

The Saarbrücken Graduate School of Computer Science

The Qualifying Exam (QE)

All candidates who wish to pursue a doctorate in *Computer Science in Saarbrücken* must take the QE, independently of their prior education and experience. The *progress committee* of the Graduate School administers the QE for the Faculty. The idea behind the QE is that the whole Faculty wishes to take responsibility for all its doctoral candidates. The *qualifying exam* is an instantiation of the “*Eignungsfeststellung*” (evaluation of aptitude) in the *PhD regulations* of the Faculty of Mathematics and Informatics at Saarland University (available online).

Graduate students who have fulfilled the necessary requirements of the *preparatory phase* (cf. separate information sheet) may then take the QE, i.e., if 30 or fewer credit points remain to be completed and the student has found an advisor. The remaining credits **must** be completed during the dissertation phase before thesis submission.

Format:

Research talk: Currently, the QE consists of a 25-minute research talk on work done and/or to be carried out by the candidate.

Question period: A question period of about 25 to max. 45 minutes in length follows the talk. Questions may be specific to the talk but may also probe a candidate’s general background knowledge as seen relevant.

Candidates need to convince the examination board of their ability to successfully pursue a doctorate. They will be judged upon clarity of presentation, the systematic approach to their task, breadth and depth of knowledge, and the achieved results.

Examiners:

The qualifying exam has a board of three examiners: 1) the candidate’s official advisor; 2) a second faculty member with PhD supervision rights, nominated by the candidate and the advisor; and 3) an assigned member of the progress committee who is usually not a specialist in the area of the talk. In justified cases, an additional senior research collaborator may attend the QE.

Arranging the qualifying exam:

Candidates who wish to take the QE should introduce themselves to the progress committee by submitting the following documents and information electronically (in pdf format please) to the Graduate School Office (gradschool@cs.uni-saarland.de) at least 4 weeks before the projected date for the QE:

- *letter from advisor* confirming supervision and financing
- *CV*
- *complete academic transcripts*
- *final report* for students coming out of the preparatory phase
or
- *progress report* for candidates with ad hoc admission status who have been in Saarbrücken more than two months
- *Title of talk* and background information/motivation concerning choice
- Suggestion for the second examiner
- General indication of desired date for the QE

(The Graduate School Office will already have some of these documents for candidates with ad hoc admission.)

Once the progress committee has agreed that a candidate is ready for the QE, a member of the progress committee will be assigned as the third examiner and the candidate informed. The candidate is then asked to arrange the exact time and place for the QE directly with the examination board and inform the GS office.

Result and next steps:

The QE can be either passed or failed. The examination board decides the result after private consultation right after the QE. Candidates who *pass* must then submit their request for admission to the Faculty’s PhD list to the Dean’s Office (E2 4, Room 110). A template for this letter is available online (cf. PhD regulations). After admission to the PhD list, candidates are expected to enroll as PhD students at Saarland University (see *enrollment* procedure). Candidates who *fail* the QE will be granted a second chance within about 6 months. In some cases, additional requirements will be set before the QE can be attempted again.