

## **UCD Neurodiversity Working Group**

### **What is Neurodiversity?**

Neurodiversity is a term coined in the 1990s to describe variation in human brain functions relating to sociability, learning, attention and mood. Neurodiversity encompasses conditions such as Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), among others. The term is designed to frame these neurodevelopmental conditions as reflecting the natural diversity of the human brain, rather than biomedical 'dysfunction'. People who are neurodiverse bring unique skills and perspectives, which enrich all cultures and organisations.

This is not to say that people who are neurodiverse do not experience challenges in life. However, many of these challenges derive from inequalities in society rather than any inherent deficiency of neurodiverse individuals. Increased understanding of neurodiversity across our communities will help to break down barriers to full societal participation and to harness the unique strengths and potential of neurodiverse individuals.

### **What is the UCD Neurodiversity Working Group?**

The UCD Neurodiversity Working Group has been established to examine and improve UCD's campus climate in relation to neurodiversity. It aims to cultivate appreciation of the value of neurodiversity across the university, and to empower neurodiverse staff and students to success in UCD and beyond. The Neurodiversity Working Group grew out of the UCD Neurodiversity Project, which was established in 2019 within the College of Health and Agricultural Sciences.

### **Why UCD?**

International research indicates that approximately 1-2% of the population meets criteria for ASD and approximately 5% meets criteria for ADHD. Many mental health conditions and learning difficulties can also be considered forms of neurodiversity. As such, neurodiversity is present across all sectors of society, including in universities.

For most neurodiverse individuals, achieving university entry follows a more arduous path through the education system than for neurotypical students. Neurodiverse staff also face unique challenges in professional development within career pathways designed for neurotypical people. UCD is committed to progressing its equality, diversity and inclusion agenda by providing adequate recognition, support and equality of opportunity for its neurodiverse students and staff. In so doing, UCD can act as a societal leader in promoting awareness of neurodiversity, and enrich its campus culture by attracting talented neurodiverse staff and students.

## **What are the objectives of the UCD Neurodiversity Working Group?**

The group is currently focusing its attention on the following key objectives:

1. Carry out a gap analysis of existing UCD policies and procedures using the Neurodiversity Hub gap analysis protocol. (Note CHAS has signed MoU with Neurodiversity Hub).
2. Identify opportunities in UCD's existing policies, programmes and practices to enable a neurodiversity friendly campus and to consider the development of new policies and practices to demonstrate UCD's commitment to neurodiversity.
3. Engage with students and staff to gain a more in-depth understanding of perspectives and lived experiences concerning neurodiversity in UCD.
4. Identify best practice internationally to inform initiatives and actions relating to neurodiversity in the university sector.
5. Raise awareness and understanding of neurodiversity through online masterclasses, awareness raising programmes, training and the development of a dedicated webpage. This may include mainstreaming into other relevant equality training and teaching initiatives.

## **Where can I find out more?**

To find out more about neurodiversity, you might find the following resources helpful:

Together with national and international partners the UCD Neurodiversity Working Group hosts an online monthly Masterclass series. You can watch back previous recordings and register for future sessions [here](#).

In December 2020 the UCD Neurodiversity Project co-hosted a conference, 'Neurodiversity : A Paradigm Shift in Further Education and Beyond,' which took place online over two days. The conference aimed to start a strength-based conversation about neurodiversity in third-level institutions and amongst employers. Recordings of the sessions can be accessed [here](#).

UCD College of Health and Agricultural Sciences has an MOU with [Neurodiversity Hub](#). Neurodiversity Hub promotes a community of practice for universities, colleges, and employers to support neurodivergent students.

## **Join UCD's Neurodiversity Working Group**

To find out how to become a member of UCD's Neurodiversity Working Group, click [here](#)