



Procedures for conducting a *viva voce* using videoconferencing

DCU University's *Academic Regulations for Postgraduate Degrees by Research and Thesis* allow for the use of videoconferencing facilities to conduct a *viva voce*.

“Section 8.4.3 Where absolutely necessary, consideration may be given to using the University's videoconferencing facilities for the *viva voce* examination. The standard procedures for conducting a *viva voce* using videoconferencing must be followed.”

1. Context in which videoconferencing may be considered

The *viva voce* is a formal part of the assessment for a doctorate; the culmination of years of work on the part of the candidate. It requires detailed discussion of the thesis text, a high degree of direct engagement between candidate and examiners and oftentimes use of illustrations, sketches and facial expression to help convey meaning and emphasis. In all cases arrangements must respect the significance of the event, and facilitate the level of communication required.

1.1 Consideration may be given, in certain limited circumstances, to conducting *viva voce* examinations using the University's videoconferencing facilities.

1.2 These circumstances will normally pertain to the external examiner, not the candidate, i.e. will normally involve inability on the part of the external examiner to be physically present. For example, an unforeseen situation may arise which prevents him or her from travelling. The distance to DCU from the examiner's home location is not, in itself, justification for use of videoconferencing facilities, and examiner appointments are made based on an assumption that the nominee plans to come to DCU for the oral exam.

1.3 Provided the relevant Head of School (or nominee) is satisfied that the circumstances relate to the external examiner and, in line with the regulations, justify the use of videoconferencing, it will not be necessary to seek specific approval for its use from the Graduate Research Studies Board (GRSB). The relevant School must, however, obtain a signed assurance from the candidate that he or she is willing to have videoconferencing used for this part of the examination process. The candidate has the right to veto the use of videoconferencing.

1.4 Only in the most exceptional circumstances should consideration be given to using videoconferencing on the grounds that the candidate is in a remote location. Such circumstances must, in all instances, be documented and, together with an indication that the internal and external examiners are in agreement, be submitted for approval to the Graduate Research

Studies Board (GRSB). If the request is approved, the relevant School must obtain a signed assurance from the candidate that the technical and logistical arrangements in the remote location will be such as to ensure compliance with the relevant sections of the University's Academic Regulations for Postgraduate Degrees by Research and Thesis (these are the sections relating to Assessment Procedures and Regulations for Examiners for Master's and PhD Degrees by Research).

1.5 Where videoconferencing is being contemplated, consideration should be given to the following:

- the fact that it involves detailed logistical and technical preparation on the part of both staff of the University and staff at the remote location
- the fact that a personal visit by an external examiner may facilitate more in-depth interaction with both the candidate and the staff members present as well as providing opportunities for networking and visiting research facilities
- experience to date has indicated that some candidates may feel increased anxiety as a result of videoconferencing, notwithstanding their willingness to engage with it; conversely, its use has some advantages in that discussions can be facilitated by the use of different camera angles, and detailed scrutiny of diagrams, etc. is possible by means of a laptop.

2. Technical issues

It is of the utmost importance that robust, reliable technology is used for the examination. Facilities such as Skype or equivalent are not sufficient for this purpose and should not be used.

2.1 In all cases in which videoconferencing is being contemplated, contact must be made at the earliest possible stage with the Information Systems and Services Department. In no circumstances should this contact be initiated less than seven working days before the examination date.

2.2 Information Systems and Services must be informed of the name and contact details of the external examiner(s) and the name and contact details of the technician at the remote location. It should be borne in mind that, in some cases, the examiner(s) and the technician will be operating from different campuses (or other locations) and will need time to liaise with each other. It is the responsibility of the principal supervisor to ensure permission has been given at the remote location for access to facilities and technical support.

2.3 Videoconferencing can be organised only where the facilities at the remote location are at least of equal standard to those available at DCU. ISS recommend the use of a Polycom unit to eliminate potential compatibility issues. In no circumstances can videoconferencing take place if the test call (see 3.7 below) is unsatisfactory.

2.4 Where time-zone differences raise the possibility that an examination may have to take place outside standard working hours, the matter must be discussed with Information Systems and Services at the earliest opportunity. ISS normal operating hours are: Irish time 8:30 to 17:30.

2.5 Information Systems and Services will normally ensure that technical support is available on an on-call basis for the period of the examination. and will liaise with the technician in the remote location to agree a similar level of support there.

2.6 The videoconferencing facilities should be booked for as long as it is reasonably estimated the examination will take (including deliberation time and the recall of the candidate). The booking facility for the videoconferencing facilities in INVENT (Main Boardroom, top floor) can be accessed at: <http://equipment.dcu.ie/wrb/login.aspx> using a DCU Username and Password. Other Facilities include the following, and should be booked and supported locally in the manner described for ISS.

<i>ISS Offices</i>	<i>Meeting Room</i>
<i>CNGL</i>	<i>Board Room L201</i>
<i>RINCE</i>	<i>S209</i>
<i>School of Computing</i>	<i>L241</i>

2.7 Information Systems and Services will coordinate the initiation of a test call from the remote location before the examination day to ensure that the facilities are working properly.

2.8 Relevant staff members, and the candidate in particular, should be encouraged to visit the videoconferencing facilities in advance of the examination to familiarise themselves with them and ask any questions they may have. It is most important that all requirements be specified to Information Systems and Services in as much detail as possible. Information on how to use the videoconferencing facilities can be found here: <http://www.dcu.ie/iss/av/howvidconfrroom.shtml>.

2.9 The candidate should be advised of the availability of laptop connectivity for use with a laptop on which diagrams, equations, etc. may be drawn where appropriate. It is recommended that this configuration is tested, in conjunction with ISS, or the support at the remote location, before the scheduled session.

2.10 If it is the candidate who is in the remote location, it is recommended that, during the period in which the examiners deliberate before calling him or her back in, the facilities be set to 'mute' rather than switched off. This is to avoid any possible problems in re-establishing the link. It is also recommended that the screen/sound be switched off so that the candidate cannot see/hear the examiners while they are deliberating. A mute button can be found on the VC remote control unit.

2.11 One of the staff members who will be present at the examination should take overall responsibility for liaising with the candidate, the others staff members who are due to be present and Information Systems and Services about the videoconferencing arrangements.

2.12 Either this staff member, or a designated other staff member, should take responsibility for operating equipment at a basic level while the examination is in progress (and the staff member from Information Systems and Services is not actually present in the room). This work involves tasks such as adjusting the camera settings, providing instruction on how to operate the equipment and (if it is the candidate who is in the remote location) setting the facilities to 'mute' during the deliberation period.

2.13 It is rare for the facilities to malfunction while in use. However, the possibility that they might e.g. network failure, and that the examination might therefore have to be rescheduled so as to allow the candidate to do full justice to his/her work, should be mentioned in advance to all concerned.

2.14 The following may be noted:

- if there are two external examiners, in different locations, it may be possible for all of the participants to dial into the session. If this is a requirement it should be raised with Information Systems and Services well in advance
- it will be possible to see both the external examiner and the contents displayed on the connected laptop on the screen at the same time.

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