



Information on proposals and decisions on the public defence of doctoral theses at Örebro University

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Introduction

The qualification descriptors for doctorates and doctorates in the fine, applied and performing arts state that a pass grade on a doctoral thesis is required for the award of these degrees. The doctoral thesis must be orally defended at a public defence¹.

The public defence at Örebro University is regulated by [regulations](#) approved by the vice-chancellor, and by [guidelines](#) approved jointly by the faculty boards. This document brings these regulations together. Some additional information and clarifications are also provided.

This document is primarily intended for principal supervisors, study and research administrators and others involved in preparing the school's proposal for a public defence, as well as for heads of school, who approve the school's proposal.

Responsibility for the content lies with the Faculty Office, which also processes defence cases in preparation for decisions by the relevant dean. Questions may be addressed to disputation@oru.se

Separate information concerning the defence proceedings and the responsibilities of the respective roles has been compiled for external reviewers, members of the examining committee, and the chairperson of the public defence. That information can be found on the following webpage: <https://www.oru.se/english/study/doctoral-studies/doctoral-student/public-defence-of-doctoral-thesis/information-for-faculty-examiners-members-of-the-examining-committee-and-the-chair-at-the-public-defence/>.

Date and location for a public defence

The public defence shall take place on a weekday between

- 1 September – 22 December, and
- 7 January – Friday a week before Midsummer.

The public defence is to take place on one of the university's campuses, unless there are special reasons to the contrary².

Special reasons may, for example, include cases where the doctoral student is funded by an employer other than Örebro University and there is an agreement or other special arrangement stipulating that the public defence is to take place at another location.

Announcement of the public defence and the doctoral thesis (*spikning*)

The date of the public defence shall be announced on a weekday no later than three weeks before the public defence between

- 15 August – 22 December, and
- 7 January – Friday a week before Midsummer.

The period from one week before Midsummer until 15 August shall not be counted as part of the three weeks preceding the public defence.

¹ Higher Education Ordinance (HEO), Chapter 6, Section 33

² Regulations on the public defence and grading of doctoral theses at Örebro University (ORU 2025/08914)

At the time of the announcement, the doctoral thesis shall be made available to the public in such a way that it is possible to conduct a satisfactory review of the thesis prior to the public defence³.

The school organises the ceremony for the announcement of the doctoral thesis (*spikning*). In accordance with tradition, the thesis is posted using a nail – hence the name “*spikning*” – on a special notice board, thereby making it available to the public. The head of school decides the time and place for the ceremony⁴.

As a complement to the announcement referred to above, the thesis shall also be announced electronically through registration in the university’s publication database⁵.

Information on announcing the doctoral thesis electronically can be found on the following webpage: <https://www.oru.se/english/research/research-support/publishing-your-research/the-publication-database-diva/register-research-in-diva/recording-doctoral-thesis-in-diva/>.

External reviewer

An external reviewer must be appointed for the public defence⁶.

The external reviewer must hold at least the qualifications required for appointment as a docent or possess equivalent qualifications obtained abroad. However, if there are special reasons, a person holding at least a doctoral degree may be appointed. ‘Special reasons’ primarily refers to considerations of expertise.

The external reviewer shall be a person who is not active at Örebro University, unless there are exceptional reasons to the contrary. The person may well be based abroad.

Being ‘active’ refers to being employed or affiliated, holding an assignment, or otherwise having a significant connection, for example through research collaboration.

‘Exceptional reasons’ primarily refers to circumstances that at short notice prevent the appointed external reviewer from participating⁷.

Grading system and grading

For doctoral theses, either of the grades Pass or Fail shall be used. When determining the grade, the content as well as the defence of the thesis shall be considered⁸. In the grading of the doctoral thesis, at least one person shall participate who is not active at Örebro University⁹.

Examining committee

The grade for a doctoral thesis shall be determined by an examining committee, which is appointed specifically for each thesis.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Faculty board delegations

⁵ Regulations on the public defence and grading of doctoral theses at Örebro University (ORU 2025/08914)

⁶ Higher Education Ordinance, Chapter 6, Section 33

⁷ Guidelines for appointing external reviewers, examining committees and chairpersons for the public defence of doctoral theses, ORU 2025/08915

⁸ Regulations on the public defence and grading of doctoral theses at Örebro University, ORU 2025/08914

⁹ Higher Education Ordinance, Chapter 6, Section 34

The examining committee shall consist of three or five members. An alternate member of the examining committee shall be appointed. A person who has served as supervisor to the doctoral student may not be a member of the committee. The committee shall appoint a chairperson from among its members¹⁰.

