



## Guidance on the use of videoconferencing or Skype, Zoom (or equivalent) for Viva Voce examination

**This Guidance is to be implemented during the CoVid-19 travel restrictions only.**

### 1. Overview

- 1.1 These guidelines apply to all viva voce examinations.
- 1.2 Due to travel advice as a consequence of the CoVid-19 outbreak it has been agreed that video conferencing may be the most appropriate means of engaging with external examiners during Viva Voce (viva) examinations that would otherwise be delayed.
- 1.3 We are therefore advising that examination committees should investigate conducting vivas requiring external examination through the use of video conferencing.
- 1.4 The term 'video conferencing' will be used for simplicity throughout this guidance document and refers to any generic technology suited to the purpose of holding secure multi-user video with audio conferencing (Skype for Business, Zoom, etc.). A basic Zoom workflow can be found in Appendix 1. Further information can be found [here](#).
- 1.5 The decision to hold a viva by video conferencing must have the prior consent of the student (candidate), supervisor and examiners and in no case should the decision to use video-conferencing place the student at a disadvantage. A suggested email template that can be sent to students requesting their consent can be found in Appendix 2.
- 1.6 It is important that appropriate arrangements are made to maintain the integrity, confidentiality and validity of the examination process.
- 1.7 The decision to hold a viva by video conference does **not** need the approval of a Vice-Dean.

### 2. Principles for using video conferencing in viva examinations

- Candidates must agree that they will not use the video conference format for the viva as grounds for an appeal.
- All viva examinations which occur by video conference must be chaired by the appointed convenor of the examination committee who should be present throughout the examination.
- The convenor will be responsible for ensuring that all parties involved in the examination are informed sufficiently well in advance, of the details of the video-conferencing examination arrangements.
- Any time differences must be considered to ensure that the candidate is not at a disadvantage during the examination (scheduling times outside local working hours should be avoided if at all possible).

- The arrangements for video-conferencing must be made by the convenor and call charges, if incurred, should be met by the candidate's host department.
- All remote viva examinations must be conducted using visual as well as audio interaction. It is not possible for a viva examination to be conducted by audio means alone.
- Any additional written materials or visual aids required of the candidate by the examiners must be available in hard copy locally and remotely. Such materials should therefore be provided to the examiners in advance of the examination.
- All parties must be visible during the examination, and the candidate must be visible at all times during the examination.
- The candidate should be alone during the examination, the video of the candidate should be such that the examiners are satisfied the candidate is alone and will not be disturbed.
- Examinations must not be recorded by any party. The record of a viva examination will be the convenor's notes.

### **3. Procedures before examination**

- Normal procedures regarding the submission of pre-examination reports should be followed.
- The convenor, internal and external examiner(s) should consult privately with each other on the conduct of the examination; how the pre-viva discussion will be conducted; the form and sequence of questions, who should take the lead at various stages of the viva; what graphics and documentation viewing facilities, etc might be required.
- A contingency plan in the event of a technical failure must be agreed beforehand. (It is advised that phone numbers are provided should a technical malfunction arise during the examination, but the oral exam should only proceed when acceptable video and audio links are re-established).
- The candidate should be advised to make themselves familiar with the room lay out and the equipment required for the video conference examination.
- The room lay-out and video camera positioning should ensure that all parties including the candidate are visible throughout the oral examination.
- It is advised that all the equipment and conferencing software is tested in advance and it is essential that at least one party in each location is capable of troubleshooting any potential problems.

#### **4. Procedures at the start of the examination**

- Prior to the start of the examination, the External Examiner should show a copy of their passport and the convenor should note that this has been shown as confirmation of their right to work in the UK.
- At the start of the oral, the convenor will:
  - ask the Internal Examiner to verify the Candidate's identity;
  - take steps to ensure that the video of the Candidate is such as to satisfy the Examiners that the Candidate is alone;
  - remind the Candidate that the oral must not be recorded by audio or video;
  - remind all parties that they must be present and visible throughout the examination.
- All parties agree that the examination should not be recorded.

