

University of Chester - Disability Policy for Reasonable Adjustments & Inclusive Practice for Vivas or Viva Voces

Created Oct 2021

This document is available in alternative formats upon request. Please contact the Disability and Inclusion Service on 01244 511550 or email disability@chester.ac.uk

Disability Policy for Reasonable Adjustments & Inclusive Practice for Vivas or Viva Voces

Published – April 2023

Author: – R Miller Disability Services Manager

Any queries or comments please contact either the author or: Disability & Inclusion Service, University of Chester Parkgate Road Chester Cheshire CH1 4BJ

Viva Assessment

The Viva assesses a student's ability to place their research in the broader context, identify its contribution to knowledge, show detailed knowledge of the thesis and prove that it is the student's own work. The candidate is expected to defend their methodology and findings of the thesis, as well to be aware of their limitations.

It is therefore paramount that each student is given an equal opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and strengths in these areas of assessment. Failure to provide reasonable adjustments may mean that the University would fail in its legal duty to anticipate any potential issues and provide the appropriate provisions.

Disability & Inclusion would look to recommended specific adjustments prior to a viva panel within the student's inclusion plan, if they are aware of expectations in advance of the assessment. Please note, the recommendations within this presentation are not final or absolute.

Responsibilities and Awareness

- The reasonable adjustments included within the specific sections that follow, are guidelines as to what may be appropriate for a disabled student, and should not be used as a blanket support.

University of Chester - Disability Policy for Reasonable Adjustments & Inclusive Practice for Vivas or Viva Voces

- The list of adjustments is not absolute and final, as there are many disabilities or impairments that may require very specific recommendations which will be reviewed on a case by case basis by a Disability Support Officer.
- We would expect all students who have disclosed a disability to the University to be in contact with us to set up an Inclusion Plan. This is where discussions regarding Viva assessments would take place if applicable.
- If the Internal Examiner is aware that the student has an Inclusion Plan or a disability and cannot see any reasonable adjustments in place, they should advise the student to contact Disability & Inclusion to discuss further.
- In regards to timescales for reasonable adjustments to be put in place, this may need to be determined by the Internal Examiner. A rough guidance would be at least 3 week's prior to the Viva assessment taking place, unless the department are happy to do this on short notice.

Autism Spectrum Condition

- The student should have the opportunity to complete a practice Viva in which they can determine the types of adjustments that may be required, or to help them understand the process involved and any expectations.
- The Viva panel should be clear and concise when asking questions, removing any potential for ambiguity. Consideration should be had in looking to break the question down if required, to ensure the student has understood exactly what is being asked.
- Opportunity for the student to take short pauses or rest breaks if required, to allow them to compose themselves and address the question accurately.
- The opportunity for the student to familiarise themselves with the Viva environment prior to the assessment taking place. This could include being shown the specific location and layout of the room, which would reduce anxiety or uncertainty around a new environment.
- The Viva panel should look to slowly introduce the student into their Viva, by spending 5-10 minutes to set the scene and expectations. This will ensure that the student is not overwhelmed by the occasion.
- The student may have difficulties processing verbal information within a timed environment. If for whatever reason the viva is timed, then the

University of Chester - Disability Policy for Reasonable Adjustments & Inclusive Practice for Vivas or Viva Voces

student could be awarded with 25% additional time. This would need to be reviewed in advance by a Disability Support Officer.

Visual Impairment

- The student should have the opportunity to complete a practice Viva in which they can determine the types of adjustments that may be required due to their visual impairment.
- The student may require the use of a computer for the purpose of enlarging text with assistive software, or larger prints of their thesis in a font and text size of their choice.
- Visual cues should not be used to indicate actions within the assessment, for example if sufficient information has been provided and it is time to move on to the next topic.
- Student should be given the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the environment beforehand. This could be due to positioning themselves due to lighting and to process the layout of the room.
- They may have an assistance dog in which accommodations may be required, such as water and adequate space to lie down.
- Student should be provided with the location and room number of the viva well in advance of the assessment date. This will give them ample time to plan their journey.

Hearing Impairment

- The student should have the opportunity to complete a practice Viva in which they can determine the types of adjustments that may be required due to their hearing impairment. This could be to determine whether the room has a sufficient loop system or whether transmitter/receiver devices would be required as examples.
- If the student communicates in sign language, then they will require use of a qualified BSL (British Sign Language) interpreter. If the viva assessment is expected to take longer than 20 minutes, then two BSL's will be required for the assessment to ensure accuracy of interpretation is maintained. Each interpreter will need to know the subject terminology, therefore the examiners may have to explain the meaning of their words during the viva.
- The Viva panel should be facing the student when talking to them, to ensure the student can use any lip reading strategies they may have. The lighting may also require specific positioning to support this.
- The Viva panel should be clear and concise when asking questions, removing any potential for ambiguity. Subsidiary questions should be

University of Chester - Disability Policy for Reasonable Adjustments & Inclusive Practice for Vivas or Viva Voces

considered as a prompt, to ensure the student has understood exactly what is being asked.

- The student may have difficulties processing verbal information within a timed environment. If for whatever reason the viva is timed, then the student could be awarded with 25% additional time. This would need to be reviewed in advance by a Disability Support Officer.

Mental Health Difficulties

- The student should have the opportunity to complete a practice Viva in which their strategies / techniques for managing the materials can be monitored and reviewed. It will also reduce any anxiety around the process involved.
- Opportunity for the student to take short pauses or rest breaks if required, to allow them to compose themselves and address the question accurately.
- Student should be given the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the environment beforehand. This could be remove any additional concerns they may be having to allow them to focus on the viva itself.
- The Viva panel should look to slowly introduce the student into their Viva, by spending 5-10 minutes to set the scene and expectations. This will ensure that the student is not overwhelmed by the occasion.

Specific Learning Difference (SpLD)

- The student could have the opportunity to complete and practice a mock viva in which their strategies / techniques for managing the materials are monitored and reviewed.
- The Viva panel should be clear and concise when asking questions, removing any potential for ambiguity. Subsidiary questions should be considered as a prompt, to ensure the student has understood exactly what is being asked.
- In preparation of their assessment, the student should have access to a Specialist One to One Study Skills tutor or similar to work on strategies / techniques to locate passages and relate them to themes. Disability & Inclusion can advise further in this area.
- The student may have difficulties processing verbal information within a timed environment. If for whatever reason the viva is timed, then the student could be awarded with 25% additional time. This would need to be reviewed in advance by a Disability Support Officer.

University of Chester - Disability Policy for Reasonable Adjustments & Inclusive Practice for Vivas or Viva Voces

- The student may be given the opportunity to review written questions a few hours prior to the viva under examination conditions to help them prepare their answers.

Mobility Difficulties

- Student should be provided with the location and room number of the viva well in advance of the assessment date. This will give them ample time to plan their journey.
- A review of whether the room should be on a ground floor should be undertaken, due to accessibility and health and safety in regards to a potential evacuation.
- Student should be provided with appropriate seating arrangements if standing will cause them difficulties within the assessment. Alternatives could include an office chair or similar, cushions or heat pads as examples.