

DIGITAL THESIS DEFENCE

Quick reference guide

Introduction

In light of the COVID-19 measures, this reference guide was created to support supervisors and PhD candidates in setting up a digital thesis defence, in case the defence cannot be postponed. The reference guide is compliant with the Central PhD Regulations and the best practices of the VUB Teams team. This way of working can be adapted according to supplementary agreements within the respective faculties.

Upon meeting the requirements specified in Art. 20¹ the examination for the academic degree of doctor includes the submission and public defence of a thesis. The examination consists of 2 parts: an **internal** and **public** defence of the thesis. It is recommended that **before** each defence the Chairman – or delegate - sets up the required ‘Microsoft Teams’ meetings.

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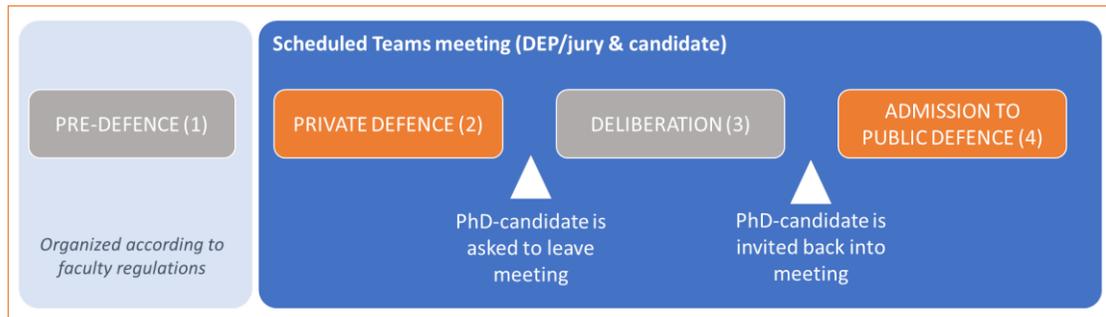
1. Part 1: Set up of **Private** defence of the thesis (4 phases)

The consultation and assessment procedure for the internal digital defence consists of **4 phases**. For phases 2 – 4 the **same** Teams meeting can be used.

- Phase 1 (Pre-defence):** The **Doctoral examination panel** (DEP) / Jury members consult among themselves (Art.30¹§3), **in writing or orally** by way of a restricted Teams meeting or other tool.
- Phase 2 (Defence):** The doctoral candidate defends the thesis internally by means of a **Teams meeting**, set up in advance, during which s/he can share her/his presentation with the jury members. For optimal conditions please read the WoW & Tips in section 3 below. After the presentation by the doctoral candidate, the DEP/Jury has the possibility to ask questions in a Q&A session.
- Phase 3 (Deliberation):** The DEP/Jury asks the candidate to **leave** the Teams meeting. The DEP/jury moves on to the deliberation process. They are mindful **not to use the chat box** while deliberating.

¹All articles can be found in the Central regulations for the Conferral of the Academic Title of Doctor (CDR), approved by the Academic Council on October 21 2019.

4. **Phase 4 (Admission to public defence):** The Chairman of the DEP/Jury **invites** the doctoral student **back** into the existing Teams meeting and informs her/him of the outcome of the deliberation. In all cases, according to Art. 30¹ the Chairman of the DEP/JURY issues a **written report** to the doctoral candidate after the internal defence stating which of the 4 possible decisions has been made (Art.30¹ §3).

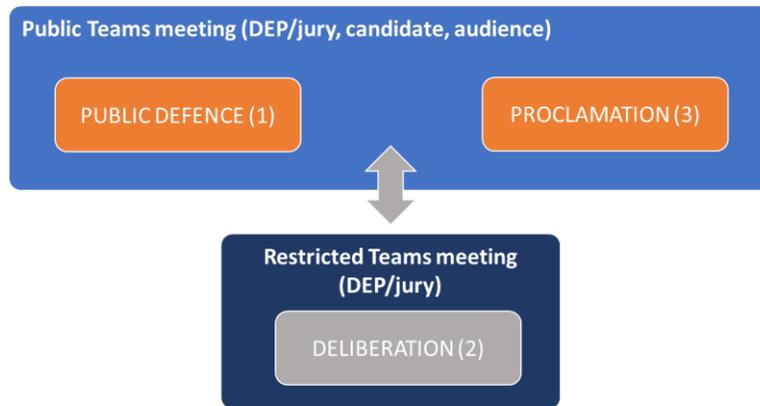


2. Part 2: Set up of Public defence of the thesis (3 phases)

For the digital public defence **2 separate Teams meetings** need to be scheduled, a **public** and a **restricted** meeting.

