



The defence of a licentiate thesis

Information for the Examination Board and Seminar Chairperson

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Introduction

This document is a compilation of the rules for examination of licentiate theses at KI. For full access to KI's *Rules for doctoral education* visit the KI website¹.

Following persons are involved:

Respondent (the doctoral student)

Examination Board, three members (or five) whereof one coordinator

Seminar Chairperson

Audience

Examination Board

The Examination Board is appointed by the Dissertation Committee on behalf of the Committee for Doctoral Education.

The role of the Examination board is to judge the student's performance at his/her thesis defence, the scientific quality of the constituent papers and the quality of the *kappa* (the comprehensive summary), and to ensure that the degree objectives have been fulfilled (see *What is examined?* below). The Examination Board is also required to conduct a preliminary review of the constituent papers.

The Examination Board shall comprise three members (in exceptional circumstance, such as a thesis being of a particularly interdisciplinary character, the number of members on the Examination Board may be increased to five). One of the members shall be designated as the coordinator (*Rules for Doctoral Education at Karolinska Institutet*, section 7.2.5)

Seminar Chairperson

It is the responsibility of the student's department to appoint a chairperson for the licentiate seminar. It is recommended that the chairperson is not one of the student's supervisors.

The chairperson's responsibility is to host and coordinate the licentiate seminar. He/she is expected to know the proceedings (see *Licentiate seminar* below) and being able to handle any complications (see *Unexpected events* last page).

The licentiate thesis

A licentiate thesis is normally written in the form of a summary and discussion of separate constituent papers, a compilation thesis. For a licentiate thesis to be considered a compilation thesis, at least one of the constituent papers must have been accepted for publication in a peer-reviewed journal.

¹ <https://staff.ki.se/rules-and-general-syllabus-for-doctoral-education>

The number of constituent papers in a compilation thesis varies, but they must for a licentiate thesis have a scope that in total is equivalent to two years of full-time doctoral education and a scientific quality expected at an international renowned university. The student's contribution to the constituent papers must be clearly identified.

The constituent papers should be original papers. One of the papers can be a systematic review article if it includes a meta-analysis or other comprehensive qualitative or quantitative synthesis. The requirement for such an article is that established reporting guidelines for systematic reviews have been followed.

A licentiate thesis that is based on constituent papers in the form of one manuscript, where none of the constituent papers have been accepted for publishing, will be treated as a monograph thesis. In which case, special review regulations apply, see 7.2.3

(Rules for Doctoral Education at Karolinska Institutet, section 7.3.2 och 7.2.2)

Preliminary review

Before the thesis is submitted for printing, the Examination Board shall conduct a preliminary review (*Sw: förhandsgranskning*) of the thesis in order to assess if the quality of its constituent papers is of a sufficiently high standard for a licentiate degree.

In the event of disagreement, the matter is decided by the majority opinion, even if all members of the board are expected to comment in its pronouncement.

If the Examination Board deems the quality of a thesis to be insufficient, the student is recommended to postpone the licentiate seminar. On the first such occasion, the student is entitled to further supervision and educational resources for an additional six months over and above the original study schedule in order that he/she may have the opportunity to improve the quality of his/her work.

(Rules for Doctoral Education at Karolinska Institutet, section 7.2.6)

Routines of preliminary review

Following documents should be sent by the student to the examination board:

- All constituent papers and manuscripts
- A copy of the granted application for licentiate seminar
- The form *Examination board's preliminary review* to be filled in by the examination board

After the Examination Board has received the papers it has two weeks to complete their preliminary review of the papers and the coordinator to send in the concluding recommendation.

(More information regarding assessing the scientific content of the papers can be found under *What is examined?* below.)

Please observe that any contact between respondent/supervisor and examination board members should be limited to only practical issues. It is strongly recommended not to discuss the content of the thesis with the respondent before the seminar.

Coordinator of the Examination Board

One of the members is appointed by the Dissertation Committee to coordinate the preliminary review. The responsibilities of the coordinator are:

- To ensure that the preliminary review of the constituent papers is conducted and that the form *Examination Board's Preliminary Review* is sent to the Dissertation Committee by no later than two weeks after receiving the relevant material.
- To ensure that any comments made by an individual member are made known to all members and to facilitate further discussions within the board.
- To receive the report from the text-matching system and to make it and the instructions available to the other members of the Examination Board (see *What is examined?* below).

What is examined?

The Examination Board will assess:

- the respondent's licentiate seminar and answers to questions
- the quality of the *kappa* (comprehensive summary) of the licentiate thesis
- the scientific content
- the fulfilment of the objectives of the licentiate degree.

Against the background of this assessment, the Examination Board comes to a decision to award a grade of either pass or fail.

