



National Open University of Nigeria

Policy Title	Policy on Learners with Special Needs
Policy No:	NQSA/POL/TEL/014
Owner:	National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN)
Approved By:	The University Senate
Manager/Driver:	Directorate of Learner Support Services (DLSS)
Date of Approval:	7 th October, 2024
Date of Next Review:	October, 2027

1.0 Introduction

National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) is a single mode university that runs inclusive educational system to help widen access to university education to all who are qualified and willing to learn. To ensure that no applicant or student of NOUN is discriminated against, the university specifically recognises those with special needs who because of their physical, sensory, developmental challenges may not be able to get the desired outcome if the adequate learning support required are not provided. Therefore, the university has mapped out strategic policy through which these people can receive adequate learning support.

The Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act 2019 prohibits discrimination against Learners with Special Needs and criminalizes violation of its provisions. NOUN policy on Learners with Special Needs adheres strictly to the Act by meeting its minimum requirements.

The NOUN policy defines disability to include long term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairment which in interaction with various barriers may hinder full and effective participation in society on equal basis with others. The policy uses 'learners with special needs' in place of 'persons with disability' to avoid discriminatory words, ensure inclusion and in recognising that every human being has one form of disability or the other.

2.0 Purpose

The aim of this policy is to provide a structure that will guide the learning support required for learners with special needs in NOUN.

3.0 Scope

The scope of this policy is to establish guidelines and provisions for learners with special needs at the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN). It:

- 3.1 defines the rights and protections of these learners.
- 3.2 outlines the support and accommodations provided for their education.
- 3.3 ensures physical and digital accessibility.
- 3.4 encourages their participation in academic and social life.
- 3.5 defines the validation of disability certificates.
- 3.6 categorizes disabilities.
- 3.7 addresses educational development.
- 3.8 specifies responsibilities for implementation and compliance.
- 3.9 aims to foster inclusivity and support for all qualified learners with special needs at NOUN.

4.0 Definitions

- 4.1 **Special Needs:** These are specific educational, physical, sensory, or developmental requirements that some learners have, which necessitate additional support or accommodations for their participation in education.
- 4.2 **Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act 2019:** This refers to a legal framework that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities and outlines the legal provisions to protect their rights.
- 4.3 **Accessibility Aids:** These are tools, devices, or resources that facilitate physical or digital access to educational materials, facilities, or services for individuals with disabilities.
- 4.4 **In Queue, First Consideration:** This is the practice of giving learners with special needs priority or preference in queues, service delivery, or access within university premises and study centres.
- 4.5 **Participation in Politics and Public Life:** This concept involves encouraging and enabling learners with special needs to engage in political and public activities within the university, with equal rights to hold positions in the alumni and other approved students' associations.
- 4.6 **Certificate of Disability:** This is a formal document that certifies an individual's disability status, which is required during the admission clearance process at the university.
- 4.7 **Temporary Certificate of Disability:** This is a short-term certificate issued by a doctor to validate a newly discovered disability, which must be approved by the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities.

- 4.8 **Categories of Disability:** These are four recognized major areas of disabilities at the university, including physical disabilities, sensory disabilities, developmental disabilities, and multiple disabilities.
- 4.9 **Educational Development:** This term refers to the process of supporting the educational growth and progress of learners, including those with special needs, through specialized teaching, accommodations, and resources.
- 4.10 **Braille:** Braille is a tactile writing system used by individuals with visual impairments, featuring raised dots that can be read through touch.
- 4.11 **Sign Language:** Sign language is a visual and gestural language used by individuals with hearing impairments, enabling communication through hand movements, facial expressions, and body language.
- 4.12 **University Premises:** This encompasses the physical locations and grounds owned or operated by the university for educational and administrative purposes.
- 4.13 **Study Centres:** These are additional locations, apart from the main campus, where students can access educational resources and receive support.
- 4.14 **Alumni:** Alumni are former students of the university who have completed their studies and graduated.
- 4.15 **Approved Students' Association:** Approved students' associations are student organizations and groups officially recognized and sanctioned by the university.
- 4.16 **National Commission for Persons with Disabilities:** This refers to a government agency responsible for overseeing and regulating disability-related issues and services at the national level.
- 4.17 **Long-term Physical Impairment:** This is a lasting physical condition or disability that affects an individual's mobility or physical functioning.
- 4.18 **Mental Impairment:** Mental impairment refers to a condition that impacts an individual's cognitive and emotional functioning, potentially affecting their learning and interaction with others.

