



## GUIDELINES FOR THE ASSESSMENT OF PHD THESES

(Link to template on the last page)

The present guidelines refer to the assessment committee's working procedures and the preparation of the recommendation.

### 1. Organisation of the assessment work

**The chairman of the committee** is responsible for setting a timeline for the assessment work which ensures that the preliminary assessment can be sent to the Doctoral School no later than two months from the submission of the thesis (section 18). Furthermore, it is expected that the chairman at an early stage initiates the planning of the defence date.

For your information, **the principal supervisor** shall assist the assessment committee without voting rights, with reference to section 16(2) in the PhD Order. This means that the supervisor can be included in the committee's work if it is found relevant by the committee/committee chair, e.g. in connection with questions regarding the PhD thesis..

The committee is welcome to divide the assessment work between the members. However, every member of the committee must relate to the thesis as a whole and provide his/her overall evaluation of the thesis. It is common practice that the chairman writes the presentation of the thesis which is subsequently commented on and finally approved by the other members. It is often the chairman who edits the evaluating part of the recommendation based on the inputs from the other members.

The major part of the communication in the committee takes place by email. In case of disagreement in the committee, it may be suitable to meet either in person or over the phone.

### 2. Drawing up the preliminary recommendation

The committee shall submit both a preliminary and a final recommendation:

*The preliminary recommendation* consists of an evaluation as to whether or not the PhD student *through his/her thesis* has proved able to carry out a research project by independent application of scientific theories and methods at a level meeting the international standards for PhD degrees within the research area in question.

The recommendation must be drawn up in such a way that it clearly reflects the form of the thesis (monograph, article based or a combination model) according to the Doctoral School's guidelines for writing a thesis <https://www.phd.samf.aau.dk/rules-guidelines-forms/>. The evaluation must also take this into account. For instance, the demands for coherence cannot be the same on an article based thesis as on a monograph.

To ensure that the preliminary recommendation constitutes a sufficient basis for the decision-making, it must consist of the following:

**a) Introduction**

Date, author, title of the thesis, members of the assessment committee (including chairman) and principal supervisor.

**b) Summary of the contents of the thesis**

It is recommended that the summary of the contents of the thesis includes the following:

- the structure of the thesis,
- the contents of the thesis, including the use of scientific theories and methods
- the argumentation and findings of the thesis

**c) Evaluation of the thesis**

It is recommended that the evaluation includes the following:

- Overview of the research field
- Research design
- Concepts and theoretical approach
- Scientific contributions
- Structure and written presentation

The summary of the thesis shall be formulated in such a way that the basis of the evaluation appears evident and separate from the evaluation itself. The subsequent evaluating part of the recommendation shall relate to all main parts of the thesis and clarify both strengths and weaknesses.

**d) Conclusion**

The final part of the recommendation is the conclusion which must be consistent with the evaluation. The conclusion will often be unanimous but if the committee members do not reach an agreement, the committee must submit a recommendation containing, in brief, the reasoned opinions of both the minority and the majority. According to section 18, the following three options prevail: 1) that the thesis fulfils the requirements for the award of the PhD degree and can be recommended for defence, 2) that the thesis does not fulfil the requirements for the award of the PhD degree and is not recommended for defence, and 3) that the thesis does not fulfil the requirements for the award of the PhD degree and is not recommended for defence in the present form, but may be resubmitted in a revised version. On the third option it must be clarified what should be improved or added in order for the revised thesis to become recommended for defence. At the same time, the committee shall state the deadline for resubmission which must be at least three months from date of recommendation.

**Extent:** The preliminary recommendation is expected to consist of 5-7 pages, 10 pages at most.

The preliminary recommendation shall be signed by all members of the assessment committee and forwarded to the Doctoral School. In order to speed up the process the school will approve that the preliminary assessment, on which the committee has agreed and confirmed by email, can be forwarded with only the chairman's signature.

The committee must bear in mind that the recommendation will often be used by the candidate for future job applications and for that reason the presentation of the thesis should be in both understandable and balanced language.

If the committee has significant criticism but finds that the thesis fulfils the minimum requirements in order to be recommended, the defence may be used to discuss the points of criticism.

If the thesis is a resubmission, the candidate is recommended to enclose a cover letter in which all the revisions are summarised. In the evaluation of the revised thesis, the committee shall focus on whether the thesis has been improved with regard to the points of criticism contained in the preliminary assessment. It should not appear from the written assessment that the thesis is a resubmission.

### **3. Defence**

The strengths and weaknesses of the thesis are discussed at the defence (see the Internal rules and regulations of the Doctoral School of Social Sciences on <https://www.phd.samf.aau.dk/rules-guidelines-forms/> for further information). The defence is part of the final recommendation, and a short evaluation of it is written in the final recommendation. Immediately after the defence, the final recommendation shall be signed by all committee members and be forwarded to the Doctoral School.

### **4. Drawing up the final recommendation**

The *final recommendation* constitutes the basis for the award of the PhD degree. The recommendation is an evaluation as to whether the PhD student, *by the thesis* and *at the public defence*, has documented the ability to carry out a research project by independent application of scientific theories and methods and in that way has contributed to advancing research at a level meeting international standards.

Apart from the assessment of the thesis, the final recommendation also contains a short evaluation of the public defence. The recommendation must originate from all members of the committee, and in the event of disagreement, the majority will prevail. The premise of the expert assessment and the conclusion must be consistent. The recommendation must always be reasoned regardless of positive or negative recommendation. The same applies in case of majority and minority recommendation.

### **5. Subsequent processing in the Doctoral School and the Academic Council**

The preliminary recommendation forms the basis for the Director of Doctoral School's decision whether the thesis can be accepted for defence.

The final recommendation forms the basis for the Academic Council's award of the PhD degree.

*The above guidelines are approved by the Dean and the Director of Doctoral School on 7 October 2015.*

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