

EQUAL APPROACH TO STUDYING WITHOUT BARRIERS IN UNIVERSITY ENVIRONMENT FOCUSED ON THE UNIVERSITY OF OSTRAVA

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Abstract: The following article outlines the system of tertiary education in the Czech Republic, with emphasis on the education of students with special educational needs at the University of Ostrava. It informs about the progress of the project The Support of Tertiary Education of Students with Special Educational Needs at the University of Ostrava (reg. no. OP VK CZ.1.07/2.2.00/29.0006), its outputs and mechanisms supporting equal education. The aim of the project is creation of inclusive university environment that is ready to accept students with special needs. The text thus presents the process of innovation of study conditions for all students, but with full respect to a priority requirement, which is the completion of a studied subject in the scope given by proper accreditation.

Key words: tertiary education, student with special educational needs, college, university, integration, inclusion, projects, innovations in education.

1 The University Education in the Czech Republic

International Standard Classification of Education (abbr. ISCED) was prepared and issued by UNESCO in 1976. In 1997 the General Conference of UNESCO approved changes concerning the level of education and also the field of study. The classification of ISCED from 1997 has 7 levels of education (0 to 6), which can further have an internal structure from A to C. In our conditions the levels ISCED 5 and ISCED 6 represent university education comparable to other countries. In the Czech Republic as in other countries (e.g. Slovakia, Poland) since 2001 has existed structured three-level university education. By that the level shows the reached degree of education. The first degree of education is the bachelor's study, the second degree of education is the master's study and third – the highest degree of education is the doctoral study. The number of active students at all levels of university education is increasing every year. In 2001 there were about 203 500 registered students, in 2010 there were already 396 300. The highest share has the bachelor's study – 62 % of students, followed by the subsequent master's study – 22 % of students, then master's unstructured study (preserved in selected subjects, e.g. General Medicine, Teaching for Primary Schools) – 10 % of students, and doctoral students represent total of 6 % of students registered in 2010. (CZSO, online) At the university the education is implemented in three forms – full-time, combined and distance.

Education is provided by state (2), public (26) and private (44) universities. If higher vocational school obtains an appropriate accreditation for given field of study of university education, it can provide the university education in this subject (usually it concerns the first degree). The accreditation to all schools is given by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic. The Accreditation Commission of the Czech Republic is an independent council that deals with the quality of university education. For this purpose the Accreditation Commission carries out comprehensive assessment of educational, scientific, research, artistic or other creative activities of universities. (AC, online)

2 Education at the University of Ostrava

The University of Ostrava is one of the 26 public colleges in the Czech Republic having the status of a university. It has 6 faculties (Pedagogical Faculty, Faculty of Arts, Faculty of Medicine, Faculty of Science, Faculty of Fine Arts and Faculty of Social Studies). Individual faculties offer subjects of bachelor's, master's or doctoral degree. The University of Ostrava has been awarded the prestigious European certificate, which demonstrates that the school teaches on the same

principles as traditional European universities. It is the ECTS Label Certificate and it is awarded by the European Commission. In 2012 at the University of Ostrava 10 637 students studied in bachelor's, master's (long and short) and doctoral programmes. 70 % of students studied the bachelor's programmes and subjects (out of which 69 % were in full-time programmes, and 29,3 % in combined programmes and 1,4 % in distance study programmes). 6,9 % of students studied long master's programmes, the number of 20,1 % students studied in subsequent master's programmes (out of which 73,9 % of students in full-time programmes and 26,1 % of students in combined ones). 3,4 % of students studied in doctoral programmes. At the University of Ostrava study in total 68,6 % students in full-time programmes, and 27,9 % of students in combined programmes and distance ones. (Annual Report of the University of Ostrava, online 2013)

3 On the Way to Inclusion in the Education at the University of Ostrava

The society approached people with disability in different ways in particular historical periods, usually the tendencies cannot be judged positively. An equal approach to people with disability did not mean a lot to the intact society. Even today, this topic is rather ambiguous. There are still ongoing expert discussions about the scope and methods of ensuring equal approach towards people with disabilities, both in the general social, educational and professional, as well as in the family context. Many questions have not been answered yet. The specialists explain the term "equal approach" variably, inconsistently, sometimes even ambivalently. Perhaps only because it is about relativism, and also because, with respect to the subject of interest of the special pedagogy, it is necessary to perceive the person (with or without disability) in an individual way. About the concept of inclusive education in relation to pre-school education, primary and secondary levels of education, we can find quite a number of research studies of domestic or foreign origin. The tertiary level of education with respect to special educational needs of students with disability is scientifically explored only a little. In the following paragraphs there are outlined the realized research and developmental activities, in which the authors of the text were participating actively or they are still participating and on which they build the way to inclusion, i.e. the way to equal approach in the education of students with special educational needs.

