Policy for Use of Video Conferencing for Viva Voce Examination

Overview
Video conferencing may only be used in viva voce examinations where the candidate is unable to travel to the University due to exceptional circumstances, such as prohibitively high costs, imposed travel restrictions beyond the candidate’s control, illness or restricted mobility; or where the external examiner is unable to travel to the University of Leicester and it would be to the distinct disadvantage of the student for the examination to be rescheduled or an alternative external examiner sought. Where examination by video conference is requested, it must be the shared opinion of the student, supervisor and examiners that video conferencing is the only viable medium for conducting the examination and that examination in person is not possible or would cause undue hardship to the student.

This policy should be read alongside the relevant Senate regulations governing the examination of research students (Senate Regulations 9.210-252).

Reasons for conducting an examination by video conference:
- Physical impairment that prevents travel to the University.
- Travel restrictions beyond the control of the candidate or external examiner.
- Illness or restricted mobility that would cause unnecessary hardship to the candidate or external examiner to attend examination at the University.
- Prohibitively high cost of travel.
  *This list is not exhaustive, and serves only as acceptable examples for seeking examination by video conference.

Procedures for using video conferencing in viva voce examinations:
- Advice should first be sought from the Doctoral College Office.
- All requests to hold a viva voce examination by Skype are subject to the approval of the Doctoral College Director.
- Candidates must agree that they will not use the video conference format for the viva as grounds for an appeal.
- Video conferencing may be used only with the written agreement of the candidate, both examiners, and the Doctoral College Director. The consent of all involved must be obtained prior to the viva voce examination. The request to hold the viva voce examination via video conference must be made as soon as possible after submission of the thesis, and should normally be requested alongside the Nomination of Examiners Form.
- All viva voce examinations which occur by video conference must have a chair.
- It is not possible to conduct the viva using video conference to more than two locations. The student must not sit physically with the external examiner and video conference with the internal examiner.
- The internal examiner is responsible for ensuring that all parties involved in the examination are informed, sufficiently well in advance, of the details of the video-conferencing examination arrangements.
• Any time differences must be taken into account to ensure that the candidate is not at a disadvantage during the examination because of it being held at an inappropriate time (starting times outside 8am-8pm local time to candidate should always be avoided).
• It is normally expected that the remote location for video conferencing is within an academic institution or similar organisation – under exceptional circumstances examination by video-conferencing from a candidate’s or external examiner’s home may be approved.
• The arrangements for video-conferencing must be made by the internal examiner and the financial costs must be met by the candidate’s school or department.
• Any additional written materials or visual aids must be available in hard copy, and these must be provided to the examiners in advance of the examination.
• Requests to hold the viva voce examination by video conference should specify the reason(s) for the request and should provide assurance that the above mentioned procedures will be followed.

Procedures before examination:

• A contingency plan in the event of a technical failure must be agreed beforehand.
• The candidate should be required to make themselves adequately familiar with the room and equipment required for the video conference examination.
• All parties must be visible during the examination, and the candidate must be visible at all times during the examination.
• Where the candidate is the remote party, the candidate should normally be alone during the examination, apart from any technical staff involved in the use of video-conferencing facilities. The video of the candidate should be such that the examiners are satisfied the candidate is alone and will not be disturbed.
• All remote viva examinations must be conducted using visual as well as audio interaction. It is not possible for a viva examination to be conducted with audio only or by phone.
• It is advised that all the equipment and conferencing software is tested in advance and it is essential that at least one party in either location is knowledgeable about the software and equipment and capable of troubleshooting any potential problems.
  - If participating from a video conference suite, this must be a system that connects over IP with a minimum connection speed of 1Mbps.
  - If participating from a home or office, PCs or laptops should have the following minimum requirements: Windows XP Service Pack 2 or higher, Dual-core processor or higher, 2GB RAM or higher and a minimum connection speed of 1Mbps via a network connection. A Webcam and Headset with microphone should also be used as a video and audio connection are both mandatory.
• It is advisable to test all the equipment beforehand and to have a practice run for connecting through skype or other video conferencing software.

Procedures during the examination:

• The content and conduct of the video conference examination should be the same as a normal viva voce examination.
• The candidate’s identity must be verified at the start of the oral examination by a staff member of the candidate’s department (usually the internal examiner).
• The examination must not be recorded.
- If communication is broken during the examination and a connection cannot be re-established, examination must be terminated and rescheduled.
- Any rescheduled examination should take place within one month of the original viva.
- If communication is broken during the examination and a connection cannot be re-established, the examiners must decide how much of the viva voce examination was completed at the point the connection was lost and what, therefore, should be covered in the re-scheduled viva examination.
- If communication is broken towards the end of an examination, and examiners can jointly agree that further examination would not change their decision, the viva may be concluded and the candidate notified of the examiners’ joint recommendation. This should be detailed in the Examiner’s report and account should be made of any content that was potentially missed after the break in communication.

**Procedures after examination**

- Examiners 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 locally to support them after the viva.
- Examiners should close or mute the audio and visual connection whilst they discuss the examination outcomes and reach their joint decision. It is advised that the candidate should be informed of the approximate time that this discussion will take and when to be on hand to discuss the examiners’ decision. Where the external examiner is the remote party, the student should be asked to leave the room.
- Candidates should be informed of the outcome of their viva voce examination as soon as possible and the procedures for outcomes and corrections should be explained to the candidate.
- Outcomes are the same as normal viva examinations and the examiners are required to file a joint report. In the case of minor corrections, the candidate should be informed of these corrections directly by the internal examiner.
- The use of a video conference examination is not sufficient grounds for an appeal.