



UMEÅ UNIVERSITY

# EXTERNAL DEGREE PROJECTS

*“External degree projects refer to projects undertaken in collaboration with external parties outside the academic community and where a resource person should be available.”*



## CHECKLIST



### CHECKLIST FOR DEGREE PROJECTS CONDUCTED IN COLLABORATION WITH AN EXTERNAL PARTY

These checklists are intended to support students, supervisors and company representatives in the planning of a degree project, regarding of subject field. Departments and subjects have varying rules for examination, which means that all parties have the responsibility to find out and agree on what should be applied in each case.

### WHAT IS A DEGREE PROJECT?

A degree project or thesis project is often a final examination of an academic education and the results are presented in a report – a thesis. Degree projects can be undertaken on first cycle level (Bachelor's thesis) or second cycle level (Master's thesis).

Degree projects and thesis projects vary in length, but usually occupy between 10 and 30 weeks of student work. The degree project can be written in collaboration with or be assigned by a company or organisation.

When degree projects are written in collaboration with an external party, they often cover a subject or problem the company needs assistance with. Beside proposing a solution to a tangible problem, the student can also add new ideas and perspectives that can be used in the organisation.

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## INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS

By working together with a company or an organisation to complete your thesis, you will learn to apply your theoretical knowledge in practice. At the same time, you also gain an insight into how the company or organisation works and how the content of your studies can be implemented with a future employer. You make new contacts that could be useful when you have completed your studies.

You cannot expect a salary or financial remuneration from the company or organisation for your work. However, it is common that the company or organisation covers expenses accrued as a result of the thesis project, but this together with the question of potential salary/remuneration is something you need to agree upon with the company.

Together with the company or organisation, you should identify what they would like to study and formulate a hypothesis. Discuss and answer, preferably in writing, the following questions and tasks:

- What needs to be implemented and how?
- What time plan should the work follow?
- What are your expectations of the company?
- What are the company's expectations of you?
- Who will be the student's contact at the company or organisation?
- Under what conditions should the assignment be carried out? How should potential costs for material, travels, print and postage be distributed?
- How should sensitive data be processed?
- How should the completed report be presented to the company or organisation?

### MAKE SURE THE CLIENT HAS APPOINTED A CONTACT

The student's contact at the company should be available and set aside time for questions, feedback and support when required. Together, you can set up a physical workplace for your use, put together the work material needed to complete the thesis or book potential interviews with employees.

During the project, an ongoing dialogue should take place between you and the company contact. For that reason, it may be beneficial to begin by setting up regular meetings with the company contact for advice and discussion.

### TOGETHER WITH THE UNIVERSITY

The academic supervisor has the task to ensure academic quality in the student's work. To fulfil formal requirements, the thesis or degree project must fulfil academic criteria. To do so, you must follow the existing guidelines for theses within your subject field.

### RESULTS AND CONFIDENTIALITY

- The student owns the copyright to the thesis.
- It is important that potential non-disclosure agreements and other terms and conditions for the degree project are set up before the work begins. It is the external party's responsibility to ensure that such an agreement is made. In the event of the need of an agreement between students and external parties, the University has set up a template agreement to use. The template regulates the situations that are commonly necessary to regulate between students and companies or organisations. It creates a reasonable balance between the external party's needs and the consideration for the student. It also contains explanatory comments. This template can either be used by the parties in the agreement or – if an external party wishes to implement its own proposed agreement – the template can be used to exemplify the terms that our students should agree to.
- The University is a public authority and fall under the principle of public access to official documents. That means that the thesis will become a public record after the examination. If a company wishes to keep large parts or the entire thesis confidential, the hypothesis is probably not suitable to implement as a degree project. However, there are no reasons why the student and client cannot pursue the hypothesis beyond the scope of the education, or for the student to write a decoded academic thesis as well as a separate report aimed for the company or organisation.



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## INFORMATION FOR EXTERNAL SUPERVISORS

A degree project or academic thesis is often a final examination of an academic education and the results are presented in a report. By collaborating with students who undertake a degree project or write a thesis, you get the chance to bring new knowledge into your organisation. In our experience, such collaborations can also be a good way of recruiting highly qualified employees. Let the students' qualifications form a resource to you and your organisation.

When degree projects are written in collaboration with or assigned by an employer, they often cover a subject or problem the company needs assistance with. Besides proposing a solution to a tangible problem, the student can also add new ideas and perspectives for use in the organisation. The student also has an academic supervisor at the University who will follow and support the work to ensure the thesis follows the guidelines for academic standard.

As a company initiator, you decide together with the student how you wish for the thesis to be presented at your company or organisation.