- 4.19 **Intellectual Impairment:** This is a condition characterized by limitations in intellectual functioning and adaptive behaviour, which may impact learning and daily life skills.
- 4.20 **Sensory Impairment:** Sensory impairment is a condition that affects one or more of the senses, such as sight or hearing, potentially leading to difficulties in perceiving or interacting with the environment.
- 4.21 **Interaction with Various Barriers:** Interaction with various barriers refers to the ways in which an individual's disability or impairment may hinder their full and effective participation in various aspects of society due to physical, attitudinal, or other barriers.
- 4.22 **Learning Needs and NOUN Learner Support:** This encompasses the specific educational requirements of learners with special needs and the support services and resources provided by NOUN to address these needs.

5.0 Principles

To ensure integration of Learners with Special Needs into the society and guarantee communication with them. Thus, this policy guarantees the following rights:

5.1 Right to Education

NOUN is required to have at least one personnel trained to cater for the educational development of learners with special needs and provide special facilities for the effective education of such learners. NOUN is also required to include braille, sign language and other skills for communicating with learners with special needs in its curriculum.

5.2 Accessibility Rights

NOUN is to provide accessibility aids for learners with special needs within the university premises including its study centres.

NOUN should provide parking lots, and suitable spaces that are properly marked and reserved for learners with special needs.

In queue, they are to be given first consideration within the university premises including the study centres.

5.3 Participation in Politics and Public Life

NOUN shall encourage learners with special needs to participate in politics and public life within the university. They have equal rights with other graduates to

hold positions in the alumni and with other students in any other approved students' association.

5.4 Certificate of Disability

All NOUN students with special needs shall come with a certificate of disability during clearance upon admission into the university. NOUN will also accept a Temporary Certificate of Disability issued by a doctor, which must be approved by the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities, where a disability is discovered during the doctor's treatment of such learner.

6.0 Policy Statements

To provide adequate learning support to learners with special needs, NOUN shall:

- 6.1 recognise four major areas of disabilities. These are physical disabilities, sensory disabilities, developmental disabilities, and multiple disabilities.
- 6.2 set up a Unit in the Directorate of Learner Support Services (DLSS) and shall call the unit: Learner Support for Special Needs (LSSN). The units shall have a minimum of **five** professional staff with qualifications in special education in five areas of specialty. A career path shall be created for these staff who will constantly serve in this unit and will not be academic staff in faculty of education.
- 6.3 ensure that the Counsellors in the study centres shall work with the professional staff at the headquarters in DLSS to provide support for individual student at the study centres.
- 6.4 provide learning materials in different formats to take care of all the learning styles of the students. This may include audio books, text to speech, speech to text, talking calculators, text simplification, spelling and grammar checkers, graphic organizers, writing aids. Interactivity is key in the learning materials.
- 6.5 provide comprehensive study guide for the students to direct their learning starting from registration.
- 6.6 allow a professional guide hired by the student to accompany the student to the study centre during course registration and examination where need be, and any other activity but under the supervision of the designated staff member at the study centre.
- 6.7 award scholarships to first two persons that enrolled in an academic year, but this is subject to availability of funds.

- 6.8 provide learning environments that meet with the learning needs of the learners.
- 6.9 not admit a candidate with a specific disability IF the university does not have the required learning support for such disability.
- 6.10 consult disability agencies where need be to support the learners.

