

## **Arrangements for Remote PGR Student Viva Examinations in FMS**

The University has indicated that there will be no face-to-face assessments for the remainder of the academic year, and this will obviously have an impact if a student has a viva scheduled between now and the end of the academic year. The assumption is that all viva examinations will be carried out remotely, and we are doing everything we can to ensure these will happen as planned. Pre-viva presentations will still continue and be carried out remotely to just the Examiners.

To facilitate remote viva examinations, the Dean of Postgraduate Research has approved a blanket concession for MPhil and PhD viva examination to take place via video link, subject to confirmation that the following arrangements are in place:

- Viva to be conducted via Zoom link  
<http://videoconferencing.ncl.ac.uk/softwareolutions/zoom/>
- IT support available in case of technical difficulties

An extract of the video link guidance taken from the Handbook for Examiners of Research Degrees by Theses is also provided below for your information. This guidance indicates that the distance location to be used by a student should belong to a “trusted partner”, however, given the current circumstances the Dean has agreed to waive this requirement.

In order to ensure that viva examinations run smoothly the following additional points with regard to the appointment of an Independent Chair have also been developed (**please note these arrangements differ from those outlined in the *Handbook for Examiners of Research Degrees by Theses* on the following page**)

- The Preliminary Reports from both Examiners must be received by the Graduate School by the due date as normal. Examiners should not liaise with each other until they have both submitted their preliminary reports.
- The Dean may require an Independent Chair to be appointed.
- The Internal examiner must be experienced – as per the normal criteria
- If the student has wellbeing or particular anxiety issues, the Dean may require an Independent Chair to be appointed. Supervisors should indicate if there is a particular problem of this kind to the Graduate School with the student’s permission to do so.

Supervisors wishing to arrange a viva via video link should contact the FMS Graduate School ([medpg-enquiries@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:medpg-enquiries@ncl.ac.uk)) to confirm that the above arrangements are in place. If, either approved examiner needs to be replaced due to the current situation, supervisors need to nominate an alternative examiner through the e-portfolio CoP. Please contact the FMS Graduate School for access if required. Ideally, the Graduate School should be notified at least 2 weeks before the proposed viva date, so that this can check can be made and an Independent Chair appointed, where appropriate.

The Dean or Deputy Dean of Postgraduate Research, ([john.kirby@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:john.kirby@ncl.ac.uk) or [alison.tyson-capper@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:alison.tyson-capper@ncl.ac.uk)) will then check examiners’ details and confirm whether or not an Independent Chair will need to be appointed to chair the viva.



**Video link guidance taken from the Handbook for Examiners of Research Degrees by Theses**  
(<https://www.ncl.ac.uk/students/progress/student-resources/PGR/Final%20Handbook%20for%20Examiners%20of%20Research%20Degrees%20Aug%202019.pdf> )

#### **4.7 Guidelines for an oral examination to be conducted by video link or equivalent audio visual service**

It is expected that all oral examinations will take place with both the candidate and examiners present at the University unless specifically requested otherwise.

Video link or an equivalent audio visual service may be used in exceptional circumstances where either the candidate or one of the examiners is not able to be present at the University. In order for an oral examination to be conducted in this way approval must be sought from the dean of postgraduate studies and approval will only be given where the integrity of the examination can be guaranteed. The guidelines listed below must be adhered to.

- In all cases it should be voluntary for candidates to participate in oral examinations conducted in this way and written consent should be obtained from them (this consent could be in the form of an email).
- A member of the supervisory team or internal adviser is not normally expected to be present unless at the specific request of the candidate, but is expected to be available to be contacted by the examiners or candidate (after the examination) if required, for example by telephone.
- Any time difference between the two locations should be taken into account and the timing of the examination planned to ensure that the candidate is not disadvantaged in any way by it taking place at an inappropriate time.
- Guidance should be provided to those involved regarding how many hours both the facilities and the people involved (student, academic staff and technical staff) will be required for.
- Skype is not considered reliable enough or of high enough quality for use during an oral examination and high quality video conferencing facilities should be used. Advice on Videoconferencing facilities should be obtained from the IT Service (<http://www.ncl.ac.uk/itservice/videoconferencing/>) Oral examinations can last for an entire day and therefore the technology needs to be able to facilitate this if necessary.
- Wherever possible the distance location used should belong to a 'trusted partner' e.g. the British Council.
- An opportunity should be provided in advance for those involved to trial the technology ahead of the examination.
- The examination should not be recorded.
- The candidate and examiners must be able to see each other at all times during the examination.
- Any materials brought into the examination by the candidate must be declared and be visible to the examiners at all times.
- An Independent Chair should be appointed to ensure that all parties are given sufficient opportunity to speak.
- Technical support should be available to those involved at all times.