

BENCHMARKING OF UNIVERSITY

**SERVICES REGARDING STUDENT DISABILITY
INCLUSION AND ACCOMMODATION**

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1. INTRODUCTION

2. Objectives and scope

The objective of the benchmarking is to identify and map up the services provided by a selection of universities around the world with regard to student disability inclusion and accommodation. The aim is to identify common and best practices to provide other higher education universities a roadmap of current service strengths and gaps.

3. Methodological framework

The benchmarking sample includes 24 universities across the world.

The main selection criteria were that the university:

- Has a service for accommodation and inclusion of students with disabilities,
- Publishes at least some information on the website of the university regarding the services provided on accommodation and inclusion,
- Has at least one good practice that is relevant and relatable to inclusion of students with disabilities.
- In addition, efforts have been made to include universities from different regions across the world.

The main method of collecting information has been desk research, accessing and analysing information about the services for students with disabilities on the public website of the universities. The advantage of this approach is that the information is easy to access and it is directed to students, therefore, it reflects the concrete activities of the services in a more direct way than for example, policy documents.

The information was mostly available in English. In some cases, the information has been accessed in national languages (mainly Spanish, French, and German).

4. Universities included in the sample

The team has strived to include universities representing different approaches from across a variety of regions in the world. Since universities in North America and Europe have advanced further on disability inclusion, the selection has been expanded in these regions to reflect a diversity of good practices in different areas of activities. The relatively large selection of universities in Europe reflects the diversity of approaches on the continent.

The following universities were included in the benchmark:

North America:

- Georgia Institute of Technology (Georgia Tech) – US
- Ohio State University (Ohio State) – US
- Princeton University – US
- University of Washington (UW) – US
- Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech) – US
- Université Laval (ULaval) – Canada

Europe:

- De Montfort University (DMU) – UK
- Lund University – Sweden
- Masaryk University – Czech Republic
- Maastricht University – The Netherlands
- Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU Amsterdam) – The Netherlands
- Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (UAM) – Spain
- Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB) – Spain
- University College London (UCL) – UK
- University of Manchester – UK
- University of Poitiers – France
- University of Vienna – Austria

Middle East:

- Ain Shams University – Egypt
- Anadolu University – Turkey
- King Saud University – Saudi Arabia
- Reichman University – Israel
- Zayed University – UAE

Africa, Asia, Australia:

- Nelson Mandela University – South Africa
- National University of Singapore – Singapore
- University of Auckland – New Zealand
- In the next phase of the project, at least one university from South America will be added.

5. Structure of the report and categorisation of activity areas

The services provided by the universities in terms of disability inclusion and accommodation have been categorised according to broad areas of activities relevant for the inclusion of students with disabilities.

The overarching categories include:

- Accessibility (Built environment, digital environment, study material, courses)
- Staff support (Guidance material, training)

- Student support (Academic support, training and mentoring, exams, careers, personalised support, financial support, admissions)
- Awareness-raising and outreach (internal, external, online, networking)
- Infrastructure and organisational resources (division of responsibilities, specific resources)

For every category, the report includes an overview of the most common practices of the universities in the benchmark and a brief highlight of good practices. It should be noted that the information on the activities in the different universities is extensive but not exhaustive since it builds on publicly available information and there is a slight possibility that some universities do not publish all their offer and activities.

6. Benchmarking results per activity area

7. Accessibility

In general, the US universities have advanced further than most when it comes to accessibility. Virginia Tech has an online accessibility portal, with info on built and digital accessibility and Princeton has an Accessibility program and publishes a list of all university staff that has an IAAP certification, together with a testimonial on why they wanted to become certified.

Outside the US, an overarching accessibility program encompassing both built environment and digital accessibility can for example be found at King Saud University. The program includes an online reporting

service where students can report barriers. In Europe, Lund University has a centrally placed accessibility expert supporting staff in different faculties and departments. At the University of Maastricht, there is a task force on barrier-free studying and working, gathering staff from different departments. A fourth example is the University of Vienna which has a comprehensive online portal that gathers information, links, and resources on accessibility for students and teachers covering different areas (built environment, IT, courses, and course material).

