

FINAL SEMINAR GUIDELINES

Timing

Outside of having an approved extension, the Final Seminar is expected to be held within 3 years for full-time doctoral students and within 6 years for part-time doctoral students.

Introduction

The Final Seminar is an event that is designed to identify the capacity of doctoral students to successfully complete their thesis and make it ready for examination. This milestone should be a formative process and one that provides quality assurance for the thesis for examination. This is achieved through public presentation of the student's work in progress to an expert panel, their peers, and others interested in their research field. The Final Seminar event will occur in a supportive environment, where there is an expectation that all contributions to the discussion will be respectful in form, and disagreements will be engaged with in a scholarly manner. All participants in the Final Seminar process are expected to adhere to the [QUT Code of Conduct](#). Further policy for higher degree research students can be found in the MOPP ([D/5.3](#)).

Final Seminar milestone provisions require that normally, the student presents a public seminar. This requirement means all students have opportunities during candidature to present their work orally and to gain feedback and discussion on their research-to-date from their peers. These opportunities are considered a vital part of the research training framework at QUT. Participation by staff, students and others at the seminars is encouraged and welcomed to provide a rigorous and informative experience for researchers in training. At Final Seminar, the panel is also inviting the student to confirm that their thesis is ready for examination, with the panel providing a discipline-specific quality assurance step to the preparations for examination.

A student who is not able to complete Final Seminar within the timeframe must apply for an extension at least one month in advance of that deadline through the faculty. Normally, a maximum extension of three months may be granted.

Benefits of having a seminar

The process is primarily a formative one, not a summative one. Broadly the seminar, conducted approximately three months prior to thesis lodgement, is primarily aimed at providing a quality assurance step as the candidature reaches a conclusion and the thesis is prepared for lodgement. It enables faculty and other relevant people involved with the student's research training experience, e.g., industry partners or family members, to engage with the work of the student. The goal of feedback is to inform and impact positively on the quality of the thesis as it is finalised for lodgement and examination.

Format of the event

Normally, the Final Seminar is open to the public and should be widely advertised to ensure attendance by researchers and research students from both within and outside of the faculty.

The faculty convenes a Final Seminar panel of at least 3 members to attend the seminar and to report on the readiness of the thesis for external examination.

About two to four weeks before the event, the student will submit a written document (e.g., draft thesis) that will be circulated to the members of the panel. The panel will be asked to comment on the work and to attend the seminar and participate in a discussion with the student after the seminar.

The seminar presentation will usually last between 30-60 minutes and will be followed by a question and answer session with the seminar attendees. While the presentation must be well-structured and informative, it is unlikely to be an exhaustive presentation of all that is provided in the written document.

The Chair will act as facilitator, moderator, and timekeeper to ensure the Final Seminar is a formative peer-review event for the student.

At the end of the seminar the panel will normally meet separately with the student for further discussion and to provide more complete and explicit feedback. This would be expected to take about 40-60 minutes and include advice on the recommendations the panel will make, and the changes expected to the work, if any. Where the recommendation is that more than three months (full-time equivalent) is required for thesis revision and to place the student under review, or to transfer to the Master of Philosophy then the Final Seminar panel should note to the student that this recommendation needs to be approved by the faculty and Graduate Research Centre (GRC) prior to formal implementation.

The panel will prepare a report and make a recommendation regarding Final Seminar to the faculty and GRC based on their discussions. This will also be provided to the student for reference, normally within one week of the seminar.

The Panel

The faculty constitutes a Final Seminar panel of at least 3 members to attend the seminar and to report on the readiness of the thesis for external examination. The Final Seminar panel shall be appointed by the faculty and should include:

- The principal supervisor;
- 2 appropriately qualified and experienced academics, external to the supervisory team.

Careful consideration should also be given to the role of the chair of the panel. Please note that each faculty will have their own guidelines for panel composition.

The panel shall normally be chaired by an objective, appropriately qualified, faculty member and shall question the student on the content of the thesis at the conclusion of the seminar. Each member of the panel must receive a copy of the thesis at least two weeks prior to the Final Seminar. The panel will be asked to comment on the work and to attend the seminar and participate in a discussion with the student after the seminar.

