

Guidelines for holding public defences at Nord University when measures relating preventing the Covid-19 infection prevent physical participation

The Rector of Nord University adopted the following guidelines on 20/03/2020 relating to the holding of public defences. These guidelines remain valid until 31/01/2021.

A. Physical and digital presence:

1. Physical attendance in the room allocated to the public defence shall be limited to an absolute minimum. In relation to limitations on attendance, the requirements relating to being open to the public may be covered by allowing the audience to follow the defence via Skype or Teams.
2. The doctoral candidate, public defence chair and Nord's internal member of the assessment committee should all be present in the same room insofar as this is possible.
3. If the candidate cannot be physically present due to the outbreak of Covid-19, the candidate may participate using appropriate digital tools. The supervisor must testify that the correct candidate is present.
4. The external members of the assessment committee may participate through the use of remote conferencing equipment.
5. Digital presentations must be shared with all participants regardless of whether they are in attendance physically or digitally.
6. It must be possible for the opponents and the doctoral candidate to ask questions via the chosen solution.
7. Facilitation must be provided for questions to be asked by members of the audience via email to the chair of the defence.
8. There must be technical and administrative personnel available to the chair of the defence - preferably in the same room or location - in order to provide rapid assistance in resolving any communications issues that arise.
9. Taking the wishes of the doctoral candidate into consideration, it may be possible to facilitate the attendance of their close relatives in the physical room. All relatives must be healthy and otherwise adhering to the guidelines issued by the Norwegian Institute of Public Health. Recommended travel advice and distances must be adhered to.

B. Requirements for a public defence

1. Since there are limitations on attendance, the requirements relating to being open to the public may be covered by allowing the audience to follow the defence via Skype or Teams. It may either be possible for the audience to ask questions via the chosen solution, or facilitation will be provided for audience questions to be asked, and potentially answered, via email.
2. It is recommended that the IT department and KOLT, if applicable, are consulted in the event that it is necessary to limit the number of audience members in the digital space in which the public defence is held. This is in order to reduce the risk of technical issues.

C. Advertisements for the public defence must contain the following information:

1. The Covid-19 epidemic and the local and national restrictions mean there are limitations on physical participation in the public defence.
2. The public defence may be followed via Skype/Teams via the published link.

- a. *If faculty/IT wish to limit access in order to reduce the risk of technical issues:* Those who wish to follow the public defence and may wish to pose a question from the audience can request a link to participate via Skype/Teams by sending an email to ... (faculty to determine point of contact).
3. Any questions from the audience should be sent by email to the chair of the defence at ...
4. Information on how to access the dissertation so that it is possible to read it in advance.

D. Disclosure requirement

1. The emergency response team, the IT department and the Service function at Nord University must be notified of the time and location (which room or office is to be used) of the public defence well in advance. This is in order to ensure preventative measures relating to infection are in place and to ensure the good technical implementation of the public defence.

E. Digital platforms:

1. Technical conferencing solutions may include a range of digital platforms such as Skype for Business or Teams.

F. The public defence must be cancelled if one of the following occurs:

1. One of the external members of the committee is unable to participate in the public defence.
2. The booked room cannot be used and it is not possible to move the public defence to another suitable, approved room or to hold it via a digital platform such as Skype or Teams.

G. Travel for doctoral candidates, committee members and the chair of the defence

1. All travel relating to activities at Nord University, both domestically and internationally, are currently suspended until May.
2. The same procedures apply to persons scheduled to participate in the public defence as to all other employees at the university.
3. With regard to travel later this spring (May onwards), it is recommended that individuals engage in close dialogue with the university.

H. Other

1. It is important that the candidate, supervisor or chair of the committee contacts the faculty and the chair of the public defence as soon as possible if they identify potential issues in relation to the holding of the examination of the doctoral dissertation.
2. Consider the need for IT support for committee members and possibly the doctoral candidate if they are participating from home.
3. Prepare for situations in which unanticipated problems arise during the event.
 - a. Which criteria will be used to determine whether to cancel the event?
 - b. What will govern whether the public defence can be approved as having been completed/cannot be approved as completed? This includes circumstances that do not directly relate to the candidate's presentation or defence.
4. The faculty is otherwise adhering to the Norwegian Institute of Public Health's guidelines and would direct opponents, doctoral candidates, their supervisors and any close family in the audience to take the standard precautions required to avoid infection and the spread of infection.

