



## Why is mental health an important issue at UCL?

Mental health conditions are common. In any one year approximately one in four British adults experience at least one diagnosable mental health condition. Stigma still exists around mental health and though this may be lessening in recent years, it means that many people have limited understanding or harmful misconceptions about mental ill health.

The ongoing stigma can lead to people feeling ashamed of their condition and may hinder them from seeking help, especially if they are a man or from a culture where mental ill health isn't seen as a health issue at all. It can be the case that some people lack the insight to realise that they need help or help is available, as mental health conditions can cloud thinking and decision making. It is not uncommon for mental health conditions in the workplace to be exacerbated as well-meaning colleagues do not know how to respond to issues or may be reluctant to help for fear of saying or doing the 'wrong thing'.

With the intense level of competition between universities, staff working in higher education increasingly work in high-pressured environments with long working hours, which can impact on mental wellbeing if sustained for an extended period. While recognising workplace demands can vary, UCL is committed to being a responsible employer. It is necessary to avoid chronic workplace stress and unreasonable demands in order to safeguard the mental health of our employees.

Increased understanding of mental health will, in time, help reduce any inequalities and

## Overview of mental health conditions

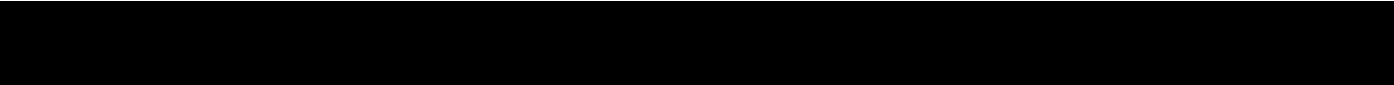
## Mental health and equality law

## Mental health and academia

Anecdotally, mental health issues are common in academia. Whilst there may not be a large body of research to evidence this, the research that does exist shows a link between the levels of stress academics face and a subsequent impact on mental health. An Australian study <sup>1</sup> found that the rate of mental illness in academic staff was three to four times higher than in the general population whilst other research estimated this to be as high as 53 per cent for UK academics<sup>2</sup>.

Another study published in 2013 by the University and College Union<sup>3</sup> used health and safety executive measures, assessed against a large sample of over 14,000 university employees, to reveal growing stress levels among academics prompted by heavy workloads, a long hours c

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## Examples of reasonable adjustments

Under the Equality Act 2010, UCL has a legal duty to make 'reasonable adjustments' for staff with long term mental health difficulties that have a substantial impact on their ability to carry out day to day activities. This means that managers are obliged to make reasonable adjustments to a person's job or working environment to reduce the impact of a person's health condition on their ability to work, and to ensure they are getting the right support. The types of reasonable adjustments that can support people with mental health problems stay productive at work are changes that are often relatively easy and inexpensive to put in place with some thought and preparation. Many of these are just good management practice. When deciding whether an adjustment is reasonable a manager should consider:

- How effective the change will be in avoiding the disadvantage the disabled worker would otherwise experience
- Its practicality
- The costs & the availability of financial support.
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