The Faculty secretariat ensures that the announcement of the public defence is published on the VUB website including the access link to Teams meeting A, the public Teams meeting. See also the Supplementary Faculty doctoral regulations for more detailed rules on the organization of the announcement. According to Art. 33¹, the competent faculty body approves the digital public defence.

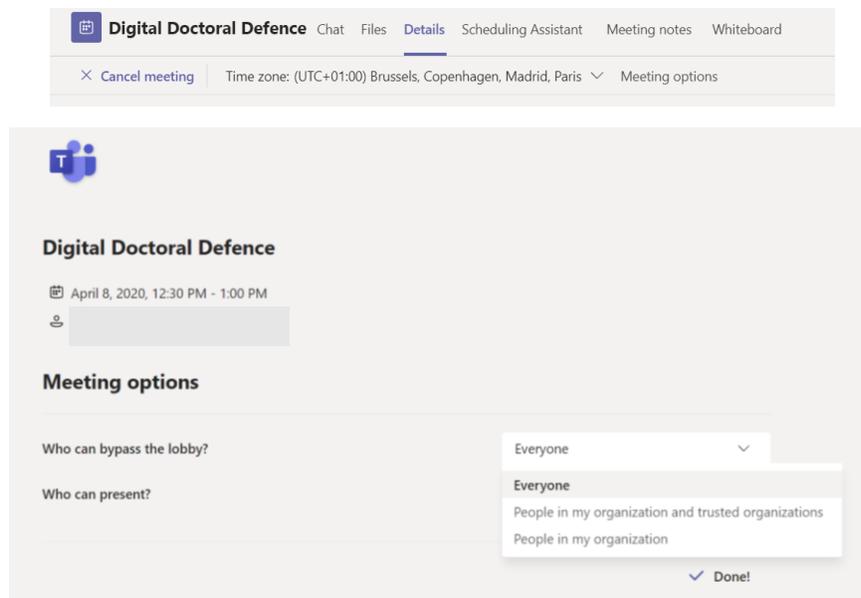
1. **Phase 1 (Teams Meeting 'A'):** During the **public Teams meeting**, the doctoral candidate fulfills the public defence and defends against any questions and concerns from DEP/Jury and the public. (Art. 34¹, §1-2).
2. **Phase 2 (Teams Meeting 'B'):** Immediately following the public doctoral thesis defence, the DEP/Jury will deliberate on awarding the degree of doctor and also a grade-if stipulated by Supplementary Faculty regulations. This will be pursued in a **separate- restricted Teams Meeting** (restricted access for DEP/Jury members only).
3. **Phase 3 (Teams Meeting 'A'):** After the deliberation the DEP/Jury **re-enters the public Teams meeting** whereas the Chairman of the DEP/Jury announces publicly the assessment of the deliberation (passed or not passed). In case the doctoral student passed the examination the Chairman of the DEP/Jury issues the proclamation and declares publicly that the relevant rules and regulations have been observed.



