

**A Qualitative Study of the Experiences  
of Disabled International Students  
in English Universities**

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## **Abstract**

This study comments on the relevance of inclusive educational theories and policies within English Higher Education (HE), with reference to disabled international students' experiences. The project is both timely and appropriate as there is an acute shortage of documentation on the application of policies for the inclusion of disabled students and disabled international students in particular in English universities. The methodology adopted was essentially qualitative but did, where possible, adhere to 'emancipatory' principles. Data collection strategies included content analysis of relevant literature and policy statements, and field studies involving a focus group and semi-structured interviews with 30 disabled international students in English universities. The study provided an up-to-date snapshot of disabled international students' accounts and the multiple disadvantages they experienced in their universities based on their identities as disabled, international and sometimes mature students. In conclusion, a number of insights have been provided which will contribute towards a more inclusive HE system.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

ADHD Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder  
ALF Access to Learning Funds  
ASL American Sign Language  
BA Bachelor of Arts  
BALEAP British Association of Lecturers in English for Academic Purposes  
BC British Council  
BCODP British Council of Disabled People  
BME Black and Minority Ethnic  
BSA British Sociological Association  
BSc Bachelor of Science  
BSL British Sign Language  
CCTV Closed-Circuit Television  
CIL Centre for Independent Living  
CRB Criminal Records Bureau  
CSV Community Service Volunteers  
DCDP Derbyshire Coalition of Disabled People  
DCIL Derbyshire Centre for Integrated Living  
DDA Disability Discrimination Act  
DED Disability Equality Duty  
DES Disability Equality Scheme  
DfEE Department for Education and Employment  
DfES Department for Education and Skills  
DIUS Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills  
DLA Disabled Living Allowance  
DRC Disability Rights Commission  
DRTF Disability Rights Task Force  
DSA Disabled Students' Allowance  
DSU Disability Service Unit  
EA Equality Act  
EAP English Studies for Academic Purposes  
ECU Equality Challenge Unit  
EHEA European HE Area  
EHRC Equality and Human Rights Commission  
ERA Education Reform Act  
EU European Union  
FAQ Frequently Asked Questions  
FE Further Education  
FEI Further Education Institutions  
FHEA Further and Higher Education Act  
GBDTC Great Britain Disability Training and Consultancy  
GCSE General Certificate of Secondary Education  
HCIL Hampshire Center for Independent Living  
HE Higher Education  
HEAG Higher Education Accessibility Guide  
HEC Higher Education Corporation  
HEFCE Higher Education Funding Council of England

HEFCW Higher Education Funding Council of Wales  
HEI Higher Education Institution  
HESA Higher Education Statistical Agency  
HMG Her Majesty's Government  
HMSO Her Majesty's Stationery Office  
IAG Information Advice and Guidance  
ICF International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health  
ICIDH International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities and Handicaps  
ID Identification Document  
IELTS International English Language Testing System  
IES Institute for Employment Studies  
ILM Independent Living Movement  
IQ Intelligence Quotient  
ISC International Students' Club  
LEA Local Education Authority  
LLC Leeds Language Centre  
LMU Leeds Metropolitan University  
LMUDS Leeds Metropolitan University Disability Services  
MA Master of Arts  
ME Myalgic Encephalomyelitis  
MSc Master of Science  
NCD National Council on Disability  
NCIHE National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education  
NGO Non-Governmental Organisation  
NPC National Postgraduate Committee  
NQF National Qualifications Framework  
NSF National Student Forum  
NSP National Scholarship Programme  
NUS National Union of Students  
ODI Office for Disability Issues  
OECD Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development  
OHP Overhead Projector  
ORS Overseas Research Scholarships  
ORSAS Overseas Research Students Awards Scheme  
OU Open University  
PA Personal Assistants  
PC Personal Computer  
PC Political Correctness  
PhD Doctor of Philosophy  
PMSU Prime Minister's Strategy Unit  
QAA Quality Assurance Agency  
RADAR Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation  
RNIB Royal National Institute of Blind People  
SCONUL Society of College, National and University Libraries  
SDT Scottish Disability Team  
SENDA Special Educational Needs and Disability Act  
SHEFC Scottish Higher Education Funding Council  
Skill: National Bureau for Students with Disabilities  
SLD Specific Learning Difficulty

SPSS Statistical Package for the Social Sciences  
SQW Segal Quince Wicksteed  
SU Student Union  
SWANDS South West Academic Network for Disability Support  
UB University of Bradford  
UCAS Universities and Colleges Admissions Service  
UH University of Huddersfield  
UHSU University of Huddersfield Student Union  
UK United Kingdom  
UKCISA UK Council for International Student Affairs  
UKCOSA UK Council for Overseas Student Affairs  
UKDES UK Department of Education and Science  
UL University of Leeds  
ULAS University of Leeds Accommodation Service  
ULES University of Leeds Equality Service  
ULIO University of Leeds International Office  
ULT University of Leeds Transcription  
UNESCO United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization  
UPIAS Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation  
USA United States of America  
UUK Universities UK  
WHO World Health Organisation

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## Chapter One: Introduction: Setting the Scene

There is a wealth of evidence to show that disabled domestic students experience discrimination in Higher Education (HE), yet little is known about the particular experiences of disabled international students. This acute shortage of available data and literature regarding disabled international students' accounts, whilst studying in the United Kingdom (UK), is significant because of the increasing internationalisation of HE in recent years. The number of non-disabled international students studying in Britain, for example, has been on a steady increase over recent years. Figures provided by the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) in email correspondence (2008b) (Appendix One), reflecting the Higher Education Statistical Agency's (HESA) calculations, show that the percentage increase of non-disabled international students between the academic year 2005/2006 and 2006/2007 was 6.22 per cent. This percentage increase was 9.26 per cent between the academic year 2008/2009 and 2009/2010 (HESA, 2011).

The growth in international students' mobility is considered by Hurst (1998) to be one of the most interesting developments to occur in recent years. To have the opportunity to spend an extended time living and studying a wide range of courses abroad is a valuable educational experience in itself. Within Europe, stimulus has come as a result of such initiatives as the Bologna Process (Europe Unit, 2006), and Erasmus (European Commission, 2009) associated with the European Union (EU). The Bologna Process, for example, is an intergovernmental initiative, which works towards creating a European HE Area (EHEA) and promoting the European system of HE worldwide (Europe Unit, 2006). Similarly, Erasmus is a European Commission exchange programme that provides opportunities for students in 31 European countries to study for part of their degree in another country (UK Socrates Erasmus Council, 2006). These and similar programmes have enabled many students to study abroad (European Commission, 2010a; 2010b).

Moreover, it is evident that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) increasingly encourage and welcome international students' participation in HE (Ramsden, 2009; Travis, 2011). International students' impact is considered to be two-fold: first, they pay tax and consume welfare benefits (the fiscal impact), and second they are economically active (Vickers & Bekhradnia, 2007). In addition to these financial considerations, they also provide other substantial benefits such as the pedagogic aspects that develop from the creation of multicultural learning environments. Thus international students are said to provide "cultural and intellectual diversity" (SCONUL, 2007: 2), and contribute essential income, when there is a curb in public funding. UK academia also derives satisfaction from having significant numbers of its graduates in leadership positions in overseas countries (Vickers & Bekhradnia, 2007).

However, what is not evident is the ways in which these opportunities have been open to disabled students, and how many have chosen to travel and live in the UK. Therefore, this thesis investigates and critically discusses disabled international students' experiences in English universities. The intensified internationalisation of the HE environment and the absence of any national policy relating to disabled international students' needs provides the backdrop for understanding how timely and academically necessary the current investigation is. Having said this, it has to be noted that the general policies and literature discussed in this thesis are from a specific moment in time, that of 2005-2010, therefore the historical nature of this research should be taken into account when considering the data and its subsequent analysis. As evident in the immigration policies discussed in Chapter Four (Section 4.3) (UK Border Agency, 2011a), the British political and HE landscape has, since the start of this research, changed fundamentally, and arguably in the current climate disabled international students face qualitatively and quantitatively different sets of barriers.

In this introductory chapter I will provide the general background to the study and demarcate the research aims and objectives. I will then clarify the terminology employed throughout this research. Lastly, a synopsis of the thesis chapters is outlined.



From the outset it must be noted that the impetus for this study stems from my personal experience and academic interests. Throughout the past 10 years whilst studying in English HEIs, I have encountered various barriers, ranging from physical to funding which have impacted on my participation and learning in two specific universities. These experiences inspired me to want to have a positive effect on disabled international students' university lives. Hence like Guenther (2005), in this research my inner monologues have surfaced and provided a richer and deeper understanding of the stories that participants shared with me, through reflection and acknowledging my own voice and reactions.

### **1.1 Background**

Institutional discrimination against disabled people is deeply ingrained, and a multitude of barriers to their full participation in everyday life, including education, has been created and perpetuated (Barnes, 1991). Traditionally, in the pedagogical system, an assumption of the 'normal' (a contested subject within disability studies - see Chappell, 1997) underpins the construction and provision of education. In examining the exclusionary treatment of people with learning difficulties by the academy, Docherty *et al.* (2004) argue that access to formal education has been conventionally based on the selection of the intellectually able and gifted. Thus the pedagogical system has excluded those deemed to be educationally incompetent or not considered elite (McDonald, 1996; Tomlinson, 1982; Wolfendale, 1996).

Whilst access to education is considered to be a "positional good" and the "passport to better paid work" (Riddell *et al.*, 2005: 1), the educational system itself is said to reproduce and disrupt existing social inequalities (Field, 2003). Underlying selection procedures, based on ability and class membership (Ball *et al.*, 2002) have created and sustained inequalities (Archer, 2003). Therefore, it could be safely argued that traditional systems have been geared towards serving the needs of those students perceived to be 'normal' in a given time and culture.

An unequal start in life forces many marginalised young people to a life of poverty, exaggerating and reinforcing the disadvantages they face on a daily basis (Magnus, 2006). Specifically, students with certain biological and physical characteristics have been excluded from accessing mainstream education, with the assumption that such educational institutions as universities were not the place for disabled students, but for “a narrow group of socially advantaged students in the richest parts of the world” (Riddell *et al.*, 2005: 11). Research conducted by the Disability Rights Commission (DRC) (2002) into young disabled adults’ lives, for example, found that 30 per cent of those who had not progressed on to Further Education (FE) and/or HE felt that they were prevented from doing so for reasons relating to their impairments. Issues for concern centred around disability-related support, transport and accommodation. Thus disabled students’ participation in HE is generally reported to be low (Magnus, 2006; Riddell *et al.*, 2005). The ECU data (2008b) (Appendix One) indicates that between academic year 2005/2006 and 2006/2007, the percentage of disabled domestic students’ increase was 9.00 per cent. This percentage increase was 4.64 per cent between the academic year 2008/2009 and 2009/2010 (HESA, 2011), reinforcing the fact that the problems persist for the recruitment and retention of disabled students into HE.

Yet, Hurst (2007) considers a shift of focus in policy and provision relating to disabled students’ education in the past three decades to have contributed to their increased access to HE. The establishment of the National Bureau for Handicapped Students in 1974 (operating until 2011 as Skill: National Bureau for Students with Disabilities) is considered by Hurst (1993; 1999) to have been a breakthrough in the area of policy and practice. According to Hurst (1999), however, the real impetus for progress came in the early 1990s, when the debate on the introduction of top-up loans presented a chance to draw attention to disabled domestic students’ financial needs. The foundation of Disabled Students’ Allowance (DSA) provided by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) in the early 1990s to cover general, specialist equipment and non-medical helper costs (Beauchamp-Pryor, 2007; Stone *et al.*, 1998) meant that many disabled students were financially better off than their predecessors. This

improvement, in Hurst's (1999) opinion, contributed to an increase in the number of disabled students entering HE - allowing a wider choice of universities where their needs could be met.

Entitlement to Access to Learning Funds (ALF), Discretionary Awards and Social Security Benefits to help with disability-related costs has also made many disabled domestic students' transition from FE to mainstream HE somewhat smoother (Hurst, 1996; 1999). Additionally, the majority of universities employ non-medical helpers, largely referred to as Personal Assistants (PA) to provide disabled students with academic, domestic and social assistance (Sheard, 2006). The opening of Kulikundis House at the University of Sussex was a landmark in the provision of this scheme for disabled students (Hurst, 1999). Furthermore, Brown and Simpson (2004), Riddell *et al.* (2005), and Tinklin *et al.* (2002) argue that the widening participation policies adopted by the Labour government in mid 1990s were a key factor in increasing disabled students' numbers in HE.

Having said this, despite the passing of the *Disability Discrimination Act (DDA)* by Parliament in 1995 to legally protect disabled people, policies and provisions in education specifically, were not covered by this act. The *DDA* defines 'disability' in individual medical terms:

A person has a disability ... if he has a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. (DDA, 1995: 1).

In 1996, the Dearing National Committee of Inquiry was set up by the Conservative government and chaired by Sir Ron Dearing. The committee produced the *Dearing report* (NCIHE, 1997), which was the first major examination of HE in the UK since the *Robbins Committee report* in 1963 (UKDES, 1963) (Hurst, 1999). Although certain social groups were specifically highlighted in this work, the paper seemed to largely lose sight of disability issues. Whilst Hurst (1999) acknowledged that the resulting policies were implemented to accommodate diversity within the student population by

including non-traditional and under-represented groups, he remained dissatisfied with the level to which disabled students' concerns were taken on board.

Finally, after six years from the inception of *DDA* (1995), the law was extended to post-16 education: schools, colleges and universities. The *Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA)* — in effect Part Four of the *DDA* with the same definition of 'disability' — became law in 2001. The implementation began in 2002 in the following three stages: firstly, 1 September 2002, the duty to not treat disabled students less favourably than their non-disabled counterparts; secondly, 1 September 2003, the duty to make adjustments involving auxiliary aids and services (e.g. sign language interpreters and note-takers); and thirdly, 1 September 2005, the duty to make adjustments to physical features (*SENDA*, 2003a).

This new act required Further and Higher Education Institutions to publish disability statements indicating policy and provision for disabled students. Thereby, discrimination against disabled students, by failing to make 'reasonable adjustments', or indeed treating a student unfavourably concerning her/his impairment without justification became illegal (*SENDA*, 2003b). Moreover, following the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit (PMSU) document (2005), the Disability Equality Duty (DED) was introduced. Under this duty, the DRC required 45,000 public sector organisations, including HEIs, to plan, publish and implement a three-year Disability Equality Scheme (DES) by 4 December 2006. The scheme obliged institutions to facilitate equality and address any barriers, by consulting disabled people in the preparation and implementation of the document. A DES was expected to provide a structure to help authorities in planning, delivering and reviewing activities that worked towards the fulfilment of this responsibility, with an ongoing evaluation (*DED*, 2006).

These examples as well as various modifications to entry procedures and examination arrangements (Goode, 2007) suggest a positive move towards more 'inclusive' educational practices, signifying progressive steps towards

adopting the social interpretation of disability in education. The social interpretation/model of disability is a concerted shift away from an emphasis on an individual's impairments as the cause of disability, to the ways in which physical, cultural and social environments exclude or disadvantage disabled people (Barnes, 2001; Finkelstein, 1994; Oliver, 1992a; Shakespeare, 1997; Walker, 1995). Within HE, the social model recognises various social, environmental and teaching barriers as obstructing disabled students' progress, and advocates for their removal, rather than holding individual disabled students responsible for their failure to access education (Riddell *et al.*, 2005).

Despite this recent progress in policy regarding disabled students' access to HE, ample research has criticised HEIs and related organisations for the limited access, disability-related support and relevant funding options they offer (Beauchamp-Pryor, 2004; Borland & James, 1999; Hurst, 1999; Konur, 2000; Stone *et al.*, 1998). Disabled domestic students who manage to enter HE often face various discriminatory social and environmental practices during their study period (Chard & Couch, 1998; Cottrell, 1996; Fuller *et al.*, 2004b). As explored throughout the current study, this is particularly the case for disabled international students, who also have to contend with possible additional cultural, linguistic and funding difficulties amongst other barriers in their English HEIs.

As an intersection between disability and other social factors, a wide range of variables can potentially impact on disabled students' experiences. Weber (2001) asserts that 'race', class, gender and sexuality are complex social systems that are manifested in political, economic and ideological social domains and the institutions within them are established to perpetuate and reproduce existing social hierarchies. As discussed throughout this thesis, the sample of students studied for the current investigation consisted of participants with a variety of impairments, and was intercut by a number of other variables. The size of an HEI, the subject/course/programme and mode of study, participants' gender and age, together with their educational and community background and nationality appeared to shape their university experience in many different ways, both positively and negatively. This fact is acknowledged

in guidance from the ECU (2004: unpagged): “Disabled people are not a homogeneous group. They have multiple identities and other aspects of their identities may influence outcomes.”

In her study, Hussain (2003) points out the disabled British South Asian young adults' educational experiences being influenced by disability, ethnicity and gender. On this account, Riddell *et al.* (2005) recognise disabled students' wide range of identities in the HE setting. In relation to Riddell *et al.*'s work (2005), Goode (2007: 36) discusses disabled students' fluid identities, asserting:

... students' constructions of self were temporal, contingent and negotiated, although ... some groups of disabled people are subject to greater externally-imposed constraints on the parameters for negotiation than others.

Furthermore, when an individual belongs to separate marginal groups, she/he may be disadvantaged on two or more levels at the same time, perpetuating each other, and exaggerating the experienced marginalisation. “... I have experienced disablism, racism and sexism.” (Vernon, 1996: 51). Disablism like racism is a process (Ahmad, 2000; Macpherson of Cluny, 1999), where “individuals and institutions may 'unwittingly' discriminate against people who deviate from 'the norm'” (Madriaga, 2007: 400-401), reinforcing the oppression of those who are categorised as being different. In analysing disabled international participants' experiences in the current study, it was evident, that at times, these students experienced discriminatory treatments on the grounds of being disabled, international and mature students. Yet, their disadvantages appeared to be so intertwined, intersectional and simultaneous that sometimes the identification of a single contributory factor to their marginalisation was difficult. Björnsdóttir and Traustadóttir (2010: 50) state that intersectional paradigms explain: “oppression cannot be reduced to one fundamental type, and that oppressions work together in producing injustice”. Similarly, Oliver (1996) believes disablism cannot be confronted in isolation. On the multiple nature of oppression, Barnes (1996: xii, cited in Barnes, 2009: 1) states:

The politics of disablement is about far more than disabled people; it is about challenging oppression in all its forms ... Like racism, sexism, heterosexism and all other forms of oppression, it is a human creation. It is impossible, therefore, to confront one type of oppression without confronting them all and, of course, the cultural values that created and sustains them.

I have mainly adopted the terms 'double' and 'multiple' oppression, when referring to the participants' difficulties grounded in their possible multiple identities, although at times 'simultaneous oppression' (Morris, 1996; Thomas, 1999) is considered to be more relevant. Favoring this concept, Vernon (1999: 385) states: "Hence it is not surprising if 'simultaneous oppression' is perceived to be the unique experience of a minority of disabled people.". Stuart (1992) also uses the term 'simultaneous oppression' when referring to 'black' disabled people's situations; not as a result of two independent oppressions, but rather both stemming from a single larger source, that of an intolerant atmosphere. These concepts are central to the issues explored in data analysis, because at any given time a disabled international student may be disadvantaged on different levels by universities' prejudiced attitudes, and experience a multiplicity of discriminations.

Nonetheless, the aforementioned data provided by the ECU (2008b) (Appendix One) further shows that the percentage increase of disabled International students between 2005/2006 and 2006/2007 was 19.99 per cent. This percentage was 7.32 per cent between the academic year 2008/2009 and 2009/2010 (HESA, 2011). A contributory factor to this decrease can be the lack of a designated organisation responsible for disabled international students' affairs. The implications are that there are no official services for information, advice and support, representation, policymaking and campaigning purposes for this group. In the literature studied, disabled international students' needs are often referred to Skill (Skill, 2007), and the UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA) (UKCISA, 2008a); neither of which appear to be specifically concerned with provision for this group. Disabled international students' marginalisation is further reflected in the limited research conducted

and literature available on this topic, reinforcing the following assertion by Reynolds Whyte (1995: 277):

If there is a danger that disabled people are presented as Others, not like us, then there is a double danger in the study of people with impairments in other cultures. They are both foreign and disabled, and it is a difficult job to render them as subjects we can understand and identify with.

It is well documented that international students encounter additional barriers to those faced by their fellow domestic students (Introna & Hayes, 2007; SCONUL, 2007; Zhou *et al.*, 2008). Whilst moving to a new country is often a rich event on its own, the experience may be constrained by uncertainty and disorientation, of not only the academic and social expectations, but also disability-related needs and the type of support on offer. Consequently, as discussed throughout this study, with little support received, disabled international students may consider themselves as invisible, and that their disability-related and cultural-specific multiple difficulties are either “irrelevant” or “added on as an optional extra” (Vernon, 1999: 391 - a reference to disabled ‘Black’ women). Disabled international students may feel discriminated against and rejected from such disabled domestic students’ activities as The ‘Disabled Students’ Campaign’ (NUS, 2011a), and also from non-disabled international students’ initiatives, including the ‘International Students’ Campaign’ (NUS, 2011b), both within the National Union of Students (NUS) (NUS, 2010a). This possible marginalisation could contradict the following statement from *SENDA* (2003a, unpagged):

Disabled students come under the Act [SENDA] no matter what their status: part-time, overseas, evening class, postgraduate, undergraduate, distance learning, etc.

This thesis is therefore concerned with disabled international students’ specific experiences in English universities. A range of barriers, both particular and general, that this group experiences in their university life, including differences in cultural interpretations of ‘disability’, and the kind of support that students receive, will be explored in detail. Hence the research is deployed to identify



and examine any concerns that disabled international students face in their academic and social life.

Thereby, with a view to enhance knowledge in the field, this study will highlight key issues and insights for future research and policy. I hope to make a meaningful contribution to debates both within the disciplines of disability studies and education, enriching both fields.

## **1.2 Aims**

In this thesis, I hoped to achieve the following aims:

- Critically analysing the national policies and the case-studied universities' literature for, and the extent and kind of support available to, disabled international students in the selected four universities.
- Documenting, comparing and evaluating 30 disabled international students' experiences in order to highlight any barriers they experienced.
- Commenting on the applicability of 'inclusive' education theories within the university context.

## **1.3 Objectives**

These aims have been fulfilled by the following means:

- Discussing previous research and the way it provides insight into disabling barriers in educational policy and practice.
- Critically evaluating national policies implemented to address the barriers identified in previous studies and also this research.
- Assessing the four identified universities' policy and practice documents as examples.
- Carrying out a focus group and 30 semi-structured interviews with the student sample.

- Analysing the field-study data, commenting and comparing students' experiences across different variables such as age, gender, impairment and nationality.
- Engaging in a critical discussion about the feasibility of 'inclusive' educational practices within the university environment.

#### **1.4 Note on Terminology**

A more thorough explanation of 'disability' will be included in Chapter Two (Section 2.1) during the discussion of the models of disability. However, it is worth mentioning here a few social model terms used throughout the thesis when referring to contentious phrases. I deem this necessary as language is about power, politics, domination and control, often used to justify oppression (Barnes, 1993; Oliver, 1994; Roberts *et al.*, 1992).

The social model of disability states that disabled people are those people with impairments who experience barriers within society (Clark & Marsh, 2002). This interpretation redefines disability as pertaining to the disabling effects of society, rather than to people's cognitive, physical and sensory status, as an assumed biological limitation or characteristic attached to them (Pfeiffer, 2002). Having used the social model epistemology throughout the thesis, the language related to this perspective on disability will be predominantly employed.

The term 'students/people with disabilities' has been avoided, as it implies that the disabling effect rests within the disabled student/person rather than from the educational system and/or society at large. This phrase is used in the individual medical interpretation; the term disability refers to a person's medical condition, confusing the crucial distinction between disability and impairment. Additionally, it denies the political or disability identity, which emerges from the Disabled People's Movement similar to 'Black' and Gay political identities (Barnes, 1992a). For these reasons, I will refrain from using 'disability' and 'impairment' interchangeably.

Such phrases as ‘the disabled’, ‘the blind’ and ‘the deaf’ will also be avoided as they objectify disabled people, denying individuality, and are regarded as oppressive by the Disabled People’s Movement (Barnes, 1992a; Bolt, 2005; Zola, 1993). Where it is necessary to indicate a student’s specific impairment in accordance with her/his self-definition (rather than using the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service [UCAS, 2009] classification), this will be prefixed with ‘a student with ...’. The correct terms for indicating a general type of impairment are considered to be ‘dyslexia as a form of Specific Learning Difficulty (SLD)’, ‘hearing impairment’, ‘mental health system survivor’, ‘physical impairment’, and ‘visual impairment’ (Clark & Marsh, 2002). Yet, due to participants’ self-assessment of impairments, and issues surrounding disclosure as well as the accuracy of these categories, I have remained cautious about the validity of participants’ impairment-specific data and labels used. Owing to the relatively small sample size, and the complexity of the issues discussed in the current study, any comparison of participants’ experiences has to be tentative. In this thesis, people who do not self-define as disabled are simply referred to as ‘non-disabled people’.

I also do not approve of the use of the “universal masculine” (Sheldon, 2001: 25), and therefore avoid using ‘he’. However, I have not changed such alternative language references, self-identifications and/or differing points of views either in direct quotations or in commenting on statements by the research participants and other authors.

The disability categories determining the figures in Appendix One (obtained from the ECU in 2008, and HESA in 2011) indicate the type of impairment that a student has on the basis of her/his self-assessment. As students are not obliged to report an impairment, and as certain universities are unwilling to provide information on disclosure, HESA (2011) advises that the figures reported in analyses are derived from a subset which may not be representative of the total student population.

In the email correspondence with the ECU (2008b), data (for Appendix One) is provided in the form of postcodes (UK domiciled students), or country codes

(non-UK domiciled students). In the chapters, where I have analysed participants' specific experiences, I have anonymised individual's nationalities to their continents, but on general terms I have referred to all non-England domiciled students as 'international students'. In this study, HE refers to pre and post-1992 university education (the nature of these institutions is discussed in chapters Two and Four - Sections 2.5 and 4.1). The HESA classifications (ECU, 2008b; HESA, 2011) consider HE students as those on programmes of study for which the level of instruction is above that of level three of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). Finally, I have followed the DfES's (2010) definition of 'mature' students as "those who commence their HE study aged 21 or over" (Ross *et al.*, 2010: 8). Having discussed the language used in the current study, next I shall outline the structure of the thesis.

### **1.5 Structure of the Thesis**

In Chapter Two, the two models of disability will be explored. The chapter will then comment on the nature of education, critically evaluating its exclusionary theoretical and practical barriers for the student population in general, and for disabled students in particular. This discussion will begin by an interrogation of the term 'globalisation of education', reviewing some previous research on barriers that international students encountered. The different theories of education, in relation to disabled children, and the way these are reflected in HE will be analysed. Finally, the scene will be set for subsequent chapters through a discussion of disabled domestic and disabled international students' experiences.

This thesis is rooted in an empirical research project. As will be discussed in Chapter Three, primary data was generated through a focus group and individual in-depth interviews with 30 disabled international students. The participants were given an opportunity and encouraged to share their university experiences in relation to disabling barriers that they may have experienced. Hence, by keeping the aims and objectives of this research highlighted in Chapter One, the data generation chapter will comment on the research questions and the methodology used in this study. By discussing the choice of

data collection strategies, Chapter Three will explain the ways this research has investigated students' experiences and the limited policies specifically for disabled international students.

Chapter Four will critically analyse various national and four case-studied universities' policy documentation and guidelines that address the practical barriers, in admission, disability-related services, pedagogy, and accommodation and social life, highlighted throughout this thesis. Therefore, chapters Five, Six, Seven and Eight will refer to Chapter Four where appropriate to compare participants' experiences with these policies.

These empirical chapters are structured around disabled people's 'Seven Needs'. Chapter Five considers the range of influential factors as to why students decided to study a specific course in their particular university/city, and the kind of 'information' available to them to make those choices. The built environment is crucial in "promoting access and choice" (Chard & Couch, 1998: 608). Thus 'access' to the university environment, including that of admissions process will be discussed. Subsequently, various issues of funding and the range of scholarships that students applied for will be focused upon.

Chapter Six begins by examining participants' views and feelings on disclosing the nature of their impairments. Participants' experiences relating to their needs assessment process or lack thereof will be highlighted. The chapter will assess the effectiveness of specific disability services ranging from the support offered in forms of transcription, accessible 'technical aids', and the 'Personal Assistance' scheme.

In Chapter Seven, such academic issues as the effects of previous education on participants' study-related performances in their English universities will be assessed. The possibilities of attending English Language classes, pre-admission, as well as their accessibility and effectiveness will be taken into account. The chapter will also discuss participants' observations of specific academic cultural differences. Hence, this chapter will seek similarities and differences in participants' academic-related perspectives.

In Chapter Eight, participants' general experiences, including the accessibility of students' 'housing', and the 'transport' used will be analysed. This chapter will comment on participants' experiences of 'peer support', and the possible barriers within their social involvements. Following this, participants' perceptions of both, general and specific cultural differences, particularly those relating to the interpretations of disability, will be examined. The chapter will then discuss students' overall experiences.

The final chapter will comment on the relevance of policies discussed in Chapter Four about disabled, international and disabled international students in an HE environment, which attempts inclusivity. I will summarise the research by offering some insights for educational organisations and policy makers. In concluding this chapter, further issues for future research will be identified.

# Chapter Two: Disability, Higher Education and Disabled International Students

In the previous chapter I outlined the background, aims and objectives for the current study. This chapter will begin by discussing understandings of the term 'disability' in a Western context. The importance of 'Independent Living' for disabled people and the seven contributory needs in realising independence shall subsequently be explained. The 'Seven Needs' schema has provided a structural framework for the current thesis; therefore this discussion is pertinent to the present study. The concept of education in also providing the choice and control necessary to live independently (HCIL, 1990), and its exclusionary practices firstly in a modern global education system will be explored. Subsequently, the problems that the internationalisation of education raises for non-disabled international students in the British Higher Education (HE) sector will be explored.

Following this, the relevance of debates surrounding definitions of 'disability' in 'special', 'integrated' and 'inclusive' educational models for disabled children will be discussed. Attention will then turn to how these models are reflected in HE. Research into barriers experienced by disabled domestic students in universities will follow. Finally, the difficulties encountered by disabled international students in the British Higher education Institutions (HEIs) will be reviewed and commented upon.

## 2.1 Explaining 'Disability'

On an international level, there are different cultural interpretations of 'disability' (Coleridge, 1993; Elwan, 1999; Stone, 1999; Üstun *et al.*, 2003). Thus (as demonstrated in the current thesis), there is variation in the ways 'disability' is understood, which is reflected in the language used by the research participants. However, this study is concerned only with two main Western views of disability, and their influence on educational policy and practice. The

individual medical, and social definitions of disability have been selected because of their specific global impact on the field of education.

### *The Individual Medical/Deficit Definition*

The concept of oppression, and the consequent marginalisation of the subordinate group, results from a power exercise - the dominance of one group over another explained by Gramsci (1971: 4) as “Hegemony”. On an institutional level, legitimising and distributing a specific point of view protects and perpetuates the position of dominant group, whilst continuing to oppress the disadvantage population (Young, 1990). The interpretations of ‘disability’ are associated with this theory, with the powerful professionals groups within society determining its meaning based on the individual medical model of disability (Oliver, 1990b). As discussed throughout the current study, this is particularly evident in HE, where the needs of non-disabled individuals are largely met with disabled students being excluded or even rejected from participating in universities.

The individual medical definition of disability is a nineteenth century Western concept, rooted in an individualised and medicalised understanding of disability (Barnes, 1997). The individual medical interpretation states that ‘disability’ stems from an individual’s biological or psychological limitations, leaving social and economic structures un-theorised (Oliver, 1990a).

In 1980, the World Health Organisation (WHO) introduced the International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities and Handicaps (ICIDH), seeking the following international agreement on a conceptual schema of impairment, disability and handicap in the context of health experiences:

**IMPAIRMENT:** ... is any loss or abnormality of psychological, physiological, or anatomical structure or function.

**DISABILITY:** ... is any restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being.

**HANDICAP:** ... is a disadvantage for a given individual, resulting from an impairment or a disability, that limits or



prevents the fulfillment of a role that is normal ... for that individual (Wood, 1980: 27-29).

Criticisms of this model include the biased view of disability only in medical terms, the surrounding disabling language, and also the perception of 'normalcy'. Imrie (2004: 209) criticises the biomedical definition as being partial and providing an "under-socialised" account of disability by failing to recognise the interrelationships of biology, culture and biography. Since its inception, disabled people have opposed the word 'handicap'; a semantic construction related to the medicalisation of disability, which conjured up images of begging, i.e. the notion of cap-in-hand (Barnes, 1991). Additionally, Barnes (2003: 12) criticises the concepts of "impairment" and "normal" in the ICIDH, as social phenomena that are not easily defined and subject to substantive "experiential, contextual and cultural variation" in meaning. Llewellyn and Hogan (2000: 159) assert that "the view of what it is to be normal" is determined by societal and cultural acceptance and expectations.

Despite these criticisms, in Western cultures, definitions within legislation (Beauchamp-Pryor, 2004), policy and provision (Barnes, 1991) predominantly reflect the deficit model of disability. The individual medical interpretation has led to colonisation of disabled people's lives (Oliver, 1996), and an expansion of professionally-run "paternalistic" services 'for' disabled people (Evans, 2003: unpagged). The Disability Service Units (DSUs) discussed in Chapter Six (Section 6.2), in most HEIs in meeting individual's needs rather than striving for equality, may be considered as part of these professionally-run services. By using rehabilitation and adjustment as compensation, most professionals consider their major task to be to normalise, care for, or cure disabled individuals (Chappell, 1997; Garland Thomson, 1997; Oliver, 1981; Roman, 2009). Disabled people have also been categorised, labelled, separated and treated differently by type and severity of their impairments.

... welfare provision for disabled people has largely worked to isolate and inhibit individuals, as opposed to enabling their integration into society. (Beauchamp-Pryor, 2007: 14).

Instead of recognising the need for social, political and economic action, these medicalised discourses reinforce dependency and blame the individual for her/his perceived inadequacies (Barnes, 1992a; Finkelstein, 1991). Thus for disabled people “the body is the site of oppression, both in form, and in what is done with it.” (Abberley, 1997: 173). The individual medical model underpins personal tragedy theory (Oliver, 1990a), which considers the onset of impairment to represent a terrible event, occurring at random to an individual, who subsequently is perceived as “unfortunate, useless, different, oppressed and sick” (Hunt, 1966: 146).

It could therefore be argued that the individual medical/deficit model of disability often perpetuated persistent traditional perspectives, and “became a potent means of oppression” (Rieser, 2008: 20). The dominant perspectives of the individual medical understanding of disability are invoked in the everyday life as ways of thinking, speaking and acting, in Roman’s (2009) opinion often thoughtlessly. Stereotyped and stigmatising ways of thinking influence social understandings of disability identity, and societal responses to disabled people in general (Goffman, 1968). Consequently, disabled people’s perceptions of themselves are molded significantly by their environment and by the culture they live in (Karagiozakis, 2010). “The medical model of disability leads from the point of diagnosis to a lifetime of feeling that we are a disappointment and a worry to everyone.” (Mason, 1990: 2). For disabled people, handling society’s negative outlook often goes beyond projecting the blame onto society, and results in internalising negative feelings (Rieser, 1990). Internalised oppression is thus defined as “not the cause of our mistreatment, it is the result of our mistreatment” (Mason, 1990: 1).

Yet, as shall be discussed in the section on ‘special education’, traditional educational policy has adopted the individual medical definition of disability, assuming that human potential/ability cannot supersede medically defined functional limitations. In this way the existence of ‘special education’ is justified and maintained (McDonald, 1996). The individual medical model of disability continues to exert strong influence in HE, although the rhetoric of the social

model of disability, discussed next, is beginning to become evident in university policy papers and websites.

### *The Social Definition*

In response to the individual medical model of disability, based on their direct experiences of impairment/disability, disabled activists examined and rejected the limitations of this deficit model. Oliver (1996) documents how the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS), in their manifesto *The Fundamental Principles of Disability* (1976), accommodated the development of a politics of difference, defining disability as:

... the disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by a contemporary social organisation which takes no or little account of people who have physical impairments and thus excludes them from participation in the mainstream of social activities. (UPIAS, 1976: 3-4).

The British Council of Disabled People (BCODP) (1981, cited in BCODP, 1997) agreed that this definition of disability should incorporate all disabled people, including those with sensory and cognitive impairments, rather than only referring to people with physical impairments. Adopting the UPIAS definition of disability (1976), in 1981 the social model of disability was developed as an invaluable, practical and heuristic tool, which has strengthened disabled people's struggle for emancipation (Finkelstein, 2001; Oliver, 2000b).

The above social model definition of the term 'disability' differs radically from that of the individual medical definition. Campling (1981), and Oliver (1990a) state that the importance of the social interpretation of disability is that instead of considering individuals' impairments as the determining factor in creating disability, this definition recognises the labelling of disabled people in relation to dominant social and cultural values, and environmental barriers. The social model distinguishes between the impairment experienced by any individual, and disability, understood in terms of societal discrimination, as a wider and fundamental issue of prejudice (Holden & Beresford, 2002; Morris, 1992). Moreover, impairment can be made more significant, or indeed created, by a disablist environment, where categories and definitions literally shape and

reflect thinking, attitudes and actions. Disabled people's day-to-day experience of social exclusion, for example, can result in or exaggerate mental health difficulties (Dunn, 1999; Morris, 2004; Stansfield, 2002).

However, the social definition of disability has been criticised by several writers (Bury, 1996; Crow, 1996; Dewsbury *et al.*, 2004; French, 1993; Swain & French, 2000). Much of this critique refers to the dominance of male, white, middle-class, wheelchair-users' concerns, the privileging of their experiences, and the undermining of disabled people's diverse identities and multiple oppression. In response, Oliver (2000b) suggests that although the social model has been applied more often to certain impairments, its relevance to others remains significant.

Additionally, the social model is said to not adequately address how individual's experiences and perceptions of disability can be identified and analysed (Hutchison, 1995). Defending the social model, Priestley (1998: 86) argues that although the existence of significant differences between disabled people may impact differentially on their personal experiences, "this does not invalidate a social model analysis of oppression".

The UPIAS definition has also been criticised (Shakespeare, 2006; Shakespeare & Watson, 2002) for either ignoring or excluding the issue of impairment as a major part of biographies, and denying the differences of experience between impairments. Moreover, Butler and Parr (1999), Corker and French (1999), and Lindsay (2003) argue that the emphasis of the social model on the discriminatory social positioning of disabled people often fails to recognise biological, psychological and socio-cultural factors. They argue that the interplay of these elements often creates pain and discomfort (including associated depression), which often remains unrecognised.

Nevertheless, in Oliver's (2000b) view the social model, as an aid to understanding disability, refuses to see specific problems in isolation from the totality of disabling environments or indeed impairments. Elsewhere, Oliver (1996: 48) asserts that the social model has made a "pragmatic decision to

identify and address issues that can be changed through collective action rather than medical or professional treatment.” Conversely, Rieser (2008) argues that medical interventions have not been dismissed in the social model approach, rather they are built upon and the emphasis has changed to challenging and removing the barriers that disabled people encounter. Disabled researchers like Thomas (2003) highlight the importance of psycho-emotional effects resulting from disability and impairment in the social model. Impairment effects are “profoundly bio-social” (Thomas, 1999: 43) impairment-related activity restrictions such as fatigue, which create constraints in certain contexts.

It can therefore be argued that whilst the social model may be criticised for not addressing issues such as disabled people’s experiences relating to impairment, gender and ethnicity, it is not possible to address disabling barriers without considering these significant experiences, particularly that of impairment. As will be discussed below, the social interpretation of disability has led to much criticism of ‘special education’, resulting in calls for ‘inclusive’ educational systems for disabled students (Barnes, 1990).

The criticisms raised regarding the above two interpretations of ‘disability’ led to the WHO’s redefinition of this term as bio-psycho-social, and the replacement of the ICIDH with the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (commonly called the ICF) (WHO, 2001) - previously known as ICIDH2. However, as the application of this model has not yet filtered through HE policy, the discussion of this model appears to be less relevant to the current work. Conversely, as will be discussed, the individual medical and social definitions of disability have a particular relevance to the selected universities’ practice and policy documents for disabled students.

Having discussed the two models of disability, I recognise, that to understand socially constructed barriers, one has to understand the impact of an individual’s impairment (and its effects), which may also be socially constructed. The social model recognises the importance of an individual’s experience of impairment, particularly when attempting to eliminate social exclusion (Barnes, 2003; Oliver, 1996). Thus my chosen epistemology is a social model analysis.

I acknowledge disabled international students' wide ranging impairments and associated difficulties, whilst concentrating on their concerns and experiences related to the disabling barriers in HE as a basis for challenging their potential disadvantages.

Although the social model has been criticised on many grounds, it is linked to the concept of 'Independent Living', discussed next, which is firstly a philosophy, and secondly a practical tool leading to the formation of the 'Seven Needs'. Independent living has been defined as "the ability to decide and choose what a person wants, where to live and how, what to do, and how to set about doing it." (Evans, 2001: 1). Throughout this thesis, I have used disabled people's 'Seven Needs' to analyse and structure the barriers participants faced.

### *Applying the Social Model*

Historically, resulting from the individual medical definition of disability discussed above, disabled people have been denied active participation in mainstream life (Oliver & Barnes, 1998). Their lives were restricted to their family homes, and also residential institutions in the past (Barnes, 2007a). Davis (1984) argues that this exclusion is the root cause of disability, and the very antithesis of independent/integrated living.

In order to improve their confined lives and living conditions, disabled people in Britain sought the option of independent living, taking inspiration from their American counterparts. Significantly, the American Independent Living Movement (ILM) emerged initially from the campus culture of American universities to influence national disability policy. In the 1960s, some American universities, particularly in Berkeley, California, introduced various self-help programmes to enable students with "severe" physical impairments to attend mainstream courses (Davis, 1984: unpagged). The inadequacy of similar schemes available outside university campuses "prompted some disabled students to develop their own services, under the banner of 'Centres for Independent Living' (CILs)" (Barnes, 2007a: 3).

To provide effective services, Davis (1984) argues that disabled people should themselves run services relevant to their self-determined needs, that people with all kinds of impairments should be involved, and that facilities should ultimately help disabled individuals to achieve their own life choices. Thus contrary to other services 'for' disabled people run mainly by non-disabled professionals and/or charities, disabled people exclusively controlled the CILs, providing a holistic, new and innovative range of support services, information and advice (Hasler, 2003). Barnes (2007a: 17) maintains that "to facilitate greater user-involvement in the development and delivery of services, people have to desire to be and feel empowered", in contrast to feeling imposed upon from above. This is particularly relevant to Chapter Four (Section 4.2), where, without any solid evidence, the case-studied universities claim that they included disabled students in consultation groups for developing their Disability Equality Schemes (DESS).

The original CIL in Berkeley established the five basic core services to meet disabled people's local needs at a "grassroots level" (Evans, 2001: 6); Housing, Personal Assistant (PA) service, Transport, Access, and Peer Counseling and Support aimed to ensure that "all disabled people have the equality of opportunity in the chances and choices of life like everybody else" (Evans, 2001: 1). These services were intended to not only empower disabled people to have self-determination and control, but also to contribute to their collective emancipation as a marginalised minority group (Evans, 2001). Importantly, instead of suggesting that a person needed "rehabilitation" in order to exist in an inaccessible environment; the CIL approach highlighted the significance of society adapting itself in order to accommodate disabled people (Hasler, 2003: unpagged).

In Britain, in 1985, the newly formed Derbyshire Coalition of Disabled People (DCDP) established Derbyshire Centre for Integrated Living (DCIL). The name for this CIL was purposefully chosen because as Brisenden (1989: 9) asserts independence "is not linked to the physical or intellectual capacity to care for oneself without assistance; independence is created by having assistance when and how one requires it". However, this CIL, as well as those founded later,

adopted a similar philosophy to organisations in the United States of America (USA) - such as Berkeley, facilitating disabled people's full and equal participation in the community both outside and within the context of education (Evans, 2001).

In translating integrated/independent living philosophy into a framework for practical action, derived from the social model of disability (Barnes, 2007a), the secondary needs were identified. The DCIL added the need for Information and Technical Equipment. This 'Derbyshire Seven Needs', became a blueprint for the development of many CILs and disabled people's organisations in the United Kingdom (UK) (Barnes, 2007a). It has to be noted that education was not included in the 'Derbyshire Seven Needs'. It was understood that once meaningful progress was made towards satisfying the 'Seven Needs', access to education would be a barrier free experience. In 1989, the 'Seven Needs' were superseded by the 'Eleven Needs' adapted by Hampshire Centre for Independent Living (HCIL). The additional needs included Employment, Education and Training, Income and Benefits, and Advocacy (Barnes, 2007a).

As the current research evolved it became evident that the 'Seven Needs' could have provided a better framework for analysing the interviews and structuring the thesis. As discussed throughout this study, the 'Seven Needs' remain pertinent to disabled students' lives in the present day. Despite more than 25 years of the initial efforts in the early 1980s to create CILs in the UK, it took until 2008 for the previous government to publish its first *Independent Living Strategy report* (ODI, 2008). This strategy identified measures to ensure that by 2013, disabled people's increased choice and control over how their own needs would be met, and "to make significant progress in tackling barriers to access health services, housing, transport, and employment opportunities." (RADAR, 2008: 2). Having justified my choice and application of the social model of disability as the epistemology for this research, I shall now explore the nature of mainstream education, starting with the globalisation of education.

## **2.2 Globalisation of Higher Education**



In the current thesis, I only discuss 'formal education', comprising of the knowledge acquired in school and university as opposed to informal education as an ongoing lifelong process, often starting, typically, in the family environment (Giddens, 1997; Illich, 1970). The primary aim of education is to nurture students' intellectual, personal and social development to the highest possible level (Bennett, 1999). These educational achievements may become an essential success factor in securing entry to sought-after positions in the employment market (EHRC, 2010; Getzel *et al.*, 2001; Hayton & Paczuska, 2002; Magnus, 2006; Wakeling, 2005). In an increasingly technological world, educational qualifications and skills are said to be "vital to career success and satisfaction" (McBrien, 2005: 344), and to an independent life (HCIL, 1990). For disabled people to exercise the same level of choice and control as their non-disabled peers, education is fundamental. Yet, as discussed below, mainstream education can be disabling as well as enabling for various groups of children/students with different biological and cultural backgrounds (Coard, 1971; Docherty *et al.*, 2004; Riddell *et al.*, 2001).

Giddens (1997) defines HE as education received beyond school, usually at college or university. The HE system has provided services and a specific form of advanced education for an elite group of the population to study a wide range of subjects undisturbed by the mundane demands of daily life (Barnes, 2007b). Thus as Windolf (1997) argues, the major beneficiaries of HE remain the middle-classes armed with the "social capital" factor identified by Bourdieu (1997: 51). "Social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition ..." (Bourdieu, 1997: 51). Thus Naidoo (2003: 252) contends: "The implementation of an institutional framework, which selectively empowers and disempowers individuals largely on the basis of social disadvantage, has become an integral aspect of the international HE landscape." What is more, as shall be discussed in this chapter, the ethos of HE as competition has recently been elevated to the level of commercial enterprise, attracting financially able students, who require minimal support.

In general terms, globalisation is said to be a set of issues relating to important social and ideological changes, including production, community identity and types of democracy (Neufeld, 2001). The explicit emphasis of the commercialisation of education, in globalisation, however is a comparably newly developed trend (James & Mok, 2003; Varughese, 2010). Knight and de Wit (1995) refer to the internationalisation of education as the integration of international and intercultural dimensions into all aspects of an HEI including teaching and research. Gribble and Ziguras (2003) consider the transnationalisation of education to be a significant feature of globalised HE, resulting in the operation of increasingly international, mobile, commercial and tradable programmes and services with high incentives for providers.

Governments world-wide have linked HE reform strategies to the concept of 'globalisation' (Naidoo, 2003). This has encompassed a range of activities such as the emphasis of advances in information technology (IT), and the heightened integration of national economies (Davies, 1999). Naidoo (2003) considers these developments to have given rise to a new type of globalised economy, depended on production of higher value-added products and services, and developed through knowledge, particularly scientific and technological research. In this area, HE has been considered as a crucial site for the "production, dissemination and transfer of economically productive knowledge and continual innovation" (Naidoo, 2003: 249).

Internationalisation of education was high on the previous government's agenda (BC, 2006); the UK had one of the largest international student populations amongst countries included in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), with international students accounting for 14.1 per cent as opposed to an OECD average of 6.9 per cent (Brown & Ramsden, 2008). The OECD claims to promote policies to enhance the member countries' social well-being and economics (OECD, 2011). Pelletier (2003) argues that international students have always studied at British universities, but due to their increased participation, nowadays have a significantly greater impact on the economics and professional rationale of HE. The early scholars' search for knowledge abroad was due to a lack of relevant educational institutions in their

home countries. In the current economic climate, however, host countries (mainly Western), arguably for financial gain, take a proactive approach to international students' recruitment (McLean *et al.*, 2003).

On a global level, countries are motivated to internationalise research in order to improve their competitiveness in market access, quality of research and development, and also to tackle global and international development issues (Bone, 2008). Furthermore, the report of the 'Joint Working Group of the Council for Education in the Commonwealth, and UK Council for Overseas Student Affairs (UKCOSA)' (2000) (here onwards referred to as 'Joint Report'), argues that the provision of courses for international students has now come to be regarded as a potential source of income, which may be promoted to fulfil the desire for precious revenue. International students contribute to the British economy through paying various services for their education and living, without recourse to public funds (*ibid*). In 2006, for instance, over 260,000 international students spent up to £10,000 in tuition fees and maintenance costs (SCONUL, 2007). Hence, the HE sector is an extremely significant export industry in the UK, outstripping the export value of alcoholic drinks, textiles, clothing, publishing and cultural and media industries in 2006 (Vickers & Bekhradnia, 2007). Since several thousand graduates remain in the UK each year to work, the impact that this has on the UK economy is also considerable (*ibid*).

In addition, according to Brown and Ramsden (2008), the British universities tend to regard world-class research inherently as international, and that the career experience of not only research students and post-doctoral researchers, but also the undergraduates is positively impacted by international research interactions. Domestic students may broaden their outlook; richer international perspectives can offset any tendencies to undue parochialism, and help raising awareness about issues of racism, global pollution, and human rights (Berchem, 1991; Papatsiba, 2006).

Therefore, Papatsiba (2006: 99) argues that the civic rationale of student mobility as a "secondary socialisation" through the introduction of such programmes as Erasmus, established in 1986 and the Bologna Process,

initiated in 1999 (discussed in Chapter One's introduction) will help to create new European citizens. All of this is said to reinforce the political vision of intertwining personal and professional development, including: a good command of languages, heightened interpersonal skills, practical application of knowledge and strengths such as autonomy, initiative, resilience and self-confidence (Papatsiba, 2006).

Globalisation has also been described in terms of equipping graduates with the suitable characteristics for an international job market (SCONUL, 2007). For individuals, a major link between education and occupational attainment in "advanced industrial" countries is relatively close (Shiner & Modood, 2002: 210). In these societies, HE is often viewed as a "stepping stone to higher level occupations" and semi-elite status (Cheng & Heath, 1993: 151). To the risk of excluding disabled students with unmet needs, the uncertainty of future employment markets is claimed to require "better fitted" graduates, who have lifelong transferable skills and intellectual independence that can be applied internationally (Joint Report, 2000: 2). Employers prefer international students since de facto they have an international background (Brown & Ramsden, 2008). Thus universities can become international businesses, transforming students' "mono-cultural" views, progressing them through stages of international awareness, to competency and finally expertise (Edwards *et al.*, 2003: 187).

All this raises the expectation that HE will enhance the nation state's competitive edge in the global market place by producing the new "smart" workers who will take up key positions in the knowledge economy (Naidoo, 2003: 251). In the view of such rhetoric, the next section will look at issues pertinent to international students in this new global knowledge economy.

### **2.3 Non-Disabled International Students**

Here, research on the range of barriers that non-disabled international students may have encountered will be examined, with the view to revisit these studies in

later chapters. I shall then highlight how research has been limited by the exclusion of disabled international students' concerns and experiences.

Walker (1999: 54) emphasises that "overseas students [are] desirable in principle but difficult in practice". As well as dealing with the common problems of adjustment to a new environment, international students attending universities in a different culture to that of their own "have to contend with novel social and educational organisations, behaviours and expectations" (Zhou *et al.*, 2008: 63). The following five categories of cultural barriers at pre-entry, entry, on-programme and at exit, specifically for international students have been identified by Burslem (2005), Pelletier (2003), and Simpson (1996). These include: Practical challenges: time-management, visas, provision of information pre-/post-arrival, accommodation, policies relating to financial support; Emotional and affective issues: stress, homesickness, lack of confidence, participation in support services; Cultural adaptation and integration: developing adequate cross-cultural skills, English language acquisition/competence; Pedagogic difficulties: unfamiliarity with the UK system and academic conventions, seminar, study and writing skills, teaching/learning experiences, linguistic diversity; Curriculum and assessment: appropriate course delivery design, performance and outcomes.

Many universities organise their educational systems, assessments and curricula within a national framework; predominantly serving the dominant culture's social expectations, which may not necessarily be accessible to students from differing cultural backgrounds (McLean *et al.*, 2003; Varughese, 2010). Mackinnon and Manathunga (2003), and Race and Brown (2006), for instance, point to differing academic cultural practices ranging from structure of essay writing, plagiarism and assessments, to the interaction between staff and students. Hence learning the culture of the host university is essential for a smooth transition into the new learning setting (Biggs, 2001).

In collectivist cultures, the teacher is said to provide all the guidance and information students need to complete their courses (Keenan & Jemmeson, 2003). Many international students' previous learning environments have been

characterised by a respect for lecturers, not being overtly critical of authoritative texts or figures (Ryan, 2000; Tweed & Lehman, 2002; Warring, 2010; Zhou *et al.*, 2008). Knowledge is also considered as communal property (Carroll, 2002; Ryan, 2000). The reproduction of written material with little alteration, therefore subjects international students to accusation of plagiarism, creating yet another barrier in presenting their written work in a second or sometimes third language. These culturally based academic difficulties may be regarded as exaggerating the existing language difficulties of newly arrived international students (Hellstén, 2002). Thus international students from cultures where learning is teacher-led and class-based may consider the transition to an independent academic environment problematic (Scheyvens *et al.*, 2003).

Funding tuition fees and living expenses presents another key barrier for most international students (Soorenian, 2008a). In Brown and Ramsden's study (2008), the vast majority of international students reported extra costs for books and course materials, field trips and excursions; very nearly half for graduation; and a minority for equipment and lab fees. Additionally, international students are also affected by a radical increase in visa charges (Brown & Ramsden, 2008) (for the recent visa charges see Chapter Four – Section 4.3).

Brown and Ramsden (2008: 6) contend the “long-term perverse incentive of maximising short-term profit” from international students is all too tempting. The UK government is said to be concerned with ensuring that most international students are not subsidised, and that institutions recover the costs of teaching (Joint Report, 2000). That said, the same report (Joint Report, 2000) still claims that the British culture of academia is attuned to the internationalisation of knowledge rather than market forces.

According to the Joint Report (2000), the UK government was invited to consider addressing such international student issues as: better publicity on the issuing of National Insurance numbers and working regulations, and rewording of stamps/vignettes in passports. Other agencies were asked to consider providing improved pre-arrival information on immigration, national initiatives for training academics, the availability of data to inform policies, and the need for

regular monitoring of international students' experiences (*ibid*). Brown and Ramsden (2008) identify the relative poor ranking of facilities such as learning spaces and sports centers in UK HE establishments compared with those of international competitors, highlighting the urgency of improvements in these services. Similarly SCONUL (2007) argues if the UK HEIs are to maintain their place in the global educational market, and face challenges particularly from China and India beside other European countries which offer degrees taught in English, they must respond to diverse and changing needs in order to continue attracting international students.

Moreover, Turney *et al.* (2002: 20) identify the implications of often unrecognised institutional "whiteness" to be the stigmatisation of "racialised" and "ethnicised" student and staff groups studying and working within HEIs. Spencer-Rodgers and McGovern (2002) argue that stereotypic beliefs are a well-established source of unfavorable attitudes towards the culturally different, specifically where there has been minimal prior inter-group and interpersonal contact. The negative aspects of perceived linguistic and cultural barriers have been investigated by Stephan and Stephan (1996a; 1996b), as determining prejudice. According to Stephan and Stephan (1996a), prejudicial attitudes often result in consensual stereotyping, inter-group anxiety, as well as realistic and symbolic cultural threats. McBrien (2005) contends that cultural misunderstandings can lead to prejudice and discrimination and have a lasting effect on international students' academic focus, and achievements. As a result students, already struggling with an unfamiliar language and confusing cultural changes, must also work to overcome the impact of prejudicial attitudes.

Yet, Zhou *et al.* (2008) suggest that international students can benefit emotionally, socially and academically from interaction with people from the host country, helping them to adjust better in the country concerned. Fewer academic difficulties and social problems have been reported by international students from an increased interaction with domestic students (Pruitt, 1978; Ward & Kennedy, 1993).

The current thesis explores participants' experiences through the barriers discussed here. Whilst research into some of these topics such as that of pedagogic difficulties is plentiful, other issues including international students' participation in social life, appears to be under-researched. This is especially pertinent when social support is said to alleviate 'homesickness' brought about by cultural differences (Hannigan *et al.*, 1997).

Furthermore, it has to be noted that the language and ideas of independence, characterising international students' participation in British HE (discussed in Section 2.2) is replete with inaccessible language (Stienstra, 2002), and discriminatory and disabling in nature. This thereby makes disabled students' participation in the globalised HE problematic, creating additional barriers to overcome. Questions are raised on how far the universities are actually prepared to go to welcome disabled students. Next, I shall focus this discussion on the disabling nature of mainstream education, starting with schooling, then progressing to the university context.

#### **2.4 'Special', 'Integrated' and 'Inclusive' Education**

There are a number of studies investigating various groups'— for example, different social class groups (Wakeling, 2005), working-class men (Marks, 2003), and ethnic minority groups' (Shiner & Modood, 2002) — participation in education. Yet, mainstream educational writers do not appear to be interested in issues surrounding disability and education, perhaps due to the presumed 'special' nature of disabled people's participation in education (Barton, 1997; Goodley *et al.*, 2011). Nevertheless, several disability studies academics (e.g. Ballard, 1999; Barnes, 2007c; Barnes & Mercer, 2003; Barton, 2003; Barton & Armstrong, 2001; Oliver, 1992b; 2000b) have explored the subject of disability in education, and evaluated 'special education' in depth. Here, I will discuss some of these studies and three models of education, namely 'special', 'integrated' and 'inclusive', in relation to disabled children/students.