7.0 Policy Implementation

The implementation of this policy shall be guided by the content in the table below:

Categories of Disability	Components	Learning Needs	NOUN Learning Support
1. Physical Disabilities	a. Cerebral Palsy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. inability to move and maintain balance ii. Spastic diplegia: Muscle stiffness on the leg with the arms less affected or not affected. iii. Spastic hemiplegia: Affect only one side of the body with the arm mostly affected than the leg. iv. Spastic quadriplegia: Affect the limbs, trunk, and the face. These sets of people usually cannot walk and may lead to intellectual disability and seizures. b. Spinal Cord Injuries c. Musculoskeletal Injuries/Muscular Dystrophy – damage of muscular or skeletal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Friendly walkway ii. Conducive sitting arrangement for examination iii. Those with intellectual disability and seizures requires flexibility in timing especially during examination. iv. Standby medical aid. v. A hand or finger(s) amputee need new tools for learning. vi. Physical therapy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Provide designated walkways for wheelchair in the university including the study centres. ii. Provide adjustable workstations. iii. Retrofit table areas with height adjustable table legs. iv. Provide ergonomic chairs. v. Provide ant-fatigue matting. vi. Provide ergonomic equipment such as monitor risers, articulating keyboard and mouse trays, footrests, forearm supports, headsets, lumbar cushions, alternative keyboards. vii. Provide designated sitting arrangement that will suit their disability during examination. viii. Where a student experiences seizure during examination, such a student should be allowed to continue his/her exam if he/she regains him/herself without losing any time from the time allotted for the exam in that instance. But may discontinue the examination if

Categories of Disability	Components	Learning Needs	NOUN Learning Support
	<p>systems. Often occurs due to strenuous activities.</p> <p>d. Amputation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Removal of part of the body e.g. arm, leg, finger(s) <p>e. Orthopaedic Impairment (OI)</p> <p>f. Arthritis</p> <p>g. Physical injuries</p> <p>h. Paralysis</p>		<p>medically advised with medical proof. In this instance, the student paper should be stepped down and not marked while the study centre director makes report to the university management. Also, the student should formally write for deferment of that course.</p> <p>ix. Provide first aid.</p> <p>x. Where an existing NOUN student suffers arm or finger(s) or balm amputation, the student should be given some time off to get artificial hand aid or retrain on how to use the arm and fingers in the status. The time given should be guided with medical report.</p> <p>xi. Where point 'v' above has been fulfilled and still have some difficulty of using the computer keyboard or mouse, the writing skills should be tried. If he/she can cope with writing, the students should be allowed to take all e-examination courses through pen on paper with adequate supervision and must not leave the hall with the question paper. Where he/she has difficulty in both the use of the</p>

Categories of Disability	Components	Learning Needs	NOUN Learning Support
			<p>computer keyboard and writing, he/she may be allowed to use office dictation tool to take both 'e' and pen-on-paper exams if available. Such a student is to spend equal amount of time allotted for the examination. No time difference.</p> <p>xii. Points v and vi should also apply to those with stiff fingers.</p>
2. Sensory Disabilities	i. Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)	Difficulty in association and learning	Special personal support should be provided from the point of course registration by the university counsellor.
	ii. Visual Impairment (VI): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blindness and Low Vision 	i. The blind cannot read normally ii. Difficulty in reading for those with low vision	i. Provide specialist assistive hardware (e.g. Braille Notetaker) ii. Provide magnification screen readers. iii. Install screen magnification software. iv. Make available text to speech software. v. Explore the provision of tactile graphics. vi. Provide ant—glare guard. vii. Provide learning materials in braille or any other form that support the blind to read. viii. Make provision for exam to be taken using braille or any software that support such.

