

THE SNOWDON SURVEY

by

Emma Stone, Geoffrey Mercer and Colin Barnes

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Disability Research Unit
University of Leeds

Commission by
Trustees of the
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THE SNOWDON SURVEY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Snowdon Survey was commissioned by the Snowdon Award Scheme to provide information which might guide the Scheme's funding policies and identify issues of relevance to bring to the attention of national and local governing bodies. 216 disabled people who have engaged in post-16 study since 1981, across all sectors and at all levels of post-16 study (from GCSEs to doctoral research), have participated. Their views and experiences form the basis of this report and are cited at length.

The Snowdon Survey is a timely and accessible addition to existing research. Timely, because there are a number of areas which are currently under review or consideration by the Government. The Snowdon Survey provides conclusive evidence which can usefully inform current debate on these issues as they are of direct relevance to current and future disabled students. In particular:

1. Extension of the Disabled Students postgraduate students and those undertaking impairment. Evidence in this report confirms groups as a matter of urgency.
2. Creation of a fair, transparent and effective system to replace discretionary awards for students who are not entitled to a mandatory award, to enable them to meet "exceptional" costs of study. Evidence in this report supports the need for a comprehensive, clear and equitable funding system for all post-16 study, which takes full account of disability-related study costs and the importance of post-16 study for disabled people.
3. Creation of a single student support agency for England and Wales (along lines similar to that of the Student Awards Agency for Scotland), to reduce regional variations in financial support. Evidence in this report highlights the ways in which funding, including DSAs, are more a matter of luck than of equity or entitlement and often depend on the attitudes and approach of an individual or borough.
4. Government spending reviews on social security benefits for disabled people, especially non-means tested benefits. Evidence in this report illustrates the critical importance of social security benefits in determining participation in post-16 learning and training.

Evidence provided in this report also supports call for increased attention to the issue of information and guidance for disabled people, of all ages, about learning opportunities, sources of funding, entitlements and careers options. Information must be accessible and targeted, not merely available.

The Snowdon Survey is a timely addition to the recent spate of high profile reports on further and higher education in Britain. Of particular importance are:

a) Inclusive Learning (the Tomlinson Report, 1996)

The Report of the Further Education Funding Council's Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities Committee, chaired by Professor John Tomlinson; the Report identifies strengths and weaknesses in current learning opportunities for disabled people in further education.

b) Learning Works (the Kennedy Report, 1997) The Report of the Further Education Funding Council's Widening Participation Committee, chaired by Baroness Kennedy of the Shaws; the Report explores the concept of widening participation in further education and how the participation of non-traditional students, including disabled people, might be encouraged and supported.

c) Higher Education in the Learning Society (the Dearing Report, 1997) The Report of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, chaired by Sir Ron (now Lord) Dearing; the Report outlines directions for the development of higher education in the next century, with reference also to widening the participation of non-traditional students, including disabled people.

The Snowdon Survey endorses the vision of a more inclusive further and higher education sector, and thereby a more inclusive society and economy, which is set out in these reports

and in the Government's response, *The Learning Age* (1998). Accordingly, the recommendations made in the Snowdon Survey aim to redress the under-representation of disabled people in further and higher education and make that vision a reality.

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Section One

INTRODUCTION and BACKGROUND

Overview

In this section, we provide background information on the Snowdon Award Scheme and the Snowdon Survey. We explain what the objectives of the research are, how the research has been carried out and how it might be used to inform decisions and policy-making on post-16 education opportunities for disabled people.

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Recommendations

1. Extend Disabled Students Allowances to part-time students, postgraduates and those undertaking a second degree to retrain following the onset of impairment.
2. Establish a fair, transparent and effective system of funding for individual students who are not entitled to a mandatory award but who nevertheless face additional disability-related costs of study.
3. Set up a single student support agency for England and Wales (similar to that of the Student Awards Agency for Scotland) to reduce regional variations in financial support for individual students.
4. Institute Government spending reviews of social security benefits for

disabled people.

We also suggest that the findings presented in the Snowdon Survey be used to inform policy and practice within all the funding councils, colleges and institutions, organisations such as: Skill (National Bureau for Students with Disabilities), other charities and trusts whose remit includes disabled students, providers of careers and educational guidance, and information providers, including the new, national helpline, Learning Direct.

1.1 Background to the Snowdon Award Scheme

In 1974, Lord Snowdon was invited to chair the Working Party on Integration of the Disabled. Two years later, the Report of the Snowdon Working Party, Integrating the Disabled, was published. It was a landmark report: comprehensive, challenging and radical. The Report emphasised the necessity of full consultation with disabled people on all matters of concern to them and the desirability of increasing disabled people's control over decision-making. Moreover, the Report was grounded in an understanding of disability as an equal opportunities issue, a citizenship and rights issue. In his foreword, Lord Snowdon challenged prevailing and disabling practices and prejudices towards disabled people in Britain.

Need disabled people still be put in herds -in schools, buses, homes -and labelled as such? Can they not instead have the equal opportunity, so commonly enjoyed, to go where they want, how they want, and when they want? Need they ever be made the visible objects of charity, or be put ill at ease on account of their disabilities, or unnecessarily made exceptions of, however well-meaningly? Must they be treated as a category "to be put up with"? (Integrating the Disabled, 1976, Foreword).

Education was the first of seven areas explored in the Report. With regard to post-school education, the Working Party made two recommendations. The first advised against the establishments of centres of excellence, prioritising disabled people's equal right to choice of college or university. The second highlighted the "peculiar" importance of higher level qualifications for disabled people who seek employment opportunities. In this context, the promotion of further and higher educational opportunities, with all the support necessary, was regarded as an imperative part of a wider strategy to facilitate social and economic integration.

It was surely the identification of that critical link between post-16 qualifications, employment and socio-economic integration that prompted the establishment in 1981 of the Snowdon Award Scheme.

The Snowdon Award Scheme was established in 1981 -the International Year of Disabled Persons. Since then, the Snowdon Award Scheme has made almost 800

Awards to over 600 disabled individuals, mostly aged between 17 and 25, with a physical or sensorial impairment.

In addition to providing financial support for individuals, the Snowdon Award Scheme has also sought to influence those in positions of power related to the provision and funding of further and higher education in Britain, with the goal of increasing the amount of statutory support available and promoting disabled people's participation in post-16 education. In this way, the Snowdon Award Scheme has sought to meet the unmet requirements of individuals whilst simultaneously seeking to influence national policy-making.

1.2 Background to the Snowdon Survey

In 1997, Lord Snowdon and the Trustees of the Snowdon Award Scheme commissioned the Disability Research Unit, University of Leeds, to evaluate the contribution of the Snowdon Award Scheme to date and to research continuing financial barriers to the participation of disabled people in further and higher education.

Aims and Objectives

- To review the value of the Snowdon Award Scheme in a national context in order to guide the funding policies of the Scheme.
- To identify issues of relevance to bring to the attention of national and local governing bodies.

In particular, the research team was asked to generate information about:

1. the characteristics and circumstances of Award Holders at the time of receiving an Award and subsequent to completing studies;
2. the range of needs met by the Snowdon Award Scheme since 1981;
3. gaps and anomalies in existing funding provision for disabled students;
4. an estimate of potential demand for Snowdon Awards in the future.

