

**AN OPEN LETTER TO THE ADMISSIONS OFFICE  
AND HEADS OF INTERNATIONAL MASTER'S DEGREE PROGRAMS  
OF ÅBO AKADEMI UNIVERSITY**

We, the undersigned students of the Master's Degree Program in Social Exclusion, write to initiate a discussion about the current English language requirement as part of the International Master's Degree Program (MDP) admissions process of Åbo Akademi University (ÅAU). More specifically, we believe that the current application requirements for an MDP within ÅAU racialize and negatively discriminate against some candidates, discouraging perhaps many of them from applying. We understand the need to make sure that candidates have the language proficiency to excel in graduate studies; therefore, we would like to propose alternative methods of evaluation.

As per the guidelines set by ÅAU, applicants "must always prove [their] level of proficiency in the English language" by submitting English-language test scores (i.e., IELTS, TOEFL, PTE, Cambridge English). Although we acknowledge that the University entitles the exception of such a test under specific circumstances, we argue that those exceptions are excluding certain applicants. They only apply to 1) those who hold a bachelor's degree from a Finnish Institution and 2) those who have received their secondary or university education in English from the following countries: Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, the United States, EU/EEA country, and Switzerland. These exemptions exclude students coming from former colonies who have studied their entire life in English. Taking into account that ÅAU "...aims to provide a non-discriminatory, gender-equal, anti-racist and accessible environment" (ÅAU Equality and Diversity Plan 2018-2020), we call for a de-/post-colonial and anti-racist approach on the issue.

The call to decolonize academia signifies the emergency to fight the persistence of asymmetric power structures, the privilege of whiteness, and the universalization of Western knowledge that still dominates our institutions. We believe that there is a need to reflect on the effect of colonization with regard to the admission process of higher education institutions. Specifically, this means confronting and challenging the 'coloniality of language' that limits and defines who is included and excluded. The persistence of the aforementioned policies makes sense as long as we realize that they are formed by the histories, capabilities, and cultures of those who draft them. Looking closer at who is in charge of the widely accepted language tests, it becomes clear that they are almost exclusively controlled and organized by representatives from the US and the UK.

We appreciate ÅAU's endeavour in upholding and enhancing diversity, inclusion, equality, and sustainability. As an academic institution that believes in equal treatment as a right that applies to all people, we urge the admissions office and the heads of the international MDPs to review the need for a language standardization test as a requirement.

Having in mind the ethical dimension of the issue as well as the importance of maintaining the high quality of researchers and students in our faculties, we propose the following:

1) The faculty members and the admission office should re-evaluate the pragmatic impact of those language tests. The language test centers- that control English language proficiency globally- are white institutions that maintain the logic that non-white/non-western English is inferior. Furthermore, we argue that although those tests are widely accepted, they are not flexible in changing their formats<sup>1</sup>. These tests also omit to include vocabulary from specific academic fields, and they focus on general decontextualized definitions.

2) Subject specialists, such as the head of the MDP should be the ones to determine whether a candidate has the language proficiency to be admitted to the program in question. We, therefore, suggest that ÅAU should no longer put an unnecessary economic and psychological burden on students who have been studying their entire life in English<sup>2</sup>. Instead of this, we suggest an interview. Through interviews of prospective applicants, department heads can better evaluate an applicant's language ability, experience, and field knowledge. This kind of language assessment is already being implemented by the MDP in Social Exclusion of ÅAU.

We humbly submit this recommendation for your consideration and feedback. Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

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<sup>1</sup> Note that they were maintaining the same format for over 25 years.

<sup>2</sup> Note that some Universities in the UK and Canada have a broader than ÅA list of countries that do not require such tests.

**You can find more information from the following specialists/ References:**

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