# University College Dublin

# **Guidance for Supervisors –**

# **Supporting PhD Students with Disabilities**

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## **Ensure students are aware of the supports available to them:**

* Inform students about [disability support](https://www.ucd.ie/all/ucdstudents/support/disabilitysupport/) in UCD Access and Lifelong Learning, if they are not already linked in.
* Keep up to date on student support policies and student support networks so you can share this information with your supervisees.

If a student declares a disability to you, you should inform the student that disability support is available to UCD through [UCD Access & Lifelong Learning](https://www.ucd.ie/all/ucdstudents/support/disabilitysupport/) in the first instance.

## **Read the Disability Fact Sheets for staff:**

* UCD Access & Lifelong Learning has prepared a selection of [fact sheets](https://www.ucd.ie/all/ucdstudents/support/disabilitysupport/informationforstaff/supportingstudentswithadisability/) for staff on how to support students with particular disabilities.

## **Establish a supportive supervisory relationship:**

* Create an open and safe environment for students to discuss any concerns they may have in relation to their research programme and their disability.
* Check in regularly to identify any concerns or issues arising. Encourage the student to review their reasonable accommodations/supports with Access and Lifelong Learning if their needs change.
* Clarify at an early stage the role and responsibilities of both student and supervisor.
* Provide as much detail as possible on expectations and timelines, and explore any concerns a student may have in relation to meeting these.
* Set reasonable expectations with students (e.g. research work, conferences, teaching, assessment etc).
* Provide flexible supervision options (e.g. in-person/virtual, particular times of day may be more suitable for the student, allow recording of supervision meetings). Agree on an agenda before/at the start of the meeting. Ask the student to write up a summary form afterwards and share it with you, to ensure mutual understanding of action points.
* Provide instructions and feedback in an accessible format for the student. Ask the student what method works best for them.
* Agree on regular timelines/deadlines for students to submit work and for you to provide feedback in a timely manner.
* Encourage students to implement boundaries around their work, and foster a culture of respecting boundaries within the supervisory relationship (e.g. not expecting response to emails outside of working hours).
* Acknowledge different working and learning preferences on a regular basis.
* Introduce students to people in the field.
* Be aware that Imposter Syndrome is prevalent amongst research students, particularly those with disabilities. Provide feedback on their strengths as well as areas for improvement. Encourage them to connect with other graduate students. Make them aware of the UCD Student Counselling service should Imposter Syndrome be impacting on their mental wellbeing.

## **Planning for formal assessment:**

* Provide students with a clear outline of what to expect at the Stage Transfer Assessment and Viva, where applicable.
* Ensure that any [reasonable accommodations](https://www.ucd.ie/all/ucdstudents/support/disabilitysupport/informationforstaff/supportingstudentswithadisability/) (identified at the student’s Needs Assessment with Access and Lifelong Learning) are implemented. Depending on the individual student this may include breaks, access to food/drink.
* Students may find it helpful to see the room in advance. Having the opportunity to practise the Viva in the room, and be provided with feedback, can be very beneficial.

*Access & Lifelong Learning January 2024*