

UNIVERSITY RESEARCH COMMITTEE RESEARCH AWARDS SUB-COMMITTEE

POLICY ON REMOTE VIVA VOCE EXAMINATIONS

The expectation is that a viva voce examination will take place at a University of Wolverhampton Campus with all appointed examiners present in the room with the candidate.

However the Research Awards Sub-Committee may give consideration to conducting viva voce examinations remotely (using technology) in the following exceptional circumstances:

- 1) When a member of the examination team has restrictions on travel for instance due to ill health, disability, and weather conditions or other emergency circumstances.
- 2) The option of a remote viva should not be made available to a student who does not wish to return to the University for the viva voce examination. However, in circumstances where there may be difficulties such as immigration, health or financial issues, an exceptional request to hold the viva voce remotely may be considered.

This should only be considered in exceptional circumstances and should not be viewed as a routine alternative to a face to face viva, or as a justification for nominating examiners from outside the UK.

APPROVAL FOR REMOTE VIVA VOCE EXAMINATION

- 1) Permission must be sought from the Research Awards Sub-Committee (RASC) at an early stage using the request form. Wherever possible, requests should be submitted alongside the NOMEX form (3-6 months before thesis submission) to allow time for alternative arrangements to be considered in the event that the request is not approved.
- 2) The Chair of RASC has the right to request further information or to refuse a request where a strong enough case has not been made.
- 3) Where unforeseen circumstances arise on the day of the viva, for example the External Examiner is unable to travel due to adverse weather conditions, please contact the STaR Office if you wish to discuss the potential for the viva to proceed remotely. This should again be in exceptional circumstances where there is a particular reason as to why the viva cannot be rescheduled for another date.

GUIDELINES FOR CONDUCTING REMOTE VIVA VOCE EXAMINATIONS:

- 1) Viva voce examinations may only be conducted remotely with the written agreement of the research student and all members of the Examination Team (examiners and independent chair). This agreement should be sought and confirmed by the STaR Office prior to the proposal being considered by the Research Awards Sub-Committee.
- 2) The internal examiner is responsible for ensuring that all parties involved in the examination are informed of the details of the examination arrangements
- 3) The internal examiner should ensure familiarity with the relevant technology (software and hardware) prior to the examination and take responsibility for operating equipment at a basic level during the examination. This may involve adjustments to camera settings, volume etc.
- 4) Any time differences between the two locations must be taken into account to ensure that the student is not disadvantaged by an examination taking place at an inappropriate time. The Chair of RASC will have the final decision on appropriateness.

- 5) A 2-way video connection only will be considered. The person/people at each end of the link should be able to see the other person/people present at all times. The viva cannot be conducted by means of telephone conference except in cases of partial completion. (see pt. 11)
- 6) Consideration should be given to:
 - Identifying a room with suitable facilities (advice from rooming /Faculty Technicians)
 - Hardware, e.g. a large TV screen would be more appropriate than a laptop
 - Software that can be accessed and utilised by both users in both locations
 - The speed of network connections available at the 2 sites
 - Access to a working webcam and microphone
 - Audio is tested for both parties (additional speakers may be required)
 - Telephone in case of equipment failure (see point 11)
- 7) Advice may be sought from Digital Services via Ext. 2000 with regards to the proposed software e.g. FaceTime, Skype etc. With sufficient notice, a call can be logged with Digital Services to check university equipment etc. to ensure that it's working properly on the day. More information regarding software available can be found on the 'Applications On Demand webpage' <https://www.wlv.ac.uk/its/self-help/software/applications-on-demand/>
- 8) A test call must be made to the remote location before the examination day to ensure that the facilities are working properly. In no circumstances can a remote viva take place if the test call is unsatisfactory.
- 9) A Viva conducted remotely should otherwise be comparable to a face-to-face viva; there should be no interruptions during the viva.
- 10) All parties must understand that in the event of any failure with the technology before or during the viva it will not be possible for the examination to continue and it may be necessary for the viva to be rescheduled. In the event that the technology fails on the day of the viva the STaR Office must be informed. Alternative arrangements to reschedule the viva must be made as soon as possible.
- 11) Under such circumstances, the Examiners will decide what proportion of the viva examination has been completed and what issues will be covered in any rescheduled viva.

Percentage of viva completed	Action to be taken following technology failure
<40% completed	Reschedule and restart
40-70% completed	Reschedule and resume
>70% completed	Complete by telephone

Care should be taken to ensure that failure of technology is not used as an excuse for a second attempt at the viva, especially when it is the student at a remote location.

- 12) If the internal and external examiners are at separate sites, they must take account of their need to consult privately with each other on the conduct of the examination: how the pre-oral discussion should be conducted; the form and sequence of questions; who should take the lead at various stages of the oral. There must be a room for the candidate to wait during these discussions.
- 13) As part of the remote viva, examiners should discuss and agree privately the content of the joint report so that their recommendations may be conveyed to the candidate. Their final signed report must then be submitted in the usual way. Examiners will be required to comment on the conduct of the viva voce examination and should refer explicitly to the use of the technology.
- 14) Examinations shall not be recorded.

15) Students, whose thesis has been examined remotely, are still eligible to submit an appeal against the decision of the Examiners in accordance with the Research Degree Appeals Procedures. Please note that once they have given written consent to undertake a remote viva, students are not able to submit any appeal simply on the grounds that their thesis was examined remotely. They will need to demonstrate that the conduct of the remote viva examination constitutes grounds for appeal as set out in the Appeals Procedure for Research Students (Appendix 7 [5](#) of the Research Student Handbook).

In addition to the above, in cases where the candidate will be attending the viva voce remotely, the following guidance applies:

- 1) The viva should normally take place in a recognised Higher Education institution with appropriate facilities. If it is not possible to use facilities in a recognised Higher Education institution, the student must provide detailed evidence of the reliability of the facilities that are proposed for use. If there are any costs incurred these must be borne by the student.
- 2) The responsibility for identifying a suitable institution/facility lies with the student in consultation with their Director of Studies. Once identified the Director of Studies should make official contact with the proposed institution to request permission to use their facilities.
- 3) When booking a location consideration should be given to the fact that the average time of a viva is 2-4 hours.
- 4) Once permission has been sought by the Director of Studies from the institution, the following details should be forwarded to the STaR Office for the consideration of the Research Awards sub-committee:
 - a) Name of proposed institution
 - b) Written agreement from the proposed Institution to host the viva and provide an invigilator
 - c) Contact details (telephone number and email address) for the institutional contact and the invigilator
- 5) The Research Awards sub-Committee should approve the appointment of the invigilator provided by the Institution. The invigilator must be present at all times during the examination.
- 6) The student must ensure that the equipment is functioning prior to the exam.
- 7) When it is the student who is in the remote location, it is recommended that, during the period in which the examiners deliberate before calling the student back in, the facilities be set to 'mute' rather than switched off. This is to avoid any possible problems in re-establishing the link. It is also recommended that the screen be switched off so that the candidate cannot see the examiners while they are deliberating.

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