

Guidance for Remote or Hybrid Viva Examinations

This document provides guidance for University of Manchester Staff and PGRs on conducting a viva incorporating a remote video link.

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](#).

Following the relaxation of national COVID restrictions on 19th July 2021 vivas can now be held either entirely in-person, remotely via video link, or a hybrid approach can be adopted whereby one or more members of the examination appear via a video link.

For vivas that go ahead fully or partially 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 or partially remotely and a record of this agreement should be retained by the internal examiner. The quality of the equipment to be used by the parties appearing via video link must be taken into account prior to agreement (University of Manchester video conferencing rooms/facilities may be unavailable).¹

Examiners and candidates must agree the use of a technology that best suits all. Examples include (but are not limited to): Zoom, Skype for Business, Teams and Blackboard Collaborate.²

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 video link to mirror normal in-person viva arrangements.

If appointed, it is expected that the independent chair will document the examination and so it is not necessary to record any online elements of the viva. However, if a recording is to take place only the viva 'host' can record the examination and all participants must give their permission to be recorded.

¹ Faculty/school PGR admin can use the Conducting an Oral Examination by Video Link Consent Form found in Appendix 1 [here for all remote/hybrid vivas](#). Or, they can ensure that written agreement is received from all parties via email. If a candidate is unhappy to proceed with an online/hybrid viva, and if their circumstances permit it, they should be allowed to wait until a fully in-person viva can be conducted.

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

Candidates appearing via video link 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 a remote/hybrid viva to verify the candidate's identity.

Candidates appearing via video link 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 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 appearing via video link 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 and appearing by video link 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, if appearing by video link, their microphone should be muted at all times. Supervisors 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 in person, 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 those appearing via video link log off, the independent chair (or internal examiner) is responsible for thanking 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 fully or partially 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.³

³ 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.