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The first report on Diversity and Inclusion in Distance Education in European Universities

The idea for a dedicated Task Force on Diversity and Inclusion (TFD-I) emerged from the EADTU General Assembly meeting of October 2020 in which some member universities indicated to have this topic as a priority in their new strategies and policy making.

Diversity and Inclusion generates great attention and even more so for EADTU members as they have a dedicated task in organising education also for disadvantaged groups of students by offering them easily accessible learning paths made fit for a great diversity of students.

This is essential as still, some education structures and policies tend to perpetuate the exclusion of socially disadvantaged and vulnerable groups: their participation in higher education remains low across all EU Member States. For example, migrants and foreign-born students are much less likely to participate in higher education than their native-born counterparts. Gender divisions are also growing in many disciplines. (Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2022).

Inclusion is therefore a priority task for universities and can be defined as an on-going process aimed at offering quality education for all while respecting diversity and the different needs and abilities, characteristics and learning expectations of the students and communities, eliminating all forms of discrimination (UNESCO, 2009).

Open Universities are inclusive, innovative and responsive, promoting social justice and equality of opportunity and represent strategic positioning of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. EADTU member universities therefore represent a great variety of policies, approaches, expertise and experiences in this field that we share within this dedicated Task Force on Diversity and Inclusion.

Expertise shared and explored within the TFD-I concerned;

- institutional strategies for DI, including examples from practice;
- new developments in the field of DI;
- research and innovation within and outside the EADTU membership on DI;
- (supportive) national policy agendas (eg. funding for facilities and actions).

In total the TFD-I consists of 22 experts from 12 EADTU members institutions from 12 nations.

The TFD-I is open to all EADTU member organisations and limited to two representatives per institution to keep meetings manageable.

Ways of working

The TFD-I started with a kick-off meeting on December 17th 2020. We discussed the topic of Diversity and Inclusion at a more generic level first, coming quickly to the conclusion that we are actually addressing 8 subgroups. These subgroups are:

- Social Inclusion
- Digital Accessibility
- Functional Disabilities
- Specific Learning Disorders
- Migrants and/or ethnicity
- Gender
- Prisoners
- Army and athletes

After the full TFD-I meeting we opened a call for subgroup representatives and organised 2 meetings per subgroup in 2021. In total we organised 5 all TF members meetings and 14 subgroup meetings.

All subgroups have a leading author for the dedicated chapters per subgroup as presented in this report. The subgroup members on their part contributed by practices from their own institutions to support the subgroup outcomes. The full collection of subgroup contributions was then processed in this publication.

Preliminary outcomes were presented and discussed during 3 wider events in 2021 at the occasion of the:

- EMPOWER webinar week: Diversity and Inclusion in Online Education on the 8th and 10th of June 2021
- Peer Learning Activity on Diversity and Inclusion on the 22nd of October 2021
- Keynote at the annual EADTU I-HE conference from 3-5 November 2021 in Bari, Italy by Dr. Björn Fisseler (FernUniversität in Hagen)

Input and feedback generated from these events were also processed in this report.

This publication was further complemented with a dedicated website on Diversity and Inclusion to present the report outcomes in a webversion, with the option to further add good practices in the future.

New strategies and policies in Diversity and Inclusion can only improve by further collaboration between experts, facilitated by a European overarching approach to guarantee continuous exchange of practices. Therefore, EADTU's TFD-I will continue to provide the peer support needed to address the challenges of the future and help the community to develop fit strategies and approaches on all subthemes under Diversity and Inclusion.

By sharing related good practice, institutional strategies, projects and results we also hope to inspire universities European wide in updating and enhancing their strategies and policies in diversity and inclusion. And we will keep adding good practice and institutional strategies on our dedicated EADTU website: <https://diversity-inclusion.eadtu.eu/>

The TFD-I will be sustained by EADTU and contribute to further community building around Diversity and Inclusion.

George Ubachs
Managing Director EADTU

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01 Social Inclusion

Attempts to mitigate poverty as a barrier to social inclusion in higher education

Field of subject related to diversity and inclusion

Social Inclusion

This chapter explores the challenge of social inclusion in relation to the financial affordability of higher education (HE) and issues associated with accessibility for those students affected by poverty.

Initially, it reports on activities at the UK Open University aimed at mitigating barriers for students from low socio-economic backgrounds. The UK offers an interesting case study as the cost of HE in England (but not the Celtic nations) was, in 2013, passed entirely to students via a system of tuition fee loans, effectively tripling the cost of HE. Universities could charge from £6K up to a maximum of £9K per year. Policymakers seemed surprised that, after some initial jockeying for market position, almost all universities charged £9K. For the first year, students from the most disadvantaged backgrounds appeared to perceive the cost of HE as a barrier, but debts of £30K+ rapidly became normalised, with a quiet recognition that some loans would never be paid back.

However, a dramatic reduction (-60%) in the numbers of those who could only study part-time (a proxy for mature students) appears to have been caused, to some extent, by fear of debt and the cost of HE. This prompted the UK Open University to address financial affordability.

Examples from other countries' attempts to address social inclusion are subsequently reported.

Introduction

This chapter explores the challenge of social inclusion in relation to the financial affordability of higher education (HE) and issues associated with accessibility for those students affected by poverty. This challenge is recognised by the United Nations (2014), who note that historically, higher education has often been inaccessible to groups such as the poor. The International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights calls for accessible higher education, underlying the Sustainable Development Goals, which recognize that access to higher education is vital to lifelong learning, and that higher education must be globally accessible to all. A key target is:

"By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to *affordable* (my emphasis) and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university."

Issues of affordability in relation to access to HE remain crucial, especially given the impact of HE on individuals' economic life chances.

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In the UK, participation in HE has increased in recent decades, but the cost of HE in England (although not the Celtic nations) passed entirely to students via a system of tuition fee loans in 2013, effectively tripling the cost of HE. English universities could charge from £6K up to a maximum of £9K per year but policymakers seemed surprised that, after some confused jockeying for market position, almost all universities charged £9K. Initially, students from the most disadvantaged backgrounds appeared to perceive the cost of HE as a barrier. However, debts of £30K+ rapidly became normalised, with a quiet recognition that some loans would never be paid back through the taxation system, as earnings would be too low. Students now bear the price of expansion and although numbers have risen, participation is not necessarily widening. A barrier of cost has been erected for students from those groups more likely to be debt averse, and more likely to perceive the cost of HE as a risky investment.

This has impacted, most critically, in a dramatic reduction (-60%) since 2013 in the numbers of students who could only study part-time, a proxy for mature learners. Such learners are likely to be adults, balancing working and learning with caring responsibilities, and some will be studying with disabilities or long-term health impairments. The precipitous decline appears to have been caused, to some extent, by fear of debt in relation to the cost of HE, and a dissonance between policy (extolling mature learners to engage with HE) and practice (inadequate maintenance support and inflexible institutional provision for part-time learners). In 2000, part-time HE in the UK was growing but 15 years ago, that growth began to reverse, and by 2010 a steep decline began.

Despite that decline, numbers engaging in 2018 remain a significant proportion of students:

193,000 part-time undergraduates studied at English universities
84,000 students in England started a part-time undergraduate course
18% first year undergraduates studied part-time

However, 60% fewer people in England started an undergraduate course as a part-time learner compared to 2010.

Since 2013, higher education policy in the UK has become increasingly divergent across the four nations, so that the substantial financial challenges faced by part-time students vary according to geography. Part-time learners, especially in England, are struggling at the sharp end of policy. The challenges reappear across the student lifecycle. Students from poor backgrounds are less likely than more advantaged peers to apply to HE and are less likely to be accepted at prestigious universities. Students from poor backgrounds are more likely to live in low-participation neighbourhoods and have low or alternative prior entry qualifications. They are more likely to be first in family to apply for HE, and consequently may lack the social and cultural capital to navigate complex systems. If young, they are more likely to apply from schools sending limited numbers to HE, and if older, more likely to have dependants, to be juggling precarious employment and

<https://www.un.org/en/academic-impact/higher-education>
(accessed 2/8/21)

therefore to be time poor. Mature learners therefore face a 'Hobson's choice' (in which an apparent free choice is offered by policy makers when, in reality, the only alternative to part-time study is not studying at all), with participation difficult in the absence of clear and appropriate maintenance support. Mature learners from impoverished backgrounds are also more likely to have a disability or a chronic health condition. Students from poor backgrounds are more likely to lack confidence, to feel 'imposters' and therefore less willing to voluntarily seek support. As a result, attrition is likely to be worse, with economically disadvantaged students more likely to disengage and passively withdraw if things go wrong.

Alignment between institutional mission, student demographics and sector policy drivers is important in analysing social inclusion through a lens of student poverty across the UK. The key policy context in England is provided by the Office for Students (OfS, 2019), the regulatory body for HE, charged with galvanising universities to address disparities and inequalities in access, participation and progression. The OfS is required to ensure that:

"All students from all backgrounds, with the ability and desire to undertake higher education, are supported to access, succeed in and progress from higher education".

The OfS expect all universities charging £6K+ tuition fees to produce a substantial Access and Participation Plan, detailing how their additional fee income (beyond the minimum £6K) is being used to widen participation and increase student success. The OfS is particularly concerned at inequitable access to HE for students from under-represented groups, the awarding gap between the most advantaged and least advantaged students, and unequal progression after graduation. Issues of economic disadvantage are increasingly recognised as intersecting with other disadvantages, including ethnic background and disability.

Definitions and context description of focus group

The Open University (OU) is a distance education university targeting mature part-time learners through a social justice mission to be 'open to all'. As a distance provider of flexible HE aimed at working adults, issues of intersectional disadvantage are at least as prevalent as the rest of the UK sector. However, the plummeting part-time numbers prompted the OU to address financial affordability through interventions aimed at mitigating barriers for students from low socio-economic backgrounds. The OU teaches students across the whole of the UK, but uniquely has to align with different policy directives and different funding regimes across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. There is a significant contrast between policies aimed at supporting the most economically-disadvantaged students in Wales, or policies supporting regional progression pathways in Scotland (Donnelly & Evans, 2019), and less generous arrangements in England which ignore the 'left-behind students' (Danvers & Hinton-Smith, 2021).

For example, a potential part-time student in Wales receives (pro-rata) parity of support with full-time learners, meaning at 50% study intensity a part-time learner can access a means-tested Welsh Government Learning Grant of up to £3,000 and a maintenance loan between £325 and £2,825.

In Northern Ireland, a part-time learner at a similar study intensity can access a means-tested fee grant of up to £820 and a course grant up to £265.

In Scotland, part-time fee grant levels, depends on intensity and tuition fee levels – at 50% study intensity, the maximum a student could receive (depending on the fee) would be £910.

In England, a part-time maintenance loan was finally introduced in 2019 (amount depending on household income and study intensity) but distance learners are excluded, and tuition fees for English students are substantially higher.

Part-time study can be a critical option for mature learners, but competing policy (and Institutional) definitions of 'mature' (which varies between over 21, over 25, and over 30) remain. While most mature part-time learners are undergraduates (including those studying on sub-degree courses which carry credit towards a degree), some are postgraduates who already occupy professional roles: the latter group are likely to use part-time study for professional upskilling while working and are less likely to be from disadvantaged backgrounds. Their motivations and even their position within the HE sector may be very different. A minority of mature learners continue to study full-time (alongside younger students) although the proportions are dropping.

International comparisons are difficult, since definitions of part-time study vary, and in some countries part-time higher education is virtually non-existent. Historically, the UK has offered a wealth of part-time HE opportunities to address both the demand for employability upskilling, and 'second-chance to learn' agendas. Indeed, across Europe, numbers studying part-time are dominated by those studying in England and Wales, with numbers in mainland Europe described as virtually non-existent (Higher Education Information System, 2008) – partly as a result of the absence of a distinctive part-time HE system in France and Germany. In the USA, part-time HE remains a marginal presence at most universities, with the full-time residential tradition remaining dominant (Jacoby, 2015). Indeed, googling part-time HE in the US generates a plethora of studies of part-time faculty rather than learners. South African HE is still based on a residential full-time daytime paradigm, with more limited after-hours part-time HE aimed at working adults (Jones & Walters, 2015).

Specific challenges

During COVID lockdowns, the OU became increasingly aware of the financial impact on its students of losses of paid employment in many sectors, as well as the impact of digital poverty as more and more learning and support shifted to online. Like other universities, the OU has explored fee waivers and bursaries (Kaye, 2020) to mitigate financial inequalities.

For the last 8 years, pro-active financial support has proven particularly effective in widening participation from poorer students on the University's Access Programme. Since 2013 the OU has presented an Access Programme to support unconfident students to take a first step into HE (many of whom will have been out of education for decades and need intensive support in a low-stakes/subsidised-cost module to help prepare them with the skills to succeed in undergraduate study).

The distance learning Access Programme (30 credits at Level 0) is aimed at part-time adult learners (a key under-represented group in UK HE) offering additional preparation. Over 4000 students a year register on our three Access modules, despite credit not 'counting' towards an undergraduate qualification. Students tell us their aim is to 'dip a toe' into HE with minimal financial risk to see if they can cope, as well as ascertaining the subject/discipline is what they expected. Each Access module, which lasts 30 weeks, is designed to support the development of study confidence in adult learners with low prior qualifications. Students can use their studies on Access to progress to any of the OU's undergraduate qualifications.

Theoretical background/research references

A recent study commissioned by the Higher Education Policy Institute in the UK (Butcher, 2020) identified a pressing need for policymakers to listen to the voices of adult learners more, in order to design better financial support systems for part-time learners and to stimulate universities to do more to adopt inclusive approaches. A study by Johnson (2018) described the importance of engaging with community stakeholders to design preparatory programmes which utilised the backgrounds of part-time adult learners and facilitated inclusive engagement via a fee bursary.

When fees in England were far lower (pre-2012) the UK OU had a well-established system of providing reactive financial support (assistance funds) on an individual basis for students who sought support when money becomes an obstacle to persistence or progression. Since fees tripled, this fund has been utilised less than might be expected (for example, during COVID lockdown) because (managers of the fund believe) many students are unaware of its existence.

Rather, the University has targeted 'up-front' bursaries to mitigate the perceived risk and actual disincentive of a tuition fee loan system – building on the Access fee waiver (see below) the University has introduced bursaries for carers, and for military veterans which are accounted for through its Access and Participation plan spend. It is as yet unclear the impact these are having (although in their first year the carers' bursary was under-spent). To some extent this reveals the conundrum – in the context of a high fee structure, do students from poorer backgrounds need lower fees or bursary/fee waiver support to overcome financial barriers?

Approaches/solutions

In targeting students from low socio-economic backgrounds, the Access Programme benefits from a 50% University subsidy, so that English students who pay a tuition fee are liable for only half the cost (about £750) of a standard OU 30 credit module. There are proportionate reductions for students in the Celtic nations, for whom the initial fee is much lower. This is important in offering poorer learners an accessible low-cost/low risk preparatory learning experience. In addition, the University offers a full fee waiver to students with a household income below £25K per year (individual income in Scotland) resulting in 60-70% of Access students studying for free. This subsidy is reported back to the OfS as a key element in our approach to widening participation (mitigating financial barriers in relation to the cost of HE) and was costed at £2.5m in 2021.

Demographic data from the 18 presentations of Access since 2013 suggests the modules attract a far higher proportion of students from the lowest socio-economic groups than traditionally found in HE, a higher proportion declaring a disability, and a far higher proportion starting with low prior qualifications (in the UK, fewer than the standard matriculation requirement of two A levels). These intersections of disadvantage demonstrate the challenges facing potential learners from groups (in this case poorer adults) under-represented in universities.

In Germany, FernUniversity in Hagen offers several support services for students and staff with disabilities. For instance, the [Inclusion Concept](#) serves to strategically implement objectives and measures that aim at improving social inclusion (with a focus on students and staff with disabilities and/or chronic illnesses) at the university. The current Inclusion Concept runs for five years (2018-2022) and consists of six focus areas with a total of 25 measures. The measures aim at raising awareness for the topic and delegating responsibility to all areas of the university. Furthermore, FernUniversity in Hagen has a [Peer Mentoring Programme](#) (financed through the Inclusion Concept). The target group of the programme are students with disabilities and/or chronic illnesses who start or re-enter their study programmes, the mentors are advanced students with disabilities and/or chronic illnesses.

The Peer Mentoring Programme is part of the [StudyFit Programme](#) of the university. It offers individual support for new students according to their needs and experience. The offer ranges from counselling to introductory modules, events and apps.

There's also an [information website](#) for students and staff who have a near or distance vision impairment. Another [information website](#) provides information for teaching staff concerning barrier-free web programmes and software and lists examples of good practice.

Conclusion

Participation in HE amongst the poorest students is lower than other groups. It is vital that universities do not 'blame' students from poor backgrounds for the economic challenges that may prove insurmountable barriers in terms of succeeding in HE. It is also crucial that universities do not require students from such backgrounds to bend themselves to inflexible assessment systems, draconian attendance requisites and unresponsive or inaccessible support systems. Universities can do more to incentivise equal participation by offering fee waivers and bursaries to enable a low-risk first step into HE.

Good practices on Social Inclusion from FernUniversity in Hagen

Field of subject related to diversity and inclusion

Social Inclusion

Good practices

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Good practices on Social Inclusion in Distance Education from UAb

Field of subject related to diversity and inclusion

Social Inclusion

Introduction

The awareness and recognition of human diversity and what it conveys in regard to different ways of knowing, acting and thinking has been highlighted by national and international reference organizations that not only recognize the social interest of diversity, but also attribute to it a strategic educational importance as a form of personal and collective development.

For example, UNESCO (2002) and, more recently, the ONU H2030 agenda for Sustainable Development enounces goal 4 as follows - "Ensure inclusive, equitable and quality education, and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all." To intend this goal is to try to keep away social exclusion, specially, due to poverty, since the results show that poverty is more prevalent among those with lower education. Moreover, even higher education is no longer enough to make individuals immune to poverty.

Since its foundation, in 1988, Universidade Aberta (UAb) has been aligned with such guidelines. Enlightening the awareness of the importance of the subject for Portugal and for the European Union, UAb has been developing several programs and activities on diversity and inclusion, placing them as an institutional goal and relating them to the identity matrix of the university itself.

Moreover, the inevitability of the presence of human diversity in everyday life, as well as the emergence of new forms of discrimination and poverty has been putting the demanding in educational institutions, specially, higher education institutions, both to educate the individual and to prepare the future of nations. In this regard, research is an essential component of this preparation, and we highlight the research that has been carried out at UAb, under the pioneering work, in Portugal, of the Research Center of Migration and Intercultural Relationship (CEMRI) founded and headquartered in Universidade Aberta since 1988, that holds a considerable collection of products developed from theoretical and applied research projects.

Social Profile

In 2018, 17.2% of the population in Portugal was at risk of poverty (Diogo, 2021). With the covid-19 pandemic this situation has worsened, since one in four families lost much of their income in 2020 (Barómetro Deco Pro-Teste, 2021).

UAb' students are mainly working adults. Fees are not very high (undergraduate fees are 11,61€ / per ECTS, and each Curricular Unit

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Diogo, F Coords (2021) *Faces da Pobreza em Portugal*. Lisboa: Fundação Francisco Manuel dos Santos. ISBN: 978-989-9064-31-7

has 6 ECTS), but wages in unspecialized jobs are usually low (minimum salary of 9.870,00 €/year in 2022¹), so students often face economic difficulties to get their degrees, and dropouts for economic reasons are common. The option is often part-time study, which means a lesser load in fees and in the amount of time devoted to study.

Government attributes unemployment or insertion subsidies, but the amount is quite low (at subsistence level). In Portugal, as in most Mediterranean countries, family support is often essential, but it becomes more difficult when the families themselves do not have economic means and, above all, when education is not valued in community, compared to making a career based on hard work and capacity to find good business opportunities. So, choosing to invest in education is also a question of valuing and wanting. The unemployed persons that decide to invest in education are usually those that have already had a job and realised that education can make a difference to climb in the career ladder. In this group can also be considered people that have poor paid positions and want to get a better curriculum to be prepared to apply for better jobs.

Given this context, UAb's initiatives to mitigate poverty as a barrier to social inclusion has two main focuses: on the one hand, the offer of programs and curricular units aiming at raising awareness about situations of need, and at encouraging social inclusion; on the other hand, and since low financial affordability is often articulated with disabilities, steps have been taken to help students included in this specific population set.

Raising Awareness Through Education

Regarding the educational offer, we begin by highlighting the existence of topics, curricular units 2nd and 3rd cycle programs whose main focus is Diversity and Inclusion, in general, or target at specific groups such as women or the refugees. For example: The Doctorate and the Masters in Intercultural Relations (since 2014 and 2006 respectively),¹ that offers specialized training and the possibility of applied research in the field of intercultural relations, and the Masters in Women's Studies (since 1995)¹ that just celebrated 25 years with a public celebration for its recognition to the development of theoretical and applied research in the field of gender, feminist, and women's studies.

In terms of professional education, we highlight the program of teacher education in Portuguese Sign Language that contributes both to the recognition of this area as an independent area of professional certification but also to the visibility of the Deaf community and their specific needs, and consequently to their inclusion in society.

Regarding short programs, we highlight the course "Education and Cultural Diversity" (since 2007)¹ that is part of the syllabus in the 1st cycle program in Education, the short program "Educating for diversity and citizenship: strategies for the academic success of Roma students"¹ and the MOOC "How to stop discrimination and enhance cultural dialogue".¹

Education Social Inclusion and Disabilities

Precarious employment and low income often go hand in hand with poor health conditions and/or disabilities (physical / sensorial problems, psychologic disorders). In fact, these adults that choose to invest in education face increased problems. They seek for support, but solutions are scarce. UAb is not included in the Government's Social Action plan (attributed to face-to-face universities and to students from 18 to 23 years). To avoid students' discrimination due to financial reasons, UAb has created a subsidy that consists in the reduction or exemption of fees, attributable to students in need (to be requested yearly)¹. Besides, students that have impairments (diagnosed as disabling as 60% or more) can also apply for a governmental subsidy that consists in the payment of fees¹. In addition, UAb has established protocols with stakeholders, such as "Associação Salvador" (an organization working in the field of motor disability)¹, where fee reductions are considered (in this case it consists of 20%).

Special attention is also paid to specific cases, namely in recent times, during the COVID crises, when lockdowns caused income decreases, unemployment, and also burnout cases. Some of these situations gave rise to debts uncollectible or very difficult to collect, regardless of the debtors' willingness to regularize the situation. In these cases, each situation is considered and, when possible, very favourable payment plans are established, adapted to the possibilities stated by each student.

In addition to the economic aids provided by the State and by Universidade Aberta, UAb also provides a supplementary framework of support specifically directed to students that face physical, sensory, or cognitive difficulties of access, factors that often aggravate backgrounds of pre-existing economic difficulties. In order to level the access to education, precise measures have been taken. One is aimed at students that need to use screen readers: UAb's Library has organized a reading community in the institutional repository¹, that has several accessible digitalized study books made available to students, upon request. Another measure implies stakeholders that have adopted inclusive policies and approaches, and that are strongly motivated to promote inclusion and equity in the labour market. This is the case of a current project of education for labour (entrance in labour market / work reconfiguration) in which Universidade Aberta and EDP¹ are collaborating to enhance the social inclusion of students with special needs, and thus preventing further impoverishment. Also worth mentioning is the action of "Projeto Acessibilidades" (Accessibility Project), which is the central element of support for students with special needs, acting both at the level of research and of practical intervention in the field. One of its' most successful initiatives has been the creation of a space for mutual help in Moodle platform that, despite not being addressed to funding issues, provides emotional and collaborative support, often considered fundamental to face difficulties and to prevent dropouts.

¹ <https://www.pordata.pt/Portugal/Salário+m%C3%ADnimo+nacional-74-7892>

² <https://www2.uab.pt/guiainformativo/detailcursos.php?curso=78;>
<https://www2.uab.pt/guiainformativo/detailcursos.php?curso=40>

³ <https://www2.uab.pt/guiainformativo/detailcursos.php?curso=46>

⁴ <https://www2.uab.pt/guiainformativo/detailuc.php?uc=20>

⁵ https://portal.uab.pt/alv/cursos_alv/educar-para-a-diversidade-e-cidadania-estrategias-para-o-sucesso-escolar-dos-as-estudantes-ciganosas/

⁶ <https://aulaberta.uab.pt/blocks/catalog/detail.php?id=53>

⁷ <https://portal.uab.pt/o-financiamento-da-acao-social-na-universidade-aberta/>

⁸ <https://www.dges.gov.pt/pt/pagina/bolsas-de-estudo-para-frequencia-de-estudantes-com-incapacidade>

⁹ <https://www.associaosaosalvador.com>

¹⁰ Comunidade Projeto Acessibilidades - <https://repositorioaberto.uab.pt/handle/10400.2/7549>

¹¹ <https://www.edp.com/pt-pt/carreiras/diversidade-e-inclusao>

02 Digital Accessibility

Digital Accessibility in Distance Education

Field of subject related to diversity and inclusion

Digital Accessibility

Introduction

What is Digital Accessibility?

Shortly speaking, digital accessibility is about designing information and communication technology (ICT) to allow all people to access it. Modern distance education is more often than not web-based distance education. Students access the learning content online, read text online, watch videos distributed over the internet and discuss and work with other students using web-based tools such as course management systems. In consequence, digital accessibility has a lot in common with the topic of web accessibility. However, digital accessibility also has additional meanings in distance teaching and learning. In addition to technical dimensions of digital accessibility, we can also talk about socio-economic dimensions and dimensions of teaching and learning in higher education.

According to the statistics of EUROSTUDENT VII, 15 % of all students in higher education in Europe report limitations in their studies due to a health impairment (Hauschildt et al., 2020). This number varies between 31% in Iceland and 5% in Romania. Thus, higher education in some European countries is not a welcoming environment for students with disabilities. The number of students with disabilities in distance education institutions might be slightly higher. The students in distance education are often older, and older people often report more health impairments. Thus, it is likely that the number of students with such impairments is higher in distance education institutions.

Examples of various types of disabilities include:

- Auditory: difficulties in hearing, such as deafness or hard of hearing.
- Visual: difficulties in seeing, such as blindness, low vision, or colour-blindness.
- Motor or physical: difficulties using a mouse or keyboard, slow response time, or limited fine motor control.
- Cognitive: specific learning disabilities, higher distractibility, inability to remember or focus on larger amounts of information.
- Speech: difficulties speaking, producing spoken language, articulating understandable language.

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These various types of disabilities affect how people with disabilities use and operate the web. They might have difficulties perceiving, understanding, navigate or interacting with web-based ICT. But they also might have problems contributing to the web, which is especially important for digital distance teaching and learning.

People with disabilities might also use various types of specialized technology which enables them to access any web-based content. This is called Assistive Technology (AT) and includes hardware and software. AT is a technology used by people with disabilities to perform functions that might otherwise not be possible or too difficult. Examples of AT that help people with disabilities use ICT are:

- Specialized software such as screen magnification software or screen reading software, text-to-speech systems,
- Alternative keyboards, e.g., with larger or smaller keys, operable limited hand and arm movements, or with a mouth stick
- Alternative input devices such as joysticks, operable using the foot or with limited hand movements, and
- Voice recognition, enabling people with disabilities to use a computer, tablet or mobile device using their voice.

Digital accessibility does not replace Assistive Technology, nor does Assistive Technology make digital accessibility obsolete. Both approaches work hand in hand to enable people with disabilities to use ICT. For example, people who are blind need text alternatives (alt-text) for non-textual content such as images. This alt-text is part of digital accessibility. But it is only usable for people who are blind when their AT can read the alt-text to them. So digital accessibility is necessary for AT to be entirely usable for people who are disabled.

Technical Dimensions of Digital Accessibility

Digital accessibility enables people with disabilities to perceive, understand, navigate and interact with web-based content and produce new web-based content. The technical dimensions of digital accessibility follow four basic principles (<https://webaim.org/intro/>):

- **Perceivable:** All information and user interface components must be available to the senses, either through the browser or assistive technology.
- **Operable:** Users can interact with all user interface components and navigate, either using the mouse, keyboard, or specialized assistive technology.
- **Understandable:** Content and the operation of the user interface must be understandable; it is clear and limits confusion and ambiguity.
- **Robust:** A wide range of technologies can access the content and the user interface, including old and new devices and AT.