The panel, and particularly panel chair, have responsibility for managing the framework and conduct of the seminar. They ensure sufficient time is given for the student to present and for the audience to ask questions. Further, they have a role in ensuring that the peer review, discussion, and scholarly debate of ideas is positive and enabling, and that the rigorous interrogation of ideas does not give way to personal, inappropriate questioning or to criticism focused on the presenter rather than the ideas.

The panel chair has a responsibility to ensure that they are familiar with the following policies and procedures:

- The MOPP section relating to Higher Degree Research students ([D/5.3](#));
- [HDR Course Regulations](#) (or relevant course regulations).
- Final Seminar guidelines (current version as approved by RDC).
- Any specific faculty considerations.

Panel chair duties may include:

- opening and moderating the Final Seminar including introducing the student (topic, course, and supervisory team) and panel members.
- advising the format of the event and the Final Seminar requirements (e.g., presentation timing, questions from the floor directed by chair).
- reiterating that the seminar is a formative experience aimed at supporting preparation of the final thesis for submission. Questions should be relevant and reasonable, engaging the student's topic and areas of interest and expertise.

- maintaining appropriate conduct of the seminar in line with peer review and a quality assurance process for thesis lodgement.
- Ensuring the student has the opportunity to present their research and receive formative feedback via questions or advice that supports the student towards revising the thesis for examination.
- providing advice where questions, or the nature of the questions, are deemed inappropriate.
- appointment of a timekeeper, if appropriate.
- discussing Final Seminar procedures and possible outcomes with the student.
- guiding panel members regarding Final Seminar procedures and possible outcomes in line with QUT policy and Final Seminar guidelines.
- liaise with the student in conjunction with the supervisory team, prior to the seminar, where the panel members have raised concerns about the quality of the thesis for Final Seminar and readiness for the milestone.
- casting the final vote where the panel is split regarding the recommendation to be made.

The chair should, at the start of the seminar, inform participants who may not be familiar with the format that:

- The purpose of the seminar is to provide useful feedback and peer review to the student.
- There is a thesis document that has informed this presentation.
- There will be time given to questions at the end of the presentation and that questions should be asked in a constructive and positive manner.
- The work presented is a work in progress and will be informed and guided by the feedback provided by the Final Seminar process.
- The chair reserves the right to adjudicate to ensure that the session runs smoothly, meets requirements, and keeps to time.

The panel should review the [QUT Code of Conduct](#) to become familiar with the expectations in terms of behaviour of QUT staff and students in this context. The panel has a responsibility to the student and university to seek to ensure that the terms of this code are observed during seminars.

Topics dealing with sensitive issues

It should be acknowledged that the point of research studies is to seek to create new knowledge and that this may challenge existing ideas, values, or ideals. Students have a responsibility to ensure that sensitive issues are managed with care, giving due consideration to the rights of others.

All participants have a responsibility to listen to the point of understanding and respect contrasting points of view. The spirit of discussion is intended not to encourage the imposition of beliefs but rather the sharing of disparate views and frameworks that may support the student in their work.

Intellectual Property and/or Confidentiality Agreements & their effect on the presentation

Where aspects of a student's work are subject to Intellectual Property (IP) and/or confidentiality agreements, it is for the student and supervisor to prepare the presentation considering these or alternatively notify the faculty and university of any concerns or constraints. In exceptional circumstances, and only with the prior approval of RDC, seminar participation may be restricted and, as appropriate, participants may be asked to sign confidentiality and/or non-disclosure agreements. Where QUT is a party to these agreements, the Office of Research Services can assist with ensuring appropriate arrangements.

If agreements do not involve QUT, the student is strongly encouraged to seek independent legal advice. QUT cannot give guidance in these matters as there is a risk to the student that their objectivity may be compromised. Limited free legal services are available through the Student Guild.

Ethical Clearance and its effect on the format

Where aspects of the student's work or data are subject to ethical clearance provisions, it is for the student and supervisor to prepare the presentation considering these. In exceptional circumstances, and only with prior approval of RDC, seminar participation may be restricted. De-identification of sensitive data is the more usual approach to addressing concerns in this context. For further advice on appropriate arrangements, please contact the Faculty Research Ethics Advisor and/or the University's Research Ethics Officer.

