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Information for external reviewer and examination committee members at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Lund University

This guide explains the procedures of defence of doctoral thesis as well as the roles of external reviewer and member of the examining committee at the Faculty of Social Sciences.

For reference, the statutory national learning outcomes for the doctoral degree are included in Appendix 1.

Swedish third-cycle education

Swedish third-cycle education comprises four years of full-time study, that is, 240 credits. At least half of the programme is to consist of a thesis, which is examined at a *public* thesis defence. At the Faculty of Social Sciences, it is the dean that appoints both the external reviewer, the examination committee members, and the chair of the thesis defence. The external reviewer and at least one of the members of the examining committee must be external, i.e. work at a university other than Lund University. The members of the examining committee must have scientific competence equivalent to at least an associate professor.

The public defence of the thesis shall be announced at least three weeks in advance. At the time of the announcement, the doctoral thesis shall be available at the University so as to enable review of the thesis at the public defence.

The roles at a thesis defence

The external reviewer

The external reviewer plays an important part in the thesis defence. Normally the reviewer gives a short presentation of the wider context in which the issue(s) of the thesis belong. The reviewer is in charge of the scientific discussion at the defence and is to engage the respondent in the discussion of the thesis, thus facilitating the examining committee's assessment of the thesis. The reviewer is not expected to deliver written comments, statements etc. and does not take part in the grading. i.e. The external reviewer receives a fee (set in separate regulations).

The respondent

The respondent during the thesis defence is the doctoral student.

Examination committee

The examination committee consists of three or five members, who assess the quality of the thesis and the author's oral defence of it. The examination committee members decide whether the doctoral student should pass or fail.

The Faculty of Social Sciences has a long tradition of not paying fees to the members of the examining committee. However, travel and accommodation costs are of course reimbursed.

Chair of the examination committee

The Chair of the examination committee is responsible for leading the discussion in the meeting after the thesis defence and records the grade pass or fail. The Chair of the committee announces the result verbally immediately after the meeting.

Chair of the thesis defence

The Chair of the thesis defence is normally the main supervisor. The Chair of the thesis defence explains the thesis defence structure and is responsible for the act of the thesis defence.

Prior to the thesis defence

The external reviewer and the examination committee members are obliged to consider and report potential conflict of interest, in relation to the doctoral student/supervisors. For instance, conflict of interest can be co-publication with a supervisor, research collaborations etc. Contact the host department (for example the main supervisor) to discuss the matter of concern. Likewise, if the external reviewer or any of the examination committee members have serious concerns regarding the thesis or the quality of the thesis, they are strongly advised to contact the host department as early as possible before the thesis defence.

If the external reviewer or committee members is unable to attend the defence due to an emergency, they must immediately contact the main supervisor, to arrange for a replacement.

The day of the thesis defence

The procedures of a thesis defence varies between different disciplines, but the defence is always open to the public.

A typical defence takes about 2-2,5 hours and follows this format:

1. The Chair of the thesis defence opens the defence act.
2. Introduction and summary of the thesis by the external reviewer or the respondent, depending on the discipline (10-20 minutes)
3. Critical review and defence – external reviewer and respondent (about 1-1,5 hours)
4. Additional questions and comments from the examination committee (about 15-20 minutes)
5. Additional questions and comments from the audience
6. The Chair of the thesis defence closes the session.
7. The examination committee meets behind closed doors.
8. The grade is verbally announced by the chair of the examination committee.

The thesis defence

The thesis defence is opened by the Chair of the thesis defence by welcoming the participants and the audience. The Chair of the thesis defence introduces the respondent, the external reviewer, the examination committee, and the supervisors, and explains how the thesis defence is carried out.

The Chair of the thesis defence then gives the respondent the opportunity to briefly present any corrections.

After the opening, the external reviewer or the respondent (depending on the discipline) is asked to present an initial overview of the thesis, providing a brief account of the most important findings. In the presentation, the focus of the thesis is related to the overall research field, placing it into context. This often takes about 10-20 minutes. The purpose of the presentation is twofold: a) the audience is given a chance to become acquainted with the work and b) the respondent or the external reviewer is given a chance to state whether or not s/he agrees with the way in which the thesis has been summarized.

