

## Students with mental health difficulties

Mental health difficulties can take many forms, for example: depression, anxiety disorders, attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), phobias, obsessive compulsive disorders (OCD), eating disorders, schizophrenia.

Each of these difficulties will create their own specific problems for students but there are a number of characteristics which are often common to many of them, as follows:

- difficulties with concentration;
- impaired memory function (especially short-term memory and verbal learning); impaired problem-solving skills, critical thinking and inductive reasoning; sudden and unexpected episodes of their illness;
- deterioration of their well-being during the course of their study;
- disrupted patterns of study;
- lack of motivation or sense of purpose;
- lack of confidence;
- low self-esteem;
- difficulties in adapting to departmental/ collegial social life;
- pre-occupation with their personal situation;
- feeling suicidal;
- anxiety & panic attacks.

### Solutions could include:

- trying to ascertain if the mental illness is under control and who outside the university you should contact if you, or other staff, have concerns;
- encouraging the student to do something, however brief or insignificant it may appear;
- highlighting their achievements e.g. results, interpretation;
- setting short-term goals to build up a record of achievement;
- working with the student on strategies to develop confidence and deal with anxiety;
- setting up suitable boundaries to help the student contain their difficulties – e.g. ensure the student knows where to go if they have a problem and know where you, as supervisor, can turn to if you have concerns about the student;
- building flexibility into plans and timetables;
- considering whether counselling or assertiveness training may help; considering whether medical or psychiatric assistance is appropriate; considering whether time out from study would be beneficial;
- the support of non-disabled members of the team to introduce the student to team members and departmental or social gatherings.