8. Accessibility in the built environment

In most of the universities included in the benchmark, built environment is not part of the responsibilities of the service for students with disabilities. Only at two of the universities, Anadolu and Nelson Mandela the services explicitly mention that they are working to increase accessibility in the built environment on the campus. However, at nine universities, the services do provide information on the accessibility of the campus, either online or at their offices.

The more ambitious practices in this area include orientation training or orientation services, mainly for students with visual impairments. Two European universities, Masaryk and the UAB (Barcelona), offer spatial orientation training at the start of the semester. In the US, Princeton and Georgia Tech offer the use of an app, Aira, in which students can receive live orientation guidance. The University of Vienna have installed tactile orientation systems around the campus. These types of IT-based solutions are dependent on the availability of the technology behind it and are therefore not possible to roll out everywhere.

9. Digital accessibility

Most of the universities included in the benchmark publish information on their website regarding guidance and/or initiatives related to digital accessibility (seventeen universities). The initiatives vary widely in ambition. Most commonly,

the universities provide online guides or guidance for digital accessibility to teachers and staff (twelve universities). A few universities provide information for students on how to improve accessibility from the user perspective. For example, the UAB in Barcelona publishes external links and information on how to adapt settings in ordinary software according to different needs.

In a majority of cases, the information on accessibility is published on the website of the service for students with disabilities. A handful of universities (Princeton, Georgia tech, Washington, Manchester, Poitiers) specifically point to accessibility or digital accessibility programs and/or departments outside the services for students with disabilities, acting as a hub for these initiatives. Some examples:

- Princeton has a digital accessibility program and centre with extensive services (accessibility testing, training, tools, consultation, awareness raising). The centre provides a wide range of training, including for certification
- At Poitiers there is a “pédagolab” that works with teachers to improve pedagogical and digital practices including the adaptation of digital tools, in particular the online course platform.

- At the University of Manchester, the Directorate of communications is working on training material for staff regarding digital accessibility

At other universities it is the library who is providing information and support on digital accessibility. For example, the library at de Montfort University organizes events and trainings on accessibility in practice.

Few of the universities provide public information on the e-learning platforms used and their accessibility. Virginia Tech uses Canvas with A11y tool. Anadolu University has an accessible e-learning platform with accessible material for the open university part.

10. Study material

Many of the universities provide support for adaptation of resources or material: UAB Barcelona, Zayed University, Virginia Tech, Ohio, Masaryk, Nelson Mandela. One of the more ambitious departments is the Teiresias centre at Masaryk University that has a library section which publishes material in braille and acquires or converts material into accessible digital formats.

11. Courses and lectures

While there is generally widespread awareness of digital and document accessibility at the universities included in the benchmarking, fewer universities report that they work actively with accessibility in the planning and

running of the courses. The American universities provide information and support to teachers on how to write a statement of the accessibility of the course into the syllabus. This practice does not seem to have reached universities in other parts of the world.

A few European universities stand out as being particularly active when it comes to promoting inclusion in the pedagogical practices. De Montfort in the UK has a long-standing commitment and programme to promote and use Universal Design for Learning as a model for teaching, learning and assessment. The University of Poitiers has a “Pédagolab”, working with teachers to improve pedagogical and digital practices. Both of these programmes were initiated outside the realm of the students with disabilities service.

Another good practice of interest related to teaching is that both VU Amsterdam, and the National University of Singapore publish checklists on accessible event organisation.

When it comes to accommodations of non-digital teaching and learning elements, the most common provision is notetaking services, which is provided by more than ten universities. Some (such as UCL and ULaval) provide recorded lectures. A few universities, for example Masaryk, also specifically mention the provision of sign language interpretation. It should however be noted that the rules and legislation on interpretation and personal support may differ between countries. This means

that students in some countries receive interpretation support from for example the public sector, for the purpose of following classes.

