POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH HANDBOOK

Chapter 9, Annex 2 – Upgrade Vivas by Video-link

1. Upgrade Vivas by Video-link

1.1   This section applies to all upgrade vivas where one or more participant joins the viva via a video-link.

1.2   The University has adopted a permissive approach to the use of vivas by video-link, recognising that vivas may be held as successfully by video-link as a viva where all participants are physically in the same room. When making decisions about whether attendance by one or more participant at the viva should take place via video-link, rather than travelling to attend in person, the University's Environment & Climate Emergency Business Travel Policy' should be adhered to with regard to prioritising low carbon solutions such as video-link attendance. It may also be a preferable option for students, e.g. on financial grounds, or to satisfy the reasonable adjustments of an ILP.

1.3   The Faculty is responsible for taking all reasonable steps to ensure that the upgrade viva process is equitable and should be mindful of the latest advice available from IT Services with regard to holding meetings online. In determining whether or not it is appropriate to conduct an upgrade viva by video-link, the Faculty must be able to have confidence that:

a.   The Faculty Upgrade Committee will be able to assure themselves that the thesis is the candidate's own work.

b.   The technology is sufficient to enable a viva to take place without limiting communications and that arrangements will be made to postpone the viva if this is not the case.

c.   That all participants are able to access an appropriate, comfortable location for the viva, whether on or off-campus, where the probability of interruptions occurring is minimal. To facilitate this, participants based off-campus should be

reminded of the need to ensure that they have refreshments and have made appropriate arrangements for their comfort. Where multiple participants are in one location the Chair of the Faculty Upgrade Committee is responsible for ensuring that the location is appropriate but may seek guidance from the PGR Support Team in so doing.

d.   Where an ILP is in place, any reasonable adjustments can be complied with, bearing in mind that the advice set out in an ILP might not have been written for a remote upgrade viva. See also Inclusive Practice within the TQA LTS Handbook, Chapter 26: Inclusive Practice within Academic Study and in particular, section 8, 'Postgraduate Research Students.

The PGR Support Team may consider that the Faculty has provided de facto confirmation that it is has confidence in points 1.3a-1.3c by virtue of the fact that no participant has raised concerns in advance about any of these points. Specific approval from a Faculty PGR Manager or the Head of PGR Support, if necessary, using their judgement to refer any cases to the discipline Director of Postgraduate Research or Faculty Director of Postgraduate Research[1], is required where:

i.   An ILP is in place, to ensure that appropriate adjustments can be made;

ii. Or any concerns have been raised about proceeding with the upgrade viva by those attending the upgrade viva with regard to points 1.3a-1.3c.

1.4   Addressing these points means that:

a.   The Faculty Upgrade Committee, the student, and their lead supervisor (as an observer) must confirm in writing if it is not feasible for the viva to proceed in this way and confirm at the conclusion of the viva that the holding of the upgrade viva by video-link has had no substantive bearing on the examination process.

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[1] Alternatives to the Faculty DPGR are those set out in the TQA Manual, as able to act on behalf of the Faculty Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Executive Dean of College.

b.   Participants may join the viva from multiple locations but the platform should be tested with all participants ahead of the viva, and approval should always be subject to confirmation of a successful test.

c.   Consideration should be given to the need for members of the Faculty Upgrade Committee to consult privately. The arrangements for managing the candidate and supervisor joining and leaving the meeting should be set out in advance of the remote upgrade viva, noting that the student shall always be invited to talk with the Committee after the supervisor is asked to leave.

d.   Where a candidate is joining a viva by video-link from an off-campus location, costs incurred for the use of resources elsewhere should be met by the candidate provided these costs are made explicit at the point at which the decision is made to hold the viva by video-link.

e.   The Faculty Upgrade Committee should be mindful of the risk that the viva may need to be halted and should ensure that it agrees an approach to record-keeping during the viva discussions to ensure that the viva could be recommended successfully at a later date.

f.   The Chair of the Faculty Upgrade Committee will be responsible for:

i.   Halting the viva in the event that the technology fails or is significantly interrupted or is of a poor quality such that participants are not able to fully engage in the viva. This may include halting the viva at the request of the candidate, if there are any indications of problems with the technology being used.

ii. If the viva is halted, confirming in writing to all participants that the viva has been postponed;

      iii. Keeping a record and reporting to their Faculty DPGR in the first instance should anyone present be unable to confirm that the holding of the upgrade viva via video-link had no substantive bearing on the upgrade process;

      iv. Ensuring that all participants confirm that they have not kept a recording of the viva.

      v. In cases where unexpected technological problems halts the viva: informing the relevant PGR Support Team.

1.5   The PGR Support Team should keep records of decisions made to hold or not hold a remote upgrade viva, along with records on actions taken with regard to postponed or halted vivas.