

## **Record of Discussion of Online session held on 15.10.2024 at 10:00 AM with Head and 2 nominees of 5 Departments from the 33 HEIs for ‘Sensitization of Departments’ under the Capacity Building on Specific Learning Disabilities (SLDs)- Cycle 2.**

An online session on ‘Sensitisation of Departments’ was organized by the Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education in collaboration with NIEPA and ChangeInkk Foundation as the Resource Partner. The session was part of the different phases planned under ‘Capacity Building on Specific Learning Disabilities (SLDs)’ for enhancing the capacities of the faculty to support the needs of students with specific learning disabilities in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The second session is named ‘Sensitization of Departments’ in which the Heads of the Admission Department, O/o Student-life or Campus-life affairs, O/o Academic Affairs, Faculty and Examinations Cell, IT department, and Career & Placement Cell, and 2 nominees from the identified departments were invited to participate in the session. As part of the program, ‘Building Understanding for Inclusion of Learning Disabilities’ Tutorials were launched on the ‘Malaviya Mission Teacher Training Programme’ website. The tutorials provided comprehensive resources for faculty to better understand and address the needs of students with Specific Learning Disabilities (SLDs). The resource persons from the ChangeInkk Foundation held an interactive session, attended by around 300 participants from 33 identified institutions. **A list of institutes is attached in Annexure 1.**

2. Director of the Department of Higher Education welcomed the participants and outlined the agenda for the sensitization session. He provided a brief overview of the Capacity Building on Specific Learning Disabilities Program, emphasizing that inclusivity in institutions is a crucial step as envisioned in the NEP 2020. He then requested Joint Secretary(Higher Education) for her opening remarks.

3. Joint Secretary (Higher Education) welcomed the participants and gave a brief background about ‘Capacity Building on Specific Learning Disabilities (SLDs)’. She emphasized the importance of focusing on students with Specific Learning Disabilities (SLDs), who often face various challenges in different aspects of life, including their academic journeys, due to a lack of awareness about learning disabilities. She stressed that higher education institutions (HEIs) must engage in regular capacity-building efforts to effectively address the needs of these students and foster inclusivity. It is crucial to be sensitized about the challenges faced by students with learning disabilities to provide adequate support within the institutions. Additionally, she reaffirmed that all nominated participants from each department of the HEIs are expected to actively participate in the scheduled phases of the program.

JS (Higher Education) launched ‘Building Understanding for Inclusion of Learning Disabilities Tutorials’ on the ‘Malaviya Mission Teacher Training Programme website’ as part of the program.

The tutorials are designed to provide comprehensive resources for faculty to better understand and address the needs of students with SLDs. She encouraged the participants to engage with the content, utilizing the resources provided to enhance their understanding and implementation of best practices in supporting students with SLDs in our institutes. The tutorial developed by the ChangInkk Foundation is a narration-based resource that can be further improved with participant feedback. Step-by-step instructions were provided for accessing the tutorials on the website. **These resources are readily available for access at the link attached in Annexure 2.**

4. Vice Chancellor NIEPA in her remarks appreciated the efforts of the Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, and NIEPA to organize the program. VC NIEPA stressed the importance of the program stating that it will be a key in promoting the inclusion of students with SLD in the HEIs.

5. Ms. Noopur Jhunjhunwala, Trustee, ChangeInkk Foundation in her remarks highlighted that education can be a challenging landscape, especially when considering the diverse needs of students with Specific Learning Disabilities (SLDs). Thus, the program aims to support HEIs not only on what needs to be done but also on how to implement it effectively. Inclusion is a major objective outlined in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, supported by legal mandates that are essential for our global competitiveness. It is important to note that leading global universities, such as Stanford and MIT, actively recruit students with SLDs to enhance their competitive edge. For India to thrive, we must ensure that these students are enrolled in our universities and are equipped to succeed. She reaffirmed that to achieve success, we must shift our mindset regarding individuals with learning disabilities, recognizing that while they may face certain challenges, they are also capable of thinking, learning, and driving innovation. We must be prepared to support these students as they transition to higher education. Ms. Jhunjhunwala encouraged participants to share their feedback and stories from the field that can contribute to meaningful change.

