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| Student Disability Service  Guidance for Viva Examiners of PhD Students with Autistic Spectrum Conditions | scan-cropped2col-transback |

**Potential issues:**

As you will be acting as an external examiner for a student with Autistic Spectrum Conditions (ASC), you should be aware of some of the potential difficulties that might occur:

**General Guidance:**

Whilst the following suggestions are likely to be generally helpful, they will not necessarily apply equally to all individuals.

Students with ASC may find social and communication situations particularly challenging.

* They may find eye contact difficult.
* They may take some comments literally.
* They may require additional time for responding to questions.
* They may become anxious if an agreed timetable is not followed:

It is suggested you state:

“The viva will start when I ask you the next question”

“This is the last question”

“The viva is now over and you can leave the room”

* The student may find it difficult to know how much information is required, particularly when discussing a topic of interest.
* They may struggle to present themselves to the best effect despite having the knowledge and skills.
* They may fail to vary their tone of voice or find an appropriate level of formality.

The prospect of a Viva exam can be particularly demanding. It is reasonable to consider implementing some adjustments for these students.

**Reasonable Adjustments (suggestions to be selected for each individual):**

* Written Viva instructions should be provided to the student prior to the process (with clear explanations about the whole PhD process including thesis and viva).
* The Supervisor should endeavour to explain the process and structure in detail before the event and after. E.g. do you shake hands, say hello on entry, rough timings, what can be taken in, seating, numbers present, format and follow up etc.
* Ensure that the student has prior knowledge of the location and can visit and become familiar with the environment and set up beforehand.
* Student may need to check the sensory impact of the room prior to the Viva e.g. lighting, distractions etc. and request reasonable alterations.
* It may be appropriate for the student to bring a representative from the Student Disability Service or another acceptable individual for support.
* Explain the procedure and method of examination at the start of the Viva
* Always use clear, plain English and unambiguous language
* Allow extra time for responses to questions, as processing information may take longer.
* The Viva process should, where possible, not be protracted and breaks should be made, at, minimum every 2 hours.
* It may also be necessary to provide more regular breaks.
* The student may request a break if they become stressed or overwhelmed during the process
* Examiners should watch for signs of stress/anxiety and should suggest short breaks
* If the student becomes agitated, appears to be talking incessantly or begins to ramble, a break should be suggested.
* It may be necessary to re-word questions or introduce a degree of prompting
* Signal when a response is sufficient or more details are required eg “I do not want you to focus on that particular detail of your methodology, I want you to consider the broad application of your findings …”
* Signal Viva completion
* Provide clear feedback. Assistance may be required for follow up action, ideally clarified in writing as soon as possible.

**Further information:** Additional useful information can be found at

[www.vitae.ac.uk](http://www.vitae.ac.uk)

[www.autism.org.uk](http://www.autism.org.uk)

[www.scottishautism.org/adult-services/](http://www.scottishautism.org/adult-services/)

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**If you require this document in an alternative format please contact the Student Disability Service on 0131 650 6828 or email: disability.service@ed.ac.uk**