



Guidelines for examinations in third-cycle education

1. General information

The following guidelines are for the assessment of elements that provide credits for third-cycle (doctoral) education and are based upon the Higher Education Ordinance (1993:100) and *Regulations on the public defence and grading of doctoral theses at Södertörn University*. They are also based on the Association of Swedish Higher Education Institutions' *Rekommendationer för utbildning på forskarnivå* (REK 2011:3).

Third-cycle education comprises an individual programme that can lead to either a licentiate degree or a doctoral degree. It is divided into two parts that provide credits: one for courses and one for the thesis. To be awarded a degree, the doctoral student must pass both parts according to the stated scope of the degree in the general syllabus for the third-cycle subject area.

A doctoral student is a student who is admitted to and undertaking education at third-cycle level, regardless of whether they are aiming for a licentiate or doctoral degree. General texts about education in the Higher Education Ordinance include the term "student", which includes doctoral students unless another level of education is specifically stated.

2. Courses

2.1. Assessment of courses

Under the university's regulations, examinations that are included in third-cycle education must be assessed using one of the following grades: Pass or Fail.¹

¹ Föreskrifter om betygssystem för prov som ingår i utbildning på forskarnivå vid Södertörns högskola, dnr 2344-1.1.2-2022

Decisions on grading for individual reading courses and other courses that provide credit may be made by the doctoral student's principal supervisor. However, a single examiner may not assess all the courses taken by one doctoral student.

Completed courses must be presented in the doctoral student's individual study plan.

Under the Higher Education Ordinance, grading decisions may not be appealed or reviewed by other decision-makers, internal or external to the university.² However, a student may request a correction or reassessment.³ If requested by the doctoral student, a reason for the decision should be provided by the examiner. A student who has taken two examinations for a course or module without achieving a pass is entitled to have another examiner appointed, unless circumstances suggest otherwise.⁴

The examiner may decide on alternative modes of assessment for students with permanent disabilities. The doctoral student must be provided with alternative assessment that is comparable to other doctoral students.

2.2. Deciding on the examiner

Under the Higher Education Ordinance, examinations that are part of doctoral level education must be assessed using the grading system prescribed by the university and the grade must be decided by a specially appointed teacher (examiner).⁵

Decisions to appoint examiners are made by the head of school, in accordance with the university's official procedures for delegation and decision-making (may be delegated, see the delegation of authority for the academic school or equivalent).

For core courses, proposals for examiners are submitted to the research area for doctoral studies. For courses in a specific subject, the examiner is proposed by the subject area, as well as in cases where the principal supervisor is the examiner.

Decisions on appointing the examiner are made every six months for courses that are scheduled for the upcoming six-month period.

Examiners for doctoral courses given by Södertörn University must have at least a doctoral degree and be affiliated to the university via employment or in some other way.

2.3. The examiner's tasks and responsibilities

The examiner has final responsibility for assessment and decides grades autonomously. This responsibility cannot be delegated.

In association with the course's planning, execution and assessment, the examiner has the following tasks and responsibilities:

² Chapter 12, Sections 2 and 4 of the Higher Education Ordinance (1993:100)

³ Chapter 6, Sections 23 and 24 of the Higher Education Ordinance (1993:100)

⁴ Chapter 6, Section 22 of the Higher Education Ordinance (1993:100)

⁵ Chapter 6, Section 32 of the Higher Education Ordinance (1993:100)

- assuring the quality of examinations and ensuring that assessment is conducted in accordance with the validated syllabus (including intended learning outcomes and modes of assessment)
- developing assignments for assessment
- developing grading criteria and ensuring they are available by the start of the course
- ensuring that assessment is legally certain, there is equal treatment and that there are no conflicts of interest
- informing the relevant administrator that a course instance must be created in Ladok
- grading completed courses
- entering grades in Ladok and attesting them within a reasonable period after the examination
- if the examiner is the course coordinator: ensuring that course evaluations and compilations of course evaluations are conducted in accordance with university guidelines ⁶
- managing applications for corrections and reassessments of grades under Chapter 6, Sections 23-24 of the Higher Education Ordinance.

Multiple examiners may be appointed for the same examination session and can thus participate in grading different doctoral students in one examination session. However, the examiners do not perform collaborative assessments; there is one examiner for each doctoral student. Examiners must ensure that their assessments are equal value.

