



Policy on Remote Viva Voce Examinations

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POLICY ON REMOTE VIVA VOCE EXAMINATIONS

1. Introduction

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 student. This ensures the integrity of the examination and provides the most conducive atmosphere for students to defend their work. The viva is not a formality and can have a major impact on the outcome of the assessment.

However viva voce examinations may be conducted in an alternative format:

- a) **Remote:** all participants join online from different locations.
- b) **Hybrid:** most participants are present in the same room while one person joins remotely. The person joining remotely might be an examiner (most likely the external examiner), or the student.

The Research Awards Sub-Committee may give consideration to conducting viva voce examinations via a remote or hybrid format in the following exceptional circumstances:

- a) 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.
- b) An alternative format 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 may be considered.

Remote or hybrid vivas 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.

2. Purpose

This Policy has been established to support the conduct of remote and hybrid viva voce examinations for research degrees. It should be read in conjunction with the [Research Degree Regulations and appendices](#).

3. Principles

The objectives of this policy are to ensure the robustness and integrity, confidentiality and validity of the examination process is maintained.

The implementation of this policy is in accordance with the University's core values which are:

- Ethical
- Respectful
- Transparent
- Inclusive and fair
- Challenging
- Confident
- Collaborative
- Professional

4. Scope

This Policy applies to all research degree programmes that include the requirement for a viva voce examination:

- Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)
- Master of Philosophy (MPhil)
- Professional Doctorate
- Medical Doctorate (MD)
- PhD by Published Work

5. Approval for Remote and Hybrid Viva Voce Examinations

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. Links to the forms can be found in the Information and Resources section.

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.

Where unforeseen circumstances arise on the day of the viva, for example the External Examiner is unable to travel due to adverse weather conditions, participants should contact Research Degree Student Services (RDSS) to discuss the potential for the viva to proceed in a remote or hybrid format. This should again be in exceptional circumstances where there is a particular reason as to why the viva cannot be rescheduled for another date.

6. Conducting Remote and Hybrid Viva Voce Examinations

Viva voce examinations may only be conducted in an alternative format with the written agreement of the student and all members of the Examination Team (examiners and independent chair).

This agreement should be sought and confirmed by RDSS prior to the proposal being considered by

the Research Awards Sub-Committee (RASC).

The Chair will have responsibility for arranging the examination and for ensuring that the student is given a fair opportunity to defend the work.

Any time differences between remote locations must be considered to ensure that the student is not disadvantaged by an examination taking place at an inappropriate time (starting times outside 8am-4pm local time for the student should be avoided). The Chair of RASC will have the final decision on appropriateness.

RDSS will formally notify the student, examiners, supervisors, and independent Chair in writing of the date and the arrangements for the oral examination. Arrangements include any agreed reasonable adjustments where these have been requested by the student, with reference to their tutor awareness sheet.

The Chair 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.

All parties must be visible and audible during the examination. The viva cannot be conducted by means of telephone conference except in cases of partial completion.

The use of any recording technology during a viva examination is expressly forbidden.

Default Platform:

The default platform for use in any remote attendance of a viva voce examination is MS Teams. This allows the University to ensure that General Data Protection Regulations are being followed. Backup platforms Skype for Business or Skype may be used in the event of technical failure.

Wider context of participants:

The Chair must ensure that they are fully aware of any contextual / particular / individual student circumstances in the operation of the viva voce examination (for example: caring responsibilities, family members with special needs, reasonable adjustments, requirement for regular breaks etc.) and that they are supportive of this for all participants.

7. Prior to the examination

Examiners must submit their preliminary reports electronically at least 10 working days before the scheduled date of the viva and RDSS will send all examination paperwork to the Chair as normal.

All participants must provide a contact telephone number. All participants must be responsible for the appropriateness, security, and integrity of their environment to avoid unnecessary interruptions and distractions.

RDSS should confirm with the supervisory team (usually the Director of Studies) who will be available on the day of the examination to verify the identity of the student at the start of the viva and to support the student at the end of the viva when the result is delivered.

A test/rehearsal call to all remote participants should be arranged by the Chair, minimum of 48hrs before examination to check the connection, quality of sound and vision and that each location is suitable. In no circumstances can a remote viva take place if the test call is unsatisfactory.

All participants must confirm access to the following:

- a) Reliable internet connection with sufficient speed to facilitate video conferencing.
- b) Reliable and suitable hardware (webcam, PC/laptop, headphones, or headset if possible).
- c) MS Teams software
- d) A private, quiet space where they will not be interrupted for the duration of the examination.

All participants should ensure that their device can remain connected to a power supply throughout the examination. Viva Voce examination usually last longer than two hours, so they should not rely on their device's battery.

Prior to the viva commencing, the examiners will meet with the independent Chair to consider their preliminary reports and the student's thesis. The examiners will also clarify the issues which they collectively, or independently, wish to raise with the student. The examiners should also agree the structure of their questioning and the time frame in which they hope to complete the oral examination.

