



Information and support at the University of Tartu

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Adaptations for students with special needs



The principle of equal treatment requires that all people in equal circumstances are treated equally. However, if people are in unequal circumstances, it may be necessary to treat them differently to ensure that they have equal opportunities to participate in social life.

Ministry of Social Affairs, Competence Centre

Equal treatment

Inclusive education is applied in Estonia. It is understood first and foremost as a person's fundamental right to a quality education – all learners, including students, have the right to education according to their abilities and needs.

Under the Equal Treatment Act, we must protect people against discrimination on grounds of nationality (ethnic origin), race, colour, religion or other beliefs, age, disability or sexual orientation. All educational and research institutions must, upon determination of the content of studies and organisation of studies, take account of the need to promote the principle of equal treatment.

Students with special needs

A student with special needs is a student who needs support to achieve learning outcomes through changes in the organisation of the course or in the learning environment. The need for support may be due to health-related circumstances: a long-term health condition or difficulties associated with a mental or physical condition. However, special needs are not necessarily health-related. For example, talent, an active sporting career or the burden of taking care of a family member, as well as a political or military situation may also require greater flexibility in the context of education.

Adaptations in teaching and studies

At the University of Tartu, making adaptations is governed by the Study Regulations. According to that, to request adaptations, the student contacts the special needs adviser and presents proof of special needs. The teaching staff member makes reasonable adaptations in the course for the student if

- the special needs adviser has prepared a list of adaptations recommended for the student

and the teaching staff member is informed of it within a reasonable time from the beginning of the semester;

- without the adaptations, it would be difficult for the student to achieve the learning outcomes in the course due to special needs.

What is the process of making adaptations?

1. The student makes an appointment with the special needs adviser in the [booking system of the Counselling Centre](#).
2. The adviser discusses with the student what the difficulties are and what the student can do to support himself/herself. The student submits a document (doctor's certificate, disability certificate, disability assessment decision, etc.) to prove the special need.
3. The adviser prepares a draft letter of recommended adaptations and sends it to the student for review.
4. If the student agrees with the content of the letter of recommended adaptations, the adviser sends the letter to the teaching staff members in charge of the courses, to the programme director and to the academic affairs specialist.
5. The teaching staff in charge informs the staff teaching the course who need to know about the special need and adaptations.
6. The teaching staff member considers the recommendations and decides on which adaptations can be made in their course.
7. The student contacts the teaching staff in charge to agree on the details.
8. The teaching staff informs the student about which adaptations can be made in teaching and studies.
9. The adaptations are implemented.

What are the possible adaptations?

- Making all study materials and information available in writing.
- Allowing breaks during exams and assessments.
- Allowing a sign language interpreter, speech-to-text interpreter or support person to lectures or an exam.
- Allowing the use of a laptop during exams and assessments.
- When marking homework and exams, not taking grammatical errors into account if the learning outcome of the course is not correct grammar.
- Allowing flexibility in terms of attendance, exam times and the deadlines of assignments.
- Giving extra time during exams and assessments.
- Allowing for alternative ways to make presentations.
- Other adaptations depending on the student's situation.

Please note:

- Making the adaptations depends on the **student's situation, the conditions of passing the course, and the possibilities of the teaching staff**.
- The adaptations are agreed upon for **one semester**. This means the student needs to contact the special needs adviser **at the beginning of each semester**.