

General guidance and rationale for reasonable adjustments for PhD / PGR students

In order to be considered for reasonable adjustments, students need to be registered with the [Disability & Neurodiversity Team](#) (D&N). A support agreement outlining any reasonable adjustments being recommended by D&N will be forwarded to the Doctoral School D&N Network Member. Support agreements can be updated if additional requirements are identified at a later date but any agreed reasonable adjustments must be in place at least one month before any meeting/assessment (viva, reviews and upgrade) so that all parties can be informed.

The following support guidelines and rationale are recommended for candidates with any disability or learning difference:

Annual review and supervisory meetings:

Students with Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLDs), disabilities and/or mental health conditions might experience difficulties with:

- Remembering what is said
- Holding questions in their mind and then answering after referring to information stored in the long term-memory
- Keeping track of ideas when listening and speaking (multi-tasking)
- Generating full and coherent responses to questions when under pressure.

With this in mind:

- It is common that students with leaning difference and/or mental health condition(s) experience difficulties with processing information and may need more time. As such, clear roadmap of each stage of a PhD, expectations and deadline of events communicated / illustrated to students by the supervisors can be beneficial (i.e. upgrade, annual review the write up year and viva);
- Multiple introductions to core administration personnel and D&N network members can paint a clear picture for students and reduce the anxiety and pressure from the working memory;
- Regular monthly supervision meetings that clarify any uncertainty or issues until the annual review date can help to reduce the pressure and anxiety for students with mental health conditions and/or autism. It is beneficial, if both parties (students and supervisors) agree to record these meetings, so students can refer back to the recordings any time if needed.

- For candidates with autism and/or learning difference it is essential to elucidate how the meetings will be conducted and therefore a systematic and consistent approach to supervision meetings (i.e. agreed agendas in advance) is recommended;
- Students with processing issues may experience cognitive overload during the meetings and as a result misunderstand key information. As such, providing accessible feedback forms after each meeting (audio or written format) and specify the agreed steps until the next meeting can assist the students. Both parties (students and supervisors) can agree on ways of working together which cater for students' need and learning preference. Provide all written information in an [accessible format](#);
- Access to written sources and/or any feedback from materials submitted to supervisors 24 hours in advance of any supervision meeting, training courses or taught components will provide enough time for students to process and understand key information effectively. This is specifically valuable for students with dyslexia or those who have memory processing issues;
- For students with a specific learning difficulty (dyslexia & dyspraxia) assessed work such as essays (in taught programmes), thesis submission, upgrade and annual reviews (referred to as a 'green sticker') is recommended to be marked for content rather than spelling and grammatical issues (that is, when this does not compromise academic standards). For more information please refer to the marking guidelines for specific learning difficulties.

Upgrade meeting:

- Students with mental health condition(s) and/or autism can experience working memory overload and anxiety. Therefore, providing the broad areas of questioning (if possible) an hour in advance of the upgrade meeting can reduce this pressure and help them to gain control;
- It is common that students with specific learning difference to be descriptive and in some cases go off on a tangent when explaining something that doesn't necessarily address the question. Where possible (that is, when this does not compromise academic standards), providing extra clarification or early re-direction of questions can reduce this possibility and encourage student to get to the relevant point;
- Word finding, irregular speed and issues in relation to flow of response are common among students with dyslexia and ADHD. As such, allow for poor fluency or any other mistake and assess for content instead;

- Allow the students to write down the questions asked during the meeting as this will give more time to the student to digest and analyse the question. Repeat the questions back to ensure clear understanding;
- If required, allow rest breaks of 10 mins if the meeting exceeds an hour;
- **Online format;** inform the students well in advance of the software platform that will be used for the upgrade meeting (normally Microsoft Teams). This will provide them with the opportunity to test the platform, navigate its features and familiarise themselves with the technology ahead of the meeting, and to identify and resolve any issues in advance;
- **Face-to-face;** allow students to gain prior knowledge of the location as this can create more familiarity, clarity and reduce anxiety. If possible, allow them to visit the place and familiarise themselves with the environment and set up beforehand;
- Provide an opportunity to introduce the student to any staff with whom they have not had any previous contact prior to the meeting. This will reduce the pressure and anxiety for the student.

D&N support

- **Diagnostic Assessments** for students with a specific learning difficulty if evidence provided is deemed insufficient for D&N registration or for Disabled Students' Allowance (*please note fees may apply*).
- **DSA Non-Medical Help provision** (specialist one to one study skills or specialist mentoring) where Royal Holloway is the named supplier.
- **Workshops** - Termly study skills workshops to improve academic writing, reading and time management skills
- **Marking guidelines** - Students registered with the Disability & Neurodiversity Team with a specific learning difficulty (dyslexia and/or dyspraxia) are eligible for the marking guidelines to be applied to their written work (thesis, upgrade and/or annual review).