

## Interim Guidance for Viva Examinations held by Video Link

---

This document provides guidance for University of Manchester Staff and Students on holding video vivas during the temporary period of remote working necessitated by the Coronavirus pandemic.

This document should be read alongside the [Examination of Doctoral Degrees Policy](#) (all guidelines detailed in section 17 [Conduct of the Oral Examination](#) must be applied where possible) and the UK Council for Graduate Education [Conducting Vivas Online: A Guide for Institutions and Candidates](#).

---

- Now that the University of Manchester has moved to a position of remote working, all vivas should be conducted remotely (via video link) or postponed to a later date. During this time the normal policy on applying for permission to conduct the viva remotely will be waived.
- For those vivas that go ahead via video link, it is advised that an independent chair be appointed and they must meet the criteria as laid out in the [Nomination of Examiners & Independent Chairs for Postgraduate Research Degree Examinations Policy](#).
- All participants must agree that they are happy to proceed remotely and a record of this agreement be held. The quality of the equipment to be used by all parties must be taken into account prior to agreement (University of Manchester video conferencing rooms/facilities will be unavailable).<sup>1</sup>
- Examiners and candidates must agree use of a technology that best suits all. Examples include (but are not limited to): Zoom, Skype for Business, Teams and Blackboard Collaborate.<sup>2</sup>
- Thought should be given to the security of the technology/meeting. If using Zoom it is advisable to set a password for the meeting. Please also refer to this [infographic](#) for further guidance on securing a meeting when using Zoom.
- It is advisable that the video link be set up at least 30 minutes before the examination time in order to test the connection and resolve any potential problems. All participants should also be able to contact each other by other means e.g. phone in case of technical issue.
- Normally, the independent chair or internal examiner will 'host' the examination to mirror normal in-person viva arrangements.

---

<sup>1</sup> Faculty/school PGR admin can use the Conducting an Oral Examination by Video Link Consent Form found in Appendix 1 [here](#). Or ensure that written agreement is received from all parties via email. If a candidate is unhappy to proceed with an online viva, and if their circumstances permit it, they should be allowed to wait until the coronavirus crisis has passed so that a 'normal' viva can be conducted.

<sup>2</sup> Some software may impose time limits, please be sure to check these prior to agreement in order to minimise the chance of any interruption.

- If appointed, it is expected that the independent chair will document the examination and so it is not necessary to record the viva. Only the viva 'host' can record an examination and all participants must first give their permission to be recorded.
- Candidates under examination must display their student ID card or some other form of valid photo ID (e.g. Passport). The candidate's supervisor may also be asked to join at the beginning of the remote viva to verify the candidate's identity.
- Candidates are permitted to take a hard copy of their thesis into the oral examination. If required, the candidate may also take a reasonable number of supplementary notes, pen and paper. Candidates are not normally permitted to take in additional laptops / electronic devices. Any materials brought into the examination should be clearly identified, on camera, by the candidate at the start of the viva.
- If the candidate does not have a hard copy of their thesis available they can take in one additional electronic device from which to access the document during the examination. This device should be declared to examiners at the start of the viva and the device should be muted with any internet access disabled.
- The candidate should also display a 360 degree sweep of the room they are located in at the start of the viva to satisfy the examination panel that there is no one else in the room with them during the viva. Examiners may request that the entrance to the room remain visible to them to ensure nobody enters the room whilst the examination takes place.
- All parties should ensure that there are no visual distractions on camera during the session (a background screen or a blank wall is preferable). They should also ensure that their location is well lit and located away from any potential audible distractions.
- Parties at each end of the video link must be able to see each other at all times.
- The oral examination should run for as long as necessary for it to serve its proper purpose. The examination host, usually the internal examiner or independent chair, must give an opportunity for breaks if the examination is anticipated to last more than two hours. Prior to recommencing the same room and materials checks performed at the start of the viva should be carried out again.
- If appointed, the independent chair should keep their microphone setting to mute throughout the viva, unless to offer breaks or to intervene if problems arise.
- Supervisors may sit in on the examinations (with the candidate's permission) but their microphone should be muted at all times, and they should not take an active role. They should also make sure that they are available to the candidate immediately after the viva to offer advice and emotional support if required.
- The examiners must ensure that the supervisor is available on the day of the oral examination by video link or by telephone, to answer any questions or concerns relating to the candidate's research and they must take account of their need to consult privately with each other before and after the examination.

- Before everyone logs off, the independent chair (or internal examiner) is responsible for congratulating the candidate and ensuring that all participants know exactly what will happen next, including the timescale for the candidate to receive the examiner's report.
- The viva taking place by video link is not grounds for appeal. Should technical difficulties occur and the oral examination be cancelled a second oral examination must be arranged, but this eventuality will also not be grounds for an appeal.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> It would be good practice to tentatively schedule a second viva date/time as insurance in the event of technical failure during the original viva.