GUIDELINES FOR THE EVALUATION PROCESS OF THE DOCTORAL DEGREE AT THE FACULTY OF MEDICINE AND DENTISTRY, UNIVERSITY OF BERGEN

Adopted by the Board of the Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry on 9 November 2012. These guidelines replace the guidelines of 9 April 2008.

I. The relationship with other regulations and guidelines

The evaluation committee is requested to state whether or not the thesis satisfies the formal and real requirements set out in the “Regulations for the doctoral degree philosophiae doctor (PhD) at the University of Bergen” of June 12, 2003, last modified on October 21, 2004, with supplementary guidelines for the Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry, last modified on 9 November 2011. “Guidelines regarding requirements for a PhD thesis at the Faculty of Medicine, University of Bergen” should be used as a support for the committee’s evaluation.

II. The Evaluation Report

The statement of the committee (evaluation report) should first and foremost present a clear and unambiguous conclusion as to whether the qualitative and quantitative scientific requirements have been met, so that the thesis can be defended for the degree of PhD. The statement should provide a well-grounded justification for this conclusion. The committee may not accept a thesis on condition of changes being made to the material submitted.

The statement should provide a description of the type and scope of the work, including a separate evaluation of each part of the work and of the general discussion. The quality of the individual parts of the work should be evaluated, by means of recognised quality measures if such are relevant. The statement should be 4-6 pages long. If the doctoral thesis includes material that has not been published in international refereed journals, the board’s written evaluation should be particularly detailed.

The evaluation committee should preferably submit a joint written statement. It will not normally be necessary for the committee to meet. If, however, this is found to be desirable, the chairman of the evaluation committee may apply in advance for a refund of any expenses incurred. Any dissent in the committee must be clearly expressed. If necessary, separate expressions of opinion may be presented. The written statement should assess the originality of the work, and whether the work is in compliance with international standards. The conclusion of the evaluation report should be a clear recommendation as to whether or not the thesis is worthy of defending for the degree of PhD.

The evaluation report should include the following elements:

1. A description of what forms the basis for the thesis. Normally, this will be previously published/accepted/submitted material for a scientific journal. Where these articles have more than one author, the role of the candidate should be addressed.

2. An evaluation of the following elements, based on criteria (see below): Clearly and concisely formulated questions, the use of methods that are adequate and can be repeated, precise presentation of results, critical evaluation of results, use of terms and language within the academic field, adequate introduction. Normally, the articles are evaluated separately, in addition to the general evaluation.

3. A separate conclusion on the conditions for the evaluation, and whether the thesis is found worthy of public defence.

When writing the report, the committee is recommended to consider the following:

• Title: Is the title adequate, accurate and not too long? Does it contain important keywords?
• Abstract/summary: Is there a sort summary, including background, objective/purpose, materials/methods, results, conclusion and consequences?

• Introduction: Is the background to the research work and what it builds on described? Does the introduction lead on to the research questions that are asked in the thesis? Is the literature review thorough and does it present state-of-the-art knowledge and research? Are relevant original publications mentioned? Does the introduction include an academic and contemporary context, and does it mention past studies of importance? Are illustrations and figures used well?

• Objective/purpose: presented clearly and concisely with a high degree of linguistic precision, and categorised into main goal and secondary goals?

• Material and methods: Is the presentation of materials and methods clear and concise, and does it include relevant details? Is reference made to already published/documented methods? Is a critical evaluation of the choice of methods and techniques (methodological considerations) included, either here or in the discussion? Are ethical considerations in compliance with international standards, and are relevant formal approvals mentioned?

• Results: Are the most relevant/important results emphasised? Is it clear if and how the results contribute to progress within the academic field?

• Discussion: Is the discussion an objective and critical review of the candidate’s own academic choices and results? Are strengths and weaknesses addressed, both in terms of methods utilised and results achieved, as well as related to existing knowledge? Is there a form of natural continuity within the work?

• Conclusions: Is there a summary of the most important results? Does the candidate describe how the objectives are addressed in the thesis?

• Future perspectives: Does this section include a description of how the work forms a basis for further development of the academic field? Should the results promote a change of opinion on a specific issue nationally or internationally? Should the findings lead to amendments or changes in routines, or new concepts?

• References: Are the references complete and are full titles listed? Are references to all sources listed, including sources for figures and tables? Is the list of references up to date and complete?

III Dissent/separate statements/rejection

Any dissent in the committee must be clearly expressed. If necessary, separate statements may be presented. The written statement offers guidance to the Faculty Board, which formally approves the thesis. If the thesis is rejected, the candidate may submit a revised version no later than one year after the committee’s recommendation has been given to the candidate. If the thesis is rejected again, this rejection is final.

IV Deadlines

Within one month of receiving the thesis, the chairman of the evaluation committee should, in agreement with the other committee members, doctoral candidate and Faculty, agree on a planned date for the public defence. The evaluation committee should submit its written recommendation within three months of receiving the thesis, but never less than three weeks before the planned defence. If the thesis is recommended to be rejected, the Faculty should be notified of this at least one month before
the planned date of the public defence. The Faculty will immediately inform the candidate. The committee cannot have any contact with the supervisor or the candidate regarding the result of the evaluation.

