



Conducting vivas online: guide for academic staff

Following a change to the research degree regulations, vivas can be held online under the following conditions:

1. The candidate agrees with the arrangement.
2. The Independent Chair sets up the virtual meeting, ensures any adjustment involving disability is made for the viva and is available throughout the viva e.g. to liaise with participants to resolve any technical problems.
3. The Independent Chair ensures that the viva is recorded and that the recording is made available to the Doctoral School, who will ensure the recording is held securely and only listened to in case of appeal.

It is strongly recommended that the viva is held via MS Teams (with Zoom, for example, there are security concerns regarding who may have access to the recording) and the guidelines below have been written on this basis. Non-Team users should be able to access MS Teams as guests (see below). If there are issues with accessing this system, Skype would be the next best alternative. With Skype the independent chair needs to send the recording to the Doctoral School but must remember to delete it from Skype after doing so. You can request a SharePoint sharing link from the Doctoral School to do this. Further advice on online video conferencing can be found [here](#).

Agreement to online viva arrangement

It is important that all parties involved in the viva agree in writing that they are happy for it to go ahead online and equally that all agree to an indefinite delay to a face to face viva. The Doctoral School will obtain the agreement as follows:

Candidate:

- When submitting the examination entry form the candidate is asked to read the guide to [conducting vivas online for candidates](#)
- The fact that a viva is held online is not valid grounds for appeal if the candidate is not satisfied with the viva outcome.

Supervisor:

- When the supervisor informs the Doctoral School of the date / time of the viva, they should also confirm their agreement to viva being held by the video conference

Examiners and Independent Chair:

- Examiner and independent chair invitations sent will include a section about online vivas so they will be agreeing to this format as part of their acceptance of the invitation to examine/chair.

At least a fortnight before the viva

- The supervisor informs the Doctoral School of the date / time of the viva and confirms their agreement to the video conference
- The independent chair sets up an MS Teams meeting (from their own Royal Holloway account) and sends out the invites to all participants. **Please ensure that you also invite Joanne Barrs and Tracey Jeffries** from the Doctoral School solely as a means of tracking the recording following the viva. They will not join or interrupt the viva.
- The independent chair makes sure the candidate has an opportunity to practise with the technology so that they feel comfortable using it (e.g. by holding a test viva)

What if the examiners are non-Team users?

Non-Teams users will be able to join meetings via the browser version of Teams. When they click 'join meeting' on their invite it will open up Teams in their browser suggesting they download the app. They can ignore this and click the button that says 'Join on the Web instead'. Please note that the MS Teams Whiteboard functionality is not accessible for non-Royal Holloway users. If an external examiner makes a specific request to make use of the Whiteboard, the supervisor will need to arrange to set-up a temporary Royal Holloway user account. For information on how to do this, please contact doctoralschool@rhul.ac.uk

Approximately one week before the viva

The Doctoral School will send the Independent Chair a link to the Doctoral School SharePoint Viva deposit folder.

A few of days before the viva

It is recommended that, where possible, the supervisor, Independent Chair, the examiners and the candidate do a practice call a few days in advance of the viva to ensure that everyone involved is able to access the technology satisfactorily. The independent chair should instigate this.

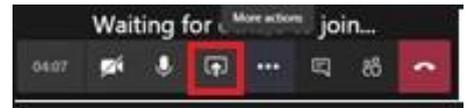
On the day of the viva

Before the viva

The Independent Chair should:

- allow guests (i.e. the external examiner and the internal examiner if they are not from Royal Holloway) in to the meeting. A notification will let them know that someone is waiting to join and they should be able to give them permission to join via this notification.
- assist the examiners in setting an agenda. Just as with face to face vivas, the examiners should be given some time before the viva to discuss their initial thoughts on the thesis, decide on who will ask which questions etc. They should have received a copy of the other examiner's preliminary report from the Doctoral School (these are sent out once the Doctoral School has received each examiner's report).
- ensure that the participants are able to contact each other by phone if a technical problem should arise
- allow time for any technical issues at the start of the viva.
- brief everyone at the start about how they will be interacting. '*a remote event concerning juggling technology as well as answering examiners' questions, is more than usually challenging. Examiners also have the challenge of making questions clear to the candidate when they aren't in a room together*'.
- ask the candidate to show the camera that they are in a room on their own If they have requested that their supervisor is not present at the viva and neither the independent chair nor the internal examiner know the candidate, the candidate must show the examiners some official ID (e.g. passport / driving licence / EU ID card).
- ask the candidate to provide a visual of the additional material brought to the viva (e.g. hard copy of the thesis)

