

General Syllabus for Doctoral Studies in Public Health Sciences*

Folkhälsovetenskap

1. Decision

The general syllabus for doctoral studies/third-cycle studies in Public Health Sciences has been decided on by the Faculty of Social Sciences Board at Stockholm University on June 12, 2013, revised on February 1, 2018, December 16, 2022, and latest revised on May 28, 2026.

The general syllabus is valid from May 28, 2026.

2. Description of the Field of Study

English name: Public Health Sciences

Swedish name: Folkhälsovetenskap

Public Health Sciences is the scientific study of public health and its determinants. Public health refers to the general condition of a population's health, how it changes, and how it is distributed both historically and over the course of people's lives. Factors that impact public health are often found in social and public structures. These structures, combined with individual conditions, shape people's habits and life conditions. In the field of Public Health Sciences, the development of public health policy and practice is also studied.

Interdisciplinary research is often carried out in the field of Public Health Sciences. Knowledge and skills are created in order to provide a general understanding and enable the designing of relevant measures to prevent illness and promote health, and to evaluate and follow up these measures.

Third-cycle education in Public Health Sciences at Stockholm University emphasises perspectives that shed light on how inequalities in health arise; how different life conditions, lifestyle habits and opportunities influence the health of individuals throughout their lives; and how structural factors, individual actions and biopsychological mechanisms jointly affect these processes. Both theoretical and methodological skills and knowledge are vital, as are knowledge and reflections concerning measures to promote good and equitable health.

Områdesnämnden för humanvetenskap

Stockholms universitet

* Please note that the General Syllabus for Doctoral Studies in Public Health Sciences in English is a translation from the Swedish version. In case of ambiguity, it is the Swedish version that applies.

3. Objectives for studies

Doctoral education in Public Health Sciences can be concluded with a licentiate degree or a doctoral degree. A doctoral student in Public Health Sciences may obtain a licentiate degree as an interim stage within doctoral education. The licentiate stage is not a mandatory requirement for obtaining a doctoral degree in Public Health Sciences.

3.1 PhD degree

A PhD degree is awarded when a doctoral student has completed 240 higher education credits within a third-cycle field of study.

Knowledge and understanding

For a PhD degree the doctoral student shall

- demonstrate broad knowledge and a systematic understanding of the research field along with advanced and current specialist knowledge within a specific research area, and
- demonstrate intimate knowledge of scientific method in general and of the methods of the specific research area in particular.

Skills and abilities

For a PhD degree the doctoral student shall

- demonstrate the ability to undertake analysis and synthesis as well as the independent critical assessment and evaluation of new and complex phenomena, issues and situations,
- demonstrate the ability to critically, independently, creatively and with scientific rigour identify and formulate research questions as well as to plan and with adequate methods carry out research and other qualified tasks within given time frames, and to examine and evaluate such work,
- demonstrate the ability to substantially contribute to the development of knowledge through own research by writing a dissertation,
- demonstrate the ability in both national and international contexts to orally and in writing with authority present and discuss research and research results in dialogue with the scientific community and the society at large,
- demonstrate the ability to identify needs of more knowledge, and
- demonstrate the skills to contribute to the development of the society and support others' learning in the research field, in the field of education and in other qualified professional contexts.

Judgement and approach

For a PhD degree the doctoral student shall



- demonstrate intellectual independence, scientific conscientiousness and the ability to make ethical judgements in relation to research, and
- demonstrate in-depth insight into the potential and limitations of science, its role in the society and human responsibility for how it is used.

Scientific thesis (PhD thesis)

For a PhD degree the doctoral student shall complete a thesis (PhD thesis) for which at least 120 higher education credits are awarded.

3.2 Licentiate

A Degree of Licentiate is awarded either when the doctoral student has completed a doctoral programme worth at least 120 higher education credits in a particular subject, or when the doctoral student has completed at least 120 higher education credits of a programme intended to result in a doctoral degree, provided that the higher education institution has decided that such licentiate degrees can be awarded.