V Trial lecture

The chairman of the evaluation committee is responsible for ensuring that the title of the trial lecture on a topic of the committee’s choice is received by the Faculty at least one month before the planned trial lecture. The title of the lecture should be submitted in writing. The title will be treated as confidential until it is given to the doctoral candidate, 10 working days before the date of the trial lecture. The trial lecture will be given in a central auditorium and at a time which permits it to be included in the Faculty’s basic and advanced teaching schedule. The subject of the lecture should be taken from central areas of clinical, paraclinical or preclinical medicine, and should be of interest to both students and staff at the university and hospital. The length of the lecture will be 45 minutes, followed by questions and discussion. The trial lecture must be approved by a committee appointed by the Faculty before the public defence takes place.

After the trial lecture and the discussion, the chairman of the lecture (acting Dean), the committee and the candidate all leave the room. The committee then withdraws to decide whether the trial lecture can be approved. The acting Dean can be in the same room, but is not part of the evaluation. As soon as the committee has reached a conclusion, the acting Dean informs the candidate. If the trial lecture is approved, all re-enter the lecture hall, and the acting Dean announces the result and that the public defence will take place as planned.

If the evaluation committee does not approve the trial lecture, a new trial lecture must be held. The new trial lecture should be held over a different topic, no later than six (6) months after the first attempt. A new trial lecture may only be held once, and must be evaluated to the extent possible by the same committee that evaluated the first trial lecture.

If the trial lecture is not approved, only the acting Dean and the evaluation committee re-enter the room to inform the audience about the result, and that the public defence cannot be held until a trial lecture is approved. The date for a new trial lecture will be announced as soon as possible.

VI. Public defence

At the public defence the first and second opponents each submit an oral opposition, the point of which is to present a critical analysis of the thesis. Central aspects of the thesis are discussed with the doctoral candidate, on this occasion in greater detail than in the written statement. The opponents should utilise the opposition to bring out the strong and weak points of the thesis and to judge its quality, the strength of the evidence it has brought to bear on the problem addressed, and the level of its information value. The opponents, primarily the first opponent, should place the thesis in a wider scientific context. The discussion should be led in such a way that it will be fruitful for the candidate and the scientific group to which he or she belongs, as well as being of interest to the audience.

How the tasks are shared by the two opponents should be agreed upon in advance. There are, however, no detailed rules concerning this aspect. Generally, the structure of the thesis and/or the scientific background of the opponents will suggest a natural distribution of tasks. For example, each of the opponents may concentrate on a particular group of papers, or each may concentrate on particular aspects of all the papers.

The doctoral candidate initiates the defence by presenting the objectives of the scientific study and the results it has obtained. The introduction should not exceed 30 minutes. Thereafter, the defence continues in the form of a discussion of the thesis involving the opponents and the doctoral candidate.
If the opponents have particular remarks about formal aspects of the thesis, the usual procedure is for the second opponent to bring these up. Technical aids (blackboard, overheads, slides, video projector, etc.) may be used. This should be arranged in advance so that such aids are installed and ready for use.

The first opponent in a normal defence has 60-120 minutes at his disposal, and the second opponent, 45-60 minutes.

Opposition ex auditorio is permitted. Contributions should be well prepared and precise, and should aim to enrich the scientific discussion. Anyone present may participate. The chairman of the evaluation committee may also present his opposition in this way. Opposition ex auditorio takes place before the second opponent takes the floor.

When the opposition is completed, the chairman of the public defence (acting Dean), the committee and the candidate all leave the room. The committee then withdraws to decide whether the public defence can be approved. The acting Dean can be in the same room, but is not part of the evaluation. As soon as the committee has reached a conclusion, the acting Dean informs the candidate. If the public defence is approved, all re-enter the lecture hall, and the acting Dean announces that the defence is recommended approved, and that the recommendation will be submitted to the University Board. If desired, the doctoral candidate, his research group and department may be congratulated briefly. The candidate may also offer his thanks before the acting Dean brings the defence to a close.

If the public defence is not approved, the candidate may defend his/her thesis again, once. A new public defence can be arranged six (6) months after the original defence, earliest and must be evaluated to the extent possible by the same committee that evaluated the first defence. If the public defence is not approved, only the acting Dean and the evaluation committee re-enter the room to inform the audience about the result, and that a new public defence will be announced later.

VII. Entry and exit

The protagonists proceed into the auditorium in the following order: Acting Dean, doctoral candidate, chairman of the evaluation committee, second opponent and first opponent. The acting Dean opens the procedure by giving the floor to the candidate. He then asks the first opponent to step forward. The second opponent is called forward after any interventions ex auditorio. The acting Dean closes the defence and proceeds out of the auditorium followed by the doctoral candidate and the evaluation committee. Customary wear for the opponents is dark lounge suit.