Inclusive Education

8 tips for staff

How to achieve inclusive education for students with functional impairments

Erasmus University Rotterdam
Make it happen.
Be informed & stay informed

Know what support your university offers to students with a functional impairment. Stay up to date on (inter)national policies, for example by following websites and social media updates of large organisations that advocate inclusive education, such as Handicap & Study (www.handicap-studie.nl).

Discuss with colleagues

More than 10 percent of higher education students have one or more functional impairments, so you are not the only one who encounters them. Share your experiences in helping students with colleagues so that successful approaches become the norm.

Ask your student

Do not make any assumptions or decisions regarding someone without consulting them. Many students with a functional impairment have experience in dealing with their issues, and know best what helps them feel and perform better. Since it is impossible to know everything about every possible functional impairment anyway, do not be afraid to ask your student for guidance.

Don’t generalise

Functional impairments can manifest themselves very differently between individuals, and even students with the same diagnosis may require different levels and means of support. Therefore, your knowledge about one student can guide you when helping another student with the same diagnosis, but it should not be leading.
Don’t let students be pushed from pillar to post

Students with a functional impairment often encounter bureaucratic difficulties when arranging support. So don’t send them away with an email address or office number, unless you are sure that this will resolve their problem. Go through the process yourself at least once to see which person is responsible or which email address works.

You can’t always see the struggle

A student who seems happy in class and performs well on exams might actually be struggling with a functional impairment. So when a student asks for help, look beyond the obvious signs. Don’t underestimate people’s ability to hide their struggles (intentionally or not).

Don’t see your student as the problem

Neither the student nor the educational setting is inherently problematic. Rather, it’s the fit between these two that can cause problems. Changing a person to better suit an environment is often difficult. It is easier and more constructive to make modest adjustments to a setting so that it can accommodate a broader range of people.

Never discourage students

Being told by a teacher that your diagnosis makes you unfit for pursuing your ambitions can have long-lasting effects on self-confidence and morale, and can make you feel like you have to put in extra effort just to prove you are not less than others. Remember that a functional impairment reshapes but does not confine someone’s possibilities.
More than 10% of university students have a functional impairment, such as asthma, dyslexia, or migraines.

These students are less likely to succeed at university, and experience lower well-being during their studies.

Your individual efforts can help these students feel and perform better.