Categories of Disability	Components	Learning Needs	NOUN Learning Support
			ix. Provide special facilitation sections including audio versions of the instructional videos. x. Provide accessible computer workstations. xi. Provide alternative access devices such as mobile technology
	iii. Auditory/Hearing Impairment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deafness and Loss of Hearing 	i. Those with auditory impairment cannot fit into normal learning process. ii. Those with mild auditory impairment need hearing aid while the severe ones need visual illustrations.	i. Make headsets and/or assistive listening devices available. ii. Implement amplification technology where necessary (headsets, telephones) iii. Provide space enclosures/sound absorption panels to isolate workstation. iv. Ensure audio and video are accessible by providing captioning. v. Provide sign interpreters where needed. vi. Provide speech to text software. vii. Where they are to be combined with other students for synchronous facilitation using zoom, there must be an interpreter. This will require NOUN having staff that can meet this need.
	iv. Speech Impairment (SI):	i. Do not do well in courses that need talking	i. Provide in-person and virtual counselling services

Categories of Disability	Components	Learning Needs	NOUN Learning Support
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This is a disorder and/or inability to communicate well. It includes stuttering, impaired articulation, language impairment, or voice impairment. These can affect the person adversely in educational performance. 		
	<p>v. Sensory Processing Disorder</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inability to tolerate bright lights and loud noises Distracted by background noises that others don't notice Overly fearful of swings and playground equipment Have trouble knowing where their body is in relation to other objects or people 	<p>i. May have difficulty working with bright computer screen.</p> <p>ii. May have difficulty learning with instructional videos with loud background music.</p> <p>iii. May not be able to know when to stay away from dangerous objects.</p>	<p>i. They should be allowed to adjust the brightness of their computer screen during examination.</p> <p>ii. The background sound in instructional videos should be made low when used to take care of the diverse interest of students.</p> <p>iii. All electrical cables must be securely covered. Others materials that can intrigue danger to the life of students should be adequately taken care of.</p>
	<p>vi. Cognitive function issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Memory Attention span and focus Problem solving Literacy, reading and verbal comprehension Mathematical comprehension Dyslexia 	<p>Slow learners</p>	<p>i. Provide space enclosures/sound absorption panels to isolate workstation.</p> <p>ii. Increase natural lighting or provide full spectrum lighting.</p> <p>iii. Make headsets available.</p> <p>iv. Use of color to distinguish important information especially in the course materials.</p>

Categories of Disability	Components	Learning Needs	NOUN Learning Support
			v. Provide signage with graphical elements when directions are necessary
3. Developmental Disabilities	a. Autism b. Behaviour disorder c. Down syndrome d. Fetal alcohol syndrome e. Intellectual disability f. Psychological/Emotional Disturbance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anxiety disorders • Phobias depression and other bipolar disorders that hinder students from gaining from a learning experience. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slow in learning • Retardation in academic performance • Incoherence in speech and action 	Provide in-person and virtual counselling services
4. Multiple Disabilities	i. Deafblind (Visual Impairment + Hearing Impairment) ii. Visual Impairment + Hearing Impairment + Mental Retardation. iii. Visual Impairment + Mental Retardation. iv. Cerebral Palsy + Mental Retardation/ Hearing/ Speech/ Visual problems.	Need guided learning	i. Provide professional guidance. ii. Set group goals. iii. Provide in-person facilitation

8.0 Sanctions on Violating this Policy

- 8.1 A student who violates this policy will not enjoy the learning supports as stated in this policy.
- 8.2 A staff who violates any part of this policy may receive a warning letter in the first instance if the violation does not seriously affect the learner(s), denial of three months' salary, suspension from duty that may last one year, being released from holding administrative position as may be decided by the University Management.

9.0 Policy Alignment

This policy aligns with the following documents:

- 9.1 Federal Ministry of Education (2002). Blueprint and Implementation Plan for the National Open & Distance Learning Programmes.
- 9.2 National Open University of Nigeria: National Open University (No. 6, 1983) CAP N63.
- 9.3 National Open University of Nigeria: National Open University (Amendment Act, No. 19, 2018).
- 9.4 NOUN Open, Distance and eLearning Policy.

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