

Guidelines for fostering accessible education at LUT

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Background, purpose and scope of application

According to chapter 6, section 2 of the Constitution of Finland and to the Non-Discrimination Act (21/2004), “No one shall, without an acceptable reason, be treated differently from other persons on the ground of sex, age, origin, language, religion, conviction, opinion, health, disability or other reason that concerns his or her person.” The non-discrimination requirement also extends to the receiving of education. However, the laws make possible differential treatment, in a positive sense. This means that certain groups of individuals may be supported through specific measures, if they would otherwise be at risk for being placed at a disadvantage.

The non-discrimination requirement in the university’s educational activities often manifests itself as accessible education. Accessibility means creating physical, psychological, and social environments in a way that enables each student to have an equal opportunity to study and receive the services that he/she needs. In many matters, the word ‘equality’ means ‘similarity’, but particularly with regards to students with learning disabilities, to disabled students, or to students with illnesses, equality means that the conditions rendering their studies more challenging are taken into account in the arrangements for learning and evaluation situations. Equality does not mean compromising the learning targets, because then all of the students do not achieve the level of knowledge required.

The purpose of these guidelines is to assist students, teachers and other staff in jointly finding solutions for removing barriers to education encountered by an individual student or a group of students. Many practices which remove barriers to study for certain groups of individuals may, at the same time, serve to promote the learning of all students. These guidelines are applicable to all training and education organized by LUT. In regards to entrance exams, the agreed-upon practices for student selection cooperation are applied.

Learning disabilities

Learning disabilities are referred to when difficulties related to learning are notable given the talent and educational level of the person, and when other illnesses are not the underlying issue. Nor can the difficulties be explained by a lack of education or inadequate prerequisite skills. Learning disabilities may make it difficult for students to learn, complete assignments, complete exams, participate in group work or follow the teacher’s instructions.

Examples of learning disabilities include dyslexia, mathematics learning disabilities and various kinds of auditory and visual processing disorders. In addition, attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and Asperger’s syndrome may make study more challenging. The learning disability

may be narrow in scope, in which case it impacts only one area of learning. Often times, however, multiple kinds of learning disabilities may appear in the same individual concurrently.

Disability or illness

Different degrees of disabilities and illnesses may also cause either permanent or temporary barriers to study. Barriers to study related to permanent disabilities, such as mobility, sight or hearing disabilities, may be diminished to a large extent through solutions and support devices at facilities and other infrastructure. However, a student may benefit from, for instance, receiving lecture material in a specific format in advance. Access to the physical environment of LUT and related improvement needs have been evaluated in LUT's accessibility report.

A slower pace of advancement in studies due to illness is taken into account in decision-making pertaining to the study grant and the time extension for studies. Students with chronic illnesses can also go on sick leave and receive sick pay instead of the study grant money. A student who is on sick leave has the right to a reduced course load without losing sick pay. A reduced course load is considered to be, at the most, 40 % of the indicated targets for the term or the academic school year.

Possible accommodations

Barriers to study may be diminished as necessary depending on the individual's situation and needs through, inter alia, the following practical arrangements:

- The student can take examinations in an area assigned to them alone.
- The student be given additional time for completing the examination.
- The student may complete the examination on a computer.
- An alternative or complementary examination method, such as an oral examination may be arranged for the student.
- An alternative method for completing the course content may be arranged for the student.
- A student's dyslexia will be taken into account in the language check portion of the maturity test.
- A student's learning disability will be taken into account in the evaluation of the student performance e.g. in the following ways (Note: this does not mean compromising the learning targets):
 - In the assessment of performance, attention is primarily given to the quality of the knowledge evaluation and not to the language evaluation.
 - For language courses, a grade on the content is also given, if this is possible.

Processes/guidelines for receiving special accommodations

Special accommodations are always begun at the student's initiative. When bringing up the learning disability, disability or illness in order to receive accommodations, the student must present proof of the situation, for example by providing a relevant statement issued by a professional.

If the student is not yet certain about the learning disability or the means of evidence, he or she may be in contact with Student Health Service (YTHS). The student will receive further assistance from the health service and the possibility of a referral, e.g. for testing.

In order for a student to receive accommodations for scheduled examinations, the Student Customer Service must be contacted at least one week prior to the examination in question. The examinations officer in the Student Customer Service is in charge of the accommodations.

The student must contact the teacher in charge of the course about 1) taking examinations outside of the scheduled examination period, 2) other special accommodations and 3) consideration given to the learning disability in the evaluation of the student performance.

If the student would like accommodations for dyslexia applied to his or her maturity test, he or she must contact the language assessor of the maturity test.

To receive general advice and assistance, the student may contact the accessibility contact person, who is bachelor's/master's programme's study counsellor. The student and the contact person can jointly identify what kinds of arrangements would best facilitate the student's studies. The accessibility contact person may, with the student's permission, contact teachers and/or other staff members. In this case, the fact that the student has proven his or her special accommodation needs to the accessibility contact person is enough.

Communication, training and support

Matters of accessibility in study and teaching is communicated to students via the Uni portal and to teachers via LUT Intranet. On these sites, LUT policy principles and practices concerning accessibility are described to both teachers and students, and support material related to accessibility are provided. LUT students are informed about learning disabilities and provided with guidance on, inter alia, the use of learning techniques and other means of support to promote study.

A university pedagogical training offered to LUT teachers covers issues of accessibility and learning disabilities. In addition to this, other training will be arranged for teachers and staff members on an as-needed basis. Accessibility support persons are faculty staff members whose task is to act as a liaison between the student and staff members. Accessibility support persons are not experts in learning disabilities, but they are trained for their task, and other support and consultation assistance will also be arranged for them as needed.