

Guidelines for suggesting an assessment committee (PhD)

Assessment committee

The main supervisor must submit a suggestion of members for the assessment committee using the form 'Form for suggesting an assessment committee (PhD)' no later than three months before submission of the PhD dissertation. It is the main supervisor's responsibility to make sure that all suggested members have agreed to participate in accordance with the schedule.

The form must be submitted to the head of the graduate programme who is responsible for recommending the members of the assessment committee. Afterwards the PhD committee assesses the proposed committee and sends its recommendation to the graduate school who makes the final decision on whether or not an assessment committee can be approved.

The assessment committee must comprise three members, at Associate Professor level or higher who are recognised researchers within the relevant field. Preferably both genders should be represented on the committee. Two of the members must be external members, i.e. employed at an institution other than Aarhus University and one of these must be from abroad. The third member must be employed at the faculty, but not at the same section as the main supervisor. This member is appointed chairman of the committee.

Moreover the members must meet the following criteria:

- Scientifically active, and active within the area of research covered by the dissertation. This should be documented via publications in internationally recognized journals and conference proceedings with peer-review produced within the last 5 years.
- Experience with teaching and/or supervision at the PhD level.

In connection with industrial PhDs, at least one of the committee members must also have business-related research experience. The members must not be co-authors of articles/manuscripts forming part of the PhD dissertation, and there should be no academic, job-related or private dependency between a member and the main supervisor or PhD student. The main supervisor assists the assessment committee, but has no voting rights. Date of the PhD defence has to be included and must take place no later than three months after submission of the PhD dissertation.

Special rules on disqualification

Part 2 of the Danish Public Administration Act (*Forvaltningsloven*) contains provisions on the disqualification of persons employed by or acting on behalf of a public administration body. These provisions therefore also apply to members of expert assessment committees. The purpose of the provisions on disqualification is to prevent a person employed by or acting on behalf of a public authority from taking part in the consideration of a case if the person in question is related to the case and/or the parties involved in such a way that there are doubts as to whether he/she will be able to ensure an impartial assessment of the case (without letting subjective or irrelevant considerations become more or less decisive in the decision-making).

According to a statement from the ombudsman, it should also be taken into account when determining the scope of the provisions that the purpose of the rules on disqualification is not only to ensure that the individual case is handled correctly, but to prevent a weakening of the confidence in the public administration.

Examples of situations where greater attention should be paid to possible disqualification:

1. Particular personal interest in the outcome of the case
 - a. Collaboration on the scientific research forming the basis of the dissertation
 - b. Co-authorship of the articles included in the dissertation
 - c. Professional or job related dependency between a proposed assessor and the main supervisor
 - d. Other conditions, e.g. if the proposed assessor and the main supervisor are close colleagues, which may lead to the common practice of assessing dissertations by each other's PhD students

2. Marriage and family relationship etc.

a. It is clear that a person is disqualified from assessing a dissertation submitted by his or her spouse, children, siblings, nieces or nephews. The same should apply to 'other relatives', including cohabitants or foster family members. In the case of 'other relatives' who are not immediate family, a concrete and individual assessment should always be made of whether such relationships are a matter of disqualification.

3. Friendship/enmity

a. A particularly close friendship or distinct enmity can lead to disqualification. Normally, disqualification should only be assumed to be an issue if the friendship or enmity is obvious and is not insignificant. However, a mutual sense of conflict is a precondition for being disqualified on account of enmity. A party cannot cause somebody to be disqualified by claiming that a personal conflict exists or by trying to spark off a conflict. General collegial incompatibility cannot lead to the disqualification of a person. Nor can academic differences of opinion within the framework of academic practice.

Decision on disqualification

Everyone is obliged to notify the PhD administration of any circumstances in which there are doubts about the impartiality of a person who is being suggested as a member of an expert assessment committee. The question of the potential disqualification of a person is assessed by the PhD committee, who makes its recommendation to the graduate school who has the final say in the matter. The person in question must not be involved in the processing and determination of the disqualification issue.

