Guidelines on the use of Video Conferencing in a Viva
(Last updated June 2017)

1. Introduction
The University strongly prefers that the viva be held on University premises with all appointed examiners present in the room with the candidate. The viva presents an important opportunity for the student to meet and engage with a senior academic outside of St Andrews who will be a useful professional contact later on. Having all members present on campus also promotes fairness by ensuring that the examination is held in a controlled environment and any necessary accommodations or support can be arranged.

In some cases, however, it may be permitted for the external examiner to join via video conferencing (VC) or other alternative. The situations when this might be considered are outlined in the Assessment section of the Policy for Postgraduate Research Students.

In all circumstances the student must be in the presence of the internal examiner/convener. The examination should take place at the University of St Andrews except in extraordinary circumstances, and subject to the approval of the Dean. If a student is expecting to leave the UK after completing their course they must submit their thesis in time for the viva to be held before leaving St Andrews or plan on returning for the oral examination. Students with a Tier 4 visa should seek advice from the International Student Advisers prior to leaving.

2. Approval and Scheduling
Whenever possible, the request for viva by video conferencing should be submitted at the same time as the examining committee nomination, or as soon as possible after it becomes clear that a face-to-face viva cannot proceed as planned. In all cases explicit permission must be obtained from the Pro Dean (Postgraduate Research) and no examination arrangements should be made prior to receiving this approval. The following information should be sent with the request:

- Why a face to face viva is not possible.
- Where each of the participants will be located. Participants based in St Andrews should give a building and room number.
- Which VC application and equipment is to be used (if not a dedicated VC facility).
- Written confirmation from all participants that they are prepared to proceed by VC (this should be collated by the Convenor).

In cases where the external examiner will be joining from a different time zone, time differences must be taken in to account when scheduling the viva.

3. Training, Preparation and Set-up
A viva conducted using video conferencing should otherwise be comparable to a viva held within the University. This means that the conditions should be similar to those used for face-to-face vivas and there should be no interruptions during the
examination. The examiners must ensure that they can speak privately before the viva to agree the structure of the examination, the form and sequence of the questions, and who will take the lead at various stages of the viva. The examiners will also need to confer privately at the end of the examination and the candidate should be given a comfortable place to wait during these discussions.

When arranging a viva by VC, consideration should be given to the software, room layout, and camera and microphone arrangements. In some cases separate viewing facilities for visual aids or additional documents will need to be considered. A room already set up for VC is preferred and the University has a number of VC rooms which can be booked. Further information can be found at: [http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/itsupport/academic/MediaServices/Videoconferencingfacilities/](http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/itsupport/academic/MediaServices/Videoconferencingfacilities/). The room should be arranged ergonomically so that all participants can speak and be heard clearly without leaning forward or twisting around. Co-located participants should be able to comfortably remain in the same camera view and have good microphone pickup at all times. The camera should be good enough to capture facial expressions and provide a high-quality image for all participants. Note that audio is more important than video and headsets going through a mixer will usually provide a better quality sound.

Training should be offered in advance of the viva and all parties must have access to technical support during the event. It is important to test the setup and network connection in advance, at least a week before the viva. The test should last at least 15 minutes and involve the same number of participants. This gives an opportunity to test the VC application, adjust the placement of seats, display, camera, microphone and loudspeakers (or headsets). The test may also identify any problems such as poor network connections which may preclude the viva proceeding using that setup. A backup plan should be agreed in case the technology fails (eg alternative VC software).

4. **Waivers and Appeals**

Following the oral examination, but prior to the examiners delivering their decision, all participants should be asked to confirm that the video conferencing arrangements had no substantive bearing on the examination process. This should be explicitly recorded in the examiners’ report.

Having agreed to a viva using VC, the candidate will not be permitted to use this as grounds for a later appeal except in instances of technical failure or other unforeseen circumstances beyond the control of the examiners where no reasonable allowance was made. If the candidate deems their performance to have been adversely affected by technical difficulties or other unforeseen circumstances they should raise this concern at the end of the examination so that it can be noted in the examiners’ report.