

Conduct of Oral Assessments for Taught Programmes of Study

Introduction

1. This document provides guidance on the conduct of all forms of oral assessment for students completing taught programmes of study (undergraduate and postgraduate taught) including credit-bearing short courses.
2. An oral assessment is defined as a conversation or presentation on a given topic. Examples of oral assessments might include individual or group conversations, discussions, debates, presentations, poster presentations, contributions to seminars, spoken language assessments, and viva voce examinations. Viva voce examinations are a specific form of oral examination that is used to defend a larger body of work, such as a thesis or project, or may be used as part of an investigation of alleged academic misconduct, as outlined in the [Academic Misconduct Policy and Procedures](#)
3. MRes programmes are required to have at least one oral assessment in line with the [Master's Level Precepts](#). There are no specific requirements for other programmes to include oral assessment however, a range of assessment methods is encouraged.

Notification

4. At the start of the autumn term departments/programmes using oral assessments (including when using vivas) in that academic session should issue students with the following information:
 - a. Clear instructions on the use and purpose of oral assessment(s) in their programme;
 - b. Information on when the oral assessment (s) are likely to take place;
 - c. The duration and format of the oral assessment(s);
 - d. How the assessment will be marked;
 - e. Who will be, or is permitted to be, in attendance.
5. For undergraduate students any oral assessment would normally be within term time. For Postgraduate Students any oral assessments would normally be expected to fall within the published programme registration period.

Examining Oral Assessments

6. For all oral assessments, the [Regulations for Taught Programmes of Study](#) stipulates how marking and moderation must be conducted. This would normally mean that no less than two markers will act together. This may include both examiners being present at the assessment, or the assessment being recorded for the purposes of second marking/moderation.

7. When a viva voce examination is used, in addition to the members of staff completing the assessment and marking process, the relevant External Examiner may also be attendance. The role of the External Examiner is not to mark the student, but to ensure that the university's assessment and marking processes are completed fairly and consistently.
8. The department/programme should inform the examiners of the marking scheme/ permitted outcomes prior to the assessment.
9. Examiners should make a report on each oral assessment which includes a note of the questions asked and a record of why marks were awarded. This must be available for review by the Board of Examiners or for other legitimate purpose, in line with the university retention policies.

Specific guidance regarding Viva Voce examinations

10. Students should be provided with information about the purpose and format of the viva voce examination in advance. This must include details of those who will be present to mark and moderate.
11. It is recommended that students are reminded about the purpose of the viva at the start of the examination.

Viva Voce examinations forming part of the programme assessment

12. It is recommended that the first five minutes of the viva voce examination should include general questions relating to the students' research interests in order to make them feel comfortable. The examiners would then be free to ask suitable questions to test the student's knowledge of the subject area. However, it is not a requirement to follow this format and examiners are free to choose a structure that is appropriate for the student and to the subject area, and in line with the assessment criteria/marketing scheme.
13. The duration of the viva would be dependent on the nature of the assessment but should typically last between 15 and 30 minutes.
14. Marking will be completed by two markers, and may be attended by the External Examiner (see above).
15. Viva voce examinations should normally be conducted in person (i.e. not by telephone or video conferencing, etc.).
16. No one may attend the viva voce examination except the examiners and the candidate.

Viva Voce examinations for consideration of allegations of Academic Misconduct

17. Where the viva is being held under the [Academic Misconduct Policy and Procedures](#), the relevant section of the policy document must be followed. Staff are advised to seek advice and guidance from the Student Casework Team in the first instance.
18. It is recommended that the first five minutes of the viva voce examination should include general questions relating to the students' studies in order to make them feel comfortable. The examiners would then be free to ask suitable questions to test the student's knowledge of the subject area in relation to the assessment which is being investigated. However, it is not a requirement to follow this format and examiners are free to choose a structure that is appropriate for the student and

enables the examiners to explore with the student whether they are the sole author of the original work.

19. The duration of the viva would be dependent on the nature of the allegation, should typically last no longer than 30 minutes and should normally be conducted in person (i.e. not by telephone or video conferencing, etc.).
20. The viva will be examined by two members of academic or teaching staff. An additional staff member may be present as note-taker but will not take part in any discussions.
21. A report of the discussion, and any findings of the examiners will be produced. The examiners should provide a detailed rationale as to whether, in their academic opinion, the student has demonstrated authorship of the original assessment.

Further Information

22. Further details on assessment practice can be found in the university's [academic regulations](#) or the [academic policies pages](#) available from the website.
23. For MRes programmes see the [Master's Level Precepts](#)

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