

SECTION 9. SPECIAL EDUCATION

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9.1 Inclusive education in higher education institutions: organisation, support, and accessibility

In the 21st century, a significant focus in the evolution of education is its inclusivity – the capacity of educational systems to meet the diverse needs of all learners by providing equitable access to knowledge, resources, and opportunities for growth, irrespective of individual differences.

In essence, inclusive education constitutes a framework of educational services that guarantees equal access to high-quality education for everyone, including individuals with special educational requirements, those with disabilities, and members of socially disadvantaged groups (*Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine*). This approach necessitates not only adjustments but also a comprehensive reorganisation of the learning environment to align with the varied needs of students.

Today, inclusion represents more than just an educational innovation; it signifies a profound shift in educational philosophy that requires re-evaluating the roles of educators, the content delivered in learning settings, and the overall organisation of educational environments.

Nevertheless, realising inclusive education presents various challenges – organisational, methodological, and value-based:

1. Limited institutional preparedness for inclusion:

- Inadequate physical accessibility (e.g., ramps, elevators, specialised equipment).
- A lack of qualified professionals such as tutors, teaching aides, speech therapists, and psychologists.

2. Insufficient training for teachers and lecturers: many educators lack specialised training in inclusive teaching strategies and are unprepared to effectively support students with diverse learning needs.

3. Societal attitudes toward inclusion: deep-rooted stereotypes and prejudices alongside a lack of an inclusive culture impede societal acceptance and endorsement of inclusion initiatives.

4. Insufficient financial resources: programmes aimed at individual development often require funding that is either unavailable or inequitably allocated.

5. Disparities in inclusion implementation: inclusive practices are generally more advanced in larger urban areas compared to smaller towns and rural regions which frequently fall behind.

While addressing these obstacles, the Ukrainian educational system is currently engaged in actively exploring effective models for inclusion. This endeavour calls for academic reflection, an interdisciplinary perspective, and sharing best practices at both national and international levels.

Thus, several academic studies focus on the structuring of inclusive education within higher education institutions. Notably, K. Chupina (2020) [352], L. Serdyuk (2012) [353], M. Ye. Chaikovskyi & O. O. Dobrovitska (2018) [354], and V. Hladush (2022) [355] have conducted comprehensive investigations into how educational services are organised for individuals with special educational needs (SEN). Their research also addresses the socio-pedagogical initiatives in these institutions and the motivation levels of students with disabilities to engage in their studies.

V. Hladush [355] reports that, according to official statistics, there are 8,000 students with special educational needs among the 2.5 million enrolled in Ukrainian higher education institutions. The rise in disability rates in Ukraine, exacerbated by military conflicts, necessitates a reassessment of educational policies aimed at supporting individuals with disabilities and enhancing the inclusive educational environment within universities. This requires universities to provide educational services to higher education applicants on an equal basis, without discrimination, regardless of age, citizenship, place of residence, gender, skin colour, social or financial status, nationality, language, origin, state of health, religious beliefs, criminal record, or any other circumstances. It applies learner-centred teaching methods, taking into account the individual characteristics of each student's learning and cognitive

activity, as well as the recommendations of an *individual rehabilitation programme* for the people with disabilities (if available) and/or the *conclusion of a comprehensive psychological and pedagogical assessment* (if available) provided by an Inclusive Resource Centres.

Drawing from contemporary research [356], we will explore key terminology utilised in this discussion. *Individuals with disabilities* are defined as those who experience long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments that may impede their ability to participate fully and effectively in society due to various barriers [356, p.10].

The Ukrainian Law “On Higher Education”, Article 1 characterises *a person with special educational needs (SEN)* as someone who requires ongoing or temporary additional assistance during the educational process due to health issues or developmental characteristics [357]. That may include *psychological and pedagogical services* – a comprehensive system of measures aimed at organising the educational process and supporting the development of a person with special educational needs, as stipulated in the individual development programme, provided by teaching staff of educational institutions, inclusive resource centres, and other specialists.

In July 2019, Ukraine's Cabinet of Ministers issued Resolution No. 635, which established guidelines for organising inclusive education within higher education institutions, identifies “*students with SEN*” as those who have special educational needs. It also mandates that individuals with disabilities follow an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) based on recommendations from the Inclusive Resource Centre (IRC) and/or their individual rehabilitation programme (IRP) which defines *correctional and developmental assistance* – a comprehensive system of measures accompanying a person with special educational needs throughout the learning process, aimed at correcting developmental disorders through the enhancement of personality, cognitive activity, emotional and volitional sphere, and speech. Such approach involves the creation of an environment in which all students – including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities – have equal access to quality higher education and opportunities for personal, professional, and social development. Higher

educational establishments must guarantee non-discrimination and equal treatment in the admission process, during studies, and throughout all academic and extracurricular activities.