- allow plenty of time before the viva is scheduled to begin for everyone to log in and to confirm they are comfortable with operating the technology e.g. make sure that the participants are aware of the Share option on the toolbar, which allows them to share a section of the thesis that they wish to focus on (see below for external participant presenting)
- ensure that all participants know that if they need a break during the viva, they may take one



The candidate should:

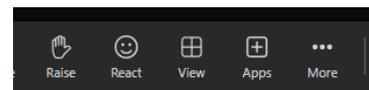
- Be prepared to show on the camera that they are in a room on their own
- If possible have a friend or family member 'standing by' to be with them at the end of the viva (virtually if there is no-one else in their household); it's important that the candidate is not alone following the viva.
- If they have requested that their supervisor is not present at the viva and neither independent chair nor the internal examiner know the candidate, the candidate must be prepared show the examiners some official ID (e.g. passport / driving licence / EU ID card).

During the viva

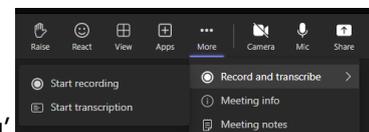
The following instructions apply to any viva that is either being recorded in MS Teams

- Ensure that the laptop or Teams ready AV equipment is positioned to capture all attendees. This is particularly important for recording Face-to-face and hybrid vivas in MS Teams. If visual capture is not possible, please ensure that the laptop is placed in a place that will at least pick up a good audio record.

- From the menu bar, click on the **three dots** (more actions)

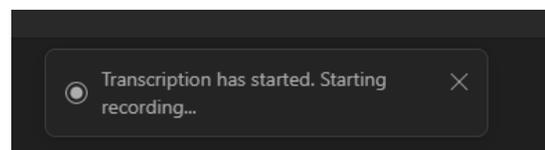


- Choose **Record and transcribe** followed by 'Start recording'



After a short delay you will see a message at the top of the screen to confirm that the meeting is being recorded and transcribed.

The Independent Chair should announce this to the viva participants.



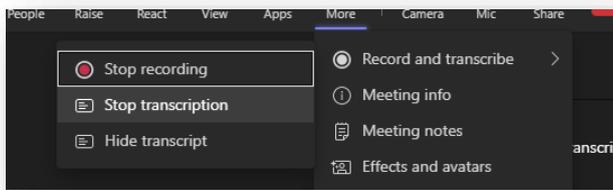
MS Teams transcription - Auto start

MS teams now transcribes as it records with no option to record only. The transcription is **NOT** required and if not stopped or deleted, it will be available for download after the viva.

It is important that the Independent Chair stops the transcription as soon as recording begins.

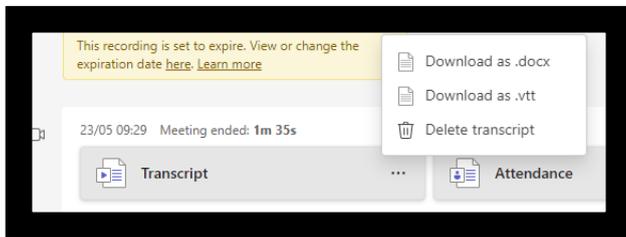
To stop the transcription

Go back to the **Record and transcribe** menu and select '**Stop transcription**'



Deleting the transcription

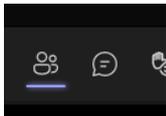
If the Independent Chair forgets to stop the transcription at the start of recording, they should go back to the meeting 'chat' at the end of the viva and delete the transcription from there.



