



Policy on Students with Par-ability

University of Ruhuna

Policy name: Policy on students with par-ability, University of Ruhuna

Effective date:

Responsible party: Center for Quality Assurance, University of Ruhuna

1. Introduction

It is an internationally and nationally accepted fact that differently-abled students have to be provided with special facilities in order to help them pursue their education on equal terms with persons without disabilities. They should be given the opportunity to live a life of 'full inclusion' in order to make them feel equal with the latter category. It is an accepted fact that they too should have the right to live a 'life of satisfaction' as enjoyed by persons without disabilities.

According to the National Action Plan on Disability (NAPD) approved by Cabinet in 2014, full participation of such students in higher education shall be ensured with reasonable accommodation, when necessary, through training of teachers, accessible teaching methodologies, alternative learning strategies, learning materials, assistive devices and technologies, accessible physical environment, accessible extra-curricular activities and accessible sports.

National Universities in Sri Lanka admit a limited number of students with disabilities, among those who satisfy the minimum requirements for university admission under the category of 'special intake' in addition to the students with disabilities who satisfy normal admission criteria to enter the university. Every year, a small segment of students with disabilities are enrolled in the University of Ruhuna too complying with above rules.

The University is committed to maintain a learning environment that is conducive for their learning without any discrimination, providing opportunities and facilities required by those students. Protecting their rights and ensuring that they are free from discrimination and harassment and making reasonable adjustments to whatever they utilize, providing access and participation to all activities persons without disabilities have access to and providing learning and support required for those students are of equal importance in the creation of such an environment.

In this context, it is recognized that the University of Ruhuna should have a policy on differently abled students. This paper sets out the framework for the policy on differently abled students.

2. Objectives

The objective of this policy document is to offer differently abled students relevant and timely advice, guidance and medical, psychosocial and academic support as necessary to enable equal and equitable access to university education as their peers without disabilities, promoting individual growth and independence and to support them to achieve the standards without compromising their required level of training.

3. Scope and applicability

This policy affirms the university's commitment to providing an environment for differently abled students are valued, supported and encouraged as far as practicably possible, to participate fully in the life of the university. The scope of this policy covers the following areas.

1. Identifying differently abled students and their requirements.
2. Handling the requests of differently abled students.
3. Provision of an accessible, safe and inclusive learning environment for students with disabilities ensuring that they are appropriately supported and encouraged and are free from discrimination or harassment.
4. Enabling the university to comply with the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act No. 28 of 1996 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) signed by the Government of Sri Lanka on 30th March 2007 and ratified on 08th February 2016.
5. Fostering an environment which encourages positive, informed and unprejudiced attitudes towards people with disabilities.
6. Implementation of procedures for any reasonable adjustments for differently abled students.
7. Ensuring that the needs of people with disabilities are met in relation to the physical environment including infrastructure.

This policy applies to the whole of the university community including all students, academic and non -academic staff.

4. Disclosure of disability

- An individual with a disability who does not require any adjustments is not obliged to disclose their disability at any time.
- An individual with a disability who requires an adjustment is encouraged to disclose their need for the adjustment to the university, with appropriate documentation, at their earliest.
- Information regarding the disability, and any adjustments needed, may only be disclosed to the staff on a 'need-to-know' basis. This may include disclosure to the Assistant Registrar,

relevant mentor/s, student counsellors, teaching staff, supervisors and other staff who may be required to implement the required adjustments. Subject to the above, university staff must treat that as confidential and private.

- Evidence of a disability may be required for appropriate adjustments to be made. Those particulars have to be provided to the university in such instances in a responsible manner with the recommendation of a responsible authority.
- The staff will respect students' rights to confidentiality by all means assuring their mental well-being.

5. Procedure

The University will ensure that in all policies, procedures, regulations, functions and activities, including strategic planning and resource allocation, special attention is paid to reasonable means of enabling full participation of differently abled students in all aspects of the academic and social life of the institution. This intends to ensure equality and equity towards differently abled students.

1. It is mandatory to screen the medical certificates of all new entrant by the University Medical Officer prior to the enrollment to identify the students with major disabilities
2. Each faculty shall have a committee comprised of Dean/representative of the Dean, Assistant Registrar, Deputy Senior Student Counsellor and one academic staff member from each department should function as the technical committee to address issues related to differently able students. The Dean of the Faculty is entrusted to activate the policy on differently abled students as per the directions of the faculty Technical Committee, Faculty Board and the University Council by acquiring the required resources.
3. Students, upon the registration at the faculty should be encouraged to declare their disabilities and apply for special considerations. The relevant application forms will be distributed to the new students during the registration process and need to be handed over to the dean's office within two weeks of enrolment. The faculty should develop a process to collect and maintain a confidential database of such students.
4. Differently able students should inform in writing to the Senior Assistant Registrar beforehand when they need special assistance for the exams. Eligibility for granting special assistance will include;
 - a. Permanent physical conditions that will require special assistance (e.g., impairment of vision/ hearing, anatomical deformities)
 - b. Temporary physical conditions that will require special assistance (e.g., injuries/fractures)

5. The applications will be evaluated by the technical committee. The decision of the committee will be conveyed to the dean, who will make final recommendations on granting privileges/reasonable adjustments appropriate for the situation.

Adjustments are made on a case-by-case basis, and may include:

- Alternative exam arrangements
- Assistance from an academic support worker
- Assistive technology
- Accessible formatting of course reading materials
- Extensions to assignments
- Flexibility in attendance requirements
- Accessible teaching spaces and specially designed furniture.

