

GUIDANCE FOR SUPERVISORS & EXAMINERS OF PGRs WITH DISABILITIES

1. SCOPE AND PURPOSE

- 1.1 This guidance document is for Bournemouth University (BU) supervisors and examiners of PGRs with disabilities.
- 1.2 This guidance summarises the collective responsibilities of BU, Faculties and Supervisors in supporting disabled students, with particular reference to Postgraduate Research students (PGRs). It is intended to support the Faculties and Supervisors in their discussions with PGRs when considering specific adjustments to the PGRs' learning and assessment throughout the research degree journey.
- 1.3 It is also intended to provide guidance for examiners of PGRs when considering specific adjustments to the assessment of the PGR's thesis and viva voce.
- 1.4 The term "disabled" is an umbrella term to include: sensory, physical or medical impairment, specific learning differences, autistic spectrum disorders and mental health conditions. Temporary injury, temporary incapacity and pregnancy are also included as BU has a legal requirement to support staff and students (including PGRs) with temporary conditions.
- 1.5 Under the [Equality Act 2010](#), there is a requirement for HEIs to give reasonable adjustments from undergraduate through to PhD. Core competences of a qualification do not require reasonable adjustments, however, the assessment of them does. Faculties and Supervisors need to be aware that where an education provider does not comply with the duty to make reasonable adjustments it will be committing an act of unlawful discrimination. A disabled PGR will be able to make a claim based on this.
- 1.6 Support for ALS Students on undergraduate & postgraduate taught programmes is clearly defined in the documents listed below. The postgraduate research community is less prepared for dealing with specific learning differences (SpLDs) or disabilities. As such, this document intends to provide information for Faculties and Supervisors in order to:
- Make them aware of the disclosure process;
 - Signpost to appropriate information to assist them in supporting a disabled PGR;
 - Assist them in correctly advising PGRs who require reasonable adjustments to successfully undertake their research degree;
 - Provide them with guidance for implementing reasonable adjustments to the examination process.

2. KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

- 2.1 **Supervisors** are responsible for leading discussions with the PGR to consider specific adjustments to the PGRs' learning and assessment throughout the research degree journey to provide appropriate support. The Supervisors should also signpost the PGR to Additional Learning Support (ALS), if they are not already registered. Supervisors are the key contact for PGRs, so they need to understand disability duties under the Equality Act. As part of supervisory training, Supervisors should be made aware of different disabilities and the impacts of specific learning difficulties. Supervisors must also have an understanding and awareness of "reasonableness", especially around academic standards and concerns.

- 2.2 **Examiners** are responsible for taking into account any specific considerations of the individual PGR's disability when independently assessing the thesis and when conducting the *viva voce* examination.
- 2.3 Individual **PGRs** are responsible for ensuring they disclose any disability so that reasonable adjustments can be made throughout the research degree journey.
- 2.4 The **Graduate School** is responsible for working with ALS to ensure that the guidance in this document remains current with respect to the appropriate legislation.

3. LINKS TO OTHER BU DOCUMENTS

- 3.1 Other documents with direct relevance to this one are:
- [Disability Impact and Reasonable Adjustment Guidelines for Staff](#)
 - [ALS Advice Note](#) (compiled on an individual basis for each student with a disability)
 - [Guidelines for Supporting ALS Students in Practice or on Placements](#)
 - [Reasonable Adjustment Advice Note Guidelines for Staff](#)
 - [ALS Marking Guidelines](#)

Guidance

4. DISCLOSURE

- 4.1 Faculties and Supervisors should be aware of the disclosure process and be able to advise any PGRs who require reasonable adjustments to undertake their research degree.
- 4.2 PGRs would normally make a disclosure as part of the application process and reasonable adjustments may be explored as part of the interview process. However, in certain circumstances, it may be that a PGR receives a diagnosis after they are enrolled. In this instance, reasonable adjustments would need to be explored at that point.
- 4.3 Registering with ALS would constitute disclosure as we cannot support unless disclosure is made

5. SUPERVISORS' RESPONSIBILITIES

- 5.1 Should a PGR make a disclosure, either pre- or post-enrolment, Supervisors are required to have a discussion with the PGR to consider the reasonableness of specific adjustments to the PGRs' learning and assessment throughout the research degree journey. These adjustments may be different for each PGR as they are totally needs-led. The agreements from this meeting should be formally recorded. As a result of these discussions, the Supervisor should:
- Signpost candidates to ALS support, if not already registered
 - Signpost to funding information, Disabled Students' Allowances (DSA), ALS, web, etc.
 - Arrange for accessible formats of relevant documentation, via ALS, if needed
 - Check accessibility, if disabled
 - Provide a copy of the relevant guidelines or BU Policies and Procedures (see Section 3).
- 5.2 There is an anticipatory duty to provide reasonable adjustments for PGRs, which must include planning ahead; taking a strategic approach to addressing the barriers that could potentially impede disabled PGRs progression. Such PGRs must be fully aware of key processes and expectations and not be affected by unplanned for events which would be detrimental to their progression.

