepares an errata sheet detailing all corrections made after submission. For a PhD in artistic research, this applies only to the reflection component. The errata sheet must be sent to the Faculty before publication of the work. The Faculty submits the errata sheet to the committee. See, however, Section 3.5 on the committee's opportunity to recommend minor revisions of the thesis.

## **3. The assessment committee's assessment of the thesis or the artistic doctoral work**

On appointing the assessment committee, the Faculty stipulates a deadline for the committee's assessment report. The committee's recommendation *must* be delivered at the latest within three (3) months after the committee has received all parts of the doctoral work to be assessed.

### *3.1 Description of the work*

The committee's report must contain a short description of the format of the work (monograph/collection of papers/concert, etc.), the type of work involved (e.g. theoretical/empirical work, artistic research) and its extent. The report must also include a discussion of the academic or artistic significance of the work and its key aspects (for example, theoretical framework, hypotheses, material, methodology and findings).

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<sup>3</sup> See Section 17 of NTNU's PhD Regulations and Section 9 of the Dr. Philos. Regulations

### 3.2 Assessment of scientific thesis

A Norwegian scientific PhD is a certification of research qualifications at third-cycle level in accordance with the Norwegian Qualifications Framework for higher education. Degrees *with* requirements for the nominal length of study and for coursework (PhD) and degrees *without* 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 the *scope* of the thesis. In the organized research training, qualifications are also documented through tests and participation in various activities within the coursework. In the Dr. Philos. degree, the thesis alone shows that the candidate has achieved the qualifications required at the third-cycle level in accordance with the Norwegian Qualifications Framework and the PhD programmes in which the candidate wishes to obtain the degree, which is expected to compensate for the absence of required coursework. Irrespective of the kind of degree, the candidate must satisfy the same *minimum requirements to qualify as a researcher* – demonstrated through requirements related to the formulation of research questions, precision and logical stringency, originality, a good command of relevant methods of analysis and reflection on their possibilities and limitations. He/she must also demonstrate knowledge of, understanding of and a reflective approach to other research in the field.

In the assessment of the doctoral thesis, special consideration should be given to whether the thesis is an independent and comprehensive piece of work of high academic standard with regard to the formulation of research questions. The assessment should also consider the methodological, theoretical and empirical bases, documentation, treatment of the literature and form of presentation in the thesis. It is especially important to consider whether the material and methods applied are relevant to the issues 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 doctoral work consists of a written component combined with a permanently documented product or a production, consideration must be given to whether the works through their content comprise a coherent entity and together meet the requirements for an independent piece of research for the degree of PhD. This includes the requirement that the committee must be present at, or otherwise witness in a satisfactory way, any production that is realized as part of the doctoral work. It must be clear from the written component that the work meets the requirements for problem formulation, methods, theoretical and empirical basis, documentation, treatment of literature and form of presentation. The written component must also explain the choices made regarding the product or production.

If the thesis consists of several individual works, the candidate must document the integrated nature of the work and the assessment committee must decide whether the content comprises a coherent entity. In such cases, the candidate must compile a separate part of the thesis that not only summarizes but also compares the research questions and conclusions presented in the separate pieces of work. This summarizing part of the thesis is to provide a comprehensive overview to document the coherence of the thesis. This summarizing part of the thesis is therefore of great importance for the doctoral candidate and for the committee's assessment of the work submitted.

In special cases, the committee may require the submission of source material and supplementary or clarifying information. In such cases, the committee may also ask academic supervisors to provide information about the supervision carried out and the work involved in the project.

### *3.3. Assessment of a PhD in artistic research*

A Norwegian PhD in artistic research is a certification of an artistic development work at third-cycle level in accordance with the Norwegian Qualifications Framework for higher education. The doctoral work is to consist of an artistic result and material that documents critical reflection. Together, these must comprise a coherent and independent work that meets international standards in the field of study in terms of the level and the ethical requirements. The work is to contribute to the development of new knowledge, insight and experience in the subject area.

In the assessment of the doctoral work, emphasis is placed on whether the work represents independent and coherent artistic research at a high level in the discipline. Criteria for assessment of the artistic result include whether it is at a high level in terms of originality, coherence, expression and dissemination, as well as whether appropriate forms of presentation have been chosen both for the artistic result and for the documentation of critical reflection. Further criteria include how research questions, use of theory and methodology, documentation and the form of presentation are relevant to the questions addressed in the doctoral work. The work must be clearly positioned nationally and internationally within the field of study and must contribute to development of the discipline.

If the public presentation of the artistic result takes place in the form of a viewing at a specific time or place, the entire assessment committee must be present.

