General guidelines for doctoral programme admissions

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2.3.2026

These guidelines will apply until further notice to doctoral education with an application period beginning on or after 1 April 2026.

This decision does not apply to admissions to international joint degree programmes. Admissions to such programmes are subject to a separate agreement on joint degrees.

This decision does not apply to admissions to commissioned education, as referred to in section 9 of the Universities Act. Admissions to any such education are subject to a separate decision.

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1 General information

Section 36 of the Universities Act stipulates that universities decide the admissions criteria.

In student admissions, special attention must be paid to observing the provisions of the Act on Equality between Women and Men (609/1986) and the Non-Discrimination Act (1325/2014), including with respect to indirect discrimination.

In addition to the University's general guidelines, each doctoral programme must determine its own admissions criteria. These are approved by the faculty coordinating the programme. The preparation of admissions criteria must take into account the University Board's decision on the intake of new students.

At the University of Helsinki, a doctoral degree must be completed in a doctoral programme. The right to pursue studies leading to a degree is granted by the faculty granting the target degree, which also decides on the rejection of incomplete applications. The decision on rejection can also be made by the director of the Education Services sector if an applicant has not demonstrated their eligibility in accordance with section 2.2 of this decision.

2 Eligibility for studies leading to a doctoral degree

2.1 Eligibility under the Universities Act (558/2009)

Pursuant to section 37 of the Universities Act, eligible applicants for studies leading to a postgraduate research degree have completed:

1) An applicable second-cycle university degree,
2) An applicable second-cycle degree from a university of applied sciences, or
3) Applicable study programmes at an institute abroad providing eligibility for equivalent higher education in the country in question.

If in the relevant country it is possible to decide on eligibility for higher education, for example, at the level of an individual state or institution, the general guidelines of the country in question must be observed.

The University may admit applicants for studies leading to a postgraduate research degree who are otherwise considered to have sufficient skills and knowledge for the studies. The criteria for admitting such applicants must be clearly indicated in the admissions criteria of the doctoral programme.

2.2 Demonstration of eligibility

Applicants applying for the right to pursue a doctoral degree must attach to their application copies of either their degree certificate and transcript of studies or other certificates demonstrating the applicant's sufficient knowledge and skills to complete a doctoral degree.

An authorised translation into Finnish, Swedish or English of the degree certificate and transcript of studies must be submitted if the language of the original documents is not Finnish, Swedish or English. The authorised translation can be obtained from the educational institution or an authorised translator. Besides the degree serving as the grounds for application, doctoral programmes may in their admissions decisions consider other completed higher education studies or degrees.

Applicants must submit a certificate demonstrating that they have sufficient language skills for the studies in question by the deadline for applications. If applicants demonstrate their English proficiency with a language test defined in the general guidelines for admissions, the result of the test must be either verifiable directly by the test organiser or received by the unit responsible for student applications and admissions directly from the test organiser.

Applicants whose documents pertaining to their educational background or language skills are not certified or electronically verifiable can only be provisionally admitted to doctoral programmes.

All the studies required for a second-cycle degree or equivalent education, including a thesis, must be completed, graded and approved by the end of the relevant application period. Applicants must be able to present a degree certificate before accepting the offer of a student place.

2.2.1 Submission of certified copies of original documents

Applicants who are admitted to a doctoral programme must submit certified copies of the documents on educational background and language skills that were attached to their application by the deadline for accepting the offered student place.

Only copies certified by the relevant educational institution, legalised copies, electronic documents delivered via reliable electronic verification services, electronically verified documents and copies certified by the Finnish Digital and Population Data Services Agency are accepted as certified copies. However, in the case of degrees or studies completed in certain other countries, applicants must meet more detailed country-specific requirements concerning the content of enclosures or the methods for submitting them.

If applicants have completed a degree or studies at a Finnish higher education institution in or after 1995 and possess a Finnish personal identity code, the unit responsible for student applications and admissions will receive information on the completed degree or studies from the relevant electronic system. In such cases, applicants need not submit a separate certified copy of their degree certificate and transcript of studies. If information on applicants' educational background is not obtained directly from the electronic system, the applicants must by a designated deadline submit certified copies of the relevant documents attached to their application.

