



Queen Margaret University

EDINBURGH

Guidance for Year 2 (Year 4) PhD Assessed Seminars (Assessed Seminar 1)

This guidance must be read in conjunction with the relevant section from the [PhD Regulations \(2020\)](#) - the Regulations take precedence in all cases.

1 Introduction

The assessed seminar progression requirement within the PhD programme was introduced in 2015. There are two assessed seminars. This guidance applies to the first of these seminars, which is undertaken in year 2 (for full-time candidates) or year 4 (for part-time candidates).

The following candidates are required to participate in this assessment:

- Full-time PhD candidates in their second year of academic study; and
- Part-time PhD candidates in their fourth year of academic study.

The assessed seminar must be completed before the end of the candidate's second (full-time) or fourth (part-time) academic year of study. If the candidate is not in a position to deliver their assessed seminar by the end of year 2/4 due to extenuating circumstances, the candidate may apply to the Graduate School Academic Board to delay their seminar.

The assessment takes the form of two parts:

- a) The first part is the submission of a written report, which should provide a clear indication to an assessment panel that the candidate has made satisfactory progress with their research.
- b) The second part is an oral presentation, where the candidate presents their work as a seminar to an assessment panel and member(s) of their supervisory team and, preferably, to members of the wider academic community.

2 Assessment panel

The assessment panel established for the candidate's probationary assessment should (normally) evaluate the second year assessed seminar.

The remit of the assessment panel is to provide the candidate with constructive formative feedback for the purpose of aiding progression and development. The panel will also identify and highlight any issues that they feel may require resolution going forward.

3 Written report

Candidates should normally submit a written report (no fewer than 3000 words in length). Acceptable submissions include:

- A completed chapter of the candidate's thesis (e.g. research methodology or methods);
- An introduction or overview to a specific study that is contributing to the overall PhD, including presentation of the study's results;
- A report in the format of a conference/seminar paper;
- A completed draft of a paper planned for academic publication/journal article;
- Submission of PowerPoint presentation slides (or equivalent) along with detailed explanatory notes;
- An exhibition, performance or other creative event (for the PhD by Creative Practice).

Different arrangements apply for candidates presenting their work at an external event. See section 4 for details.

It would normally be appropriate within the chosen format to present some aspect of methodology, preliminary data and analysis and any early conclusions that might have been drawn from the research to date. 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 candidate is already undertaking as part of their PhD research/thesis preparation/academic development.

Further, candidates must submit the following documents (in an Appendix, if appropriate)

- An abstract of 300 words;
- Their thesis completion plan for their third (full-time) or fifth and sixth (part-time) year(s) of study. The plan must clearly indicate tasks and progress and 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) e.g. Red = to do, Yellow = ongoing, Green = complete.
- A summary of progress with READ modules and submission plans (approx. 1-2 pages).

4 Oral presentations

4.1 Preparing for the oral presentation

Candidates 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 be so readily understood by 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 candidates (especially those lacking confidence in public speaking) may find it beneficial to practise their oral presentation with 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 candidates deliver a presentation of required length.

4.2 Delivering the oral presentation

Option 1 – Presenting in person at QMU

A candidate may choose their mode of presentation e.g. PowerPoint, Prezi or appropriate other. Where the research involves creative practice, candidates may include draft works, performances, events or other such outputs. The preferred options for candidates to present their submission are:

- At a QMU Graduate School Assessed Seminar Day;
- At the Doctoral Candidate Conference, normally held in April of each academic year (as organised by the Doctoral Candidates' Association – DCA); or
- At a QMU internal Divisional/Research Centre seminar session, as organised by individual Division(s) or Centre(s).

Candidates may also present their submission:

- At an individually arranged seminar at QMU; or
- At an external seminar or conference (see option 2 for more details) – this option requires prior approval from the Graduate School Academic Board.

The candidate 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). Candidates may choose their mode of presentation e.g. PowerPoint, Prezi or appropriate other.

It is beneficial to the development and progress of all PhD candidates to attend QMU to present their seminar in person. This includes candidates who predominantly study at a distance, in line with PhD Regulation 3.1.2, which states that 'as far as possible, non-resident candidates should visit QMU for three weeks each year to allow face-to-face supervisory meetings and participation in various research study and development opportunities and to be part of the wider culture of the School and the University.'

In very exceptional circumstances, and predominantly only for part-time candidates based overseas, it may be possible to arrange for the seminar to be held remotely using video conference, Skype, or other technology.

In all cases, the assessment panel must be in attendance and their availability will need to be taken into account. It is also advisory for at least one member of the candidate's supervisory team to attend. Where a candidate is presenting at a QMU seminar, a wider audience is likely to be present and the opportunity to present to the wider academic audience should be welcomed.

Option 2 - Presenting at an external seminar or conference

Exceptionally, a candidate may be permitted to present a seminar paper at an external conference or seminar session. Circumstances where this is most likely to be appropriate include:

- Where a candidate has been demonstrating evidence of exceptional research and academic performance during their PhD programme so far;
- Where a candidate's study is closely linked to an external professional institution such as a hospital or clinic; and
- Where a candidate is based predominantly abroad.

Any candidate wishing to complete the assessment in this manner needs to gain permission from both their supervisory team and the Graduate School Academic Board. The route to be followed (see below) needs to be clearly identified, as well as the name, date and location of the external conference. Evidence of acceptance by the conference organiser needs to be provided to The Graduate School in advance.

