



# GUIDANCE ON THE OPERATION OF VIRTUAL OR HYBRID ORAL EXAMINATIONS

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# **GUIDANCE ON THE OPERATION OF VIRTUAL OR HYBRID ORAL EXAMINATIONS**

## **Overview**

1. This document provides guidance for University of Strathclyde staff and PGRs on conducting oral examinations incorporating video conferencing. This document should be read alongside the [General Academic Regulations: Postgraduate Research Degree Regulations](#).
2. Following the move to virtual oral examinations necessitated by the Covid-19 pandemic, a number of benefits were identified as a consequence of this change, most notably the widening of the pool of external examiners. Whilst in-person oral examinations remain the default format, hybrid or virtual exams will be permitted, however under no circumstances should the chosen format of the examination place the candidate at a disadvantage. It is essential that appropriate arrangements are made to maintain the integrity, confidentiality and validity of the examination process.
3. The term 'video conferencing' will be used for simplicity throughout this guidance document and refers to any generic technology suited to the purpose of holding secure, multi-user video with audio conferencing (Zoom, MS Teams, Skype for Business etc.).

## **Format of Oral Examinations**

4. Oral examinations may be conducted in one of three ways:
  - In person/on campus
  - Virtually
  - Hybrid
    - In such circumstances, the expectation would be that only the External Examiner and/or the candidate would attend remotely.
5. Candidates will normally only be permitted to attend their oral examination via video conferencing if their visa status has required them to return to their home country. The interim progress report or thesis submission documentation may be utilised as a means of agreeing the format of the oral exam and this should subsequently be recorded in the post-exam report, for audit purposes.

## **Procedures for Utilising Video Conferencing in Oral Examinations**

6. Candidates must agree that they will not use the video conference format for the exam as grounds for an appeal.
7. All oral examinations which occur by video conference must be chaired by the appointed convenor of the examination committee who should be present throughout the examination.
8. The convenor will be responsible for ensuring that all parties involved in the examination are informed, sufficiently well in advance, of the details of the video-conferencing exam arrangements and that their agreement has been obtained. An email record of agreement should be retained.
9. Any time differences must be considered to ensure that the candidate is not placed at a disadvantage during the examination (scheduling times outside local working hours should be avoided if at all possible).
10. The arrangements for video conferencing must be made by the convenor.

11. All remote oral examinations must be conducted using visual as well as audio interaction. It is not permissible for an exam to be conducted by audio means alone. The candidate's microphone should remain on throughout the duration of the examination; the convener and examiners may wish to mute their microphones when not required.
12. A 'lobby' or 'waiting room' should be created in which the student may be requested to wait, when required.
13. Any additional written materials or visual aids required of the candidate by the examiners must be made available in advance of the examination whenever possible. Where the candidate wishes, or is asked by an examiner, to provide a written or illustrated response to a question during the examination, this may be presented either electronically (using a tablet or the whiteboard function on the video conferencing software) or manually (by sketching on paper and holding the sheet up to the camera).
14. All parties must be visible during the examination.
15. The candidate should be alone during the examination, the positioning of the candidate and angle of the camera should be such that the examiners are satisfied the candidate is alone and will not be disturbed.

### **Before the Examination**

16. All the equipment and video conferencing software to be utilised during the exam should be fully tested and it is essential that at least one party in each location is capable of troubleshooting any potential problems.
17. A contingency plan in the event of a technical failure must be agreed. It is advised that phone numbers are provided should a technical malfunction arise during the examination, but the oral exam should only proceed when acceptable video and audio links are re-established.
18. The candidate should be advised to make themselves familiar with the room layout and the equipment required for the video conference examination.
19. Normal procedures regarding the submission of pre-examination reports should be followed.
20. On the appointment of the external examiner, appropriate Right to Work checks should be undertaken in line with current [guidelines](#).
21. The convenor, internal and external examiner(s) should consult privately with each other on the conduct of the examination; how the pre-exam discussion will be conducted; the form and sequence of questions, who should take the lead at various stages of the exam; what graphics and documentation viewing facilities, etc might be required.
22. The room layout and video camera positioning should ensure that all parties, including the candidate, are visible throughout the oral examination.
23. If the candidate is undertaking the exam remotely, the convenor must ensure that appropriate student welfare arrangements are in place to support them, particularly following an unsuccessful outcome.

## **During the Examination**

24. The content and conduct of the video conference examination should be the same as that for a face-to-face oral examination.
25. The candidate's identity must be verified at the start of the examination by a staff member of the candidate's department (usually the internal examiner).
26. The examination must not be recorded.
27. If communication is broken during the examination and a connection cannot be re-established, the exam must be terminated and rescheduled.
28. Any rescheduled examination should take place within one month of the original exam.
29. If the need to reschedule the examination arises, no re-assessment of material covered in the original exam should occur.
30. In the event that a communication link is broken towards the end of an examination, and examiners are agreed that further assessment would not change a positive outcome decision, the exam may be concluded and the candidate notified of the examiners' joint recommendation. This should be detailed in the examiners' report and account should be made of any content that was potentially missed after the break in communication.
31. If a positive outcome is not assured, the examination should be rescheduled and fully concluded.

## **Following the Examination**

32. At the close of the examination of the candidate, the convenor should invite the candidate to physically leave the room or, if attending remotely, be moved to the lobby/waiting room whilst the examiners hold a private discussion on the examination outcome. It is advised that the candidate be informed of the approximate time that this discussion will take and when to be on hand to re-join the committee to be informed of the examiners' decision. It is important that the candidate is aware in advance that this is part of the normal procedure.
33. Candidates should be informed of the outcome of their oral examination as soon as possible and the procedures for outcomes and corrections should be explained to the candidate.
34. Outcomes are the same as those for face-to-face oral examinations and the examiners are required to file a joint report. In the case of minor corrections, these should be cited in the joint post-viva report and brought to the attention of the candidate by the internal examiner.
35. Internal members of the examination panel should be prepared to offer further counsel once the examination has ended. It is important to keep in mind that the candidate will require support in the event of an undesirable outcome, and therefore sufficient support should be offered by the examination team and supervisors. It is sensible for candidates to have someone available to support them once the exam has concluded. When required, the candidate should be provided with, or directed towards, appropriate student welfare arrangements.