In the academic year of 2012/2013 a total of 34 students with special educational needs studied at all faculties at the University of Ostrava. For a long time the authors of the article have been engaged in research and developmental projects, where the target group consists of children, pupils and also students with special/specific educational needs. Between years 2008 - 2011 at the "Centrum Pyramida" ["Pyramid" Centre] - the centre of support for students with special educational needs – they worked or co-worked on developmental projects focused on supporting the integration of students with health disabilities. In 2010 they dealt with a research called "Education of Pupils with Special Educational Needs from the Perspective of Frame Educational Programmes", it was followed in 2011 by further research project called "Analysis of Key Determinants Influencing the Process of Education of Children, Pupils and Students With Special Educational Needs in the Context of Frame Educational Programmes." In 2012 they worked on a research with the topic "Analysis of Determinants Influencing the Education of Students With Special Educational Needs at the University of Ostrava." The last mentioned research project was done parallel to currently running developmental project from European Structural Funds within the Operational Programme for Competitiveness (2012 – 2015) with the name of "The Support of Tertiary Education of Students with Special Educational Needs at the University of Ostrava" (registration number: CZ.1.07/2.2.00/29.0006). It is a university project, in which all the faculties are involved. The project concept is based

on the philosophy from the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, based on the Act no. 198/2009 Coll., on Equal Treatment and on Legal Means of Protection against Discrimination and on Amendment to some Laws. It is in accordance with the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, which explicitly prohibits discrimination against the disabled. Further it follows the National Plan for the Creation of Equal Opportunities for People with Disabilities for 2010 – 2014, which states a claim that a person with health disability is offered a reasonable modification according to individual needs and education. It is also in accordance with the National Action Plan on Inclusive Education, which was approved by the Government of the Czech Republic in 2010. In the specific strategic objectives in the sphere of education in the Long-Term Strategic Plan of the University of Ostrava for 2011 – 2015 there is besides other things mentioned an active support for students with specific needs. A practical objective of currently solved developmental project “*The Support of Tertiary Education of Students with Special Educational Needs at the University of Ostrava*” is a creation of supportive measures to equal education so as the modifications of study and educational procedures come out of evaluation of specific needs of a student with special educational needs, not from the nature of their health disability. The implementation of the project counts on coordinated cooperation of academic and other university staff. Its contribution is structured into 5 key spheres: innovation of study programmes, fields of study and subjects, increase of professional competences of academic and other staff, implementation of a system monitoring the needs of the labour market for the graduates, architectural accessibility of buildings for students with special educational needs and creation of an inclusive environment.

The starting point of the key activities included in the project is a principle that *the university is obliged to accept a student with specific needs, if the possible adaptation of study does not prevent the graduation in the studied field in the scope given by proper accreditation, only with modification of formal (technical and organizational) side of the study.* The primary aim of the wide research team is to find out and verify the possibilities and circumstances of the adaptation of study for students with specific needs. For this purpose the strategy of innovation of study subjects in the selected field of study was chosen. The basic principles of innovation are based both on respect to the demands of the university for graduating particular subject, and also on the respect to special educational needs of students with health disability. The scope of specification of special educational needs of a student and of studying conditions including their possible modification is due to the variability of symptoms of health disability individual and it is based on number of factors, not only the type of disability and the content of a study plan. The university education in addition puts a considerable demand on a student in the sphere of social and speech communication, work with written texts, work with symbols and graphics, multimedia work (audio-visual materials), demands on the usage of technologies, or working with physical material during lessons and while studying, etc.

The precondition for creation of equal opportunities to study and at the same time the central philosophy of this project is the understanding of the term “special educational needs”, the understanding that every person with health disability needs individual level of help or compensation for satisfaction of basic human needs, where the need for education belongs as well. This help, however, does not mean any exceptional need, but a set of measures that lead to enable access to the possibility of fulfilment and realisation of one’s basic needs. By the set of measures is understood a summary of service activities provided by the university, which arise from the requests for functional diagnostics according to the currently valid typology of students with special educational needs.¹

¹ The Rules for Provision of Grants and Subsidies to Public Universities by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, no.MŠMT-1325/2012-33 from January 17th, 2012, specifying the financing of the increased costs for education of students with specific needs.

