Graduate Board
Examinations Group and Programmes and Quality Group

Use of Video Streaming\(^1\) for research degree transfer and final examinations

Extraordinary arrangements in response to the Coronavirus situation

University policy on arrangements for the transfer viva/final examination

1. The University’s policy remains that transfer assessments and final vivas should be conducted with all parties in attendance in person. We recognise, however, that in the current situation there will be many situations (perhaps all, for a period of time) in which this will not be possible.

2. In view of this, arrangements are in place for the viva to be conducted by video streaming, with all participants completing the process remotely. The exceptional regulations outlined below should be applied.

3. These should be considered extraordinary arrangements in response to, and for the duration of, the current situation only. This does not represent a permanent change to established policy for PGR assessments. University policy remains that the transfer viva/oral examination will normally take place in Leeds with the PGR and all appointed assessors/examiners present.

4. In all cases the integrity of the transfer/examination process must be paramount to ensure the examination is conducted fairly and robustly, in accordance with University policy. Graduate Board must be satisfied of the fairness and consistency of the process, that this will be conducted appropriately according to expected standards, and that the PGR will not be placed at a disadvantage. The University reserves the right to require that a viva be postponed and a face-to-face viva rearranged at a later date if it is not satisfied with any arrangements, or in the case of technical difficulties on the day.

\(^1\) Video streaming may be carried out via any reliable video conferencing system (Microsoft Teams is the recommended platform). Please note that Zoom has been removed from the list of acceptable tools for vivas. Please see the advice on IT website for further advice.
5. This guidance will be reviewed regularly in the light of the changing situation. Graduate Schools are encouraged to contact Doctoral College Operations to discuss individual cases.

**Video streamed transfer or final examination**

6. A transfer viva/oral examination conducted using video streaming should be comparable to those used for a face-to-face oral examination. Due consideration should be given to the environment in which the parties are located, that this is fit for the purposes of an oral examination and that it is in all other ways comparable to those used for face-to-face examination. Appropriate consideration must be given to time zones.

7. Particular consideration should be given to the location of the PGR. The candidate must be alone and undisturbed during the examination. The transfer panel/examiners will be required to verify this at the start of the viva and must be satisfied that the PGR is alone and that the environment is appropriate.\(^2\)

8. The Graduate School must confirm that pastoral support (normally via the supervisor or other appropriate member of staff, who might be available via video streaming or telephone) will be available to the PGR immediately after the viva, should this be necessary.

9. In the case of a video-streamed final examination, an Independent Chair may be requested by the Examining team for an online viva.\(^3\) An Independent Chair will continue to be required by the University under the established (pre-Covid-19) position where it will the internal examiner’s first PGR examination or a second viva following resubmission.

10. An Independent Chair is not required for a transfer viva being held by video streaming.

11. All the other usual arrangements set out in the former video streaming policy will apply including: the assessor/examiners must be able to discuss in private during the pre and post-viva meetings; a thorough testing of the connection must be completed in advance; the camera must be on (telephone vivas are not permitted);

12. **Recording of the viva by any party is not permitted.**

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\(^2\) The PGR should be asked to show the room at the start of the examination, and have the door in view behind the PGR, if possible.

\(^3\) Examiners will be advised that an Independent Chair can be appointed on request for an online viva. Where the examiners request that a Chair is in place to oversee the online viva, a Chair must be appointed.
13. A thorough testing of the connection must be conducted before the oral examination. This should include both a ‘trial run’ a few days before the oral examination and immediate, prior testing of the connection on the day.

14. Having to continually interrupt the oral examination to refresh the connection can disrupt the flow of the oral examination and disadvantage the candidate. If there are any doubts about the connection and whether it will last the duration of the assessment/examination the examination cannot go ahead and must be rescheduled.

15. If audio and/or visual communication is lost with one or more of the parties during the viva the viva should be paused until communication is re-established. If such communication problems continue and are severely disruptive, the transfer panel/examiners should discuss with the PGR whether to postpone and rearrange the viva. The PGR should be informed of this at the start of the viva.

16. All parties must have access to, and be comfortable with the use of, the appropriate technology. Video streaming should not be used in any cases where any party (including the PGR) is not comfortable with the arrangements or the technology. The use of video streaming should not form grounds for a subsequent appeal and if there are any doubts or concerns the viva must be postponed and a face-to-face viva arranged at a later date.

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