

Additional guidance - *viva* by video conferencing – with Independent Chair

Before the *viva voce* examination

UP7A (Preliminary report)

All examiners will have been sent the thesis, a UP7A Preliminary report form, a link to the Regulations for Research Degrees and a detailed Guidance Note for the Examination of Higher Degrees by Research.

The UP7A must be completed and returned to the Research Degrees team **at least 10 working days** before the date of the *viva voce* examination.

The *viva* may not proceed unless all preliminary reports have been received by Research Degrees.

UP7B (Examiners' Recommendation) and Pre-*viva* meeting

The Examiners' Recommendation form (UP7B) will be emailed to all examiners before the *viva* is to take place. A Pre-*viva* meeting should take place between all examiners, to discuss a format and agenda for the oral examination.

If any further clarification is required then examiners should contact the Research Degrees team on +44 (0)23 9284 7707.

The Role of the Candidate's First Supervisor

It is the responsibility of the First Supervisor to arrange the date and time of the *viva voce* with the Candidate and Examiners. They must also notify Research Degrees team by completing and returning a UPR5(A) form (Confirmation of arrangements for a Postgraduate Research *viva voce* examination).

Both the pre-*viva* meeting and the *viva* itself should be set-up and hosted by the Internal Examiner, however the First Supervisor may also set this up.

Any or all member of the Supervisory Team (usually the First Supervisor) may attend the *viva voce*, if the Candidate agrees.

If attending, the Supervisor will join and leave the online meeting at the same time as the Candidate and should only participate in the discussion if asked to do so by the Examiners in order to provide clarification on a specific matter. During the *viva*, the **First Supervisor must switch off their camera and their microphone** to ensure that they sit out of sight from the Candidate and do not contribute to the exam unless invited to do so.

If the Candidate agrees, the First Supervisor may sit in on the feedback session at the end of the *viva*. The participation of the First Supervisor should be agreed with the Candidate prior

to the online *viva* and communicated with the host so that the online meeting can be set up to include all the appropriate participants.

The Role of the Independent Chair

An Independent Chair has a non-examining procedural role and will advise the panel accordingly.

The Independent Chair hosts the online meeting and conducts the pre-*viva* briefing.

The Independent Chair is expected to:

- Discuss with the Examiners a format and agenda for the oral examination.
- Oversee the online examination (and presentation, where applicable) to ensure the examination procedures are followed and conducted fairly.
- Ensure that the Candidate is given the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge, defend their thesis and respond to all questions asked by the examiners.
- Ensure that each of the Examiners has the opportunity to contribute to the examination process.
- Ensure any approved Reasonable Adjustments for the student are accommodated during the examination
- Ensure that when the First Supervisor is present during the *viva*, they only act as an observer and are not present for the examiners' deliberations or the pre-*viva* briefing.
- Ensure that the Examiners inform the Candidate of their decision and give a verbal report on any amendments (if necessary).
- **Remind the Examiners to complete and sign the UP7B form, confirming their recommendation for the candidate, and to email the UP7B to the Research Degrees team within 24 hours (Email: researchdegrees@port.ac.uk)**
- Remind the Examiners of the requirements for compiling the joint report following the decision for resubmission and to do so within the specified timeframe (normally 10 working days).

The *viva voce* Examination

The *viva voce* may not proceed unless all Examiners, Independent Chair and the Candidate are present in the online meeting.

These meetings may be hosted by the Independent Chair to brief the participants and pre-empt any potential queries in relation to the process. It may be suitable to consider two separate briefings, with Examiners and Candidate/First Supervisor, respectively.

It is recommended that an audio test is conducted at the beginning of the *viva* for each participant.

The examination will normally be conducted under the chairmanship of the Independent Chair.

Both Examiners and the Candidate should be visible by means of webcams.

The Independent Chair should ensure that the private chat function is disabled during the online meetings.

The examination is a formal assessment, and if any irregularities are spotted or there is any unusual behaviour on the part of the Candidate, the examination will be stopped, either to be resumed once the Candidate has been able to provide a satisfactory explanation for such behaviour, or terminated altogether and a report of suspected misconduct lodged for further investigation.

On completion of the *viva voce* examination, the Candidate and the First Supervisor (if present) will leave the online meeting while the Examiners discuss their recommendation. The Candidate (and the First Supervisor) will be able to return to the meeting once examiner deliberations are completed and they will be advised of the recommendation to be made to the Academic Registrar on behalf of the Academic Council. At this point the Examiners should also give a verbal report to the Candidate regarding required amendments, where applicable to the recommendation.

It is important that the Candidate, irrespective of the outcome, is not alone following the viva. Try to establish that the candidate will have a friend or family member 'standing by' on the phone or using other media at the end of the *viva*, if there is no-one else available.

Following the *viva voce*

The Internal Examiner should organise the completion of the UP7B form via email and its return to researchdegrees@port.ac.uk within 24 hours.

Should the outcome of the viva require the student to complete corrections, a report of required amendments must be emailed to the Research Degrees team within 10 working days.

An example set-up of an online *viva*

