



Studying at Bern University of Applied Sciences with a disability

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1. Background

In the interests of equality of opportunity (Art. 30 para. 1 letter a section 5 [HEdA](#)), Swiss universities – and therefore also BFH – implement and coordinate measures to compensate for the disadvantages faced by people with disabilities in basic and continuing education¹.

The starting point and legal basis is the prohibition of discrimination laid down in the Federal Constitution (Art. 8 para. 2 [Federal Constitution](#) (FC)). This provision prohibits discriminatory treatment, in particular on the grounds of physical, mental or psychological disability. Not only direct, but also indirect or disparate discrimination is prohibited. Disparate discrimination against persons with a disability occurs when a regulation does not contain any obvious discrimination against persons with a disability, but in its impact it ultimately places persons with disabilities at a particularly severe disadvantage without objective justification².

¹ See also Art. 30 [Statute of Bern University of Applied Sciences](#) (German).

² Cf. BGE 129 I 217, E.2.1; see also the express provision in Art. 2 para. 2 [Disability Discrimination Act](#).



BFH's policy of dealing with of students or applicants with a disability is also guided by the [Federal Disability Discrimination Act \(DDA\)](#)³ and the [UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) (German) (in particular Art. 24 UN CRPD).

BFH takes appropriate precautions to ensure that equality of opportunity for people with disabilities is guaranteed in the admission process, during classes and in competency assessments of the degree programs and in continuing education. Disability-related disadvantages should be compensated for with proportionate adjustments to study and examination conditions (termed 'reasonable adjustment'), and by providing access to buildings and study information that is as barrier-free as possible.

In its implementation, BFH is guided in particular by the paper "[Reasonable adjustments: Challenges and best practices at Swiss universities](#)" (German) by swissuniversities and the "[Guidelines for universities on reasonable adjustments during studies](#)" (German) by swissuniability.

2. Support and advisory services

- [BFH contact persons](#) are available to answer questions about reasonable adjustments and barrier-free access to studies.
They can offer support in clarifying requirements and individual resources and provide information about the requirements of the degree programme and of the associated profession.
- [Contacts for barrier-free access](#) (German)
- [Universities of Bern Counselling Centre](#) – may be consulted when clarifying requirements and personal resources.
- [Swissuniability platform](#) (German)
- [myAbility Talent Programme](#)
- [CléA: assistance platform for people with disabilities](#) (German)

3. Reasonable adjustments: Concept, proportionality and delimitation to eligibility for study

3.1. Term

People with disabilities have special learning requirements. If their academic achievements are assessed without making allowances for their disadvantages or compensating for them, this is discriminatory. In such cases, people with disabilities are entitled to reasonable adjustments.

'Reasonable adjustments' is the term used for individually defined measures that compensate for the disadvantage a student suffers on account of their disability. Their purpose is to change the (formal) conditions that exist for the acquisition of skills and learning content – including the associated competency assessments – in such a way as to guarantee equality of opportunity (cf. Art. 2 para. 5 [DDA](#)).

No adjustments are made to the required academic standards, such as the skills to be acquired and learning goals to be achieved. Students who are eligible for reasonable adjustments must perform to the same standard as their fellow students. Consequently, reasonable adjustments are not noted on the diploma or diploma supplement or any other qualification certificate.

Anyone who has a proven disability can apply for reasonable adjustments. Disability in the legal sense is defined as a physical, mental or psychological impairment that is likely to be permanent and which, among other things, makes it difficult or impossible for the person concerned to complete degree programs and continuing education (cf. Art. 2 para. 1 [DDA](#)).

³ Due to the division of authority between the Confederation and the canton, the [DDA](#) only applies to educational programmes within the jurisdiction of the Confederation. With the exception of primary schools, it is not directly applicable to cantonal educational programmes, but BFH follows it in practice and consults individual provisions to interpret binding legal provisions and with respect to the balancing of interests.

3.2. Proportionality

Measures related to reasonable adjustments must always be proportionate⁴. Whether this is the case must be examined on the basis of the specific circumstances of the individual case by balancing conflicting interests.

The benefit of the chosen reasonable adjustments must also be balanced with the economic and organisational costs incurred by BFH and must not lead to discrimination against fellow students (cf. Art. 11 para. 1 DDA).

There is no entitlement to a specific form of reasonable adjustment. The simplest possible suitable measure should always be chosen to compensate for the disadvantage.

3.3. Delimitation with respect to the eligibility for study

The subject-related standard a student is expected to achieve is not lowered because of the disability. Although students may be given the opportunity to demonstrate their competence in a form that takes their disability into account through individually defined measures, the competency assessment at the end of the degree programme must remain equivalent.

The maximum threshold for adjustments to study or examination conditions is when a point is reached at which it is no longer possible to check whether people fulfil the examination or study requirements. This also applies in particular to the practical components of degree programs or continuing education.

If a person is unable to achieve the learning objectives of a degree or continuing education programme, even if appropriate reasonable adjustments are granted, it means they lack sufficient ability to study or sit exams. This makes it especially important to provide careful information and advice to prospective students with disabilities during the application and admission process.

Universities are not obliged to compensate for all de facto inequalities. Just like different professions, degree and continuing education programmes also require special qualities and skills that not all people possess equally. The mere fact that individuals do not have these skills through no fault of their own cannot mean that the requirements have to be watered down⁵. The Federal Supreme Court has ruled that the prohibition of discrimination recognises a prohibition of degradation and exclusion, but not a de facto equality requirement⁶.

3.4. Languages

No reasonable adjustments can be granted for the linguistic disadvantages of foreign-language students, because a foreign language is a difficulty but not a disability. Language-related reasonable adjustments are possible for people whose disability takes the form of dyslexia, for example, which causes problems with reading, writing and spelling.

4. The nature of reasonable adjustments at BFH

Due to the different types and degrees of disabilities, reasonable adjustments are examined on a case-by-case basis and determined individually in line with the applicant's needs. It is not permitted to apply a one-size-fits-all definition of the nature and scope of possible reasonable adjustments without an individual assessment. There is no entitlement to a specific form of reasonable adjustment.

⁴ This was, for example, the verdict of the Federal Administrative Court B-5474/2013 of 27 May 2014, finding 4.1.3 with references.

⁵ BGer, Judgement 2P.140/2002 of 18 October 2002, finding 7.5.

⁶ BGE 134 I 105, finding 5.



The principles to be observed and possible compensatory measures for selected areas are briefly described below. The list of possible adjustment measures here is by no means exhaustive.

4.1. Admissions

Any reasonable adjustment must be granted to applicants with disabilities as part of the admissions procedure (in particular during aptitude assessments for a specific degree programme)⁷.

In the qualifications that are regularly required to gain access to educational programmes, case law states that no concessions in the sense of lower entry hurdles have to be made. However, educational institutions are obliged to review the required qualifications to determine whether disability-friendly alternatives are possible.

4.2. Tuition

Also during degree program and continuing education, those responsible examine how to apply appropriate measures to compensate for disability-related disadvantages without lowering the academic requirements.

Possible reasonable adjustment measures could be, for example:

- Approval of disability-related aids (e.g. spellchecker, screenreader) for applicants and students
- Requirement for lecturers to use disability-related aids (e.g. wearing a special microphone for students with hearing impairments)
- Permission for an assistant (paid for by invalidity insurance or privately) or a guide dog
- Prior handing out of classroom materials
- Clear communication of the timetable for lessons (e.g. setting up a Time Timer, specifying planned processing sequences and steps)
- Preparation of relevant visual elements such as graphics for blind or severely visually impaired people, explanation of visual elements shown in class
- Access to a quiet place/relaxation room
- Granting of a reduced study workload and study time extensions

During their studies at BFH, students are also expressly protected against discriminatory behaviour based on physical, mental or psychological characteristics (Art. 5 letter h Regulations for the Protection of Personal Integrity (SPIR)).

4.3. Examinations and other competency assessments

Students and applicants with disabilities should have the same chances of passing the competency assessment as if the disability did not exist, through appropriate adjustments. This necessitates an individualised approach.

According to the ruling of the Federal Administrative Court of 15 July 2008 (B-7914/2007), the legal entitlement to reasonable adjustments for people with a disability requires educational institutions to make deviations from the 'normal' examination procedure in specific individual cases. Thus case law dictates that it is not permissible to reject requests from disabled students for individual solutions by making a blanket reference to examination and study regulations, without going into the matter in more detail and without giving specific reasons.

⁷The principle is undisputed, as was recently also the case in the Federal Supreme Court ruling 2C_299/2023 of 7 May 2024, in response to a student with dyslexia being refused extra time for the entrance test for a veterinary medicine degree.

Individualisation is limited by the principle of proportionality and with respect to the required academic standards, which must not be affected.