In addition, the research team went beyond the original remit of the Trustees, with their approval, to include:

5. information as a barrier to participation of disabled people in post-16 study;
6. and the ways in which disabled students have met the "challenges" presented by post-16 education and employment, together with advice they have for disabled people in, or considering, post -16 education.

1.3 The Snowdon Survey Questionnaire

The Snowdon Survey questionnaire was produced by the Disability Research Unit

following consultation with representatives from current and former Award Holders (via a pilot study with follow-up consultation), the Snowdon Award Scheme Trustees and Selection Panel. Initial drafts were also sent to Skill: National Bureau for Students with Disabilities and the Department for Education and Employment (DtEE).

The questionnaire was produced in several accessible formats: standard print, large print, Braille, audio tape, floppy disk and email. Responses were invited in all the above format and respondents were given the additional option of responding via a telephone interview.

The Snowdon Survey questionnaire was a comprehensive and detailed questionnaire and is set out in full in Appendix A. Questions related to:

1. Your Snowdon Award
2. Your Course
3. Finding the Right Information
4. Getting Money and Additional Support
5. Life after Study
6. Snowdon Award Scheme
7. Personal Details
8. Looking to the Future

Many of the questions required options to be ticked or circled. Attention was paid to the importance of providing space for respondents to voice their opinions and experiences. This is often sacrificed when undertaking a postal survey.

In line with a commitment to prioritise the views and experiences of current and former disabled students, and to enable participants to add to the research agenda (albeit in a limited fashion), all participants were invited to write their opinions and experiences in "free space" in addition to completing the main questionnaire. Ideas as to issues that students might cover were provided with the main questionnaire {see Appendix 2}.

The Snowdon Survey questionnaire was certainly longer than an average postal survey. No doubt, several of those who did not return their questionnaires found the questionnaire too lengthy. A few chose to write a letter outlining salient points instead of filling in the questionnaire. The length and comprehensive nature of the questionnaire may have discouraged some individuals from participating. On the other hand, several respondents expressed their approval of the questionnaire and made full use of the option of "free space".

Participation in the Snowdon Survey

The individuals who have received a Snowdon Award since 1981, as current and

former students, are ideally placed to comment on issues related to disabled people's participation in further and higher education. As will become clear in Section 3: 'Profiles of Participation', the survey respondents are a very diverse population: different courses, different levels and places of study, different socio-economic and educational backgrounds, and so forth.

The sample was based on current and former holders of a Snowdon Award. The total number of Award Holders, past and present, was 588. Inevitably, given the establishment of the scheme in 1981, it proved difficult to trace all 588 individuals. Many had changed address, some had died, others were presumably unwilling to be involved in the research. In order to maximise the final sample, notices were placed in Disability Now (published by SCOPE), Coalition (published by the Greater Manchester Coalition of Disabled People), Notes & Quotes and the Skill Newsletter (both published by Skill: National Bureau of Students with Disabilities) and on the Internet.

Initial (and, where necessary) follow-up letters were sent to all 588 people which made clear the research objectives, how the research would be used, what participation would entail and how confidential the information would be. Those interested or curious were invited to complete a response slip and specify a preferred format (e.g. floppy disk).

282 individuals expressed a willingness to respond in a format of their choice. Seven of these later apologised for not being in a position to help thereby taking the number of potential willing respondents down to 275. This group represents a significant number (almost half) of all Snowdon Award Holders since 1981.

Surveys were sent out to all who had agreed to participate in the survey, along with a small number of current Award holders (18 individuals) who we hoped might yet be willing to participate.

Responses were received from 216 individuals, of whom 206 replied using the surveyor via a telephone interview whilst the remainder elected to respond in another media or were responses by proxy. The overall response rate (216 out of 275 potential and willing respondents) was 78.5% which, especially in view of the length and detailed nature of the Snowdon Survey questionnaire, is exceptionally good.

Coding and Analysis

Inevitably, the emphasis on open-ended questions and "free space" has brought its own challenges to the process of recording, coding and analysing data. As a result, both a statistical analysis package (SPSS version 6.1) and a package for analysing qualitative social science data (NUDIST version 4) have been employed in coding and analysing data.

A Note on Tables and Charts

For ease of reference, tables and charts are included at the end of each relevant section. The tables and charts included in this report have been selected on the basis of their relevance to the text. They do not represent the complete set of tables generated in data analysis: quite simply, that would have greatly increased the length of the report without adding sufficient depth to warrant it.

1.4 Significance of the Snowdon Survey

The Snowdon Survey was commissioned at a particularly appropriate time in the history of further and higher education (FE and HE) for all, including disabled people, in Britain. The Snowdon Survey builds on existing and recent work; it prioritises the views and experiences of disabled people throughout; it is a timely addition to the evidence which confronts national policy-makers as they consider amendments to current funding arrangements for students in post-16 study.

Builds on Existing Research .

Interest in disability issues in further and higher education has soared, as a succession of high profile reports which have focused on disability, or included disability within wider discussion of student diversity and participation, confirm. Without doubt the most significant contribution over recent years has been the work of the FEFC Committee on Students with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities, chaired by Prof, John Tomlinson. Inclusive Learning (Tomlinson Report 1996), and reports such as Mapping Provision (FEFC 1997) and Duties and Powers (FEFC 1996) which fed into the Tomlinson Report, have been radical and well-received. Disabled students were not completely forgotten in the work of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (NCIHE, Dearing Report, 1997) whilst disability has certainly crept up the agenda of the higher educational funding councils (HEFCE 1995, 1996; SHEFC 1994; Hogarth et al 1997). Most recently, the National Working Party on Dyslexia in Higher Education, chaired by Dr. Chris Singleton, has begun to report its findings.

Smaller scale but still significant research has been produced by several researchers and interested organisations over the years, often published in the Skill Journal (formerly Educare) or the journal, Disability & Society (Preece 1995, Baron et al 1996, Ash et al 1997 are a few examples). Hurst (1992, 1993, 1996) continues to inform on disability issues in HE. Recent texts which set out a wide range of issues around disabled people's participation in FE and HE are Johnstone's (1995) Further Opportunities and Corbett & Wolfendale's (1996 edited collection) Opening Doors.

All of the above recognise the pressing need for more information and data. There

is a need for improved statistical data at a national level (a point to which we return in Section 3: 'Profiles of Participation' and Section 1: 'Looking Ahead'). There is also a need for more quantitative information which is grounded in the views and experiences of disabled students across all sectors of post-16 study. To date, and with the exception of larger scale workshops conducted by Skill/FEFC for the Tomlinson Report, most research which has included the voice of disabled students has been very small scale and has focused on either higher education or further education. This is understandable, given the very real differences and structures which maintain the division. Nevertheless, it is also regrettable since it perpetuates the divide and restricts opportunities for genuine intersectoral learning and collaboration. In this regard, the Snowdon Survey should make a valuable contribution to existing research and bridging the divides between FE and HE.

Prioritises the Views of Disabled Students

The Research Team make no apologies for prioritising the views and experiences of survey respondents throughout the report, for it is here that the Snowdon Survey has most to offer. The report is considerably larger than anticipated simply as a result of the rich data generated by respondents. In order to retain some of this richness, we have cited - sometimes at length - the voices of respondents. In this way, we hope to honour commitments to the individuals who participated in the Snowdon Survey by ensuring that at least some of their views, advice and experiences are disseminated to a wider audience of policy-makers and practitioners.