#### **5. Procedures during the examination**

- The content and conduct of the video conference examination should be the same as a normal viva examination.
- The convenor will interrupt the oral if video/audio contact is lost with anyone and only proceed when acceptable video and audio links are re-established.
- If communication is broken during the examination and a connection cannot be re-established, examination must be terminated and rescheduled.
- Any rescheduled examination should take place within one month of the original viva.
- If the need to reschedule the examination occurs no re-examination of material covered in the original exam should occur.
- In the event that a communication link is broken towards the end of an examination, and examiners are agreed that further examination would not change a positive outcome decision, the viva may be concluded and the candidate notified of the examiners' joint recommendation. This should be detailed in the Examiner's report and account should be made of any content that was potentially missed after the break in communication.

#### **6. Procedures after examination**

- At the close of the examination of the candidate, the convenor should invite the candidate to leave the room\* whilst the examiners hold a private discussion on the examination outcome. It is advised that the candidate be informed of the approximate time that this discussion will take and when to be on hand to re-join the committee to be informed of the examiners' decision.
- \*Note: 'leave the room' should be interpreted as temporarily breaking on-line contact with the candidate to enable the usual confidential post-viva examiners' discussion to take place through a completely separate on-line meeting between the examiners. Once this has happened, on-line contact can be re-established between the examiners and the candidate so that the outcome of the viva can be communicated. It is important that the candidate is aware in advance that this is part of the normal procedure.
- Candidates should be informed of the outcome of their viva examination as soon as possible and the procedures for outcomes and corrections should be explained to the candidate.

- Outcomes are the same as normal viva examinations and the examiners are required to file a joint report. In the case of minor corrections, the candidate should be informed of these corrections directly by the internal examiner.
- The Internal Examiner should be prepared to offer further counsel once the examination has ended. It is important to keep in mind that the candidate will require support in the event of an undesirable outcome, and therefore sufficient support should be offered by the examination team and supervisors. It is sensible for candidates to have someone available to support them after the viva.

## **Appendix 1**

### **Basic Zoom workflow**

Zoom video conferences require that the host, and all attendees, have Zoom installed on their device. The software will automatically download when you host or join your first Zoom meeting, or you can download it at <https://zoom.us/download>. It is a good idea to let people know in advance that they will need to have the software installed in one of these ways.

There are also Zoom apps available for iOS or Android for people to participate from their phones.

Meetings are started by unique meeting links. Schedule a meeting to generate its URL, and share that URL with anyone who should attend the meeting. Anyone who clicks the link will be taken to the Zoom video chat room. You can test your video and audio, and see what the Zoom UI is like, here: <https://zoom.us/test>

### **Hosting a Zoom meeting**

You will be given a Zoom account attached to your academic email address so you have access to professional features, like longer meetings with more participants. At <https://zoom.us/signin>, log in with that email address and password.

To organise the viva, the convenor should go to <https://zoom.us/meeting> and click “Schedule a New Meeting.”

The settings can be made immediately or later.

Settings to note include:

- Video: Turn on host video and participant video.
- Meeting options: “Enable join before host”  
It is recommended that viva convenors leave this unchecked until they are ready to start the meeting. A pop-up window will tell participants to wait
- Meeting options: “Mute participants upon entry”  
This should be unnecessary in a small group like a viva examination. The convenor may wish to mute the microphone of any attending supervisors.
- Meeting options: “Enable waiting room”  
This will be useful for telling the candidate and any attending supervisor to wait, until you manually admit them to the meeting.

Leave the Password blank.

Click “Save” to schedule the meeting.

This will take you to the meeting information screen. The information you need to share with participants is the “Join URL.” Anyone who has that URL will be able to join the meeting.