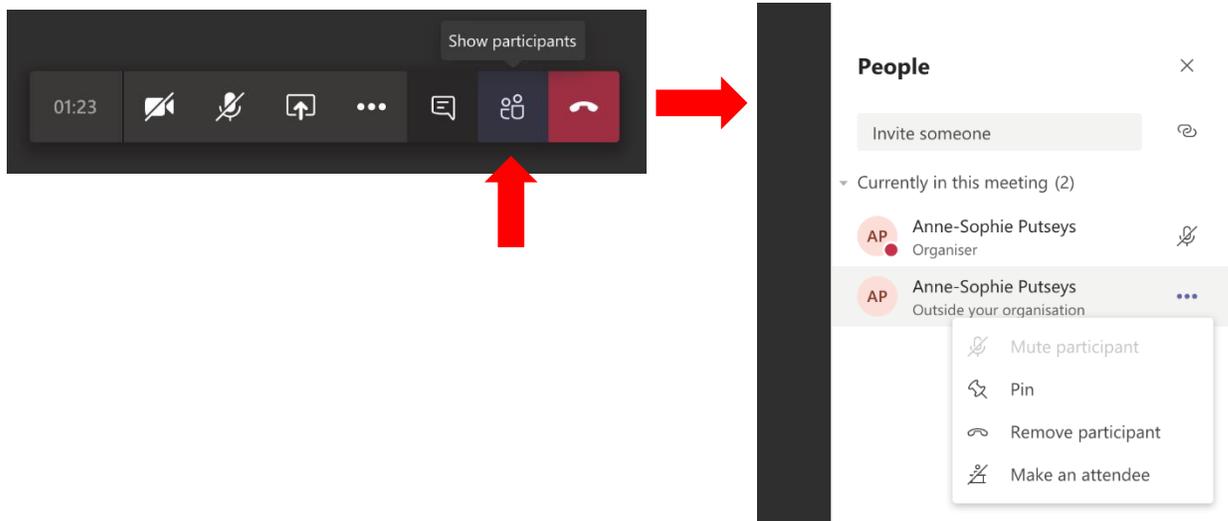
3. Best practices for (public) digital doctoral defence

...for the Chairman of the doctoral examination panel/jury

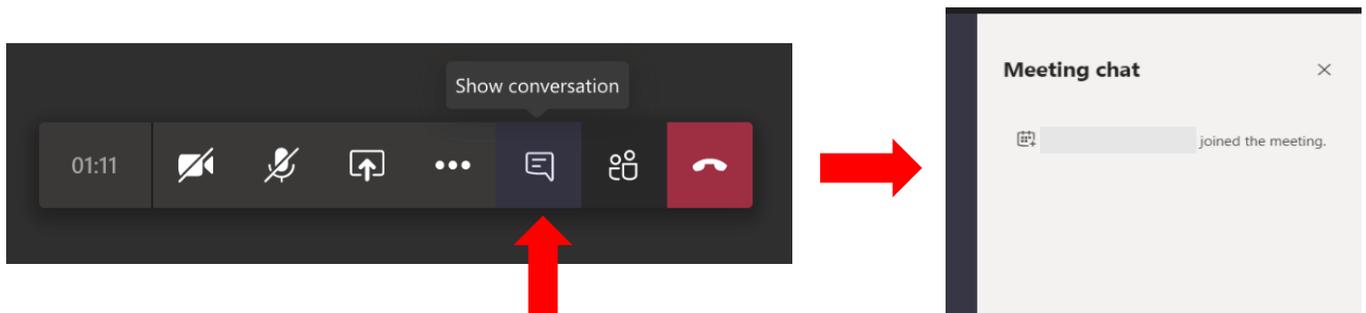
- Schedules the required online meetings for private and public defence (or his/her delegate).
- Makes the **public** defence accessible to the public through the public Teams meeting link.
- Prevents having to admit every participant separately through the lobby by changing the setting 'Who can bypass the lobby' to 'everyone' by clicking 'Meeting options' in the meeting settings.



- Tests the online environment (e.g., software, computer, voice, screen sharing, chat, camera, ...) with the doctoral candidate prior to the opening of the Teams meetings.
- Runs an internet speed test to assess bandwidth before the defence (Type 'Internet speed test' in search engine).
- Makes sure to keep an eye on the **attendance list** during the defence and deliberation.



- Takes the lead as the **Moderator** of all online meetings.
- Explains the course of the public defence (the audience does not participate in the deliberation, but is welcome during the rest of the defence and at the proclamation).
- Communicates the rules about camera and microphone during the digital defence to the audience when entering the public Teams meeting (without camera and micro muted)
- Invites doctoral candidate to start the defence
- Keeps track of time according to the defence planning
- Manages the Chat, sets up the order in which all questions from the audience will be addressed to the doctoral candidate

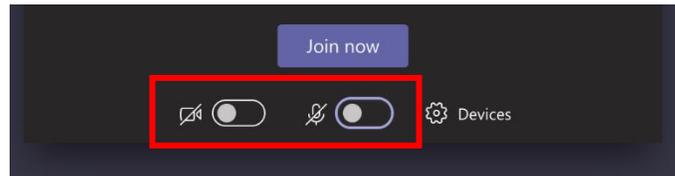


...for the doctoral candidate

- Limits the use of **web links and video clips** during the presentation to avoid bandwidth issues. If necessary, tests prior to the live defence.