The service measures include, e.g. access to study literature, recording / visualization services, interpreting services, individual education, study assistance, personal assistance, spatial orientation training, diagnostics, overhead measures, time compensation, etc. To make the university accessible for people with health disability requires to create environment, which is characterized by understanding the differences of students, by the atmosphere of perception and empathy in the relation to special educational needs of students arising from the presence of disability, as well as to create an easy-access (communicative, informative, architectural). During education further basic needs of human must be also satisfied, i.e. the sense of security, belonging, mutual respect, which are not defined by any directive or decree, but which belong to the set of supportive measures inseparably. Equal opportunities can be created only by mutual active approach both from the side of students with specific needs, and also from the side of the university. The Centre of Support for Students with Special Needs (“Pyramid” Centre) has the coordinating role in the whole process at the University of Ostrava. The aim of accessibility of education is not to create a “greenhouse environment”, in which we would create the barriers, but to modify conditions of entrance examinations, study conditions and study environment so as on the contrary we can break down the barriers. The parts of the project are thus mandatory courses to increase personal and professional competences of academic and non-academic staff of the University of Ostrava.

4 The Innovation of Fields of Study at the University of Ostrava

The project involves the staff of all the faculties of the University of Ostrava, while the innovation concerns mainly fields of study resulting from the internal analysis for education of students with special educational needs at the University of Ostrava. Those are e.g. the fields of study like Teaching for Pre-Schools (Pedagogical Faculty), Teaching for Primary Schools (Pedagogical Faculty), Special Pedagogy (Pedagogical Faculty), Information Technology (Pedagogical Faculty), Pedagogy (Pedagogical Faculty), Social Pedagogy (Pedagogical Faculty), Applied Information Technology (Faculty of Science), Physiotherapy (Faculty of Medicine), Occupational Therapy (Faculty of Medicine), Medical-Social Care (Faculty of Social Studies) and others. The internal analysis was done before submitting the project application and so it also became a motivating and supporting material for creating the project.

The aim of the key activity focused on innovation of the studying subjects is the adjustment of studying and educational procedures based on evaluation of specific needs of a student with special educational needs, not on the nature of their health disability. It is necessary to stress that the features of the innovation of studying and educational procedures including the demands of students with special educational needs are of inclusive nature because at the same time they can improve educational possibilities of all students at the University of Ostrava. Innovated subjects will be offered to students as substituting or supportive.

A substituting subject (compulsory or compulsory elective) considers a modified structure of completing the subject, which is a part of the studying plan. The modification must not change the *aims and the content of the subject or the obtained qualifications*. On the contrary, the modification is expected in the *requirements for a student* (solely from the organisational, technical and material perspective, not as regards content)², *educational methods, assessing methods and categories of studying*, which means all the activities a student performs to reach the studying output. We must always take into account adequate and acceptable modifications in accordance with the conditions for completing the subject. For example an oral exam of a student with strong hearing impairment would take place with the presence of an interpreter into the Czech sign language,

² What a student must do to meet the requirements of the subject (lecture participation, continuous fulfilling of correspondence tasks, handing in an essay, etc.)

a student with strong visual disability obtains the credit through verbal presentation, conversely, in the case of a student with strong hearing impairment through written task fulfilment. Other possible modifications include increasing the amount of time for fulfilling tasks, studying assistance services, personal assistance services, the usage of special tools, the adjustment of the environment, etc.

A supportive subject (elective) means creating a new subject that a student chooses to be able to meet the requirements of the studying plan (e.g. a student with strong hearing impairment chooses a subject focused on teaching Czech language in order to understand the terminology of the given field, etc.).

The outputs of the key activity focused on the innovation of subjects also include modified educational documents closely related to the innovated subject (see table no. 1). Studying support in a digital form accessible to all students takes into account a large amount of possible demands (even before they are claimed by individual students). It is a desirable non-discriminating approach that the universities should consider a part of the anticipation of the requirements of students with special educational needs. If the subject contains e-learning features (e.g. the lecture takes place in a virtual environment), it must be accessible for all the students of a specific subject or such an adjustments must be implemented that enables the students with disability to access equivalent educational opportunities (e.g. for a student with strong visual disability). During the project a pilot testing will be done on 20 innovated subjects within those fields of study, where students with special educational needs are currently studying. Their participation is necessary in order to identify possible obstacles in studying and evaluating innovated subjects.

