

Use of Video Streaming for research degree transfer and final examinations Extraordinary arrangements in response to the Coronavirus situation

Video streaming may be carried out via any reliable video conferencing system (Microsoft Teams, etc.). Please note that Zoom has been removed from the list of acceptable tools for vivas, unless there are exceptional circumstances and the organisers have consulted IT to ensure effective security of the session due to issues with 'Zoom bombing' attacks.

University policy on arrangements for the transfer viva/final examination

The University's policy remains that wherever possible, transfer assessments and final vivas should be conducted using the established mechanisms, 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. In view of this, the exceptional regulations outlined below should be applied.

Transfer assessor / examiner unable to attend in person

Existing mechanisms are already in place to permit video streaming where an examiner/transfer assessor is unable to attend in person, and these are attached.

PGR unable to attend in person

Existing policy does not currently permit a PGR to complete their transfer assessment/final viva by video streaming. In view of the exceptional circumstances, the Graduate Board (with the Programmes and Quality Group and Examinations Group) will consider additional flexibility as needed.

Where a PGR is unable to travel and attend in person the viva may be postponed and rescheduled for a later date. Alternatively, a case may be made for the use of video streaming as outlined below.

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. Alternative arrangements will only be considered where Graduate Board can 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 the alternative arrangements proposed, or in the case of technical difficulties on the day.

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.

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.

Guidance for Supervisors and Directors of PGR Studies

- For the transfer viva, cases must be made to the Graduate School Office for consideration by the Director of PGR Studies. For the final viva, applications must be sent via the Research Office to Doctoral College Operations using the form provided.
- A transfer viva/oral examination conducted using video streaming should otherwise 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.
- 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. 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.
- 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.
- In the case of a final examination, the requirement for the appointment of an Independent Chair will normally remain in place. Any Graduate School facing difficulties should contact Doctoral College Operations for advice. An Independent Chair is not required for a transfer viva being held by video streaming.
- The Chair needs to be from a cognate discipline but does not necessarily need to be from within the PGR's parent School. The Chair plays no formal part in the examination, and is there only to ensure that regulations are followed and the PGR not disadvantaged by the exceptional arrangements. Consideration should be given to the appointment of a Chair from outside the immediate School to widen the potential pool of Chairs. Directors of PGR Studies/Heads of Schools will always be considered eligible to serve as Chair.

- All the other usual arrangements set out in the 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); no permanent recording must be taken.
- 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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UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Graduate Board Examinations Group

Policy on the use of video streaming for a final research degree oral examination

Introduction

The expectation is that the oral examination will take place in Leeds with all appointed examiners present in the room with the candidate. However in exceptional and unforeseen circumstances the Examinations Group may give consideration to the use of video streaming technology for the oral examination in emergency circumstances. This should only be considered in exceptional and unforeseen circumstances and should not be viewed as a routine alternative to a face to face oral examination.

Appointment of External Examiners from outside the UK

The Examinations Group welcomes the appointment of external examiners from outside of the UK. However the expectation is always that a face to face oral examination will take place in the UK with the external examiner in attendance. Distance/cost of travel by the external examiner is not a valid reason for the use of video streaming for an oral examination and should not form part of the case.

Requests to conduct an oral examination using video streaming

The Examinations Group may give consideration to cases for an oral examination to take place by means of video streaming in accordance with the requirements set out overleaf. Permission must be sought from the Examinations Group via the DoPGR as soon as events arise to allow time for alternative arrangements to be considered in the event that the request is not approved. Supervisors should use the application form provided.

Where unforeseen circumstances arise on the day of the oral examination, for example an examiner is unable to travel due to adverse weather conditions, illness etc. please contact the Thesis Examination Section of Doctoral College Operations (34003) if you wish to discuss the potential for the oral examination to proceed by means of video streaming. If an examiner is unable to travel to attend/travel for any reason, immediate consideration should be given to rescheduling the oral examination. Cases for the use of video streaming should only be made if exceptional reasons against postponing can be demonstrated.

The Examinations Group may give consideration to cases for an oral examination to take place by means of video streaming as follows:

All parties must give their consent to the arrangements (candidate, examiners, supervisors and Director of PGR Studies (DoPGRS)).

Video streaming should not be used in any cases where the supervisor or DoPGRS feels that a candidate may be placed at a disadvantage.

All parties must have access to and technical support for the appropriate technology (software and hardware) and are comfortable with its use.

At least one of the Examiners must be present in the same room as the candidate. The University requires the candidate to be in attendance for their oral examination. Video streaming cannot be used to avoid the need for a candidate to travel to Leeds for their oral examination. However in exceptional circumstances a case may be made for one of the examiners (Or, in very exceptional circumstances, another member of Leeds staff, independent of the supervision/examination to travel to the candidate's location to be present in the room with the candidate during the oral examination)

An Independent Chair must be appointed in any case where video streaming is to be used, to ensure that the examination is conducted fairly and thoroughly, in accordance with University regulations. The Chair must be a senior member of staff who has examined at least 3 times as internal examiner at Leeds, including at least once in the last 3 years. The role descriptor for an independent chair can be found at the end of this document.