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The POUR principles are the basis of most web accessibility laws globally, the basis of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) and other web accessibility standards developed by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C). Though the WCAG is a technical document, its content and the POUR principles also apply to distance education and online learning. As most distance education universities offer their courses online, they must also follow the relevant laws and make their offerings accessible for all students. And most often, the relevant laws refer to the WCAG standard for digital accessibility.

One central aspect of the technical dimensions of digital accessibility is online learning resources. Such learning resources can be different media types such as text, audio, video, multimedia or simulations. When studying at distance teaching universities, such learning resources are intentionally acquired by enrolling in an online course. But learning resources can also be acquired only partially intentionally by searching the internet. Or learners create learning content themselves through posting in forums or uploading documents and other content for their peers to review.

Though not all online learning resources are web-based, likely, the WCAG standard is also applicable to them. Non-web-based learning resources are Microsoft Word documents, PowerPoint presentations or PDF documents. The WCAG standard and the POUR principles are also applicable to non-web-based content. For example, it is also possible to specify alternative text for images on Word or PDF documents to make all the content perceivable. Or PowerPoint presentations can be structured using slide layouts, making it easier to understand presentations.

But digital accessibility is not just about following technical standards. We identified that digital accessibility also has a socio-economic, pedagogical, and institutional dimension.

Socio-Economic Dimensions of Digital Accessibility

Socio-economic dimensions of digital accessibility go beyond the idea that digital accessibility is all about providing people with disabilities with access to digital infrastructure. Having access to a broad range of technologies, using these technologies, and engaging with other people and participating in the digital society is central to various concepts of the socio-economic dimension of digital accessibility. We will further examine the ideas of (a) digital divide and (b) digital inclusion. The concept of a digital divide became popular in the 1990s, especially in the United States. At its core, the digital divide describes the phenomenon of inequality of access to digital technologies (van Dijk, 2002). Digital divide is defined as an “uneven distribution of access to information and communication technology” (Lebeničnik & Istenič Starčič, 2020, p. 2422). This means unequal access to the Internet and unequal access to devices such as computers, tablets, or smartphones. In the context of disability, this includes access to assistive technologies, be it hardware or software, such as screen readers, braille readers, magnification software or specialized input devices.

There is no simple divide between easy to distinguish groups, the “haves” and the “have-nots”. Instead, van Dijk notes that “in contemporary modern society, we may observe an increasingly complex [...] differentiation” (2002, para. 2), stretching the whole spectrum of positions across the entire population. This also means that students with disabilities are found on any position of this spectrum. On one side of the spectrum is the “ICT elite”, and on the other side the “ICT excluded”, though the majority of the population is somewhere between these two extremes. Most people, and this holds true for students with disabilities, have access to the internet in one way or another and use ICT to a certain extent (van Dijk, 2002).

Van Dijk conceptualizes the digital divide as a multifaced concept of access (van Dijk, 2002):

- Material access: Possession or non-possession of devices and internet access;
- Mental access: Elementary digital experience, influenced by interest, willingness to use computers and ICT or the perceived attractiveness of ICT;
- Skills access: Digital skills, influenced by the perceived user-friendliness, education and training, or social support;
- Usage access: Unequal distribution of significant usage opportunities.

Van Dijk (2002) argues that public opinion and policymakers focus mainly on the first two kinds of access: material and mental access. As soon as these problems are solved, public policy considers the digital divide bridged. The two other types of access, having the skills to operate ICT, be it hardware or software, and using ICT to improve one’s societal position, are often ignored. But both are very much relevant to learning at distance teaching universities.

Students at distance teaching universities must have the digital skills to operate the systems the universities provide to them for their studies. They need the skills to search, select and process the information provided to them and apply it strategically. So, universities should not only ask whether or not the students have the material access to ICT and internet access fast enough to watch lecture videos or if students are willing to use ICT for their studies. They should also think about providing the students with the necessary skills and suitable usage opportunities.

Another critical question to raise would be, “What are the reasons for the digital divide?” For society, age, gender, majority status, employment, education level, and household composition relate to the first-level digital divide. White males, well-educated, married and employed, are more likely to benefit most in terms of material access (Deursen & Dijk, 2019, p. 369 pp.). These members of society have the material and social resources to buy and use ICT for their benefit. On the other hand, being a disabled member of the community makes it more likely to use the internet less often or mainly use tablets or smartphones. Though, the latter is getting more and more capable, it is still no adequate replacement for desktop or laptop computers.

The concept of digital poverty is similar but not entirely identical to the idea of the digital divide. In contrast to the digital divide, digital poverty seems more common in the academic discourse about the global South. Barrantes (2007b) defines digital poverty as “[...] a lack of ICT with regards to access and use of the information and communication allowed by the technology” (Barrantes, 2007a, p. 49) and distinguishes three types of cause for digital poverty:

- lack of supply: this type is comparable to “material access” in Van Dijk’s concept, as it is a lack of connectivity or internet access;
- lack of demand: this cause is related to inadequate income so that people don’t have the financial resources to buy or rent ICT devices;
- lack of need or capacity: this cause results from inadequate literacy to use ICT, but also older people might not need ICT.

The two main reasons for individuals being digitally poor seem to be (a) not having the financial resources or (b) not having the skills to operate ICT and using it to improve one's position in society. We will focus on the digital divide concept, as the concept of "digital poverty" only covers a fraction of the concept of the digital divide.

Lebeničnik and Starčič (2020) examined the contemporary digital of university students with and without disabilities and the factors that contribute to the students' use of online learning resources. They found that it is not the first-level digital divide that affects the students' use of online learning resources. All students, whether disabled or not, seem to have sufficient mental and material access to ICT and the internet. Socio-cognitive factors such as beliefs and self-efficacy were the only significant predictors of the use of online learning resources. But self-efficacy was only a significant predictor for the non-disabled students. Thus, they recommend that universities focus on developing the students' digital skills, education, and training. And universities should develop and provide significant usage opportunities for all students.

Seale et al. (2010) use the concept of digital inclusion to widen the understanding of what technology means to students with disabilities in higher education. They argue that focussing solely on access and accessibility does not help to fully understand the role that technology plays in the learning experiences of disabled students. Instead, Seale et al. (2010) use the concepts of digital agility and digital decision-making to widen the idea of what ICT can do for students with disabilities. The superordinate concept is empowerment; the empowerment model is used to recognize the strengths of disabled students and focus on supporting the learners to pursue their goals. Empowering students with disabilities can be successful when the students are allowed to do their own digital decision-making. This means that they can decide which technology they want to use and not to use, but this decision has to be empowered. The second way to empower disabled students is digital agility. Digital agile students are highly familiar with technology, use a wide range of strategies, and are very confident with their ability to use technology.

Pedagogical Dimension of Digital Accessibility

Digital accessibility in higher education is not only about technical or socio-economic aspects of accessibility but also about pedagogical planning of teaching and learning. Thus, it is essential to consider pedagogical ideas when designing and developing for digital accessibility in higher education. Following the idea of inclusive education, digital accessibility has to support all higher education students studying together, regardless of any health impairment, disability or other diversity aspects. In practice, inclusive education means that higher education is delivered so that all students can participate in learning activities and student services related to it.

The concept of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) has become the internationally recognized framework to support learning design and development of higher education accessible for all students to the greatest extent possible. The concept of UDL consists of three principles (Meyer et al., 2014):

- Provide multiple means of Engagement
- Provide multiple means of Representation
- Provide multiple means of Action & Expression

Guidelines and checkpoints accompany these principles to help educational designers and teachers pay attention to those elements that usually build some obstacles for students. Some researchers have applied the concept of UDL to online and distance education (Rao et al., 2021). UDL is a concept that embraces all other inclusive strategies and approaches related to design, planning, curriculum, instruction, and policies. UDL is being recognized around the world as a means to achieve true inclusion (Dalton, 2017).

UDL guidelines are very generic. However, they offer useful basics for planning and implementing training and teaching with the goal of inclusive practices. By applying the framework of UDL in digital higher education, educators can successfully achieve educational experiences that are inclusive, accessible, and usable by all students (Burgstahler, 2020).

Challenges

The topic of digital accessibility is associated with many challenges. We identified technical, pedagogical, and institutional challenges. In addition to this, dealing with digital accessibility is about engaging various stakeholders, complying with national and international laws and guidelines, and also respecting the socio-economic dimension of digital accessibility.

One of the **institutional challenges** is that higher education institutions (HEI) have to consider that digital accessibility is not a one-time issue but arises all the time. Making digital teaching and learning accessible is a process the HEI continuously goes through. Also, HEI need to get to know the situation first and then base its answers and solutions on it. This means that HEI have to find ways to assess the accessibility of all of their courses as well as the digital infrastructure. After assessing the accessibility, the institution should then find ways of how to fix all errors found and ideally develop persistent solutions so that the errors won't emerge again.

Possible solutions include creating an institutional digital strategy, developing institutional policies, and providing support for both bottom-up as well as top-down approaches. The HEI as a whole have to think about how to integrate accessibility in their institutional digital strategy. It is not only about developing and integrating new digital tools and processes into teaching and learning practices but about ensuring that all students can successfully use new tools and processes, thus making them fully accessible for all students. Developing institutional policies is one way to achieve this, but HEI have to make sure that they don't develop too many policies, as this might hinder accessibility progress. And HEI should support not only top-down processes, where management and administration set the direction. Often enough, bottom-up approaches such as communities of practice or working groups bring a variety of stakeholders to the table who are all interested in the topic of digital accessibility. This offers the chance to also include students with disabilities and better understand the needs and demands of the learners.

We consider as **technical challenges** the need to evaluate the accessibility of learning resources and materials as well as the digital infrastructure. HEI provide many different learning resources to their students; this can be digital texts, presentations, audio and video content, multimedia and other interactive learning resources. All these resources have to follow certain guidelines, regularly the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), which are often part of the national or international laws and guidelines. HEI have to ensure that all the learning resources are accessible in accordance with the WCAG and other standards. The same applies to the digital infrastructure.

This infrastructure can be rather complex, as it is not only the course management system the students use to access the materials and discuss with their fellow students. The digital infrastructure also includes systems for exam registration and exam-taking, administrative systems such as campus management or course enrolment systems, library catalogues and journal articles and many more. Thus, it can be a complex endeavour to regularly assess the accessibility of all these systems and ensure that they are fully technically accessible for all students.

Technical challenges also include the question of monitoring and evaluating. Who is responsible for assessing the accessibility of what part of the digital infrastructure? What approach is used to assess the accessibility? Digital accessibility can be evaluated using automatic evaluation software, doing extensive manual evaluation routines or having people with various disabilities check out the accessibility of websites, software and other digital infrastructure. All of these approaches have their pros and cons, which have to be considered when deciding which approach or what combination of approaches to use. Another challenge that should not be forgotten is when the HEI or its stakeholders buy new hard- and software or when new versions of software are introduced. The "Buying Accessible" approach can be used to ensure that the HEI buy only accessible hard- and software.

Digital accessibility in higher education also faces **pedagogical challenges**, as it is not just about technical accessibility. Students can also be excluded by decisions about how they are expected to learn. As all students differ in their abilities and preferences for learning activities, lecturers should also think about providing multiple methods for how the students can interact with the learning content and about multiple ways to engage with other students. The digital divide also mentions the need for skills access. Students have to learn how to use the learning content and operate the digital infrastructure. This is especially the case for students with disabilities who use AT, such as screen readers. Helping students find their way through the ICT infrastructure can be additional support for these students. They can save time finding out how to use the course management system with their AT and use the time for learning and working instead.

There are some additional challenges to consider when working on digital accessibility. One is the proactive handling of national and international guidelines and laws. Another challenge is **stakeholder engagement**. There are many stakeholders who are responsible for smaller or larger parts of digital accessibility in higher education institutions. The challenge is to get all these stakeholders engaged without taking too much time (King et al., 2020).

Universities and other higher education institutions also have to consider their responsibilities for the **socio-economic dimensions** of digital accessibility. One aspect here is the experience being excluded or included by technology. To what extent do HEI support the skill and usage access of students with disabilities? What help can HEI offer to students who cannot afford the computer required for successful studies?

Conclusion

Ensuring that all ICT systems are fully accessible for all students, especially those with a disability, is a huge endeavour. Digital accessibility is not limited to being compliant with the latest technical standards. We have shown that there are at least four dimensions of digital accessibility:

- Technical dimension
- Socio-economic dimension
- Pedagogical dimension
- Institutional dimension.

Though the complexity might be overwhelming at first, there are many good and promising practices that higher education institutions can implement:

- HEI need to develop their own policies, clarify what needs to be done to make their ICT systems accessible for all students, and decide who is responsible for which parts.
- Many people have probably heard of the term digital accessibility but are unsure about the details. It is an excellent idea to provide digital accessibility training and guidelines to at least all faculty and staff. HEI can also raise awareness for digital accessibility among its members.
- Clearly worded accessibility and disability statements ensure students and other members of the HEI that the institution cares about digital accessibility. These statements also help to clarify the institutional integration of digital accessibility.

Examples of these and many other good practices can be found in the accompanying documents, providing examples from EADTU member universities.

Good practices on Digital Accessibility from Anadolu University

Field of subject related to diversity and inclusion

Digital Accessibility

Introduction

Anadolu University is one of the world leaders in open and distance education. With over 3 million alumni, the university currently offers higher education to over one million students and operates in more than 30 countries worldwide. With a student enrollment of over 1 million, Anadolu University is the third-largest university in the world. In the case of Turkey and, more specifically Anadolu University, open education faculty strives for “easy access to educational opportunities, with multiple entry points, no or low monetary costs, flexible learning processes, and where the focus is on independence in time and place” (Bozkurt, 2019, p. 37). Addressing nearly half of the higher education students in Turkey, open education systems puts a special emphasis on providing access to educational content for those who demand for educational opportunities (Kondakci, Bedenlier, & Aydin, 2019). These efforts vary in a wide range of practices, policies and strategies.

Good practices

Accessibility Training and Guidelines

At Anadolu University, open education students are offered a wide variety of learning materials. Open education has recently gone through a digital transformation process to enhance self-learning with the help of materials such as textbooks in digital format (PDF, ePUB, MOBI, HTML5), audiobooks, chapter summaries, interactive videos, practice tests, exercises, live online classes, and videos of online classes. In addition, various services for disabled students enrolled in the Open Education System are offered on the Accessible OEF (<http://engelsizaof.anadolu.edu.tr/>) website. Students with disabilities studying in the Open Education System are supported on this website on many issues, especially the registration process, add-delete courses, use of the e-campus system, exams and graduation. There is a sign language translation application on the barrier-free OEF site. In addition, all students are provided with instant support on many issues such as the open education system, vertical transfer, registration processes, exams, student services, horizontal transfer, and abroad programs via the aosdestek.anadolu.edu.tr website. In addition, face-to-face student support services are offered in all OEF offices. Also, All services and career support activities offered during the education process, from student support services to e-learning environments and materials, from exam organization to social and cultural activities, are

Raising awareness

The Council of Higher Education (CHE) delivers badges for higher education institutions who adopt universal design principles in their campuses for learners with special needs and disabilities. In this regard, Anadolu University is granted a green label (given for providing accessibility in education) in 2021 (and also in previous years) which is important to raise awareness and be a role model for other higher education institutions.

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planned through data management according to the specific needs of the students, by obtaining detailed health information from the students in the electronic Environment upon entering the system.

Developing Policies

Inspired by open educational practices and openness philosophy, Anadolu University states its vision as "to be a global university with a focus on lifelong learning" (Anadolu University, 2021, para. 2). The Open Education System of Anadolu University, dedicated to equal opportunity, aims to open a wide range of programs based on this principle and to offer learning environments that effectively promote these programs. This policy is predicated on the following principles:

- to develop and implement policies that promote effectively equal opportunity and diversity of students, human resources and the faculty.
- to ensure that all students have equal access to opportunities offered
- to ensure that all students benefit from affordable tuition fees
- to ensure that all students have equal access to environments where curriculum, assessment, support services and resources are available.
- to protect the diversity of students and human resources in the Open Education System.
- not to allow harassment, bullying and discrimination under any circumstances.
- to ensure that all staff have full understanding of equal opportunities and different opportunities and put these principles into practice.
- to set up effective systems to ensure equality of opportunity and diversity.
- to observe all equality principles in service provision.

Disability Statements

The Open Education System of Anadolu University, dedicated to equal opportunity, aims to open a wide range of programs based on this principle and to offer learning environments that effectively promote these programs. To ensure quality education for persons with disabilities the following policy is predicated on the following principles:

- to develop and implement policies that promote effectively equal opportunity and diversity of students, human resources and the faculty.
- to ensure that all students have equal access to opportunities offered.
- to ensure that all students benefit from affordable tuition fees.
- to ensure that all students have equal access to environments where curriculum, assessment, support services and resources are available.
- to protect the diversity of students and human resources in the Open Education System.
- not to allow harassment, bullying and discrimination under any circumstances.
- to ensure that all staff have full understanding of equal opportunities and different opportunities and put these principles into practice.

- to set up effective systems to ensure equality of opportunity and diversity.
- to observe all equality principles in service provision.

Research and Projects

AKADEMA is a platform launched to offer Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) in the Open Education System of Anadolu University. Learners from any background can join the courses on a broad range of topics from natural pharmacy to data mining. Two types of courses are offered on AKADEMA: instructor-facilitated courses, and courses fully based on individual learning. AKADEMA currently offers over 100 courses including cello playing, basketball, scuba diving, 21st century citizenship, body language, CV writing, photography, game theory, project-based learning, Arabic, Turkish, and social network analysis. Courses are free on AKADEMA.

Online Learning Tutorials and Instructions

Anadolu University, Open Education Faculty delivers its educational content using a learning management system developed by its own know-how based on a set of analytics, learners' needs and institutional necessities. It intends to create a learning ecosystem that focuses on delivering a wide range of learning materials by providing different accessibility options. Accordingly, learners with special needs can benefit from features such as virtual keyboard navigation, smart contrast, screen reader, highlighted links, adaptive fonts, dyslexia fonts, text spacing, line spacing and pausing animations.

Though digitalization and digital solutions ensure accessibility, it also leads the digital divide and can emerge as a barrier to access educational content. In this regard, Anadolu University, Open Educational Faculty provides opportunities to access both online and offline materials. The overall system is based upon self-regulated text books and these books are available in print for offline access and also available in digital adaptive formats (e.g., ePub). Besides, text based digital educational content is designed in a way that can be printed for those who would prefer accessing educational content in printed forms.

(Centralised) Technical Support

Computer Research and Technical Support Center at Anadolu university provides technical support at the university. The center aims to promote, support and organise scientific, technical, cultural and artistic research and applications. Besides, it targets to encourage improvement of lecturers and students at the university to engage in research and application.

Good practices on Digital Accessibility from FernUniversität in Hagen

Field of subject related to diversity and inclusion

Digital Accessibility

Introduction

The FernUniversität in Hagen is Germany's largest and the only state distance-learning university. For over 40 years, it has made higher education accessible to students who want an accredited university education but cannot or do not want to enroll in a traditional on-campus university. What began in 1975 in rented rooms with 1,330 students is now Germany's largest university, housed in Hagen's attractive and modern campus. Throughout its history, the FernUniversität has been dedicated to pioneering new approaches to teaching and learning and a wide range of innovative research.

Good practices

Institutional Integration

In 2015 the FernUniversität began working on its concept for inclusion ("Inklusionskonzept"). The university worked on the concept as part of the audit process on "Designing for diversity" ("Vielfalt gestalten") of the German Stifterverband. The concept for inclusion identified 25 measures and areas of development:

- Information and communication
- Consulting and qualification for lecturers and staff members involved in teaching and studies
- Accessibility of study materials and learning infrastructure
- Examination system: Reasonable accommodations and exam variability
- Accessibility of buildings and build infrastructure

Institutional integration of inclusion

The university will target these measures and areas of development until 2022. Specific to the topic of digital accessibility are the following measures:

- Provide information and services regarding accessible study materials
- Provide individualized alternative formats of study materials

Digital Accessibility Training

Staff members can take part in training on creating accessible study materials. The training is offered once a year and focuses on preparing materials for blind and visually impaired students. Participants get credits for the university's e-teaching certification program.

The university's IT department offers additional information on digital accessibility. The web development team members provide general information on digital accessibility, on creating accessible documents, videos, and images.

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FernUniversität in Hagen: Diversity without barriers (Vielfalt ohne Barrieren), <https://www.fernuni-hagen.de/diversitaet/inklusion.shtml>

FernUniversität in Hagen: [Global Accessibility Awareness Day \(https://www.fernuni-hagen.de/diversitaet/inklusion.shtml#aktuelles\)](https://www.fernuni-hagen.de/diversitaet/inklusion.shtml#aktuelles)

- Accessible procurement of study materials and digital learning infrastructure

Various departments and people across the university work on digital accessibility and are responsible for ensuring that students with disabilities have access to their studies. The overall responsibility lies with the prorector for studies and diversity. The department for equal opportunities is responsible for implementing and evaluating the concept for inclusion. Various departments ensure the technical accessibility of study materials and the technical infrastructure.

(Centralized) Technical Support

Students who are blind or have severe visual impairments can receive alternative formats of their study materials. This service has been available for many years. The most common alternative forms are braille and large-print materials. While students can still get braille-printed course materials, they can also receive digital versions of their study materials in the DAISY format. Materials are made available on request, and students have to document their eligibility for disability services and accommodations.

The central department for study materials offers an accessibility service to the lecturers of the FernUniversität. As many study materials are provided as PDF documents, the department checks these materials for compliance with the official accessibility regulations. They also offer remediation services and support for creating accessible study materials.

The video department offers captioning services for videos. Many lecturers at the FernUniversität use videos for their teaching. These videos accompany the other study materials as part of the blended-learning concept of the FernUniversität. Providing captions for these videos is essential for the university's digital accessibility strategy. The video department uses a combination of automatic captioning with manual post-processing to offer good quality captions.

Raising Awareness

Since 2016, the FernUniversität each year celebrates the Global Accessibility Awareness Day (GAAD) with its own event. The GAAD is celebrated each year on the third Thursday of May. On this day, there are various events worldwide to inform people about digital access and inclusion. The FernUniversität organizes an event to raise the awareness of digital accessibility among its lecturers and staff members. Since 2019, the events have been open for guests from other universities in Germany. The topics change each year:

- 2021: Digital exams – between accessibility and reasonable accommodations
- 2020: EU Guideline 2016/2102 and its relevance for higher education institutions
- 2019: Digitalization and inclusion
- 2018: Barriers in distance learning

Good practices on Digital Accessibility by The Open University of Israel

Field of subject related to diversity and inclusion

Digital Accessibility

Introduction

The Open University of Israel was founded in 1974 by virtue of an agreement between the Government of Israel and the Rothschild Foundation (Yad Hanadiv) and further to a decision of the Council for Higher Education dated. October 2nd, 1973 and with the generous help of the Rothschild Foundation. The university is committed to access her campuses and digital content, in accordance with national and international regulations (web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0). There are several departments who take care of accessing content and services for students.

Students with disabilities of all kind, have a center who helps with their various needs. Tutors and website managers (academic faculty) have a personal technological tutor who aids with the process of accessible digitations. Digital tools for course coordinators were built so they could check their documents and website's level of accessibility.

Good practices

Teaching staff has online tutorials guiding them how to improve accessibility in their websites and teaching and learning materials.

Social related accessibility is also being dealt with for students from geographic, social and economical periphery (israeli-arabs, jewish ultraorthodox, students of Ethiopian origin etc.). There are interventions with the teaching staff in terms of workshops about teaching strategies and tools for classes with multicultural students. This includes visits in various communities and meetings with people from those various. Nowadays we serve thousands of student's (6%) with special needs, providing accessibility in digital texts, transcripts for videos in courses and conferences.

Two special projects were boosted recently, as a result of Covid-19 pandemic. Our recent successful initiatives are Simultaneous transcription and subtitles. The project started at 2017 with a management decision to add subtitles in hebrew (and arabic in several cases) to lectures who had been video recorded for course online resources.

Moreover, there are several courses (16 in this 2020 autumn semester, for example) that have had live transcription with a person who sits in the lesson and transmits the transcription via shared documents (like Google Docs). Immerse distance learning because of Covid-19 pandemic, enabled students with special needs (and others) to have direct access to our course materials and the simultaneous transcription or subtitles for the videos were found as most successful aid.

Good practices on Digital Accessibility by The Open University

Field of subject related to diversity and inclusion

Digital Accessibility

Introduction

The OUUK has a long history of using technology to deliver its mission of being open to people, places, methods and ideas. In the 1970s we used television and radio to share content with students, in addition to correspondence materials, summer schools and weekly tutorials. As digital technologies have developed more and more curriculum has been designed to be delivered online. This has inevitably brought challenges to those who lack the equipment needed, affordable access to broadband and the digital skills to be able to make use of the equipment. Additionally, there are many students with disabilities (circa 34,000) who need support to access the right technology for them and offender learners (in prisons and secure environments) who do not have any internet access.

Good practices

Digital Accessibility Training and Guidelines

Diagnostic tests are available for students to assess their readiness for study and these cover digital skill levels. Those who may need support are directed to our Access courses ([Access Courses | Preparing for Study | Open University](#)) which assume that students will need guidance to get the right equipment and acquire the necessary skills very early on in the course. Skills development is embedded into the course materials and the learning is scaffolded so that the student should have acquired both equipment and skills to enable them to progress. The skills students will have the opportunity to develop are captured within the OU's Employability Framework and Digital and Information Literacy Skills Framework. These frameworks cover both the skills students need for study and for their career development. A recent survey of our current students highlighted high levels of satisfaction with the support they received with developing their digital literacies. The priority for the University is exploring how we support the development of the basic digital skills prospective students need to study with us at the OU, should they not be ready for an Access course.

There are many materials available for staff and students to ensure digital content is accessible for all. (see, for example, [Assistive technologies and online learning - OpenLearn - Open University - H810 1](#)). Guidance is provided for students ([Studying on a screen | Help Centre | The Open University](#)) and there is help and support for all students at [Computing help | Help Centre | The Open University](#).

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Developing Policies

The University is currently piloting innovative approaches to providing in-cell access to digital material for students in secure environments. A recent research project into digital connectivity in rural areas highlighted it was challenging for students with limited/no broadband in rural areas to access online materials and some find it challenging to travel to locations with internet access, particularly if they have caring responsibilities, disabilities or long-term health conditions. The evaluation of the pilot with students in secure environments is showing a positive impact and the University is exploring the potential for these approaches to make online study materials more accessible for students with limited/no broadband (e.g. students in rural areas).

There are no specific policies currently in relation to digital accessibility but principles are included in our Accessibility policy ([Student Policy & Regulations | Academic Services \(sharepoint.com\)](#)). There is however work underway to address all aspects of digital exclusion. This work is currently in phase 1 and the expected outputs will include:

1. A more robust evidence-base in place to inform the University's work on digital inclusion, including an approach to monitoring impact and measuring the benefits of this work.
2. Good practice from across the OU and the higher education sector will be disseminated across the University through a Seminar, special edition of the Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning journal, Jisc Digital Inclusion and Wellbeing events, newsletters and OU Life articles.
3. Principles underpinning digital inclusion at the OU will be approved through the appropriate governance channels.
4. Mechanisms will be established to enhance how we identify students at risk of digital exclusion and to communicate more effectively the support available.
5. Students will have improved access to Information, Advice and Guidance on the digital literacy skills needed to complete their qualification and how the University will support the development of these skills
6. Solutions that will enhance digital inclusion and can be implemented in Phase 1 are embedded for October 2022, following pilots where appropriate.
7. Decrease in the percentage of students reporting difficulties in access to the equipment and/or broadband needed for study
8. Increase in the percentage of students satisfied with how the OU has helped them develop their digital literacy skills
9. Mechanisms for improving digital inclusion in the long-term will be identified and plans developed for Phase 2 to ensure the University continues to remove barriers to learning posed by digital exclusion.

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**Universidade Aberta (UAb)
- Portugal**

Good practices on Digital Accessibility by UAb

**Field of subject related to
diversity and inclusion**

Digital Accessibility

Introduction

Universidade Aberta (UAb) is the public Portuguese distance education university. Pioneer in distance higher education in Portugal, it was founded in 1988 and it has been promoting actions related to higher education and continuous education. It has also contributed to develop important know-how that allows it to be the biggest provider of online courses in the country.

At present UAb is considered to be amongst the European mega-providers of e-learning, playing a prominent role in 1st and 2nd cycle (graduation and master's) educational offering. It also has PhD programs.