The Outputs of Key Activity	No. of Products
Innovated subjects for students with specific educational needs (SEN)	100
Innovated subjects for students with SEN tested in pilot testing	20
Studying support in electronic form	100
E-learning courses	35
Adaptation of courses (educational CD)	35
Adaptation of courses (educational DVD)	35
Methodical recommendation for further creation of the innovation of subjects	
Methodical recommendation for following accreditation and reaccreditation processes of chosen fields of study	

T1: The overview of the outcomes of key activity focused on the innovation of the field of study

5 Other Mechanisms to Support Inclusive Education at the University of Ostrava

The key activity focused on increasing professional competences of academic and other staff of the university aims to prepare the staff to possible difficulties that students with special educational needs and also the staff involved with them meet. One of the outputs is the course Students with Special Educational Needs at Universities (K1), a course focused on methodological preparation of lectures and the creation of presentations using modern technologies (K2), Sign Language Course – beginners (K3), Sign Language Course – advanced (K4), a course supplemented with practice or fellowship in chosen workplaces, focused on modification of electronic texts for readers with visual disability and also focused on work with digital library for students (K5) and a Course of Personal Assistance (K6). The aims of the activity are based on the precondition of the necessity of increasing the competence of the university staff in the sphere of communication with individuals with health disability. It involves gaining information, pieces of knowledge and competences.

Course	K1	K2	K3 ³	K4 ⁴	K5	K6
No. of successfully supported staff members	79	78	8	8	81	taking place in winter term 2013

T2: Courses for the university staff

The system of monitoring the needs of labour market provides the university graduates with published works and conference outputs. Empirically there is investigated the monitoring and work success of students with special educational needs with regard to current trends in the employment policy. It involves updating the *Methodology of Support and Balancing the Conditions during Studying of Students with Special Educational Needs at the University of Ostrava* (the latest version in 2012), with methodological recommendation to provide occupational fellowships of students with special educational needs and students with socio-economic disadvantage. The point is to strengthen their competitiveness. The completion of these partial steps results in the creation of a list of fields of study suitable for candidates with special educational needs at the University of Ostrava, a report about the possibilities of success of students with special educational needs at the labour market after they graduate from the chosen field of study and methodological recommendation for realisation of fellowships of students with special educational needs at the University of Ostrava.

Students with special educational needs (minimum of participated so far)	Students with socio-economic disadvantage (minimum of participated so far)
5/1	5/2

T3: Students' occupational fellowships

The presence of no barriers in education is ensured by building modern easy-access elevator in the historic building of the university, by installing two platforms for wheelchairs and also by web interface called Inclusive Environment, which aims to start and support communication of people at the university. The staff (academic and other members) and students (intact, and with disability) at all the faculties are motivated to actively communicate with each other about topics solving equal approach in education and various life situations connected with this problem.

Inclusive environment (web interface)	No. of registered users
Students with special educational needs	13
Intact students	746
University staff	43
Total	802 ⁵

T4: The number of registered users in the Inclusive Environment

The Inclusive Environment offers communicational panel "Ask us", where students with special educational needs are logged in using their personal profiles. This enables an open communication with students who showed willingness to share their personal experience. The panel "Stories" contains five sections (My Family; Something I Would Like to Tell Others; A Person With a Disability Can Study at a University; The Importance of Volunteering; My Experience with the Disabled), that offer categories of contributions of those students or university staff members who wanted to share their own or interpreted life stories. Discussion panel contains altogether 5 topics focused on fighting prejudices and stereotypes, it also focuses on the problems of education of students with specific learning disability, equality in education, etc.

6 Conclusion

We face the problem of integrative and inclusive education of persons with health disability at all educational levels. The academic community should observe current development and react adequately. We can expect a continuous increase in the amount of active students with specific educational needs (SEN). The University of Ostrava is on the way to equal approach – to creating inclusive environment for students with special educational needs. Thanks to the realisation of research and developmental projects it creates equality in the system of tertiary education. However, the necessary mechanism of inclusion is the coordination of all the bodies taking part in both direct and indirect pedagogical activity, administrative agenda, related to the course of the studying of intact students as well as students with special educational needs. The necessary part is the

³ Will be repeated in the following academic year.

⁴ Will be repeated in the following academic year.

⁵ As at a date of August 18th, 2013.

still developing tool of the support of personal and professional competences of all the staff at the University of Ostrava in the approaches (attitudes) to people with health disability (e.g. courses focused on assistance, adaptation of studying materials, sign language, etc.). At the same time it is necessary to create a system offer of the above-mentioned tools for all the students at the University of Ostrava. Even though the process of creating inclusive university environment at the University of Ostrava has already started, the length of its track is not given as it is a continuous and complex activity aiming to change studying environment and conditions.

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