

Revised regulations for the PhD programme

OPINIONS

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The formulation and implementation of the regulations for the PhD programme at the Faculty of Medicine, University of Oslo, have attracted attention and sparked debate. We have now revised the regulations, and believe that the new rules help to ensure high-quality education, and provide doctoral candidates with good frameworks and predictability for their researcher education – and support Norwegian academic language.

Doctoral degree training represents the highest level of academic education and is one of the key tasks of universities. PhD programmes educate the experts, researchers and teachers of the future. The Faculty of Medicine at the University of Oslo is responsible for Norway's largest PhD programme with approximately 1 350 doctoral candidates and around 200 doctoral defences annually.

Our PhD programme shall be of high quality both academically and administratively and thus calls for continuous development. We adhere to the standards set by international guidelines [\(1\)](#) and engage in active cooperation with other medical faculties in Norway and the Nordic countries [\(2\)](#). Following a rigorous process, the Faculty has now updated the PhD regulations. There has been considerable interest in this matter, and we therefore wish to describe the process and the result of this work.

Revision process

The University Board has the overarching responsibility for doctoral training and oversees this through its own regulations. The faculties adopt supplementary regulations giving doctoral candidates and supervisors clear guidance on how education in the different disciplines is organised. The Faculty of Medicine's supplementary regulations, adopted in 2010, were last revised in 2019. Our research communities have put forward several suggestions for changes and adjustments to the regulations. Consequently, in spring 2023, we appointed a working group tasked with proposing regulatory changes to enhance the quality of the PhD programme – from admission to completion of the doctoral defence. The revised regulations are intended to provide predictability for doctoral candidates and supervisors, and to simplify case processing for the programme.

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The Dean's office wanted the entire faculty to be broadly involved. The proposals of the working group were submitted for consultation to the various departments, and a digital questionnaire on the most significant changes was sent to all doctoral candidates and the academic staff at the faculty. We received comprehensive consultation responses from the departments, and 367 doctoral candidates and 242 members of the academic staff completed the questionnaire. After the round of consultations, further adjustments were made, and the proposals were discussed by faculty bodies. The final proposal was adopted by the Faculty Board on 4 November 2025.

Significant adjustments

Academic discussions, research methodology training and inclusion in academic forums are of vital importance in researcher education. Therefore, doctoral candidates must be included in a research group at the University of Oslo or a partner research institution (so-called residency requirement) for a period of at least one year (previously six months). To ensure that doctoral candidates have good working conditions, funding for a three-year period is normally required. Moreover, a supervisor must not supervise more than six candidates at the same time to make certain that they have adequate time for supervision.

Several research communities have pointed out that expecting the inclusion of at least three articles in the thesis is unfortunate, and may promote 'salami publication'. The new regulations specify that the work must represent a significant research contribution to the discipline, and that the number of articles will vary according to the candidate's degree of involvement and the extent and quality of the works. The revised regulations require that at least one work must have been published or accepted for publication.

The debate on promoting Norwegian medical academic language was an important consideration. For the most part, medical research is international, and Norwegian researchers make a significant contribution to global knowledge about health and disease. The majority of the faculty's doctoral theses are written in English and published in English-language journals. The revised regulations specify that at least one article must be published or accepted for publication by an internationally recognised English-language journal with peer reviews in English. There are no specific publication requirements for the other works in the thesis. This change facilitates access to other academic communities, also via Norwegian indexed journals that are published in Norwegian and English.

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Furthermore, language has also shaped the discussion of the oral doctoral examination, which consists of a trial lecture and public defence of the thesis. We expect the candidate to hold the trial lecture in English and to communicate in English with the committee during the public defence. The Faculty may waive the English language requirement at the public defence if both the candidate and the committee are proficient in a Scandinavian language

Doctoral education is important

Revising the supplementary regulations is part of comprehensive efforts to develop the Faculty's PhD programme. Following a process evaluation, we have adjusted our administrative procedures and improved the efficiency of our case processing. In order to boost the training of candidates, we are working to update our course portfolio, and will launch a package of supervisor-training courses in 2026.

Expertise at doctoral level is necessary for tackling vital tasks and challenges in the public and private sectors. The PhD degree is also the gateway to applying for research positions at universities and university colleges. The work of our academic staff in conducting research, teaching students and supervising doctoral candidates is invaluable. We are working actively to develop and manage a high-quality research training programme for the researchers of the future. This approach will promote excellent education and research in the best interests of society.

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