3. Collegial reviews of doctoral and licentiate theses

Before a public defence is held, a doctoral thesis must have undergone at least two reviews during the doctoral student's study period, for example at seminars. On these occasions, work thus far must be presented in its entirety, and the development and quality of work on the thesis must be assessed. A reviewer external to the university must participate on at least one of these occasions. Prior to a licentiate seminar, the licentiate thesis must have had at least one review by an external reviewer.

Under the recommendations issued by the Association of Swedish Higher Education Institutions, these reviews should be conducted separately to the work of the examining committee, as the committee must make an autonomous assessment at the public defence.⁷ Reviewers who have participated in a review prior to the public defence should therefore not be included in the examining committee.

The format for collegial reviews is specified in the general syllabus for the third-cycle subject area. For reviews, reviewers are appointed by the subject, for example by the supervisory collegium.

⁶ Riktlinjer för genomförande, sammanställning och arkivering av kursvärderingar, dnr 799-1.1.2-2022

⁷ Rekommendationer för utbildning på forskarnivå. REK 2011:3. Association of Swedish Higher Education Institutions

The supervisory collegium assesses whether a doctoral student will be advised to undertake a public defence of their thesis, based on the opinions presented at the abovementioned reviews. Third-cycle subject areas may develop a routine procedure for a recommendation to cancel or delay a public defence.

4. Public defence and assessment of doctoral theses

4.1. General information

Under the Higher Education Ordinance, for a doctoral degree the doctoral student must have been awarded a pass grade for a documented research project (doctoral thesis) of at least 120 credits.⁸ The scope of the credits is decided by the third-cycle subject area and specified in the general syllabus.

The doctoral thesis must be presented and defended orally in public. An external reviewer must be appointed for this presentation.⁹

4.2. Date and place of public defence

Section 2 of the *Regulations on the public defence and grading of doctoral theses at Södertörn University* states that public defences must be held on a normal workday in the period 15 August – 21 December or 7 January – 15 June. Two public defences may not be held simultaneously at the university. The public defence must take place at the university unless there are exceptional circumstances; the reason for these must be provided when the request to hold the public defence is submitted. In exceptional circumstances, the public defence may be hybrid or fully online.

4.3. Request to hold a public defence, and decisions about the external reviewer, members of the examining committee and chair of the public defence

The request to hold a public defence must be processed by the third-cycle subject area's supervisory collegium and then approved by the steering committee of the relevant research area for doctoral studies.

The steering committee sends the request to the Faculty Board, with the

- proposed date, time and place of public defence
- proposed external reviewer
- members of the examining committee, including substitutes
- chair of the public defence
- title of the thesis (or the preliminary title)
- statement that applicable practice for the rules on conflicts of interest has been observed.

⁸ Higher Education Ordinance (1993:100), Annex 2 – System of Qualifications

⁹ Paragraph two of Chapter 6, Section 33 of the Higher Education Ordinance (1993:100)

At least two months prior to the public defence, decisions on the date, time and place of the public defence, as well as the external reviewer, members of the examining committee, including substitutes, and the chair of the public defence, must have been made by the Faculty Board or the body to which the board has delegated the right to make these decisions.

4.4. External reviewer

The external reviewer must have a doctoral degree or the equivalent and have the necessary scholarly expertise for reviewing the thesis. The external reviewer must not be employed or otherwise active at Södertörn University.

In exceptional circumstances, the external reviewer may participate remotely.

If the appointed external reviewer has to cancel at short notice, a member of the examining committee who is not employed at Södertörn University may be asked to be, and appointed as, external reviewer. An appointed substitute then becomes a member of the examining committee. The decision is made by the chair of the public defence. The chair also decides whether the public defence must be cancelled if no new external reviewer can be appointed.

The principal supervisor and the chair of the public defence are jointly responsible for providing the external reviewer with detailed information about the procedure for a public defence in the research area for doctoral education, see section 4.8.

4.5. Examining committee

Under the Higher Education Act, at least one person participating in the grading of a doctoral thesis must be someone who does not work at the higher education institution awarding the degree.¹⁰

Sections 8-10 of *Regulations on the public defence and grading of doctoral theses at Södertörn University* state that:

- The grade for a doctoral thesis must be decided by an examining committee that is specifically appointed for each thesis.
- The examining committee must have either three or five members. The committee must appoint its chair internally. None of the doctoral student's supervisors may sit on the examining committee.
- At least one substitute must be appointed for the members of the examining committee.

