POSTGRADUATE PROTOCOLS

Doctoral Oral Examinations Undertaken Remotely

Summary

When arranging the doctoral oral examination remotely there are processes that should be followed in order to facilitate a smooth and successful examination.

Purpose

This protocol outlines the timeframe, communication process, and technical solutions associated with remote oral examinations. It also outlines the roles and expectations of all participants.

Scope

This protocol is to be used when arranging remote oral examination for doctoral students for doctoral oral examinations.

Application

Prior to the oral examination - GRS Examinations team

All participants will have indicated to the GRS Examinations team whether they will present in person or remotely for the oral examination. Examiners outside Auckland will be advised the oral examination will be conducted via Zoom. The Auckland examiner may attend in person. If the student wishes to participate in the examination remotely, they must notify the GRS when completing Lodgement for Examination form or email the Examinations team directly. In some instances, such as unexpected pandemic alert level restrictions, all orals will be conducted using Zoom at short notice.

Prior to the oral examination - Student

Off-site location

The GRS would recommend that the student is set up in a space where they can focus and concentrate during the oral examination without any surrounding distractions.

Defer oral examination

The student can contact the Examinations team if they want to defer their oral examination to another date, due to inadequate online accessibility, equipment or space to participate remotely.

Support person for the student

The student may have a support person with them prior to the oral examination commencing and during the outcome of the oral examination. The student may request to have a support person with them during the oral examination. This request will be considered on a case by case basis, and only applicable to oral examinations that are managed remotely.

The role of the support person will be to observe only - coaching the student is not permitted.

Prior to the oral examination - Examiners

The Examinations team would already have the examiners' mobile or land-line phone numbers and email contact before the oral. The exams team will send a reminder the day prior with a phone number for each country that participants to dial into the zoom meeting, should examiners have any technical issues.

Prior to the oral examination – All participants
Observing convenor
For training purposes, the GRS appoint new convenors to observe oral examinations and oral examination briefing and will undertake to notify the student, supervisors, and the examination panel members in advance if this is required.

Prior to the oral examination - Convenor, Student and Supervisors
Oral Examination Briefing
A zoom meeting would be set up in the normal way, 7 - 10 days prior to the oral. The Convenor will meet with the student and supervisor(s) to go over the new protocol for doctoral oral examinations undertaken remotely – including how to manage technical difficulties, as well as the usual discussion about the examination itself and the reports that will be provided by the Examinations team via email.

Oral examination – All participants
A zoom meeting would be set up in the normal way. The student and supervisors will be set up in a 'waiting room' (zoom meeting) where they will meet before the examination and after the questions while the examiners decide on the outcome. The Examinations team will still be remotely managing and monitoring the examination so participants can send them a message at any time through Zoom Chat messaging in the meeting.

Format/outline for the oral examination
The Exams team have provided a step-by-step guide below on how the oral examination will be conducted via Zoom. The Examinations team will be in Zoom meeting the entire time and availability to assist when required. The duration of the oral examination may take between 2-2.5 hours.

Prior to the oral examination commencing, the Exams team will provide a 10-minute session for the Convenor to Zoom in with the student and supervisors.

Step 1: The Convenor will enter the Examination room or request to be moved into the Breakout room with the student and supervisors to outline the process and if any technical issues arise, how they will be managed. The Convenor finishes the discussions with the student and supervisors and will enter the Examination room with the examiners.

Step 2: Convenor and Examiner introductions. Convenor to discuss and outline the process of the oral examination, and how technical issues will be managed. The Convenor will then ask the Examinations team to invite the candidate and supervisors to Zoom into the oral examination meeting.
(Examinations team will liaise with the student and supervisors to enter the oral examination meeting)

Step 3: When all participants are in the oral examination meeting, the examination will begin.
Once the examiners conclude their questions, the student and supervisors will be asked to exit the meeting, while the examiners discuss and deliberate the outcome.
(Examinations team will monitor to ensure that the student and supervisors are no longer in the oral examination meeting)

Step 4: The Convenor will ask the Examinations team to invite the student and supervisors back into the room to confirm the outcome of the oral examination.
(Examinations team will liaise with the student and supervisors to enter the oral examination meeting)

Step 5: The Convenor will conclude the meeting.

Technical Issues
The Convenor may wish to use one or two devices for the examination. It would be advisable to have Zoom link or meeting ID and password ready and available to ensure ease of linking into the meeting room, where applicable.
If there are internet/technical issues during the oral examination, we will look at the following solutions:

1. When everyone has entered the Zoom meeting, the Convenor will check that participants can see and hear each other by giving a thumbs up to the camera. The Convenor will ask each participant in turn to say hello to ensure, as the host, they can also hear everyone okay.

2. Critical people to ensure are clear on visual and sound are candidate, examiner and Convenor. The Convenor may do regular checks to see that the candidate and examiners are able to see/hear.

3. If someone wishes to speak, they raise their hand physically or via the Zoom raise hand option so that the Convenor can invite the participant to speak.

4. If there is poor video quality, we will revert to audio only and ask the participant with the issue to stop their camera.

5. If there are audio quality issues:
   a. Audio feedback creating a loud noise - ask the participant to mute their audio sound when they are not speaking,
   b. Ask the participant to leave the meeting and re-enter,
   c. If the above options do not work, ask the participant to phone into the meeting. The exams team will have a series of numbers for each country that participants can dial into the zoom meeting. The exams team will email the participants should this happen.

6. If a participant drops out, the Convenor will ask the exams team to liaise with the participant to get them to dial in:
   a. If they cannot dial in, the exams team will notify the Convenor and ask that everyone wait five minutes. The exams team will work with the participant to try and re-enter the meeting.
   b. If they are not able to return after 5 mins, the exams team will ask everyone to leave the meeting and retry in 15 minutes and then again at 30 minutes. If we are unable to return to the meeting at this point, the exams team will discuss with the Convenor regarding postponing the examination. The exams team will email all participants advising of the decision to postpone.

All these points will be communicated in the confirmation email in the days prior to the oral so that all participants are aware of the protocol. The Convenor may reinforce this before the oral commences.

Please note:
- Don't hesitate to pause if needed;
- If an examiner drops out near the end of the process and can't return, we will leave it up to the Convenor's judgement if the Convenor has enough information for an outcome or not.

Videoconferencing etiquette and presentation advice
For videoconferencing etiquette and tips, the Exams team recommends:
- [Zoom etiquette and tips for hosts and participants](#)
- [Video presentation tips](#)
- [video conferencing etiquette](#)

Post oral examination – All participants
The Convenor will complete the 'Oral Examination Panel Report' form and the Convenor Report and email the two documents to the Examinations team for processing. The examiners are expected to respond to the Convenor report provided within 48 hours of receipt. The Examinations team will contact the student and supervisor(s) with the oral examination outcome once the Convenor's Report has been approved by the examiners. This may take 2-3 working days.

Review

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Related Protocols

Doctoral Examinations Protocol
Appointment of Examiners Protocol
Revise and Resubmit Protocol