

# Additional comments to the Recommended Guidelines for the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) Degree issued by the Norwegian Association of Higher Education Institutions

Adopted by the Board of the Norwegian Association of Higher Education Institutions on 29 April 2011

The recommended guidelines issued by the Norwegian Association of Higher Education Institutions establish the framework for doctoral education in Norway. It is recommended that the institutions use these guidelines as the starting point when formulating their own regulations. The content of doctoral education is to be determined on the basis of an institution's regulations. This document provides additional comments to specific items in the recommended guidelines which have been subject to a variety of practices and interpretations.

## Section 5 Admission

### *Several means to admission*

A variety of means may be used to admit candidates to doctoral training, including:

- Through a publicly advertised position, in which the applicant formulates a project description that is used as the basis of assessment for admission and in which admission and appointment to the position are conditional upon each other.
- An academic unit advertises a position within a rather precisely formulated thematic project. The applicant is appointed to the position on the basis of marks and other predefined criteria on the condition that the applicant is granted admission.

Regardless of the means used to admit candidates, it is crucial for the quality and implementation of doctoral training that the candidate is assigned an academic supervisor quickly and that the project description is finalised under supervision.

### *Coordination of admission and appointment to a position*

Section 1-3, paragraph 8, of the regulations concerning terms and conditions of employment for research fellows (*Forskrift om ansettelsesvilkår for stipendiatstillinger, FOR 2006-01-31-102*) issued by the Ministry of Education and Research states the following:

*Appointment to a position as a research fellow is conditional upon admission to a doctoral degree programme. The final plan for the candidate's doctoral training must be approved and set forth in a written agreement within three months following the appointment. The deadline for admission to the doctoral degree programme must be stated in the employment contract. It must also state when the final plan for the doctoral training is to be submitted. All research fellows must be admitted to a doctoral degree programme. The number of programmes offered by degree-conferring institutions varies, and the programmes may have different dates and intervals for admission. In addition to admission to a programme, an individual plan specifying each research fellow's duties must be drawn up. The requirement regarding when this plan must be approved is usually dependent upon the admission deadline.*

In the letter from the Ministry of Education and Research dated 4 November 2009 on the interpretation of regulations concerning terms and conditions of employment for research fellows (*Ansettelsesvilkår for stipendiatstillinger – tolkning av forskrift*), the Ministry confirms that admission

to a doctoral degree programme is an absolute condition for assuming a position as a research fellow. It is essential that the appointment and admission are coordinated to avoid the passage of too much time in the start-up phase of the appointment period while formalities related to admission are being clarified. To ensure that this process is carried out as quickly as possible, and within a three-month period of time<sup>1</sup>, please refer to the Norwegian Association of Higher Education Institutions' letter of 3 July 2009 which recommends the following measures:

For the degree-conferring institution:

- The degree-conferring institution must have clear criteria and procedures for admission.
- Admission should take place at least two times during the semester.
- Separate admission procedures for external applicants should be considered.
- The institutions are encouraged to grant qualified applicants conditional admission to a doctoral degree programme provided that the applicant secures funding. Conditional admission should be valid for a limited period of time.

For the applicant's institution:

- Institutions not authorised to confer the PhD degree must familiarise themselves with the various doctoral degree programmes offered at relevant degree-conferring institutions.
- The institution should seek to draw up a preliminary agreement with a relevant degree-conferring institution in order to clarify that institution's interest and capacity after it has been determined which research area the fellowship will be connected with.
- The institution must be familiar with the relevant application deadlines.
- The institution should explore the possibility of having a representative from the degree-conferring institution sit on the evaluation committee for the position.
- Encourage the research fellow to apply for admission as early as possible.

For applicants to research fellowships at institutions not authorised to confer the PhD degree:

- Contact the potential academic supervisor at the degree-conferring institution early in the process to discuss the individual education plan.
- Admission should be sought prior to appointment to a position.
- Participate in the discussion on how the candidate's time and work duties should be distributed between the two institutions.

## Section 8 Required coursework

In order to exploit national competencies and resources, candidates will more frequently take courses at institutions other than the degree-conferring institution. Courses at the doctoral level at another institution must be approved pursuant to section 3-4 of the Act relating to universities and university colleges, and credit for a course may be reduced if parts of the course are covered by the degree-conferring institution. In the case of formalised cooperation with i.e. graduate-level researcher schools, the cooperating institutions should clarify in advance how they will recognise each others' courses on a reciprocal basis.

## Section 10 The doctoral thesis

The length of the doctoral thesis, including the minimum number of articles, varies among subject areas. It is therefore not prudent to establish minimum requirements on a general basis. However, requirements may be established for the individual subject areas, and in accordance with prevailing international norms. The number of articles required will also vary, depending on the candidate's

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<sup>1</sup> Please refer to the *Regulations concerning terms and condition of employment for the posts of postdoktor (post-doctoral research fellow), stipendiat (research fellow), vitenskapelig assistent (research assistant) and spesialistkandidat (resident)*

[http://www.uhr.no/documents/Regulations\\_Post\\_doctoral\\_and\\_research\\_fellow.pdf](http://www.uhr.no/documents/Regulations_Post_doctoral_and_research_fellow.pdf)

contribution to the individual articles included in the doctoral thesis. As a general rule, the candidate should be listed as the lead author on at least half of the articles.

### **Section 15.2 Reworking of a submitted doctoral thesis**

This section permits minor corrections of a non-material nature to be made to the doctoral thesis. It is not meant to apply in all situations, but it refers to the fact that in some subject areas on an international basis it is viewed as both normal and desirable to have the opportunity to identify minor corrections that will enhance the quality of the thesis. This practice must not be confused with academic supervision or conflict with the supervisor's responsibility to approve the doctoral thesis for submission for evaluation. The opportunity to make minor corrections must **not** be regarded as an evaluation, but instead will result in a postponement of the evaluation. Consequently, this practice does not affect the opportunity to resubmit a doctoral thesis should the thesis then be rejected, nor must it be of such a nature that in reality it opens up the possibility for three evaluations.