

GUIDELINES FOR THE ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE FOR PHD DISSERTATIONS

Aarhus BSS Graduate School
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Legal basis

The legal basis for the award of PhD degrees is in:

- Ministerial Order no. 1039 of 27 August 2013 on the PhD Programme at the Universities and Certain Higher Artistic Educational Institutions (PhD Order): <https://ufm.dk/en/legislation/prevailing-laws-and-regulations/education/files/engelsk-ph-d-bekendtgorelse.pdf>
- the University Act's rules regarding graduate schools and the award of PhD degrees, etc.: <https://www.retsinformation.dk/Forms/R0710.aspx?id=164209>
- Aarhus University's rules regarding the PhD degree programme: <https://international.au.dk/about/organisation/index/6/64/aarhus-universitys-rules-regarding-phd-education/>
- Aarhus BSS Graduate School's rules and guidelines regarding the PhD degree programme: <https://bss.au.dk/en/research/phd/rules-and-regulations>
- Basic principles of PhD education at Aarhus University: <https://phd.au.dk/strategy-and-collaboration/basic-principles-of-phd-education/>

Objective

The purpose of the work of the assessment committee is to ensure the impartial academic assessment of the PhD dissertation, to issue a preliminary recommendation to the graduate school as to whether a defence should be conducted, to carry out the PhD defence, and then to issue a recommendation to the Academic Council as to whether the PhD degree should be awarded.

The preliminary recommendation is the written result of the assessment work and constitutes the basis enabling the graduate school to decide between conducting a defence, or requiring that the dissertation be resubmitted by a specified deadline, or appointing a new assessment committee. The preliminary recommendation also constitutes the basis of the author's preparation for the defence. Furthermore, together with the final recommendation, the preliminary recommendation constitutes the basis for the Academic Council's decision as to whether the PhD degree should be conferred.

The final recommendation is prepared in immediate continuation of the defence and, together with the preliminary recommendation, it constitutes the basis for the Academic Council's decision as to whether the PhD degree is to be conferred.

Requirements for the PhD dissertation

(Rules and guidelines for the PhD degree programme, part 11.1)

Pursuant to Section 11 of the PhD Order, the PhD dissertation must document the author's ability relevant scientific methods and to carry out research work meeting the international standards for PhD degrees within the field in question. This has been further detailed in the basic principles of PhD education at Aarhus University, which state that: *The PhD dissertation must demonstrate the academic independence of the PhD student and that he or she has contributed to the development of new knowledge that meets the international standards of the field. Therefore, the dissertation must demonstrate the PhD student's ability to independently plan, initiate and carry out research as well as participate in international academic debate within the chosen research field.*

Pursuant to the Rules and guidelines for the PhD degree programme, a PhD dissertation can consist of either:

- a monograph, or
- a collection of scientific articles including an extended summary (in Danish sammenfatning or kappe) accounting for the relation between the publications and how they contribute to the overall PhD project. Note that the extended summary and the brief abstract mentioned below are not the same, and that the extended summary must be included in the assessment.

The monograph as well as the collection of scientific articles must include research contributions that have been published in or are potentially publishable through recognised publishing channels. For both types of PhD dissertations, the number of pages depends on the nature and quality of the content. The monograph is typically 150-300 pages, while a collection of scientific articles must generally consist of three to six papers and an extended summary.

Part of the dissertation may be written in collaboration with others, e.g. supervisors, but must include entirely independent substantial scientific contributions. If the dissertation contains co-authored papers or chapters, the dissertation must include co-authorship statements clearly identifying the PhD student's share of the work.

The dissertation must be written in Danish or English, unless the head of graduate school has granted permission for the PhD dissertation to be written, in part or in whole, in another language than Danish or English. Furthermore, a brief abstract in Danish and English must be enclosed.

Role of the assessment committee

(Described in the Rules and guidelines for the PhD degree programme, part 12.2)

The assessment committee have three overall tasks. They must:

1. make an assessment of the dissertation and, based on this assessment, make a written preliminary recommendation as to whether the dissertation fulfils the requirements for award of the PhD degree
2. act as opponents at the dissertation defence
3. issue a written final recommendation to the Academic Council as to whether the PhD degree should be awarded

Members and delegates of the assessment committee have a duty to keep information confidential. The main supervisor should be regarded as a delegate to the assessment committee without voting rights. This means that the chair of the committee must ensure that the main supervisor is involved in the committees' work. How this is done in practice may differ depending on the case. It is the chair's responsibility to clarify this with the main supervisor, and it is understood that the main supervisor participates to such an extent as circumstances may require. The main supervisor should be invited to participate in committee meetings. If the committee's activity is conducted in writing, it must be done in a way that ensures that the main supervisor has reasonable insight into the members of the committee's points of view. The committee's draft for a written assessment must be presented to the main supervisor well in advance of the deadline for submitting the assessment and before it is sent to the head of graduate school.

The written assessment and the final recommendation are the sole responsibility of the assessment committee.