12. Staff support

13. Guidance material

11 universities from all regions have guiding information for teachers on their websites. (For example, Poitiers and Vienna in Europe, Auckland in New Zealand, Nelson Mandela University in South Africa and Virginia Tech, Ohio State and Georgia Tech in the US). The content and extent of the information varies widely. A few examples of topical guidance include:

- Resources and information on different disabilities (Auckland, Barcelona, Vienna)
- How to formulate a syllabus statement on inclusion (Virginia Tech, Georgia Tech, University of Washington)
- Making courses and exams accessible, pedagogical approaches, Universal Design for Learning (Poitiers, Ohio, Lund, Virginia Tech, Georgia Tech, Vienna)
- Disability awareness and etiquette (University of Washington)
- Digital accessibility, alternative formats (Barcelona, Georgia Tech)

14. Training

14 of the universities offer some type of training related to inclusion or accessibility to teachers.

At Masaryk University and the UAM in Madrid, the service for students with disabilities organize yearly training courses for staff to raise awareness on the inclusion of students with disabilities.

At other universities, the training is provided by specialized units outside the service for students with disabilities. For example, at Princeton there is a digital accessibility centre that provides both training and certification opportunities. At Poitiers, the Pédagolab provides both services and training.

The training offered by universities varies. The most common themes of the training are:

- Inclusive pedagogical approaches (Laval, Masaryk, Ohio, de Montfort (focus on Universal Design for Learning), Poitiers, Vienna, Barcelona)
- Disability sensitivity and awarenessraising (Washington, Madrid, Masaryk, Anadolu, Vienna)
- Digital and document accessibility (Masaryk, Manchester, Reichman, Vienna)

15. Student support

16. Academic support

The table below lists the ten most common support and accommodations offered to students. It should be noted that the summary builds on publicly open information from the universities, it is therefore not necessarily exhaustive. For example, in the Dutch universities the offer depends on the faculties and will vary accordingly. The table does however provide a good overview of

what kind of services that students can expect in general. The top three accommodations include exams accommodations, note-taking, and support with assistive technology (AT).

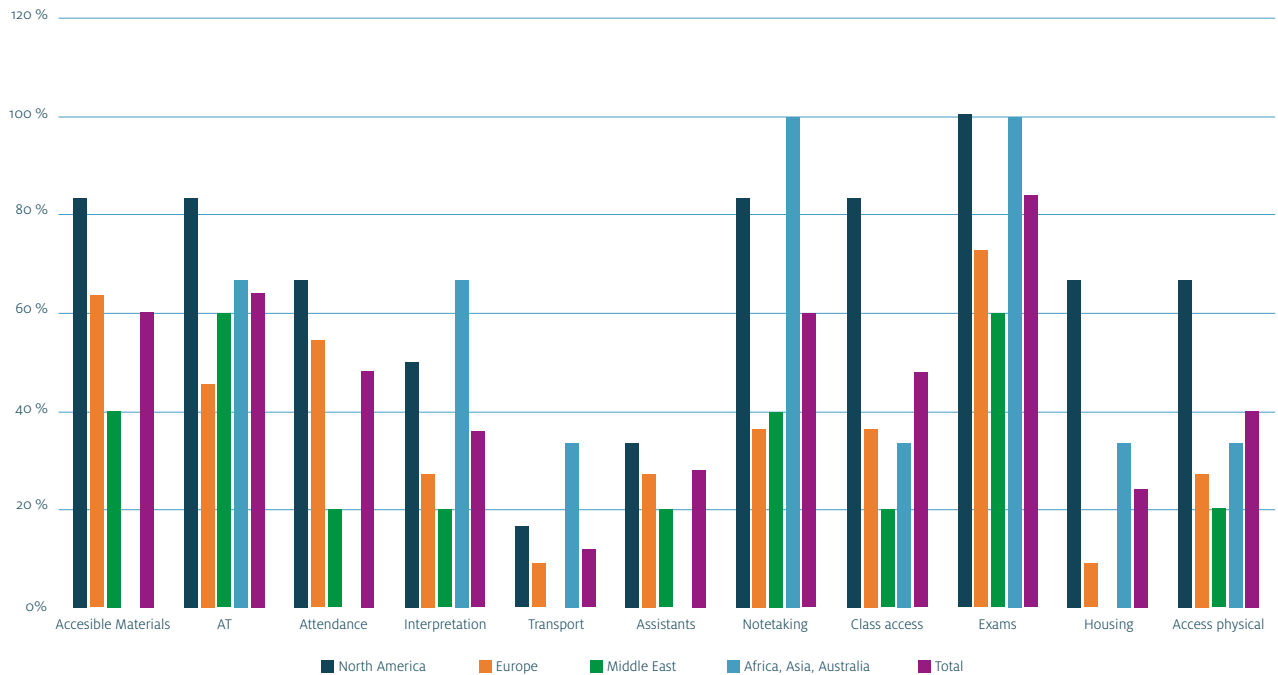
A few universities in the sample do not publish information on the specific content of the support it provides (Anadolu, Ain Shams, de Montfort)

