

Examiners & Supervisors Guide: Online Viva Voce Examinations

Please see below link for our procedures for examination of PGRS:

<https://www.ljmu.ac.uk/the-doctoral-academy/policies/policy-and-procedures-for-the-examination-of-research-degrees>

A General Overview

- All viva voce examinations taking place by virtual means should be conducted in line with the Research Degree Framework, any exceptions must be agreed in advance with the Chair of the Research Degree Committee.
 - Exception requests should in the first instance, be submitted with a supporting rationale to PGRExaminations@ljmu.ac.uk
- We would encourage our academic colleagues to facilitate the viva voce examination online where possible and reasonably practical to do so. Hosting the viva online minimises the impact of the ongoing pandemic for our candidates.
- Nevertheless, all participants must be agreeable to the viva taking place online and the candidate is entitled to postpone the viva until after the crisis is over to allow it to take place in person.
- Given the logistical considerations of online vivas, an Independent Chair is not mandatory. However, an Independent Chair may still be requested, and, if you wish to appoint one, you should advise the Doctoral Academy at the earliest opportunity.
- Having an online viva is not in itself, grounds for an academic appeal or complaint should the candidate receive an unsuccessful outcome.

Preparing for a Virtual Viva

- Lead Supervisors remain responsible for practical arrangements
 - Agreeing the date and time of the viva
 - Ensuring all parties have agreed in writing to the viva proceeding online
 - Agreeing the appropriate online facility for the viva, and that a trial run takes place at least 24 hours in advance
 - Confirming the arrangements with PGRExaminations@ljmu.ac.uk
- Examiners are still expected to submit preliminary reports ahead of the viva and complete a final joint report at the end. Our Examinations Officer will keep examiners informed of what is needed and by when.
- Examiners should in advance of the viva, agree how and when they will conduct their pre-viva meeting and how and when they will contact the candidate to join the online viva.
- The Research Degrees Framework does not stipulate a specific platform for online vivas, however, the Doctoral Academy supports the University recommendation of using Microsoft Teams wherever practicable. Due to security issues, Zoom is **not** a permitted platform.
- Whichever online platform is selected you should ensure that:
 - The chosen method is clearly communicated to all, including the Doctoral Academy

- The method is suitable and will last for the duration of the viva (please note, free applications often have a call time limit).
- Appropriate login details have been created in advance (The Doctoral Academy has a Skype account which can be used by request.)
- A trial run should check the connection that all parties can participate, and that video cameras and microphones are working clearly. The trial run can be the perfect informal opportunity for the candidate to meet the examiners in advance.
- Agree contingency plans should the connection be lost and cannot be re-established.
- Contact details should be exchanged between all parties in advance should the need to email or telephone be required either before or during the viva.

During the Virtual Viva

- Examiners should recognise that an online viva can be less spontaneous and should agree the structure of the viva during their pre-meeting. Particular consideration should be given to
 - Who is taking on the role of Chair (if an Independent Chair not been requested)
 - How and when an examiner may intervene if a new question occurs to them; consider using a comfort break to allow time to do this.
 - Be particularly mindful that the additional pressure of dealing with technology, could cause some distress for the candidate
- The candidate's identity must be verified at the start of the viva voce examination by the candidate's Lead Supervisor or another appropriate member of LJMU Staff (Internal Examiner); reasonable ways to verify the candidate would be for them to produce their LJMU Student ID Card or other photo ID such as passport or driving licence.
- The candidate must verify that no unauthorised person(s) are present with them in the examination room.
- Explain to the candidate the schedule/running order for the viva, including any comfort breaks. Candidates should also be reminded what should happen should the connection be lost.
- At the end of the viva advise the candidate of how and when you will contact them and reconnect online to discuss the outcome.
- We recommend that your mobile phone should be on silent, rather than switched off. That way you can still see calls coming through should the candidate be trying to contact you.
- During the viva be aware that there could be delays or slight distortions with the sounds or images – try to remember to pause after speaking to allow things to

catch up and check the candidate was able to hear everything clearly, on occasion questions may need repeating.

- If communication is broken during the viva voce examination and cannot be re-established the examination should be terminated and EITHER:
 - Reschedule the viva voce, normally within 1 calendar month

OR

- If communication was broken towards the end of the examination, the Examiners can jointly agree that further examination would not alter their recommendation and inform the Candidate of their final joint recommendation. In making their decision, the Examiners should take into consideration whether recommendations for revision include aspects of the thesis not discussed prior to the breakdown in communication.

After the Viva

- The candidate should receive the outcome of their viva on the day directly from the examiners. When you bring the questioning to a close remind the candidate of how and when you will reconnect online to deliver your outcome.
- The Final Joint Report, along with a list of any amendments, is normally completed and submitted to the Doctoral Academy within one working week. Given the current circumstances, should you have difficulties in submitting your report within the required timescales you should advise both the candidate and the Doctoral Academy.

We have also produced a complementary set of guidance for candidates which you may refer them to. Any queries or concerns can be discussed with the Doctoral Academy by emailing PGRExaminations@ljmu.ac.uk

Doctoral Academy Team.