3 Application procedure

The University of Helsinki has determined common periods for applying for the right to pursue a doctoral degree and for accepting the offer of a student place. The director of the Education Services sector decides on the dates of application periods, the periods for accepting student places and the dates on which study rights come into effect.

The admissions criteria for doctoral programmes must indicate the application periods to be observed in accordance with the decision of the sector director.

Prospective doctoral researchers must submit their applications using an electronic form. In their applications, applicants must select their doctoral programme, faculty and target degree. If the applicant consents, the University can transfer an application to another doctoral programme or faculty if the University deems that programme or faculty to be better suited to the applicant. The University may also designate a different target degree than that selected by the applicant in their application.

Applications must include a research proposal, accompanied by a funding plan. Applications must also be accompanied by a statement from the person who has agreed to serve as the thesis supervisor if the doctoral programme's admissions criteria require that a supervisor must be designated at the application stage. The supervision arrangements or research proposal must indicate the applicant's sufficient association with the University of Helsinki's research environment.

The research proposal must indicate the language of the doctoral thesis. When assessing the research proposal, consideration will be given to whether the supervision of the applicant as well as the preliminary examination, approval and assessment of the doctoral thesis are possible in the language indicated by the applicant.

Applicants for doctoral education must demonstrate the language proficiency required for the studies. Language proficiency in Finnish can be demonstrated according to the guidelines presented in Appendix 1, in Swedish according to the guidelines in Appendix 2 and in English according to the guidelines in Appendix 3. If the doctoral programme is offered in English, all applicants must demonstrate their proficiency in English as outlined in Appendix 3.

The director of the Education Services sector can decide, for each programme available for application, whether the required application enclosures can be submitted after the application deadline, by a date determined separately in the sector director's decision.

The Administrative Procedure Act (434/2003) stipulates that applicants must be provided a reasonable period to supplement a deficient application.

An application will not be considered if the degree that the prospective right to study would entitle the applicant to complete is essentially the same in content as the degree which the applicant has the right to complete at the University of Helsinki on the day after the application deadline.

3.1 Using artificial intelligence

Applicants who have used AI in preparing their research proposal or application must disclose how it was used.

The admissions criteria of doctoral programmes may prohibit the use of AI for drawing up research proposals or applications.
In this case, an application may be rejected if the applicant has used AI in writing their research proposal or application.

If the admissions criteria of the relevant doctoral programme do not prohibit the use of AI, an application may be rejected when the applicant has used AI in completing their research proposal or application, but has not disclosed this in the application itself.

4 Admissions to education leading to a doctoral degree

The admissions of doctoral researchers must be based on predetermined and published admissions criteria. The purpose of the admissions procedure is to assess the motivation, commitment and aptitude of the applicants for studies.

The right to pursue a doctoral degree is granted on the basis of diplomas, certificates and other documents. The admissions criteria include previous academic performance, the content of previous studies applicable to the prospective doctoral programme, and the quality and feasibility of the research proposal. Applicants may be invited to an interview if so decided when the admissions criteria for the relevant doctoral programme were approved. The steering group of the relevant doctoral programme is responsible for organising such interviews.

An application can be rejected if no suitable supervisor is found for the doctoral thesis. In admissions to education leading to a doctoral degree, it must be ensured that the admitted doctoral researchers have access to high-quality supervision and support on the topic of their doctoral theses and that they or their research project are sufficiently associated with the University's research environment.

The steering group of each doctoral programme must assess the applications of all applicants to the programme who meet the formal requirements. This assessment takes place in accordance with the admissions criteria that the faculty council has determined for the doctoral programme. For the faculty's decision-making, the steering groups of doctoral programmes must prepare an admissions proposal indicating the names of admitted and rejected applicants, together with the reasons for each decision. The admissions proposal must also list the prospective doctoral degree titles of the admitted applicants, and name their coordinating academics and supervisors.

5 Announcement of admissions results and acceptance of a place offer

Section 38 of the Universities Act states that applicants may accept only one place in a degree programme that leads to an academic degree and begins in the same term. This provision also applies to student places leading to a doctoral degree.