	Accessi- ble material /media	AT	Atten- dance	Inter- preta- tion	Trans- port	Assis- tants	Noteta- king	Class access	Exams	Housing	Access (physi- cal)
Am- ster- dam			X					X	X		X
Auc- kland				X			X		X		
Barce- lona	X	X	X					X	X		
Georgia Tech	X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X
King Saud	X	X		X			X		X		
Zayed	X	X	X			X	X	X	X		X
Laval		X						X	X		
Lund	X						X		X		
Maas- tricht	X		X						X		X
Madrid				X	X	X				X	
Man- chester	X	X					X		X		X
Ma- saryk	X	X	X	X		X	X		X		
Nelson Man- dela		X			X		X		X	X	X

	Accessi- ble material /media	AT	Atten- dance	Inter- preta- tion	Trans- port	Assis- tants	Noteta- king	Class access	Exams	Housing	Access (physi- cal)
Ohio	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X		
Poitiers	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X		
Prince- ton	X						X		X	X	
Reich- man		X							X		
Singa- pore		X		X			X	X	X		
UCL		X				X	X		X	X	X
Vienna	X	X	X					X	X		
Virginia Tech	X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X
Was- hing- ton	X		X		X		X	X	X		X

Class access refers to accommodations in the classroom including for example breaks, seating, access to presentations

Academic Suport



17. Training and mentoring

Training or guidance for students with disabilities is available at more than half of the universities, across all regions, for example at the universities of Madrid (UAM), Vienna, Masaryk, Barcelona (UAB), Reichman, Nelson Mandela, UCL, Singapore, King Saud and Anadolu.

The most common topic proposed is study skills which is available in at least ten universities. Training can be provided either as coaching one on one (for example Virginia Tech, VU Amsterdam), or in groups. A few universities provide less formal training in the form of student buddies, peer support and mentoring (Lund, Vienna). At VU Amsterdam, study skills groups for students with disabilities are led by master students in psychology and in Vienna students from the inclusive pedagogy programme provides peer to peer support on a wider range of issues including orientation, adaptation of study material and communication with staff.

Another commonly occurring training provided is orientation guidance on campus for students with visual impairments (Masaryk, Nelson Mandela, and Singapore). A few universities offer more specialised training. For example,

King Saud University runs a computer training program for students with visual impairments.

