Reasonable adjustments and support for PGR level assessment/examination.

It is recommended that this document is read in conjunction with the [Transfer page](#) and the [Thesis submission and the viva pages of the For Students website](#). If you require this information in an alternative format, please contact your Faculty Graduate School.

Introduction.

There are two formal assessment/examination points for PGRs:

- The transfer stage
- The final oral examination after submission of the thesis.

The University is experienced in supporting disabled PGRs through these assessments and examination processes. This is always considered on a case-by-case basis; in consultation with Disability Services, the individual PGR and their academic School. The following sets out the process for identifying and agreeing support and adjustments for these assessment points[1]. These arrangements ensure that reasonable adjustments are made to the transfer viva/oral examination so that disabled PGRs are not disadvantaged by the process for transfer/examination. The same academic standards for the transfer to/award of the particular research degree must be upheld.

It is important to note that, the transfer assessment and the final oral examination for PGRs are very different from assessments at undergraduate and taught postgraduate (UG/TP) level. It may be necessary to identify alternative strategies to those utilised for UG/TP level examinations due to the particular assessment and examination requirements at PGR level

Background to the assessment points for PGRs.

Purpose of the transfer assessment.
The assessment at the transfer stage is intended to identify:

- whether the PGR and their research have the potential for success at doctoral level.
- whether completion of a thesis within the standard period of study is a reasonable expectation.

The process consists of a written submission by the PGR followed by a viva with a transfer assessment panel.

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[1] Advice on adjustments/support during the candidature is available on the [Disability Services webpages of the For Students website](#) and from Disability Services.

Purpose of the final oral examination

The role of the oral examination is to ensure that the thesis reaches the University standards for the degree (in terms of the criteria for award and learning outcomes) and that the thesis has been written and is understood by the PGR. It also gives the PGR the opportunity to answer questions in areas where the examiners are not satisfied or would like to gain clarity to encourage the PGR to provide convincing evidence that the stated criteria for award can be met. Some examiners will also wish to satisfy themselves of the candidate's general level of understanding in the subject area. The process consists of a thesis submission by the PGR followed by an oral examination with the team of examiners (normally one internal and one external examiner) as set out in more detail in the Thesis submission and the viva pages of the For Students website.

Examples of support arrangements/reasonable adjustments. – See Annex 1 and Annex 4

The University has a series of support arrangements/reasonable adjustments which can be agreed by the PGR and the academic School and put in place without the need for approval from the Graduate Board's Progression and Examinations Group (PEG). These are outlined in sections A & B of Annex 1.

Where it is identified that the examples in sections A & B are insufficient, or if alternative adjustments are being considered or requested, these should be discussed with both Disability Services and the Graduate School. The Graduate School (normally the Director of PGR Studies) should then forward a request for additional adjustments to Doctoral College Operations (DCO) who will arrange for the recommended adjustments to be considered at university level (by PEG).

Examples of adjustments which may require PEG consideration and approval are given in Section C of Annex 1.

- PGRs are advised to contact Disability Services at the earliest opportunity to discuss the reasonable adjustments and/or additional support that may be needed for an online transfer or final viva.

Recommended timescales for identifying support/reasonable adjustments.

It is important that the need for reasonable adjustments is identified well in advance of the transfer and viva process to allow due consideration to be given prior to assessment/examination.

Schools need to work in partnership with PGRs, and Disability Services where required, to identify when reasonable adjustments may be required for the transfer and viva processes; and what those reasonable adjustments might be.

It is recommended that discussions about any reasonable adjustments for the assessment points should begin as follows:

- ***Transfer viva:*** as part of the first formal progress review point (approx. month 6 of full-time study) which will be at least 3-6 months prior to the expected transfer viva date.

- ***Final viva:*** as part of the examination entry process (at least 3 months before thesis submission) which will be 4-6 months prior to the expected viva date.

Any adjustments that can be put in place at School/Faculty-level can be confirmed within a short, local timeframe. Any adjustments which require University-level consideration should be submitted to DCO, for consideration by PEG, at least 2 months before the expected transfer viva/final viva date.

Process for facilitating agreed reasonable adjustments.

After the PGR has identified the adjustments they require, the Graduate School is responsible for communicating any agreed adjustments and support arrangements to the PGR and the transfer panel members/team of examiners (this includes adjustments agreed locally and any adjustments which have been approved by PEG).

