



Video conferencing guidelines for research degree vivas

Overview

Information about the examination process for [students](#) and [supervisors](#) is available on the BGRS website. The expectation is that the viva examination will take place at Birkbeck with all appointed examiners present in the room with the candidate. The term 'video conferencing' is used throughout this guidance to refer to video conferencing, Skype or other appropriate technology.

Participation in an oral examination by video conferencing is not normally permitted, but if there are extenuating circumstances for an examiner to act in this way, supervisors may make a request to the BGRS in the first instance.

Use of video conferencing

Video conferencing should not be viewed as a routine alternative to a face to face viva. However, circumstances occasionally arise where the ability of an examiner to attend a viva are significantly constrained. Such situations might include travel disruption, restricted mobility or other health-related reasons. The option of using video conferencing may sometimes be the only feasible route to ensure that the thesis is examined by viva in a timely fashion.

Approval process

All requests will be considered on a case-by-case basis by the RSSC. The supervisor should contact the BGRS in the first instance and explain why video conferencing is thought to be necessary.

- It must be ensured that video conferencing is the most appropriate course of action, that the interests of the candidate are taken fully into account and that the integrity, confidentiality and validity of the examination process is maintained.
- The supervisor must have evidence of agreement to use video conferencing by the candidate and all the examiners and have discussed the benefits and potential difficulties with them before seeking approval.
- The decision about whether to allow video conferencing will be made by RSSC who are responsible for considering and approving nomination of examiners. No arrangements for a remote viva should be made until the decision is confirmed.
- RSSC may require presence of an independent chair.

Supervisor responsibilities for the viva

Once permission for a remote viva has been given the supervisor is responsible for making arrangements.

- We advise that supervisors allow as much time as possible to set up a remote Viva – in order to allow for the booking of suitable equipment and rooms.
- At least two parties from the candidate and examiners must be in the same location, ideally the candidate and the internal examiner, along with the Independent Chair if required.
- Any time differences between the two locations must be taken into account to ensure the candidate is not disadvantaged by an examination taking place at an inappropriate time and bearing in mind the availability of the video conferencing facilities at each end.

- The supervisor must ensure that all parties have access to the appropriate technology and a reliable connection for the duration of the viva.
- In order to enable adequate sound and video use of a webcam, external microphone or speaker should be considered and arranged in advance.
- A thorough testing of the connection for sound and vision must be conducted before the viva. If there are any doubts about the connection and whether it will last the duration of the viva, the viva should not go ahead. There must be prior agreement between all parties about how to proceed in the case of unexpected technical failure during the viva. This should include arrangements for reconvening the examination if needed.
- Remote vivas must be held in a Birkbeck location where the supervisor is confident that connection and IT support will be available for the duration of the viva.

Examiner responsibilities

Examiners should prepare for the viva having read BGRS Guidance on the conduct of oral examinations but if using video conferencing should note the following additional requirements.

- The internal and external examiners must consult privately with each other in advance of the viva on the conduct of the examination including: how the pre-viva discussion will be conducted; the form and sequence of questions; who should take the lead at various stages of the viva; what graphics, and document viewing facilities, etc might be required. These issues should be addressed in the examiner preliminary reports.
- On conclusion of the viva all participants should be asked to confirm that the holding of the examination by video-conference has had no substantive bearing on the examination process.
- Examiners are be invited to comment on the conduct of the viva voce examination using the standard examiner's report form and should refer explicitly to the use of video conferencing.
- In the event of any failure with the technology during the viva, or other concerns regarding the conduct of the viva by video conference, it is the responsibility of the Independent Chair to suspend the examination and to decide whether it is possible for the examination to continue or whether the viva should be rescheduled. A post-viva report should be made by the Independent Chair at the end of the examination, and should comment on the technical performance of the facilities used in both locations.
- Having agreed to a viva voce examination involving video conferencing the candidate will not be permitted to use this as grounds for appeal, unless the circumstances of technical failure or other unforeseen eventualities beyond the control of the examiners were deemed to have adversely affected the candidate's performance.