



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 and procedures regarding the defence and examination of licentiate theses at KI. For full access to KI's *Rules for doctoral education* visit the KI website¹.

The purpose of this document is to brief examination board members and the defence chairperson to read up on their assignment.

Examination board – role and responsibilities

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*, and to ensure that the degree objectives have been fulfilled (read more under *What is examined?* below).

The examination board is also required to conduct a preliminary review of the constituent papers (read more under *Preliminary review* below).

Members of the examination board

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 KI*, section 7.2.5)

Coordinator of the examination board

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 examination board member at the preliminary review are made known to all members and to facilitate further discussions within the board.

Read more under *Preliminary Review* below.

¹ <https://staff.ki.se/doctoral-education/documents-and-information-doctoral-education>

Seminar Chairperson – role and responsibilities

A chairperson is appointed by the Dissertation committee. 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

Rules for Doctoral Education at Karolinska Institutet, section 7.3.1 och 7.2.1:

A licentiate thesis is normally written in the form of a compilation thesis, i.e. separate scientific papers which are introduced and discussed in a comprehensive summary (kappa).

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.

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 defence of his/her thesis.

When making its recommendation, the examination board must consider whether the papers meet the standards of two years of full-time doctoral studies at a highly ranked international university. This is a subjective assessment that requires both expertise and integrity from the members of the examination board.

Special attention should be placed on unpublished manuscripts.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

Please note that the examination board cannot in the preliminary review ask for more papers to be published.

Routines:

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 board.

The doctoral student also sends the reports on the doctoral student's learning and development as a researcher including achievement of outcomes for degree.² (More information under *Degree objectives* below.)

After the examination board has received the documents, it has two weeks to complete their preliminary review and the coordinator to send in the concluding assessment.

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.

What is examined?

The examination board will assess:

- the respondent's **presentation** of the thesis at the public defence, including the ability to answer questions and discuss the significance of the results within the field of research,
- the quality of the **kappa (comprehensive summary)**,
- the scientific content of the **constituent papers**,
- the fulfilment of the **objectives (outcomes) 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 Kappa / Comprehensive summary

The purpose of the *kappa* is 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,

² Only applies to those applying for thesis defence from 2024-03-15 onwards.

- demonstrate that the intended outcomes (degree objectives) for licentiate education have been achieved.

The *kappa* should be weighted towards a reflective discussion and contextualisation of the student's own research results. The text of the *kappa* must be the student's own original work without the extensive reproduction of extracts from the constituent papers.

At the latest on the same day as the thesis is made public through "nailing", i.e. three weeks prior to its defence, the respondent is to send the printed thesis to the examination board and to the defence chairperson.

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.

Text-matching and plagiarism

On "nailing", the thesis *kappa* is run through a text-matching system. The ensuing report is then sent to the members of the examination board by the University library. The purpose of the report is to serve as a tool when assessing the quality of the *kappa*.

With the report the examination board will receive instructions on how the report is interpreted. The instructions are also available on the KI website.³

Degree Objectives

The examination board is required to ensure that the objectives of the licentiate degree have been met.

If the examination board is uncertain whether the respondent has met all objectives, questions should be asked to give the doctoral student the opportunity to show and describe his/her knowledge, understanding and abilities according to the objective in question. The reports on the doctoral student's learning and development including achievement of outcomes can be used as a basis.

Please find information on the KI web site on how the degree objectives can be achieved⁴

Reports on the doctoral student's learning and development as a researcher, including achievement of outcomes for degree

Both the doctoral student and principal supervisor have written reports of the doctoral student's learning and development.

The purpose is to provide an overall picture of the doctoral education. This is a complement to the results presented in the *kappa* and in the papers and constitutes a basis for the examining board as they prepare the public defence.

³ <https://staff.ki.se/plagiarism-checks-in-doctoral-education>

⁴ <https://staff.ki.se/outcomes-for-doctoral-education-according-to-the-higher-education-ordinance>

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.

Thereafter, 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)

Digital participation

from Rules for Doctoral Education at Karolinska Institutet, section 7.2.9:

Examination board members may take part remotely via a digital platform provided that it does not compromise the quality of proceedings. Should a technical problem arise, the proceedings must be suspended until it is properly and satisfactorily resolved.

The respondent and the chairperson must be present in person and may only take part remotely for exceptional reasons (e.g. a pandemic) upon the approval of the dissertation committee.

A remote audience is allowed, but it is only the audience present in the auditorium that can be guaranteed an opportunity to interact with the respondent.

Examination board meeting following the seminar

Following the seminar, the examination board is called to an immediate meeting to decide on the grade. The 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, 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 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 7.3.8 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 fail to attend, the defence can 1) be postponed awaiting late arrival, 2) the person can be connected digitally or 3) a new person can be appointed.

To appoint a new examination board member, contact the dissertation committee administrator (contact information below). There must be three examination board members present for the examination to proceed.

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 or to report irregularities: disputation@ki.se. E-mails 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 <https://staff.ki.se/doctoral-education>

APPENDIX. Objectives for the Licentiate Degree

Knowledge and understanding

For a licentiate degree, the student is required to

- 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 student is required to

- 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 student is required to

- 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.