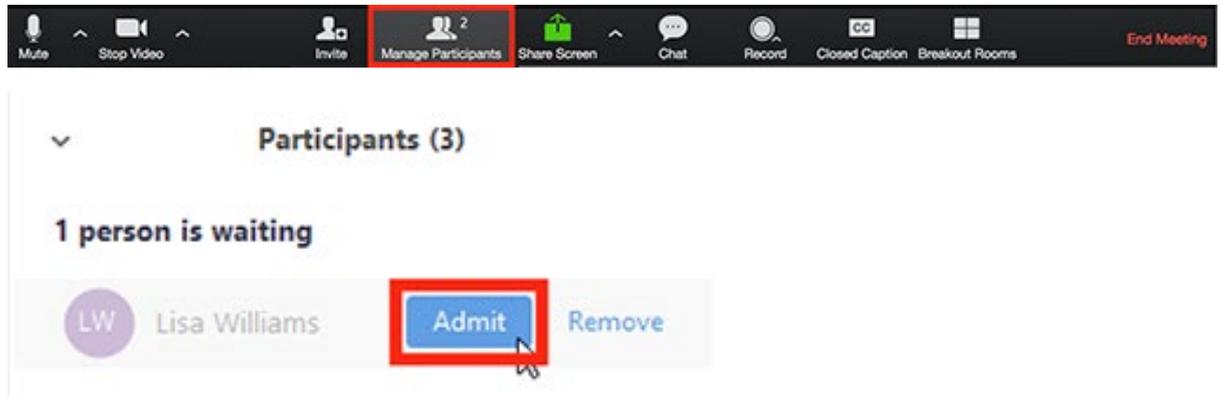
When it is time for the meeting to begin, go to the Join URL and it will start automatically.

### **During the meeting:**

When participants speak, their video or name will appear as the main image on the screen.

At the end of the examination of the candidate (i.e., prior to the outcome discussion), the convenor can use the Breakout Rooms function to move the candidate and any attending supervisors into separate rooms (one each), while the examiners consider their decision and recommendations.

**Using the waiting room.** During the meeting, to see who is waiting, and to admit them to the meeting, click on “Manage Participants.”



## **Appendix 2**

### **Template e-mail**

Dear X

As Convenor of the Examining Committee I am responsible for arranging your oral examination for the degree of MRes/MPhil/PhD/EngD/DPharm/DInfoSci. As you know, the University is closed due to the restrictions in place within the UK due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In the circumstances, exceptional permission has been given for your oral examination for to be undertaken by video conferencing. The aim is to prevent delay in completion of your degree while ensuring that the examination is rigorous and fair.

I would like you to confirm in writing that you are willing to undertake your oral examination by video conferencing. If you are not willing to do so, I will make arrangements for the oral examination to be undertaken face-to-face as soon as is practicable.

I would also like you to confirm in writing that you accept that undertaking the oral examination by video conferencing does not in itself constitute grounds for appeal. Appeals should only be made on the grounds outlined in the [Personal Circumstances and Academic Appeals Procedure](#).

I look forward to hearing from you.



## ANNEX 1

### Feedback from QAC on Guidelines for Virtual PhD Examinations

On 1<sup>st</sup> April QAC was asked to review and approve Faculty specific guidelines for conducting PhD examinations virtually.

The feedback received suggested some presentational developments and updates it is clear that the fundamental content and intent of the papers have QAC's full support and that this is viewed as a welcome and important development.

On the basis of the comments received the QAC Convener reported to ESC that further to suggested minor updates being made, "QAC has considered and approved proposals and recommendations from each of the Faculties regarding their respective Guidelines for Virtual PhD Examinations"

QAC supports the imperative of progressing the Faculty-specific guidelines as a matter of priority. However, QAC also recognised there was an opportunity to further standardise the guidance and will undertake this ahead of onward communication to ESC.