UAb is deeply involved with digital accessibility by flexibly empowering many individuals who, by attending Higher Education at UAb and, consequently, by training, qualifying, and developing new skills, reach new possibilities for inclusion, and intervention in the global world. Moreover, according to the Portuguese law DL 83/2018 that encompasses the European directives 2016/2012, public sector and organizations should take the necessary steps to make websites and mobile applications more accessible.

Good Practices

Developing policies

Aligned with the guiding principles of the Bologna process, the Universidade Aberta of Portugal designed, in 2007, its Virtual Pedagogical Model (MPV-UAb) (Pereira et al, 2007).

The MPV-UAb assumes a clear relevance in the identity of the UAb and in Distance Education in Portugal. In a very brief way, it is important to say that it anchors the educational organization of teaching-learning activities, the development of virtual pedagogical practices and the courses' evaluation process.

The MPV-UAb is built around four axes: Student-centered learning; The primacy of flexibility; the primacy of interaction; and the Digital Inclusion Principle. Of these 4 axes, digital inclusion is clearly aimed at increasing digital accessibility and it reflects the institutional thinking of the UAb in the recognition that digital access and competences influence

Disability Statements

At UAb, students with special needs are covered by the current specific internal regulation (available at <https://portal.uab.pt/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Regulamento-do-Estudante-com-Necessidades-Educativas-Especiais-da-Universidade-Aberta.pdf>), and followed by the Student's Monitoring Committee.

Research and Projects

"Projeto Acessibilidades" (Accessibility Project) acts both at the level of practical intervention in the field, and of research (participation in conferences, publishing).

The UAb has both conducted and participated in projects in the area of inclusion, namely Erasmus + projects.

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opportunities for social participation and citizenship and, therefore, should be a universal right. In addition, this principle unequivocally contributes to the development of a set of digital skills, and throughout commitments made to students for education and training, it offers an introductory module for the acquisition of digital skills.

At national level, UAb collaborates with GTAEDES – Task force for the Support of Higher Education Students with Disabilities - <https://www.gtaedes.pt>

Institutional integration

At Universidade Aberta, every new student is offered an eLearning Familiarization Module ("Módulo de Ambientação ao Ensino Online") that provides the basic training and essential guidelines to be more at ease in an e-learning environment. In this module, students train, not only the most common situations that they will face (e.g., how to participate in a forum; how to do group work) but they are also informed about the pedagogical model adopted at the UAb, and other fundamental issues, such as the existing resources in the library, netiquette and what is plagiarism. It is also during this time that students with special needs are often identified and reported. Applying students have the possibility to state if they have special needs during registration, but some do not do it. In these cases, it is only during the online study setting module that they begin to feel more comfortable to disclosure difficulties. These students are forwarded to the Student's Monitoring Committee (where the adjustments more adequate do each case are determined), and to a supporting structure called "Projeto Acessibilidades" (Accessibility Project).

Accessibility Training and Guidelines

Within the scope of the action of Accessibility Project, documents were produced with recommendations to UAb's staff, mainly programme coordinators, and teachers regarding various issues related to accessibility, including digital accessibility (e.g., how to design Moodle pages in a way that is more convenient for students with special needs; how to make accessible pdf...).

Raising Awareness

To reinforce the documents with recommendations and guidelines available to the UAb's staff, two other ways are used to increase teacher's awareness regarding digital accessibility of students with special needs. On the one hand, the presence of the coordinators of the various programmes in the Student's Monitoring Committee, and, on the other hand, the availability of the Accessibility Project's team to attend sectorial meetings with the teachers of the programmes with students with special needs.

Regarding students, the awareness about different situations occurs by way of the provided online socialization since the Accessibility Project's team maintains a space in the Moodle platform destined to the interaction among students with various special needs. In here, apart from the teaching staff, there are also some former students that act as mentors and examples of success. It is in these forums that some students verbalize questions, some of them regarding digital accessibility, that they do not feel at ease to place in their curricular units.

Online Learning Tutorials and Instructions

At UAb, the "Módulo de Ambientação ao Ensino Online" (eLearning Familiarization Module) provides the basic training and essential guidelines for new students to become online students.

The Accessibility Project has produced a document with suggestions for programme coordinators and teachers on the main challenges and possible approaches regarding student's special needs.

The Documentation Sector offers tutorials and personalized assistance (when needed) to help students with difficulties to become autonomous as Library users (namely accessing adapted study materials) - https://portal.uab.pt/dsd/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2021/03/Acessibilidades_UAb_GUIA.pdf

Moreover it is necessary to consider the access of the entire UAb community to this "Accessible Document Templates" space, since the accessibility of digital documents must also be considered for documents produced by the entire academic community, that is, in the interaction between professors and students, and between services and students.

Likewise, training in accessibility should be extended to all University employees (tutors, teaching staff and non-teaching staff), adapting the training to the user profile.

(Centralised) Technical Support

At UAb, central technical services provide tools and templates in accordance with universal design, to be used by teachers (for teaching materials, assignments, exams, as well as ppt, audio and video production).

The Virtual Campus support division is responsible for online parametrization of the final exams, taking into consideration time extensions for students with Special Needs.

Following a decision taken by UAb's Editorial Committee, all e-books edited by the Institution are produced in accordance with accessible format rules.

03 **Functional Disabilities**

The challenges of social recognition and information for students with functional disabilities

Functional disabilities

Functional disabilities mainly concern students with hearing, vision and mobility impairments.

According to the World Health Org., visual function has four stages: normal vision, moderate or severe visual impairments and blindness. These stages of **visual impairment** have consequences on certain abilities such as: reading and writing; daily life activities; communication; assessing space and moving around; pursuing an activity that requires prolonged visual attention.

The International Bureau of Audiophonology classification defines four degrees of **hearing impairment** according to the average hearing loss: *Mild hearing loss* (difficulty in perceiving soft speech); *Moderate hearing loss* (the perceived spoken message is incomplete); *Severe hearing loss* (leads to significant difficulties in perceiving sounds and thus accessing understanding); *Profound hearing loss* (use of lip-reading is essential).

Mobility impairment covers all disorders that can lead to partial or total impairment of motor skills, particularly of the upper and/or lower limbs (difficulties in moving around, performing certain gestures).

Introduction

Our subgroup is focused on functional disabilities, excluding specific learning disabilities. It mainly concerns students with hearing, vision and mobility impairments.

The central concept called functional disabilities implies that it is linked to people's characteristic features. The support is sometimes based on all kinds of disabilities (e.g. Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia, UNED) or in other cases, the university has to provide equal opportunities for students with functional disabilities (e.g. Anadolu University).

There is still a European directive and law, that is equal rights and opportunities. So, what we mean is that some universities do not distinguish specific actions according to disabilities while others promote equality for those students with a functional disability.

In France, the number of disabled students pursuing higher education in public institutions under the supervision of the Ministry of Higher Education and Research rose to 16,000 in 2013 (5,000 in 2004). Ninety per cent of these students were enrolled at university and received support or monitoring as such. The general trend towards longer study periods and the diversification and greater awareness of support schemes explain this increase.

More than half of them (54.2%) get human assistance, more than three quarters (77.9%) have their exams adapted and two out of three disabled students are offered specific monitoring by a disability advisor within their institution.

Students with functional disabilities, excluding specific learning disabilities, represented about 40% of students with disabilities in the 2011-2012 academic year (visual impairment: 8.9%, hearing impairment: 6.2%, mobility impairments: 24.8%).

The challenges:

The challenges are first and foremost the detection of the people concerned by these functional disabilities, the accessibility issues, the diffusion of information and the adaptations of the right materials for them. What is reasonable in making adjustments and who decides on what is a reasonable adjustment to make?

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Institutional framework:

Legal rules (national-ministerial ones)

In France, since 2005, the Ministry of Higher Education has been supporting institutions in developing a disability strategy. It takes students' entire studies into account, from informing high school students about higher education to post-graduation career guidance including schooling, exams, university life, internships and stays abroad.

In Ecuador, the *Organic Law on disabilities* (2012) referred in Art.27 to the fact that the state should ensure that disabled people could get access to complete school education, including higher education.

In *Regulations to the Organic Law on disabilities* (2017), Art.1 specifies that a person with a disability is someone who, as a consequence of one or more physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments, has permanently restricted biological, psychological and associative capacity to exercise one or more essential activities of daily life, in a proportion equivalent to 30% of disability. This percentage is duly qualified by the national health authority. Article 11 mentions the scholarships or financial aid that the Organic Law on Higher Education provides. Other aspects such as the mandatory accessibility of web content and the sign language interpretation service are to be taken into account in the educational field.

In Finland, equality in education is the basis of the educational system. All kinds of discrimination, including discrimination on the grounds of disability, is forbidden. Nowadays, there is a national focus on students from under-represented groups and on supporting their equal academic careers.

According to legislation, some accommodations or individual arrangements when needed must be available but formal medical certificates are usually needed to consider those options. A publication entitled "*Towards more accessible higher education and higher education institutions*" (2021) is available only in Finnish with the abstract in English. The Ministry of Higher Education supports the development of tools to help produce accessible digital teaching materials.

Institutional Rules

In some countries, the rules for taking disability into account are not the same from one university to another.

A university without strategy plans for students with disabilities, can offer special programs for people who have special needs. In Spain, UNED offers special programs for older people (that is people over 25). Students with disabilities can get the same special adjustments throughout their studies.

In other cases, a specific decision regarding students with disabilities is made by the institution's governance.

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KILINÇ, H., OKUR, M. R., YILDIZ, G. (2021), Examination of User Experiences and Needs for the Web Page and Learning Environment Used by Students with Special Needs in Open and Distance Learning: The Case of Anadolu University. Sakarya University journal of education 2021-08-30. <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/download/article-file/1742955>

Lee, M., Han, S. H., Kim, H. K., & Bang, H. (2015). Identifying user experience elements for people with disabilities. Proceedings of the 8th International Conference on Advances in Computer-Human Interactions, Pohang, Korea.

In Finland, at the University of Jyväskylä (JYU), the Vice-rector took a decision on December 2nd 2019 about Accessibility of education ([Accessibility of education at the university of Jyväskylä](#)). The decision consisted of principles to follow (e.g. responsibilities, arrangements concerning students' admission and individual arrangements during their studies). It also gave guidelines for social, physical and digital services.

A service can be provided for the welfare of students. In Ecuador, for example, the Private Technical University of Loja (UTPL) through the University Welfare Unit, will guarantee attention, monitoring and advice for the access. It will also guarantee integration, continuity in studies, promotion of university inclusion and equity and comprehensive development of people who are part of priority groups. These policies suggested in the "Instructivo de admisión y fortalecimiento para estudios de grado y posgrado" (UTPL, 2019) reveal aspects that are more detailed in specific regulations such as admission and upgrading. Scholarships and financial aid are also detailed in the regulations. Furthermore, it is pointed out that according to the needs, accessible educational resources will be designed and implemented (Art. 11). As for the facilities to the Headquarters and the Support Centers, these policies specify the physical spaces with architectural criteria of universal accessibility (Art. 13). They stipulate that the university community will be permanently informed of the equal rights and obligations of each of its members (Art. 15).

The Open Education System of Anadolu University (Turkey), dedicated to equal opportunity aims to open a wide range of programs based on this principle and to offer learning environments that effectively promote these programs. To ensure quality education for disabled people, the policy is based on the following principles:

- Equal opportunity and diversity of students, human resources and the faculty;
- Affordable tuition fees;
- Equal access to opportunities which are offered;
- Equal access to environments where curriculums, assessments, support services and resources are available.

In France, the May 2012 "university/ disability" charter and the 22nd July 2013 Fioraso Law asked each higher education establishment to draw up a master plan for disabled students.

The master plan is composed of the following axes:

- The first one concerns students, their reception, their support and their professional integration;
- The second one includes the management of human resources through the adaptation of workstations, teleworking, the issue of recruitment, partnership;
- The third one deals with real estate and improving accessibility;

<https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.681.7575&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

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Rosa, J. R. D. S., & Valentim, N. M. C. (2020, October). Accessibility, usability and user experience design for visually impaired people: a systematic mapping study. In Proceedings of the 19th Brazilian Symposium on Human Factors in Computing Systems, pp. 1-10. <https://dl.acm.org/doi/abs/10.1145/3424953.3426626>

Santos, O. C., Couchet, J., & Boticario, J. G. (2009, July). Personalized e-learning and e-mentoring through user modelling and dynamic recommendations for the inclusion of disabled at work and education. In Ninth IEEE International Conference on Advanced Learning Technologies, pp. 514-518, IEEE. Madrid, Spain. <https://ieeexplore.ieee.org/document/5194291>

- The fourth one is about training and research.

Accessibility for these students

Accessibility or Compensation?

Compensation is the response to the person's specific individual needs (adjustment of the curriculum, tools for reading...). Accessibility refers to general measures independent of the presence of the person (Accessibility of buildings, of information, of knowledge, of sites, lifts, installation of remote magnifying screens...). We will not make the formal distinction in our comments.

Accessibility is a legal principle. The principle of accessible education is to ensure that all practices and functions of the university comply with the stipulations and the spirit of the EU's directives on the accessibility of the websites and mobile applications of public sector bodies (2016/2102) and the *Non-Discrimination Act* (1325/2014).

A student has the right to expect that the university staff aims to provide a learning environment that is socially, psychologically and physically as accessible as possible.

Moreover, communication and materials related to students' admission, teaching and studying as well as administrative rules and regulations at the university of Jyväskylä (JYU), must be accessible. According to Finnish legislation asking about students' disabilities or registering them are not allowed. It is always the student's own responsibility to inform the staff about their special educational needs or disabilities. As staff members, they can only inform students about their rights and the support services that they can be offered.

Accessibility for the students concerned is therefore facilitated by the administrations in the interests of equal opportunities. These universities like the UTPL in Ecuador have a humanistic vocation. The UTPL does not only conform to the regulations given by state agencies. But, thanks to its vocation as a humanistic and inclusive university, it aims at the accessibility of all its students and has regulated its policies on the inclusion of students with functional disabilities (523 students from April to August 2021).

However, students must register themselves to obtain the status of disabled students. In France, once enrolled, they must follow a clearly established procedure. The Ministry of Higher Education encourages each university to follow a procedure which generally is:

- Interview with the Student Life & Disability Office;
- Appointment with a doctor from the Student Health Centre;
- Accommodation granted by the Plural Disability Commission of the institution;
- Communication of accommodation to components for implementation;

- Follow-up with the component and in particular with the disability referents;
- Adjustment in tuition fees to encourage students to have their disability recognised.

The challenges for these students

Despite the efforts of the actors and institutions, the students concerned are faced with three challenges:

The fear of declaring oneself "disabled": Beyond the procedures and the rather favourable accessibility to students with functional disorders, the challenge is the detection of these students. More precisely, it is the question of the real and immediate identification as students with functional disorders. Through a record of the French Conference of University Presidents ([La parole aux acteurs du Handicap, 2014](#)), students reveal the difficulties they encounter, namely the fear of declaring their disability or simply talking about it or even of showing their disability... For these students with functional disorders, perhaps 20-25%, might not wish to register themselves as such. Organizational responses and adaptations are then made later in the year or even afterwards when difficulties arise in the curriculum.

Furthermore, trying to focus too much on the different forms of disabilities may accentuate fears. Thus, the concept of functional disabilities may seem restrictive. According to Tiberio Feliz (UNED) it might exclude a large group of people. Everyone who has a certain need requires to be supported by the university.

Beyond the actions carried, the **problem of the student's declaration** is a societal one.

Social and academic inclusion: Technical tools are necessary but not sufficient. Human mediation has a crucial role to play. In Spain, there is a big gap in the access to university. Students with disability don't have access or don't imagine that they can get access to university like regular students. Students with disability have to be promoted and empowered. There are mainly psychological or social issues which are family-related ones. Sometimes, a person with disabilities can't have access to some studies or trainings because teachers think they can't achieve or develop all the competences.

Lack of information and training of teachers: According to these students' statements ([La parole aux acteurs du Handicap, 2014](#)), even if they wanted to identify themselves as functionally disabled students, some of them still suffer from a lack of information at the university. They explain that, very early in their approach, the upstream orientation towards the specialized actors, the search for the right people to contact and the suitable locations to find are very practical issues they are confronted with for a good insertion in a system that is nevertheless more adapted.

In France, students consulted by the Conseil National du Handicap and the Mornay Group, criticize the unawareness of teachers about disability. According to disabled students, it is difficult to detect whether their disinterested attitude results from the application of the principle of equality: compensation would be enough not to consider them as disabled students or whether "the teaching staff, which is the reflection of society, is neither more indulgent nor more trained for disability".

Financial and human support

Enrolment can be usually "free" (UNED) otherwise it involves payment of fees at the same rates as for regular students. Higher education in Finland is free of charge. If financial support is needed it is provided by other institutions, not by universities. In Ecuador, scholarships are awarded to all students according to their degree of disability and financial means. In Anadolu University's Open Education System, there is no registration fee for students with a disability of 40% or more.

The human support for students with disabilities (and for other students as well) can be based on the cooperation of several partners. In Finland, the JYU administrative "Student and academic services" work with the JYU faculties and JYU independent institutions. Any student (all of them, not only those with disabilities) has a lot of well-being support services available under the "Student life" concept. In Ecuador, the UTPL provides appropriate assistance to achieve the objectives of their higher education in

any of the 23 undergraduate degrees and 10 graduate ones they currently offer. In Anadolu University's Open Education System, with the slogan Barrier-Free, Open Education Workshops have been held every year since 2017. Annual meetings are held by the Open Education Disability Support Unit with students, families and representatives of relevant NGOs. It organizes national and international barrier-free art, short film, composition, story and essay competitions. In addition, by participating in various student societies within the Open Education System, students can work on their fields of interest and participate in activities.

Implementation of quotas

A quota in education means that everyone cannot undertake particular studies, but only a small percentage of students.

The access to the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (Belgium) is open to people who have a secondary education certificate. The university authorities do not work with quotas, except when someone wants to study medicine, then they take an entrance examination. Students with a disability can ask for special treatments for courses and for their exams as well; then a tailor-made solution will be made for them. In many cases, for blind people for instance, it includes very important adjustments such as courses translated in braille...

In Ecuador, the UTPL has a quota policy but it is not limited to a strict adherence to it as all the students who are deemed fit to pursue higher education are admitted. The UTPL provides adaptations in accordance with the RRA ([Reglamento de Régimen Académico](#)) for non-significant curriculums, considers special quotas to promote inclusion and guarantees equal opportunities for admission to a university career in accordance with current regulations (2019).

For Anadolu University's Open Education System, there are no quota or criteria for the registration of students with disabilities.

Examples of good practices

The **Adaptations for students** with functional disabilities may concern student life, coursework or examinations.

In France, the [Summary of the FIED member universities practices](#) gives an overview of what is being done about technical and pedagogical adaptations.

Technical adaptations can be:

- Lifts, access ramps;
- Parking access badges;
- Information desks at wheelchair level;
- Loan of small electric motorized vehicles;
- Ergonomic cushions;
- Dedicated rest rooms.

Some universities help students by providing them with suitable materials:

- Digital pens;
- Magnifying glasses;
- Large letter keyboards;
- Line Magnifiers;
- Supply of a voice recognition software (e.g. Dragon).

Some universities adapt the right materials for their platform especially for deaf and blind students:

References-Guides

«Les étudiants en situation de handicap», Centre de ressources – INSHEA, pp. 1-45.

[https://inshea.fr/sites/default/files/Bibliographie-%C3%A9tudiants en situation de handicap 2019.pdf](https://inshea.fr/sites/default/files/Bibliographie-%C3%A9tudiants%20en%20situation%20de%20handicap%202019.pdf)

Association pour faciliter l'insertion professionnelle des jeunes diplômés (Afi handicap). (2012). *Guide des droits et des aides pour réussir son insertion professionnelle: spécial «Étudiants et les jeunes diplômés en situation de handicap»*. Paris: Afi handicap.

http://cache.media.education.gouv.fr/file/juin2016/94/5/afij_guid_e_aides_etudiants_handicapes_nov_2011_613945.pdf

Conférence des présidents d'université (CPU). (2012). *Guide de l'accompagnement de l'étudiant handicapé à l'université*. CPU, Crédit coopératif.

https://cache.media.enseignementsup-recherche.gouv.fr/file/Lutte_contre_les_discriminations/90/2/121671_guide-handicap-2012_275902.pdf

Fraisse, A., et Gangloff-Ziegler, C., Conférence des présidents d'université (CPU). (2014). *La parole aux acteurs du handicap à l'université*. Paris.

http://www.cpu.fr/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/handic_ape-web2.pdf

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- Audio and braille materials besides paper materials;
- Audiobooks instead of textbooks specially for maths or statistic;
- Subtitles are added to videos, thus ensuring that they can be seen by students with partial or total hearing loss;
- Use tools which provide the LMS with accessible versions of the files/resources that are uploaded within a course, automatically creating alternative versions (enhanced pdf, audio, electronic braille, ePub, HTML) allowing the students of a course to choose the type of file that best suits their needs.

The use of human resources:

- A buddy system can be implemented: a disabled student can be guided by another peer who can help him in certain situations;
- Administrative officers can act in multiple provinces and with local universities to support the disabled students.

Examinations can be adapted:

- Additional time during the exam session and/or when returning written tasks;
- Adaptation of tests; use of adapted equipment (Braille displays; foreign language keyboards, etc.);
- Individual exam-arrangements with e.g. the permission to type instead of handwriting;
- Impunity for spelling or grammatical errors;
- Composition in a private room with a school life assistant;
- Support of personal assistant;
- Assistance of a sign language interpreter or a secretary who reads scripts;
- Allow access to various personal aids or (computer) programs;
- Use of a laptop computer that has been emptied;
- Transmission of subjects in an adapted format (A3 format, line spacing, bold font, etc.);
- Authorization to take a break for tests lasting more than an hour and a half;
- Taking examinations in a different location or in a dedicated room.

Actions can be put in place for teachers to ensure inclusion **in teaching practices**.

At the beginning of their studies, students must be informed about the possibility to have some individual arrangements and to get a document about the recommendations for individual arrangements. These individual arrangements could be:

- Alternative study materials;
- Alternative study modes;
- Getting lecture materials/slides in advance;
- Possibility to record lectures if recordings are not otherwise available;
- Extended loan period for course book loans.

Support for teachers based on pedagogical guides

supérieur et de la Recherche. (2014). *Guide pratique 2014: le handicap, tous concernés*.

http://cache.media.education.gouv.fr/file/Handicapes/65/5/handicap_2014_-MESR_Guide_Handicap_HD_SSH_IR_365655.pdf

Sciences Po. (2018). *Guide de l'étudiant en situation de handicap*. Paris.

http://www.sciencespo.fr/sites/default/files/sciences-po_guide_etudiant_handicap_web_accessible_FR.pdf

To assist teachers, the Université de Poitiers (FIED-France) develops a *pedagogical and on-line exam guide*.

UTPL developed a *Manual of pedagogical guidelines* (UTPL, 2020) for inclusive practices in order to respond to the educational needs of different groups of students with special needs. It orients the curricular adaptations of first and second grades, known as non-significant. In terms of methodology, it suggests using specific methods and resources, adapting the organization of the classroom and the level of complexity of the class. Other suggested areas are directed to the evaluation of learning with the adaptation of techniques and instruments or the evaluation criteria.

The use of an accessible website

Various services for disabled students enrolled in the Open Education System of Anadolu University are offered on the Accessible OEF website (<http://engelsizaof.anadolu.edu.tr/>). Students with disabilities are helped on this website with many issues, especially the registration process, add-delete courses, the use of the e-campus system, exams and graduation. There is a sign language translation application on the barrier-free OEF site. Moreover, face-to-face student support services are offered in all OEF offices. Furthermore, all services and career support activities offered during the education process (from student support services to e-learning environments and materials, from exam organization to social and cultural activities) are planned through data management according to the specific needs of the students, by obtaining detailed health information from the students in the electronic environment upon entering the system.

Professional integration is one of the goals of universities.

The Université de Lille (FIED-France) develops:

- Awareness and support actions for professional integration;
- Sponsorship actions by professionals;
- Network of disability referents within the University.

Possible solutions and approaches

Under the impetus of new regulations, the constant effort of universities and staff to facilitate accessibility and adapt distance learning to these audiences has spread widely through an active and prolific ecosystem (rectorates, associations, teachers, students, public or private companies). The approaches are formalized, specific staff members welcome and monitor these students and particular materials are available for them.

In this respect, the good practices of universities are **technical** (lifts, access ramps; parking access badges; information desks at wheelchair level; loan of small electric motorized vehicles; ergonomic cushions; dedicated rest rooms; suitable materials), **pedagogical** (additional time in the exam, adaptation of tests; use of adapted equipment, e.g. braille displays; individual exam-arrangements) and **human** (implementation of a buddy system; administrative officers acting in multiple provinces).

These good practices are the result of numerous actions to raise awareness among university actors, round tables, and informal exchanges in connection with rectorates, companies and associations. Nevertheless, problems of social recognition are still present.

The problem of the student's declaration is a societal one. It can only be solved through awareness-raising actions among the youngest schoolchildren, high school and university students, teachers, and institutional leaders. Likewise, bearing in mind the lack of information, the lack of training of teachers and the need to raise awareness among other people, awareness-raising and information activities should be encouraged such as:

- **Involving disabled students with other students by conveying positive values**, exchanging information on professional, sports and community projects and attitudes towards disabled people;

- **Proposing a program of awareness-raising activities for students through conferences**, sporting events for disabled people, and the participation of "disabled-minded" companies;
- **Making teachers aware of disabilities** (better understanding of visible or invisible disabilities, how to adapt their behavior and communication according to disabilities?);
- **Implementing agreements with associations, education authorities and high schools** (transfer of information to high school students, etc.);
- **Disseminating feedback more widely from former students and good practice guides on the universities' internet platforms** (personalized procedures and contacts for registration, present the approach when welcoming disabled people, communicate on the accessibility of rooms, digital accessibility, teaching schedules, etc.).

Conclusion

Is digitalization a solution to inclusion for these students? Digitalization is one aspect of the solution. From the acquired experience and implemented good practices and in reference to the feedback of the students enrolled in Open and Distance modality, we consider that technology and the digitalization of contents help the integration of the student. This has been observed with greater emphasis in the time of the pandemic when some face-to-face activities have been substituted with virtual ones.

Though digitalization is one solution among others it can be a new obstacle as well. Thus, it is very important that online education and all digital services should be accessible for all.

According to students, digital solutions, for example subtitles and captions in videos, different text to speech programs and of course, the possibility to follow the lecture without travelling to campus help them a lot. There are a lot of other good examples as well.

Accessibility remains a real challenge for all people involved. The legal framework, through the European directive, organic laws and even the constitution, recognizes the right to equal opportunities for all. At the institutional level, in European universities, access to training for example, is widely developed and facilitated through adapted teaching and courses. Access to examinations has been greatly improved by mobilized staff, which our article particularly highlights through good practices.

The major challenge is the detection of the students concerned and more specifically their real and immediate identification, e.g. the acceptance of the identity of disabled student as such. Too many students do not wish to identify themselves socially as disabled students. The challenge is no longer legal or institutional but societal and the answers cannot be only "technical".

The challenges of social recognition and information for students with functional disabilities

Functional disabilities

Functional disabilities mainly concern students with hearing, vision and mobility impairments.

According to the World Health Org., visual function has four stages: normal vision, moderate or severe visual impairments and blindness. These stages of **visual impairment** have consequences on certain abilities such as: reading and writing; daily life activities; communication; assessing space and moving around; pursuing an activity that requires pro-longed visual attention.

The International Bureau of Audiophonology classification defines four degrees of **hearing impairment** according to the average hearing loss: *Mild hearing loss* (difficulty in perceiving soft speech); *Moderate hearing loss* (the perceived spoken message is incomplete); *Severe hearing loss* (leads to significant difficulties in perceiving sounds and thus accessing understanding); *Profound hearing loss* (use of lip-reading is essential).

Mobility impairment covers all disorders that can lead to partial or total impairment of motor skills, particularly of the upper and/or lower limbs (difficulties in moving around, performing certain gestures)

Good practices

The **Adaptations for students** with functional disabilities may concern student life, coursework or examinations. We insist on technical, pedagogical and human support and follow-up practices. But the challenges are societal and concern the information the student gets well before registration and also the raising awareness of staff and its training, other students and other people involved so that these students do not hesitate to register themselves as "students with disabilities".