##### *'Special Education'*

Here I will give a brief history of the 'special education' system, describing its operation in the context of school settings. The term 'special school' refers to



institutions, which separate from mainstream schooling, accommodate children who are perceived as disabled, exceptional, and ultimately as having 'special needs' (Barton & Tomlinson, 1984).

Influenced by the individual medical/deficit model of disability and driven by the non-disabled population's interests, the ideology of 'special education' was used to offer remedial help through 'segregated education' (Michalko, 2002; Roman, 2009). Based on controversial Intelligence Quotient (IQ) tests, disabled, working-class, and immigrant children generally were often labelled as "naturally educationally handicapped" (Tomlinson, 1982: 179), or as having a "fixed innate intelligence" (*ibid*: 46). These children were often placed in 'special education' classes with low academic streams and expectations, regardless of their high achievements (McBrien, 2005).

Although the practice of 'special education' originated in the seventeenth century (Tomlinson, 1995b) and was fully implemented by the nineteenth century (Davis, 1995), the current study is concerned with its recent history, from the 1970s to the present date. In November 1975, Margaret Thatcher, then Secretary of State for Education and Science, appointed a Committee to review educational provision for disabled children in England, Scotland and Wales (Barton, 1997). The committee produced the *Warnock Report (1978)* - an influential account of disabled children's education that took into account their medical needs.

The report recommended replacement of the 10 statutory categories of educable "handicap" - identified in the 1944 *Education Act* (Barton, 1997: 10) - with an evolving and expanding notion of 'special educational needs' in the *Education Act* of 1981 (Hurst, 1998). Indeed this represented an attempt to remove the division between "handicapped" and "non-handicapped" pupils and to include a larger population of children in mainstream education (Barton, 1997: 147). Nevertheless, in practice this report did not work towards the abolition of the categorical conceptualisation of 'disability', and has been criticised for its individualistic medical assumptions (Oliver, 2000b). Labels including "severe" and "moderate" learning difficulties still exist today in 'special

schools', and are arguably rooted in the Universities and Colleges Admission Services (UCAS) categories (Farrell, 2001: 4), as discussed in Chapter Four (Section 4.4). UCAS is the organisation responsible for managing applications to HE courses in the UK, providing application, research, consultancy and advisory services across a range of subject areas and modes of study for UK universities and colleges (UCAS, 2009).

Farrell (2001) criticises the arbitrary categorisation of a child as having 'special needs'. First, Farrell argues that the process of labeling implies that the problem lies within the child, freeing the school from any responsibility in addressing her/his needs. Second, focusing on categories can lower the expectations of what a child can achieve in school. Third, there are general assumptions among teachers that children with a certain label require a particular form of exclusive intervention. Fourth, unlike the labels they receive, for many disabled children, their impairments lie on a continuum. Their difficulties may improve or deteriorate depending on the support they receive. Notably, all these criticisms may equally be applied to the categorisation of disabled students' impairments in HE.

Conversely, as shall be discussed in Chapter Six (Section 6.1), if handled sensitively, categories can result in staff being better informed about the nature of students' difficulties as well as students being supported effectively. The label dyslexia (unrecognised as a statutory educational category of 'disability', but noted under the *Health Act* in 1970 - Tomlinson, 1995b), for instance, informs the relevant staff that the student is most likely to be competent in a wide range of areas, but may have specific difficulties, usually in acquiring literacy skills (Farrell, 2001). However, as discussed below, problems arise when labels such as 'special education needs' developed by *Warnock*, are used to justify the child's failure to succeed rather than attempting to remove barriers. The growth of 'special education' has been explained in a variety of ways. Next, three interrelated perspectives, namely 'Functionalist', 'Conflict', and 'Social control' theories will be linked to those on mainstream education. In Illich's view (1970), compulsory education does four basic things: the provision of custodial care; the distribution of people into occupational roles; the learning

of dominant values; and the acquisition of socially approved skills and knowledge.

### Functionalist Theory

In general terms, formal education allocates and selects people for participation in education and the workforce (Macionis & Plummer, 1997), and regulates people through the dissemination of dominant social values (Middleton, 1993). Selection is therefore concerned with “weeding out what is undesirable” (Dewey, 1997: 14), arguably, into ‘special education’ schools, where disabled children are distributed amongst certain low-status occupational roles (Barnes, 1991; Tomlinson, 1982).

The Functionalist view considers that ‘special education’ teaches dominant values and promotes the learning of socially approved norms, skills and knowledge, so that disabled children can “fit in” to the society in which they live (Tomlinson, 1995b: 124). The functionalists argue that the vocational training taught in ‘special education’ schools has been (and remains) concerned with mechanical, manual and moral fields; presumably enhancing students’ self-control and social skills, creating conformity and obedience (Tomlinson, 1982; 1995b). Hence three of Illich's basic tenets of compulsory education, the distribution of people into occupational roles; the learning of dominant values; and the acquisition of socially approved skills and knowledge, are specifically relevant to the Functionalist view of ‘special education’.

### Conflict Theory

Illich (1970) criticises the ‘hidden curriculum’ in mainstream schooling, arguing that it has failed to deliver equality and space for the creative imagination. Illich (1970: 15) asserts that the hidden curriculum: “... adds prejudice and guilt to the discrimination which a society practices against some of its members and compounds the privilege of others with a new title to condescend to the majority.” Thus Illich advocates deschooling and the abolition of formal education as an analogous process, favouring a more egalitarian and lifelong informal learning processes (Illich, 1970).

In the Conflict theory perspective, Tomlinson (1982; 1995b) considers the 'special education' structure in post-industrial Britain to be determined and constrained by political and economic factors that shape many disabled children's lives. Depending on vested interests and spheres of competence, experts analyse, explain, theorise and judge children's capabilities based on social, rather than educational criteria (Tomlinson, 1995b). As "paid servants of the state" (Tomlinson, 1995a: 5), teachers manage these schools as formal businesses, and as agents of power they legitimise structures of control, domination and inequality (Barton & Armstrong, 2001).

Tomlinson (1995a) refers to 'special education' schools as dysfunctional organisations based on nineteenth century factories, characterised by continuity, discipline, rationality, reliability, legitimacy of authority, and regulated tasks and rules. Citing Mintzberg (1979), and Skrtic (1995), Tomlinson (1995a: 3) likens these school structures to "professional bureaucracies". With professional autonomy, these bureaucracies often undertake tasks that are too complex to be rationalised and too uncertain to be formalised.

The learning of dominant values as one of Illich's basic tenets of compulsory education is particularly appropriate to the Conflict theory perspective of 'special education'. Through the reproduction of social, cultural and economic positions, professionals use 'special education' to exercise their power, and influence policies regarding disabled children by segregating them (Tomlinson, 1982), leading to the discussion of Social control theory next.

### Social Control Theory

Marxist theorists like Bowles and Gintis (1976) discuss schooling generally, in relation to industrial capitalism, stating that education reflects the wider world, where conformity and disobedience result in rewards and punishments respectively. This theory stresses the inequalities practiced in education, which continue into the labour market (Tomlinson, 1995b), limiting people's abilities by enforced conformity: "How working-class kids get working-class jobs" (Willis, 1977, cited in Giddens, 1997: 418).

The Social Control theory attributes the growth of the 'special education' system to the generalised interest in controlling potentially disruptive social problems, such as uneducable or troublesome children (Barnes & Mercer, 2003; Skrtic, 1995). Throughout the history of British formal education, children with biological and cultural minority backgrounds have been constituted as different or even inferior and have been controlled and allocated services by a team of social and healthcare professionals (Graham, 2009; Pijl *et al.*, 1999). Tomlinson (1982) notes that these mechanisms have been used to reproduce and protect middle-class values, promoting social order by enforcement of compliance and stigmatisation, using persuasion or even coercion. In this way, the dominant relations of power and contemporary cultural norms seem to be indeed maintained and privileged (Graham, 2009). Thus the expansion of 'special education' can be attributed to the "rational action" of those who control and regulate education, to meet the needs of a "postindustrial, technologically" based society (Tomlinson, 1995a: 126).

This theory corresponds with Bowles and Gintis's (1976) perception of schooling as related to industrial capitalism. According to the Social Control theory, 'special education' enforces conformity to authority, creating and reinforcing inequalities. Illich's theory (1970) on the learning of dominant values, and the acquisition of socially approved skills and knowledge as means of control in mainstream schools, by reinforcing societal prejudice against some of its members, can also be applied to this theory of 'special education'.

However, it has been argued that generally, 'special education' does little to provide children with any value system that would result in long-term self-confidence (Hirst & Baldwin, 1994). As a result, disabled adults who had a history of 'special' schooling are often confined to a specific lifestyle, to "significant living without work" (Warnock, 1978: 202). Barnes (1990) contends that 'special education' does not provide children with skills, and the education received often results in their attendance at day-centres.

Conclusively, 'special education' has had a long history of providing a lack of effective and adequate services that are culturally responsive and respectful

(McCray & García, 2002). Medicalised discourses, generally adopted in these schools, focus on disabled children's deficits, and attempt to correct or normalise them (Ainscow, 1999; Fulcher, 1995; Rieser, 2006). Additionally, 'special education' provides little chance for receiving further qualifications, which would tend to increase children's entry to HE, a decent employment, and forming relationships (Rieser, 2006). For these reasons, amongst others (e.g. narrow curriculum, and separating very young children from their communities), the 'special education' system has been heavily criticised (Armstrong and Barton, 1999; Barnes, 1990; Barton, 2004; Morris, 1997; Rieser, 2006). In the struggle for inclusion, many disabled people's organisations have called for the abolition of all 'segregated' institutions (Allan, 1999; Barnes, 2003; Oliver, 2000a). Next, alternative models of education for disabled children/students, namely 'integration' and 'inclusion' will be discussed; the application of these in relation to disabled domestic and disabled international students in HE will then be explored.

### *'Integration' and 'Inclusion'*

Following the publication of the *Warnock Report (1978)*, there was a shift from 'special education' towards two very different views of integration, known as "old" integration (now referred as "integration"), and "new" integration (now termed "inclusion") (Oliver, 1992b: 25). 'Integration', as understood by Oliver (1992b), suggests that schools should establish 'special needs' departments and provide both internal and external support services to accommodate disabled children (Dessent, 1987).

Subsequently, the 1981, 1993 and 1996 *Education Acts* (HMSO, 1981; 1993; 1996) were introduced, and the legislation allowed for integration at the parents' discretion. The Education Authorities offered 'integrated' education only if the disabled child's needs were not severe and could have been appropriately met; if an uneconomic use of resources was not necessary; and where this would not have interfered with the efficient education of other children in the mainstream classes (Rieser, 2006). Consequently, the 1981 *Education Act* saw numerous attempts to place an increasing number of disabled children in mainstream schools or units attached to mainstream schools, so that social interaction with

their peers was maintained (Lindsay, 2003). Yet, Rieser (2006) argues that at most mainstream schools, the staff had little or no training and experience of successfully integrating more significantly impaired children. Oliver (1992b; 2000a) believes that mainstream schools were dominated by 'special education' ideology, merely tolerating disabled children. There appeared to be little point in assimilating disabled students into schools, which, whilst striving to accommodate all, "have not addressed the 'deep culture of exclusion' that pervades their societies" (Slee, 1997: 412).

Tomlinson (1995a) believes that the situation will remain the same until mainstream schools alter their goals, functions and organisation, evolving into completely inclusive institutions. An alternative model to 'integration' is said to be the development of schools which are able to meet the needs of all children (Mason & Rieser, 1994).

In the current capitalist economical and social structure, and the traditional educational approaches that still prevail, this vision seems to be idealistic. By implication, using such measures as increasing the general diversity of students may prove not to be effective (Felder, 1993), but reinforce existing inequalities (Ballard, 1999; Barton, 1997; Lindsay, 2003; Reynolds, 1995).

Oliver (1992b) proposes another, less radical approach. He suggests that organisational changes and methods of curriculum delivery need to be connected with the process of struggle, and that inclusion can only be achieved through attitudinal changes and a properly resourced vision of the aims. The new paradigm of 'integration' as 'inclusion' is underpinned by a completely different philosophy to 'special' or even the old 'integrated' education (Rieser, 2006; 2008). This approach adopts the social model understanding of disability in challenging the constructed notion of normality, by removing barriers and meeting students' needs (Oliver, 1992b).

In making these demands, Oliver (1992b) contends that the provision of a legal framework must be supported with moral fervour and genuine political commitment to strengthen its influence. Thus, the identification and removal of

ignorance, fear, prejudice, competition, selection and therefore exclusion are central to an inclusive society, providing the non-disabled world with an alternative and positive perception of disability (Barton, 2003; Farrell, 2001; Sharma *et al.*, 2008; Ware, 1999). Ultimately, the student voice as a stimulus for effective training and resources remains critical for this transformation process to take place (Ainscow, 2005; Ainscow *et al.*, 1999; Rieser & Mason 1990).

By highlighting: "... schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions'." (UNESCO, 1994: 6), the Salamanca Statement has been significant in enhancing the prospects for 'inclusive' education throughout the world (Farrell, 2001). Lindsay (2003), and Norwich (2010) assert that in the British context, the previous Labour Government claimed to promote the policy of 'inclusion' through its *Green Paper* (DfEE, 1997), *Special Educational Needs Action Programme* (DfEE, 1998), and also the *National Curriculum Inclusion Statement* (DfES, 2000).

These were succeeded by a number of initiatives, the most recent piece of legislation, being the *Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA)* (2001) as the first entry of disability in education into statute books, which has emphasised 'inclusion' in greater measures in post-16 education. The provision of this act affected teaching, learning and assessment of disabled students in HE (Fuller *et al.*, 2004b). Having said this, as shown throughout the current study, the manifestations of 'inclusive' education in practice in the current Western formal education context are not without problems. As with other non-traditional students, differences in disabled students' expectations and needs often exist and most HEIs are unable to identify and meet these specific needs (Haque, 2001). Relative inequalities with regards to social background (Davies, 1999), and disability (Barnes, 2007c) seem to have changed very little. Ultimately, the exclusionary HE context is about pursuit of knowledge, where "selection by ability inevitably means exclusion on presumptions of inability or disability." (Barnes, 2007c: 2). Next, I shall explore disabled domestic students' experiences within this HE context.



## **2.5 Disabled Domestic Students**

Many of the issues raised about 'integrated education' are, arguably, reflected and heightened in HE. Yet, the possible inclusive practices, discussed in the preceding section, based on the social interpretation of disability, can also be extended to HEIs through the effective application of *SENDA* (2001), and other guidelines and policies, discussed in Chapter Four. This section will address the challenges imposed by two conflicting interpretations of 'disability' in HE, and the difficulties that disabled domestic students may face.

Post-1992 institutions were former polytechnics accorded university status after the Reform of HE under the terms of the *Further and Higher Education Act (FHEA)* 1992 (HMSO, 1992a). These 'new' universities often already had learning support services in place for disabled students, and had a better record of attracting under-represented groups in HE (Maton, 2005; Riddell *et al.*, 2005). Conversely, 'red-brick' pre-1992 institutions have had to establish facilities and services to meet the expanding diverse student population's needs (*ibid*). They had often been unable to develop because of their inheritance of inaccessible buildings and multi-site facilities. In short, as will be discussed in Chapter Four (Section 4.1), in the British context, pre-1992 and post-1992 universities have different histories of governance, funding and degree-awarding powers (Knight, 2002; Maton, 2005; Riddell *et al.*, 2005).

Riddell (1998) argues that the expansion of HE in the 1960s following the *Robbins Report* (UK Department of Education and Science, 1963), and subsequent moves to widen access, largely ignored and excluded disabled students. This group's under-representation within HE has only recently been recognised (Hurst, 1993) as problematic. Yet, the failure to educate disabled people has resulted in many disabled individuals not attaining the rewards and experiences of an academic life and, subsequently lacking the fulfilment and empowerment gained from the relevant qualifications (Fuller *et al.*, 2004b).

Although due to recent policies, discussed in Chapter Four (Section 4.2), access for disabled students to HE has been widened over past decades

(Viney, 2006), disabled students' voices remain unheard (Fuller *et al.*, 2004b; Riddell, 1998; Riddell *et al.*, 2005). Additionally, many barriers to their full participation exist (Fuller *et al.*, 2004b; Holloway, 2001; Shevlin *et al.*, 2004). Similar to their non-disabled counterparts, disabled students may be as concerned about issues that affect all students —workload, money, having a social life and housing; yet for some, additional disabling barriers may pose further challenges that are difficult to overcome.

In social model terms, the barriers met by disabled students are structural in nature, but as shall be discussed below, have been perceived by most HEIs in individualistic medical terms. Therefore, the solutions proposed are often inadequate and supported by medical and personal tragedy discourses, focusing on individual deficit and the negative consequences of impairment (Riddell, 1998). Attempts are focused on changing the individual, and meeting needs, reflecting “care, concern and compensation” model (Beauchamp-Pryor, 2007: i), rather than implementing structural changes (Borland & James, 1999). This medicalised approach in HE policy is also discussed by Leicester and Lovell (1994) in their research into equal opportunity policy and practices in HE.

Beauchamp-Pryor (2004), and Brown and Simpson (2004) point to the lack of clarity in the way ‘disability’ is defined and how disabled students are consequently treated in HE. These authors suggest that HE is more inclined to adopt the individual medical definition of disability highlighted in the *Disability Discrimination Act (DDA)* (discussed in Chapter One – Section 1.1). It can therefore be argued that the actual implementation of most HEIs’ policies indicate a more ‘integrated’ approach, still grounded in the individual medical interpretation of students’ perceived ability “deficiencies” (Simpson, 1996: 22).

Indeed, the issue of accuracy in measuring impairments through the UCAS categories (UCAS, 2010) has shifted the emphasis away from the social interpretation of disability and created another hindrance for disabled students (Brown & Simpson, 2004; Hurst, 1996). In categorising ‘disability’, UCAS has mostly used the ICDH interpretation of disability, which is based on ideas of individual deficit rather than social barriers, promoting the individual medical

definition of impairment/disability highlighted in the *DDA* (1995). As Riddell (1998) argued, even 20 years after the *Warnock Report* (1978), categories of impairment still have not been subjected to appropriate critical scrutiny.

Consequently, in disclosing their impairments formally on the UCAS form, or even informally to a university in order to receive support, students may fear being labelled, treated differently or even rejected from their choice of course and university (Cottrell, 1996). Students are, therefore likely to make a series of judgements as to whether the benefits gained from disclosing an impairment will be outweighed by the disadvantages of doing so (Riddell, 1998). Although the label of 'disability' in HE may confer certain benefits, such as access to various support services, it may also undermine the possibility of inclusion in certain areas and courses (e.g. archaeology and health and physical education) (Beauchamp-Pryor, 2004; Borland and James, 1999; Ulley *et al.*, 2007). Thus, the irrelevant nature of these categories to educational and social needs, and the real or perceived threat of rejection can indeed make students unwilling to disclose, taking the responsibility of their impairments on themselves and going without support (Baron *et al.*, 1996; Hall & Tinklin, 1998).

Having said this, Fuller *et al.* (2004b), in their study, give examples of the university staff not making accommodations for students' disability-related needs, where this failure to be flexible or understanding could be the result of not knowing about the impairment; they also reveal cases, where staff had been unhelpful despite their awareness of the disabled students' presence. This suggests that students usually enter university unsure of the provision of, and funding for, the support they may need (Cottrell, 1996; Komesaroff, 2005; Viney, 2006).

Beauchamp-Pryor (2004) found that even when promised to be supported, students felt that the help did not always materialise. Students had to be continually proactive in ensuring issues were resolved, during which time, they may have missed lectures and deadlines and been forced to request extensions. In most institutions, disabled students' academic hurdles are seen as objective and manageable. Disability barriers, on the other hand, may be

perceived as subjective and their successful negotiation at the discretion of staff— who make the final decisions regarding appropriate solutions and support (Borland & James, 1999). There is also a danger of a conflict with other students (especially those with undiagnosed impairments), who can claim unfair treatment if they feel certain students receive undue or unfair amounts of support (Brown *et al.*, 1997).

Several studies, discussed in this section, identify difficulties that disabled domestic students experience, pre and post admission stage, during their studies in British HE. In the later chapters, these studies will be revisited and compared with the current research participants' experiences. At the point of transition into HE, the divulgence of accessible and responsive Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) is essential for widening participation (Hayton & Paczuska, 2002; Paczuska, 2002). Having said this, in Baron *et al.*'s study (1996) information in prospectuses was reported to be often inaccurate, and academic staff's accounts indicated that none of the institutions had general guidance information available in formats such as Braille, audiotope or large print.

Holloway (2001), and Shevlin *et al.* (2004) have also criticised barriers such as informational and physical access for disabled students in HE. Baron *et al.* (1996) found that none of the HEIs researched were entirely physically accessible to disabled students and most were generally inaccessible. Partial or complete lack of access to sites was also given as the most common barrier in Fuller *et al.*'s study (2004b).

In another account, in research conducted both before and after the introduction of Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) to cover disabled domestic students' equipment, non-medical helpers, general costs and sometimes transport, the inadequacy of governmental financial support available to disabled students was criticised (Stone *et al.*, 1998; Tozer, 2006). Most disabled part-time, as well as international students, (Soorenian, 2008a; 2008b; 2008c; 2009) often face financial barriers and need to rely on charitable trusts such as the Snowdon Scheme for funding their disability-related support costs (Snowdon,

2008). This specific fund has been running since 1981, providing grants of up to £2,500 to students with physical and sensory impairments who are studying in UK Further Education (FE) or HE or training towards employment, to help them fund their disability support service costs (Snowdon, 2008).

Growing in popularity, one such essential support service for disabled students is The PA scheme, which is organised and managed by HEIs to enable students to have more inclusive university experience (Earle, 1999). Prior to the inception of this scheme, disabled students had three options: the use of Community Service Volunteers (CSVs), studying at a local institution, or through distance learning, otherwise their university choices were extremely restricted (Earle, 1999). Yet, the appropriateness of the PA scheme in facilitating independence has been criticised (Parker, 1999).

Additionally, some areas of teaching, curriculum delivery and assessment procedures can also act as significant barriers for disabled students' full participation in HE (Chard & Couch, 1998). Baron *et al.*'s study (1996) shows that in the lecture context, little material was available in alternative format to printed material, whilst the volume of reading was high. Giving all students the same photocopied handouts - to be read on the spot, using the noisy Overhead Projectors (OHP), using certain coloured chalks, moving around whilst speaking, and relying on subtle innuendo were all disabling examples cited by disabled social-work students in Baron *et al.*'s research (1996). Consequently, these and similar practices exclude disabled students through the assumption of 'normality' (Lee, 2011).

In Fuller *et al.*'s study (2004b), students experienced lack of cooperation from some lecturers. These included an unwillingness to allow their lecture to be tape-recorded, lecturers having unrealistic expectations about the amount of new reading that students could reasonably manage during a taught session, or failing to provide user-friendly handouts. Hall and Tinklin (1998) document how students were forced to put pressure on staff, so that they made some modest adaptations, including using radio microphones in order to support hearing through induction loop systems.

The examination process has also been considered as a barrier in relation to students' impairment-related needs. The HE tradition of privileging written work positions students with visual impairments and dyslexia at a disadvantage (Baron *et al.*, 1996; McCarthy & Hurst, 2001). The main barriers for students with visual impairments undertaking assessments are said to be the availability of accessible exam materials (McCarthy & Hurst, 2001). Deadlines for written work, "enforced in the name of equity", pressure some disabled students, particularly those with physical impairments, to submit work before the adequate amount of material is assimilated (Baron *et al.*, 1996: 372).

The extensive additional examination arrangements are said to work towards more equitable assessment systems for disabled students across HEIs (Konur, 2002). Waterfield *et al.*'s research (2006) recommends continuous assessment, multiple choice, oral examination, coursework and portfolio as alternative formats to the formal examinations. More importantly, their study advocates the philosophy of 'universal design' within assessment in HE. They champion a broad-spectrum inclusive solution to assessment, which benefits everyone, with a notable reduction in requests for 'special' provision. Inclusive exam processes are particularly significant, when considering that participants in Riddell's research (1998) perceived the separate rooms and seating during examinations to perpetuate the 'special' status ascribed to disabled students, reinforcing notions of 'normality'.

The library visits known as an essential element of successful completion of a course, have been reported as challenging. Identified barriers include short loan-time, library staff's unhelpfulness, as well as poor quality computer clusters with some areas lacking the accessible software or other enabling equipment (Fuller *et al.*, 2004b). Students with dyslexia and visual impairments were unable to access print material, which made browsing and finding books problematic (Fuller *et al.*, 2004b). Due to the particular constellation of some old learning centres, some parts can remain inaccessible to students with mobility impairments through lack of lifts or very heavy doors (Fuller *et al.*, 2004b).

Moreover, Murray-Seegert (1993: 36) recognises that for disabled students, “the [non-academic] things outside school” take on a greater complexity as these significantly affect and determine students’ interactions with others in the educational institution concerned. One non-academic area that presented a key barrier to disabled students’ participation in university life was inaccessible accommodation. Farrar (2004), for example, found that students used vital energy fighting for accessible accommodation, which limited their concentration and time for study.

In the area of social activities, King (undated) discusses non-disabled students’ attitudes towards their disabled peers, and how these can potentially impinge on developing personal and social relationships, specifically with the opposite sex. King (undated) contends that whereas integration into the academic sphere may be dealt with, participating in social activities is more complicated resulting from inaccessibility of social venues, disability-related support needs as well as interpersonal issues.

Whilst anticipatory duties place responsibility on HEIs to understand and remove barriers, it appears that disabled students are often expected to go to extreme lengths and display skills beyond those required by their non-disabled peers, to merely access the same opportunities and achieve the same entitlements as non-disabled students. Preece (1995) considers disabled students’ underachievement to be the consequence of disabling practices, reflecting attitudinal and access issues. Explaining attitudinal barriers, McCarthy and Hurst (2001: 4), assert: “Tutors might never have encountered people who are blind or deaf and so they lack personal knowledge and personal experience”. Beauchamp-Pryor’s study (2004) shows that disabled students often felt their own views were perceived as unimportant or ignored and a low priority was given to their presence. What is more, such “negative constructions of disability” (Gilson & Dymond, 2011: unpagged) can result in internalised oppression, where some disabled students may feel inferior, and use various techniques to compensate in the face of disadvantages they experience.

Studies reviewed here have highlighted barriers related to the HEIs' dominant ideological value system underpinning disability practice and policy. It could therefore be argued that the way 'disability' is defined in medical terms can shape the opinions of those influential in the "planning and implementation of policy and provision" (Beauchamp-Pryor, 2007: 36), resulting in more 'integrated' rather than 'inclusive' practices.

Many of the barriers to disabled students' education, such as limited accessible information, finance and accessible pedagogy are shared with international students, who are also affected by the inflexible framework of the HE sector. The commonality of disabled and international students' experiences points to the "superiority of the normative order" (Lee, 2011: unpagged), which promotes 'sameness' and excludes 'otherness'. Yet, of those discussed above, only a few (e.g. Brown & Simpson, 2004; Riddell *et al.*, 2005; Stone *et al.*, 1998) refer to disabled international students' experiences. Interestingly, all three studies are concerned with disabled international students' financial needs and the limited funding available to them. However, Preece (1995) refers to the experiences of domestic disabled students with an ethnic minority background without acknowledging disabled international students. Similarly, with no specific reference to disabled international students' experiences, Riddell *et al.* (2004) focus on the way disabled students from different backgrounds such as social class, impairments, gender and ethnicity negotiate and prioritise their multiple, yet fluid identities in the HE setting. Despite this lack of research, the Higher Education Funding Council of England (HEFCE) (2003b) claims to appreciate that issues of race equality are not clear-cut - individuals may have multiple identities - and that discrimination can affect people in different ways. In the next section, I shall discuss disabled international students' experiences in British HE.

## **2.6 Disabled International Students**

In the literature reviewed thus far there is no explicit mention of the problems caused by a non-inclusive disabling HE for disabled international students. Indeed, the Joint Report (2000: 46) states that when recruiting international



students, universities are interested in the “best” and most able students, particularly for postgraduate work, presumably excluding disabled students. Yet, as shown in this chapter, non-disabled international students encounter numerous barriers during their university experience. If the inflexible setting of the British universities is unable to accommodate this group of students, questions arise about disabled international students’ presence in British HE and as to how the latter group’s additional needs are met.

It has been argued that on an international level, the majority of universities have taken the responsibility of developing a globally diverse student population, through equitable educational access paths (McLean *et al.*, 2003). This is facilitated by increasing exchange programmes and the process of internationalising teaching for ‘all’ students, in principle, including, disabled students. McLean *et al.* (2003) argue that as global education opportunities widen, the failure to address disabled students’ needs can be considered discriminatory, as it restricts their opportunities to succeed. In the view of such rhetoric, here I shall review the limited research on disabled international students’ experiences.

As discussed in this chapter, most international students experience a degree of culture shock: how people live and work in Britain may challenge previous perceptions and expectations. However, for disabled international students, this is often exaggerated by additional factors such as the level and type of disability support required and provided, and physical and informational accessibility, which can significantly affect a successful study period (McLean *et al.*, 2003).

McLean *et al.* (2003) contend that cultural factors affect disabled students’ opportunities to participate in ‘inclusive’ HE in the following three ways. Firstly, culture and ethnicity shapes family attitudes and social relations to ‘disability’ and disabled people. Secondly, cultural differences in social structures lead to differential access to social power and participation in community. Thirdly, opportunities opened to disabled people vary significantly across cultures, presenting differing attitudes to disability influenced by different elements including the educational, legislative and social settings. Preliminary medical

tests in some countries, for example, can effectively exclude disabled students from accessing and participating in university (McLean *et al.*, 2003). Hence Farrar (2004) considers non-disclosure of impairments in the university setting being affected by cultural and historical barriers.

For students, who require high levels of support in their home country, additional financial and personal burdens associated with this support can make the transition particularly difficult (McLean *et al.*, 2003). As UKCOSA and Skill: the National Bureau for Students with Disabilities (2005) suggest, these students may initially feel they must cope on their own without assistance, therefore choosing not to disclose the details of their impairments. It should be emphasised that there are no specific grants available for disabled international students' support needs, who are only allowed to remain in the UK on the condition that they make no recourse to public funds, including such welfare benefits as DSA (Soorenian, 2008c). Additionally, the identification of international students' impairments and related support needs may be problematic, due to language and cultural barriers. Cottrell (1996), for example, discusses the problems related to diagnosing and testing non-native English speakers for dyslexia.

Hence this group of students, not only experience the cultural differences afforded by living and learning in a new country, but often experience cultural variation in understanding 'disability' (Conway & McDow, 2010). Hurst (1998), for example, documents that students from the USA may be frustrated and disappointed by some of the difficulties they are confronted with, barriers that may not exist in their country following the various anti-discrimination legislations.

As a result of these additional dimensions, in an 'integrated' HE system, where disabled international students' differences are merely tolerated, their difficulties may be compounded and new obstacles created. Disabled international students may be conceptualised as doubly or multiply oppressed because the two sets of structural oppression - disablism (Barnes, 1991; Oliver, 1996), and racism (Allen, 1998; Modood, 1993; 1998) can interact, potentially creating new

barriers specific to this group only. That said, the disentanglement of these different sets of oppression may not always be possible. Yet, as demonstrated here, research into disabled international students is limited, despite this group experiencing qualitatively and quantitatively different complex sets of barriers to their non-disabled and domestic counterparts.

## **2.7 Summary**

This chapter highlighted the two definitions of 'disability'. Their relevance to 'special', 'integrated' and 'inclusive' educational systems in schools was discussed.

Within Western cultures, HE is an institutional system at the height of educational achievements, nurturing particular skills and abilities. Universities are concerned with giving financially able students opportunities to develop physically and intellectually, yet as demonstrated in this chapter, can be considered as exclusionary to students with biological and cultural minority backgrounds. It was recognised that disabled domestic and non-disabled international students, as two separate groups, encounter numerous barriers during their studies in British HE. Their shared difficulties were in the areas of information, access and admission; pedagogy; social life and general support services, and attitudinal barriers.

It can therefore be argued that disabled international students, in addition to experiencing the same barriers encountered by both groups of non-disabled international and disabled domestic students, may also face a unique set of concerns specifically relevant to their own group. As discussed throughout the current research, this can potentially result in their possible further marginalisation, multiplying their difficulties and exaggerating the sense of social isolation they experience. Conversely, the creation of a fully 'inclusive' and flexible learning environment can benefit all students, including those disabled students who, for a variety of reasons, do not disclose their impairments, as well as international and disabled international students.

As I have shown here universities are by definition elitist for the majority of students, how these are manifested is the subject of the current thesis. In the next chapter, I discuss the research design and methodology utilised in conducting this study. Having described the data generation strategies, the thesis will then begin to present the research findings, starting with an analysis of the disability legislation and policy in Chapter Four, moving to the analysis of participants' experiences in chapters Five, Six, Seven and Eight.

# Chapter Three: Methodology and Data Generation Strategies

In previous chapters I have discussed literature related to, and research conducted on, disabled, international, and disabled international students' difficulties in British Higher Education (HE), ranging from support costs to language/cultural barriers. This chapter addresses my theoretical assumptions and key methodological considerations for researching disabled international students' experiences. I begin the chapter by discussing some of the existing recommendations for undertaking disability research, with reference to the 'emancipatory' research paradigm. This is followed by a more detailed examination of the key strategies employed for the research and the methods selected. I then discuss the transcription and analysis of data, as well as my reflexive accounts, the ethical considerations and the dissemination of findings.

## 3.1 Background

Much traditional disability research has been non-inclusive and oppressive to research participants in terms of design, implementation, analysis and dissemination (Barnes, 1992b; Beazley *et al.*, 1997; Mercer, 2002; Oliver, 1992a). The conventional research paradigm has perpetuated the dominant idea of disability as an individual problem, and has done little to improve the position of disabled people, sometimes even compounding their difficulties (Oliver, 1990b). Conversely, the social understanding of disability has been associated with what is now referred to as the 'emancipatory' research paradigm, although exactly what this involves has been loosely defined and widely debated (Barnes, 2001; Barnes & Mercer, 1997; Beazley *et al.*, 1997; Mercer, 2002; Oliver, 1992a; Shakespeare, 1996; Stone & Priestley, 1996; Vernon, 1997; Zarb, 1992).

Stone and Priestley (1996) highlight the following principles of 'emancipatory' research: using the social model epistemology; surrendering objectivity; personalising the political and politicising the personal; participants' gain and

empowerment; using appropriate research methods; and reversing the social relations of research production. Oliver (1992a) identifies, building trust, respect and reciprocity as other principles of 'emancipatory' research. Below, I will examine my research in relation to each of these categories to ascertain the extent to which the study adhered to the 'emancipatory' research principles.

The current investigation was inspired by 'emancipatory' research principles, in the methods used and the adoption of the social model of disability epistemology. Blaikie (2000) defines 'epistemology' as the ways one would gain knowledge about the social reality under investigation. In Chapter Two (Section 2.1), I discussed two main competing Western epistemologies of disability: individual medical, and social. Central to the aspiration of doing 'emancipatory' research is replacing the individual medical model of disability epistemology, used for decades in positivist research, with the social model (French & Swain, 2004; Oliver, 1992a; Stone & Priestley, 1996). Hence, the epistemology of this research, "ways of knowing" (Boyatzis, 1998: 5) about disabled international students' reality, recognises the significance of external barriers in their educational life, couched firmly within an environmental and cultural context. Acknowledging this, the disabling consequences (Borland & James, 1999; Hurst, 2007; Riddell *et al.*, 2004), such as information and physical inaccessibility in university settings, increasingly organised around the majority of non-disabled students' needs, are highlighted and discussed. Having said this, like Stone and Priestley (1996), throughout this research, I endeavoured to not act as an advocate for the social model of disability, and to not impose my theoretical position on participants who did not recognise the social model as part of their understanding of disablement.

However, my personal experience of the barriers facing disabled international students in English HE has informed and enriched this research. I therefore consider the ontology— claims or assumptions that are made about the nature of the social reality under investigation (Blaikie, 2000) — from my experience as a disabled international student. Ultimately, the current research is as much about understanding my own experience as that of the participants. Studying the topic was made all the more necessary by the continued exclusion of

disabled international students' experiences from both academic agendas of disability and education. Due to my passionate political and ethical interest in the topic, surrendering to objectivity was not possible, and throughout this chapter, I acknowledge the subjectivity that has constructed my experience as a disabled researcher.

Additionally, the recognition of differences in the personal experiences of impairment and disablement (French, 1993), and the primacy of such experiences for research (Morris, 1991) has been identified as the most contentious principle of the social model framework (Stone & Priestley, 1996). In fact, Sheldon (2001: 63) suggests that the epistemology of disability research must:

... be rooted in disabled people's experiences of oppression, should assume that disabled people are the experts about their own experiences, and that data can be generated by allowing them to describe these experiences.

Similarly, Morris (1991) asserts that disability research should include the subjective realities of individual disabled people, and that the denial of such experiences can collude in our own oppression. Acknowledging personal experience can therefore lead to a social model understanding of disability, fuelling opposition and commitment to challenge oppression (French & Swain, 2004; Noddings & Witherell, 1991; Priestley, 1998).

By carefully selecting interview questions, I have sought to recognise participants' different experiences of impairment, and respected their related narratives, yet mainly focused on the significance of the environment in which those experiences were shaped. I acknowledged that impairments restrict participants' university life, whilst also focussing on physical barriers and social reactions that work towards marginalising them in the HEIs concerned. As Barnes (2001: 13) advocates, I avoided "simply [re-emphasising], albeit possibly unintentionally, the personal tragedy theory of disability". Depending on the nature of students' impairments, I concentrated on specific questions about the barriers that appeared to be more relevant to each student's individual

experiences. Therefore, this research is fundamentally concerned with the identification and removal of disabling physical, financial and social barriers in HE, and challenging institutional disablism.

In adhering to one other principle of the 'emancipatory' research framework—facilitating participants' gain and empowerment through partaking in the research process—the current investigation aims to be of modest value to disabled international students. By listening to their accounts, the key objective was to provide insight that might be used in developing new policies on access to funding and support, to improve disabled international students' educational experiences. Because of the very limited research on disabled international students, when I was recruiting the sample, the participants' responses to the idea of investigating our experiences were encouraging. Furthermore, wherever possible, I tried to reciprocate participants' contributions, for example, by providing information about funding opportunities (for Peter and Tanji), and compatible screen-reading software (for Maria), at their request (to protect participants' identities, fictitious names have been used throughout the thesis, See Section 3.5). In my initial communication I also explained that the research process hoped to be "an open dialogue" (Deepak, 2002: 18), and I was happy to share my own educational experiences.

That said, as much as I tried to be transparent about my own experiences, I am aware that the researcher expects her/his participants to reveal far more about themselves than the researcher her/himself (Ribbens, 1990). Nevertheless, through the focus group and semi-structured interviews, participants are said to be given the opportunity to reflect upon their own positions and view their situation as a product of social forces, attempting to empower the powerless (Finch, 1986). On a personal level, as expressed in their interviews, some participants like Nathan and Patrick, found the interviews an enjoyable learning experience, and were grateful for such an opportunity.



Whilst this research is grounded in literature about disabled students' difficulties in HE, there is a clear lack of extensive studies on disabled international students' experiences. As their accounts and voices are the most important evidence in this work, I chose qualitative data generation strategies, using flexible and exploratory methods, to provide a detailed insight into this under-researched area. In doing so, I also tried to adhere to one other principle of the 'emancipatory' paradigm - using appropriate research methods for both research and participants, in understanding participants' experiences of marginalisation (Abberley, 1992; Barnes, 1992b).

Although Stone and Priestley (1996) do not consider a simple causal relation between the use of qualitative data and the removal of disabling barriers, researchers with a social model understanding of disability (Beauchamp-Pryor, 2007; Hemingway, 2008; Sheldon, 2001; Woodin, 2006), generally, use qualitative research methods. Blaikie (2000) suggests that the strength of qualitative methods is the flexibility of the procedures without reduction to a set of prescriptive principles. The use of creative and explorative qualitative methods can assist a deeper understanding of the topic under investigation, with less restriction by the research aims (Eisner, 1991; Fink, 2000; Morris, 1992; Patton, 1990; Whitemore *et al.*, 2001). Additionally, according to Finch, (1986) qualitative methods are specifically appropriate for small-scale studies like this one. Thus the freedom granted by the qualitative data generation strategies was helpful in exploring specific issues about participants' university life in more depth. For these reasons, qualitative methods were deemed to be more appropriate for the current investigation.

Qualitative research is in favour of participants being collaboratively involved in the research process, exercising control over their accounts, and influencing the research direction (Shakespeare, 1996). As Stone and Priestley (1996) identify, 'emancipatory' research aims to reverse the research hierarchy, so that those being researched become the experts and the researcher merely a facilitator. The transformation of control from the researcher to the researched is critical, demanding that researchers learn to put their knowledge and skills at the disposal of the researched for them to use in whatever way they choose (Oliver,

1992a). Building rapport, and utilising focus groups and semi-structured interviews to generate data were attempts towards reaching this goal.

However, although the initial focus group saw participants consulted on what aspects of our experience should be researched, as Sheldon (2001) argues this does not constitute a complete reversal of research hierarchies. In the current investigation, decisions about controlling and running the project, or indeed how, when and with whom to proceed, were not made by participants. As with Vernon's study (1997), this research is for my Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) thesis, and 'the social relations of research production' remained unchanged, although I tried to act as a conduit, disseminating the research findings and thereby influencing local and national policy. Like Stalker (1998), due to my personal experiences and the demands (nature/scale) of PhD work, I was unable to directly involve participants at every stage. As much as I endeavoured to make the research process accountable and transparent, with the suitable resources, skills and time, ultimately it was I who solely initiated the process as well as deciding on how to undertake the field-study and the analysis.

Through these attempts (although I remained sympathetic to the 'emancipatory' research framework), I found that adopting an entirely 'emancipatory' approach, in view of these principles, would have been impossible. Therefore, the current study cannot claim to be a piece of 'emancipatory' or even 'participatory' research as described by Zarb (1992). Having discussed the theoretical aspects of this research, I shall now explain my adopted research methods.

### **3.2 Data Generation Strategies**

There were three overlapping and complementary stages involved in this research process (each phase informing the subsequent one) to explore the various dimensions of the "intellectual puzzle" (Mason, 1996: 87) concerned. These were:

- Discovering what is known already, both in literature and policy, about this research area (secondary data analysis); and selecting locations and participants for the field-study;
- A focus group with a small number of participants to identify key themes for the interviews;
- Qualitative semi-structured interviews with 30 disabled international students to explore perceptions and to record any key barriers through experiential information.

These methods were applied to inform the following research questions:

Q1 “What is known at present about disabled international students’ status in English HE and the kind of services they receive?”

Q2 “What are disabled international participants’ opinions and experiences on the services they receive, particularly those concerning their disability-related support needs?”

Q3 “What are disabled international participants’ opinions and experiences on encountering difficulties in HE?”

### **Stage One**

I began this stage by selecting institutions to conduct the document analysis. Their policies and documents were subsequently analysed. Then on a national level, participants for the field-study were recruited.

#### *Selecting Locations*

During the first year of the current research, I compiled a preliminary study of the equal opportunity policy documents and various literatures of five English universities. For reasons of convenience, the five locations consisted of my previous and current universities, two local Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), and one other university with which I was familiar and visited frequently to meet friends who studied there. The experimental nature of this preliminary study allowed investigation and trial of the policy analysis, and proved to be useful. I learnt, for example, that the university-specific literature on support services yielded useful information and therefore has been included in the current study extensively.

The initial intention was to recruit the student sample from the same universities as I was conducting the document analysis, in order to compare participants’

accounts with the evidence provided by the universities. For this reason, due to their proximity, the three Yorkshire based universities in the preliminary study were selected for the main field-study. In addition, I added one other local university to the sample. Thus, two 'old' and two 'new' Yorkshire universities were identified as example universities for the policy/document analysis stage of the field-study (See Appendix Two). Although it was hoped that studying old/new universities may highlight the differences outlined in Chapter Two (Section 2.5) concerning the level of support for disabled students (Ainley *et al.*, 2002), the current study did not identify any significant differences in the literature on services provided by these two sets of universities.

In November 2006, I contacted Disability Service Units (DSUs) and the International Offices in the selected universities, requesting literature on services for disabled and international students. I was directed to the relevant websites; which I examined extensively. As discussed in Chapter Four, I have assessed the case-studied universities' written evidence about services offered, as examples, relating to the barriers outlined in Chapter Two, and also those reflected in participants' accounts.

To collect national policy documents and legislation regarding disabled and international students, and widening participation policies generally, I contacted (Appendix Three 1), and requested information from a number of influential national educational organisations. These included: the Department for Education and Skills (DfES); Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE); National Union of Students (NUS); Skill: The National Bureau for Students with Disabilities; the Snowdon Trust; and UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA). I also sought relevant information from several other organisations, including: the British Council (BC) (International Students' Awards Team); Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) (Policy Officer); the Higher Education Statistical Agency (HESA) (Information Provision Officer); and the National Postgraduate Committee (NPC) (executive committee). Additionally, statistical data was obtained from ECU and HESA.

Initially, I planned to also invite two officials from a number of these organisations to interview at Stage Three of this research. However, at the end of the first year, I decided solely to reflect and voice students' accounts. Thus I decided to forego interviewing staff. This was felt especially so as I thought staff might be restricted by their institutional guidelines and unable to talk about the limitations of their services freely. The study therefore, presents only the disabled international students' vantage point and not that of the staff.

### *Document Analysis*

According to Mason (1996: 73), documents “verify or contextualize or clarify personal recollections and other forms of data.” The initial stage of this research aimed to address Question 1, on existing knowledge about disabled, international and most importantly disabled international students' experiences. Therefore, this stage involved a thematic exploration of the current available literature on previous research and policy. When conducting the literature review, I intended to analyse barriers identified in previous research, whilst the national organisations and universities' document and policy analysis helped to highlight national and local services that claimed to address these and other emergent barriers. The investigation was based on four key areas: (1) information, access and funding; (2) disability services; (3) learning and teaching; and (4) non-disability support services such as accommodation and social life. The main national policy and legislation were taken from within the last two decades. The period was specifically chosen because of the particular implications of these policies on the HE sector for the current study.

However, there are problematic issues associated with using secondary data. First, the depth and scope of document analysis as a data generation strategy is unclear. Second, the methods employed in previous research may themselves have implications for reliability and validity of results (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998), beside other errors and biases e.g. in the construction of the sample. Third, the previous researcher's motivations, conceptual frameworks and definition of certain terms may be different from those of the subsequent researchers and the way they intend to use the data (May, 2001 - although the last two criticisms relate particularly to using statistics as secondary data,

arguably they can be equally applicable to document analysis). It is, therefore important to remain aware of the implications of using secondary data, especially when referring to the interpretations of certain terms like 'disability'.

Due to complicated processes of identifying the value and usefulness of such records, Mason (1996) advises use of document analysis alongside a range of other data generation strategies. To address this, I used a focus group and semi-structured interviews to complement the findings in this first stage. Having said this, Stage One acted as a scoping exercise: clarifying topics from the literature review, refining the foundation and highlighting the four key areas, mentioned above, for the focus group (Appendix Four). Next, participants were selected for the focus group (and interviews) (addressing Q2 and Q3), assisting in finding out whether a similar type of support identified in the first stage was provided in their HEIs.

#### *Recruiting the Student Sample*

Due to the nature of this research, and lack of resources, representative/random sampling procedures were not feasible. I relied on a combination of networking and chain referrals in various locations; using a snowballing method to recruit the participants, whereby various techniques for requesting informants were developed. These included contacting the four selected universities in November 2006 (Appendix Three 2), and advertising the research on their message boards and websites (Appendix Three 3). Due to lack of responses from students in the selected four universities, I subsequently advertised my research, requesting participants in various email bulletins related to disability and student life generally. Additionally, I approached a number of friends, who had studied in England but at the time of the current study were residing in their respective countries. Participants then often directed other potential informants to this research.

For this reason, I relied on students who volunteered to participate from 11 different universities. Three of these volunteers, self defined as 'international student', but in fact had a 'domestic student' status with regards to funding. Thus I have excluded their funding-related experiences in Chapter Five (Section

5.5) as these are not comparable with the rest of international participants' experiences. Without identifying with English culture, Elaine was born in the United Kingdom (UK) (not England), and Mary and Nathan were 'domestic students' as they had resided in the UK for over 10 years. Two of the participants were studying in non-English UK universities; whilst in this thesis generally I have commented on students' experiences in relation to English universities (in line with the broader context of the study), wherever I have discussed Kate and Mlinda's accounts I have ensured to provide indication that these are British universities.

Additionally, as with the research methods adopted, this sampling procedure had its limitations. One such shortcoming is the potentially biased sample obtained from social networking, which can influence the generalisation of findings on both a theoretical and empirical level (Burton, 2000b; Pole & Lampard, 2002). This form of sampling may also involve participants who are empathetic to the researcher's own theoretical framework (Pole & Lampard, 2002). Using this sampling method meant that it was not possible to exercise full control over the participants' differing characteristics, including their year of study or educational backgrounds. For this reason, recruiting the initially planned sample with even numbers of men and women, with a set number of impairments and nationalities, proved to be problematic and last minute changes to the sample plan were inevitable. The final sample represented a cross-section of informants with different impairments, age, gender, nationality and level of study (See Table One).

Table One - Table of Participants

Name	Gender	Nationality	Age	Impairment	Course	Mode of study	University
Alice	F	Western (North American)	24	Visual Impairment (Congenital)	PhD Arts	Full-time	Old University
Angela	F.	Western (European)	27	Dyslexia (Congenital)	PhD Social Science	Full-time	New University
Anna	F	Western (European)	29	Myangic Encephalomyelitis (ME) (Acquired)	PhD Social Science	Full-time	Old University
Carol	F	Western (North American)	26	Visual impairment (Congenital)	PhD Social Science	Full-time	Old University
Domenic	M	Western (European)	26	Physical impairments (wheelchair-user) (Congenital)	PhD Social Science Exchange Student	Full-time	Old University
Ed	M	Non-Western (Asian)	27	Visual impairment (Congenital)	Master of Arts (MA) Social Science	Full-time	Old University
Elaine	F	Western (European)	24	Physical impairments (sometimes wheelchair-user) (Congenital)	MA Social Science	Full-time	Old University



Gloria	F	Non-Western (African)	37	Mobility impairment (Congenital)	MA Social Science	Full-time	Old University
Irin	F	Non-Western (Far Eastern)	28	Physical impairment (Congenital)	MA Social Science	Full-time	New University
Iris	F	Non-Western (Far Eastern)	26	Mental health system survivor (Acquired)	MA Social Science	Full-time	Old University
Janet	F	Western (North American)	28	Dyslexia and depression (Congenital)	MA Social Science	Full-time	Old University
Joseph	M	Western (European)	25	Visual impairment (Acquired)	Bachelor of Arts (BA) & MA Social Science Exchange student	Full-time	Old University
Kate	F	Western (North American)	41	Mobility impairment (sometimes wheelchair-user) (Congenital)	PhD Social Science	Full-time	Old University
Linda	F	Western (North American)	30	Physical impairments (Congenital)	MA Social Science	Part-time	Old University
Margaret	F	Non-Western (Asian)	28	Mobility impairment (Congenital)	PhD Social Science Exchange Student	Full-time	Old University

Maria	F	Western (European)	32	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and dyslexia (Congenital)	Master of Science (MSc) Natural and Social Science	Full-time	Old University
Mary	F	Non-Western (African)	40+	Visual impairment (Congenital)	MSc Natural and Social Science	Full-time	Old University
Milinda	F	Non-Western (Far Eastern)	25	Hearing impairment (Congenital)	BA Social Science	Full-time	Old University
Nathan	M	Western (European)	40	Physical impairments (Congenital)	BA Social Science	Full-time	New University
Ned	M	Non-Western (Far Eastern)	32	Physical impairments (wheelchair-user) (Congenital)	MA Social Science	Full-time	Old University
Nicky	F	Non-Western (Far Eastern)	29	Physical impairment (back impairment, sometimes wheelchair- user) (Acquired)	MA Arts	Full-time	Old University
Nora	F	Western (European)	32	ADHD and Dyslexia (Congenital)	BA Humanities	Full-time	Old University
Norman	M	Western (European)	27	Hearing impairment	PhD Natural Science	Full-time	Old University

Olivia	F	Non-Western (Far Eastern)	29	(Congenital)	Physical impairment (Congenital)	MA Social Science	Full-time	Old University
Patrick	M	Western (European)	28.5	ADHD, dyslexia and depression (Congenital)	BA Arts	Full-time	Old University	
Peter	M	Non-Western (African)	38	Mobility impairment (Sometimes wheelchair-user) (Congenital)	PhD Social Science	Full-time	Old University	
Sova	F	Western (East European)	25	Visual impairment (Congenital)	MA Social Science	Full-time	Old University	
Tanji	F	Western (North American)	40	Visual impairment (Acquired)	MA Social Science	Part-time	Old University	
Tina	F	Non-Western (Asian)	35	Mobility impairment (wheelchair-user) (Acquired)	MA Social Science	Full-time	Old University	
Toney	M	Non-Western (Asian)	24	Visual impairment (Congenital)	Bachelor of Science (BSc) Natural Science	Full-time	Old University	

The student sample consisted of 30 students with a range of impairments (five with dyslexia, two with invisible, 13 with physical, and 10 with sensory impairments). Categorising impairments was difficult, particularly as some participants themselves were uncertain about these classifications. Participants were grouped according to the impairment they identified with most. Both women and men were recruited in order to assess the gender differences in experiencing disability (nine male and 21 female).

Evidence suggests that the experience and definition of 'disability' is contextual (Coleridge, 1993; Stone, 1999; Üstun *et al.*, 2003). Therefore, I included 11 students from Europe, six from North America (broadly referred to as Western in this study), and three from Africa, four from Asia, and six from the far-East (broadly referred to as Non-Western in this study). To anonymise participants from Canada and United States of America (USA), the general label 'North American' has been used when referring to the nationality of these students. Nine of the participants spoke English as their first language. According to the DfES definition (Ross *et al.*, 2010), all the participants were considered mature students. The sample consisted of three exchange students, seven research postgraduates, 15 taught postgraduates, and five undergraduates. Only two participants were registered as part-time students in their universities. Three of the participants studied in new universities, and 27 in old universities; two of whom were studying cross-disciplinary studies, six non-social-sciences (including two natural sciences), and 22 social sciences. Eleven students were interviewed at least two years after the completion of their courses; 11 in the first year of their stay, and eight at least two years into their stay in Britain. Due to small number of participants (three) attending new universities, it was not possible to compare participants' experiences based on the type (old/new) of university they attended. This was also the case with regards to undergraduate participants' (five) experiences and those of the two students who only studied natural sciences.

Upon their agreement to participate in the research, students were sent an email, containing information sheets, detailing my background and motivations for the study (similar to Appendix Three 3), and a consent form. The email also included information about the focus group and interviews (discussed next), explaining to participants what was expected from them.

## **Stage Two**

In the second stage, I conducted a focus group to generate topics for the semi-structured interviews.

### *Focus Group*

In general terms, focus groups are simply a research method that generates data through group interaction on a topic chosen by the researcher (Morgan, 1997). The two vantage points of focus groups are considered to be the relatively non-hierarchical and also the contextual nature of this data generation strategy (Sheldon, 2001). By fostering a collective will for social change, the focus group permits the researcher to study the individual in the social setting and not as an isolated "nomad" (Johnson, 1996: 522). More importantly, by using the focus group as a collective and participatory data generation technique in the second stage, attempts were made to fulfil the goal of 'emancipatory' research in creating an environment in which disabled people empowered themselves (Stone & Priestley, 1996).

These reasons shaped my decision to conduct a focus group with five students (one with a visual and four with physical impairments, for three of whom English was the first language) in April 2007. Although I planned to follow Morgan's (1997) recommendation to have an ideal group size of between six and 10, due to my lack of control in recruiting participants, achieving this number was not possible. The focus group lasted approximately 60 minutes in a location central to all the five

participants. Beforehand, I briefed the participants about the process; the option to cease participating at any stage was explained. Following this, the participants were encouraged to discuss and share their experiences of HE in a group setting. With participants' consent, the focus group was tape-recorded and subsequently transcribed for deriving themes for the interviews.

In the focus group, instead of asking for any personal information, I sensitively asked the participants to introduce themselves and mention a little about their educational experiences, letting them, in turn, voice their opinions on the subject. A focus group driven by the interests of the researcher, group norms, or dominant members, can be a source of weakness and partisanship (Johnson, 1996). To address the criticism concerning the domination of focus group by the researcher, I adopted Flick's (2002: 116) moderator model of "topical steering". I introduced new issues and helped develop certain topics. As Morgan (1997) suggests, participants were invited to consider a set of discussion topics that were only loosely phrased as questions. This helped to explore the topics further and allowed flexibility of responses (Frey & Fontana, 1993). When the discussion turned towards an emerging topic, I encouraged the group discussion with such comments as: "That's something I'm really interested in hearing more about. What do people think about this topic?"

When participants started the discussion, asking questions, exchanging anecdotes, and commenting on each other's accounts and viewpoints, I ensured each participant had an equal amount of time to contribute if she/he wished. At one point, I felt Nathan was dominating the discussion; I therefore tried to change the direction of conversation in order to include all participants. Prompting was inevitable, sometimes to keep the discussion going or, more often, to keep the conversation on the topics outlined in Appendix Four.

The focus group is said to provide an opportunity to assess the actors' tacit understandings, including the exchange and sharing of ideas and the degree of

consensus in the group (Gibbs, 1997; Johnson, 1996; Kitzinger, 1995; Morgan & Kreuger, 1993). Participants like Ned and Gloria, for example, confirmed one another's observations with regards to the informality of the lecturer-student relationship in their English universities. As Kitzinger (1995) suggests, the presence of less inhibited participants conversely encouraged and promoted the discussion of difficult topics, such as criticising the disability support they received from their universities. Elaine, for example, started a discussion by volunteering to talk about her experience of going through the first few weeks of term without any disability-support. Throughout this process, when participants were talking about their difficult experiences, I remained empathetic. In this instance, I responded to Elaine's comment by saying: "You're right, if anything the support is crucial at the start because that period is important and that's when the student requires assistance more."

