

Advice to postgraduate research students and supervisors on RDC2 viva examinations during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The entire postgraduate research student team is aware that this is an exceptional and unprecedented situation for all of us. There will be communication from the schools to address the difficulties that postgraduate research students may face with their own individual research projects. The purpose of this guidance is to ensure that RDC2 viva examinations can continue under the circumstances we now face due to Covid-19. The Chair of the RDC, the PVC Research and the entire postgraduate research student team will do their best to manage the situation in the best interests of everyone, while taking into account the health & safety advice coming from government and the university, and trying to ensure that our examination process remains robust. It is very important to realise however that you as postgraduate research students will have a very important role in enabling us to manage this situation effectively together.

You should monitor your email regularly as the situation is very fluid and could change at short notice.

Given the recent advice from government to work from home wherever possible we have taken the decision that RDC2 viva examinations should proceed using one of the available videoconferencing tools, these would include Skype, Zoom, Microsoft Teams and Collaborate Ultra on GCULearn.

For viva examinations arranged

- If your RDC2 viva examination was already arranged, you should proceed by arranging the viva using one of the videoconferencing tools.
- We would ask the Director of Studies to take the lead on arranging the examination by videoconference, and communicate with your student, and the independent assessor to arrange a method of videoconferencing which can be accessed by all participants. As everyone should be on the GCU network either MS Teams or GCULearn Collaborate Ultra should be most suitable. Support will be available from IT services via the normal channels.
- RDC2 reports can be circulated electronically as pdf or Word (.doc or .docx) documents.
- All participants should familiarise themselves with the videoconferencing software chosen and we would ask the Director of Studies to arrange test calls with all participants to ensure no glitches occur at the beginning of the viva. If there are problems consult with IT.
- The examination team need to agree who will lead the viva on the day, and who will initiate the call, we would generally expect this to be the Director of Studies.
- Paperwork should be submitted electronically to the Research Administrators/PGRTs as normal. Email confirmation will suffice as evidence of signature

Arrangements for future RDC2 viva examinations

- You should arrange to conduct the viva examination by videoconferencing as described above.

How to prepare for a remote viva examination

- Remote examination will require some additional preparation and consideration in addition to usual activities to make the viva go as smoothly as possible.
- All participants should familiarise themselves with whichever videoconferencing software chosen and the software should be tested with each participant to make sure that glitches do not happen at the beginning of the viva which might result in delaying the start, rushing and certainly adding stress to the situation. We would ask the Director of Studies to do this.
- Test calls of the entire examination team are advised ahead of the viva and we would ask the Director of Studies to take the lead here. If there are problems consult with IT.
- The examination team will need to agree who will lead the examination on the day, and who will initiate the call, once the DoS has made sure everything has been set up.
- It is usual for examiners to have a short discussion ahead of the viva, so there might need to be two calls, the second of which invites the student.
- Usual practices to make students comfortable might need to be enhanced for remote examination, including a clear introduction of the order of what is to follow, how to indicate that you want to speak, regular checks whether the student might want to add/ clarify/ consolidate their answer; agree what to do if someone needs a break and so on.
- The role of the person leading the examination is of additional importance with remote examinations to keep things on track and ensure that examiners and students get the opportunity to speak. Without usual body language cues, the lead of the examination will need to be more explicit and direct.
- If you are unsure or need some time to formulate your answer, students should feel able to say so and take the time to clarify questions and/or pause for a few moments as would be usual.

Further information on the examination regulations and guidance can be found on the Graduate School website at

<https://www.gcu.ac.uk/graduateschool/postgraduatestudy/regulationsandguidelines/>

The information in this message and further updates on using MS Teams for vivas will be posted on the Graduate School website as soon as possible at

<https://www.gcu.ac.uk/graduateschool/theresearchstudenthandbook/>

We will send you email updates as these resources and guidance documents are developed and become available on the GCU website.

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