

## **Guidance for research degree oral examinations by video conference**

### **Choice of oral examination format**

For examinations held from October 2021 onwards, oral examinations will be held in-person in Cambridge by default unless the student indicates a preference for viva by video conference.

Arrangements where the candidate and one Examiner are co-located, with the second Examiner participating by video conference are permissible, provided all parties are in agreement. Similarly, where an Independent Chair is appointed arrangements where the chair is co-located with the candidate are also permissible.

Appropriate Government or University guidance related to social distancing and COVID-19 in force at the time of the in-person examination must be adhered to.

The Internal Examiner is responsible for confirming the format of the viva, after consultation with the candidate and other Examiner (and Independent Chair if appointed). Examiners should respect the candidate's preference and not seek to encourage viva by video conference where the candidate has opted to be examined in person. If an Examiner is unable or unwilling to examine in the candidate's preferred format they should contact the Degree Committee. The Examiner's position will be put to the candidate as a matter of fact; the candidate may agree to proceed as proposed by the Examiners, or request the examination be delayed until their preference can be met. Where this is not possible the appointment of an alternative Examiner may be required.

### **Practical arrangements**

The Internal Examiner will be responsible for hosting the viva. The Internal Examiner will determine the platform for the viva and ensure that all participants have advance notice of and access to the platform and have the opportunity to test the platform in advance of the viva. Testing at least one day in advance of the viva is advised.

The Internal Examiner should ensure they have telephone contact details of the candidate, External Examiner and Independent Chair (if appointed).

In cases where the two External Examiners are appointed, the Degree Committee will be responsible for supporting Examiners with the practical arrangements.

Times zones should be taken into account if one or more of the participants are outside of the UK.

### **Validating identity**

The identity of the candidate must be validated either by their supervisor being present at the start of the viva to verify the candidates identity (with the supervisor leaving before the viva formally starts) or by the candidate providing a suitable form of photo identification to allow the Examiners to confirm their identity. The Internal Examiner should make the candidate aware of what will be required in advance.

The viva must not proceed if the Internal Examiner is not able to validate the identity of the candidate. All participants must be visible through their webcams throughout the viva.

### **Starting the viva**

The Internal Examiner should ensure all participants can see and hear each other clearly and brief the candidate on how they will be interacting. Let the candidate know if a mid-viva comfort break is planned, or how one can be requested during the viva.

### **Problems during the viva**

If during the viva connectivity with any of the participants is lost or if a participant is unable to engage fully due to technical difficulties the viva should be halted and attempts made to restore full connectivity. If this proves impossible, the Internal Examiner should stop the viva at this point, and make arrangements for it to be rescheduled. The viva must not continue via telephone.

### **Recording the viva**

It is not permitted to record viva voce examinations.

### **After the viva**

At the end of the viva the candidate should be asked to leave (or be moved to a virtual waiting room) while the Examiners confer and agree a recommended outcome. The Independent Chair (if appointed) should remain with the Examiners. The Examiners should then invite the candidate to re-join and receive initial feedback, although an outcome should not be formally confirmed at this point.

Examiners should report to the Degree Committee any notable circumstances that might have affected the examination.

The supervisor may wish to make themselves available to the candidate after the viva to talk over the feedback and provide support. Candidates may wish to arrange an event with their peers, friends or family on the day of examination to help give a sense of closure and celebrate their achievements.