GUIDELINES FOR ASSESSMENT COMMITTEES ON AWARD OF THE PHD DEGREE

Aarhus BSS Graduate School
September 2021
Rules and regulations governing award of the PhD degree

The regulations governing the award of the PhD degree consist of:


- Aarhus University rules regarding the PhD education: [https://international.au.dk/about/organisation/index/6/64/aarhus-universitys-rules-regarding-phd-education/](https://international.au.dk/about/organisation/index/6/64/aarhus-universitys-rules-regarding-phd-education/)


- Basic principles of PhD education at Aarhus University: [https://phd.au.dk/strategy-and-collaboration/basic-principles-of-phd-education/](https://phd.au.dk/strategy-and-collaboration/basic-principles-of-phd-education/)

Requirements for the PhD dissertation

(Rules and regulations of the Graduate School, section 11.1)

In accordance with section 11 of the PhD Order, the PhD dissertation must substantiate the author’s ability to apply the scientific methods of the field in question and must demonstrate the author’s research contribution to the field in question, and such contribution must correspond to international standards for PhD degrees awarded in the field. This is further specified in the basic principles of PhD education at Aarhus University: *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.*

In accordance with the general rules and regulations of Aarhus BSS Graduate School, a PhD dissertation may be in the form of either a monograph or a collection of scientific articles, including a summary and a conclusion accounting for the relation between the publications and their individual contribution to the total PhD project.

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

Part of the dissertation may be written in collaboration with others, e.g. supervisors, but must include entirely independent contributions of major scientific importance. If the dissertation contains co-authored papers or chapters, declarations of co-authorship identifying the PhD student’s share of contribution must be included in the dissertation.
The dissertation must be written in Danish or English language, and a brief summary in Danish and English must be enclosed. The head of the Graduate School may give permission for submission of a dissertation written, in part or in whole, in another language than Danish or English.

**The role of the assessment committee**  
(Rules and regulations of the Graduate School, section 12.2)

The assessment committee must provide an impartial and qualified assessment of the submitted PhD dissertation. The assessment committee must submit a recommendation in writing to the Academic Council, and the wording of such recommendation must present the committee’s joint assessment. The preliminary recommendation must state whether the submitted PhD dissertation has been found to meet the quality requirements of the PhD Order (i.e. the submitted dissertation is of satisfactory academic standard and found suitable for public defence) provided that a successful oral public defence is completed. Both the preliminary and the final recommendation must be forwarded to the Dean of Aarhus BSS through the head of the Graduate School.

The recommendation must be motivated and may be determined by simple majority of votes in case of disagreement. If the recommendation is not unanimous, the minority and majority of votes must be listed and both should be motivated separately. The recommendation must be suitable for forming the basis for the decision of the Academic Council on award of the PhD degree in accordance with the Danish PhD Order and the Danish Public Administration Act.

**The duties of the assessment committee and the chairman**

The assessment committee’s members and delegates have a duty of confidentiality. The PhD students’ main supervisor should be regarded as a delegate to the committee but has no right to vote. This means that the chairman of the committee must ensure that the main supervisor is involved in the committees’ work. How this should be done in practice must be based on a specific assessment. It is the chairman’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 written 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, in any circumstance, be presented to the main supervisor well in advance before the deadline for submitting the assessment and before it is sent to the head of the Graduate School (Rules and regulations of the Graduate School, section 12.2).

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

All enquiries to and from the committee take place via the chairperson. The chairperson is responsible for ensuring that deadlines are met, and that if necessary an extension is requested, and that any doubts about the work of the committee are clarified. In case of unanimous recommendations, i.e. unanimous acceptance or rejection of the PhD dissertation as a basis for the award of the PhD degree, the chairperson must adapt the individual contributions from the committee members to form one combined statement accounting for the committee’s joint motivations.

**The preliminary recommendation**  
(Rules and regulations of the Graduate School, section 12.3)

No later than two months after submission of the dissertation, the assessment committee must
forward a preliminary reasoned recommendation to the head of the Graduate School including one of the following conclusions:

1. In accordance with ministerial order section 18, subsection 2, the dissertation is found suitable for public defence in the submitted version.
   - The recommendation must include a defence date and a suggestion for a topic for the public defence.

2. In accordance with ministerial order section 18, subsection 2, the dissertation is found suitable for public defence in the submitted form, but the assessment committee recommends certain improvements, which are assessed as feasible to implement before the specified defence date.
   - The recommendation must include a specification of the recommended improvements, a defence date, and a suggestion for a topic for the public defence.

