

Research Degrees: Guidance for Students on the Modality of Final Thesis Research Degree *Vivas*

This document is for students wishing to request a remote final thesis *viva*. It provides details of the College policy and the process for submitting a request for a remote *viva*. Where requests for a remote *viva* have been approved, this document also provides guidance for students on how to prepare for a remote *viva*.

1. Policy

1.1 The College policy states:

Research degree final vivas are expected to take place on-site and in person, but remote or hybrid vivas may be considered in the following circumstances:

- a) *Where travel makes it difficult for the external examiners or student to attend the examination.*
- b) *Where the appointment of an external examiner who is an international leading expert in the field would be of great benefit to the student and the Department, but there are considerable travel expenses and/or travel carbon emissions associated with the appointment.*
- c) *Where examiners or students have concerns about attending an in-person final thesis viva due to their own medical condition, or the medical condition of an individual they are living with or caring for.*
- d) *Where circumstances beyond the control of either the student or the examiners means that an in-person on-campus viva needs to be re-scheduled at short notice. Such examples may include natural events such as adverse weather, industrial action, or civil disturbances.*

The case to hold a remote or hybrid final thesis viva requires student consent and must be approved by the Director of Postgraduate Studies (DPS).

2. Guidance for students requesting a remote *viva*

2.1 The College recognises how important examinations are to you and that you will want to be prepared and confident for your final thesis *viva*. When you reach the Exam Entry milestone, which should be submitted through MyImperial at least four months before the anticipated date of submission of your thesis, you should discuss with your supervisor the mode of delivery for your final thesis *viva*. Any case to request a remote *viva* must be communicated to your supervisor at this stage.

2.2 If you would like to request a remote *viva*, you should present your case to your supervisor indicating which of the circumstances listed in 1.1 apply to you. You should also provide your supervisor with information about:

- Your access to digital technology in which to support a remote examination. For this, you should at least have access to the internet, a laptop/desktop with webcam,

MS Teams/Zoom, plus any other software/technology which is required for a remote examination in your Department.

- Details of the location/environment in which you will sit your exam. This should be a quiet location where you will not be disturbed for the duration of the *viva*.

2.3 If you do not have access to suitable technology to support a remote *viva*, or an appropriate venue in which to sit your examination, your request for a remote *viva* would not normally be approved.

2.4 Where you are making a case based on your own medical reasons (physical or mental health reasons), you may wish to include evidence from a medical practitioner, counsellor, the College's Disability Advisory Service, but this is not mandatory. You could also include a statement of support from your Senior Tutor (PGR), but again, this is not mandatory. However, where you have indicated that your request for a remote *viva* is based on your own medical reasons, your Department may seek advice from the College's support services to determine whether a remote *viva* is appropriate, or if other reasonable adjustments to the examination would be the best way to support you.

3. Guidance on submitting your case for a remote *viva*

3.1 If your supervisor supports your request for a remote *viva*, you should initiate exam entry through MyImperial in the usual way. At this stage, your request remains subject to Departmental approval via your DPS.

3.2 If your supervisor does not support your request, you may approach your DPS directly with your request. Your DPS will consider the case and will ask your supervisor for their perspective. If your DPS supports your request, they will inform your supervisor that your *viva* will take place remotely. If your DPS does not support your request, you can accept their decision or you can appeal against this decision, via your Head of Department. If you wish to appeal, you should follow your Department's process and submit your appeal to your Head of Department within 5 working days. Your Department will have guidance on when you can expect to receive a decision on the outcome of your appeal. If the Head of Department does not approve your request, you will be expected to attend an in-person *viva*. The Head of Department's decision is final.

3.3 Where you do not wish to discuss your reasons for a remote *viva* with your supervisor, you can speak directly with your DPS who will consider your request and make the decision. If your DPS supports your request, they will inform your supervisor that your *viva* will take place remotely. If your DPS does not support your request, you can accept their decision or you can appeal via your Head of Department. If the Head of Department does not approve your request, you will be expected to attend an in-person *viva*. The Head of Department's decision is final.

