



the british  
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promoting excellence in psychology

# Guidance for viva assessments

July 2019



# 1. Role of viva assessors/examiners

'Assessors/examiners must ensure that they are familiar with the requirements of the qualification, the standards and competencies to be addressed, and the processes involved in the viva examination.'

Assessors/Examiners are responsible for:

- Undertaking an assessment of the portfolio/ final submission in advance of the viva and, where appropriate, completing an independent pre-viva report which must be submitted to the Qualifications Office at least 2 weeks before the viva takes place;
- Preparing for the viva which includes; identifying which assessor/examiner will take the role of chair, preparing key areas of questioning, the allocation of topics/ questions to each assessor and allocating timings to topic areas to be covered to ensure that areas of concern are sufficiently explored in the published viva time
- Ensuring the viva does not run over the allocated time
- Conducting the viva examination and agreeing a joint decision with co-assessor;
- Finalising the post-viva report which provides a comprehensive, developmental and supportive feedback to the candidate;
- Meeting with the Chief Assessor/Lead Assessor to agree a recommendation to the Qualifications Board and clarify the decision-making process
- Assessing the amendments made by the candidate and confirming whether they have satisfactorily complied with the amendments requested in the feedback;
- Conducting a further viva exam as required; and
- Maintaining confidentiality of the viva proceedings and their outcome.

Viva assessment Chair is responsible for:

- Introducing those present at the viva and putting everyone at ease;
- Outlining the nature of the viva process, including the purpose of audio recordings (quality monitoring and academic appeals);
- Intervening if there is a danger of misunderstanding, unfairness, bias or unprofessional behaviour; and
- Maintaining confidentiality of the viva proceedings and their outcome.

Chief Assessor is responsible for:

- Overseeing the proceedings to ensure that due process is followed at all times;
- Stepping into the role of the assessor/ examiner on the rare occasion where an assessor becomes unavailable (e.g. due to sudden illness) too close to the viva date for a suitable replacement assessor/examiner to be appointed in time;
- Ensuring that those present understand the procedures which are to be followed;
- Deliberating with the assessors/examiners in order to establish the rationale for the assessment outcome and recommendation to the Qualifications Board;
- Moderating in cases where assessors do not agree on the assessment outcome;
- Taking notes on the process for possible use in the future, for example, in the case of an appeal; and
- Maintaining confidentiality of the viva proceedings and their outcome.
- Where the examiners' preliminary reports are not in agreement (that the candidate or portfolio is of a sufficient standard for the viva to proceed) then the Chief assessor will review the reports and submission, and decide whether the viva will go ahead.

## 2. Viva assessment

### A. PURPOSE OF THE VIVA

A Society viva is a professional discussion the purpose of which is to evaluate whether the candidate demonstrates the core competencies required for the award, confirm whether the work the candidate has submitted is their own and explore any areas where the assessors need further reassurance about the candidate's competence.

The examination of competence has two elements: the assessment of the submission (portfolio, essay, clinical logs) and the confirmation and exploration of competence in the viva voce examination.

The viva examination should be a positive experience for the candidate, regardless of the outcome, and should be conducted in a fair, transparent and professional manner.

Although there is no set formal procedure laid down for the conduct of the viva assessment, assessors/examiners must always be prepared and ensure that their questions are appropriate, relevant, at the right academic level and designed to confirm the candidate's competence.

The purpose of the viva is for the candidate to demonstrate competence in the area, not a high standard of achievement or expertise; and accordingly the viva questions should reflect that. However, if a candidate does demonstrate expertise, or has undertaken exceptional work, this should be reflected in their feedback (and the award of a merit or distinction result, if available).

All viva proceedings are recorded for quality assurance purposes.

### B. ARRANGING THE VIVAS

The arrangement of the viva date is a joint responsibility of the Qualifications Administrator and Chief Assessor. Once a date has been agreed, the Qualifications Administrator books a suitable venue and equipment and makes any additional arrangements, such as accommodation and catering for the examining team. The Qualifications Administrator is also responsible for managing all communications

regarding the viva and ensuring that all involved stay informed about any changes to previously agreed arrangements.

Vivas will normally take place at Society offices in Leicester or London. Occasionally, viva examinations may have to be held at external venues but, in every instance, every effort will be made to ensure that candidates undertake the viva in suitable conditions.

### C. ATTENDEES TO THE VIVA

Only the candidate and relevant members of the assessment team (examiners/assessors and Chief Assessor) should be present during the viva. No other member of the Qualifications Board is permitted to attend viva proceedings unless, unless due to unforeseen extenuating circumstances, the Chief Assessor is unable to attend and a formal request has been made for another Board member to step in. Normally, this

is the Chair of the Qualifications Board. In these instances, final ratification of assessment results will be the responsibility of the Chair of the Qualifications Committee.

The Candidate's Coordinating Supervisor may attend the viva as an observer at the discretion of the examining team and with prior written permission of the candidate.

A member of the Qualifications Team provides administrative support for the viva but is not allowed in the viva room during the

proceedings. If the viva is held away from the Leicester Office, the support will be provided by phone on the day.

#### **D. BEFORE THE VIVA**

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Each assessor/examiner is required to prepare a pre-viva report and prepare for the conduct of the professional discussion.

The examining team is expected to meet before the viva to plan the conduct of the examination and agree the questions/areas of questioning.

The Chief Assessor and/or Qualifications Administrator will fully brief the assessors/examiners about any changes that have been made to the regulations and handbook under which the candidate is being examined since the last set of vivas, and discuss preliminary reports and the approach to the viva.

#### **E. DURING THE VIVA**

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There is no formal procedure for the conduct of the viva examination. However, in most instances, the assessors/examiners will set the professional discussion around pre-determined questions about the candidate's work agreed prior to the viva although, based on the

candidate's responses, additional exploration should be expected.

The viva should not to exceed a maximum of two hours and assessors/examiners are required to adhere to the Regulations for the Society's postgraduate qualifications and Candidate Handbook throughout.

#### **F. AFTER THE VIVA**

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At the conclusion of a viva, assessors discuss the viva, complete the written feedback forms, and jointly recommend an assessment outcome. The assessors then meet formally with the Chief Assessor to agree a recommendation to the Qualifications Board. As part of this meeting, the Chief Assessor will seek to clarify

the decision-making process and rationale for the final decision, ensuring it was driven by the standards against which competence has been assessed. The Chief Assessor will then make a recommendation to the Qualifications Board who has the responsibility for ratifying the final result.

#### **G. RESULTS**

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Once ratified, the results are released to the candidates. Please note that candidates will receive their results within four weeks of their viva. This information will have been communicated to them in their invitation to viva letter.

If a candidate's first viva attempt is not successful, they have two further opportunities to pass the assessment. Where the result is not a pass, the post-viva report will clearly outline what work ought to be undertaken in preparation for a resubmission, or subsequent viva.



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INF145/07.2019