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 parties[1], 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) senior[2] 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.

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[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

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.

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2

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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3