

## CODE OF PRACTICE ON POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH DEGREES: APPENDIX 6

### PROCEDURE FOR REMOTE ORAL EXAMINATION OF A RESEARCH DEGREE

#### 1. Introduction

1.1 The Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine (LSTM) is committed to providing a high quality educational experience for all students, with appropriate academic support, administrative structures and good welfare services and facilities. This procedure is Appendix 6 of an inter-related framework of procedures under the *Code of Practice on Postgraduate Research Degrees*.

1.1. The term '*remote oral (viva voce) examination*' refers to circumstances where the mobility of the student is a feature of the programme, i.e. either the student, and/or the internal examiner and/or the external examiner (and/or any independent Chair) is engaged in the examination remotely, at separate locations, some or all outside the UK. The conduct of any remote oral examination and the academic examination of the thesis should replicate, as far as possible, an examination held in person at LSTM and should adhere wholly to other relevant procedures under the *Code of Practice on Postgraduate Research Degrees*.

#### 2. Scope

2.1. This procedure applies to all current PGR students registered with LSTM, whether based on-site, off-site or split-site, and studying full-time or part-time.

2.2. The procedure covers examination of a thesis leading to one of the following awards:

- Master of Philosophy (MPhil)
- Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)
- Doctor of Medicine (MD)

#### 3. Requesting a Remote Examination and Eligibility Criteria

3.1. A candidate must request to hold an oral examination remotely when they submit their Intention to Submit form. The request should indicate the specific locations of each of the parties involved, confirmation that appropriate premises and technology are available, and the anticipated local time of the examination.

3.2. The granting of permission to hold an oral examination remotely should be regarded as an exceptional circumstance and it will not be granted on the grounds solely of convenience, availability of examiners, or preference of the student or supervisors. The circumstances under which a remote oral examination will be considered are confined to where a student has studied for an LSTM research degree, either as a single, joint or dual award, wholly or partly outside the UK. Where a student has undertaken their research degree at LSTM or under an off-site arrangement elsewhere in the UK, it is expected that oral examinations would take place at LSTM. Exceptions may be considered and approved by the Director for Postgraduate Research, on application, based on sound reasons.

3.3. A remote oral examination will not be permitted where a student who has undertaken their LSTM research degree in the UK under a Tier 4 student visa has had their right to

remain in the UK curtailed by the Home Office before their examination has been undertaken. Under these circumstances, the examination should be arranged within the normal period of leave to remain in the UK, according to the Tier 4 visa or, if this is not possible, the candidate would have to leave the UK and apply for a visitor visa to attend their examination at LSTM.

- 3.4. Any institutional agreement with a collaborative partner should set out the arrangements for the examination, stating whether or not the option of holding a remote examination is available and/or would be the default arrangement. Students must be informed of this option at registration and again when they submit their Intention to Submit form.

#### **4. Authority to Approve Remote Examinations**

- 4.1. The decision to permit an oral examination to be conducted remotely will be taken as part of the process to appoint the examiners, at which time the reason for the request will be considered and approved by the Director of Postgraduate Research.
- 4.2. LSTM reserves the right to withhold permission for a remote oral examination to be conducted where it believes it is more likely than not to be disadvantageous for the candidate or in contravention of these procedures. There is no right of appeal for the candidate of the decision.

#### **5. Location and Timing**

- 5.1. Under normal circumstances, the internal examiner, and/or independent Chair, will be based at LSTM when convening a remote oral examination. Exceptionally, the internal examiner(s) may convene the examination outside the UK at the same location as that of the student. This is particularly relevant where a student has undertaken their research degree as part of an institutional collaborative arrangement and where the internal examiner may be based at the partner institution. The External Examiner will normally join the examination remotely from their home institution.
- 5.2. Students must attend a remote oral examination in a specified and appropriate location and not in a domestic setting. This could be British Council Offices, an institutional partner's premises, or their place of work. The location must meet with normal examination conditions with appropriate hardware and software facilities. It is the responsibility of the student to secure appropriate premises and to provide the internal examiner with a room booking confirmation, or equivalent, which includes details of the technical specification of the IT resources to be used for videoconferencing. It is the responsibility of the internal examiner to approve these arrangements.
- 5.3. Under normal circumstances the examiners' location would be their place of work or an appropriate alternative location, e.g. British Council Offices or another institution.
- 5.4. No other person, other than the candidate and the approved examiners and, where appointed, an independent Chair, are permitted to attend a remote oral examination.
- 5.5. The scheduling of the remote oral examination will be expressed in terms of UK time and should be arranged at a time mutually agreed by all parties.
- 5.6. Postponement of a scheduled remote oral examination should be exceptional. Students may postpone the examination on one occasion and only for good reason.

