Procedures for conducting a *viva voce online or* using videoconferencing facilities

Dublin City University's Position

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* online or using videoconferencing must be followed."

The *viva voce* is a formal part of the assessment for a doctorate, based on 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 etc., to help convey meaning and emphasis. In all cases arrangements must respect the significance of the event and facilitate the level of communication required.

Normally the *viva voce* examination for doctoral candidates (and other research degree candidates, where applicable), will take place at on the Dublin City University campus. However, under exceptional circumstances, a *viva voce* may be conducted virtually.

1.   Context in which a virtual *viva voce* examination may be considered

1.1 Consideration may be given, in certain limited circumstances, to conducting *viva voce* examinations using the University's online/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 the external examiner from travelling. The distance to DCU from the examiner's home location is not, in itself, a justification for use of online/videoconferencing facilities, and examiner appointments are made based on an assumption that the nominee plans to come to DCU for the oral examination, in line with providing the best experience for the candidate.

1.3 The Independent Chairperson of the Examination panel should ensure that all of the following guidelines are in place before, during and after a virtual *viva voce*.

1.4 Provided the relevant Head of School (or nominee) is satisfied that the circumstances relate to the external examiner and, in line with the regulations, justifying the use of online/videoconferencing, it will not be necessary to seek specific approval for its use from the Graduate Research Studies Board (GRSB). The relevant School through the Independent Chairperson must, however, obtain a signed assurance from the candidate of their willingness to have videoconferencing used for this part of the examination process. The candidate has the right to veto the use of videoconferencing and should do so through the Independent Chairperson. Please refer to the Addendum at the end of this procedure for additional information.

1.5 Only in exceptional circumstances should consideration be given to using online/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, along with the Head of School (or their nominee) are in agreement, be submitted by the Independent Chairperson for approval to the Graduate Research Studies Board (GRSB) well in advance of the expected *viva voce* examination date, using the following Registry Link. If the request is approved by GRSB, 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 (i.e., sections relating to Assessment Procedures and Regulations for Examiners for Master's and PhD Degrees by Research). Please refer to the Addendum at the end of this procedure for additional information.

1.6 Where online/videoconferencing is being contemplated, consideration should be given to the following:
- The use of a virtual *viva voce* cannot be used as grounds for appeal
- The fact that a virtual *viva voce* involves detailed logistical and technical preparation on the part of both staff of the University and staff (or candidate) 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
- The fact that experience to date has indicated that some candidates can 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.
- If a preliminary test of the IT platform results in communication, connection etc. issues, then the *viva voce* examination must be re-scheduled and held on campus.
- Normally, if communication is broken during the *viva voce* and a connection cannot be re-established, the examination must be terminated and re-scheduled on campus.
- Time differences must be considered to ensure that the candidate is not disadvantaged.

- The fact that a *viva voce* examination cannot be recorded and that no *viva voce* is to be conducted by audio only or over a phone.
- The Examiners' reports and Independent Chairpersons report must include a statement that the *viva voce* was conducted virtually.

2.   Technical issues

It is of the utmost importance that robust, reliable technology is used during a *viva voce* examination. Zoom is the recommended online platform to be used, which is supported by DCU Information Systems and Services Department (ISS). Skype or equivalent are not sufficient for this purpose and should not be used.

In each location, measures should be taken so that the appropriate conditions are in place to ensure minimal disruption, security and integrity of the examination. A virtual private network (VPN) may be required where the intellectual property of the thesis needs to be protected.

Using Zoom:

Where an online platform like Zoom is chosen, then extra support from DCU Information Systems and Services Department (ISS) may not be required. A test of the virtual platform must be conducted prior to the commencement of the *viva voce*.

2.1   If the candidate is been examined virtually, that 'waiting room'/'mute' 'screen/sound' be switched off so that the candidate cannot see/hear the examiners etc. are used during the period in which the examiners deliberate before or after the *viva voce* examination. This is to avoid any possible problems of losing a link with the candidate or trying to re-establishing the link.

2.2   Either the Independent Chairperson, or a designated other staff member, should take responsibility for operating Zoom at a basic level while the examination is in progress and contact Information Systems and Services if issues arise. This work involves tasks such as setting up the Zoom meeting, adjusting the camera settings, providing instruction on how to operate such platforms, setting the facilities to move the candidate/supervisors to a 'waiting room' or 'mute' during the deliberation period.

2.3   In the rare instance where Zoom malfunction while in use or communication issues arise e.g. network failure or broadband issues, the examination may therefore have to be rescheduled so as to allow the candidate to do full justice to their work, and therefore should be mentioned by the Independent Chairperson in advance to all concerned.

2.4   The following when using Zoom may be noted:

- If there are two external examiners, in different locations and facilities other than Zoom are been used, 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 and follow the next section "Using Videoconferencing Facilities/Other IT".

