



# **Postgraduate Research Code of Practice**

## **APPENDIX 9**

### **Policy and Procedures for Conducting Remote *Viva Voce* (*Viva*) Examinations for Research Degrees**

## **Policy**

1. This Policy and its Procedures have been established to support the *viva voce* (hereafter referred to as *viva*) examination process for research degrees within the context of the internationalisation of the University of Liverpool's activities, whereby students studying for a University of Liverpool research degree, either as a single, joint or dual award, may undertake this study wholly or partly outside the UK, or wholly online.
2. The term 'remote *viva* examination' refers to circumstances where either the candidate, and/or the Internal Examiner and/or the External Examiner (and/or any Independent Chair) is engaged in the *viva* examination remotely, at separate locations, some or all outside the UK.
3. The research degree programmes for which a remote *viva* examination might be considered include:
  - Doctor in Philosophy (PhD)
  - Master of Philosophy (MPhil)
  - Doctor of Medicine (MD)
  - Professional Doctorates
4. The conduct of a remote *viva* examination and the academic examination of the thesis should replicate, as far as possible, a *viva* examination held in person at the University of Liverpool or any other location where all parties are physically in the same room, (e.g. Liverpool or XJTLU), and should adhere wholly to other relevant policies under the PGR Code of Practice.
5. The integrity of the academic standards and the conduct of the remote *viva* examination for a University of Liverpool research degree, whether delivered as a single, joint or dual award, either solely by the University or in collaboration with the University's institutional partners, are the responsibility of the University of Liverpool and any such examination must be conducted in accordance with this Policy.
6. This Policy and its Procedures are supported by the following Annexes which appear within this Policy:
  - a) Annexe 1      Protocols and Conduct for holding a remote *viva* examination;
  - b) Annexe 2      Requirements for holding a remote *viva* examination;
  - c) Annexe 3      Declaration by the Candidate.

## **Eligibility of the candidate to have their thesis examined using a remote *viva* examination**

7. The circumstances under which a *viva* examination will be conducted remotely by default are confined to **where a candidate has studied for a University of Liverpool research degree, either as a single, joint or dual award, wholly or partly outside the UK, or online, normally as part of a collaborative agreement with an institutional partner(s)**. Candidates whose registrations fall outside of this criterion have the option to request that their *viva* examination is conducted remotely.
  - a) Any institutional agreement with a collaborative partner should set out the arrangements for the *viva* examination, stating whether or not the option of holding a remote examination is available and/or would be the default arrangement. Students must be informed of this option at registration and again when they submit their Intention to Submit (ITS) form or the equivalent used for the submission of the thesis by candidates studying on Online Professional Doctorate programmes.
  - b) It is expected that the *viva* examination for candidates who have studied wholly online for a University of Liverpool professional doctorate degree will be conducted remotely

under this Policy as the default position. Under these circumstances, this Policy should be considered alongside the appropriate [Framework for Online Professional Doctorates](#) (Appendices 12a and 12b of the PGR Code of Practice) in relation to the provision for the *viva* examination. Students studying online professional doctorates should be informed by the UoL programme team of the arrangements for the remote *viva* examination, and be provided with a copy of this Policy, at initial registration and when they submit their thesis. They should also be told of their responsibilities for ensuring they have appropriate technical support and an appropriate location for their *viva* examination, and that they are required to meet all associated costs of their own location. Candidates studying for a professional doctorate online and who are based outside the UK may request that they come to Liverpool in person for their *viva* examination but they must have good reason to request such an adjustment and such a request should be made at the point when they submit their thesis, if not before. Such requests should be submitted to the University's online Programme Director, in writing, at least three months prior to the expected timing of the *viva*. The request should be supported by the reasons and any appropriate documentation. Good reason is normally associated with unexpected personal circumstances. Approval for the adjustment must be made by the University's Dean of School/Institute. Under these circumstances it would be expected that some of the Examiners would still conduct the *viva* examination from remote locations, but that at least one of the Examiners, or the Independent Chair, would be in the same room as the candidate. Candidates are expected to meet their own personal costs if they travel to Liverpool for the *viva* examination.

8. Candidates (excluding those studying for an online professional doctorate as above) who are normally eligible to have a remote *viva* may choose to have their *viva* examination in person, in Liverpool, or to attend the examination remotely, either alone, or in the same room with either the Internal or the External Examiner or the Independent Chair, depending on the circumstances. Candidates will be provided with a copy of this Policy and must sign and submit Annexe 3 if they choose to attend their examination remotely. Under normal circumstances, the student may state their preference on one occasion only; they must be provided with this option, in writing, and should state their preference, in writing, at least three months prior to the examination being organised.
9. All remote *viva* examinations will be conducted in English for 100% of the time, even where one or more of the Examiners may be native speakers of the same language as the candidate.