Background for some of the provisions

A. Physical and digital presence:

1. Physical attendance in the room allocated to the public defence shall be limited to an absolute minimum. In relation to limitations on attendance, the requirements relating to being open to the public may be covered by allowing the audience to follow the defence via Skype or Teams.

Physical attendance is the norm and it is to facilitate exceptions from this norm that has necessitated the creation of these guidelines. As a result, this is set out as the first point.

2. The doctoral candidate, public defence chair and Nord's internal member of the assessment committee should all be present in the same room insofar as this is possible.

It states that this should be the case, which means it is not a requirement. It is primarily for the sake of the doctoral candidate that the use of the same location is proposed. It should be possible for the doctoral candidate to receive technical support during the event, which is not necessarily always available to them at home. One hypothetical issue is the participation of third parties during the defence when it is not possible to see what is taking place behind the candidate's own camera. We are committed to upholding trust and believe this will not occur, but there should never be any doubt about whether the candidate is receiving undue assistance in an examination situation.

7. Facilitation must be provided for questions to be asked by members of the audience via email to the chair of the defence.

Normally, questions from the audience are provided to the chair of the defence during the break between opponents. In order to avoid overloading the selected electronic platform unnecessarily by granting access to too many people to submit comments, email will be used instead. This will also prevent third parties from interrupting communications between the doctoral candidate and the opponent, cf. point B.1.

8. There must be technical and administrative personnel available to the chair of the defence - preferably in the same room or location - in order to provide rapid assistance in resolving any communications issues that arise.

The doctoral candidate is in a very vulnerable situation and all technical issues must be resolved immediately. The computer literacy of individual defence chairs will vary, and the public defence cannot depend on the chair's knowledge of individual electronic platforms. The IT department must provide an on-call service to ensure that the chair of the defence can quickly receive assistance when necessary, cf. point A.2.

9. Taking the wishes of the doctoral candidate into consideration, it may be possible to facilitate the attendance of their close relatives in the physical room. All relatives must be healthy and otherwise adhering to the guidelines issued by the Norwegian Institute of Public Health. Recommended travel advice and distances must be adhered to.

This is for the sake of the doctoral candidate, who may feel more confident with their partner/parent/best friend present. It is not uncommon for nervous doctoral candidates to fix their gaze on a familiar face that they feel safe in the presence of. Regardless, this will only apply if the assigned room is big enough (there must be at least 1 metre between each person present) and meets other infection prevention requirements.

C. Advertisements for the public defence must contain the following information:

4. Information on how to access the dissertation so that it is possible to read it in advance.

Section 18-2 of the PhD Regulations state that

The dissertation shall be publicly accessible no later than two weeks prior to the date of a public defence. The dissertation shall be made available in the format that it was submitted in for assessment, or - if applicable - following amendments on basis of the committee's preliminary comments.

Furthermore, it is stated that *no restrictions may be imposed on the publication of a doctoral dissertation with the exception of a pre-agreed postponement of the date of publication.*

This is an area of the regulations for which no exceptions can be made. The dissertation must be available.

D. Disclosure requirement

1. The emergency response team, the IT department and the Service function at Nord University must be notified of the time and location (which room or office is to be used) of the public defence well in advance. This is in order to ensure preventative measures relating to infection are in place and to ensure the good technical implementation of the public defence.

Guidelines, information and advice from Nord University concerning the Covid-19 virus are changing on a daily basis and in line with the measures implemented by the Norwegian Institute of Public Health and the Directorate of Health. It may therefore be the case that further restrictions are introduced that may affect the planned implementation of any public defence.

E. Digital platforms:

1. Technical conferencing solutions may include a range of digital platforms such as Skype for Business or Teams.

As the guidelines in point A.8. stipulate that there must be technical personnel available, it is essential that the IT department is aware of which digital platforms they have the expertise to provide support for.

F. The public defence must be cancelled if one of the following occurs:

2. The booked room cannot be used and it is not possible to move the public defence to another suitable, approved room or to hold it via a digital platform such as Skype or Teams.

This may occur in those cases where special rooms must be used for the public defence or the trial lecture, and if the public defence/trial lecture is of such a nature that it is not possible to hold it digitally.