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## Inclusive Higher Education in Russia (by the Example of the Volga Federal District)

### Abstract

*The article covers the possibility of establishing resource centers in higher education institutions for teaching people with disabilities and health limitations. The implementation of the project «Monitoring, research and information support of activities provided by the regional resource centers of higher education for people with disabilities» is considered. The university has developed a model of information-analytical guidance to educate people with disabilities with the help of regional resource centers of higher education for people with health limitations. A number of measures for establishing educational activities at the university are presented. The main effect of the organized events by the resource training and methodological center is considered. It is the involvement of all participants of the process at all its levels in the problem of inclusive higher education. Priority activity areas of the resource training and methodological center of Minin University are highlighted. The results of the inclusive higher education on the base of Minin University were summed up.*

**Keywords:** Inclusive Higher Education, Social and Cultural Space, Resource Centers.

### Introduction

#### Literature Review of Related Work

Russian universities are cultural centers of the society, a source and a presenter of new ideas and values, affecting the society's attitude to life phenomena (Borodkina, 2014; Gruzdeva & Tukenova, 2019a; Vaganova, Tuaeva, Smirnova, Parsieva & Aleshugina, 2019). As a promising

direction, Minin University can claim to manage the development of inclusive culture in the society through its development at the University. At the same time, development activities of inclusive culture should cover not only the University space, but also go beyond it into the social and cultural space of the region's society (Sedykh, Zanfir, Vaganova, Smirnova & Bulayeva, 2019).

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Minin University is the university that actively participates in the activities of the Public Council under the Ministry of Education of Nizhny Novgorod region, the Presidium of the Federal educational and methodological association for groups of specialties and directions. The University is a unity of educational, scientific, sports and recreational centers of the University campus with a comfortable barrier-free environment. It has human and resource potential for training people with disabilities and health limitations. It is the only establishment in the region that qualify specialists in the field of special (defectological) education, and trains professionals to work in the field of physical culture with disabled people (Krasnopevtseva, Filchenkova & Vinokurova, 2020; Smirnova, Vaganova, Chanchina, Koldina & Kutepov, 2020). The University has a successful experience in implementing state contracts: due to the Federal Targeted Program in Education for 2016-2020, the University completed work on 3 projects, 2 of them – on the development of inclusive higher education in 2015-2017 (Markova, Sedykh, Polunin & Tsyplakova, 2020; Smirnova, Kuznetsova, Koldina, Dyudiyakova & Smirnov, 2020).

### ***Rationale for the Need for Inclusive Education***

Inclusive education is a process of development of general education, which implies the availability of education for all, in terms of adaptation to the different needs of all children, which ensures access to education for children with special needs.

The main features of the need to develop inclusive education are as follows:

- Human rights and children's rights obligations must be treated equally;
- analysis of what is in the true interests of each child determines what exactly is good for him. The facts show that institutional (for example, in boarding schools, boarding schools) care does not always meet the interests of the people under guardianship;
- data analysis suggests that social services are improving as a result of being more flexible and adaptable.

### ***Inclusive Learning: Tasks, Problems and Perspectives***

The number of children officially receiving disability benefits in the country has increased dramatically (1.3 of the total number of children).

Special education for special needs students with disabilities is undergoing severe

shocks due to funding cuts and structural adjustment.

Research of public opinion on the problems of accessibility of higher education and ways to solve them is of particular relevance today. The researchers set the task to find out what are the views of schoolchildren, students, their parents, teachers, employers, managers and teachers of state and non-state universities, workers of state and non-state employment services about the differences in the quality of higher education (including bachelor's, master's, postgraduate studies in state and non-state universities) and in the possibilities of obtaining education of different quality.

### **Methodology**

#### **Participants**

During the implementation of the project "Monitoring and information-analytical support of regional resource centers of higher education for people with disabilities" the University developed a model of information-analytical support of work-based learning in higher education to educate people with disabilities. Regional resource centers of higher education have experience of monitoring research in the field of inclusive higher education (the monitoring was attended by 876 universities, 1740 graduates with disabilities).

#### **Measures**

By order of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation, the University has developed and tested the Portal of inclusive education. During its creation, Minin University employees gained experience working with a large amount of data on higher education for disabled people, demonstrated their readiness and ability to interact with organizations of various levels to put together the materials for the Portal.