H. Davydenko [358], a researcher in inclusive education within higher learning contexts, emphasises on integrated groups – where students with disabilities learn alongside their peers – must maintain both high quality and accessibility. This means that students with special educational needs have the right to obtain higher education on an equal basis with others, access educational, information, and infrastructural resources in formats suitable for their individual needs, and receive reasonable accommodation and individual support within the educational process.

In this way the organisation of the educational process for higher education students with special educational *needs to be based on* the following principles:

- respect for inherent human dignity, personal autonomy, including the freedom to make one's own choices, and independence;
- equality of opportunity;
- gender equality;
- fostering tolerance and mutual understanding within the educational community and ensuring non-discrimination;
- openness and flexibility of education, the ability to respond swiftly to changes and challenges, and the full and effective inclusion of all participants in the educational process;
- respect for and acceptance of persons with special educational needs and/or disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity;
- ensuring **architectural, informational, educational, and social accessibility** of the educational environment;
- respect for the abilities of persons with special educational needs and/or disabilities and safeguarding their right to preserve individuality;
- innovation, analysis, and implementation of best practices in inclusive education;

- adherence to quality standards in educational services and academic-methodological support;

- coherence and coordination among University units and participants in the educational process;

- continuity and consistency of inclusive education at all levels of learning;

- individualisation of learning and the harmonious development of personality;

- engagement in social life, socialisation, and preparation for professional activity.

Consequently, it includes:

- the creation of an **inclusive educational environment**;

- the application of the **principles of universal design** within the educational process;

- the adaptation of the University's premises, buildings, and facilities in accordance with national construction norms, standards, and regulations where full adaptation of existing facilities for persons with disabilities is not feasible, **reasonable accommodation** shall be ensured in line with the principles of universal design;

- the provision of necessary **teaching and learning materials** and **information and communication technologies** for the organisation of the educational process;

- ensuring reasonable accommodation where required;

- the use of the most suitable **methods and means of communication** for students with special educational needs, including **Ukrainian Sign Language** and **Braille**, with the involvement of relevant specialists and academic staff;

- ensuring the **availability of information** in multiple formats (Braille, large print, electronic format, etc.).

The creation of an inclusive educational environment at university is to be aimed at the development of its core components:

Physical space – ensuring the accessibility of the entire infrastructure, availability of clear and comprehensible information regarding the location of university buildings, premises, and divisions;

Educational (activity-based) space – functional zoning of university's territory by types of activity (educational, practical, professional, sports, artistic, recreational, etc.), provision of appropriate teaching materials, furniture, equipment, and facilities;

Social environment – ensuring effective interaction among all participants in the educational process, taking into account their individual characteristics: among students, between students and academic (teaching) staff, and between participants in the educational process and other stakeholders (employers, NGOs, community associations, etc.);

Extending university's presence within the community and region through **non-formal and adult education**, and by providing **additional educational and social services**;

Organisation of university activities in terms of time (flexible working and learning schedules).

The organisation of both physical and educational space must ensure the principles of **universal design and reasonable accommodation**, namely: equality and accessibility of use; flexibility in use; simplicity and intuitive clarity of use; perceptibility and accessibility of information; tolerance for error; minimisation of physical effort; provision of adequate size and space for access and use.

Accessibility and Universal Design is another important requirement to be taken into consideration. One of the key principles of universal design is **accessibility**, which encompasses **architectural, transport, and informational accessibility**, including access to information and communication technologies and systems, as well as other educational services (*Article 9 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*). The main elements of architectural accessibility include the adaptation of the University's territory, buildings, structures, and premises to comply with national construction standards and regulations. Where complete adaptation is not possible, **reasonable accommodation** is provided with due regard to the principles of universal design. Measures to ensure physical/architectural and informational accessibility should include:

- accessible routes to University buildings (pathways, parking areas);

- barrier-free entrances and exits (doorways, ramps, stairs);
- unobstructed movement inside buildings (corridors, lifts, signage, pictograms);
- adaptation of spaces (movement routes, sanitary and recreational facilities);
- the ability to freely obtain information about the University and its educational services in various formats (large print, Braille, electronic format, etc.);
- free navigation and orientation within the University and surrounding areas.

Where existing buildings and premises cannot be fully adapted for persons with disabilities, their **reasonable accommodation** shall be ensured according to the principles of universal design.

University shall also provide **teaching materials** and **information and communication technologies** to support the educational process, applying the most appropriate **methods and communication techniques**, including Ukrainian Sign Language and Braille, and ensuring access to information in multiple formats (Braille, large print, electronic, etc.).

The accessibility of educational activities is to be ensured, in particular, by adapting them to the needs and capabilities of higher education students through: modification of the form of material presentation without changing its content or complexity; adjustment of conditions for task completion; adaptation of teaching methods and strategies. Additional mechanisms for ensuring accessibility include: adjustment of learning pace, alternative formats for teaching materials, the use of non-traditional communication methods to enable repetition, additional materials, and clarification.