#### **Location and timing of the remote *viva* examination**

10. An 'appropriate location' for the relevant parties (i.e. candidate, Examiners, Independent Chair) means that appropriate technology is available and that privacy can be guaranteed, i.e. there will be no interruptions or other distractions likely to disrupt the examination. Only when the candidate and Examiners have confirmed these arrangements are in place may the remote *viva* examination proceed.
11. Candidates must attend a remote *viva* examination in an appropriate location. The location must meet with normal examination conditions with appropriate hardware and software facilities in place to hold a remote *viva* examination. It is the responsibility of the candidate, where they have been given permission for a remote *viva* or are a candidate for an online professional doctorate degree, to secure appropriate premises, and it is the responsibility of the Internal Examiner to approve these arrangements.
12. Candidates must confirm to the Internal Examiner that the location they will be using meets the requirements as stated in this Policy and by IT Services.

13. Under normal circumstances the Examiners' location would be an appropriate location as outlined in section 11 above.
14. No other person, other than the candidate and the approved Examiners and, where appointed, an Independent Chair, are permitted to attend a remote *viva* examination. Candidates may **not** be accompanied by any other person. Wherever possible the candidate's supervisor(s) should make themselves available to the candidate as soon as possible after the examination is complete particularly in cases where holding the *viva* remotely is not the default examination format for the candidate's programme of study.
15. The scheduling of the *viva* will be expressed in terms of UK time and should be arranged at a mutually agreed time by all parties. The convenience of timing for the candidate should take precedence over those for the Examiners.
16. Postponement of a scheduled remote *viva* examination should be exceptional. Students may postpone the *viva* on one occasion and only for good reason.

### **Technological requirements for remote *viva* examinations**

17. As a remote *viva* examination for a University of Liverpool research degree is a formal examination, the technological requirements supporting such examinations under this Policy must be in accordance with those set out by IT Services. This ensures that there is a consistent approach to the use of appropriate technology for these purposes and that the University's expert advice on this matter is adopted.
18. All remote *viva* examinations must be conducted using **visual** as well as audio interaction. It is forbidden for any *viva* examination to be conducted only by audio, such as telephone. Should visual links significantly fail, the *viva* examination must be suspended and re-scheduled. Under such circumstances, the Examiners will decide what proportion of the *viva* examination has been completed and what issues would be covered in any re-scheduled *viva* examination.
19. The use of any recording technology during a remote *viva* examination is expressly forbidden.
20. It is expected that all parties would have with them, during the *viva* examination, their own copy of the submitted thesis.

### **Authority to approve remote *viva* examinations**

21. It is at the discretion of the Internal Examiner (if they are based in the UK) or Independent Chair to decide whether or not the arrangements for a remote *viva* examination are appropriate. The University reserves the right to withhold permission for a remote *viva* examination to be conducted where it believes it is more likely than not to be disadvantageous for the candidate or in contravention of this Policy. There is no right of appeal for the candidate of the decision.
22. Under **all** circumstances, the decision to permit a remote *viva* examination to be conducted will be considered and approved by the Faculty. It will be the responsibility of the Internal Examiner, in all circumstances, to ensure that, once approved, the remote *viva* examination is organised and conducted in accordance with this Policy, and the broader PGR Code of Practice, including [Appendix 8](#): Policy on Research Degree Examinations and Examiners.
23. It is expected that normally all online professional doctoral theses will be examined remotely. The arrangements for such examinations will be approved as part of the thesis

submission process. Even under this arrangement, Clause 21 above will apply where the University may have good reason to require the *viva* examination to take place at Liverpool. Candidates may make an exceptional request to attend their *viva* examination in Liverpool in accordance with Section 7 (b) above.