All enquiries to and from the committee are through the chair. The chair is responsible for compliance with deadlines, requests for extension of deadlines where necessary, and for clarification of any queries concerning the work of the committee.

The three tasks are described separately below.

Preliminary recommendation

(Described in Rules and guidelines for the PhD degree programme, part 12.3)

Pursuant to the PhD Order, within two months of the submission of the PhD dissertation, the assessment committee must make a written, reasoned preliminary recommendation to the head of graduate school as to whether the PhD dissertation can be accepted for defence in its current form and thus fulfils the requirements for award of the PhD degree. After the defence, the preliminary recommendation will be included in the material submitted to the Academic Council and will therefore form the decision basis for award of the PhD degree.

The recommendation must be reasoned and must be contained in a separate document of no more than 12 standard pages (of 2,400 keystrokes).

Formal requirements for the preliminary recommendation:

- Heading: Preliminary recommendation.
- Please state the name of the author and the full title of the dissertation. The text must state that this is a PhD dissertation.
- Please explain the composition of the assessment committee: names, academic titles, and the names of the institutions to which they belong, including the country for members from outside Denmark. Please indicate the chair of the committee as well.
- Please state the name of the main supervisor (name, title, home institution) and confirm that the main supervisor has taken part in the work of the assessment committee without voting rights. You may indicate possible co-supervisors, but this is not a requirement. If the dissertation has been submitted without the student being enrolled as a PhD student (section 15(2) of the PhD Order), please state that this is the case.
- State whether a pre-defence was held.
- The following should then be included:
 - an explanation for the dissertation format (monograph or collection of articles).
 - an explanation for the structure of the dissertation (a brief abstract in Danish and English, an extended summary, chapters/articles (and possibly their publication status), conclusion, appendices, etc.), as well as scope (number of pages with and without appendices). If the PhD dissertation includes work that has been written or published in collaboration with others, please state that this is the case.
 - a presentation of the topic of the dissertation, including a description of strengths and weaknesses of the dissertation. The scientific contribution of the dissertation must be highlighted as well as whether the research results are well-founded and presented in accordance with customary practice in the field.
 - an assessment of each of the main elements of the dissertation, including the extended summary and chapters / articles.
 - a final overall assessment/conclusion. As the recommendation is to follow after this section, it should be stated clearly here whether the recommendation is unanimous or

whether there is a split decision, and in the latter case which members of the assessment committee have which viewpoints.

- Choose one of the following recommendations:
 1. In accordance with Section 18(2) of the PhD Order, the dissertation is found suitable for public defence in the submitted version.
 - If this recommendation is chosen, the recommendation must include a defence date and a suggestion for a topic for the public defence.
 2. In accordance with Section 18(2) of the PhD Order, the dissertation is found suitable for public defence based on its contents, but the assessment committee recommends certain improvements, which are assessed as feasible to implement before the specified defence date.
 - If this recommendation is chosen, the recommendation must include a specification of the recommended improvements, a defence date and a suggestion for a topic for the public defence. This can only be minor changes/improvements to the dissertation, and thus not substantial revisions.
 3. In accordance with Sections 18(3) and (4), no. 2, of the PhD Order, the dissertation is not found suitable for public defence in the submitted version, but the assessment committee finds that the dissertation may be accepted for public defence after revision.
 - If this recommendation is chosen, the recommendation must include a deadline for submission of the revised dissertation as well as a specification of the recommended improvements. The author and the main supervisor should be given the opportunity to submit their comments on the recommendation within a period of at least two weeks.
 4. In accordance with Sections 18(3) and 18(4), no. 1, of the PhD Order, the dissertation is not found suitable for public defence in the submitted version, and revision within a reasonable period of time is not considered possible.
 - The author and the main supervisor should be given the opportunity to submit their comments on the recommendation within a period of at least two weeks.

If the recommendation finds the dissertation suitable for defence, the date of the defence must be agreed with the author (through the supervisor), as far as possible taking into account the deadline stipulated in section 20(2) of the PhD Order. This means a deadline of at least 14 days after the author has received the preliminary recommendation and no later than three months after submission of the dissertation. If these deadlines are not complied with, the graduate school should be notified (see Rules and guidelines for the PhD degree programme, part 12.4).

- Date and signatures. The last page of the preliminary recommendation must state the names of the members of the assessment committee. The recommendation may be signed by the chair on behalf of the committee if the other members agree to this by email.

If the preliminary recommendation found the dissertation not suitable for public defence, the head of graduate school will make one of the following decisions on the basis of the recommendation by the assessment committee and any comments by the author and the main supervisor:

- that the public defence cannot be held
- that the PhD dissertation may be resubmitted in a revised version within a period of three months at minimum. If the PhD dissertation is resubmitted, it will be assessed by the original assessment committee unless special circumstances apply
- that the PhD dissertation will be referred to a different assessment committee for assessment

The preliminary recommendation should be addressed to the dean and should be forwarded to the head of graduate school via the graduate school and with the programme chair cc'ed. Both the graduate school and the programme chair must ensure that the preliminary recommendation complies with the above guidelines. The programme chair must also ensure that the preliminary recommendation complies with the scientific standards applicable to the field in question.