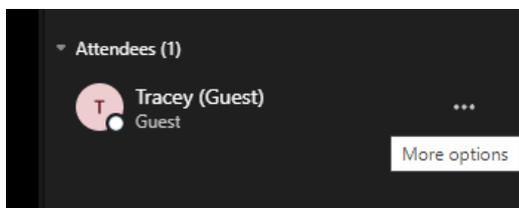
Giving presentation permission access to a 'guest' in MS Teams

Should one of the examiners wish to present during the viva, the meeting organiser can grant them access to present as follows:

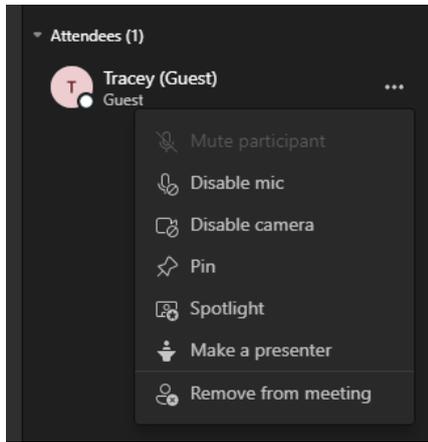
Whilst the meeting is ongoing, click on 'show participants'



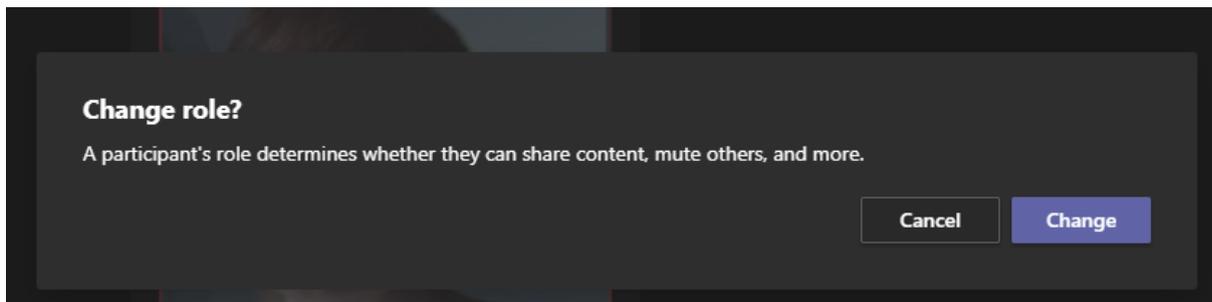
From the list of guest participants select the name of the person who wishes to present and the '...' 'more options'



Choose – 'Make a presenter'



Allow the change



If there are connection issues:

- If any of the connections break down during the viva but can be restored after a short break, the viva should continue
- If any of the connections break down during the viva but cannot be restored after three extended dropouts of the MS Teams connection, participants will be asked to come to an agreement as to whether the viva should be halted and a new viva date set. (e.g. if this happens near the beginning of the viva, rescheduling would be the most appropriate course of action but this may not be considered necessary if it were to happen near the end of the viva)
- If at any point the candidate feels they are being disadvantaged due to technical issues they are able to request that the viva is stopped and request a postponement to another date that would be in person.

At the end of the viva, before the examiners confer over the outcome, the independent chair stops the recording and both the supervisor (when in attendance) and the candidate leave the meeting.

After the viva

- Either the supervisor (if in attendance) or the independent chair should check there is someone with the candidate (virtually if not possible in person):
'It is important, irrespective of the outcome, that the candidate is not alone following the viva. For most this will be a time for celebrating the successful culmination of their studies (even remotely), but for others, the outcome will be less pleasing than they were expecting'²
- The independent chair should ensure the recording of the viva is transferred to the ownership of the Doctoral School – see below.

Transferring the recording to the Doctoral School

After the viva has stopped meeting participants can still access and view the recording. We therefore ask you to take the following steps immediately after the viva has finished.

PLEASE FOLLOW THESE INSTRUCTIONS TO **MOVE** THE FILE TO THE DOCTORAL SCHOOL
DO NOT DOWNLOAD AND THEN MOVE THE FILE

Downloading the file and then moving it to the Doctoral School will result in participants being able to access the recording and any transcription in Teams or the Stream after the viva.

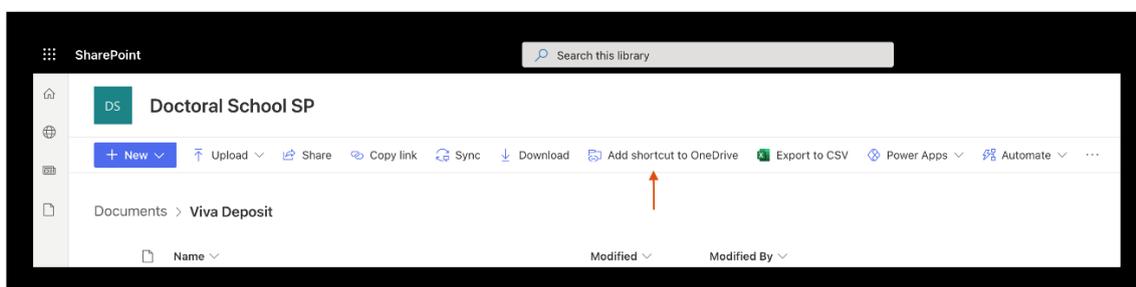
Creating the link from your OneDrive folder (you should only need to do this once)

- Open the SharePoint link sent to you by the Doctoral School – This is the destination folder for the viva recording which will have automatically uploaded to your Royal Holloway OneDrive.

