

Notification

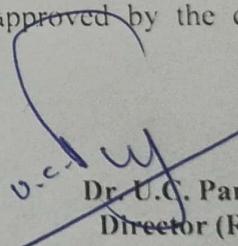
Subject: Online Learner Support Centre for Persons with Disability.

IGNOU already has a mechanism of Learner Support Centre (LSC) for PwD as a specific category. However, with the increased usage of Internet, it was envisioned that IGNOU should serve the learners under PwD category through Online Learner Support Centre. The concept is in consonance with the NEP 2020 which provides for increased usage of technology and providing flexibility to learners with student centric approach. This would also serve the RPWD Act 2016 and UNCRPD 2006 mandate. In order to achieve this objective an 'Online Learner Support Centre' (OLSC) has been approved on a pilot basis which will work under Regional Centre Delhi-2 in consultation with NCDS.

The major objectives of the OLSC are:

- To act as a single window system for providing all sorts of information to PwD including process of admission, availability of the programs, filling of admission and examination form as well as support in conducting online academic counseling.
- To look into the individual learning needs of the learners with disabilities and accordingly provide the relevant accommodation so that he/ she may comfortably complete the course of study at IGNOU.
- To provide additional support that is envisaged by the OLSC, but not be limited to, tele-counseling recorded sessions facilitation, live lectures, problem solving sessions, peer groups studies amongst Person with identical challenges.
- To provide additional measures that can be provided through these centers include handholding, special induction programs, special intervention sessions etc. previous case studies sharing to sensitize the learner on different issues etc.
- To conduct session in choice of different language or Sign language or sharing Braille material or sign language interpretation.
- To provide examination scribe or special accommodation or resources allocation from time to time etc.

This OLSC will work on round the clock basis to serve the learners under PwD category with financial implications. An operational framework of the OLSC duly approved by the competent authority is attached.


Dr. U.C. Pandey
Director (RSD)
निदेशक (क्ष.से.प्र.)
Director (RSD)

Distribution:

1. Directors of Schools, Heads of Divisions/Centres/Units/Cells
2. Director NCDS
3. Regional Directors/ Regional Director (In charges) of Regional Centres
4. AR VCO, for information of the V.C
5. All PS to PVCs, for information of the PVC
6. Office Copy

Operational Framework for Online Learner Support Centre for Persons with DisabilitiesBackground and concept

Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) is a People's University and one of the most popular Universities in India for learners opting for education through Distance & Open Learning mode. IGNOU has a county wide network of regional centers and study centers. Learner support is one of the most important objectives of IGNOU so that students enrolled with IGNOU could complete their study smoothly. The University is increasingly making use of various online tools and its website to support the learners for having a wonderful experience while undergoing various courses of study. It is important to mention that IGNOU caters to nearly 38 Lakh learners at any given point of time. The better part is that it caters to nearly 25000 Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) out of the said 38 lakh students. This is a huge number and almost one fourth of the estimated one lakh learners enrolled in the country in Higher Education Institutions. This puts on it a bigger responsibility to provide support and services which are open for all, equity based, reliable, accessible, affordable, and flexible among others.

The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016 has mandated a minimum reservation of five percent of seats in Higher Education Institutions. Also, there is a clause for five years upper age relaxation for admission in any course of study. The Gross Enrollment Ratio of Persons with Disabilities is abysmally low as compared to persons without Disabilities. Since the PwDs require continued support, mentoring and handholding to meet their common and specific needs; Open and distance education & learning model is one of the most favored and popular models to help the PwDs in their quest for Higher Education.

IGNOU is already a market leader in terms of its geographical reach pan India basis. However, the Persons with Disabilities have unimaginable hurdles in their quest for education. IGNOU should empathize with such learners and go the extra mile to reach out to them; at the time, place and manner they are most comfortable. Looking into this aspect, it is felt that Internet is one of the best enabling technologies on whose basis; it can help improve the reach of the University and also provide Education to the PwDs at the time and place of their choice.

IGNOU already has a mechanism of Learner Support Centre for Persons with Disabilities as a specific category. Under this mechanism, flexi-teaching methodology is already being provided to the PwDs. However, with the increased usage of Internet- which has become a norm for the new age Ed-tech platforms; it is proposed that IGNOU should serve the learners under Persons with Disabilities category through Online Learner Support Centre. The efficacy of the study centers had already been tested during the COVID times; wherein maximum study centers provided online support to all their learners. It was proven that such centers had provided more than expected support and helped the learners complete their study in time without compromising quality of the program.

It is amply clear from the RPWD Act 2016 that the learners under the Persons with Disabilities category must be provided accommodations and support to empower the learners so that they may complete the program in a proper manner. The challenge is that the number of Special Study Centre in the country is very limited. Their geographical reach is also not spread as much as would have been

9
ideal. Since there are more than 300 programs being offered by IGNOU; it would be very difficult to establish Online Learner Support Centre in every part of the country. Also, when the number of learners is below 10 or so; it becomes financially unviable to provide counseling sessions. Learners, though pick up with the support of their counselors and peer group. However, when the numbers of learners are less than ten and are Persons with Disabilities; the challenges multiply and the study centers may not be able to do justice with the completion of the program for the Persons with Disabilities.

Therefore, in order to begin with; it is proposed that IGNOU can look at establishing Online Learner Support Centre for Persons with Disabilities in the country.

Objective

Major objective of the Online Learner Support Centers is:

- To act as a single window system for providing all sorts of information to Persons with Disabilities including process of admission availability of the programs, filing of admission and examination form as well as support in conducting online academic counseling.
- To look into the individual learning needs of the learners with disabilities and accordingly provide the relevant accommodation so that he/ she may comfortably complete the course of study at IGNOU.
- To provide additional support that is envisaged by the Online Learner Support Centre, but not be limited to, includes: tele-counseling, recorded sessions facilitation, live lectures, problem solving sessions, peer groups studies amongst Persons with identical challenges.
- To provide additional measures that can be provided through these centers include are handholding, special induction programs, special intervention sessions etc. previous case studies sharing to sensitize the learners on different issues etc.
- To conduct session in choice of different language or Sign language or sharing Braille material or sign language interpretation.
- To provide examination scribe or special accommodation or resources allocation form time to time etc.

It is envisaged that the Online Learner Support Centre shall be a revolution in the arena of Higher Education Institutions. The proposed concept is in sync with the NEP 2020 which provides increases usage of technology and providing flexibility to learners with student centric approach. This would also serve the RPWD Act 2016 and UNCRPD 2006 mandate apart from raising curtains for the dawn of a new era of learning in the Higher Education space in the country. It is expected that not only the number of learners will multiply but also help in create a more equitable society as per the constitutions of India.

Therefore, it is proposed that to begin with as a pilot phase, the first online Learner Support centre for Persons with Disabilities enrolled in various program of IGNOU may be established in the jurisdiction of Regional Centre Delhi-2. This Online Learner Support Centre will work on round the clock basis to serve the learners under PwD category.