Clearly, in terms of statistical significance, we cannot claim that the views of 216 disabled people, and the funding/participation profiles of 106 disabled people, are immediately generalisable to the entire population of disabled students in Britain. Yet it will be apparent to any reader with knowledge of disability issues in further and higher education that the sentiments expressed by survey respondents are likely to be shared by significant numbers of disabled people across the UK, and across all sectors of FE and HE.

Timeliness of the Snowdon Survey

1998 could prove a landmark year in the shaping of further and higher education in Britain. The recent publication of the Government's strategies and vision in *The Learning Age* and the establishment of a University for Industry are among the signs that post -16 education will assume even greater national importance in the next millennium. What contribution can the Snowdon Survey make to that process? There are a number of areas which are currently under review or consideration by the Government and existing Advisory Groups in FE and HE sectors. The Snowdon Survey provides conclusive evidence which can usefully inform current debate on all these issues as they are of direct and material

relevance to current and, above all, future generations of disabled students. Policy-makers in the Department for Education and Employment, funding councils, pressure groups and interested organisations will find this report a timely addition to existing evidence. In particular, we hope this report will inform decision making on the following:

1. extension of the Disabled Students Allowances (DSAs) to part-time students, postgraduate students and those undertaking a second degree to retrain following onset of impairment;
2. creation of a fair, transparent and effective system to replace discretionary awards for students who are not entitled to a mandatory award, to enable them to meet "exceptional" costs of study;
3. creation of a single student support agency for England and Wales (along lines similar to that of the Student Awards Agency for Scotland), to reduce regional variations in financial support; and
4. government spending reviews on social security benefits for disabled people, especially non-means tested benefits.

In addition, evidence provided in this report strongly supports the arguments put forward in the Kennedy Report (1997), Learning Works, and in the Dearing Report (1997) for increased attention to provision of lifelong and high quality information and guidance about learning opportunities, sources of funding, entitlements and careers options.

1.5 Disability: definitions and the social model of disability

The Snowdon Survey is grounded in a social model approach to disability. The social model of disability views disability as social restriction and not individual limitation. The "problems" of disability are located within a society which excludes people from participating on the basis of a physical, sensory or mental impairment. It is up to society, not the individual, to change through the removal of social, economic and attitudinal barriers to participation and opportunity.

This approach, which establishes disability as an equal opportunities issue and a human rights issue, is not new but it has yet to achieve the recognition it deserves.

In terms of post-16 education, the social model of disability centres on the social, attitudinal, economic and institutional barriers to the participation of disabled people in further and higher education. The aim of the Snowdon Survey and the Disability Research Unit at the University of Leeds is to provide information which identifies and challenges barriers to equal opportunity. This is

commensurate with the ethos of the Snowdon Award Scheme.

1.6 Conclusion

The Snowdon Survey was commissioned by the Snowdon Award Scheme to provide information which might guide the Scheme's funding policies and identify issues of relevance to bring to the attention of national and local governing bodies. 216 disabled people who have engaged in post-16 study since 1981, across all sectors (FE, HE, vocational and professional) and at all levels of post-16 study (from GCSEs to doctoral research) have participated in the Snowdon Survey. Their views and experiences are the basis of this report.

The Snowdon Survey is a timely and accessible addition to existing research and, as such, it can usefully inform the development of new funding mechanisms which will promote, rather than inhibit, disabled people's participation in post-16 study.

Section Two

REVIEWING the PAST, ASSESSING the PRESENT

Overview

In this section, we consider recent debate and practical developments relevant to the concepts of "widening participation" for disabled people in further and higher education. To this end, we outline developments since 1976, when the Snowdon Working Party published its findings in *Integrating the Disabled*, and we draw extensively on the views of survey respondents to get their assessments of developments over the past two decades.

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List of Tables (included in Appendix 1):

Table 2A: Respondent Views: "Do you think there have been positive changes over the last fifteen years for disabled students" by year in which received Award.

Recommendations

Priority must be given to removing the following and persistent barriers to learning:

1. insufficient or non-existent funding for additional disability-related study costs -' an experience common to many, if not most, disabled students in FE and HE;
2. lack of disability awareness across all staff in all colleges and universities;
3. inaccessible teaching and assessment methods;
4. inaccessible buildings, including student amenities;
5. low expectations of educational ability, resulting from segregated schooling and inadequate careers and educational guidance for many disabled young people, leading to "self-exclusion" from post -16 education, especially higher education; and
6. lack of a civil rights-based legislative framework for disabled people, which includes entitlement to attend the college or university of one's choice.

2.1 Reviewing the Past

In this section, we consider the national context of disabled people's participation in further education (FE) and higher education (HE) and how it has changed over the past two decades. Reference is made to the report of the Snowdon Working Party, *Integrating the Disabled* (1976), since this serves as a yardstick by which to measure progress to date in equalising opportunities for disabled people in post-16 study.

Findings of the Snowdon Working Party, 1976

Lord Snowdon chaired the Working Party on Integrating the Disabled. It specified a wide range of policy goals to be met by government, local authorities and individual institutions of further and higher education. Among them were the following (paraphrased) points:

1. All disabled people should have entry as of right and at any time of life to courses of post-16 study at the college or university of their choice. Centres of excellence should not be established since they conflict with principles of genuine choice.
2. Disabled students, across all sectors of post-16 study, should receive, as of right, a basic entitlement to monies which would meet extra disability-related costs of study, including equipment and 'non-medical help'.¹

¹ 'Non-medical help' is an official but outmoded term for any form of paid human support such as personal assistance for people with mobility related impairments, readers for Blind people, and signers for Deaf people

3. Quality careers guidance must be available to disabled students but the future employment prospects of an individual should never be used to determine how much, where and whether or not s/he is entitled to study.
4. The physical environment should be fully accessible and 'non-medical help' should be provided to ensure that the environment is also fully supportive.
5. Every college or university, across all sectors, should have at least one central point of reference for disabled students, to co-ordinate services and facilities and ensure that the required support is in place.
6. Colleges and universities should be fully supported to enable them to support individual students and make changes commensurate with the above.

The rationale which lies behind these recommendations and the recommendations themselves are as pertinent -and even as radical -in the 1990s as they were twenty years ago. Perhaps even more so.

The critical link acknowledged by the Snowdon Working Party is that which operates between disabled people's employment prospects and their attainment of further or higher level qualifications. As the voices of respondents affirm, that link remains equally decisive in today's social and economic climate:

We have to over-qualify in order to begin to compete with the 'normal' people.

I feel more disabled students need higher education in order to achieve employment in high paid jobs. The more disabled one is, the higher ones expenses for care and equipment -and only high earners can afford to get out of the benefit trap.

Preferably I would be working and would have already established the beginning of my employment history. Instead I find myself continuing to study in the hope that academic qualifications will lead me into appropriate employment.

The question is, then, how much have we -as a nation -moved on from the situation which characterised disabled people's participation in post-16 study in the 1970s? If we use the Snowdon Working Party report as a yardstick, what has been achieved?

Changes in further and higher education since 1976

There are several helpful sources which provide detailed reviews of national changes in policy, provision and legislation which relate to disabled students in further and higher education. In addition to the specific texts that are mentioned here, the interested reader is also referred to the Skill Journal (formerly Educare) which contains much useful material on developments across FE and HE. Given limitations of space, it is possible only to highlight the most salient features below.

