**Guidelines for assessing PhD applications**

**Faculty of Medicine, UiB**

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### ***General comments***

A number of factors should be taken into account in the assessment of applications for PhD positions, and it is important to assess the application as a whole. The guidelines describe what is expected for each grade and are meant to aid the committee to evaluate the applicants fairly. However, this does not necessarily mean that an applicant must fulfil all criteria to obtain a certain grade. It is important that those who assess the applications are conscious to use the full scale.

It is important that the <u>potential</u> of both the applicant, project and supervisor is assessed. Supervisors who are in the early stages of their careers and who are showing a good scientific development and ability to build a productive and good research community should be credited and may be considered as highly as a more experienced supervisor with higher merits.

It is especially important to consider recent activity. For example, exams from early in a student's career should be considered less important than those which are newer, and recent scientific activity should be emphasized more, both in the applicant and the supervisor.

### ***Applicant (33%)***

Factors to be considered:

- Scientific qualifications and previous scientific work (considering their age and time in research). Note that it cannot be expected that applicants who have just completed their degree have any publications.

- When considering published work, factors such as the applicant's contribution (order of authors), level of the journal and number of articles should come into account, but it is important the evaluation is not just based on bibliometrics. Preprints or submitted manuscripts may also be considered. For manuscripts, information on the stage of the publication process, the applicant's contribution and the name of the journal must be included in the application. It is not relevant if previous publications or manuscripts are connected to the project or research group in the current application.

- Grades from previous education (if the applicant has a degree where the grading scheme is pass/fail, all courses must be passed, but grades will not be considered beyond this. In these cases, other criteria become more important) [1].

- Relevance of previous education

- Motivation (as presented in the application letter)

- Supervisor statement

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[1]Grades are not awarded for all degree courses, for example the medical courses at UiT, NTNU and UiO. This means that the grade requirements above are advisory only.

Grading – Grading scale 1-5

*Grade 5:* An exceptional applicant. The applicant has very high marks (A-level) on relevant final exams, and exceptional scientific production and qualifications considering the time passed since they completed their masters or professional degree. The applicant might have presented their own work at scientific conferences, written popular science articles or been granted scholarships or awards based on their merit, or similar. The applicant describes his/her motivation for the project in particular, and the PhD education in general, in an excellent manner, and the supervisor statement supports the application as a whole very well.

*Grade 4:* A great applicant. The applicant has very high marks (A-level) on relevant final exams and very good scientific production and qualifications considering the time passed since they completed their masters or professional degree. If the applicant does not have many scientific publications, this can to some degree be compensated if the applicant has presented their own work at scientific conferences has attended scientific conferences, written popular science articles, or been granted scholarships or awards based on their merit, or similar. The applicant describes his/her motivation for the project in particular, and the PhD education in general, in a very good manner, and the supervisor statement supports the application as a whole very well.

*Grade 3:* A very good applicant. The applicant has high marks (B-level) on relevant final exams and scientific productions as appropriate considering the time passed since they completed their masters or professional degree. The applicant has not necessarily attended scientific conferences with their own work, written popular science articles, or been granted scholarships or awards based on their merit, or similar. The applicant describes their motivation for the project in particular and the PhD education in general in a good manner, and the supervisor statement supports the application as a whole.

*Grade 2:* A good applicant. The applicant has ordinary marks (B- or C-level) on relevant final exams, and limited scientific experience considering the time passed since they completed their masters or professional degree. The applicant typically will not have attended scientific conferences with their own work, written popular science articles, or been granted scholarships or awards based on their merit, or similar. The applicant describes their motivation for the project in particular and the PhD education in general in a good manner, and the supervisor statement supports the application as a whole.

*Grade 1:* The applicant has poor marks and is lacking scientific experience. The motivation is poorly described.

### *Project (33%)*

Factors to be considered:

- The scientific quality and originality of the project.
- That the data and methodology is adequate to reach the aim of the project and that the suggested methodology or competence within methodological development is available.
- That the scope of the project is realistic, and that the application includes a reasonable time plan.
- That the relevant ethical questions have been addressed. For projects using patient data/materials an approval from the ethics committee should be available, alternatively an explanation why this is not needed for the project in question. If the approvals are not yet available, there should be a plan for how to obtain ethical approvals before starting the project.
- That the costs of the project are realistic and presented in a budget.
- Realistic plan for publications


Grading – Grading scale 1-5

*Grade 5:* The project is original, innovative and of a very high scientific standard, while remaining realistic within the timeframe of a PhD position. The project is very well described, using the available template. Any data sets and proposed methodology is available and of high quality, and necessary competence is available. Publications in highly merited journals can be expected. Necessary ethical considerations have been made.

