



Principles and procedure for conducting Viva Voce examinations for doctoral students remotely and online

****Please note that this document replaces QA7 Appendix 3 until further notice****

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1 Principles

- 1 In order to protect the health of our staff, students and wider academic community, the University permits doctoral students to undertake their viva voce examination remotely, online, using video calling.
- 2 The university has agreed to temporarily suspend the requirement to gain formal approval for a video viva to take place. However, certain protocols must still be observed when conducting a remote viva examination in order to maintain academic standards and ensure the assessment remains fair and robust.
- 3 Although the viva will take place under different conditions, the expectations for the conduct of the examination including examiner input and the behaviour of all participants remains the same as if it were being held in person on-campus.

2 Process

- 4 When preparing to submit work for an examination, the lead supervisor and student should discuss whether to proceed with a video viva, or to postpone the exam until any relevant travel restrictions are lifted.
- 5 The intention to conduct the examination via video call should be indicated on the Board of Examiners nomination form.
- 6 When the student has a Disability Access Plan pertinent to examination arrangements or conduct, the lead supervisor will contact the newly appointed internal examiner (or lead examiner in the event of a Confirmation examination) to inform them of this and discuss any reasonable adjustments required.

- 7 To conduct a video viva the following steps apply:
- 1) Before making the examination arrangements, the internal examiner (or Confirmation lead examiner) must gain written confirmation from all participants of their willingness and ability to conduct the examination remotely using online video calling.
 - 2) At the same time all participants must confirm that they have access to the following:
 - a. A reliable internet connection with sufficient speed to facilitate video calling from multiple locations.
 - b. Reliable and suitable hardware (web-cam, PC/laptop, headphones).
 - c. The appropriate software (the default being MS Teams).
 - d. A private and quiet space for the duration of the examination where they will not be interrupted. There are rooms on campus (in 10West) reserved for doctoral students to use for confirmation or final viva examinations. These can be booked from [book your study space on campus](#).
 - e. A test call with all participants 48 hours before the exam is due to take place.
 - 3) The examiner must retain a record of this confirmation.
- 8 Once confirmation is obtained, the internal examiner (or Confirmation lead examiner) is responsible for ensuring that all participants involved in the examination are informed of the arrangements. This includes setting a time which means that no participant is expected to be present at an unreasonable hour; reasonable hours normally being 08:00 – 19:00 but will depend on individual circumstances.
- 9 The remote nature of these examinations means that supervisory support is more important than ever. The internal examiner is responsible for ensuring that the lead supervisor is aware of the final viva examination date and time. The supervisor must make themselves available to either join the examination at the point where the student is informed of the recommended outcome, or to call the student following the conclusion of the examination.

3 Detailed instructions: Protocols for a remote viva voce examination

These must be followed in order to ensure a fair and robust examination.

Before the examination day

- All participants must provide a contact telephone number at least 3 days before the examination day
- All participants must have a test call 48 hours before the examination is due to take place, preferably at the scheduled time. This is not only to ensure the technology works but that each location is suitable. It is also an opportunity for the internal examiner (or Confirmation lead examiner) to be clear about how the examination will be conducted, including protocols for a drop in connection or abandoning the examination due to technical problems.

- The candidate must inform the Board of Examiners of any materials they intend to have with them.

On the day

Before the examination starts

- Each party must introduce themselves and their role.
- If the candidate has notified the Board of any materials they want to have present then these must now been shown and remain visible throughout.
- The internal examiner (or Confirmation lead examiner) will confirm the process for the examination including the protocol for any drop in connection and any technical issues which results in the examination being abandoned (see below).

During the examination

- All parties must remain visible throughout.
- The examination will follow the normal format for a viva-voce examination.
- The examination will not be recorded.

End of the examination

- All participants will be asked to confirm that the remote viva using video calling has had no substantive bearing on the examination process.

After the examination

- 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.

In the event of a technical failure

- If the connection drops for one or all participants then all reasonable attempts should be made to re-establish the connection.
- If, after a reasonable number of attempts and time, it isn't possible to establish a stable connection for all participants, the examination must be abandoned and rescheduled if necessary.
- A reasonable period to wait will be longer if the candidate remains visible to at least one examiner at all times. If the candidate is no longer visible, then a reasonable time to wait would be much shorter to ensure the examination is still robust.
- In such an event the Internal Examiner (or Confirmation lead examiner) will be responsible for conferring with other participants (by phone if necessary) and having the final decision on whether to abandon the attempt.
- If sufficient discussion has taken place, it may be possible to recommend an outcome.
- It is not permissible for the examination to be conducted by audio only or by telephone.