Knowledge and understanding

For a licentiate's degree, the doctoral student shall

- demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the research field, including up-to-date specialist knowledge within a specific research area, along with advanced knowledge of scientific methods in general and the methods of the specific research area in particular.

Skills and abilities

For a licentiate's degree, the doctoral student shall

- demonstrate the ability to critically, independently, creatively and with scientific rigour identify and formulate research questions, to plan and with adequate methods carry out a defined research project and other qualified tasks within given time frames and thereby contribute to the development of knowledge, and to evaluate such work,
- demonstrate the ability in both national and international contexts to orally and in writing lucidly present and discuss research and research results in dialogue with the scientific community and the society at large,
- demonstrate the requisite skills to independently participate in work of research and development and to work independently in other qualified activities.

Judgement and approach

For a licentiate's degree, the doctoral student shall

- demonstrate the ability to make ethical assessments in own research,
- show insight concerning the potential and limitations of science, its role in society and human responsibility for how it is applied,



- demonstrate the ability to identify personal needs of further knowledge and to take responsibility for one's own development of knowledge.

Scientific essay

For a licentiate's degree, the doctoral student shall write an approved scientific essay for which at least 60 higher education credits are awarded.

4. Admission requirements

4.1 General entry requirements

To be qualified for admission to doctoral studies, a student must have either

- taken an advanced level academic degree,
- completed course demands for at least 240 higher education credits, of which at least 60 credits were taken at the advanced level, or
- in any other way within this country or abroad achieved substantially equivalent competence.

The university may under certain circumstances exempt applications from the general admission requirements. Exemptions are decided by the Faculty of Social Sciences Board.

4.2 Special entry requirements

To meet special entry requirements for doctoral studies in Public Health Sciences, applicants must have good oral and written skills in English. Applicants must also have completed the course requirements concerning quantitative or qualitative methods relevant for Public Health Sciences comprising of at least 7.5 higher education credits at the advanced level.

The entry requirements can also be met if the applicant has acquired substantially equivalent knowledge either in Sweden or abroad. Whether such knowledge meets the specified requirements is decided upon by the Director of Studies for the doctoral programme in Public Health Sciences, and the final decision is made by the Head of Department.

The requirements must be met by the final date of the announcement.



5. Announcement and admission

The Departmental Board at the Department of Public Health Sciences makes decisions on admissions to PhD studies in Public Health Sciences. The Departmental Board is unable to delegate this decision. The board can only admit applicants who will be employed as PhD students.

Decisions on admissions to PhD studies with funding other than employment as a PhD student and admission for PhD students who only aim to complete a licentiate degree are made by the Faculty of Social Sciences Board.

A doctoral level student who has previously been admitted to the doctoral level education with the aim to complete a licentiate degree, and, after completing the licentiate degree, wishes to continue their studies for a doctoral degree in the same subject, must apply to be admitted during a regular announcement. The admission is, where applicable, only for studies during the time remaining until the doctoral degree.

For further information on how exceptions are applied in accordance with Chapter 7, Section 37 of the Higher Education Ordinance, please see the rules for PhD studies at the Faculty of Social Sciences.

The opportunity to apply for doctoral level education in Public Health Sciences is usually given each spring term (application deadline March 15) and autumn term (application deadline October 15) to the extent that available resources allow. Positions are announced one month before the application deadline. Announcements are made in Stockholm University's recruitment tool.

When applying, the applicant must attach a concept note that describes the planned research (1-3 pages). This must be linked to the call's project description, where applicable. The concept note must indicate the main focus, conceivable thesis topic, and preferably also a specification of a possible research problem, theory, method and material. The concept note is not binding. Applicants should also enclose their CV, earlier publications and any other documents the applicants would like to be considered.