Another key factor for using the focus group was the suitability of this method in analysing such interpersonal communication as humour, consensus, and dissent of people with different cultural backgrounds, and its strength in examining different kinds of group narrative (Kitzinger, 1995). In the focus group I conducted, Gloria and Ned shared their very similar experiences of academic cultural differences related to plagiarism. Ned, for example, confirmed what Gloria said: "Like she said, in my country ... even though we are saying plagiarism is unacceptable, I don't think it is as strict as it's here."

Due to focus groups' reliance on verbal interaction for data generation, Kitzinger (1994) suggests that group work can create barriers against people with communication impairments, asserting further that if group members each had different impairments, new difficulties can arise in communication. Because of the nature of the participants' impairments, I did not experience any of the difficulties highlighted by Kitzinger (1994). Yet, I was aware that not all five participants were equally comfortable speaking in the focus group. At times, as Sheldon (2001) experienced, eliciting some response from the quieter participants without creating

unnecessary anxiety for them was a problematic balance. Hence, the semi-structured interviews in Stage Three, for those who felt uneasy expressing their views in a group setting, proved to be beneficial.

The focus group stimulated conversations and helped the participants to reflect on their own experiences. The strength of this method in providing spontaneous and exploratory data made it an informative tool in assessing not only the students' interactions, but also in generating, validating and refining phases for semi-structured interviews. All five focus group participants were interviewed at Stage Three, discussed next. Once each of the 30 participants agreed to be interviewed they received a copy of the final interview schedule, in their preferred format, so that they were informed about the questions prior to the interviews.

### **Stage Three**

In the third stage of this research, I used face-to-face, email and phone semi-structured interviews as a data generation method. Following this, the interviews were transcribed and thematically analysed.

#### *Semi-structured Interviews*

In the final stage of this research, I used Barnes's (1992b) three-stage model of research and validation of data when carrying out interviews. The first stage of this model introduced the topic, the second was concerned with the interviews, and in the third stage participants were consulted about the interview transcripts.

Qualitative interviews generate data via an informal conversation between the interviewer and the interviewee, and generally as the conversation progresses the interviewee is given the opportunity to elaborate upon or change her/his position (Mason, 1996). In the current investigation, the practical and explorative data collection strategy of semi-structured interviews was preferred over structured or unstructured interviews. In structured interviews, the presence of fixed-choice



questions can “distort, constrain or impose violence” upon contributors’ statements (Barnes, 1990: 55). In contrast, the interviewer’s flexibility in incorporating, omitting and expanding different semi-structured interview questions is an advantage. Unlike an unstructured interview, where conversations can become broad and focusing on the interview topic may become difficult (Blaikie, 2000), the presence of semi-determined questions in a semi-structured interview assists the interviewer in ensuring a fluent, yet focused conversation. In the current research, semi-structured interviews allowed relevant issues to be explored in depth. Based on participants’ validated topics generated in the focus group, a draft interview schedule (Appendix Five) was outlined and used via face-to-face, email and phone interviews.

However, as Mason (1996) suggests, the lack of standardisation particularly in semi-structured interview questions cannot eradicate or control for inconsistent outcomes, pointing to the possible unreliability of this method. In attempting to ensure reliability, I conducted all the interviews over a period of 14 months, asking similar questions, with an aim to obtain similar responses from all 30 participants. Nevertheless, due to the informal and open-ended nature of the semi-structured interviews, and also the applicability of some questions to certain groups of students, not all 30 participants responded to every single question. Additionally, some students like Toney declined to comment on topics such as funding. He found the question to be intrusive to his financial circumstances. Therefore, the depth and breadth of responses varied considerably, and in responding to students’ experiences, I decided to omit or alter the questions accordingly. As a result, within this semi-standard framework, each interview took a different trajectory. Participants were given a chance to speak about issues that pertained to being a disabled international student, yet, as evident in chapters Five, Six, Seven and Eight, no issues related to gender were identified.

Face-to-face

On a practical level, in Stage Three, starting from April 2007, 12 face-to-face semi-structured interviews were carried out in participants' preferred locations, including: a room in the participants' respective departments, the researcher's office and accommodation, and even in a train station. The longest interview lasted two hours and 35 minutes and the shortest just over an hour. On one occasion, half way through one interview, I realised that the batteries in the tape-recorder had run out. The participant concerned very kindly offered to return the next day to repeat the interview, for which I was grateful.

Before the interviews, I asked permission to tape-record so that I was able to concentrate on listening and responding to the participants without being concerned about note-taking or memorising. Each interview began with introducing the research— as Barnes's (1992b) first stage— and explained how their information would be recorded, anonymised, used and stored. The extent of the data analysis (comparison of participants' responses) that was to be done was also discussed. As Miller and Bell (2002) suggest, the issue of consent was reiterated throughout the interviews and beyond.

In face-to-face interviews, sometimes due to participants' speech impairments, foreign accents, or background noise (in the train station), fully understanding their verbal communications was difficult. Wherever possible in these cases, I tried to summarise my understanding of the conversation to check its validity. In Ned's interview, for instance, I asked the following question about his response on the university 'disability' categories: "You feel that you are forced to pick a specific category, and you would like it to be more flexible, is this right?" It was, therefore, important to be aware of the ways in which the social, personal and contextual characteristics of both the researcher and informant could influence the data obtained (Hemingway, 2008).

Even though my own anxieties and emotions in the interviews may have inflected the outcome (a reference to Rubin & Rubin, 1995), throughout the field-study, I

avoided making assumptions about what participants were thinking or feeling, in order to neither distort nor constrain respondents' statements. As recommended by Mercer (2002), I generally gave encouraging responses, agreeing and empathising with participants (when talking about barriers experienced for example), where appropriate. Thus by listening to the participants, showing interest in their experiences and being sensitive, I tried to balance the unequal power relations between the interviewer and the interviewee noted by Oakley (1981), and Sheldon (2001).

In contrast with the email-interviews (discussed below), the face-to-face interviews involved a definite time restriction of one to three hours (as suggested by Barnes, 1992b). In this period, I aimed to complete the whole interview schedule (and any questions), indicating a sense of closure on the interview. The short time available led to a sense of urgency and a strong desire on my part to fully exhaust each topic.

Next, I shall evaluate email-interviews, commenting on the practicalities, as well as the advantages and disadvantages I gained when conducting online-interviews.

### Email-interviews

Email-interviews facilitate a flexible and "user-friendly research setting", which provides empowering means for participants to engage with the interview topic (Bowker & Tuffin, 2004: 234). Additionally, the application of this method: quick and easy access to world-wide samples, low administrative and travel costs, access to already transcribed data (devoid of the impact of transcription bias), and unobtrusiveness are several advantages outlined by Selwyn and Robson (1998).

Email-interview can also allow some participants to remain anonymous or develop a different identity/subjectivity at a physical distance. The potential for alternative subjectivities online may increase "democratisation of exchange", characterised by equality of opportunity and reciprocity, with a greater disclosure of personal information (Boshier, 1990, cited in Selwyn & Robson, 1998: unpagged).

For these reasons, where it was not possible to conduct face-to-face interviews, due to participants' impairments, time and location constraints, I arranged interviews via email. Fifteen interviews were carried out in this way. Beforehand, I familiarised myself with issues identified in the literature regarding general email-interview operating guidelines and specific knowledge. These conventions include: turn-taking, preliminary empathetic conversation, the technical skills needed to access/deliver information, resisting the urge to correct inappropriate language and postings that themselves invalidate or ignore an original request (Coomber, 1997). The interview schedule was sent as an attachment to be filled in, saved and returned. As participants needed to access the programme in which the interview document was created, Microsoft Word was used with the hope that most participants would be familiar with the programme and be able to access it.

Although a desired completion date was suggested, online data collection allowed participants to conveniently respond to questions at their own pace, time, and in a familiar location. This incorporated particular advantages for the participants, for example, in being able to participate irrespective of possible barriers to accessing a face-to-face interview setting. This was particularly the case for two students with hearing impairments, one student who was uncomfortable talking on the phone due to her communication impairment, and 12 others, who were living not only in different countries, but also in different continents at the time of the interviews.

I had to factor in a certain amount of uncertainty regarding the timing of responses as this was partly left to the participants' discretion. However, the lengthy nature of online-interviews, coupled with the time delay between sending questions and receiving feedback, meant that there was more time to deliberate over participants' reactions and to consider different possible interpretations and new questions.

Bowker and Tuffin (2004) claim that developing a rapport usually takes longer to achieve by online-interviews than in other forms of interview methods.

Nevertheless, in the online-interviews that I conducted for this research, I was able to form a professional, yet friendly relationship with the participants after the first few email contacts. Holge-Hazelton (2002), and Mann and Steward (2000) argue that this method can alleviate some of the interpersonal problems commonly associated with conventional interviewing techniques, such as discussing sensitive issues and challenging dominant ideology without fear of judgment. That said, participants appeared to talk as freely and openly about their difficulties in the other two types of interviews as they did across email.

Yet, the ambiguity surrounding those who actually responded to the email-interviews (Fielding & Thomas, 2001) has implications for validity, as does the uncertainty about the conditions and location the interview was conducted in, and any other details about the participants (Hewson *et al.*, 2003). Because eye contact establishes trust, conducting interviews online, where suspicion may exist, can disturb the maintenance of ethical principles in governing interactions (Bowker & Tuffin, 2004; Hewson *et al.*, 2003; Thomas & Purdon, 1994). I tried to overcome this difficulty by offering further discussion via email if participants felt it necessary. Only two participants used this opportunity to ask questions about the study for their personal interest. Furthermore, participating in online-interviews was heavily reliant on having access to the internet for all concerned.

There were instances when I misjudged participants' responses in relation to conversational 'turn-taking'. In the absence of any visual clues, on some occasions, for example, it was difficult to know whether a participant had finished her/his answer or whether there was opportunity to probe further, or indeed whether pursuing questions to extend the research topic would be deemed redundant by participants. At times, explaining questions further via email proved complicated and misunderstandings occurred. Tanji was asked whether the information and application forms received were accessible. Initially she answered: "Yes". In the light of her other responses, when I inquired about this

again, she responded: "The application forms were not available in large print so I answered that question wrong."

Some responses were very brief, without any explanation or interpretation. Mlinda, for example, used the statement "Very accessible, the staff are very friendly", when asked to comment on accessibility and staff's attitude in a number of support services, such as the International Office. In these instances, I asked the participants to expand on their comments.

Although this process kept the email-interviews interactive, it prolonged the interview duration by a few weeks. Indeed time-spans for email-interviews varied - some online-interviews carried on for weeks, months, and more than a 12-month period on two occasions. Sometimes, this resulted in a rather agonising process when creating and sending questions via email, particularly when asking questions of a sensitive or personal nature (such as funding issues). Yet, all 15 participants preferred this type of interview, and I refrained from sending them reminders, lest I cause them annoyance. Regardless of these issues, the approach proved successful for gathering data.

#### Phone-interviews

Having examined the email-interviews as an alternative data generation strategy to face-to-face interviews, I shall now briefly discuss phone-interviews as another method of gathering data. This method is said to be beneficial for generating reasonably quick, cheap data over large geographical distances (Thomas & Purdon, 1994).

Whilst phone-interviews were not a suitable method for some participants (with hearing impairments or communication difficulties), three England-based participants, who found typing for long periods difficult, preferred to be interviewed by telephone instead of email. Indeed, Maria and Toney started their interviews via email, but typing became strenuous for them. I decided to continue these

interviews by telephone. The interviews were pre-arranged and any questions about the research were answered. Although an average of half an hour has been prescribed for retaining attention in phone-interviews (Burton, 2000a), all three phone-interviews remained consistently interactive and lasted over two hours. Yet, phone-interviews have been criticised for lacking naturalness and openness of response (Shuy, 2003). However, as with Burton (2000a), I felt that the phone conversation was a common everyday activity for the participants concerned, and was a valuable data generation method.

Subsequently all 15 non-email-interviews were fully transcribed to reflect the interviews as accurately as possible. This process was extremely difficult and time-consuming that differed significantly from the 15 email-interviews which did not require this stage of transcription.

Having accommodated students' various needs through different types of interviews, in Barnes's (1992b) third stage, I sent a copy of their interview transcripts to all participants but one. Mary's contact details changed during the time I was transcribing her two hour long interview. I consulted my supervisors and explained that I felt it would be unfair to disregard Mary's interview, especially so as she had strong opinions on the disadvantages she had experienced in her university life, which she was keen to voice on a larger scale. Mary's account has been included in this thesis. I am determined to try to find Mary through mutual friends and share the findings of this study with her when I have more time to give it my full attention. Having said this, one of my Personal Assistants (PAs) assisted me in transcribing Mary's lengthy interview, which in hindsight protected transcription bias on my part.

I asked the rest of the participants to read the transcripts through and to make any additions, alterations, or exclusions as they saw fit. Overall, seven participants made noticeable changes to their interview transcripts. A further meeting was offered if participants felt necessary to discuss the transcripts. Upon receiving her

interview transcript, one participant wished to withdraw her contribution. After an email conversation, she decided against this, and suggested some more changes to her transcripts in order to protect her identity further. Therefore, sending the interview transcripts back to the participants, in order to obtain their comments was helpful to verify the responses and check interpretative validity, giving the participants the chance to rethink their statements. Bowker and Tuffin (2004: 8) argue that this exercise empowers participants to make any changes and plays a significant role in “securing participants’ ownership of their data.” Next, the way these transcripts were analysed will be discussed.

### *Transcript Content Analysis*

The transcripts were read and coded several times over. I employed manual coding rather than using advanced qualitative data analysis software. I was aware that the latter could have increased the speed of handling, searching and presenting data and related materials (Flick, 2002; Marshall, 2002). Yet, as Sheldon (2001) argues the use-value of such a system did not merit the time and effort needed to use it effectively, particularly due to the fact it was not user-friendly and compatible with my screen-reading software. In addition, I was unable to afford to employ someone to assist me in transcribing the full interviews or indeed to use the relevant analysis software.

Boyatzis (1998: 161) defines a ‘theme’ as “a pattern in the information that at minimum describes and organises the possible observations and at maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon”. Initially, I deployed thematic analysis to code the qualitative interview data. Furthermore, categorising the content of transcripts has the capacity to reduce and simplify large amounts of data. Flick (2002) states that the uniform schema of categories as codes facilitates the comparison of the different subjective viewpoints and themes to which it is applied.

The coding schema took the form of lists of themes and categories. In the early stages, themes were generated from reading and reflecting on theory, prior



research findings, and codes used in previous research, as suggested by Crichton and Childs (2005). Subsequently, it was through the data analysis process, the sifting and sorting of data into themes with similar characteristics, that the frames and codes were established. The themes were modified throughout the data collection and analysis process on the basis of disabled people's 'Seven Needs' discussed in Chapter Two (Section 2.1). Therefore, the final themes used to write chapters Five, Six, Seven and Eight are based on this dynamic analysis, supported by the interview data, the literature review, and my experiences of HE. Whereas, Chapter Five, for example, deals with 'Information' and 'Access' as two of disabled people's 'Seven Needs', Chapter Six is concerned with 'Technical aids' and the 'PA scheme', and Chapter Eight with 'Accommodation', 'Transport' and 'Peer support'. I defined and decided on what constituted a particular code and how to exclude certain information. The process involved recognising and recording an important part of the text, and encoding it prior to a process of interpretation. The explicit codes captured the qualitative richness of the given phenomenon (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006), such as accessibility or inaccessibility of different services.

The codes were used precisely and consistently throughout each interview, and the number of participants belonging to each code counted. However, some sections of transcripts appeared to fit more than one code, or even into two opposing ones. Whilst I generally created a new category of 'mixed' for this purpose, determining an accurate number of participants in each category was not always without problems. Additional themes developed as the study moved beyond the main research questions, creating sub-themes such as impairment, age, gender, cultural and social background-related elements according to the barriers each participant experienced both prior to admission to university and during university life. Analysis of the data then proceeded by combining and comparing the main themes from all the interviews. I analysed and explained both commonality and difference in the experience of disablement in HE. When summing up the findings that were sorted by theme-coding, sometimes, I had to refer back to the context in which a particular piece of information had emerged in

the transcript. As Mason (1994) argues this assured that context was considered at all times.

Although, with the exception of Mary's interview, I was the only scribe, the impact that the transcription process had on the content must be acknowledged. An additional challenge in this research was managing the quantity of data collected. As the data collection process drew its strength from accumulating raw data and making sense without a set of preconceived hypotheses, the analysis process was labour intensive and time-consuming. The scale and complexity of this process often resulted in emotions of frustration, hope and despair. Thus at various stages of the research, my PAs supported me in handling the interview data. It could be argued that having someone to select transcripts could annul principles of confidentiality, and invalidate the data analysis. To address the first issue, I asked my PAs to sign a confidentiality agreement (Appendix Six). I also closely supervised my PAs in the handling of the data, so that consistency of the analysis could be retained.

Validity is concerned with whether research explains or measures what the researcher had set out to explicate and illuminate (Cano, 2006). To ensure validity, the appropriateness of the research methods were discussed extensively with my supervisors. To prevent invention or misinterpretation of participants' accounts, I consulted Linda, Maria and Toney, with whom I am still frequently in contact, about a number of excerpts of my interpretation of their interviews, asking them to corroborate or disapprove. Additionally, every step of the research was recorded and justifications made with regards to the validity of methods and data interpretations used, attempting to ensure that the investigation researched its initial aims.

Reliability addresses how accurately and consistently the research methods and techniques produce data (Cano, 2006; Hoepfl, 1997; Punch, 2005). The analysis was undertaken over 18 months, using the same thematic framework for all 30

interviews. Thematic analysis helped to keep a check on consistency of judgment, reliability and scoring, and scaling to validate the themes and codes. Audiotape recording also helped reduce variation in observations by creating a consistent source of recording the information (Boyatzis, 1998).

It must be noted that empirical generalisation (Mason, 1996) from such a small-scale study is impractical, especially so as the participants were atypical having a wide range of impairments, nationalities and backgrounds. I have, however, attempted to ensure theoretical generalisation; trying to demonstrate accuracy of method and validity of both method and interpretation where possible with the view to have something meaningful to conclude. Following Mason's (1996) advice, throughout this thesis, I have tried to provide clear grounds for making each claim in relation to participants' experiences.

In the current study, the content analysis as an ongoing process was considered on two levels: interpretive and reflexive (Mason, 1996). The method of analysis chosen for this study was a hybrid approach of qualitative methods of thematic analysis incorporating both the data-driven inductive approach of Boyatzis (1998), and the retroductive approach (Blaikie, 2000). The aim of the latter is to explain observed regularities through the identification of mechanisms - disabling barriers, which produce them. Thus the difficulties experienced by disabled international students in accessing HE were considered as evidence of their respective HEIs' disabling structures. An inductive approach - searching for patterns based on the facts, or information (Boyatzis, 1998), such as the participants' accounts of HE, can conversely proceed to draw conclusions, offer insight and enhance understanding, albeit in the context of this research only. Having described the details of the operation, it seems appropriate to discuss my influence as a 'non-detached' disabled researcher in this study.

### **3.3 Reflexive Accounts**

Throughout the study, I was aware of my proximity to the participants, and made every effort to avoid bias in the interpretation of the data. As an insider myself, I often felt sadness and anger at the terrible accounts the participants, like Maria (discussed in Chapter Five – Section 5.5) told about discrimination they had experienced in their HEIs. Similar to Vernon (1997), at times, I was careful to not conflate participants' experiences with those of my own. As with Mauthner and Doucet (1998)—referring to themselves in their own work as 'insiders'—I found that there were many similarities as well as differences between my experiences and those of the participants. Hence, I have no claim to objectivity.

For Zarb (1992), the ideology of objectivity works towards limiting scope for developing alternative models of research to positivist approaches (including the 'emancipatory' paradigm). Ashmore and Reed (2000), Coffey *et al.* (1996), and Hunt (1981) state the researcher cannot be detached and impartial. What is more, Becker (1966) acknowledges that the researcher always has to look at the issue under investigation from someone's viewpoint, taking sides, and it is likely that her/his perspective will be greatly affected by participants' positions and relevant arguments. My personal and political commitments necessitated a degree of partisanship with those interviewed. Instead of merely monitoring the participants' experiences, albeit sympathetically, my commitment was driven by the social analysis of disablement in HE, and my engagement in the possible processes of disabled international students' emancipation.

Mauthner and Doucet (1998) point out that data analysis methods are not neutral techniques, they reflect, and are imbued with, theoretical, epistemological and ontological assumptions including subjectivities, and understandings of how knowledge is constructed and produced. The way that I selected and devised my research topic, sample, methods, and the interpretations based on my own values, point to my subjectivity, and reflexive interdependency, which may have disturbed the validation of the research outcome.

Although it has been argued that disabled researchers of disability may obtain more detailed and honest responses than non-disabled researchers (Faulkner & Thomas, 2002; Nicholls, 2001), the way the findings were interpreted and presented might be accused of favouring false conclusions, because of my sympathy with the students. As discussed in the last section, I tried to validate the interview data, and counter the possible criticism, about pressurising participants to recount what I was already sympathetic with (a point also raised by Hammersley and Gomm, 1997; and Oppenheim, 1966). In his interview, Nathan largely praised the university support. To give a balanced picture of the participants' experiences I have not made any attempts to exclude either Nathan's or other participants' positive accounts. Next, I will discuss the implications of my disabled identity/status on the research process.

### **3.4 The Paradox of Undertaking Disability Research**

As a disabled researcher, working towards improving fellow disabled international students' experiences, I found crossing the thresholds of the inflexible and demanding research process itself inaccessible and disabling. In the initial stages of the study, compiling a literature review from a mass of inaccessible published materials provided barriers for the undertaking of this thesis/study. As Oliver and Barnes (1997) contend, converting the materials to alternative (electronic) formats was a time-consuming, costly process. As a result, at times, I limited the research exclusively to already-transcribed materials, which no doubt affected the quality of this study. Additionally, a lack of technical aids and equipment meant that the research was delayed by approximately six months. The necessary communication undertaken to receive specialised software resulted in long periods away from the main focus of my research. During the policy analysis stage, I had difficulty reading some websites with my current screen-reading software, which meant my access to policy documents was restricted to the accessible websites. Recruiting suitable PAs with relevant expertise to assist me at this level of education proved to be very difficult. It was only in my third year that I was able to

work with PAs who I felt had the necessary skills for this post. Even at this point, due to PAs' own commitments, maintaining continuity and consistency in their support was not always possible. In addition, when carrying out the interviews, particularly the phone-interviews, my speech impairment made communication with participants problematic at times.

The additional disability-related costs of field-study included the expenses of having a PA present for support with organising the focus group and assisting the participants throughout. Purchasing and upgrading appropriate screen-reading software on a frequent basis became another financial barrier for my undertaking of this research.

In addition to these barriers, limited time and energy levels were two key factors that I was constantly battling against, especially when transcribing the interviews single-handedly. I was therefore prevented from conducting more extensive interviews, and obtaining additional relevant data. Indeed as Oliver and Barnes (1997) further assert, for some disabled people everyday tasks take longer to complete. The continual fatigue and resulting depression that I experienced often hindered the concentration and self-motivation essential to a research student who is reliant primarily on independent study. At times, I strived beyond my physical resources; consequently I found that in the long-term my health deteriorated and created additional barriers to effective study. This led to unforeseen difficulties associated with periods of sick leave, although a doctor's note permitted some extensions, for example, "money is a different matter" (Sheldon, 2001: 87). I had to continually fundraise for the time I spent completing the PhD, inclusive of all the periods of extension, a process, which I found extremely long-winded and strenuous. Consequently, I was unable to fulfil some obligations to participants (sending them a report of the findings), and thereby hindering the emancipatory nature of the research. Additionally, any research on HE policy can quickly become outdated and irrelevant, and deemed non-generalisable.

As Farrar (2004) argues much of the research students' learning is informal, and is acquired in shared offices and research social events. Due to not being able to use the inaccessible computer in the shared office, I was denied the opportunity of working amongst colleagues. This arguably resulted in an impeded informal and incidental learning process as well as exaggerating the isolation associated with the lone research work. Due to these restrictions, I do not think I had the opportunity to be as creative in conducting this research as I could have been; instead I primarily concentrated on confronting everyday disabling barriers. Seeing non-disabled colleagues starting and completing their PhDs one after another had a negative impact on my self-confidence. As Sheldon (2001) argues this situation must be challenged in order to encourage more disabled people to take up positions in the research arena. Having discussed the difficulties I faced as a disabled researcher, the next section addresses the ethical issues that I experienced during the current research.

### **3.5 Ethical issues**

An important ethical feature in this study included assurances of anonymity and confidentiality. In conforming to the requirements of the British Sociological Association's (BSA) 'Statement of Ethical Practice' (2002), I made every effort to inform participants about the anonymity of the information they provided, and the possibility of declining the use of tape-recorders. Pseudonyms were deployed to ensure participants' anonymity during the write-up. In the interest of anonymity, participants were not given nationalistic-specific names. Two participants requested their real names to be used. Although I respected their wishes, I have not identified who these participants are throughout the thesis. Any identifying information and names that appeared in the interviews was either removed or substantially altered.

That said, the participants, who studied in the same universities may have known each other previously. Indeed the staff in the universities concerned may have been familiar with the participants. Therefore, despite the intention to provide

confidentiality by adopting pseudonyms, the identities of universities, organisations and individuals may be recognisable through quotes and information in the thesis and subsequent academic output. Hence altering participants' names alone may have been insufficient in protecting confidentiality.

In the focus group, invasion of confidentiality in sharing experiences and tape-recording was particularly critical, despite its flexible nature. To address this issue, as Barnes (1990) suggests, the focus group participants were asked to refrain from discussing our conversation with others in the interests of validity and confidentiality. Sensitive discussions about disability-related cultural, racial and religious barriers, such as the type of support, or the gender of the PA needed, was also difficult. Throughout the focus group (and also the interviews), I remained sensitive to participants' disability-related concerns. For example, I initiated one such question by stating:

I'm not sure if you receive any disability-related support. If you do, would you tell me about your related experiences?

Furthermore, as Barnes (1990) states, discussion of the knowledge individuals had of the severity of their respective impairments was problematic, particularly if the condition was caused by a progressively degenerative disease. Irin was asked to comment on the nature of her impairment. She responded: "I don't know, I'm not quite sure." Following this vague response, I reformulated the questions to deliberately avoid mentioning her impairment.

Not all the participants were aware of the social model and therefore did not perceive their experience as defined by the social understanding of disability. I was unsure to what extent I should take on the role of an educator. I attempted not to impose my own value judgements and interpretation of the world on participants' realities. Due to the participants' language and cultural differences of 'disability', in the interviews, sometimes I found myself moderating what disability-language I used or adopting alternative terminologies. The decision was made to



accommodate the differences and to allow participants to follow the questions according to their own cultural/linguistic interpretations of 'disability'. When Nathan, for example, was asked why he considered himself a disabled person, he responded:

No, Armineh, I would not. I consider myself as a 'this-abled' person, **T H I S A B L E D!** Because I think that as soon as society makes that distinction, life will become a hell of a lot easier for people with so called 'disability'.

Consequently, throughout Nathan's interview, I had to recognise and respect his rationale for choosing this term. He felt 'this-abled' was a more positive term that highlighted his "abilities". Interviewing Irin was more difficult as throughout her interview, Irin repeatedly used such statements as "I try to be, I have to be a normal person ...". Without challenging her, I remained vigilant and sensitive to Irin's responses.

On another account, during the field-study, a student contacted me, expressing his willingness to be interviewed. Two months later, I had an email from his mother, informing me of his death; news I found terribly saddening. Whilst she indicated her willingness to be interviewed regarding her son's experiences, for ethical reasons and upon my supervisors' instructions, I decided against interviewing her, although I was grateful for such a generous offer.

My prior familiarity with some of the participants had its strengths and weaknesses. Whilst being friends with some of the participants helped me to relate to them better, this familiarity was often at risk of being taken for granted. Participants may have assumed that I was aware of certain facts about their experiences, thereby not revealing some significant information explicitly. This was evident in Olivia's interview, where she referred to a shared experience without commenting on the details, leaving it to my memory and discretion to fill in the gaps. Another incident of this kind occurred when Peter was talking about one of his PAs, with whom I had been friends for a several years. At that point, I felt it necessary to reassure Peter

about our confidentiality agreement. The potential established relationships between the interviewer and interviewee is therefore important to acknowledge when considering the quality of interview data obtained (Ackroyd & Hughes, 1992).

Challenges occur for all studies. When using the transcripts in the thesis, the extent that I was expected to amend participants' English in their quotations was problematic at times. Although in some cases, I tried to add and take out some words to present their statements more clearly, I was careful not to change the meaning of their accounts.

### *Dissemination*

Exposing how mechanisms of oppression work is no guarantee of bringing about change; as Vernon (1997) argues, changing attitudes is a slow and laborious task and merely taking part in research will seldom result in immediate collective action. With the exception of studies that offer evidence for a social problem and for analysis that alters people's consciousness, Shakespeare (1996) states that action, instead of research, will lead to change. Hence dissemination is considered to be a significant aspect of ensuring that disability research positively impacts on disabled people's lives (Roberts, 1994). Upon participants' agreement, the findings of this research have been disseminated widely. I have presented the participants' experiences in a number of national and international conferences, seminars and workshops, as well as writing articles/chapters in different publications. I have also set up two virtual groups for disabled international students (Disabled International Students in UK Universities, 2007a; 2007b), where they can share and benefit from each other's experiences. To date, these two websites have been used for information and advice in related areas. As I will show, the outcomes of the research have been used in influencing national and local policy (See chapter Four – Section 4.6).

The future dissemination and utilisation of the research has to be considered in reference to the potential benefactors, including policy makers, governmental

organisations and individual HEIs as well as disabled, international, and disabled international students and their families. In addition to the thesis, the intention is to disseminate the results further in a variety of ways, including the writing of articles and individual summary reports for specific groups. These will be presented in different formats (e.g. Braille, large print, and electronically), ensuring their accessibility (Hemingway, 2008).

### **3.6 Summary**

This chapter has explored the methodological considerations and data generation strategies throughout the study. Although the research process cannot be considered 'emancipatory', I attempted to ensure that principles were adhered to, for example, the adoption of the social model of disability, and focusing on participants' voices and experiences as the main source of data. I was fully committed to assist disabled international students in their struggle for full equality and inclusion in the HE sector.

This research process involved several adjustments and compromises specifically in relation to the sampling methods utilised. Those approaches and methods adopted seemed to be as appropriate as was possible. Although the findings cannot claim to have a wider applicability, the issues raised may be relevant to other disabled students and HEIs. The application of these methods will be contextualised throughout the rest of the thesis. The next chapter will examine the extent to which the national and local policy and practice documents have addressed similar barriers to those outlined in Chapter Two (Sections 2.3, 2.5 and 2.6). The following chapters will focus on and interpret disabled international students' firsthand experiences of university life.

## Chapter Four: Higher Education, Policies and Practice

This chapter is concerned with national and local policy in Higher Education (HE) and disability since the early 1990s. As discussed in Chapter Two (Sections 2.2 and 2.4), widening participation in HE has been high on recent governments' policy agendas (Archer *et al.*, 2003; Beauchamp-Pryor, 2007; HEFCE, 2009a; 2010a). I will start this chapter by discussing such widening participation legislations as the influential *Further and Higher Education Act (FHEA)* (1992) (HMSO, 1992a), which made new general provisions for further education (FE) and HE. I shall then explore a number of policy frameworks and initiatives implemented to promote and safe-guard disabled students' equal access and participation in HE. Subsequently, various national developments for disabled, for international and for disabled international students in the last two decades in relation to (1) information, access and funding; (2) disability services; (3) learning and teaching; and (4) non-disability support services such as accommodation and social life will be examined. These four broad categories and related policy documents will provide the main focus for the current thesis and offer policy background for the following four chapters.

Where appropriate, I will use the four case-studied universities' policy and practice documents as examples of claimed provision for disabled, international and in some cases disabled international students. Studying such documents for this particular research is paramount in order to give a policy overview of how the institutions, in principle, intend to address similar inequalities to those discussed in Chapter Two with regards to disabled, international and disabled international students. The chapter will demonstrate that rhetoric is comprehensive and positive, but as I will illustrate in the following chapters, may not always correlate with lived reality.

#### **4.1 General National Policies for Widening Access to Higher Education**

Participation in HE is considered to be linked to improved life chances in general (Fulton & Ellwood, 1989; Granville, 1995; Haezewindt, 2004). Possession of a university degree can be a passport to various professions, increasing an individual's earning power as well as job satisfaction (Paczuska, 2002). Yet, prior to an expansion period in the 1980s and 1990s, HE was primarily considered to be a natural path for a minority elite of mainly white male fulltime students aged 18-21, from middle or upper social-classes, who entered university with good A-level grades (McNair, 1993).

In the subsequent years, a variety of strategies have been introduced by succeeding governments in an effort to create greater equality through education, so that individuals could strive for change, develop and succeed (Fuller, 2002; McNair, 1993; Martin, 2004). Widening participation as activities targeting under-represented groups (Carey, 2002), introduced a radical change in the HE sector, from "an elite system for the privileged few, to a mass system providing greater access for many" (Beauchamp-Pryor, 2007: 113). The Labour Government had aimed to increase 50 per cent of young people's participation in HE before the age of 30 by the end of 2010 (Hodgson & Spours, 2002). Through the introduction of such initiatives as the National Scholarship Programme (NSP) (HEFCE, 2011), the current Coalition Government's reforms on HE funding expect universities, particularly those charging over £6,000 "to attract more students from less affluent backgrounds" (HMG, 2011: 5). The university sector itself has been actively recruiting and encouraging more of the population to become students, in contrast to the situation a century ago when many struggled to access HE (Farwell, 2002; Hayton & Paczuska, 2002). However, as the *FHEA* of 1992 (HMSO, 1992a) proved, despite disadvantaged students from non-conventional backgrounds being encouraged to enter HE, disabled students are still recognised as an under-represented group in this potentially empowering process (Fuller *et al.*, 2004a; Hurst, 1996; Riddell *et al.*, 2005).

### *The Further and Higher Education Act (FHEA) (1992)*

Here I will discuss the *FHEA* of 1992, an act, which aimed to promote levels of participation in HE by under-represented groups. The influential *White Paper Education and Training for the 21st Century* (HMSO, 1991) recognised that decades of failure to invest in post-16 education and training had left Britain with low skills, wages and productivity, and with one of the least educated and trained workforces in the industrialised world (Gleeson, 1993). As such, the *White Paper* (HMSO, 1991), followed by the *FHEA* (HMSO, 1992a), represented the first concerted attempt since the *Crowther report* (1959) (expanding the sixth-form education - McGrath, 2006) to provide a new legislative framework for post-16 education and training.

The *FHEA* (HMSO, 1992a) was instrumental in establishing the Higher Education Funding Council in England (HEFCE), Higher Education Funding Council in Wales (HEFCW), and Scottish Higher Education Funding Council (SHEFC) (HMSO, 1992b). Additionally, the act granted independent corporate status to institutions. Universities gained responsibilities for their own budgets, staffing, marketing, personnel, course planning and provision. As McTavish (2003) argues, the scope of the act included the introduction of far-reaching reforms designed to provide a better deal for young people and adults, and a funding regime: a powerful financial incentive for recruiting additional students and thereby expanding participation.

Since this time, many former polytechnic educational institutions have taken the opportunity offered by the legislation to change their names and titles to post-1992 'new' universities. As Higher Education Corporations (HECs) they embraced changes which attributed emphasis to vocational knowledge and transferable skills (Farwell, 2002).

In recent decades, the representation of ethnic minority students in HE, particularly in the post-1992 universities has increased (Hodgson & Spours, 2002; Mirza, 1998; Modood & Acland, 1998). Additionally, it has been argued that most new

universities have a commitment to accessibility for disabled students, offering a range of disability services (Ainley *et al.*, 2002; Corbett, 1996). This kind of corporate institutions' willingness to change and make adaptations was alarming for some academics in the pre-1992 'old' universities, and thought to signal a lowering of 'quality' in HE (Readings, 1996).

Thus, the old universities have been the sites for the strongest opposition to institutional review, marking a problematic polarisation in the area. A traditional binary divide that separated post-1992 institutions from the old universities remains intact to this date. Despite embracing change and implementing widening participation to accommodate the new learners, post-1992 new universities remain at the bottom of the government league tables, whilst the pre-1992 institutions, which made little changes, occupy the top places (Farwell, 2002; Sharman, 2008). Indeed, the inequalities between pre and post-1992 institutions are widening rather than being challenged through current policy developments (Archer *et al.*, 2003). As Ainley *et al.* (2002: 104) contend, "... the older the university, the younger, whiter and more affluent the students it will attract ...". In this chapter, I will comment on the relevance of the divide between pre and post-1992 universities, ascertaining how significant this is to the debates around widening participation for the current study.

Concurrently, a more recent development: that of the National Committee of Inquiry (NCIHE, 1997), chaired by Sir Ron Dearing also largely omitted disabled students' issues from the Committee's terms of reference. Hurst (1999) asserts that the social model approach initially adopted by the committee dissipated as the report progressed and the committee gradually based its decisions on the individual medical model of disability. For example, it was recommended that certain institutions should be designated to meet the needs of students with a specific set of impairment rather than encouraging a more inclusive HE culture for all universities. "Significantly, the focus is no longer about changing barriers for all

students, but on meeting the needs of a group of students with a particular impairment.” (Beauchamp-Pryor, 2007: 123).

The committee did however propose a list of recommendations, which were “a positive step forward in the development of disability policy and provision within institutions” (Beauchamp-Pryor, 2007: 126). As a result, in 1999, the newly established Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) published the ‘Code of Practice for the Assurance of Academic Quality and Standards in Higher Education’ (QAA, 1999), and incorporated a section regarding ‘students with disabilities’ (discussed in the next sections). As has been demonstrated in the current thesis, despite such initiatives, persistent and fundamental inequalities remain within the HE sector, deeply entrenched in academic cultures and practices. Disability is often excluded as part of the national widening participation agenda within Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), perceived as a specialised area to be dealt with separately.

#### **4.2 General National Initiatives for Disabled Students**

In the previous section I examined *FHEA*, and the implications of this act on the general student population in pre and post-1992 universities. For the most part, policies implemented through the *FHEA* (HMSO, 1992a) alone, neglected disabled students and educational barriers remained intact for this group (Hurst, 1993). Here I will present a brief history of legislation related to disability in HE, and consider initiatives of a general nature by the government, quangos and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) regarding disabled students’ participation in HE.

##### *Disability Legislation*

Prior to 1995, there was a clear lack of anti-discriminatory legislation to protect disabled people in the United Kingdom (UK). Since this time, the UK government has developed policies aimed at addressing barriers to mainstream living for disabled people; the 1995 *Disability Discrimination Act (DDA)* marking a significant



step in this direction. Yet, it has been argued that the act was a superficial compromise which presented the interests of traditional charities, business and industry, in short “those with the most power” (Beauchamp-Pryor, 2007: 84). Furthermore, as discussed in Chapter One (Section 1.1), the legal definition of ‘disability’ in the *DDA* reflected an individual medical model approach. Riddell *et al.* (2005) contend, in order to bring a case under the *DDA*, the complainant had to first prove that she/he was disabled under the terms of the act. Disabled people were thereby encouraged to think of themselves in medical, categorical terms. The definition is clearly concerned with the effect of impairments rather than the disabling barriers in society (Beauchamp-Pryor, 2004), arguably limiting efforts towards a genuine equality and inclusion. This interpretation of ‘disability’ and the resulting individualistic responses (Gooding, 1996) clearly contradicts the social model approach, and has been widely criticised by disabled activists and their organisations (Oliver & Barnes, 1998). It has to be recognised, however, that the *DDA* was an important starting point for subsequent developments. Yet, education was not included in this act.

As a result of this cursory treatment, organisations such as the Disability Rights Task Force (DRTF, 1999) began to pressure the government, leading to the creation of the Disability Rights Commission (DRC) in April 2000. This organisation claimed to facilitate “the elimination of discrimination against disabled people” (DRC, 1999: unpagged) as well as protect, enforce, and promote their rights.

Furthermore, in 2001, Part Four of *DDA* (1995) - ‘Access to Post 16 Education’ entered the statute books. This placed a duty on the HEFCs to require HEIs to publish Disability Statements containing information on existing policy and provision, and future policy development for disabled students, in order to raise awareness of disability issues amongst senior management (Harrison *et al.*, 2009). *The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA)* followed this in 2001 and was implemented in 2002. The *SENDA* represented progress towards officially

placing disability alongside other equality and diversity dimensions (Riddell *et al.*, 2005).

*SENDA* made it illegal to discriminate against disabled students in the provision of educational services, including pedagogy, the curriculum and assessment. Under this act, institutions are expected to provide anticipatory adjustments, rather than responding in an *ad hoc* or reactive way to individual disabled students' needs. According to this act, discrimination has occurred when HEIs fail to make 'reasonable adjustments'; or indeed when they provide unfavorable treatment to a student relating to her/his impairment, without justification. In an academic context reasonable adjustment has been explained not merely in terms of "additional aids and equipment", but involving "changes to working practices" (Felsing & Byford, 2008: 26). Yet, *SENDA* (2003b: unpagged) states: "The Act does not define exactly what reasonable adjustments are, as they will relate to the type and nature of the service being provided". In reference to reasonableness, the document (*SENDA*, 2003b) continues by stating that consideration has to be given to academic standards, cost, practicality, health and safety, and relevant interests of others. For these reasons, the term 'reasonable adjustments' has been criticised for being vague and open to interpretation to the extent that it gives room for justifying discrimination (Beauchamp-Pryor, 2007; Brown & Simpson, 2004).

Although *SENDA* claims that a prior consultation to its inception was significant to achieving disability equality, in her study, Beauchamp-Pryor (2007) found no evidence as to whether disabled students had an opportunity to partake in this legislative development. Moreover, there appears to be no enforcement or monitoring duties attached to this act, particularly within the HE sector, which questions its creditability.

Nonetheless, the extension of anti-discrimination legislation impacted on all sectors of education including HE with claims that this move prohibited discrimination against disabled students (DfES, 2003; Riddell *et al.*, 2005). In January 2005, the

Prime Minister's Strategy Unit (PMSU) published the report, *Improving Life Chances of Disabled People*, professing to adopt the social model understanding of disability, moving disabled students' access to education up the policy agenda.

Following the PMSU document (2005), the DRC produced information for 45,000 public sector organisations, including HEIs, to legally oblige them to plan, publish and implement a three-year Disability Equality Duty (DED) Scheme as a proactive measure by 4 December 2006. The DRC (2006) claimed that the DED adopted the social model and applied it to the functions of a public authority by recognising the negative effects on disabled people of a society designed for non-disabled people. The DED was said to put pressure on universities to promote equality of opportunity for disabled people and a general positive attitude even if that encompassed a positive discrimination (DRC, 2006). Universities were also required to eliminate discrimination that was unlawful under the *DDA* (2005).

A Disability Equality Scheme (DES) was expected to provide a framework to assist authorities in planning, delivering and evaluating actions to meet the general duty, and to report on these activities. The scheme was said to require institutions to address any barriers, and to outline plans to make the necessary changes to policy and practice to facilitate disabled people's full inclusion in the processes of consultation, preparation and implementation of DES (DED, 2006). The DRC (2006) recognised, at least on paper, that "This 'involvement' requires more active engagement of disabled stakeholders than 'consultation'" (DRC, 2006: 6), claiming to include disabled people in the duty as "active partners rather than interested onlookers" (DRC, 2006: 4).

However, at a university level, as the document analysis for the current study showed (LMU, 2006; UB, 2006; UH, 2009a; UL, 2009b), the extent of student involvement in preparation of DES remains unclear. Similarly, not all of the universities that Harrison *et al.* (2009) studied had consulted students, even though this was required in relation to the DES. The lack of records is disquieting in

relation to the importance attached to disabled students' views and to transparency of action by all parties concerned. As well as failing to honor its commitment to consult disabled people (GBDTC, 2007), the DED is unnecessarily long and complicated, either ignoring or merely giving perfunctory acknowledgment to the social model of disability (e.g. using individual medical model terminology and categorising disabled people accordingly, also giving disabled people individual rights instead of allowing collective action).

The Guidance for HE on equality duties was updated by the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) for 2007 and 2009. The ECU produced a briefing (ECU, 2006) to remind institutions of the essential components of the DES. For most HEIs, a revised DES was by law expected to be produced by 4 December 2009 (ECU, 2009a). Yet, in the document analysis for the current investigation, information on a revised DES for 2009 was not found. Subsequently, in the public sector, as a single equality act, the Equality Act (EA) (EA, 2010), which came into force in October 2010 replaces, "harmonises and in some respects extends" (Government Equalities Office and Equality and Diversity Forum, 2010: 3) the existing anti-discrimination laws for race, disability and gender.

Having examined disability legislation, next I shall introduce three educational organisations, namely ECU, Skill: the National Bureau for Students with Disabilities, and QAA; and also one national student body, the National Student Forum (NSF). The guidelines and policies of these organisations will be discussed throughout this chapter. More specific organisations and their activities will be explored under appropriate headings within the current chapter.

### *Quangos and Non-Governmental Initiatives*

The National Bureau for Handicapped Students was established in 1974 (renamed Skill), as the only disability charity, and an independent voluntary organisation dedicated to promoting disabled students' access to HE. Its work involved vocational preparation, assessment and certification, staff development and

research and publications (Skill, 2007). Skill's policy team responded to, and influenced, such national policy developments on provision for disabled students as the *Dearing report* (NCIHE, 1997) (Hurst, 1999). Skill's membership included local authorities, industry, commerce and the professions, educational bodies, Student Unions (SUs), organisations of/for disabled people, and individuals. At the time of Beauchamp-Pryor's study (2007), all four organisations representing disabled people on Skill's council were exclusively 'for' disabled people, with the four student positions being largely tokenistic. Thus, Skill's credibility as an organisation representing disabled students' interests was increasingly scrutinised (Beauchamp-Pryor, 2007). Yet, due to a period of financial difficulty, in April 2011, Skill announced its closure: "Skill's Board of Trustees has decided that it is no longer viable to keep the charity open" (Skill, 2011b: unpagued).

In 1997, the QAA was established as an independent body funded by subscription from HEIs, Further Education Institutions (FEIs) and contracts with the main related funding bodies. The QAA aimed to work in the public interest to promote sound standards of HE qualifications, and to inform and encourage continuous good practice (QAA, 2009a). The first version of QAA's 'Code of Practice' for 'Students with Disabilities' was produced in 1999 and implemented in 2000. Its 24 precepts were intended to ensure that disabled students had a learning experience comparable to that of non-disabled peers (QAA, 1999). HEIs were encouraged to incorporate the directives into their traditions, cultures and decision-making processes. The second version was published in 2009 (QAA, 2009a), and included 21 precepts of a more practical nature. As shall be discussed throughout this chapter, these documents contained a number of comprehensive key principles underpinning good practice "to avoid discriminating against students with disabilities." (McCarthy & Hurst, 2001: 3). However, evidently the precepts were not legally implemented, and it is left to each HEI's discretion to apply the QAA's principles. Additionally, the fact that QAA has no remit to become involved in complaints from students, either on their behalf or as an arbitrator (QAA, 2009a) reduces its effectiveness should a student wish to make a formal complaint.

In 2001, the ECU was established as a limited company to promote equal opportunities, initially for staff, expanding its remit to include students in 2006. The impetus for setting up the ECU came from a series of policy measures (Bett Committee, 1999; NCIHE, 1997), and promoted women and Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) staff's equal employment opportunities in HE and FE. Until 2015, ECU will be funded by Universities UK (UUK), GuildHE, HEFCE and HEFCW. The ECU manages projects on equality and diversity issues (including age, disability, ethnicity, gender, religion and sexuality) in relation to all aspects of university life. Sector-wide advice on a range of equality issues is said to be offered (ECU, 2011), with dissemination through conferences, seminars and publications. ECU's three publications: *Inclusive Campus: Accommodation and Social Space: Guidance 2008* (2008a); *Inclusive Students' Unions: Equality and Diversity in Practice* (2009b); and *Sensory Access in Higher Education* (2009c) are specifically relevant to this thesis and will be discussed in the following sections.

The NSF was set up by the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) in early 2008, claiming to give greater attention to the voice and input of students in HE policy and practice by providing a direct line to Government and other national policy-makers (NSF, 2008). The Forum consisted of an independent chair appointed by DIUS and up to 18 members, who were said to reflect the diversity of the undergraduate and postgraduate population. I was a member of NSF and shared the insights gained from the current research, potentially influencing local and national policy by proposing recommendations as discussed in section 4.6. Having explored a number of general national pieces of legislation and initiatives to improve disabled students' participation in HE, next I will examine specific national and local policy on access, disability services, learning and teaching, and accommodation and social life.

### **4.3 National and Local Policy on Information, Access and Funding**

Here I will thematically discuss national and local initiatives found on information, access and funding for disabled domestic, non-disabled international and disabled international students. On a national level, in 2007 HEFCE contracted Universities and Colleges Admission Services (UCAS) to set up the 'Unistats' to provide official information about universities and colleges in the UK, comparing the subjects they offer (DirectGov, 2011a). Although the website offered a range of useful information, including about academic issues, there was no explicit reference to the information that disabled students may need, for example, about disability support services offered in each HEI.

### *Information for Disabled Domestic, Non-Disabled International, and Disabled International Students*

Within the disability movement there has been an acknowledgement that access to information is a prerequisite to meeting disabled people's needs and allowing choice and control (Priestley & Rabiee, 2002). I will begin this discussion by examining policies on accessible information as the first of disabled people's 'Seven Needs'. Nationally, the ECU (2009c) recommends for HEIs to make the information on services accessible for a range of disabled students. Similarly, in the area of information about academic matters, the QAA (2009a: 9) stipulates:

Information about the programme (including programme specifications, learning outcomes and expectations) should be made available to students in different formats ... preferably prior to the start of the course.

Rhetorically, these policies appear to be implemented on the university level. Practice document examples of the four case-studied universities claim to be committed to making such information readily available and accessible for all disabled applicants, at the pre-admission stage (UB, 2001; UL, 2011a).

Access to appropriate information is equally significant for international students, disabled or non-disabled, in preparing them for a new country where they will be living and studying, possibly for a considerable time. The British Council (BC),

founded in 1934, is the international organisation in the UK for “educational opportunities and cultural relations, developing relationships with people from a wide range of backgrounds” (BC, 2007: 3). Working in partnership is a cornerstone of BC’s work in cultural relations, and it supports institutional links between the UK and overseas, benefiting from others’ experiences (BC, 2008). The BC’s website (BC, 2010) contains useful links on information on various courses, funding opportunities and immigration issues for international students. However, crucial information on how to prepare application forms, how to communicate with administrative staff, and generally survive the initial stages of university life is missing.

The UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA, previously known as the UK Council for Overseas Student Affairs - UKCOSA) is “the UK’s national advisory body serving international students’ interests and those who work with them” (UKCISA, 2008a: unpagged). UKCISA’s website (UKCISA, 2008a) states that the organisation facilitates international students’ mobility to and from the UK, helping students to develop a global perspective and to contribute to human development, political stability, economic prosperity and greater intercultural understanding. UKCISA also claims to produce regular electronic and print publications on current legislation, regulations and resources, as well as initiating and encouraging research for a network of members committed to the ideals of global education (UKCISA, 2008a). Yet, at an HEI level, UKCISA’s influence only appears to extend to the advisory work that it offers.

UKCISA states that it provides a range of advice on topics such as funding and fees, immigration and visa issues, and offers answers to various Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for both incoming students and also UK students who study abroad. UKCISA’s webpage (UKCISA, 2008a), has information about arriving in the UK, guiding students from their arrival at the airport to their universities. This website provides useful advice on immigration issues and various transport options. The ‘Information Sheet’ (UKCISA, 2008b) helpfully (despite its brevity)



listed information for new arrived students, covering issues such as keeping healthy, culture shock, and driving in the UK. Another document (UKCOSA, 2008) discusses the international recognition of qualifications. However, as for the BC's website, extensive step-by-step information was unavailable on the point of entry to university - when students need to face numerous uncertainties. International students often feel overwhelmed with enrolment, police registration and accommodation issues in the first weeks of their stay (NSF, 2008).

In the university case-studies, all four HEIs provided information on different aspects of being an international student. The University of Leeds (ULIO, 2009), and Leeds Metropolitan University (LMU, 2005), for example, had dedicated information sections on the university and city social life for international students. Bradford and Huddersfield provided information booklets on relevant arrival issues for international students e.g. 'Enrolment information' (UB, 2009a), and 'Arrival in Huddersfield' (UH, 2009c).

The documents discussed above seem to fail to acknowledge that some students may be both disabled and international, and pre-arrival may need culturally sensitive disability-related information. Here I will examine the very limited specific policies, separate information and advice made available, by Skill, and UKCISA to disabled international students. Skill has a booklet on 'Information for International Disabled Students' (2003), covering a range of issues such as application to a college and university in the UK, obtaining funding, UK entry requirements and immigration procedures, support with students' 'disability', as well as information on national and local support. UKCISA's webpage 'International Students with Disabilities' (UKCISA, 2011) lists useful sources of information for disabled international students, including The Higher Education Accessibility Guide (HEAG) database. The HEAG is a central source of information about the support available to disabled students at HEIs across Europe.

### *Access for Disabled Domestic, Non-Disabled International, and Disabled International Students*

In addition to information, access to the built environment is considered to facilitate disabled people's independence and inclusion in mainstream society (Hasler, 2003). To achieve this in an HE setting, QAA (2009a: 17-18) highlights:

Institutions are required to ensure the accessibility of their physical environment under both the *DDA* and general building regulations (and subordinate legislation), as amended from time to time.

In 2009, the ECU published a briefing (ECU, 2009a) to promote inclusive practice in building design and refurbishment in HE through outlining a process that would ensure equality was taken into consideration at key stages of development. This checklist proposed that universities should devise their own access guide. Moreover, the following ECU recommendations are proposed for students with 'sensory' impairments but are also applicable to students with a range of impairments - particularly relevant to the current research participants' experiences in Chapter Five (Section 5.3). The ECU (2009c) stipulates:

it is important to provide clear symbols and tactile information so that everyone can verify that they are entering the correct facility. (ECU, 2009c: 37).

Wherever practicable, have sliding automatic doors rather than swing or revolving doors. (ECU, 2009c: 39).

Furthermore, one of the action points of the DES in most universities, including three case-studied ones (Hubbard, 2010; UB, 2006; UH, 2007; information on Leeds Metropolitan University was not found) was to commission an access audit of the university campus with follow up progress reports, from Estates and the contractors who undertook the audit, at each meeting. Following the access audit, The University of Bradford, for example, claimed: "there is an appropriate lift and level access to all areas of the University estate for mobility-impaired people" (UB,

2006: 14). Continuing improvements to the accessibility of buildings was also highlighted in 'Information for Disabled Students' (UB, 2010b). Additionally, the University of Huddersfield reported that: "All lifts have 'voice-overs' and Braille buttons" (UH, 2007: 7). The programme of work to improve access for the first stage of implementing the audit at the University of Leeds comprised five separate areas of activity: Lift improvements; Hearing enhancement systems; General improvement projects; General maintenance; and Management procedures (Hubbard, 2010).

In addition to physical access, in attempting to make the specific admission process as accessible and fair as possible to 'all' students, the QAA (2009b: 10) states:

Ensure that appropriate support is offered and available for applicants attending interviews and other selection activities, for example, meeting with appropriate support staff.

Having said this, without offering any additional support, the University of Leeds' 'pre-arrival guide' (UL, 2009a: unpagged) states: "Complete your registration form: Your registration instructions explain how to do this." The assumption appears to be that 'all' students have equal access to the generic instruction material without any alteration or support to make these accessible to their needs.

Having discussed disabled international students' access needs, I will examine quangos and non-governmental initiatives on international students' access to HE and assess whether these cover disabled students' concerns. HE in the UK has a reputation for offering an outstanding experience and remains admired across the world for producing well-trained highly employable graduates (Ramsden, 2009; Williams, 1982). The British HE sector is said to be viewed worldwide as being central to a competitive modern economy and an open and inclusive society (HEFCE, 2003a). The social and economic benefits gained from having international students in the UK is also considerable. International students were

estimated to contribute £1,300,000,000 in 2000 - 9.5 per cent of all income from international visitors to the UK in that year (HEFCE, 2003a).

Despite this, the entry requirements for international students to the UK has been made complicated and expensive. The current government introduced the following changes (enforced in April 2011) to the 'student visa':

... tougher English language requirements, tighter rules on students working part-time, restrictions on which students can bring dependants with them, maximum time limits of between three and five years on the length of courses, and severe restrictions on who can stay on to work after completing their studies. (Travis, 2011: unpagged).

In addition to filling in a complex and lengthy application form, the UK Border Agency (2011a) stipulates that international students need to provide the following information: test certificate from an official test provider, proving that they have attained the appropriate English language requirements; a confirmation of acceptance on a specific course, and the documents used to obtain it; Bank statements or an official letter confirming that the student has adequate funding to cover educational and maintenance costs for the duration of studies. For example, it is stated that to live and study in London, a student on a course of less than nine months will require their full course costs and £800 for each calendar month of the course; or on a course of nine months or more, they will need to show the first year of course fees plus £7,200 (UK Border Agency, 2011c). To obtain a student visa, international students are also required to pay between £255 and £702 depending on whether they are applying from outside or inside the UK, and applying by post or in person within the UK (UK Border Agency, 2011a).

Ramsden (2009) states that policies' for international students, and increased investment in quality and the standard of infrastructure and learning spaces, as a joint responsibility of government and HEIs, are significant. This is particularly so when considering that competition between UK and overseas universities to attract

international students is intensifying (Ramsden, 2009), and more countries offer programmes taught in English, providing a high standard of education, but at a much lower cost to the student. European activities are taking a higher profile and the impact on HE seems to continue and increase following the Bologna Declaration (discussed in Chapter One's introduction), and follow-up agreements and European Union (EU) HE and research initiatives (HEFCE, 2003a; Keeling, 2006). The importance of maintaining and improving the UK HE reputation for high quality teaching and learning outcomes through such example initiatives as HEFCE's (2003a) discussed next is therefore significant.

HEFCE's 'International strategy' (2003a) states that HEFCE has a small international team (7.4 full-time equivalent posts), and a budget for strategic international initiatives of approximately £500,000 a year for activities that directly benefit international collaboration and development for the English HE sector. The principal values that underpin HEFCE's strategic international activities are said to add value to the work of the sector: to utilise the benefits of knowledge-sharing and partnership, and to produce high-quality outcomes (HEFCE, 2003a). HEFCE claims that these goals are achieved by: "learning from others", "Supporting HE systems development", and "Facilitating opportunities for international collaboration and development" (HEFCE, 2003a: 2).

