

Guidance on the use of videoconferencing for oral examinations

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

1 Overview

- 1.1 The Dean has agreed that video conferencing* may be used to undertake oral examinations that would otherwise be delayed due to the implementation of Covid-19 restrictions. We are therefore advising that Examining Committees should investigate conducting orals by video conferencing.

**The term 'video conferencing' is used for simplicity throughout this guidance and refers to any generic technology suited to the purpose of holding secure multi-user video with audio conferencing (Skype for Business, Zoom, etc.).*

- 1.2 The decision to hold an oral by video conferencing must have the prior consent of the student (Candidate) and Examiners. In no case should the decision to use video conferencing place the student at a disadvantage.
- 1.3 It is important that appropriate arrangements are made to maintain the integrity, confidentiality and validity of the examination process.
- 1.4 The decision to hold an oral by video conference does **not** need the explicit approval of a Vice-Dean.

2 Initial arrangements

- 2.1 An oral examination undertaken by video conference must be chaired by the Convenor of the Examining Committee.
- 2.2 The Convenor will arrange the video conference, including ensuring that costs are met by the host department and that the event is held at a suitable time. Any time differences must be considered to ensure that the Candidate is not at a disadvantage (e.g. scheduling times outside local working hours should be avoided if at all possible).

- 2.3 The Convenor will ensure that the Candidate confirms in writing that

- (i) they agree to the oral being undertaken by video conferencing;
- (ii) they understand that the oral has to be undertaken alone;
- (ii) accept that using video conferencing for the oral examination does not in itself constitute grounds for an appeal.

- 2.3 The Convenor will ensure that

- (i) the Examiners involved in the oral consent to its being undertaken by video conferencing;
- (ii) all parties[^] involved in the oral are informed sufficiently well in advance of the details of the video-conferencing arrangements.

[^]A supervisor is invited to attend the oral but their consent for the oral to be undertaken by video conferencing is not required.

Oral examination by video conferencing

3 Before the oral

- 3.1 The Examiners will follow the standard procedure of submitting an individual written critique of the thesis to the Convener.
- 3.2 The Convener will consult the Examiners on the conduct of the oral: how the pre-oral discussion will be conducted; the form and sequence of questions; who should take the lead at various stages; what graphics and documentation viewing facilities, etc might be required.
- 3.4 The Convener will ensure that any written materials (other than the thesis) or visual aids required during the oral have been made available to the Candidate or Examiners in advance.
- 3.5 The Convener will ensure that
 - (i) equipment and conferencing software are tested in advance;
 - (ii) at least one party in each location is capable of troubleshooting any potential problems;
 - (iii) a contingency plan is in place in the event of a technical failure; this would include, for example, ensuring that there are contact details available for all involved.
- 3.6 The Supervisor will ensure that the Candidate is familiar with the equipment required for the video conference. The Supervisor should advise the Candidate that they might wish to have someone available to support them after the examination.

4 At the start of the oral

- 4.1 Prior to the start of the oral, the External Examiner(s) should show their passport(s) and the Convener should record that this has been accepted as confirmation of their right to work in the UK.
- 4.2 At the start of the oral, the Convener will
 - (i) ask the Internal Examiner to verify the Candidate's identity;
 - (ii) take steps to ensure that the video of the Candidate is such as to satisfy the Examiners that the Candidate is alone;
 - (iii) remind the Candidate that the oral must not be recorded by audio or video;
 - (iv) remind all parties that they must be present and visible throughout the examination.

5 During the oral

- 5.1 The Convener will ensure that the content and conduct of the oral is the same (as far as is practicable) as a face-to-face oral.
- 5.2 The Convener will interrupt the oral if video/audio contact is lost with anyone and only proceed when acceptable video and audio links are re-established.
- 5.3 If communication is broken temporarily and connection is re-established, the Convener will ensure that information missed or not heard is repeated for the Candidate and/or members of the Examining Committee.
- 5.4 If communication is broken and a connection cannot be re-established, the Convener will terminate the oral.

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- 5.5 The Convener will consult the Examiners on whether the oral is sufficiently complete or requires to be rescheduled. If the Examiners agree that further examination would not change a positive outcome decision, the oral may be deemed to have been concluded at the time of the interruption. In that case, the Convener will notify the Candidate Examiners' joint recommendation. The fact that the oral was interrupted and the decision that the oral need not be rescheduled should be recorded in the Examiner's Report along with details of any content of the thesis that was not fully examined.
- 5.6 If the oral is to be rescheduled, the Convener will reschedule as soon as possible and within one month of the original oral.
- 5.7 The Convener will ensure that the rescheduled meeting is not used to re-examine material already covered.

6 After the oral

- 6.1 At the close of the examination of the Candidate, the Convenor should invite the Candidate to leave the meeting 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.
- 6.2 Candidates should be informed of the outcome of their oral examination as soon as possible and the procedures for outcomes and corrections should be explained to the Candidate.
- 6.3 Outcomes are the same as for normal oral 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.
- 6.4 The Internal Examiner should be prepared to offer further advice 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 Examining Committee and supervisors.

End

Template e-mails

Dear X

As Convener 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.

I look forward to hearing from you.