In France, the [Summary of the FIED member universities practices](#) gives an overview of what is being done about **technical and pedagogical adaptations**.

Technical adaptations can be:

- Lifts, access ramps; parking access badges;
- Information desks at wheelchair level;
- Loan of small electric motorized vehicles;
- Ergonomic cushions;
- Dedicated rest rooms.

Some universities help students by providing them with suitable materials:

- Digital pens;
- Magnifying glasses;
- Large letter keyboards;
- Line magnifiers;
- Supply of a voice recognition software (e.g. Dragon).

Some universities adapt the right materials for their platform especially for deaf and blind students. UNED offers students audio and braille materials besides paper materials. Anadolu University offers blind people audiobooks instead of textbooks. For maths or statistic courses such audiobooks do not work well, so they have introduced braille materials. So far, such materials are not, however, embedded in all courses for blind students.

In order to guarantee the accessibility of the resources/documents, as would be the case of the videos, subtitles are added with the help of YouTube; thus ensuring that they can be seen by students with partial or total hearing loss.

For other resources or documents, they use the ALLY tool which provides their LMS with accessible versions of the files/resources that are

Ressources-Guides

INSHEA. (2019). *Les étudiants en situation de handicap*, Centre de ressources, pp. 1-45. [https://inshea.fr/sites/de-fault/files/Bibliographie-%C3%A9tudiants en situation de handicap 2019.pdf](https://inshea.fr/sites/de-fault/files/Bibliographie-%C3%A9tudiants%20en%20situation%20de%20handicap%202019.pdf)

Association pour faciliter l'insertion professionnelle des jeunes diplômés (Afi handicap). (2012). *Guide des droits et des aides pour réussir son insertion professionnelle: spécial «Étudiants et les jeunes diplômés en situation de handicap»*. Paris: Afi handicap. http://cache.media.education.gouv.fr/file/juin2016/94/5/afij_guide_aides_etudiants_handicapes_nov_2011_613945.pdf

Conférence des présidents d'université (CPU). (2012). *Guide de l'accompagnement de l'étudiant handicapé à l'université*. CPU, Crédit coopératif. https://cache.media.enseignementsup-recherche.gouv.fr/file/Lutte_contre_les_discriminations/90/2/121671_guide-handicap-2012_275902.pdf

Conseil national du handicap, et Groupe Mornay. (2012). *Les étudiants handicapés: Quelle place dans l'enseignement supérieur?*

Livre Blanc, Paris. http://www.handipole.org/IMG/pdf/CNH_groupe-Mornay_etude_avril12.pdf

Fraisse, A., et Gangloff-Ziegler, C., Conférence des présidents d'université (CPU). (2014). *La parole aux acteurs du handicap à l'université*. Paris. <http://www.cpu.fr/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/handicap-web2.pdf>

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uploaded within a course, automatically creating alternative versions (enhanced pdf, audio, electronic braille, ePub, HTML). This tool allows the students of a course to choose the type of file that best suits their needs.

The use of human resources

A *buddy system* can be implemented. At the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, a disabled student can be guided by another peer who can help him in certain situations.

Administrative officers can act in multiple provinces and with local universities to support the disabled students (Anadolu University).

Examinations can be adapted

Anadolu University makes arrangements for students with functional disabilities, for example in regular exams with multiple choice questions and open questions they leave the open questions out for disabled students and even make shortened questions for them. For UNED, students with learning disabilities are able to do their exams in other classrooms with staff members who can support them through their exams. Sometimes a translator comes to the classroom to translate certain communications.

At the university of Jyväskylä (JYU) in Finland the most common individual arrangements are:

- Additional time during the exam session and/or when returning written tasks;
- Individual exam-arrangements with e.g. the permission to type instead of handwriting;
- Impunity for spelling or grammatical errors;
- Allowing access to various personal aids or (computer) programs;
- Support of personal assistant.

In France, FIED member universities offer other adaptations of examinations such as:

- Use of a laptop computer that has been emptied;
- Transmission of subjects in an adapted format (A3 format, line spacing, bold font, etc.);
- Assistance of a sign language interpreter or a secretary who reads scripts;
- Permission to take a break for tests lasting more than 1h30;
- Taking examinations in a different location or in a dedicated room;
- Adaptation of tests;
- Use of adapted equipment (Braille displays, foreign language keyboards, etc.).

Actions can be implemented for teachers to ensure inclusion in teaching practices.

In Finland, at the university of Jyväskylä (JYU), the main principle is to support inclusive practices. In terms of online education, it is very important to make everything accessible (using WCAG guidelines criteria AA) and to check it in advance. It is also important to have an ongoing

Supérieur et de la Recherche. (2014). *Guide pratique: le handicap, tous concernés*. http://cache.media.education.gouv.fr/file/Handicap/65/5/handicap_2014_MESR_Guide_Handicap_HD_SSHIR_365655.pdf

Sciences Po. (2018). *Guide de l'étudiant en situation de handicap*. Paris. http://www.sciencespo.fr/sites/default/files/sciencespo_guide_etudiant_handicap_web_accessible_FR.pdf

system for feedback. JYU staff are still working on these topics to find the best solutions for their institution.

An Open University with very heterogeneous student groups offers alternative study modes for all students. At the beginning of their studies, students must be informed about the possibility to have some individual arrangements. Individual arrangements are, of course, always individual and decided in the meetings with the student, one or several teachers and specialists.

These arrangements could be:

- Alternative study materials;
- Alternative study modes;
- Getting lecture materials/slides in advance;
- Possibility to record lectures if recordings are not otherwise available;
- Extended loan periods for course book loans.

Support for teachers based on pedagogical guides

To assist teachers, the Université de Poitiers (FIED-France) develops a *pedagogical and on-line exam guide*.

The UTPL (Ecuador) trains their teachers in the application of the standards, in the methodology to be followed in specific resources and in the evaluation of learning. Thus, they can adapt the instruments and techniques for evaluation as well as its criteria and duration. Intervention forms are suggested to be applied according to the type of disability (hearing, visual, mobility impairments...).

UTPL developed a *manual of pedagogical guidelines* (UTPL, 2020) for inclusive practices in order to respond to the educational needs of different groups of students with special needs.

Professional integration is one of the goals of universities.

The Université de Lille (FIED-France) develops:

- Awareness and support actions for professional integration;
- Sponsorship actions by professionals;
- Network of disability referents within the University.

Results and satisfaction

Anadolu University has a team of six people who deal with functional disabled students and makes sure the students are satisfied with the way they get their education. In Finland, JYU staff works with the Student Union to get feedback about the arrangements. The Student Union is also very active, in terms of sharing their experiences and pointing out the issues of students with disabilities.

UNED's Strategies for Inclusion of People with Disabilities

Field of subject related to diversity and inclusion

Specific Learning Disorders

2022 is the 50th anniversary of UNED. For this long period, this university has promoted people with disabilities and developed several strategies to improve their inclusion (Lorenzo Perez et al., 2021). Three guidelines are underlined: Structural measures, Student-oriented measures, and Strategies linked to the society.

The structural measures include the free registration, the reservation of places, the specialized services, the advisory board, and the volunteer program. The student-oriented measures consist of reasonable test accommodations, and digitized, individualized exams. Finally, the strategies linked to the society involve extracurricular paid internships, the SAPDU organization, the monthly newsletter on university and disability, the communication with people with disabilities, the collection of publications, and the workshop about guidance for inclusion.

Structural measures

Free registration

Spanish universities have by law free tuition for all people with disabilities that affects both undergraduate and master's degrees. In the case of unofficial titles, discounts apply. This could lead to an overdemand for official training, but even so the percentage of people with disabilities is much lower than the general percentage of university students. Distance education is in this sense the preferred modality as it has 5% of students with disabilities compared to 1.5% on average throughout the Spanish university.

Reservation of places

In some universities, reservation of places are applied in access to training. The UNED only applies it to postgraduate courses because they have a limited number of places, but not for degrees because they lack limitations and can be accessed by all people who meet the official access requirements. The percentage established is 5% by analogy to the reserve quota established for access to a public job. The justification is a projection of the reservation to employment insofar as it will only be effective if we also guarantee the training of people to access jobs.

Specialized services

All Spanish universities have services or centres for people with disabilities that are linked in different ways to the university and offer various supports. In general, we can appreciate that services can be responsible to varying degrees for the adjustments and services needed by people with disabilities (Guillamón & Rodríguez, 2010). According to the centres, other services and various activities related to university life, community and leisure are also offered. In the UNED case, UNIDIS is the centre with technical and administrative staff. The technical staff include pedagogical, psychological, accessibility, and communicational competences.

Advisory Board

The advisory board is the governing collegiate body of UNIDIS, the centre to support university members with disabilities. It is made up of persons in charge in UNED and representatives of social organizations of people with disabilities. It meets once a year to evaluate the work done and guide future actions.

Volunteer Program

References

Andreu Bueno, A. B., Pereira Calvo, A., & Rodríguez Muñoz V. M. (2011). *Guía de adaptaciones y recursos para estudiantes con discapacidad [Adjustment Guide and Resources for Students with Disabilities]*. Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia & Fundación MAPFRE.

Guillamón, J. R., & Rodríguez, V.,M. (2010). Atención y orientación a los estudiantes con discapacidad en la UNED. *Revista Española De Orientación Y Psicopedagogía*, 21(2), 391-400. <https://10.5944/reop.vol.21.num.2.2010.11541>

Lorenzo Pérez, V.; Vázquez, I.; & Feliz Murias, T. (2021). Inclusion of Students with Disabilities at UNED. Lessons Learned. In G. Ubachs; S. Meuleman; & A. Antonaci *Higher Education in the new normal: the role of online, blended and distance learning* (p. 162-171). EADTU.

Centro de Atención a Universitarios con Discapacidad (UNIDIS) (2022). Website. <http://www.uned.es/unidis>

The volunteer program allows to give personal support to students with disabilities through other students, teachers, or administrative staff who are offered for that purpose. Volunteers can provide support in learning, in the use of virtual tools, in administrative actions, in the preparation of works and activities, in participation in extracurricular activities, or in the development of exams.

Student-oriented measures

Reasonable Adjustments

There are several types of reasonable adjustments in exams (Andreu Bueno et al., 2011). We can organize them into several types:

- Adjustments in the presentation of information (e.g., font size) or technological support (paper, digital, Braille, audio)
- Adjustments in the duration. We have standardized in 30 minutes the extension of time when, starting from the diagnosis and reports received, the technicians consider that this person may need more time to perform the same test as their colleagues. When the exams are one hour or an hour and a half, the time is automatically added in the departure time granted to the student. When the test is two hours and reaches the limit of the session, the teacher is asked to reduce the content of the tasks or number of questions of the exam so that the student can perform it on equal terms with his classmates.
- Adjustments in the spaces of realization: The space is another of the important conditions for taking face-to-face tests. Students with agoraphobia may need to be in specific classroom locations such as being near the door, being in another classroom with very few students, or even being alone in another classroom. In very pronounced situations, people with very reduced mobility, people bedridden by illness, or people with chemical hypersensitivity, it is sometimes necessary to send a teacher to the student's home to take the exam. In exceptional situations such as during the pandemic or in cases where it is very difficult to send a teacher home, there is also the possibility of doing it by virtual means or with alternative tasks that can be requested in various ways.

Digitized, individualized exams

The distribution of the exams that are carried out three times a year (February, June and September) is distributed through a fully digitized procedure and teachers upload the exams to an application. This standardized system also allows the upload of individualized exams that are specifically required and adapted with the adjustments granted to students with specific educational needs. To carry out this process and after granting the adjustments to the students for each of their subjects with the authority of the rector of the university, each teacher prepares these individualized exams of his topics. These exams are associated with specific students who will be the only ones who will receive that

test adapted with the requested adjustments, whether it is printed on paper or if it is a digital file to be done on a computer.

Strategies linked to the society

Extracurricular paid internships

All Spanish universities have a number of scholarships to be able to finance extracurricular internships in companies for people with disabilities through an agreement between the conference of rectors and the ONCE foundation. For three months, students have an amount of € 600 with social expenses included to be able to exercise according to their studies in a company.

SAPDU

This is the meeting of all the services for support of people with disabilities of the Spanish universities in a dependent body on the conference of rectors. It allows to establish the coordination of actions and the exchange of experiences at the same time as meetings and the publication of documents related to the work done.

Newsletter on University and Disability

A monthly digital newsletter is published that collects all the information and news of the universities in relation to disability. It is free to subscribe and includes various sections on activities, news, meetings, publications, training, etc.

Communication with people with disabilities

UNIDIS has distribution lists, communities of people and professionals related to disability, as well as social networks through which news, activities, publications and training offered in this field are exchanged and publicized.

Collection of publications

UNIDIS has published various reports and studies, as well as the proceedings of events and congresses related to the university and disability. It is a monographic collection dependent on the UNED publishing house. Currently they can be downloaded directly from the web in digital format.

Guidance for Inclusion

Starting from 2020, we organized a workshop about guidance for inclusion with representatives of associations of people with disabilities, students, teachers, and professionals of the guidance of secondary education in order to raise the needs and knowledge of people with disabilities for their access to university. The aim is to reduce the university access gap between persons with disabilities for various reasons in which professionals and secondary school guidance services could mediate.

04 Specific Learning Disorders

Specific Learning Disorders in Distance Education

Field of subject related to diversity and inclusion

Specific Learning Disorders

Introduction

If we want to ensure equal opportunities for students with special needs, including students with specific learning disorders, and provide them with quality studies, we must first ask ourselves what is typical of these students. It is necessary to clarify what can hinder their learning and what their strong areas are so that we can then consider implementing reasonable adjustments to the study process which would allow them to achieve the required academic standards and comprehensive professional and personal development.

Who are students with specific learning disorders?

In accordance with the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11) World Health Organization (WHO, 2021) and the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) American Psychiatric Association (APA, 2013), this group of students has neurodevelopmental disorders characterized by significant and persistent difficulties in learning foundational academic skills for reading, writing, and/or mathematics. "The affected academic skills are substantially and quantifiably below those expected for the individual's chronological age, and cause significant interference with academic or occupational performance, or with activities of daily living, as confirmed by individually administered standardized achievement measures and comprehensive clinical assessment." (DSM-5, 2013, p. 67) The term specific learning disorders refers to a very diverse group of disorders that spread on a continuum ranging from mild, moderate to severe. What these disorders have in common is the fact that they arise from an individual, where one or more psychological processes that are crucial for successful information processing are disturbed (attention, memory, linguistic processing, social cognition, perception, metacognition) (Kavale & Forness, 2000; Magajna, 2002). Deficiencies affect the cognitive processing of verbal and non-verbal information, hinder the acquisition and automation of school skills, and affect learning and the functioning of an individual across their lifespan (Košak Babuder et al., 2018).

It should be pointed out that "developmental learning disorder is not due to a disorder of intellectual development, sensory impairment (vision or hearing), neurological or motor disorder, lack of availability of education, lack of proficiency in the language of academic instruction, or psychosocial adversity" (ICD-11, 2021). These students therefore do not have reduced mental abilities, so it is more appropriate to use the

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Jakšič Ivačič, Ž., Fricelj, N., Košak Babuder, M., & Knez, M. (2020). *Poučevanje študentov s posebnimi potrebami, Priročnik za visokošolske učitelje, strokovne sodelavce in druge, ki se v študijskem procesu srečujejo s študenti s posebnimi potrebami [Teaching Students with Special Needs: Handbook for higher education teachers, assistants, and others who meet students with special needs during the study process]*. University of Ljubljana.

University of Ljubljana.

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Kavale, K. A., & Forness, S. R. (2000). What Definitions of Learning Disability Say and Don't Say, *A Critical Analysis. Journal of Learning Disabilities, 33*(3), 239–256.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/002221940003300303>

Košak Babuder, M., et al. (2018). Študija o stanju ureditve posebnih skupin študentov v visokem šolstvu, Nacionalna študija – poročilo *[Study on the State of Regulation: Special groups of students in higher education, National Study – Report]*. Republic of Slovenia, Ministry of Education, Science

term “learning disorder” and not “learning disability”, since some authors, especially those from the United Kingdom, use the term “learning disability” to denote intellectual developmental disability or mental retardation (Vidyadharan & Tharayil, 2019). Moreover, Vidyadharan and Tharayil (2019) advocate for the use of the term learning disorder in order to reduce the stigma associated with the use of the term disability. It is true, however, that certain disorders, depending on the intensity, lead to poor academic ability (disability). We need to be aware, however, that the poor academic ability can be the result of several different factors and not just the brain’s ability to perceive or process verbal or non-verbal information, which is typical for students with specific learning disorder. These students may have average or above-average mental abilities, but often due to a slower and insufficiently automated performance of some academic skills they cannot achieve and demonstrate their knowledge under normal conditions (Jakšič Ivačič et al., 2020).

Students with specific learning disorders are a very heterogeneous group. Students can have the following types of problems (DSM-5, 2013, p. 67; Jakšič Ivačič et al., 2020; Košak Babuder et al., 2018):

- Dyslexia – reading disorders,
- Dysgraphia – writing disorders,
- Dysorthography – spelling disorders, troubles with grammar and punctuation accuracy,
- Dyscalculia – impairment in mathematics (specify with number sense, memorization of arithmetic facts, accurate or fluent calculation, accurate math reasoning),
- Dyspraxia – impaired motor coordination,
- Nonverbal specific learning disorders – disorders in the field of motor skills, abilities of visual-spatial organization and social skills.

Specific learning disorders can occur alongside other neurodevelopmental (e.g., ADHD – Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, communication disorders, autistic spectrum disorder) or other mental disorders (e.g., anxiety, depression, personality disorders) (DSM-5, 2013; Jakšič Ivačič et al., 2020). It is common that specific learning disorders co-occur with ADHD, for which is characteristic a less effective ability to regulate attention, restlessness, and impulsivity. ADHD is explained by weak executive functions and reduced ability to self-regulate, which, while studying, can be reflected in problems with: activation, maintaining focus, mental effort, motivation, emotional arousal, and less effective organization (e.g., time, obligations, study material...) (ibid.). “ADHD can significantly hinder students’ performance in all areas of life: academic, emotional and social, and later in life, issues with performing in the workplace can occur.” (Jakšič Ivačič et al., 2020, p.57).

According to DSM-5 (2013), individuals with specific learning disorder can have negative functional consequences across their lifespan,

and Sport. http://mizs.arhiv-spletisc.gov.si/fileadmin/mizs.gov.si/pageuploads/Visoko_solstvo/Statistika_in_analize/StudijaPosEbneSkupineVStudentov.pdf

Magajna, L. (2002). Specifične učne težave – prepoznavanje, razumevanje, premagovanje [Specific Learning Disorders – Recognizing, Understanding, and Overcoming Them]. In N. Končnik Goršič & M. Kavkler (Eds.), *Specifične učne težave otrok in mladostnikov* [Specific Learning Disorders: Children and Adolescents] (pp. 15–27). Svetovalni center za otroke, mladostnike in starše Ljubljana [The Counselling Centre for Children, Adolescents and Parents Ljubljana].

Magajna, L. (2008). Specifične učne težave: od modela deficitov k rezilientnosti [Specific Learning Disorders: from the Deficit Model to Resilience]. In L. Magajna et al., *Učne težave v osnovni šoli: problemi, perspektive, priporočila* [Learning problems/difficulties in the elementary school – problems, perspectives, recommendations] (pp. 32–42). Zavod Republike Slovenije za šolstvo [National Education Institute].

Rebolj, A. B. (2018). *Prilagoditve za študente s posebnimi potrebami pri doseganju zahtevanih akademskih standardov (neobjavljena doktorska disertacija)* [Adjustments for Students with Special Needs in Attaining Required Higher Education Academic Standards, unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Arts.

including lower academic attainment, higher rates of high school dropout, lower rates of postsecondary education, poorer overall mental health, higher rates of unemployment, etc. It can be concluded that for many students with specific learning disorders it is not as easy to get to the stage where they could enrol into university compared to the students who do not have a specific learning disorder as severe and have higher mental abilities. Students with specific learning disorders who have developed compensatory strategies that enable them to learn successfully and have received appropriate support and assistance during primary and secondary education can also have a higher chance of enrolment. It is therefore important to ensure as inclusive education as possible at all levels and enable individuals to develop optimally and achieve academic success. We need to be aware that these students can also have strengths that can help them learn successfully; we need to help them discover their strong areas.

Strong areas of these students may include: the ability to connect information and have a holistic view, the ability to solve complex problems, the ability to visualize different processes and spatial relationships and an in-depth understanding of them, mental flexibility and creativity (Jakšič Ivačič et al., 2020; Košak Babuder et al., 2018). Some students with specific learning disorders have exceptional talents or gifts, so they can be considered twice exceptional (ibid.). Among them we can find those who are gifted in science, who write prose and poetry, and those who are artists, managers, architects, innovators, and so on (Košak Babuder et al., 2018). The findings of in-depth qualitative studies of successful adults with specific learning disorders conducted by Gerber et al. (1997, in Magajna, 2008) are interesting; in the interviews, the researchers were told that it was crucial for them to take responsibility and thus control of their lives. They spoke openly about their problems, acknowledged and accepted their limitations, but they were also aware of their strengths. This allowed them to function effectively and progress despite their limitations.

It is important that every student, with or without special educational needs, takes responsibility for their own learning and the learning of others in the learning community. At the Open University of the University of Jyväskylä (JYUOpen), guidelines for students have been created to support their participation in the online course. These guidelines are welcome for all students and especially for students with special educational needs. See these guidelines in the description of good practices at JYU, Finland (p.66).

Specific learning disorders do not disappear with age, but individuals can, in accordance with their abilities and with appropriate pedagogical support and interventions, develop certain strategies that help them learn more successfully.

University of Ljubljana (2018). *Pravilnik o študentih s posebnim statusom na Univerzi v Ljubljani [Rules on the SSN of the University of Ljubljana]*.

https://www.uni-lj.si/o_univerzi_v_ljubljani/organizacija_pravilniki_in_porocila/predpisi_statut_ul_in_pravilniki/2014101712292151/

Vidyadharan, V., & Tharayil, H. M. (2019). Learning Disorder or Learning Disability: Time to Rethink. *Indian Journal of Psychological Medicine*, 4(3), 276–278.

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However, they will still have spelling problems, slow and effortful reading, or problems making important interferences from written text or from numerical information in work-related written documents. Therefore, they often need to reread the material to understand it or get the main point. They might thus avoid the activities that require reading or writing or use alternative approaches to access print (e.g., audiobooks, audiovisual media, text-to-speech/speech-to-text software) (DSM-5, 2013). Košak Babuder et al. (2018) state that these students cannot function properly and demonstrate their knowledge under time pressure due to problems in the field of rote memory, fast sequential recall, working memory, graphomotor problems, etc., without the use of some compensatory strategies or without adequate technical support. They further emphasize the importance of choosing the appropriate study program, which should be in accordance with the individual's strong areas and interests.

Specific challenges and possible approaches/solutions

Specific learning disorders can present a significant barrier when trying to succeed academically. Many students with specific learning disorders, who do not receive adequate support and adjustments during primary and secondary education, fail to complete their education, or their achievements are not good enough for them to enter tertiary education. The first step is to secure their entry into higher education. Data from the last twenty years show that the number of students with specific learning disorders in education systems is growing all over the world, but many still, despite their good potential, fail to enrol in higher education (Košak Babuder et al., 2018). For students with specific learning disorders, accessible vocational or career counselling (especially before enrolment) is important in order to receive appropriate support and relevant information when choosing a study program. The counselling should take into account both their limitations and their strengths and interests. Websites of universities and faculties should include information on the process of obtaining special status and the possibilities of adjustments and support for these students.

The students who manage to enrol in tertiary education need to be provided with appropriate support and adjustments so that they can successfully study and achieve the learning goals and required academic standards. Problems resulting from specific deficits can be a significant obstacle to achieving academic success (Košak Babuder et al., 2018). Compensatory strategies that have been effective enough in primary and secondary education are not necessarily effective enough at the university level. Specific deficits can hinder students from learning independently, attending lectures, and completing study obligations and exams. Most often, they have problems listening to lectures and making notes at the same time, reading a large amount of a more demanding text, writing seminar papers, organizing study activities, preparing for exams, and recalling knowledge when taking exams (ibid.). The consequences of these problems are reflected in a higher level of stress and more time spent achieving a similar level of efficiency as it can be achieved by their colleagues without any problems. This can negatively affect their self-confidence and self-esteem (ibid.).

Such problems of students are mostly invisible, so many teachers do not know or believe that students with specific learning disorders need any adjustments to the study process for successful study and that the reason for applying to gain a status of a student with special needs is not about finding the easy way out. It is therefore important that teachers receive appropriate trainings, where they can gain relevant knowledge about what can hinder students with specific learning disorders from successful education and how they can adapt the study process, without lowering the study requirements, for the students to be successful. The problem may also be that some higher education teachers have reservations about the ability of students with specific learning disorders; they have doubts that these students can achieve the required levels of specific competences in a particular field of study and the subsequent professional activity (e.g. language studies), as has been shown in two surveys where higher education teachers in Slovenia shared these opinions (Kořak Babuder et al. 2018; Rebolj, 2018). However, it may happen that out of pity and because they do not know how to act, teachers give in to students and lower the level of required academic standards (Rebolj, 2018).

At the university level, however, it is necessary to provide a well-established procedure with which a student can apply for and obtain the status of a student with special needs upon submission of appropriate supporting documents (e.g., medical reports ...). For instance, at the University of Ljubljana (Slovenia) students can apply for different statuses: special status for student with special needs, status of student athlete, status of student-recognized artist, status of student participating in international competitions, and status of student-parent (Rules on the Students with Special Needs (SSN) of the University of Ljubljana, 2018). By acquiring the status, students gain help and various adjustments when it comes to study obligations, as they are facing additional obstacles that due to additional burdens or restrictions affect their inclusion in the study process and study obligations. Students with specific learning disorders thus acquire the status of a student with special needs. This status can be obtained by students with very different problems and needs (for instance, long-term or chronically ill students, blind and visually-impaired students, deaf and hearing-impaired students, students with mobility impairments, students with speech and language impairments, students with autism spectrum disorders, physical and mental health disorders, etc.). These subgroups represent very diverse students so it is always necessary to think about adjustments and plan them in accordance with the individual student, taking into consideration his/her problems, limitations, needs and strengths.

Similar arrangements for students with special educational needs are made at the University of Jyväskylä (JYU, Finland) and the University of Aberta (UAb, Portugal). In both cases, the needs of the student in question are considered when preparing the proposal for adjustments. In the description of the good practises at JYU you can also read about the Finnish legislation and the fundamental orientation of the university towards more accessible higher education and inclusive practices.

A possible solution can be found in a tutor teacher being assigned to each student with specific needs and together they can formulate a proposal for adjustments to the study process. The tutor then monitors the student's progress and, if necessary, after consultation with the student proposes new solutions. The proposal to adapt the study process is presented to all teachers who teach this particular student. Of course, each student must be empowered to negotiate with each of the teachers for the adjustments they need in order to be successful in his/her study. A group of tutor teachers who look after students with special needs can also be trained to formulate adaptation proposals.

For students with specific learning disorders to be successful in their studies, a number of adjustments can be made. Let us look at some possible adjustments based on our own practice and recommendations listed in the Handbook for higher education teachers, assistants, and others who meet students with special needs during the study process (Jakřiĉ Ivaĉiĉ et al., 2020, pp. 55-56). Recommendations can be divided into four areas:

1. Design of teaching materials:

- Strong contrast between background and letters. The information should not be written on a graphic background.

- Use of font sizes between 12 and 18 with a distinct legible appearance (avoiding italics and underlining phrases).
- Use of sans serif fonts (e.g. Arial, Calibri, Verdana, and not Times New Roman).
- Use of line spacing (1.5) and paragraph spacing.
- Use of lowercase letters.
- Matte paper surface.
- Align left only.
- Shorter sentences (e.g. a maximum of 18 words per sentence).
- The illustration/photo should be above or below the text.
- Digitization of learning materials (e.g. handouts that allow personalized adaptation of size/shape/colour of letters...).

2. Contents of teaching materials:

- Information/content should be concise.
- The content should be linguistically simplified (short, simple sentences).
- Clear instructions (as few long sentences as possible).