The decision of the majority applies. A single member may dissent from the Examination Board's decision on the grade, in which case, specific justification must be given.

The Examination Board must provide a written justification when awarding a fail, and the student will have the opportunity to, at a later date, re-apply to defend their licentiate thesis in order to achieve a licentiate degree. However, there is no obligation on the part of supervisors, the department or KI to support the doctoral student financially after a failed licentiate examination beyond the expiry of the existing appointment.

(Rules for Doctoral Education at Karolinska Institutet, section 7.2.9)

Constituent papers

The scientific content of the constituent papers is judged primarily during the preliminary review. When making its recommendation, the Examination Board is to pay particular regard to the following:

Is the thesis material of a scope and quality that may be deemed high in relation to the equivalent of two years of full-time doctoral studies in an international highly ranked university? This is a subjective assessment requiring expertise and integrity of the Examination Board members.

It is the scope and quality of the material presented that is critical to the assessment, not the number of constituent papers. This means that relatively few comprehensive papers published

with the student as the principal author in some of the more renowned journals in the research field is a better reflection of the quality of the student's work than many papers co-written by a number of authors (of which the student is not the principal one) or publication in less prestigious journals.

The student's contribution to each article is clearly indicated in the defence application and is to be taken into regard in this context. Special attention should be placed on unpublished manuscripts.

If during the review suspicion arises regarding any kind of deviation from good research practice, please see *Unexpected Events* last page.

The *kappa* or comprehensive summary

The Examination Board is required to judge the quality of the *kappa* (comprehensive summary).

On the same day as the thesis is made public after "nailing" (i.e. three weeks prior to its defence), the respondent is to send the printed thesis to the Examination Board.

On "nailing", the thesis *kappa* is run through a text-matching system. The ensuing report is then sent to the Examination Board coordinator along with instructions, for use as an aid in the *kappa*'s examination.

The text-matching process is designed to uncover any plagiarism, which as suspected deception must be reported. The report can also be used as a basis on which to judge the quality of the *kappa*, and whether the requirements set out in the *Guidelines for the kappa or comprehensive summary* (see appendix 2) have been met (e.g. that the thesis is the student's own work).

Should the Examination Board judge the quality of the *kappa* to be insufficient, the matter should be taken up with the respondent at the seminar. Should the *kappa* be of such poor quality as to risk a failing grade, the respondent and his/her supervisor should be notified in advance.

Objective fulfilment

The Examination Board is required to ensure that the degree objectives have been fulfilled. The members should therefore have appendix 1 (Outcomes for the Licentiate Degree) at hand during the seminar. Note that the licentiate seminar application, the *kappa* and the constituent papers also provide information regarding objective fulfilment.

If the Examination Board is uncertain whether the respondent has met one or more of the intended outcomes, it should ask questions during the seminar until the matter is settled satisfactorily.

The licentiate seminar

The licentiate seminar shall be public and preferably held in English, but Swedish is also acceptable. Note that there is no opponent at a licentiate examination.,

The respondent will, during the public licentiate seminar, describe the research project which constitutes the basis for the licentiate thesis, including its background, methods, results and conclusions. Following the seminar, the Examination Board will pose questions in order to assure themselves that the respondent has achieved the intended outcomes for licentiate degree. Others in the audience will also be given an opportunity to ask questions.

(Rules for Doctoral Education at Karolinska Institutet, section 7.3.7)

Examination Board meeting following the seminar

Following the seminar, the Examination Board is called to an immediate meeting to decide on the grade. The Examination Board meeting is comprised of two parts:

1. In the first part, the seminar chairperson and the supervisors may be present for discussing the respondent's performance.
2. In the second part of the meeting, only members of the Examination Board are present. The grade and the written justification for this are confirmed, after which the minutes are written up and signed.

If there are anything so extraordinary that the Examination Board considers it necessary to undertake specific investigations or consultations before a decision can be made, the Examination Board should adjourn the meeting. The adjournment must be short, but can extend it to maximum two weeks.

The decision of the majority applies. A single member may dissent from the Examination Board's decision on the grade, in which case specific justification must be given.

The Examination Board must provide a written justification when awarding a fail, and the doctoral student will have the opportunity to, at a later date, re-apply to defend their licentiate thesis in order to achieve a licentiate degree.

(Rules for Doctoral Education at Karolinska Institutet, section 7.2.10 and 7.3.9)

Unexpected events

Sometimes complications may occur affecting the seminar proceedings. The seminar chairperson has the responsibility to handle the situation.

In case of impediment

If any of the members of the examination board or the chairperson fail to attend, the defence can either be postponed awaiting late arrival or a new person can be appointed.

To appoint a new examination board member, contact the Dissertation Committee administrator at the university administration (contact information below). There must be three Examination Board members present for the examination to proceed.