At the regional level, the University is the organizer and the key element of the regional social and teaching cluster that operates through the development of network cooperation and social partnership with authorities, educational and public organizations. The cluster includes more than 200 participants, 40 practice sites, more than 60 testing sites, 12 associations of teachers in Nizhny Novgorod region, which indicates the readiness and ability to hold outstanding events in the field of inclusive higher education.

#### **Analysis of the Results**

Minin University is one of the top 10 universities according to the university readiness

index (IVO, n./d.) to offer education for people with disabilities and health limitations. The University has 46 students with disabilities and health limitations. For their training and support in higher education, the appropriate architectural, medical, technical, learning, socio-pedagogical and socio-psychological conditions were provided. The Centre of vocational orientation and the Center of assistance to employment of graduates and practice organization are in operation; the concept of post-graduate support is developed, e-service for post-graduate support for a young professionals with disabilities and special needs is created.

In 2016, a new project was created in Russia – a network of regional training centers that manage logistics and content work for people with special needs in higher education. The goal of this project is to consolidate the achievement of conventionality between the individual, society and the state (Rudenko et al., 2019). This is one of the main problems in Russia. Achieving such a convention can only be a public matter, not a state or administrative decision (Agurto Adrianzén, Fiestas Chevez, Nuñez Morales, Quevedo & Vegas Chiyón, 2019; Ametepee & Anastasiou, 2015; Gruzdeva & Tukenova, 2019b; Yada, Tolvanen & Savolainen, 2018).

This structure has been operating for only a year, as well as 20 other regional training centers for people with disabilities and health limitations in the Russian Federation.

The resource training and methodological center of Minin University, established in October 2017, has a wide representation of people interested in this matter and partners who work with the University, not because they were ordered to do so, but because it is really an important public matter. To date, the resource training and methodological center of Minin University has signed 26 collaboration agreements with universities in 7 regions of the subordinated territory: Nizhny Novgorod region, the Republic of Mordovia, Penza region, Perm region, Samara region, Ulyanovsk region, Saratov region. In total, there are 29 universities located on the territory that are subordinate to the Ministry of Education and Science of Russia. Public organizations for disabled people, comprehensive and remedial schools, executive authorities, experts in the field of inclusive education in foreign countries: China, Germany, Finland, the United States, the Republic of Belarus, Kazakhstan are partners as well (Krasnopevtseva, Paputkova & Filchenkova, 2019).

### **Statistical Analyses**

In total, 934 students with disabilities and health limitations study at universities, located on the previously-mentioned territory, of which:

- 27% - people with disorders of the musculoskeletal system.
- 11% - visually impaired.
- 5% - hearing impaired.
- 57% - with other types of disorders (including somatic, mental and other diseases).

The resource training and methodological center implemented the entire list of activities within the road maps approved by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation for 2017-2019.

The main effect of the events held by the resource training and methodological center is involvement in the problem of all participants dealing with inclusive higher education at all its levels:

- interdepartmental level: the participants are representatives of Ministries of Education, of regional and federal levels, the Ministry of labour and social protection, public organisations.
- interinstitutional level: the representatives of 26 universities, 5 secondary vocational education establishments, and more than 17 schools (more than 300 students) participated in the events.
- interregional: 7 regions took part in the events.

This involvement took place in each activity: both in the number of calls received by the Call-center and in the number of participants in the events.

The result analysis of resource training and methodological center's activities revealed a number of significant problems and ways to solve them.

Thus, at the level of pre-university training, the main problem was identified. It is the poor continuity of the "school-university" system for people with disabilities and health limitations (Robinson, 2017; Smirnova, Kamenez, Vaganova, Kutepova & Vezetiu, 2019). In our opinion, this problem can be solved by developing and replicating methods and technologies to support the school to university transition.

We have identified two main problems related to training and support of education at the university. To solve them, we suggest the following:

- It is possible to make good the deficit of specialized teaching materials and educational technologies in higher education institutions by identifying, consolidating and replicating the best practices of work with people with disabilities in higher education at the resource training and methodological center's site.
- To create educational and methodological support of physical training for people with disabilities in higher education institutions, it is necessary to start with reconsideration of the mechanisms and tools, the development of physical training's adapted model, the technology for forming healthy lifestyle habits.