Possible reasonable adjustments for examinations and other competency assessments can be, for example:

- Additional time to prepare and take the competency assessments or extension of submission deadlines
- Individual rest breaks during exams (with or without extra time)
- Exams in a quieter or separate room or a smaller group
- Preliminary discussion of enrolments and the exam planning and examination procedure
- Written exams taken on the computer or electronic exams printed out on paper; oral exam questions provided additionally in written form
- Comprehension questions permitted for open examination questions
- For exam questions, additional information on the approximate time required and e.g. visualisation via TimeTimer
- Change of examination form (e.g. oral instead of written exam) – although this option should only be used with caution for reasons of equal treatment and available resources
- Individual instead of group work (only if collaboration is not part of the skills to be acquired)
- Permission for aids or strategies to improve concentration (e.g. hearing protection, wobble cushions, silent fidget toys, energy snacks)

Students with reasonable adjustments must immediately point out any shortcomings in the procedure of an exam or competency assessment. If a complaint to this effect is made only after an unsatisfactory exam result has been announced, it cannot be considered⁸.

Students with reasonable adjustments are also responsible for deciding whether they are capable of taking the competency assessment or exam before it begins. If the candidate is not fit to take the examination for health reasons, they must submit a postponement request (Art. 25 para. 3 FSR). An exam or competency assessment may only be cancelled in the event of an acute, unforeseeable deterioration in health, which must be certified by a doctor's note as soon as possible.

4.4. Barrier-free structural access

New buildings and conversions that are accessible to the public must be designed to be barrier-free. If this is not the case, the removal of structural barriers can be demanded (Art. 2 para. 3 in conjunction with Art. 3 letter a, Art. 7 para. 1 and 9 DDA).

For existing buildings, however, this can only be demanded within the framework of proportionality. The benefits of removing the barrier for people with disabilities must be weighed against the economic cost of doing so (Art. 11 BehiG). The principle of proportionality is further concretised in Art. 6 of the Disability Equality Ordinance (BehiV) (German).

Possible measures could be:

- One-off tour of the premises for new students
- Adaptation of the layout of classrooms and examination rooms
- Organisational support in obtaining any necessary keys for staircases and other lifts in the building

To implement these measures, students with reduced mobility should get in touch with the relevant contact person (PDF in German) well ahead of time.

⁸ See, for example, FAC, B-3253/2024, judgement of 12 May 2025; FAC, B-7024/2024, judgement of 10 July 2025.

5. Applying for reasonable adjustment

5.1. Submission of an application

Prospective and current students who have any questions about the procedure should get in touch with the contact person in the relevant school.

- Students or applicants should complete the application form for reasonable adjustments as early as possible. Students are advised to submit the application when registering for the degree programme or aptitude assessment, but at the latest before they start their studies. It is also possible to submit an application later on during the course. Please note that it usually takes two or three weeks to review applications for reasonable adjustments. It is not possible to apply retrospectively or to be granted retroactive reasonable adjustments for a competency assessment that has already taken place or a module that has already been completed⁹.
- The application can be submitted for the entire duration of the degree course or for individual elements (e.g. one or more modules, one or more competency assessments).
- The desired reasonable adjustment measures should be described in as much detail as possible in the application form.
- The application must be accompanied by a medical certificate that is no more than two years old. It should contain the following:
 - o Diagnosis and statements on the expected progression of the disability
 - o Assessment of study-related impairment
 - o Recommendations on the possible form that the reasonable adjustments could take
 If the impairment is likely to persist, a diagnosis that was determined and issued by a specialist more than two years previously can be reconfirmed by a doctor or a qualified specialist. The updated confirmation should also contain appropriate recommendations on the impact on the student's studying and the reasonable adjustments to be granted.
- The application is to be submitted to the head of the degree programme (for bachelor's and master's degrees) and to the head of continuing education for continuing education programmes.