An examining committee of five members is very unusual, but could be relevant, for example, if the thesis is explicitly interdisciplinary.

Qualifications

The members of the examining committee must hold at least the qualifications required for appointment as a docent or possess equivalent qualifications obtained abroad¹¹.

The members must have relevant subject-specific/methodological expertise. Even if not every individual member has a detailed command of all parts of the thesis, the examining committee as a whole must be able to assess the thesis in its entirety.

Institutional affiliation

No more than one member of the examining committee may be active at Örebro University in the subject area to which the doctoral student belongs. In the case of medical science, the term ‘subject area’ refers to the specific specialisation within the subject to which the doctoral student belongs^{12, 13}.

Being ‘active’ refers to being employed or affiliated, holding an assignment, or otherwise having a significant connection, for example through research collaboration¹⁴.

Gender balance

Both genders shall be represented on the examining committee, unless there are special reasons to the contrary. ‘Special reasons’ primarily refers to considerations of expertise¹⁵.

Alternate member of the examining committee

An alternate member of the examining committee shall be appointed¹⁶. The alternate member shall be prepared to step in as a member of the examining committee at short notice if the need arises.

If the alternate member is required to step in, the examining committee as a whole must continue to meet the requirements set out above¹⁷. This means that if an alternate member steps in, the examining committee must still include at least one person who is not active at Örebro University and no more than one person who is active within the doctoral student’s subject area at Örebro University. The

¹⁰ Regulations on the public defence and grading of doctoral theses at Örebro University, ORU 2025/08914

¹¹ Guidelines for appointing external reviewers, examining committees and chairpersons for the public defence of doctoral theses, ORU 2025/08915

¹² The specialisations within medical science are however broad in nature. Having two members of the examining committee representing the same specialisation may be permitted, provided that the members in question can certify that no conflicts of interest exist between them.

¹³ Guidelines for appointing external reviewers, examining committees and chairpersons for the public defence of doctoral theses, ORU 2025/08915

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Regulations on the public defence and grading of doctoral theses at Örebro University, ORU 2025/08914

¹⁷ Guidelines for appointing external reviewers, examining committees and chairpersons for the public defence of doctoral theses, ORU 2025/08915

requirement for representation of both genders applies to the regular members of the examining committee.

Examining committee meeting

The examining committee's meeting shall be held in two parts. The first part shall concern the gathering of information from the external reviewer and the supervisor(s). The second part shall consist of the examining committee's separate deliberations and decision. The external reviewer and all supervisors have the right to attend and to speak, but only during the first part of the meeting.

If the public defence is that of a doctoral student whose resources have been withdrawn¹⁸ and no supervisor is therefore appointed, the chairperson of the public defence may decide that another suitable person may participate during the first part of the meeting in place of a supervisor¹⁹.

The examining committee shall be quorate when all members are present. If the members hold differing views on the grade, the decision shall be taken by majority vote²⁰.

The alternate member of the examining committee does not have the right to attend or speak at the meeting unless they step in as a regular member.

A template for the minutes of the examining committee meeting, along with further information about the meeting, can be found on the following webpage: <https://www.oru.se/english/study/doctoral-studies/doctoral-student/public-defence-of-doctoral-thesis/>.

Chairperson at the public defence

The public defence shall be chaired by a chairperson, who must be a member of the teaching staff at the university and employed until further notice²¹.

The chairperson shall be a professor or docent. A person who has served as supervisor to the doctoral student may not be appointed as chairperson²².

Participation by remote means

If there are special reasons, the external reviewer and/or members of the examining committee may participate in a public defence by remote means (via two-way real-time audio and video transmission). Special reasons may include, for example, the need to avoid long journeys. Special reasons may also include situations where, at a late stage, the external reviewer or a member of the examining committee notifies that they are unable to attend in person²³.

Information about practicalities in relation to a public defence where some participate by remote means – in a so-called hybrid public defence – can be found on the following webpage: <https://www.oru.se/english/study/doctoral-studies/doctoral-student/public-defence-of-doctoral-thesis/public-defence---hybrid/>.