Whilst improvements to general physical access features for disabled domestic students can also benefit disabled international students, the documents related to widening access for non-disabled international students seem to largely lose sight of disabled international students. The principle values of HEFCE's (2003a) document, and the ways in which these are achieved do not acknowledge disabled international students' contribution. Like their non-disabled counterparts, disabled international students can have a wide range of personal experiences and other valuable expertise in their home communities, and can add effectively to various internationalisation programmes. Thus an internationally shared good practice on

"an open and inclusive society" (HEFCE, 2003a: 2) can be enriched by disabled international students' involvement.

### *Funding for Disabled Domestic, Non-Disabled International, and Disabled International Students*

As noted below, funding policies position disabled students, in general, at a disadvantage to their non-disabled counterparts (Holloway, 2001). Disabled domestic students receive Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) to pay for equipment, non-medical helpers, general (e.g. books and computer consumables), and sometimes transport (Directgov, 2010; Viney, 2006). Postgraduate students in 2010/2011 were entitled to a single allowance up to a maximum of £10,260 (DirectGov, 2011b). The amount of DSA for undergraduate students in 2010/2011 identified by Skill (2011a) was as follows: specialist equipment, maximum £5,161; non-medical support, maximum £20,520; general allowance, maximum £1,724.

Whilst domestic students' tuition fees have risen to a maximum of £9,000 starting in the academic year 2012/2013 (DirectGov, 2011c), the international tuition fee can range from £4,000 to £18,000 per year (UKCISA, 2009). Since 1980, non-EU students' fees have risen to full-cost levels, whereas EU students pay 'home' fees - the same as domestic students (Joint Working Group of the Council for Education in the Commonwealth, and UKCOSA, 2000). For the purposes of fee payment, the following international students were identified as eligible to pay 'home' fees:

Those who are 'settled' in the UK and either meet the main residence requirements, or have exercised a 'right of residence' in the European Economic Area (EEA) and/or Switzerland; EU nationals and their family members; 'EU nationals in the UK'; EU nationals/family members with the right of permanent residence in the UK; EEA/Swiss workers and family members; Child of a Swiss national or Turkish worker; Refugees, their spouse/civil partner and children; and those not granted refugee status but allowed to remain in the UK, and their spouse/civil partner and children (UKCISA, 2010b).

International students who do not fall into the above categories are liable to pay the international tuition fee (Barer, 2007; DirectGov, 2011d; Schweisfurth & Gu, 2009), which despite recent changes, at times, is still twice as much as the home tuition fee. Moreover, according to Barer (2007), the introduction of variable fees (top-up fees) in 2006/2007 affected most students to the extent that Barer (2007) refers to a significant drop in admissions for students from outside the EU. Therefore, the availability of sufficient funding appears to be a key factor to international students retaining their involvement in British HEIs. Despite this, offers of scholarships, such as Overseas Research Scholarship (ORS) (ORSAS, 2009), for research students have been abolished. Only a limited number of scholarships, both internal and external to universities are generally offered to international students to assist with their academic expenses (UL, 2011e).

Although disabled international students who have home student fee paying status may receive DSA (Barer, 2007), those without this status are strictly prohibited from recouring to any public funds, including DSA or Disabled Living Allowance (DLA), for their expenses endured in the UK, be it disability-related support or living expenses (Harrison *et al.*, 2009; UKCISA, 2009; Viney, 2006; Waterfield & West, 2002). International students are not specifically covered through the mainstream Premium disability funding allocation either; this fund largely relates to domestic students and is calculated on the number of full time students in receipt of DSA (HEFCE, 2009b). In short, the majority of EU and International students are ineligible for the DSA, “yet the DDA IV provides them with the same rights to support as ‘home’ students, regardless of the (lack of) available funding for that support.” (Viney, 2006: 61). In addressing this shortcoming, Felsing and Byford (2008: 19) propose: “Allocate specifically designated resources for disabled students and staff who are ineligible for DSA ...”

Thus, the provision of equality of opportunity pressures the universities to offer support to all disabled students, without providing any regular source of central funding to help the institutions in their attempts to comply with such policies

(Holloway, 2001). Instead the individual universities are left to fund the provision of support for disabled international students from their own resources.

Some institutions therefore identify a suitable stream of centralised funding, e.g. from overseas fee income or other sources, to provide academic support including auxiliary aids and services for disabled international students (Felsing & Byford, 2008; Riddell *et al.*, 2005; UKCOSA & Skill, 2005). Hence strong “moral reasons and longer term economic gains that could accrue through increased student numbers” are necessary to motivate universities in their efforts to support disabled international students (Holloway, 2001: 612). In the absence of such university-specific initiatives, many disabled international students have to rely almost solely on independent non-public trusts and charities for financial support when studying in the UK (Soorenian, 2008a; 2008b; 2008c; 2009).

In this section, I examined various steps taken by quangos and NGOs concerning the general admission process, for disabled, international and disabled international students. Although guidelines were issued for disabled students’ access to HE by ECU (2009c), and QAA (2009b), these organisations seemed to have little enforcing power on HEIs. That said, for non-disabled international students, and more so for disabled international students, national policies and information on their admission were limited, despite many initiatives to attract international students to British HE (HEFCE, 2003a), and internationalise the sector.

#### **4.4 National and Local Policy on Disclosure and Disability Support Services**

Here, I will assess quango and non-governmental initiatives and guidelines on improving disclosure rate and disability support in HE in the form of services for disabled domestic and international students. The relevant university literature will be discussed concurrently. This is important because in the current HE climate, full access and entitlement to services may facilitate integration whilst restricted



access acts as a barrier. There are some general dedicated support services across British HEIs for disabled students but the approaches taken to service provision vary greatly from institution to institution. Disability Service Units (DSUs) are becoming quite well-established in HEIs, however, core staff numbers remain relatively small (Harrison *et al.*, 2009). A report commissioned by HEFCE (Gorard *et al.*, 2006) highlights a need for closer liaison between the staff in DSUs and those providing more general staff development to help with raising disability awareness.

*Disabled Domestic Students, Disclosure and Disability Support Services*

I will start this discussion by highlighting guidelines on disclosure. The UCAS website (2009) strongly encourages disabled applicants to make early direct contact with individual institutions before submitting their applications, reassuring students that under *DDA* they will not face discrimination in admissions and the provision of student services. When applying for a place at a university, students are invited on their UCAS form to select one of the following medical categories of impairment.

Table Two - UCAS Categories of Disability

1) No disability
2) A social /communication impairment such as Asperger's syndrome/other autistic spectrum disorder
3) Blind or have a serious visual impairment uncorrected by glasses
4) Deaf or have a serious hearing impairment
5) A long-standing illness or health condition such as cancer, HIV, diabetes, chronic heart disease, or epilepsy
6) A mental health condition, such as depression, schizophrenia or anxiety disorder
7) A specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia, dyspraxia or AD(H)D
8) Physical impairment or mobility issues, such as difficulty using your arms or using a wheelchair or crutches

9) A disability impairment or medical condition that is not listed above
10) Two or more impairments and/or disabling medical Conditions. (UCAS, 2009).

The UCAS website claims that the disability categories above were amended for 2009/2010 application forms in line with recent developments in legislation. However, the terminology used in these categories continues to reflect an individual medical model approach, using 'disability' and 'impairment' interchangeably. The notable difference between the later version and that used in 2006 is that the new version has an extra option of "No disability" (UCAS, 2009: unpagged). The new version explains that the category "physical impairment or mobility issues" can include "difficulty using your arms or using a wheelchair or crutches" (UCAS, 2009: unpagged), confusing the distinction between a number of physical impairments.

Archer (2003) is dissatisfied with the ways the UCAS categories are developed and deployed in general, arguing that it is questionable whether they generate specific, accurate and valid data to be included in the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). Paczuska (2002) contends that UCAS's capacity to widen participation is limited because it largely ignores social and cultural inequalities that are produced and maintained outside of education. Arguably, these critical points can act as a deterrent for some students from disclosing their impairments on the UCAS forms in the crucial pre-entry stage to university.

That said, the QAA's 'Admissions processes and policies' section (2009b: 18) emphasises that the operation of admissions processes and application of entry criteria ensures fairness in relation to disabled students. Precept 20 of QAA (1999) also emphasises that the institutions should adopt a clearly defined policy on issues of confidentiality in disclosing information about an individual student's impairments to staff and other students. Without highlighting its relevance to student life, in the university case-studies, the University of Leeds alone mentions

the QAA 'Code of Practice' (1999) in its entirety on the DSU's webpage (ULES, 2009a).

In reference to disclosure, the case-studied universities, as examples, claim to put equal opportunities into practice, despite receiving application forms from students with diverse backgrounds. Huddersfield's 'Guidance for Students on Equal Opportunities' (UH, 2009a) discusses the academic application process, reassuring students that the university, including the university campuses, welcome applications from disabled people. Another document by this university states that: "it is our policy to select students on academic criteria alone" (UH, 2008: 4).

Following disclosure, to access disability-support services, disabled domestic students' disability-related needs are assessed at the initial stages of their university studies. "Diagnostic assessment refers to the procedures that are available to identify barriers to learning, and strategies/ technology that can be used to overcome them." (McCarthy & Hurst, 2001: 8). QAA's Precept six (1999, cited in Waterfield & West, 2002: 14) explains that: "disabled applicants' support needs should be identified and assessed in an effective and timely way, taking into account the applicant's views."

In December 1997, HEFCE and HEFCW jointly commissioned the Segal Quince Wicksteed report, (SQW, 1999), which offered recommendations from a project on base-level provision for disabled students in HEIs. Baseline provision listed the minimum level of services that an HEI should provide. The following two baseline recommendations are particularly relevant to Chapter Six (Section 6.3) in the area of needs assessment:

Accessible information on needs assessment procedures at the point of entry, including a code of practice governing the circulation of relevant personal information that secures appropriate levels of confidentiality.

Arrangements for monitoring the agreed support following the needs assessment. (SQW, 1999: 3).

As an example, the university of Bradford's website (UB, 2009b), outlines the DSU's role in conducting needs assessments for DSA applications, noting possible recommendations for a range of adjustments, such as allowing extra time in examinations or note-taking support in lectures. This website also lists a range of assistive equipment and furniture that disabled people may try during their needs assessment process, with plans in place to set up a dedicated demonstration room.

In the area of service provision, as a NGO, Skill's FAQs page (2010: unpagged) informs students that if they had a "disability", they may need extra support (listing various support available) to access courses and successfully complete their studies. Although differences between the terms 'disability' and 'impairment' is given some attention, the individual medical model seems to be prevalent in the language used by Skill throughout. Additionally, there is no information available about how these services can be accessed, what the services can support with, and how much they cost, apart from suggesting students contact the staff member responsible for disability services in the universities concerned. Hence, attention has to be given to the practical issues with regards to using the disability services.

In Chapter Six, I have examined participants' experiences with regards to using technical aids, transcription and Personal Assistance (PA) scheme as some of the services identified in the students' needs assessments. Due to limited space here, I will concentrate on the guidelines I found on transcription and PA schemes. With regards to transcription, the ECU report (2009c: 16) encourages universities to:

Choose to use a transcription service to make books and journals available in other accessible formats. It is also possible, in some circumstances, to contact publishers directly to ask for electronic

copies of books that can then be manipulated to meet the needs of a particular student.

In the university documents studied as examples for the current investigation, the University of Leeds claimed to be particularly strong in the provision of its on-site transcription centre services (ULT, 2009b). This particular transcription centre claims to continuously provide reading materials for specific courses at the university itself in a range of different formats (e.g. audio copies, Braille and electronic), developing both its own collection and that archived at the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) National Library Service (RNIB, 2011) (ULT, 2009b). With regards to the price of transcription, a document found on the University of Leeds Transcription Centre (ULT, 2009a) lists costs of transcription, e.g. £7.42 per 400 words converted to Braille and the same cost for the equivalent amount as e-text.

The advantage of the PA scheme in universities is said to be enabling a disabled student to live, study and socialise independently on campus (Earle, 1999). Due to my familiarity with the DSU at the University of Leeds and its PA scheme, I contacted the service and obtained some information about this support. The trained PAs at the University of Leeds (ULES, 2011b) are expected to provide "support in the academic environment, social support, and domestic help as appropriate", but they are not required to provide medical support (ULES, 2011a). The document analysis also showed that the responsibility of funding and providing personal care did not rest with the case-studied universities. The University of Huddersfield, for example, states that the students should: "... finalise details for personal care and support with external agencies." (UH, 2007: 4). For students with more specific needs, a publication by Skill (2011a: 10) about information on personal care claims that "Universities may be able to put you in touch with specialist agencies that employ workers such as dyslexia tutors, note takers, sign language interpreters." Moreover, in my email correspondence with the University of Leeds (ULES, 2011b), I was informed that the PA rate per hour for the academic year 2010/11 was £20.71 (covered by DSA for domestic students).

Overall, Bradford and Huddersfield universities (UB, 2009b; UH, 2008) have more comprehensive DSUs websites in comparison with the two other universities. Huddersfield was exceptional in discussing equality issues in work placement and careers services.

#### *Disabled International Students, Disclosure and Disability Support Services*

In relation to international students, Skill (2003: 3) starts a document by this very general advice: "As a disabled student, you must also make sure the institution of your choice will be able to provide the access and support you require." A joint publication by UKCOSA and Skill, 'International Students with Disabilities in Higher Education: notes on good practice' (UKCOSA & Skill, 2005) argues that it is easier for universities to meet support requirements if these are disclosed prior to students' admission. The document suggests that the conditions and incentives for disclosure should include both students and institutions' full understanding and recognition that international disabled students are covered and protected by the *DDA*. This publication continues by pointing to a particular statement for international readers, highlighting that it will also be helpful if overseas agents have effective disability equality training so that they are clear about the legal framework and the importance of encouraging any disabled student to disclose her/his impairments at the application stage. No advice, however, was given to international students on how to disclose their impairments in English in a different cultural context, and what kind of information to include in the application forms.

Whilst improvements in general services such as note-taker support, and teaching adaptations for disabled domestic students, may also benefit disabled international students (UKCOSA & Skill, 2005), during the policy analysis stage, I was not able to find any specific government policy on support provision for disabled international students. Whereas domestic students are covered by DSA in meeting their transcription and PA costs, for example, international students need to fund these expenses themselves. There is no national policy implemented to assist this

group with such high expenses for their crucial support, which at times may include personal care costs. Therefore, I will examine the limited non-governmental material I found on disability services for this group.

The aforementioned joint publication of UKCOSA and Skill (2005) gives a statement of best practice, supplemented by illustrative case studies from the sector. In this document, a UK institution is praised for providing an 'International Students' Handbook', which includes information on disability, academic, personal and financial support services for international students. It was noted that this had been helpful for an individual student, who "suffers from mental ill-health" (UKCOSA & Skill, 2005: 3). After reading about the stresses involved in studying abroad in this document, the student concerned was encouraged to "discuss her plans with her doctor, counsellor or psychologist, and to disclose her disability to the host institution" (*ibid*). The section on 'Meeting Students' Needs' suggests as a matter of good practice disability co-ordinators work with international officers to establish procedures for funding, carrying out needs assessments and support provision for disabled international students. Also highlighted are the importance of knowing how to obtain information in alternative formats, and how to relate to disabled students (*ibid*). However, when examining the site in December 2010, it became clear that this handbook had not been updated since August 2005, which shows a lack of urgency, when considering the diverse and fluctuating needs of disabled international students.

A document found on Skill's website 'The Scottish Disability Team' (SDT, 2006) provides information on the responsibilities that a university may have when providing personal support to an international disabled student. Although this information is intended for Scottish institutions, the document makes it clear that the information is also relevant for other UK universities.

The significant sums paid by international students to attend courses at British universities is said to be a factor in determining what would be considered a

'reasonable adjustment'. This document continues by stating that another key factor in determining what forms a reasonable adjustment in relation to personal "care", for a disabled international student, is likely to include the student's lack of recourse to other funds for such "care" (SDT, 2006: 20). Moreover, this paper proposes that where lack of funding for personal 'care' or reasonable adjustment for a disabled international student is the main barrier to the student attending university, an HEI should provide assistance in this area. The publication stipulates that an HEI will potentially be required:

... to meet its duty of care towards an international student, who may face language, cultural and other difficulties as a result of choosing to study in the UK, compared with a domestic student (SDT, 2006: 9).

Similarly, UKCOSA and Skill (2005) state that institutions have a duty to treat all disabled students equally regardless of characteristics such as nationality. That said, it has been documented that in rare cases, adaptations for individual international students may not be reasonable for an institution to make (UKCOSA & Skill, 2005). Support may be deemed unreasonable, if the cost of an adjustment is considered too high, if there is a lack of specialist support including American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters, or if a requested reasonable adjustment would be perceived to be lowering academic standards or oppose competencies set out by an institution. In such cases, UKCOSA and Skill (2005) suggest that the HEI concerned may consider the student on an individual basis; possibly rejecting the student if meeting her/his needs was not possible; although they state this must not lead to a general policy of refusing certain disabled students. Additionally, from analysis of such literature it appears that organisations such as Skill are vague about the crucial differences between concepts of 'care' and 'assistance', the latter facilitating disabled people's inclusion in mainstream society (see Morris, 2001; Woodin, 2006).



Conversely, when inquiring about the price of a dyslexia assessment, in an email correspondence with a dyslexia assessment centre (Educational Guidance Service Ltd., 2011), I was informed that the centre does not have a fixed price for the assessment of international students with dyslexia, as these students are infrequent. The price of assessment is agreed on a case-by-case basis when it arises. As one of the case-studied universities, Leeds Metropolitan University (LMUDS, 2011), comparatively, mentioned that both domestic and international students are required to pay £50 towards the assessment costs. Whilst the Adult Learning Fund (ALF) covers the remainder of domestic students' assessment costs, international students are funded by the university itself.

Whilst both Huddersfield (UH, 2008), and Leeds Metropolitan Universities (LMU, 2011b) have informative DSU and International Office websites, offering a range of information (detailing different aspects of university life), specific information for disabled international students was clearly lacking. The University of Leeds' DSU site has a link to 'Information for International Applicants' (UL, 2007), appropriately, linked to the University's International Office. The section on 'Applying to the University' welcomes applications from disabled international students, and encourages them to declare their 'disability' and support needs as soon as possible via an electronic or paper copy of a self-assessment form. The document reassures students that the disclosure of their "disability" will not affect their selection as a student, "but will enable us to assess your needs, plan your stay at the University and inform you to what extent we can meet your requirements." (UL, 2007: unpagged). However, this safeguarding statement may have quite the opposite effect for some, in that despite reassuring students that disclosure will not lead to discrimination; it remains ambiguous about the level of support that the university can offer.

When discussing needs assessment, this document (UL, 2007) points to an important cultural difference in receiving assistance. Students are invited to take

into consideration the informal help that they receive from family and friends in their home countries, and to include it on the form, so that the university can deliver a tailored service. Students are made aware that classmates and housemates may help with support if asked, but if this becomes regular, “the expectation is usually that disabled students will employ a personal assistant and not rely on regular disability support from friends” (UL, 2007: unpagged).

The university of Bradford’s booklet on ‘Information for Disabled Students’ (UB, 2010b) advises students who are not eligible for DSA (EU, international or some part-time students), to obtain support through the DSU and/or apply for funding from charitable organisations. However, the document is clear in stating that the DSU has no funds to provide direct financial support for students. Technology available to loan out to students who are not eligible for DSA, is said to include portable induction loops for students who wear hearing aids, recording devices for lectures, personal computers (PCs) and laptops with assistive software and a variety of keyboards, mice, trackballs and other input devices. Yet, neither Bradford nor Leeds made any comments or links about the information found for disabled international students on Skill and UKCISA’s websites; pointing to the low profile given nationally to the specific information needs of this group. Moreover, neither commented on the crucial aspect of student experience, by which I mean: disabled international students’ pedagogical experiences and that of accessible social activities, areas which shall be explored in the next two sections.

#### **4.5 National and Local Policy on Learning and Teaching**

The discussion of this chapter will now focus on guidelines produced by a number of quangos and NGOs on disabled, international and disabled international students’ learning and teaching experiences. This section will provide a policy background for Chapter Seven, where disabled international students articulate the barriers and opportunities they experience in their learning environments in an educational context which professes to aim for inclusion.

Studying at university level can be empowering for disabled students (as it is for many non-disabled students) (Fuller *et al.*, 2004a). The empowering potential of HE may not always be achieved, however, and disabled students may encounter more barriers to learning at university in communicating with lecturers, in accessing teaching materials, in following lectures and in partaking in the assessments (Chapman, 2007/2008; Fuller *et al.*, 2004b; Tinklin *et al.*, 2004). In a teaching environment, the non-traditional students are perceived from a deficit perspective, for which Gorard *et al.* (2006), without any solid evidence, claim that compensatory approaches have been offered. There is little evidence that teaching approaches are being adapted for diverse learners, despite recognition of the unmet needs of disabled students in the institutional literature studied for this chapter. Yet, studies (Beauchamp-Pryor, 2004; Brown and Simpson, 2004; Konur, 2000) explored in Chapter Two (Section 2.5), revealed various difficulties experienced by disabled students. Here, I will focus on guidelines proposed by different bodies to address these and emergent barriers.

### *Disabled Domestic Students and Learning and Teaching*

I will first discuss the policy found on physical access to the academic environment as the initial step in partaking in a learning setting. Particularly relevant to participants' access to their learning context in Chapter Seven (Section 7.3), the ECU's briefing (2009a) encourages universities to develop an access guide to suggest ways of entering university properties so that the access is not compromised, should a specific route be closed at a certain day/time.

In the area of physical access to the learning and teaching environment, QAA's Precept three (1999, cited in Waterfield & West, 2002: 63) invites Institutions to consider the requirements of disabled students in:

the height and layout of classroom tables and laboratory benches supporting access around the campus with appropriate signage and information, such as large print and Braille notices

ease of use of equipment in laboratories, computer and teaching rooms.

Similarly, the QAA (2009a: 12) highlights the importance of accessibility of the academic environment as a whole for disabled students:

Both the design and implementation of learning and teaching strategies and activities should recognise the entitlement of disabled students to participate in all activities provided as part of their programme of study.

Despite this precept, the same document also makes the following recommendation, arguably removing the responsibility from the HEIs to challenge the barriers by making the environment inclusive for 'all':

Where there are unavoidable difficulties in ensuring physical access, institutions should have contingency plans to ensure the participation of disabled students. (QAA, 2009a: 18).

Apart from the physical accessibility for inside the teaching context, QAA's Precept 10 (1999, cited in Waterfield & West, 2002: 34) stipulates:

Institutions should consider making arrangements which ensure that all academic staff and technical staff:  
plan and employ teaching and learning strategies which make the delivery of the programme as inclusive as possible.

On HEFCE's website, a discussion paper (Wald, undated) was found on disabled students' learning and teaching experiences. The report recognised that an 'inclusive' approach, which aims to meet every individual student's learning needs, would benefit all students and not only those who declared an impairment. Two particular recommendations relevant to participants' experiences in the current study are noteworthy. The first recommendation continues with the theme of

physical access and suggests ensuring adequate spaces are available for wheelchair-users in lecture-rooms. The second recommendation is concerned with students' experiences when in the lecture-rooms. It proposes lecturers speak clearly, and refrain from explaining the complex lecture material too fast in both spoken and written communication (Wald, undated).

Nevertheless, this paper appears to have an underlying individual medical model tone, using such terms as "disabilities" and "visual problems" (Wald, undated: unpagged). Reflecting a more 'integrated' education system the paper suggests that students unable to access teaching rooms may be accommodated through the use of video and data conferencing technologies. As with the QAA's (2009a: 18) precept discussed above, by responding in an individualised approach, this recommendation not only removes any commitments from universities to create an inclusive teaching environment, but also contributes to disabled students' possible isolation in excluding them from studying in groups.

In relation to accessible handout provision, for students with 'sensory' impairments in particular, the ECU report (2009c) highlights the importance of the lecture notes containing handwritten script (particularly when displaying complex equations) to be typed out and made available in accessible formats. Moreover, this report (ECU, 2009c: 39) recommends:

Post timetables and lecture notes online in advance of lectures so that students have easy access to them, and time to read them.

To address disabled students' difficulties in accessing information and communication technology (ICT), installed in most libraries, the QAA (2009a: 15), emphasises:

Have in place the capacity to investigate the range of ways in which disabled students can be aided by ICT and to provide students and staff with the information to enable them to make the best use of assistive technologies.

Conversely, in an examination setting, to avoid background noise, the ECU (2009c) proposes that building works should be carried out at weekends or during holiday periods. Additionally, the report suggests that staff can reduce noise levels during exams by placing students who require extra time into a room of their own, so other students will not cause any disruption. To minimise barriers, ECU (2009c: 40) further recommends:

Provide students with reasonable adjustments in examinations, and consider allowing alternatives to written exams, such as course work, oral exams, or exams in BSL.

It is said that the academic assessment practices need to ensure that all students have the opportunity to demonstrate the achievement of learning outcomes (QAA, 2009a). There may be more than one standard way of measuring this attainment. A flexible programme design should include the various assessment methods to provide opportunities for disabled students to demonstrate that they have attained the required standard (QAA, 2009a). Following the academic assessment, in terms of feedback received, the National Union of Students (NUS) recommends the provision of different kinds of feedback on assessment, rather than just more of the same feedback, if there is any disparity between students' expectations and results (NUS, 2008).

As one of the case-studied universities, the University of Huddersfield (UH, 2008) states that the university ensures that relevant staff are made aware of exam support recommendations, including a separate room, alternative materials, an amanuensis (scribe), a reader, use of appropriate equipment, extra time, and rest breaks. Reflecting Beauchamp-Pryor's (2007: 30) discussion of "care, concern and compensation", the university of Huddersfield (UH, 2009a: unpagged) explains that the additional arrangements are implemented "to compensate for any ways in which a disability may affect the assessment."

On a general level, Huddersfield (UH, 2009a), and Leeds (ULES, 2009a) universities have information on disabled students' learning and teaching experiences. Huddersfield (UH, 2009b: unpagged), for example, claims to assist academic staff, who teach students "with additional needs" to use a wide range of teaching and assessment methods designed to meet the specific needs of all students. This university asserts that "where practicable", materials in alternative formats (based on each student's individual needs) are made available (*ibid*). This commitment as positive as it may sound, could imply an individualistic approach, where simply making materials accessible, lies at the discretion of university staff rather than being a university-wide good practice, thus indicating an 'integrated' education system. Having discussed national and local initiatives on disabled domestic students' learning and teaching experiences, next I will examine similar policies for international students. The BC and UKCISA appeared to be the leading organisations in providing such information for this particular group of students.

#### *Non-Disabled International Students and Learning and Teaching*

Language is considered to be one of the main barriers to most international students' learning experiences (Introna & Hayes, 2007; Ryan, 2000). To measure and report test scores for English proficiency in Listening, Reading, Speaking and Writing in a consistent manner, across the globe, the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) is designed to use a nine-band scoring system (IELTS, 2011). Each HEI is said to set an internal benchmark of IELTS scores to meet its own requirements (IELTS, 2011; Travis, 2011). Most universities use this result to identify those non-English speaking international students, who may find the opportunity to part-take in free, optional and pre-sessional English courses prior to commencing their academic studies useful. At the University of Leeds, for example, students who score below 60 per cent on more than one of these tests are said to receive a letter from the Language Centre, suggesting that they might benefit from one of the Centre's in-sessional courses. These important

programmes are offered in order for international students to be able to follow their studies successfully. In contrast, students who receive a score of 60 per cent or above are regarded as having an adequate level of English for academic study. However, they could still “seek advice from the Language Centre if they experience language-related difficulties in their studies” (LLC, 2009: unpagged).

The BC's site has a number of documents on studying the English language, but none available on teaching and learning experiences generally. A document was found, however, entitled 'Study in the UK' (BC, 2009) for students from the United States of America (USA). Delineating the British education structure, the document highlights the benefits of studying in the UK compared to the USA, namely the short length of undergraduate and postgraduate courses, a fact also highlighted by the participants in the current research. This document (BC, 2009) also notes the favourable comparative difference between fees in the UK to that of the fees of private universities in the USA.

UKCISA has a detailed document (in two sections) on 'study methods in the UK' (UKCISA, 2010a). The first part, 'Teaching and Learning in the UK', gives an introduction to the different teaching methods (e.g. lectures, seminars and tutorials), and assessment procedures (including issues related to plagiarism) used in British institutions. This section also provides information about attitudes to studying in the UK, outlining benefits of independent study, and highlighting that studying independently for significant periods of time is an integral part of UK education.

The second part of this document (UKCISA, 2010a: 3), 'Study Skills Tips' highlights some key elements and expectations of British academic culture, and offers study tips. The ability to “develop critical judgement, and assess whether an argument is coherent and well supported by evidence” (UKCISA, 2010a: 3) is, for example, listed as one of the core characteristics of British academic culture.



### *Disabled International Students and Learning and Teaching*

Having discussed a number of documents and guidelines published by various educational bodies relating to students' learning and teaching, the needs of disabled international students seem to be largely overlooked. For example, in HEFCE's report (Wald, undated), when lecturers were encouraged to speak clearly in lectures largely for the benefit of disabled students, no reference was made to disabled international students, who may have additional language difficulties. Similarly, the literature on international students found on the UKCISA website does not mention disabled students' support needs e.g. to address additional difficulties resulting from learning independently identified by Farrar (2004), which can compound international students' problems.

ECU's report (2009c) makes only one particular reference to disabled international students' issues. In this report, 'reasonable adjustments', such as additional time for exams for those disabled students who use an interpreter or are "working in a second language", is recommended (ECU, 2009c: 22). Furthermore, no specific literature was found on disabled international students' learning experiences.

The discussion showed that with little reference to disabled international students' needs, guidelines on how to improve students' (both disabled domestic and non-disabled international) pedagogical experiences are readily available. Whilst it has to be acknowledged that "inclusive teaching is good teaching" (OU, 2006: unpagged), this gap in guidance appears to be significant as disabled international students' linguistic and impairment-related (e.g. difficulties in reading for students with dyslexia) barriers may exacerbate one another causing double or even multiple disadvantages in the learning environment. Next, I will discuss national policies and recommendations on disabled, international and disabled international students' accommodation and social life.

### **4.6 National and Local Policy on Student Accommodation and Social Life**

Finally, the discussion of this chapter will focus on policy found on a national and local level on university provided accommodation and student activities. I will explore relevant policy found for disabled domestic, non-disabled international and disabled international students respectively.

### *Accommodation for Disabled Domestic, Non-Disabled International, and Disabled International Students*

Crucial for many students, disabled or non-disabled, international or domestic, is that university halls provide a protective environment, yet “a valuable first step into independence” (NUS, 2008: 19). Emphasising this fact, the ECU (2009c) reports that students with sensory impairments generally preferred living in university halls. In the view of this, another report by ECU (2008a: 25) highlights:

Disabled students should be given priority for accessible rooms, en suite rooms, or rooms near teaching buildings if this is their preference, depending on the nature of their disability and its effects.

In relation to accessible accommodation, the report stipulates the following recommendations relevant to this section (4.6), and also Chapter Eight (Section 8.1):

Fire regulations need to consider different ways to alert students with hearing impairments. ... Also, fire alarms should come with flashing lights as standard, so no adaptations are necessarily required for hearing-impaired students .... (ECU, 2008a: 26).

All new builds and refurbishments should anticipate a wheelchair-user visiting rooms, and social areas should provide adequate internal space, corridor widths and door widths ... (ECU, 2008a: 26-27).

It is also highlighted that in residential accommodation, electric goods should be made user-friendly for disabled students' independent use (ECU, 2008a). Nevertheless, due to the limited number and type of accessible student accommodation, the ECU (2008a: 25) proposes that: “Accessible rooms should not

all be grouped together, but integrated throughout to prevent marginalisation and isolation of disabled students.”

Furthermore, the four case-studied universities identify a range of accessible accommodation for disabled students. The University of Leeds’ claims that the university will adapt the accommodations for disabled students “according to individual needs where possible.” (ULES, 2009b: unpagued). This university gives the following types of adjustments as examples of adaptations made to student accommodation:

Flashing fire alarms and vibrating pillows for deaf or hard of hearing students

Large and level access rooms for wheelchair users or students with physical/mobility impairments (*ibid*).

In relation to international students, without any reference to postgraduate students, the ECU (2008a) highlights that in 2006/2007 85 per cent of international undergraduate students were offered university housing at the beginning of their stay. Yet, recommendations on improving non-disabled international students’ accommodation (such as the provision of culturally sensitive dietary requirements) were limited. NSF (2009: 88) was one of the very few organisations to offer such a policy proposal by inviting the HEIs to: “seek international students’ views on whether they would like their accommodation to be segregated, or integrated with home students.” Despite this shortage in policy, as discussed below, international students are a heterogeneous group; and accordingly they tend to have as diverse accommodation-related needs as their domestic counterparts.

Disabled international students, who arrive in the UK with their families, for example, need family accommodation. As the document analysis showed, the amount of family accommodation is restricted on the university campuses (UH, 2011a). Although ECU (2008a) recognises this limitation, no recommendations are made about university owned family accommodation.

Additionally, the accessible rooms are often based in catered halls (ULAS, 2011). Although disabled international students may benefit from such facility, holiday periods can present a challenge for those disabled students who stay in the UK, but have difficulty in cooking for themselves. Whilst ECU (2008a: 29) comments about the isolation students from care, who do not have homes to go to during holidays, may experience, it fails to recognise disabled international students' needs during this period:

Students from care ... may need to be grouped with other students who stay on campus. They may need different or additional social facilities to compensate, such as a games room or TV room.

Although the documents above outline the ways they intend to meet disabled students' needs, little is known about disabled international students' concerns, (e.g. the provision of family accommodation). Furthermore, due to cultural, linguistic and religious reasons, some disabled international students may prefer to live in accessible accommodation in same-sex halls or with their compatriots. Recommendations on a national level to make rooms accessible in same-sex or specific international halls appear to be absent. The regulations identified above seem largely related to the newly built halls, restricting disabled students' accommodation choices.

In Chapter Eight (Section 8.2), I also examine participants' experiences of transport. Limited information was found on this topic on the websites examined. However, without considering the needs of students over the age of 19, under the *Education Act 2002* (HMSO, 2002), Local Education Authorities (LEAs) have a duty to make transport provision for students aged 16-19, and to ensure that transport does not create a barrier to FE (Barer, 2007). In the four universities' document analyses, only Huddersfield (UH, 2009a) has related policies on

transport, which incorporate equal opportunity principles, particularly in relation to disabled students' need to have access to an accessible parking space.

### *Social Activities for Disabled Domestic, Non-Disabled International, and Disabled International Students*

For most students having a satisfying university experience, not only depends on successful academic achievements, but also on a fulfilling social life. Having opportunities to socialise on university campus and to form strong and supportive friendships can make disabled (Earle, 1999), international (Ryan, 2000), and disabled international students' university experiences smoother. The SU and International Office are two university-based organisations responsible for providing social opportunities for students.

In addition to lobbying, campaigning, debating and carrying out other democratic activities, most SUs are said to facilitate various student social, sport and volunteering activities, and provide support through advice centres and job shops (ECU, 2009b). The majority of SUs receive funding through an annual allocation from their educational institution, and many supplement this income from commercial sales from their venues and shops. The SU is a constitutional organisation in HEIs for students, with a central principle of student representation. The University of Huddersfield's SU, for example, states: "Although part of the University, the Student's Union is independent, student led and student focused and passionate to ensure that your time at University is as awesome as possible." (UHSU, 2011: unpagged).

On another account, in most universities the remits of International Offices are said to be assisting students with opening a bank account, registering with the police and a doctor, university registration etc. (ULIO, 2010). Most International Offices also organise social events like day trips, providing opportunities for friendships to be developed as well as showing international students something of Britain's cultural heritage. Leeds Metropolitan University states: "The social programme is

an ideal way to meet other new international students, see different parts of the UK and most importantly, to have fun!" (LMU, 2005: unpagged).

In the case-studied universities, only the University of Leeds (UL, 2010), and Leeds Metropolitan University (LMU, 2005) appear to have measurements in place to prepare students with the debilitating effects of a possible culture shock. These universities encourage international students to see the 'Culture Shock' comedy drama (ISC, 2011) - a humorous short play about cultural differences that new students may face in their initial months of staying in the UK, and the effects - during the International Welcome Programme. Students are also directed to visit the UKCISA (2008b) website, familiarising themselves with such changes as food, climate and social values.

However, the ECU reports (2008a; 2009b) confirm that there are still discriminatory barriers caused by a physical and social inaccessible and inappropriate environment for students with different impairments accessing and utilising university social spaces including clubs and societies. Whilst the SU movement is renowned for challenging practice within HEIs; the ECU report (2009b) highlights the importance of individual Unions to demonstrate that their own policies and practices can withstand scrutiny, and that they are fully aware of equality legislation requirements. Thus this report proposes that SUs integrate equality and diversity training into the orientation/induction period, and recommends the following adaptations in creating an inclusive SU:

Make adjustments in advance, for example by providing either an interpreter or palantypist ... providing visual materials in alternative formats; and ensuring the venue is accessible. (ECU, 2009b: 12).

Likewise, section three of the QAA 'Code of Practice' states:

Since disabled students have an entitlement to access both the social and the academic life of their institution, it follows that

institutions need to be confident that the services used by students, such as cultural or sporting activity, catering or accommodation, are as accessible as possible. (QAA, 2009a: 16).

In order for international students to overcome a range of emotional barriers, including homesickness, accessing social activities, where they can meet other international and also British students is essential. Yet, the SU activities might not necessarily be inclusive of 'all' students from their very foundations. The ECU (2009b) suggests the range of events offered by SUs, particularly during the Freshers' week to be too narrow and focused on the "traditional" young British student (ECU, 2009b: 23). According to the ECU report (2009b), it is also likely that international students participate less than other groups in SUs democratic activities due to issues around language and cultural understandings of democracy. The lack of awareness of the rights of international students to become sabbatical officers, for example, is highlighted in this report as a particular hindrance, when attempting to stand for elections in SU.

The NUS report (2008) also argues that 'white' students are more likely to feel that university provided social spaces met their needs compared with either 'black' or Asian students. Additionally, ECU (2009b) notes that the 'traditional' students did not always display inclusive attitude towards their peers from different backgrounds including disabled, international, and arguably disabled international students.

The documents above recognise disabled and international students' different social needs as two separate groups in various university-based social activities. None, however, point to the unique difficulties faced by disabled international students (e.g. cultural interpretations of 'disability' in a social context) in accessing university social venues or services. There is no recognition of the double marginalisation created for disabled international students when the physical accessibility of an SU, for example, is exaggerated by their cultural alienation from a specific student activity.

Nonetheless, the NSF recognises that although many academic spaces are now increasingly accessible, social facilities lack a similar commitment. "Socialising can pose particular challenges for disabled students, and even greater challenges for disabled international students." (NSF, 2008: 51). Whilst there were no proposals following this recognition to make university social venues accessible for the specific needs of disabled international students, NSF (2008) offers the following recommendation to create an organisation that is solely concerned about disabled international students' issues. As evident throughout the present thesis, this is crucial to the current HE environment. NSF (2008: 52) states:

We propose that the feasibility of an Association of Disabled International Students be considered to combat the isolation that can be felt by these students – and to provide peer support about any potential sources of funding and broader advice.

#### **4.7 Summary**

I began this chapter by exploring the influential *FHEA* of 1992 (HMSO, 1992a), and its role in widening students' participation in the HE sector. This act was significant in dividing universities into old and new institutions. Literature suggests that old universities are more reluctant to adopt inclusive policies and accommodate non-conventional students in comparison with the new universities. However, when I examined four (two old and two new) selected universities' disability-related documents, as examples, there was no evidence that the new universities offered a better service provision for disabled students. In fact of the four universities the two old universities' websites were informative about disabled international students' needs. I also reviewed various quangos and non-governmental initiatives on (1) information, access and funding; (2) disability services; (3) learning and teaching; and (4) non-disability support services such as accommodation and social life for disabled domestic, non-disabled international and disabled international students.



This chapter illustrated that although there were some guidelines on service provision, centrally there is no consistency, or indeed a standard requirement that the universities have to comply with in providing information and services for disabled students generally. As in Beauchamp-Pryor's study (2007), based on the dominant ideology of 'disability', guidelines set by various bodies appeared to be superficial and offer only compensation, leading to dependency and inequality, and resulting in varying quality of disability support across institutions. The case-studied universities had introduced the concept of social understanding of disability only superficially in their policies (UH, 2006; UL 2009a), with little evidence to show their full commitment in removing barriers and adopting inclusive practices. Barnes (2001: 9) contends that for many organisations, the social model has become a "new orthodoxy", the interpretation and practical application of which is not necessarily commensurate with its original principles. In addition, although rhetoric found on the paper/website is sound and positive, the degree to which these principles are being practiced in each university remains unclear.

The literature related to disabled students took little notice of international students' concerns including in the area of funding for disability-related support. The documents for international students, such as in learning and teaching, showed little commitment to remove disabling barriers and encourage disabled international students' participation in HE. Information, related to the four broad areas discussed here, for disabled international students, both on national and local level, was scarce. The information that did exist appeared merely cursory and wholly inadequate as it overlooked crucial aspects of student life.

The following four chapters will discuss, at length, disabled international students' firsthand experiences in a variety of contexts within university life. By doing so, I will attempt to find out whether the policies implemented by different national bodies on disabled, international and disabled international students, discussed in this chapter, are being actively practiced at an individual HEI level.

## **Chapter Five: Choosing, Arriving and Settling in an English University: “left in a sea of nothingness”**

In the previous chapters, I discussed literature and research conducted about disability in education. Whilst examining various national policies, I chose to focus on four universities as case-studies in relation to different aspects of disabled, international and disabled international students' university experience. With reference to two of disabled people's 'Seven Needs', here I shall analyse the participants' firsthand accounts of 'information' received, and 'access' to the university environment, alongside the specifics of the literature and policies discussed in chapters Two and Four.

This chapter is concerned with a range of issues that participants encountered pre and at the point of entering their universities. Starting university life constitutes, for many students, disabled or non-disabled, international or domestic, a considerable move in the direction of forming an independent personal and social identity. It is argued that disabled students have an increased complicated nexus of social relations to deal with, as part of this transition period, compared with their non-disabled counterparts (Borland & James, 1999). This can be intensified for disabled international students who may have to deal with greater uncertainties.

Initially, I will consider participants' opinions on written and verbal accessible information received that enabled them to make informed choices about their educational opportunities. Other influences on participants' decisions about choosing a particular country/university are also taken into account. Participants' experiences of access to the university environment, including the admissions process, are central to this chapter. A discussion of how participants acquired funding for their tuition fees, disability-support and living costs, and the adequacy of such funds will then follow. Subsequent to this, the participants' opportunities of visiting their universities pre-admission will be examined.

## **5.1 Information: Finding Out**

For disabled people, leading an independent life, which is integrated to the greatest possible extent with the non-disabled community, requires making one's own decisions and exercising choice (Morris, 2005). In order to do so, according to the Derbyshire Centre for Integrated Living (DCIL) (DCDP, 1986), in the first instance, disabled people need appropriate information, stipulated in disabled people's 'Seven Needs' (Hasler, 2003: unpagged). Here, I will assess participants' opinions on the availability, accessibility and usefulness of information they received on various aspects of university life, including guidance on academic matters, disability-support, and personal issues, before and during admission stage. The relative information made available to participants by the universities may have indeed dictated choices on where and what to study.

Disabled students, in particular, need accessible, transparent and unambiguous information about what university life involves (e.g. where to go for Information, Advice and Guidance [IAG] on disability-support, and how to apply). Some students also need to know about their potential university's prior experience of successfully supporting students with impairments similar to those of their own (Hurst, 1993). Without information to make informed choices, disabled students can experience not only high levels of stress, but also difficulty in preparing themselves for university study (Madriaga, 2007).

Similarly, international students need accurate, well-timed pre-arrival information in order to alleviate anxieties when facing the unknown, helping them with "adjustment and acculturation" (Ryan, 2000: 81). Such communication is a crucial prerequisite to a proper understanding of, first, the British culture; second, Higher Education (HE) in general; and third, the expectations, academic programmes and facilities of the specific institution at which the student will be working (Lewins, 1990). In the case of students with ethnic minority backgrounds, Acland and Azmi

(1998) note that reading prospectuses and other pre-admission literature shaped students' perceptions of universities before entry.

Whilst all international students are susceptible to poor pre-arrival communications, disabled international students face additional problems due to uncertainties regarding the accessible accommodation and type of support on offer (Hurst, 1998). The general prospectus may not, necessarily, include such specific information for disabled students (O'Connor & Robinson, 1999), be in students' preferred format (McCarthy & Hurst, 2001), or indeed be culturally sensitive. Participants were asked to comment on the appropriateness of a range of information received in the admission stage from their prospective universities.

#### *Prospectuses and University-specific Information*

In general terms, of 30 participants, 20 received accessible university-specific advice, information and prospectuses on university life prior to arrival. Tina was satisfied with the type and accessibility of information and advice received pre-arrival:

There were three people who contacted me: Tracy, for the application process, Laura, from the accommodation office, and Karen, from the DSU. So, I contacted different people, before I came here, for different things.

As a student with a visual impairment, Alice was particularly pleased with her university for providing the materials she requested by email as Word and text attachments. When considering the cost of printing and postage, Patrick (with dyslexia) was impressed by the willingness of university staff in sending the accessible information to his home country.

Conversely, six students were openly dissatisfied with the accessibility of general information sent by their universities. Angela (with dyslexia) preferred yellow, blue and pink print background, especially when reading extensively. Her university

failed to provide information in this format, even after she specified her preference. In Nora's case, pre-entry and even after admission to her university, both general and specific information in alternative formats was not readily available (a request by prior arrangement was needed). She was, however, happy with the university's Web-based information.

Additionally, even though 21 participants did not speak English as a first language, none were offered alternative versions of prospectuses. The reason for not producing publications in other languages may be the expectation that international students are enrolled on programmes taught in English, and therefore deemed to have reached a certain degree of proficiency in English language (SCONUL, 2007). Yet, specifically at the beginning of their university experience, international students may need more help with their language skills, and provision of such materials in their own language may not only benefit them, but also enable their families to play a more active role in their university selection.

#### *Information on Disability Services*

Many Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) try to provide guidance about entry to their institutions for disabled students, listing the support services they have on offer (Hurst, 1993). Eight participants received such information about the Disability Service Units (DSUs) in their universities. Whilst six received the information directly from DSUs, Peter was given this university-specific information from his academic department, and Sova from the British Council (BC) office. Although Irin (with physical impairments) acknowledged receiving information from the DSU, she continually insisted that she was a "normal" student, and did not need the "special services" or indeed the related information.

However, the other 22 participants (both from Western and non-Western countries) did not receive any information about their DSUs. Whilst Olivia, for example, was told that there was a support centre for disabled students, she did not know about the specifics of the support on offer. She highlighted the significance of receiving

information on such details: "It would have been helpful and would have given me a sense of security."

Maria recalled a "tokenistic" description of the DSU in the information pack she received, she observed: "It seems more as if they wanted to be politically correct and included such section because they must."

As a result of not receiving specific information at pre-admission stage about dyslexia support, Angela, as with the participants in Borland and James's study (1999), stated that initially she was unaware of the support services available: "During my research, I found out that there are a lot of services and I am using some of them now, but I wasn't informed about them when I applied for the Uni."

Joseph thought that information on disability services could have been helpful. Conversely, Sova (with a visual impairment) explained how, due to the inaccessibility of the information, she was not able to read it independently. She was, therefore, restricted to listening to the small print introductory page only, read and recorded by her course director in her previous place of study. Consequently, Sova felt disadvantaged and ill-informed about the full disability services available: "I had no idea about all the support on offer. There just was nobody to read the full text out for me."

#### *Information on Non-disability-related Matters*

Providing materials on academic issues for international students pre-arrival is significant in raising awareness of changes in academia and the skills they may require to cope with the transition (Pringle *et al.*, 2008). Yet, only four students received literature on academic issues from their departments. The information consisted of course outlines, module descriptions, and the academic calendar.

To make informed choices about their housing opportunities, maximising chances of living in accessible housing, disabled people need to know about different

housing options available (Barker, 1984). Nine participants received written information on accommodation. Whereas Domenic (wheelchair-user), for example, was informed that his room could be made more accessible to meet his specific needs, Ned (also wheelchair-user) was ill-informed about such adaptations. Ned attributed this to the lack of cooperation between the DSU and the accommodation office in meeting students' needs. In addition to the information received, overall 12 participants had one-to-one discussions with the accommodation office staff about their disability-related needs. The rest found accommodation through friends, BC staff, estate agencies, or had to rely on their own efforts to find suitable accommodation. Linda, who resided in England with her partner (as with three other participants) stated:

I certainly trusted my partner, of course, by being my partner I knew that he understood my situation a heck of a lot better than some faceless person in the university. He was kind enough to come here before me, and he did his homework and he found a good place for us to live.

Moreover, nine students discussed receiving information and brochures about such support services as welfare and finance in their universities. Whilst Alice, Joseph, Norman and Tanji (all from Western countries) received the international student pre-arrival guide before reaching their English universities to commence their studies, Peter (African) did not obtain this information until after he commenced his studies. Tanji listed the information she received from the International Office: "about student life, banking, Students' Union, medical advice, insurance." Tina highlighted the importance of receiving city and university maps from the International Office. It has to be noted that instead of the DSU, pre-arrival, the International Office provided helpful information on the counselling service for Iris (a mental health system survivor).

A lack of adequate information on social life was affirmed by three participants' (one with a visual impairment, and two with mobility impairments). Evidently, there was also an absence of this information in the case-studied universities' websites

as examples. When talking about arranging social activities, Toney (with a visual impairment) highlighted the difficulties related to spontaneity, a privilege that most non-disabled students take for granted, as major aspect of university life:

By the time I get accessible information, either it's too late or too sudden. There has to be sudden plans, or I have to rely on other people to let me know something interesting is going on; in which sense I don't have choices. Either I say 'no' or I just tag along.

Yet, on a general level, 10 participants received very little or no information on crucial student services. Linda expressed her dissatisfaction: "I had no idea how to access other services. You know how I learned about that stuff? From classmates."

Minda and Nicky took on the responsibility of searching for information on their university. They thought that as all the information was on university websites, it was unnecessary to send the materials through the post. As a postgraduate student, Kate had a different set of expectations with regards to her university academic and social life. She criticised the limited university information that she received for not being geared to postgraduate students, instead primarily meeting the typical undergraduate students' needs.

Only six participants were given brief disabled international student specific information about funding for their disability-support. The lack of information sensitive to this group's needs (e.g. specific academic support), concerned the participants. They considered receiving such information invaluable, helping them to alleviate disability-related anxieties, and clarifying requirements and expectations.

This section examined the participants' opinions on the provision, accessibility, relevance and language of the information received. It was clear that access to robust, reliable information was important for participants, who like other



prospective students were “making decisions about where to apply amid greater demand for places” (HEFCE, 2010b: 6). As discussed above, 20 of the sample received erratic information offered by various student services. However, the remaining participants, all from different countries, did not receive accessible and impartial information as in Dinsdale (2002), and Reindal’s (1995) studies. Similarly, in Connor and Dewson’s survey (2001), 68 per cent of students felt the information received was inadequate; they wished to receive more information to help them decide which HEI to apply to.

Moreover, as discussed in Chapter Four (Section 4.3), the four case-studied universities, as examples, invite international students to visit their websites to obtain crucial information on various student issues (UL, 2006; LMU, 2005). There seems to be an immediate expectation for students to have access to the internet, or at least to be able to read the hard copy small print university materials readily.

Accessing the internet was problematic for some participants (like Sova and Toney) from their non-Western home countries as was the case with meeting staff face-to-face. Indeed, some university websites lacked accessibility features for students with visual impairments as Ed and Mary affirmed. The eight participants, who were dissatisfied with the accessibility of various pieces of information received, were with dyslexia (two), a hearing impairment (one), and visual impairments (five). This points to the universities’ unwillingness to provide information in students’ preferred formats, be it in large print, Braille or audio version, making the provision of information inclusive. Lack of such useful information can add to a feeling of anxiety for most disabled students (Baron *et al.*, 1996; Madriaga, 2007), especially important when being in an unfamiliar environment as an international student, as it can reduce one’s self-confidence (Kinnell, 1990).

It can therefore be argued that participants were disadvantaged on two levels in the area of receiving the relevant information in tailored, accessible formats.

Knowing one's options is crucial for disabled students; unlike their domestic counterparts, however, participants were not able to visit or contact their universities by phone/email as conveniently. Angela, for example, did not receive any information on university services; yet she preferred to keep the number of email contacts with her English university from home minimal, intoning that the process was stressful. The participants' experiences of receiving inaccessible and sporadic information contradicted the Equality Challenge Unit's (ECU) (2009c) recommendation, and also the case-studied universities' policies (discussed in Chapter Four – Section 4.3) on providing accessible information to help with making choices similar to the ones discussed in the next section.

## **5.2 Choosing Country/University/Course**

In the view of information received, I will now examine participants' choices of study details. They were asked a range of questions about their choice of country, university and course. As with Goode's study (2007), for some, going to university was a natural next step in their educational career. For others, starting university was part of a search for a more independent identity than that which had been previously ascribed. In any case, starting university life often tends to constitute a step away from students' familiar home environment. Losing this source of 'support' can be stressful (Lowe & Cook, 2003), and make life more complex (Goode, 2007; Parker, 1999).

### *Choosing a Country*

Students from former colonies of Britain have been arriving in the United Kingdom (UK) to pursue their education for over 200 years (Sen, 1970). As discussed in Chapter One's introduction, in general, international students' numbers are on a sharp increase in British HEIs at all levels (Kinnell, 1990; Ramsden, 2009). The majority have taken advantage of British educational facilities, which may not yet

be fully developed in their home countries. The higher standard of British education and English as an international language also confers a status on the students, improving their prospects when returning home (Sen, 1970; Williams, 1982). Many countries also desperately need trained manpower, which is only achievable by sending their nationals abroad to countries like the UK (Perren, 1963). Reflecting these previous findings, the participants' expectations of English HE varied enormously.

Five students acknowledged family and friends' influences for choosing to study in the UK: either they had friends in Britain or knew someone who had studied in the British HE sector. For Patrick, having "British roots" was a significant factor for living in the country. Mlinda followed in her brother's footsteps in completing A-Levels in Britain.

Similar to Allen (1998), and Madriaga's (2007) studies, six of the participants mentioned their future economic success and enhancement of career opportunities as an important reason for studying in the UK. Sova (East-European) highlighted this economic necessity:

It's good for my career to get another Masters degree (especially British). Unfortunately I couldn't find a better job, but my British Masters certificate helped a lot in persuading some other employers in publishing business whom I currently work for.

Being able to work in Britain and gaining experience, albeit on a short-term basis, was also significant for Tina (Asian):

By law, I can work in the UK for one year and I plan to do so at a Non-Governmental Organisations for disabled people, because I want to widen my network. When I go back to my country, I still want to keep in touch with colleagues in the UK, in order to use that knowledge and experience for disabled people in my country.

Exposure to English language and culture was important to participants from non-Western countries. In fact, this was the main reason why Peter (African) decided to travel to the UK despite having a place to complete a doctorate in his home country/city. However, for Anna (a European non-English speaker), and Toney (Asian), the universality of the English language made a considerable difference. Whilst the unstable political situation in Toney's home (Commonwealth) country was an influential factor for him in choosing to study in England, he highlighted his familiarity with the English language as another reason for this decision.

Additionally, research (Barer, 2007; Gitlow, 1999; Hall *et al.*, 2002; Riddell *et al.*, 2005; Ulley *et al.*, 2007) has shown that disabled students mainly opt for social science (including sociology and social policy), and creative art and design courses versus geography, earth and environmental sciences. These authors consider social science subjects to be more accessible and teaching staff generally likely to be aware of equality and diversity issues. Participants like Olivia, were drawn to the nature of particular social science courses in British HEIs, remarking: "British universities are advanced in the field of my study compared to [Far-Eastern] universities."

Furthermore, the relatively short duration (one year) of Masters courses in the UK, and the "do-able" fees (for European Union [EU] students), played an important role for participants like Nicky and Anna respectively. Three other participants chose to study in England because they had obtained BC or other similar scholarships. For others, working with their supervisors, or in a particular research group, was highlighted as important, for example, as "a dream research environment" for Domenic.

For three participants (two Asian, and one European), the comparably advanced Disabled People's Movement in the UK, and its influence on national policy and practice was significant in their choice of country. Conversely, Sova (East-European) mentioned the importance of living for a year abroad on her own. In her

interview, Sova appeared to have an outgoing and confident personality, for example, wishing to partake in student life implying that perhaps she would have liked to go to a nightclub and “drink typical student drinks”. Chapter Eight (Section 8.3) will further comment on Sova and other participants’ experiences of social life. However, her desire to live independently for a year may have also arisen from her segregated background. Sova described how, like others in a similar position, her visually impaired family was not included in mainstream society in her country. She mentioned the convention to segregate disabled people “in special boarding schools, factories, resting homes and hostels.” Additionally, Peter was keen to experience and be exposed to a different meaning of social life to that of his home country.

In general, participants’ reasons for choosing to study in England depended on the cultural, educational, economical, political and social status of their countries of origin. The participants’ statements about choosing England to pursue their university education corresponded with the reasons given for disabled students’ participation in HE in a publication by Skill: National Bureau for Students with Disabilities (1991), namely, improving knowledge; obtaining future employment-specific qualifications; and developing independence. Next, participants’ reasons for studying in their specific university/city will be explored.

### *Selecting Cities*

The reasons for choosing to study in England interlinked with the reasons given for selecting specific cities and universities. Three participants with visual impairments had a holistic view when choosing their university. Alice and Tanji illustrated this:

I have always dreamt of living in England, the appeal of this particular county was heightened through the friendly and helpful staff in the admission process. (Alice).

The reputation of the university, the city as a cultural centre, the world-famous eye hospital here, and the reasonableness of tuition. (Tanji).

Nora, on the other hand, referred to the social life of her chosen city, i.e. variety of things to do outside university with her friends. Patrick discussed the cultural venues in his chosen city, including theatres, museums and art galleries. Apart from Nora and Patrick (both with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder [ADHD] and Dyslexia), the social life of a city appeared to be less of an important issue for participants.

I asked participants how important university social life was in selecting their university. For Tina this was important:

Because I actually want to get involved in the university society, I actively attend the international student society every week, in order to communicate with international students. I also want to know about British culture.