### **WHAT IS EXPECTED OF YOU AS A CLIENT?**

You should agree on how often you should meet, consolidate and to what extent the student needs to be present at the company.

The company should appoint a person who is in regular contact with the student. The company contact should be available and should set aside time for questions and feedback. We recommend that you set up regular meetings with the student for advice and discussion. Please keep in mind that the student has a due date for the project as a part of the education.

### **ANALYSING AND WORDING THE HYPOTHESIS**

The thesis or degree project should contain a hypothesis or a subject field that you as a company initiator wishes to shed light upon. Clarify to the student what your objective is and what your desired outcome of the project is. The hypothesis must be approved by the academic supervisor.

### **Together with the student, clearly define and answer in writing the following questions and tasks:**

- What needs to be implemented and how?  
How and when should the work take place?
- What time plan should the work follow?
- What are the student's expectations of you?  
What are your expectations of the student?
- Who will be the student's contact at the company or organisation?
- Under what conditions should the assignment be carried out? How should potential costs for material, travels, print and postage be distributed?
- Who owns the result and how should sensitive data be processed?
- How should the completed report be presented to you as a client?
- The company contact and the student should jointly put together the work material needed.
- The company contact helps to book potential interviews with employees.
- The company contact makes sure the student gets a workplace at the company or organisation if this is agreed upon.
- The work is a part of the student's studies and it is hence not necessary to provide financial remuneration for the student's work. Nevertheless, some still choose to provide such remuneration. It is customary that the company or organisation pays for any expenses that may arise as a result of the project, such as travel costs and phone bills. This is something you should agree upon with the student before starting the project.



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## THE PRINCIPLE OF PUBLIC ACCESS TO OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS

The theses/reports that students write during their project work become public documents when they are submitted for examination. This means that you have limited possibilities of keeping its content confidential. It may, however, be possible to label parts of the report as confidential. One condition is that the remaining parts of the report should be substantial for the examiner to assess and approve the student's work.

If the project requires making a large portion of the result confidential in the eyes of the principle of public access to official documents, the degree project may not be suitable as one. In the majority of cases, companies rarely wish to share company secrets with a person who is only carrying out a degree project, which is why this is usually not an issue.

It is important that potential non-disclosure agreements and other terms and conditions for the degree project are set up before the work begins. It is the external party's responsibility to ensure that such an agreement is made. In the event of the need of such an agreement between students and external parties, the University has set up a template agreement to use.

The template regulates the situations that are commonly necessary to regulate between students and companies or organisations. It creates a reasonable balance between the external party's needs and the consideration for the student. It also contains explanatory comments. This template can either be used by the parties in the agreement or – if an external party wishes to implement its own proposed agreement – the template can be used to exemplify the terms that our students should agree to.





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## INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS/SUPERVISORS

Collaborations with external initiators such as companies and organisations provide students with the opportunities to put their theoretical knowledge into practical use and gain valuable contacts and experiences.

Student collaborations with companies and organisations can lead to valuable contacts between departments and external parties that can develop into long-term collaborations within both education and research.

### THE ROLE OF THE SUPERVISOR

Structuring the assignment takes place in dialogue between companies, students and you as a teacher/supervisor. Even if the other parties reach a joint conclusion, you must determine if the assignment is feasible within the scope of the course.

As a supervisor for external degree projects, you have a particularly important role to fill in ensuring the academic quality of the degree project, this since the student will need to take into consideration both the scientific perspective and the practical use for the client.

Many clients seek solutions to specific problems. In many fields, this is not possible. The student can instead contribute with investigations that can form the basis for potential solutions. The students' proposal for solutions can be suitable in an appendix, for instance.

Remind the student to discuss with the client who should pay for any potential expenses such as for travels or postage, as well as if employees may participate in interviews during their working hours.

### WHAT TO CONSIDER FOR SUPERVISION

- Your task is to approve the hypothesis and ensure that the work builds upon a scientific basis.
- Clarify to the student what requirements the department sets in order to pass a thesis or degree project.
- Ensure that the student and the company agree on what needs to be done and how.
- Clarify what the assignment of writing a thesis or degree project entails; for instance what effort and what results are reasonable to expect from the student.

What level is reasonable should be discussed with the student before the work is under way.

- Make sure that there is a reasonable time plan and plan for regular meetings with the student for advice and discussion.
- Make sure that it is clear who will own the results and how this should be handled in the thesis/degree project.

### DURING THE COURSE OF THE WORK

The student is responsible for keeping in regular contact with the company and the appointed company contact during the degree project. To develop good long-term relations, it is also a good idea for you as a supervisor to participate in some of the meetings with the company or organisation. In other respects, you as a supervisor should follow the guidelines for degree projects set up at your department.

