Appendix 3: Use of Video Conferencing in Viva Voce Examinations

Video conferencing facilities may be used in viva voce examinations only when either an examiner or the candidate is based at such a distance from the University (normally outside the UK) that s/he is not able, for reasons of prohibitively high cost, difficulties of time or restricted mobility, to travel to the University of Bath in order to conduct or participate in a viva voce examination at an appropriate time. The option of video conferencing should not normally be made available solely for the reasons that the candidate has left Bath after submitting a thesis and does not wish to return to the University for the viva voce examination.

Procedures for using video conferencing in viva voce examinations:

a) Advice should be sought, in the first instance, from the Graduate Office;

b) Video conferencing may be used only with the written agreement of the candidate and all proposed members of the Board of Examiners. This agreement should be sought and confirmed prior to the proposal being considered by the Board of Studies;

c) The Board of Studies should be informed at the time of the appointment of the Board of Examiners of the intention to use video conferencing facilities in the viva voce examination. The Board of Studies has the right to request further information in relation to a proposal to use video conferencing or to refuse a request where it feels a strong enough case has not been made. The decision of the Board of Studies is final;

d) The lead supervisor is responsible for ensuring that all parties involved in the examination are informed of the details of the arrangements;

e) Any time differences between the two locations must be taken into account to ensure that the candidate is not disadvantaged by an examination taking place at an inappropriate time;

f) When arranging video conferencing the quality of the equipment used should be taken into account. Sessions will automatically default to the lowest common denominator (i.e. ISDN6 based equipment at one site will provide a high quality output, but if the remote end has only ISDN2 capability the quality will default to the lower configuration). A session where one end is using PC-based desktop equipment with a modem should not be considered. Contingency plans are essential in the event of technology failure;

g) The candidate must be given the opportunity to practice speaking to another party using the facilities in advance of the viva voce examination;

h) The candidate should normally be located in the University of Bath and accompanied by the internal examiner;

i) Where the candidate is the remote party, any materials brought into the conference should be identified at the start of the examination and visible throughout. The University will not normally permit any person to be present with the candidate other than technical staff involved in the use of video conferencing facilities;

j) Examinations will not be recorded;

k) The set-up of the conference facilities should be such that the person/people at each end of the link should be able to see the other person/people present at all times;
l) When concluding a viva voce examination which has involved video conferencing, all participants should be asked to confirm that the holding of the examination by video conference has had no substantive bearing on the examination process. Examiners will be invited to comment on the conduct of the viva voce examination using the standard examiner’s report form and should refer explicitly to the use of video conferencing;

m) Requests for academic review will be considered, and where appropriate conducted, under the University’s standard procedures. Having agreed to a viva voce examination involving video conferencing the candidate will not be permitted to use this as grounds for appeal, unless the circumstances of technical failure or other unforeseen eventualities beyond the control of the Board of Examiners were deemed to have adversely affected the candidate’s performance.