5.1 Basis for assessment and selection criteria

The Director of Studies for the doctoral programme typically prepares the applications. The selection of applicants is carried out by an admission committee appointed by the Director of Studies after consultation with the Supervisors' council. Selection among the qualified applicants is based on their ability to achieve the goals for doctoral studies. The criteria used in this selection process are:



- subject-specific knowledge of relevance to Public Health Sciences
- subject-specific knowledge of relevance to the research project to which the employment is linked (where applicable)
- independence in the analysis and planning of previous scholarly work
- scholarly stringency and quality of previous work and of the concept note
- the ability to communicate and collaborate
- the department’s possibilities to provide adequate supervision for the planned research

The admission committee will prepare and submit a written decision proposal with justification to the Departmental Board, which makes the final decision regarding the admission and employment of doctoral students. For further information about the admission procedure, refer to the Department’s document *Procedures for admission to doctoral level education*.

6. Content and structure of the study programme

The doctoral education in Public Health Sciences involves four years of full-time studies and amounts to 240 higher education credits. One semester of full-time study is equivalent to 30 higher education credits. The study programme consists of one course component corresponding to 60 credits and one thesis component corresponding to 180 credits. It is possible to complete a licentiate degree after being awarded 120 higher education credits, of which 35 credits are from courses and 85 credits are from a scientific project. A licentiate degree can be extended into a doctoral degree by completing additional course credits and by expanding the licentiate thesis into a doctoral dissertation, provided that the doctoral student has been admitted to third-cycle (doctoral) studies with a PhD as the final objective.

The study programme is planned to cover four years of full-time study. This implies that students must devote themselves to their studies and take full and efficient advantage of courses and tuition. Studies may also be structured so that they can be completed on a part-time basis for a minimum of 50 per cent of full-time over a maximum of eight years.

All doctoral students who are admitted to the Doctoral Programme in Public Health Sciences must follow the General Syllabus for Doctoral Studies. Collaborations such as “cotutelle agreements”, individual students’ participation in research schools or externally funded projects may result in individual changes to the study programme only if they are incorporated in the individual study plan.

Detailed plans for the study programme are listed in point 6.3 as well as in the individual study plan.



6.1 Individual study plan

Individual study plans must be set up for all active doctoral students in Public Health Sciences. The individual study plan includes commitments from both the university and the PhD student as well as a financial plan and a time schedule for the study period. The plan is approved by the Departmental Board following discussion with the PhD student and all the supervisors. The individual study plan shall be approved no later than two months after the doctoral student have started.

The individual study plan is reviewed at least once a year following a discussion between the PhD student and the supervisors, and it may be amended by the university to the extent necessary. Decisions to approve the revised individual study plan are made by the Head of Department. In cases where the Head of Department is also the student's supervisor, the decision is made by the Deputy Head of Department. In cases where both the Head and the Deputy Head of Department are supervisors, the decision is made by the Director of Studies for the doctoral programme.

For details on how to devise, manage and review individual study plans, see Chapter 6, Sections 29 and 30 of the Higher Education Ordinance, Rules for doctoral level education and examination at Stockholm University, the guidelines for the area of Human Science, and the rules for the Faculty of Social Sciences.

6.2 Supervision and other resources

Students who are admitted to doctoral studies have the right to supervision throughout the study period unless the President (on the basis of the Higher Education Ordinance, Chapter 6, Section 30) decides differently. For each doctoral student admitted, at least two supervisors shall be appointed by the Departmental Board, of whom one should be the main supervisor. At least one supervisor shall have completed supervisory training or have been judged by the Faculty Board to have the corresponding competence.

As a rule, the main supervisor should be employed by the Department of Public Health Sciences. If this is not the case, another supervisor must be employed by the Department of Public Health Sciences. All supervisors must hold a PhD or equivalent, and at least one supervisor should hold the rank of associate professor (docent) or higher.

Besides supervision, the doctoral student has a right to resources that may be considered necessary in order to complete the doctoral programme satisfactorily. Such resources may include access to a place of work at the department where the student is employed. The student should have access to shared equipment and services. Further details regarding supervision and other resources are to be listed in the individual study plan.



Doctoral students are entitled to change supervisors upon request. Such requests should be made to the Head of the Department of Public Health Sciences. In cases where both the Head and the Deputy Head of Department are supervisors, the request should be made to the Director of Studies for the doctoral programme. A change of supervisor always entails a revision of the individual study plan.