3. Study process:

- If possible, provide materials, abstracts, Power-point presentations in advance so that the student can simply add notes during the lecture.
- Clear structure of the learning unit/lecture: announcement of objectives, important concepts and contents, clear explanation, clarification of new terms and finally a summary of key points.
- The power-point presentation should not be overloaded with text.
- Enable the use of assistive technology - ICT (e.g. laptops, tablets, readers, smart pens).
- Enable borrowing the materials for longer periods and assistance in finding study literature in the library.

4. Completing study obligations:

- Time extensions for submitting seminar papers, research reports, etc., and preparing for the exam, for which the student agrees with the professor in advance.
- Assisting the student with finding a tutor who can help them with the organization and distribution of study obligations.
- Extended time for taking the written exam and allowing them enough time to think about the answer in the oral exam as well.
- Taking an oral exam instead of a written exam (this, however, does not suit all students and some find it easier to show their knowledge in a written exam).
- Providing a special, quiet space for the exam.

- If necessary, enable the use of a computer to take written exams.
- If possible, the use of calculators, tables, pre-agreed formulas should be allowed.
- Font, spelling, grammatical structures, word order, and punctuation should not be assessed.

Common adaptations for students with specific learning disorders are also described in the two examples of good practice attached.

To be able to provide appropriate support to students with specific learning disorders, higher education teachers, assistants, other employees in contact with the students, and tutors, do not need to become experts on the topic of specific learning disorders (Kořak Babuder et al., 2018). They should understand the problems that students face, be willing to help, and be familiar with and use some simple teaching strategies that help students with such problems. Students with special needs themselves emphasize the importance of accessibility and understanding of teachers and that these teachers have a friendly, respectful attitude (Kořak Babuder et al., 2018; Rebolj, 2018). Moreover, many of these quality teaching strategies benefit all students; by introducing them into the teaching of all students, the focus is not placed solely on students with special needs. For example, accessible pre-formatted templates are provided for all teaching materials (an example of good practice at Alberta University).

In addition to adapting learning materials, adapting the study process and fulfilling study obligations, students with specific learning disorders need professional help and support, which is aimed at developing both self-regulated learning and interpersonal skills to achieve better inclusion and their well-being. One of the possibilities in ensuring greater involvement of students with special needs and providing support is the introduction of student tutors. These tutors can help individual students in the organization of study obligations, collection of study materials, preparation for the exam, organization of study groups, mutual socializing, etc. (Kořak Babuder et al., 2018).

These students need to be encouraged to apply for the status and ask for appropriate adjustments and be able to speak up when they do not receive the adequate support, even when they are entitled to it. The problem arises when some teachers do not consider adjustments to their study process despite the fact that the student has acquired the status and a proposal for possible adjustments has been formulated (Kořak Babuder et al., 2018; Rebolj, 2018).

One issue that arises here is that some students do not want to expose themselves and reveal their problems, as they are afraid of being misunderstood, or being labelled incompetent by teachers and thus reducing their chances of academic success, etc. If a student wants to make adjustments to their study process, they will also have to talk about their special needs. The precondition for this is self-awareness: knowing both one's good qualities and accepting limitations and one's special needs (Fricelj, 2020). Furthermore, the student needs to be aware that special needs do not define them as a person. Every student with special needs should therefore consider the pros and cons of sharing their limitations openly. It is important that they themselves make decisions about the studies, even if they first consult with the people they trust (see also the two appendix of good practice). Should they need adjustments, it makes sense to talk about their special needs, either to an individual teacher, to the person handling special needs students, or a tutor (teacher or student).

Under the mentorship of Janja Kořir, the manual titled "Self-Advocacy of Students with Special Needs" by Nina Fricelj, a student of Special and Rehabilitation Pedagogy, was created at the University of Ljubljana within the project "University of Ljubljana Career Centres – The compass on your career path". It is a manual made by students for students, designed to facilitate the transition from high school to university. Based on personal experience and stories, the handbook contains key information that can help students start their studies and apply for the status of a student with special needs. It includes guidance on how to find yourself in a university environment; how, to whom, and when to reveal their special needs; how to communicate with professors about adjustments; how to strengthen self-advocacy; how to strengthen other skills and knowledge for independent decision-making in their studies; at the end, a list of steps for obtaining the status of a student with special needs is attached.

"It's important to talk about everything, about dyslexia, ADHD, dyspraxia, autism... People with special needs need to be understood. Being different does not mean that we are not normal or that we are bad people. It is important that we talk about it openly, raise awareness so that people will know more about these issues and consequently understand and support people with specific learning disorders better. /... /" (Viktor, student with ADHD, in Fricelj, 2020, p. 26)

A good example of the inclusion of students with special needs in the academic community is the creation of a web area in Moodle for interaction between students and alumni at the University of Alberta.

Examples of good practices

Some characteristics of good practices:

- Affordable and quality career counselling before entering the university.
- Easily accessible information on the possibilities of obtaining a status for special needs and possible adjustments of the study process.
- A well-established procedure for obtaining status at the university and faculty level.
- Informing and training teachers about characteristics of students with specific learning disorders and possible adjustments that could be made to the study process.
- Suggestions about the possible adjustments are formed alongside the students according to their needs.
- Introduction of teacher tutors who advise students with special needs about possible adjustments, and form a proposal about said adjustments, inform other colleagues about them, monitor students' progress, etc. Students can turn to them when faced with a problem (e.g. when the appropriate adjustments are not made).
- The possibility of providing help in a form of a personal student tutor who helps the student with special needs with integrating in the academic community of teachers and students, planning and organizing their studies, gathering study material, organizing study groups, etc.
- Organized training for teacher tutors and student tutors and evaluating their work in the form of acknowledged pedagogical hours for teachers or credit points for students.
- Organizing additional training to develop learning strategies (e.g., enhancing self-regulated learning), interpersonal skills, and empowering students with special needs.
- Increased cooperation with various experts, institutions, and associations that can in any way contribute to more successful work with students with specific learning disorders.

Conclusion

The inclusion of students with special needs, including students with specific learning disorders in higher education, must be systemically regulated so that future students will already be familiar with demands of a specific study program before enrolling. They should also be informed about the possibility of obtaining the status of a student with special needs and the possible adjustments to the study process. Procedures that ensure reasonable adjustments to the study process must be well-established. When planning adaptations for each student, it is good to keep in mind that students with specific learning disorders are a very heterogeneous group. For this reason, one should think about possible adjustments together with individual student, modify them to his/her needs and demands of the studies, evaluate them during the studies, and if necessary modify them again. Above all, it is important that we try to understand students with special needs and be ready to find solutions with them in a way that allows them to study successfully and achieve expected academic standards.

Good practices on Specific Learning Disorders from Jyväskylä University

Field of subject related to diversity and inclusion

Specific Learning Disorders

Introduction

The University of Jyväskylä (JYU) is a multidisciplinary, research university – community of almost 2600 experts and 14 000 degree students. The Open University of University of Jyväskylä (JYUOpen) is an integral part of the University of Jyväskylä. It offers studies that are mainly available online and open for all. Open university does not offer degrees, but parts of the University degrees, and many paths to the degrees run by faculties. Amount of active, registered students at the JYUOpen is about 16 000.

According to Finnish legislation it is not allowed to ask about or register disabilities of the students. It is always on student's own responsibility to inform the staff about their special educational needs or disabilities. As a staff, we can only inform students about their rights and the support services that we can offer. According to legislation, there must be available some accommodations or individual arrangements when needed, but formal medical certificates are usually needed to reach those options. Equality in education is the base of our educational system. All kind of discrimination, including on disability bases, is forbidden. Nowadays, we have a national focus on the under-represented student groups and on supporting their equal educational paths. Unfortunately, the publication "[Towards more accessible higher education and higher education institutions](#)" (2021) is available only in Finnish, with the abstract in English.

At JYU we have a JYU Vice-rector's decision (2.12.2019) about [Accessibility of education at the university of Jyväskylä](#). The decision consist of principles to follow at the University of Jyväskylä, e.g. responsibilities, arrangements related to student admission and individual arrangements during the studies. It also gives the guidelines for social, physical, and digital services. Please, follow the link above to see the whole document. Higher education in Finland is free of charge. Financial support needed is organized by other institutions, not by universities.

Human support for students with disabilities (and other students as well) is based on the cooperation: JYU administrative "[Student and academic services](#)" works with the JYU faculties and JYU independent institutions. Every student (all, not only one with the disabilities) have a lot of wellbeing support services available under the "[Student life](#)" [concept](#) including study skills support (planning, scheduling, study habits), study motivation issues and procrastination, study anxiety (tests, writer's block, public speaking), life skills and personal development, difficulties with stress, anxiety, depression, learning

difficulties, accessibility issues, bullying and harassment and student drug and alcohol abuse prevention.

Wide staff training is also needed to change the attitudes, to teach how to make accessible materials, how to design courses and how to run accessible synchronous online teaching. To support our staff we have organized staff training (face to face and online courses) and shared some checklists related to accessible learning environments and materials.

Good practices

In terms of online education, it is very important to make everything accessible (using Web Content Accessibility Guidelines, criteria AA) and check it in advance. It is also important to have an ongoing system for feedback. We are still working on these topics to find the best solutions for our institution.

JYUOpen with very heterogenous student groups offers alternative study modes for all students. Flexibility and offering alternatives seem to be a very effective way to tackle challenges caused by huge diversity of students. However, sometimes some individual arrangements are needed.

Informing students already in the beginning of their studies about the possibility to have some individual arrangements and to have a document about the recommendations for individual arrangements. Individual arrangements are always individual, decided in the meetings with the student, teacher/teachers and specialists.

The most common individual arrangements are:

- Extra time for the exam and/or return of written tasks.
- Separate exam mode with e.g. the ability to respond on the computer.
- Alternative study materials.
- Alternative study modes.
- Getting lecture materials/slides in advance.
- Possibility to record lectures if recordings are not otherwise available.
- Impunity for spelling or grammatical errors.
- Extended loan period for course book loans.
- Allow access to various personal aids or (computer) programs.
- Support of personal assistant.

During the studies some of the students find out that they have some challenges with reading and writing and that they might have dyslexia. At the Open University we offer for them an opportunity to participate in online screening test (developed by Niilo Mäki Institute) that shows if further, more formal, testing is recommended. Our specialists give them a feedback about their results.

In Finland we have a national Library "[Celia](#)" that offers e.g. audiobooks for students.

Celia produces and distributes literature in accessible formats, such as talking books and braille books, together with public libraries and publishers. In addition to fiction and non-fiction, Celia also produces and distributes textbooks in accessible formats for all educational levels. [Celia's books are available online](#) as well as on CDs and a variety of physical media. Higher Education Institutions can register their students with specific learning disabilities, visual impairments etc. for that service.

To support students' participation in an online course at the JYUOpen we have produced following instructions for students:

As a student, you are responsible for your own studies

- Before the start of the course, read the practical instructions and schedules.
- Get the necessary literature and learning materials on time.
- Find out what's unclear.
- Start making weekly tasks and participating in online discussions in time, in the beginning of the week.
- Show your own expertise. There's not just one kind of expertise. When you share your own expertise, you can also get it back from others.
- Boldly bring out your own reasoned thoughts.
- Inform the teacher (and other students) of any obstacles to participation in teaching.
- Give feedback on the teaching.

As a student, you are also responsible for learning other people

- Support and promote with your activities the learning of others: stick to the schedule, take care of your part in teamwork or group work and online discussion.
- Be sure to appreciate and respect other students and teachers, be open and friendly and justify your own views.
- Strive for constructive cooperation and feedback.
- Take feedback as a gift: constructive feedback enables learning.
- Write in the discussion area in a way that takes account of readership and readability: prefer short, clearly expressed, and consistent messages; use exact headers.
- Appreciate diversity and differences: we can experience, feel, and express things differently.
- Keep in mind that discussions during the course include confidentiality and anonymity: please do not pass on any personal matters, names, or other identification information when processing persons, situations, or events outside the course.

Good practices on Specific Learning Disorders by Universidade Aberta

Field of subject related to diversity and inclusion

Specific Learning Disorders

Introduction

The number of students with cognitive difficulties is relatively scarce since only a few reach higher education. Those that manage to enrol in university usually have mild or moderate levels of disorders, and a strong will to succeed. People with severe, and some with moderate levels of learning disorders often do not even try higher education, preferring more practical professional outings.

At Universidade Aberta (UAb), candidates and students with specific learning disorders follow the general protocol concerning students with special needs as defined by the University's policies: they must apply for the special needs' status (upon registration, or after), providing supporting documentation (an official medical certificate and further medical reports, when necessary). Each case is submitted to a board called the "Student Monitoring Committee". This committee is composed of the representatives from various sectors relevant to the path of the students (Academic Services; Documentation/Library Services; Virtual Campus Support; Student's Association; Pedagogical Council; and also the coordination team of the programme in which each student is enrolled), in articulation with the Accessibility Project which is the central element of support for students with special education needs (acting both at the level of research and of practical intervention in the field). It is this committee that decides what the adjustments and compensatory strategies to be implemented for each student to help his/her study process are. The decision aims at being reasonable and adequate, based on the consideration of medical reports, on the requirements and objectives of the study programme, and on the request of the student, where he/she states what kind of measures he/she considers to be adequate. This self-evaluation is crucial since it provides a more tangible perception of the student (e.g., a student may need more time to do tests and exams, not because that is necessary at the level of his/her capacities, but because it is fundamental to prevent additional anxiety that may inhibit finishing exams).

Good practices

Some issues are considered regardless of whether there is anyone who needs them or not, namely templates for documents (teaching materials, tests, and exams). UAb provides

References

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accessible pre-formatted templates (in accordance with universal design) to be used by teachers (non-experts in accessibility rules) when they produce teaching-learning materials. In addition, guidelines and examples of good practices and tips for problem solutions are provided in a document with recommendations, produced by the teachers that work in the Accessibility Project, aimed at the teaching staff, non-teaching staff, and programme coordinators. This document includes recommendations and hints for adjustments valid for various kinds of special needs. Since it is considered at UAb that every adjustment that is important for students with special needs and does not disturb other students should be put to practice, various procedures are expected to be implemented even if there are no students with special needs in that class (e.g. pdf documents created, not as image, but using OCR become accessible to screen readers, and are also better for anyone that needs to do word search).

As far as students with special learning disorders are concerned, the following recommendations (concerning web design in Moodle) are meaningful:

- Clear organization of the virtual classroom and of messages with instructions (avoid excessive complexity; large amounts of information; large number of formulae or of graphic marks such as italics, underlined, bold...);
- The structure of the virtual classroom must be as simple and clear as possible (e.g., with dates clearly stated, and with topics organized down-top so that the most recent topic appears first);
- Graphics, diagrams, mind maps... should be completed with detailed explanations to avoid reading difficulties;
- Accuracy of the provided instructions and stability of the information, avoiding changes.

Other possible adjustments are:

- Extension of home loan of books from the library;
- Deadline extensions for work delivery.

Student-directed counselling focuses on questioning the relevance of their disclosure to teachers. Students are free to consider that their cognitive difficulties are mild and that they do not need any support during their study process, and just need a time extension during exams (electronically programmed by non-teaching staff). When students consider that their situation must be reported to teachers, they can use a model of presentation, where they state their difficulties and choose from a list the kind of support that they consider adequate to his/her specific situation.

Adjustments, of pedagogical or technical nature, concerning specific students are considered in teachers' meetings with the coordination team of each study programme. In fact, a representative of the Accessibility Project is available to attend these sectorial meetings whenever there are students with special needs enrolled in that specific programme. It is intended that adjustments comply with a balance that

supports the students, without harming the scientific requirements of the study programme. The success of the adaptations aiming at levelling equal opportunities for students with specific learning disorders during the study process are closely monitored by teachers.

During exams, students with specific learning disorders have extra time. There is also the possibility of doing an oral exam, upon request. From 2020 on, because of the pandemic, UAb's exams are no longer in person. Therefore, students can take them in their own homes, with their computers (with access to orthographic correctors, and calculators).

For what concerns interaction with colleagues, the Accessibility Project has created a web space in Moodle intended for the interaction between students and former students with special needs. Apart from the dissemination of information that may be of interest for the group (special grants, internships...), this space is destined to be a dialogue environment among students and with former students, so that they can learn from each other, get to know inspiring cases of success, and strengthen their self-confidence. There are no designated mentors since the group functions as a whole, strategically addressed at the integration and support of new students, and thus preventing dropouts.

05 Migrants and Ethnicity

Migrants and ethnicity in digital higher education

Field of subject related to diversity and inclusion

Migrants and ethnicity

Introduction

Compared to some decades ago, participation in higher education studies is much more common in Europe, also as an increasing number of jobs require a higher education qualification. In some European countries, every second school graduate accesses Higher Education (HE); also, a large number of Third Country Nationals (TCN) in Europe are in fact international students. While integration can be important for any TCN or EU international student who may decide to stay in their host country, those with a refugee background as a group arguably have more urgent integration needs.

As stated in the European Union's Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-27, the challenge of integration and inclusion is particularly relevant for migrants, not only newcomers but also for third-country nationals who might have become EU citizens. Integration and inclusion are key objectives for people coming to Europe and for the local communities, as well as for the long-term well-being of European societies and the stability of European economies.

Furthermore, the Union requires Universities to make a strong commitment to find innovative ways to offer educational opportunities to TCN as a way towards integration and inclusion. The Action Plan makes special reference to the role of education in this process.

In this context, the role of Open Universities becomes even more important. By their nature, OUs target adult students, who aim mostly at capacity building or career change via upskilling / reskilling. Therefore, Open Universities are by mission inclusive, innovative and responsive, promoting social justice and equality of opportunity and their role cannot be confined within the boundaries of their campus and community.

The mission of this working group was to identify the different target groups and their educational needs, especially TCN, second and third generation migrants, by considering them as candidate students of open Universities. At the same time, we studied ways to distill inclusive behavior of University staff at all levels of management, teaching, research, support and administration, including third parties (e.g. that do web design, production of teaching material etc.), as well as HE policy makers and other stakeholders. Finally, we explored the organisational conditions for the implementation of various supportive measures in order to identify or create institutional strategies and a reference model (based on best practice examples).

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Definitions

The population in question covers different sub-groups such as migrants, asylum seekers and designated refugees. **Migrant** is an umbrella term, not defined under international law, reflecting the common lay understanding of a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons. The term includes a number of well-defined legal categories of people, such as migrant workers; persons whose particular types of movements are legally defined, such as smuggled migrants; as well as those whose status or means of movement are not specifically defined under international law, such as international students.

At the international level, no universally accepted definition for "migrant" exists. Two approaches are generally adopted to define the term "migrant": the inclusivist approach, followed among others by International Organization for Migration, considers the term "migrant" as an umbrella term covering all forms of movements; the residualist approach excludes from the term "migrant" those who flee wars or persecution.

For the purpose of collecting data on migration, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) defines "international migrant" as "any person who changes his or her country of usual residence" (UN DESA, Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration, Revision 1 (1998) para.32). The UN DESA definition excludes movements that are due to "recreation, holiday, visits to friends and relatives, business, medical treatment or religious pilgrimages" (ibid.). Specific definitions have also been developed by UN DESA to identify short term and long-term migrants.

Asylum seeker is an individual who is seeking international protection. In countries with individualized procedures, an asylum seeker is someone whose claim has not yet been finally decided on by the country in which he or she has submitted it. Not every asylum seeker will ultimately be recognized as a refugee, but every recognized refugee is initially an asylum seeker.

Refugee is a person who qualifies for the protection of the United Nations provided by the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), in accordance with UNHCR's Statute and, notably, subsequent General Assembly's resolutions clarifying the scope of UNHCR's competency, regardless of whether or not he or she is in a country that is a party to the 1951 Convention or the 1967 Protocol – or a relevant regional refugee instrument – or whether or not he or she has been recognized by his or her host country as a refugee under either of these instruments.

Data on participation in higher education of such a diverse population remains scarce. In the following table, Eurostat provides data for the percentage of third country nationals in higher education for **2020** without making distinctions among sub-groups. It is noticeable that several countries do not provide the required data.

Heckmann, Friedrich et.al. (2008), Education and Migration: Strategies for integrating migrant children in European schools and societies.

European Union - 27 countries	10,2
Belgium	17,6
Bulgaria	:
Czechia	10,0
Denmark	12,1
Germany (until 1990 former territory of the FRG)	6,7
Estonia	:
Ireland	20,2
Greece	:
Spain	9,4
France	19,2
Croatia	13,4
Italy	3,5
Cyprus	16,6
Latvia	:
Lithuania	:
Luxembourg	17,7
Hungary	:
Malta	:
Netherlands	13,6
Austria	15,3
Poland	:
Portugal	:
Romania	:
Slovenia	:
Slovakia	:
Finland	:
Sweden	8,4

(Eurostat: EDAT_LFS_9912)

Indicative are also the OECD data published in 2018, which refer to the previous year, according to which the percentage of the foreign-born among the 18-64 population who have attained a university degree is 29% for the EU in total. In Greece this figure is 17%, while for Germany is 23%, for France 29%, for Italy 13% and for Spain 24% (OECD/EU, 2018).

In this context on-line course offering access to higher education degrees can become central in creating opportunities for migrants and refugees, helping to overcome structural barriers of all kinds.

Specific challenges

We identified several challenges at different levels: TCN, University staff and management, institution, policy makers and stakeholders. It is interesting to note that some of these challenges are shared by several target groups, an indication that comprehensive policies, if designed and applied systematically, can be very efficient.

Awareness of cultural diversity (for migrants and staff) in European Universities differs greatly according to the history of immigration of each country. Southern European countries until recently have not been on the receiving end of the migration movement; during the last decade especially, the rise in numbers of refugees and asylum seekers has made the issue of visibility of cultural diversity an everyday issue. For academic institutions despite the proclaimed motivation to incorporate migrant students, during the daily encounter with cultural diversity we are still confronted with many challenges, such as the "color-blind" and the "difference as deficit" perspectives, partially resulting from a lack of knowledge and readiness to approach diversity. However, lack of awareness sometimes appears in a reciprocal manner, as TCN are not aware of the culture, societal structure and administration procedures of the hosting societies.

In another dimension, we identified a lack of awareness of the potential that HE studies can generate for TCN pursuing them. **The lack of role models** for the migrants, either as successful graduates or members of staff, can also hinder their participation in HE programs. The involvement of mentors and role models from the same ethnic background can support students and their families to integrate better and understand the education system in the host country. Often mentors are older immigrant peers who have successfully completed education in the host country themselves and are therefore able to guide the children in terms of individual homework support, but also in relation to family matters that teachers may not be able to relate to or understand. In the Netherlands, for example, there are many individuals and organizations taking part in these mentoring activities (Heckmann, 2008).

One of the main barriers against inclusion of migrants in tertiary education is the lack of knowledge of the host country's **language**, which is even more evident for the refugees and asylum seekers that have entered European Union during the last decade. In European host countries, languages continue to be a challenge for successful integration of refugees. Language barriers may prevent successful communication with the local population on a daily basis, and significantly reduce access to essential services and support, which is often inaccessible to refugees who are not familiar with the Latin alphabet, or who have low levels of literacy in their own languages. For many refugees arriving in Europe, learning English, or the local language of the host country, is one of the first steps to take. For those who pick up some vocabulary and are able to introduce themselves or manage a short conversation, there is still a long way to go before they can talk about health issues or legal matters.

Recognition of prior learning and skills / language **certification** processes are, at best, slow. The legal basis for the recognition of degrees of third country nationals in Europe is the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC), based on which signatory countries establish various instruments and structures for the recognition of foreign qualifications and/or study periods abroad. However, a 2016 report of the LRC Committee monitoring the implementation of the convention found that in 35 out of 50 countries surveyed, this article was not formally implemented – neither through national level regulations, nor through recognition bodies or agencies at national level. In most systems, higher education institutions are autonomous enough to make their own decision on the recognition for access to their own study programs, and in some cases, have come up with flexible solutions to also consider the level of education in the absence of documentation. Due to the influx of refugees in the past years, in some systems, universities have also become drivers of policy change, collaborating with ministries or recognition networks and agencies in order to revise procedures, to enhance regulations and to fast-track recognition both as a means of access to higher education as well as to the labor market. Building on procedures previously developed for other types of learners, some universities have adapted their recognition services to specifically target refugees.

Lack of policy support for higher education institutions is an important obstacle that must be quickly overcome. While education is often viewed as a key area of integration policy, the focus is mostly on early education levels. Not often a concrete link is established between higher education participation and integration policy. Even if the role of the tertiary sector in contributing to societal integration is recognized, it is often left entirely to the higher education institutions to implement measures for TCN and refugee integration. There is a general lack of European and national level policy support, with too few concrete measures, a lack of funding for integration activities, and overall, a lack of visibility and recognition for the role of and the work done by the higher education sector.

In both the policy areas of integration and education, the EU has only a supporting role. The EC thus funds a large number of projects for the exchange of good practices on refugee integration in higher education – which is directed mostly at institutional, but very little national policy level change. In its recent Action Plan on the Integration of TCN, education is one of the five policy priorities, but focuses largely on primary and secondary education and language learning measures. In terms of higher education policy, the EC, together with all other Bologna Process members recently made commitments to improve the conditions of access for under-represented groups, including refugees.

Also, **the lack of multi-stakeholder collaboration** hinders inclusion. As it has been pointed out (Tandem report, 2019), while all host countries proclaim a multi-stakeholder collaboration, approaches largely remain top-down, which can be a challenge to realizing high impact, dynamic and participatory measures for integration. Policy is often centralized at the level of ministry responsible for integration. There are only few examples of approaches that successfully decentralize integration to e.g. municipal levels and that directly involve TCNs and refugees in the development and implementation of the measures that aim to integrate and facilitate access to higher education for them. The ministries of education are at times involved to different degrees in the drafting and parts of the implementation of the national level integration plans. However, none of them have their own integration portfolio, or integration-related budgets available. Non-governmental actors, such as charities and higher education institutions, have been active in TCN and refugee integration for many years – with or without government support. Therefore, expertise and established good practices already exist in most of the host countries and need to be included in national agendas.

In several research papers voicing TCN and refugee students, they mentioned **high cost** as one of the main challenges they had to face in accessing to and participating in higher education in their host countries. Some also expressed their frustration about having to pay significantly higher tuition fees than domestic and EU students. Little financial support is available to them in the form of scholarships or student aid – especially if they are non-refugee TCN students. Higher education institutions surveyed and many of the national level interviewees confirmed this as one of the top challenges (Tandem report 2019, Bertozzi 2018, Marcu 2018). As long as there is no funding aimed at strongly supporting TCN and refugee students, the cost will burden the institutions involved. Some HE institutions themselves offer financial support to refugee students, albeit very limited due to their own budgetary constraints.

At the same time, adapting their programs to be more inclusive can present a significant challenge for HE institutions, especially Open Universities, which rely more on digital material and services than face-to-face lectures. The cost that is required to translate the educational resources and services may not be bearable by small-to-medium sized OU.

Good practices

However, Universities have already engaged in widening participation in their programs, primarily by offering educational and training opportunities to TCN and investing in capacity building of their staff. Below you can find some of the good practices that we have collected:

- **Mapping and analysis of MOOCs & free digital learning for inclusion of migrants & refugees**

MOOCs4inclusion is a study, commissioned by the European Commission via the DG Joint Research Centre, which aims at assessing the adequacy of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and Free Digital Learning (FDL) for the inclusion of migrants and refugees. In 2021, the international research center CARDET undertook a new study, to update the catalogue and enrich it with new initiatives. Here you can find the results of the study: <https://moocs4inclusion.org/>

- **Specific Belgian University Integration programmes for beneficiaries of international protection**

Most of the main Belgian universities (Brussels, Leuven, Louvain-la-neuve, Ghent, Liège, Namur, Louvain, Mons, Antwerp, Hasselt, etc.) have developed programs to facilitate access to higher education and integration of asylum seekers and refugees. These programs provide a diverse range of support tools such as language courses, social support (housing, transportation, scholarships, etc.), orientation, sponsorship and mentoring of refugee students. Through these programs, efforts are undertaken to facilitate the educational and social inclusion of refugee students. Here you can find more about the opportunities offered: <https://globalcompactrefugees.org/article/specific-university-integration-programmes-beneficiaries-international-protection>

- **The AIMES Programme**

Every year since 2016, working with various partners, the AUF has launched a call for projects with its member institutions, in France or abroad, to facilitate the reception and integration of students in exile, holding refugee or asylum seeker status, or benefitting from subsidiary protection. The aim of the initiative is to assist the institutions who offer relevant French-learning tools, with a view to integrating students in exile into their university courses, thus facilitating their social and professional integration. Here you can find more about this programme: <https://www.campusfrance.org/en/aimes-programme-AUF-integration-migrant-students>

The call for projects launched in 2018 enabled the support of 43 projects, distributed across 38 institutions in France, 3 in Lebanon, 1 in Belgium and 1 in Burundi. The chosen projects emphasize the entire integration process, beyond the learning of French as a foreign language, now also catering for French-speaking students in need of refresher courses and assistance. The support projects for the 2018/2019 year accommodate more than 2,000 students, of whom 1,500 are in France. They hail from 53 different countries, although mainly from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and the Sudan. There are also several from Eastern Europe (Armenia, the Ukraine, Russia, Kosovo, Albania, Georgia, Turkey), Iran, Libia and Palestine.