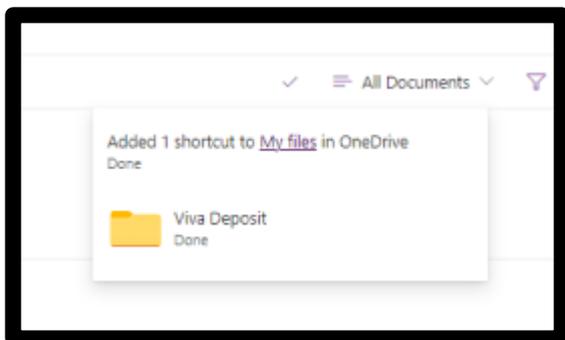
[Viva Deposit](#)

You will need to make a shortcut from your OneDrive to this folder to make the file transfer much easier by following the steps below. This is a one time set up. If you have already created a shortcut move to 'Moving the recording to the Doctoral School Viva Deposit folder' (below)

- Once you have opened the link you will see:

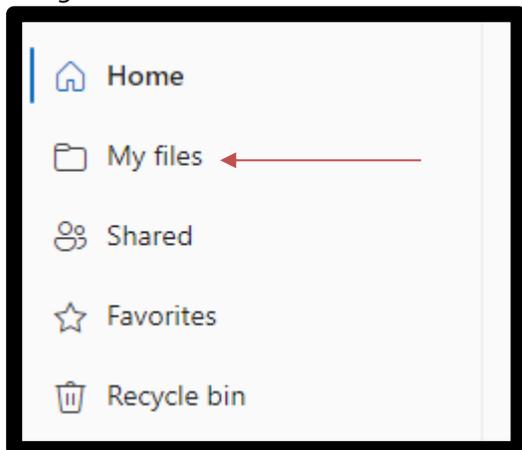


- Click on the '**Add shortcut to OneDrive**'. Your one Drive will then be in view
- A pop-up will appear letting you know that the item is now available in 'My Files', you can choose to click the link in the pop-up to navigate to OneDrive automatically.

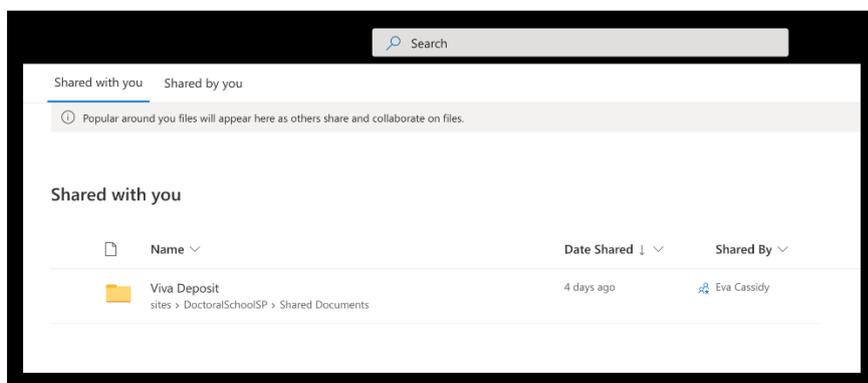


Alternatively, open OneDrive in a new tab.

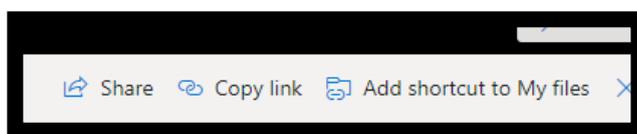
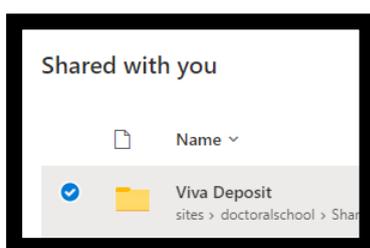
- You'll be in the 'Home' tab. The folder should be listed under the 'My Files' tab. Use the sidebar to navigate.