In special cases, the committee may require the submission of source material and supplementary or clarifying information. In such cases, the committee may also ask academic supervisors to provide information about the supervision carried out and the work involved in the project.

### *3.4 Joint work (applies to both scientific theses and artistic doctoral work)*

Definition of joint work: A work produced jointly by two or more people.

NTNU's PhD Regulations<sup>4</sup> provide for submission of joint works as part of a doctoral work for assessment. Monographs will not be approved as joint work.

If the thesis includes joint work, the candidate must obtain declarations from co-authors, including their consent to the use of the work as part of the doctoral work. The statement must include a description of the candidate's contribution. The committee must consider whether the candidate's contribution to the relevant work or works can be identified and whether the candidate is solely responsible for a sufficient part of the thesis (see chapters 3.2 and 3.3). The summarizing part of the thesis or the critical reflection must be designed 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 work, 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 assessed and tested in accordance with the requirements for the assessment of work submitted by one individual. The Faculty decides whether a doctoral work produced through collaboration between several contributing partners may be submitted for assessment. In this case, it must be possible to identify the contributions of the individuals involved.

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<sup>4</sup>Section 11-3

### *3.5 The committee's report and conclusion*

The committee submits its report including reasons to the Faculty on whether the doctoral work is worthy of defence for the doctoral degree<sup>5</sup>. A joint statement is to be prepared with an assessment and discussion weighing up strong and weak aspects of the doctoral work. This must lead to a conclusion on whether the committee finds the work worthy of a public defence.

Any dissenting opinions and individual statements by committee members must be included in the report, with an explanation of the reasons.

In cases in which the committee concludes that the doctoral work should be approved for public defence, the committee should formulate a relatively brief recommendation. If the committee recommends rejection of the doctoral work, more detailed reasons for the decision would be desirable. If the committee recommends rejection of the doctoral work and the work has not previously been assessed for the degree, the conclusion must also include a recommendation on any resubmission of the work.

### *3.6 Revision of a submitted thesis/material documenting critical reflection<sup>6</sup>*

The assessment committee may recommend that the Faculty permits the candidate to make minor revisions before the committee submits its final report. This can only relate to changes of a non-substantial character for the doctoral work, but which may raise it to a higher level. It must be emphasized that this is not a standard procedure and the committee should only make such a recommendation if it considers it probable that a revision with a satisfactory standard can be achieved with three (3) months' work. For the PhD in artistic research, such a revision may only apply to the material that documents critical reflection. If the committee cannot approve the artistic result as it exists, the doctoral work must be rejected.

If minor revisions are recommended, the committee must provide a specific overview in writing on what the candidate must revise. The committee should give some indication as to which parts of the doctoral work need improvement (for example the relationship between the material and the conclusion, use of documentation, use of concepts, or clarity of questions raised). This type of indication should not give the impression that a new assessment will necessarily lead to approval of the thesis.

If the committee concludes that fundamental changes, for example related to the theory, research question, material, documentation or methodology, are necessary before the work can be recommended for public defence, the committee must reject the doctoral work.

If the Faculty allows minor revisions to doctoral work, a deadline normally not exceeding three (3) months is to be set for completing such revisions. A new deadline for submission of the committee's final report must also be set.

The opportunity to make minor revisions should not be considered a new assessment, but it results in postponement of the assessment. If the thesis is rejected after this, resubmission is still possible.

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<sup>5</sup>See Section 15-3 of NTNU's PhD Regulations

<sup>6</sup>See Section 15-2 and Section 15-3 of NTNU's PhD Regulations and Section 7-2 of the Dr. Philos. Regulations

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

The committee's written recommendation and conclusion are to be submitted to the Faculty and must be sent to the candidate as soon as possible. If the candidate has comments on the recommendation, they are to be submitted in writing to the Faculty within ten (10) working days. The decision lies with the Faculty as to whether the work is to be approved for public defence and the candidate may appear for the doctoral degree examination, or whether the doctoral work is to be rejected for public defence, including whether a recommendation should be given for resubmission of the work in a revised version. The new assessment can only take place six (6) months after the Faculty has made its decision. The work may only be reassessed once.

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

##### *5.1 The trial lecture(s) or other test on an assigned topic*

The purpose of the trial lecture(s) or other test on an assigned topic is for the candidate to document his or her ability to acquire and impart knowledge beyond the candidate's area of specialization. The lecture or test should be conveyed in such a way that students at master's level can benefit from it.