Solving these problems, in our opinion, will help universities to preserve the maximum number of students with disabilities and health limitations.

Within the activity related to employment promotion, which is an interdepartmental task, the following problems were identified as the main ones:

- The lack of interdepartmental interaction.
- The lack of a unified database for graduates with disabilities and health limitations.
- The shortage of job opportunities for graduates with disabilities.

These problems prevent effective planning and assistance. The above mentioned problems are typical for the world practice of inclusive education and require focused efforts to establish mechanisms and coordinate the actions of different parties responsible for a certain part of the overall result (Alquati Bisol, Valentini & Rech Brauna, 2015; Dare & Nowicki, 2018; Sansour & Bernhard, 2018).

Taking into account the systemic nature of the problem, the development of effective interaction forms should also be systemic and affect all levels of interaction (Tiwari, Das, & Sharma, 2015).

## Results

Special attention should be paid to post-graduate support (PGS) for people with disabilities, which is formal and fragmentary in most universities of the assigned territory. Therefore, in our opinion, to solve this problem conceptual justification of technological solutions should be made first. PGS programs for people with disabilities and health limitations are considered as an element of this system.

We believe that the creation and replication of planning tools and supporting career development (PGS e-service, career router, etc.), as well as the development of retraining and advanced training programs for graduates with disabilities and health limitations, will help to solve this problem. It also will lead to an increase in number of graduates with disabilities and health limitations using postgraduate support programs.

It should be noted that universities are interested in forming the inclusive competence of university teachers. During the project 586 members of academic staff, universities command and control, educational support staff of 18 universities improved skills in inclusive higher education.

As part of consulting, call center employees of the resource training and methodological center at Minin University conducted more than 1200 consultations on admission, training, and employment of people with disabilities. The subject matter of those who applied for advice corresponds to the main issues in the field of inclusive higher education – issues of legal, educational, methodological and instrumental support of the educational process, psychological and pedagogical support, career guidance and admission to higher education institutions, employment of graduates with disabilities and health limitations. In 2018, the Call center's operations were transferred to the Federal number 8-800-550-61-15.

According to the statistics of the resource training and methodological center's call center, out of 1232 consultations, the largest number of questions related to the employment of disabled people (112 consultations) and the development of adapted educational programme (109 consultations), the problem of involving people with disabilities in extracurricular and volunteer activities (34 consultations).

## Conclusions

The result analysis of the monitoring made it possible to identify both typical and specific regional problems and resources. The most popular professions that require higher education in the assigned territory are engineering, medical and pedagogical ones. The employment level of public educational institutions' graduates with disabilities on average is 45%, the minimum is in Penza region (12.5%), the maximum is in Ulyanovsk region (80%).

It is also important to note that a large number of student volunteers who have a personal interest are currently involved in the resource training and methodological center's activity (more than 150 students at Minin University are involved in inclusive volunteering,

including not less than 2 students from each partner university, who were trained to assist people with disabilities and health limitations in 2018-2019).

Now the resource training and methodological center has reached a certain decisive moment, when it is absolutely clear that the actions of the Federal Ministry, control and supervisory structures are not even stimulating, not even auxiliary, but only a concomitant factor in the development of higher education policy and changes in the urban environment in order to achieve a balance between the people's needs and what all civil society institutions can do together. Russia has changed a lot in the development of inclusive education in recent decades. The changes are noticeable, but this is still not enough and now we have the opportunity to take a new big step. Civil society is changing, and the university is becoming the factor that changes the environment and the attitude to the society.

The priority areas of the resource training and methodological center of Minin University in 2020 are to continue interaction with all members/parts of inclusive process, inclusive culture development through the transference of the inclusive culture of the University. The role of the resource training and methodological center is to assess existing experience, develop and replicate scientific and methodological approaches to teaching people with disabilities, find modern tools for support and training, teaching and learning guidance, and to consolidate the best models of inclusive culture in higher education institutions. It is planned to transfer inclusive values to society through public events of an educational and charitable nature, as well as through involvement of the mass media in the coverage of events.

To make the world better, there are such things that the resource training and methodological center is doing today. We absolutely do not overestimate the situation, realizing that the path to success will be very long.

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