

Nanyang Technological University

PhD QUALIFYING EXAMINATION AND CONVERSION

PhD Qualifying Examination (QE), which is also known as PhD confirmation, is the first formal assessment of a PhD candidate's research by the university. It is compulsory for all PhD candidates and should be completed within the confirmation period stipulated by the university.

Masters candidates seeking a conversion to PhD candidature must also follow the same procedure of a PhD confirmation.

The University does not require the research student to publish any journal paper prior to the Qualifying Examination.

I PhD QUALIFYING EXAMINATION PANEL

1. The core composition of members for the student's PhD QE panel shall include the School Chair or his nominee, and at least two other examiners. Members of the panel should be PhD holders themselves or hold its equivalent doctoral research degrees.
2. The Chairman of the panel, whose role is that of the representative of the School Chair, should be a senior faculty staff who is an Associate Professor or above. Therefore, the Chairman ought to be a senior faculty staff from the home School of the PhD student.
3. The PhD Qualifying Examination panel consists of the following members:
 - a. The Chair or his/her nominee (from same School as PhD candidate)
 - b. Reviewer 1 (from same School, can be TAC member)
 - c. Reviewer 2 (can be from the same or different School, can be TAC member)
 - d. Additional Examiner(s) as appropriate and approved.
4. The supervisor and co-supervisor cannot serve as members of the QE panel.

II THE PhD CONFIRMATION REPORT

5. The candidate submits the confirmation report (refer to Annex A1) to the Associate Chair (Research) Office through the supervisor.
6. It is the responsibility of the supervisor to guide and work together with the student to ensure that the confirmation report is well written and in the format that is suitable for review.

III KEY CONSIDERATIONS IN ASSESSING A CANDIDATE'S PERFORMANCE

7. To assess whether a candidate should be recommended for confirmation, the review members in their various capacities should take the following factors into consideration:
 - a. The candidate has defined the research topic or problem clearly.
 - b. The proposed study has a research methodology that is appropriate.
 - c. Appropriate data for the purpose.
 - d. An appropriate literature review that is convincing for the purpose and the literature has been referenced according to the norm of the discipline.
8. The panel's decision on the candidate's performance during the presentation seminar for the QE should include the following areas:
 - a. Clear and coherent presentation of his/her research.
 - b. Adequate knowledge of the field to continue with the rest of his/her research.
 - c. Ability to answer all or most of the questions clearly and convincingly.
 - d. Awareness of the meaning and purpose of PhD research and has given considerable thought to the next stage of his/her work in order to demonstrate its significance and originality.
9. In all, a candidate's PhD confirmation report and seminar presentation must demonstrate sufficient evidence of the knowledge and skills needed to conduct research at the PhD level and the potential of the study to contribute to knowledge in the field.

VI OUTCOMES OF PhD QUALIFYING EXAMINATION

10. Following the PhD QE seminar, the panel shall reach a decision on the outcome:
 - a. Pass the QE seminar and accept the confirmation report. Recommended by the panel for confirmation.
 - b. Pass the QE seminar. Recommended by the panel for confirmation subject to completing the specified corrections to confirmation report to the satisfaction of an appointed TAC member.
 - c. Fail QE. Repeat the confirmation/conversion within the next two months.
 - d. Fail QE with termination.
11. Repeat QE seminar after which the panel shall reach a decision on the outcome:
 - a. Pass the QE seminar and will be recommended by the panel for confirmation.
 - b. Fail QE with termination.

12. The final outcome of the Qualifying Examination panel is generally expected to be made by consensus. In cases where such consensus is not possible, the majority view will prevail. In such cases, a written record of the reasons for dissenting view and the name of the panel member must be put on record and this should be submitted together with the final report.