Outcome of the Final Seminar Process

A key outcome of the process is a recommendation from the panel to the student and supervisor on the readiness of the thesis for lodgement for external examination.

The Final Seminar panel will review the student's progress and proposed thesis for lodgement and shall submit their recommendations via the faculty to the GRC. The Final Seminar outcomes are as follows

- **Thesis is ready for examination (no or minor changes only)** (lodgement within one month full-time equivalent)
- **Major changes required before the thesis is ready for examination** where comments can relate to, but are not limited to, content, discipline style, demonstration of research capacity (lodgement within three months full-time equivalent)
- **Re-submission and student to be placed Under Review for 3 months FTE.** At the end of the under review period, the supervisor will advise the GRC whether the conditions of the review have been met
- **Transfer to MPhil** where the thesis is not ready for examination and the student has not produced work that is of an appropriate standard. This recommendation would typically be supported by a period of under review to assist the student to revise their thesis.

In line with QUT policy for committees (<http://www.mopp.qut.edu.au/Appendix/append02-cp1.jsp>), in instances where the Final Seminar panel cannot come to a unanimous decision, then the majority recommendation should apply. Where the panel is split regarding the overall outcome, the panel chair makes the final recommendation.

Where a student's progress remains unsatisfactory after an under review period recommended by the Final Seminar panel, the GRC, on advice from the supervisory team and/or faculty, shall either grant a further extension of the under review period of up to three months or, recommend progression to show cause. Show cause provides the student the opportunity to demonstrate why their candidature should not be terminated. Termination of candidature includes the following:

- terminate the candidature with an offer to complete a lesser degree including Master of Philosophy/ Graduate Certificate of Research, or
- terminate the candidature with no such offer.

In instances where the student chooses not to engage with an approved Under Review period, then this would trigger an immediate move to show cause. In cases where show cause is recommended as an outcome of the under review period, the GRC will review the relevant documentation, including the show cause submission from the student. A recommendation will be made for either the student to proceed to lodgement for external examination or for progression to termination of candidature. Termination of candidature would be instigated in accordance with policy as outlined in [MOPP D/5.3.7](#). The student would then have their candidature terminated and would have a last avenue to appeal RDC's decision through the University Appeals Committee ([E/1.2 Appeals Committee](#)) in accordance with its terms of reference.

In exceptional cases, the student would be able to apply in writing to GRC requesting permission to lodge their thesis for examination without attaining faculty approval and/or without addressing some or all the Final Seminar panel recommendations. The RDC may at this stage decide in favour of allowing the student to lodge their thesis without faculty approval.

In addition to recommending an outcome, the Final Seminar panel, through the panel chair will negotiate with the supervisory team and student to:

- ascertain a submission date for examination; and
- approve the thesis study area

The approved thesis study area as well as the lodgement date is communicated in the Final Seminar report which **must** be submitted via the online Final Seminar form to Graduate Research Centre within two (2) weeks of the Final Seminar being held.

Please refer to the [HDR Course Regulations](#) for further details about the policy requirements.

Related Links

- MOPP D/5.3 Higher degree research candidates: http://www.mopp.qut.edu.au/D/D_05_03.jsp
- MOPP E/1.2 Appeals Committee: http://www.mopp.qut.edu.au/E/E_01_02.jsp
- [HDR Course Regulations](#)
- [Final Seminar form and resources](#)

Approval and Modification History

DATE	AUTHORITY	DETAILS
August 2022	Graduate Research Centre	Updated due to transition to new system
December 2021	Director, Graduate Research Centre	Inclusion of timeframes for lodgement based on outcomes.
November 2021	Director, Graduate Research Centre	Inclusion of new section to clarify expected timing of seminar.
May 2020	QUT Research Degrees Committee	Addition of option to transfer to Masters as an outcome of the Final Seminar panel, removal of Lay Thesis Title requirements. Amendment to reflect updates to panel composition.
July 2018	RDC Chair executively	Addition of Lay Thesis title and Study area requirements.
November 2014	QUT Research Degrees Committee	Policy to place candidates Under Review if extensions are requested to due date for lodgement.
June 2014	QUT Research Degrees Committee	Revised. Expanded explanation of role & responsibilities of Panel Chair.