¹⁸ Under the Higher Education Ordinance, Chapter 6, Section 30

¹⁹ Regulations on the public defence and grading of doctoral theses at Örebro University, ORU 2025/08914

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Guidelines for appointing external reviewers, examining committees and chairpersons for the public defence of doctoral theses, ORU 2025/08915

²³ Regulations on the public defence and grading of doctoral theses at Örebro University, ORU 2025/08914

If there are exceptional reasons, for example a risk of the spread of infection, a public defence may be conducted entirely online. In such cases, the requirement that the public defence be open to the public²⁴ must be fulfilled²⁵.

Conflict of interest²⁶

To ensure legal certainty for the individual doctoral student, it is essential that the doctoral thesis and its defence are assessed objectively and impartially. It is therefore important that issues of conflict of interest are identified and addressed when the school is drafting the proposal for the public defence.

A 'conflict of interest' refers to any circumstance that may undermine the confidence of an external observer in a person's impartiality in the handling of a matter. This may involve a situation in which a person could be perceived as having an interest in the matter that might influence their position or judgement. An assessment of conflict of interest therefore involves considering whether there are circumstances that could typically result in a person handling a matter in a partial manner. Thus, the assessment does not concern the risk that a specific person will *in fact* act partially, but rather how the situation may be perceived by others.

The rules governing the public defence contain several general provisions concerning organisational restrictions, for example limits on the number of members of the examining committee who may come from the subject area concerned or from the university itself. These provisions are intended to ensure an impartial and objectively based assessment, thereby preventing conflicts of interest.

However, a conflict-of-interest assessment must be carried out for each individual appointed as external reviewer or as a member of the examining committee. This assessment shall cover affiliations both with the doctoral student and with the doctoral student's principal supervisor and assistant supervisor(s).

Assessment of conflict of interest

The Swedish Administrative Procedure Act²⁷ (Section 16) sets out several grounds for conflicts of interest. For example, a person is considered disqualified from involvement in a matter due to a conflict of interest if they, or a close associate, are a party to the matter, or may otherwise be affected by the decision to a not insignificant extent (so-called party, interest, or close-association conflicts of interest).

There is also a more generally worded conflict-of-interest rule that addresses situations not covered by the other grounds. Under this so-called general clause, a person is considered disqualified due to a conflict of interest if there is any other specific circumstance that may give rise to doubts about the person's impartiality in the matter. It is often this broader ground for conflict of interest that is the most difficult to assess.

Examples of situations that may provide guidance in the assessment are listed below²⁸.

²⁴ Higher Education Ordinance, Chapter 6, Section 33, second paragraph

²⁵ Regulations on the public defence and grading of doctoral theses at Örebro University, ORU 2025/08914

²⁶ Guidelines for appointing external reviewers, examining committees and chairpersons for the public defence of doctoral theses, ORU 2025/08915

²⁷ For the Administrative Procedure Act rules on conflicts of interest, see annex.

²⁸ The examples are based on the Swedish Research Council's guidelines for the management of conflicts of interest, reg. no 1.2.4-2023-00185.

It is important that each situation is assessed on the basis of the circumstances of the individual case, and that due consideration is given to the nature, extent, and duration of the relationships that could constitute a conflict of interest.

Particular difficulties may arise in cases where the subject or research area is narrow and the number of individuals with the relevant expertise who may be considered for appointment as external reviewer or member of the examining committee is relatively limited. In such cases, an overly strict application of the conflict-of-interest rules may make it difficult to identify appropriately qualified participants for the public defence. However, a precautionary principle should always serve as the starting point - the credibility and legitimacy of the university and of the public defence must always be safeguarded. Even if a conflict of interest does not arise in the eyes of the Administrative Procedure Act, it is nevertheless unfortunate if attention is drawn to the possible impartiality of the individuals involved rather than to the quality of the thesis.

It is important that the school accounts for all circumstances identified in the conflict-of-interest assessment, even if the school does not consider them to constitute a conflict of interest.

Examples of situations in which a conflict of interest typically exists

Financial or other relationships of dependence

A conflict of interest may arise where there are financial relationships of dependence or other forms of dependency between a person proposed as external reviewer or member of the examining committee and the doctoral student or any of the supervisors. An example of the latter is where one of the supervisors is acting as an external expert in an ongoing matter concerning the person proposed.