Post-QAC these have been summarised and collated for review and approval by ESC. It is intended that these general recommendations will complement the Faculty-specific approaches. In progressing this action QAC recommends the following standardisations to accompany and underpin the Faculty-specific guidelines:

- QAC acknowledged the need for support for the process and considered the technical support offered in the HaSS submission was helpful (see appendix 1) and that this should be incorporated into the standardised guidance. This should also include details of video conferencing options and IT helpdesk contact details where appropriate.
- QAC recognised the importance of consistent communications and welcomed the email template that was included in the Science submission (see appendix 2) and that wording should be agreed across all faculties. The issue of gaining the student's consent is important to highlight and is incorporated into this letter template.
- QAC noted that in Faculty communications and correspondence, it was critical that the standardised guidance informed students that:
  - the use the video conference format for the viva will not, in itself, constitute grounds for subsequent appeal;
  - time differences, if relevant, must be considered to ensure that candidates not at a disadvantage during examinations;
  - that call charges, if incurred, should be met by candidates host departments;
  - that all remote viva examinations must be conducted using the visual as well as audio functions. It is not possible for viva examinations to be conducted by audio means alone; and,
  - that examinations must not be recorded by any party. The record of a viva examination will be the convener's notes.

- It was considered that the introduction incorporated into the SBS and Engineering guidance would be a helpful introduction for any amalgamated guidance – see appendix 3. This also raises the issue of student consent but also emphasises that these arrangements seek to maintain the integrity, confidentiality and validity of the examination process.

On the basis of feedback received from the Convenor of the Academic Regulations Review Group, QAC also suggests that arrangements made for virtual PhD examinations should also apply to MRes and MPhil students required to undertake a viva.

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You will be given a Zoom account attached to your academic email address so you have access to professional features, like longer meetings with more participants. At <https://zoom.us/signin>, log in with that email address and password.

To organise the viva, the Graduate School (or the convener, if that has been agreed) should go to <https://zoom.us/meeting> and click “Schedule a New Meeting.”

The settings can be made immediately or later.

Settings to note include:

- Video: Turn on host video and participant video.
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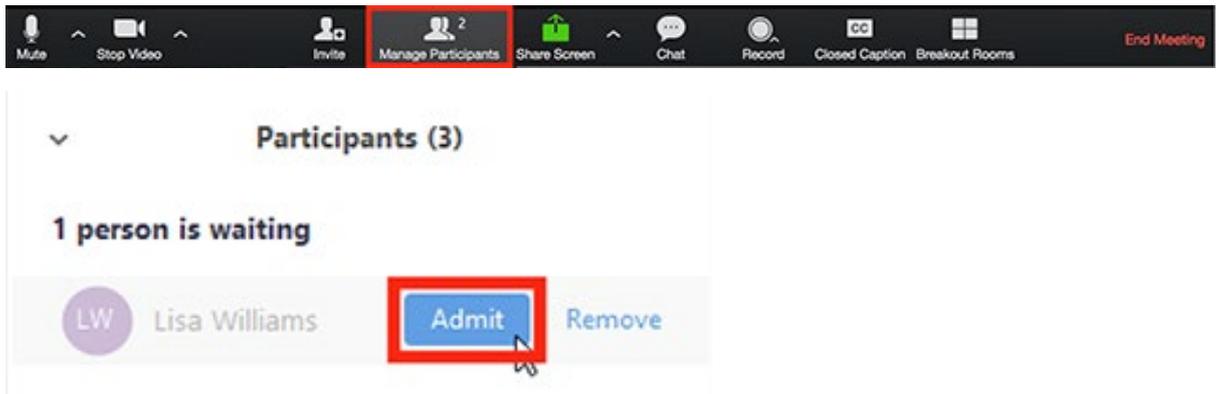
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I would also like you to confirm in writing that you accept that undertaking the oral examination by video conferencing does not in itself constitute grounds for appeal. Of course, if there is some failure in the examination process, you have the right to appeal.

I look forward to hearing from you.

### **Appendix 3 – Generic introduction**

Due to travel advice as a consequence of the CoVid-19 outbreak it has been agreed that video conferencing may be the most appropriate means of engaging with external examiners during Viva examinations that would otherwise be delayed.

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