

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 of Mathematics and Informatics (MI) at Saarland University. 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 Faculty MI.

Graduate students who have fulfilled the requirements of the *preparatory phase* may then take the QE. After successful completion, they enter the *dissertation phase* of their doctoral studies. Graduate students in the preparatory phase of their doctoral studies are expected to have completed coursework equivalent to 90 ECTS points. Upon request, some credits may be deferred until after the QE. Candidates with ad hoc admission status should plan their QE within the first year of their doctoral work.

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, as well as the scope of future research plans and the likelihood of successful completion, while taking academic maturity into account on an individual basis.

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 their 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 upon request.

Arranging the qualifying exam:

Candidates who wish to take the QE must 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 6 weeks before the projected date for the QE:

- *letter from advisor* confirming supervision and financing
- *up-to-date CV*
- *complete academic transcripts (unless already available from ad hoc admission)*
- *final report* for students coming out of the preparatory phase
or
- *progress report* for candidates with ad hoc admission status
- *Title of talk* and background information/motivation concerning choice
- Suggestion for the second examiner (from the official list of possible advisors)
- General indication of desired date for the QE

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 in 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. After admission to the PhD list, candidates are expected to update their enrollment as PhD students at Saarland University. Administrative information will be provided by the GS office.

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 may be attempted again.