The doctoral student is entitled to at least 120 hours of supervision per year. The distribution of supervision time between the supervisors is specified in the individual study plan.

If a doctoral student has substantially neglected their obligations according to the individual study plan, the President may, on the basis of the Higher Education Ordinance, Chapter 6, Section 30, decide that the doctoral student is no longer entitled to supervision and other resources for the training.

6.3 Courses and examination

The courses comprise 60 higher education credits for a doctoral degree, and 35 higher education credits for a licentiate degree. Out of these credits, at least 15 credits (for a doctoral degree) or 10 credits (for a licentiate degree) should constitute method courses. A course in teaching and learning in higher education to a maximum of 7.5 credits for a doctoral degree and a maximum of 3 credits for a licentiate degree may be included in the programme. Optional courses are selected in consultation with the supervisors.

The following courses are mandatory for both a doctoral and licentiate degree:

- Introduction to Public Health Sciences: A social science perspective. The course comprises 5 credits. Exemptions can be made if the student has a prior degree in Public Health Sciences. Decisions about exemptions are made by the Director of Studies for the doctoral programme in Public Health Sciences.
- Theory of knowledge and ethics in Public Health Sciences. The course comprises 5 credits.
- Theoretical approaches and current research in Public Health Sciences. The course comprises 5 credits.

Each course or credit-bearing activity includes an examination that is assessed by an examiner. Grades for a course or credit-bearing activity are either fail or pass.

A maximum of 12 credits for a doctoral degree or 7 credits for a licentiate degree can be awarded to the doctoral student for the following activities:

- literature course
- active participation in the higher seminar series at the Department of Public Health Sciences
- active participation in the journal club at the Department of Public Health Sciences



The content of any potential literature courses will be determined by the supervisor(s). The number of pages and the level of difficulty should be considered in relation to the number of credits. The literature course will be examined by means of the doctoral student writing an essay discussing the literature, or a summary of the literature included in the course. The examiner of the literature course must be employed as a teacher at Stockholm University and cannot be one of the supervisors. The examiner may decide to include additional elements in the examination.

Participation in the higher seminar series at the Department of Public Health Sciences may, with a certificate from a seminar coordinator, also be included as a credit-bearing component of the programme. Attendance on six occasions, including one where the doctoral student has either commented on or presented a manuscript, then corresponds to 1.5 credits. Credits for seminar participation may not exceed 4.5 credits for a doctoral degree or 1.5 credits for a licentiate degree. Participation in one own's introductory seminar with a presentation of the research plan, half-time seminar, and final review seminar is a mandatory part of the thesis work and thus does not give any credit points.

Participation in the doctoral programme's journal club may, with a certificate from the seminar coordinator, also give course credits. Attendance on four occasions, including one where the doctoral student presents an article, then corresponds to 1.5 credits. The total number of credits for participation in the journal club may not exceed 4.5 credits for a doctoral degree or 1.5 credits for a licentiate degree.

The course component of the programme must be completed before the public defence seminar.

6.3.1 Credit transfer from previous education

A doctoral student who has been admitted to the doctoral programme in Public Health Sciences may transfer credits from courses taken previously, and from courses taken at another department or another university during the doctoral studies. The transferred credits must be from courses taken at the advanced or doctoral level. Exceptions can be made if there are special reasons to transfer credits from a course at the undergraduate level.

Applications to transfer credits from a particular course are made using a special form⁴ on which the university, course name, date, level and number of credits should be specified. The syllabus and certificate (or equivalent) should be included as well. If the course has not been included in the PhD student's individual study plan, the form is signed by the supervisor.

Decisions about transferring course credits are made by the Director of Studies for the doctoral programme.

When transferring credits from previous courses, the funded period of the doctoral programme will be shortened according to the principle of one week per 1.5 transferred credits. The application for transferring credits from previous education must be completed at the beginning of the doctoral education.