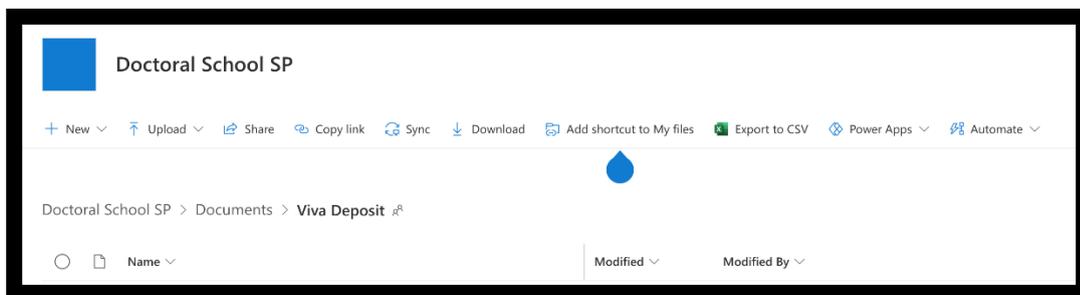
- If you can't find the folder under 'My Files', go to 'Shared' to see the files and folders shared with you. You should see the 'Viva Deposit' folder shared by the Doctoral School.



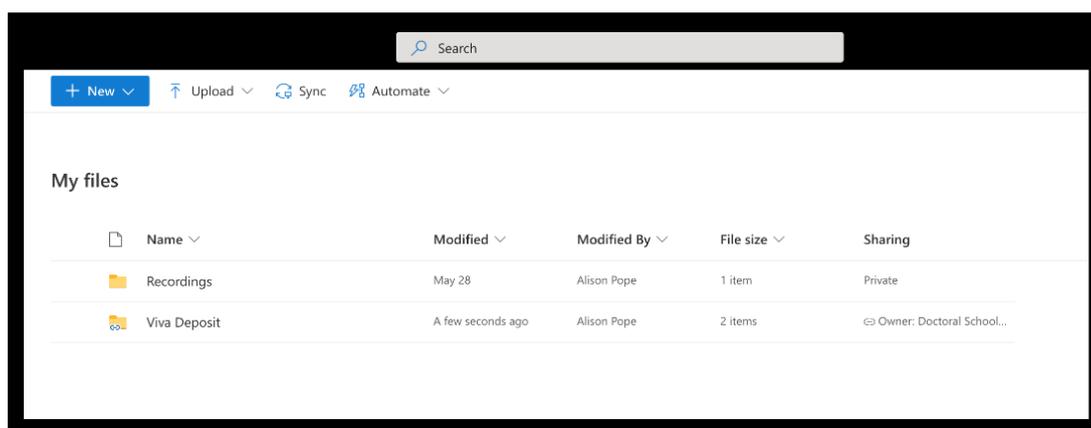
- Tick the circular icon to the left of the **Viva Deposit** folder to show further options at top of page.



- Click on the 'Add shortcut to My files' option in the top menu bar



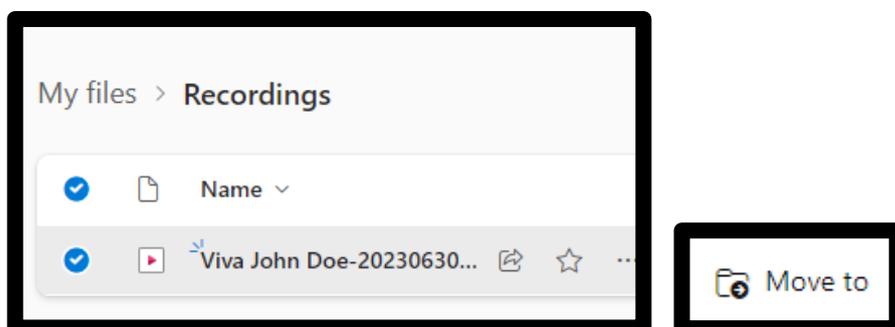
You should now see the **'Viva Deposit'** folder in **'My files'** in OneDrive. The folder has a small link icon to indicate it is a shortcut, you will see that the owner is the Doctoral School.