18. Exams

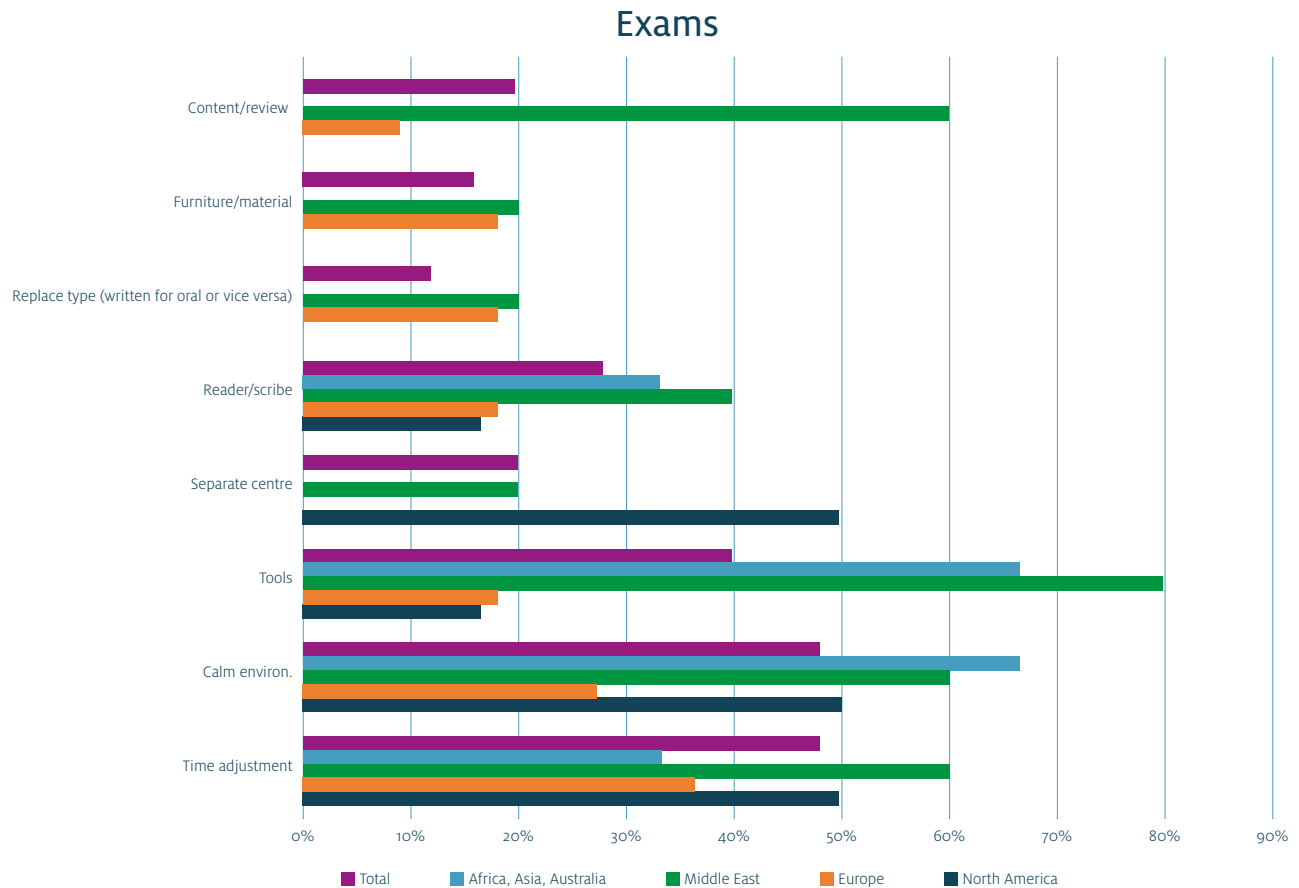
Exam accommodations are offered by all universities included in the benchmark.

The responsibility for providing the accommodations lie primarily with the service for students with disabilities at some universities (Ain Shams, Barcelona), whereas in others the main responsibility is with the faculties (UCL, Lund, Maastricht, VU Amsterdam, Universität Vienna). A few US universities have separate centres for accessible testing that can be booked either by the faculty or the students themselves (Virginia Tech, Georgia Tech).