### **Responsibilities of candidates under this Policy**

24. It is the responsibility of the candidate, when requesting a remote *viva* examination, or, for online professional doctorate candidates, when the remote *viva* examination arrangements are being made, to notify the University if they require any adjustments to the way in which the *viva* will be conducted due to a disability. Any such adjustments can only be made based on the submission of an independent needs assessment which recommends such adjustments. Any such adjustments must be requested at least **5 months** prior to the *viva* examination being held and cannot be considered for the first time on the day.
25. It is the responsibility of the candidate to ensure that their location and the required technical support for the remotely conducted *viva* examination comply with the terms of this Policy and to provide evidence of this. The candidate is required to attend any pre-tests of the videoconferencing links. Failure to do so will result in the *viva* examination being re-scheduled and the candidate will be required to meet any personal costs associated with this.
26. It is the responsibility of the candidate to meet any costs associated with their location and technical support required for the remote *viva* examination.
27. Candidates, whose thesis has been examined remotely under this Policy, are eligible to submit an appeal against the decision of the Examiners in accordance with the [Research Degree Appeals Procedures](#) (Appendix 10 of the PGR Code of Practice). However, candidates are not eligible to submit any appeal on the grounds that, as a matter of fact, their thesis was examined remotely, under this Policy, once they have agreed to undertake the examination process in this manner by signing the Declaration (Annexe 3), unless they can demonstrate that the **conduct** of the remote *viva* examination constitutes grounds for appeal as set out in the Research Degree Appeals Procedures.

### **Procedures**

28. The locational and operational requirements for participating in the remote *viva* examination are set out in a guidance document (Annexe 2) for all parties.
29. Except for online professional doctorate programmes (where Section 30 pertains):
  - a) Requests to hold a remote *viva* examination should be made at least 5 working days prior to the examination. Candidates should be provided with a copy of this Policy and its Procedures and all Annexes prior to any request being submitted. Under normal circumstances, Supervisors should provide the candidate with this information during discussions about their request.
  - b) Requests made should indicate the specific locations of each of the parties involved, confirmation that appropriate premises and technology are available, and the anticipated local time of the examination (primary consideration should be given to the candidate).
  - c) Requests should be considered by the relevant Dean of School/Institute (or nominee) at the same time as the Examiners are nominated and approved by the relevant Faculty. Under normal circumstances, the Examiners would be asked in advance if they would be willing to conduct the *viva* examination remotely. It is the

School/Institute's responsibility to ensure that all Examiners are provided with relevant information about remote *viva* examinations as above.

- d) There is no right of appeal for the candidate against the decision of the Faculty not to permit the *viva* examination to be conducted remotely.
- e) If a request for a remote *viva* examination is approved, the candidate should sign and submit a statement to confirm that they have read this Policy and agree to abide by its terms. This Declaration by the Candidate (Annexe 3) must be submitted to the Research Degree Administration Team (SAS), who will forward a copy to the Internal Examiner. If such a statement is not received, the Internal Examiner should postpone the *viva* examination and further consideration should be given as to how the examination will be conducted.
- f) Candidates must provide the Internal Examiner with a scanned colour copy of photographic identification, such as a passport or other personal identification, prior to the examination for identification purposes.

30. For online professional doctoral candidates:

- a) Candidates will have been provided with all information about this Policy at initial registration and just prior to the point at which they submit their thesis. Candidates will sign to say they understand and agree to abide by the terms of this Policy using Annexe 3 below.
- b) The technical and locational arrangements for the remote *viva* examination will be reviewed in advance by the Internal Examiner in consultation with IT Services, as approved by the Faculty and supported as appropriate by professional services staff at the relevant School at Liverpool, to confirm that the arrangements are appropriate. Where the arrangements are deemed not suitable and or not compliant with this Policy, or if a signed statement is not received from the candidate, the *viva* examination must be postponed.
- c) The Internal Examiner or, where relevant, the Independent Chair assigned to the *viva* examination will ensure that appropriate support is provided to candidates in securing and in the use of appropriate technical facilities.
- d) Candidates must provide the Internal Examiner with a scanned colour copy of photograph identification, such as a passport or other personal identification, prior to the examination for identification purposes.

31. Preparation for the remote *viva* examination

- a) Once the Faculty has agreed that the *viva* examination may be conducted remotely, the Internal Examiner (supported where appropriate by professional services staff) will arrange the date and time of the examination. All other arrangements for the preparation for the *viva* examination, such as distribution of the thesis, academic regulations and other documentation, will be in accordance with the PGR Code of Practice – [Appendix 8](#): Policy on Research Degree Examinations and Examiners.
- b) The Internal Examiner, supported where necessary by professional services in Schools and Institutes, must liaise with IT Services in the University of Liverpool and any equivalent technical support at other locations, to ensure that networks are connected. The Internal Examiner will co-ordinate all necessary email addresses (candidates must use their University of Liverpool email address) and any other required technical details.

