

Guidance notes / checklist for holding PhD by Research oral examinations by video link

(See Postgraduate (Research) Assessment Regulation 4.1.2)

The normal expectation remains that the oral examination will be held in Edinburgh. If exceptional circumstances make it necessary for an oral examination to be conducted by video link, the following guidelines should be observed.

The authority for any such decision lies with the College committee with responsibility for postgraduate research matters on written application from schools. In considering applications for the conduct of examinations in this way, College Committees will expect cases to be fully costed. An application to conduct the examination via ISDN link should be considered only if circumstances make it impossible for the candidate to return to Edinburgh within a reasonable period, or if this is the only means by which the most appropriate external examiner could undertake the examination.

1. The oral should normally be held between two sites only, with the candidate accompanied by one of the examiners. A supervisor may attend, if appropriate, under the normal rules of attendance.
2. Exceptionally, three sites may be used. In any such case, the candidate must be accompanied by an approved authority under suitable guidance. If the candidate is abroad, such an approved person might be a British Council representative.
3. The candidate and each of the examiners must signify in writing their agreement to conduct the examination in this way. Prior to making a decision, they should have the benefits and difficulties of the technology explained [i.e. that there may be a break in the link mid-examination; that over long distances, scheduling the examination at a conventional time may be problematic; that there may be some time delay that could slow the flow of discussion; and that the normal forms of cueing and interrupting do not work in the same way as in face to face contact].
4. Appropriate training must be provided to candidates and examiners. If necessary, skilled operators should be present at one or all sites. Examinations should only proceed when candidates have signified in writing that they feel confident about operating the system. The candidate should not feel under any pressure to acquiesce to being examined by video link, but, having given such an assurance, a candidate will not normally be permitted to appeal against an adverse result on grounds connected with her or his ability to operate the system.
5. Flexible seating arrangements should be made that encourage direct interaction between the candidate and examiner at the same site, rather than with the camera.
6. If the internal and external examiners are at separate sites, they must take account of their need to consult privately with each other on the conduct of the examination: how the pre-oral discussion should be conducted; the form and sequence of questions; who should take the lead at various stages of the oral; what graphics, and document viewing facilities, etc might be required. Examiners must not be in contact with each other until each has submitted the Part I report.
7. As part of the video link, examiners should discuss and agree privately the content of Part II of the examiners' report so that their recommendations may be conveyed to the candidate. Their final signed report must then be submitted in the usual way.
8. The candidate's school will be responsible for any costs which are incurred in the provision of special training to the candidate and/or the examiner[s], and in the attendance with the candidate of an approved person. Examiners' costs up to the normal limit will continue to be met from central funds for external examiners. If the examination is to be conducted using the ISDN link, the school concerned may be asked to pay only those costs which could be regarded as being beyond the normal limits. If the link is to be used because of the

candidate's inability to return to Edinburgh, the school will have the discretion to require the candidate to contribute all or part of the additional costs.

Discretion to make use of video facility for examinations should rest with College Committees.

These notes should be made available to candidates when oral examinations are to be conducted by video link.

Guidance approved by Senatus Postgraduate Studies Committee, 2005
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