- **TOGETHER - Refugees Welcome Map**

Institutions at EU level and networks and associations of Universities have studied the main questions related to the possibility of building more inclusive HE institutions by favouring the enrolment of refugees and migrants with international protection status. The project identifies two main specific objectives: (a) developing social responsibility of HE students providing them with intercultural and civic competences and raising their awareness on integration of refugees and (b) rising awareness of HE staff by providing specific instruments, knowledge and skills for a more inclusive HE environment. The project is addressed to University staff, University students and refugees. Here you can find more about it: <https://together.pixel-online.org/refumap.php>

- **Higher Education Supporting Refugees in Europe (InHERE)**

An early attempt (2017) to collect and analyze good practice examples of HE approaches and initiatives in wide range of urgent situations, focusing on refugees and displaced students, facilitating the identification of successful patterns of integration which have the potential to be easily scaled up. Furthermore, the project seeks to sensitize HE governance, facilitating communication and institutional support within and outside the university (<https://www.inhereproject.eu>).

It provided relevant orientation and training to the university staff, to empower universities so that they are able to take an active stand and further replicate successful approaches and practices. Includes a catalogue of good practices: https://www.inhereproject.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/inHERE-GPC_en.PDF.pdf

- **Towards Empowered Migrant Youth in Southern Europe (TandEM)**

The TandEM project (<https://iomintandem.com/>), led by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in partnership with EUA and COREIS Italiana, aims to improve higher education integration of TCN and to contribute to making societies in Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta and Spain more socially inclusive. TandEM piloted a student mentorship scheme, which took inspiration from the cross-country study findings and from a well-established mentoring scheme carried out by WUSC (World Education Service) in Canada. During the two-year project (2018-2019), young TCN also directly contributed to shaping narratives on migration and cultural diversity in the six target countries.

- **MSc course in Language Education for Migrants**

The Postgraduate Course "Language Education for refugees and immigrants" offered by Hellenic Open University is designed for teachers and graduates who wish to supplement or deepen their knowledge and skills in teaching a language course in various languages, as well as to develop new resources that they can later use in specific contexts and levels. The course offers a strong background in theoretical literature, as well as a suitable methodology for educational practice, course planning and introduction to the most important research tools. Here you can access the structure of the course: <https://www.eap.gr/education/postgraduate/biannual/language-education-for-refugees-and-immigrants/>

- **Project WEMIN - Migrant Women Empowerment and Integration**

Hellenic Open University coordinated the AMIF project WEMIN, which implemented a comprehensive integration model for migrant/refugee women (MRW). Through direct interventions in women populations and through experience-sharing among partners social, cultural, educational and professional aspects of inclusion were addressed and active participation was achieved. The outcomes of the project can be found here: <http://www.wemin-project.eu/>

- **Project NITTI - Developing the peer-based family training model for immigrants**

The AMIF Nitti project, led by Tampere University of Applied Sciences in Finland, is developing a peer-to-peer based antinatal class model for immigrant families. The project aims at facilitating the everyday life of immigrant families, strengthening their participation in social and health care services and promoting their integration. The model prepares immigrants for the childbirth, care for the baby, breastfeeding, parenthood, way of life and everyday life of families. Families' service needs related to culture-specific sexual and reproduction health practices are considered in development.

- **MATTEAS - Immigrants as clients in healthcare services**

The goal of MATEAS project, funded by AMIF and led by Tampere University of Applied Sciences in Finland, is to make Finnish healthcare services and the organizational actors supporting them – more transparent and accessible for immigrants from third world countries, who are also eligible to join the events and activities organized by the project (excluding asylum seekers). The procedures developed in the project aim to make it easier for immigrants to use healthcare services as clients within the system.

Approaches and suggestions for possible actions

To tackle the issues mentioned above, one must act both at Institutional and Societal levels. Initiatives at institutional level should target educators (teacher, tutor etc.), students, management and administration staff, as well the organization scheme of the Institution, its courses, training material and tools. Regarding the environment of operation, the Institution must address regional and national stakeholders, communities (migrant and local), representatives of economic sectors and the society at large. Indicative actions are:

Inclusive institutional policies and practices. Each Open University must create and put in place a formal "Inclusion Plan", which will describe the policies, practices and ethics that will widen participation of TCN in HE studies. Some suggested practices are flexible learning pathways (with the opportunity to enter, exit and re-enter the learning process), targeted TCN scholarships, support for multi-cultural research teams, promotion of role models, special "inclusion days" or campaigns etc.

Capacity building of teachers and staff in intercultural competences. The institution should offer Open Educational Resources or even Short Learning Programmes and make it mandatory for the members of the academic community to access them. TCN language learning could also be included. Moreover, Intercultural Mediators could be employed to provide guidance and mediate in situations of conflict. Achieving a change of mindset towards more inclusive attitude can prove a very profitable investment and should be the primary target of Open Universities.

Inclusive (or culture-neutral) educational material. Translating and offering educational material in TCN languages can make HE studies more attractive; however, making this content culture-neutral can prove to be a real winner.

Fostering multi-cultural research. Open Universities, especially because they rely on modern technological means, can easily support the formation of multi-cultural research teams including TCN. At the same time, special funds should be systematically allocated to research on multi-culturalism and issues related to accommodating TCN in HE. In this way Open Universities will pave the way for policies that will achieve really inclusive HE in Europe, which will be based on actual research data.

Direct collaboration with TCN communities. By establishing mutual trust between University and local TCN communities, Open Universities can attract members of the communities to pursue HE studies. Members of the communities can be formally employed as mentors to assist TCN in accessing the University.

Specially designed education / training / re-skilling opportunities for TCN. Universities must take into account the TCN needs in course design. Firstly, they could offer language, culture and preparatory courses that lead to certification. In addition, they should make available a range of educational offers, from Short Learning Programmes to full courses, all of which are stackable and lead to certification, so that TCN can be enabled to access the market quickly and then return to complete their studies. The recent concept of micro-credentials, combined with a flexible "recognise-as-you-study" scheme could be an attractive opportunity.

Recognition scheme of prior learning / skills. Many TCN have already received HE qualifications from their countries of origin, but cannot provide the formal documents to prove this. Open Universities can put in place flexible schemes for recognition of prior learning and especially skills by giving TCN the opportunity to enroll and assess their achievement of learning outcomes. Moreover, Open Universities can collaborate at European level (e.g. via EADTU) so as to mutually recognize qualifications or ECTS that have been awarded by any Open University, thus accommodating the high degree of TCN volatility.

Promotion of role models. The opportunities that HE offers must be demonstrated at TCN in the most convincing way. Open Universities should include more TCN in their academic and other staff; apart from functioning as real-life role models, they can serve as TCN mentors and guides in the academic landscape. At the same time, they could give the opportunity to TCN students to discuss with successful TCN HE graduates or entrepreneurs about possible careers than can follow HE studies.

Make stakeholders and society aware of the potential of cultural differences. As we stated in the beginning of this document, Open Universities can better accommodate TCN in their programmes, because by design, they are more flexible and tolerant to individual differences, while at the same time, they have strong ties with stakeholders and society. Exactly for this reason, Open Universities must seek to implement projects that on one hand enhance the inclusiveness of stakeholders and society and on the other hand provide targeted services to TCN (i.e. training the personnel of sectoral organisations – e.g. NGO, healthcare, education, public administration etc. – in intercultural competences, making employers aware of the potential of employing TCN, increasing the employability potential of TCN, offering to TCN placement in enterprises etc.)

06 Gender

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Gender Equality in Distance Education

Field of subject related to diversity and inclusion

Gender

Introduction

EADTU members are inclusive, innovative and responsive, promoting social justice and equality of opportunity, and represent strategic positioning of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. EADTU member universities represent a great variety of policies, approaches, expertise, and experiences in this field that we share within the Task Force on Diversity and Inclusion. Gender is one of the subgroups the Task Force has identified in the field of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

The European Union also requires universities to make a strong commitment to gender equality. The European Commission is committed to promoting gender equality in research and innovation. It is part of the European Commission Gender Equality Strategy for 2020-2025, which sets out the Commission's broader commitment to equality across all EU policies. In addition, the EU has a well-established regulatory framework on gender equality, including binding directives, which apply widely across the labour market, including the research sector.

Definitions and Description

Gender is defined here as an individual's social identity – as male, female, or non-binary, the last of which referring to people who identify as other than "male" or "female". Definitions of gender also include transgender persons – persons whose gender differs from their assigned sex. Gender equality aims to empower all students and to provide them with equal human rights.

In this subsection we outline the gender ratio for different fields of study in the participating countries with a focus on university applicants and students. We are aware that there are applicants and students who identify with a gender beyond the male/female binary. The statistics of this subsection, however, only contain the male-female axis because many universities are only beginning to collect these data.

University applicants by gender year 2021:

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Finland	Male	Female	All	% Female
Universities	32301	56805	89109	63,7
Universities of Applied Sciences	47313	79212	126525	62,6
All	79614	136107	215634	63,1

Even though the proportion of female university applicants and students is high in Finland, it is important to note that for different fields of study the ratio of women and men varies greatly. Let us look at the proportion of female students at universities and at universities of Applied Sciences in select fields of study for the year 2020:

Universities:

Finland	Male	Female	All	% Female
Art and Culture	6 744	15 477	22 221	69,7
ICT	11 433	3 330	14 763	22,6
Engineering, manufacturing and construction	14 781	5 445	20 226	26,9
Health and welfare	3 078	6 801	9 879	68,8

Universities of Applied Sciences:

Finland	Male	Female	All	% Female
Art and Culture	2 193	5 355	7 548	70,9
ICT	11 978	3 396	15 354	22,1
Engineering, manufacturing and construction	27 579	6 702	34 281	19,6
Health and welfare	7 029	36 027	43 056	83,7

(<https://vipunen.fi/en-qb/>)

Universities and Universities of Applied Sciences:

Finland	Male	Female	All	% Female
Art and Culture	8937	20 832	29 769	67 %
ICT	23 411	6 726	30 137	22,3 %
Engineering, manufacturing and construction	42 360	12 147	54 507	22,3 %
Health and welfare	10 287	42 828	53 115	80,6 %

The same phenomenon can be observed in the open university studies: even though the proportion of female students is high, there is a strong gender bias - particularly in the area of STEM (Science, technology, engineering, mathematics) and in Health and welfare studies.

Germany

The proportion of female first-year students and female students is high in universities in Germany, and is slightly lower at Universities of Applied Sciences.

First-year students by gender (year 2020/2021):

Germany	Male	Female	All	% Female
Universities	80.959	105.268	186.227	56,5
Universities of Applied Sciences	79.307	77.346	156.653	49,4
All	160.266	182.614	342.880	53,3

Students by gender (year 2020/2021):

Germany	Male	Female	All	% Female
Universities	726.560	813.360	1.539.920	52,8
Universities of Applied Sciences	526.839	460.949	987.788	46,6
All	1.253.399	1.274.309	2.527.708	50,4

However, it is important to note that the ratio of females and males varies greatly in the different fields of study. If we consider the proportion of female students at universities and at universities of Applied Sciences in the fields of Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction, it is evident that fewer women (i.e. only one quarter of all students) choose these subjects.

Universities (year 2019):

Germany	Male	Female	All	% Female
Human Sciences, Art	130.493	257.411	387.904	66,4
Natural Sciences	152.995	148.422	301.417	49,2
Engineering, manufacturing and construction	268.746	89.128	357.874	24,9
Health, welfare	46.028	82.400	128.428	64,2

Universities of Applied Sciences (year 2019):

Germany	Male	Female	All	% Female
Human Sciences, Art	14.280	25.777	40.057	64,4
Natural Sciences	10.620	10.198	20.818	48,9
Engineering, manufacturing and construction	319.949	96.864	416.813	23,2
Health, welfare	16.014	42.244	58.258	72,5

(<https://www.datenportal.bmbf.de/portal/de/Tabelle-2.5.20.html>,
<https://www.datenportal.bmbf.de/portal/de/Tabelle-2.5.21.html>)

Austria

At Austrian universities, a very similar gender imbalance across different disciplines can be observed.

First year-students by gender (winter semester 2020/2021):

Austria	Male	Female	All	% Female
Universities	20.482	27.822	48.304	57,6%
Universities of Applied Sciences	11.150	11.909	23.059	51,6%
Private Universities	2.130	3.585	5.715	62,7%
All	33.762	43.316	77.078	56,2%

Students by gender (winter semester 2020/2021):

Austria	Male	Female	All	% Female
Universities	123.622	144.618	268.240	53,9%
Universities of Applied Sciences	28.579	30.156	58.735	51,3%
Private Universities	6.738	10.271	17.009	60,4%
All	158.939	185.045	343.984	53,8%

Selected fields of study:

Universities (winter semester 2020/2021):

Austria	Male	Female	All	% Female
Education	10.041	22.125	32.165	68,8%
Arts and humanities	17.559	33.738	51.297	65,8%
Engineering, manufacturing and construction	26.411	12.770	39.181	32,6%
ICT	13.685	3.397	17.082	19,9%

Universities of Applied Sciences (winter semester 2019/2020):

Austria	Male	Female	All	% Female
Health Sciences	1.491	6.516	8.007	81,4%
Social Sciences	1.016	3.031	4.047	74,9%
Technology, Engineering	15.247	5.072	20.319	25,0%
Military and Security Science	347	29	376	7,7%

(<https://unidata.gv.at/Pages/auswertungen.aspx>)

Specific challenges

Gender equality challenges were addressed at different levels in the subgroup: from students and university applicants to teaching staff and professors as well as research, and management. The following is an overview of the key challenges that have emerged.

Gender bias and underrepresentation of women is most severe in the STEM area (science, technology, engineering, mathematics). Here, gender-imbalances exist on all levels: among university applicants, students, teachers, principal lecturers, and professors. This bias results in a loss of talent for society and threatens the search for excellence in research.

At European universities, student admission is based on demonstrated capability. Applicants' gender may not influence student admission. And yet, in all countries the field-related gender distribution of university students follows the traditional pattern: in the field of technology, the majority of applicants are men whereas most applicants in health care and social services are women.

Reviewing the gender ratio among university staff shows that in leading positions – professors and upper levels of management – women remain disproportionately underrepresented throughout all faculties, although certain exceptions related to particular disciplines or specific countries exist. Exploring the problem of female underrepresentation among higher levels also pinpoints the fact that the opposite is true for lower administrative tasks at universities: more women than men are to be found in auxiliary positions.

Raising awareness for gender inequality is a central aspect on the road towards establishing university cultures welcoming and accepting of people of all genders. In order to address the structural reproduction of inequalities within universities, identification of as well as acting upon the mechanisms which require change is crucial. Nevertheless, focusing on individual actions will not be as effective as addressing the structure in its entirety through a comprehensive, holistic approach (EIGE 2016). Our discussions made apparent the fact that sensitising university members to these issues often represents a challenging task. For example, communicating the fact that support measures for women – such as job advertisements strongly inviting applications from women or the promotion of inclusive language – do not translate into disadvantages for men.

While there is still a long way to go in terms of equality between women and men, attention should nevertheless be paid to non-binary people (people identifying as other than "male" or "female") and transgender persons (persons whose gender differs from their assigned sex) also. Gender equality needs to involve empowering as well as providing the same human rights to all students.

Progressing towards the equality of genders in the university sphere also necessitates detecting and stopping any (sexual) harassment based on sex, gender expression and/or sexual orientation. Given that universities are an integral part of society, they are as susceptible as any other area to situations of violence that may be triggered by gender inequalities. At most universities, university-wide guidelines exist to meet this reality, as well as designated points of contact and/or support to aid people affected by misconduct. Many institutions also offer brochures and other publications on how to deal with and react to witnessing or becoming subject to such situations. In the subgroup it was summarized that communicating bias as well as other issues surrounding gender, such as sexual harassment, represent highly sensitive and complex problems within universities.

In research institutions, inequalities tend to be (re-)produced by several mechanisms. Strong evidence exists both in literature and statistics that research and higher education institutions reproduce social values which result in gender bias and/or discrimination. Therefore, there is a need for institutional change as this will not only benefit the organisation as a whole but society in general.

Possible approaches/solutions by category of approach (for example course adaptations, specific student support, support, facilities, flexibility in regulations, fee structure... etc.)

Despite legislation and various programs and plans, the need to devise novel means for tackling and reducing gender biases and imbalances at universities still remains. Inclusion of a gender equality perspective in the evaluation of education, teaching, and student admission is important, as is the support of students and applicants finding themselves outside traditional gender roles.

A great number of universities have experience in projects aiming to encourage women to apply for traditionally male-dominated fields. For example, NaisTech in TAMK, Finland. Experience shows that such influencing should occur during upper secondary education before the application to higher education studies. Once at university, all genders should be encouraged to choose any field of study that is of interest.

Treating staff equitably is an important managerial task. Equality is believed to have a positive effect on the wellbeing of students and staff and their experience of being equal. In that way it positively affects the university community in its entirety.

In this regard, university awareness trainings represent one method of sensitizing university staff to gender-related imbalances. These trainings could – at best – be obligatory for new staff members. However, the introduction of such a requirement is difficult to realise.

Additionally, there exists an extensive university program aiming to increase the number of female professors and to create new gender equality measures in Germany ("Professorinnenprogramm des Bundes und der Länder"). The universities, which apply and are accepted, receive considerable financial support for the implementation of a new professorship (with a female professor) and for gender equality measures and ideas.

In the field of research, FernUniversity in Hagen has established several scholarships for students who pursue their PhD in topics related to gender and queer studies and hosts a visiting scholarship with focus on gender and queer studies every term at one of the faculties.

Examples and references to good practices, with full description in annex

Austria: Women into Engineering – JKU's Plan for the Advancement of Women explicitly stipulates the promotion of women's access to university studies.

Space for Diversity – JKU's Gender & Diversity Report forms the basis for monitoring and for further measures concerning the advancement of women, gender equality, and diversity.

Gender and Science – as part of JKU's Plan for the Advancement of Women, the university commits to implementing women- and gender-sensitive courses into all curricula.

Awareness Raising Trainings for Employees – in order to foster equality oriented working environments, JKU offers awareness raising trainings for employees and managerial staff.

Finland: All universities in Finland are required to have a written equality and non-discrimination plan.

Tampere University of Applied Sciences (TAMK) has an **equality plan** that describes the equality situation at TAMK and measures to promote staff's and students' equality.

Tampere University of Applied Sciences leads a nation-wide **project Equal Career Paths for Women – NOW!** which aims to support and promote equal employment and career development for women. Another TAMK's project is **Naistech**, which encourages girls in secondary and upper-secondary education to take an open-minded approach to technology studies at university level.

Germany: Gender equality is a central development objective of the **FernUniversity in Hagen, Germany**, and is considered an issue of shared and social responsibility based on a legal framework involving all areas of the university. The university has developed several instruments to implement gender equality in the last years, among them **the central gender equality plan**, which applies to the whole university as well as **gender equality plans for the faculties and units**. Moreover, FernUniversity in Hagen has a **Gender Equality Concept**.

Recommendations

Awareness trainings and unconscious-bias trainings represent one method of sensitizing university staff to gender-related imbalances. These trainings could – at best – be obligatory for new staff members.

While there is still a long way to go in terms of equality between women and men, attention should nevertheless be paid also to non-binary people (people identifying as other than "male" or "female") and transgender persons (persons whose gender differs from their assigned sex) also beyond the binary gender division. However, even though research connected to the issues and obstacles transgender persons face is conducted in most of the countries involved, this does not automatically translate into sensitivity on a practical level: i.e. research may exist but awareness raising activities or trainings for staff and/or students remain scarce.

Concerning institutional relevance of these issues, it was interesting to learn about the different stages of organizational awareness during our discussions.

In the Netherlands, universities are working on alternative forms of address beyond the binary "sir" or "madam", for example, while in Israel the topic is just being introduced.

In Austria, an interuniversity working group of gender officers has held regular meetings on the topic since 2019 and with *Non-Binary Universities – Vade Mekum on Genderfair(er) Higher Education*, Vienna's academy of fine arts provides a comprehensive guide on how to transform universities into spaces that welcome all genders, including tips on fair language use, registration procedures, online systems and infrastructure. Featured good practices cover easily adoptable measures such as the inclusion of personal pronouns in the signature of e-mails and the routine of pronoun sharing when introducing oneself.

Conclusion

In the subgroup, Gender equality challenges were addressed on different levels: students and university applicants, teaching staff and professors, research, and management. Despite the fact that the proportion of female university applicants and students is generally high in most European countries, the ratio of women and men still varies greatly depending on the respective fields of study. In the area of STEM (Science, technology, engineering, mathematics) gender imbalance and underrepresentation of women is most severe. Here, gender-imbalances exist on all levels: among university applicants, students, teachers, principal lecturers, and professors, resulting in a loss of talent for society and threatening the search for excellence in research.

Furthermore, equal access to academic education and careers in the higher education setting has not yet produced equal outcomes in terms of leadership and academic positions, pay, research or publications. Regarding gender balance among university staff, women in leading positions – professors and upper levels of management – remain disproportionately underrepresented throughout all faculties.

Although individual projects to a certain degree may improve and have already improved gender balance and awareness, it is crucial to identify and act upon the mechanisms requiring change in order to address the structural reproduction of inequalities in higher education.

Structures supporting gender equality can include organizational arrangements (unit, office, network) mandated to advocate structural change that is aimed at gender equality, to raise awareness, and to develop competences among all university personnel and other stakeholders. Furthermore, gender awareness is particularly required in recruitment, career progression support services as well as in leadership and decision-making. Sexual and gender-based harassment must be combated on all levels while the safety and well-being of non-binary and transgender students should be given special consideration as this group often reports feeling unsafe at universities affecting academic achievement in adverse ways.

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Good practices on Gender Equality in Distance Education

Field of subject related to diversity and inclusion

Gender

Good practices

Gender equality is a central development objective of the FernUniversity in Hagen and is considered an issue of shared and social responsibility based on a legal framework involving all areas of the university. The university has developed several instruments to implement gender equality in the last years, among them the **central gender equality plan**, which applies to the whole university as well as **gender equality plans for the faculties and units**. The focus areas of the central gender equality plan apply to the faculties and units through various gender equality measures, which are elaborated in their gender equality plans. These are effective for three years and the faculties and units agree upon special quota and objectives that need to be fulfilled and evaluated by them. Moreover, FernUniversity in Hagen has a **Gender Equality Concept**. This instrument serves to strategically specify and implement the objectives and measures of the university's central gender equality plan. Over time, the Gender Equality Concept has been extended and adjusted. Creative gender equality measures were created, based on FernUniversity's specific needs and demands, to improve the situation both in the short and the long term. The current Gender Equality Concept runs for four years (2019-2022) and consists of five focus areas with a total of 24 measures and a budget of 2.4 million EUR. It involves all areas and target groups of the university, particularly (female) researchers. The single measures are evaluated on a regular basis and quantitative and qualitative data are collected to guarantee the measures' ongoing compliance with the corresponding objectives.

Tampere University of Applied Sciences (TAMK) has an **equality plan** that describes the equality situation at TAMK and measures to promote staff and students' equality. According to legislation enacted in 2015, employers and education providers are required to assess and promote equality in their operations in addition to preventing discrimination. The equality plan follows these requirements and lists equality promotion measures for the period 2020-2021. Equality work aims at identifying and preventing expressions, structures and operations which maintain or increase inequality and at strengthening and increasing equality practices. The equality plan aims at including the equality viewpoint in the evaluation of education and teaching and student admission as well as supporting students and applicants who want to diverge from the traditional gender roles. Equal treatment of staff is an important part of management. Equality is believed to increase wellbeing of

Comparable examples

Network for female professors in the Netherlands. The network monitors gender quota at universities and organizes specific appointment of female professors <http://www.Invh.nl/>

References

[Gender&Diversity Report 2019 Women into Engineering](#)

<https://intra.tuni.fi/en/handbook?page=3227>

<https://tasaarvoisestiuuralle.fi/in-english/>

students and staff and their experience of equality and thus have a positive effect on the entire university community.

Equal Career Paths for Women – NOW! project aims to support and promote equal employment and career development for women. The focus is on vertical equality in three fields: technology, business, as well as security and risk management. The project is coordinated by Tampere University of Applied Sciences TAMK, and it is implemented by three Universities (Aalto, LUT and Tampere), five Universities of Applied Sciences (TAMK, JAMK, Haaga-Helia, Laurea and Oamk) and the trade union Academic Engineers and Architects in Finland TEK.

The Finnish labour market is among the most gender segregated in the EU. Women head for professions in education and care, whereas men are directed to technology and logistics. Within different fields, the segregation continues and manifests itself as differences in jobs, wages, and career paths. Gender segregation is present especially in the fields of technology, business, and security. It is necessary, therefore, to strive for more equality and less segregation. The project produces new and topical knowledge about the causes and consequences of gender segregation in Finnish working life and it creates, pilots and consolidates – especially in the field of technology – new forms of study and career counseling, career services and entrepreneurial support for female students and professionals. Various activities help the formation of peer networks and the development of practices which promote equality and diversity of professions.

1. The concrete objectives of the Equal Career Paths for Women – NOW! project are:
to produce and disseminate knowledge regarding equality and gender parity
2. To develop and disseminate the best practices in gender awareness study and career counseling, to develop female students' working life contacts, and to support the universities in devising and implementing equality plans
3. To support the careers and entrepreneurship of females with higher education, and
4. To increase the knowledge on unconscious bias among the universities and companies.
Good communications throughout the project help to disseminate knowledge and good practices among the project partners and within the society during as well after the project period.

NaisTech – reducing the segregation by gender in working life and studies -project. This TAMK's project:

1. Encourages girls in secondary and upper-secondary education to take an open-minded approach to technology studies at university level
2. Encourages unemployed women to seek diverse career paths as workers and entrepreneurs
3. Develops and pilots training materials, to spark women's interest in technology
4. Provides an up-to-date picture of today's technology requirements, diverse jobs and working conditions
5. Builds a mentoring network among entrepreneurs, technology teachers, and guidance counsellors.

Women into Engineering – JKU's Plan for the Advancement of Women explicitly stipulates the promotion of women's access to university studies. By organizing informational events at the university as well as visits to schools throughout the region, Women into Engineering's exclusively female ambassadors specifically address young women interested in STEM and show that technical fields can be female as well. In 2019, 24 ambassadors reached 1375 pupils at more than 60 schools in Upper Austria, Lower Austria and Salzburg with presentations and counselling.

Space for Diversity – JKU's Gender & Diversity Report forms the basis for monitoring and for further measures concerning the advancement of women, gender equality and diversity. It illustrates the distribution of women and men among the student body, among academic and non-academic staff and for certain aspects of diversity (age structure, working hours, leaves of absence, caregiving duties, educational qualification and international composition).

Section 4 of JKU's Plan for the Advancement of Women designates areas with a female proportion of less than 40% as "women's advancement areas". By allowing for an evaluation of university targets related to gender equality for women and men, the collected and exemplified report data render apparent areas still requiring action and thus aid in the conception of targeted improvement measures.

Gender and Science – as part of JKU's Plan for the Advancement of Women, the university commits to implementing women- and gender-sensitive courses into all curricula. Furthermore, the plan also stipulates that women- and gender sensitive research is to be present throughout all fields and areas. All members of university, especially its governing bodies, are obligated to actively counteract existing underrepresentation of women, remove existing disadvantages, preserve a female ratio of 40% where already achieved, and increase women's share in research projects and habilitations.