The Chair/Independent Assessor of the transfer assessment panel or the Internal Examiner has responsibility for facilitating on the day any reasonable adjustments to the transfer viva/oral examination, which will have been agreed upon in advance. There may be instances, for example where specific assisted technology has been recommended, where it would be expected that this is made available (if necessary) and tested well in advance of the viva examination. It may be necessary, depending on the software, that this is tested by all parties in advance of the viva.

Reasonable Adjustments for a video-streamed (online) viva or transfer viva. – See Annex 3.

If it is decided that the format of the transfer or final viva is to be online, previously agreed adjustments around the transfer or final viva must be honoured for an online viva. However, it is recognised that additional bespoke arrangements may be required in some cases for an online viva.

- PGRs are advised to contact Disability Services at the earliest opportunity to discuss the reasonable adjustments and/or additional support that may be needed for an online transfer or final viva.

Annex 1.

Examples of support & reasonable adjustments for PGR level assessment/examination.

A   Reminder of support covered by the good practice guidance.

The following can be agreed between the PGR and the academic School (with involvement of Disability Services if necessary) <u>without</u> the need for prior approval by PEG. The examples listed here are covered in the <u>Instructions to examiners</u> and the <u>guide for transfer panels</u> which allow for – as standard for all PGRs – the following:

- Wherever possible, assessors/examiners using succinct and focussed questions and avoiding the use of multi-part questions.
- Thinking time before answering questions
- Asking for a question to be repeated/re-phrased or requesting clarification
- Being able to consult their own copy of the thesis/submission
- Breaks during the viva
- PGR afforded (reasonable) time to write down questions posed by the panel/examiners

It may be helpful to note that the University does not have specific regulations regarding the length of the oral examination/transfer viva - it should be 'open-ended' and last as long as it needs to. Therefore, requests for additional time can be easily accommodated within the assessment/examination procedures.

B   Other examples of routine adjustments which do not require committee approval.

The following adjustments can be agreed between Disability Services, the PGR and the academic School <u>without</u> the need for prior approval by PEG.

- Optional rest breaks pre-scheduled at e.g., x minute intervals and/or the opportunity to request breaks
- Scheduling of the viva at a specific time of the day
- Advance briefing for the Panel/Examiners on the particular nature of the disability (for example to explain communication and thinking style)
- PGR providing a presentation to the panel/examiners at the start or end of the viva
- Particular room requirements e.g., accessible room, lighting, seating & furniture arrangements and option to visit and familiarise self with room beforehand
- Providing materials in alternative formats
- The use of a British Sign Language interpreter

C   Examples of adjustments which require committee approval.

Adjustments considered to exceed those covered by the guidance in A or B above should be discussed with both Disability Services and the Graduate School and then forwarded to Doctoral College Operations (DCO) to be considered at university level (by PEG[2] on behalf of the Graduate Board). These must be proposed in good time to allow due consideration to be given prior to assessment/examination.

Any adjustments requiring University-level consideration should be forwarded to DCO at least 2 months before the expected transfer viva/final viva date.

There are time limits for the assessment/examination and failure to submit a request for an adjustment within a reasonable timescale may result the viva being re-scheduled.

Examples of adjustments for the viva which will be considered on a case-by-case basis by the Chair of PEG include:

- Presence of a supporter/support worker/note taker
- Presence of a Specialist Mentor to assist communication
- Use of assistive technology
- An extension to the deadline for submission of the transfer report or thesis[3].
- Where the thesis has been recommended for award of the degree subject to minor corrections a period for corrections can be agreed (after the viva)[4].
- Taking time off-camera during the viva to focus on their thinking/processing (time off camera during a break is fine)

If proof-reading is required, once all other avenues of support have been exhausted, a separate conversation will take place between the PGR, Graduate School and Disability Services. Please refer to the Postgraduate Research Proof Reading Policy and Guidance for more information.

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[2] In practice this will normally be the Chair acting on behalf the relevant Group.
[3] Further advice can be found in the Policy on suspensions and extensions.
[4] For more information about the recommendations following the viva please see the Outcome of the viva page on the For Students website.

Annex 2.

Training and support in preparation for the transfer assessment/final viva.

PGRs should consult their supervisor for appropriate guidance in preparation for their transfer and final viva. A "mock viva" may be helpful for some PGRs.

- Where this would be beneficial the PGR should discuss this with their supervisor to arrange this.

The [Postgraduate Research Skills and Training page](#) on the For Students website includes the "The final stages of your research: Post-transfer to completion" course which guides you through the final stages of your research, thesis preparation and preparing for your viva.

Training and support in preparation for a final or transfer viva.

Guidance on the viva, including video streamed vivas, is available in a [Viva Collection](#) section in LinkedIn Learning (You may be asked to log in. Simply use your usual University login).

For those with upcoming Vivas you can experience a short mock viva when participating in a Your Viva workshop. Information about the workshop and how to book is available via ODPL's [Postgraduate Research Professional Development](#) opportunities web page.

If you are unable to attend the workshop or you particularly want to experience answering viva questions in a video streamed environment, you can request a mock viva by emailing researcherdev@leeds.ac.uk. Your email needs to indicate you would like a mock viva and why you are requesting it.

Note that you can ask you supervisor to do a mock viva with you. OD&PL support here is offered in addition to any support from your supervisor.

Other sources of information.

There are also several other sources of information which PGRs might find it helpful to consult in preparation for their transfer or final viva:

- All PGRs should, at an early stage in their candidature, ensure they are aware of the criteria for award of the research degree programme for which they are registered. This is the criteria that will be used by the examiners when examining the thesis at the final examination stage. At the transfer stage the assessors will be considering the potential for these criteria to be met. The requirements and learning outcomes for research degrees are provided in the [Ordinance and Regulations and Programmes of Study](#).

- The [Research Skills and Training page on the For Students website](#) includes the "The final stages of your research: Post-transfer to completion" course which guides you through the final stages of your research, thesis preparation and preparing for your viva.

- After the transfer viva and the final viva the assessors/examiners must produce a joint report which outlines their recommendation. All PGRs might find it helpful to look at the [Joint Report of the Transfer Assessment Panel](#)[5] or the final [examiners' report form](#) which describes the criteria against which the assessors/examiners will be assessing their work.

- The [Thesis submission and the viva pages of the For Students website](#) provides an overview of the thesis examination process and sets out the University's requirements for the presentation of theses and offers advice about the different stages of the process, including advice about the final viva.

- The [Transfer page on the For Students website](#) provides further information about the transfer process. The exact procedures for the transfer assessment may vary between individual Faculties/Schools according to the requirements of the different disciplines. PGRs should contact their Faculty/School for guidance on the transfer process and the arrangements specific to their Faculty.

- The University provides all assessors/examiners with good practice advice on the conduct of the viva and PGRs may also find it helpful to consult this advice when preparing for their viva. For the final viva please see [Instructions to examiners](#). For the transfer viva please see the [Transfer panel guidance](#).

- Disability Services have a Preparation for your viva document which contains generic advice on common strategies which may help preparing for, and during, the viva. This will be shared with you by your Disability Co-ordinator.

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[5] The report is completed by the Panel in GRAD after the transfer viva and the completed report can be accessed by the PGR in GRAD after approval by PEG.

Annex 3.

Reasonable adjustments for a video-streamed (online) transfer of final viva.

If it is decided that the format of the transfer or final viva is to be online, previously agreed adjustments around the transfer or final viva must be honoured for an online Viva where applicable. However, it is recognised that additional bespoke arrangements may be required in some cases for an online viva.

- PGRs are advised to contact Disability Services at the earliest opportunity to discuss the reasonable adjustments and/or additional support that may be needed for an online transfer or final viva.

Microsoft Teams is the platform that would normally be used for a transfer or final viva[6]. As a tool, Microsoft Teams is accessible to most PGRs, but there are some practical accessibility issues that may make it more difficult for some disabled PGRs. For example, consideration may need to be given to:

- Whether any required assistive technology is compatible.
- Facilitating access to British Sign Language Interpreter.
- Whether lip reading or subtitles will work effectively.
- Difficulties with the practical navigation of screens and reliance on audio.
- Additional anxiety at 'inviting in' strangers into a personal space (e.g., home).
- A need for breaks.
- The attendance of a supporter.
- How conducting the viva via IT/a screen may impact your usual communicate methods (e.g., eye contact, arm movements/expression, use of chat)

To ensure that online viva process is accessible, the following may need to be considered:

- Previously agreed adjustments around the viva must be honoured.

- PGRs must have access to any assistive technology agreed under Annex 1 (section C).

- PGRs must be informed well in advance of the software platform to be used for the viva. This will provide the opportunity to test the platform, navigation and support arrangements ahead of the viva, and to identify and resolve any issues in advance. Any difficulties should be noted for discussion between Disability Services, the PGR and the Supervisor to explore solutions and adjustments.

- Training and support are available to all PGRs, as set out in Annex 2, including the opportunity for a mock Teams viva through OD&PL.

