**Advice to postgraduate research students and supervisors on 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 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 viva examinations should proceed using one of the available videoconferencing tools, these would include Skype, Zoom and Microsoft Teams.

For viva examinations arranged

* If you have a viva examination arranged, you should contact the Senior Registry Officer, Diane Dickie (d.dickie@gcu.ac.uk) as soon as possible as she will be in communication with IT to advise them of viva examinations taking place where staff and students may need assistance.
* We would ask the Director of Studies to take the lead on arranging the examination by videoconference, and communicate with your student, the examiners and chair, to arrange a method of videoconferencing which can be accessed by all participants. Support will be available from IT services via the normal channels and IT have agreed to prioritise things like viva examinations wherever possible. Diane will assist in informing IT of forthcoming viva examinations.
* Where theses have not yet been sent out to examiners we may ask for pdf and Word (.doc or .docx) versions of the thesis to be sent to Diane for circulation to the examiners
* 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 which might result in delaying the start. If there are problems consult with IT and Diane as necessary.
* The examination team will need to agree who will lead the viva on the day, and who will initiate the call once the DoS has made sure everything has been set up. We would expect the Chair to initiate the call, but this could be the Director of Studies if they are attending.

Arrangements for future viva examinations

* You should continue to submit RDC5 and RDC8 forms as before but send them electronically to Diane. Confirmatory emails from participants will be accepted in place of signature.
* Electronic versions of the thesis should be provided to the Senior Registry Officer for research degree examination, Diane Dickie (d.dickie@gcu.ac.uk) and these will be delivered electronically to the examiners.
* Arrange to conduct the viva examination by videoconferencing as described above.
* As stated In the regulations: **Students**should have no involvement in the appointment of the examiners or the examination arrangements, other than to be included in the setting of a suitable date and testing the videoconferencing arrangments.

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 as the Director of Studies to take the lead here. If there are problems consult with IT and/or Diane.
* 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. This should be the Chair or could be the Director of Studies if they are attending.
* 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 and Director of Studies (where relevant).
* 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. This would normally be done by the Chair.
* The role of the Chair 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 Chair 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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