In addition to these regulations, the following guidelines apply:

- A majority of the members must be qualified in the research area for the public defence.

¹⁰ Chapter 6, Section 34 of the Higher Education Ordinance (1993:100)

- A majority of the members must be employed and work externally to Södertörn University.
- Members of the examining committee must be at least associate professors (*docent*). Examining committees with three members must have at least one member who is a professor. Examining committees with five members must have at least two members who are professors.
- Men and women must be represented on the examining committee.
- Where necessary, the Faculty Board can appoint an additional substitute if there is a risk of the examining committee not being quorate.
- In exceptional circumstances, a member of the examining committee may participate remotely.
- If there are exceptional circumstances that conflict with any of the above requirements for the composition of the examining committee, a request to deviate from these requirements may be submitted. These reasons are presented as part of the proposals submitted to the Faculty Board.
- The above-stated deviations to the composition of the examining committee may be made if substitutes are called for inclusion in the committee.

4.6. Chair of the public defence Section 5 of *Regulations on the public defence and grading of doctoral theses at Södertörn University* states that the public defence must be led by a chair.

The chair must have excellent scholarly qualifications in the research area for doctoral studies and employed at Södertörn University. The doctoral student's supervisor must not be appointed chair.

4.7. Notification of public defence and doctoral thesis

Sections 3-4 of *Regulations on the public defence and grading of doctoral theses at Södertörn University* state that:

- The notification of a public defence and doctoral thesis (*spikning*) must take place at least three weeks prior to the date of the public defence. Any weeks outside the public defence periods may not be included in these three weeks. Electronic *spikning* must be done in the university's publication database.
- The doctoral thesis must be available at the university library when it is presented at the *spikning*, so it can be reviewed prior to the public defence.

See *Guidelines for the format, publication, announcement and distribution of doctoral and licentiate theses* for more information.

4.8. The public defence

Instructions for the public defence are produced by each research area for doctoral studies.

4.9. Grading system

Sections 6-7 of *Regulations on the public defence and grading of doctoral theses at Södertörn University* state that:

- A doctoral thesis must be assessed as one of the following grades: Pass or Fail.
- The content of the thesis and its public defence must be considered when it is graded.

4.10. Meeting of the examining committee

Sections 11-16 of *Regulations on the public defence and grading of doctoral theses at Södertörn University* state that:

- The examining committee must meet as soon as possible after the public defence. The examining committee is quorate when all the appointed members are present, either on campus or via online conferencing tools.
- The external reviewer and supervisor may attend and may have the right to speak, but not to participate in decision making.
- The substitute on the examining committee must attend and participate in the decision if they are replacing an appointed member. The examining committee decides whether a substitute who is not called upon to replace an appointed member may attend the meeting and have the right to speak. A substitute who is not replacing an appointed member may not participate in decision making.
- The examining committee has the right to discuss and decide the grade without the presence of other participants.
- The meeting of the examining committee and the grading decision for the thesis must be documented in minutes that are immediately checked by all members of the examining committee. A decision on grading is a majority decision. If a thesis receives a fail grade, the examining committee must justify this in writing within one week of the public defence.
- A member of the examining committee who wishes to register an objection to the majority decision may have this noted in the minutes of the meeting. A divergent opinion may be submitted in writing to the chair of the examining committee within one week of the public defence and appended to the minutes.

After the examining committee's meeting, the chair of the examining committee is responsible for sending the minutes and any appendices to the relevant person at the academic school, who informs the relevant people of the decision before it is archived.

5. Licentiate seminar and assessment of a licentiate thesis

5.1. General information

Under the Higher Education Act, for a Degree of Licentiate the doctoral student must have been awarded a pass grade for a research thesis of at least 60 credits.¹¹ The scope of the credits is decided by the third-cycle subject area and specified in the general syllabus.

The licentiate seminar and assessment of the licentiate thesis are not regulated in the Higher Education Ordinance in the same way as the public defence and assessment of a doctoral thesis, but at Södertörn University they must follow the university's guidelines, stated below. Each research area or subject area for doctoral studies may also decide on more detailed procedures for the licentiate seminar.