Applicants must be informed of the admission results, including the reasons for them. Letters of acceptance must mention the restriction referred to in section 38 of the Universities Act. Admitted applicants must report whether they accept the offer in the manner and period indicated by the University. Those who fail either to report whether they accept the offer or to submit the requested documents by the deadline will lose their student place.

In accordance with Rector's Decision HY/3220/00.00.06.00/2021, students can at any one time hold only a single right to study in the same degree programme at the University of Helsinki. Should students wish to obtain another right to study, they must either graduate or waive their previous right to study before they can receive another. By accepting the student place offered to them, applicants simultaneously waive their previous right to study if they must do so in accordance with the rector's decision, unless they complete the degree based on their previous right before the new right to study becomes effective. University Services is responsible for ensuring that the applicants affected by this provision have the opportunity to obtain information on it before accepting the place offered to them.

After having accepted a student place, admitted applicants may register as non-attending students only on the basis of grounds referred to in section 39 of the Universities Act.

6 Transferring between doctoral programmes

During their studies, doctoral researchers may apply, for well-grounded reasons, for a transfer to another doctoral programme due to, for example, a change in the topic of their doctoral thesis or supervisory arrangements. Doctoral researchers may also apply to transfer to another doctoral programme if they are admitted to a salaried doctoral researcher position in a doctoral programme under the University of Helsinki Doctoral School other than the one in which they have a right to study. The target degree and faculty cannot be changed during studies. In such cases, students must apply for a new right to study leading to a degree.

Transferring between doctoral programmes requires supporting statements from the supervisors and the appointed coordinator. Transfers are not possible after the preliminary examination process of the doctoral thesis has begun.

Decisions on transfers between doctoral programmes are made by the dean of the faculty that granted the relevant right to pursue studies leading to a degree. The director of the Research Services sector decides on the procedures to be observed when transferring between doctoral programmes.

7 Administrative review procedure

A decision not to offer a student place to an applicant must be accompanied by information on the administrative review procedure, as referred to in sections 82 and 83a of the Universities Act.

This decision was prepared collaboratively between Education Services and Research Services.

Rector Sari Lindblom

Specialist Sonja Mitroshin

The Finnish-language document has been digitally signed in the records and document management system of the University of Helsinki.

Appendix 1 Demonstration of Finnish language proficiency in student admissions
Appendix 2 Demonstration of Swedish language proficiency in student admissions
Appendix 3 Demonstration of English language proficiency in student admissions

APPENDIX 1 Demonstration of Finnish language proficiency in student admissions

Proficiency in Finnish can be demonstrated with the following degrees or studies:

- Basic education, an upper secondary-level qualification or another qualification providing eligibility for higher education, completed in Finnish
- A higher education degree completed in Finnish
- A completed higher education degree with the Finnish language (or an equivalent discipline) as the major subject
- An approved grade for the Finnish language and literature syllabus or equivalent studies in Finnish as the applicant's mother tongue, as indicated in the certificate awarded for studies defined in the Basic Education Act (628/1998) or the Act on General Upper Secondary Education (714/2018) or for equivalent studies
- A specific degree completed in accordance with section 23 of the Basic Education Decree (852/1998) demonstrating that the applicant's knowledge and skills correspond to those provided by the basic education syllabus for Finnish language and literature

Finnish-language proficiency can also be demonstrated with the following completed studies (including incomplete degrees or qualifications):