...for the audience

- **Shares questions** through the chat box of the public Teams Meeting. All questions will be addressed to the doctoral candidate and moderated by the Chairman of the doctoral examination panel/Jury only.
- Switch off **camera and microphone** when joining the public Teams Meeting.



4. Using Microsoft Teams

Detailed instructions can be found on the [VUB teams site](#), see topics and links below.

At a glance, important ways of working (WoW) and security tips are resumed hereafter.

A. Stappenplan (*guides in Dutch*)

- [Hoe installeer je Microsoft Teams?](#)
- [Een online vergadering organiseren in Teams](#) (geschreven handleiding)
- [Deelnemen aan een online vergadering](#) (ook zonder Teams account) (geschreven handleiding)
- [Je scherm delen of een presentatie opstarten tijdens een online vergadering](#) (instructievideo – 47sec).

B. Roadmap to your Teams Meeting (*guides in English*)

- [Schedule a meeting in Teams](#) (instruction manual)
- [Join a meeting in Teams](#) (instruction manual)
- [Join a meeting without a Teams account](#)
- [Show your screen in a meeting](#) (video instruction – 47sec)

C. [Tips & tricks bij online vergaderen](#) (Dutch) (incl. **printscreens**).

5. Annex: general info & digital signatures

General info

Participants² (DEP/Jury) (Art.27)¹

- **Number (#5)** => The DEP/Jury consists of at least 3 members of ZAP of the VUB and at least 2 external members.
- **Voting (#8)** => The DEP/Jury consist of no more than 8 voting members. Advisory Commission may not constitute the majority of the voting members on the doctoral examination panel. The supervisor(s) is part of the DEP/JURY-if there is more than one supervisor, all the supervisors are considered to be 1 single voting entity. Votes of the VUB members at all times constitute the majority of the votes cast.
- **Attendance requirements** => At least $\frac{1}{2}$ of the DEP/Jury should take part in the interactive digital Internal defence of the thesis to validate the assessment (Art.29¹ §1). When 1 member of DEP/Jury submitted a written opinion that member is then deemed to participate (Art.29¹ §2).
- **Chairman** => Appointed by the competent faculty body and among the members of the DEP/JURY, the Chairman can never be the supervisor of the doctoral candidate (Art.27¹§5).

Submission of the doctoral thesis

- According to Art. 231 at least 1 copy of the thesis is submitted to the Faculty secretariat in electronic form at the time of requesting the doctoral examination see also the 'Supplementary Faculty' doctoral regulations. (for language info see Art. 261).

Date of the public defence of the thesis

- Art. 311 stipulates that the public defence will take place within one month after the decision to allow a public defence at the latest. For an extension see also the mail³ of the vice rector research.

² In case of contradictions between this document and the Central Doctoral Regulations (CDR) the CDR will always take precedence over this quick reference guide.

³ email d.d. March 31st 2020 - Update Aangepaste richtlijnen | Uitstellen doctoraatsverdedigingen | Postponing doctoral defence from vice rector Research : *As long as all parties involved (supervisor, doctoral candidate and jury members) agree on this, the period (one month after a successful private defence the public defence should be organised) as foreseen in the Central Doctoral Regulations can be extended.*

Digital signature

Introduction

There are 2 ways to add digital signatures to the documents.

- A. Print the document, **sign, scan and send it by email** to the Faculty (hereto having a printer/scanner is required).
- B. Sign the online document with a **digital pen** (via Adobe Pro⁴) and send it to the Faculty; upon receipt the next person in line can sign the same document with a digital pen (only email is needed and the usage of software/digital pen).

Part 1: internal defence

The written report is signed by the Chairman and sent to the faculty who will send it to the doctoral candidate.

Part 2: public defence

As a 'temporary document' and depending on the Supplementary faculty rules the Chairman and vice Chairperson may digitally sign a document -in case the doctoral candidate passed- which is often used for future employee/salary purposes.

⁴ Other software e.g. ['HelloSign'](#)