National developments within the FE sector have been helpfully summarised in the Tomlinson report (1996): Annex E offers a brief history of developments in education (pre- and post-16) since the nineteenth century, relevant to disability issues. David Johnstone's (1995) *Further Opportunities* also reviews developments in policy and provision for disabled children and young people in FE. Both concur, and many more would agree, that considerable achievements have been made over recent decades and that there appears to be a general commitment within the FE sector to build on these achievements, to improve opportunities for disabled people already in FE and to extend opportunities to thousands more. Both also concur that a crucial role has been played by legislation, above all the Further and Higher Education Act 1992.

The importance of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 centres on the specific reference made to disabled students (including students with learning difficulties) and, above all, to the duty placed on the new Further Education Funding Councils (FEFCs) for England, Wales and Scotland "to have regard for the needs of persons with learning difficulties and disabilities". The creation of the new funding councils was a tremendous impetus for change, primarily through the utilisation of new funding methodologies as a lever for change. This is explored in greater detail in Johnstone (1995) and the Tomlinson Report (1996), suffice to say that the FEFC now operates a range of "additional support bands", aimed at supporting individual colleges of FE to meet the support requirements of disabled students in their locality. Thereby, the principle of maximising choice for mainstream educational opportunities has also received a welcome boost.

Admittedly, there is a huge difference between a duty to "have regard for" disabled people and a duty to guarantee the entitlements of disabled people to further education in a college of their choice, with all the support required to do so. This difference is exacerbated by the fact that individual FE colleges do not, yet, share the same duties to have regard which have been placed on the FEFC. As a result, changes in FE still fall short of the rights and entitlements advanced by the Snowdon Working Party in 1976.

In terms of accessible physical, teaching and learning environments, there have certainly been many achievements within the FE sector. The recent FEFC Report from the Inspectorate, *Provision for Students with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities: Good Practice Report* (FEFC 1996) provides many examples and is illustrative of the advances made in identifying good and enabling practice, as does the Tomlinson Report (1996) which advances the concept of Inclusive Learning: a holistic approach to learning which will benefit all and widen participation. Outreach programmes, drop-in skills and study centres, new and resourced posts in student services and the development of disability co-ordinators are all areas in which FE colleges have taken a lead.

In terms of numbers, there can be little doubt that the participation of disabled people in further education, especially mature and part-time students, has risen over the past two decades and that national-level policies and local-level practices have contributed to that rise. However, reliable statistics, and therefore reliable indicators of change over time, are notoriously thin on the ground. Certainly, current statistics point to a continuing under representation of disabled people in FE. But there is also little doubt that the total number of disabled people in FE has grown, maybe several fold, since 1976.

Developments in FE, and increased mainstreaming in schools, have led in turn to rising demand for access to HE colleges and universities (higher education institutions or HEIs) both as "natural progression" by school-leavers and, more commonly, as later level entry by disabled people who have completed FE courses and are seeking higher level qualifications, or who enter HE having never previously had a chance to develop their academic potential (often as a result of segregated schooling in their youth). How has the higher education sector responded to this demand?

Excellent reviews of recent developments in higher education for disabled students have been provided by Alan Hurst (1993, 1996) and Deborah Cooper & Sophie Corlett (1996). Some attention is paid to the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, although this did not do for disabled students in HE what it did for disabled students in FE. It was not until the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 that comparable duties to have regard for disabled students were placed on the higher education funding councils (HEFCE in England, SHEFC in Scotland and HEFCW in Wales). In the event, all the HE funding councils had already taken steps by 1995 to widen participation among disabled students through a variety of funding mechanisms and special initiatives with more and less success (see HEFCE 1995, 1996, SHEFC 1994, Corbett and Wolfendale 1996, for further information). Individual HE colleges and universities, too, have been active in undertaking changes to the physical, learning and teaching environments and building up disability-related student support services, often as part of a funding council special initiative. However, without doubt the main boost to disabled people's participation in HE has been the increased value of Disabled Students Allowances (DSAs).

For first-time, full-time undergraduates, there can be little doubt that the Disabled Students Allowances (DSAs) have made a significant contribution to disabled people's opportunities to enter higher education. This is confirmed by survey respondents, as we will see shortly. The DSA assumed its present form in 1990. The three elements of the DSA are a general allowance, a specialist equipment allowance and a 'non-medical helper' allowance.

On an individual level, the DSA has made it possible for disabled students to enter and complete a course of higher education. On a collective and national level, the DSA provides clear recognition that disabled students do face additional study costs, related to their disability or impairment, and that they should be entitled to outside and extra financial support to meet those costs. That is the principle on which the Snowdon Award Scheme was set up. It is also the principle on which pressure groups have campaigned for extension of the DSA, for extra financial support for disability-related study costs, to all disabled people in post -16 study, irrespective of course, level, place, mode of attendance or income.

In summary, and returning to the yardstick offered in the Snowdon Working Party Report, there have been changes -in some areas more than others -which have promoted the participation of disabled people in FE and HE. However, it is not yet the case that all disabled students are entitled to post-16 study, at the college or university of their choice, with all the outside financial support they require to do so. Nor is it yet the case that environments are fully accessible.

The number of disability co-ordinators has certainly risen dramatically, especially over the last few years -but their roles are often restricted by lack of power and influence within the institution and a basic lack of resources to support students to the full. The Government, via the funding councils in FE and HE, has channelled some resources and guidance to colleges and universities, with the aim of supporting them to support students. But, to judge from recent research by the Institute for Employment Research and funded by HEFCE, disabled students are viewed by many colleges and universities as an expensive consumer group, a drain on resources. That is a short term view which is indicative of the (sometimes enforced-) short-termism and almost profit-orientation now associated with colleges and universities, across both sectors. It is a view which was dismissed by the Snowdon Working Party in 1976 and which has been rejected in several recent and high profile reports to the Government.

2.2 Assessing the Present

The last couple of years have seen a flurry of Committees, Advisory Groups and Working Parties which have set about the task of reviewing the past, assessing the present and building a stronger vision and strategy for FE and HE in the next millennium. Several of these millennial projects have incorporated concepts of participation and entitlement. These concepts, if extended (as some have argued they must be) to disabled people could provide the impetus required to transform the world of post-16 learning making it a fully accessible and inclusive world.

Removing Barriers to Learning: recent debates

Recent debates on widening participation and removing barriers to learning have

been promoted by numerous high-profile reports, especially the Tomlinson Report (1996), the Kennedy Report (1997), the Dearing Report (1997) and the Government's responses and vision statement, The Learning Age (DfEE 1998) and related publications.

There are several widely accepted arguments on which the case for widening participation is built.

1. Equity

Participation in FE and, especially, HE reflects and reinforces current socio-economic inequities. The under-representation of disabled people, people from certain ethnic minority backgrounds, people from socio-economic groups 111M -V (skilled to unskilled manual) must be tackled as a matter of priority in order to redress socio-economic imbalances.

2. Social Cohesion

Increased representation of the afore-mentioned groups within FE and HE will promote greater social cohesion, by increasing understanding and tolerance of diversity and by building consensus around social concerns.

3. Economic Prosperity

Wider participation in FE and HE creates a more highly skilled, productive and therefore competitive and modern workforce: the key to Britain's economic prosperity and the key to individual attainment of a good livelihood.

