## THE UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD

**Guidance on conducting remote or hybrid vivas using video conferencing**

The University’s priority is to ensure that guidance on undertaking oral examinations that take place either remotely or in a hybrid format remains in line with University regulations and procedures to maintain appropriate rigour and fairness. Vivas must adhere to the normal requirements, as set out in the [Code of Practice](https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/research-services/code) and [Guidance Notes for Examiners](https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/media/29505/download?attachment).

Guidance below is to facilitate best practice during the video-conference (VC) viva and is not exhaustive. Generic guidance from UK Council for Graduate Education is available [here](http://www.ukcge.ac.uk/media/download.aspx?MediaId=2252).

**Pre-Viva**

***Examiners***

As with face-to-face vivas, examiners should share their independent reports in advance of the viva and arrange to discuss such matters as the main points to be raised with the candidate and the structure of the questioning. This should be done outside of the Blackboard Collaborate (BBC) session via an appropriate means (i.e. telephone).

***Supervisors and Candidates***

As with face-to-face vivas, supervisors should offer the candidate the opportunity to have a formal mock viva using VC technology. A test room for each Faculty in BBC is available for this purpose, or other VC technology can be used. The main purpose of the mock viva is to give the student the opportunity to practice their defence and to become familiar with the format of doing a viva via VC.

***All***

It is important that both the candidate and the examiners familiarise themselves with the use of the VC technology. The vivas will be conducted using BBC and specific technical guidance is available on how to use this technology will be provided, with generic guidance on BBC available [here](https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/apse/digital/collaborate). Everyone should also familiarise themselves with the use of Google Meet (generic guidance available [here](https://shef.topdesk.net/tas/public/ssp/content/detail/knowledgeitem?unid=2240d1f53bd34554950de3ca7cb9c333) ) as this is the preferred back up should there be technical issues with BBC.

**During the Viva**

The internal examiner or the internal coordinator should ensure that the recording has started in BBC and then get each of the participants in the conference to introduce themselves and to confirm that they are in agreement with the format of the viva and that they give consent for the recording of the viva. If the supervisor or an independent observer is present (only by prior agreement), they should be reminded that they should not participate in the discussion other than if the supervisor is asked to provide clarification on a specific matter. They should enter and leave the session with the candidate

It should be agreed upon before the discussion how to handle interactions such as muting microphones when not talking, using the “raise hand” function to talk etc. A back up plan also needs to be agreed upon in advance/at the start of the viva should connection to the BBC session be disrupted or is not stable. If it is not possible to hold the viva in full due to technical issues then the viva needs to be suspended and either re-arranged (with any technical issues addressed) or postponed to such a time that it can be completed in full without disadvantaging the candidate.

As with face-to-face vivas everyone should have a copy of the thesis, access to water, be comfortable in their surroundings and be allowed comfort breaks when needed.

**Delivering the Outcome**

Once the discussion of the thesis is finished, recording of the BBC should be stopped. The procedure and the method for delivering the outcome to the candidate should be agreed upon – ie re-entering the BBC session. The examiners should then discuss the outcome of the viva outside of the BBC session ie via telephone call. When delivering the result to the candidate it is also possible (and encouraged) to have the supervisor or other colleagues/friends present (i.e. all return to the BBC session via the link originally sent) to support the candidate in receiving their outcome.

**Post Viva**

Exit the BBC session as detailed in the technical instructions, and the normal procedure for compiling and submitting the joint reports should be followed.