*Grade 4:* The project is original, and of a high scientific standard while remaining realistic within the timeframe of a PhD position. The project is well described, fully or partly using the available template. Any data sets and proposed methodology is available and of high quality, and necessary competence is available. Publications in highly merited international journals within the field can be expected. Necessary ethical considerations have been made.

*Grade 3:* The project is original, and of a good scientific standard while remaining realistic within the timeframe of a PhD position. The project is well described, fully or partly using the available template, but there is some uncertainty in areas like methodology or data quality. Publications in highly merited international journals within the field is within reach. Necessary ethical considerations have been made.

*Grade 2:* The project is of good scientific quality, while remaining realistic within the timeframe of a PhD position. The project is described fully or partly using the available template, but there are uncertainties in areas like methodology or data quality. Publications in highly merited international journals is unrealistic, also within the field. Necessary ethical considerations have been made

*Grade 1:* The project is poorly or inadequately described, is not realistic within the timeframe of a PhD, is not descried using the template, is lacking in the ethical considerations, or similar.

***Research community (33%)***

Factors to be considered:

- The research merits of the supervisors (for example publications, external funding and awards)
- The national and international network and collaboration
- The research activity of the main supervisor (most importantly in the last 5 years)
- The previous supervisor experience of the main supervisor (it is a positive that the main supervisor can refer to previous experience with PhD supervision, but the number is not decisive)
- The research community's resources, including methodological strengths that are relevant to the project, and available funding for the running for the project in question

Bibliometric tools like H-index and quotations can be used to aid the assessment, but the Faculty of Medicine has good research groups and subject areas that would not be highly rated if this is used without caution. The same applies to assessing journal quality solely on the basis of impact factor or NSD-level.

For younger supervisors, their age and length of their career should be part of the evaluation of their publication activity, ability to obtain external funding and supervision experience.

Grading – Grading scale 1-5 (whole and half points)

*Grade 5:* Internationally leading research community which publishes in very highly merited international journals (with author contributions that indicate significant input to the paper) and collaborates with other very strong groups in Norway and abroad. The main supervisor is highly merited considering their age and research field, in an active phase of their career and has previously supervised PhD candidates who have defended their degree. If the supervisor is in an early stage of their career, experience co-supervising candidates who have defended their degree or being the main supervisor for candidates who have not yet defended their degree can be considered. The community has the necessary resources available to see the project through. The main supervisor receives or has received funding from the EU, the Research Council of Norway or other sources.

*Grade 4:* Nationally leading research community which publishes in highly merited international journals (with author contributions that indicate significant input to the paper). The main supervisor is well merited considering their age and research field, in an active phase of their career and has often previously supervised PhD candidates. If the supervisor is in an early stage of their career, experience co-supervising candidates who have defended their degree or being the main supervisor for candidates who have not yet defended their degree can be considered. The community has the necessary resources available to see the project through. The main supervisor receives or has received funding from the EU and/or the Research Council of Norway or other sources.

*Grade 3:* Very good research community which publishes in leading journals within the field (with author contributions that indicate significant input to the paper) and collaborates with good research groups in Norway and abroad. The supervisor is merited considering their age and in an active phase of their career and may previously have supervised PhD candidates. If the supervisor is in an early stage of their career, experience co-supervising candidates who have defended their degree or being the main supervisor for candidates who have not yet defended their degree can be considered. The community has the necessary resources available to see the project through. The main supervisor or the research community has or has received funding from external sources.

*Grade 2*: Good research community which publishes in international journals, but which does not collaborate much outside UiB. The supervisor is in an active phase of their career, but

might not have supervised any PhD candidates. Experience as main supervisor for master students, co-supervision for PhD candidates who have not yet defended their PhD is regarded as positive. The community has the necessary resources available to see the project through. The research community has or has received funding from external sources.

*Grade 1:* The research community and main supervisor has low scientific activity, do not publish internationally and/or do not have the resources to see the project through, or similar.

### *Extra points for planned stays abroad*

The faculty encourages PhD fellows to go abroad for research stays between 6 months and a year. To encourage this, a stay abroad gives an additional 0.5 point in the total score. For the planned stay abroad to give the extra points, the following must apply:

- A formal invitation letter from the relevant institution, naming the applicant, must be enclosed with the application.
- The project plan, time plan, motivation letter and mentor statement should all clearly state how the stay abroad will be integrated in the project and how the stay will enrich the project and the PhD education.