Corresponding with Lewis's study (1984), for the four other participants who discussed university social life, their involvement in such activities was less important, when making university choices. According to Janet, one reason was that because she studied "all the time", to the extent that she felt her friends were being neglected. For Anna (European), even after checking her selected few universities' societies, differentiating between the provision of social life was difficult: "because they are so similar". Lack of interest in university social life may also be due to not receiving adequate information on existing university social activities (as discussed in section 5.1). Having friends, who were studying, or had studied, in participants' chosen universities seemed to have been more important in choosing a particular university. In her university, Mlinda, for example, had many friends from her secondary school.

Based on the information received, the ranking and quality of teaching/courses on offer (in various disciplines) were exclusive reasons for choosing a specific university for 20 participants. However, to secure anonymity, these subject matters in the universities concerned cannot be named. Ed, Iris and Ned also pointed out that their courses in the specific English universities, where they studied, had a high reputation back in their home (Asian and Far-Eastern) countries, and determined their choice. Gloria was told that her University was the best choice for her specific course. Whilst Anna acknowledged the importance of receiving a university-specific scholarship, the fact that her university was one of the few in the country offering her chosen course was also significant. Nicky was the only one to discuss cost, noting that her course tuition fee was less expensive than in other English universities.

Participants were asked whether the quality of disability services, promised in the information received pre-admission, was important in their respective university selection process. This was the case for seven participants. Similar to Pearson's study (1994), for Gloria (African with a mobility impairment), the provision of services for disabled students' integration into university life was significant. For the same reason, Peter (with a very similar background), chose his university in England over any other in the United States of America (USA) or Australia, because it claimed to practise equality, especially, disability equality. Although for Peter, the provision of disability-support was an important factor in choosing his university; during his stay, access to the surrounding environment, or lack thereof, took priority over the type and quality of services on offer:

Given the nature of my disability, the issues of accessibility are paramount. All the buildings, for example, which were built before the issues of disabled people came up, all are inaccessible. So it needs commitment. They need a strong policy. They need dedication to ensure that everything is accessible.

Even though due to lack of accessible information, Sova was ill-informed about the disability services available, the quality of the DSU was nonetheless crucial for her:

“The university was a place with the course I needed and with the DSU, support from which I required.”

Conversely, as in Baron *et al.* (1996), and Goode’s (2007) studies, three of these seven participants felt the information on DSUs to be wildly inaccurate. For Ed, the availability of disability-support promoted in the student prospectus led him to believe that: “They will arrange for every student, they will get support based on their disability.”

Janet was dissatisfied with the DSU and felt the information received misled her: “I didn’t think I would have to think about that in a social sciences programme. I couldn’t have been more wrong.” Similarly, Maria expressed her unfulfilled expectations:

Because I was so used to high standards and the political sensitiveness toward disabled people in the previous place of study; it did not occur to me that an economically advanced country such as the UK could be so backwards in terms of supporting disabled students.

Although in Allen’s study (1998), ethnic minority students considered the ethnic mix of their future university and the surrounding community an important factor when deciding where to study; in the current investigation, the participants were less interested in such issues prior to starting their university life. Yet, for 20 participants in the universities concerned, the promised quality of disability services as in the *Life, Not Numbers* report (NUS, 2010b), and Pearson’s study (1994), particularly for students with mobility and visual impairments, appeared to primarily determine which university to study at. The nature/type of participants’ chosen courses was also significant in this decision. Next, the reasons why participants chose to study particular courses will be discussed.

### *Choosing Courses*



As in Shevlin *et al.*'s study (2004), and also the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) Student Survey (IES, 2000), for 20 participants, a strong personal interest and passion in the topic of study was a motivating factor. Peter related his interest in Human Rights to his firsthand experience of disability. Likewise Maria stated:

I have always felt strongly about social justice, poverty and development, and have always been extremely curious about the questions that economists ask. Since I was little, I wanted to learn how to measure my thoughts and questions about society. So rather than me choosing economics, economists happen to answer questions that interest me.

Seventeen participants were attracted by the quality and approach of courses and research/teaching methods. Five noted that choosing courses which advanced career opportunities after graduation was a strong driving force behind their initial selection. Tanji's comment combines these two points: "The legal studies expand in a nice way and it is a very fast growing industry and hot so to speak."

Overall, a strong interest in the nature and content of the courses participants studied seemed to have the greatest appeal in their subject choice. Unlike findings in Dunne *et al.*'s study (1997: 517), none of the participants were attracted to their courses based on whatever "looks easiest", "won't take up extra time", "has the shortest/easiest assessment", or as Fuller *et al.* (2004b: 308) suggest had "practical element or [was] ... information technology based". In fact, as shall be discussed below, some participants chose their courses, knowing that they may face disability-related barriers in the course content and environment.

As has been illustrated, participants' reasons for choosing England (family, culture/language, funding, nature of the course, disability policy); a specific city and university (friends, reputation of the course, quality of disability services); and a particular course (personal interest, approach of the course, careers enhancement) varied considerably. Some decisions rested on their past roots, some to present expectations and others to future dreams.

Having chosen a suitable course, the next stage marks participants' initial step in beginning their university adventure, and the following sections/chapters continue along this journey. The general access issues to and inside the university environment will now be discussed.

### **5.3 General Access: Getting There**

Wendell (1996: 32) refers to the inaccessible facilities that disabled people experience on an everyday basis as “daily stress and wounds to self-esteem”. In addition to information access, in university life, physical access remains a serious obstacle to disabled students' full participation in academic and social experiences (Baron *et al.*, 1996; Borland & James, 1999; Causton-Theoharis *et al.*, 2009; Emong, 2010; Holloway, 2001; Shevlin *et al.*, 2004). Access to the environment, “to go where everyone else does” has been identified as one of disabled people's ‘Seven Needs’ by DCIL (Hasler, 2003: unpagged). In the view of similar local and national initiatives discussed in Chapter Four (Section 4.3), the participants commented on various general access issues they had experienced on a daily basis on university campus. Access to specific buildings including lecture rooms, libraries, participants' accommodation, and the social venues will be dealt with separately in the next chapters with due attention.

Whereas 10 students had experienced no difficulty in accessing the university environment, the remaining 20 highlighted some barriers in entering a number of buildings. Dominic and Nicky complained about heavy doors to various buildings. Whilst Olivia (with one short arm) acknowledged fellow students' support when facing disabling barriers; she pointed to the inaccessible areas in and around a number of departments:

The doors at university buildings were too heavy to open with one hand. Also, a hot-water heater in the common-room was not

accessible because it was installed at a high position (my short left arm could not reach it).

Although Irin felt the level of access to buildings on a whole was agreeable, like the participants in O'Connor and Robinson's study (1999), she complained about walking long distances between different buildings. Kate was of the same opinion:

I often had to walk twice as far to get half the distance (use the accessible route). I had to do a lot of planning in advance and do a number of things together to make the best use of my time and energy.

Wendell (1996: 30) refers to the impeding effects on time and energy levels, when disabled people make accommodations to their physical environments to overcome access barriers as "ordinary living arrangements". Magnus (2006) also comments on the extra time disabled students spend in communication with university staff and official services about removing disabling barriers. Like in Shevlin *et al.*'s study (2004), participants appeared to expend huge amounts of time and energy in negotiating many seemingly accessible buildings. Four participants with physical impairments discussed this in depth, Elaine commented: "A huge effort, exhausting, and difficult to find accessible entrances, longer ways round to get to places if you need wheelchair access."

Furthermore, Farrar (2004), and Viney (2006) discuss how disabled students experience fatigue as a dimension of their impairments, resulting in limited concentration and energy available for studying and other activities. For these reasons Murray (2004: 19) highlights an important fact: "energy must be prioritised, time used effectively." For Linda also, fatigue was a major concern when contemplating which options/routes were quicker and more accessible: "It's that constant internal struggle of priorities all the time. I think practically every single day it's an issue."

In addition, the outside environment was inaccessible to participants like Tina (wheelchair-user), due to the “maze-like” campus and the “natural” hilly landscape of the city concerned. Elaine explained why she chose not to use her Motability aid:

I'm glad that I didn't bring my scooter, because it's a three-wheeler and it would have got stuck in every crack on every pavement ... I felt that my manual wheelchair would cope more easily with the environment.

Carol commented on the uneven pavements and cobblestones on the campus in her 'old' university:

It's the thing about depth perception. Having sight from one eye, I always catch my feet, catch my toes, almost falling on my face. I've noticed that more than back home, where everything is paved over, maybe newer. We don't really have cobblestones there. But again, if I'm in a familiar route, like walking from my department to Union, I'll know what parts are bumpy and it wouldn't be a problem, but if I'm in a new area I don't remember to pick up my feet more.

Toney (also with a visual impairment) shared a concern with students with mobility impairments. He was dissatisfied with the distance between facilities as they were 15 to 20 minutes away from each other; finding his way round was problematic. Additionally, some of the participants' pre-1992 institutions had a number of older buildings. Reflecting Holloway (2001), and Laitinen's (1992) studies, moving around such structures was identified as a challenge for participants like Toney. Similar to one of the participants in Beauchamp-Pryor's study (2007), Toney was critical of the old listed buildings where the lift services were inadequate, especially one that housed a number of student support services:

They are based in a poorly accessible 1960s building. It is six floors, which is not well labelled. It has a revolving door now, which hasn't made it very accessible.

He continued by saying that there were no plans for a desperately needed building with good accessibility to replace the old listed one until 2013. However, accessibility often encompasses more than structural changes to the actual spaces for disabled students. Use of colour contrast or a range of signs, for example, can make environments more accessible for students with visual impairments. Sova discussed how labelling the doors in Braille would have enabled her to find the university rooms easier. Mary commented on the overall inaccessibility of the university she attended: "So many stairs, so many signs, not Braille, so many heavy doors. It's just completely inaccessible for a visually impaired student."

The participants' access difficulties described above, are not exclusive to international students and can be discussed in relation to most disabled students. Nevertheless, Mlinda's experience can arguably be a unique disabled international student's difficulty. As a student with a hearing impairment, Mlinda found the size and impersonal nature of the university campus daunting. This was exaggerated, and proved to be more strenuous, due to her double identity and status as an international student and the need to lip-read in English on a larger scale.

This section has highlighted a range of physical barriers faced by participants with different impairments, mainly in pre-1992 universities. Students with mobility difficulties complained particularly about the inaccessible routes and distances between buildings; students with visual impairments discussed their difficulties with lighting and visual signage in the university environment. Apart from Mlinda's experience, access difficulties seemed to be general for disabled students, regardless of their nationality. Inaccessible physical locations (be it due to uneven pavements or heavy doors) were unmovable barriers for students unless they had support from their universities. Despite various recommendations (ECU, 2009c; QAA, 1999; 2009a), the HEIs generally did not appear to have taken their legal responsibilities seriously, making the required 'reasonable adjustments' to the built environment. Next, the admission process and its accessibility will be discussed.

#### **5.4 Enrolling on the Course**

The broad term 'admission' includes a range of activities: identification, recruitment and selection of prospective students on specific programmes; offer of a place and enrolment on these courses of study; and induction and orientation of new students to the HEIs and the relevant departments (QAA, 2006a). For the purpose of this section, admission to a university is used as a generic term to encapsulate students' experiences of the application process and enrolment on the specific programme of study. If first impressions of admissions are unfavourable, the students' whole experience tends to become problem-based (Lewins, 1990). Therefore, for disabled students to access the administrative process of registration, flexible approaches in enrolment are necessary (Farrar, 2004).

The accessibility and speediness of the admission process was explored in the interviews and shall now be discussed. The admission process to English HEIs was identified as easy for Janet compared with that in her North American home country. Carol, on the other hand, acknowledged that the doctoral application process was very different than for undergraduate or taught postgraduate student courses. The research postgraduates are required to submit a specific research proposal (Farrar, 2007; UL, 2011d), and apply for funding independently. The undergraduate students, conversely, have to fill in their personal and educational details in boxes on the Universities and Colleges Admission Service (UCAS) application forms (UCAS, 2011).

In many cases, the admission period causes anxiety, particularly when students are not contacted after they have sent off their application forms (Dinsdale, 2002). Nine participants commented on the length of the admission process with three of them stating that the procedure was speedy. Mlinda talked about her university being exceptionally quick in responding. Elaine also felt securing the place was very quick.

Six participants were less satisfied with the time taken. Nicky found the process rather time-consuming because of changes in staff and the computer registration system server being down during summer. This meant she had very little time to prepare herself for her university experience abroad.

In relation to accessibility of the admission process, whilst 15 participants appeared to have been satisfied, the other half were critical of some access issues. Alice and Irin commented on the helpfulness of university staff in sending them the accessible information and application forms. Three participants stated that the fact their sponsors liaised with their universities on their behalf throughout the admission process was particularly helpful.

Margaret (with a mobility impairment) mentioned that the admission process in her university was "Normal as being a big university". Yet, Kate criticised the admission process for its inaccessibility for those with mobility impairments, when queuing for enrolment: "few chairs, lots of leaning and standing".

Elaine (who had difficulty using a computer mouse due to some physical impairments) was particularly pleased about the way she was able to "tab around the electronic application form instead of using the mouse as much". Although Elaine's parents had to assist her with filling in the form, she preferred the electronic one to the hard-copy sent by another university she had applied to in which she had to neatly handwrite.

Linda and Patrick commented on the inaccessibility of the paperwork. Linda explained how she had to handwrite the paper forms, which was "a time and energy issue, taking ages". She further discussed how in the end her partner typed up the application on the computer: "Because I got too tired, so I just dictated to him, but again, if I can minimise having to do it, I will."

Whilst participants' experiences in admission stage, discussed so far, are not particular to international students, the few examples described next seem to be exclusively disabled international students' concerns. As an undergraduate student with a visual impairment, Toney did not find the UCAS form accessible: "It was only after I got it, somebody said 'if you want a pack of alternative format, please call the number or email here'." Due to deadlines approaching, Toney decided against this: "Because I was also applying to Cambridge and Oxford, and applying from abroad; it took a long time to come anyway."

As an international student, for Tina, the complication over receiving her unconditional offer letter was challenging:

After I got the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) result, I sent it to accommodation, and admissions office, but after maybe three weeks, I didn't receive the unconditional offer letter. I asked them: 'Where is my offer? Because I need this to obtain a visa.' They said that they didn't receive my IELTS result. 'Oh, my God, not even after three weeks?'

Tina continued by saying that in the absence of an unconditional offer, obtaining a visa would have been very difficult if not impossible had it not been for the help of BC staff. She only received the letter after arriving in the UK. This in itself was a great cause for concern when arriving in Britain. Tina spoke of being anxious of the immigration officers' possible interrogation: "I'm lucky, because no one asked about the unconditional letter."

For Angela, the challenge of this process was the fact she had to prepare a research proposal for a research post, find a suitable supervisor, and apply for funding all by email and post from her home country. Additionally, the difficulties related to using the postal service was intensified due to the inaccessibility of printed materials for Angela as a student with dyslexia.



Iris's dissatisfaction related to her linguistic difficulties. With an international student status, Linda talked about a lack of support from staff during admission, and their assumption of her having the necessary cultural background to cope, because she had lived in the UK previously:

It was basically like I was left in a sea of nothingness, nobody told me anything. I think it is quite difficult, because my situation is that I lived in the UK more than once, and I think the attitude was 'oh well, she has been here before, she knows the system'. Just because I lived here before doesn't mean I knew everything about how it works: I had no idea what I was entitled to or what I could ask for. Moreover, there is always the sense when you are in that situation, you don't want to jeopardise your position, you rather say nothing and just get on with it.

I examined participants' views on the support received with the enrolment, and accessibility and speediness of the admission process. Participants' experience of the admissions system suggests there was even more complication in procedures than indicated by university literature. The general reasons for their dissatisfaction ranged from the physical inaccessibility of the admission centres, the inaccessibility of application forms, to the time taken to complete the admission process. The additional barriers that disabled international students faced revolved around linguistic difficulties in filling out forms, visa issues, and disability-related difficulties and time taken when corresponding by email/post from abroad. Staff's lack of awareness about the differing needs of disabled students with international backgrounds was also emphasised. Additionally, as in Baron *et al.*'s study (1996), participants were concerned with asking for guidance in case they jeopardised their status, or were perceived as a nuisance.

One aspect which underlines much of the above is finance. Studying abroad can lead to additional expense, and students will need to find out where they can search for sources of funding (Hurst, 1998). The focus will now turn to various issues of funding to which participants applied.

## **5.5 Paying for the University: Financial Strain**

Generally in university life, students may find themselves short of money at one stage or another to the extent that “pleasure in learning is rarely the prime focus of the university experience today - even when entry qualifications allow students to take the course of their choice.” (Hayton & Paczuska, 2002: 17). In the case of international students, there may be additional problems in terms of actual budgeting in a different context and currency to that of their familiar home environment. The high international tuition fees linked to differential fee levels initially introduced in the early 1980s is said to have had “substantial financial consequences” for international students and individual universities (Lewis, 1984: 91). Participants were asked a number of questions about funding, regarding the amount and adequacy of funds received for academic, disability-support and living costs.

### *Paying for Tuition Fees*

As shown in Appendix Seven, 23 participants received funding from various sources (scholarships and student loans) for their tuition fees. Scholarships usually provide a very minimal budget, often with extremely strict conditions (Schweisfurth & Gu, 2009). In addition to the scholarships received, five students had to self-fund in order to be able to live and study in England. Without access to scholarships, Irin, Iris and Nicky relied on their own savings and parental contributions during their university lives; whilst Mlinda and Ned were fully supported by their parents. It is of interest to note that these five students were all from Far-Eastern countries, whose culture points to a specific strong parental interest and influence in their educational life (Hawkey, 1980). Domenic and Linda were the only two students, who were fully self-funded. Linda wanted to maintain control and not be emotionally drained by external funders. She explained how (with her partner) they prepared the funding from their own resources: “We had worked for a while and we already factored in that I wanted to do my Masters and we simply saved up the money.”

Whilst participants like Anna received funding through loans from her home country that had the policy of being returned within 25 years, others like Olivia did not have to return the US \$20,000. Nicky was clear about the fact that her father helped her, lending his money that he had saved for his retirement. She was, therefore, determined to return the money, acknowledging the sacrifices her parents had made for her studies.

Where the length of the funding application process was concerned, Ed seemed to have spent the longest time investigating, applying and being notified about funding. He started this process three years before finding out about the result; a process, which included searching extensively on the internet for different funders, and completing various pieces of paperwork. This was especially difficult due to the inaccessibility of websites for Ed as a student with a visual impairment, his linguistic difficulties, and also the fact that he had to prepare the application and meet the deadline all by email from his home country. Conversely, Anna explained how her home government had a student loan scheme, which was granted automatically and without issue, to the full-time students in credited universities even when studying abroad.

Participants' various scholarships covered different aspects of their educational expenses. Peter's funding, for example, was for "living expenses, support workers, and tuition". Tina's scholarship included £737 monthly specifically for the accommodation (£445 per month), food, books and general living costs. Even though Tina was satisfied with her general scholarship, she felt discriminated against, being forced to pay a higher fee due to her status as an international student.

Eight other students commented on the adequacy of funding that they received, be it in the form of a scholarship or self-funding. Four were content with the level of funding. As a postgraduate student, Anna thought that her government loan was

very generous. Carol and Peter, both doctorate students, although satisfied with their scholarships, would have preferred to have had more funding to spend on attending conferences and detailed field-studies for their research similar to their domestic counterparts.

The remaining four participants were dissatisfied with the amount received. Toney had to pay for part of his tuition fees by working part-time, also using his own savings and parental contributions. He expressed concern about falling short on payments and did not wish to put extra strain on his parents, especially as they were supporting his siblings. Maria's university refused to pay her a scholarship she had been awarded for her MA:

I was considered for full funding (£15000 for the year) at first. At one point, a woman in the admission committee realised my disability and called me in to a meeting and said, among other ruthless things, that 'We won't give you funding because we can't fund somebody who we think will fail'.

Although in the end, Maria's ex-boyfriend helped her out financially at very short notice, as a consequence of university's negative treatment, Maria experienced extreme financial difficulties, resulting in depression and delaying her course completion date considerably. Maria's experience is in accord with Andrews and Wilding (2004), and Roberts *et al.*'s (1999) findings, which indicate that financial worries make students more susceptible to experiencing depression. Maria's depression incurred additional costs for her, similar to the other participants' disability-related expenses discussed below.

#### *Paying for Disability Support Costs*

Previous research has shown that having an impairment leads to additional expenditure (Barnes, 1992b; Martin *et al.*, 1989; Morris, 1989). Hurst (1993) also recognises the issue of increased expenses experienced by disabled students in order to cover their support during university life. The majority of participants in the current investigation (27) incurred extra financial costs as a direct result of their

impairments. They felt, meeting these costs was crucial in order for them to experience a disabling-barrier-free university experience.

As discussed in Chapter Four (Section 4.3), and also demonstrated below, in some instances universities provide funding for their international students' disability-related costs, albeit on discretionary basis. Without specifying the logistics, Harrison *et al.*'s report (2009) found that 34 per cent of institutions used their own funding for disabled international students' support costs.

Yet, only six participants were aware of this source of funding being available in their university; their related experiences appeared to be inconsistent. Irin and Ned, for example, were unsure how their support costs were covered, although both thought that their universities might be funding their support automatically. Mlinda and Nora were fully funded by the disabled international students' fund in their universities. Toney commented on this source available to disabled international students in his university: "They administer where, when, and how much money needs to be provided to make the services of the university accessible. It varies from year to year."

When asked what this fund covered, Toney stated that it paid for on average of 14 hours of support-workers and a mobility trainer, various pieces of equipment and software, and printing costs: "They said that the maximum they could fund me was equivalent to the maximum DSA. The minimum fund was no support at all."

Toney stated how the application process for the fund was not straightforward. It took some convincing and persuading to prove his support needs. Gloria talked of the lack of both funding and physical support she received from the DSU, and the complicated and intrusive application process for the disabled international students' fund:

I went to the DSU, to try to get any kind of support, but I was met with frustration, because they had to ask me a whole lot of questions. I should find out from my government and all other avenues, before they could give me the support, and I thought that was not fair. So I didn't go back there again. I just left it there.

None of the other students were aware of such fund existing in their universities. They were left to their own devices to find out about this possibility, and did not have an opportunity to apply. Therefore, during their university lives, disabled international students experience more difficulties "because of the greater complexities of transition and the associated financial risks." (Barer, 2007: 69).

Although five participants' academic scholarships covered their disability-related costs, those participants whose scholarships or university funds did not extend to pay for any of these expenses, had to rely on other sources. They had to, for example, apply to charitable organisations such as the Snowdon Award Scheme (Snowdon, 2009), or ask for parental contributions to meet, sometimes, very high costs of disability-support. Indeed, Harrison *et al.* (2009) report that disabled international students in 34 per cent of institutions (they researched) made use of The Snowdon Award Scheme.

In addition to her scholarship, Alice had obtained funding from the 'Commission for the Blind' in her home country for this purpose. Four other students had to rely on their own funds. Two students' expenses were covered by different health and medical insurance companies in their home countries. Domenic and Linda were the only two students who were wholly self-funded including their disability-related expenses. For Iris, as with most students, support with her mental health issues, such as counselling, was free (Student Counselling, 2011).

Three students did not need to access any disability services, and therefore did not need additional funding. Seven others were not able to access any funds and either had to "do without" (Holloway, 2001: 600), or to rely on informal support

networks. It seemed in the context of the unequal and disabling funding system, relying on charitable support from friends and organisations was a necessity. However, charity is said to create “a morally asymmetric relationship” (Bickenbach, 1993: 197), increasing stigma and indebtedness whilst undermining self-esteem (Shakespeare, 2000). Due to their status (as explained in Chapter Three – Section 3.2), Elaine, Mary and Nathan received Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA), and therefore their experiences shall not be discussed in this section.

Participants were asked whether the funding received was adequate in meeting their disability-support needs. Eight participants thought that their support needs were covered adequately. Sova's BC scholarship covered the additional disability-related expenses such as a laptop, scanner and printer, with 15 hours a week (and more, if needed) of Personal Assistant (PA) support.

Peter was satisfied with the scholarship he received to cover his support and PA costs. However, as a student with a mobility impairment, he felt that, on a general level, there was an urgent need to invest in projects to make certain university buildings accessible.

Twenty-two participants were openly dissatisfied with the availability and amount of funds. For this reason, Alice did not utilise the transcription centre in meeting her access needs - converting the printed reading material to Braille. Instead she had to make informal arrangements. Ed discussed how his scholarship did not extend to cover transcription costs, and as a result he felt disadvantaged accessing recent print materials for his course. Joseph stated how his limited fund did not cover daily PA costs, noting how this was problematic during holidays, when his catered accommodation did not provide meals.

Furthermore, Moreton (1992) notes that students require different levels of support depending on the nature of their studies, arts versus science courses. On this account, Toney explained how the limited funding available from his university

made him cautious about the modules he chose and assignments he undertook in a natural science programme:

Sometimes I do need a bit more support because obviously being the very first student with visual impairment studying this particular natural science course, sometimes, there isn't really even a set of procedure of how we are going to deal with things. So sometimes I have to be extra careful what units I am choosing.

Kate highlighted the hidden costs of disability, and the failure of the majority of funding bodies to recognise these expenses:

Most funders don't take into account the costs of disability. Things such as: taxi transport, train use or a ground level flat or the need to have your hair washed at the salon each week, because assistance is required or the need for a cleaning person to do household tasks.

Although Linda thought that her self-fund was as adequate as she and her partner could financially afford, she thought some external support would have been helpful. However, Linda was mindful of the implications of this potential support:

It would be nice to have got some kind of support from the university, but on the other hand, again, if you have the financial means, I'm lucky at least I had control. I had total control around how to do things, versus if somebody else says 'We have to get you this one because the criteria says'. I mean, it meant more financial cost, but it meant less emotional cost.

In addition, 17 participants discussed how they felt about domestic students receiving DSA. Joseph was genuinely happy for his domestic counterparts, discussing how he thought that DSA was an effective source of support. However, five participants, whose needs were not met in their universities, were somewhat resentful towards this system. Olivia, who had not even been given information on services available, thought of this as unfair: "I don't see any reason for giving such allowance only to home students." Maria thought:



Discrimination. Especially if you come from an EU country. I think UK students studying in my country are treated the same as the domestic students in all aspects.

Eleven participants displayed an ambivalent attitude. Students in this group, in contrast, were either satisfied with their support levels received in their HEIs or they did not require any particular disability-support. Norman stated: "It's okay. I don't need them, but others may have more troubles than me, so it's okay if they receive them." Tanji rationalised: "It is not my right - I have no access to it so ...". Miinda thought of DSA as a given benefit for domestic students: "I think it's normal. The governments are working hard to ensure that disabled people could benefit more from the state."

This discussion demonstrated that 22 participants did not find the funding received adequate and needed more resources to cover all their disability-related support costs. The university funding that was indeed available, was often inadequate, complicated, and inconsistent across the HE sector. This contributed to feelings of resentment towards national policies that bestowed benefits (like DSA) for disabled domestic students, particularly from those participants, who had no means of meeting these expenses. Alice and Kate wished that similar options were available for international students, especially so as they already had to pay higher tuition and living costs. The high price of the latter due to value of currency will be discussed next.

### *Paying for Living Expenses*

To cover their living expenses, as shown in Appendix Seven, 15 participants used their scholarships or their student loans. Three of these 15 students had to use their own funds in addition to the external money received. Whilst four participants were fully self-funded; Irin, Iris and Toney's parents contributed towards their living

costs, and Minda, Ned and Nicky's parents covered their full living expenses. Tanji, on the other hand, stated: "Since I do not have a family and no recourse to support here, a group of friends from my home country gathered a sum of money and sent to me."

In the view of all the funds discussed in this section (5.5), 17 of the participants experienced general financial difficulties in their university life (whereas the rest did not). Alice, who studied for a year on a doctoral programme, described her financial difficulty: "I learned valuable lessons about frugal living. Lack of funding influenced my decision not to return to England."

Tanji described the effects of her financial difficulty on her day-to-day living:

I cut back on food and could not pay my rent for three months. Additionally, what really hurt is that I had to pay council tax because I switched to part-time status after the fast and detrimental deterioration in my eye sight. So it was hard going all around.

However, students can obtain funding from a number of voluntary charitable organisations and trusts (Hutchinson *et al.*, 1998). This process usually involves a considerable amount of preparatory work and effort for students. As evident in the current writer's firsthand experience, the applicants may face rejection after rejection, which is a disappointing experience. At the time of the interviews, only Kate and Nora had completed applying to charitable sources to help with their financial shortfall; neither was successful. Angela and Peter were still waiting to hear the outcome of their application from the relevant trusts. Six of the participants made it explicit that they knew about additional sources of funding, but did not apply, mainly due to timing issues. Iris, for example, stated: "Because I decided to go abroad almost too late, I couldn't apply to any funding sources." Gloria and Linda found the process to be too demanding to deal with during a heavy academic year.

Moreover, some charities declare a specific interest in relevant issues such as the area or level of study, or a specific impairment (Hutchinson *et al.*, 1998). Related to this, Kate, Nora and Toney found meeting the eligibility criteria of various funds difficult.

To overcome their financial difficulties, Angela, Carol, Irene, Iris and Toney decided to take up part-time work, which as Nicky and Olivia experienced was problematic due to time and impairment issues. Angela discussed how being in employment distracted her from her studies: “when I work, I have less time for my studies and that is also delaying my plans to finish my PhD ASAP as I have more to do and more to think about.” On this topic, Viney (2006: 62) asserts:

Some students with disabilities experience fatigue as an aspect of their impairments and therefore have limited energy available for studying, and no extra energy available for additional work.

For such reasons, Linda and Olivia had to discontinue their part-time employment. Even when fatigue is not an issue, as Gloria, Joseph and Nora experienced, and as Viney (2006) highlighted, disabled students face a disabling and competitive part-time employment market. Additionally, disabled international students attempting to find a part-time job may be affected by the limitations imposed in their student visa, allowing only 20 hours paid work during term time (UK Border Agency, 2011b).

To address their financial difficulties, others asked for parental or friends' contributions. Due to these constraints, Iris, Olivia and Patrick were unable to participate in social activities. Kate simply curbed her expenditure:

I had to pay very close attention to expenses. Things often cost more than double what they do in my country, especially groceries. I had to buy value brand everything!

This section examined participants' experiences of being funded for their academic, disability-support, and living expenses. Although in total 23 participants received different scholarships to cover these areas, due to their status, 17 participants experienced general financial difficulties. In the face of increased financial pressures, most students undertake part-time employment, besides their studies (NUS, 2008). However, access to the part-time job market was limited for the participants due to their double status, financially marginalising them even further. The next step in the students' journey to university: the option to visit their institutions, and different departments prior to starting their courses will now be explored.

### **5.6 Speculative University Visits: Preparation for Adjustments**

For students, a visit to an HEI prior to starting their studies is considered as the first step in the transition to HE (Hurst, 1993), giving them "a flavour of what to expect in terms of their learning and living experiences" (NUS, 2008: 9). For international students, in particular, the visit can act as an introduction to life in the UK. Attending open days is said to give the prospective disabled students opportunities to meet other students, both disabled and non-disabled, creating informal support networks (Farrar, 2007). The induction period may also provide a chance to experience the HEI's academic and social physical environment, factual information and practical guidance about disability aids and support services (Graham, 1985; Mackenzie, 1986). The possibility of university visits, therefore, appears to be of a particular importance for disabled international students, who need to familiarise themselves with university environment on two different levels.

Yet, it should be noted that because participants lived in different countries, and traveling to the UK was often expensive, unlike their domestic counterparts, visiting their prospective universities at pre-admission stage was not always an option. Having said this, Hodkinson (1995) contends that in contrast to rational policy, patterns of students' decision-making are rarely based on an orderly examination

of all the facts. According to Ball *et al.* (2001), most students tend to visit prospective universities only after they have received or indeed accepted their offers to confirm their choices.

Ed, Ned and Tanji were based at their universities before they started their academic degrees because they had attended either an English language or foundation course. They found this introductory period particularly useful. Elaine had the opportunity to visit the university she applied to, mainly because her home country was relatively close to the institution concerned. She made favourable judgements on the basis of how she was supported during this visit:

The course director was very willing to give me some time. I met one of the lecturers as well. I immediately thought that I was going to be on this programme. They were very welcoming. That actually made a big difference.

However, not all the 11 participants who visited their universities before starting their courses, necessarily had direct contact with the academic or/and non-academic staff. Linda, for example, visited her university but did not have an opportunity to meet the staff. Mary explained that in her visit she was not inducted into all areas of university life:

I only visited the university a couple of months before I was enrolled. It wasn't really a proper induction though. I just visited the library and a few sights of university.

The remaining participants did not attend open-days or visit the universities pre-admission at all, mainly because of the distance between their home countries and the UK, and the cost of travel. Janet stated that no-one ever contacted her about a possible visit, and that she was "too poor for a trip over". These participants did not have the opportunity to meet and be interviewed by the academic staff, and explore the campus and surroundings of where they might be living, missing out on garnering a full picture of what to expect upon their arrival. As in Sen's study

(1970), the institutions might equally have been concerned regarding their inability to interview admitted international students face-to-face.

These accounts go against the university literature (UL, 2006) studied as examples, where students are encouraged to visit their prospective HEIs to form a rounded idea about their would-be university experience. Acclimatising themselves with all the relevant departments would have inevitably helped the participants to be familiar with their future surroundings, promising an easier start to university experience, which can be a challenging time for most students. Disabled international students may have indeed found the visits useful based on being both disabled and international, and requiring experiential information on both grounds.

### **5.7 Summary**

In this chapter, I considered a range of issues related to pre and during admission process. Participants discussed the information they received and to what extent their decisions were influenced by these materials. Receiving inaccessible, or indeed not receiving any materials, proved to be detrimental to disabled international students, who would have found the literature particularly informative and helpful on the grounds of being disabled and international.

Most access difficulties that participants experienced, including lack of visual signs and heavy doors, were applicable to all disabled students, regardless of their nationality. This chapter also examined students' experiences of the admission process itself. The disability-related difficulties participants experienced at this crucial stage were exaggerated by barriers associated with them being international - applying from abroad and staff's unwillingness to accommodate their diverse needs. This resulted in participants feeling unwelcome, adding to levels of natural anxiety when starting a completely new experience as a disabled international student.

On the financial side, 22 participants found funding for their disability-related support inadequate. For this reason, they were unable to access support, which left them feeling disadvantaged both academically and socially due to their double status.

I also discussed students' experiences of visiting universities prior to starting their courses. None of the participants, who had this opportunity, were given a full picture of the university environment upon their visits. Others felt, specifically disadvantaged when they were unable to visit their future universities to base their choices on firsthand experiences. Having dealt with admission issues, the next chapter will address participants' disability-related concerns.

## **Chapter Six: Disclosure and Receiving Disability Support “Why should I pay for something that is available to other students free of charge in order to have the same access?”**

This chapter will examine participants' disability-related concerns. As with the previous chapter, the following sections will include two of disabled people's 'Seven Needs', namely 'technical aids and equipment', and 'Personal Assistance' (PA), identified by Derbyshire Centre for Integrated Living (DCIL) (Hasler, 2003).

Participants' views and feelings on disclosing the nature of their impairments by applying via Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS), using a numerical coding system, and the associated advantages and disadvantages that ensue will be discussed. Revisiting debates on different interpretations of disability identified in Chapter Two (Section 2.1) will be useful in highlighting issues surrounding the disclosure of impairments. Having made the pre-admission choices, participants then need to make use of disability services to overcome disabling barriers present in their universities and access the Higher Education (HE) sector. Thus, I will explore participants' opinions on their visits to the Disability Service Units (DSU) in their universities and the staff's willingness to assist them. The usefulness and accessibility of the needs assessment process in identifying participants' support needs, and providing information on how these can be met will be assessed. Participants' experiences of different disability support received, and the effectiveness of each in turn will follow. The discussion will include such topics as the role of assistive technology as a tool to overcome technological barriers (Söderström & Ytterhus, 2010) in participants' university educational lives.



## **6.1 To Disclose or Not to Disclose**

The discussion of this chapter will start by exploring the issue of 'disclosure', the adequacy of 'disability' categories on both university and UCAS forms, and related sensitive issues. As disabled students need appropriate information about disability-support on offer (discussed in Chapter Five – Section 5.1), they are required to be transparent about their support needs on the application forms (Baron *et al.*, 1996). In the admission stage, undergraduate students are given the opportunity to classify themselves as disabled, and opt for one of nine categories of 'disability' based on the individual medical model of disability (Viney, 2006) (discussed in Chapter Four – Section 4.4). Similarly, the postgraduate students are invited to disclose their impairments on the university forms (LMU, 2011a). Following students' self-identification by entering the appropriate numerical code on their application form, the information is included in the Higher Education Statistical Agency (HESA) return. It can be therefore argued that for disabled students, the problematic process of 'disclosing a disability' constitutes a significant example of how the private becomes public in the HE context (Freewood & Spriggs, 2003; Shevlin *et al.*, 2004).

As discussed in Chapter Four (Section 4.4), the early disclosure is said to facilitate the organisation of support services, whereas late disclosure is usually frowned upon, viewed with suspicion by university staff and is often seen as "special pleading" (Borland & James, 1999: 11). Even with this growing awareness, as discussed below, and also as Hurst (1993), Stanley *et al.* (2007a), and Tinklin and Hall (1999) argue students often feel under pressure to reveal private aspects of their lives and experience a dilemma about disclosing information regarding their impairments, not wishing to be treated differently to fellow students.

Twenty-five participants said that they had indeed disclosed their impairments on the UCAS and university forms. Elaine related the importance of disclosure to her past experience, because she left her previous university due to lack of adequate

PA support. Ed thought by disclosing his impairments, the support needed to arrange assistance would run without any unnecessary glitches.

However, five participants did not disclose their impairments at the admission stage. Carol, for example, represented the students who, Lambert (2001) argues, see their impairments as merely a difference, and regard 'disability' as a label attached signifying a condition of accessing support services. Carol thought that as she did not require any support arrangements, due to the nature of her visual impairment, disclosure was not necessary, arguing that:

I don't necessarily think that impairments should have to be explained to anyone, as they are just a part of someone i.e. you're not asked to explain about other bodily differences that are more socially acceptable.

Yet, Olney and Kim (2001) offer an explanation for students like Carol's wish to not access any support. They suggest that people with invisible impairments usually neither consider themselves nor are considered by others as disabled; they do not apply for support, counting themselves as undeserving of such assistance. In fact Carol's statement reflected these authors' assertion, Carol remarked: "I didn't want to take the service away from someone else and I've never had that provision before."

As with the participants in Thomas's study (2003), Patrick, on the other hand, pointed out that due to lack of information received, he was unsure of the support available and advantages of disclosure. Similarly, Angela talked about how she did not realise that support services were provided for disabled students in some English Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), because: "Dyslexia is not considered as a disability in my country and there isn't any support for students with dyslexia at HE."

As Hurst (1993), Rose (2006), and Viney (2006) in reference to their studies suggest, it appeared, feeling that one may be disadvantaged in some way following disclosure often contributed to participants' unwillingness to declare their 'disabilities'. Barer (2007), Baron *et al.* (1996), and Stanley *et al.* (2007b) found that students with invisible impairments were concerned that disclosure may even result in being rejected at admission stage. Likewise, Patrick was concerned in case disclosing his recent depression would have jeopardised his place on the course: "Because I thought, it would make them not want me". That said, in principle, he was in favour of disclosure: "If I feel that I can trust people, why should they not know? It helps them understand after all."

Encountering stereotypical reactions, frequently triggering stigma and prejudice is another factor for not disclosing discussed by Gilson and Dymond (2011), Rose (2006), and Stanley *et al.* (2007b). Lambert (2001: 2) categorises students who disclose their impairments with caution, based on others' negative responses in the past, as "disability disclosed". Establishing new relationships can be affected by particular past events (Grayson *et al.*, 1998). Nora, for example, explained that her negative experiences with certain individuals in her previous university were influential in subsequently deciding to not disclose straight away:

I waited for an offer before disclosing. This is because of my previous encounters with some people within the academic world and elsewhere. In my former university, two members of staff handled me with disrespect. The first one said that I'm clearly smart enough to study but an academic career is not possible for mentally ill people. The other one said, that as a disabled student my applications for research projects, excavations, training etc. will never get through since there will always be more desirable student applicants.

Although only five of the participants were reluctant to disclose their impairments, these students' concerns revolved around two main issues: the participants were either ill-informed about services available and the potential advantage of disclosure, or they feared being treated negatively, and even rejected from the

university. The difficulties participants encountered can be generalised to all disabled students. However, unlike their domestic counterparts, in the absence of relevant information, international students may be disadvantaged in contacting their universities as easily to inquire about the benefits of disability services and facilities available. Additionally, the ways in which ongoing opportunities for disclosure were provided, and the information on disclosure (e.g. the questions asked on enrolment forms, and the ways in which support available was communicated) may have been culturally alien for the participants and their families, acting as a disincentive to disclosure. Next, participants' opinions on the categorisation of different impairments will be assessed.

#### *Difficulties with 'Disability' Categories*

Language that the HE sector uses to explain various impairments can reflect what the institution thinks, influencing how disabled students are treated in the system (Rose, 2006). An institution, which considers a problem to be located with an individual, may take a different line to an institution which sees 'disability' located with the practices and attitudes that can create disabling barriers. This reflects two contrasting models of disability: the individual medical and the social models of disability discussed in Chapter Two (Section 2.1).

Furthermore, different cultures may have a different terminology of impairment, and may not readily relate with the words commonly adopted to encourage disclosure in the United Kingdom (UK). In some cultures, for example, there is no obvious translation of the term 'learning difficulties', and international students may not readily identify with the words such as 'Specific Learning Difficulty', (SLD) commonly used to refer to dyslexia (also referred to dysnomia or dyscalculia) (Rose, 2006). Hence, some of the concepts utilised to define impairments, when translated literally, can be misunderstood by disabled international students and their families.

As in Stanley *et al.*'s study (2007b), participants expressed a range of perspectives about the labels and language used in relation to 'disability'. The use of particular labels was contentious and terminology was a significant factor in disclosure. Irin did not consider herself as being disabled according to her interpretations of the concept, continuously referring to herself as "normal". Lambert (2001: 3) identifies students like Irin, who considered their impairments as a normal part of human variation, and therefore had low identification with disabled people, as "disability notified". Irin's desire to pass as 'normal' can be attributed to her concerns about being stigmatised (Goffman, 1968) and the consequences of this process in her university life. Nevertheless, Irin knew that she had to disclose her "disabilities", but due to the multiplicity of her impairments, and inadequacy of categories, she did not find a suitable section on the form in which to disclose this information.

Twenty-five participants accepted one label or another, however. Elaine explained that her student support service only allowed one category of 'disability' to be ticked. Due to the complexity of her impairments, she felt only the generic category of 'multiple impairments' was close enough to partially indicate her difficulties.

Linda was critical of the category 'mobility impairments' for being lumped together with 'wheelchair-users' in the form provided by her university. Ned, on the other hand, added the word "wheelchair-user" in the blank space provided on his university form because he thought:

The name 'Cerebral Palsy' can't fully explain my condition, because it is very different from person to person, even though it is the same medical condition.

Anna thought that Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (ME) did not fit into any of the available categories. For her, the 'invisible impairment' category was the most appropriate label to tick. As the findings in Rose's study (2006) showed, for Iris (a mental health system survivor), university categories of 'disability' were more

indicative of physical impairments than any other. Iris thought that this lack of awareness of mental health issues also extended to people's attitudes: "I think people might have difficulties interacting with people with mental impairment like depression." Elaine, Kate and Nora also criticised the categories for being fixed, stigmatising and medicalised. Having physical or communication impairments are medical labels that might be attributed to students, but give little or no indication of the impact of an impairment on their experiences or the institutional barriers that must be removed to provide an equal educational experience (Baron *et al.*, 1996; Rose, 2006). Perhaps because of his more easily defined impairment, Norman (with a hearing impairment) found the categories adequate and descriptive of his impairment.

It is evident that terminology is an important part of the language that contributed to the construction of 'disability' (Barton, 2001). Whilst the confusion about the inadequacy and complexity of 'disability' categories based on the individual medical model of disability (particularly for participants with multiple impairments), may not be exclusively an international students' issue, the cultural and linguistic differences may have added to the misunderstandings that participants described. Different concepts of impairment may be prevalent in different cultures and contexts. Gloria was unsure what terminology was correct to use in the UK in relation to her impairment. Carol wished to have received more information on what a 'disability' meant in the British context. She was uncomfortable with the ambiguous nature of the language used on the forms. With a different cultural background, Carol was confused about the questions she was asked at the disclosure stage:

In my country, you're never asked about ethnicity or disability, it's considered illegal. Whereas here it's used to protect against discrimination. So when I first got that form I thought 'Why do they want to know this, why do they want to know that my background is "White, other", that I have a visual impairment, But does that mean I'm disabled? What does that mean in the British sense?' I have no idea.

Only Peter explicitly discussed his observation of differences between the descriptive interpretation of impairments in the UK, and that in his African country, and how these are understood by medical professionals:

In my country, four main categories are known - 'physical', 'hearing', 'sight' and 'mental' impairments. When we talk about disability, people understand those, so other hidden disabilities are not known.

### *Feelings about Disclosure*

Reflecting Stanley *et al.*'s study (2007b: 33), feelings on disclosure were polarised between those who viewed it in practical terms as a "necessary evil", providing means to different support services, and those who felt stigmatised by labels. Two of the participants explicitly expressed their negative feelings about disclosing their impairments. Linda felt ambivalent:

I am not always confident in bureaucracy, having seen many sides of it. I think sometimes information can be used in ways that do not benefit the information sharer.

Moreover, identifying a label for a student takes the focus away from HEIs' responsibilities to remove barriers, and perpetuates the individual medical model of disability. For this reason, for Maria (with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder [ADHD] and dyslexia), and Mary, Tanji and Toney (with visual impairments), the superficial and general acknowledgement of their impairments without any follow-up questions, was a somewhat cursory approach. Mary commented: "They just like to gather information from students, but they don't really do much. They don't really provide for our rights or anything like that."

Therefore, disclosure can cause anxiety amongst students and is related to the need to see the information put into good practice (Barer, 2007). Gloria's

statement demonstrated how not knowing what the information would be used for made her wary of disclosure:

I didn't specify what. I just told them limp in the right leg. I wasn't straight forward to the point because I didn't know what they needed the information for and I thought that could have been used against me, in a way or other.

Confidentiality has also been identified as important in facilitating disclosure (Stanley *et al.*, 2007b). Carol and Elaine expressed a desire for some control, or at least information, about who would be told about their impairments, why and when, Carol commented:

I would have felt more comfortable if there were two envelopes, one to return the admission form to the registrar and one to return the form about disability to the DSU. It was strange to me that they went all together. Why would the registrar need to know that about me.

Anna, on the other hand, likened disclosing her invisible impairment (ME) to the process of her "coming out" as a bisexual as both were invisible: "you can't tell, when somebody looks at you." Fourteen participants were matter-of-fact about their impairments, to the extent that they had neutral feelings about disclosure. Olivia, for example, stated: "I didn't feel good or bad about it." Domenic, Ed, Mlinda, Ned and Tanji (each with different impairments), felt confident disclosing their impairments and gave this action little consideration. As in Goode's study (2007), these participants understood the political economy of their HEI, and in order to receive the appropriate support, they were candid on the application form. Lambert (2001: 2) terms students who are likely to have initiated contact for resources to use them as "matter-of-fact necessity to be negotiated" as "disability declared". For participants who described practical reasons for disclosure (whether at the outset of their studies or at a later stage), disclosure was perceived as an enabling process, as a prerequisite to procuring adjustments and support, shifting responsibility onto HEIs.



Peter (with a mobility impairment), Sova and Toney (with visual impairments) pointed to the visible nature of their impairments and the fact that for pragmatic reasons, they could not (and wished not) to hide their differences. “That which can be told about an individual's social identity at all times during his daily round and by all persons he encounters therein will be of great importance to him.” (Goffman, 1968: 65). Sova combined this with her awareness of the fact that according to the Disability Rights Commission (DRC) (2002), in light of the universities’ awareness of students’ impairments, the failure to provide support and adaptations is likely to be unlawful:

I wanted people in the university to be ready to meet my needs. When communicating in person, you can't hide your blindness anyway. I always think it's better if people take me for what I am, not for something else. At least, nobody can blame me for not telling them.

These participants clearly wanted to give as much information as they could about their impairments to the university, and were comfortable with their decision. Stanley *et al.* (2007b: 43) recognise this as “an ethical stance that outweighed personal concerns about responses to disclosure”.

Alice acknowledged that her sense of her own identity and the personal level of comfort with the label “blind” contributed to such decisions: “My blindness is part of who I am, and I didn’t mind sharing the information because it was relevant.”

Likewise, Maria highlighted the positive aspects of her impairment:

I see my ‘disability’ as an ability, and I am proud of the creativity that is implied. So I have been mainly proud to disclose. But this is just because I was diagnosed in my previous place of study, where ADHD and dyslexia is related to creativity.

### *Impact of Disclosure*

The positive element of accepting a label can facilitate access to support services and instigate 'reasonable adjustments' to enable students to participate in their university life (Stanley *et al.*, 2007b). Domenic, Margaret and Tina (with mobility impairments) thought that disclosing their impairments had had a positive impact in accessing services, particularly with regards to their accommodation. Irin (with physical impairments) described how her disclosure resulted in her being granted two extra hours for exams.

Additionally, as students with invisible impairments, Anna (with ME), Iris (a mental health system survivor), and Mlinda (with a hearing impairment) stated that disclosure made their universities aware of, and more receptive, to their invisible impairments. Anna remarked: "If anything, people have been very supportive of it, like my tutors in all the three universities that I studied in."

Joseph acknowledged that it had been in his interest to disclose his visual impairment, but he did not feel that he had necessarily benefited from this process. Alice (also with a visual impairment), Elaine (with physical impairments), and Patrick (with ADHD and dyslexia) were unsure of the benefits received as a result of disclosure. Nora (with ADHD and dyslexia) highlighted the advantages and disadvantages of disclosing her impairments:

To be quite frank, that sword cuts both ways. I have received support, both technical and personal, but also faced total lack of understanding from a member of teaching staff. My personal tutor lacks any knowledge or sympathy for students, who are not 'mainstream'. Who is mainstream, really?

Janet, Norman and Olivia (all with different impairments) did not think disclosure had any impact on their university experience. Conversely, Maria (with ADHD and dyslexia), who had been subjected to staff's negative treatment, experienced recurring depression and anxiety switching antidepressants/anxiety medications and enduring severe side effects. The completion of Maria's Masters was therefore drastically affected. She went as far as saying: "Disclosing my

impairments ruined three years of my life.” As a consequence of all this, Maria decided to terminate her studies in the English university concerned after six years of difficult time. In email correspondence, Maria explained: “Enough is enough. That university really sucked too much energy out of me and it's no longer worth it.”

Furthermore, as a result of not disclosing at the admission stage, Angela's tutor was dismissive of her dyslexia, primarily based on her status as an international student: “My tutor doesn't know about my problems. I did tell him that I need more time for reading, but he thinks that it is because English isn't my first language.” In relation to dyslexia-related difficulties, Riddick (2000; 2001) contends that labels are significant in justifying why it is inappropriate to judge a person unfavourably against certain cultural norms for such skills as correct spelling. Fuller *et al.* (2004b) also report similar experiences to that of Angela - the staff's unwillingness to be supportive or flexible, particularly when students had made their impairments known.

I considered participants' views and feelings about declaring their impairments on UCAS and university application forms. Although the majority (25) had disclosed their impairments, their opinions on disclosure and its outcomes were mixed. Participants were concerned about not knowing what the information would be used for and the possible negative implications. Additionally, as Angela's experience demonstrated, and as Borland and James (1999) remark, disclosing an impairment at a late stage, not only fails to benefit the student, but it can also provoke staff's suspicion about impairments like dyslexia. Thus the core limitation was lack of communication in the form of culturally sensitive, accessible and effective Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) pre and at the point of entry, about disclosure.

However, even when the participants disclosed their impairments, the support services were not always forthcoming in assistance, arguably due to the students' international status. Abang's (1989: 118) general statement, “Even when given

admission, some students encounter untold difficulty in an environment not designed with them in mind” is reflected in participants like Ed’s experience. When Ed endeavoured to be open about all his impairments, he still felt that the university was unwilling to help him access the financial support to be able to use the disability services, as promoted in the DSU literature. Having made decisions about disclosing their impairments, most participants visited the DSUs in their universities, both pre and post-arrival; this stage shall be explored next.

### **6.2 Disability Service Units: ‘Meet and Greet’**

Most HEIs now have disability co-ordinators, who recognise that university can be a disabling environment for disabled students (Thomas, 2003). The personnel in DSUs are trained in identifying and responding to a variety of learning needs, and liaising with tutors and lecturers regarding how to assist disabled students in particular teaching contexts (Race & Brown, 2006). Their remit is usually to ensure that disabled students have access to the information, support and any adaptations they need in order to fully demonstrate their ability to successfully complete their studies. However, not all the participants had used DSUs to the same extent. Six participants mentioned that they had not made any contact with the units.

Margaret and Norman did not need to utilise support from DSUs. Olivia was not given such opportunity; she felt this would have been useful. Linda (with physical impairments), who needed equipment and information on different services, made a conscious decision to not access the unit: “I tried to avoid bureaucracy wherever I could to maintain control”. Mary explained her reasons for not visiting the DSU:

Because they can’t really make alternative changes, they are only there for advice. No-one is there to put the advice into practice. We’ve got so many places where people can advise you, but then who is going to take action? I don’t need somebody to advise me, I know what to do. Even if the DSU wasn’t there, I know how to get my life and where to get advice.

Alice felt her status prevented her from visiting the DSU:

As an international student, I had to pay for any support services I needed. So I had little contact with the DSU. They probably had many students they were trying to accommodate and limited funding to do it. I preferred to hire my own readers and make all other arrangements.

As a wheelchair-user, Tina talked about her minimal contact with the unit. When she first arrived, Tina met a disability support officer as part of the needs assessment process, up until the current interview process she did not need to use any of the DSU's support services, apart from a letter to obtain a concessionary bus pass, discussed below. Peter (with a mobility impairment), and Mlinda (with a hearing impairment) were using the specific university disability support services for their needs, yet they too only visited the units if they were called in. Both were satisfied with this level of contact and found the staff helpful.

Thirteen participants were satisfied with the staff's supportiveness in their DSUs. Patrick (a full-time undergraduate student with ADHD and dyslexia), who took a gap year to attend to personal issues, visited the DSU during this time. Although he was unable to access any practical support because of his non-student status, he thought the meeting with a disability officer "worth its weight in gold":

It was a very, very useful conversation that I had, because again, the disability officer said a lot of things that I found helpful. If I come back at the end of this year to finish my degree, if I have already missed some deadlines or more, which is what usually happens, then I think talking to him again from time to time would be quite helpful.

In another instant, staff at the DSU convinced Irin (with physical impairments) to use the support. However, she felt uncomfortable using the help with study. Irin was never given allowances for her impairments in her previous university, and she found the idea alien. As with the young people in Söderström and Ytterhus's study (2010), a predominant issue for Irin was the importance of being ordinary.

Söderström and Ytterhus (2010: 313) assert: "Standing out from the majority has a significant impact"

Elaine had mixed views:

The DSU seemed to be very much still working on an individual medical approach. The new head of Service is more approachable though. He certainly seems more friendly. I think he is keen to consult the students. He's more on the students' side.

Nicky (with a back impairment) also had mixed opinion about the DSU in her university. She explained how the unit refused to buy her an ergonomic chair, but agreed to provide a wheelchair:

I did apply for a special chair to the disability department and accommodation office for my room, but it took so long to hear their decision (at the end they said "No"). So I had to buy it myself. But they helpfully offered me a wheelchair.

Conversely, Tina (wheelchair-user) compared the staff's unhelpfulness in one of her very few visits to the unit with that of her friend Jane's experience (who studied in Tina's university previously). Whereas staff in the DSU were supportive in enabling Jane (also an international student) to obtain a concessionary bus pass; they were reluctant to help Tina with providing a similar supporting letter that the council required: "It's not fair for me. Maybe there is a negative change in policy or management."

Additionally, Tina referred to one of her friend's experiences. Although the DSU managed to persuade Peter to use the PA scheme, Tina thought they were not helpful to Peter in other equally important areas, such as providing information on his mobility aid:

If they commit themselves to supporting disabled international students, they shouldn't only provide PA support, but all the information disabled students need should be provided.

Reflecting on West *et al.*'s study (1993), Maria pointed to some staff's insensitiveness and lack of awareness about disabled students' specific needs in her English university:

The DSU has advisors for all disabled students. You can see that person once every other week, to talk about whatever you want. So if you want to talk about study or organising your study, you can do that. But they wouldn't be specialised in ADHD. They would need to be trained specifically to understand how ADHD works against a person. I think my disability advisor has no idea what ADHD is about, not to mention depression.

Mary, on the other hand, explained how the staff in the DSU were not only unhelpful, but also discouraging of her pursuing the course despite lack of funding:

They were trying to put up a barrier saying 'Why did you do it if you didn't have the funding?' 'You shouldn't have done it, why don't you cancel!' So I knew then that they weren't going to do much because of this mentality.

With regards to international students, Tina and her friends thought that the DSU in their university had become a commercialised profit-making organisation. They previously had been informed that the unit was much better, and had the students' interests at heart (both international and domestic). This section showed that whilst 13 participants were satisfied with the way they were treated by the DSU in their universities, 14 participants were openly dissatisfied, two participants' experiences were mixed, and the other one had neutral opinions. Most dissatisfaction related to issues such as lack of funds and a general discouraging attitude and lack of responsiveness to students' difficulties from disability support staff. The concerns, which were directly related to participants as disabled international students, were about staff's failure to recognise and respect this group's additional difficulties with funding, for example, due to their double status.

Having discussed participants' visits to the DSU, the next step - disability-needs assessment (ULES, 2010) to enable them access support services (Lee, 2011), enabling them to study in an unequal HE system will be explored.

### **6.3 Disability-related Needs Assessment**

As discussed in the previous chapter (Section 5.1), relevant information received from the point of entry into HE for disabled students is fundamentally crucial in delineating a strong start that ensures a positive experience for the entirety of one's time at university. Additionally, a detailed Needs Assessment process can not only identify individual student's support programmes, but can also provide timely and appropriate information. A Needs Assessment is a "structured, but fairly informal" (ULES, 2010: unpagged) non-medical/psychological assessment with an assessor about what disability-support would be appropriate for an individual student in light of her/his impairments and the resultant effects on the student's studies. Subsequent to the meeting, a report is produced usually containing recommendations and information for any support identified.