Awareness Raising Trainings for Employees – in order to foster equality oriented working environments, JKU offers awareness raising trainings for employees and managerial staff. In the Summer Term of 2020 these include classes on Privilege Awareness, on Unconscious Biases Affecting Staff-Selection and Decision-Making Processes, as well as on Using and Understanding Inclusive Language. JKU's on-boarding program for non-academic staff is partly conducted by a member of the Gender & Diversity Unit covering equality essentials while the compulsory training for new scientific university staff with teaching responsibilities at JKU includes a section on "Diversity in Teaching".

07 Prisoners

Prisoners in Distance Education. Distance Education in Prisons.

Field of subject

Prisoners

Prisons are environments of deprivation of liberty and disconnection with the outside and reality. The life of an incarcerated person is totally transformed so that studies, especially at the university level, become a way to normalize that anomalous life and to develop other objectives thinking about their re-integration into life after incarceration. There are many problems that we find for this reason in prisons, but there is also empirical evidence that, through training, the possibilities of re-integration are increased and the reduction of recidivism in crime. In general, there is a tendency to use Distance Education as the main modality for access to higher education for prisoners. The challenges we face are numerous and complex, but we are already beginning to have successful experiences that overcome barriers and limitations such as lack of resources, appropriate spaces for study, lack of connectivity or impossibility of communication with teachers. The achievements attained make us harbour great expectations of normalization and improvements for which there is an evident and hopeful path.

Introduction

The article 26 of the Universal declaration of human rights defines Education as a basic, universal right for everybody, independently of his/her conditions, idiosyncrasy, or circumstances:

Everyone has the right to education. (...) Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality, and to the strengthening of respect for human rights, and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance, and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

This is a principle that is sometimes forgotten in certain circumstances, as in the case of people held in prisons. However, it is universally applicable, and needs to be carefully reviewed to increase the opportunities of reintegration of prisoners upon their release from prison.

Most of us know life in prisons through fiction, novels, television series, and, above all, movies. We've all seen fanatical productions that somehow reflect life in prison: "The Great Escape" (1963), "Papillon" (1973), "Escape from Alcatraz" (1979), "In the Name of the Father" (1993), "The Shawshank Redemption" (1994), "Dead Man Walking" (1995), "The Green Mile" (1999), or "Bronson" (2008). However, fiction, as in so many other cases, only reflects a fictionalized part of reality according to the interests and goals of its creators, producers, and filmmakers.

Each country has generated different systems, procedures, and terminologies according to its political and historical development. To unify the meaning, and to compare the different realities, we will try to use a neutral and general terminology. Various names are currently used to describe places of confinement, with different meanings according to contexts, and times, among them (Ugelvik et al, 2020): prison, penitentiary, jail, penal complex, detention centre, house of corrections, asylum, borstal, reformatory, and correctional institution. However, the words are not neutral. As Scott maintains, the "words we use to refer to people predispose us to act towards them in a different way" (2014, p. 412).

After a Custodial sentence, a judge or court could issue a judgment with a prison term that transform the people life. The prison term is the punishment or period inside a prison. It converts people in prisoners. Different terms are used to refer to the prisoners as captive, inmate,

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imprisoned, or held in custody. Some of these terms are more formal, and others are politically incorrect according to the context. Then they go in the penal system. This process is named imprisonment, incarceration, or confinement. During that period, they will remain isolated from the reality of the rest of the world, on an island with different norms, routines, and means. Although contexts can change greatly, the problems of incarcerated people are repeated in all parts of the world to a greater or lesser extent (Pandey, 2021).

The penal system is the set of penitentiary centres, and institutions. The prison is the building for keeping people accused of a crime, and awaiting trial, or for keeping prisoners. However, it is also a reference to a whole way of life within a retreat and without freedom. This special situation generates distinctive expectations, frequent common obstacles, and distinctive habits of inmates (Vázquez Cano, 2013). Some penitentiary institutions are organised in prison wards or cellblocks as specific units or buildings for a specific group as men, and women, or different types of prison terms. However, the lack of means and facilities is a very common observation (Moreira et al., 2017). Sometimes, prison wards are specialised in training purposes with facilities, and resources specialized in learning. However, the general situation of the prisoners is the use of common facilities, and with very few services for training, and communication (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 1995).

Comparing penal policies around the World, Cavadino, and Dignan (2006) identified three models of penal systems:

- 1) Norway, and Sweden: rather more liberal countries. Rights-based framework for, and an inclusionary approach towards, prisoners.
- 2) Germany, Italy, and France: mixed modes of punishment. Dominant penal ideology based on rehabilitation, and resocialization.
- 3) England, Wales, USA, Australia, and South Africa: 'law, and order' ideology. Exclusionary attitude toward prisoners.

This analysis could be complemented by data on incarceration, and resources for education in prison. Starting from data of the Institute for Crime & Justice Policy Research (ICPR), the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning argues:

Countries with more punitive penal polices tend to invest less – in terms of both policy development, and financial resources – in education, and prison programmes. Those with higher rates of imprisonment, and more punitive penal cultures such as the USA, which has over 2.1 million prisoners or 655 prisoners per 100,000 inhabitants, tend to have a more restrictive approach to the provision of education in prison. By contrast, Norway, with 3,735 prisoners, equating to just 63 prisoners per 100,000 inhabitants, has one of the lowest rates of imprisonment in the world. At the same time, Norway is considered to have one of the most progressive systems of education in prison in the world. (2021, p. 48)

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Tett et al. detected that prisoners usually “tend to have lower than average attainment, and poor experiences of compulsory education” (2012, p. 172). Brevity is the main characteristic of the schooling of prisoners: they leave school much earlier (Fassin, 2017). In this context, it has been shown that training is a way for the transformation, and social reintegration of people. Higher education is also a part of the training offer present in prisons and is often conveyed through distance education. The specific characteristics of this context often force universities to transform or adapt their usual means, procedures, and strategies. As UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning stated in its report (2021, p. 85):

There are myriad reasons why education in prison is necessary. First, education is not just about the accumulation of knowledge or the acquisition of skills; it also enables personal fulfilment. Education enhances individuals' lives, opening up a world of reading, culture, history, and identity that helps us all make sense of our lives. It enables us all to make meaning of the world we live in. People who engage in education are more likely to participate in public activities: volunteering; attending plays, films, and concerts; getting involved in sport; and playing an active role in their communities. Families, communities, and society benefit from groups of individuals who engage in education, outside, and inside prison.

However, this same report reflects how the principles, and commitments that are often expressed in governmental, and international declarations, and agreements are not always reflected in the practice of prison education. The principles indicated in the agreements are ambitious, and inspiring, but they do not apply to the usual practice of prisons. “In order to make ‘education for all’ more than a noble aspiration, and to provide a robust education system for those confined in penal institutions, there needs to be a re-examination of penal policies, strategies, and pedagogical approaches in many jurisdictions.” (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2021, p. 96)

The approach to social action from the socio-educational model has demonstrated its value for the public policies for prisons (Pozo Serrano, 2013).

The Specific challenges

This group is an opportunity for collaboration to analyse strategies and results about:

- Exchanges of experiences.
- Agreements and models of action.
- Designs of specific resources.
- Studies of other universities.
- Research and innovation projects.
- External support in coming out.
- Research on learning inside prisons and coming out

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Theoretical background/research references

It is now commonly accepted that "Education for all, including incarcerated people, is a key component in developing sustainable societies" (Perreault, 2020, p. 6). However, the role of the education in prisons is related to their functions (Foucault, 1977; Yvarel, 2005; O'Donnell, 2016). Some antecedents of education in prison are related to new conceptions of prison in the early 1800s (Gehring, 2017), and reveal a hidden heritage that reflects progressive practices before the real professionalization of pedagogy in prison. Some of these relevant innovators were Elizabeth Fry (1780–1845) who began organizing educational activities at London's Newgate Prison in 1817, Alexander Maconochie (1787– 1860) who instituted many advanced programmes in Norfolk Island prison (Australia) such as the 'mark' system (more marks meant a shorter prison sentence) or Janie Porter Barrett (1865–1948) who carried out a programme of self-reliance, and self-discipline offering academic, and vocational instruction for women.

In 1900, Alengry conducted a questionnaire survey that reflected that there was school education at that time in prisons in Germany, England, Austria, Switzerland, Belgium, Luxembourg, and France (Alengry, 1901). Even today, the serious difficulties to research from an observational and empirical approach in penitentiary centers are admitted (Viedma Rojas et al., 2019). Analysing the basic education in prisons, United Nations and UNESCO Institute for Education identified main objectives:

In summary, there can be three main immediate objectives of prison education at the basic level, reflecting differing views of the purpose of a criminal justice system: first, to keep prisoners meaningfully busy; secondly, to improve the quality of life in custody; and thirdly, to achieve something useful (skills, knowledge, understanding, social attitudes and behaviour) that will last beyond prison and may lead to employment or further training. (1995, p. 13)

Later, UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning said that "there is a strong case to be made for considering the education of prisoners within a social justice context, on the basis of common characteristics identified among prison populations internationally." (2021, p. 33).

In general, all around the World, minority groups, poor people, ethnic groups, indigenous populations, and marginalized communities are over-represented than general population in prisons (Armstrong, and Maruna, 2016; Behan, 2018). Wilkinson & Pickett (2009) have also identified a relationship between imprisonment, and income inequality.

Analysing data from USA, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Asia, and Africa, UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning concludes that "Internationally, racial, and ethnic minority populations are disproportionately imprisoned, and punished." (2021, p. 49)

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In addition to article 26 of the human rights that we have cited, we find the recognition of the relevance of education in prison in various international agreements that we are referring very briefly.

In 1955, the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (adopted by the first United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime, and the Treatment of Offenders) was the first document after World War II that specifically reflected the right to education among the rights of prisoners.

In 1990, UN General Assembly resolution 45/111 included among its Basic Principles for the Treatment of Prisoners that “All prisoners shall have the right to take part in cultural activities, and education aimed at the full development of the human personality.” (United Nations, 1991).

In 2015, the UN General Assembly Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules) included the access to education, and special attention to people with literacy difficulties, and juveniles.

European Prison Rules (Council of Europe, 2020) contains references to educational programmes; literacy, and numeracy needs; basic or vocational education; the education of young prisoners, and those with special needs; libraries for the use of all prisoners, both recreational, and educational, resources, books, and other media; and educational, and vocational training.

The penal policy determines how means are oriented, and education is defined; how resources are allocated, and how they are used; how many teachers there are, and what training they have. The conditions, and available resources in prisons seem more often organized to assure safety, and order, instead improving learning, and environment.

One is tempted to conclude that the available resources in prisons are more often used in order to improve protection, safety, and order, and not to invest in the prison workshops, vocational training, tools for providing the educational process, sports, and leisure, on the assumption that security can be achieved by applying more restrictive, and disciplinary measures, but not by improving the prison environment, providing constructive employment of prisoners, and encouraging positive relationships between staff, and prisoners. (Baratov, 2014, p. 125)

However, the organization of education in prison seems to be directly related to the reduction of recidivism, and the increase in social re-integration. Collecting evidences among nine countries data, UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning stated that “From the results of small-scale research studies, there are strong indications that education, especially vocational preparation, does have a positive effect on subsequent recidivism and gainful employment, between which there is an inverse relationship” (1995, p. 47). Analysing 57 studies about recidivism, and 21 studies about employment following participation in prison, Bozick et al. (2018) found that prisoners participating in educational programmes decreased 28 per cent in recidivism comparing them with prisoners who did not participate.

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The reinforcement of the pedagogical aspects of education in prison instead punishment, and control will undoubtedly produce beneficial effects on the personal development, motivations, engagement, and desires of social re-integration of the inmates. Analysing theoretical models of education in prison, Pike and Farley observed "how best to cultivate a learning environment in prisons which can fully engage prisoners in education; to be not only employable, but with a positive pro-social identity, encouraging active citizenship" (2018, p. 82).

In this way, higher education is a stronger ally that adds more powerful, and lasting motivations, and expectations of re-integration as Scott observed:

While prison systems do not encourage incarcerated men, and women to challenge the existing social order, many college-in-prison programs facilitate their students becoming advocates of peace, justice, social engagement, taking action to challenge individual, and institutional violence, becoming spokespersons for their communities, and succeeding where the system had told them they were failures. (2014, p. 402)

In his autobiography, Malcolm X reflected on the role of the books, and training during his staying in prison, and asserted: "In fact, prison enabled me to study far more intensively than I would have if my life had gone differently, and I had attended some college". (X, and Haley, 1965, p. 175).

The perceptions of imprisonment, with primacy of security, the effect of alienation, and other negative effects, frequently related to characteristics of the prison population, provide opportunities for the education in prisons. Incarceration negatively impacts on prisoners, and education could provide new feelings, better ambiances, and opportunities regarding the re-integration into society. Coercive space should offer environments for education to engage, implicate, motivate, and empower (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 1995).

Wedemeyer's (1981) Theory of Independent Study seems join the features of distance education, and education in prison: the student, and the teacher are separated, the learning processes are developed through some kind of means, the learning is individual, and self-regulated, the learning is carried out through the autonomic activity of the student, the learning is adapted to the possibilities of his environment, and the control of time (progress, rhythm, start, duration, etc.) depends fundamentally on the student. Perhaps therefore training activity in prisons is frequently organized through Distance Education.

Some experiences as the Disabled Students Section of the Paris-Diderot University (France) offers to detained persons the access to higher education. They offer face-to-face training within the prison establishments, instead most of universities offer distance education. In addition to the Access Diploma in University Studies (in French D.A.E.U.), and a university diploma "Training in Humanities – Literature, and Human Sciences", Paris-Diderot University organizes conferences, and workshops for reflection, and discussion (Institut de l'UNESCO pour l'apprentissage tout au long de la vie, 2021).

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As said, most universities offer Distance Education, but it also needs adaptation to the prison environment. Since 2012, the Fédération Interuniversitaire de l'Enseignement à Distance has set up a working group (Étudiants empêchés) and published two guides to facilitate the implementation of administrative, and pedagogical work of a university course in prison university education in prison: The Guide to university education in prison (FIED, 2017), and The Guide for distance education adapted to the prison environment (FIED, 2020).

As in the prisons, the model of distance education presents in practice the break of the direct relationship between teacher and student. The interaction is reduced to minimal forms of communication and academic supports (tutors, mediators, didactic material, etc.) that are provided according to the design and the autonomy of the student becomes the basic key of the model (Viedma Rojas, 2003).

While the earliest practices of educational intervention in prison focused on the most basic levels such as the acquisition of literacy, and numeracy, with the progress of time, new demands, and needs were settled. While the most basic levels of training, and other types of intervention of a non-formal type have been attended with face-to-face trainers inside the facilities of the penitentiary centers, due to the infrequency of the demands, and their smaller number, for higher levels of education such as secondary or tertiary education, they were frequently carried out through Distance Education. As higher education requires higher skills, and more expensive resources, they were initially individual initiatives, and later they gave rise to collaborations, and institutional programs that allowed financing the costs of tuition, and materials. In general, in Europe, higher education in prison has been developed through Distance Education programs. For instance, the Open University (UK) has been providing training, and programs to prisoners since the late 1960s. The hard reality of the UK with a traditional massive carceral bulk tends and "the fact that the UK punishes more people with imprisonment, and with longer sentences, than any other Western European state" (Earle et al., 2020, p. 70).

Possible approaches/solutions

Relationship between penitentiaries and universities

Due to the nature of this type of training, some type of agreement is usually required with the Penitentiary Institutions or the persons in charge for the ministry. This can be funded in different ways and can be subject to specific government policies. For example, in the UK, students in secure environments can only obtain a student loan within the last 6 years of their sentence. In some countries, a complete set of professional and staff are defined inside the prison to maintain the relationship between the university organization and the student-prisoners. This is the case of the local education officer (French: responsable local de l'enseignement, RLE) whose missions are related to administrative tasks and/or educational services (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, de la Jeunesse et des Sports, 2020). Some can obtain charitable support.

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There are also limitations on what people can study – for example courses which require access to laboratories, such as chemistry or biology or specialist equipment, such as geology. In Turkey, specific rules were approved for distance learners educational service in prison by the Ministry of Justice to organize, allow, and provide specific means inside these contexts (Demiray, 2016).

Learning and deprivation of liberty

The deprivation of liberty has a direct impact on the possibilities, and characteristics of learning. The limitation of movement, and isolation determine the well-being, and health of people with special incidence of psychological factors. Experiential or problem-based pedagogies are unsuitable for the prison environment. Diverse experiences and pedagogical approaches have been carried out in many contexts and countries (Pozo Serrano, 2013; Demiray, 2016; Dias-Trindade & Moreira, 2019; Earle and Mehigan, 2019; FIED, 2020; Pandey, 2021).

Impact of context on learning

Prisons are environments with specific rules that determine the procedures, spaces, times, means, and organization of learning. The organised environment, and the available time seem advantageous. However, the penitentiaries also present scarce resources, no connection to the internet, control of activities, absence of tutorial support, and forced locations that are clear obstacles to learning well-being. Frequent movement between prison locations can also prevent continuity of learning. Lack of internet access means that paper versions of course materials must be provided, and these may not be suitable, for example, when interaction is required (Adams & Pike, 2012; Moreira, 2021).

Jail Specific Procedures and Resources

The prisons have facilities for common use, and other specific facilities for training. In most cases, universities need to adapt or adjust generally designed procedures, and resources. In the procedures, communication between students, and teachers, the tutoring system, the learning model, and evaluation are of special relevance. In resources, the possibility of accessing to the Internet, and didactic materials for learning are especially important, especially if they have a cost or are digital. Library access is often problematic – the prison library may only have a limited collection, and not carry the materials needed for many higher education courses. Digital competences and pedagogical scenarios enriched with audiovisual technologies are interesting solutions in prisons (Dias-Trindade, S. & Moreira, 2019).

Results and outcomes

The impact of the training on the well-being of incarcerated people and in their social re-integration when they leave prison is of special interest. The impact not only affects academic results, but also the effect on people and their lives during the imprisonment, and after it. It also has wider effects on families, and friends of prisoners, setting aspirations, and ambitions.

In general, it is accepted that educational penitentiary models are the base of success in the social reintegration of inmates (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 1995; Bozick et al., 2018; Enjuanes & Morata, 2019).

External support in coming out

It is especially important to contribute to the reintegration of people into life, and society after their incarceration. There are associations, and support networks to facilitate reintegration to life in freedom. However, OUUK has found that continuing to study once outside the secure environment when accommodation might be temporary and equipment suddenly unavailable can be very difficult, and lead to drop out. They offer a 'Through the Gate' support leaflet with information about agencies that support people who want to go back into employment (Earle et al., 2020).

Examples, and references to good practices, with fill description in annex

France

As every university can offer distance education, there are central, common rules of the Ministry to organize training in prisons. A commission coordinate and promote documents and procedures.

Germany

The federal laws and state laws regulate vocational training in the penitentiary system. There is a university's online infrastructure and services via the Elis-platform.

Spain

The UNED in most of the Spanish territory and the UOC in Catalonia offer access to higher education in prisons. Analogic procedures are used and students are assessed in prisons.

Turkey

There is a protocol signed with the Ministry. Contents are presented offline through self-study books and exams are organized inside prisons.

United Kingdom

Study materials, an online study portal, a dedicated tutor, and student forms are provided. However, not all of these are accessible to SISE students.

Recommendations

- Policy: It is necessary to specify in the real regulations, and policies the international recommendations assumed by the governments so that a legal framework is created to facilitate the organization, management, and integration of higher education in prison.
- Funding: Given the financial limitations of the inmates, and of the penitentiary institutions, it is necessary to ensure stable, and sufficient financing to guarantee the infrastructures, training environments, learning resources, and the necessary tutorial support.
- Curriculum: Given the singularity of penitentiary environments, and of prisoner as students, curricular flexibility is needed to allow the general syllabus to be adapted to these contexts. In addition, the curricula must be able to connect with the experiences, and realities inside prisons, and the peculiarities of incarcerated students.
- ICT connectivity: Connectivity and the use of ICT are fundamental as an essential basic competence for current learning, and re-integration. The security and control measures must be foreseen, and the appropriate means and times must be provided for the development of these capabilities.
- Civic engagement, and active citizenship: University students in prison must be able to participate in representative, and decision-making bodies, which will also allow them to develop civic participation, and active citizenship skills.
- Language teaching: Linguistic competence is one of the basic skills that improve employability, mobility, and inclusion in an increasingly mobile, diverse world. It should be one of the basic competences to be reinforced in higher education in prison.
- Learning means and facilities: The creation and maintenance of training-oriented facilities such as libraries, study rooms, gyms, workshops, laboratories, etc. should be reinforced. University students within the prison cannot constitute an island within another island. All facilities and facilities aimed at creating an environment conducive to the training, learning and transformation of people should be strengthened.
- Diversity: In addition to being incarcerated, people also have other traits or characteristics of diversity that need to be cared for within the prison. The possibility of providing accessibility and inclusion within this environment is also part of the special needs that we must address.
- Re-integration: Among the priority objectives that we must address is the reintegration of people into society once they finish their sentence. Mechanisms and supports that facilitate the transition from this environment of seclusion to society should be designed and strengthened, paying particular attention to employability and inclusion in standardized life networks.
- Future research: research, and innovation must be the fundamental pillars that allow us to generate new experiences, environments, and resources to strengthen the success of students with expectations of university education in prison.

UNED in prisons. Joining prisoners through learning.

Field of subject

Prisoners

When we talk about inclusion, we must also think about those who are excluded by law. Prisons represent a form of legal institutionalization of exclusion and, within their walls, people live together in the hope of one day reintegrating into society. To contribute to this purpose, the UNED annually signs an agreement with the administration in order to be able to offer undergraduate degrees and the access course to people over 25 years old. An organization has been developed both in the University and in the penitentiary centres with staff dedicated specifically to the tasks of organization and communication that facilitates the fluidity in the relationships between the students and their professors. Access to digitized learning processes is increasingly facilitated, although not directly connected to the Internet. Throughout this process, the UNED advisor plays a fundamental role as a liaison person from inside the penitentiary centre.

Introduction

The studies that can be taken through this program are all bachelor's degrees, except experimental degrees (Environmental Sciences, Chemistry, and Physics) and engineering, as well as the Direct Access Course for Over 25 Years-Old People.

The objective of the program is to increase the educational and cultural level of the prison population in national territory, enabling, through the distance methodology, their access to university studies.

University management

Agreements

The Institutions which have signed agreements at this time are the Ministry of the Interior Affairs, the Ministry of Defence, and the Government of Andorra. The agreement implicates procedures, organization, and funding.

We collaborate with all prisons. It is the business of the General Secretariat of Penitentiary Institutions to transfer inmate students to priority examination centres. Currently, the priority centres are 56 that depend on the Ministry of the Interior Affairs as well as others dependent on other administrations.

Specific staff/service in the university

The UNED has a service and technical staff that coordinates all activities related to prisons both from the point of view of sending materials and resources, communication with prison coordinators, and organization of examinations in prisons. One of the services that is organized is the collection of didactic material to be sent to the penitentiary centres.

The number of students enrolled in the last courses was:

- 2018-19: 974
- 2019-2020: 1,035
- 2020-21: 907

The number of exams taken in the 20-21 academic year was 5,071.

Adjustments at university

The UNED methodology allows students to independently carry out the main part of the tasks to learn, through the printed teaching material

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Viedma Rojas, A., Val Cid, C., & Callejo Gallego, J. (2019). Investigar en Cárceles. Apuntes para Futuros Científicos Sociales. *Empiria* (42), pp. 165-195. DOI: 10.5944/empiria.42.2019.23256

for each subject, made up of basic texts and support materials, enough to pass the different tests prepared by the teaching teams.

For the degrees, there is the UNED educational platform in different penitentiary centres, managed through the UNED Advisors, which allows access to the multimedia material provided by the teachers.

In each penitentiary centre, the general information and administrative management of the program will be carried out by the Training and Labour Insertion Managers.

Complementary activities

Between June and September, monographic non-formal courses are usually organized in Spanish universities on specific topics of a very diverse nature that usually last between three and five days and that combine scientific knowledge with a certain festive or relaxed spirit of the summer period. UNED organizes numerous courses during those months distributed throughout the Spanish territory. Specific courses are also organized in penitentiary centres with the possibility of the participation of both inmates and external citizens. These activities are always a space for exchange and openness for inmates of penitentiary centres.

Research

Various UNED researchers, either through projects or doctoral theses, have been studying the evolution of the program and its effects on the expectations, obstacles and study habits of the students, thus contributing to the improvement of its design (Viedma Rojas, 2003; Vázquez Cano, 2013; Viedma Rojas, Val Cid, & Callejo Gallego, 2019).

Organisation inside the prison

Registration

The fees are free accessing through this program. Information, guidance, selection, and registration is carried out through the prison services.

Staff accompanying teaching

The staff involved in this management are the Training and Labour Insertion Managers, who are officers of the penitentiary centre who are entrusted with the task of supporting and facilitating the training of inmates (registration, reception of shipments, communication with the teaching teams, support to the assessors of the exam boards, the tutors for some subjects of the Access Course for Over 25s, and the UNED Advisors who are contracted by the UNED to perform similar functions to the tutors of Undergraduate students.

The functions of the UNED advisors are: 1) Support students and facilitate access to the contents of the subjects; 2) Coordinate communication with the teaching teams and manage the delivery of

activities or student tasks to the teaching teams. The counselling is weekly.

Resources and facilities for learning

Specific computer classrooms with partial connection to the training platform have been set up in some centres and are managed by a UNED advisor; in other cases, the consultant has only an offline computer room.

On the other hand, in all the centres there are computer rooms available to the inmates, which they can use to carry out tasks or academic papers, although not to access the Internet.

The teaching teams send the resources they consider to their students through an internal UNED service and manage the communication, monitoring and evaluation of their students through this service.

Management of the learning process

To carry out the training, the UNED makes the following services and materials available to intern students in penitentiary centres:

- A guidance system (Welcome Plan), information, and registration.
- Weekly tutorials in some priority penitentiary centres about subjects of the Direct Access Course for Over 25s.
- Support through UNED Advisors in the use of the educational platform, in penitentiary centres that have access to it, for undergraduate studies.
- Assistance from the nearest UNED Centre for students in the open regime and probation.

Assessment

The assessment combines continuous evaluation through tasks and activities with the face-to-face tests that UNED organizes three times a year (February, June and September), which will be held in the prisons designated as priority. Internal students who are not in one of these centres may request the transfer sufficiently in advance of the dates of the face-to-face tests.

UNED teachers are sent to prisons to take the exams. There is a specific digitalization process for the exams that are printed, taken, and collected inside the prisons for later delivery to the teachers who will grade them.

Conclusions

The experience of all these years has allowed us to develop and improve strategies to improve the successful learning of prisoners and favor their social re-integration later.

Aras Bozkurt, Cengiz Hakan Aydın

Anadolu University (Turkey)

Open and Distance Learning for Prisoners: Experiences of Anadolu University

Field of subject

Prisoners

Anadolu University is a dual-mode university that delivers face to face and distance education. As a state university with an open education faculty, it facilitates lifelong learning (Anadolu University, 2021) and also keeps the back door open (Wedemeyer, 1981) for those who seek knowledge and learning. While there is an increasing demand, increasing security measures, the need for legal regulations, insufficient infrastructures (e.g., computer labs, internet connection, etc) and lack of student support (Farley et al., 2016) the provision of open and distance education is a challenge, yet Anadolu University delivers education to students at prisons at its capacity. In this regard, as a giga university with more than one million students each term, Anadolu University, Open Education Faculty goes beyond the classroom walls and in some cases, penetrates into the walls of the prisons to access and provide higher education opportunities for convicts and detainees.

Legal Background and university management

As the case for students at prisons requires special attention and following a set of procedures, Anadolu University and the Ministry of Justice General Directorate of Prisons and Detention Houses signed a protocol to regulate and facilitate the teaching and learning practices through open education. Accordingly, all the communications between Anadolu University and students at prison should be provided through official channels. Upon receiving the request to enrol in a program at the Open Education Faculty of Anadolu University, printed books are provided to students through educational officers or the family members of the students. In some special cases, if there is availability to use computers at prisons and if the permission is granted by the prison management (especially for those in low-risk detention centres), students at prisons can also access learning materials through the learning management system of the Anadolu University. By their request, the time and place for the exams are coordinated and identified by Anadolu University and these onsite exams are supervised by a representative from Anadolu University and another representative from the prisons. Exams are conducted onsite, and if convicts and detainees want to take the exam in prisons, they have to apply to the prison directorates one month before each exam period (with the possibility of being released). Those who complete their courses and pass exams are granted a diploma. In short, all these processes have four essential steps. These are enrolling students to programs, providing learning content, organizing exams and graduating them if they successfully pass exams and meet predefined graduation requirements.

