

Guidelines for Viva Examiners regarding students with Specific Learning Differences (SpLD)

Specific Learning Differences (Dyslexia, Dyspraxia AD(H)D) can impact upon auditory and visual information processing in working and short-term memory function. The combination of exam nerves or anxiety is likely to exacerbate the underlying short-term memory weakness, therefore, increasing the impact of these difficulties.

In order to ensure fairness and be in line with disability discrimination legislation, any viva board should consider whether the examination situation will inhibit the performance of students with Specific Learning Differences and make appropriate reasonable adjustments.

A student with Specific Learning Differences in a viva exam might experience difficulties with:

- Remembering what is said, particularly if a question is long and has more than one element to it
- Holding questions in their mind and then answering, referring to information stored in the long term-memory
- Keeping track of ideas when listening and speaking
- Formulating full and coherent responses to questions under pressure

With this in mind *it is recommended* that any viva board consider the following reasonable adjustments:

- To provide a written copy of questions on entering the examination room, to act as a prompt/guide
- To break down information into manageable chunks
- To keep questions short and ask follow-up questions if further elaboration is required. A two or three part question may be very challenging.
- To expand or clarify a question if necessary
- To use unambiguous language if possible (technical terminology is still expected to be used)

Additionally a candidate may request and act upon the following:

- Repetition/clarification of information/questions
- Use of mind maps, diagrams, prompt cards/ notes to formulate responses
- To jot down notes/ideas whilst a question is being asked to act as a memory aid

These adjustments will not be automatically put in place. It is the student's responsibility to inform their Academic Department at least 10 working days in advance of their VIVA which, if any, of the adjustments above that they would like to be implemented.

Not all students with SpLD experience all of the above difficulties to the same degree and not all students will require all of the above adjustments. The guidelines above represent a broad approach and level of awareness.