It has been well documented that all of us share the same basic needs (Barnes, 2000; Shakespeare, 2000). In this context, the crucial difference between non-disabled and disabled people, is that whilst the former group's needs are automatically met, due to their "no needs" status, the latter group's needs are neglected and they must therefore "make a special plea for assistance and support" (Marks, 1999: 97). Thus disabled people are often subjected to countless professional needs assessments, which are largely based on an inflexible medical framework (Sim *et al.*, 1998) as a means of simply enabling them access services and opportunities that other people automatically receive.

Yet, as Goodlad and Riddell (2005) argue, and as demonstrated below, tensions are often evident when despite the provision of services being ostensibly based on needs assessment, delivery of agreed services does not necessarily follow the



assessment, or long delays are reported. There is also a “mechanistic, controlling trend which arises from the specification of assessment procedures, eligibility criteria, budgetary control, and the contract culture.” (Stevenson & Parsloe, 1993: 59).

Fuller *et al.* (2004a) criticise specific disability-related needs only being discussed once a place is offered. Only three of the 30 participants were interviewed face-to-face, before starting their courses, during their visits to the universities concerned prior to moving to England. Four others were contacted about their needs by email prior to arriving at their English universities. Ten participants were assessed after they started their courses, which meant the support was not in place when they began their university life. “If the expected support is not in place or if students do not feel fully 'integrated' at the start of their course this can have an enormous 'knock-on' effect ...” (Goode, 2007: 46). Sova was not assessed until the middle of the first term. She talked about the impact of this on her ability to study effectively:

To be honest, they were ashamedly slow in conducting the assessment. I got the necessary equipment only after Christmas, which did little help in preparing the first semester essays.

Elaine felt her grades in the first term were affected by lack of support provided, due to a late needs assessment. She explained that it was left to her to relay her needs to the lecturers, which caused “additional stress”. Tanji was assessed continuously through oral interviews and regular communication with the disability advisers during her course.

However, 13 participants' needs were not assessed at all. Whilst Norman and Margaret stated that they did not need to use any disability services, and hence it was unnecessary to have Needs Assessment, others felt differently. Olivia, who was a non-English native speaker, thought that her linguistic difficulties may have caused problems, when trying to explain her disability needs in English: “I didn't

want to bother to explain my small problems to the DSU staff in English. It was quite tiring to speak in English when I first arrived.”

Moreover, Cottrell (1996) states that, in diagnosing dyslexia, assessments for non-native English speakers are not always available, amplifying the process of diagnosis as problematic. Angela pointed out her disadvantaged position due to her status as a non-English native speaker, when she asked for her dyslexia to be diagnosed in English. She also talked about the suspicion her status as an international student created, and how her dyslexia was mistaken as a linguistic difficulty:

When I asked about the dyslexia assessment at the DSU, I was informed that the fact that I struggle in reading in English isn't a good reason to do the assessment. I was told that I was only few months in a new country and that is too early to assess the dyslexia-related needs in English. So I did not ask again.

In addition, Angela was unsure of the difference the Needs Assessment could make in improving her student life. Angela's experience indicated a lack of appropriate information, especially for international students e.g. inviting her to a meeting, and explaining what a needs assessment can help with - providing examples of the relevant services on offer. I have, in this chapter, discussed a lack of national guidance related to international students disclosing their 'disabilities' in English on the UCAS and university application forms. When considering Angela and Olivia's concern, the provision of information and guidelines to know how to describe impairments and needs in English in a Needs Assessment setting also appears to be significant.

On the practicalities of this procedure, Toney discussed the process of his needs assessment prior to starting the course:

They did do quite a detailed analysis. They had quite a few visually impaired staff on their access unit and one of them had a

chat with me about how he gets on. The attitude was friendly and they were quite willing to change things.

Additionally, for the course analysis, Toney had to outline how many hours of support he was going to need. This was difficult as his lecture and lab hours varied from term to term, and he had fluctuating support needs. The process was made especially problematic due to Toney's status as a disabled international student. Toney had to reapply for his support because his studies were delayed by one year due to the political instability of his home country:

When I visited the institution on a visiting visa, it was all agreed 'yeah, we are gonna do this'. When I came back after a year, I had to persuade them again.

Although Anna (with ME) was happy with her needs assessment, she discussed the superficial approach the DSU adopted when examining her needs: "They kind of just said 'well if you don't need anymore help, then thank you, we got records, and that's it, bye bye'."

In discussing the outcome of the Needs Assessment process, the following six participants reflected Ellis' study (1993), where professional opinions were viewed as superior judgements by practitioners, yet users' views belittled and perceived as inferior. Ed felt that the assessment could only be considered useful if the identification of needs is acted upon and followed-up by providing the appropriate support. As a student with a visual impairment, from the start, Ed needed to have mobility orientation training in order to familiarise himself with the new university environment. This training, similar to guided tours, concentrates specifically "on the areas with which the student will need to be familiar and to which full access will be crucial" (Hutchinson *et al.*, 1998: 241). Even though the DSU promised to deliver this training, several weeks later, Ed had to ask his PA (who did not have the appropriate training) to carry out this task, as he could wait no longer for the DSU to arrange an appointment with a specialised mobility officer.

Elaine and Nora talked about the long delay in receiving the items recommended in their assessment. Nora (with ADHD and dyslexia), for example, had visited her DSU in the summer prior to starting the course. At the time of this research interview (half way through the first term), she was still waiting to receive the suggested equipment.

Maria (with ADHD and dyslexia) was clearly dissatisfied with the outcome of the Needs Assessment process, implying that it was an ineffective exercise. She was unimpressed with the range of services on offer:

The disability advisor sat down with me and helped me with filling a questionnaire, so that she could tick off the services I would consider to use. But there was nothing offered that is very helpful for me.

In his university, as an international student, Patrick (with ADHD and dyslexia) was required to fund the dyslexia assessment on his own, but he was unable to afford this (see Chapter Four – Section 4.4 - for examples of dyslexia assessment costs). Patrick thought the assessment would have allowed him the much needed time extensions in the exams, and for this reason felt disadvantaged, when taking exams.

Tina (wheelchair-user) talked about the ineffectiveness of the needs assessment. She discussed how during this process, she realised that the university DSU had a policy of not providing personal care, and was unable to meet her needs. Tina explained how in her assessment, she informed the DSU that she did not need a PA for note-taking in lectures or visiting the library, but:

I said that I cannot move from wheelchair to toilet and from bed to wheelchair, which are important for me. So, I need someone, who can always accompany me, to lift me up from the wheelchair to another place. They said that they cannot provide a Personal Assistant for personal care needs.

Although, strictly speaking, Tina's needs do not appear to be academic in nature, the process of requiring assistance for moving in and out of her wheelchair, arguably, could have hampered her academic experience, preventing her from participating in lectures, seminars and related academic events as comfortably due to her reliance on this assistance. Moreover, whilst domestic students receive funding from their local authorities for personal care (NUS, 2010b; Skill, 2011a), as an international student, this option was not open to Tina, which further disadvantaged her in the university experience.

Here, I examined the timing of participants' Needs Assessment, the process itself and its subsequent effectiveness and outcomes. The information on details of the Needs Assessment process and the possible benefits was lacking. The 13 participants, whose needs were not assessed, mentioned a number of reasons, which prevented them from undergoing this process. These difficulties were directly related to their status as international students, and accompanying language and diagnoses difficulties. Yet, not all the remaining 17 participants found the needs assessment process useful, due to delays with service provision, through lack of funding, and specific support identified as needed, without any monitoring scheme in place. "The key determinant is the available budget: self-defined needs are rejected in favour of what is possible and available." (Shakespeare, 2000: 56). Participants' experiences explored here clearly contradicted the third and sixth recommendations of the Segal Quince Wicksteed (SQW) (1999) report - to make accessible information on needs assessment available, and arrange monitoring schemes - discussed in Chapter Four (Section 4.4). Next, some of the disability services identified in participants' needs assessment (e.g. technical aids, transcription and PA scheme) will be examined.

#### **6.4 Assistive Technology and Support**

A major factor contributing to disabled people's participation in mainstream society is perceived to be technology (NCD, 1996). Although it has been recognised that

'disability' and 'technology' are shaped by the same forces (Sheldon, 2001); it has also been the case that in the past 20 years, technology has enabled disabled people to perform various tasks, equalising their participation in the virtual world (NCD, 1996). Thus equipment and technical aid "to reduce unnecessary dependence on others" (Hasler, 2003: unpagged) has been identified as one of disabled people's 'Seven Needs'.

Additionally, for a large section of the population, the Internet is becoming a common way of gathering vast quantities of material on all subjects of interest, alongside instant communication with other internet users around the world. The introduction of electronic text files as opposed to printed books, enabled by the internet, has been hugely beneficial for disabled students (Hutchinson *et al.*, 1998). The fast and efficient method of accessing the internet is considered to be more practical than physically going to a library, particularly to users with visual impairments, allowing a greater independence, and avoiding the time delay involved in converting hard copy materials to electronic ones.

Furthermore, the increase in the availability of computers and other assistive technologies has had a significant effect on the number of students with SLDs, such as dyslexia, accessing HE (Bryant & Seay, 1998; Day & Edwards, 1996; Klemes *et al.*, 2006; Raskind & Higgins, 1998). In some contexts, the adoption of assistive technology as a tool to overcome technological barriers has even said to "make impairment less of an issue and enhance an understanding of disability as socially constructed" (Söderström & Ytterhus, 2010: 310), or "reduce or eliminate the effects of an impairment" (La Rocca & Turem, 1978: 1).

Therefore, technology, in its broadest sense, today is said to help to lower some of the academic barriers experienced by disabled students (Burgstahler & Olswang, 1996) discussed in the next chapter (Section 7.3). Word processors have replaced typewriters, hard copy books have been supplemented by online services, and

electronic mail is largely used instead of telephone and written communication. Teaching staff often make their lecture notes available electronically, and indeed some assessments are undertaken in this way. By using accessible methods, disabled students are more able to independently handle a wider range of academic activities. Thereby, students are able to make use of course-specific computer software, and independently and conveniently access books, journals, online library catalogues, encyclopaedias, dictionaries, newspapers, and other electronic information resources (Coombs, 1991; Duderstadt, 1992). In the current investigation, Sova (with a visual impairment) discussed how use of one such software facilitated her independent study:

Electronic documents were, obviously, more accessible to me than the printed. First I have had some difficulties with reading journal articles as they were in PDF format, but after having installed the latest version of Acrobat Reader on my PC, I could enjoy them all.

Thirteen participants (six with visual impairments, and seven without) had made use of various screen reading, scanning and typing hardware and software technology. Elaine (with physical impairments) used "Kurzweil 2000, and ClaroRead" for scanning text, and read-back to support hesitant reading (Price, 2006), purchased with Access to Learning Fund (ALF). Linda (also with physical impairments) briefly tried to use "Dragon Naturally Speaking" to help to transfer ideas quickly onto screen for editing (Price, 2006), purchased with her own funds. Olivia (with one short arm) relied on the "User Support Option of Windows" for using "Shift", "Control" and "Alt" keys to enable her to type with one hand. As a music student with a visual impairment, Alice mentioned some specialised items which enabled her in scanning, screen-reading, and music notation and recording, funded by the 'Commission for the Blind' in her home country.

Patrick (with ADHD and dyslexia) was satisfied with the electronic Outlook Calendar he used, highlighting the importance of staff being aware of the range of

technology on offer, and its intended purposes (Hutchinson *et al.*, 1998; Mulliken & Atkins, 2009). Patrick remarked:

It's been recommended to me by the people in the DSU this year, that I use things like Outlook, because it has a calendar, which is good. What I'm doing at the moment is I try to have one diary that I stick to, and I try to carry around with me, put things in all the time. In my life, I have started a million diaries, and not used them for more than two weeks at most.

Klemes *et al.* (2006: 28) found that students with SLD like dyslexia "are more comfortable when listening to the text being read". These authors suggest that an electronic study environment added to the students' motivation to learn. Correspondingly, Maria (with ADHD and dyslexia) expressed her wish to have had screen reading software: "One thing that I would really love is to have some sort of software that reads to you, that you can read and hear it at the same time."

When talking about the effectiveness of software used, Elaine (with physical impairments) noted how the two software programmes (for reading and writing), she used complemented one another. Yet, she would have preferred to use a free-standing one: "I couldn't find one that did both adequately." For Elaine, the flexibility of the use of technology and software that make the difference was important.

Linda (also with physical impairments) discussed her difficulties in manipulating a scanning pen (Scanning Pens, 2011) to scan the material for later use:

The pen was pretty good most of the time, but of course my grip is not so good. So sometimes if I was a little tired or little stressed, it was a little moody, because you have to hold it very specifically. If you had a book, it's quite chunky and it scans the exact text word for word into the computer. Very good, if your hands are in the mood to operate, but if you're having a bad day or you are kind of cranky or you're not having enough sleep, forget it, it doesn't work very well, but if you are on form that was a beautiful thing.



Mary (with a visual impairment) commented on her limited use of the Jaws (screen-reading) software she used for reading journal articles:

To be honest, when you are doing research, I prefer to read in Braille. Then when it comes to typing and rearranging ideas and all that, I don't mind using the computer, but to read and pick up the relevant pieces, I'd rather use Braille first. I don't like to rely on electronic materials, its very tiring for the brain as well.

As with the participants in Fuller *et al.*'s study (2004b), Tanji (also with a visual impairment) discussed her frustration with not being able to focus on the content of lectures whilst using new, difficult-to-use equipment (Zoom text and closed-circuit television [CCTV], magnifiers and a monocle): "Often there are no manuals for things!!!" Thus she preferred working in small study groups.

Whilst participants' difficulties, discussed thus far, can be generalised to most disabled students, Linda's experience appeared to be one that may concern only international students with a variety of accents. Linda (with physical impairments) commented on the inadequacy of "Dragon Naturally Speaking" as a voice recognition (VR) software, when typing her dictation, and how she consequently resorted to other assistive technology instead: "It was terrible! It hated my accent. So I gave up on it and I used a recorder ..." Linda's experience reflected Stacey's (1998) argument that unsuitable technology provision can be just as problematic as no provision at all.

Referring to VR software generally, Hutchinson *et al.* (1998: 184) report that "no VR system is 100% accurate and for the first time user the best that can be expected is approximately 80-90% accuracy". These authors state that sometimes, due to the inconsistency of volume and pitch of user's voice, the user needs to repeat "one or two words in every ten spoken into the computer" (Hutchinson *et al.*, 1998: 184), which can prove to be tedious. Additionally, it has been argued that the role of advanced technology is to enhance independence,

providing the mainstream solutions that disabled people request, rather than “designing and engineering ‘specialist’ expensive technology” (Harris, 2010: 427). Contrary to this, when discussing assistive technology, Linda continued by saying that due to limited funds available, she and her partner could not afford to buy all the necessary technology that she would have found helpful.

The 13 participants, who had used accessible software and hardware felt the assistive technology had improved their academic experience. Joseph (with a visual impairment), for example, was happy working in the university computer clusters on a Personal Computer (PC) with the special software. Participants with physical impairments (Nathan and Ned), and with a hearing impairment (Norman), were less affected by technological inaccessibility and were satisfied with their general access levels to the computing facilities and related support. Whilst 14 participants did not need to use specialist software; Gloria, Kate and Maria, all from pre-1992 universities, had not been given much information and opportunities to make use of such technology, which they thought may have been useful for their courses. Furthermore, as Linda’s experience demonstrated, funding such items was problematic for the participants as disabled international students, most of whom had limited access to additional financial resources. Next, participants’ difficulties as well as benefits gained, when using the transcription services will be considered.

### **6.5 Transcribing the Reading Materials**

In the academic context of HE particularly, transcribing small print materials (that are not available online) to such alternative formats as audio, Braille, electronic or large print is crucial for a range of students in order to readily access relevant course resources. Students with dyslexia, for example, are often said to experience difficulties, when reading small print materials, due to slow reading rate and poor organisation skills (Klemes *et al.*, 2006). Reading electronic materials on the computer, for example, enhances the reading rate and makes reading less

stressful and time-consuming, providing more of a quality reading time (Elkind *et al.*, 1996).

In the current investigation, 10 participants (three with dyslexia and seven with visual impairments) gave their accounts of the transcription service or lack thereof. Toney explained the way transcription was carried out in his university:

Sometimes they do it themselves in the university and sometimes it is contracted out to RNIB or to A2i (a transcription service that converts printed materials to alternative formats to enable people with visual impairments to have equal access to information [A2i, 2011]), and to a few transcription companies based in the prisons in the UK, but normally it is either transcribed at the university or ordered from the publishers.

Although Maria (with dyslexia) was aware of the transcription service, such provision was not offered to her in her pre-1992 university. Maria highlighted how beneficial she would have found this service:

I think it would be difficult because in economic literature there are so many maths formulas, but even if I could have the paragraphs explaining the maths on tape, it would make a night's and day's difference. I would never ask for this, I think I'm asking for too much. In my previous university, this is provided by law to any discipline.

Maria's concern is particularly relevant in the light of Equality Challenge Unit's (ECU) (2009c) specific recommendation to transcribe the complex equations to students' preferred formats. Due to not having her needs assessed, as discussed above, Angela (also with dyslexia) was not aware of any transcription option (e.g. a possible university service), and made her own arrangements for transcribing the course reading material to accessible formats. She found this inconvenient. The transcription support was not identified in Nora's (the third student with dyslexia) needs assessment and no information about the service was given to her. She felt

using a transcription service would have been very helpful, because she read small print poorly.

Tanji (with a visual impairment), found the transcription service useful, although she used it only twice because it was towards the end of the academic year that the facilities became available to her due to a limited number of support-workers, who coordinated the transcription arrangements. Similarly, Toney did not have access to this service from day one, but it became “readily available, when I just said I need transcription, it was arranged quite quickly”.

### *Time Constraints*

Having crossed the initial hurdle, Toney thought the service was inconsistent and not necessarily timely on a regular basis, which impacted on his work:

Two to three weeks, because when I give them transcription, I normally give them a really big list. So I think that is quite reasonable. It does affect my work, and obviously I would like it to be quicker. They know. They say: ‘Make a list for us in the beginning’, which I do at times, whenever available.

On this account, Van Acker (1998: 43) remarks that “Even where a battery of scanners is available, the demands are difficult to meet on time”. Van Acker continues by stating that sometimes, when the accessible material becomes available, the course has already moved on and students are expected to follow a tight schedule. Additionally, Sova (also with a visual impairment) was less satisfied with the time taken for transcription in her English university. Furthermore, she found it difficult to use the scanning facilities in the computer cluster independently. Yet Sova appeared to be understanding:

They were very good but too slow. Doing an article could take them up to a month. They showed the high quality of services

both in doing Braille and tapes. I did, however, most scanning for myself in my accommodation (or my PA had to), because as a student you normally have a couple of days or a week to prepare a seminar or discussion group. The university transcription centre has dozens of students' requests to work on and, obviously, they can't be that quick.

Joseph, on the other hand, was content with a week-long process of transcription in his English university. He compared this with the process in his home country, which usually took more than a month.

### *Money Constraints*

In addition to Angela, Alice chose to find her own transcribers, primarily to keep the cost down and also so that the materials were transcribed quicker:

I hired my own transcriber, and he completed tasks quickly and efficiently, within days. The university transcription service costs too much and I didn't know how reliable and timely it would be compared with my own transcriber who had proven both.

Mary pointed to how the high cost of transcription did not match up with her limited use of the materials concerned: "It is a lot of money because it is only something that you are going to have a look at and you may not use it in the future."

Ed used the scanning facilities in the computer cluster to convert the reading materials, which were only available in hard copy. He discussed the financial barriers he experienced when attempting to access the transcription service:

Unfortunately because my sponsor doesn't cover the transcription fee, I'm not using that service, really. So, if I need any material, I just ask the transcription unit whether they have this book [already transcribed], for example, in electronic format or not. If they have, they would be able to give it to me for free.

Here I discussed the barriers that participants experienced when using transcription services. The major difficulties were the time required to transcribe

materials to accessible formats and the subsequent costs. Thus the reading materials that were readily available to other students were not available to the participants without more effort on their part. In the absence of national guidelines in addressing the practicalities of the transcription process, this concurs with the current writer's firsthand experience, when these two elements imposed limitations in accessing reading materials, resulting in an inability to enrich the current investigation further by including more of the recent literature. Mary summarised the unfair, yet pertinent point of her unequal access to printed materials, like other international students with visual impairments or dyslexia, due to the unnecessary financial burden associated with her double identity:

I don't have the money to pay for that. Why should I pay for something that is available to other students free of charge? I don't mind paying for something that is not available to other students, but if it is, then why should I pay for it?

### **6.6 Facilitating Work: The Personal Assistant Scheme**

Having discussed two specific disability services thus far, the attention of this chapter will now turn to the PA scheme, "human help with everyday tasks" recognised by DCIL to be one of disabled people's 'Seven Needs' (Hasler, 2003: unpagged). In the view of barriers discussed in this thesis, disabled students need to receive the wider support and understanding of staff, to be able to participate fully in university life. Yet, the Disabled People's Movement has highlighted the significance of choice and control over their support arrangements (Woodin, 2006). The PA scheme provides assistance to disabled people to take control of their own lives, deciding how, where, when and by whom the support is provided (Barnes, 1993; Brisenden, 1996; Hasler *et al.*, 1999; Ratzka, 1992; 2004). Thus, the central ideas of this scheme, as Zarb (2003) asserts, are control, choice, and full and equal participation.

In their interviews, participants were asked a number of questions on different aspects of their relationship with the PAs. Fourteen participants used PA schemes

to help with a range of academic and domestic tasks such as: shopping, and guiding them in visits to the library, Student Union (SU), sports centre, medical practice and hospital. Additionally, PAs provided support with typing, proofreading, reading print material, scanning, acting as voice-overs (for students with hearing impairments), and providing information. Whilst Ned, for example, used the PA scheme as little as four hours a week, Ed had PA support for eight hours a day. Mlinda explained how her British university determined the number of support hours she needed and the service was in place when she arrived. Sova, on the other hand, pointed to her having a control in this process:

Although there was a Student's Needs Assessment meeting with the appropriate officer of the DSU in the beginning of the term, it was always my decision how many hours of PA support and what technical aids I need.

Toney gave an insight to the way he recruited his PAs with the help of the DSU in his university. Following his request for PAs, the unit had to find suitable candidates, typically by publicising the post in his department first (to attract subject-specific support), and if this was unfruitful, advertised the job more widely, in external agencies.

Then together with the DSU, he had to recruit the PAs and also wait for the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks to take place. The CRB provides access to criminal record and other relevant information to employers and licensing bodies in England and Wales (CRB, 2011).

### *Thoughts on PA Training*

When considering the adequacy of PA training, seven participants were satisfied. As with Parker's study (1999), Ned identified the positive attributes of his PAs, most frequently associated with "an open attitude and good communication skills" (Parker, 1999: 490). Ned thought that his PAs did not need any extra training and that his support needs were adequately met.

Joseph thought that the difficulties that he had experienced with his PAs was due to some personality differences, and could not be solved with more training. As with Vasey's study (2000), Nicky pointed out the crucial issues of confidentiality and boundaries. She gave an example of a PA, James, siding with another student, Julie, with whom Nicky had fallen out. Nicky felt that the only reason James was on Julie's side was because they had developed a romantic relationship. She talked of James spending the night in Julie's room even though Julie did not require support overnight. However, Nicky too thought this was a personality issue and not a training matter.

Maria was concerned about the lack of training PAs had in order to assist students with ADHD and dyslexia. As a student with a visual impairment, Tanji commented on her PA not having any background knowledge in her academic subject, for note-taking purpose, for example. Ed felt the PAs did not have the necessary skills in guiding him around and helping him to locate where the objects were in a closed environment using only touch. He had previously tried to train them himself, but ultimately thought it was the DSU's responsibility to offer such training.

Participants' dissatisfaction indicated that more impairment and academic subject-specific training may improve some student and PA relationships. Participants did recognise, however, the interpersonal issues and the unavoidable impact of these on their working relationships.

On another topic, Sova pointed out to the slow and bureaucratised process of organising PA rotas: "I can hardly arrange any changes in my PAs' schedule. For example, I've got an urgent need of a PA or, reverse, there's no PA to work with." Joseph also criticised the inflexible way the PA rota was organised in the DSU. He discussed how the person who usually prepared rotas was on leave in the busy period of exams. Joseph thought this was un-professional: "since there was no clear communication of who was taking over her responsibilities. Even the PAs were uninformed." However, Ned (from the same university as Joseph and Sova)



was particularly pleased with the organisation of rotas, explaining how the DSU sent him a detailed rota every week.

Elaine was the only student, who highlighted the importance of having consistency in working with the same PAs. She had to allow for her only PA (David) to learn how to assist her:

I mainly work with David. I find it easier if someone just knows, where everything is, because it is stress, effort having to constantly say 'Can you help me with this?' 'Can you help me with that?'

Elaine's experience reflected Wang's argument (2007: 86) that: "A partnership grows as mutual understanding increases and thus a period of acculturation is necessary." Yet, Elaine's wish to work only with David points to her possible dependency on one PA, in a profession with a relatively high staff turnover. She was, for example, concerned about David going away during summer, when she had to complete her dissertation. Emphasising the importance of consistency further, Elaine referred to a scenario when in the absence of David the DSU allocated her another PA:

The new PA was lovely, and I got on very, very, very well with him, but I didn't understand, why they'd given me someone with zero typing skills. He couldn't understand why I was asking him to type, when my typing was obviously so much better. He didn't seem to understand my explanations. So, there has been things like that, making it more difficult, but I got over those issues by having David all the time.

Toney, on the other hand, did not mind having several PAs. He did highlight, however, the importance of a clear communication amongst all his PAs, so that the support was efficient and time was not being wasted.

### *PAs as Friends*

Owing to the amount of trust they had invested in their PAs, Elaine, Mlinda, Nora and Peter described friendship as an important element of these relationships. Nora summarised her experience: "They are very friendly and provide a relief for me, since I sometimes have the feeling of banging my head against a brick wall."

Participants' relationships with their PAs supported Woodin's (2006: 117) description of the "paid friendship". "... but the fundamental stance was the decision to treat personal assistants as paid friends rather than 'friends who were paid'" (Woodin, 2006: 133). Yet, Vasey (2000: unpagged) advises against this, stipulating: "Be friendly, but do not be friends while the PA is in your employment." Whilst Vasey (2000) recognises that the friendship can result in losing control over the working relationship; Marfisi (2002) associates this with a sign of weakness and loneliness.

Reflecting a number of studies, exploring the issue of PA and the way in which this relates to disabled people's increasing independence (Morris, 1993; Oliver & Zarb, 1992; Parker, 1993; Shakespeare *et al.*, 1996; Twigg & Atkin, 1994), eight participants found working with PAs helped them to feel independent. They thought PAs facilitated their empowerment - helping them in fulfilling their potential, respecting their rights to decide and make choices.

Having said this, although Joseph (with a visual impairment) needed his PAs to accompany him to different university buildings, he found the presence of the PA problematic when trying to integrate in the classroom: "The PA was a bit of an obstacle for this." He continued by saying that, after he started going to the lectures on his own, he was included more often amongst other students. Another student with a visual impairment, Ed was of the same opinion. Ed was not used to working with a PA in his home country on a daily basis, and pointed out to the constraining effects this had on privacy with his friends. He did not feel comfortable communicating with his friends when a PA was present. Murray (2002), Parker (1999), and Vasey (2000) also acknowledge the inhibiting effects

that the presence of a PA can create on students' social relationships when in group situations.

Joseph discussed how his country had more of a culture of volunteering, where students helped on a more spontaneous basis. He thought this had a more socially inclusive approach. On similar volunteering contexts, Van Acker (1998) refers to a university example in Belgium, where groups of around 15 non-disabled students live together for the full academic year with a disabled student in the accessible residential halls. They provide assistance without payment on a rota basis for 24 hours every day of the week. Van Acker (1998) contends that the involvement of non-disabled students on a daily basis with a disabled student in a realistic manner helps them to confront and rid themselves of any pre-conceived notions, generally working towards breaking down of prejudice and negative attitudes.

Even though fellow students can comprise an important group of people who have been "stimulated to take on greater involvement with their disabled peers" (Van Acker, 1998: 41), the charitable basis of this approach can be criticised for reinforcing dependency (Coleridge, 1993). Commenting on similar voluntary schemes, Ratzka (1997: 58) argues: "Obviously, users of assistance from volunteers cannot demand the same competent, punctual, and courteous work from volunteers as they might from assistants who are paid competitive wages." It has to be noted that the provision of PA scheme itself has been mainly designed to prevent disabled people from enforced dependency on informal support networks, including family and friends (Martinez, 2003; Ratzka, 1997). Additionally, as Ratzka (1997), and Wang (2007) note the quality of family life and friendships could be sacrificed or at least drastically altered when they are expected to provide assistance. Although from different countries, Ed and Joseph's experience may indicate a cultural barrier in the way support is given and received, and the expectations from an assistant particularly in a social context.

On the topic of cultural differences, without any prior experience of working with PAs, uncertainties were expressed about what to expect from this working relationship. Additionally, working with PAs with international backgrounds created linguistic difficulties for both parties and resulted in misunderstandings, due to lack of fluency in English. Participants found this hindrance in communication an additional barrier in a scheme, which they thought was implemented to help remove such barriers. When working with a large number of PAs from different countries, inconsistency and variation in styles of cooking was also mentioned to be problematic for participants, who were unable to cook for themselves. However, none of the participants had any objections to working with PAs of the opposite sex.

#### *Limitations in PA Scheme*

There were a number of reasons why not all the participants used the PA scheme. Some universities did not have specialised PAs to meet the participants' specific needs. Maria was in the need of ADHD-specific support, and Angela that of a proof-reader and dyslexia tuition. Anna and Tina would have benefited from having help with domestic tasks. An effective needs assessment process with regular monitoring schemes in place, and links with external organisations to provide specialised support (Skill, 2011a) could have improved these four participants' PA-related experiences. However, Olivia seemed more in need of a counsellor than a PA. Her expectations did not match up with the PA responsibilities identified in the Skill's (National Bureau for Students with Disabilities) publication (2011a), mentioned in Chapter Four (Section 4.4). Olivia stated:

I would have required counselling from a PA. I wanted someone who is experienced, whom I can explain problems, and help me solve them by giving useful information, arrange any services, etc.

The service was simply not offered to five of the participants. Mary had to rely on a friend to assist her. Furthermore, due to their impairments, Norman (with a hearing impairment), and Margaret (with a mobility impairment) did not need to use the service. Nathan refused to use the scheme, determined to prove that he could “do the work alone” - a point discussed by Weiner and Wiener (1996, cited in Thomas, 2003: 40). Carol, on the other hand, seemed to stigmatise students who used a PA scheme. She thought that, to receive PA support, students had to have a particularly compatible personality:

I don't think I would have benefited from a PA support. I think, you need to be a specific kind of personality to have a PA, and people will find me annoying to deal with.

When discussing their financial difficulties, four students commented on the high PA costs. For funding reasons, Domenic employed his own PAs, who did not have the same level of training as the university PAs. Although Peter's sponsors covered his PA expenses, he thought the PA rates were high for international students specifically, who could not access funds such as Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) for this purpose (See Chapter Four – Section 4.4 - for an example of PA costs).

This section demonstrated that the development of PA schemes in participants' universities made an effective contribution to their independent living. It was evident from this discussion that participants were generally satisfied with using the PA scheme. However, with minimal guidance received from their DSUs, Domenic, Ed and Joseph pointed to the cultural differences in the perception of giving and receiving help in their home countries with that in the UK. As international students, participants were critical of the high PA costs. Other issues, not exclusive to international students, such as organisational matters, consistency in PA numbers and training were also of importance for the participants.

## **6.7 Summary**

This chapter examined participants' disability-related experiences. Whilst participants had similar barriers to their domestic counterparts to confront, they faced additional difficulties, which had marginalising effects on their university experience.

When deciding whether to disclose their impairments or not, with minimal appropriate guidance received, the participants had the extra barrier of not knowing how to describe their impairments correctly in English, and what the information would be used for in a different cultural setting to that of their own. When communicating with the staff in the DSU, participants were faced with such cultural barriers as differences in responses to 'disability', and a lack of staff's awareness of their concomitant difficulties. Participants' cultural and linguistic differences also prevented them from accessing a full needs assessment process.

Funding appeared to be predominantly the additional barrier to purchasing appropriate technical aids and equipment, and also using the transcription service. In utilising the PA scheme, participants experienced a multiplicity of problems related to cultural diversity. These ranged from unfamiliarity with how the PA scheme worked in England, to feelings of discomfort with the level and kind of support received, to linguistic barriers.

Thus both staff and students' lack of awareness of each other's cultures and limitation of funding for international students precluded them from readily using the services discussed in this chapter. Due to restrictions in available funding, participants were unable to access assistive technology, transcription services and adequate PA hours to have an equal experience of university life with their disabled domestic and non-disabled international counterparts. All that said, had the student services in participants' universities adopted an 'inclusive' approach, accommodating a range of students with diverse needs, arguably, the need to access the disability support services, and the associated difficulties would have

been unnecessary. Having dealt with pre-admission issues and that of equalising access within the university environment, the next chapter will focus on participants' pedagogical experiences.

## **Chapter Seven: Studying a Course in England: “As a Deaf international student I'm more used to lip-reading the seminars in my own language.”**

In this chapter, I will explore participants' academic-related experiences in the English Higher Education (HE) sector, both as disabled and international students. First, the links between participants' previous studies (in their home countries) with those in the United Kingdom (UK) will be examined. Participants' accounts of the language courses they attended prior to starting their academic courses in the English universities will be assessed. In relation to participants' disability-related needs, the possibility of offering both variety and flexibility in teaching will be discussed. Additionally, academic difficulties may arise from being unable to understand or communicate at a cultural rather than a linguistic level (Shotnes, 1985). Therefore, I shall also consider issues regarding differences between academic conventions such as plagiarism and the effects this potentially has on international students' learning adjustments.

### **7.1 Effects of Previous Study**

Previous education generally prepares students for future academic demands, or better still, the requirement to think and learn critically and independently, which comprises the essence of a high quality university education (Else, 1990). Where the continuation of study is concerned, previous education can provide an effective background to be developed.

Seventeen participants thought their previous studies had positively contributed to their university courses in England, and that a direct relationship was seen in subjects chosen and studied. Gloria noted the importance of having an undergraduate diploma for progression to a higher level of qualification, such as a Masters. The academic standard of the undergraduate degree is said to provide



“the opportunity to become a post-graduate student” (Wright, 1982: 112). Peter reflected on this:

It is that strong background of my previous education in similar areas [such as in programme development project, planning and management] that has enabled me to gain admission for PhD here, because, in my research, I do a lot of critical analysis of contemporary human rights issues.

The other 15 postgraduate participants in this sample thought that their general previous university training had helped to improve their English language skills as well as preparing them for research and academic writing. Carol stated: “The double major English degree that I did for my undergrad made me a better writer, just in general, which I think helps doing a PhD because you do a lot of writing.” Norman thought that his prior undergraduate studies in his home country (five years), and taught postgraduate studies in another country (one year) were crucial for him in order to complete his Doctorate in England.

However, the remaining 13 participants did not see any relationship between their previous studies and their British university education. Reasons related to language difficulties or different levels of study. The latter reason was particularly the case for the five undergraduate participants, who did not have university education in their home country. Although Toney’s elementary education was completed under the British education system in his commonwealth country, he stated: “No correlation. It has been very different. Because they were different levels. It’s HE in the UK, and Further Education, GCSE/A levels in my country.”

Additionally, Ed, Ned and Tina considered the nature of their studies to have been very different. Even though Ed’s courses in both countries were about ‘special education’, he found his previous education to be contextually dissimilar to what he studied in his English university. The curriculum in his previous education referred to ‘inclusive education’ only in the context of the Salamanca convention, whereas the English one was concerned with more recent developments.

Singleton (1999) argues that many students with dyslexia may be used to practicing unhelpful coping strategies as well as damaged self-esteem, resulting from excessive fears about being able to cope with academic life. Revealing elements of 'Internalised oppression' discussed in Chapter Two (Section 2.1), Maria considered personality traits to be responsible for keeping her previous education separate from her studies in England:

I was less prepared in terms of some very basic but difficult mathematical economics than some of my class-mates had. I think mostly my lack of self-confidence has influenced my performance.

In a new learning environment, students, who have been identified for a considerable time as having dyslexia, may be confident and comfortable with their identity. However, anxiety is said to be linked to past negative encounters, coping techniques and personality issues (Farrar, 2004; Riddick *et al.*, 1999). Maria also attributed her lack of self-confidence to the disabling experiences in her previous place of study that hindered her pursuit of future education. As a student with dyslexia, Maria explained that without any support, she was put through school, when she could not read "properly": "I never knew that I had dyslexia/ADHD; so I always felt treated as if I was less intelligent."

Wright (1982: 119) contends that depending on disabled people's "previous schooling and the way that they have been encouraged to develop a sense of their own identity from which comes a sense of self-confidence", their perception of the skills required for the nature of an academic task may be different to that of their peers. Maria further explained why she did not feel included in her previous education:

It's like you're trying to fit yourself into a scenario, which is literally impossible, but you don't really know that it is impossible because it works for everybody else and that's what you see. So then you automatically assume that you are dumb or incapable.

This section demonstrated that 17 participants thought that the education they received in their home countries directly influenced their English university education. However, the other 13 did not consider any relationship between their studies in the countries concerned. The reasons given, none exclusive to disabled students, ranged from differences in language and curriculum to differing levels of study. Maria's reason alone was based on her identity as a disabled student and the disabling effects of her previous education, rather than being about her status as an international student. In general terms, those whose first language was English, and those that were postgraduates found integrating into their British universities a smoother experience. Having explored participants' academic backgrounds, next, the way their existing linguistic skills were dealt with in the universities concerned shall be examined.

## **7.2 Attending Language Courses Pre-admission**

Language is a very sensitive area, and is "at the heart of the matter for many international students" (Ryan, 2000: 40). Most students find starting a new university experience challenging, but international students coming to a British university, may be doing so in their second, third or even fourth language (Race & Brown, 2006). The difficulties are compounded for those international students, who experience a shortfall in a particular language skill, such as reading and writing, to express ideas critically as well as clearly in their studies (Introna & Hayes, 2007; Wright, 1982). McLoughlin (1995) argues that academic writing for those whom English is not their first language poses a double hurdle: the first related to their limited English language skills, and the second linked to knowing how to present a written academic argument. When discussing Iranian students' difficulties in writing essays, for example, Houghton (1980: 83) suggests that "a student may be able to master grammar at the sentence level, but be unable to write an acceptable essay."

Twenty-one participants pursued their studies in the UK with English as a second or third language. Nine of these participants enrolled in language courses in their universities, as part of their educational packages, prior to starting their academic studies. Tina, for example, took language courses both in her home country and at her English university. The rest of the sample appeared to have undertaken a degree of self-directed and rather isolated private study, also recommended by Elsey (1990) to try to overcome linguistic barriers. Joseph thought attending a language course would have been fun, providing: “a good moment to get to know some people at the start”.

The nine participants who attended language courses were asked to discuss the accessibility of these programmes. Unlike Ed’s academic studies, this course did not require him to pay for disability-support and the transcription of the printed course materials to alternative formats from his own limited funds:

The director said: ‘Because you are international student, and you are disabled, you’ll need this kind of support, and as an international student you will be treated as others. So, we will cover the support that you need with our own budget without asking for additional funding.’ So, it’s different.

Sova attended an English Studies for Academic Purposes (EAP) course in her previous place of study, where her tutors “did everything they could to assist me in my studies”. EAP is accredited by the British Association of Lecturers in English for Academic Purposes (BALEAP), and consists of pre-sessional and in-sessional English language study, covering a wide range of linguistic, applied linguistic and educational topics (BALEAP, 2011).

Olivia described how the teachers at the Language Centre helpfully discussed her support needs with her prior to starting the course. Tina also commented on teachers’ encouraging attitudes, making it comfortable for her to participate in every aspect of her course: “in speaking, writing ... because writing is more difficult”. On the physical location of the teaching spaces, Ned (wheelchair-user)

stated that the staff moved the classes from the third to second floor - next to the accessible toilets to meet his access needs.

Participants expressed satisfaction with the relevance of the language courses to their academic studies. Ned described how he took two kinds of language courses. The first one was for eight months independent of his university and he worked on his general language skills in order to pass the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) exam. The second course was situated in his university language centre prior to the academic year, focusing specifically on academic writing, which Ned considered more relevant.

Conversely, Carol (a Doctor of Philosophy [PhD] student whose first language was English) mentioned that she had searched for essay and academic writing tuition: "To make myself aware of the British style of writing for articles, because it is very different from our [North American] style."

She was told that all the English Language courses offered in the language centre were only available if English was not students' first language. Thus the centre was unable to meet Carol's specific academic need:

What they were teaching in the English as a second language was not what I needed to know. I wanted to know the finer points. So that when I read a journal article, I can tell that it comes from a North American source or British source, just from the style or how people write like a persuasive essay, how they structure the argument, stuff like that. It's very subtle but I think if you want to write like the country you're in ...

All the participants, who undertook language classes not only found them beneficial, but also accessible with supportive staff. However, even after a short pre-admission language course, the barrier of language in HE as a 'language disability' often persists. "Language disabilities do not necessarily entail failure for the overseas student, but it is likely that the more proficient he is in the language,

the more he will benefit from his course.” (Wright, 1982: 100). In the current study, the non-English speaking participants noted language barriers including difficulty in following British and regional accents, inability to understand abstract terms or idioms, and in following the speed at which lectures were normally delivered. Ryan (2000: 24) states that “International students may not be able to interpret verbal and physical gestures signalling important information in lectures.” Thus, participants found it difficult to understand, remember and follow the lectures. They felt that there was room for their language to be improved.

Language problems have a specific effect on the performance of courses which have a substantial descriptive component, as in arts and social sciences (Brew, 1980; Houghton, 1980). Tina explained that no matter how hard she concentrated and listened carefully, due to excessive use of professional jargon as well as colloquialisms and slang, she often missed considerable amounts of the taught material in her social science classes. Reflecting similar findings in Fuller *et al.*'s study (2004b), Ed (Asian) thought: “Sometimes the [social sciences] lecturers spoke very fast”. Angela (European) was of the same opinion.

In addition to listening and understanding the lectures, it has been argued that students from non-European countries may find it a cultural and linguistic challenge to write an assignment effectively, or to perform adequately in a seminar (Hellstén, 2002; James, 1980; Schweisfurth & Gu, 2009). Wright (1982: 94) refers to lack of oral fluency in English as an “insuperable obstacle to effective participation in seminars and tutorials”. Thus due to lack of experience and knowledge of Western conversation rules and norms, and adequate language skills, the discussion-based seminar and tutorial settings caused anxiety for participants like Ed, making him self-conscious about mispronouncing English words in the presence of students whose first language was English.

Moreover, Mlinda found it difficult to cope with group discussions in English: “People could talk at the same time!!” Mlinda’s status as a student with a hearing

impairment and the resulting communication barriers in a group setting, including the speed with which most people communicate through language, and a lack of sensitivity and also awareness to different means of communication (Murray, 2002), further intensified her language problems. Therefore, it can be argued that Mlinda was doubly disadvantaged in the seminar settings due to her identity as a disabled international student.

This discussion showed that although language courses were valuable in participants' university education, the nature of language used for high levels of study is more complex and demanding than that used in everyday discourse (Lewis, 1984). There was a clear need for the language courses to be available to a larger number of students, particularly for those with different academic and linguistic backgrounds. Having dealt with participants' pre-admission academic issues, next I will explore their course-specific concerns.

### **7.3 Learning and Teaching**

In British Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), provision for international students is considered to be significant in effective teaching and learning (Elsay, 1990; Fraser & Sanders, 2005). International students often embark upon a specific form of status and experience, "charged with a high level of personal risk and vulnerability" (Elsay, 1990: 56), when starting university life. Every step along the route to successful academic completion can prove to be difficult and challenging (Ryan, 2000). International students in general have a pressing need and anxiety, perhaps above all else, to return to their home countries with the inner satisfaction and the achievement of successful academic qualifications (Fenwick & Moss, 1985; Hellstén, 2002).

Responding to "identified additional needs in the context of programmes which are designed for all learners, rather than isolate those with additional needs into separate programmes designed specifically for them" is said to rest at the heart of

'inclusive' teaching (Race & Brown, 2006: 13). Ineffective teaching and learning, on the other hand, contradicts the ideals of university education, which is said to be the pursuit of excellence through the development of knowledge and critical thinking (Else, 1990). Thus experiencing accessible pedagogy appears to be the key to success, both for disabled and international students.

### *Physical Accessibility of Learning Environment*

Participants were asked a range of questions relating to their academic experiences at post-arrival stage, starting with the accessibility of lecture settings (physical structure), and lecture contents. Elaine, for example, discussed a significant, but an often overlooked issue about the way paper notices were placed on notice-boards in and around her academic department:

I knew from my experience with my electric scooter that punctures and things could happen very easily ... But one of the things that makes uni more accessible to me is that a lot of the information for people is within glass notice-boards, and not pinned with drawing pins. I've not had a puncture for a year. So when I've walked, it's because I'm choosing to for whatever reason rather than being forced to.

Seven students with physical/mobility impairments expressed dissatisfaction with the physical features of the lecture-rooms, including broken lifts. Gloria illustrated concern regarding the steps to lecture-rooms: "For some of the lectures, I have to climb stairs, which are very difficult, not very accessible". As with Holloway's study (2001), Kate stated that many lecture/seminar-rooms and the general department spaces were not accessible for students with mobility impairments, and she was unable to attend occasional departmental workshops. Resultantly, Kate met her research supervisor on a weekly basis in the visitors' centre. Her attitude was: "You find a space and make it work."

The Quality Assurance Agency's (QAA) (2009a) recommendation, discussed in Chapter Four (Section 4.5), about flexibility regarding where the meetings/seminars



were held, including moving activities from inaccessible spaces to more accessible rooms, appears to address the way, albeit superficially, Kate's difficulty was dealt with. Even though this solution may have created an equivalent access opportunity for Kate to that of her course-mates, the social and personal implications it may have resulted in, cannot be overlooked. Partaking in an academic setting together with other students often leads to: "Intellectual stimulation, emotional growth, academic gains, an expanded social network, increased self-confidence, and independence" (Causton-Theoharis *et al.*, 2009: 2). Kate was clearly disadvantaged in not having this opportunity.

Additionally, Elaine's comment on the size of the lecture-rooms, contradicts a suggestion to ensure adequate spaces for wheelchair-users highlighted in a discussion paper on the Higher Education Funding Council of England's website (HEFCE) (Wald, undated), discussed in Chapter Four (Section 4.5). Elaine stated: "The room is particularly small and in the first semester, there was virtually no air. There were four wheelchair-users and other random bodies in that tiny room with no windows".

However, Elaine's course-mate, Ned (also wheelchair-user) was satisfied with the access levels to his lecture-rooms in the same university as Elaine. He thought that it was allocated purposefully to meet the large number of disabled students' needs on his course.

On another account, due to her back impairment, Nicky was unable to sit down and work for long periods at a time. She needed a higher desk to allow her to study whilst standing. Nicky mentioned that this need was not met in her learning environment. She had to make alternative arrangements herself by the means of taking regular breaks: "I had to ask every lecturer to allow me to stand at the corner in the room."

Nicky also needed additional time to complete the translation projects, and usually had to access the lab on the weekends to make use of the translation software, but this was difficult: “as every accessible route was closed on Saturdays.” Sova (with a visual impairment) complained about the electronic entry device on the front door of her academic department. To access this building, Sova was unable to operate the system independently.

Carol overcame her sensitivity to direct light in the seminar-rooms by her own intervention - having “the lighting more indirect or to open the curtains and not have the overhead lights on”. Carol’s solution in removing a key barrier by blocking direct lighting may well have created a problem for other students (e.g. students with hearing impairments needing to lip-read), conflicting with their needs. However, Carol stated: “people are fine with that.”

In reference to using technology, Harris (2010) argues that legislation on inclusive design for each product group is a huge undertaking, requiring detailed research into practical and safety issues. Reflecting on this, like participants in Fuller *et al.*’s study (2004b), for Toney, the size of machinery particularly in the physics lab was problematic, causing difficulty when looking at demonstrations:

I have experienced things in the lab, which is not always easy to do because the machineries are tiny or you can’t read things or it is not safe. If you’re given a choice of experiments, I try and take the safer one, but sometimes if there isn’t a choice, I can’t use the lab.

Whilst participants appeared to have overcome some physical access difficulties, often through their own interventions, inaccessible lecture settings were significant barriers to learning. However, the barriers discussed here are applicable to all disabled students regardless of their nationality, rather than being specific to those of an international status. Yet, as discussed in Chapter Four (Section 4.5), on a national level, policies (ECU, 2009a; QAA, 1999; 2009a; Wald, undated) have indeed been implemented to address similar barriers to the ones participants’

experienced, ranging from Gloria and Kate's problem with the physical inaccessibility of their learning settings to Nicky and Sova's concern about the closing hours of certain buildings.

### *Handouts*

Apart from the physical structure of lecture-rooms, participants also discussed their experiences of receiving lecture materials. Mlinda and Norman (both with hearing impairments) needed the core information of the lecture/seminars written down in note format, due to the specific difficulties associated with lip-reading and note-taking simultaneously (Borland & James, 1999). Mlinda's note-taker helpfully wrote down almost everything that the lecturer said, sometimes even copying the lecture slides. Norman highlighted a key issue, where being a disabled and an international student amplified his difficulties. He discussed not only the problems related to lip-reading, but also doing so in a different language. Norman explained his reasons for needing lecture notes:

Understanding spoken language, e.g. at seminars and talks, is quite difficult, particularly in English. I'm more used to listening and lip-reading in my own language. So I don't understand as much. However, in my field of study [natural sciences], most of the important information is written down as well.

Many lecturers are in favour of using handouts when teaching (Hutchinson *et al.*, 1998). Yet, handouts are not always accessible to disabled students as it was the case with some hard copy reading materials (Shevlin *et al.*, 2004), and information discussed thus far. Twelve participants did not require materials in alternative formats to the small print; the nature of their impairments was such that they were able to read size 12 font commonly used in various pieces of literature. Conversely, the other 18 participants needed information in alternative formats.

Whilst as a student with a visual impairment, Alice spent hours scanning a book herself, she was enthusiastic about the fact that she received electronic handouts/music-text in advance of her music-based lectures. Ed, Joseph and

Toney (three students with visual impairments) needed and received electronic handouts. Ed explained that because he had difficulty understanding the lectures due to linguistic barriers, receiving handouts before the lectures were conducted helped him in following the lecture content. Joseph mostly received the electronic handouts on the day, just before the lectures started. He felt that this was not conducive in giving him time/opportunity to read the materials in order to be on equal footing to fellow course-mates. Similarly, Mary did not like receiving electronic handouts, because, for practical reasons, following them in a class setting, which would have ensured a comparable experience to that of her class-mates was not possible:

I wanted to be the same. The other students have their notes, they have their power point and they have the tutor as well. Whereas the only thing I was relying on was the tutor.

Maria needed the solutions to the mathematics problems in her economic course worked out on the lecture boards, so that she could have copied them, since as a student with dyslexia, she was unable to take notes for herself. Despite the Equality Challenge Unit's (ECU) recommendation (2009c), discussed in Chapter Four (Section 4.5), as Maria explained this support was not forthcoming:

The professors don't take you seriously if you asked them to use the board. Taking lecture notes is impossible. So I have to do without in the cases where they are not published online.

Additionally, due to various impairments, the following participants needed alternative format handouts but did not receive them. Nora (also with dyslexia) would have found large print handouts helpful if the university was forthcoming in providing this format upon her request. For Angela (with dyslexia) receiving lecturers' presentations in electronic copies in advance of the lectures would have been particularly beneficial. She needed to study the handouts in her own time without any pressure on her reading speed. Nathan (with dyslexia and physical impairments) was uninformed of the existence of alternative format handouts. By

the way of improvisation, he used a green sheet over a red sheet in front of his handwritten script to improve his comprehension. When asked whether he would have benefited from alternative format handouts, had he known about them, Nathan replied: "I could have done with them, because I'm a very, very slow writer and if that had been available at that time, it would have been superb."

Nicky expressed how she would have found electronic handouts useful. She found walking to her department to pick up the hard copy handouts an unnecessary strain on her back impairment. She talked about her reservations in asking for help: "I did not ask for it to be sent because I thought the office won't reply when I really need help if I ask for too much."

Thus, nine participants' need to receive handouts in their preferred formats was not met. Six (three with dyslexia and three with visual impairments) had asked for these to be available, but such support was not provided, as Maria and Mary highlighted:

I've asked for this, but they didn't bother. I get the feeling that they don't believe that this is actually helpful and could make a night and day's difference to somebody. Also, they are convenient, and are only willing to go as far as they have to by law. I believe they are ignorant and have not bothered to investigate what their duties are under the *DDA*. So I don't think they realise that it is unlawful to not provide this. (Maria).

I requested for the lecture slides to be provided in Braille because I had a problem with my speech software, but the course is completed, the lectures completed in April and, two months on, I am still waiting for the slides to come in Braille. I haven't received them. That's just to show you how bad it is. (Mary).

Commenting on staff's willingness to provide handouts in alternative formats, Toney discussed the variance across the board:

Some people are very good, some people aren't, just like we can't be bothered sort of thing. Some lecturers made material

available in the right formats as a matter of fact. Some needed a bit of persuasion and some gave this task to me/PAs. Some had never met a visually impaired person before ... But they were not bad generally.

Likewise, Tanji (also with a visual impairment) talked about her experience of delays in receiving large print materials: "Not at the beginning of my course, but near the end [in the third term] large print handouts became available but these were not consistent." Maria, Mary, Tanji and Toney's accounts on staff's attitude appear to concur with Shevlin *et al.*'s findings (2004: 21), stating: "These underlying attitudinal issues [suspicion, indifference, lack of awareness] became most explicit in the provision/non-provision of lecture notes."

Conversely, Sova felt that fellow students were more accommodating in providing electronic format materials than staff: "Students, on the other hand, always remembered to send me an email handout or something else whenever I asked them." Similarly, Anna talked about the informal arrangement with her classmates, whereby she photocopied their lecture notes free of charge if she was unable to attend lectures due to fatigue resulting from Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (ME): "Encouraged by the tutors, but arranged by us between ourselves." Nevertheless, Baron *et al.* (1996) point to the problems that can arise, once the academic work becomes heavy and pressurising, often leading to other students' unwillingness to help. Toney exemplified this finding:

Some people say: 'If you have missed some notes, I'm happy to give them to you', and sometimes it becomes more difficult, like in the lab scenarios, where people have their own agendas, like they want to get the work done and finished. That's where I struggle.

Nonetheless, Mary thought that regardless of staff's attitude, due to the nature of some courses such as statistics, converting the lecture materials to accessible formats was not possible:

It is difficult for me, because they are using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software for the analysis.

Unfortunately there is no version of SPSS available in Braille or electronically. I can't produce it in Braille because it is just impossible. I can't put it on tape because it is impossible as well.

This discussion showed that nine participants who would have benefited from alternative format handouts were openly dissatisfied with this provision, with two participants being uninformed about the opportunity to receive such materials. Additionally, despite the ECU's (2009c) recommendation, discussed in Chapter Four (Section 4.5), to make the accessible lecture notes available in advance of lectures, not all participants who received alternative format materials thought of it as timely and efficient. The barriers participants experienced in this section appear to be mainly related to their status as disabled students (with the exception of participants with hearing impairments). However, the negotiations participants had to conduct with the academic staff in their departments to obtain accessible handouts, often in a second or third language, proved to be an additional hurdle, unique to disabled international students. The provision of a range of accessible format handouts, on the other hand, would not only create an 'inclusive' education system, but also help disabled international students to concentrate on their studies, instead of justifying their needs and going to extreme lengths in order to have the same access to lecture materials as their classmates.

#### *Tape-recording the Lectures*

The possibility of taping the lectures and being aware of this option will now be examined. Listening and writing notes, or indeed watching and making notes in a lecture context is said to be problematic for many disabled students, leaving them unsure as to which aspect to concentrate on, often resulting with poor notes (Fuller *et al.*, 2004b). Many students use tape-recorders either as the sole note-taking technique, or to augment handwritten notes. For students with visual impairments, in particular, taping the lectures may comprise a major part of their study skills (Hutchinson *et al.*, 1998). Fifteen students with different impairments from both

natural and social science courses stated that they were informed and given the opportunity to tape-record lectures.

For the reasons related to lecturers' varying dialects, discussed above, for Angela and Ed, tape-recording the lectures was particularly important. They overcame their language difficulty by using a digital recorder, and listened to recordings in their own time. To assist with adjusting to the new teaching environment, Tina tape-recorded the lectures for the first month or so.

Mary, on the other hand, encountered a difficulty in this process, which was also identified in Baron *et al.* (1996), and Fuller *et al.*'s (2004b) studies. Mary remarked:

I do tape-record my lectures, but unfortunately because most lecturers don't actually stay in one place, they keep moving around, the quality of recordings can be very bad sometimes.

The remaining participants were either uninformed about this possibility, or did not see a benefit in using tape-recorders. Iris represented the former group: "I never thought that a student can tape-record lectures. I didn't know about this opportunity." Patrick thought this would be an unnecessary exercise as he did not think he would have the motivation to listen to the tapes. Due to language barriers in a lecture setting, Ned mentioned that he would have taken up this opportunity if he had to take exams, but for writing essays he felt this was unnecessary as he could rely on text-books alone as reference points. Irin thought of tape-recording as a "special disability aid", which she refused to make use of. Instead she tried to memorise and take notes on the essentials.

Overall, 15 participants were given the opportunity to tape-record the lectures. With the exception of Mary, those who took up this option, found the exercise helpful. Yet, participants' chose to tape-record the lectures due to linguistic difficulties than any impairment-related concerns.



The reasons given by the participants for not using this facility were practical in nature. Irin's non-practical reason differed in that she did not wish to draw attention to herself and be treated differently from her class-mates. However, not all the participants were aware of this possibility, indicating lack of information received in the area concerned. As part of obtaining reading materials, the discussion of this chapter will now shift its focus to participants' visits to libraries.

