



Queen Margaret University
EDINBURGH

**Guidance for Year 3 (Year 6)
PhD Assessed Seminar 2**

1. Introduction

Following the introduction of the PhD Regulations (2015), undertaking an assessed seminar in the third year of PhD study is now a progression requirement within the PhD programme. Students required to participate in this assessment include:

- Full time PhD students in their third year of academic study; and
- Part time PhD students in their sixth year of academic study.

The assessed seminar must (normally) be completed before the end of the student's third (full time) or sixth (part time) academic year of study and before submission of the PhD thesis for formal examination. If the student is not in position to deliver their assessed seminar by the end of year 3 due to extenuating circumstances, the student may apply to the Graduate School Academic Board to delay their seminar into their fourth year of study.

The assessment takes the form of two parts:

- a) The first is the submission of a written report, which should provide a clear indication to an assessment panel that the student has made satisfactory progress with their research and is writing at doctoral level standard.
- b) The second part is an oral presentation, where the student presents an aspect of their research to an assessment panel and member(s) of their supervision team and, preferably, to members of the wider academic community.

2. Assessment panel

In line with PhD Regulation 6.4.2, the assessment panel who assessed the student's probationary assessment should (normally) evaluate the third year assessed seminar.

The remit of the assessment panel is to provide the student with feedback and guidance for the purpose of aiding submission of a strong thesis and helping prepare the student for final *viva voce*.

The panel will also (if appropriate) highlight any issues that they feel require resolution before the student is permitted to progress towards thesis submission and the oral examination stage.

3. Written report

The written report submitted to the panel should be at least 5000 words and no more than 10,000 words - this would (normally) include a chapter from the student's thesis.

It is emphasised that this report should **not** be a separate piece of written work purely for the purpose of assessment, but should be a flexible piece of work that the student is already undertaking as part of their PhD research and thesis preparation.

All reports should include (in an appendix if appropriate) the student's thesis completion plan for the remaining period of their study (i.e. the final end point being thesis submission). The thesis plan should be no more than 1-2 pages long. It may be appropriate for the plan to be guided by a traffic light system (or similar) that clearly indicates tasks and progress (e.g. Red = to do, Yellow = ongoing, Green = complete).

4. Oral presentations

4.1 Preparing for the oral presentation

There is flexibility in the manner in which a student delivers their presentation as this is likely to vary depending on what aspect of the thesis is being presented. The talk should, however, be clear and logically organised. It would be appropriate to start with a brief introduction to the research and its wider importance. Students should remember that although they are an expert on their topic and the work they have completed, what seems easy and understandable to them may not apply to non-specialist members of the audience. If the talk includes presenting data and results from a particular research study, for example, it would be appropriate to briefly explain the methodology/method(s) that have been employed to gather that data. A good presentation will also finish with a summary of the main points / findings / conclusions.

All students (especially those lacking confidence in public speaking) may find it beneficial to practice their oral presentation in front of their supervisors before their formal assessment. This will also allow supervisors to provide early feedback on the content / flow of the presentation and the standard of delivery. Timing is also important and practising will help ensure that students deliver a presentation of required length.

4.2 Delivering the oral presentation

The student should aim for their presentation to last 20 minutes. This will be followed by approx. 10 minutes of questions from the panel (and audience, if appropriate).

Students may choose their mode of presentation e.g. PowerPoint, Prezi or appropriate other.

It is beneficial to the development and progress of **all** PhD students to attend QMU to present their seminar **in person**¹. The occasions open to students to present their work are:

- At a QMU Graduate School Assessed Seminar Day(s), normally scheduled

¹ This also includes PhD students who predominately study at a distance / based abroad, as per PhD Regulation 3.1.2 that states "*as far as possible, non-resident students should visit QMU for three weeks each year to allow face-to-face supervisory meetings and participation in the research culture of the School and the University*".

- to take place in June of each academic year; OR
- At the DSA Doctoral Student Conference, normally held in April of each academic year (please note there are limited places available - these will be allocated on a first come, first served basis); OR
- At a QMU internal departmental / research centre seminar session, as organised by the student's supervision team.

Students may state their preferred option, but in all cases above, the assessment panel must be in attendance and their availability will need to be taken into account. It is considered prudent for at least one member of the student's supervision team to attend the seminar, and ideally all supervisors should attend.

In *exceptional circumstances*, students based at a distance may be permitted deliver their seminar via Skype. Students wishing to do this must apply to the Graduate School Academic Board (GSAB) for prior approval in this instance.

5. Assessment criteria

The purpose of the Assessed Seminar 2 is to help students prepare for the submission of their thesis and defence of their work to their PhD examiners during their final *viva voce*. Following their presentation, students should expect the assessment panel to ask questions which focus on both the strengths and weaknesses of the research presented.

The aim is to provide the student with an opportunity to confidently address questions relating to their research, as would be expected during the final *viva voce*. It is, however, acknowledged that this is not a simulation of a final *viva voce* as such, given that in the latter the study is addressed in its totality (e.g. logical progression and interlinking of chapters).

The assessment panel will look for evidence from both the written submission and the oral presentation to answer the following questions (*if applicable to the work that the student has opted to submit, and the content of the presentation*).

Assessment Criteria	Evidenced from:
Is evidence provided that the student has thorough background knowledge of their research area and that they understand the significance of their work within the wider research context?	Written work Oral presentation
Does the student demonstrate an understanding of their chosen methods/methodology, its ontological and epistemological underpinning, and of any potential methodological limitations?	Written work Oral presentation
Has the student drawn reasonable and defensible conclusions from their research data?	Written work Oral presentation
Does the student demonstrate an aptitude for critically appraising key research issues?	Written work Oral presentation

Can the student clearly explain their research to their target audience?	Oral presentation
Does the student demonstrate an ability to participate in articulate academic discussion with research colleagues?	Oral presentation
Are the assessors satisfied that the research will be completed, and thesis submitted, within the maximum 4 years (full time) or 8 years (part time)? If not, what additional support from supervisors or specific training do they need in order to meet their submission deadline?	Time plan
Overall, are assessors satisfied that the student is able to write in a clear and concise manner and written work presented is doctoral standard?	Written work
Overall, are assessors satisfied that the student has the knowledge and skills to deliver a strong oral defence of their thesis during their final viva? If not, what additional support from supervisors or specific training do they need in order to meet their submission deadline?	Oral presentation

6. Joint report

The Chair of the assessment panel should complete the Joint Report and submit it to the Graduate School within 7 working days of the seminar assessment. The assessment panel may make one of four recommendations:

- a) That the student continues to progress with their PhD studies
- b) That the student be required to resubmit with specified revisions
- c) That the student be required to resubmit with specified revisions and make another presentation
- d) That the student be de-registered

The panel's Joint Report and their recommendation will be reviewed, and if appropriate approved, by members of the Graduate School Academic Board. The outcome of the assessment will then be communicated to the student and supervisor formally by email from the Graduate School.

Where a student is required to resubmit their written report, the details of the amendments required should be clearly stated in that report. Typically, students will be permitted 6-8 weeks to submit their amended report to the panel for their review. The panel will then reconsider the amended report (and second presentation if appropriate) and make one of the following recommendations:

- a) That the student continue to progress with their PhD studies
- b) That the student be required to resubmit for a third and final time
- c) That the student be de-registered

For students required to resubmit for a third and final time, the panel will make one of the following recommendations:

- a) That the student continue to progress with their studies
- b) That the student be de-registered.