Considering this as an outline Kyiv National Linguistic University (KNLU) develops *Provisions on **Organisation of Inclusive Education*** [359] which is implemented in accordance with:

- the **Law of Ukraine “On Education”**,
- the **Law of Ukraine “On Higher Education”**,
- the **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**,
- and other relevant normative legal acts of Ukraine.

It postulates that **inclusive education** involves the creation of an environment in which all students – including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities

— have **equal access to quality higher education** and opportunities for personal, professional, and social development. The University guarantees **non-discrimination** and **equal treatment** in the admission process, during studies, and throughout all academic and extracurricular activities [359].

The organisation of inclusive education at KNLU is coordinated by:

- the **Rector**, who bears general responsibility for ensuring inclusivity in the educational process;
- the **Vice-Rector for Academic Affairs**, who supervises the implementation of inclusive education practices;
- the **Deans of Faculties**, who ensure accessibility and support within their faculties;
- the **Department for Educational Work and Student Affairs**, which provides organisational and social support;
- the **Inclusive Support Group (ISG)**, established at the University to assist in the implementation of inclusive policies and to provide individual support to students with special educational needs.

The **Inclusive Support Group** is a structural subdivision of the University that coordinates the provision of psychological, pedagogical, and social assistance to students with special educational needs [359].

The ISG's primary functions include:

- identifying students who require additional support in the educational process;
- collecting and analysing information on individual educational needs;
- developing and monitoring the implementation of **Individual Support Programmes (ISP)** for students;
- advising academic and administrative staff on the organisation of inclusive learning;
- providing recommendations on the adaptation of teaching materials, assignments, and assessment methods;
- facilitating communication between students, teachers, and University administration;

- promoting awareness of inclusive values and non-discriminatory attitudes within the University community.

The ISG operates in close cooperation with faculties, departments, the Psychological Service, and external experts, including Inclusive Resource Centres and rehabilitation specialists [359].

The Inclusive Support Group may include:

- a coordinator of inclusive education (appointed by the Rector);
- a psychologist;
- a speech therapist (if needed);
- a rehabilitation specialist or physical therapist;
- a social pedagogue;
- a representative of the student self-government;
- academic staff representatives (methodologists or mentors).

Specialists of the ISG work together to identify barriers to learning, provide consultations, and offer practical assistance in adapting the educational process.

An **Individual Support Programme (ISP)** is developed for each student with special educational needs who requires assistance [359].

The ISP includes:

- a description of the student's individual educational needs;
- information on necessary forms of assistance, accommodations, or modifications;
- recommendations for teaching methods and assessment procedures;
- the duration and format of the support provided.

The ISP is developed by the ISG in collaboration with the relevant faculty and approved by the Vice-Rector for Academic Affairs.

Implementation of the programme is monitored throughout the student's study period and may be revised as needed.

Faculties and departments are responsible for ensuring that:

- the educational process is inclusive and accessible to all students;

- lecturers are informed about the individual educational needs of students (based on ISG recommendations and with the student's consent);
- appropriate adaptations to the learning environment, materials, and teaching methods are implemented;
- regular feedback is provided to the ISG on the effectiveness of support measures;
- inclusive principles are reflected in academic programmes, teaching methodologies, and assessment systems [359].

Departments are encouraged to integrate topics related to inclusion, diversity, and equality into curricula, seminars, and methodological discussions.

Academic and teaching staff play a crucial role in the effective implementation of inclusive education.

The University provides ongoing **training, workshops, and methodological support** for educators on topics such as:

- inclusive pedagogy and differentiated instruction;
- universal design for learning (UDL);
- reasonable accommodation and accessibility;
- communication with students with sensory or physical disabilities;
- use of assistive and digital technologies in teaching [359].

Lecturers are encouraged to apply learner-centred and inclusive pedagogical approaches, promote peer collaboration, and foster a culture of respect, empathy, and understanding.

Assessment methods for students with special educational needs should be **fair, transparent, and non-discriminatory**.

They must reflect the student's knowledge and skills without creating additional barriers.

Adaptations may include:

- alternative formats of assignments or exams (oral instead of written, extended time, use of assistive technology, etc.);
- modification of assessment criteria (without reducing academic standards);

- support from an assistant, interpreter, or sign language specialist during examinations.

Decisions on assessment adaptations are made by the Dean in coordination with the ISG and the relevant department.

The University ensures that students with special educational needs receive **psychological counselling and social assistance** aimed at facilitating adaptation, motivation, and personal development [359].

Psychological support includes:

- individual and group counselling sessions;
- stress management and self-regulation techniques;
- career guidance and professional orientation.