#### **7.4 University Campus Libraries and Accessibility**

Library facilities, integral to students' successful completion of a course in HE, may prove to be difficult to access for disabled and international students (Baron *et al.*, 1996; SCONUL, 2007). Participants were asked to comment on the accessibility of university library buildings and facilities. Three participants did not use the library on regular basis and relied mainly on online publications. Time and energy issues, for example, prevented Linda from using the library frequently: "If I could have avoided going physically to the library, I definitely did do, let's put it that way. I used internet materials, wherever I could."

Sixteen participants were satisfied with the accessibility of their visits. Joseph (with a visual impairment) stated: "Really good. I haven't seen this much accessibility in the libraries in my home country; I liked it very much." However, 11 participants were openly dissatisfied.

Due to the inaccessibility of printed books to students with visual impairments, libraries were not generally used by this group of participants for research and studying purposes. Instead they mainly used the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) and university-based transcription centres as well as online publications for reading and research. However, Mary, Tanji and Toney criticised the lack of appropriate equipment and Closed Circuit Televisions (CCTVs) in the libraries to assist them with reading. In order to use the CCTV, for example, Toney had to carry the books from the physics library to the arts one:

It was quite distanced from the Arts library, like 15 minutes walk away. It wasn't very convenient to go to the library, issue the books and come back, which was 30 minutes out of the day, and have nothing done, especially if the weather was bad.

Like the participants in Fuller *et al.*'s study (2004b), Toney also criticised the lack of computers that were equipped with any screen-reading software in the library 24-hour computer centre: "So you can't really use them without anybody's help, which means if you want to spend a 24 hours session writing up your dissertation, you're screwed". Mary had difficulty operating the scanner in the library, and found staff unwilling to be sensitive to her needs:

Unfortunately, we have a very complicated scanner. I have asked the librarians, and they have told me they don't know how to use it. The technicians are really stubborn, they don't really show you. They just say 'You have got to do this and this and this', but they don't really explain what they are talking about. They think they are talking to a totally sighted person. So you can't really waste your time talking to these people!

Mary further complained about the technical problem with the special reading software that she used on a library computer:

The facilities are there, I must acknowledge that, but no one knows how to use them. No-one knows how to stop the bad interference during programmes, and I don't have the expertise unfortunately. Sometimes, I can't get the speech on; sometimes I can't actually turn it off.

However, Alice, Ed and Sova (all with visual impairments) were satisfied with their library visits. Alice and Ed managed the visits by asking staff to assist them with finding books. These participants then used a scanner to be able to read the books themselves. In her library visits, Sova was always accompanied by a Personal Assistant (PA), who assisted her in finding and reading out the books.

Participants with physical impairments found the building structure of the libraries inaccessible. When Elaine wanted to use the library, she was able to access the ground floor, but all of her course-specific books were on upper floors. The library lift was too small to turn her wheelchair round, so every time she had to reverse out. In order to attend a training workshop, Elaine was made to use a service lift; she felt uncomfortable and never went back to complete the training. As with Tinklin *et al.*'s study (2004), Domenic (also wheelchair-user) commented on the unreliability of the main library lifts, mentioning that once he was almost trapped in one. Similar to O'Connor and Robinson's study (1999: 98), the general impression conveyed was that even though the lifts were being improved and were an effective aid when they functioned, the expectation was that disabled students should use and rely on "service lifts which are frequently located in remote areas".

Domenic also pointed to the height of the book shelves and the difficulty he had in attaining them when in his wheelchair. On two occasions, the books even fell down on his head, causing embarrassment and frustration. He added: "The tables and desks are not really powered-wheelchair friendly." Kate reflected McCarthy and Hurst (2001), and Tinklin and Hall's (1999) findings, by stating: "Stacks close together, shelves difficult to access." Ned could not enter the accessible toilet in the library: "It was too narrow to go in with an electric wheelchair." Whilst studying in the library, Ned had to go all the way to the Student Union (SU) building (10 minutes journey) to use the accessible toilet there.

Having discussed the difficulties participants with physical impairments encountered in their library visits, Tina (wheelchair-user) overcame the difficulties by asking library staff to assist with obtaining books off the top shelves. Gloria asked for similar support from fellow students. Yet, as with one of the participants in Chard and Couch's study (1998), Gloria's main difficulty was carrying the heavy books herself, both inside and outside the libraries, particularly so as Gloria was unable to pay for a PA to assist her in the library visits.

Reflecting Fuller *et al.*'s findings (2004b), participants with dyslexia like Angela and Maria found the library visits problematic because their reading limitations made browsing and finding books on the catalog system difficult. Differing cultural, linguistic, and previous academic contexts is often a challenge for international students when using libraries (Ryan, 2000; SCONUL, 2007). As international students, for Angela and Maria, this exaggerated their already difficult dyslexia-related problem in searching for books in the library catalogue system. Maria explained:

I always avoid looking for books in the library, because I never can figure out the numbering, and how it's been worked out. I'm starting to do a literature review for my thesis and I have to find articles and some of them are not available online. I have avoided asking somebody, because I know they are going to explain it to me and I am not going to understand.

Conversely, where their Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and dyslexia was concerned, Nora and Patrick were satisfied with the provision of quiet areas in the libraries, where they were able to study without being distracted. Due to the nature of their impairments, Mlinda and Norman (with hearing impairments) did not have any difficulty in accessing libraries. For impairment-related reasons - as a result of an impairment, it may take longer to perform such essential tasks as communicating, and moving from A to B (Baron *et al.*, 1996; Doherty, 1997; Murray, 2004), many students in Fuller *et al.* (2004b), and Holloway's (2001) studies considered loan times on books to be too short. However, in the current investigation, participants were generally happy with the length of borrowing books.

The discussion here showed that 11 participants faced impairment-specific barriers in library visits. These buildings remained inaccessible to participants with mobility impairments through lack of functioning lifts and high shelves. Whilst students with visual impairments mentioned lack of equipment to be problematic, students with dyslexia found library catalogue system complicated. Some participants chose to ask library staff for assistance. As in Fuller *et al.*'s study (2004b), and also as

Carol, Ed and Nicky discussed, the staff's willingness to help was inconsistent. In busy periods, especially, they were reluctant to assist; Ed was explicitly refused help on one occasion. Moreover, participants' reliance on staff and other students for assistance may be considered as "acceptable in the context of care" (Beauchamp-Pryor, 2007: 240), but arguably goes against facilitating their inclusion and independence.

In reference to similar experiences, Holloway (2001: 610) states: "The lack of flexible library arrangements was a marginalising experience for students and the arrangements they made were as 'one-offs' or concessions by individual staff." Additionally, like their non-disabled peers, participants preferred to move around and browse the library shelves independently. Thus not having access to the library as an essential facility on an equal footing with their non-disabled counterparts became a disempowering experience for the participants. Having thus far discussed the different contexts in which participants obtained learning materials for their studies, I will now assess their accounts of the examinations taken as tangible proof of this educational practice.

### **7.5 Academic Assessment and Additional Provisions**

Assessment is "a site of institutional power ... where [students] must fulfil the requirements of understanding, knowledge and skill that grants them formal recognition and validates their knowing" (Clifford *et al.*, 1998: 3). A range of assessment processes including essays, individual projects and dissertations, portfolios, group work projects and seminar presentations is used in British HEIs to assess students' learning outcome, and to: "... appraise an individual's knowledge, understanding, abilities or skills." (QAA, 2006b: unpagged).

However, here assessment mainly refers to 'closed' examinations. In this method of assessment, students are prohibited from referring to books or their notes, they have "a specific time to complete a certain number of questions" (UKCISA, 2010a:

unpaged). Participants were asked to comment on their experiences of the examination processes and the options that they requested in making these accessible. Twenty participants (with 16 postgraduates) did not need to sit exams. The remaining 10 (with six postgraduates) had to take a number of examinations throughout the course of their studies, some as many as eight, others as few as three.

Yet, with little consideration of how the assessment is connected with students' cultural interests and previous experiences, as with some of the other academic areas discussed in this chapter, Western academics hold many assumptions about how such forms of assessment as essay writing may be perceived by international students (MacKinnon & Manathunga, 2003). On a general level, Ed preferred to have coursework rather than examinations, stating that he could base his essays on the topics that interested him: research, read and write extensively around issues that stimulated his intellect. Although De Vita's study (2002) has been criticised by Morrison *et al.* (2005) for being culturally biased, it suggests that assessment by examination penalises international students' differences in ability levels, as measured by other forms of assessments including multiple-choice test and coursework assignment. Thus the conventional HE "practice of assessment weighted towards exams might not be 'neutral'" (Van Dyke, 1998: 124).

That said, Irin preferred exams over essays. Although she found the nature of exams challenging, she enjoyed the process. Similarly, Gloria thought she did better in her exams than the essays. Like the international students in Channell (1990), and Pringle *et al.*'s (2008) studies, In a system, which promotes independent study, with the little guidance Gloria received, she found the essays to be confusing and difficult to complete. She felt lacking direction and lost. On the same account, Farrar (2004) identifies an emphasis on 'independent' study to constitute a hurdle also for disabled students.

#### *Additional Exam Provision*

Participants were asked if they made use of any disability-related provision for exams. Seven participants did so. Although Irin was granted extra time in the exams, she actually felt uncomfortable, because she had never used “special” allowances previously. Nicky’s (with a back impairment) lecturer gave her permission to stand or rest during exams, as she was unable to sit down for long periods of time. She was granted extensions as well as a separate room for exams. At Anna’s request, her doctor provided a medical letter, notifying her department about the possible effects of Anna’s ME on the amount of revision she was able to undertake. Nora (with ADHD and dyslexia) received slots of 15 minute breaks, the use of a separate room and computer in her exams.

Patrick (also with ADHD and dyslexia) needed extra time and a quiet room, because he was easily distracted by other students’ presence and was not able to complete the exam papers in the time given. If Patrick was treated like a domestic student (see Chapter Six – Section 6.3), having access to a free dyslexia screening test and a further in-depth psychological assessment, he may have been entitled to appropriate provision, identified by Farmer *et al.* (2002) as extra time in exams and technological support. Without the assessment, he was unsure who to ask for these allowances. It can be therefore argued that Patrick was disadvantaged in being granted extensions based on his status as both a disabled and international student.

Maria was granted arrangements, not for her ADHD and dyslexia, but for recurring episodes of depression, resulting from her negative university experience following staff’s discriminatory treatment (see chapters Five and Six – Sections 5.5 and 6.1). With a medical note, she received extensions, sessional breaks, and coloured exam papers, but no PA support for revision and exams was provided. Maria stated: “My university is a “you cut it or you don’t” environment.”

An important dimension of extra time is that it can help reduce students’ anxiety and “give people the confidence that they don’t need to rush things” (Farmer *et al.*,

2002: 109). Students with dyslexia are said to require extra time to access words from memory (Kail & Hall, 1994), and also to maintain "concentration for sufficient time to decode, comprehend and respond" (Crombie, 1999: 2). For this reason, a cognitive test in Maria's previous place/country of study, granted her a 100 per cent extra time in exams. However, in her English university, this amount was reduced to only 25 per cent. Maria felt that this was unfair: "I would need more time, especially now when the antidepressant slows me down even more."

Maria further explained that in her English university one of her exams, for which she was well prepared, was in the noisiest room on campus. This was next to one of the busiest roads in the city centre:

All I could hear was busses slamming breaks, sirens going off and on, honking horns and engines. Also across the road, there is a church, and every hour, it had a little symphony.

Due to her short attention span, Maria was advised by the Disability Service Unit (DSU) in her English university to take the exams in a small quiet room and a calm environment. Nonetheless, this exam setting was far from ideal, as Maria stated:

It was horrible. I couldn't focus at all. You had continuous noise from the street and I was interrupted with all the other noises, people coming and going all the time. It took me so long to focus. I was re-reading and re-reading the questions, like 100 times and I couldn't understand what was written. I filled in 50 per cent of the exam and left the rest completely blank, because I just didn't have enough time.

Following this, Maria wrote a complaint about the exam conditions, asking to re-sit this paper because she felt that she could have performed much better. The Dean of Graduate Studies responded to her in a letter, saying:

I'm disappointed that you didn't raise this issue with us much earlier in the year. You could have told the invigilators that it was noisy and they would have transferred you to a different room.



Maria did not feel directly accused, but indirectly she felt let down, since due to lack of information received, she had been completely unaware of this option at the time of the exam. Due to all these difficulties, Maria had to stay in England for another year and sit three exams in June 2008, which resulted in her experiencing financial and emotional difficulties.

Tanji (with a visual impairment) also had an exam-related negative experience. She felt that there was a lack of understanding of the nature of her impairment, and her need for additional provision. Tanji contributed this to a lack of university-based standard guidelines on exams, leaving to the discretion of each department to accommodate disabled students' exam-related needs. She believed that the school guidelines were "blindly" applied to her case without looking at her specific impairment and its implications on the exams. Tanji explained the process she had to go through to help with resolving the extension issue:

I had very lengthy discussions which drained my energy. I felt a sense of humiliation, like I had to justify my disability and was forced to divulge very personal medical information.

She continued by saying that in the end, her school was receptive to hearing her out, and showed willingness to change policies. A series of short essays, instead of sit down exams, was only tentatively being suggested. For Tanji, the issue of exams was a very sensitive topic, one that at the time of the current investigation interview was still being resolved with her university. Yet, the ECU report (2009c), discussed in Chapter Four (Section 4.5) promotes the replacement of written exams with coursework when taking an exam is not considered as a reasonable option.

Although Toney was given extra time, the exam papers were not always in his preferred format. Even when he requested the materials in a larger print, in advance, the print was not always large enough. Most of his exams consisted of

mathematical equations; some of the exponents were not possible to read:  
“Things like H<sub>2</sub>O, the two goes slightly downwards ...”

Sometimes, Toney had to wait for several hours or even reschedule his exam for another day, so that the papers were in his preferred format. He continued by saying:

I really struggled. They said that they're not going to count the unit in the future, but they have counted for now. So if anything goes wrong, it affects my grade.

In this section, the 10 participants who took exams found distractions with different finishing times, sitting for long periods, and exam and time pressure difficult to manage during the assessment period. Despite various national guidelines and recommendations (ECU, 2009c; QAA, 2009a), and university examples on alternative exam arrangements, including alternative materials, extra time, a separate room, discussed in Chapter Four (Section 4.5), Follett (2003), and Sharp and Earle (2000) have argued, fair assessment for disabled students is patchy and *ad hoc*. This was evident in Toney's frustration with waiting for accessible exam papers, and in Maria and Tanji's case feeling humiliated, whilst negotiating the accommodation for exams.

Although none of the difficulties described here (with the exception of Patrick's one) are international students' specific concerns, formal examination is often stressful for any student, particularly for disabled students. The situation appears to be amplified for disabled international students. They not only need to overcome disability-related barriers and fight for appropriate exam settings, similar to other disabled students, but they also have to conduct these lengthy discussions with staff in a different language to their native one (as with Maria and Toney), proving to the university staff that they require additional arrangements for exams. Disabled domestic students are granted exam allowances, when they are

assessed prior to starting their course; as international students, the participants missed out on such opportunities as Patrick's case highlighted.

### *Different Cultural Perspectives on Assessment and Feedback*

In the area of cultural differences in assessment and feedback received, 10 participants thought that there were differences between the means in which assessments were conducted in their home countries to that in England. Gloria thought that in her African university, the assessment method was based more on examination, whereas the institution she studied in England mainly assessed students' learning through essay writing.

Participants were generally satisfied with the verbal and written feedback received. Ned (Far-Eastern) was pleased with the marking system in the English universities, and found the comments given to be constructive in improving the final written presentation of his work.

Conversely, Janet preferred the commenting and peer reviewing system prevalent in her North American country over the marking in the English universities. Due to lack of guidelines received, she did not know how the marking system worked in her English university. Janet had different expectations of what comprised a successful student achievement: whereas a merit was understood as a "good" mark in England, in Janet's home country, it was not considered as such.

Gloria was also dissatisfied with the marks received:

I think one of the problems for my department is that I don't understand how they mark. You get your feedback and it tells you: 'You did wide reading ...' all the relevant criteria, and then you realise that at the end the mark is not 70 or 80, it is 62 or 63. So if you have been given all this good recommendation, how come my mark is so low?

Furthermore, Van Dyke (1998) argues that lack of a specific kind of written and oral English style, privileged only to 'white' students, may be responsible in the low marks ethnic minority students are awarded in their university exams. "There is a feeling that the criteria that are being applied are discriminatory, because they are imbedded in white culture and because there is no recognition of the language skills these students have to offer." (Van Dyke, 1998: 128). Gloria reflected this, alleging that some staff might have discriminated against her when marking assignments:

To be honest with you, when it comes to the exam, you realise that you do better than some people. But by the mere fact that you are an international student, and especially a black student, you are not treated as fairly as the others you are in a class with ... the mere fact that they belong here gets them more marks than you.

### **7.6 Academic Cultural Shock: Experiencing Differences**

Having considered participants' cultural differing views on the assessments conducted in English HE, I shall now explore opinions on other cultural variations within the same academic context. At the beginning of their courses, international students are not only required to study new materials, but also must adjust to new academic cultural expectations (MacKinnon & Manathunga, 2003): learning what it means to be a student at a British HEI.

Learning and adapting to different teaching methods, including the expectation of self-directed learning can be difficult and time-consuming for international students, in terms of being left to one's own devices with regards to extra reading and writing essays. Some international students may start out their British university experience by using assumptions and patterns that have been effective for them as students up to beginning their education in the UK. Additionally, under the pressure of a heavy workload, alien teaching styles, linguistic barriers and a new culture, international students may return to earlier more deeply rooted attitudes

and patterns of behaviour (James, 1980). Hence learning is said to be determined and conditioned by culture (Race & Brown, 2006). To observe such differences, below, I will examine participants' perceptions of the differences in two areas of relationship between staff and students, and plagiarism.

#### *Student/Staff Contact Hours and Relationship*

It is argued that the quality of international students' interaction with academic staff, as key gatekeepers in the British HE system, is crucial to their sense of security, motivation and effective learning (Elsley, 1990; Wright, 1982). The contact hours (via face-to-face meetings, email and phone) between academic staff and students vary in individual HEIs and subjects studied. According to a National Union of Students (NUS) survey report (2008), undergraduate students studying physical sciences have 20 contact hours per week in Pre-1992 universities, compared with 15 hours of contact per week in Post-1992 universities. Additionally, natural science students with their syllabus-determined science subject and practical laboratory work need greater contact time with the staff than the amorphous lecture and tutorial essay style of social sciences subjects (Wright, 1982). Although in the current investigation, it was not possible to compare participants' contact hours due to the diversity of subjects studied, and also the small number of students from post-1992 universities sample (three), in general, the participants felt that the type and amount of contact hours with the academic staff was sufficient and tailored to their needs.

As a social science PhD student in a pre-1992 university, Anna (with ME from a European Union [EU] country) was pleased to have received one-to-one attention from her supervisors whenever she needed to have a meeting. This flexible approach in her English university suited her and the health related issues she was experiencing. Another PhD student, Carol mentioned how she often needed to have surgery or medical treatment that took her away from work for two weeks at a time. Due to the academic independence that a PhD grants students, and the

contact hours involved, with her supervisors' support, she was able to arrange the work flexibly.

In addition to lectures, Mlinda (with a hearing impairment from a Far-Eastern country studying social science) was comfortable with using emails as an important means of communicating with her lecturers in a pre-1992 British university. A social science taught postgraduate student, Ned (also Far-Eastern) was particularly satisfied with his tutor's accessibility and contact time. Ed (Asian) was helped by some lecturers providing time for individual tutorials to clarify points that he had had difficulty understanding in the social sciences lectures. However, Maria (European), who was studying a taught postgraduate cross-disciplinary course in a pre-1992 university, thought that lecturers were unwilling to give time to students on a regular basis and saw the time spent with students as a "burden".

The expectation of student and lecturer relationship itself is heavily conditioned by the previous cultural experiences of the two parties concerned (Channel, 1990). Discrepancies in expectations can lead to misinterpretation of the other's behaviour, and become problematic. Participants were asked to comment on the nature of their relationship with academic members of staff. The informal and close nature of this relationship was noted as the predominant cultural difference. Wright (1982) asserts that in their home countries, international students generally see their role as students and the teacher as an authority figure, who is there to guide them with a degree of control. Thus, the authority of 'teacher' and of established knowledge often goes without being questioned or challenged. Peter, a PhD student from an African country, backed up this assertion by acknowledging that issues of formality and informality are closely linked with one's cultural heritage:

In my home country, there are some communities, whereby anybody, who is slightly old, or who is above you, either by position or qualification, or is a family member, anyone, who is

above your status, by any kind of denomination, you have to show respect.

Yet, Mary (also African) had a different opinion: “Academic staff are more friendly in my country, and less formal. They are very formal here and less friendly.” Mary talked about the lecturers being more enthusiastic in her home country compared with the English universities, where the lectures are less intense and students are encouraged to study more independently.

Janet (North American) had a similar opinion. She was critical of the independent study style encouraged in the English HEIs, and was unsure of what lecturers expected of her academic work: “A lot was demanded of a student relative to what was put out in terms of teaching.”

Carol (also North American), on the other hand, thought the relationship between staff and research postgraduates was very close and non-hierarchical in her English university. Carol’s compatriot, Alice was of the same opinion, she commented on this close relationship:

My research supervisor was wonderful; he was a good mentor and welcomed me heartily. Between the research supervisor and the student, the relationship was one of mentor and mentee rather than teacher and student.

On another account, Tina stated that in her (South-East) Asian country, she had to strictly adhere to the lecturer’s set direction, but the “more democratic” English HE system allows room for argumentation and disagreement with the lecturers: “students have an opportunity to deliver their argument, and the teacher gives guidance about the topic”. Tina’s statement was seconded by her compatriot Ed, stressing the fact that in their home country, they are expected to revere the lecturer and do what they are told; disagreement with the lecturers is frowned upon.

Hawkey (1980: 77) states that in Far-Eastern cultures, “Disagreeing with teachers is probably the worst of all crimes.” Ned explained that this kind of relationship existed on a vertical axis with more hierarchical and unequal principles. He alluded to a deeply entrenched cultural norm in many Far-Eastern countries that places respect for elders in high standing, which could on occasion be detrimental to the learning process.

Referring to most international students’ hierarchical academic background, Ryan (2000: 14) contends that “This is often displayed by students being overly deferential to teachers or by their reluctance to address teachers by their first names.” Angela described how unlike in the UK, lecturers in her home European country did not permit students to call them by their first names. Anna and Joseph (both European) used the terms “accessible” and “open”, when talking about the relationship between staff and students in English universities.

However, Maria (European), who had experienced a difficult time in her English university, thought the relationship between staff and students was very “remote”. She felt that in comparison to her previous places of study, the lecturers in English universities “are not nearly as excited to teach students”. Maria’s statement corresponds with Ryan’s assertion (2000: 14) that some EU students find the UK HE system to be “too rigid, formal and constraining of activity, compared to what they have been used to”.

Furthermore, Nora (European) found the system very different; in handout-based lectures, she thought there was very little room for asking questions and expressing her views. Nora’s observation on her relationship with staff is interesting, one that combines disability-related difficulties with the ones created by the cultural differences, doubly disadvantaging her:

Also the question of straightness is very different, i.e. if and when I am asked to produce an honest opinion about something, and I do so, I learn it is not respected as such. From my experience,



one should 'wrap things up' first and never say things as they truly are but try always focus on the positive, even when there's nothing positive to say. I am sorry, but I find it very hard, as a person, and as a person with Aspergers too.

### *Plagiarism*

Having considered participants' views on the differences between staff and student relationships, I shall now examine different cultural perceptions on plagiarism. In the English academic context, the rules regarding the incorporation of established academics' writings in students' work is said to be different to the practices in other countries (UL, 2008). Yet, staff often make assumptions about international students' "pre-existing referencing and other skills when students do not have them or have never had the opportunity to acquire them" (Mackinnon & Manathunga, 2003: 141). Owing to the exam-based Chinese academic culture, for example, Chinese students do not have any experience of using referencing (Introna & Hayes, 2007). The notions behind the concept of plagiarism are therefore culturally loaded, with considerable differences between individualistic Western societies, and those societies with strong collectivist ideologies. "The concept of individual ownership of ideas runs contrary to the ideas of collective ownership in these societies." (Ryan, 2000: 54-55). (For more discussion on this topic, also see Dryden, 1999).

International students may not have the specific learning tools to know the boundaries between quoting, embedding sources and plagiarism or indeed collaboration, collusion, cooperation, and cheating (Race & Brown, 2006). They may also recourse to copying because they are simply not able to express themselves as expected. Some international students may have been previously praised and rewarded for their academic performance based on the work of others, considered as paying a compliment to authors whose work they faithfully copied. As a consequence, tampering with previous writers' words may be considered as arrogant and offensive (Elton, 1985). International students may also think it is disrespectful to imply that their lecturers were unaware of the literature that they

cite (Carroll, 1999). Hence, they may be penalised for not exercising independence, or even being accused of plagiarism in their English HEIs.

Seven participants (one African, three Asian, two European, and one Far-Eastern) acknowledged similar differences in the way plagiarism was perceived in an English academic context compared with that of their own. These participants appeared to have studied in educational backgrounds where presenting evidence of original thinking was not required. Gloria had never experienced referencing in her home African country, and she had to adapt to this when writing for her English university. In fact, on one occasion, the originality of her work was questioned by an academic committee:

I felt very bad, because I had to go and meet a committee and all of them didn't want to believe me, but I didn't know when using stuff from the internet, apart from referencing the writer's name, you have to cite the website ... So if you use that against an international student, who does not know about those issues, you make that person feel very stupid.

Tina discussed that in her (South-East) Asian country there were “no strict rules” for referring to various sources and referencing generally. She referred to a few cases where old dissertations were even rewritten 10 years on with very little or no modification.

As demonstrated here, the education system in England is very different from a number of other countries. For international students from non-Western countries, in particular, the teaching innovations encouraged in English universities, which was not a formal part of their taught educational background, sometimes caused unease. This transition was difficult, compounded by their disability-related needs. Mainly non-Western participants met with such cultural and linguistic barriers in teaching and learning as differences in the referencing systems. Their relationship with the academic staff was influenced by similar experiences in their previous place of study. All participants commented on differences they had observed in

their relationship with lecturers, the main variation identified, mostly by Far-Eastern and South-Eastern - Asian, and also male participants, appeared to be the nature of the informal staff and student relationship in English HE. That said, a number of participants from the same geographical regions had contradictory opinions about some of the academic differences they had observed. In this regard, no generalisations, therefore, can be made about the nationality of participants.

### **7.7 Summary**

This chapter explored participants' academic-related concerns as both disabled and international students. Whereas participants' access difficulties to the learning and teaching settings were generic to all disabled students, some other barriers were more specific. Mlinda and Norman's (with hearing impairments) difficulties in communicating via lip-reading in English in seminars, for example, were unique to disabled international students. This was also the case with Angela and Maria's (with dyslexia) concern when browsing in the library catalogue system in English. Patrick's (with ADHD and dyslexia) problems in exams stemmed from the fact that, due to his status as a disabled international student, he was ineligible to be readily assessed, without cost implications, for his ADHD and dyslexia, and the effects of this on his exams.

A more general barrier to participants' educational experience was the fact that they had to conduct long, emotionally draining dialogues with their universities to access additional provision for entitlements such as alternative format handouts. Whilst most of these allowances, including additional exam provision were immediately given to domestic students following a needs assessment process, without having access to such assessments, international students had to justify their needs often in a second or third language to that of their own. For Nora, this was further exaggerated by her communication-related impairment (Aspergers). Hence the participants' specific experiences made unnecessary emotional and time-related demands, doubly disadvantaging them in the academic setting. If the

academic facilities and processes are designed in ways that the majority of students are accommodated most of the time, automatically an inclusive environment for 'all' is created (Fraser & Sanders, 2005) without need for such justifications. In the next chapter, the focus will turn to participants' more general experiences, including accommodation and social life.

## **Chapter Eight: Social Life and General Experiences**

**“My life became very isolated, I am also an international student and therefore suffered further isolation.”**

This chapter is concerned with participants' non-academic, non-disability related experiences. Three of disabled people's 'Seven Needs', namely, 'housing', 'transport' and 'peer-support' are used to thematically structure sections of this chapter. Firstly, I shall explore participants' living arrangements, including issues related to the accessibility of university accommodation. The choice of transport used to travel to various venues, and its accessibility will be examined. The possibility of partaking in social life, including participants' involvements in the International Office and Student Union (SU) activities is considered, as well as ease of their participation. Friendships are valuable in helping students to manage the demands of living in a new environment, and to cope with the resulting pressures. This chapter will also focus on the formed friendships of the participants during their university life.

In addition, participants highlighted a number of general and particular cultural differences, which will be assessed here. Lastly, this chapter will broadly examine participants' overall university experiences, recognising that not all had a fully inclusive experience in the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) concerned.

### **8.1 Experiences of University Accommodation**

For disabled people, independent living necessitates a physical living environment that does not disable them further (Barnes, 1991; Gasser, 1992). 'Housing' as a "suitable place to live" is considered to be one of disabled people's 'Seven Needs' (Hasler, 2003: unpagged). However, due to exclusion from the economic and social

structure of the mainstream society, most physical spaces, including public amenities and buildings, have been created without taking disabled people's access needs into consideration. As such housing is often an area in which disabled people are forced to confront barriers and institutional discrimination (Hemingway, 2004).

Here I will examine participants' concerns with regards to their university residential arrangements. Living in an on-campus accommodation with other students, particularly for disabled students, offers greater opportunities for social networking and engagement, helping individuals appreciate that they are not alone in dealing with such problems as money and workload (Gorard *et al.*, 2006; Thomas, 2002).

Referring to Foster (1989), Hurst (1993) discusses the concept of 'trading options' as the need to forgo study at one university (where the course might have greater appeal) in order to take advantage of the more suitable environment/accommodation of another HEI. This is mainly because type and standard of student accommodation on offer, if available at all, is variable across the HEI sector (Huchinson *et al.*, 1998). The restriction of choice (often to the newly built halls only) may result in greater compromises, or separation, contributing to students' isolation and dislocation (Baron *et al.*, 1996).

Moreover, living in suitable accommodation is an important prerequisite for international students' adjustment due to their unfamiliarity with British culture, and also because they consider their accommodation to be their main home in the United Kingdom (UK) during their studies (Lewins, 1990). Carol exemplified this point:

I decided to live in university accommodation just because I knew absolutely no one here. I wanted to make sure that I was in a safe place that was relatively close to the university. Therefore I picked a small house at a postgraduate hall.

Twenty-one participants lived in university provided accommodation, the rest either lived in private accommodation, or in Linda's case with her partner. Yet, at a time when international students are under pressure to adapt to studying in a new environment, the additional need to find accessible accommodation can be stressful. Anna (European) was particularly pleased with the manner in which the university allocated her appropriate accommodation to help with reducing the fatigue she experienced on a daily basis resulting from Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (ME):

I was given an accommodation right next to the university, which was basically just five minutes walk from the main university building. Because I'm an EU student, I shouldn't have been given a university accommodation at a postgraduate level. They just didn't do that ...

However, Gloria (African) had a negative experience regarding her room allocation. Contrary to the information Gloria received from the university at pre-admission stage, in which she was told her room would be ready for her to move into on her arrival, she had to wait for a while. For this duration, Gloria lived in an inaccessible room, which provided an unnecessary hurdle during the crucial first term, a stage which can be considered vital to disabled and international students' successful university experience. Gloria explained:

For two weeks I did not cook, because I had to go via stairs (which I could not retain balance on due to my limp) between the bedroom and the kitchen. So for two weeks, I just went on an empty stomach.

### *Being Bracketed Together*

Once moved into their new accommodation, 15 participants were grouped with fellow postgraduates, whilst 17 lived with international students. Three participants were placed in same-sex flats, and seven were accommodated with other disabled students. None of the seven participants felt segregated when grouped with other disabled students. However, Joseph (European) discussed a pertinent issue: that

of the accommodation office's lack of sensitivity when grouping students together in a flat. He complained about the negative implications that resulted from grouping a diversity of students' together:

I didn't like that mature international students were mixed with first year students. The age gap, combined with the culture gap, had an isolating effect of one group versus another group, that being non-British versus British.

Anna and Olivia also experienced sharing space with other international students difficult; aggravated by cultural differences. Although, because of her background, Anna (European) considered herself to be sensitive to the needs of people from different cultures, she stated:

The other students, who were postgraduates, were also international students, they were from outside the EU, which I was really happy about. It so happened that I was placed in a flat with three Chinese girls, and one girl from Thailand. Because of the three Chinese girls there, it became a very Chinese flat. I was the key person, who knew about England, because I had been here longer.

Even though Olivia (Far-Eastern) felt living with people from different cultures was interesting, she had issues with her flatmates which ranged from age-gaps, different standards of hygiene, shared cleaning duties, and respect for privacy. Explaining her frustration, Olivia made the following inappropriate comment, in fact suggesting her low tolerance of people from different nationalities:

I had trouble with a Chinese girl in my flat. She was, like many young Chinese girls, noisy, lazy and unable to keep the kitchen clean. For example, one day she lent her friends (a boy and a girl) her (girls-only) flat key. None of the flatmates including me had met them before. Then they came into our flat using that key while the girl was away. I was shocked when I saw those complete strangers in my flat! From my point of view, this girl ignored security issues.



### *Accessibility of Accommodation*

With regards to the accessibility issue, Hemingway (2011) contends that disabled students encounter access barriers with privately rented student housing, as well as university provided accommodation. Baron *et al.* (1996), for example, report that lack of lifts in residences often restricted disabled students to the ground level only, which meant that students were substantially dependent on other people taking the initiative to establish social contact, and therefore potentially contributed to their social isolation. When asked to comment on the accessibility of their accommodation, however, six participants with mobility impairments were especially satisfied with their accommodation being on the ground floor. Overall, nine participants mentioned the close proximity of their accommodation to university buildings to be helpful. Margaret (with a mobility impairment) found the location of the accommodation in relation to her lecture-rooms (the same building) very convenient indeed. Furthermore, Ned, (wheelchair-user) was particularly pleased with the automatic doors in his accommodation. Domenic (also wheelchair-user) found the adapted shower facility in his room very useful. All these participants' satisfaction corresponded with Equality Challenge Unit's (ECU) (2008a) guidelines, discussed in Chapter Four (Section 4.6), on the close location of residential rooms to the main campus and the necessity of automatic doors in the university halls.

Yet, Elaine (wheelchair-user) had mixed feelings about the accessibility of her accommodation. Although she recognised that being in an accessible flat removed some stress, she criticised the staff in her university accommodation office for making adaptations based on their own assumptions about what disabled students might need without consulting them directly. She discussed an example where the accommodation office had installed what they thought were easy curtains to operate for disabled students, but for Elaine, the position and height of the curtains was difficult to reach.

Thirteen participants were openly dissatisfied about various access issues in their accommodation, which adversely affected their ability to settle into their work. In order to live in a ground floor flat, Kate (with a mobility impairment) had to move to a nearby town rather than live on her British university campus. Although due to the independent nature of a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) programme, Kate did not need to travel to her university on a daily basis, this was a very inconvenient arrangement, nonetheless.

Nicky (with a back impairment), who sometimes used a wheelchair, was critical of her first accommodation for having narrow corridors and heavy doors. Nicky had sought the accommodation office's help regarding the heavy doors, but they had not been forthcoming. She had no choice but to take out the hinges from the doors, and place doorstoppers in front of some. Nicky was aware that her actions breached the accommodation contract. To address her unmet need of having a higher desk in her accommodation to prevent further back strain, Nicky had to also make other arrangements by improvisation - placing cardboard boxes under a standard desk herself.

Nicky's second accommodation was very similar. Like Nicky, six other students stated that they had to move at least twice to different accommodations because their first, and even second one, did not meet their needs. They stressed the disruption caused from moving around during an intense one-year Masters degree course, and how they fell behind in their studies by the time their accessible accommodation was ensured. Wilson (2004) highlights that changes in accommodation have a greater impact on disabled people than non-disabled people's lives. Unlike their non-disabled counterparts, disabled students can not move out from their residences as easily due to additional barriers attached to moving and the taxing effects of a move on their health. Thus in many accommodation cases, disabled people have no choice but to confront several barriers at once, resulting in a more financially and emotionally exhausting process

(cf. Smith *et al.*, 2003). Indeed the negative effects of these negotiations and constant moves on Nicky's health and overall experience were traumatic:

The accommodation issue was an absolute nightmare for me. They did everything that made the academic life difficult during my academic year ... It was horrible due to the accommodation office's lack of understanding of being both a disabled and international student.

To reach her first accommodation independently, Sova had to cross a road without a traffic light indicator. As a student with a visual impairment, this was clearly unsafe and problematic for Sova. She was given this accommodation in an inaccessible location, despite her ongoing discussions with the accommodation office pre-arrival. Sova also had to continue negotiations after arrival to finally secure accessible accommodation, which clearly impinged on her study time in the first term, disadvantaging her both academically and socially:

There was a problem with the Accommodation Office, but after a long and hectic struggle, I managed to get a room I wanted. It took me about a month of day-to-day talks with the Accommodation Office staff and with other people who could possibly influence their decision.

Another student with a visual impairment, Toney, discussed how his university was able to make certain areas of his accommodation accessible by installing ramps. However, due to the natural landscape of the city concerned, some areas still had steep steps, which were difficult for Toney:

The only problem is that at night, because the stairs that I have to go down from the back door are on an incline, I have already broken my arm on them because I couldn't see them. I mean, only once in four years is not too bad!

For Alice the washing machine in her accommodation presented a challenge as the visual display left her unable to choose the right programme. As a student with partial sight, Tanji complained that people who allocated the rooms made the

assumption that because she had a visual impairment she would not want a pleasant view from her window. Norman (with a hearing impairment) noted that in his accommodation, there were no visual fire alarms to alert him in case of a fire.

In addition, Ed, Peter and Tina discussed how restrictive their choices were when trying to find accommodation for their families to accompany them. This was significant as they needed their families to assist them in day-to-day living, particularly as they could not afford to pay for a Personal Assistant (PA) to cover all their support needs.

#### *Catered vs. Self-catered Accommodation*

Four students lived in catered accommodation. Mlinda liked socialising with her friends during meal times. Domenic and Toney talked about the convenience of this option for them as disabled students, though they did point out the inflexibility of the hours for serving food as an issue. Although cultural/impairment-related dietary issues can be problematic for some disabled, international, and disabled international students when living in a catered accommodation, none of the four participants were affected by such issues. Yet, Domenic complained about the food in his accommodation being low in quality and not variant enough for him. For Joseph, the fact that during holidays his catered accommodation did not provide meals presented a difficulty unique to disabled international students. For this reason, his family had to travel from his European country to England during holidays to help him with cooking.

Due to these restrictions, and also for the freedom to cook their favourite dishes, 14 participants preferred self-catered accommodation. Margaret particularly enjoyed socialising with other hall-mates whilst cooking in the kitchen. As an international student, although Alice enjoyed cooking, she felt it was sometimes isolating, and costly buying utensils and household goods. Additionally, the self-catered option was problematic for students with multiple physical impairments. Whilst Elaine, for example, preferred the self-catered option, she thought catered

living might have been helpful for times when due to her impairments she felt low in energy, and was unable to cook. Like one of the participants in Lewins's study (1990), due to his cultural background, Peter (African) grew up without cooking for himself: "In my country, men don't cook, but that's the challenge, I have."

Furthermore, Hurst (1993) asserts that disabled students' accommodation is one of the most costly aspects of student life. For lack of accessible accommodation, many disabled students have no choice but to live in specialist/converted facilities provided by their institution, which may be more expensive. As Joseph and Tina confirmed, this is a particularly significant issue for international students, who often have access to limited funding, and experience financial difficulties as discussed in Chapter Five (Section 5.5).

This discussion demonstrated that disabled students' social and learning experiences can be affected by barriers, such as inaccessible accommodation, that are independent of the quality of courses. Participants encountered numerous barriers whilst living in their residences. Yet, on a national level, the ECU (2008a), discussed in Chapter Four (Section 4.6), had recommendations in place for the barriers participants experienced in this section such as lack of flashing lights as fire alarms, and adequate corridor and door widths for wheelchair-using rooms. The largest group of participants, who were dissatisfied with their accommodation, was students with visual impairments (11) followed by students with mobility impairments (seven). Participants with other impairments like Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and dyslexia were not affected by the accessibility or their lack of accommodation.

Although some difficulties experienced were independent of students' nationalities, issues related to family accommodation and meal provision during holidays were particular to disabled international students. Funding the high cost of accessible accommodation was also cited to be a problem for international students, who had limited access to funding. Additionally, Nicky considered her disabled and

international student identities as contributing to her negative accommodation experience, and the accommodation office's lack of understanding of this group's unique needs. Nicky and Sova highlighted the difficulties resulting from ongoing negotiations in a different language to that of their own in ensuring their accommodation was accessible. The discussion will now centre on the barriers students experienced when using public transport.

## **8.2 Independent Travel Options**

'Transport' as the means of getting where one needs to be has been identified as one of disabled people's 'Seven Needs' (Hasler, 2003: unpagged), because however well designed and equipped disabled people's accommodation may be, without accessible means of transport, it can become a place of confinement in no time (DCDP, 1986). Disabled people are more likely to consider public transport an essential element of their mobility (Jolly *et al.*, 2006). Lack of access to transport is therefore seen as a barrier to their wider inclusion and independence (Disabled People's Transports Needs, 2005). Finkelstein (1994) refers to people who do not have equal access to mobility systems, be it private or public, as mobility disabled, socially dead, significantly prevented from participating in mainstream activities.

Hence, issues around accessible housing are not the sole reason for disabled students' positive university experience, the ease and accessibility of using transport is also a large factor in determining these accounts (Barer, 2007). However, disabled students have noted problems, including unhelpful and hostile bus drivers and train conductors (Anderson *et al.*, 2003; Barer, 2007; Wilson, 2004). Here I will assess participants' experiences of using transport, and their thoughts on the related accessibility issues. Twenty-seven participants mentioned that they used public transport during their weekly activities. In addition to public transport, Alice, Maria, Nathan and Norman also walked to various places, whilst Patrick used his bicycle to visit different parts of the city.

### *Catching the Bus*

For the majority of people, journeys tend to be comparatively short, and although buses provide a convenient and inexpensive means of travel, for disabled people this means of transport is mostly inaccessible (Barnes, 1991). Twenty-one participants used buses for transport - to go shopping or meet friends. Seven of these participants were satisfied with the access level of the buses. Additionally, Nathan and Patrick praised the university night bus for providing the service after midnight, largely for female students returning home from nightclubs. They emphasised the importance of this service being more frequent and aimed at both sexes. Ed (with a visual impairment) was generally happy with the bus service, he thought the drivers were very helpful and alerted him whenever the bus reached the stop of his destination. Ed's view was not shared by other participants with visual impairments, however. Alice and Sova were disappointed that there was no announcement system installed on the buses to call out the names of the stops. Alice stated:

The buses were unreliable and often ran late and were not frequent enough. The drivers' never called an upcoming stop, nor was there any other device put in place to make these announcements. The schedules would change without notice, especially going to the university from the train station on weekends.

Toney complained about the poor bus service with restricted hours to and from his halls of residence, preventing him from partaking in social life late at night. Tanji found independently navigating her way on the bus problematic: "Traumatic - pushed and shoved, now I always need assistance."

Participants were also concerned about the drivers' attitudes. Reflecting Jolly *et al.*'s findings (2006), Peter (with a mobility impairment) remarked:

Drivers sometimes do not wait for people to sit down before driving off. That is the complaint that must be raised. I think they need training on handling disabled people.

Although Tina found passengers always helpfully made sure that there was room for her wheelchair, due to limited space available and narrow aisles, she faced difficulties with manoeuvring and positioning her wheelchair in the right direction on the bus. Whilst these participants' experiences were fairly generic to disabled students, Norman's was more relevant to disabled international students' unique needs. Although Jolly *et al.* (2006) argue that public transport poses the fewest barriers for people with hearing impairments, as an international student with a hearing impairment, Norman discussed his difficulty in communicating with the bus drivers:

Communication with the bus drivers for buying tickets is tedious. Because of my hearing impairment, my English pronunciation is not very clear and I often don't understand the drivers well, too.

#### *Hopping on the Train and Tube*

The lack of understanding on the part of railway planners of the problems experienced by disabled passengers with stairs, escalators, inadequate and difficult to read signage, and lack of ticket offices that are accessible to wheelchair-users creates access barriers (Barnes, 1991). "Lack of knowledge would appear to have a negative effect on public transport use for many disabled people." (Jolly *et al.*, 2006: 28). Eleven participants stated that they had travelled by train or the London Underground on a frequent basis. Whilst five were dissatisfied with the service, six had no complaints. Iris (a mental health system survivor) found the train service in England less stressful than the one in her Far-Eastern country. Due to tannoy system on most trains, unlike buses, Alice and Sova were happy with the accessibility of this form of transport for people with visual impairments.

Ned's dissatisfaction related to the trains being very expensive. Due to his status as an international student, Ned was unable to obtain a Disabled Railcard. This was because the rail company expected him to provide a supporting letter from his



home country confirming his financial status first. Ned was over 25 years of age, and as stipulated by National Rail (2011), he was not eligible for the 16-25 Railcard (also referred to as Student Railcard) as another option to buy train tickets with discount. As a student with a mobility impairment, Margaret found stepping onto trains problematic.

In using the London Underground system particularly, access to information, automatic ticket barriers and the unpredictability of lifts and escalators for reaching the platforms have been problematic for disabled passengers (Barnes, 1991; Jolly *et al.*, 2006). When visiting London on her study breaks, for accessibility reasons, as a student with a visual impairment, Tanji described travelling independently on the underground as a nightmare. Maria and Nora (both with ADHD) disliked the underground system for the same noise-related reasons. Maria stated: "Because I can't screen out noises, that's part of ADHD, so public transport for me is very exhausting because it's noisy."

### *Hiring a Taxi*

For seven participants, taxis were the most accessible means of transport. Domenic (wheelchair-user) was impressed with the wheelchair-accessible taxi service and the friendliness of drivers in England: "I'm trying to make the Minister of Transport in my home country and my Town Mayor to implement the UK style accessible cabs."

However, not all taxis are user-friendly, and as two participants confirmed, they are also expensive for disabled people. Elaine and Tina had mixed views on the accessibility of taxis. Whilst Tina was content with the wheelchair-accessible taxis, she acknowledged the fact that these taxis were few and far between and sometimes she had to wait for a while for one. Elaine chose to use the taxi service, despite not necessarily receiving help from the taxi drivers and their lack of disability awareness, she justified: "with taxies what you see is what you get."

This discussion demonstrated that the 27 participants, who used public transport, experienced impairment-specific barriers. Whilst students with visual impairments were concerned about accessibility of travel information, students with physical impairments complained about access issues regarding public transport and the additionally unfriendly attitude of bus drivers. Students with ADHD were affected by noisy transport services. Most dissatisfaction, general to disabled students, relating to trains and taxis, came from students who used wheelchairs, and was largely concerned with the lack of accessible train stations and limited accessible taxis. However, as an international student with a hearing impairment, Norman's problem in communicating with the bus drivers by lip-reading in English appeared to engender a second disadvantage. This was especially so as most bus drivers, with whom Norman communicated, had strong dialects. Ned's inability to obtain a Disabled Railcard was also impacted by his double identity, resulting in further social isolation as a disabled student on one hand, and financial marginalisation as an international student on the other. Having discussed the ways participants travelled to different places, next their participation in varied social activities will be explored.

### **8.3 The Role of Friendships and the Imperatives of Inaccessible Social Structures**

In addition to accessible accommodation and transport, a fulfilling period of study also depends on the creation and sustaining of interpersonal relationships with peers and academic staff through opportunities to socialise (Earle, 1999). For international students, not only is socialising (as a means of relaxation), a useful way of overcoming feelings of homesickness and loneliness, but also is significant to their general well-being (Lewins, 1990). Studying at a university is inherently stressful for any student, but as discussed in this thesis, disabled international students can experience a range of additional difficulties. Away from their familiar surroundings, and support structures provided by their family, friends and

community, friendships are thus especially significant for all international students, and more so for disabled international students.

### *Friends and Acquaintances*

Overall 26 participants talked about the friendships they had formed with both disabled and non-disabled students, and the benefits gained from such relationships. Whilst Tina explained how the friends she met became her family in an environment, where she knew nobody, Linda identified the common grounds between her international class-mates:

It feels like a family, because almost half of the students in my class are international: from Zambia, from Zimbabwe, from Indonesia, from Japan, from Greece. So, we share our experiences ... we are close to each other. (Tina).

I liked the fact that it was culturally diverse, in that sense, I got a feeling from classmates, there was some level of sympathy, and empathy that we were all in the same boat to some degree, more or less. (Linda).

Even though participants had friends with a range of nationalities, they talked about their limited opportunities to make friends with British students. These participants felt if they wanted to get to know British students, they were obliged to take responsibility for making the friendships work, a point also raised by Lewins (1990).

Friends formed an essential support network for participants, helping them both with specific disability-related needs and more general issues. Olivia (with a short arm), for example, mentioned how her friends held the doors open and carried heavy things for her; whilst Gloria (with a mobility impairment) discussed how her friends helped her with the grocery shopping. Janet talked about the everlasting friendships she had made in her English university: "they were all really wonderful, supportive people. I still count many of them as my closest friends!"

'Peer Support' as a means of receiving encouragement and guidance from other disabled people has been recognised as one of disabled people's 'Seven Needs' (Hasler, 2003). The facilitating effects of peer support in helping disabled people, as a group, to combat societal negative attitudes as well as developing their self-belief as individuals has been documented by D'Aubin (1992), and Hasler (2003). When interacting with disabled peers, participants felt like belonging to a community of disabled people, forming a type of disability culture, which empowered them in facing their disabling university environment. Brisenden (1992), and Vasey (2004) recognise one aspect of disability culture to be the shared skills that disabled people develop in order to live well and communicate with others. Thus friendships are based on common interests (Van Dam & Cameron-McGill, 1995). Reflecting on these, Ned was able to share the commonalities of disability with his disabled international friends, whilst exploring some cultural differences. Yet, Ash *et al.*'s study (1997) reports a limited contact between disabled and non-disabled students, and that many of the latter group was only vaguely aware of the former one's presence, and the barriers they face. Similarly, Ned wished to have had more chance to meet non-disabled students outside his class.

However, the dynamics at work when participants interacted with non-disabled peers were complex and contradictory. In general terms, the non-disabled world holds various paternalistic attitudes towards disabled people, which at best encompass feelings of shame and pity, and at worst include objectification and resentment (Charlton, 1998; Finkelstein, 1980). For example, as Lenney and Sercombe (2002) highlight, and as evident in Alice's experience, at least initially, non-disabled students were uncertain as to how to interact with their disabled peers. Alice observed:

At first, there was some awkwardness ... for example, walking down the street and them feeling uncomfortable with the reality that, as part of its function, my white cane touched things. At first,

they thought that when the cane detected an obstacle, that was the same as me 'running into it'.

Domenic felt non-disabled students were fascinated by his impairments. Barnes (1992a: 12) also highlights non-disabled people's voyeuristic attitude as "lewd fascination". Five other participants had mixed views on their interactions with non-disabled students, including thought of as being a burden on one hand, and brave, having super human - "almost magical abilities" on the other (Barnes, 1992a: 12). Mary experienced this range of attitudes, including being treated as "Pitiable and Pathetic" (Barnes', 1992a: 7), she commented:

Some of them have great admiration to the fact that in spite of my disability, I'm trying to do things that even sighted people are not able to do. Some of them look at you as someone who is always disabled. Some of them look at me as 'wow, she can't see and she does that, oh my God'. It's like they envy you, jealousy. They don't really like, the fact that a disabled person gets better compliments than them. Some of them look at me in a way like they always feel sorry for me, even though these people are very well educated.

Four participants felt neutral towards their non-disabled course-mates. Sova stated: "There was no friendship among us and I'm not sure there could be." However, Gloria and Joseph commented on the superficiality of their friendships with non-disabled students, Joseph stated: "Rather from a distance. Not keen on making contact. Literally keeping distance and not sitting next to you or keeping small talk very restricted."

Of 13 participants with mobility/physical impairments, 10 were satisfied with non-disabled students' attitude towards them and the friendships formed. Out of eight, six participants with visual impairments were explicitly dissatisfied with these relationships, tentatively suggesting that it was easier for non-disabled students to relate to and befriend students with mobility difficulties than those with other impairments who may have different barriers to overcome. A similar finding was evident in Chan *et al.*'s study (1988), perhaps indicating that treating someone who

is as similar as possible to non-disabled people is “easier or less imaginative than treating someone in relation to their differences.” (Lee, 2011, unpagged).

### *Romantic Relationships*

Having discussed participants' experiences of forming friendships with both disabled and non-disabled students, attention should be also given to participants' intimate relationships as “primary aspect of being human” (Howard & Young, 2002: 101), playing a significant role in the quality of their lives. “Sexuality, like leisure, should be viewed as inherently positive, something that adds to ones' happiness and satisfaction with life.” (Howard & Young, 2002: 8). Sexuality is said to be a social phenomenon (Way, 1982), all of us are social creatures who desire and find “friendship, warmth, approval, affection, and social outlets” fulfilling (Edwards & Elkins, 1988: 7). Yet, disabled people are historically perceived to be polarised, perverts and oversexed on one hand, and asexual and innocents on the other (Barnes, 1992a; Brown, 1994; Naudé, 2001; Sanders, 2007; Shakespeare *et al.*, 1996). Furthermore, Sanders (2007) argues that in a disabling society, finding a sexually fulfilling relationship for disabled men is problematic due to physical, social and educational barriers. On the same account, Rintala *et al.* (1997), discussing disabled women's dating issues, note that disabled people in general may have more barriers to challenge in finding partners and forming romantic relationships leading to intimacy compared with non-disabled people.

Eight participants talked about their romantic relationships. Iris discussed her unfulfilled desire to have a partner, with whom she could have shared her difficult English university time. Toney highlighted the difficulties he had in forming a relationship on campus due to attitudinal barriers he encountered in his university environment. These barriers prevented him from having opportunities similar to non-disabled students in socialising and dating other students. As a consequence, Toney thought he may need to venture further afield when looking to meet someone:

Having a girlfriend here could have definitely improved my university experience. I have to spend extra time to go and find a girlfriend in the city, who may not be of my compatibility. They may think that I am a useless student so they might not want to go out with me, or maybe we are different.

Conversely, Linda discussed her strong and supportive relationship, particularly helpful when negotiating the practicalities in a new environment: "I had a very supportive partner, who I relied quite a bit on."

### *Social Life*

Having commented on participants' romantic relationships, on a larger scale, the role of leisure and recreational experiences in disabled people's lives is considered as the "essential part of a satisfying life and a primary pathway to love and intimacy in the most meaningful way" (Howard & Young, 2002: 114). Leisure is considered to be an important aspect of human life "allowing us to expand our horizons through the development of our interests, whilst at the same time giving us the opportunity to meet and interact with others holding similar interests." (Murray, 2002: 91). Yet, disabled people's ability to participate in recreational pursuits, establishing social contacts and relationships, has also been severely restricted as a consequence of access, attitudinal, economic, environmental and social barriers (Barnes, 1991; Deepak, 2002; Fullagar & Owler, 1998; Howard & Young, 2002; King, undated; Murray, 2004). Here I will examine participants' social experiences, including the possibility of their involvement in the university International Office and SU activities, and the accessibility of these events.

Participants discussed how they took part in social activities external to university, including socialising with friends and partaking in cultural and religious events (e.g. going to museums, concerts and church). Maria described the time spent with friends: "I invite them for dinner or go out, like to a pub and talks".

### *International Office*

Overall 24 participants used the International Office, with most visiting the service mid-way through their stay. The reasons for their visits included seeking advice on immigration issues, and obtaining general information about the city. Iris described how the International Office helped her to call the police, when her purse was stolen: "Because I don't have confidence to speak in English, I often feel stressed to talk with others over the phone. I asked the staff in the International Office to call the police when I needed."

Six participants (one Asian, two European, and three North American) thought the staff in the International Office were unhelpful; complaints revolved around the failure to provide specific advice and support during their stay. Carol thought the support for international postgraduates was poor:

We have different issues. I had to open a bank account before receiving my funding. I needed some British ID before I was able to open the bank account. It was just sort of a mess, and they didn't really know how to help.

Four participants took part in the social activities organised by this office. Carol and Norman described their different experiences:

I went on one of the international trips and I found that they treated you like very young children. They gave us a map and like 'be back here by five o'clock!' I felt like I could travel on my own and I didn't need someone to hold my hand as much. So it wasn't for me. (Carol).

I contacted the International Office to attend a trip to another city that they had organised. Also, I visit the International Office nearly every week for an event. It's a social gathering for international students. (Norman).

Yet, as several participants explained, provision of opportunities and the possibility to seize them did not always equate. Two participants with visual impairments did not find the International Office buildings accessible. Due to its complicated layout, Ed mentioned that he had to be accompanied by a PA, which as Murray (2002: 28)



argues: "The presence of a support worker not only inhibited friendships but also on occasions caused resentment ...". Three participants with mobility difficulties complained about the lack of accessible toilets and lifts. Although Tina (wheelchair-user) was happy with the old-fashioned lift installed outside the International Office; she felt awkward ringing the bell for assistance with the lift every time she needed to visit the office. This could explain why Tina did not visit the International Office on frequent basis compared with other venues like the SU, discussed next.

### *Student Union*

Twenty-three participants mentioned visiting SU more than once throughout their university life. The purpose of their visits ranged from doing shopping, participating in societies, bars and clubs, and obtaining information and advice from the welfare centre. When talking about the range of activities in SU, Patrick discussed the extent of his involvement:

The Student Union is fantastic, it really is good. I volunteered in green action. I did student television - film society, and then I did the odd thing, like caving, which I wouldn't otherwise have been able to do. I went to theatre productions.

Due to accessibility issues, Kate (with a mobility impairment) was unable to socialise on campus, including in the SU. She had to modify her social life, her social activities revolved around venues in a nearby town, outside her university city. Thereby, Kate missed out on taking part in university activities similar to her non-disabled peers. Murray (2004: 22) explains the consequences of similar difficulties:

... environmental obstacles range from outright prevention to the kind of 'second-class' access that ensures not only lower levels of enjoyment but also, yet again, reduced opportunity to relate to other ... people ...