The table below provides an overview of the types of accommodations provided in exams. It should be noted that a) the accommodations listed are not exhaustive for the universities, b) More universities than those listed provide accommodations, but have not specified the nature of the support in the information they make public.

Accommodations regarding content include possibility to disregard spelling mistakes or exemptions from questions.

	Time ad-justment	Calm environ.	Tools	Separate centre	Reader/ scribe	Repla- ce type (written for oral or vice versa)	Furnitu- re/mate- rial	Content/ review
Ain Shams			X					
Anadolu		X			X			X
Barcelona	X	X			X	X	X	
Georgia T				X				
King Saud	X	X	X			X		
Zayed	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
Manches- ter	X		X		X		X	X
Nelson Mandela		X	X		X			
Ohio	X	X	X		X			
Poitiers	X	X				X		
Reichman	X		X					X
Singapore	X	X	X					
Virginia T	X	X	X	X				
VU Amster- dam	X	X	X					
Washing- ton	X	X		X				



19. Career and employment

Nine universities provide information on support in the areas of careers and employment. In most cases, the support is provided by the service for students with disabilities in cooperation with the university career centre. At least three of the universities offer internship programs that are specific to students with disabilities (Singapore, Auckland, Washington).

20. Personalisation of support

While most of the universities included in the sample produce individualised plans for the students seeking accommodations, the nature and follow-up of the plans vary largely. In universities in the US and Europe, the most common procedure is that the service for students with disabilities produce the plan, in consultation with the student, and then it is the responsibility of the faculty to implement the plan (for example Lund and Barcelona). In some of the US universities the students have

the responsibility of activating the accommodation themselves.

A handful of the universities have services on site that can assess the needs of students regarding learning difficulties. These include Singapore, Masaryk, and de Montfort.

The Teiresias centre at Masaryk University makes assessments of specific learning difficulties, on the basis of which they provide training on learning strategies. At the National University of Singapore, students with dyslexia or ADHD need updated reports on a yearly basis for arrangements. These assessments can be done by the university or externally. This approach can be contrasted with the approach at VU Amsterdam where it is the students themselves who must assess what kind of support they need and then ask for it. For example, students with dyslexia should first look at study guide and then figure out what support they might need and to what extent.

21. Support tailored to different categories of disability

Many of the universities included in the benchmarking have specific information for students with certain disabilities. The focus varies largely from one university to another. It does not, however, follow automatically that these students receive more extensive support than other groups.

Some examples:

- **Hearing:** Washington and Ohio universities (interpretation, coordinator, resources, handbook)
- **Learning differences:** de Montfort (allowances for study skills tuition, specialist software packages,) Auckland (screenings, consultations, support for learning disabilities)
- **Autism/neurodivergence:** Manchester (ASC ¹ lunchtime social group), UCL (autism welcome event, ASD ² mentoring), de Montfort (autism support), Vienna (peer counselling)
- **Dyslexia:** VU Amsterdam (specific info and support)
- **Vision:** Ain Shams (laptops distributed to students with visual impairments), King Saud (ICT training for persons with visual impairments)

Overall, the most common type of personal support provided is the provision of assistive technology. AT devices can be borrowed in at least five of the universities included in the benchmark (King Saud, Masaryk, Princeton, UAB Barcelona, UAM Madrid).

22. Financial support

Seven of the universities provide information and support on scholarships

¹ Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC)

² Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

and grants available to students with disabilities (Georgia Tech, de Montfort, Reichman, Singapore, Auckland, Nelson Mandela, Maastricht, Ain Shams, Madrid, VU Amsterdam). UAM in Madrid offers an exemption from tuition fees.

23. Admission support

Only one of the universities (Ain Shams) mentions the possibility to exclude students with disabilities from the admission conditions. Two universities provide accessibility support for admission exams: standardised tests (Virginia Tech) and entry exams (UAB Barcelona). At the UAM in Madrid, 5% of the entries to the university are reserved for persons with disabilities.