The special assistance granted will be decided on a case-by-case basis and within the purview of Examination By-Laws of the Faculty. These are intended for facilitating the requirements of a student to minimize the obstacles in achieving his/her fullest potential.

Further, the technical committee should follow up each case and refer the individual for further assistance to relevant places/individuals if and when required.

6. Faculty within its limitations shall make the best effort to provide physical and psychological support for the differently abled students and will ensure equal and equitable participation of all students with disabilities in all aspects of university life by decreasing barriers and promoting inclusion.

This can be achieved by;

- Improving the infrastructure of the existing buildings to provide disability access, making accessible sanitary amenities and washrooms and appropriate hostel facilities
- Planning new infrastructure according to current legislature
- Training academic staff in accessible teaching methodologies, alternative learning strategies, learning materials
- Introducing assistive devices and technologies, accessible extra-curricular activities and accessible sports
- Creating awareness on and implementing measures to minimize societal and attitudinal barriers deterring students with disabilities from full and equal participation in University life

It is recommended that once approved, the policy on differently abled students, Center for Quality Assurance, University of Ruhuna, should be reviewed and revised periodically.

Reasonable adjustments in the creation of an inclusive learning environment for differently abled students

The faculty shall consider making reasonable adjustments to course content, delivery and assessment methods without compromising the academic standards. The adjustments may take the form of an aid, a facility or a service that the student requires owing to his/her disability making him/ her feel equal to students without disabilities.

1. Make adjustments to examinations for differently abled students, to provide students with an equitable opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and competency for assessment purposes.
2. Alternative arrangements for examinations will be recommended after considering standard practices that redress the impact of a student's disability on their performance in examinations. These may include adjustments such as:
 - a. Extensions of time
 - b. Use of assistive technology
 - c. A separate room
 - d. Use of reader, scribe or computer where necessary
 - e. Assistance from academic/academic supportive staff for practices and examinations
 - f. Accessible teaching/examination space
 - g. Specially designed furniture
 - h. Alternative formatting of exam papers
 - i. Flexibility in attendance requirement
 - j. Negotiation of an alternative assessment.
3. The University shall ensure that it has specially adapted rooms where disabled students could have an easy access to.
4. The University shall provide resources and development opportunities to assist staff to meet the learning and support needs of students with disabilities, including inclusive teaching, learning and assessment strategies such as universal design for instruction and assessment practices.

Action plan for differently abled students

In conjunction with this policy, the university will introduce an action plan for differently abled students which set out the university's approach to meeting its obligations and responsibilities towards students with disabilities. This action plan is proposed to be incorporated into the faculty and university action plans.

Complaints and grievances reporting

Differently abled students, who feel or believe that they have been discriminated, based on their disability or have not been provided equitable access to participate fully in university life

may report the grievance to the faculty grievances committee or to the university. If the complaint receives to the university when there is no grievances committee in the faculty, it will be considered by a Board appointed by the University Senate and will be managed promptly in a thorough and confidential manner.

6. Definition

Person with disability means (but not limited to):

- total or partial loss of the person's bodily or mental functions
- total or partial loss of a part of the body
- the presence in the body of organisms causing disease or illness
- the presence in the body of organisms capable of causing disease or illness
- the malfunction, malformation or disfigurement of a part of the person's body
- a disorder or malfunction that results in the person learning differently from a person without the disorder or malfunction
- a disorder, illness or disease that affects a person's thought processes, perception of reality, emotions or judgments or that results in disturbed behavior
- specific learning disability

Direct disability discrimination- When a person with disability is treated less favorably than a person without a disability in similar circumstances (and otherwise, as defined in the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act of 1996) it is considered a direct disability discrimination.

Indirect disability discrimination- a person with a disability is not able to comply with a requirement or condition, because of their disability. The requirement or condition will also be likely to have the effect of disadvantaging persons with disability in a way that is not reasonable (and otherwise as defined in the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act of 1996).

Reasonable Adjustments- It is believed that a person with a disability requires certain reasonable adjustments in what he or she consumes or uses in order to fully and equally participates in any work or studies that one undertakes. The aim of reasonable adjustments is to provide negotiated measures to ensure that students with disabilities have equality of access to education. Such adjustments are not aimed at compromising academic standards or providing an undue advantage to students with a disability. A student must be able to fulfill the necessary requirements to undertake a course of study, unless their inability can be overcome by making a reasonable adjustment. In practice, the principle of reasonable adjustment allows that whenever it is possible, necessary or reasonable to do so, the usual policy or practice will be adjusted to meet the needs of a person with a disability. Examples of reasonable adjustments include

variations to examinations and assessments, provision of adaptive as well as assistive equipment and modifying course delivery methods and introducing alternative methods.

Universal Design - The design of products and environments to be used by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design.

5. Related Acts, Rules and Regulations, and Key Circulars

1. United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).
2. Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act No 28 of 1996, Sri Lanka. Accessible at http://socialemwelfare.gov.lk/web/images/content_image/pdf/legislation/act1996.pdf
3. Disabled Persons (Accessibility) Regulations, No. 1 of 2006 promulgated under Article 23 (2) of Act No 28 of 1996. (Accessible at http://socialemwelfare.gov.lk/web/images/content_image/pdf/legislation/act1996.pdf).