## **6. Technological Requirements**

- 6.1. All remote oral examinations must be conducted using both audio and visual interaction. Should visual links fail, the examination must be suspended and re-scheduled. Under such circumstances, the examiners will decide what proportion of the examination has been completed and what issues would be covered in any re-scheduled examination
- 6.2. The use of recording technology during a remote oral examination is not allowed.
- 6.3. It is expected that all parties would have their own copy of the submitted thesis with them during the examination.

## **7. Responsibilities of Candidate**

- 7.1. It is the responsibility of the candidate to notify LSTM if they require any adjustments to the way in which the examination will be conducted due to a disability. Any such adjustments can only be made based on the submission of an independent needs assessment which recommends such adjustments. Any such adjustments must be requested at least three months prior to the examination being held.
- 7.2. It is the responsibility of the candidate to ensure that the location and technical support requirements for the remote oral examination comply with the terms of this procedure. The candidate is required to attend any pre-tests of the videoconferencing connections. Failure to do so will result in the examination being re-scheduled at LSTM and the candidate will be required to meet any personal costs associated with this.
- 7.3. It is the responsibility of the candidate to meet any costs associated with their location and technical support required for the remote oral examination.
- 7.4. Candidates, whose thesis has been examined remotely are eligible to submit an appeal against the decision of the examiners in accordance with the *Procedure for Appealing against the Outcome of a Research Degree Examination*. Candidates are not eligible to submit any appeal on the grounds that their thesis was examined remotely unless they can demonstrate that the conduct of the examination constitutes grounds for appeal

## **8. Preparation for the Examination**

- 8.1. It will be the responsibility of the internal examiner to ensure that, once approved, the examination is organised and conducted in accordance with these procedures and the broader *Code of Practice on Postgraduate Research Degrees*.
- 8.2. It is the responsibility of the Internal Examiner to arrange the date and time of the examination. All other arrangements for the preparation for the examination, such as distribution of the thesis, academic regulations and other documentation, will be in accordance with the *Code of Practice on Postgraduate Research Degrees*.
- 8.3. The Internal Examiner must liaise with the IT Team to ensure that, wherever possible, network connections are trialled by all parties at least 48 hours prior to the formal start of the remote examination. A remote oral examination should not be started where there are known technical problems with network connections and alternative arrangements should be explored.

## **9. Conducting the Examination**

- 9.1. Under normal circumstances, the internal examiner, supported by the IT team, will initiate the videoconference session for the examination and will invite all relevant parties to attend.
- 9.2. The examiners will have the opportunity to convene for an appropriate period prior to the student being invited to the examination. When the examination has been completed, the candidate will leave the videoconference whilst the examiners deliberate on their decisions. The candidate will be re-admitted to the session to be informed of the outcome of the examination.
- 9.3. When all parties are convened, the normal order of proceedings for an oral examination will be followed in accordance with the *Code of Practice on Postgraduate Research Degrees*.
- 9.4. All remote oral examinations will be conducted in English for 100% of the time, even where one or more of the Examiners may be native speakers of the same language as the candidate.
- 9.5. A record should be made in the Final Report of the Examiners that the examination was conducted remotely and the report should include any issues, both technical and any other which occurred during the examination together with details of any action taken.
- 9.6. If there is a breakdown in either the audio-visual connections, the examination must be suspended and re-scheduled. Under such circumstances, the examiners will decide what proportion of the *viva voce* has been completed and what issues should be covered in any re-scheduled examination. If, after two attempts, the connections fail with no prospect of resolution, consideration should be made for the examination to be conducted at LSTM with all parties present. The reasons for this interruption to the process should be noted by the internal examiner. Where a remote examination has had to be suspended, the same examiners should continue to examine the thesis.

## **10. Establishing the Identity of the Candidate**

- 10.1. Candidates must provide the internal examiner with a scanned colour copy of photograph identification prior to the examination for identification purposes.
- 10.2. It is the responsibility of the internal examiner to ascertain, as far as is reasonably possible, that the candidate has provided appropriate evidence of their true identity.
- 10.3. Log-in details for accessing the videoconference must be kept confidential and should not be shared with any other persons. Candidates will only be able to access the videoconference using the email address provided to them by LSTM. Personal email addresses will not be used.
- 10.4. Candidates will be required to show evidence of their identity to the examiners prior to the examination starting.
- 10.5. Any evasion by the candidate to verify their identity will prevent the examination from taking place and will result in disciplinary action being taken.