

**Addendum to the Liverpool Hope University Code of Practice for Postgraduate Research Students (those studying at Hope and Partners)**

**Guidance for Conducting Viva Voce Examinations Remotely during COVID-19**

1. **Introduction**

This guidance outlines the University’s position on managing candidate and examiner attendance and participation in postgraduate research degree programme oral examinations (vivas).

As far as it is reasonable to do so vivas will proceed as planned utilising video conference technology via an appropriate platform such as Zoom, or Microsoft Teams.

1. **Arranging a VIva**

When arranging the Viva, the appropriate administrator will ensure that:

1. All parties (candidate, external examiner, internal examiner) must confirm that they agree to the viva being conducted remotely using video conference and, having done so, agree the most suitable platform to use together with a suitable date and time.
2. If the candidate would prefer to delay the examination until a physical meeting is possible, this should be allowed but will be reviewed on a monthly basis. However, any delay will not normally be delayed beyond six months. It should be noted that any delay between the submission of the thesis and the viva arising from this decision will not in itself be grounds for appeal.
3. The candidate must agree that if they proceed with the viva being conducted via video conference then this cannot by itself be used as grounds for a later appeal.
4. Some video conferencing software has the facility to record meetings. The University position is that Viva examinations must not normally be recorded. Should a student wish to have the meeting recorded by exception, for example due to specific needs within a Learning Support Plan, this request must be made on the Intention to Submit Form. A decision will be made by the University in advance of the Viva and notified to the student. In the exceptional cases where recording permission is granted in principle, this will in any case be subject to all participants in the Viva expressly agreeing to such recording taking place. Where a recording is made, the Independent Chair as host of the online meeting will record it. A copy will be given to all participants within 48 hours of the meeting taking place. The University will retain a copy of the recording in line with its Data Retention Policies which are available on request.
5. The candidate must be provided with a copy of this guidance and the UKCGE Guide to Conducting Vivas Online.
6. **Technology Failure**

To minimise the risk of technological issues arising all parties should access the agreed platform in advance of the viva to ensure that they are comfortable with operating the technology. If there are any issues, these should be notified as soon as possible to the relevant administrator in order that a solution can be identified.

If there is a failure in the connection on the day of the viva, in the first instance attempts should be made to reconnect. If there is a serious or protracted breakdown in the connection or quality of the connection lasting more than 20 minutes, then the viva should be halted. If it is clear before expiry of the 20-minute period that reconnection cannot be made or is unlikely then the viva should be halted.

If the viva has to be halted due to a breakdown in the connection or quality of the connection, the Independent Chair should consult with the examiners via an alternative method. The examiners should decide whether there is a need to reconvene at another date or whether sufficient discussion had taken place by the point of the communication loss that further examination would not change their decision. In arriving at such a decision, the examiners should take into account the requirements and outcomes of the research degree and not the extent to which they had covered the contents of the thesis.

If it is agreed that the viva needs to be reconvened then this should be at a mutually agreed time for all parties. The Independent Chair should communicate the outcome of this decision to the candidate as soon as possible.

1. **Examiner Discussion**

In order that the examiners can discuss the candidate’s performance, the candidate must leave the video conference call and the Independent Chair must confirm that this has happened. The candidate should be advised how they will be contacted to invite them back into the video conference and given an approximate time when this will happen.

1. **Communication of the Examiners’ Decision**

The candidate should be contacted and invited to re-join the video conference.

Candidates should be informed of the outcome of their examination as soon as possible. The possible outcomes and procedures to be followed are the same as for a standard viva.

1. **The Independent Chair**

In addition to the usual Independent Chair responsibilities, in relation to the viva via video conference, the Independent Chair will:

1. Host the video conference
2. Preside over the viva proceedings in order to ensure consistency in the conduct of vivas conducted using video conference format as compared to those conducted under normal circumstances.
3. Be clear to the participants that the meeting should not be recorded unless it has been agreed in line with point D on section 2 of this guide. In such exceptional cases, the Chair will be responsible for recording the meeting
4. Ensure that any post viva decisions and comments are based solely on the candidate’s performance and do not reflect issues related to the video conference format of the viva.
5. Provide an additional viewpoint if the conduct of the viva should become the subject of a student appeal.
6. Actively monitor the quality of the connection, and in the case of occasional pauses in either the video or the audio link to ensure that any discussion is repeated and that no misunderstanding has occurred.
7. Make the decision about whether the viva continues in the event of a serious or protracted breakdown in the connection of more than 20 minutes (of it becomes clear before 20 minutes lapses that reconnection cannot be made).
8. Make notes of what was covered during the viva and if the candidate experienced difficulties in responding whether this was due to their understanding or due to the technology being used.