

Section 3.

Peculiarities of the problems of accessibility of higher education for individual social and territorial groups

Accessibility of higher education for disabled persons

**Project team: E.R.Yarskaya - Smirnova (Project Director),
P.V.Romanov, D.V.Zaitsev, E.V.Belozyorova, G.G.Karpova,
E.K. Naberushkina, A.A.Chernetskaya**

Saratov State Technical University

Problem

Realization of the rights of disabled persons to education is related to a consolidated number of problems pertinent to the reform of educational system, to social policies pursued in respect of disabled persons.

The period from 1930 through 1960 saw the development of first dedicated programs in technical universities where specific disabilities were concentrated on. Regrettably at that period the issues of disabilities stayed at the outskirts of State policies public opinion and higher education system management. In the 1960-s, a number of central universities started to enroll disabled people for group and individual training and increased the number of professions available to disabled persons.

Policies towards disabled persons changed substantially from the beginning of the 90-ties as new regulations were adopted in compliance with international humanitarian rights. Those regulations introduced new patterns of dismissing disabled persons-related problems; relative functions were set up at federal ministries and agencies and new mechanisms were put into action to facilitate disabilities documenting and rehabilitation activities. A consolidated set of dedicated federal programs is being implemented in Russia whereby a number of institutions of higher education received goal oriented funding to consolidate material and technical basis to provide higher education to disabled persons. All this put together allows to extend the enrollment of invalid into institutions of higher education, expand the number and diversity of educational programs including liberal disciplines.

Vocational Department at the Federal Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation report that the total number of disabled persons enrolled into universities within the period from 1996 through 2000 had trebled. Currently the number of disabled students in Russian institutions of higher education continues to grow. This indicator had increased from 5400 students back in 1996 to 14,500 in 2003. As a result, the share of disabled persons in the student community had risen within the same period from 0.08% to 0.4%. It is a positive trend though many things are still to be done to reach the European level: the share of disabled persons among French students stands at 5%¹.

Many factors hamper disabled people from getting higher education despite efforts spent. Integrated programs at high schools are not used often, negative attitude towards disabled persons in Russia still persist.

Objective and methodology

The scope of investigations addresses the analysis of potential and barriers in the ways to facilitate the availability of higher education to disabled persons. Investigations consider principal liabilities and responsibilities of the State towards physically disadvantaged entrants

¹ Utro.ru, 14.07.2003 <http://www.utro.ru/news/2003/07/14/2139115.shtml>

and students; expose terms, principles and workings of realization mechanisms of present day federal polices in the area of higher professional training of disabled persons.

Research methods:

- analysis of documents on how contemporary higher education programs for disabled persons are developed in Moscow, Saint Petersburg, Novosibirsk, Samara and Chelyabinsk;
- fill-in-the-form polling of students (N=266) and professors (N=106) in Saratov and Chelyabinsk institutions of higher education;
- half structured interviewing of experts representing administrations of institutions of higher education from Saratov, Samara, Moscow, Saint Petersburg, Chelyabinsk (N=34);
- fill-in-the-form polling of young disabled persons of Saratov province in respect to their needs in vocational training (N=842);
- half structured interviewing of entrants (N=11) and freshmen (N=21) with disablements.

Findings

1. Some of the Russian higher education institutions started program development for education of disabled persons at various times and on various reasons and have consolidated respective backgrounds. In some cases the decisions were taken by the Government whereas in other cases the initiative came from the higher education institution manager or someone of his team. The issue as a rule was to concentrate on a selected category of disabled persons. Sometimes the program is budgeted by the Federal Ministry of Education and sometimes financed with the support of foreign foundations. Certain institutions of higher education have consolidated a “traditional” package of offers for disabled entrants like computer technologies and design for example. Other institutions of higher education are flexible to change offers on an annual basis depending on the enrollment requirements by profession.

Four main routes of developments in training disabled persons at institutions of higher education have singled out:

- 1) Dedicated departments for disabled persons at the institutions of higher education.
- 2) Dedicated institutions of higher education for disabled persons.
- 3) Centers of additional pre-training for disabled entrants of institutions of higher education.
- 4) Psychological and pedagogical assistance centers for physically disadvantaged students of institutions of higher education.

The general concept of education of disabled persons however ranges from total segregation to partial or complete integration.

2. The Department of Vocational Training at the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation report an uneven distribution of physically disadvantaged students in the students communities: fourteen institutions of higher education have over 100 disabled persons on the list, 52 institutions train from 50 to 100 disabled persons and the number of physically disadvantaged students in the remaining institutions of higher education does not exceed several

dozens². The entrants with disablements therefore face the alternative of either, first, enter an institution of higher education at his place of residence with small chance to find adapted barrier-free environments with professors likely not trained to work with disabled persons³, or, second, move to another region where the above environments are available. The latter however poses an immediate problem. An incoming student from a region must “bring with himself” the budgeting for his personal rehabilitation program. Mismatching workings of various agencies and functions involved, unverified procedures of the transfers add more problems for the second option.