Demand for higher level qualifications is rising, both from individuals and from employers, thereby increasing the importance of higher level qualifications to individual employability and job prospects. For this reason, the link already established between post-16 study and employment is even more relevant in the 1990s. If disabled people do not secure entitlements to participate in post-16 study, then it will be even harder to secure entitlements to participate in employment. As has been acknowledged in the Kennedy Report (1997), if and when participation increases, so too do the costs of non-participation for those who are excluded or exclude themselves. Those who remain outside FE and HE will find themselves even more disadvantaged socially and economically.

Disabled people, as already stated, are one of the groups cited widely as being particularly under-represented in HE and also FE. This is especially lamentable since disability is a cross-cutting theme -even though it is seldom recognised as such in reports, research and policy. Put simply, removing barriers to the participation of disabled people will reap benefits for a much wider population of

non-traditional participants in FE and HE.

The concept of inclusive learning is central to the Tomlinson Report -and gives the report its name -deserves to be extended far beyond discussion of the learning and teaching environment. Any steps taken to make the whole world of FE and HE fully inclusive for disabled people will almost inevitably lead to a more inclusive learning and social world for all, irrespective of disability, age, ethnicity, gender or income.

We know that the nature of participation in higher and further education is changing. Even in the more traditional HE sector, the student profile has altered dramatically over the last few decades, with more women, more mature students, more people from ethnic minorities. It appears that the concept of lifelong learning has already taken off among several sectors of the UK population. The issue now is to promote lifelong learning as an entitlement for all, including disabled people. If this is the vision, then it needs to be backed up with real policies, real funding and real practice.

Removing Barriers to Learning: recent developments

With regard to student support in higher education, 1998 has already witnessed significant changes in funding policies, especially for undergraduates.

The most publicised changes are, of course, the introduction of tuition fees of up to £1,000 for full-time, first-time undergraduates, with the safeguards of full and partial exemptions for students from low-income households. There have also been very significant and welcome development for certain disabled students.

1. The abolition of means-testing of the Disabled Students Allowances (DSAs).
2. A substantial increase in the non:-medical component of the DSA, in recognition of the high costs of readers, interpreters and note-taking assistance.
3. A doubling of Access Funds for Higher Education and the extension of these funds to part-time students and a commitment to reconsider eligibility criterion and the purpose of these funds.
4. A 50% increase in Access Funds for Further Education and a commitment to reconsider eligibility criterion and the purpose of these funds.
5. The establishment of the Institute for Learning and Teaching, which is required to consider the learning and teaching requirements of disabled students in all aspects of its work and training.

Also, and as stated in the Introduction to this report, the Government is currently considering and reviewing the case for extending DSAs to other students within HE, for establishing a single student support agency for England and Wales, and for replacing the inequitable and ineffectual system of discretionary awards for students not entitled to a mandatory award.

Recent developments and the prospect of changes to the DSA, discretionary awards and administration of funding support, appear to bode well for the future. In the final section of this report, Section 7: 'Looking Ahead', we explore the views of respondents on what the future holds. For the time being, we stay with the present and the past and set out respondent views on changes over the last two decades.

2.3 Respondent Assessments of the Past and the Present

In the Snowdon Survey questionnaire, respondents were asked for their assessment of changes in policy and provision for disabled students. Table 2A and the accompanying graph set out their responses to the question: "Do you think there have been positive changes over the last fifteen years for disabled students?"

The majority response is that yes, things have been and are getting better, although many respondents add the caveat that there is still a long way to go. That said, most would probably agree with the statement made by one respondent, who received her Snowdon Award as a mature student for a course of further education: "twenty odd years ago, you wouldn't have dreamt of disabled people going to college".

In total, almost 67% of all respondents (136 individuals) felt that there had been considerable changes in policy and provision for disabled students. The remaining respondents were either uncertain (15%) or felt that there had been no significant change (18%).

The proportion of those in each year band who hold that positive changes have taken place appears to be relatively constant (around two-thirds of respondents), if not gradually increasing. Interestingly, the lowest level of dissatisfaction is recorded for respondents who received an Award in 1996: only 2.7% of 1996 respondents made a negative evaluation of change, and 75% of respondents felt that progress had been made. In stark contrast, the feeling among 1997 Award recipients is quite different: only 58.9% of 1997 respondents identified positive changes (the lowest positive evaluation rate) and a significant minority (25%) felt there had been no progress.

The views of the 1997 respondents cannot be lightly dismissed on grounds of being anomalous. Indeed, their views, as current consumers of further and higher education, are particularly salient for policy makers and providers of education. So, what might account for the apparent dissatisfaction among the most recent recipients of Snowdon Awards?

One explanation could be that 1997 was a year of considerable uncertainty for all

current and prospective HE students (over tuition fees and increased use of student loans), and for disabled students in particular, arising from widespread anxiety over the future of disability-related social security benefits, especially those which are not means-tested. Also it is highly probable that disabled people in the 1990s have higher expectations of colleges, universities and government funding bodies than did their counterparts in the 1980s, and also a higher sense of entitlement to full support and equal opportunity.

Of those who felt that there had been significant advances for disabled students, positive changes tended to relate to one or more of the following areas:

1. Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) for first-time, full-time undergraduates;
2. developments in information technology and communications technology;
3. improvements in access and support;
4. improvements in attitudes and disability awareness; and
5. increased opportunities for mainstream schooling and further education.

Correspondingly, those who felt that there had been no significant advances identified the same areas as important, but stated that the achievements had been minimal, and were more tokenistic than genuine and lasting.

In the remaining part of this section, we cite at length voices of survey respondents as they assess and review the past, grouping responses under the above headings.

1. Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) for first-time, full-time undergraduates

The introduction of the Disabled Students Allowance. If it had been available for me, it would have helped me focus my energies on academic achievement instead of how to fund my needs.

Not so long ago, the allowances for special computer equipment, for instance, were very small or non-existent. Now they offer a substantial contribution.

The Disabled Students grant and all the related grants have made it possible for disabled people to enter study and employment.

2. Information Technology and communications technology

The amount of high quality, new high tech equipment has made it possible for V.I [visually impaired] students to attempt almost any course. The price of this equipment has also fallen enormously in real terms and thus the statutory grants/awards can go much further.

3. Improvements in access and support

Deaf people can now get note-takers etc. I could get nothing, they just kept telling me to learn to lip-read "properly" !

Better access to almost all areas of study.

More staff; equipment and help is available.

More places of study willing and able to cater for disabled students.

Some of the colleges have got good facilities and they are still always looking for improvements.

4. Improvements in attitudes and disability awareness

Attitudes are changing -there is more willingness to consider integration.

Although I only have my own experiences to go on, I am sure disabled students are more readily accepted at university/college in the present day.

Universities seem in my opinion to have a positive attitude to taking or catering for disabled students if at all possible.

I think its got easier for disabled students. I think people are more aware of visual and physical disabilities. I'm grateful that I wasn't born 15 years earlier.

5. Increased opportunities for mainstream schooling and further education

I feel that there has been change in the education system, in the form that disabled children and adults are being integrated into mainstream schools and colleges.

6. Voices of Dissatisfaction

There are many policies about now -even well written -where none existed before, but of course that doesn't guarantee that anything has changed. The presence of a policy can actually be worse than nothing because it gives the APPEARANCE of positive change.