6. Dr. Basheerhamad Shadrach, Director- Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA) offered a Global Perspective on the importance of inclusive education in HEIs. He provided a background of his organization - CEMCA which actively works for the inclusion of students with specific learning disabilities. Dr. Shadrach discussed various global initiatives aimed at supporting students with Specific Learning Disabilities (SLDs), including specialized assessment tools and programs in countries such as the United States of America and the United Arab Emirates. He emphasized the importance of adopting a bottom-up approach that actively incorporates feedback from those utilizing the resources and sessions of the programs. Establishing peer learning groups can facilitate the sharing of experiences and enhance the programs, making them more relevant and impactful.

While various efforts exist worldwide, they often remain confined to the policy level without effective implementation. We must make a collective effort to increase the support of students with SLDs, not merely to meet government mandates but to enrich our educational communities.

He highlighted that in contrast, the Department of Higher Education, the Ministry of Education in India has made significant progress, guided by the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (RPWD) 2016.

7. Ms. Aparajita Singh, Resource person from the ChangeInkk Foundation gave a detailed session on understanding learning disabilities, the need to create inclusive ecosystems, and the policies and mandates related to learning disabilities. She emphasized the need to clarify common misconceptions about the condition before taking the necessary action to create a more inclusive society. The session provided a conceptual understanding of different types of SLDs – Dyslexia, Dyscalculia, and Dysgraphia. Out of all dyslexia accounts for most of all SLD cases. During the presentation, the impact on SLDs' self-esteem, ability to memorize, sensitivity to excessive stimulation, delayed information processing, planning challenges, and inconsistency between their written and spoken communication were highlighted as factors that continue to cause them daily struggles. A triad representing academics, life skills, and emotional well-being was presented to illustrate how SLDs' lives are impacted and how difficult it is for them to overcome these obstacles. It was highlighted that people with dyslexic thinking have achieved amazing things in their lives and made a name for themselves globally thanks to their innovation and potential to make an impression.

It was highlighted that as per the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act of 2016, diagnosis of SLDs can occur only at or after the third grade, or when a child is eight years old. This often leaves many students without formal diagnoses at risk of missing critical assessments. It's essential to distinguish between screening and diagnosis: screening is an informal process conducted by parents or educators to determine if a student

may be at risk for a disability, especially when it's not immediately visible. In contrast, diagnosis is a formal process requiring a qualified professional. If a psychometric test shows a disability level of 40% or more, a disability certificate or Unique Disability ID (UDID) can be issued, enabling access to government benefits. Therefore, encouraging students suspected of having SLDs to seek formal diagnosis is vital.

The contributions of various academic institutions, both nationally and internationally, were shared for their initiatives aimed at creating systems and structures to support students with learning disabilities. These efforts have been vital in improving the institutions' capacity to accommodate and effectively address the needs of these students. The different challenges students face while transitioning to higher education include difficulties in campus life related to disclosure and self-advocacy, and academic struggles with reading, writing, and task management. In contrast, solutions to these challenges, such as instructional aids, need-based assessments, and scholarships, were also discussed. The presentation emphasized enabling policies in place to promote the inclusion of students with disabilities in educational institutions. In addition to that, discussed pillars of global best practices concerning the inclusion of SLDs include counseling support, academic support, assistive technologies, research vis-à-vis admissions, access to resources, employment, and other opportunities for SLDs.

8. In the presentation, testimonial videos from individuals with first hand experience, as well as from various personalities advocating for the increased participation of students with Specific Learning Disabilities (SLDs) were shared. These videos aimed to enhance the participants' understanding of the challenges of individuals with SLDs. Resource persons employed various engagement techniques, including pictorial quizzes, to encourage active participation from attendees. The curiosity of the participants, combined with the expertise of the resource persons, created a highly interactive and engaging session.

9. Following the presentation, the resource persons addressed several questions raised by participants and encouraged the participants to submit responses to a survey focused on understanding their institute's inclusion of students with specific learning disabilities.

10. JS(Higher Education) outlined the further phase of the program - 'Master Classes for Department' which would be organized separately for the 5 identified departments from the 33 HEIs in an online mode to support matters specific to their department on SLDs.

11. The session ended with a vote of thanks.

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