- c) Wherever possible, network connections should be trialled by all parties, at least one week prior to the formal start of the remote *viva* examination. A *viva* examination should not be started where there are known technical problems with network connections and alternative arrangements should be explored. All parties who are attending the *viva* remotely, including the candidate, should provide the Internal Examiner and Independent Chair (where applicable) with a contact telephone number prior to the *viva*.

### 32. Initiating the *viva* on the day

- a) Under normal circumstances, IT Services at the University of Liverpool, under the co-ordination of the Internal Examiner, supported, where appropriate by School-based professional services, will initiate the videoconference session for the *viva* examination and will invite all relevant parties to attend.
- b) The Examiners should normally have the opportunity to convene for an appropriate period prior to the student being invited to the examination. Similarly, when the *viva* examination has been completed, the candidate should be removed from the videoconference whilst the Examiners deliberate on their decisions. The candidate should be re-admitted to the session to be informed of the outcome of the examination.
- c) When all parties are convened, the normal order of proceedings for a *viva* examination will be followed in accordance with the Policy on Research Degree Examinations and Examiners ([Appendix 8](#) of the PGR Code of Practice). The Internal Examiner should confirm with the candidate that they have read and signed the terms and conditions of this Policy and that they are content to proceed.
- d) A record should be made in the Final Report of the Examiners that the *viva* examination was conducted remotely and the report should include any issues, both technical and any others which occurred during the examination and any action taken.
- e) If, at any time, there is a significant breakdown in either the audio or the visual connections, the *viva* examination must be suspended and re-scheduled. Under such circumstances, the Examiners will decide what proportion of the *viva* examination had been completed and what issues would be covered in any re-scheduled *viva* examination. If, after two attempts, the connections fail with no prospect of resolution, consideration should be made for the *viva* examination to be conducted on the Liverpool campus. The reasons for this interruption to the process should be noted by the Internal Examiner. Where a remote *viva* examination has had to be suspended to be partially or wholly re-scheduled either remotely or in person on the Liverpool campus, the same Examiners should continue to examine the thesis.

### 33. Establishing the true identity of the candidate

- a) It is the responsibility of the Internal Examiner and/or the Independent Chair (where applicable) to ascertain, as far as is reasonably possible, that the candidate has provided appropriate evidence of their true identity. (See Sections 29(f) and 30(d) above).
- b) Log-in details to the *viva* examination, provided as part of the access to the video conference must be kept confidential and should not be shared with any other persons. Candidates will only be able to access the video conference using the email address provided to them by either the University of Liverpool or one of its partners. Personal email addresses will not be used.

- c) Candidates will be required to show evidence of their identity to the Examiners prior to the examination starting, in accordance with the evidence previously provided as outlined in Sections 29(f) and 30(d) above.
- d) Any evasion by the candidate to verify their identity will prevent the *viva* examination from taking place and will be handled under the University's [Policy for Student Conduct and Discipline](#).

## **Annexe 1**

### **Protocols and Conduct for a Remote *Viva* Examination**

1. At the start of the *viva* examination, the Internal Examiner (or, where present an Independent Chair) will:
  - a) Confirm with all parties that there are no other unauthorised persons present in the remote locations;
  - b) Confirm the identity of the candidate by confirming the candidate's University of Liverpool student identification number and reviewing photographic identification of the student, such as a passport. Where a candidate wears clothing which partially or fully covers their face, for reasons of religious observance, they are required to show their face briefly to the Examiners (or another independent party as approved by the Examiners) prior to the start of the examination;
  - c) Introduce all Examiners present;
  - d) Remind all parties that they must remain in the physical rooms for the duration of the *viva* examination, even when the candidate is excluded from the videoconference when the Examiners are making decisions as to the outcome of the examination;
  - e) Remind the candidate that they should NOT be accompanied at all in the physical room, even when the Examiners are providing feedback after completing the examination itself;
  - f) Remind the candidate that they may not access any additional material either on their computer or on the internet during the course of the *viva* examination nor engage in any electronic communication with any other person during the examination and warn them that, should the Examiners have reason to suspect that they are in breach of any of the rules set out in this Policy, they would be subject to disciplinary action for examination misconduct;
  - g) Remind all parties of the principles of good practice when using videoconferencing;
  - h) Ensure the camera angles are adjusted so that the head and upper body of all parties may be seen by all other parties.
2. Mobile telephones must be switched off during the *viva* examination and the use of email and other methods of electronic communications (e.g. Social Media etc.) are prohibited. In the event of a significant breakdown in the audio or visual connections it is the candidate's responsibility to establish telephone communication with the Internal Examiner (or Independent Chair).
3. It is expected that the candidate's hands would be in full view to the Examiners at all times.
4. Principles of good practice when using videoconferencing:
  - a) Allow others to finish speaking before another person starts to speak;