Reflecting ECU (2009b), and National Union of Students' (NUS) (2008) findings, discussed in Chapter Four (Section 4.6), participants' dissatisfactions with the levels of their involvement in the SUs related to their non-traditional status as disabled, international, mature and in two cases PhD students. Participants did not identify any gender-related barriers in their social activities. Six participants were critical of the access levels to their SU, which restricted their involvement in the Disabled Students Societies. Whilst three participants with mobility impairments complained about narrow and broken lifts, three participants with visual impairments discussed how they were unable to visit their SU independently due to complicated operating lift systems, and revolving/heavy doors. Sova and Toney (both with visual impairments) noted:

I couldn't, for example, go to the Union bar or a party in SU whenever I wanted because I had to arrange a PA beforehand. And it's difficult to make friends with your able bodied peers, when there's a PA next to you. (Sova).

The SU has put a revolving door in, which has become such a nightmare, because it is quite a fast moving revolving door and I can't get into the building. (Toney).

For six participants' (one with a visual impairment, and five with physical impairments), time and energy levels were significant barriers to social life, as also identified by Murray (2004), and Sachs and Schreuer (2011). For these reasons, balancing social life and study was problematic; Linda, for example, had to focus on the studies alone:

Where is the SU? [laughing]. Honestly, the only places I knew were the two libraries and where my classes were. I absolutely did not see any other part of university at all.

Three participants discussed staff's negative attitude and lack of awareness towards disabled students in the SU. Although Mary's request was unreasonable in nature, as she pointed out, the staff could have been more aware of disability-related issues:

They need to have proper training in how to approach disabled students. Once I wanted to go somewhere at university, and I phoned up the SU and said: 'I want to go to the financial office and I need assistance' 'Why do you need assistance?' I said: 'Because I can't see' 'Why can't you see?' I said: 'Because I am visually impaired' 'What do you mean "visually impaired"?' 'Because I am "Blind"' "'Blind"? Why don't you have someone with you?' 'Well, because I don't have someone, that's why. This is why I'm asking for assistance' 'Well you need to make an appointment' 'Well, what if I wanted to go to the toilet. Do I need to make an appointment?'

From an international student's point of view, Janet, on the other hand, felt that her university Union promoted the binge drinking culture, which she was not part of. Instead she spent most of her time in the coffee shops, working and socialising. Lewins (1990) also states that British students' penchant for the pubs and clubs as the basis for socialisation, is not necessarily of interest to many international students.

Seven mature participants (two African, two Asian, one European, and two North American) felt that for cultural and age-related reasons, they did not belong to the student life and therefore did not wish to get involved in the SU. Tanji explained: "I could not blend in due to my age and different experience." Anna was of the same opinion:

It's more a case of me having slightly different attitudes towards university life and being ... mature, knowing what I want. That aspect then gives me different attitude. It makes me study more, probably I'm more serious about what I do.

Although PhD students have more flexibility and a degree of control over their time and work (Thomas, 2003), Alice and Angela referred to their general social experiences as isolated. Lack of opportunities to socialise meant that they were invariably relying on random meetings, which was not an ideal way of striking up friendships. This, Angela felt, partly stemmed from the self directed nature of her

PhD studies, and partly because of not having opportunities to be introduced to the other research students, when in England. At the time of the current investigation, Angela was working and continuing her studies part-time based in her home country, which dislocated her even further from her colleagues.

Moreover, not having extra money left participants like Iris, Olivia and Patrick, unable to engage in social activities. The significance of this was more than the immediate effects of missing out on “good times” (Murray, 2004: 21). To have opportunities to build relationships with other students appeared to be more important for participants like Tanji: “Due to isolation and no one to take me out, I have started to lead a very lonely life.”

### *Sport Activities*

An important part of a healthy recreation and leisure is involvement in sport activities. Groff and Kleiber’s qualitative study into an adapted sports programme (2001) report that opportunities to be involved in such activities provided an overall sense of competence not just in sport but also in other tasks, as well as outlet for the expression of emotions, chances to interact with others in a range of social settings, and a sense of independence. Seven participants talked about their involvements in sports, including: biking, hiking, karate, running and roller-blading. Four other participants were keen to take up sport at some point. For the rest of the participants, accessibility of venues/activities, time, money, accessible information, confidence and isolation were noted as reasons contributing to their lack of involvements in sport activities. In relation to the sport centres, Devas (2003: 235) explains that:

A broadening of the notion of access assumes a responsibility on the part of sports centres to work on accessibility of not only the physical environment, but also to make a range of activities more inclusive.

Yet, Toney was critical of the accessibility of his university sport centre (where he was employed on part-time basis):

None of the instructors can sign. I had to give instructions to a deaf person once. If somebody doesn't have enough sight then they may not be able to use some machines compared to others, because some machines have better contrast, some don't. Some of the old machines have panels which are nice and brightly coloured, and some of them have old ones, which are quite dull, white on black. Some machines have tight nuts and bolts to adjust, fiddly things.

Although participants' social marginalisation discussed thus far appears to be mainly based on their single identity as disabled, international or mature students, had they in fact been able to partake in social life, these activities may have brought additional barriers based on their other identities. Nonetheless, participants like Margaret, Ned and Toney's double marginalisation in, or by, their social life is more relevant to the core of this thesis, as this is caused by the confluence of their disabled and international identities. For Margaret, not only were the physical structures of some social venues inaccessible, but also she could not relate to most cultural activities prevalent in her university environment such as the clubbing culture. If either of these barriers were removed, Margaret might have been more comfortable in facing the next set of barriers. Similarly, communicating in English in a social context was more difficult for Ned due to the unpredictability of topics discussed, and also the excessive usage of slang amongst the student population. This was an additional barrier for Ned, who already faced physical access barriers in entering the social venues in SU with his wheelchair. For Toney, the additional layer of being an international student exaggerated the attitudinal-related difficulties he faced as a disabled student in a social context:

Social life is quite bad actually, because if you are a disabled student, it is always hard anyway. But then if they see that you are an international disabled student, they shy off even a lot more, thinking probably you are different.

This section demonstrated that being a student entails more than attending lectures and meeting deadlines. With a chance to meet a wide range of students, university life is an ideal opportunity to partake in a wide range of social and cultural activities. Disabled people's access and involvement in leisure has been considered as one of the main ways of developing acceptance and inclusion in society (Devine & Lashua, 2002). Yet, most of the participants' dissatisfactions with their social life related to barriers in receiving appropriate advice, physical access and staff attitude issues present in their International Offices and SUs. Whereas these problems can be generalised to all disabled and international students, six participants experienced unique difficulties, only concerning disabled international students. The cultural and linguistic exclusionary practices in SUs, as well as participants' hesitancy to speak in English, constrained their efforts to be sociable, despite physical access and attitudinal barriers. Arguably, all the general barriers discussed in this section reinforced and added to the participants' feelings of social isolation caused by their disabled status. When discussing their social experiences, participants pointed to some cultural differences they had observed. Next I shall explore these specifics as well as general differences, participants experienced in the UK.

#### **8.4 Experiencing Cultural Differences**

International students not only need to adapt to new methods of learning and study, but also have to make a variety of cultural and linguistic compromises and personal and social adjustments in order to learn to live in the host country (Hellstén & Prescott, 2004). Thus in the initial stages of their stay, international students can feel overwhelmed by cultural differences, and may experience stress, referred to as 'culture shock'. This experience at times can have quite serious effects, including homesickness and loneliness, lack of motivation, boredom, frustration, mental fatigue and even depression (SCONUL, 2007; UKCISA, 2008b; Wright, 1982; Zhou *et al.*, 2008).

The students arrive in England from various cultural, economic, geographic and historic backgrounds, yet the adjustment necessary to adapt to a completely new environment can be daunting. The greater the shift is in culture and customs, the more the student is likely to experience problems and distress (Ryan, 2000), and be “lost in translation” (Zhou *et al.*, 2008: 63). The students need to learn to adapt to British standards of living and new customs, which may seem trivial but are essential to them being more readily accepted (Sen, 1970). This experience has been described in terms of a cycle:

... from honeymoon period, to a stage of depression, rejection, hostility and withdrawal, then finally adjustment, autonomy and independence, then a readjustment period after returning home. (Ryan, 2000: 77).

In light of limited programmes available to deal with change of culture, discussed in Chapter Four (Section 4.6), here I will assess participants’ experiences of the phenomenon ‘culture shock’. Seventeen participants commented on the attitudinal differences they had observed when communicating with British people.

### *Attitudes*

Alice and Kate (both North American) felt British people were reserved, whilst Patrick (European) stated:

British people, it’s a terrible generalisation to make, but tend to be nicer. In Britain, there is higher value placed on being nice to people, and being polite. I always compare the bureaucrats. In my country, like in Britain, a bureaucrat would never help you, but in Britain they will be ‘ever so sorry about it’.

Similarly, Sova compared the politeness of British society to that of her East European country. She discussed how in her country, unlike the UK, people do not smile too much and how they rarely say “excuse me” or “would you please ...?” in shops or transport.

### *Social Relations*

Participants talked about the social differences they had noticed. Joseph (European) highlighted a broad structural difference between two countries:

On the dimension of capitalism to socialism, England is more on the capitalist side and my country more on the socialist side. England is more individualistic, my country is more collectivistic. England is more pragmatic, my country is more social. England has better organised facilities, my country has a better volunteering culture.

Similarly, Nora (also European) talked about her observations, she commented on aspects that she had witnessed and felt was individualistic about Britain:

The environment is very lonely, i.e. people are afraid to help or get involved, even when someone is in danger. I find this lack of basic humanity quite horrible. For example, when someone needs help (medical condition) in public, when someone is assaulted in public etc. It's very sad indeed, when basic moral and humanity is neglected so easily.

Mary referred to similar differences between the individualistic culture of Britain and that of the collective one in her African country:

I think in my country, we live as groups not as individuals. This is why the community is much stronger and the help is more available. Whereas here, because we live as individuals, we focus on ourselves more than anything else; we tend to lose common ground, of sticking together. People are very selfish. They are very, very individualistic. They don't really think about you, even when they know that something is wrong and that they should do something about it. They don't have time, when they do have it, they don't share; they just use it to have fun.

Gloria highlighted how in her African country, people are more committed to their families and jobs, rather than focussing on going out to socialise as she perceived UK culture to be centred around. Whilst Alice (North American) and Irin (Far-



Eastern) felt that family relationships and friendships are stronger in the UK, Gloria and Peter (both African) thought the contrary.

Peter compared people's friendliness towards strangers in his African country with that in the UK: "In the UK you can walk into town without anybody saying 'hi' to you. In my country, people will say 'hi, how are you?' even if they don't know me." That said, Norman and Patrick (both European) discussed how friendly and inclusive of foreigners they perceived British society to be.

Though Iris considered Britain to be a sexually liberal country to live in, she felt constrained by her Far-Eastern cultural background, the social customs and boundaries regarding sexual relationships. She felt uncomfortable inviting her male friends home: "My compatriots think that if a girl invites a male friend to her house, it's more than an invitation of friendship."

### *Leisure*

Five out of nine participants, who commented on differences in social customs, talked about the excessive drinking habits of British people compared with their compatriots. They discussed, how in the UK, most social activities are centred on going out to the pubs. Patrick compared the meaning of nights out in the two cultures concerned, and discussed how in his European country, unlike the UK, alcohol is not the sole reason for going out:

People in Britain drink a vast amount of alcohol ... Here people drink more often than in my country, and it's also just the culture, where you just go to the pub. In my country, I would never just go to a bar, we were doing something, and also having a drink, but we weren't having a drink as the meaning of going out in the evening.

Contrary to most British people, in her home African country, Gloria's community chose to participate in church activities as the means of socialising. Tina (Asian) pointed to another cultural difference in socialising. In her country, if she was

invited out for a meal with a friend, she never needed to pay for herself; her somewhat embarrassing experience in England proved otherwise.

Five others discussed general issues including religion, language, customs and social differences. Only Tina compared the tropical weather of her home country with the cold one in the UK. Nicky commented on her observation of the vast differences in hygiene standards between two countries: "Basically our [Far-Eastern] nationality is hyper sensitive about hygiene in comparison to international standards." Peter commented how modestly he felt women dressed in his African country compared with the way women tend to dress in the UK. Relating to this issue, the UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA) (2008b: unpagged) also states: "Not all students will find the British style of dress different but, for some, it may seem immodest, unattractive, comical or simply drab."

Participants' experiences of cultural differences ranged from social values and expectations, to habits and the meaning of family life. Whilst participants (like Alice and Kate), who perceived themselves to be from more individualistic cultures than Britain, praised the close social relationships and bonds in the UK, those (like Gloria, Mary and Peter), who claimed to be from collective cultures, did not approve of what they perceived to be a lack of family ties and social relationships in British culture.

As far back as Sen's study (1970), and as late as Ward *et al.*'s findings (1998), it is understood that integration into the social life of the community for students who had lived in the host country longer, takes place quicker and easier. Sen's investigation (1970) showed that students were less lonely and homesick, and had made more British friends. They were more accustomed to British life and manners and were also less fastidious about food. However, in the current investigation, the analysis of participants' responses in terms of their length of stay and their social adjustment did not show any differences between the 11 participants who had been in this country for a shorter period and those 19 who

lived in the UK for a greater length of time. Overall, the newcomer was not affected more explicitly by the British culture than those who had lived in Britain for sometime. The cultural differences the participants had experienced appeared to be mainly relative to their own cultural backgrounds and norms.

### **8.5 Inconsistencies in Understandings of 'Disability'**

More importantly, disabled international students taking up the option of a British education not only experience cultural differences created by living and learning in the UK, but can experience cultural differences of disability (Hurst, 1998; McLean *et al.*, 2003). After all, culture determines an individual's beliefs in relation to norms and definitions (Charlton, 1998). The socially accepted interpretations of who is and who is not disabled, for example, is relative to a given culture and time (Coleridge, 1993; Stone, 2001). When examining definitions of disability in different cultures, one should note that culture and ethnicity often shape social attitudes to disability (McLean *et al.*, 2003). Hence opportunities available for disabled people such as education, employment and family life differ markedly across cultures, reflecting various attitudes to disability, and different social, political, economic and legislative contexts (Berghs, 2007; Mclean *et al.*, 2003; Stone, 1999). The culturally conditioned interpretations of responses to and also definitions of disability were reflected in participants' experiences.

As a result of their previous experiences, a group of six (three European and three North American) commented on differences they had observed in university staff's attitude to disability. Maria (European) compared the general atmosphere of the Disability Service Units (DSU) in the two countries:

The greatest difference is the archaic attitude they have in England toward students with disabilities. In my country it is not a big deal to have ADHD and dyslexia and they go out of their way to try to compensate. In England I get the feeling that we should be thankful and get down on our knees for that they bother to care even remotely.

Cultural differences in understanding and responding to different impairments like dyslexia appeared to have contributed to Maria's dissatisfaction. Maria contrasted this specific unsatisfactory experience of the DSU in her English HEI with that of her previous university, where she received one-to-one dyslexia and ADHD-specific support, including improving basic literacy skills, maths, memory, note-taking, structuring assignments, proofreading, organising study time, and social support:

I tend to keep comparing to when I was in my previous university, because disability staff were really trained with PhDs in Psychology and Learning Disabilities etc. They would spot the problem immediately. If I would go there with a problem like severe insomnia and overwhelming sadness, they would be like 'OK depression', and send me to a psychiatrist. But this disability woman in my current university is clueless. She is not passionate, so she doesn't really care! I mean, she wrote her Masters thesis on dyslexia, a long time ago.

All six participants thought they received better services in their home countries. Alice remarked that in her North American country a fundamental theme in the field of disability was integration and equality:

In my country there seems to be a wider acknowledgement of the equality and need for integration of blind people into society. In England, there seems to be a kind of reluctance to speak of blindness, or, when one does so, it is often softened by using PC terms like 'Visually Impaired Person' or 'no sighted person'.

Alice also discussed being asked such questions in England as: "Will you be needing any special eating utensils besides a fork during lunch?" Although Alice recognised the patronising nature of these questions, she felt the questions were: "great opportunities for education and increased understanding of what a blind person can do."

However, three African, four Asian and four Far-Eastern participants found the services provided by their universities and the general attitude enabled them to have a fulfilled university experience. Ed discussed how in his Asian country, he out of politeness, had to accept help even when he did not need assistance. Based on their assumptions, people tried to help him, which at times came across as condescending. In England, Ed felt his choices were respected and he had the liberty of refusing help. Toney compared the opportunities and facilities available to him in England with those in his Asian country:

Back home, there is no white cane recognition, there is no RNIB, no DDA, no DLA, no DSA, no support network, no organisations. Being made fun of - just because of being disabled was quite normal and very acceptable and sometimes very enjoyable activity. If you were disabled you knew people frowned upon you for sort of trying to get ahead and get more from life than what people expected you to have or want.

Additionally, four students (three African and one European) commented on the collective nature of responses to disability in their country. They highlighted the significance of working together and helping out in their communities as an effective support network. Another group of eight participants (one Asian, six European, and one North American) discussed such issues as differences in definitions of normalcy, diagnosis of certain impairments and issues about disclosure. Anna, for example, discussed the differences of diagnosing ME between UK and her European country:

The biggest cultural difference ... in my country is the fact that ME isn't recognised ... which it is here. On the other hand, fibromyalgia is recognised in my country, but not in the UK. Therefore, if I ever go back to my country, and I get a problem with it, I'm going to have to try and be re-diagnosed as having fibromyalgia, if I'm going to be able to get support from the state.

This discussion demonstrated that participants (three African, four Asian, and four Far-Eastern), from cultures where disability services were not so advanced as in

the UK, found the opportunities offered here of great value. Participants (one Asian, six European, and three North American), who had already benefited from high quality enabling facilities and services in their home countries, were more concerned about issues such as disclosure, definitions and diagnoses of impairments.

### **8.6 Feelings of Inclusion and Exclusion: A General Overview**

In order to give a final and general overview of their experiences, participants were asked: "How was your overall experience of being a disabled international student in your British university?" Twenty participants felt their experience was a positive and worthwhile one. For Joseph being away from family and friends was significant in facing the challenge head on:

It was an excellent way of growing and maturing, I feel completely satisfied and if I could I would do it again. It was a challenge to overcome inexperience with travelling abroad without family and friends supporting, and a challenge to be able to become more independent and travel into the unknown.

For Domenic, the fact that he had been able to explore new opportunities in a city where, as a wheelchair-user, he felt safe and independent was significant:

Fantastic! I did things I would never expect myself being able to do. Access is fundamental and the city is the most accessible community I've ever been in. It is the most disability-friendly town I've ever lived in.

Of the other 10, six were dissatisfied with their experiences because of problems caused due to their unique status as disabled international students. Janet's overall experience was shaped by the overlapping of her disabled and international student identities. She felt doubly disadvantaged throughout her university life due to her impairments being misunderstood in a different cultural context to her own:

As far as my learning disability, I don't think people understood it and there was no one to advocate for my needs. I think I needed someone who could explain my impairment to people and explain to me what potential pitfalls I needed to look for as a person who didn't know or understand the British system.

Likewise, for Olivia (with a short arm), the combination of being a disabled and an international student had undesirable effects, exaggerating the disability barriers she faced:

Being an international student itself is not easy. My impairment added a little more difficulties. I found a lot of difficulties due to differences of social infrastructure or environment. For example, cooking tools are different from country to country. Non-disabled international students may get used to different types of tools quicker, but for me, some types of tools are not accessible. Peelers and can openers in the UK are not accessible for me at all. So I asked my husband to send them from my country.

On the subject of being included in the university community, 16 participants felt welcomed to the extent that Nora and Tina became actively interested in their local associations and SU initiatives. Alice described her level of inclusion in university life: "By the end, quite included. I began to see the fruits of a year building a life in a new place with different customs and a different social climate."

Conversely, Ned and Peter thought they were obliged to take responsibility in participating in university life generally. Kate felt due to access barriers, she was not fully included: "Somewhat, some events were moved in order that I could attend." At times Linda thought of discontinuing her course, partly because of the impairment-related fatigue she experienced on a daily basis and her status as a 'mature' student, and partly because she did not feel that her experiences were being respected in the university academic environment.

Whilst participants' experiences of being excluded discussed so far are more general, applicable to students at large, or related to most disabled and indeed

international students; the following participants highlighted the reason for their exclusion from university life to be their double identity as disabled international students. As an international student, Toney thought not many British people could relate to his situation in facing disabling and financial barriers, and therefore could not sympathise with him regarding his money worries. Due to their double identity, Ed and Tina felt financially marginalised both socially and academically. Anna, Carol, Nora and Tanji were fully aware of their differences in being slightly older than the average student as well as being disabled and international, and the impact of these three characteristics. Anna explained: "It's the case of the way I am, and how I identify myself; there aren't other people around me, who identify like I do."

Tanji summarised how her identity as a disabled international and slightly older student caused social isolation, disadvantaging her three-fold:

My life became very isolated, I am also an international student and therefore suffered further isolation. I did not know anyone when I came to study here. I did not live on campus because of my age. My vision deteriorated rapidly and I could not cope with the full-time workload. I switched to part-time and this meant that I did not have many classes to attend. So I went weeks and weeks without seeing anybody - I was in complete isolation.

To overcome her isolation, Tanji thought the creation of an organisation specifically for disabled international students' concerns would be of a great value, a point further discussed in Chapter Nine (Section 9.3). Tanji explained how such an organisation could help with disabled international students' inclusion in university life:

By creating a good support system, a circle so that international disabled students know where to go for advice and understand what rights they have. At the moment advice and help is too fragmented.



The experiences discussed here illustrated that 20 participants had satisfactory university life and felt included in their HEIs. However, for the others, the dominant reason for feelings of exclusion was participants' differences, cutting across a range of identities, as disabled, international and occasionally older students. Yet, most of the causes of their double or multiple marginalisation were so intertwined that the identification of the root of these disadvantages was not always possible as Gloria, Joseph and Toney described:

You can't tell whether it's because of your colour or disability.  
(Gloria).

The disadvantage is not a disability or nationality question but rather and because of the former and because of the latter.  
(Joseph).

Disability and race don't intertwine with each other but they intertwine with me as a person, because obviously, I have to look at both of these aspects. There're all sort of aspects that I have to look at as well, like religion, race, well they do come together and affect me. (Toney).

### **8.7 Summary**

This chapter has examined a range of barriers in participants' accommodation, transport and social experiences; a multiplicity of barriers presented themselves in all these areas. In housing, participants' disability-related access difficulties were exaggerated by barriers like ongoing discussion regarding accessible accommodation with office staff in English. Most participants found these additional meetings time-consuming and emotionally draining.

In transport, with two exceptions, the barriers participants encountered were generic to all disabled students. Participating in social activities, crucial to a wider student life, introduced multiple barriers related to impairment, nationality and age for participants. Hence not all participants were able to be included in general university life, leaving them with no choice but to lead insular lives. In the next,

concluding chapter, I shall propose a list of insights to combat this isolation and potentially improve disabled international students' quality of university life in a holistic manner.

## Chapter Nine: Conclusion

The main focus of this thesis has concerned disabled international students' continuing struggles for an equal participation in English Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Adopting the social model of disability epistemology, wherever possible, the research adhered to the 'emancipatory' research principles and has intended to work towards improving disabled international students' quality of university life. The issues were examined through a qualitative investigation of the experiences of 30 disabled international students, and reviewing national and case-studied universities' policy documents on service provision for this group, in relation to (1) information, access and funding; (2) disability services; (3) learning and teaching; and (4) non-disability support services such as accommodation and social life. Within the sphere of policy and service provision, the intention was to ascertain what disabled international students' status in English Higher Education (HE) was and the kind of services national organisations and universities claimed to provide within the specific political and contextual timeframe of 2005-2010. Therefore, where appropriate, I have drawn the reader's attention to the historical value of this thesis. Furthermore, through a focus group and semi-structured interviews, I discussed with the participants the range of barriers they had faced in their university life and asked their opinions and experiences on the services they received, particularly those concerning their disability-related support needs.

In concluding the thesis, it seems appropriate to discuss the key themes. In this chapter, I will present a summary and discussion of the research findings. Insights on inclusive practices, for both universities and the government, will then be explored, which would ensure that universities are more accommodating and welcoming to students with diverse needs, including disabled international students. Finally, further issues for future research in the same topic area of the current project will be proposed.

## **9.1 Summary of Findings**

Much has changed over recent years with regards to disability and HE.

Rhetorically, legislation such as the *Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA)* (2001), and initiatives such as Disability Equality Duty (DED) (2006) have been implemented to improve disabled students' quality of educational experiences. However, previous research and the fieldwork for the current investigation demonstrated that equal access to HE, although considered essential to independent living, is still problematic for many disabled students. This is reinforced by the fact that it is both justifiable and necessary to provide additional support and alternative modes of teaching. As the study has demonstrated, both universities and government are responsible. Presently, whilst universities wield an immense amount of power, despite their rhetoric to the contrary, their manifest practices of supporting disabled and disabled international students are secondary to their latent function of attracting financially able students, particularly those with international backgrounds, who may, as a result of their status, expect greater benefits in return. Relative to this, there is little evidence of them receiving services that are any better in quality than those to which domestic counterparts have access. Moreover, as discussed in Chapter Four (Section 4.3), the current government has now introduced ever more stringent rules for international students regarding their financial status, on entering the UK; implying that students who are unable to support themselves financially, be it for academic or disability-related reasons, are unwelcome. The other restrictions imposed on 'student visas' also indicate a less tolerant political atmosphere for international students than that which prevailed during the previous government. For these reasons, disabled international students, who may have more support needs and consequently higher costs to meet may feel particularly discouraged from studying in British universities.

That said, most universities nowadays, have informative websites and a dedicated Disability Service Unit (DSU), yet the policy of support is rarely matched by the reality of provision for either domestic or international students. The lack of

general organisations and universities' commitment (as examples discussed in Chapter Four) to practice their policies, and comply with national guidelines respectively, in relation to disabled, international and even less so, for disabled international students, was disquieting. Additionally, as the participants highlighted, the provision of promised, appropriate information, advice and services both pre and post admission to universities was clearly lacking. This support would not only have empowered disabled international students to be more informed of the university choices they had made, but also would have facilitated an equal participation for disabled international students, ensuring an easier start to their university life. Furthermore, organisations such as the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) in its role as a regulatory body, do not seem to have either the will or the power to work towards creating an 'inclusive' (discussed in Chapter Two – Section 2.4) HE.

Thus in an inflexible HE environment, disabled international participants faced many barriers (reflecting previous studies discussed in Chapter Two) based on their double identities. Whilst living in their home countries, participants found receiving accessible and appropriate information, pre-admission, from their English universities, through post and phone contacts, particularly difficult. Thus the provision of inaccessible information as the first obstacle to the participants' university experience limited their choices of suitable English HEI, and did little to reduce the anxiety associated with being a disabled and international student. Participants' admission experience was hindered by such issues as the inaccessibility of application forms and the time taken to correspond with their English universities. Once in the university, access and funding barriers prevented disabled international students from having an equal and fulfilling participation in their universities similar to that of their non-disabled international and disabled domestic peers. Limitations in funding meant that participants had to make compromises in both their academic and social pursuits.

With regards to disability-related concerns, in the light of minimal information received, as disabled international students, participants felt particularly disadvantaged not knowing how to disclose their impairments in a different cultural and linguistic context, and also the benefits of doing so. For this group of students, disability needs assessments were inconsistent across the board with varying outcomes. Similarly, access to a number of disability services was affected by their status as disabled international students and the ineligibility to access the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA). The high cost of support services such as the Personal Assistant (PA) Scheme and transcription meant that many of the participants had to go without crucial support, whilst facing disability-related barriers in a new environment during their studies.

In the context of learning and teaching, participants experienced a number of access difficulties to the lecture settings and handouts provided. Whilst arguably these difficulties were general to all disabled students, participants often had to conduct lengthy, draining discussions with the academic staff in a second or third language in order to access the same allowances as their domestic counterparts. This was also the case when arranging additional provision for exams.

Specific disabled international students' accommodation concerns related to family accommodation, and meal provision during holidays. Furthermore, many participants felt excluded from social life due to the combination of inaccessible venues and lack of compatible social activities to their cultural and linguistic backgrounds and age related concerns. Thus participants had to compromise in all of the broad categories discussed throughout this thesis. Their double or multiple identities sometimes simultaneously compounded difficulties experienced (for a discussion of these concepts see Chapter One – Section 1.1), resulting in an unequal university experience to that of their non-disabled and domestic peers, meaning that often they had to settle for less. What is more, universities' approaches in responding to participants' needs were not only inconsistent and unpredictable, but also reactive and based on the individual medical interpretation

of disability, more indicative of the 'integrated' model of education (discussed in Chapter Two – Section 2.4). Hence, although disabled international students are desired by universities for their power to pay international tuition fees, their disability-related needs are at best tolerated and at worst ignored and neglected. At this point, it seems necessary to discuss the possibility of an 'inclusive' HE structure, its characteristics and how such a system can benefit disabled international students.

## **9.2 Discussion**

As discussed in Chapter Four, many educational organisations and universities claim to adopt the social model of disability and work towards inclusive practices. Yet, as the previous studies reviewed in Chapter Two demonstrated and as was evident in the participants' accounts, the HEIs tend to display characteristics of a more 'integrated' education system. By providing support, albeit inconsistent, the universities try to modify students' needs so that the institutional demands can be fulfilled. In a truly inclusive education setting, however, the universities will change the system to be inclusive of all students regardless of disability, nationality or any other characteristics.

An 'inclusive' education refers to an environment where: "the majority of students who have a disability are accommodated most of the time without anything 'additional' or 'special' being done 'for' them." (Fraser & Sanders, 2005: 130). Unlike the 'integrated' system, in an inclusive educational framework, difference is not being excluded or merely tolerated, but publicly identified and celebrated (Ainscow, 2005; Barton, 2003; Nunan *et al.*, 2000). Such a system must then reject the biological and cultural determinism that underpins the elitist education structure. Barton (2003) explains that 'inclusive' education is fundamentally about understanding and engaging with difference in constructive and valued ways, maximising participation for all concerned. To achieve this, the "irrelevance, discriminatory and exclusionary features" (Barton, 2003: 14) of present policy and practice should be understood and challenged. Disabled

students must have control and choice as to how to access various aspects of HE. In their interviews, participants discussed the ways they thought barriers that they had encountered could be removed and a more inclusive university system implemented. Based on these discussions and also the literature reviewed, below is a list of insights for both universities and government that can contribute towards an 'inclusive' HE environment.

### **9.3 Policy insights**

Throughout this study, I have recognised that the participants' numbers in the analysis are applicable only in the context of my research strategy and practice. Therefore, I have not made any generalisations about participants' experiences and the following points are only insights to inform universities and policy-makers when working on policies for disabled international students.

#### *Insights for Universities*

1 Universities should provide accessible, culturally sensitive and tailored information on university-specific student life (both verbal and written) in a range of alternative formats, pre-arrival, in a timely manner to all prospective students to allow them to have choices in selecting universities and to know what to expect. The information must include the specifics of disability support services on offer with an accurate explanation of the cost involved for international students in particular. Upon request, universities must be able and willing to provide the information in different languages so that students' families, who may not know English, can be involved in the university selection process.

2 Universities should have extensive guidelines on the physical accessibility of the university campus, with a firm commitment to review the implementation of these recommendations on a regular basis. These guidelines must comply with



'universal design' principles so that an inclusive physical environment is automatically created for all.

3 University admission systems should have flexible and tailored procedures in place, and specific advice and support on offer in a variety of formats to accommodate the diversity of students' needs pre and during enrolment period.

4 The information should be readily available on disclosure in different languages, explaining how to disclose different impairments in English and what the outcomes of such disclosures will be. Informing students to the extent that they are fully aware of the potential "benefits and drawbacks" of disclosure (Madriaga, 2007: 407) whilst highlighting issues of confidentiality can lead to more cases of disclosure and fewer misunderstandings or anxieties about why an HEI needs this information (Rose, 2006).

5 University DSUs should communicate with the prospective disabled students about their disability-related needs prior to arriving in the United Kingdom (UK), and have a culturally sensitive, more specific mandatory needs assessment procedure in place for students to be assessed in the first month of their arrival that is well publicised. This will ensure that at least some support is in place when students arrive at their universities, followed by more appropriate support after the detailed assessment, for individual students. The outcomes of the needs assessments must genuinely and accurately reflect the student's support needs, rather than being based on budgetary constraints or support available. Following this, an effective monitoring scheme must be in place to review any changes in students' needs and appropriateness of support offered.

6 Universities should have, as part of their funding requirement from the government, a central fund (perhaps from international tuition fees) to cover disabled international students' support costs, particularly those who do not have any means of meeting these expenses.

7 Following the needs assessment, universities should provide a 'reasonable' amount of PA support, as a base provision, to those students who need this essential assistance, regardless of their nationality or financial status. Students must be given briefing on the practicalities of this working relationship. They must have choice and control as to who and how many PAs to work with. Universities must have specialised PAs with relevant expertise in meeting a range of disabled students' impairment-specific needs. The HEIs must also provide ongoing training and support for PAs. This training must be responsive to disabled students' concerns and involve them in the delivery.

8 Universities should have accessible computer software and hardware for a range of disabled students' use in university libraries and computer centres. The staff in these premises must be trained in assisting disabled students with their impairment-specific technical problems.

9 University libraries should have books and reading materials on electronic format so that a range of students can access these materials without any additional cost, effort or request for transcription. For this reason, the universities must also subscribe to a variety of online journals in accordance with the courses they offer. The library staff must have appropriate training in supporting students with a range of impairments.

10 Universities should structure their learning and teaching around a strong commitment to maximise all students' learning experiences. One way of achieving this would be if the universities' academic departments adopt a range of creative and flexible teaching methods and assessment procedures (such as those recommended by QAA 1999; 2009a discussed in Chapter Four - Section 4.5) in accessible buildings with appropriate equipment, so that no student is excluded from the curriculum and teaching process in the academic setting. A compulsory English academic orientation course on speaking, reading, writing

and study skills prior to starting the university course, must be in place for international students who need additional language tuition. Universities must accommodate disabled students' needs and provide support for the duration of these courses.

11 In addition to flexible assessment procedures, universities should consult with disabled students about their exam-related needs in the beginning of the academic year, so that additional provision is available without students needing to conduct long negotiations during stressful exam periods.

12 In consultation with students, university accommodation services should provide a range of accommodation compatible, not only with disabled international students' access needs, but also responsive to individuals' requirements with regards to family accommodation and cultural and religious specificities. Students must be closely involved in choosing their accommodation and staff should be responsive to students' needs at all times.

13 Universities should provide accessible, inclusive and culturally sensitive social spaces to which a wide range of students, with diverse needs, are welcomed and encouraged to be involved in activities that suit their interests, needs and backgrounds. The sports and leisure facilities must similarly be accessible. The International Offices must provide support and advice for a range of international students including English speaking, postgraduates and/or disabled students.

14 Universities should provide one-to-one support for disabled international students who feel overwhelmed by the variety of barriers they face due to their double identity and status as disabled international students.

15 In collaboration with relevant student representatives, universities should provide ongoing training for all staff in relation to disabled and international

students' issues and also the overlapping difficulties for students who belong to both these groups. This training must be based on a full understanding of the social model of disability and a commitment to removing disabling and cultural barriers. The training must promote better co-ordination amongst staff members who are involved in various aspects of disabled international students' lives.

### *Insights for the Government*

1 The government should have more enforcing powers on the existing national guidelines and also recommendations that can derive from the insights above with stricter mandatory powers that would have direct ramifications if not met.

2 In the view of all the barriers highlighted in this thesis, it appears that provision of a specific fund to cover disabled international students' support costs, in order to create a level playing field with non-disabled international, or indeed disabled domestic students is essential. Therefore, the government should have a central source of funding to assist universities with supporting disabled international students. The government must also invest in more scholarships in a range of subjects for international students, with a commitment to cover potential disability-related costs.

3 The government should set up an organisation solely concerned with disabled international students' affairs: for peer support, representation, campaigning, and providing Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) to this group.

### **9.4 The Limits of Change**

Implementation of the above insights would no doubt contribute towards creating an inclusive HE and it would eradicate some of the barriers participants experienced. The limitations of such changes have to be acknowledged, however.

The enactment of the above recommendations will not work towards removing the source of oppression. Whilst certain disabled students with financial means and minimal support needs may find accessing universities empowering, others with more complex needs will still not benefit from such a system. The implementation of universal access in the university environment for all is impractical because of the heterogeneity of university students with regards to differences in social, cultural backgrounds and type of impairments (Barnes, 2007c).

More importantly, the Western formal education sector is developed within the capitalist system, and policies reflect wider social, economic and political forces (Barton & Armstrong, 2001). Since capitalist societies are the main oppressor of minority groups including disabled people, a more radical reform is needed to alleviate the oppression altogether (Sheldon, 2001). It is essential therefore to change the society - the society that created formal education and continues to be non-inclusive and oppressive. A truly inclusive and democratic society must recognise education as a human right and challenge inequalities and discriminatory practices whilst promoting creative and flexible approaches to learning and participation for all students.

An inclusive education ethos should actively encourage anyone regardless of age, gender, class, ethnicity, impairment, sexual preference and previous educational experience to study at their optimum level. (Barnes, 2007c: 3).

Thus radical moves are necessary for this wish to be fulfilled: we have to believe in this vision, a belief "that we can make our own history" (Sheldon, 2001: 268). After all "human progress is nothing less than a search for utopia." (Barnes, 2007c: 5).

### **9.5 Ideas for Future Research**

Expanding this work further, in future research I hope to conduct a more detailed study with a larger sample of students with the potential to compare and explore, in

depth, experiences across impairments, gender and country of origin, as well as type of university and subjects studied. I shall attempt to elaborate further on each of the general barrier categories that I have identified in this research, possibly seeking staff opinion, at both a national and local level. This will provide the potential to compare students' experiences with staff voices. Additionally, the study may involve further research that gradually encompasses all the relevant facets of the HE sector's operations in relation to disabled international students. The outcome of this kind of research will assist me in producing a more specific and refined list of recommendations for a diverse group of students, with a greater focus on more different areas of university experience.

Fulfilling its initial aims outlined in Chapter One, the current study, has given a voice to disabled international students in English universities, and has identified barriers that they experienced. Hence, this research has significant implications for the current and future disabled international students' experiences. If the insights discussed in this chapter are taken on board, disabled, international and disabled international students can benefit from a more inclusive education system than that which I have experienced. I hope they will not have to deal with the difficult encounters that I dealt with in my university life as a disabled international student. I hope this research will contribute to disabled international students' full participation in British HE, in order for more students to gain from this enriching process, aiding them in developing a range of skills which may lead to an involvement in similar interesting research. It has been a privilege to undertake this research and to offer the insights above in achieving a more inclusive HE system for future years to come, in which a continual process of re-investment, critique and re-evaluation, in line with existing policy, will be necessary in order to refine and better the guidelines I have thus-far determined through this research.

## Appendices

Appendix One – Data Provided by Equality Challenge Unit (2008) and Higher Education Statistical Agency (2011)

Table Three 1 - Data provided by ECU (2008)

Table Three 2 - Data Provided by HESA (2011)

Appendix Two – Case-Studied University Profiles

Appendix Three – Call for General Participation in Research

Three 1 - Letter to the Selected National Educational Organisations

Three 2 - Letter to the Selected Universities

Three 3 - Call for Participants

Appendix Four – General Topics for the Student Focus Groups

Appendix Five – Interview Questions

Appendix Six – PA Consent Form

Appendix Seven – Participants' Sources of Funding

Table Four – Participants' Sources of Funding

**Appendix One – Data Provided by Equality Challenge Unit (2008) and Higher Education Statistical Agency (2011)**

**Table Three 1 - Data provided by ECU (2008)**

1) Numbers of all students in the years 2005/06 and 2006/07

	2005/2006		2006/2007	
	UK	International	UK	International
Disabled	137890	6680	150305	8015
Non Disabled	1868065	323235	1861110	343325
<b>Total</b>	<b>2005955</b>	<b>329915</b>	<b>2011415</b>	<b>351340</b>
		<b>Total</b>		<b>Total</b>
		144570		158320
		2191300		2204435
		2335870		2362755

2) Percentages of all students based on their disabled status in the years 2005/06 and 2006/07

	2005/2006		2006/2007	
	UK	International	UK	International
Disabled	6.87%	2.02%	7.47%	2.28%
Non Disabled	93.13%	97.98%	92.53%	97.72%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>100.00%</b>
		<b>Total</b>		<b>Total</b>
		6.19%		6.70%
		93.81%		93.30%
		100.00%		100.00%

3) Percentages of all students based on their nationality in the years 2005/06 and 2006/07

	2005/2006			2006/2007		
	UK	Other	Total	UK	Other	Total
Disabled	95.38%	4.62%	100.00%	94.94%	5.06%	100.00%
Non Disabled	85.25%	14.75%	100.00%	84.43%	15.57%	100.00%
<b>Total</b>	<b>85.88%</b>	<b>14.12%</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>85.13%</b>	<b>14.87%</b>	<b>100.00%</b>



4) Percentage increase of all students between 2005/06 and 2006/07

	UK	Other	Total
Disabled	9.00%	19.99%	9.51%
Non Disabled	-0.37%	6.22%	0.60%
Total	0.27%	6.49%	1.15%

**Table Three 2 - Data Provided by HESA (2011)**

1) Numbers of all students in the years 2008/09 and 2009/10

	2008 / 2009		2009 / 2010	
	UK	International	UK	International
Disabled	169185	9285	177030	9965
Non				
Disabled	1883260	380700	1933390	415940
Total	2052445	389985	2110420	425905
		178470		186995
		2263960		2349330
		2442430		2536325

2) Percentages of all students based on their disabled status in the years 2008/09 and 2009/10

	2008 / 2009		2009 / 2010	
	UK	International	UK	International
Disabled	8.24%	2.38%	8.39%	2.34%
Non				
Disabled	91.76%	97.62%	91.61%	97.66%
Total	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%
		7.31%		7.37%
		92.69%		92.63%
		100.00%		100.00%

3) Percentages of all students based on their nationality in the years 2008/09 and 2009/10

	2008 / 2009		2009 / 2010	
	UK	International	UK	International
Disabled	94.80%	5.20%	94.67%	5.33%
Non				
Disabled	83.18%	16.82%	82.30%	17.70%
Total	84.03%	15.97%	83.21%	16.79%
		100.00%		100.00%
		100.00%		100.00%
		100.00%		100.00%

5) Percentage increase of all students between 2008/09 and 2009/10

	<b>UK</b>	<b>International</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Disabled</b>	4.64%	7.32%	4.78%
<b>Non</b>			
<b>Disabled</b>	2.66%	9.26%	3.77%
<b>Total</b>	2.82%	9.21%	3.84%

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## **Appendix Two – Case-Studied University Profiles**

### *Leeds Metropolitan University (New university)*

Leeds Metropolitan University is a Higher Education Corporation (HEC), established under the *Education Reform Act (ERA)* (HMSO, 1988). It was given university status following the *Further and Higher Education Act (FHEA)* (1992a). The Board of Governors includes representatives of the staff and students and lay members, and consists of a number of standing committees to oversee different areas of business. The committees are responsible to exercise the powers of the University defined in the Instrument and Articles of Government, the *ERA* (HMSO, 1988), and the *FHEA* (1992a). As the principle academic authority, the Academic Board, for example, has oversight of academic activities, including: assessment, learning and teaching, and research and scholarly activity. The Vice-Chancellor and a number of executive committees are said to be responsible for the executive management of the University (LMU, 2011c).

### *The University of Bradford (Old university)*

Originating in the nineteenth century, the Bradford Institute of Technology was granted a Royal Charter in 1966 to become the University of Bradford and the 40th university to be created in Britain. Harold Wilson was the first Chancellor of the university. “The student population has leapt from 2,000 in 1966 to over 10,000 people today ...” (UB, 2007: unpagged). This university claims to have “always been pioneering in our course provision, being the first British University to offer a Peace Studies degree” (UB, 2007: unpagged).

The Council’s responsibilities, as the University’s Governing Body (UB, 2010b), are “to ensure that the University’s overall Mission and Strategy are delivered through an effective framework of both Governance and Management” (UB, 2010a: unpagged). Chaired by the vice-chancellor, the Senate is the supreme academic decision making authority of the University. The Senate discusses matters related to academic policy of the university during its four yearly meetings. The membership of the Senate includes deans of the academic schools and elected staff and students (UB, 2010c).

### *The University of Huddersfield (New university)*

The University of Huddersfield was incorporated as a Higher Education Corporation (HEC) on 21 November 1988 through the *ERA* (HMSO, 1988) (UH, 2011b). The University Council is the principal decision-making body in the University.

### *University of Leeds (Old university)*

With a long history dating back to the nineteenth century (UL, 2011c), the University of Leeds is an independent corporation established by the Royal Charter in 1904. The Council is a 23-strong body who are referred to as trustees with a collective responsibility to promote the University’s wellbeing and to ensure its

sustainability. The Council meets six times a year, and the members include staff and student representatives and lay members.

The Senate is responsible to the Council. The Senate is concerned with “the admission of students, the curriculum, academic standards, the award of degrees and other qualifications” (UL, 2011b: unpagged). Supporting the Council and the Senate are a number of committees. “The principal committees of the Council include: audit and risk committee, health and safety committee, remuneration committee, Committees of the Senate include, learning and teaching board, graduate board, enterprise and knowledge transfer board, research board” (UL, 2011b: unpagged).

## **Appendix Three – Call for General Participation in Research**

### **Appendix Three 1 - Letter to the Selected National Educational Organisations**

Armineh Soorenian  
30 Clarendon Place  
Leeds  
LS2 9JY  
spl3a2s@leeds.ac.uk

To whom it may concern,

I am a disabled international student studying for a PhD at the University of Leeds. For my research, I am investigating disabled international students' experiences in British Higher Education. From the literature I have studied during the first year of my PhD, it is clear that there is very little written about this group and the difficulties they may experience in their university life. It appears that across Higher Education, this group is under-represented and their voices unheard. Considering the growth of this group's participation in Higher Education over the last four years (indicated by the Higher Education Statistical Agency), research in this area seems to be timely and original.

For this research, I am contacting two national educational bodies, including your organisation, as well as four universities. In order to find out about your organisational policies, I very much hope to carry out a semi-structured interview with one of your staff members. All institutions and participants will remain anonymous, to comply with the guidelines outlined in the 'Statement of Ethical Practice' for the British Sociological Association. After analysing the results and writing the thesis, with the permission of all concerned, I would like to disseminate the outcomes and thereby contribute to the disability debate across higher education.

Therefore, I am writing this letter to ask for your participation. If you are kindly willing to be involved, I would be most grateful to you if you could let the relevant staff in your organisation know about my research and encourage them to participate. Should you require further information, please do not hesitate to contact me. I will be phoning directly later this week to answer any queries you may have.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

With much appreciation,

Ms. Armineh Soorenian MA BA

## Appendix Three 2 - Letter to the Selected Universities

Armineh Soorenian  
30 Clarendon Place  
Leeds  
LS2 9JY  
spl3a2s@leeds.ac.uk

November 2006

To whom it may concern,

I am a disabled international student studying for a PhD at the University of Leeds. For my research, I am investigating disabled international students' experiences in British Higher Education. From the literature I have studied during the first year of the PhD, it is clear that there is very little written about this group and their experience of university life. It appears that across Higher Education, this group is under represented and their voices unheard. Considering the growth of this group's participation in Higher Education over the last four years (indicated by the Higher Education Statistical Agency), research in this area seems to be timely and original.

For this research, I have selected four universities, including your institution. In order to assess the students' experiences, I am hoping to be able to study these universities' equal opportunity policies, policies on disabled international students and the service provision literature for this group. Additionally, upon participants' agreement, I hope to carry out one focus group with eight disabled international students in each university. A semi-structured interview with five of these students and two members of staff from 'Disability Services' and the 'International Office' is also hoped for. All institutions and participants will remain anonymous, to comply with the guidelines outlined in the 'Statement of Ethical Practice' for the British Sociological Association. After analysing the results and writing the thesis, with the permission of all concerned, I would like to disseminate the outcomes and thereby contribute to the disability debate across Higher Education.

Therefore, I am writing this letter to ask for your participation. If you are kindly willing to be involved, I would be most grateful to you if you could inform disabled international students and relevant staff in your university of my research, and encourage them to participate. Should you require further information, please do not hesitate to contact me. I will be phoning directly later this week to answer any queries you may have.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.  
With much appreciation,

Ms. Armineh Soorenian MA BA



### Appendix Three 3 – Call for Participants

#### CALLING ALL DISABLED INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

\*\*\*\*\*

- ❖ ARE YOU AN INTERNATIONAL STUDENT WITH AN IMPAIRMENT/DISABILITY, LONG TERM HEALTH CONDITION AND/OR LEARNING DIFFICULTY?
  
- ❖ WOULD YOU LIKE TO TALK ABOUT YOUR LIFE EXPERIENCES IN AN ENGLISH UNIVERSITY?
  
- ❖ WOULD YOU LIKE TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE DISABILITY DEBATE IN ENGLISH UNIVERSITIES?

I am a disabled international student, currently studying for a PhD at the University of Leeds and I am researching **disabled international students' experiences in English universities.**

I am interested to hear about **your experiences** and **your ideas** on the services provided in your university, and also any difficulties you have encountered during your education, with the hope of working towards a **more inclusive university system in the UK.**

Your involvement in the project will include taking part in a small **focus group** of six to eight people of around 1 ½ hours in length, and / or an **individual interview** of approximately an hour's duration. Participation is voluntary and **all participants** will be given pseudonyms to safeguard their identity.

To contribute to this particularly important study please contact me at the following address: [sp13a2s@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:sp13a2s@leeds.ac.uk)

If you would like more information about this project please go to:

<http://www.leeds.ac.uk/sociology/pgres/armineh.htm>

I look forward to hearing from you.

**Armineh Soorenian**

## **Appendix Four – General Topics for the Student Focus Groups**

### **Prior Knowledge**

- Q1. How do disabled international students become aware of facilities available in British universities?  
(e.g. adequacy and accessibility of information received)

### **Admissions Procedures**

- Q2. What are disabled international students' experiences in accessing the university?  
(e.g. any difficulties/concerns throughout the admissions process)

### **Experiences of Services Received**

- Q3. What are disabled international students' experiences of the support services they receive concerning their impairment-related needs?  
(e.g. technical aids, personal assistants [PA])

### **Pedagogical Experiences**

- Q4. What are disabled international students' learning experiences?  
(e.g. different academic cultures)

### **Social Life**

- Q5. What are disabled international students' experiences regarding their integration into university life and the local community?  
(e.g. events organised by the International Office and the Student Union

[SU])

### **Areas for Improvement**

- Q6. How do disabled international students perceive the level of support they receive from their universities?  
Q7. How can the disability-related support experiences be improved?  
Q8. Are there any areas to be developed to increase disabled international students' level of inclusion?

NB: These are just general topics which can be added to or amended, depending on the direction of the discussion.

## **Appendix Five – Interview Questions**

### **Biographical Details**

Nationality:

Gender:

Age:

Duration/type of impairment:

Degree course:

Level of study:

Mode of study: Full time/Part time:

Year of study:

Name of university:

Previous education:

### **Why This University?**

Why did you come to study in England?

Why did you choose this particular university?

Why did you choose this particular course to study?

What factors influenced your decision?

Was the quality of Disability Services important factor for you?

How did you find the recruitment and admissions process?

Were the information and application forms received accessible?

Was the material in your own language?

Were you given information about the different available services before coming here? What services did you receive information on?

What qualifications did the university require?

Did you visit the university before starting the course? If yes, please give details of your visit. (e.g. when, how, who did you meet)

Did you obtain funding before starting the course? How did you go about this?

### **Funding**

How are you funded for your course? Please explain in detail.

How are you funded for any impairment related costs? Please explain in detail.

Have you experienced financial difficulties whilst at university? If yes, please explain in detail.

Were you told of any other funding sources? If yes, what were these sources? Please explain in detail.

How do you feel about disabled home students receiving 'Disabled Students' Allowance' (DSA) to cover their impairment related costs?

### **Impairment-related Concerns**

Can you tell me about the nature of your impairment?

How do you think your impairment affects your ability?

Why do you consider yourself a disabled person?

Did you disclose your impairments on application to the university?

How did you find the categories of "disability" on the application form?

How did you feel disclosing your impairments?

Has disclosing your impairments impacted on your university life?  
What kind of additional support do you require?  
Were you interviewed or your needs assessed before starting the course?  
If not, did you visit the Disability Services after arriving at your university?  
How soon after starting your course did the needs assessment take place, how accurate and beneficial was it, and how long did it take to complete?

### **Impairment-related Support Services**

*PA/Support Worker schemes and support services relating to your impairment needs (medical – academic - domestic)*

Are PAs working with you trained enough for your needs?

Do they allow you adequate independence?

Can you talk more about your experience of working with PAs?

Do you require any special computer software? If yes, what kind of software do you use?

If you use transcription services, how efficient and cost effective are the facilities?

Do you receive adequate support? If not, why do you think this is?

Are the facilities you use daily accessible for your needs? (Physical, technical)

### **Pedagogical Experiences**

Was there 'English as a Foreign Language' support available before starting the course? If so, when/how often was it offered, was it accessible, and was the cost included in your fees or did you have to pay for it separately?

Do you receive accessible handouts/materials before the lectures?

What kind of accessible handouts do you require?

Are you allowed to tape record lectures?

Have you experienced any difficulties in learning and curriculum experiences?

Have you experienced any difficulties in lectures, tutorials and teaching generally?

Are the lectures accessible for you?

How accessible is the university library?

How helpful are the staff in the library?

Did you have to take any examinations? If so, can you talk about this experience and any additional arrangements for the assessment?

Did you encounter a different culture of teaching, curriculum, assessments, and lecturer/student relationships? If so, please explain in more detail.

Was there a difference relating to issues of plagiarism, lecturers' feedback and marks received on your work?

How has your educational history influenced your current academic performance?

What were your experiences in following areas:

- Work load?
- Placements?
- Graduation?

## **Other**

### *General cultural difference*

If you have experienced any cultural differences, please explain in more detail.

### *Social activities in and outside university*

How accessible are the social venues in and around the university?

Can you talk a bit about your friendships and relationships you formed during your university life?

What sport activities are you involved in? Are these accessible?

### *Accommodation issues*

Is your accommodation accessible?

Please describe the accommodation that you live in.

Who chose your accommodation for you?

How do you find the experience of living in catered or self catered accommodation?

Have you lived with students from a similar background to you? If so, how does this make you feel?

### *Residence permits (visas)*

What kind of difficulties did you face, when you applied for a student visa?

### *Other general services*

How do you find getting around your university?

How accessible are, and how friendly are the staff in the following services:

- International Office
- Disability Services
- Student Union (SU)
- Medical and Counselling Services

What external (to university) impairment related services (such as 'Skill: National Bureau for Students with Disabilities') do you use in England?

What kind of services would you have received if you studied in your own country at the same level as in England?

What was your experience of the careers office?

### *Part-time paid work besides studies*

How do you find the experience of studying and working at the same time? If not, why not?

### *Public Transport*

How often and for what purpose do you use the public transport? Can you talk about your experiences of public transport

### **Individual Experiences**

How do you perceive university staff's attitudes towards your impairment/s?

How do your course mates/friends relate to you as a disabled person?

Is there a cultural difference in attitudes to "disability"? If so, please explain in more detail.

Have you experienced any discriminatory attitudes (based on your age, gender, impairment, nationality, religion and/or sexual orientation) in your university life? If yes, please explain in more detail.

What is your overall experience of being a disabled international student in your university?

How included in university life do you feel?

Have you experienced any difficulties in your university life? (if yes) What kind of difficulties have you experienced?

Have you experienced any emotional difficulties? (if yes) What kind of difficulties?

### **Ways Forward**

If you have experienced any difficulty:

How have you overcome the difficulties (if at all)?

How could the difficulties be removed?

How could your university experience improve?

What are your future plans?

Has your education in England influenced your career path?

**Appendix Six – PA Consent Form**

As a Personal Assistant (PA), I hereby agree to respect the confidentiality and anonymity of Armineh Soorenian's research participants, and not to disclose any of their data or personal information that I have been assisting her with, in reading, transcribing and typing out.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_  
Name (printed) \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix Seven – Participants' Sources of Funding**

**Table Four – Participants' Sources of Funding**

Name	Academic Fee	Disability Support Costs	Living Expenses	Other Sources of Funding
Alice	Self-funded, research grant from university's Phil and Lit Society	Her home country's Commission for the Blind	Her savings	No
Angela	International organisation United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), university funding and part-time work	No	Part-time work	In the process of applying
Anna	Student Grant from home country	Not needed	Student Grant from home country	No
Carol	Overseas research scholarship (ORS)	Self-funding	ORS	No
Domenic	Self funding	Self funding	Self funding	No
Ed	Ford Foundation's International Fellowship Program	No	Ford Foundation's International Fellowship Program	No
Elaine	Student award agency in home country	Disability benefit and Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA), access to learning	Benefits	No
Gloria	Governmental scholarship	No	Governmental scholarship	No
Irin	Parents and self	Unsure, but thought Disabled International Students' Fund	Parents and self	No



	Parents and self	No	Parents and self	Late applying
Iris	Parents and self	No	Parents and self	Late applying
Janet	Loan	Not needed	Loan	No
Joseph	European and home-country funding and self-funding	European and home-country funding	European and home-country funding and self-funding	No
Kate	Home country government, home country institute of health research	Access assessment – university funding	Home country government, home country institute of health research	Applied, but not successful
Linda	Self-funding	Self-funding	Self-funding	No
Margaret	European Commission	Not needed	European Commission	No
Maria	Loan from ex-boyfriend	No	Loan from ex-boyfriend	No
Mary	The Snowdon Award Scheme, Access to Learning Fund	DSA	Income Support	No
Mlinda	Parents	Disabled International Students' Fund	Parents	No
Nathan	Local Education Authority (LEA)	DSA	Benefits	No
Ned	Parents	Unsure, but thought Disabled International Students' Fund	Parents	No
	Self-fund and parents	Home country medical	Parents	No

Nicky		insurance company				
Nora	Local student loan for home student fee	Disabled International Students' Fund	Local student loan, part-time work	Applied, but not successful		
Norman	University-specific scholarship	Home country health insurance	Covered by scholarship	No		
Olivia	Rotary scholarship and self-fund	No	Rotary scholarship and self-fund	No		
Patrick	Student Loan	No	Student loan and self-fund	No		
Peter	International Fellowship Program	International Fellowship Program	International Fellowship Program	In process of applying		
Sova	British Council (BC) scholarship	BC scholarship	BC scholarship	No		
Tanji	Home country student loan	Self-funding	Friends	No		
Tina	BC scholarship	BC scholarship	BC scholarship	No		
Toney	Parents, self and bursary from university	Bursary from university, Disabled International Students' Fund, and Snowdon Award Scheme	Parents, savings and work	No		

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