3. In accordance with ministerial order section 18, subsection 3 and subsection 4 No.2, 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.
   - The recommendation must include a deadline for submission of the revised dissertation as well as a specification of the recommended improvements. The candidate and the main supervisor are given the opportunity within a minimum of two weeks to put forward their comments to the recommendation.

4. In accordance with ministerial order section 18, subsection 3 and subsection 4 No. 1, 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 candidate and the main supervisor are given the opportunity within a minimum of two weeks to put forward their comments to the recommendation.

The head of the Graduate School must then forward a copy of the recommendation to the candidate as soon as possible.

If the preliminary assessment concludes that the dissertation is not found suitable for public defence, the head of the Graduate School must, on the basis of the recommendation submitted by the assessment committee and the candidate’s and the main supervisor’s comments (if any), make one of the following decisions:

- The public defence cannot take place
- The PhD dissertation may be re-submitted in a revised version within three (or more) months. If the PhD dissertation is re-submitted, the revised version will be assessed by the same assessment committee unless special circumstances apply
- The PhD dissertation must be assessed by a new assessment committee

**Pre-defence**
(Rules and regulations of the Graduate School, section 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 organized by the chairperson 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
The submission of the PhD dissertation.

The PhD 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 chairperson 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 main supervisor no later than 48 hours prior to the scheduled time for pre-defence. The discussion at the pre-defence must, as a minimum, cover all parts of the dissertation, in which the assessment committee disagrees with the student, and where the assessment committee is of the opinion that the dissertation can be improved.

Submission of revised PhD dissertation
(Rules and regulations of the Graduate School, section 12.5)

A revised PhD dissertation must be submitted before the deadline for re-submission, which has been recommended in the preliminary assessment made by the assessment committee and set by the head of the Graduate School. A copy of the revised PhD dissertation is forwarded to all members of the assessment committee through the head of the Graduate School.

The assessment committee then evaluates the quality of the improvements made to the PhD dissertation and assesses whether the dissertation in the revised form is suitable for public defence. If positive, the assessment committee must forward the revised assessment to the dean, through the head of the Graduate School, together with a suggestion for a topic and date for the public defence. If negative, the assessment committee must inform the dean, through the head of the Graduate School, that the revised dissertation cannot be accepted for public defence. The head of the Graduate School must then as soon as possible send a copy of the new recommendation to the candidate.

The final recommendation
(Rules and regulations of the Graduate School, section 12.6 and 12.8)

The public defence must take place no earlier than two weeks after the committee has released the preliminary assessment, but no later than three months after submission of the dissertation, unless special conditions apply.

The assessment committee must in immediate continuation of the oral defence decide whether the PhD degree can be awarded and must inform Aarhus University and the author of the PhD dissertation of such decision. The recommendation is an assessment of the quality of the PhD dissertation and of the public defence. The recommendation must be motivated and may be determined on the basis of majority of votes in case of disagreement. Any differences of opinion, including the reasons for such, must be clearly stated in the recommendation. The committee’s final recommendation must be announced verbally immediately after the defence session and must be available in writing as soon as possible hereafter.

The final recommendation drawn up by the assessment committee may be phrased, for example, in the following way:
If the oral defence provides new information (for instance if the author provides incorrect, missing or inadequate answers) that may alter the opinion of the assessment committee as to not awarding the PhD degree, this must appear from the final recommendation drawn up by the assessment committee.

If the final recommendation is negative, the Academic Council may decide to get a second opinion on the dissertation by appointing a new assessment committee, provided that a second opinion is requested by the author (who must be allowed at least one week to consider taking such step) and the Academic Council finds such request to be valid.

The Academic Council may award the PhD degree if at least two members of the assessment committee recommend the award of the PhD degree.

**Technical requirements to the recommendation**

Both the preliminary and the final recommendation must be prepared jointly by all members of the assessment committee. The recommendation is signed by all members of the assessment committee. The recommendation may be signed by the chairman alone on behalf of the full committee when the committee members have agreed on the wording of the recommendation. The recommendation must be phrased in an unbiased and objective manner and must constitute a sufficient basis for the final decision.

A preliminary recommendation should generally not exceed 12 standard pages.

The recommendation must be addressed to the dean and must be forwarded through the chairman of the PhD programme to the PhD school administration.