- b) Allow for time delays in both audio and visual communication;
  - c) Speak clearly and slightly slower than usual and leave time at the end of each statement for the complete audio to be transmitted, remembering that there may be a slight audio delay;
  - d) Use names to direct questions to specific people;
  - e) Be concise and keep to the point;
  - f) Refer specifically to page numbers and diagram references in order to draw all participants' attention to any particular part of the thesis under discussion;
  - g) At any time during the exam indicate immediately if they cannot see or hear the other participants.
5. If a significant breakdown in communication occurs the remote *viva* will be suspended and re-scheduled for a second time. If a breakdown in communication occurs a second time the third *viva* will take place on-campus at the University. See Section 32e of the Policy.
6. Academic misconduct associated with participation in a remote *viva* examination by the candidate may include, but is not confined to the following:
- a) Introducing, accessing and/or using unauthorised materials during the *viva* examination, whether electronic or in hard copy;
  - b) Permitting any other person(s) to attend the remote *viva* examination on behalf of the candidate or in addition to the candidate;
  - c) Arranging for and permitting any unauthorised person to attend the remote *viva* examination in their remote location;
  - d) Making any recording at all of the examination;
  - e) Any other behaviour which contravenes the Rules for Student Conduct as set out in the University of Liverpool's [Policy on Student Conduct and Discipline](#).
7. Any candidate suspected to be in breach of these rules for student conduct is likely to be referred for further investigation under the University of Liverpool's [Policy on Student Conduct and Discipline](#). Where the Examiners suspect a candidate of being in contravention of these rules, they must issue a warning and inform the candidate that the matter will be reported under the University's Disciplinary Procedures, after the *viva* examination. Under such circumstances, the Examiners must make appropriate notes of suspicions and any response to the warnings issued. Where the candidate has received a warning, and the Examiners consider there to be further breaches, they must suspend the examination, pending further investigation.
8. Cases of suspected academic misconduct in relation to the thesis will be handled in accordance with the [University's Academic Integrity Policy](#) (Appendix 4 of the PGR Code of Practice) and the University [Policy on Misconduct in Research](#) in the same way as for *viva* examinations conducted on campus and in person.
9. Candidates may not introduce new material in support of their submitted thesis during the *viva* examination. Examiners must not consider any such new material.

## **Annexe 2**

### **Requirements to support the conduct of a remote viva examination**

Under normal circumstances, the University will act as the videoconference *viva* host. Prior to the *viva* the Internal Examiner must seek advice from IT Services to determine the most appropriate audio visual platform required to conduct the remote *viva* examination. In each case, the candidate and the Examiners must ensure that they have the required technology available and in place.

#### **General**

Only email addresses issued to the candidate by the University of Liverpool or its partners will be used in the organisation of the video conference.

A member of UoL's technical support team will contact the candidate to confirm with them that their remote arrangements meet the minimum requirements. At that stage a short test, normally lasting for approximately 15 minutes will be scheduled between the candidate and the UoL technician. The test should be conducted in the same location that the candidate will be using for the *viva*. The technician will send the candidate an email invitation to join or create an account for the test and the *viva*.

The Internal Examiner (and, where relevant the Independent Chair) assigned to the remote *viva* examination must ensure that, where possible, technical advice is available to the candidate from the University.

### **Annexe 3**

#### **Declaration by the Candidate**

Candidates must be provided with a copy of this Policy prior to the *viva* examination being arranged and they must sign Annexe 3. Failure to do so will prevent a remote *viva* examination taking place.

By signing this declaration, candidates confirm that they have read the Policy and understood the terms contained within it, and accept the responsibilities placed on them in relation to the conduct of a remote *viva*.

Signed forms should be returned as a scanned and emailed copy to the Research Degree Administration Team (SAS) in Liverpool, or, for online professional doctorates, to the relevant professional services contact in the School at Liverpool.

The candidate should also submit, at the same time as the signed declaration, a scanned colour copy of photograph identification, such as a passport or other personal identification, prior to the examination for identification purposes.

**I confirm that I have read and understood the Policy and Procedures for Conducting Remote Viva Voce (*Viva*) Examinations for Research Degrees, and agree to abide by these Terms and Conditions**

**Signature of candidate (ID)**

**Date**

**Confirmation of receipt by the University of Liverpool**

**Name**

**Designation**

**Date**