Guidance notes for Viva Voce examinations by video link

1. General

1.1 It is the normal expectation that the viva voce examination for research degrees be held in Dundee with all parties present: candidate, examiners and convener. However, if exceptional circumstances make it impossible for an oral examination to be conducted in the normal way, then the convener of the examining committee may apply to hold the examination by video link. The guidelines below lay out how approval is sought and what arrangements need to be made to ensure that an examination by video link runs smoothly and fairly. Under no circumstances should a viva voce examination take place by audio conference alone.

1.2 These guidelines do not replace those concerned with the viva voce examination contained in the Research Degrees Quality Code and should be made available to candidates and all examining committee members where it is proposed that a viva voce examination be conducted by video link.

1.3 An application to conduct the examination via video link should be considered only if circumstances make it impossible for the candidate to return to Dundee within a reasonable period, or if this is the only means by which the most appropriate examiners could undertake the examination.

1.4 Where a viva voce by video link has been permitted, it should normally be held on a maximum of two sites only (see 5 below).

1.5 Before permission can be sought for a viva voce to take place by video link, all members of the examining committee as well as the candidate must agree in writing to the proposed arrangements. Supervisors should also be consulted, in particular to verify in writing that the candidate, as far as they are able to ascertain, will not be adversely affected by an examination by video link. If any member of the supervisory team raises doubts about the proposed arrangements, even where the candidate has nevertheless agreed to them, a video link examination may not be used. Agreement can only follow where all parties have read and understood these guidelines.

1.6 The candidate must not feel under any pressure to acquiesce to being examined by video link.

1.7 Prior to making a decision, all parties should have the benefits and difficulties of the technology explained [i.e. that there may be a break in the link mid-examination; that over long distances, scheduling the examination at a conventional time may be problematic; that there may be some time delay that could slow the flow of discussion; and that the normal forms of cueing and interrupting do not work in the same way as in face-to-face contact].

1.8 Appropriate training must be provided to candidates and examiners. If necessary, skilled operators should be present. The candidate's Department/Division/School will be responsible for any costs that are incurred in the provision of such training to the candidate and/or the examiner[s].

1.9 The viva voce examination must not be recorded.

2. Member of Examining Committee at distance

2.1 There are normally three members of an examining committee: Convener, Internal Examiner, and External Examiner. The Convener must always be present in Dundee, but, if circumstances make it unavoidable, either of the internal or external examiners may participate at distance by video link.

2.2 Applications for an examiner to participate by video link must be approved by the relevant Head of Department/Division/School and by the Director of Policy, Governance & Legal Affairs.

2.3 Where the External Examiner participates by video link the College will normally cover the cost as part of the External Examiner's expenses. However, the College must receive an estimated costing in advance, taking into consideration costs incurred in setting up and running the link in Dundee as
well as at the remote site; where costs are high, the relevant Department/Division/School will be asked to contribute to the cost.

2.4 Where the Internal Examiner participates by video link, the cost will be borne by the relevant Department/Division/School.

2.5 Members of the examining committee must ensure they consult privately on the conduct of the examination.

2.6 After the examination but as part of the video link, examiners should discuss and agree privately the content of the final examiners’ report so that their recommendations may be conveyed to the candidate. Their final signed report must then be submitted in the usual way.

3. Candidate at distance

3.1 Applications for a candidate to be examined at distance from Dundee by video link must be approved by the Director of Policy, Governance & Legal Affairs who must be assured that all parties are in agreement and that the candidate will have the opportunity to perform to the best of his/her ability within the constraints of the technology used, and in cognisance of the inherent problems of video links (see 1.7 above).

3.2 The candidate must be accompanied by an approved authority, for example a senior academic at a local university (preferably known to the Dundee Department/Division/School).

3.3 If the link is to be used because of the candidate’s inability to return to Dundee, the Department/Division/school will have the discretion to require the candidate to contribute all or part of the additional costs.

4. Supervisors at distance

4.1 Supervisors may attend the viva voce as observers with the permission of both the candidate and the examining committee. Where attendance is permitted, supervisors must attend in person and not by video link.

5. Three-site examinations

5.1 Viva voce examinations on three sites are generally unacceptable. Where they prove unavoidable they may exceptionally be permitted in cases where two external examiners are at distance independently.

5.2 The Director of Policy, Governance & Legal Affairs alone will have the authority to approve applications for three-site video-link examinations. Such examinations may only take place where all other possibilities have been investigated and exhausted.

6. Appeals

6.1 The examining committee should consider the fact that the extraordinary nature of an examination under these conditions can affect even the most confident candidate. Particular care should be taken with points 1.5 to 1.8 above. When convening an examination under video link conditions, the examining committee is advised to give the candidate the benefit of any doubt when making a final recommendation, whilst nevertheless upholding the standards expected of the degree for which the thesis was submitted.

6.2 The grounds for appeal against a decision resulting from an examination using this method are no different from one under normal circumstances. However, non-adherence to these guidelines (particularly 1.5-1.8) may constitute ‘procedural irregularities’ in terms of section 7.2(b) of the Postgraduate Appeals Procedure.

Policy Approved by Senate 2006 (Terminology Updated 2013)