Social support may include:

- assistance in obtaining social benefits or scholarships;
- provision of information about accessible housing, medical, and social services;
- support in participating in extracurricular, cultural, and sports activities.

The effectiveness of inclusive education at KNLU is monitored through:

- periodic evaluation of the implementation of inclusive practices;
- collection of feedback from students, teachers, and ISG specialists;
- review of ISG reports and statistical data;
- identification of challenges and development of improvement strategies [359].

Monitoring results are considered by the University Academic Council and used to improve policies, teaching methodologies, and infrastructure to ensure continuous enhancement of the inclusive educational environment.

*The Provision also defines **Rights, Responsibilities, and Continuous Improvement of Inclusive Practices** [359].*

Rights of Students with Special Educational Needs

Students with special educational needs at Kyiv National Linguistic University have the right to:

- obtain higher education on an equal basis with others;

- access educational, information, and infrastructural resources in formats suitable for their individual needs;
- receive reasonable accommodation and individual support within the educational process;
- participate in academic, research, and extracurricular activities without discrimination;
- be treated with respect, dignity, and fairness;
- express their views on all matters affecting them and to have those views taken into account;
- confidentiality regarding information about their health or disability, unless disclosure is required to ensure appropriate support;
- file complaints or appeals in cases of discrimination, inadequate support, or violation of rights;
- receive psychological, pedagogical, and social assistance;
- take part in the development and evaluation of inclusive education policies at the University.

Responsibilities of Students with Special Educational Needs

Students with special educational needs are expected to:

- actively participate in the educational process and follow the academic integrity principles;
- comply with University regulations, including the Code of Conduct and Internal Rules;
- communicate with academic staff and the Inclusive Support Group (ISG) regarding their learning needs;
- cooperate in the development and implementation of their Individual Support Programme (ISP);
- notify the ISG or faculty of any changes in their condition that may affect learning;
- respect the rights and dignity of other students and staff.

Rights and Responsibilities of Academic and Administrative Staff

Academic and administrative staff at KNLU have the right to:

- receive methodological and professional training on inclusive education;
- obtain expert support and consultation from the ISG regarding teaching adaptations;
- work in an environment that fosters respect, tolerance, and professional collaboration.

They are responsible for:

- implementing inclusive pedagogical practices and reasonable accommodations in their courses;
- respecting the confidentiality of students' personal data and medical information;
- fostering a positive and supportive atmosphere in the classroom;
- reporting to faculty leadership or the ISG about any difficulties encountered in supporting a student with special needs;
- contributing to the continuous development of inclusive policies through feedback and professional engagement.

Professional Development and Training

The University ensures continuous professional development of its staff in the field of inclusive education through:

- seminars, training sessions, and workshops on inclusive pedagogy and universal design for learning (UDL);
- academic conferences and round tables dedicated to inclusion, equality, and accessibility in education;
- participation in national and international projects, networks, and partnerships promoting inclusion;
- publication and dissemination of best practices in inclusive higher education.

Training activities are aimed at enhancing the professional competencies of educators in working with diverse student groups and at developing inclusive teaching materials and assessment tools.

Academic Integrity and Ethical Conduct

Inclusive education at KNLU is grounded in the principles of **academic integrity**, **ethical responsibility**, and **mutual respect**.

All members of the University community – students, academic staff, and administrative personnel – must adhere to:

- the principles of honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and accountability;
- non-discriminatory behaviour and respect for diversity;
- ethical communication and responsible use of inclusive resources;
- prevention of any form of bullying, stigmatisation, or bias.

Violations of these principles are subject to review in accordance with the University's internal regulations and applicable legislation.

Cooperation with External Institutions and the Community

KNLU actively cooperates with:

- **inclusive resource centres**, rehabilitation and medical institutions;
- **non-governmental organisations** working in the field of inclusion, disability rights, and social integration;
- **employers** to facilitate inclusive career opportunities and internships;
- **international educational and research institutions** to exchange experience and implement joint projects on inclusive education.

Through community engagement and outreach, the University promotes the values of social inclusion, equality, and respect for human rights in society.

Monitoring, Reporting, and Continuous Improvement

Monitoring of inclusive education practices is conducted regularly and includes:

- assessment of accessibility of University facilities and learning environments;
- evaluation of the effectiveness of Individual Support Programmes (ISP);
- analysis of feedback from students, staff, and the ISG;
- review of academic and social outcomes of students with special educational needs;
- annual reporting to the Academic Council of the University [359].

Based on monitoring results, the University develops **recommendations and action plans** for the continuous improvement of inclusive education, infrastructure, and staff development.

The process is cyclical, ensuring long-term sustainability and the alignment of University policies with national and international standards.

In conclusion, The University reaffirms its commitment to fostering an educational environment that upholds human dignity, equality of opportunity, and respect for diversity, thereby ensuring the full inclusion of all students in academic and community life.