- 5.3 Supervisors will need to review the proposed research project to ensure total transparency about the requirements of the research and that the PGR is fully aware of these. Similarly, the Supervisors will need to ensure that the PGR is fully aware of the requirements of processes for each of the key progression milestones, as set out in *8A Code of Practice for Research Degrees*, towards the final *viva voce*.
- 5.4 It is important that, where appropriate, Supervisors attend relevant ALS training to ensure their knowledge and understanding of issues facing disabled PGRs is current. Supervisors should also check with ALS during the course of the PhD regarding appropriate adjustments as there may be changes to the ALS support available.
- 5.5 Below are some examples of adjustments that Supervisors should consider:
- Academic Support:
 - Provide one-to-one support to help the PGR learn specific methodologies which can transform usual study methods
 - Provide additional support (e.g. structuring ideas, research scheduling and research methodologies) especially but not exclusively for PGRs with specific learning differences eg dyslexia
 - Feedback:
 - Consider the way feedback is presented.
 - Separate out feedback on content from feedback on structure and expression. This helps PGRs with specific learning differences to address their progression and enables them to make focussed improvements.
 - Provide digitally recorded feedback where appropriate which can be highly beneficial for some PGRs depending on the disability.
 - Follow guidance on feedback as addressed in the [ALS Marking Guidelines](#).
 - Thesis Preparation:
 - Signpost the PGR to ALS who can provide support for thesis writing
 - Proof reading can be paid for by the Disabled Students' Allowances (DSA).
 - *Viva voce* Preparation:
 - Signpost the PGR to ALS who can provide support in preparing for a *viva voce*
 - Hold mock *viva voce* to familiarise the PGR with the process and to enable automaticity of responses;
 - Use role play for dealing with difficult examiners
 - Provide PGR with examples of phrases to use with potential aggressive examiners to diffuse anger e.g. 'If I'm right.....' 'I hear in your question....' 'From what you are saying I understand ...' etc.
 - On the day of the *viva voce*, check all arrangements with the Research Administrator to ensure no last minute hitches on accessibility or adjustments such as extra time or breaks

6. EXAMINERS' RESPONSIBILITIES

- 6.1 Any disclosure and the agreed adjustments must be agreed in good time with internal and external examiners to reduce the impact of any anxieties for the PGR.
- 6.2 The internal and external panel members should be notified several weeks before the *viva voce* of any adjustments and the rationale for the adjustments. Supervisors and Research Administrators should agree with the PGR the wording of personal details to be passed on to the examiners. The examiners should have an opportunity to raise any concerns which can then be addressed.
- 6.3 It is important that, where appropriate, Examiners or Chairs attend relevant ALS training to ensure their knowledge and understanding of issues facing disabled PGRs is current. Where appropriate, examiners should be offered briefing notes with links to relevant explanatory materials or training.

- 6.4 The examiners should have access to the ALS Marking Guidelines on oral examinations (in the ARPPs).
- 6.5 Examiners should be encouraged to use simply phrased questions avoiding multiple parts. They should also be actively discouraged from using literal language when examining a candidate with Asperger's.
- 6.6 On the day of the *viva voce*, the Research Administrator or Independent Chair should check all arrangements to ensure that no issues arise relating to accessibility or reasonable adjustments.
- 6.7 Below are some examples of adjustments that Examiners should consider:
- Provide PGRs with key questions 24 hours in advance of the *viva voce*. Alternatively, provide PGR with information 24 hours in advance of the *viva voce* on which part of the thesis will be discussed in depth.
 - Allow questions to be written down and give PGR time to think and prepare their response
 - Allow the PGR to make notes of key words to keep them focussed during their responses.
 - Allow an extended time for the *viva voce* to incorporate thinking time or rest breaks.
 - Allow PGR to mark sections of the thesis with coloured sticky tabs so text can be located easily
 - Allow digital recorded feedback, which can be highly beneficial for some PGRs depending on the disability
 - Make specific adjustments for those with Asperger's, especially around the use of literal language when questioning.

7. REFERENCES AND FURTHER INFORMATION

- [Competence Standards: Technical Act 2010 from the Equality and Human Rights Guidance on the Equality Commission \(EHRC\)](#)
- equalityhumanrights.com/advice-and-guidance/further-and-higher-education-providers-guidance/
- Lesaux N, Pearson M, Siegal L (2000) *The Effect of Timed and Untimed Testing Conditions on the Reading Comprehension Performance of Adults with Reading Disabilities*.
- Ofeish N and Hughes C (2003) *How much extended test time: An Analysis of Research and Recommendations for PGRs with Learning Disabilities*.