



Policy on Differently/Para-abled Students University of Ruhuna

The policy document was approved at the Council meeting held on With the recommendation of the Senate meeting held on and the meeting on Senate Standing Committee on Center for Quality Assurance held on 03rd March 2022.

Policy name: Policy on Differently/Para-abled Students, 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/para-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 reasonable adjustments to whatever they utilize, providing access and participation to all activities, have access 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/para-abled students. This paper sets out the framework for the policy on differently/para-abled students.

2. 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

Reasonable Adjustments means that a person with a disability requires certain reasonable adjustments in what he or she consumes or uses in order to fully and equally participate 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.

3. Objectives

The objective of this policy document is to offer differently/para-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.

4. Scope and applicability

This policy affirms the university's commitment to providing an environment for differently/para-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/para-abled students and their requirements.
2. Handling the requests of differently/para-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/para-abled students.
7. Ensuring that the needs of people with disabilities are met in relation to the physical environment including infrastructure.

5. 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.

6. 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 para-abled students in all aspects of the academic and social life of the institution. This intends to ensure equality and equity towards differently/para-abled students.

- It is mandatory to screen the medical certificates of all new entrants by the University Medical Officer prior to the enrollment to identify the students with major disabilities.
- Each faculty shall have a committee comprised of Dean/representative of the Dean, Assistant Registrar, Deputy Senior Student Counsellor, University Medical

Officer/designated and one academic staff member from each department/level of study should function as a committee to address issues related to differently able students. The Dean of the Faculty is entrusted to activate the policy on differently/para-abled students as per the directions of the faculty committee, Faculty Board, Senate and the University Council by acquiring the required resources.

- Students, upon the registration at the faculty should be encouraged to declare their disabilities and apply for special considerations. The information should be collected within four weeks of enrolment. The faculty should develop a process to collect information and maintain a confidential database of such students.
- 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)
- The applications will be evaluated by the 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 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 committee should follow up each such student and refer the individual for further assistance to relevant places/individuals if and when required.

- Faculty within its limitations shall make the best effort to provide physical and psychological support for the differently/para-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/para-abled students, Center for Quality Assurance, University of Ruhuna, should be reviewed and revised periodically.

7. Action plan for differently/para-abled students

In conjunction with this policy, each faculty shall introduce an action plan for differently/para-abled students which set out the 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. Further, individual faculty shall have the authority to decide the measures they would implement depending on the requirement, facilities, capacity etc.

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).

This policy document was developed based on the policy documents on differently abled students submitted by the Faculty of Medicine and the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences.