



L-Università  
ta' Malta

# **Guidelines for Online Oral Examinations**

in terms of the Doctor of Philosophy – Ph.D. – Degree Regulations, 2008 and  
the Doctor of Philosophy – Ph.D. – Degree Regulations, 2023

DOCTORAL SCHOOL  
2023

## Guidelines for Online Oral Examination

1. This document provides guidance on the preparation for an oral examination where an examination board member is present remotely. The *Doctor of Philosophy – Ph.D. – Regulations, 2023* make provision for two instances when this can happen:
  - (a) The University recognizes that in exceptional circumstances it may not be possible for all the examiners to be present in person for an oral examination and allowance is made for **one** of the examiners to participate in the oral examination remotely with the approval of the Doctoral Academic Committee [Regulation 53(4)].
  - (b) In the case of a thesis that has been resubmitted for examination, the visiting external examiner is allowed to be present remotely to re-examine the student orally [Regulation 55(1)(d)].

Exceptionally, the Doctoral Academic Committee has had to consider requests for oral examinations to be held remotely when a student is being assessed under the terms of the Doctor of Philosophy – Ph.D. – Regulations, 2008. These guidelines are meant to be applicable even in cases where the examination is governed by such regulations.

2. The purpose of the viva and its conduct should remain as per the standard procedure, as defined in the *Procedures for the Examination of the Master of Philosophy (M.Phil.) and Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) Degrees in terms of the Doctor of Philosophy – Ph.D. – Degree Regulations, 2023* (§ 5).
3. All reasonable steps must be taken to ensure that the candidate is not disadvantaged compared with the standard oral examination.
4. The video conference platform used for online oral examinations must be supported and licensed by the University of Malta. IT Services currently support a ZOOM platform for the purpose of remote communication.
5. Where the oral examination will include a member who is present remotely, the following points should be observed:
  - (a) The oral examination should be scheduled at a time that is reasonable to the time zone in which the candidate and the examiners are located. Every effort must be made for the examination to be held during UM business hours so as to guarantee the best possible administrative and technical support.
  - (b) The candidate and the examiners are to ensure that they have suitable equipment (with both audio and video) for the viva and access to a location free from distractions. The University of Malta is providing a location for local participants and is located at the IT Services building. This room shall always be used by local members for such examinations with remote participation.
  - (c) When the oral examination is attended by one member being present remotely, the method cannot be used as grounds for an appeal of the outcome of the examination process.
  - (d) Online oral examinations will not be routinely recorded.

6. The Chair, as Convenor, is responsible for arranging for the oral examination and for setting up the online session before the viva, ensuring that suitable equipment is available. It is important that:
  - (a) The online video conferencing facility and any required equipment should be available for sufficient time for the examination to take place. If there is doubt about the length of time required, every effort should be made to ensure that possible overrunning can be accommodated. It is recommended that any required equipment is booked for at least one hour beyond the anticipated length of the examination.
  - (b) Time should be allowed in advance of the examination for the parties to undertake a short familiarization session in the use of the technology. It is recommended that a trial run is undertaken prior to the oral examination to ensure that the technology meets the expected standards.
  - (c) The technology used must support video and audio connections and the parties must confirm that they have the required equipment and that it can be plugged in to maintain battery life.
  - (d) The oral examination must be carried out using both video and audio. However, video and audio may not be required by members throughout and it should be noted that maintaining active video engagement may be difficult, if there is also a need to consult simultaneously an online version of the thesis.
  - (e) If there is a failure in the connection/technology attempts should be made to re-connect. In the event of a serious or protracted breakdown in the connection or quality of the connection of more than 20 minutes the oral examination should be halted. However, if it is clear before 20 minutes are up that re-connection cannot be made or is unlikely, the oral examination should be halted.
  - (f) The decision as to whether to halt an oral examination should be made by the Chair. How to make the decision as to whether the viva is postponed, re-convened or concluded is covered in section 7.
  
7. If the viva has to be halted due to a breakdown in the connection, undesirable quality of the connection or for any other valid reason, the Chair should consult with the examiner present remotely via an alternative method (e.g. telephone). The examiners should decide whether there is a need to reconvene at another date or whether sufficient discussion had taken place by the point of interruption that further examination would not change their decision. In arriving at such a decision, the examiners should take into account the requirements and outcomes of a doctoral degree and not the extent to which they had covered the contents of the thesis. If it is agreed that the viva needs to be re-scheduled this should be at a mutually agreed time for all parties and examiners be cognizant of the fact that The Chair should communicate the outcome of this decision to the candidate as soon as possible.
  
8. The room booking procedure shall be as follows:
  - a. The Chair or their delegate shall book the venue for both a trial run and the actual examination with UM Scheduling Office (SCO). The procedure should follow the same process as when booking for regular lectures in UM learning spaces.
  - b. Once the venue booking is confirmed, the Chair or their delegate shall make a request for technical staff from IT Services to be available throughout the trial run and at the beginning of the actual examination. The procedure for this is to click on 'Request technical assistance for viva' from the IT Services [Audiovisual & learning spaces technology](#) web page. Confirmation whether such technical assistance is

available on the requested dates will be sent via email. While all efforts are made for the venue to be self-operational, it is strongly advised that such a technical appointment is set with IT Services technical staff for the trial run and also for the start of the examination. In view of this, it is highly recommended that such bookings and appointments are made well ahead of time (a few weeks in advance).

- c. The Chair, student and foreign party shall be present for the trial run and examination. If it is not possible to have everyone available at the same time, individual appointments can be made. This is so as to ensure that everyone is comfortable with the system and all equipment, especially personal devices, are tested.
- d. Any special requests for additional technical setup shall be made ahead of time and prior to the trial run. The Chair will then authorise such arrangements in collaboration with IT Services. No changes shall be entertained during the examination. The student can book a visit to the venue with SCO ahead of the trial run for which there will be no need for the Chair or any foreign parties to be present. Technical assistance can still be requested following the same procedure indicated above.

Nothing in the content of these Procedures takes precedence over the *Doctor of Philosophy – Ph.D. – Regulations, 2023* which may be subject to amendment.

*Endorsed by Academic Registrar, IT Services, Scheduling Office*

*Approved by the Doctoral Academic Committee, Doctoral School – 15 March 2023*