

## Dear Readers!

Here you have the thematic issue of our journal called "*Inclusive Higher Education in Russia: Vectors of Strategic Development.*" The relevance and demand for the tasks described here are due to the fact that, in recent years, the number of students with disabilities studying in higher education programs in Russian universities has significantly increased. According to the Federal State Statistics Service, the total number of people with disabilities on January 1, 2022, was 11,331 thousand, among them 521 thousand people aged 8—17, and 490 thousand aged 18—30. According to preliminary data from the monitoring of inclusive higher education collected by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation in 2022, the total number of students with disabilities was 33,368 people (for comparison, as of September 1, 2021, the number of such students in higher education institutions was 31,100 people).

The growth of the number of students with disabilities proves effective state policy in the field of creating conditions for higher and professional education for persons with special needs on the one hand. On the other hand, indicates the need to pay special attention to the process of inclusion development in higher education institutions in the country in order to provide the opportunity for a person with disabilities to choose an educational organization at the place of residence and to expand the range of educational programs available.

In Russia, the term "inclusive education" was legislated in 2012. Today, "inclusive education" (Federal Law No. 273, p. 27, article 2) means providing equal access to education for all students, taking into account the diversity of their special educational needs and individual capabilities. At the same time, inclusive processes in Russian universities remain terra incognita. According to researchers who analyze the scientific development of the problems of inclusive higher education, this scientific field is insufficiently studied. Many problem fields of inclusion in higher education remain in the shadows. At the same time, it's important to understand how to build a comfortable, inclusive environment in educational organizations. This way, the further strategy for the development of inclusive education in Russia will be elaborated, work with this category of students will be improved, and requests that come from the subjects of the educational process, government agencies, and society will be considered.

Today, the image of a person with disabilities and the perception of his or her needs and opportunities are being transformed. Under these conditions, both the models of functioning of social institutions, in particular education, and people—their way of life, forms of education, activities, thinking, behavior, and communication—are changing. The educational and social practices of teaching and employment of persons with disabilities are also being transformed. It is the most important component of the development of inclusive higher education and the improvement of the quality of life for people with disabilities.

The introduction of inclusion in higher education required the restructuring of the existing processes. It also promoted the search for completely new approaches to the structure of the educational process in higher education institutions and the development and testing of innovative educational methods and practices. The main idea of inclusive education is to go from full inclusion in education to **full social inclusion** and complete social functioning of a person with disabilities as a subject of social activity.

Today it acquires a new meaning; it's how to get from inclusion in education to social inclusion.

It is obvious that not all higher education institutions in the Russian Federation are fully prepared to implement inclusive education for students with disabilities. There are still problems with the use of terminological vocabulary in relation to those processes that are associated with the inclusion of this category of students. For example, the category of a student with disabilities is not represented in the current regulatory and legal field; there is no definition of this social group in the existing federal laws that provide access to education or an inclusion of this category of students in the educational environment.

The next problem is the lack of awareness among employees of educational organizations about the importance and significance of inclusive higher education, both for people with disabilities and without. There is a lack of understanding of the role of employees with disabilities in the formation of an inclusive corporate culture in the educational organization, and there is a need for "management through values"

(understanding and supporting the value of each employee of the organization, including those with individual characteristics and needs).

It is impossible to ignore the problems with accessibility to educational buildings and students' residences at both metropolitan and regional universities. It often depends on the financial capabilities of the organization, which require certain management decisions.

The formation of inclusive culture in educational organizations of higher education remains an actual problem field. It should be stated that inclusive culture in schools, colleges, universities, and society is the focus of attention for a large number of scientists who study this problematic in order to construct mechanisms of inclusion for people with disabilities in social interaction. At the same time, the problem of "resistance" of some university professors to teaching students with disabilities still exists, especially when it requires changing the usual methods of teaching and the usage of other educational technologies, as well as adapting existing teaching and methodological materials for students with disabilities.

The mechanisms of financing the implementation of educational programs of higher education that take into account the special conditions of education for students with disabilities have not been regulated, and, as a consequence, the mechanisms of financial incentives and encouragement of teachers and staff working with students with disabilities, supporting the learning process of this category of students, adapting teaching and learning materials to their needs and requirements have not been developed.

An important issue is the "digital maturity" of Russian universities in terms of organizing education for students with disabilities; it mostly consists of the personalization of learning and bridging the digital gap. The personalization of learning changes the traditional organization of the educational process and ensures that each student achieves high results using different variations of higher education formats. Students with disabilities should not only accumulate knowledge but also develop the ability to learn, to navigate in an information flow, to assess the relevance of knowledge and skills at the current moment, and to adapt to changes in the profession that may occur during the study period.

A certain barrier to the implementation of inclusive higher education in terms of a continuous educational trajectory are the problems of socio-psychological adaptation of first-year students to the educational environment of the university. There is also a lack of special programs for supporting the process of adaptation of first-year students with disabilities to the educational environment of higher education institutions.

Answers to these and many other questions about inclusive education are presented in the materials for the thematic issue. It is prepared by the Association of Inclusive Universities, a public and professional organization whose tasks include theoretical and methodological justification and research of the processes of educational and social inclusion, as well as the design of effective practices in order to provide students with disabilities with accessible professional education. You can learn more about it here.

*Vitaly V. Rubtsov  
Guzel G.Saitgalieva*