5.2. Decision on the reasonable adjustments

- Reasonable adjustment measures are set out in writing in a ruling (decision document). During the appeal period (30 days), the measures specified in the ruling are granted as a provisional measure. Modifications to reasonable adjustments that place a burden on students only become valid once the appeal period has expired without objection. In degree programs, the head of teaching decides on reasonable adjustment measures, in continuing education the head of school.
- Students or applicants should check the ruling on the reasonable adjustments (decision document) immediately upon receipt. In the event of errors/incomplete details, they should contact the person that issued the ruling.
- The implemented reasonable adjustments may be subject to another review at a later date, if the measures granted are no longer sufficient or no longer required.
- If reasonable adjustments are granted, it is the student's responsibility to inform the persons responsible for its implementation, such as module supervisors, lecturers and examiners, about the reasonable adjustment well ahead of the affected modules (in some cases also CAS in continuing education) or aptitude tests, and to present the decision document. The concrete implementation of reasonable adjustments in the individual modules is the responsibility of the module directors (in consultation with the head of the relevant degree

⁹ Cf. judgements of the FAC B-7024/2024 of 10 July 2025, finding 5.3; of the FAC B-616/2023 of 30 April 2024 finding 3.7; of the FSC 2D_7/2011 finding 4.6; 2D_22/2012 of 17 October 2012 finding 6.3.2.



programme if necessary, and possibly also with the head of teaching or head of continuing education).

- Tip: It is wise for students/applicants to save a copy of the ruling on reasonable adjustments in an easily accessible place so that it can be presented in the event of any uncertainty.

5.3. Appeal against the ruling on reasonable adjustments

- If the decision on reasonable adjustments does not meet the applicant's expectations, an appeal may be lodged within 30 days of the legally valid notification of the decision. Students submit complaints to the BFH Appeals Commission; applicants submit complaints about the reasonable adjustment measures for aptitude assessments to the Education and Culture Directorate (BKD).
- The appeal procedure is free of charge: in accordance with Art. 10 para. 1 in conjunction with Art. 7 and 8 of the Disability Discrimination Act, no procedural costs are to be charged in proceedings involving persons with disabilities. However, as a cantonal university, the Disability Discrimination Act is not directly applicable at BFH. Case law is not uniform with regard to the charging of procedural costs in the education sector.



6. More information

6.1. Legal basis

- [Federal Constitution \(FC\)](#), in particular Article 8 on legal equality
- [Disability Discrimination Act \(DDA\)](#)
- [Disability Equality Ordinance \(BehiV\)](#) (German)
- [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities \(CRPD\)](#)
- [Federal Act on Funding and Coordination of Higher Education Institutions HEEdA](#) of 30 September 2010, SR 414.20, in particular Article 30 paragraph 1 letter a section 5 on the promotion of equal opportunities as a prerequisite for institutional accreditation
- [Statute of Bern University of Applied Sciences \(FaSt\)](#), Article 30 on equality of opportunity (German)
- [Framework regulations for studying at BFH \(FSR\)](#), Article 23 on reasonable adjustments

6.2. Position papers and factsheets

- [Reasonable adjustments: Challenges and best practice at Swiss universities, swissuniversities 2024](#) (German)
- [Reasonable adjustments during studies: Guide for universities, Swissuniability, Netzwerk Studium und Behinderung Schweiz, 2019](#) (German)
- [Fact sheet on reasonable adjustments for people with disabilities in professional examinations and higher professional examinations, SERI, 2023](#) (German)

6.3. Information from BFH

- [BFH website on disability and accessibility \(includes list of specific contact persons\)](#)
- [Application form for reasonable adjustment during studies or admission/aptitude examinations at BFH](#) (German)
- [Process diagram “Applying for and implementing reasonable adjustments \(degree programs and continuing education\)”](#) (German, only accessible with a BFH account)

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Replaces the leaflet “Legal aspects of studying at Bern University of Applied Sciences with a disability”.



7. APPENDIX: Checklist for students and applicants applying for reasonable adjustments

Submit your application as early as possible.

If you have any questions, please get in touch with the relevant contact person.

- I have a medical certificate that confirms my diagnosis. The certificate is not older than two years or has been confirmed as still valid by a specialist.
- I have completed the application form. I have listed the desired adjustment measures.
- I have submitted the application to the head of my degree programme or the head of continuing education.
- I have received the decision document and checked it for inconsistencies and errors. If I do not agree with the decision, I have 30 days in which to lodge an appeal.
- I have saved the decision document in electronic form or printed it out so that I can present it if required.
- I will inform the module supervisors no later than at the start of the semester of the reasonable adjustments to be granted to me.
- If I realise during my studies that an adjustment to the measures is necessary, I will submit a new application.
- If I realise that I am not being granted the agreed measures during a competency assessment or an examination, I will point this out to the examiners immediately. It is not possible to lodge a complaint retrospectively.
- If I realise in the run-up to a competency assessment or an examination that I am unable to take the examination for health reasons, I have the option of submitting a postponement request (Art. 25 para. 3 FSR).