People think if they put a few ramps in they have done enough, whilst disabled access is still a big problem. Educators etc. need to think wide1: Disability issues are so much wider than just wheelchair access.

They plead old buildings as an excuse for not admitting disabled people.

Disability is always seen as "how much will we have to pay for them ".

The process of change is very slow and when you are in a system waiting for it to change, it doesn't change fast enough. I think the government could do a lot more to enable disabled students to go to college/university.

Much is said, but little actually seems to change.

2.4 Conclusion

There is much to commend. There are positive signs that the Government is considering much needed revisions to funding support for disabled students across all sectors of post-16 education and training. There are also signs that the participation of disabled people is gradually increasing and with participation come increased expectations, awareness and demands. But clearly there is also a long way to go, and we have not come far enough since 1976. Disabled people do not yet have the full entitlements that are their due and that are necessary if Britain is truly to enter the Learning Age.

Perhaps the most accurate and fair summary of past changes is expressed in this comment by a Snowdon Survey respondent:

From nothing, anything is an improvement!

Section 3

PROFILES of PARTICIPATION

Overview

In this section, we provide an overview of the disabled people who have participated in the Snowdon Survey. Background data (on gender, ethnic background, age, socio-economic group I and educational history), are set out, alongside information on the level, place and mode (full time or part time) of study undertaken by survey respondents. In so doing, we provide a context in which the views and experiences which form the bedrock of this report can be situated, making explicit ways in which these views are more or less representative of the wider population of disabled students in Britain.

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Recommendations

Future research, data collection and policies aimed at widening the participation of disabled people in post-16 study should take account of: .

1. the diversity of disabled people and the role of factors such as ethnicity, gender and socio-economic group which can compound the barriers to participation;
2. the specific nature of disability as social restriction on people with impairments be fully acknowledged in policy and planning; and
3. the likelihood that putting disability at the centre of debate on participation will, in the process, benefit a far larger population of non-traditional students.

3.1 Current Issues and Contexts

Good practice starts with the identification of those who do not take part (Kennedy Report 1997: 77)

It is now widely accepted that disabled people are under-represented in both further and higher education, along with people from certain ethnic minorities and from socio-economic groups 111M, IV and V (skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled manual). There are several explanations for this, including present and projected financial hardship (in individual households and disadvantaged localities), lower expectations of the individual (by self, family, peers, teachers, advisers and society in general), and individual histories of education.

To combat under-representation, it has been suggested that the more "general" characteristics of previous educational achievement, level of income and, above all, geographical location should be the criteria on which funding councils direct resources into widening participation, rather than more "specific characteristics such as age, sex or ethnicity" (Kennedy Report 1997, p. 20). This suggestion is prompted by changing levels of participation by mature students, women and individuals from certain ethnic minorities. However, similar successes have not been enjoyed by disabled people, who encounter barriers to participation irrespective of (and often compounded by) their age, sex, ethnicity, income,

previous educational experience or geographical location.

The absence of legal entitlements to equal rights for disabled people (such as exist for women and people of different ethnic origin) mean that disability, as a specific form of discrimination, surely requires specific consideration by funders and policy-'makers. A failure to consider disability as a specific characteristic will inevitably compound the exclusion of disabled people from post-16 education. Conversely, specific consideration of issues important to disabled people will strengthen attempts to widen participation for all under-represented groups.

We argue that the identification and removal of barriers to learning faced by disabled people produces wider lessons relevant to all current and potential learners. Why? First, because of the scale of financial, social and attitudinal barriers faced by disabled students: remove these barriers and few non-disabled people will still be excluded from lifelong learning. Secondly, because of the common-sense but downplayed fact that disability is a cross-cutting theme: disabled people come from all socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds, include both women and men (more women than men) and people of all ages. So, removing barriers faced by all disabled people must involve removing barriers faced by individuals who have been socially, economically or educationally marginalised, for whatever reason.

The profiles of Snowdon Survey respondents underline the diversity of the wider population of disabled students and point to compounded disadvantages faced by certain groups within that wider population, especially disabled women, disabled people from ethnic minority backgrounds, those from socio-economic groups IV and V, and those whose educational experiences have been restricted by the segregated schooling system.

3.2 Findings from the Snowdon Survey

The questionnaire asked for information on: impairment, gender, ethnic origin, nationality, socio-economic group, age, school attended between 11 and 16, educational background of immediate family, details about the course of post-16 education undertaken (course title, qualification, mode and place of study) and the year(s) in which the respondent received a Snowdon Award. All respondents were asked to assess the impact of factors such as schooling and socio-economic background on their own access to post-16 education. The findings generated by these questions are set out below and in the tables and accompanying figures provided at the end of the section.

Of course, the individual characteristics of the Snowdon Survey respondents are not necessarily representative of all Award holders, let alone the wider population of disabled students with physical and/or sensorial impairments. But nor are they

wholly unrepresentative. As the following evidence and discussion makes clear, there are several areas in which the individual characteristics of survey respondents tally with national datasets (data provided by HESA and the FEFC Mapping Provision project) and/or existing survey research findings, such as the Institute for Employment Research (IER) survey which involved 140 disabled graduates as 5% of the total sample (Hogarth et al 1997), research by Preece (1995) on 44 disabled adults in or considering adult education, and research by Baron et al (1995) which included indepth interviews with 8 disabled social work students. Individual or background characteristics of disabled students are explored in each of these research projects and wider conclusions drawn though the samples are very small.

So it is with the Snowdon Survey. In the sections that follow, we make explicit the ways in which the characteristics of Snowdon Survey respondents do, or do not, tally with the overall picture of disabled students in FE and HE in Britain. This is not done to enhance claims for generalisability but to provide a semblance of context in which the reader can situate the views and experiences presented in the report. It is also done to focus attention on the participation of disabled students with physical and/or sensorial impairments since we argue that their participation has become obscured by aggregated national statistics.

Finally, the characteristics of the Snowdon dataset throw into sharp relief issues of compounded disadvantage, often termed "multiple oppression", which face disabled students who are from ethnic minority backgrounds and/or - socio-economic groups 11M-V, or whose past experience of schooling (especially in segregated schools) constitutes a major barrier to post-16 education. In this way, the *Snowdon Survey* findings highlight the need for funders and policy-makers to recognise: a) the specific characteristic of disability; and b) the diversity of disabled students and the existence of compounded disadvantage or multiple oppression.

Impairment

Impairment was included in the questionnaire for the simple reason that the profiles of disabled students who receive a Snowdon Award (see Table 3A at the end of this section) may be significantly different from the aggregate profile of disabled students in FE and HE. This is a strength rather than a weakness of the survey dataset.

The Snowdon Award Scheme provides bursaries to help physically disabled students with the additional costs of further and/or higher education or training. The definition of "physically disabled" extends to students with sensory impairments but it does not generally extend to people with other impairments, including specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia (although some Award holders have multiple impairments which may include a learning difficulty). The

aggregate profile of disabled students in FE and HE is quite different, and includes large numbers of students with "unseen disabilities" (such as asthma, diabetes and epilepsy) and with learning difficulties, especially dyslexia. Therefore, and setting aside other caveats, the *Snowdon Survey* might be considered unrepresentative of the majority of disabled students in Britain. This view is flawed on two counts.

