



2 December 2020

Distribution list

## Temporary exemption from the guidelines for third-cycle (doctoral) education

### Decision

The vice-chancellor has decided

that the public defence of doctoral theses should take place online to the extent possible;

that a maximum of 8 people may be physically present in the room where the defence takes place;

that, notwithstanding section 8.4, Defence of a doctoral thesis, in *Guidelines for doctoral education*, the author of the thesis, the external reviewer, the examining committee and the chair need not be physically present at the defence;

to request that the deans, preferably through their respective doctoral education committee, ensure that the public can attend defences of doctoral theses via video link or other online tools, provided they have registered to attend prior to the defence, *and* to ensure that there are alternates for the members of the examining committee should those appointed be unable to perform their duties due to technical problems;

to request that the chief operating officer ensures that the university administration can provide sufficient IT support at defences of doctoral theses, and

to apply this decision for as long as the decision by the SLU Board of 26 March on *particular authority granted to the vice-chancellor et al because of the corona pandemic*, SLU ID ua 2020.1.1.1-1283, is in force.

## Background

In light of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, the Public Health Agency of Sweden ([www.folkhalsomyndigheten.se](http://www.folkhalsomyndigheten.se)) issues guidelines aimed at reducing the risk of infection. On 24 November 2020, the government [issued restrictions that further limit the number of people who can attend public gatherings and other events](#). These restrictions apply until further notice and should be seen as binding. At SLU, this affects the number of people who can be physically present in the room where a thesis defence takes place. Those who cannot be offered a place should have the option of attending the event online.

On 18 December 2018, section 233/18, SLU ID ua. 2018.1.1.1-4677, the vice-chancellor adopted guidelines for doctoral education. Section 8.4 of these guidelines, Defence of a public thesis, state the following:

In the light of the degree outcomes, the examining committee present at the thesis defence must assess the thesis and the author's oral defence of the thesis. The external reviewer, examining committee, chair and author of the thesis must be physically present in the same room during the public defence of the doctoral thesis. If the defence of the thesis does not take place at one of SLU's sites, a video link should be set up. The external reviewer must facilitate the examining committee's assessment by engaging in discussion with the author of the thesis. Consequently, the thesis defence must be organised so there is time for:

- the author to present their thesis;
- the external reviewer to present the subject of the thesis, place the findings of the thesis in a wider context within the subject area, and question and thoroughly discuss the thesis with the author;
- the examining committee to discuss matters with the author;
- an open discussion in which the public are invited to participate.

In March, a communication from the vice-chancellor was posted on the staff web informing about exemptions from the guidelines for doctoral education. This communication should be viewed as a forthcoming decision by the vice-chancellor and its content has since been applied at the defences that have taken place.

On 26 March 2020, the chair of the SLU Board decided to grant particular authority to the vice-chancellor and other managers due to the corona pandemic. This applies to education at first-cycle and second-cycle level until the SLU Board decides to repeal the decision. Several other decisions taken as a consequence of the pandemic apply during the same period as the board's decision.

The corona pandemic has severely impacted SLU's operations since it started at the beginning of the year. The measures taken in March and April served to ensure that

critical tasks could be carried out despite the limitations on travel and attending face-to-face meetings.

The pandemic will affect society for some time to come, and no-one can predict how long restrictions will remain in effect. This, together with the recently issued stricter guidelines, mean that it is justified to formalise, in a decision, the practice for public defences of doctoral theses that has been applied since March 2020. This decision will be valid for the same period as the board's decision granting particular authority.

The purpose of this decision is to make it possible to adapt public defences of doctoral theses in a way that reduces the risk of infection.

This decision has been taken by Vice-Chancellor Maria Knutson Wedel after a presentation by Principal Administrative Officer Lotta Hansson and in the presence of Chief Operating Officer Martin Melkersson. Pro vice-chancellor Ylva Hillbur and Academy Secretary Sune Lindh also contributed to the preparation of the case.

Maria Knutson Wedel

Lotta Hansson

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