The introductory presentation of the work is followed by the most important part of the thesis defence, the scientific discussion. The external reviewer is expected to go through the strengths and shortcomings of the dissertation by asking questions that the respondent is expected to answer one at a time. This portion of the defence act can be conducted as the external reviewer best sees fit. Some external reviewers organize their comments/questions by theme (aim, theory, method, result etc.) while others do it chapter by chapter. Some focus on the work and the rationale for carrying it out and for the results obtained, while others also try to engage the respondent in a discussion about future research. At the end of the discussion, the external reviewer typically sums up their main impressions of the work. Worth noting is that the critical review and discussion is the part of the defence that is expected to take the longest. The external reviewer has the right to carry on as long as they see fit, until they find that they have received answers to all their questions. Usually, this part takes one to one and a half hour.

After the external reviewer's conclusions, the Chair of the thesis defence invites the examination committee members to add questions and comments. Finally, the audience is given the opportunity to ask questions, before the Chair of the thesis defence closes the defence. There is no formal time limit for the thesis defence, but the entire defence usually lasts about two hours.

The examination committee meeting

Immediately after the thesis defence the examining committee assembles in a closed meeting to award the grade "pass" or "fail".

As the meeting starts, the examination committee members appoint a Chair amongst themselves (usually the department's representative in the examination committee). The external reviewer, Chair of the thesis defence and supervisors can attend the meeting to answer questions from the committee, but they cannot take part in the grading. The external reviewer may give a more informal opinion of the thesis. The supervisors usually comment on the role of the respondent in the project, the extent of independent work etc. Additional questions regarding the thesis may be raised.

Each member of the examination committee then presents their evaluation of the thesis and the thesis defence. The evaluation concerns, for example, strengths and weaknesses in relation to the state of research, theoretically, methodologically, ethically, etc., and how well the respondent has defended his or her work.

After the defence, no changes can be made to the thesis manuscript.

The grading decision is taken by the members of the examining committee by way of a simple majority. The decision is confirmed in a thesis defence protocol which is signed by the Chair of the examining committee.

A passing grade is usually submitted without commentary. A grade of "fail" should always include comments explaining the shortcomings that led to the failure. Individual members of the examination committee have the right to have a dissenting opinion noted in the thesis defence protocol.

Immediately after the meeting the result is publicly announced by the Chair of the examination committee.

After the thesis defence

The department normally hosts a reception for the audience, colleagues, family and friends who gather in anticipation of the examination committee's decision. The Chair of the examination committee announces the decision at the reception.

Appendix 1 – Outcomes for the degree of Doctor according to the Swedish Higher Education Ordinance (1993:100)

Knowledge and understanding

For the Degree of Doctor the third-cycle student shall

- demonstrate broad knowledge and systematic understanding of the research field as well as advanced and up-to-date specialised knowledge in a limited area of this field, and
- demonstrate familiarity with research methodology in general and the methods of the specific field of research in particular.

Competence and skills

For the Degree of Doctor the third-cycle student shall

- demonstrate the capacity for scholarly analysis and synthesis as well as to review and assess new and complex phenomena, issues and situations autonomously and critically,
- demonstrate the ability to identify and formulate issues with scholarly precision
- critically, autonomously and creatively, and to plan and use appropriate methods to undertake research and other qualified tasks within predetermined time frames and to review and evaluate such work,
- demonstrate through a dissertation the ability to make a significant contribution to the formation of knowledge through his or her own research,
- demonstrate the ability in both national and international contexts to present and discuss research and research findings authoritatively in speech and writing and in dialogue with the academic community and society in general,
- demonstrate the ability to identify the need for further knowledge, and
- demonstrate the capacity to contribute to social development and support the learning of others both through research and education and in some other qualified professional capacity.

Judgement and approach

For the Degree of Doctor the third-cycle student shall

- demonstrate intellectual autonomy and disciplinary rectitude as well as the ability to make assessments of research ethics, and
- demonstrate specialised insight into the possibilities and limitations of research, its role in society and the responsibility of the individual for how it is used.