

## The Academic Counselling Centre – Faculty of Education

Since the 1990s, there have been two counselling centres at the Faculty of Education – one at the Department of Psychology and the second at the Department of Special Education. The fact that academics in the Department of Psychology had experience in counselling services in education and also that the programmes of the Department of Special Education had, at the time, the most students with special needs (SN) certainly played a role.

Over the last ten years, the question of merging the two counselling centres into one independent centre was debated. Neither of the two centres had autonomy. There was activity of the staff of the departments rather than institutionalised counselling services.

The European Social Fund project ESF for VŠ II in the UK (2020–2022), implemented by Charles University, made possible the unification and formal anchoring in the organisational structure of the Faculty of Education. The project involved nine faculties and UK Point in several key activities. The Faculty of Education took advantage of the opportunity to participate in the project and prepared

activities that were part of key project activity 4, with two sub-activities.

KA4: Comprehensive support system for students with SN and other disadvantaged groups

4.1 Counselling and other support for students with SN and other disadvantaged groups.

4.2 University staff training for working with students with SN and other disadvantaged students.

Our primary goal in the project was to support the Academic Counselling Centre of the Faculty of Education, especially by expanding the range of activities, setting up a new organisational structure and establishing an independent faculty institution.

### **Activities of the Academic Counselling Centre of the Faculty of Education for CU students**

Currently, the Academic Counselling Centre (<https://pages.pdf.cuni.cz/poradna/>) offers psychological and special education services. Speech therapy is also newly

**Table 1.** Counselling services provided by the Academic Counselling Centre of the Faculty of Education

Study counselling	Study modifications, fulfilment of study obligations, organization, exam nervousness and stress, learning strategies, communication with the teacher
Personal counselling	Solving difficult life situations - breakup, loss of a loved one, etc.
Relationship counselling	Solving problems in relationships - in partnerships, in the family, in friendships, as well as in other interpersonal areas (e.g. in the teacher-student relationship)
Special education counselling	Counselling for students with visual impairment, hearing impairment, impaired communication skills, physical disabilities, for students with specific learning difficulties, with autism spectrum disorders, with psychological problems, speech therapy
Crisis intervention	Life crisis situations, for example, in connection with the war in Ukraine
Career counselling	Inappropriately chosen studies, reorientation of studies, choosing a suitable job, etc.
Aids and compensation counselling	Tools and compensation strategies recommendations, free time guidelines, etc.

integrated into the counselling centre. It is the only one at the university. The list of counselling services provided by the centre is shown in Table 1.

The counselling centre provides services not only to students with SN but also to all other students in need (student parents, students with a reduced socio-economic status, students with SN without registration, so-called secret students, and students in a difficult life situation). During the time of the Covid restrictions, the consulting services were online. Within the project, the specialists of the counselling centre provided 550 individual consultations (to the end of June 2022).

In addition to consulting services, other services were provided to students.

*Optional subjects.* We opened one opti-

onal subject each semester to support students, especially in their first year of university. The optional subjects are listed in Table 2. Their goal was to support adaptation to university studies, a healthy lifestyle and the development of study strategies among students with SN.

*Informative materials.* The centre published a handbook for incoming students with SN (SpecInfo) that complements the more general handbook (PedInfo). Furthermore, we issued methodological materials for students with SN in given categories (e.g. *Students with physical disabilities at university: starting points and recommendations, not only for teachers, Students with specific learning difficulties at university - questions and answers, and Development of study competencies in students with autism*

**Table 2.** Optional subjects

Study and coping strategies for students with visual and hearing impairment
Study strategies and coping strategies for students with hearing impairment and impaired communication skills
How to cope with studying at university?
Coping with study demands and mental balance
Yoga for students with SN

**Table 3.** Educational programmes for CU employees

Autism spectrum disorders in university students
Physical disability and visual impairments as an everyday challenge and reality of university students
Specific learning difficulties in university students
Hearing impairments and communication disorders in university students
Psychological problems in university students

*spectrum disorders; Anxiety, worry and stress during university studies).*

### **Activities of the Academic Counselling Centre of the Faculty of Education for CU employees**

This activity focused on training CU staff to work with students with SN and other groups of disadvantaged students. Five educational programmes (see Table 3) with a scope of 40 hours were organised. The courses allowed the participants to expand their knowledge and skills and also get to know colleagues from other workplaces with whom they can share

specific practices and, if necessary, communicate possible future problems.

In addition, seminars were regularly organised for the contact persons (departmental coordinators) for students with SN. Regular training and the transfer of information to the departments through the departmental coordinator support awareness and the application of appropriate approaches to students with SN.

We also focused on the issue of indirect support for teachers. Several methodological materials for academics have been published, serving further development in supporting students with SN. Namely, we published the following

brochures: *The specifics of teaching and communication for students with hearing impairment, Students with physical disabilities at university: starting points and recommendations, not only for teachers, The principles of contact and rules of communication with a student with visual impairment during university studies, and Approaches to students with SN in distance education.*

The completion of our activities for university employees was the organisation of the conference University counselling – current trends and challenges, which took place on 25/5/2022.

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