- 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.

Using Videoconferencing Facilities/Other IT:

However, where further IT equipment may also be required such as videoconferencing facilities, extra monitors, document readers, cameras etc. depending on the needs of the candidate, research and the examination itself - such considerations should be taken into account in consultation with DCU Information Systems and Services Department (ISS) support, along with the pre-testing of such before conducting the examination. In such cases, steps 2.5 to 2.18 should be followed:

2.5   Relevant staff members (particularly the Independent Chairperson), and the candidate in particular, should be encouraged to become aware of the videoconferencing facilities available in advance of the examination making contact at the earliest possible stage with ISS. Information regarding the available videoconferencing facilities can be found here: https://www.dcu.ie/iss/video-conferencing-2

2.6   In all cases in which videoconferencing is being contemplated, contact must be made at the earliest possible stage with ISS. In no circumstances should this contact be initiated less than seven working days before the *viva voce* examination date.

2.7   ISS 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 Independent Chairperson to ensure permission has been given at the remote location for access to facilities and technical support.

2.8   Videoconferencing can be organised only where the facilities at the remote location are at least of equal standard to those available at DCU. In no circumstances can videoconferencing take place if the test call is unsatisfactory.

2.9   Where time-zone differences raise the possibility that an examination may have to take place outside standard working hours, and ISS are required to provide support, then the matter must be discussed with ISS at the earliest opportunity. Contact with ISS regarding normal operating hours should be made in such cases.

2.10 Where applicable, ISS 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.

2.11 The room been used for videoconferencing should be booked for as long as it is reasonably estimated the examination will take (including deliberation time and the recall of the candidate) and have the necessary equipment in place prior to the commencement of the examination.

2.12 Where required ISS will support the Independent Chairperson and/or coordinate the initiation of a test call from the remote location before the examination day to ensure that the facilities are working properly.

2.13 The candidate should be advised by the Independent Chairperson, of the availability of laptop connectivity equipment (e.g. extra monitors, document readers, cameras etc.) for use with a laptop on which diagrams, equations, etc. may be drawn where appropriate. It is recommended that this configuration is tested, if necessary in conjunction with ISS, or the support at the remote location, before the scheduled examination.

2.14 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 the candidate back in, the candidate is moved to a 'waiting room' when using Zoom by the Independent Chairperson. Alternatively, if other virtual platforms are been used, the facilities are set to 'mute' rather than switched off (e.g. a mute button on a videoconferencing remote control unit), 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.

2.15 The Independent Chairperson 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 ISS about such videoconferencing/other IT arrangements.

2.16 Either the Independent Chairperson, or a designated other staff member, should take responsibility for operating equipment at a basic level while the examination is in progress and contact Information Systems and Services if issues arise. This work involves tasks such as setting up the Zoom/videoconferencing meeting, adjusting the camera settings, providing instruction on how to operate any additional equipment and (if it is the candidate who is in the remote location) setting the facilities to move the candidate/supervisors to a 'waiting room' or 'mute' during the deliberation period.

2.17 In the rare instance where the facilities malfunction while in use or communication issues arise e.g. network failure or broadband issues, the examination may therefore have to be rescheduled so as to allow the candidate to do full justice to their work, and therefore should be mentioned in advance to all concerned.

2.18 The following again when using Videoconferencing/Other IT equipment may be noted:

- If there are two external examiners, in different locations and facilities other than Zoom are been used, 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.

ADDENDUM- Additional Information to Provide Clarity of Approach:

General Differences:

	In-Person	Hybrid	Fully Online
Description	The candidate and all members of the examination panel attend in-person on DCU campus.	The External Examiner(s) attends the examination remotely. The candidate and all other members of the examination panel attend in-person on DCU campus.	The candidate and all members of the examination panel attend remotely.
Organised under:	Standard Practice	Specific Circumstances	Exceptional Circumstances
Circumstances	The candidate and all members of the examination panel are able to attend in-person on DCU campus.	The External Examiner(s) is unable to attend the examination in-person on DCU campus.	The candidate is unable to attend the examination in-person on DCU campus due to unforeseen and unavoidable personal reasons.
Request/Agreement /Approval	None required, follow normal standard DCU process and procedures	Request and Reasons by the External Examiner(s). Agreement by Candidate. Approval by Head of School	Request and Reasons by Candidate. Agreement by Examiners and Head of School. Approval by GRSB

Roles and Responsibilities:

	In-Person	Hybrid	Fully Online
Independent Chairperson	Follow normal standard DCU process and procedures according to the regulations	Be aware of standard procedures for conducting a *viva voce* online or using videoconferencing and follow such. Obtaining acceptance from the Candidate and Obtaining approval from the relevant Head of School to conduct a hybrid *viva voce* examination. Managing the In-person as per normal standard DCU process and procedures according to the regulations Managing the online/video call, which includes: • Scheduling the meeting • Inviting the External Examiner(s) • Resolving access, audio and sound issues, with the support of ISS where necessary The Independent Chairperson must also ensure the location of the examination has suitable facilities to support the video call and allow for the full participation of the External Examiner(s).	Be aware of standard procedures for conducting a *viva voce* online or using videoconferencing and follow such. Obtaining the request and reasons from the Candidate. Obtaining the agreement from the Examiners and the relevant Head of School to conduct a fully online *viva voce* examination. Seek approval from GRSB to conduct a fully online *viva voce* examination, using Registry's online request form. Managing the online/video call, which includes: • Scheduling the meeting • Inviting the candidate and all members of the examination panel • Resolving access, audio and sound issues, with the support of ISS where necessary The Independent Chairperson must also ensure the location of the examination has suitable facilities to support the video call and allow for the full participation of the External Examiner(s).
Candidate	No additional responsibilities other than following normal standard DCU process and procedures according to the regulations	Accept that External Examiner(s) will be online or using videoconferencing. Be aware of standard procedures for conducting a *viva voce* online or using videoconferencing.	Provide Request and Reasons for fully Online examination to the Independent Chairperson. Be aware of standard procedures for conducting a

		Be aware of the online/videoconferencing facilities available in advance of the examination	*viva voce* online or using videoconferencing. Be aware of the online/videoconferencing facilities available in advance of the examination Ensuring access to the following to allow for full participation in the examination: • Necessary hardware, i.e. laptop, microphone, camera, etc., and software (Zoom is the approved platform for video calls and is supported by ISS). • Reliable broadband connection capable of supporting video calls. • Suitable private location. The Candidate must also ensure that there will be no interruptions for the duration of the *viva voce* examination.
External Examiner(s)	No additional responsibilities other than following normal standard DCU process and procedures according to the regulations	Provide Request and Reasons for Hybrid examination to the Independent Chairperson. Be aware of standard procedures for conducting a *viva voce* online or using videoconferencing. Be aware of the online/videoconferencing facilities available in advance of the examination. Ensuring access to the following to allow for full participation in the examination:	Accept Request by Candidate that the examination will be online or using videoconferencing. Be aware of standard procedures for conducting a *viva voce* online or using videoconferencing. Be aware of the online/videoconferencing facilities available in advance of the examination. Ensuring access to the following to allow for full participation in the examination:

		• Necessary hardware, i.e. laptop, microphone, camera, etc., and software (Zoom is the approved platform for video calls and is supported by ISS). • Reliable broadband connection capable of supporting video calls. • Suitable private location. The External Examiner(s) must also ensure that there will be no interruptions for the duration of the *viva voce* examination.	• Necessary hardware, i.e. laptop, microphone, camera, etc., and software (Zoom is the approved platform for video calls and is supported by ISS). • Reliable broadband connection capable of supporting video calls. • Suitable private location. The External Examiner(s) must also ensure that there will be no interruptions for the duration of the *viva voce* examination.
Internal Examiner	No additional responsibilities other than following normal standard DCU process and procedures according to the regulations	No additional responsibilities other than following normal standard DCU process and procedures according to the regulations Be aware of standard procedures for conducting a *viva voce* online or using videoconferencing. Be aware of the online/videoconferencing facilities available in advance of the examination	Accept Request by Candidate that the examination will be online or using videoconferencing. Be aware of standard procedures for conducting a *viva voce* online or using videoconferencing. Be aware of the online/videoconferencing facilities available in advance of the examination Ensuring access to the following to allow for full participation in the examination: • Necessary hardware, i.e. laptop, microphone, camera, etc., and software (Zoom is the approved platform for video calls and is supported by ISS). • Reliable broadband connection capable of supporting video calls. • Suitable private location.

			The External Examiner(s) must also ensure that there will be no interruptions for the duration of the *viva voce* examination.
Principal Supervisor	No additional responsibilities other than following normal standard DCU process and procedures according to the regulations	Be aware of standard procedures for conducting a *viva voce* online or using videoconferencing.	Be aware of standard procedures for conducting a *viva voce* online or using videoconferencing.
Head of School	No additional responsibilities other than following normal standard DCU process and procedures according to the regulations	Approve External Examiner(s) will be conducting a hybrid based on reasons given. Be aware of standard procedures for conducting a *viva voce* online or using videoconferencing.	Agree to the Request by Candidate that the examination will be online or using videoconferencing for reasons given. that the will be conducting a hybrid based on reasons given. Be aware of standard procedures for conducting a *viva voce* online or using videoconferencing.

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End.