Doctoral student–supervisor relationship

A doctoral student–supervisor relationship is regarded as giving rise to a conflict of interest regardless of how long ago the supervision took place. This means that former supervisors or former doctoral students shall not be proposed as external reviewers or as members of the examining committee.

Ongoing or recently concluded close collaborations

A conflict of interest may exist if the proposed external reviewer or member of the examining committee has ongoing or recently concluded close collaborations with the doctoral student or with any of the supervisors. Examples include jointly conducted research, joint applications for research funding, or joint supervision of doctoral students.

Manifest friendship or animosity

Manifest friendship is considered to exist where there is private social interaction. Ordinary collegial relationships, however, do not constitute a conflict of interest.

Manager-employee relationship

The immediate manager of the doctoral student or of any of the supervisors should not be proposed as external reviewer or as a member of the examining committee.

Examples of situations in which there is a risk of conflicts of interest

Joint authorship

As a general guideline, appointments as external reviewer or member of the examining committee should be avoided where joint authorship with the doctoral student or with any of the supervisors has occurred within the past five-year period. A single jointly authored article or a jointly written chapter in an edited volume may be sufficient to constitute a conflict of interest. Joint publication that took place more than five years ago may also give rise to a conflict of interest. The decisive factor is whether, in professional terms, the collaboration can be regarded as close, which must be assessed on

a case-by-case basis. Exceptions may be made, for example, in the context of large multicentre studies involving many independent authors.

Editorship of a journal or an edited volume does not in itself constitute a conflict of interest in relation to chapter authors or co-editors. An assessment of whether a conflict of interest exists must nevertheless be made in each individual case, based on the degree of collaboration involved.

Inquiry regarding conflict of interest

Under the Swedish Administrative Procedure Act (Section 18), a person who is aware of a circumstance that may be presumed to render them disqualified from involvement in a matter due to a conflict of interest is obliged to report this to the authority concerned. This means that, during the preparatory process, the school must request that persons proposed as external reviewer or as members of the examining committee disclose any circumstances that may constitute a conflict of interest.

Conflict of interest in the handling of the public defence matter

Conflicts of interest must also be taken into account in the handling of the public defence matter. For example, a supervisor may not present a proposal for the public defence of their own doctoral student for decision by the head of school. A person is also considered disqualified if they propose or appoint themselves to an assignment.

If a conflict of interest is identified, another person shall step in and take over the handling of the matter. If the head of school is disqualified, the deputy head of school shall instead approve the school's proposal for the public defence. If the deputy head of school is also disqualified, the dean shall appoint another person to approve the proposal for the public defence.

Proposal for the public defence, statement of reasons for the proposal and other supporting documentation for the decision²⁹

The following documentation shall be submitted in connection with the school's proposal for a public defence.

1. A concise summary of the thesis, written by the doctoral student in Swedish or English.
2. In the case of a compilation thesis: a list of the component papers that constitute the thesis.
3. If a component paper or the thesis has been jointly authored with another person, the principal supervisor shall provide an account of the doctoral student's contribution to the work.
4. Information shall be provided as to whether a final review, mid-way review, or other quality review has been conducted. The identity of the external experts/reviewers, including their qualifications and institutional affiliation, shall be stated. Minutes or another written statement from the external experts/reviewers

²⁹ Guidelines for appointing external reviewers, examining committees and chairpersons for the public defence of doctoral theses, ORU 2025/08915

- shall be attached, as well as the principal supervisor's account of the revisions made to the thesis in response to the experts'/reviewers' comments.
5. A statement of reasons for the proposed appointment of the external reviewer and the members of the examining committee, including the alternate member.
 6. If the school proposes that the external reviewer or a member of the examining committee participate in the public defence by remote means, in accordance with the university's regulations on the public defence, the proposal shall be accompanied by a statement of reasons why participation is to take place by remote means rather than in person.
 7. Information shall be provided regarding conflict-of-interest assessments concerning the persons proposed as external reviewer and as members of the examining committee.
 8. Where special or exceptional reasons are required for a particular decision under the vice-chancellor's regulations or the faculty boards' guidelines, such reasons shall be included.
 9. If the school has consulted with the dean or the Faculty Office at an earlier stage of the preparatory process, this information shall be included.

Review of decisions on ethics approval prior to the public defence (MH Faculty)

Within the Faculty of Medicine and Health, an ethics review must be performed for all doctoral theses prior to the public defence. The review is conducted in compliance with special [procedures](#).