It should be noted however, that the entry conditions are very different from one national context to another and depend on the subject of the courses. Before deciding on a course of action regarding entry conditions, it would be wise to investigate the accessibility and inclusiveness of these conditions to see if the processes can be changed to become universally accessible, or if exceptions are necessary.

24. Students' own responsibilities

A smaller section of the universities publishes information about the limits of support and the students' own responsibilities. For example, the University of Washington provides information on what kind of personal support that is not provided in higher

education accommodation. The University of Laval includes a section on their website with advice on what students with disabilities can do themselves to succeed better. The two Dutch universities (Maastricht and VU Amsterdam) also emphasise the role of the student in being proactive about what support they need to be able to receive accommodations.

25. Awareness-raising and outreach

Seven universities regularly organize awareness-raising events for students and staff (Virginia Tech, VU Amsterdam, Barcelona, Poitiers, Anadolu, King Saud, Nelson Mandela).

In Barcelona, the students receive study credits for attending the events.

A few universities organise events for an external public in collaboration with other organisations. For example, Ain Shams University has organised a series of symposiums on disability and inclusion together with national organisations, under the patronage of the university president.

The universities of Poitiers, Masaryk, Nelson Mandela, Ain Shams specifically mention collaborations with external organisations. For example:

- **Nelson Mandela University has organised workshops with special education schools and donated assistive technology to special education schools.**

- The Teiresias centre at Masaryk University collaborates with national organisations to provide services to other institutions on modification of study materials and tests. The university is also engaged in a many different projects at national and international level on inclusive learning, universal design, and accessibility.

26. Online awareness-raising and dissemination

All universities have a website with at least brief information about the service to students with disabilities.

Popular features on the websites of the services include:

- Animated videos showing student stories or describing the services available to students with disabilities (de Montfort, Vienna, Maastricht, Laval, Singapore, Anadolu, Washington).
- Testimonials from students with disabilities that have received support (Manchester, Washington, Lund, Reichman)

A few universities have invested more time and resources on public dissemination:

- The Universal Accessibility and Disability Services at Nelson Mandela University has a YouTube channel with videos from awarenessraising campaigns they

organise and are active on social media,

- Teiresias centre at Masaryk University has a podcast,
- University of Laval has a podcast, and has participated in national inclusion competitions

27. Networking

Five of the universities included in the benchmark have communities or networks that are internal to the university and addresses issues of inclusion for students with disabilities. The networks at Princeton, Ohio State, Maastricht, and the National University of Singapore (NUS) are focused only on students, while UCL in the UK has engaged a broader group also including faculty and staff. The UCL network addresses broader issues of diversity, inclusion, and equity, where disability is included.

The groups have slightly different focus to their activities:

- At Ohio State, the organisation is student-run and works for an inclusive and accessible campus.
- The UnliMited-students network at Maastricht was created in 2020 and works on awareness-raising campaigns.
- The NUS Enablers is a student support group at the National University of Singapore that works both with peer support and awareness-raising campaigns.

28. Infrastructure and organisational resources

29. Division of responsibility

The division of responsibility for providing services and accommodations to students with disabilities differ between universities. At one end of the scale, there are universities where the unit for services to students with disabilities have the main responsibility of the services (Masaryk, King Saud), and at the other there are universities where each faculty is responsible for their own offer of services (Maastricht, VU Amsterdam). In between, at many universities there is a collaboration between the service and the faculties, where the service coordinates the efforts, but most of the implementation is done by the faculties (Lund, Manchester, UAB in Barcelona, Poitiers, UCL)

30. Specialised infrastructure or resources

The most common type of special infrastructure on campus related to

accessibility and inclusion is assistive technology labs or spaces, which exist in at least seven of the universities. In some universities these labs are run by accessibility centres or the services for students with disabilities (for example King Saud), whereas in others the services are run by the library (UAM Madrid, Virginia Tech).