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[6] As of April 2021, Zoom has been added to the list of platforms that can be used for a PGR viva

- A period must be allowed ahead of the viva for all parties to become familiar with the environment and ensure they are comfortable with the technology and set-up before commencing the viva.

- Careful consideration should be given to the use of breaks. Online meetings may take longer and can be more tiring than face-to-face meetings. It might be necessary to agree pre-arranged break times (e.g., 10 minutes every hour) and/or to have breaks available on request. It is not necessary for the PGR to remain in the room or on camera during a break period.

- The remote viva policy indicates the PGR will need to be alone during the examination. However, as set out in Annex 1 – section C of this document, it continues to be possible for a PGR to be accompanied by a supporter, if agreed as part of any reasonable adjustments. The supporter may be in the room with the PGR, or join the viva remotely, as appropriate.

- It might help to provide familiarity with those involved in the viva before via (for example) recent photographs or informal pre-viva video introductions to those involved, or blurring the background on the call.
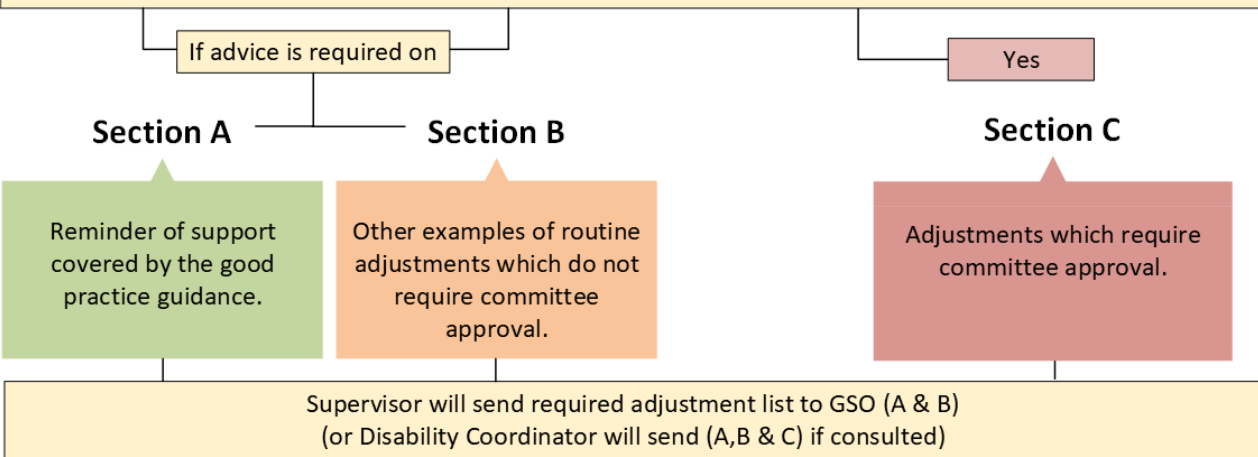
Annex 4.

Flowchart outlining process

1 - Identify support needed

It is recommended PGR's begin this process at least 2-3 months before submission of the Transfer Report or Thesis as some adjustements may require consideration and approval from Graduate Board's Progression and Examination Group.

2 - PGR discusses adjustments requirements with supervisory team and GSO

If necessary the PGR may also contact their Disability Coordinator (in Disability Services) if they require advice on what adjustments may be suitable and what practical arrangements may be required.

Should PGR discuss with their Disability Co-ordinator?

If advice is required on

Yes

Section A

Section B

Section C

Reminder of support covered by the good practice guidance.

Other examples of routine adjustments which do not require committee approval.

Adjustments which require committee approval.

Supervisor will send required adjustment list to GSO (A & B)
(or Disability Coordinator will send (A,B & C) if consulted)

4 - Request sent to PEG for consideration

5 - PEG approval

Director of Postgraduate Research studies forwards request for adjustments to Doctoral College Operations for consideration by Progression and Examinations Group by e-mail at least two months before the expected viva date.

PEG may request additional information from the School.

6 - School to communicate adjustments to Transfer Panel/Examiners

The Graduate School is responsible for communicating any agreed adjustments and support arrangements to the PGR, the transfer panel members/team of examiners (this includes adjustments agreed locally and any adjustments which have been approved by PEG).

The Chair/Independent Assessor of the transfer assessment panel or the Internal Examiner has responsibility for facilitating on the day any reasonable adjustments to the transfer viva/oral examination, which will have been agreed upon in advance.