Remote Viva Voce Examinations and thesis submission Policy

This policy applies to all Postgraduate Research (PGR) thesis submissions and remote viva voce examinations (‘Remote vivas’) at the University of Sussex, and should be read in addition to information on the submission and examination process.

Theses submission

Theses must be submitted online via the Assessment and Examination office. Similarly, the sharing of theses with examiners or adding an accompanying summary of changes for corrected theses will operate online, following standard processes.

Remote Viva Voce Examinations

The viva should normally be held at the University of Sussex with all parties present in one room. A ‘Remote Viva’ is a viva voce examination where one or more of the parties cannot be physically present at the University of Sussex.

1. Summary of Remote Viva Process

   i. Requests for Remote Vivas must be reviewed and approved in advance by the Chair, or Co-Chair, of the Research Degrees Examination Board (or nominee) under delegated authority from the Research Degrees Examination Board.

   ii. For permission to be granted, the Remote Viva Approval Form must be completed and retained, to confirm agreement of all parties¹, the time, date, confirmation that a private location is available and suitable supporting technology can be used, and that there are no concerns about the appropriateness of conducting a Remote Viva.

   iii. The candidate’s needs and preferences are central to the decision making process.

   iv. A Remote Viva may not be appropriate where concerns have been raised about academic misconduct.

   v. It is recommended that a Remote Viva is carefully considered, where there are well-being concerns about the candidate.

   vi. Approval of a Remote Viva may be withheld where a review of the request indicates that the candidate will be disadvantaged by the conditions of a remote examination.

   vii. Schools may be required to nominate a (normally) senior² member of Sussex Faculty to act as a Viva Chair. The Viva can proceed without a Chair, however the University reserves the right to require an independent Chair in certain cases.

   viii. The Viva Chair, or the Internal Examiner in the absence of a Chair, must notify the Exams and Assessment Team – via the Remote Viva Approval Form – of:

      a. the names of all parties and confirmation of their agreement to a Remote Viva, and the viva date and time,

      b. that teleconferencing (Microsoft Teams/Zoom etc.) has been tested, the availability of suitable/private locations.

¹ ‘all parties’ refers to PGR candidate, internal examiner, external examiner and viva chair, where appointed.

² See section 5 for further details on the role and criteria to act as a Viva Chair

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2 'all parties' refers to PGR candidate, internal examiner, external examiner and viva chair, where appointed.

2 See section 5 for further details on the role and criteria to act as a Viva Chair
Support during and after a Remote Viva

ix. Candidates may request to have a nominated supporter/observer present with them during the Remote Viva. The nominated person, who will normally be a supervisor or another member of academic or professional services staff, and whose attendance should be approved in advance, is not allowed to contribute in any way to the conduct of the Remote Viva unless directly addressed by the examiners. They must be introduced at the start.

x. Given the significance of the outcome of the viva to the candidate, it is recommended that the candidate have someone available to support them (either online or in-person) when the outcome is communicated. Where the candidate opts to have a nominated supporter/observer present during the Remote Viva itself, the same person may be present for the outcome. Otherwise, if the candidate opted not to have a nominated supporter/observer present during the Remote Viva, or they opt to have a different individual present for the outcome, they may choose to have a supervisor, other academic or professional services staff member, friend or family member present for the communication of the outcome.

2. Technological considerations

i. It is recommended that the viva be conducted using University-supported teleconferencing such as Microsoft Teams, or Zoom, however other platforms can be used if agreed by all participants.

ii. The viva must commence using both video and audio, and video should normally be maintained by all parties throughout. It may be appropriate for the Independent Chair or supporter, if present, to turn off video to enable to the viva to progress between the candidate and the examiners without distraction. The internal examiner must confirm the identity of the candidate at the start of the viva.

iii. If there is a failure in the connection/technology, attempts should be made to re-connect. It is suggested that attempts to reconnect could halt after 20 minutes, with the agreement of all parties.

iv. If the viva has to be halted for technological reasons, the internal examiner should consult with the external examiner via an alternative method (e.g. telephone) to ascertain if sufficient discussion has taken place for a viva outcome to be recommended to the Research Degrees Examination Board.

v. The decision to postpone, re-convene or conclude a Remote Viva should be made by the Chair, or internal examiner if no Chair is present.

3. During and after the viva

i. It is expected that Remote Vivas follow the same protocols and format as a standard viva.

ii. The communication of provisional outcomes, which are subject to approval by the Research Degrees Exam Board and Senate, should be sensitive to the fact that the viva is the most significant culmination of the candidate’s work and that the normal in-person or departmental support may not be available to the candidate. In addition to the support noted in section 2, it is recommended that Supervisors are available remotely to candidates on the day, and immediately after the viva.

4. Viva Chairs

The role of the Viva Chair in a Remote Viva is to ensure the candidate’s wellbeing, that the viva process is conducted without disadvantage to any party, and that the viva process is consistent with University regulations. In the absence of a Viva Chair, the internal examiner shall take on the Chair’s responsibilities. The Chair’s role and responsibilities are listed below.
i. **Viva Chairs** should normally be members of senior University of Sussex Faculty with experience of internal and external doctoral examining.

ii. **Viva Chairs** can be from any disciplinary background, department or school, but they must not have previously acted as a named Supervisor of the candidate.

iii. **Viva Chairs** must not participate in academic discussion during a viva, or any deliberation regarding the quality of the candidate’s work, unless the internal examiner acts in the Chair’s role.

iv. The specific role of **Viva Chairs** in Remote **Vivas** is outlined below:

a. Arrange a test call with all parties separately ahead of the viva.

b. Collect and hold telephone numbers of all parties (and supervisors) for effective communication, in particular in case the viva has to be halted due to technical difficulties.

c. Confirm that all parties are comfortable with the arrangements and that the candidate and the examiners can see and hear each other clearly.

d. Verify the candidate’s identity, if this cannot be done by the Internal Examiner.

e. To consider the wellbeing of all parties, making clear the expectations of likely duration, that the candidate and examiners can request brief breaks if necessary, and ensuring that all parties have everything to hand that they require.

f. Preside over the viva proceedings in order to ensure the quality of the video/online format does not detract from the examiners’ ability to form a decision on the viva outcome, and that the candidate is not disadvantaged by the viva format.

g. If visual links are terminated, to ensure that clear signposting between the parties continues and the candidate is not disadvantaged.

h. Make the decision about whether the viva continues in the event of a serious or protracted breakdown in the connection.

i. Make notes of what was covered during the viva, and if the candidate experienced difficulties in responding, due to the technology/format being used. Any technological issues should be recorded via the Exam Joint Report.

### Review / Contacts / References

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