

## **Guidance for Directors of Graduate Studies on making adjustments to the assessment arrangements for disabled students**

1. Students with disabilities may apply for adjustments to be made to their transfer and confirmation assessments and final viva arrangements using GSO.19 form. All of the adjustments outlined below may be approved by the DGS, except where it is indicated that the approval of the Proctors is required. The DGS may consult the Proctors if they have queries about any application. This guidance is given in three parts:
  - general adjustments that will remove barriers for all disabled candidates: it is recommended that over time departments seek to embed these arrangements routinely as inclusive practice that will eliminate the need for special requests;
  - individual adjustments appropriate to all disabled candidates;
  - additional individual adjustments appropriate for particular disabilities.
2. While these adjustments will address the needs of most disabled candidates, please note that they are not exhaustive and it might be that different adjustments are necessary. Should the DGS require further guidance, they should liaise with the relevant disability coordinator or contact the Disability Advisory Service at [disability@admin.ox.ac.uk](mailto:disability@admin.ox.ac.uk).

### ***General adjustments that will remove barriers for all disabled candidates***

3. It is assumed that all candidates will have had ample opportunity to discuss the nature of the examination with their supervisor prior to the assessment. The following practical arrangements will help remove barriers for disabled candidates, and if embedded in routine practice will eliminate the need for disabled candidates to specially request them:
  - ensure the examination takes place in an accessible building with level access via lifts/ramps, automatic doors, with accessible toilet facilities nearby, and that the sensory impact of the room is minimal (in terms of hearing, lighting, and noise distractions);
  - ensure clear timetable information and written Viva Voce instructions are provided in a timely way to allow candidates sufficient time to prepare;
  - give advance notification of and access to the venue so the candidate can familiarise themselves with the route and the environment;
  - provide all written information in an [accessible format](#);
  - clearly explain the procedure and method of the examination at the start of the viva;
  - allow the candidate to take in written notes and a copy of their thesis, and to jot down notes and refer back to these as necessary;
  - provide flipcharts and other materials to enable a candidate to explain ideas in writing or diagrams where beneficial;
  - present one question at a time (avoiding multi-faceted questions), and be prepared to re-phase questions if the candidate appears to have misunderstood;
  - allow the candidate brief pauses to compose answers;
  - allow adequate time to read and absorb any new material that is introduced during the assessment;
  - monitor fatigue and provide reasonable breaks (e.g. at a minimum every 2 hours) as required;

- provide a clear written summary of any formal feedback, corrections, and action points as part of the examiners' report.

### ***Individual adjustments appropriate to all disabled candidates***

- avoid timetable changes (including venue) as much as possible; if unavoidable, provide notice as far in advance as possible;
- allow extra time (beyond that needed by others) to read/absorb any new material, collect thoughts/compose answers, or locate details in a specific section of the thesis, and reassuring the candidate that this is acceptable;
- schedule more frequent and/or extended rest breaks than typically required;
- structure questions into shorter sections, repeating and rephrasing if necessary, and allowing intermediate responses;
- write questions down if requested;
- allow the use of a digital recorder for the part of the viva where corrections are discussed;
- consider whether a Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan (PEEP) is required and undertake this in advance where necessary.

### ***Additional individual adjustments appropriate for particular disabilities***

#### **3.1. Candidates with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)/Asperger Syndrome:**

- provide an opportunity to meet the examiners beforehand (possibly by Skype) if there are anxieties about meeting new people; it should be made clear this is not part of the examination and the conversation would not address academic matters but be limited to an introduction to personnel and the likely conduct of the viva;
- allow the supervisor to provide a more detailed explanation of the process and structure of a viva in advance, particularly in terms of any social conventions (the candidate may find it helpful to rehearse greetings, requests for clarification of a question, etc.);
- give permission for an appropriate person to attend in a supportive capacity; it should be made clear that this person is not permitted to participate in the viva by, for example, interpreting the examiners' questions for the candidate;
- direct examiners to avoid the use of metaphorical language, to be prepared to re-phrase/ask questions in more explicit concrete terms if the candidate is having difficulty interpreting what is being asked or expressing their knowledge clearly, and encourage them to redirect/prompt the candidate if they stray off topic or have difficulty judging how much information is required;
- ensure examiners are aware of the potential for unusual behaviour/social communication and greater anxiety than might typically be expected (suggest short breaks if necessary).

#### **3.2. Candidates with a visual impairment:**

- permitting the use of assistive technology for reading, writing and notetaking;
- provide written information in an accessible format (check in advance what the candidate requires);

- the candidate may require a sighted guide or a registered assistance dog; it should be made clear that the guide is not permitted to participate in the viva by, for example, interpreting the examiners' questions for the candidate.
- 3.3. Candidates with chronic medical conditions and unseen disabilities:
- ensure consideration is given to scheduling (e.g. morning or afternoon start) due to the potential for symptoms/side-effects of medication to be worse at a particular time of day;
  - ensure allowance is made for the candidate to bring any food, drink, medication or equipment into the examination which helps them to manage their condition;
  - split the viva over more than one day to accommodate the impact of fatigue.
- N.B. This would require the permission of the Proctors.**
- 3.4. Candidates with a hearing impairment:
- ensure examiners follow appropriate [communication guidelines](#);
  - facilitate the candidate's use of communication aids – this could include hearing support systems compatible with hearing aids (infra-red/loop systems installed in the room, or portable individual technology) or British Sign Language (BSL) interpreters;
  - ensure any relevant departmental equipment is available/fully operational in advance;
  - if required, ensure examiners wear/use a microphone.
- 3.5. Candidates with mental health difficulties:
- awareness of the potential for more severe anxiety than would typically be expected; adopt a calm, understanding approach, and suggest short breaks if necessary;
  - ensure consideration is given to scheduling due to the potential for symptoms/side-effects of medication to be worse at a particular time of day;
  - give permission for an appropriate person to attend in a supportive capacity; it should be made clear that this person is not permitted to participate in the viva by, for example, interpreting the examiners' questions for the candidate.
- 3.6. Candidates with physical disabilities and mobility impairments:
- give permission to stand/move around as required;
  - provide any necessary ergonomic furniture;
  - give permission for a personal carer/study support assistant to attend; it should be made clear that this person is not permitted to participate in the viva by, for example, interpreting the examiners' questions for the candidate;
  - schedule frequent and/or extended rest breaks.
- 3.7. Specific learning difficulties (SpLD)
- redirect/prompt the candidate if they stray off topic;
  - be prepared to re-phrase/ask questions in more explicit concrete terms if the candidate is having difficulty interpreting what is being asked or expressing their knowledge clearly.

For further support or guidance, please contact the Disability Advisory Service at [disability@admin.ox.ac.uk](mailto:disability@admin.ox.ac.uk)