- In the Finnish matriculation examination, the test in Finnish as the mother tongue with a minimum grade of *approbatur*
- In the Finnish matriculation examination, the Finnish as a second language test with a minimum grade of *approbatur*
- In the Reifeprüfung or Deutsches Internationales Abitur, a written test in Finnish with a minimum score of 4
- In the Reifeprüfung or Deutsches Internationales Abitur, a test in Finnish as a second language at CEFR level B2 with a minimum score of 8
- In the International Baccalaureate (Diploma Programme or Career-related Programme), Finnish as language A, A1 or A2 with a minimum grade of 2
- In the International Baccalaureate (Diploma Programme or Career-related Programme), Finnish as language B with a minimum grade of 5
- In the European Baccalaureate, Finnish as language L1–L2 with a minimum grade of 4 if completed before 2021, or with a minimum grade of 5 if completed in or after 2021
- Finnish-language studies completed as part of a higher education degree demonstrating oral and written proficiency in Finnish as a second national language with a minimum grade of Good (or an equivalent language test) (decree 481/2003, section 16, subsection 2)
- Studies in the Finnish language at a higher education institution with a minimum scope of 35 credit units or 60 credits (or equivalent studies in an equivalent discipline, as evidenced by a certificate issued by the relevant institution) (decree 481/2003, section 16, subsection 3)
- Intermediate-level (*cum laude approbatur*) Finnish-language studies at a higher education institution (or equivalent studies in an equivalent discipline, as evidenced by a certificate issued by the relevant institution) (decree 481/2003 section 16, subsection 3)
- A maturity test written in Finnish for a higher education degree

In addition, Finnish-language proficiency can be demonstrated through the methods outlined in the table below:

Method	Required skill level
Civil Service Language Proficiency Certificate: oral and written skills in Finnish	At least good in both
National Certificate of Language Proficiency (YKI) in which the applicant's Finnish skills are assessed on the basis of six skill levels	At least 4 in all sub-tests

Applicants must demonstrate their language proficiency even if they have previously been granted the right to study at the University of Helsinki. Language qualifications and tests are considered only in full. Applicants cannot demonstrate language proficiency by combining discrete parts of language qualifications

or tests. An exception is the National Certificate of Language Proficiency (YKI), certificates of different levels of which can be combined in the application.

APPENDIX 2 Demonstration of Swedish language proficiency in student admissions

Proficiency in Swedish can be demonstrated with the following degrees or studies:

- Basic education, an upper secondary-level qualification or another qualification providing eligibility for higher education, completed in Swedish
- A higher education degree completed in Swedish
- A completed higher education degree with the Swedish language (or an equivalent discipline) as the major subject
- An approved grade for the Swedish language and literature syllabus or equivalent studies in Swedish as the applicant's mother tongue, as indicated in the certificate awarded for studies defined in the Basic Education Act (628/1998) or the Act on General Upper Secondary Education (714/2018) or for equivalent studies
- A specific degree completed in accordance with section 23 of the Basic Education Decree (852/1998) demonstrating that the applicant's knowledge and skills correspond to those provided by the basic education syllabus for Swedish language and literature

Swedish-language proficiency can also be demonstrated with the following completed studies (including incomplete degrees or qualifications):

- In the Finnish matriculation examination, the test in Swedish as the mother tongue with a minimum grade of *approbatur*
- In the Finnish matriculation examination, the Swedish as a second language test with a minimum grade of *approbatur*
- In the Reifeprüfung or Deutsches Internationales Abitur, a written test in Swedish with a minimum score of 4
- In the International Baccalaureate (Diploma Programme or Career-related Programme), Swedish as language A, A1 or A2 with a minimum grade of 2
- In the International Baccalaureate (Diploma Programme or Career-related Programme), Swedish as language B with a minimum grade of 5
- In the European Baccalaureate, Swedish as language L1–L2 with a minimum grade of 4 if completed before 2021, or with a minimum grade of 5 if completed in or after 2021
- Studies in the Swedish language completed as part of a higher education degree demonstrating oral and written proficiency in Swedish as a second national language with a minimum grade of Good (or an equivalent language test) (decree 481/2003, section 16, subsection 2)
- Studies in the Swedish language at a higher education institution with a minimum scope of 35 credit units or 60 credits (or equivalent studies in an equivalent discipline, as evidenced by a certificate issued by the relevant institution) (decree 481/2003, section 16, subsection 4)
- Intermediate-level (*cum laude approbatur*) Swedish-language studies at a higher education institution (or equivalent studies in an equivalent discipline, as evidenced by a certificate issued by the relevant institution) (decree 481/2003, section 16, subsection 4)
- A maturity test written in Swedish for a higher education degree

In addition, Swedish-language proficiency can be demonstrated through the methods outlined in the table below:

Method	Required skill level
Civil Service Language Proficiency Certificate: oral and written skills in Swedish	At least good in both
National Certificate of Language Proficiency (YKI) in which the applicant's Swedish skills are assessed on the basis of six skill levels	At least 4 in all sub-tests
Test in Swedish for University Studies (TISUS)	Successfully completed test

Applicants must demonstrate their language proficiency even if they have previously been granted the right to study at the University of Helsinki. Language qualifications and tests are considered only in full. Applicants cannot demonstrate language proficiency by combining discrete parts of language qualifications

or tests. An exception is the National Certificate of Language Proficiency (YKI), certificates of different levels of which can be combined in the application.

APPENDIX 3 Demonstration of English language proficiency in student admissions

Proficiency in English can be demonstrated with the following degrees or studies:

- Upper secondary education in English in Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Iceland, the United Kingdom, Ireland, the United States, Canada, Australia or New Zealand
- The International Baccalaureate (Diploma Programme or Career-related Programme) completed in English
- A degree completed at a Finnish university with the English language as the major subject

English-language proficiency can also be demonstrated with a degree meeting the following four conditions:

- The degree was awarded by a higher education institution operating in an EU or EEA country or one of the following countries: Antigua and Barbuda, Australia, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Botswana, Cameroon, Canada, Dominica, Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Grenada, Guyana, Hong Kong, India, Jamaica, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, Namibia, New Zealand, Nigeria, Philippines, Rwanda, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Sierra Leone, Singapore, South Africa, Switzerland, Tanzania, Trinidad and Tobago, Uganda, United Kingdom, United States, Zambia, Zimbabwe.
- It is a higher education degree in accordance with the country's official higher education system.
- The degree is equivalent to a first-, second- or third-cycle higher education degree in the Finnish education system.
- The applicant completed the degree in English.

English-language proficiency can also be demonstrated with the following completed studies (including incomplete degrees or qualifications):

- In the International Baccalaureate (Diploma Programme or Career-related Programme), English as language A1 with a minimum grade of 2
- In the International Baccalaureate (Diploma Programme or Career-related Programme), English as language A2 with a minimum grade of 5
- In the International Baccalaureate (Diploma Programme or Career-related Programme), English as language A (literature/language and literature/literature and performance) with a minimum grade of 2
- In the European Baccalaureate degree, English as language L1 with a minimum grade of 4 if completed before 2021, or with a minimum grade of 5 if completed in or after 2021
- In the European Baccalaureate, English as language L2 with a minimum grade of 7
- Foreign-language studies in English included in a Finnish higher education degree completed in Finland (Decree No 794/2004, section 6, subsection 1, or Decree No 1129/2014, section 7, subsection 1)

In addition, English-language proficiency can be demonstrated through the methods outlined in the table below:

Method	Required skill level or score	Test completed
National Certificate of Language Proficiency (YKI) in which the applicant's English skills are assessed on the basis of six skill levels	At least 5 in all sub-tests	
Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), Internet-based Test (completed before 21 January 2026)	92, a minimum of 22 for the written section	Up to two years before the deadline for submitting application attachments
Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), Internet-based Test (completed on or after 21 January 2026)	4.5, a minimum of 4 for each section	Up to two years before the deadline for submitting

		application attachments
Cambridge English: C2 Proficiency (CPE)	Pass level A, B, C or Level C1 Certificate	Completed in or after 2005
Cambridge English: C1 Advanced (CAE)	Pass levels A, B, or C	Completed in or after 2005
International English Language Testing System (IELTS) Academic	6.5, a minimum of 6.0 for each section	Up to two years before the deadline for submitting application attachments
Pearson Test of English (PTE) Academic	68, a minimum of 61 for the written section	Up to two years before the deadline for submitting application attachments

Applicants must demonstrate their language proficiency even if they have previously been granted the right to study at the University of Helsinki. Language qualifications and tests are considered only in full. Applicants cannot demonstrate language proficiency by combining discrete parts of language qualifications or tests. An exception is the National Certificate of Language Proficiency (YKI), certificates of different levels of which can be combined in the application.