

# CHUGD

## Committee of Heads of University Geoscience Departments

---

### Viva Voce Examinations

A recent CHUGD survey of member institutions has highlighted a steady reduction in the use of *Viva voce* examinations. Whilst there are a number of drivers behind such a decline, CHUGD considers that these examinations continue to serve an important function in undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes, as follows:

- To provide external examiners with an overview of overall standards for a particular cohort of students, a programme or a subject area within a particular HEI
- To aid determination of whether a student has carried out work submitted for assessment
- To provide students with an impression and overview of external standards
- To provide students further opportunities to develop communication skills as outlined in the QAA ES3 benchmark document:
  - a. receiving and responding to a variety of information sources (e.g. textual, numerical, verbal, graphical)
  - b. communicating appropriately to a variety of audiences in written, verbal and graphical forms.

Where *Viva voce* examinations are being used as part of the summative assessment of programme learning outcomes, CHUGD supports their use only as an integral part of the assessment package and not as an adjunct to modify marks at examination boards. In many cases this means that such examinations will be included as part of the assessment of a module, in which case CHUGD would advocate their use in modules related to independent project/research work.

Given the different drivers for *Viva voce* examinations, their purpose should be stated clearly from the outset and made available to students and to examiners well in advance. This should include the basis on which students will be selected, and the format and possible outcomes of the examination.

In advocating the continued use of *viva voce* examinations within member institutions, CHUGD refers members to relevant parts of the QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education:

#### *Chapter B6: Assessment of students and accreditation of prior learning*

“where oral examinations take place, ensuring that opportunities are available for a student to practice and receive constructive feedback, and that the practice and feedback are timed to enable students to refine their work and, if necessary, to further develop the personal skills needed to present their arguments effectively”

#### *Chapter B7: External examining*

To fulfil their role in a rigorous manner, external examiners are informed of:

- whether they are entitled to meet students on programmes or parts of programmes they are examining, and if so the purpose of any such meeting
- what evidence they need in order to judge the quality and appropriateness of assessment and to assure themselves that assessments are testing the intended learning outcomes
- how they will be given adequate opportunity to communicate with internal examiners and others involved in teaching and assessment (such as placement providers/assessors).

---

#### **Executive Committee:**

**Chair:** Prof M Lovell ([mtl@leicester.ac.uk](mailto:mtl@leicester.ac.uk))

**Vice Chair:** Prof J Davidson ([j.p.davidson@durham.ac.uk](mailto:j.p.davidson@durham.ac.uk)),

**Executive Secretary:** Dr M Anderson ([manderson@plymouth.ac.uk](mailto:manderson@plymouth.ac.uk))

**Treasurer:** Prof R Patrick ([richard.patrick@man.ac.uk](mailto:richard.patrick@man.ac.uk))

**Members:** Prof H Rollinson ([H.Rollinson@derby.ac.uk](mailto:H.Rollinson@derby.ac.uk)), Prof Dorrick Stow ([Dorrik.Stow@pet.hw.ac.uk](mailto:Dorrik.Stow@pet.hw.ac.uk)), Prof David Manning ([David.Manning@newcastle.ac.uk](mailto:David.Manning@newcastle.ac.uk)), Prof Tim Minshull ([tmin@noc.soton.ac.uk](mailto:tmin@noc.soton.ac.uk))

**Administrative Secretary:** Wendy Sinha ([wca@noc.soton.ac.uk](mailto:wca@noc.soton.ac.uk)) Tel: 023 8059 6468