3.4 If you decide to initiate exam entry without having previously discussed your preferred mode of delivery for your *viva* with your supervisor or DPS, it will be assumed that your *viva* will take place in-person and arrangements will proceed on that basis.

4. Changing circumstances

- 4.1 It is acknowledged that your personal circumstances could change during the exam entry process or there could be unexpected circumstances beyond your control which prevent you from attending campus for your final thesis *viva*. Where you have suitable technology in place and access to an appropriate venue in which to sit your exam, your DPS will discuss with you switching to a remote *viva*. However, if you would rather your examination takes place in person, and/or you do not have access to suitable technology or a suitable venue in which to sit your examination, it would be usual practice to re-schedule your *viva*.
- 4.2 It could also be possible that the personal circumstances of your examiners change unexpectedly and, at short notice, they are unable to attend campus for your *viva*. Rather than delay the *viva*, your DPS will discuss with you whether you are prepared to give your consent to participate in a hybrid *viva* (where one or more of your examiners attends remotely). However, if your preference is for an in-person examination, then that remains your right and it may be necessary to re-schedule the *viva* and/or appoint an alternative examiner.

5. Departmental requests for a remote or hybrid *viva*

- 5.1 Where you would benefit from the expertise of an international examiner, but an in-person *viva* would be extremely difficult to arrange, or where the appointment comes with significant travel expense and cost to the environment through travel carbon emissions, your supervisor may propose a remote or hybrid *viva*. However, if your preference is for an in-person examination, an alternative examiner will be appointed.

6. Examiner requests for remote/hybrid *vivas*

- 6.1 As part of the examiner appointment process, internal and external examiners will be informed of the Department's agreed mode of delivery for your *viva*. Examiners can accept (or not) the appointment on the basis of the mode of *viva* presented to them. They may also request a hybrid *viva*. Where this is the case, the DPS will seek your consent before proceeding. If you are happy to proceed with a remote or hybrid *viva*, then arrangements for the exam will proceed. Where your preference is for an in-person *viva*, a new examiner will be appointed.

7. Guidance for students on Preparing for a remote *Viva*

- 7.1 Where your Department has approved your request for a remote *viva*, it is good practice for you to participate in a mock *viva* examination. If your supervisor offers you one, you are encouraged to take up the offer. If it is not offered to you, ask your supervisor if this would be possible to arrange. Use the opportunity at your mock to do a "tech check" and to understand how the "live" exam will work in practice.
- 7.2 If you are abroad for your examination, make sure you alert your supervisor/Department to any time zone differences which need to be considered when setting up the examination.
- 7.3 Ensure that you have access to a quiet space where you will not be disturbed for the duration

of the examination.

- 7.4 The College makes reasonable adjustments to examinations to support students with disabilities or specific learning needs. When *vivas* are taking place remotely or through hybrid delivery, there may be further considerations. Talk to your supervisor and your Department's Disability Advisor about your needs and what is possible.
- 7.5 Some students find examinations stressful at the best of times and in a remote setting, you may feel more anxious than usual. Consider whether it is possible for someone to join you after your exam has taken place. If you will be by yourself, make a plan for who you can contact after the exam – it will be a chance to celebrate and/or talk through how the exam went. The [Student Support Zone](#) offers a range of helpful advice and guidance.
- 7.6 A few practicalities to remember for your remote *viva* include:
1. Make sure you have a copy of your thesis available, you would not normally be allowed to have access to other sources of information during your examination.
 2. You should have blank paper and pens to hand.
 3. Ensure you have access to a quiet space where you will not be disturbed for the duration of the *viva*.
 4. Ensure you have software on your device, such as an electronic whiteboard, which can be screen-shared with your examiners. If you are not sure what software is appropriate, ask your Department.
 5. At the start of your examination, your examiners should talk you through the process which will enable you to remain in contact with your examiners in the event of technology failure.
 6. At the start of your exam, ask your examiners when breaks are scheduled.
 7. *Viva* examinations should not be recorded.
 8. Your webcam must remain on for the duration of your exam.
 9. Have your College ID card to hand to verify your identity.