3. Motivation of physically disadvantaged entrants to join an institution of higher education stays low through a number of reasons like poor training at invalid’s care and training boarding schools, fears of the environments not adapted for disabled persons, absence of special equipment and appliances at the institutions of higher education, mobility problems in conventional transportation facilities. Many disabled persons sustain additional problems through low incomes of their families and face problems in training at home conditions with no telephones, computers, electronic communications.

Some of physically disadvantaged students come to the universities straight from high schools with good training records and with motivation for further education. Many respondents from senior school forms displayed however disbelief in their own faculties and psychological unpreparedness to study at higher education institutions.

The integration in this view must commence with pre-school and school education and continue within additional and higher education. Next important problem is posed by the delays with the adoption of the Federal law “On Special Education” designed to regulate policies of integration and other pivotal issues in education of disabled persons.

4. The Ministry of Education suggests that student and invalid are two different statuses inviting mutually supplementing relationships among an individual, higher education institution and the State. Further development of education of disabled persons in this respect may follow two scenarios.

A physically disadvantaged student in the first case will enjoy the status of a conventional student. The positive side in this case is that the natural striving of disabled persons for enjoying real equality, respect of human dignity and partnership is realized. The negative side is that many students with disablements will be excluded from the regular process of education as the environments in higher education institutions are not adapted for their specific features.

In the second event a physically disadvantaged student has the status of a student and an invalid. This will find reflections in the curricula, methods of training, loads adjustment and particulars of the pay roll as well as in the variety of services to adapt the environment of higher education institution. Entrants and students later on will master the habits of getting knowledge, behavior in the integrated environment, easily get to the destination within premises the institution of higher education to have accesses to the library and technical equipment. In this connection the issue of corrective component of the curriculum and rehabilitative function of higher education shall be accounted for. The corrective component is financed by the Ministry of Education while the rehabilitative is budgeted by respective regional authorities.

5. Despite the provisions of the currently effective Federal Law with guarantees of benefits for physically disadvantaged entrants a number of factors make joining higher education institutions by disabled persons questionable. The majority of Russian institutions are stripped even of minimum conditions needed for education of disabled persons. The conditions are

² For reference: in 2001 in 299 institute and universities under the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation studied 11 073 physically disadvantaged students inclusive 4 454 in polytechnic institutes, 3 591 in classical universities, 2 161 in pedagogic institutes, 840 in economic institutes.

³ In the majority of institutes and universities conversion and upgrading programs for professors working with disabled persons are not available though professors are of opinion that the problem is topical.

related to the architecture of buildings and audience rooms, door spans and steps, furniture and equipment, outfitted cafeteria, libraries and rest rooms, missing recreation premises and chair in corridors, medical rooms needed for the daily use by disabled persons. Institutions of higher education have no funds to remodel the premises to comply with the principals of versatile design.

6. Availability of higher education for disabled persons is understood by respondents as the freedom to select a department and profession in absence of financial, bureaucratic or other barriers.

Methods to realize the polices of available higher education vary from institution to institution. There are few examples of universities that have adopted and are currently implementing internal routine measures in respect to trained disabled persons. The recent initiatives of this universities produced positive impression on disabled entrants and students: their number grows (along with the number of universities with pre-entrance additional training courses for disabled persons, dedicated centers and departments). Federal higher educational policy treat disabled persons as a social minority group. Disabled persons as a rule are not provided with special conditions for training. Educational choice of disabled persons is narrowed and the majority of existing programs concentrates on diagnostics and is pinned to regional localities.

7. Centralized assistance and allocations in course of educational training reaches disabled persons on far from regular basis. The development of adequate educational conditions mainly depends on the family efforts⁴, incidentally on private initiative of coeds, professors and administration of institutions. Administration personnel do recognize the necessity to extend the availability of higher education but effort-saving prudence to avoid problems drives them to stay outside large scale developments in socio-educational integration of individuals with restricted health capabilities.

8. Independent life style, free selection of life strategies by disabled persons are today debated only by closely involved circles – individual public organizations of disabled persons, some university professors and researchers.

The concept of independent living as a tool for an invalid determine and select by himself make decisions and manage life situations is still in the phase of consolidation. The implementation of the concept greatly depends on the realization of the policies of the state in the sphere of higher professional education of disabled persons.

The attitude of students and professors towards social integration of disabled persons within the frames of higher education depends on how disablement is defined, on whether relevant services are accessible, on individual qualities and experiences of students, on policy in every university , expertise and ideology of each professor.

⁴ The status of invalid in many respects depend on systematic efforts of the parents of invalid to advance the child in the education structures. Refusing to place the invalid child in a specialized boarding center parent try to resist indolence, bureaucracy and stereotypes of Soviet and now of Russian system of education.