First, disability discrimination, as framed by the social model of disability set out in the Introduction, is based on any and all impairments. Whilst there is great diversity among disabled people (including diversity of impairments), there is also an overriding commonality: a shared experience of barriers to participation and equal opportunities.

Secondly, there is a strong case for arguing that the profile of *Snowdon Survey* respondents enhances the Survey's contribution by focusing on a sector of disabled students whose levels of participation have become obscured by the overall profile. This point is illustrated in Table 3B, which is based on data generated by HESA (Higher Education Statistics Agency) and based on the academic year 1995/96. In the original HESA table, student numbers are provided for each impairment category. The overall participation rate of disabled students is 33% of the total number of students with known disability status (information about disability status is non-existent for 15.6% of all students). In Table 3B, the HESA data is rearranged so that the number of students who fit Snowdon Award Scheme criteria (students with visual, hearing, multiple impairments, mobility difficulties, who require personal care support or use a wheelchair) can be compared with students with an unseen impairment, dyslexia or mental health difficulties.

Of those for whom information on disability status is available, 12,031 fit the Snowdon Award Scheme criteria, but this leaves a further 34,567 disabled students who are ineligible. Evidence from the *Mapping Provision* project (FEFC 1997) points to a similar discrepancy in the further education sector. Even though overall participation rates of disabled people in FE are higher than in HE (at between 5.3% and 5.7% of the entire enrolled population, irrespective of known disability status), it is still the case that particular groups of disabled people -many of whom would come under the Snowdon Award criteria -are less represented than others.

In short, both the *Snowdon Survey* and the Snowdon Award Scheme serve a valuable purpose in drawing attention to sectors of the disabled student population which are particularly excluded from FE and HE.

Gender

The overall gender balance in the *Snowdon Survey* (Table 3A) is exactly 50:50. However, this changes according to different levels of study:

| Level | Female | Male |
|-------------------|--------|-------|
| Undergraduate | 52.2% | 47.5% |
| Postgraduate | 50% | 50% |
| Further education | 37% | 63% |
| Other courses | 60% | 40% |

Source: *Snowdon Survey Findings*.

It is pertinent to add that male survey respondents were significantly more likely to have received a Snowdon Award between the ages of 17 and 20 (58.5% of men compared to 41.4% of women), which suggests a possible (and unsurprising) link between gender and time of entry into post-16 education.

How do these findings compare with national gender ratios of participation? In the further education sector, results of the *Mapping Provision* exercise suggest that the participation of disabled women is slightly less than that of women as a whole: just under 50% of FE disabled students are female (FEFC 1997). In the higher education sector, although there are slightly more disabled women than men, the participation of disabled women is still lower than the national average for all female students in HE (HESA 1997).

Findings from smaller surveys point more directly to the compounded disadvantage faced by disabled women. In research conducted by the Institute of Employment Research, 60% of the 140 disabled undergraduates involved were male (Hogarth *et al.* 1997);- whilst a survey of 44 disabled people in or considering adult education suggests that disabled women are far less likely to engage in professional training or higher education than disabled men (Preece 1995). These findings are commensurate with widespread evidence of the "multiple oppression" experienced by disabled women in Britain.

So, whilst the strong representation of disabled women in the sample, especially at undergraduate level, makes for a good dataset, it probably does not paint an accurate picture of disabled women's participation in FE and HE as a whole.

Ethnicity

If the gender ratio among survey respondents appears above average, the same cannot be said for the disabled students from ethnic minorities (see Table 3A). Only 10.7% of survey respondents described themselves as having an ethnic minority background, whilst 89.1 % described themselves as white. In addition, of the 24 respondents from an ethnic minority, only 7 (or 29.2%) were women. In stark contrast, women comprised 52% of those who described themselves as white.

There are several possible explanations for the very low number of non-white students in the survey dataset. First, the survey data- set is not necessarily an

accurate representation of all Award holders. The Snowdon Award Scheme is unusual in welcoming applications from disabled students who are not domiciled in the UK: 5.4% of survey respondents are currently (or were at the time of receiving an Award) not UK nationals, most of whom also described themselves as non-white. Secondly, and more importantly, the low rate of survey participation and/or application to the Snowdon Award Scheme may well be indicative of the compounded disadvantage faced by disabled people from ethnic minority backgrounds.

This conclusion tallies with wider social research on the particular (multiple) oppression experienced by disabled people (again, disabled women in particular) from ethnic minority backgrounds, as well as existing data on post-16 education which record lower than average participation rates for disabled people from ethnic minority backgrounds in both FE and HE (FEFC 1997, HESA 1997, Hogarth *et al* 1997). Without doubt, the findings indicate the need for funding and outreach projects which will enable participation by disabled women and men from ethnic minority backgrounds.

Socio-Economic Group (SEG)

There can be little doubt that socio-economic group is a strong predictor of entry to further and, especially, higher education (see Report Six of the Dearing Report, NICHE 1997 and Hogarth *et al* 1997).

The socio-economic profiles of survey respondents (Table 3A) exhibit the same pattern that characterises participation in HE especially, namely the over-representation of people from professional and managerial SEGs and the under-representation of people from SEGs 111M (skilled manual), IV (semi-skilled manual) and V (unskilled manual). Even in the further education sector, there is a very long way to go before ratios or participation in post-16 education correspond with ratios of participation in the workforce.

Unfortunately, data on the socio-economic profile of disabled students in either FE or HE are thin on the ground. Surprisingly, socio-economic group does not appear alongside investigations of age, ethnicity, gender or impairment in the *Mapping Provision* exercise (FEFC 1997), nor does it feature in direct relation to disability in *Report Six* of the Dearing Report, even though the latter's remit is to explore the under-representation of both lower socio-economic groups and disabled people (NCIHE 1997).

One example is the Institute for Employment Research (IER) survey commissioned by HEFCE (Hogarth *et al* 1997). Although comparability with the Snowdon Survey dataset is difficult (the IER sample was largely full-time, first-time undergraduates only), IER findings are still of use and might be summarised thus:

| SEG | All | Disabled People |
|------------|-----|-----------------|
| I/II | 63% | 57% |
| IIN | 10% | 11% |
| IIIM | 13% | 15% |
| IV/V | 9% | 10% |
| Not stated | 5% | 7% |

Source: Hogarth *et al* 1997 , Table IV.2.

The differences in the SEG composition among disabled students compared to that across all cases are even more stark in the *Snowdon Survey* findings. Table 3A illustrates the socio-economic backgrounds of all survey respondents, while Table 3C shows the same data but excluding respondents who are/were retraining following later onset or acquisition of impairment. The findings show a higher than average participation rate of people from SEGs 111M, IV and V (between 17.1 % and 18%) and a lower than average participation rate of people from SEGs I/II (between 43.1 % and 43.8%).

As might be expected, socio-economic profiles for Snowdon respondents vary according to level of study:

| Level | SEG | |
|-------------------|--------|-------|
| Undergraduate | I/II | 45.3% |
| | IIN | 17.4% |
| | IIIM | 17.4% |
| | IV/V | 15.1% |
| | DK/NS* | 4.6% |
| Postgraduate | I/II | 51.6% |
| | IIN | 10.9% |
| | IIIM | 20.3% |
| | IV/V | 15.6% |
| | DK/NS* | 1.6% |
| Further Education | I/II | 18.5% |
| | IIN | 18.5% |
| | IIIM | 29.6% |
| | IV/V | 25.9% |
| | DK/NS* | 7.4% |

*DK/NS Don't know/ Not stated

Source: *Snowdon Survey*.