V APPEALS

13. A candidate may appeal against a negative outcome of the report on the confirmation document or the QE seminar. He/she should write the letter of appeal to the Chair.
14. Potential grounds for appeal are:
 - a. Perceived prejudice or bias on the part of one or more of the panel members.
 - b. Medical reasons that have severely affected the candidate's performance on the day of the confirmation/conversion seminar.
 - c. Perceived procedural irregularities during the QE seminar.
15. The letter should state the purpose and grounds clearly, and it must be substantiated clearly by documented evidence in support of the appeal.
16. The appeal process is similar to that for coursework examinations whereby a student can submit an appeal for a review of the course grade only. The outcome of the appeal is final. The candidate is not permitted to request for any change in the QE panel.

ANNEX A1 – The PhD Confirmation/Conversion Report

1. The confirmation report by the candidate should be no more than 100 pages in length; please consult your supervisor on the specifics, (Font size 12 and double-spaced A4 page with 1 inch margins) and contain the following:
 - a. Background to the study and research objectives
 - If the topic of study has deviated from the original proposed topic, an explanation for this should also be given.
 - Masters students seeking conversion should include a clear explanation of how the original study proposed at the Masters level has been modified to meet the expectations of a PhD research topic.
 - b. Literature review
 - c. Methodology
 - d. Preliminary results, if any
 - e. Discussion of preliminary results, if any
 - f. A plan of action that should include the methodology suitable for the next stage of work and that is achievable within the remaining timeframe of the candidature. A detailed schedule should be included as far as possible.
 - g. A description of possible challenges and how the candidate intends to meet those challenges.
2. All candidates are allowed to resubmit their confirmation/conversion document up to a maximum of two times, subject to the time allowed for confirmation/conversion as stated in the letter of offer.
 - a. In the case of a PhD candidate, if the second attempt is still considered to be below the standard required for confirmation, he/she will be advised to withdraw from the programme.
 - b. A Masters by Research candidate will have to complete his/her studies as a Masters candidate, if the second attempt is still considered to be below the standard required for conversion. No further requests for conversion to PhD will be considered.

ANNEX A2 – Code of Conduct for Panel Members

1. The panel members should review and examine the confirmation report within one month after receiving it. The date of the QE presentation will be scheduled at the time that the confirmation reports are sent out by the School.
2. During the seminar, panel members should take their role conscientiously at all times and ask challenging but fair questions of the candidate.
3. They should be aware that most if not all candidates will suffer a certain level of stress and anxiety, particularly at the start of the seminar. It is important therefore that some allowance is made for this.
4. They should behave professionally at all times and treat the candidate with dignity and respect.

5. Where possible, the members should also seek opportunities to advise the candidate on ways of improving his/her research.
6. The Chair of the panel may at his/her discretion intervene if a particular line of questioning is deemed to be biased or prejudicial to the candidate's performance.

ANNEX A3 – Code of Conduct for the Candidate

1. The candidate should keep track of his/her own candidature and work together with his/her supervisor(s) to begin preparing for the confirmation six months before the deadline stipulated by the university.
2. The candidate should ensure that his/her confirmation report is submitted to the School at least two months before the end of his/her approved confirmation period.
3. The candidate should spend time discussing and working together with his/her supervisor(s) to produce a confirmation report of high quality.
4. The candidate should declare that he/she has screened his/her confirmation report for plagiarism against previously published works.
5. The candidate should indicate clearly if his/her supervisor's approval has been obtained before submitting his/her confirmation report.
6. The candidate should take his/her performance at the QE seminar seriously by preparing well for the presentation and the questions that may be asked.
7. The candidate should dress appropriately for the occasion to reflect the significance and importance of the QE seminar.
8. The candidate should stand to deliver his/her presentation.
9. The candidate should speak politely to the panel at all times but they are not required or expected to agree with everything that is said. Nevertheless, given the purpose of the QE seminar, the candidate should be prepared to consider the recommendations and advice of the panel.
10. The candidate should argue his/her points clearly and calmly and always in a professional manner.

ANNEX A4 – Further Considerations in the Conduct of the Seminar

1. Should a candidate become upset or overly anxious/emotional during the seminar, the Chair may adjourn the seminar for a short while to enable the candidate to regain his/her composure and confidence.
2. A repeat QE seminar should as far as possible involve all the members in the original panel.

3. All QE seminars are to be conducted at a face-to-face meeting on the premises of the University.