Details of the implementation of any reasonable adjustments being made during the viva should be agreed, with the Chair ensuring that they comply with the student's entitlements.

8. During the examination

It is expected that all parties would have with them, during the viva examination, their own copy of the submitted thesis.

Supervisors may attend the examination (at the written request of the student) but, if appearing by video link, their microphone should be muted at all times. Supervisors should not take an active role.

The Chair should ensure that all parties introduce themselves and their role.

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. The oral examination should run for as long as necessary for it to serve its proper purpose.

Additional requirements when the student is attending via video link:

- a) Students must display their student ID card or some other form of valid photo ID (e.g. Passport). A member of the student's supervisory team will also be asked to join at the beginning of a remote/hybrid viva to verify the student's identity. They should also make sure that they are available to the student immediately after the viva to offer advice and emotional support if required.
- b) The student should be alone during the examination and should 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.
- c) The student will also be asked at the outset to confirm any materials present such as a hard copy of their thesis or creative works and any materials declared should remain visible at all times. If the student does not have a hard copy of their thesis available, they are permitted one additional electronic device from which to access the document during the examination. This device should be declared, and the device should be muted with any internet access disabled.

The independent chair must give an opportunity for breaks if the examination is anticipated to last more than two hours. Prior to recommencing, any room and materials checks performed at the start of the viva should be carried out again.

The independent chair should keep their microphone setting to mute throughout the viva, unless to offer breaks or intervene if problems arise.

9. Technical failure

The content and conduct of a viva conducted remotely should otherwise be comparable to a face-to-face viva; there should be no interruptions during the viva.

If communication is broken before or during the examination for one or all of the participants, then reasonable attempts should be made to re-establish the connection. If connection is not re-established after a reasonable number of attempts, the examination must be terminated and rescheduled. Alternative arrangements to reschedule the viva must be made as soon as possible.

The examiners must decide how much of the viva examination was completed at the point the connection was lost and what, therefore, should be covered in the re-scheduled viva examination.

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

If communication is broken towards the end of an examination, and examiners can jointly agree that further examination would not change their decision, the viva may be concluded, and the student notified of the examiners' joint recommendation. This should be detailed in the Examiner's and Chair's reports and an account should be made of any content that was potentially missed after the break in communication.

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

10. At the end of the examination

All participants should be asked to confirm at the conclusion of the viva that the holding of the examination by video conferencing had no substantive bearing on the examination process.

The chair should ask the student to leave the meeting while they discuss the examination outcomes and reach their joint decision. It is advised that the student should be informed of the approximate duration that this discussion will take and when to be on hand to discuss the examiners' decision.

When the student is in a 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 student cannot see the examiners while they are deliberating.

Once a recommendation is agreed, the student is invited to re-join the meeting to be advised of the outcome of the examination. The supervisor may accompany them if they attended the viva.

After the student is informed of the outcome and following any further discussion with the examiners, they should leave the meeting. The examiners and chair should remain in the meeting to agree the list of changes or revisions that might be required from the student.

The examiners' report must include a statement that the viva voce was conducted in a remote or hybrid format. Any issues should be recorded on the post viva examination paperwork and in the independent chair's report.

11. Appeals

Students whose thesis has been examined remotely are still eligible to submit an appeal against the decision of the Examiners in accordance with the University appeals procedure.

[\(https://www.wlv.ac.uk/current-students/conduct-and-appeals/\)](https://www.wlv.ac.uk/current-students/conduct-and-appeals/).

However, the student should be aware that if they agree to proceed with the viva being conducted using video conferencing, the method/format cannot be used as grounds for a later appeal. They will need to demonstrate that the conduct of the remote viva examination constitutes grounds for appeal.

12. Exceptions

There are no exceptions to this policy.

13. Amendments

This Policy was approved by the University's Executive Board in November 2023. The University may change this Policy at any time, and where appropriate. Where a policy is not due for review, but is found to require updating, it will remain published, unless the reasons for review render it obsolete.

14. Information and resources

This policy should be read in conjunction with:

- Research Policies, Procedures and Guidelines www.wlv.ac.uk/researchpolicies
- Research Degree Forms <https://www.wlv.ac.uk/current-students/student-support/research-degree-student-services/research-forms/>
- Research Degree Regulations <https://www.wlv.ac.uk/about-us/governance/legal-information/regulations-codes-of-conduct-and-by-laws/academic-regulations/>

15. Contact

For general queries regarding Research Policies, Procedures and guidelines contact Jill Morgan, Research Integrity Manager, by email: J.Morgan4@wlv.ac.uk

Research Degree Student Services can be contacted at rdss@wlv.ac.uk

For general queries, please contact the University Corporate Compliance Team via email: compliance@wlv.ac.uk.

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