### THE RESULT

The student should submit the results to the company in accordance with the initial agreement. Students own the rights to the results of the degree project. This includes systems, products, processes and the copyright to the thesis/report. If the rights should be credited to someone else, this must be regulated in an agreement between the student and company before the work begins. It is the external party's responsibility to ensure that such an agreement is made.

Students have no employment relationship with the University and hence hold the right to the results themselves. If Umeå University wants to publish or in other ways use a student's work, this can only be done with the student's consent.

### ETHICAL ASPECTS AND PERSONAL DATA

As a supervisor, it is essential to focus on the ethical aspects. If a person at a workplace can suffer from results of the thesis, depending on the subject field, you need to consider who can be identified in a thesis. If necessary, consider to what extent it would be possible to conceal the workplace, the company, potential customers, etc.





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Umeå University is the personal data representative for students' potential personal data processing within the scope of the degree project. As a supervisor, you are responsible for making sure such processing is registered according to the University's regulations, and that the processing fulfils the requirements for personal data processing.

## THE PRINCIPLE OF PUBLIC ACCESS TO OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS

The theses/reports that students write during their project work become public documents when they are submitted for examination. This means that your possibilities of keeping its content confidential are limited. However, it may be possible to label parts of the report as confidential. One condition is that the remaining parts of the report should be substantial for the examiner to assess and approve the student's work.

If the project requires making a large portion of the result confidential in the eyes of the principle of public access to official documents, the degree project may not be suitable as one. In the majority of cases, companies rarely wish to share company secrets with a person who is only carrying out a degree project, which is why this is usually not an issue.

It is important that potential non-disclosure agreements and other terms and conditions for the degree project are set up before the work begins. Contact one of the legal officers if you have questions about the principle of public access to official documents.

## CONTRACTING PARTIES

Agreements on degree projects regulate the relationship between the student and the company. Umeå University should not be a party in this agreement. At the same time, it is not desirable for the student to join in an agreement that puts an excessive responsibility on the student or that limits the student's rights to an excessive extent. In the event of the need of an agreement between a student and an external party, the University has set up a template agreement to use.

For more extensive or long-term collaborations with companies for external degree projects, an agreement can be set up between the University and the company regulating the terms and conditions that should apply for collaboration between the University and the company.

In such an agreement, the student is not a party and the University cannot take responsibility for the student's actions or fulfilment of his or her duties to the company. Students are not employees at the University and hence own the right to their own results, and hence the University has no authority to influence the student's actions or dispose of the student's results.

In addition to this, Umeå University is abided by confidentiality according to the Public Access to Information and Secrecy Act (2009:400), regardless of if Umeå University is a party or not. On the other hand, the University can never offer more confidentiality than what that law classifies as confidential. On the other hand, the requirements of confidentiality and secrecy that the Public Access to Information and Secrecy Act puts on employees at the University is much stronger than the terms of confidentiality and non-disclosure an agreement can establish. The Parliamentary Ombudsmen (JO) are generally hesitant about civil servants writing agreements on confidentiality.

If the issue of confidentiality for the University arises, please contact the senior legal officer to assess any such agreement. Agreements in which Umeå University is one party and that contains conditions of non-disclosure should, in accordance with the Vice-Chancellor's delegation of authority, be signed by the Vice-Chancellor or the University Director.

## AGREEMENT AND NON-DISCLOSURE AGREEMENT TEMPLATES

In the event of the need of an agreement between students and external parties, the University has set up a template agreement to use. The template regulates situations that are often necessary to regulate between students and companies. It creates a reasonable balance between the external party's needs and the consideration for the student. It also contains explanatory comments.

This template can either be used by the parties in the agreement or – if an external party wishes to implement its own proposed agreement – the template can be used to exemplify the terms that our students should agree to. If the company is reluctant to agree to these terms, the student must be informed of the discrepancies – particularly when it comes to the rights to the results, remuneration and damages.

When it comes to agreements between the University and the company, there are various templates to use depending on what the collaboration should entail. Contact the university's legal officer for support in drafting such an agreement. In a partnership agreement between the University and a company, terms of non-disclosure can be entered pertaining to information that the supervisor can obtain as a part of his or her role as a supervisor.

Such a non-disclosure agreement includes Umeå University and the company – the supervisor is not a party in such an agreement. The University cannot accept that university employees take on any personal responsibility in relation to a company who is in agreement with the University. All employees hold certain responsibilities in relation to the University, but not to any external party.