Submission of the proposal for the public defence

The proposal for a public defence shall be submitted by the head of school no later than two months prior to the proposed date of the public defence and should, prior to submission, have been subject to collegial consultation in the supervisors' committee or an equivalent body, or with the head of subject or specialisation coordinator³⁰.

However, the preparations at the school need to start long before the two months prior to the proposed date of the defence. The school's study and research administrators coordinate all parts of the process and assist with information about schedules and deadlines.

The head of school decides on the proposal after it has been presented³¹. The head of school decides who will serve as the presenting officer, for example the head of subject/specialisation coordinator or the study and research administrator. The doctoral student's supervisor cannot serve as the presenting officer (see the section on conflicts of interest in the handling of the public defence matter).

The doctoral student's role in connection with the school's proposal for the public defence is primarily

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Faculty board delegations

- to register their participation in the defence and confirm the title of the thesis, the preferred title of qualification³² and other details.
- to report any conflicts of interest of which the doctoral student is aware or that they subsequently become aware of.

Information on how to submit the proposal can be found on the following webpage:

<https://www.oru.se/english/study/doctoral-studies/doctoral-student/public-defence-of-doctoral-thesis/>.

A doctoral student may also submit a proposal for a public defence themselves. However, this should only be relevant in exceptional cases, for example if the doctoral student wishes to defend their thesis but no longer has active contact with the school or otherwise does not feel they have the school's support to proceed with the defence. In such cases, the doctoral student may contact the Faculty Office to find out how to request permission to hold a public defence.

Decision on the public defence

The decision on the date and location for the public defence and on the external reviewer, members of the examining committee and chairperson for the public defence is taken by the chair of the respective faculty board (dean). The dean also decides whether the external reviewer or a member of the examining committee may participate by remote means³³.

Information about the decision

The Faculty Office circulates the decision on the public defence to the head of school, the presenting officer for the head of school, the doctoral student, the principal supervisor, the chair of the defence, and to the relevant departments and functions within the university.

The school is responsible for ensuring that the appointed external reviewer and members of the examining committee, as well as the doctoral student's assistant supervisors, are informed of the decision.

Procedure if a member of the examining committee or the external reviewer is unable to attend

If an external reviewer is unable to attend the public defence in person, the dean may either decide that the external reviewer may participate by remote means or appoint a new external reviewer.

If a member of the examining committee is unable to attend the public defence in person, the dean may decide that the member may participate by remote means. As an alternative, the person appointed as an alternate member of the examining committee may step in. If the alternate member is also unable to participate in the public defence, the dean may appoint a new member.

If none of the above is possible, the public defence must be postponed to a later date.

³² About the doctoral student's choice of qualification title: No later than in connection with the school's proposal for the public defence, the doctoral student must state whether they wish to choose a title of qualification other than the one that is the standard. If there are exceptional reasons, the doctoral student may request to be awarded a non-standard title of qualification (*avvikande examensbeteckning*). See *Föreskrifter om examen från utbildning på forskarnivå vid Örebro universitet* (ORU 2015/03380) (in Swedish).

³³ Faculty board delegations

Annex, Extract from the Administrative Procedure Act: on conflicts of interest

Section 16 A person who takes part on behalf of an authority in the processing of a matter in a way that can influence the authority's decision in the matter is disqualified if:

1. either they or a person close to them is a party in the matter or can otherwise be assumed to be affected by the decision to a not insignificant extent;
2. either they or a person close to them is or has been a representative or counsel for a party in the matter or someone else who can be assumed to be affected by the decision to a not insignificant extent;
3. they participated in the final processing of the matter at another authority and have, as a result of this, already taken a position on the questions to be examined by the authority as a superior instance; or
4. there is some other special circumstance that means that their impartiality in the matter can be questioned.

If it is obvious that the question of impartiality is of no importance, the authority shall disregard the disqualification.

Section 17 A person who is disqualified must not take part in the processing of the matter and must not be present when the matter is determined either. However, they may perform tasks that no one else can perform without a considerable delay in the processing of the matter.

Section 18 A person who is aware of a circumstance that can be assumed to disqualify them must immediately notify the authority of this.

An authority shall examine a question of disqualification as soon as possible.

The person that the disqualification applies to may only take part in the examination of the question of disqualification if this is required for the authority to be quorate and a replacement cannot be summoned without material delay to the examination.

Administrative Procedure Act (2017:900)