Organizations and Services

In prisons, education and training activities are given special emphasis in order to reintegrate the convicts into society, to prevent them from committing crimes again and to continue their lives as individuals with a sense of responsibility. In this context, convicts and detainees are provided with all kinds of educational opportunities, from basic education to higher education.

Higher education services are provided to convicts and detainees through open and distance learning. In this regard, convicts and detainees communicate with education officers and all their communications with educational institutions are provided with education officers. Upon having their request to attend higher

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[Prisons_The_Cases_of_Four_Universities_in_Australia_UK_Turkey_and_Nigeria](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/311735536_Delivering_Digital_Higher_Education_into)
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education, branches of Anadolu University in the relevant city supervise the application and enrolment process.

Those who are accepted to the programs are given books that are specifically designed as self-study materials. Though open and distance learning practices are mostly online, these practices and educational contents are presented offline through self-study books. Convicts and detainees at prisons should take their learning responsibility, and thus, they are supposed to demonstrate a high level of self-regulated, self-management, and self-directed learner skills.

Earlier studies reported that most of the students at prisons in Turkey are male learners and one of the mostly enrolled programs is the Judicial Studies Program (Demiray et al., 2016). The current facts and figures confirm that the pattern has not changed much thus far. Accordingly, by the 2020-2021 academic year, there were a total of 5648 students in prisons (Male, 5227, 93%; Female, 421, %7). Of all, around 15% of learners in prisons are traditional first-time students while 80% are those already graduated from a higher education institution (who can enrol directly) and 5% are enrolled through different entry options. Another interesting figure is that around 10% of learners are enrolled in the Judicial Studies Program whose graduates can work as clerks in courts. This program provides courses such as Administrative Law, Constitutional Law, Civil Law, Administrative and Constitutional Jurisdiction, Introduction to Human Rights Law, Basic Enforcement Law Knowledge, etc.

Field of subject

Prisoners

As a traditional provider of distance education, OUUK has a long trajectory offering training in prisons. For 50 years, this university has carried out various kinds of programs to open also the world of the higher education to prisoners (Earle & Mehigan, 2020; Earle, Mehigan, Pike, & Weinbren, 2020).

Some of their strategies are specially relevant as the personal learning support of tutors and the students' work on tutor-marked assignments (TMAs), the correspondence tuition purposes, and the students' support.

Introduction

The Open University is a flexible part time study provider of distance learning. The University is Open to all regardless of prior education qualifications or experiences. This open aspect of the University is unique to the UK Higher Education Sector. Within the distance learning model, we provide study materials, an online study portal, a dedicated tutor, student forms and appropriate learning events; not all of these are accessible to SISE students.

The Open University (OU) has always valued the relationship between tutors and their students, and correspondence tuition plays a vital role in that relationship, especially with SISE students. Correspondence Tuition involves assessing students' work according to given marking schemes and giving written and other defined feedback to students to help them in their learning.

In an OU context, correspondence tuition is the personal learning support given by OU tutors in relation to their students' work on tutor-marked assignments (TMAs). This entails supporting students in their preparation in advance of a TMA and responding (in written, spoken or electronic form) to the TMA itself. It also includes following up afterwards to support further learning needs, through clarification or discussion.

Correspondence Tuition Purposes

Correspondence tuition serves several different purposes. It helps:

- encourage – all students report that feeling encouraged is of vital importance
- teach – the tutor can explain at a distance something that has not been understood
- facilitate skills development (the tutor can help the student develop an underdeveloped ability) the student attains learning outcomes
- individualise the learning experience and, if it connects with the student, make it personal to her or him and acknowledge her or his uniqueness
- provide for flexibility in response to the different learning needs of each student and his or her place in a course of study

References

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- explain the evaluation process, so a student can identify their strengths and weaknesses
- provide space for reflection, encouraging the student to think about both how something has been done and how well it has been achieved, and hence to identify the next steps in learning
- feed forward, looking ahead to mid-term and long-term learning goals of the student, and to skills which are encountered or developed further
- involve the student in self-assessment.

Students' Support

We support students in secure environments as below:

- **Accessible modules, prospectus, materials** – Students in Secure Environments Team (SiSE) work with Faculties to make as many modules and qualifications available to prisoners as possible taking into account their circumstances. We ensure that no inappropriate subjects or images are included and where possible make alternative activities that can be completed in an offline manner where general students would need to partake online i.e., assessed forums, use of software or external access to websites etc. A bespoke prospectus is produced each year and all materials are produced in a paper format to ensure all prisoners can access this education.
- **Learn 7** – We offer most SiSE modules through a prison-based system called Virtual Campus. Module teams host a locked down version of their Learn 2 module websites which restricts access to external links and forums. This gives prisoners in England and Wales the closest study experience to general population as possible.
- **Remote Exams** – During the pandemic we arranged for prisoners to have extra time to complete their remote exams due to lack of access to the Education Departments being locked down. This came to an end in September 2021 however we have negotiated to have this extended again for 2022 due to restrictions and lockdowns coming back into force in the coming weeks.
- **Face 2 Face IAG** (Information, Advice and Guidance) – Where possible we hold face to face IAG sessions for both prisoners and prison staff. We also arrange telephone appointments to suit the prison regimes.
- **Ceremonies** – When a student completes their qualification, we arrange bespoke degree ceremonies within the prisons where other prisoners can attend as guests and sometimes family can also be in attendance.

The actions and objectives of FIED concerning imprisoned students

Field of subject

Prisoners

The actions and objectives of FIED concerning imprisoned students offer a wider national context and a real training policy of partner universities for these audiences.

In order to promote distance academic teaching in prisons, universities must act by pooling and coordinating best practices from organizational and educational perspectives, in connection with prisons. The Fédération Interuniversitaire de l'Enseignement à Distance (FIED) organized a working group to analyze the situation, design a joint strategy and prepare procedures and documents. As a result of this group, two guides were published: The administrative guide (2015) and The educational guide (2020).

FIED working group

Our FIED working group's primary objective is to give visibility and improve the readability of distance training for these incarcerated groups.

- We supplied each penitentiary centre with posters and flyers (more than 600) to encourage accessible distance learning.
- We targeted about fifteen partner universities and the obtainable training programs including incarcerated students. It would be best to suggest a limited and more readable learning offer as many actors involved in education in prison would like to have. So, we expect partner universities to put forward their distance learning experiences and particularly the Diplôme d'Accès aux Etudes Universitaires (the DAEU) which, for prisoners, seems to be a goal in itself (35% of incarcerated students opt for the DAEU) and improve or adapt their organizational and educational practices.
- We identified 15 reference people (teachers or administrative staffs) who can be contacted, if necessary, by the Local Teaching Staffs in prison (RLEs in French). We published and distributed their list and facilitated the relations between local RLEs and reference people especially through on-site visits and meetings with the RLE and the academic teaching teams.

The framework agreement

A second area of work was the signing of a binding framework agreement and the supplying of model conventions.

Agreements between universities and penitentiary centres are the result of field work by committed and voluntary staff. We have a standard model agreement to facilitate the enrolment of incarcerated students and university-prison relations.

To promote access to higher education for people in the hands of justice, we have started work on drafting a framework agreement between institutions (ministerial departments/ministries).

This framework agreement known as the cooperation agreement between universities proposed the development of access to higher education for the people under the control of justice and was signed on February 22nd, 2017. The signatories are the Conference of University

References

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Presidents, the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Higher Education and Research. It aims at developing good organizational and educational practices within universities with a view to adapt systems to these audiences. It also provides a national framework in order to facilitate relations between the 3 signatories. A national steering committee monitors the actions carried out locally and promotes the diffusion and development of good practices.

The education guide and the teaching guide

We have sought to define pedagogical adaptations for the partner universities, to consolidate good practices and to raise awareness among teachers.

The administrative guide (2015)

The publication of a booklet on university education in a prison environment allows prison staffs (RLE, etc.) to be guided more easily in administrative procedures. For these detained students, the risk of dropping out and that of isolation are often very high, specifically by the sole failure to disseminate information or a simple delay in sending courses... There can be no success of Distance Learning in prisons without the mobilization of two pivotal actors within the establishments (prisons / university): a reference teacher on the university side and the Local Education Manager (RLE) in the prison. Active collaboration will increase the visibility of the training offer for the student. For each training course, it will ensure the fluidity of information about educational objectives, course calendars, examination periods and results. It is also a matter of making adjustments while offering a course as close as possible to what is done outside the prison.

The educational guide (2020)

We proposed a contextualization of the educational system based on a set of specifications or a guide to good practices with the sending of documents by CD-ROMs, the adaptation of contents for non-connected students (CD-ROMs...), the access to resources via the Local Education Manager (RLE), occasional face-to-face interventions, the access to documentary sources and the flexibility of training courses. For these modalities, we presented examples of practices used in universities.

Then, we listed more innovative educational materials (automatic captures of PDF animations, captures of forums on CD-ROMs sent to the Local Education Manager) for these students who are not connected, according to the practices of Université Paul-Valéry Montpellier 3.

Finally, we presented the possible modalities for an individualized follow-up (different roles of methodological/educational tutoring extracts from forums via CD-ROMs ...) as well as teaching support experiences (the tutoring by older students, a single reference teacher, videoconferences via the Internet access of the Local Education Manager (RLE), the organization of course breaks and that of the end of studies).

Field of subject

Prisoners

Prisoners in Germany are allowed to participate in vocational training measures. As the state of Germany has a federal structure, federal laws and state laws regulate vocational training in the penitentiary system. According to § 7 StVollzG, each enforcement plan must document vocational training measures or continuing education. The goal is to teach, maintain, or pro-mote skills for successful employment after release from prison (§ 37 StVollzG). In addition to this, prisoners are also allowed to participate in continuing education in their free time (§ 67 StVollzG). Each prison has an educational service that oversees and coordinates the educational activities and measures.

Context

The FernUniversität in Hagen opens up the opportunity for incarcerated persons to pursue higher education studies as part of the mentioned educational activities. These studies range from continuing education to an academic degree to provide, maintain and promote skills for successful employment after they can leave prison.

The prospective students can select from the complete range of studies that the FernUniver-sität has to offer:

- Academic studies: The students can select from all courses and modules, depending on their interests. However, not all faculties allow students to enrol in any module, especially not in those modules with practical training or seminars.
- Bachelor's or master's degree: These degrees are the first and second professional university degrees. Students in prisons can enrol in all university degree programs as long as they fulfil the admission requirements.

But the students also have to fulfil specific technological requirements. They need access to a computer connected to the internet, as the FernUniversität provides courses and learning content in its course management and video content management systems, available via the internet.

University management

The university management supports the participation of students in prison through a general agreement with the federal government, though no additional resources are associated with this arrangement. Most of the university's services, e.g., the central IT department, library, and student services make their services available to students in prison.

Student services are the first point of contact for prospective students and their supervisors in prison. They inform the prospective student and the supervisor whether a study of the desired course of studies is possible under the conditions of the correctional institution. If the study is possible, the student can be enrolled and subsequently access the university's online infrastructure and services via the elis-platform (see below).

References

Strafvollzugsgesetz vom 16. März 1976 (BGBl. I S. 581, 2088; 1977 I S. 436), das zuletzt durch Artikel 27 des Gesetzes vom 5. Oktober 2021 (BGBl. I S. 4607) geändert worden ist.

In addition to the elis-system, the students in prison also receive their student registration. Only this registration allows access to the university's digital learning infrastructure. The student registration comes with a personal email account, which students in prison are not allowed to use, as they are not allowed to communicate with people outside prison freely. Access to the course management system is also limited, as the students in prison are not allowed to communicate with the other students. So, while access to the learning materials is possible, students in prison are limited in their digital communication.

These limitations make studying more difficult and sometimes require additional support by instructors and lecturers. Some study activities are not able for the student to do, so lecturers have to provide alternatives to these activities. As the university also has no specific staff to support students in prison, it is sometimes difficult for students in prison to get answers to their particular questions.

Elis-Platform

The acronym elis stands for "E-Learning im Strafvollzug", which translates to e-learning in the penitentiary system. Elis is operated by the "Institut für Bildung in der Informationsgesellschaft" (IBI), a non-profit limited liability company. The elis-platform enables students in prisons to access the ICT infrastructure of the university. Access to the learning infrastructure is enabled via cooperation between the university, IBI, and the various prisons. The university provides the ICT infrastructure and specialized operation modes for the elis-system. The elis-system is accessible for the students in jail and enables them to access vital parts of the digital learning infrastructure.

The elis-platform is financed by the federal states of Germany. Elis currently connects more than 120 prisons and enables the prisoners to access offerings of the FernUniversität, but many other websites with learning content, content relevant for the transition phase (e.g., website of the Employment Agency), and various video libraries.

08 Army and Athletes

Tiberio Feliz-Murias

UNED (Spain)

Athletes/army

The UNED has a specific agreement with the armed forces that allows the exams to be developed at the three usual times (February, June, and September) without students having to travel to the UNED centre, especially in the case of military units displaced in missions in various areas of the world. There is a person in charge within the military unit who organizes the exams by receiving the tests, taking the exam, collecting them, and sending them to UNED central office. To carry out the exams, a digitized system is used that allows the control of the tests, their printing and scan the student's answer that will reach the teacher for correction. These tests are carried out under the visual supervision of an evaluation commission from the headquarters through a video call system.

Thanks to an agreement with the Higher Council of Sports (Ministry of Culture and Sport), an aid program for high-level university athletes is carried out. The program supports athletes at an academic level in terms of organizing their study time, providing specific online tutors, solving doubts about the different subjects, and adapting the regular calendar of exams.

Diplomatic corps and embassy staff are also a target group with specific actions, specially to take exams.

Good practices in distance education from the UNED with the army and athletes

Introduction

The increasing demands for academic purpose in diverse contexts offer opportunities to widen the action for distance education. The UNED offer three specific actions as army missions, elite sports, and diplomatic corps and embassy staff.

The army is a pillar of democratic society that contributes to stability and the maintenance of international order. Spain has a professional Army that also participates in missions in difficult contexts to support the maintenance of political order in complex and delicate situations. Soldiers also need opportunities for their academic development and the UNED provides it in these complex, distant situations (Muñoz Mansilla, 2016, 2017 & 2018). On the other hand, the UNED provides the flexibility that high-level athletes need to be able to prepare and participate in international competitions when the official calendar requires it. They also dedicate the youngest years of their lives representing their country with a lot of effort and dedication in their short career. When they finish, they will need to rejoin common life and we must support them so that they are prepared for their new life.

Finally, we include the possibility of having examinations in the embassies for the diplomatic corps and personnel of the diplomatic headquarters who also have difficulties to go and use the services of the UNED centres.

The army

Exams at international missions

Based on an agreement with the Ministry of Defence signed on 2011, the soldiers of Spanish Army in military bases can take their exams. For instance, personnel of the Armed Forces in Afghanistan, Central African Republic, Djibouti, Gabon, Iraq, Kabul, Lebanon, Mali, Somalia, and Turkey took their exams in various calls in recent years. Also, examination outside the ordinary term of the calendar to military displaced in the Ship Hesperides (Atlantida Mission) and Ship Juan Carlos I, which have carried out exams in several centres (Fernández Vázquez, 2020a & 2020b).

General Gutiérrez Mellado University Institute

The Institute is a research and teaching centre specializing in issues related to the search for peace, security, and defence. It was born in

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<https://bit.ly/3zo3nXM>

Fernández Vázquez, A. (2021). *Acuerdo de creación del Grado para la promoción de suboficiales de las Fuerzas Armadas* [Agreement to create the Degree for the Promotion of Non-Commissioned Officers of the Armed Forces]. UNED.

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UNED.

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Muñoz Mansilla, R. (2017). *Memoria de Actividades Pruebas Presenciales. Curso 2016-2017*. [Memory of Activities Face-to-face Tests. Academic year 2016-2017].

UNED.

<https://bit.ly/3pTurLn>

1997 with an agreement between the Ministry of Defence and UNED to offer studies in military education centres to strengthen ties between the political, military, and academic spheres. Its objectives are to develop scientific research, encourage postgraduate education, promote the dissemination of scientific works, and create a framework for reflection and dialogue. It offers specialization programs – official master's degrees and courses – and doctorate) and means (events, library, and publications) with specific issues of peace, security, and defence to the professionals and researchers who require specific knowledge on these matters.

Degree for the promotion of non-commissioned officers of the Armed Forces

The Project is an agreement between the Ministry of Defence and the UNED for the promotion of the rank of non-commissioned officers, military personnel who constitute the fundamental link of the Armed Forces. The special situation of these personnel requires credit recognition mechanisms based on the qualifications of higher technician of Vocational Training, professional experience and courses of improvement education developed in the career of non-commissioned officers. The project has been presented in 2021 and is currently being designed (Fernández Vázquez, 2021).

High-performance sports

Thanks to an agreement with the Higher Council of Sports (Ministry of Culture and Sport), an aid program for high-level university athletes is carried out. The program supports athletes at an academic level in terms of organizing their study time, providing specific online tutors, solving doubts about the different subjects, and adapting the regular calendar of exams. It also promotes and rewards their participation in the different university championships, and supports them financially either by granting them credits, making a return of the tuition, or giving them an economic bag for books and didactic materials (Ramos Rodríguez, 2011).

Specific protocol for learning

The UNED has a protocol of attention to elite athletes that facilitates the adaptation of the times and the realization of the tests according to the calendar of preparation of tests in which they must participate. In addition to flexibility in pace and time management, these students need to be able to regulate the moments of face-to-face tests when the official calendar of written tests coincides with the competitions and be able to move them if they require it.

Objectives

- To support athletes at an academic level in terms of organizing their study time, solving doubts about the different subjects and as far as possible changes in the date of exams.

Muñoz Mansilla, R. (2018). *Memoria de Actividades Pruebas Presenciales. Curso 2017-2018. [Memory of Activities Face-to-face Tests. Academic year 2017-2018].*

UNED.

<https://bit.ly/3EXH5xc>

Ramos Rodríguez, C. (2011). *Programa de ayudas a deportistas universitarios de alto nivel. [Aid program for high-level university athletes].* UNED. <https://bit.ly/3pRIZos>

- To promote and reward the participation of athletes in the different university championships.
- To support athletes financially either by granting them credits, making a return on tuition or giving them an economic bag for books and teaching materials.

Actions

The program has a series of actions specifically designed to support elite athletes:

- Recognition of credits for being registered in high-level sports organizations or for representing the UNED in university competitions.
- Specific tutorial support plan to help make academic activity compatible with sport.
- Financial aid from the university in the public prices of the tuition, bag for books and didactic materials and endowment of material and sports clothing.
- Specific Reception Plan for athletes, explaining the operation of the UNED, the services and the possibilities of flexibility and adaptation of the UNED to their needs.
- Professional guidance advising on the professional opportunities of the careers.

Diplomatic corps and embassy staff

Students of the diplomatic corps and embassy staff can take their exams thanks to a technological deployment supervised from the headquarters of the rectorate of the UNED. Due to this agreement, they take their exams in the embassies and consulates of several countries as Australia, South Korea, Egypt, United Arab Emirates, Philippines, Hong Kong, India, Israel, Kenya, Nicaragua, Panama, Romania, Serbia, Singapore, and Turkey (Fernández Vázquez, op. cit.).

Good practices in distance education for student athletes in Slovenia

Field of subject related to diversity and inclusion

Athletes

Introduction

The educational levels of primary and secondary school in Slovenia are defined in the Law on Sport (Zakon o športu, 2017). At the elementary school level, children who are also athletes have the opportunity to obtain the so-called "athlete status," which allows them to make certain adjustments to school requirements - such as the number of classes they attend, how they are evaluated, when they receive their grades, and the like... The details of this status, and the opportunities and options students with athlete status have, are further defined by specific guidelines from individual schools. These can be further adapted to help children participate in school and sports without one interfering with the other (Štrumbelj, 2018).

Good practices

The Law on Sport (Zakon o športu, 2017) also refers to the Law on Gymnasium and the Law on Vocational Education and allows for adjustments to schooling for athletes at the high school level. These can be defined either by policies of individual schools or by a personalized educational plan prepared for the best performing athletes by professional staff of the school. These include, for example, psychologists, educators, and often the athletic coordinator, whose job it is to ensure the coordination of sports and school requirements. The person responsible for this coordination is determined by the principal of each school and can come from very different backgrounds, just as each high school can have its own policies that determine the rights and adjustments of school instruction for children who are also active athletes.

Often, these policies include rules about how often athletes must be present in class - usually they are allowed to miss many more school activities than their peers. They can also usually receive their grades at other times or orally instead of in writing, for example. Personalized education plans can also be adjusted during the year if it is found to be necessary. The purpose of this personalized education plan is to allow athletes to coordinate school and sports as much as possible so that the two do not interfere with each other.

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This is especially important when students participate in sports that require a lot of attendance, which keeps them away from school-for example, alpine skiers who are absent for much of the winter, or when practices require a lot of travel, as in sailing or similar sports (Štrumbelj, 2018).

High school students can also attend so-called "sports classes" that are specifically designed for athletes. They allow students more time during the day to participate in sports drills, sometimes starting later in the day so athletes can do their morning drills, and so on. The schools that have sports classes also require the participation of the athletes' coaches. For example, the coaches must attend meetings with the school principal or school sports coordinator to ensure that school and coaching go hand in hand (Kajtna, Koren, and Robnik, 2020). So far, we have found that this is a particularly well-coordinated system of school-based support for children and youth who are active in sports. The Law on Sport (Zakon o športu, 2017) also emphasizes the importance of graduation requirements to ensure that athletes do not receive lower grades that would diminish their opportunities for later enrollment in college.

After high school, the Law on sport no longer applies when it comes to athletes' education. This means that the coordination of higher education and active participation in competitive sports is mainly determined by the policies of individual universities. At Slovenia's largest university, the University of Ljubljana, the rights and opportunities of students and athletes are defined in the Statute of the University of Ljubljana (Statut UL, 2017) and the Policy for Students with Special Status (Pravilnik o študentih s posebnim statusom Univerze v Ljubljani, 2018). At the second largest university in Slovenia, the University of Maribor, student athletes are treated based on the Student Status Definition Act (Zakon za urejanje položaja študentov, 2017). This law from 2017 mentions student athletes in Article 7, which only states that they can receive adjustments in their study process, but does not define them further. We should also mention that some universities or some faculties within certain universities also have their own policies that further support the education of student athletes. One of them is the Policy for Special Conditions of Education of Student Athletes and Student Coaches (Pravilnik o posebnih pogojih izobraževanja kategoriziranih športnikov in trenerjev kategoriziranih športnikov Fakultete za šport v Ljubljani, 2018) at the Faculty of Sport of the University of Ljubljana. All these statuses will be explained in more detail later.

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The importance of coordinating studies and sports activities is also promoted by the Olympic Committee of Slovenia (OKS, 2020), which has established a program called "athlete-friendly education certificate," which high schools and universities can receive if they prove that they promote dual careers for athletes. This means that educational institutions that hold this certificate have demonstrated that they are doing everything in their power to help their student athletes coordinate the demands of sports and the demands of their studies. This essentially means that these institutions support the dual careers of their athletes (Kolar and Robnik, 2018). In 2020, when this certificate was issued for the first time, it was awarded to 14 institutions, which means that the importance of coordinating school and sport in Slovenia is at a high level. The Student Status Regulation Act (Zakon za urejanje položaja študentov, 2017), adopted in November 2017, defines the status of sports students. Article 7 of this law states that students with a special status are students who are top athletes, a special status can also be granted to students who are top artists and other students who participate in regional or international competitions. This article also defines students with special needs, i.e., blind and visually impaired students, deaf and hard of hearing students, students with mobility problems, and various other special needs students. Students with special needs and students with special status receive more favorable treatment in the selection process when applying to universities, they receive adjustments in class attendance, they may receive adjustments in the way they are graded. They also receive additional professional assistance in their studies so that they can progress in their studies and complete their studies in a longer period of time than is provided or allowed for other students.

We see that the law is very general in its description and rights of student athletes, providing only the general basis for universities and institutions to make adjustments. However, the detailed rights and adjustments are usually more clearly defined in the policies of the universities or educational institutions - for example, if we take a look at the policy for students with special status at the University of Ljubljana (Pravilnik o študentih s posebnim statusom Univerze v Ljubljani, 2018), which was adopted in May 2018, this special status is given to students who are top athletes or top artists or who participate in regional or international competitions. This status is also given to students who are parents or have special needs. This status allows students to receive extra help and adjustments with their degree requirements because they either have extra activities in their life or certain obstacles, that prevent them from participating normally in the degree process and completing their degree requirements normally.

A student may receive student athlete status if they are classified by the National Olympic Committee as an Olympic, World, International, Perspective, National, or Junior athlete, or receive an equivalent confirmation from abroad if they are a foreign student. They can also obtain the status if they compete at the national or international level and achieve top results in sports or disciplines not recognized by the National Olympic Committee. They can also receive this status as a student coach if they are a national team coach or coach an individual athlete categorized by the National Olympic Committee. They can also obtain the status if they are directly involved in the preparation of top athletes at a high level and can prove it with a confirmation from the athlete or the federation or sometimes a club. They can also obtain the status of student athlete or student coach if are Paralympic athletes or if they coach a Paralympic athletes - in this case the confirmation must be issued by the Paralympic Committee of Slovenia.

These students can receive adjustments when it comes to the extent to which they have to participate in the study process, they can also receive individual examination dates, they can receive different types of assessments if they cannot participate in the same type of assessment that other students go through... Of course, this also depends on the faculty, and sometimes it is exactly these faculty policies that determine how student athletes should study or what their study process should look like. Among the general adaptations, we should mention especially the communicative availability of materials and the study process. This is something that has turned out to be a really good outcome of the epidemic period, because we learned a lot about online and hybrid courses. This way, students athletes can attend classes even when they are away for practice or competition. Of course, teachers have to be flexible enough to allow streaming of their courses, but it's interesting that many students who are athletes or coaches say that the pandemic period of online-only study was very good for them in terms of academic participation and success.

The most detailed guidelines within the University of Ljubljana can be found at the Faculty of Sport (Pravilnik o posebnih pogojih izobraževanja kategoriziranih športnikov in trenerjev kategoriziranih športnikov Fakultete za šport v Ljubljani, 2018), where the Senate of the Faculty of Sport adopted in November 2018 a guideline on the special conditions of training categorized athletes and coaches. This Faculty is in a special situation because every year many student athletes and student coaches participate - every year about 150 student athletes and between 10 and 20 student coaches are enrolled. From this perspective, the adjustments are necessary for them to successfully complete their studies. Student athletes and student coaches can receive three different types of status and lowered attendance status. Status A is awarded to Olympic and World Class athletes and coaches of Olympic and World Class athletes according to the National Olympic Committee. Status B is awarded to International and Perspective Class athletes and coaches of International and Perspective Class athletes and Status C is awarded to National and Junior Class athletes and coaches of Junior and National Class athletes.

Depending on the status, athletes must participate in classes to a lesser extent – this goes for practices, lectures and seminars. They may also advance to a higher year with fewer credit points than their peers. For example, the student athlete with status A only needs to be present for 50% of the student activities, while their peers need to be present for 100% of the activities. In addition, the student athlete with status A only needs to gain 40 credit points to advance to a higher year, while the other students need to gain 60 out of 60 credit points to advance to a higher year, according to the Statute of the University of Ljubljana (Statut UL, 2017). Attendance and required credit points for a higher year are slightly higher for Status B and even slightly higher for Status C, but all receive some bonuses for attendance and advancement to higher years due to their athletic activity or coaching activities.

Students may also receive an attendance bonus if they do not have a classification or participate in sports that are not part of the National Olympic Committee sports family. These athletes generally receive a 25% attendance bonus because it is important to help as many student athletes as possible, even if they do not compete at the highest level. Student athletes and student coaches on the Faculty of sport also have their own teacher mentor to help them coordinate sports and studies, and A status student athletes even get an individual mentor. This is usually the teacher who teaches the sport they are participating in. For example, if the student is a handball player with the highest National Olympic Committee class, one of the handball teachers is usually his or her individual mentor because he or she knows the sport well enough to optimize the coordination of sport and study for that athlete.

Contributing Institutions

European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU) | The Netherlands

Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED) | Spain

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The Open University (OUUK) | The United Kingdom

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