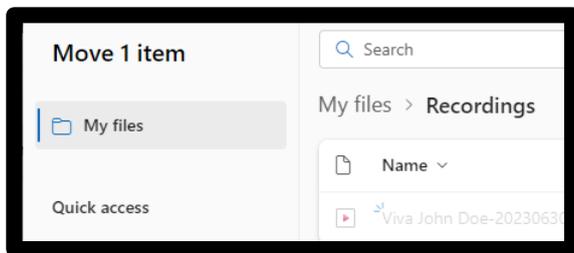
Moving the recording to the Doctoral School Viva Deposit folder

If you have previously created a shortcut to the viva deposit folder you can start from here

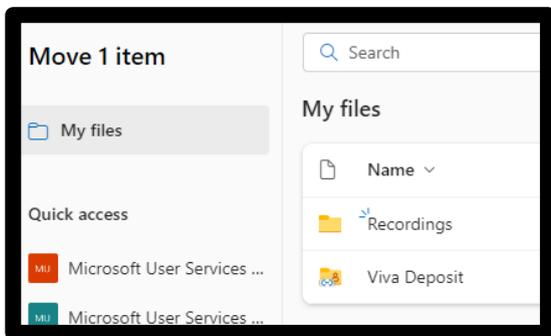
- You now need to locate your meeting recording. Look in **'My Files'** for a **'Recordings'** folder, inside you should be able to locate the meeting recording.
- Select the file by ticking the circle icon on the left, then click **'Move to'** in the top navigation bar.



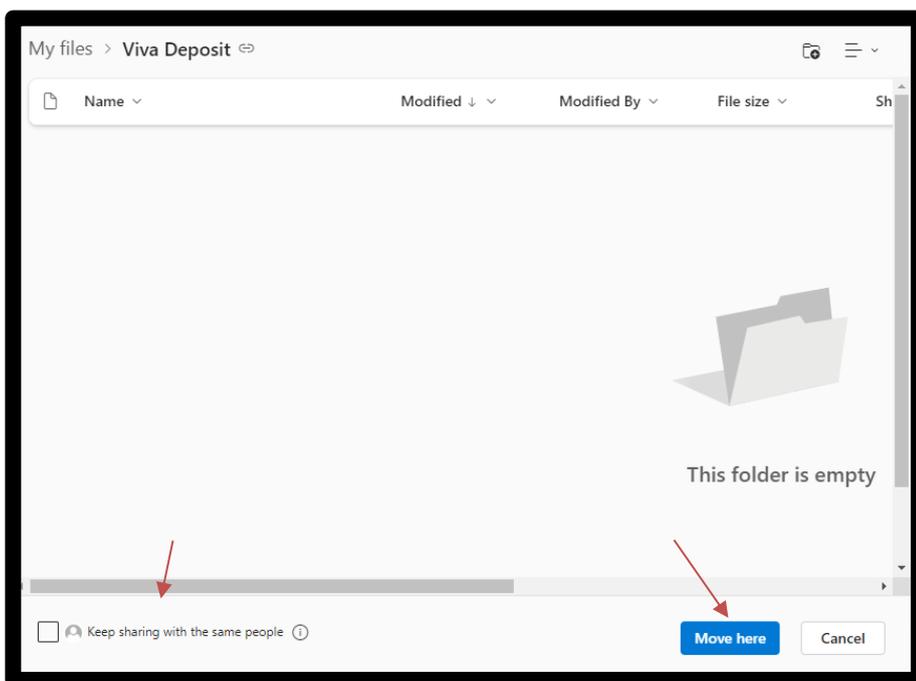
- The **'Move 1 item'** panel will open as a pop-up.



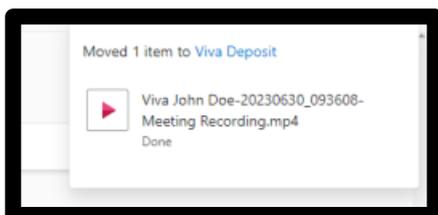
Click **'My Files'** in the pop-up to search your My Files area for a suitable recording destination.



- Find the Viva Deposit Folder. Ensure 'keep sharing with the same people' is unchecked and select **'Move here'**.



- A notification will appear to confirm the item has been moved.



- You can now log out of OneDrive and the Doctoral School will receive an automated message to confirm the safe transfer of the file to their ownership. From this point no one other than the Doctoral School can view the recording.