



Conducting vivas online: guide for departments

Following a change to the research degree regulations, vivas can be held online under the following conditions:

1. The candidate agrees with the arrangement.
2. The candidate's supervisor or an Independent Chair sets up the virtual meeting, ensures any adjustment involving disability is made for the viva and is available throughout the viva e.g. to liaise with participants to resolve any technical problems. The exception to this is if the student has specifically indicated on their exam entry form that they do not wish their supervisor to observe the viva, in which case this role will need to be delegated to an alternative academic member in the department or to an Independent Chair.
3. The supervisor / Independent Chair ensures that the viva is recorded and that the recording is made available to the Doctoral School, who will ensure the recording is held securely and only listened to in case of appeal.

It is strongly recommended that the viva is held via MS Teams (with Zoom, for example, there are security concerns regarding who may have access to the recording) and the guidelines below have been written on this basis. Non-Team users should be able to access MS Teams as guests (see below). If there are issues with accessing this system, Skype would be the next best alternative. With Skype the supervisor needs to send the recording to the Doctoral School but must remember to delete it from Skype after doing so. You can request a SharePoint sharing link from the Doctoral School to do this. Further advice on online video conferencing can be found [here](#).

Agreement to online viva arrangement

It is important that all parties involved in the viva agree in writing that they are happy for it to go ahead online and equally that all agree to an indefinite delay to a face to face viva. The Doctoral School will obtain the agreement as follows:

Candidate:

- When informed of the need for a viva, the candidate is asked to read the guide to [conducting vivas online for candidates](#)
- The fact that a viva is held online is not valid grounds for appeal if the candidate is not satisfied with the viva outcome.

Supervisor:

- When the supervisor informs the Doctoral School of the date / time of the viva, they should also confirm their agreement to viva being held by the video conference.

Examiners:

- The Doctoral School will liaise with the supervisor to obtain a copy of the examiners' written agreement to this arrangement.

At least a fortnight before the viva

At least a fortnight before the viva, the supervisor or Independent Chair (if this is anyone other than the supervisor or chair please inform the Doctoral School)

- informs the Doctoral School of the date / time of the viva and confirms their agreement to the video conference
- sets up an MS Teams meeting and sends out the invites to all participants – see below. **Please ensure that you also invite [Laura S. Ventura Nieto](#)** (solely as a means of retrieving the recording following the viva. They will not join or interrupt the viva)
- makes sure the candidate has an opportunity to practise with the technology so that they feel comfortable using it (e.g. by holding a mock viva)

What if the examiners are non-Team users?

Non-Teams users will be able to join meetings via the browser version of Teams. When they click 'join meeting' on their invite it will open up Teams in their browser suggesting they download the app. They can ignore this and click the button that says 'Join on the Web instead'.

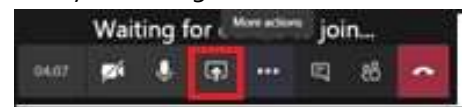
A few of days before the viva

It is recommended that, where possible, the supervisor / Independent Chair (if applicable), the examiners and the candidate do a practice call a few days in advance of the viva to ensure that everyone involved is able to access the technology satisfactorily.

On the day of the viva

Before the viva

- The supervisor or Independent Chair will need to allow guests (i.e. the external examiner and the internal examiner if they are not from Royal Holloway) in to the meeting. A notification will let them know that someone is waiting to join and they should be able to give them permission to join via this notification.
- Just as with face to face vivas, the examiners should be given some time before the viva to discuss their initial thoughts on the dissertation, decide on who will ask which questions, etc. They should have received a copy of the other examiner's preliminary report from the Doctoral School (they are sent out once the Doctoral School has received each examiner's report).
- **The supervisor** should:
 - ensure that the participants are able to contact each other by phone if a technical problem should arise
 - allow plenty of time before the viva is scheduled to begin for everyone to log in and to confirm they are comfortable with operating the technology e.g. make sure that the participants are aware of the Share option on the toolbar, which allows them to share a section of the dissertation that they wish to focus on:
 - ensure that all participants know that if they need a break during the viva, they may take one
 - brief everyone at the start about how they will be interacting. *'.. a remote event concerning juggling technology as well as answering examiners' questions, is more than usually challenging. Examiners also have the challenge of making questions clear to the candidate when they aren't in a room together'.*
- **The candidate** should:
 - show on the camera that they are in a room on their own
 - If possible have a friend or family member 'standing by' to be with them at the end of the viva (virtually if there is no-one else in their household); it's important that the candidate is not alone following the viva.
 - If they have requested that their supervisor is not present at the viva and neither the supervisor's replacement nor the internal examiner know the candidate, the candidate must show the examiners some official ID (e.g. passport / driving licence / EU ID card).