(Rules for Doctoral Education at Karolinska Institutet, section 7.2.9)

Suspicion of irregularities

At any suspicion of possible deviation from good research practice, conflicts of interest, cheating or any other misconduct arises either at the preliminary review or at seminar, it must be reported, see contact information below.

Contact information:

- Matters concerning formalities and rules or to report irregularities: disputation@ki.se. Emails are read regularly during office hours by KI Dissertation Committee administrators.
- Matters concerning practicalities: The director of doctoral studies or the doctoral education administrators at the relevant department: <https://staff.ki.se/contact-directors-of-doctoral-studies-and-administrative-officers-at-the-departments>

General information regarding doctoral education at KI, rules etc, is available from this web page: <http://ki.se/en/staff/doctoral-education>

APPENDIX 1. Outcomes for the Degree of licentiate

Intended outcomes according to the Higher Education Ordinance

Knowledge and understanding

For a licentiate degree, the doctoral student shall

- demonstrate knowledge and understanding in the field of research including current specialist knowledge in a limited area of this field as well as specialised knowledge of research methodology in general and the methods of the specific field of research in particular.

Competence and skills

For a licentiate degree, the doctoral student shall

- demonstrate the ability to identify and formulate issues with scholarly precision critically, autonomously and creatively, and plan and use appropriate methods to undertake a limited piece of research and other qualified tasks within predetermined time frames in order to contribute to the formation of knowledge as well as to evaluate this work,
- demonstrate the ability in both national and international contexts to present and discuss research and research findings in speech and writing and in dialogue with the academic community and society in general, and
- demonstrate the skills required to participate autonomously in research and development work and to work autonomously in some other qualified capacity.

Judgement and approach

For a licentiate degree, the doctoral student shall

- demonstrate the ability to make assessments of ethical aspects of his or her own research
- demonstrate insight into the possibilities and limitations of research, its role in society and the responsibility of the individual for how it is used, and
- demonstrate the ability to identify the personal need for further knowledge and take responsibility for their ongoing learning.

APPENDIX 2. Guidelines for the *kappa* or comprehensive summary

Guidelines for writing a *kappa* ²

Most theses from Karolinska Institutet are compilation theses comprising a collection of original papers introduced by a *kappa* or comprehensive summary chapter (sometimes called the “thesis frame”).

The purpose of the *kappa* is for doctoral students to:

- demonstrate the depth and breadth of knowledge and understanding they have of the research field, and their ability to identify a need for further knowledge in the field
- encapsulate the aim of their research project and the hypotheses/points of enquiry that have been addressed
- demonstrate familiarity with the methods applied in the research field
- demonstrate an ability to place their own research in a wider context of the latest research in the field
- demonstrate by means of a reflective discussion that the learning outcomes set out by the Higher Education Ordinance for doctoral education have been achieved

The *kappa* should be weighted towards a reflective discussion and contextualisation of the student’s own research results. It is to be considered part of the examination and is included in the assessment of whether the learning outcomes set out by the Higher Education Ordinance for doctoral education have been achieved.

The text of the *kappa* must be the student’s own original work without the extensive reproduction of extracts from the constituent papers. Failing to acknowledge sources when quoting from the work of others constitutes plagiarism.

Diagrams/tables from the constituent papers may be included in the *kappa*, although permission must be sought from the journal in question if the source article has been published or accepted for publication.

The *kappa* is a public document and is published digitally. It may be used to present preliminary (unpublished) results, but its public nature should be borne in mind if, for example, the research group is considering patenting any aspect of their work. Including preliminary results in the *kappa* might also cause difficulties for the group should they wish to have their results published in a journal at a later date.

² Decided by the Board of Doctoral Education. Ref: 7451/11-500

APPENDIX 3. Conflict of interest

Conflict of interest

The members of the examination Board are obliged to report any Conflict of Interest (COI) with either a supervisor or the student.

Apart from obvious bias by virtue of family ties or friendship, COI is also deemed to exist in the following situations:

- Scientific collaboration and co-production during the past five-year period constitutes COI. A joint article is considered sufficient to qualify as co-production. An exemption from the five-year rule may be made for collaboration carried out in the form of multicentre studies or similar, for which the COI situation is assessed case by case. A COI situation can exist for longer than five years if the collaboration has been particularly close.
- The student-supervisor relation is always considered to constitute COI regardless of how long ago the partnership was active.

More information on COI:

Swedish Research Council: How we avoid conflicts of interest:

<https://www.vr.se/english/applying-for-funding/how-applications-are-assessed/how-we-avoid-conflicts-of-interest.html>

Karolinska Institutet: Guidelines on conflict of interest, Ref: 1-405/2019:

<https://staff.ki.se/media/7285/download>