As a rule, a decision is invalid if a disqualified person has been involved in the processing of the case.

Legal basis

The professional qualifications of the committee members and their affiliation with the faculty are regulated by section 16¹ of the Ministerial Order.

Deadlines for submission of the preliminary assessment of the PhD dissertation and the defence are regulated by sections 18-20² of the Ministerial Order. It is stated in the Ministerial Order that, within two months of submission of the PhD dissertation, the assessment committee makes its recommendation to the university as to whether the PhD dissertation can be accepted for defence. The recommendation must be reasoned, and in the event of disagreement, the majority will prevail. If the recommendation is not favourable, the university may decide that the PhD dissertation may be resubmitted in a revised version within a deadline of at least three months. The PhD defence is public and must be held, at the earliest, two weeks after the assessment committee has made its recommendation and, at the latest, three months after submission of the PhD dissertation. The date and time must be agreed with the PhD student.

According to Aarhus University's rules on the PhD programme, the faculty lays down the rules on the appointment of assessment committees and the conducting of the defences³.

Satisfactory reasoning

Satisfactory reasoning must be provided for each of the proposed members which form the basis for the PhD committee's decision for the appointment of the committee. It is possible, for academic reasons, to deviate from the requirement that at least one assessor must be foreign and/or the wish for both genders to be represented. It must be stated clearly in the reasoning if this is the case.

Agreement required

The faculty assumes that all proposed members have agreed to participate in the committee's work. It is also assumed that the main supervisor has informed the proposed persons about the scope of the task and the conditions associated with it (deadlines for submission, payment of honorarium, travel rules etc.). Furthermore, it is expected that the proposed persons are aware that the composition of the committee may be changed upon the processing by the PhD committee and graduate school.

Content of the work

The assessment committee must prepare a preliminary assessment and participate in the PhD defence. The committee chairman has to make arrangements with the members on how to divide the work. The chairman compiles and submits the committee's preliminary assessment no later than six weeks before the PhD defence. The chairman of the assessment committee is also responsible for preparing an assessment of the defence agreed upon by the committee, which is submitted to the faculty within one week after the

1 PhD Order of 27 August 2013

2 Ibid.

3 PhD programme (AU rules) of 1 July 2010, section 8(2)

defence. Guidelines for the assessors and forms for the preliminary assessment as well as the assessment of the defence are available at the graduate school's homepage.

The day of the PhD defence

Before the PhD defence the chairman can invite the committee for a work lunch. The chairman will introduce the PhD student before he or she can begin the defence.

Honorarium

External members of the assessment committee receive a honorarium of 16 hours based on a coexaminer rate for their participation in the committee's work. As of 1 April 2015, the amount is ca. DKK 7,000 including holiday pay.

After the defence the external members of the committee can submit the honorarium form to obtain the honorarium. Foreign members of the committee also have to submit a copy of their passport in order to get tax exemption in Denmark.

Travel

The chairman of the committee is responsible for assisting the members in any questions regarding travel and accommodations.

To cover travelling expenses in connection with participation in a PhD defence, the graduate school reimburses up to DKK 8,000 (Europe) or up to DKK 15,000 (other countries). In addition, hotel expenses for a maximum of two nights will be reimbursed in accordance with state rules (as at 1 January 2017 up to DKK 1020 per night, including VAT). We highly recommend using hotels with a state agreement. Please contact the administration for information on which hotels are included.

If possible, please use one of the public buses to and from the airport. If this is not possible for you, you will need to make an agreement about taxi in advance with the Graduate School in order to get the trip reimbursed

Upon return from the PhD defence the external assessor can submit a travel reimbursement form, the get travel expenses covered. Please submit the form along with tickets and receipts. Hotel bills may be billed directly to the PhD administration: EAN 5 798 000 418 370.

Any questions may be directed to the PhD administration graduateschoolhealth@au.dk