A few universities have social spaces for students that have been built to be inclusive and accessible. The PitStop space at the National University of Singapore offers relaxing spaces and activities as well as access to assistive technology. The space also hosts peer student supporters and peer wellness managers providing mental health support.

At Princeton, the AccessAbility Center is a student gathering centre that does not only offer accessibility features but has also been designed to create awareness of different abilities and universal access. Students can explore different abilities through the displays and accessible environment at the centre, to see how disability is a part of diversity.

CONTRIBUTORS

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ANNEX 1: NAMES AND WEBSITES OF THE SERVICES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES AT THE UNIVERSITIES INCLUDED IN THE BENCHMARK

Ain Shams University

Disabled Students Services Center

<https://www.asu.edu.eg/106/page>

Anadolu University

Handicapped Students Support Center

<https://www.anadolu.edu.tr/en/campus-life/campus-information/disability-support-services>

Anadolu accessible Online Open Education System:

<http://engelsizaof.anadolu.edu.tr/>

<https://diversity-inclusion.eadtu.eu/good-practices/2-uncategorised/46-digital-accessibility-at-anadolu-university>

De Montfort University (DMU)

Student Gateway

<https://www.dmu.ac.uk/current-students/student-support/wellbeing-disability/disability-advice-support/index.aspx>

Georgia Institute of Technology (Georgia Tech)

Office of disability services

<https://disabilityservices.gatech.edu/>

King Saud University

Universal Access Program

<https://uap.ksu.edu.sa/en/node/1040>

Lund University

Disability support services

<https://www.lunduniversity.lu.se/student-life/before-you-arrive/students-disabilities>

Maastricht university

Disability support

<https://www.maastrichtuniversity.nl/studyingwithdisability>

Masaryk University

Teiresias Center

<https://www.teiresias.muni.cz/?lang=en-GB>

National University of Singapore

Student Accessibility unit

<https://nus.edu.sg/osa/student-services/student-accessibility-unit>

Nelson Mandela University

Universal Accessibility and Disability Services

<https://disability.mandela.ac.za/>

Ohio state university (Ohio State)

Disability services

<https://slds.osu.edu/>

Princeton

Office of disability services

<https://ods.princeton.edu/>

Reichman University

Accessibility and study skill centre

<https://www.runi.ac.il/en/students/accessibility/>

Universidad Autónoma de Madrid

Atención a la Diversidad Funcional

<https://www.uam.es/uam/diversidad-funcional/estudiantes>

Universita Autònoma de Barcelona
PIUNE (Support for students with special
educational needs)

<https://www.uab.cat/web/discapacidad-nee/conoce-el-piune-1345780035703.html>

UCL

Student Disability Services

<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/students/support-and-wellbeing/support-disabled-students>

University of Auckland

Student Disability Services

<https://www.auckland.ac.nz/en/students/student-support/personal-support/students-with-disabilities.html>

Université Laval (ULaval)

Student assistance centre

Unit «Accueil et soutien spécialisé en situation de handicap» (ACSESH)

<https://www.aide.ulaval.ca/situation-de-handicap/presentation/>

University of Manchester

Disability Advisory and Support Service

<https://www.dso.manchester.ac.uk/>

University of Poitiers

Disability Service

<https://www.univ-poitiers.fr/en/live-campuses/studying-with-a-disability/>

University of Vienna

Accessible Studying Team

<https://studieren.univie.ac.at/en/accessible-studies/>

University of Washington (UW)

Disability resources for students

<https://depts.washington.edu/uwdrs/drs/who-we-are/>

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State
University (Virginia Tech)

<https://www.vt.edu/>

Student services:

Services for students with disabilities

<https://ssd.vt.edu/>

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU
Amsterdam)

<https://www.maastrichtuniversity.nl/>

Zayed University

Student Accessibility Service

<https://www.zu.ac.ae/main/en/sasd/index>