An oral examination conducted using video streaming should otherwise be comparable to those used for 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. The School must ensure that the examiners and independent chair can speak privately to one another before and after the oral examination. There must be a room for the candidate to wait during these discussions.

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 before the candidate arrives.

Having to interrupt the oral examination to continually 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 oral examination the examination cannot go ahead using video streaming and scheduling a face to face oral examination must be considered. All parties must understand that in the event of any failure with the technology before or during the oral examination it will not be possible for the examination to continue it will be necessary for the oral examination to be rescheduled.

- If using video streaming technology, a 2-way connection only will be considered. A 3-way connection will not be permitted. This must include video facilities (telephone only will not be permitted). The University does not permit the oral examination to be conducted by means of telephone conference.
- If the software permits recording this must not be enabled (as normal procedures do not allow for recording of an oral examination).
- In the case of an external examiner from overseas, due consideration should be given to the time zones in which examiners are residing.
- Arrangements for video streaming must be made by the candidate's School and any financial costs must also be met by the School. The technical arrangements must be the responsibility of technical members of staff not involved in the examination as Examiners. Estate and Campus Support Services can assist with video conferencing facilities: http://www.leeds.ac.uk/estate_services/fss/videoconferencing.htm
- In the event that the technology fails on the day of the oral examination please inform DoPGRS (Thesis Examination Section 34003). Alternative arrangements to reschedule the oral examination must be made as soon as possible.



Doctoral College

Application to use video streaming for a final research degree oral examination

In exceptional and unforeseen circumstances the Examinations Group may give consideration to the use of video streaming technology for an oral examination. This should only be considered in exceptional and unforeseen circumstances and should not be viewed as a routine alternative to a face to face oral examination.

Candidate Name:

LTU ID Number

Request for the viva to be conducted using (Please specify the video streaming technology to be used)

- (1) Please provide the case in the box below. Requests should only be made in exceptional and unforeseen circumstances.

- (2) An independent chair must be appointed who must be a senior member of staff and an experienced examiner. Please confirm the name of the independent chair in the box below.

- (3) An independent chair must be appointed who must be a senior member of staff and an experienced examiner. Please confirm the name of the independent chair in the box below.

(4) Please specify the location of each party. At least one party must be located with the candidate.

Internal Examiner:		External Examiner:	
Candidate:		Independent Chair:	

(5) Signatures. I have read the full Video Streaming Policy. I understand that in the event of any failure with the technology before or during the oral examination it will not be possible for the oral examination to continue and a face to face oral examination must be scheduled.

(email confirmation is acceptance in place of a physical signature)

Candidate:		Supervisor:	
PGRT/HoS:		Internal Examiner	
Independent Chair		Approved for ExamsGroup:	

Use of an Independent Chair for research degree examinations

An Independent Chair might be appointed to ensure the best PGR experience if the team of examiners with the most appropriate subject knowledge have, for example, minimal UK examining experience or seniority. Examples of when a Chair will be appointed are as follows:

- Where the internal will be undertaking their first appointment as a research degree examiner.
- Where the internal examiner is still under probation and this will be their first appointment as internal examiner at Leeds.
- Where neither the external or internal examiner holds a senior academic position.
- Where there are a limited number of previous UK PGR examinations across the team.
- Where a second viva is required on a resubmission following referral.
- Where approval is given for the viva to be conducted via video streaming.
- Where exceptional or non-standard examination arrangements are agreed. Including on the first occasion on which an internal examiner is examining an alternative format thesis under the model for submission of an alternative format thesis including published material.

After the examination entry form has been reviewed by the Examinations Group, PGR&O will advise the Director of Postgraduate Research (DoPGR) in individual cases if an Independent Chair should be appointed. The nomination for the Independent Chair should be made by the DoPGR and send to the UoL via the Research Office (in consultation with the Supervisor(s)) for approval by the Examinations Group.

- The role of the Independent Chair is to ensure that the examination is conducted fairly and professionally, and in accordance with University regulations.

The Independent Chair is expected to:

Be a senior member of staff of Leeds from a cognate discipline but not necessarily from the same School, with significant and recent experience of research degree examinations at Leeds. The Chair is normally expected to have acted as internal examiner at Leeds a minimum of 3 times, including at least once in the last 3 years. Other Leeds examination experience could be taken into account when considering any nominations which fell below the published criteria. This might include acting as DoPGR or as a member of the Examinations Group.

- Advise the examiners on process and procedures before, during and after the examination.
- Ensure that the examination is conducted fairly and professionally, and in accordance with University regulations.
- Attend the meeting with the examiners prior to the oral examination, where preliminary reports are discussed.
- Be present for the duration of the oral examination and the post-viva discussions.
- Ensure that the examiners complete and return to the Research Office all the necessary paperwork.
- Complete a brief report after the oral examination to confirm s/he is satisfied that the examination was conducted in accordance with the University's regulations. A pro forma for this purpose will be provided and should be submitted with the final report of the examiners.

The Independent Chair is not expected to

- Read the thesis or be an expert in the subject.
- Complete a preliminary report.
- Play a role in academic examination of the PGR or question the PGR on the work being examined at the oral examination.
- Undertake the arrangements for organisation of the oral examination. This remains the responsibility of the Internal Examiner.