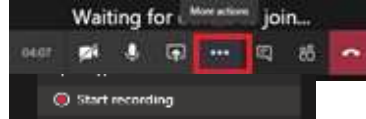
During the viva

- Once everyone is ready, the supervisor starts the recording and the viva commences.

Recording of the viva

The College regulations state that all vivas must be recorded. The supervisor/Independent Chair (if applicable) is responsible for starting the recording:

- Click on the three dots (more actions)
- Click on 'Start recording'
- You will see a message at the top of the screen



- The supervisor / Independent Chair should have their microphone on mute. The supervisor should not participate in the viva beyond starting / stopping the viva recording and liaising with the participants if there are any connection issues.
- If there are connection issues:
 - If any of the connections break down during the viva but can be restored after a short break, the viva should continue
 - If any of the connections break down during the viva but cannot be restored after a short break, participants will be asked to come to an agreement as to whether the viva should be cancelled and a new viva date set (e.g. if this happens near the beginning of the viva, rescheduling would be the most appropriate course of action but this may not be considered necessary if it were to happen near the end of the viva)
- At the end of the viva, before the examiners confer over the outcome, the supervisor stops the recording and both the supervisor and the candidate leave the meeting.

After the viva

- Make sure there is someone with the candidate (virtually if not possible in person):
*'It is important, irrespective of the outcome, that the candidate is not alone following the viva. For most this will be a time for celebrating the successful culmination of their studies (even remotely), but for others, the outcome will be less pleasing than they were expecting'*²
- The recording of the viva should be transferred to the ownership of the Doctoral School – see below.

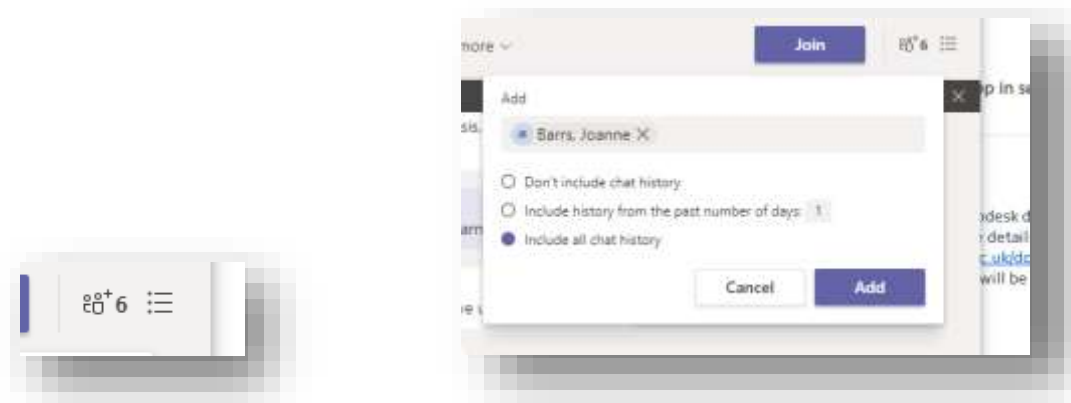
Transferring the recording to the Doctoral School

If you invited Laura S. Ventura Nieto to the Teams meeting, she should be able to see the viva recording in the meeting chat on prompting. Please email the [Doctoral School](#) to check safe receipt of the recording.

If for any reason you forgot to add Laura S. Ventura Nieto to the meeting they will still be able to download the recording if you add them to the chat history.

To add members of the Doctoral School to the chat history

In the chat history (not the meeting invite) Add Laura S. Ventura Nieto. Please select the option that says 'include all chat history'



The recording will be saved securely and will only be listened to in the event of an appeal.



In the same way that you invited people to the meeting please remove them by clicking the 'X' by all delegates except for the organiser and Laura S. Ventura Nieto.