For the Dr. Philos. degree, the candidate is to hold two trial lectures, one on an assigned topic and one on a topic of his/her own choice. The PhD candidate must submit the title of the topic that he or she has chosen to the Faculty at the latest four (4) weeks before the public defence.

The topic of the trial lecture(s) must not be directly related to the topic of the doctoral work. The committee submits the assigned topic for the trial lecture or equivalent artistic dissemination to the Faculty. The Faculty informs the candidate of the topic ten (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. For a PhD in artistic research, the committee is to specify the topic and form of the examination. The examination can be conducted as a trial lecture or other equivalent artistic dissemination.

The assessment committee determines whether the trial lecture(s) or equivalent artistic dissemination is approved or not. In the assessment, emphasis should be placed on both the academic content and the candidate's ability to impart knowledge. The trial lecture(s) or equivalent artistic dissemination are part of the doctoral degree examination and must be approved prior to the public defence. For the Dr. Philos. degree, the trial lectures are approved together. If the trial lecture or equivalent artistic dissemination is not approved, an explanation must be provided. If the trial lecture(s) or equivalent artistic dissemination is/are not approved, the candidate may register for the doctoral examination again in accordance with the regulations for the relevant degree.

##### *5.2 Public defence*

The public defence is chaired by the Dean or by the person to whom the Faculty delegates such authority. The opponents are appointed by the Faculty or the assessment committee. Care must be taken to select opponents who will ensure that critical views of the thesis are not repressed. The standard procedure is that the public defence is opened by the first opponent and concluded by the second opponent. If the committee wishes to depart from the standard procedure in which the opponents conduct their opposition in clearly separated sequences,

this should be agreed with the chair of the public defence in advance.

Other persons present wishing to take part in the discussion *ex auditorio* must notify the chairperson of the public defence about this within the time limit that the chairperson determines and announces at the start of the proceedings. For a more detailed description of the public defence proceedings, see the regulations with supplementary provisions and other traditions for the implementation of the public defence.

For a scientific doctoral thesis, the public defence is to be an academic discussion between the opponents and the candidate concerning the research questions raised, the methodological, empirical and theoretical sources, documentation and the 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 address need not be limited to those mentioned in the committee's report.

A public defence in artistic research is to be an academic discussion between the opponents and the candidate, with the aim of elucidating the doctoral work in the best possible manner, from the perspective of both the artistic result and the candidate's critical reflection. The discussion should address research questions, choice of methods, theories, forms of documentation and of presentation, and how the work contributes to new knowledge, insight and experience in the subject area. The questions that the opponents choose to address need not be limited to those mentioned in the committee's report.

The opponents should encourage academic discussion that challenges the candidate, not only on the academic content of the work, but also on its effectiveness in placing the work in a broader scientific / artistic and social context. During the public defence, opponents and candidates are encouraged to challenge each other in the context of the discipline in a respectful manner.

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 assessment of the public defence, but merely refers to the assessment that will be given in the committee's recommendation.

### *5.3 Assessment of the public defence*

If doctoral work is found to be worthy of public defence, this will normally lead to approval of the work and its defence for the doctoral degree. The assessment committee writes a recommendation to the Faculty. In the recommendation, members of the assessment committee whose main position is at an institution outside Norway are to compare the level of the doctoral work and the public defence in relation to international standards in the discipline.

Should the main conclusions of the work prove to be untenable in the context of new factors which come to light during the public defence, the committee must evaluate the public defence as not approved in its report to the Faculty. This is also the case if blameworthy factors come to light during the public defence which are significant to the assessment of the work, such as a breach of ethical research norms or sound academic practice.

## **6. Concluding procedures**

The assessment committee submits a recommendation to the Faculty about the trial lecture(s) or equivalent artistic dissemination and the public defence. Should new factors come to light during the public defence that create uncertainty among the committee members and that cannot be resolved during the public defence, the committee should clarify and assess the possible consequences of these factors before making its final recommendation.

The Faculty considers the committee's recommendation and decides whether the public defence has been passed or not. If the Faculty departs from a unanimous committee recommendation, there must be extraordinary and compelling reasons for this. Examples of such reasons could be obvious misinterpretation by the assessment committee of NTNU's quality requirements, or new information which comes to light after the committee's recommendation has been finalized (e.g. academic misconduct) and which are key to the final decision on approval.

If the Faculty approves the disputation, the Faculty will award the doctoral degree to the candidate in accordance with the applicable Regulation.<sup>7</sup>

## **7. Right of appeal**

See the provisions for the degree in question in NTNU's regulations.

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<sup>7</sup> See Section 20 of NTNU's PhD Regulations and Section 13 of the Dr. Philos. Regulations