6.3.2 Other compulsory elements

In addition to the mandatory elements presented below, doctoral students are presumed to participate in half-time review seminars, licentiate seminars and final review seminars given within the doctoral programme in Public Health Sciences. Another compulsory component is that the doctoral student presents their research results in at least one international scientific context.

1) Introduction seminar with presentation of research plan

During the first year, the doctoral student shall present the thesis plan at an introductory seminar given within the higher seminar series at the Department of Public Health Sciences. The seminar leader for the higher seminar series is generally the chair of the seminar.

2) Half-time review seminar

A half-time review seminar should be conducted after the equivalent of two years of full-time study. The half-time review is a public seminar with three reviewers who have been appointed in advance in consultation between the supervisor(s) and the doctoral student. All members of the review committee should hold the rank of associate professor (docent) or professor, and at least one of them should be based outside Stockholm University or work at another department than the Department of Public Health Sciences. The seminar leader for the higher seminar series is generally the chair of the seminar.

The purpose of the half-time review is primarily to verify that the learning outcomes for the doctoral studies are well on the way to being achieved. At the seminar, the doctoral student will present their research work and explain how it fits in with the overall thesis plan. This is followed by comments from the reviewers with responses from the doctoral student.

Finally, the seminar is opened to questions from the audience. After the half-time review seminar, a joint assessment is made by the reviewers on a special form which is communicated to the supervisor, the doctoral student and the Director of Studies for the doctoral programme. In cases where the doctoral student completes a licentiate degree as an intermediate exit, or where the doctoral studies are concluded with a licentiate degree, the licentiate seminar replaces the half-time seminar.

3) Final review seminar

A final review seminar should take place no later than two and a half months before the thesis is supposed to go into print, i.e., no later than four months before the public defence seminar. The discussant at the final review seminar should hold the rank of associate professor (docent)

or higher and be appointed in consultation between the doctoral student and the supervisor(s). The documents to be reviewed at the final review seminar, including the protocol from the half-time review seminar, must be available to the discussant no later than two weeks before the seminar. In addition, the discussant must be provided with the individual study plan together with the appendix on goal attainment, as well as an account of the doctoral student's independent contribution in cases of co-authorship. The seminar coordinator is usually the chair of the seminar.

The main part of the thesis, including a well-developed draft of the introductory chapter, should be presented at the final review seminar. First, the doctoral student will present a short summary of the thesis. Then, the discussant and the respondent will discuss the main merits and demerits of the thesis, with emphasis on constructive suggestions for improvement. Finally, the chair will open the discussion to the other participants at the seminar. After the seminar, the discussant will make an assessment which is communicated to the supervisor, the doctoral student, the final reader, and the Director of Studies for the doctoral programme.

In cases where the doctoral studies are concluded with a licentiate degree, the final seminar is not held.

4) Final reading of the thesis manuscript

When a date is scheduled for the final review seminar, a professor or associate professor (docent) from the Supervisors' council shall be appointed for the final reading of the thesis manuscript and be given the opportunity to attend the final review seminar. The final reader must not be the doctoral student's supervisor. The thesis manuscript, the individual study plan (ISP) with the accompanying appendix for goal attainment, the protocol from the final review seminar as well as a description of the doctoral student's independent contribution in the case of co-authorship, shall be submitted by the doctoral student to the appointed final reader no later than five weeks before the thesis is supposed to go into print. The final reader's assessment shall be submitted to the supervisors, the doctoral student and the director of studies for the doctoral programme.

The Head of Department shall then, after consulting with a working group appointed by the Supervisors' council, assess whether or not to recommend the scheduling of a public defence seminar.

In cases where the doctoral studies are concluded with a licentiate degree, a final reading of the dissertation manuscript is not carried out. Instead, a professor or associate professor (docent) at the department must be appointed to conduct a final reading of the licentiate thesis. This person must not be the doctoral student's supervisor. The final reader's assessment is communicated to the supervisor, the doctoral student, and the director of doctoral studies.

5) Presentation of research results in at least one international scientific context

An additional compulsory component is that the doctoral student must present their research results in at least one international scientific context.