There are two routes available within this option:

Route one: The candidate presents a seminar, or equivalent, at an external event, at which at least one of the supervisors (with the candidate's agreement) and one panel assessor are able to be present. The full assessment takes place at the event. The panel assessor must then discuss the assessment with the other panel member prior to completing the assessment report.

Route two: The candidate presents a seminar, or equivalent, at an external event and it is video recorded for panel assessors to view, live from a distance or at a later date.

If approval is given for the candidate to complete the assessment in this manner, the candidate will be required to submit, in advance, a portfolio of work that includes:

- The paper/presentation and abstract submitted and accepted by the external conference/seminar provider;
- A specific chapter of the thesis (e.g. research methodology) that has relevance to the content of the external presentation (no fewer than 3000 words in length). As with the standard assessed seminar route, it is not expected that this will be a new piece of work created especially for the seminar.
- Their thesis completion plan for their third (full-time) or fifth and sixth (part-time) year(s) of study. The plan must clearly indicate tasks and progress and 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) e.g. Red = to do, Yellow = ongoing, Green = complete.
- A summary of progress with READ modules and submission plans (approx. 1-2 pages).

Where the research involves creative practice, presenting this work along with an associated critically reflective analysis is also important.

For route two, following viewing of the presentation by the candidate's assessment panel, an assessed Q and A discussion session takes place, either face to face or remotely, for example via Skype or Microsoft Teams to allow the panel an opportunity to ask questions about the candidate's progress and to share their feedback.

Exemption from post presentation Q and A/discussion requires approval from the Graduate School Academic Board. The reasons for this must be clearly stated in the assessors' report form. In all cases, a mechanism is required for the assessment panel to feed back to the candidate on their progress.

5 Assessment criteria

The assessment criteria for the Assessed Seminar 1 focus on providing positive and constructive formative feedback on both the written submission and the candidate's performance at the assessed seminar.

Formative assessment criteria include:

- Ability to write in a clear and concise manner and at doctoral standard;

- Evidence of thorough background knowledge of their research area and its significance;
- The candidate's ability to explain and justify their research to their target audience;
- Aptitude for critically appraising key research issues;
- The candidate's capacity to defend their research work and elaborate on their reasoning in discussion in response to questions; and
- Evidence of the candidate's plan of future work with appropriate thesis milestones.

The purpose of the assessed seminar is not to hinder progression, but to provide an opportunity for candidates to celebrate their work and for academics to provide further support and guidance on the process of planning, developing and completing excellent academic work.

The seminar will, however, also provide a useful opportunity to identify where there may be issues (e.g. in study design, methodology, academic writing capability etc.) that may require mitigating measures to be put in place by the supervisory team to ensure successful progression during year 3 (or year 5/6) of study.

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 candidate has opted to submit, and the content of the presentation).

Assessment Criteria	Evidenced from
Is evidence provided that the candidate 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 candidate demonstrate an understanding of their chosen research paradigm, including its ontological and epistemological underpinning, and of any potential methodological limitations?	Written work Oral presentation
Has the candidate presented a robust and coherent research design?	Written work Oral presentation
Does the candidate demonstrate an aptitude for critically appraising key research issues?	Written work Oral presentation
Can the candidate clearly present and explain their research to their audience?	Oral presentation
Does the candidate 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 does the candidate need in order to meet their submission deadline?	Time plan

Overall, are the assessors satisfied that the candidate is able to present and write in a clear and concise manner, and that written work presented is doctoral standard?	Written work
Overall, are assessors satisfied that the candidate 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 write a Joint Report (submitted to the Graduate School within seven working days of the seminar assessment) providing formative feedback on the candidate's written report and oral presentation.

The panel may also comment on whether the candidate is, in their opinion, making satisfactory progress. The contents of the Joint Report will be reviewed by the Graduate School Academic Board and, once approved, will be provided to the candidate and their supervisory team.

The report will be provided in such a way that it enables the candidate to plan their development and the supervisory team to guide the candidate. At the end of the report a clear and numbered list of requirements must be set out. Any optional advisory statements are not to be included in this list and can be offered separately – and must be relevant to the candidate's priorities and direction of study. Reports found to be offering poor quality feedback or feedforward and lacking in a clear list of requirements (where needed) will be returned to the panel for revision.

The assessment panel may make one of four recommendations:

- a) the candidate continues to progress with their studies
- b) the candidate continues to progress with their studies with minor issues to be resolved by the candidate and supervisory team
- c) the candidate continues to progress with their studies with major issues to be resolved by the candidate and supervisory team
- d) the candidate has not made satisfactory progress with their studies

In the event of (b) above, the candidate and Supervisory Team would be expected to develop a study action plan to help resolve the minor issues raised by the Panel. Where only minor issues have been identified, normally no further meeting with the Panel will be required.

In the event of (c) above, the candidate and a member of the supervision team will be invited to meet with the Chair of the assessment panel to discuss the candidate's performance and how any concerns could be addressed. The candidate and Supervisory Team will be required to develop a study action plan to address the major issues raised by the Panel.

In the event of (d) above, the candidate will be invited to meet with the Chair of the assessment panel and the Doctoral Research Coordinator for the relevant School to discuss their performance and how the concerns of the Panel can be addressed. The candidate and Supervisory Team would be required to develop a study action plan to address the issues raised by the assessment panel. The Graduate School, in consultation with the Supervisory Team, should agree a maximum timescale for the candidate to address the issues to their satisfaction. Failure to address the issues may result in de-registration on grounds of failure to progress, except where extenuating circumstances apply.