The preliminary recommendation is then forwarded by the graduate school to the author.

Pre-defence

(Described in the Rules and guidelines for the PhD degree programme, part 12.3)

The assessment committee's preliminary recommendation can be based on a so-called pre-defence, where the PhD student is summoned for a meeting. The meeting must be organised by the chair of the assessment committee and must be completed early enough to ensure that the preliminary recommendation will be available no later than two months after submission of the PhD dissertation.

The student, the supervisors and the members of the assessment committee must all participate in the pre-defence. In exceptional cases, one of the committee members may be absent, and in such cases the chair of the assessment committee must ensure that the views of the absent member are presented. If technically possible, the pre-defence may also take place as a video conference.

The discussion at the pre-defence must be based on an outline of the committee's preliminary recommendation, which must be forwarded to the PhD student and the supervisors no later than 48 hours prior to the scheduled pre-defence meeting.

As a minimum, the discussion at the pre-defence meeting must address all the parts of the dissertation on which the assessment committee disagrees with the student and which the assessment committee finds can be improved.

Submission of revised dissertation

(Described in the Rules and guidelines for the PhD degree programme, part 12.5)

The revised PhD dissertation must be submitted within the deadline for re-submission recommended by the assessment committee and stipulated by the head of graduate school. A copy of the revised PhD dissertation will be forwarded to all members of the assessment committee by the head of graduate school.

The assessment committee will then make an assessment of the revised PhD dissertation and will determine whether the revised dissertation is suitable for public defence as described above under the preliminary recommendation.

Public defence

(Described in the Rules and guidelines for the PhD degree programme, part 12.7)

The defence must take place no earlier than two weeks after the author has received the

preliminary recommendation, but by no later than three months after submission of the PhD dissertation, unless special circumstances apply.

The defence will be chaired by the programme chair or a representative of the programme chair, and will be held in accordance with customary practice in the relevant field.

The public defence must be conducted as a public lecture of no more than 45 minutes on the topic indicated in the preliminary recommendation. The introductory lecture must be followed by a discussion on the basis of questions presented by the members of the assessment committee, followed by questions from the audience. A public defence should usually last no longer than two hours and must not exceed three hours.

The public defence must allow committee members to account for the significance and quality of the dissertation, and for the PhD student to present and defend the dissertation to the members of the assessment committee. Furthermore, the defence should invite others to participate in the discussion.

Immediately after the conclusion of the defence, the assessment committee will withdraw to make a decision as to whether they will recommend the award of the PhD degree on the basis of the defence. If the members of the committee agree unanimously that the PhD degree can be awarded, the chair of the committee will inform the author of this orally.

The final recommendation

(Described in the Rules and guidelines for the PhD degree programme, part 12.6)

The final recommendation must include an assessment of the quality of the PhD dissertation and of the public defence. The recommendation must include an explanation of the reasons for the assessment, and in the event of a difference of opinion, the majority will prevail. Any differences of opinion and the reason for these must be clearly stated in the committee's recommendation. The committee's final recommendation is to be announced orally immediately after the defence and must be made available in writing and forwarded to the graduate school as soon as possible hereafter.

The final recommendation document may, for example, be drawn up as follows:

On [Date], Aarhus BSS Graduate School, Aarhus BSS, Aarhus University, appointed an expert committee for the assessment of a dissertation submitted by [academic degree, name] with a view to obtaining the PhD degree in [name of the PhD degree programme]. The committee was composed as follows:

[Title, academic degree, name and place of employment (for all members)] with [name] as the chair.

(If relevant, include information that the student has exercised the option to object to the composition of the assessment committee, that the assessment committee has approved changes or additions to the dissertation before the defence, etc.)

The main supervisor (title, academic degree and name) has been involved in the committee's work but without voting rights.

With reference to the committee's enclosed written assessment of the dissertation "[title of dissertation]" submitted by [name] and after a successful oral defence on [date] under the topic "[topic for the defence]", the undersigned members of the assessment committee recommend that [name] be awarded the PhD degree in [name of PhD degree programme].

If information is provided during the defence, e.g. in the form of incorrect, incomplete or inconclusive answers from the author, which influences the assessment committee's

recommendation as to whether the PhD degree should be awarded, this must be stated in the committee's final recommendation.

The final recommendation must be signed by all members of the assessment committee.

Award of the PhD degree

(Described in the Rules and guidelines for the PhD degree programme, part 12.8)

After the defence, both the preliminary and the final recommendation will be forwarded to the Academic Council. If the dissertation has been re-submitted, all the preliminary recommendations will be forwarded along with the final recommendation. On the basis of the material submitted, the Academic Council will decide as to whether the PhD degree is to be awarded.

If the recommendation of the assessment committee is negative, the Academic Council may decide to allow the dissertation to be assessed by a new assessment committee if so requested by the author within a period of at least one week and if the Council finds this relevant.

When a decision has been made to award the degree, the author will be informed as soon as possible and a diploma will be issued.

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