6.4 The doctoral thesis and the public defence

For a PhD degree to be awarded, the thesis has to be approved and all courses have to be completed and approved. A doctoral thesis shall consist of a piece of work of which the student's individual work corresponds to 180 higher education credits at the doctoral level. The thesis is the most important part of the study programme and consists of an independent project in the field of Public Health Sciences. This work is planned together with the supervisor(s) and should commence during the first half of the study programme, but should be concentrated and completed during the latter part.

A doctoral thesis in Public Health Sciences typically takes the form of a compilation thesis consisting of 3-5 published or publishable articles and an interconnecting introductory chapter ("kappa"). For co-authored pieces of work, the division of labour between the authors shall be described in a separate form where the doctoral student's independent contribution is clearly stated.

The "kappa" (comprehensive summary) shall include an overview of the research field as well as an account of the theoretical foundations. The overall aim of the thesis, research-ethical considerations, and methodological reflections must be clearly presented. The kappa must also contain a reflective discussion that integrates and contextualises the doctoral student's own research results. The combined scientific contribution of the constituent papers must be clarified and situated within a broader public health science context. The kappa should normally comprise at least 60 pages, including references.

The thesis must be written in English or Swedish. All doctoral theses must have a summary in both English and Swedish.

A thesis shall be defended orally at a public defence during term-time as prescribed in Chapter 6 of the Higher Education Ordinance. The public defence can be held in English or Swedish. Publication of the date of the defence of the dissertation (the so-called "nailing") must take place no later than three weeks prior to the defence. The dissertation must be available at the department and the university library at least three weeks before the public defence takes place.

The chair of the public defence, the faculty opponent and the grading committee are appointed by the Deputy Dean on behalf of the Faculty of Social Sciences Board on the basis of a proposal from the closest affected professor in consultation with the Head of Department. The committee must not include anyone who has supervised the doctoral student or who may be disqualified for other reasons, e.g., due to close cooperation or dependency. The thesis is graded with either pass or fail. In setting grades, both the content of the thesis and its defence are taken into account.



The faculty opponent should have the academic level of associated professor (docent) or professor. In special circumstances, a doctor who does not have the academic level of docent can be appointed. The faculty opponent shall have no ties with the doctoral student or the thesis.

The composition of the grading committee and other matters related to the public defence of the thesis will conform to the rules for public defence seminars at the Faculty of Social Sciences.

6.5 The licentiate thesis and the licentiate seminar

The licentiate dissertation shall consist of a piece of work where the student's individual work corresponds to 85 higher education credits at the doctoral level, and should follow the form of a doctoral thesis.

The licentiate dissertation shall, at a publicly announced seminar which takes place at term time, be reviewed by an opponent with the lowest academic level of doctor and who has good knowledge of the subject areas and methods essential to the thesis. The dissertation should be available at the department and the university library at least three weeks before the seminar takes place.

The examiner or the composition of the examination committee will conform to the rules for licentiate seminars at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Stockholm University.

The opponent, the chair, and the examiner or the possible examination committee are selected by the Head of the Department. In cases where the Head of Department is also the student's supervisor, the decision is made by the Deputy Head of Department, and in cases where both the Head and the Deputy Head of Department are supervisors the decision is made by the Director of Studies for the doctoral programme. The grade of the dissertation is either fail or pass. Supervisor(s) must not participate in the grading of the dissertation.

The licentiate dissertation must be written in English or Swedish. All licentiate dissertations must have a summary in both English and Swedish.

7. Transitional rules

Doctoral students admitted before this version of the general syllabus was in place may ask to switch to this syllabus following discussion with their main supervisor and the Director of Studies. The request should be submitted to the Director of Studies for the doctoral programme in Public Health Sciences and the decision is made by the Head of Department. In cases where both the Head of Department and the Deputy Head of Department are supervisors, the decision is made by the Director of Studies for the doctoral programme. The individual study plan should then be updated.



8. Miscellaneous

For all other matters, reference is made to the applicable legislation, the guidelines at Stockholm University and the Faculty of Social Sciences, as well as the department's implementing regulations.