5.2. Time and place

A licentiate thesis must be examined at a publicly announced licentiate seminar, which must take place on a weekday during the periods 15 August – 21 December or 7 January – 15 June. The licentiate thesis must be presented at the university but, in exceptional circumstances, may be hybrid or fully online.

5.3. Registration of licentiate seminar, and decisions about the external reviewer, members of the examining committee and chair of the public defence

When registering a licentiate seminar, the third-cycle subject area must send the following to the relevant research area for doctoral studies

- information about the date, time and place of the seminar
- proposed external reviewer
- proposal for members of the examining committee, including substitute, or examiner
- chair of the seminar
- title of the thesis (or the preliminary title)
- statement that applicable practice for the rules on conflicts of interest has been observed.

At least two months prior to the licentiate seminar, the steering group must make decisions about the external reviewer, members of the examining committee, including substitute, or examiner, and the chair of the seminar.

5.4. External reviewer

The external reviewer must have a doctoral degree or the equivalent and have the necessary scholarly expertise for reviewing the licentiate thesis. The external reviewer must not be employed or otherwise active at Södertörn University.

In exceptional circumstances, the external reviewer may participate remotely.

¹¹ Higher Education Ordinance (1993:100), Annex 2 – System of Qualifications

If the appointed external reviewer has to cancel at short notice, a member of the examining committee who is not employed at Södertörn University may be asked to be, and appointed as, external reviewer. An appointed substitute then becomes a member of the examining committee. The decision is made by the chair of the seminar. The chair also decides whether the seminar must be cancelled if no new external reviewer can be appointed.

The principal supervisor and the chair of the licentiate seminar are jointly responsible for providing the external reviewer with detailed information about the procedure for a licentiate seminar in the research area, see section 5.8.

5.5. Examining committee or examiner

An examining committee that grades the thesis must be appointed for the licentiate seminar.

- The examining committee must have three members. The committee must appoint its chair internally. None of the doctoral student's supervisors may sit on the examining committee.
- Members of the examining committee must be at least associate professors (*docent*).
- A majority of the members must be qualified in the research area for the public defence.
- A majority of the members must be employed and work externally to Södertörn University.
- Men and women must be represented on the examining committee.
- A substitute must be appointed for members of the examining committee.
- In exceptional circumstances, a member of the examining committee may participate remotely.
- If there are exceptional circumstances that conflict with any of the above requirements for the composition of the examining committee, a request to deviate from them may be submitted. These reasons are presented as part of the proposals submitted to the Faculty Board.
- The above-stated deviations to the composition of the examining committee may be made if a substitute is called for inclusion in the committee.

The instructions for the meeting of the examining committee stated under 4.10. must otherwise be applied.

Alternately, an examiner who grades the thesis may be appointed to the licentiate seminar. The examiner must be at least an associate professor (*docent*) and be employed and active externally to Södertörn University. A substitute who fulfils the same criteria must be appointed.

5.6. Chair of the licentiate seminar

The licentiate seminar must be led by a chairperson. The chair must have excellent scholarly qualifications in the research area for doctoral studies and employed at Södertörn University. The doctoral student's supervisor must not be appointed chair.

5.7. Notice

The seminar must be announced in good time and the thesis must be available at least three semester weeks prior to its examination. Unless there are exceptional circumstances, the thesis does not need to be printed as a hard copy, see *Guidelines for the format, publication, announcement and distribution of doctoral and licentiate theses* for more information.

5.8. Licentiate seminar

Instructions for the licentiate seminar are produced by the relevant research area or subject area for doctoral education.

5.9. Grading system

The licentiate thesis must be assessed as the following grades: Pass or Fail. When grading the thesis, the content of the thesis and its public defence must be considered.

6. Degree certificate

The rules for degree certificates at doctoral level are found in the university's *Local System of Qualifications for General Qualifications*.¹²

Under the Higher Education Ordinance, a student whose request for a degree certificate is rejected may appeal the decision to the Higher Education Appeals Board.¹³

7. Entry into effect

These guidelines enter into effect on 19 October 2022.

¹² *Local System of Qualifications for General Qualifications at First, Second and Third Cycle Levels*, reg.no. 2959-2.1.1-2021

¹³ Item 7 of Chapter 12, Section 2 of the Higher Education Ordinance