**UCD Guidelines for Conduction *Viva Voce* Examinations Virtually
September 2021**

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

Reasons for conducting a *viva voce* virtually include:

- The most suitable Extern Examiner is (a) located at a significant distance from the university thus prohibiting travel or (b) unable to travel.
- Pandemic associated travel restrictions beyond the control of the candidate, Extern Examiner, Chair of Examination Committee or Intern Examiner.
- The candidate has returned to their home country and is unable to travel to Ireland.

The virtual viva may be **fully virtual**, where all attendees are remote, or **a blend of in-person and virtual,** where two or more attendees are present at the same physical location. Due to current COVID-19 restrictions, social distancing measures (see below) must be adhered to, in the case of *viva voces* where two or more persons are in the same location. Please note that it is recommended that, at a minimum the Chair of the Examination Committee is present with the candidate on the day.

These guidelines include underline recommendations from the HSE to protect yourself and others.

- The Chair of the Examination Committee should ensure that all of the following guidelines are in place before, during and after a virtual *viva voce* examination.

Principles

- Approval for conducting a virtual viva is through the Chair of the Graduate Research Board.

- Written agreement must be obtained by all parties to conduct the *viva voce* virtually. In particular, the candidate MUST support the decision to conduct the *viva voce* virtually. If all parties do not agree, the *viva voce* must be delayed until an in-person viva can be held. The 'Virtual Viva Voce Request Form' can be found [here]:

- Use of a virtual *viva voce* cannot be used as grounds for appeal. Normally the Extern Examiner is the member of the examining committee that is participating in the *viva voce* virtually. Normally the Chair, the Intern Examiner and candidate are in the same location. Due to the pandemic the *viva voce* may be conducted virtually across multiple sites. Specifically, each member of the Examination Committee, including the candidate, can be based at a different site. Where a *viva voce* is to be held both on campus and virtually it is recommended the Chair of the Examination Committee is present with the candidate on campus.

- Zoom is the recommended online platform to be used and is supported by UCD IT Services.

- In each location, measures should be taken so that appropriate conditions are in place ensuring minimal disruption, security and integrity of the examination.

- All parties should be able to see one another at all times during the *viva voce* examination.

- No *viva voce* is to be conducted by audio or phone.

- A virtual private network (VPN) may be required where the intellectual property of the thesis needs to be protected.

- If a presentation is required, this may be facilitated through screen sharing or distributing the presentation to members of the examining committee through the Chair of the Examination Committee.

- The *viva voce* must not be recorded.

- Time differences must be considered to ensure that the candidate is not disadvantaged.

- A test of the virtual platform must be conducted prior to the commencement of the *viva voce*.

- Normally, if communication is broken during the *viva voce* and a connection cannot be re-established, the examination must be terminated and re-scheduled. However, where the Examination Committee agrees that a truncated *viva voce* provides the basis for a positive recommendation, this recommendation may be taken. No recommendation to fail a candidate can be taken where a *viva voce* is interrupted.

- Any re-scheduled examination should normally take place within one month of the original *viva voce*

- The Examiners' report must include a statement that the *viva voce* was conducted virtually.

COVID-19-related Social Distancing Measures

If the *viva voce* is conducted with two parties in the same physical location, the following guidelines must be followed:

1. Confirm that no party has travelled from abroad to Ireland without adhering to current [Government COVID-19 Travel Advisory](#).

2. Everyone attending should be in good health.

3. No one with an underlying medical condition or who is a member of a high-risk group should attend.

4. Every person involved must be free from COVID-19 symptoms now and for the last 14 days and must not be awaiting test results or have been advised to self-isolate .

5. Observe HSE guidelines including physical social distancing.

6. Attendees should bring their own paperwork and remove it with them when leaving.

7. Use a well-ventilated area.

8. At the start of each session, advice on hand and respiratory hygiene should be reinforced. Encourage all persons to wash their hands before and after the meeting.

9. No sharing of IT equipment (or any other equipment like pens).

10. Ensure waste bins and tissues are available close at hand to each attendee.

11. All attendees are asked to make the School aware immediately if they develop symptoms following the session.

Virtual Viva Voce Procedures

Procedures aligned with in-person *viva voce* examinations

- The Chair is responsible for ensuring all the arrangements for conducting the *viva voce* are in place. In a virtual *viva voce*, the role of the Chair includes verifying the identity of the student, observing the student for signs of stress and adhering to University *viva voce* regulations and following Government guidelines re COVID-19.

- Extern and Intern Examiners must submit their preliminary reports in good time. The Extern and Intern Examiners must read each other's individual report in advance of the *viva voce*. At the start of the *viva voce* examination and before the candidate is admitted to the examination, the Chair, Extern Examiner and Intern Examiner should discuss their approach to the viva.

- Following the *viva voce*, the candidate must leave the virtual meeting to allow the Examiners to discuss a recommendation. They can be placed 'on hold' using Zoom.

- Once a recommendation is agreed, the candidate is invited to re-join the meeting to be advised of the outcome of the examination.

- If the Examiners agree on the recommendation, a joint report is submitted by the Chair to the ACCE via the eThesis Examination System.

- If the Examiners do not agree on the recommendation, separate reports are submitted by the Chair to the eThesis Examination System.

NB: these guidelines should be used in conjunction with the UCD Academic Regulations and the Theses in Graduate Research Programmes Policy.

Virtual Viva Logistics

Testing the IT Platform

- The Chair of the Examination Committee should organise a preliminary meeting of the Examination Committee using the same Zoom address in advance of the *viva voce* to test the IT Platform. The Chair should ensure that the practice Zoom meeting with the Examiners is operating correctly and allow sufficient time to do this. After the IT Platform has been shown to work, the Chair should spend time with the Extern and Intern Examiners discussing how the viva will run.

- The Chair should practice the Zoom meeting (separately) with the candidate, including the ability to give a presentation and being placed on hold. A trial run with candidates tends to make them less nervous - so they know how the technology works, how screen sharing works, how to come in and go out of a Zoom meeting (which they will need to do at the end of the viva).

Timing

- An examination may run to 2.5 hours from beginning to end, thus a short break may be appropriate after 45 minutes or so.

Computer logistics

- The Wi-Fi connection on all sides should be tested in advance to make sure it is functioning solidly.
- If using a laptop computer, ensure that the laptop has sufficient power and access to a power source & functioning charger.
- If a participant does not have a solid Internet connection, they should see if they can safely establish a connection elsewhere. If this cannot be resolved in a timely manner or the connection remains an issue, the viva may need to be rescheduled.

Zoom Logistics

- The Chair should have a contingency plan in place prior to the viva if Zoom does not work e.g. plan to reschedule or use alternative technology.
    - The viva should not be conducted by phone or audio. Google Meet is an alternative video conferencing solution, supported by UCD IT services.
- It is suggested that the Extern Examiner have an e-copy of the thesis to hand and to share the relevant page on screen when posing questions.
- Although the Chair should be on screen at all times, it is suggested that they are muted (with the volume on so they can hear).
- Supervisors, where invited to attend, should switch off video and mute themselves.

- The default is for Zoom to record a session and this should be switched off by the Chair. The viva should not be recorded.