Of course, the apparently more equitable socio-economic composition of disabled students evident in the IER research and even more evident in the *Snowdon Survey* findings (even when "retrainers" are excluded from analysis) may be misleading.

First, a larger proportion of disabled people enter HE and FE as mature students. The socio-economic backgrounds of mature students in both FE and HE, irrespective of disability, are likely to be more diverse than among the school-leaver population on whom much national data is based (NCIHE 1997).

Secondly, the higher levels of people from lower socio-economic groups in the Snowdon dataset is, perhaps, less surprising given that the purpose of the Snowdon Award Scheme is to provide bursaries. Needless to say, the Snowdon Award Scheme does not, and never has, introduced any formal or informal means testing of applicants. However, self-exclusion by applicants from comparatively wealthier backgrounds probably takes place. Of course, it could also be argued that applicants from SEGs I-IIIN might be more likely to apply, since they may have a stronger sense of entitlement to outsider support and better access to information.

These two reasons go some way towards explaining the higher than average representation from lower socio-economic groups. It might also be the case that disabled people from all socio-economic backgrounds place themselves, and/or are placed, under greater pressure to seek higher level qualifications, with a view to securing employment? That is a question to which we return shortly.

Even the "higher than average" participation of people from SEGs IIIM- V in the Snowdon dataset falls short of desired levels, especially where HE is concerned. So, there can be little doubt that socio-economic group plays a decisive role in disabled people's access to HE or FE. This view is confirmed by survey respondents themselves. Table V and the accompanying chart corroborate the findings presented above.

Disabled people from SEGs 1/11 were twice as likely to view their socio-economic background as facilitating their access to FE or HE. In contrast, disabled people from SEGs IV/v were between three and five times more likely than people from any other SEG (including IIIM) to view their socio-economic background as hindering their own access to post-16 education. It is also interesting to note that most respondents, especially from SEGs IIIN and 111M, did not feel that SEG made a significant difference to their experiences either way. This possibly reflects the overarching importance of disability as the dominant factor shaping access. If this is the case, we can only reiterate the point made earlier: factors such as belonging to SEG IV/V may (and clearly do) compound disadvantages, but disability remains the major, and specific, factor which inhibits access.

Age

The age profile of *Snowdon Survey* respondents is in line with the widely held belief that disabled people are more likely to enter further and higher education at an older age than non-disabled counterparts. Of the 206 survey respondents, just under 20% received their Award between the ages of 17 and 20; nearly 50% received an Award between the ages of 21 and 29, whilst a further 26% were over 29 years old (see Table 3A). The "age when received Award" need not be the same as "age of entry" to a course of study, although significant numbers of respondents appear to have applied for funding during or before their first year. So, the ages used here are a rough but fairly reliable guide to age of entry.

If we breakdown the data presented in Table 3A (excluding 21 respondents who did not specify level or age) to consider links between age and level of study, the overall trend of later entry is basically unaltered, given that one would expect, for instance, postgraduate entry to commence at a later stage of life.

| Level | 17-20yrs | 21-24yrs | 25-29yrs | 30+ |
|----------------|----------|----------|----------|-------|
| F.E. | 37% | 22.2% | 14.8% | 25.9% |
| Undergrad | 30.5% | 37.9% | 15.8% | 15.8% |
| Postgrad/other | 6.1% | 33.3% | 16.7% | 44.0% |

Source: Snowdon Survey

Of note is the comparatively high percentage of earlier entrants to FE. Nearly 60% of survey respondents were under 25 years old when they received an Award for a course of further education. This is higher than the national estimated average of 50% for disabled students, an estimate which includes students aged 16 and under (FEFC 1997).

Of note also is the significantly lower number of early (school-leaver) entries to undergraduate education when compared with national statistics: less than one-third of survey respondents doing degree or sub-degree-study were between 17 and 20 when they received a Snowdon Award.

As with data on ethnic origin, these findings are less than representative of all Award holders, since the Snowdon Award Scheme's eligibility criteria are explicitly biased towards younger applicants between 17 and 25 years of age, although applications from mature students are considered (especially for retraining).

Nationally, and across both FE and HE, the picture is one of a larger proportion of disabled students among the mature student population than the school-leaver population. Findings from the IER (1997) survey confirm this picture, although entry in the 20-25 age group is lower than in the *Snowdon Survey* findings. It might be usefully recalled that the IER dataset leans heavily towards full-time students and presents no indication of impairment type.

| Age | Disabled | Non-disabled |
|----------|----------|--------------|
| Up to 17 | 0% | 1% |
| 18/19 | 52% | 63% |
| 20/25 | 14% | 19% |
| 26+ | 33% | 17% |

Source: Hogarth *et al* 1997, Table IV.3

Later entry is to be expected where disabled people have acquired an impairment in adulthood and seek first or second time entry to FE and HE in order to retrain - as is the case for 45 of the 206 survey respondents. But other explanations must be sought for the later than average entry also evident among those who have had an impairment since birth or childhood. The most well-aired explanations for this revolve around lower expectations (of self and by others), lower self-confidence and lower levels of educational achievement at 16 and 18 -all of which may be traced to pervasive social attitudes and legacies of segregated schooling.

Educational Background Findings from the IER report (Hogarth et al), the Tomlinson Report (1996), research by Barnes (1991), Hurst (1993), Johnstone (1995), Preece (1995) and Ash *et al* (1997) among others, all provide conclusive, and common-sense, evidence that segregated schooling inhibits entry to mainstream post-16 education for large numbers of disabled young people.

In addition to keeping disabled and non-disabled children separate from each other in a way that produces and reinforces disabled people's exclusion, segregated schooling is also criticised for failing to provide disabled young people with the academic challenges and skills necessary for entry to HE in particular; for failing to provide high quality educational and careers guidance; and for failing to encourage ambition, raise individual expectations and promote self-confidence among disabled young people. Do the *Snowdon Survey* findings support this picture and critique?

In Table 3C, we provide the educational profiles of 123 survey respondents who received an Award over the last eight years and are/were not retraining. A significant minority (38.2%) of respondents attended segregated schools only and a further 5.7% attended a mixture of segregated and mainstream schools. In Table

3E, respondent assessments of the impact of school background on their own access to post-16 education are set out (for the same 123 respondents). Whereas almost half of those educated in a mainstream environment felt that their schooling facilitated entry into post-16 education, less than one third of those educated in a segregated environment felt likewise. A tiny proportion of those who attended mainstream schools (less than 5%) felt their schooling had a negative impact on access to FE or HE, whilst almost 40% of those who educated in segregated schools saw their educational experience as a barrier.

In addition to the statistical data, a sample of voices from respondents highlight the different ways in which schooling, and school advisers, can shape individual paths to further and higher education, and beyond.

Going to special school has meant that I had not developed social and analytical skills which are important in everyday life and professional capacity. Much time has been spent in gaining these experiences ...it is still hard to get into University especially if one attends a special school because academic abilities are not developed.

The hardest problems to overcome were those presented by the prejudices and set attitudes of educational establishments, i.e. teachers etc. I am thinking especially of when I was 15 years old and had to fight to move from a special to a mainstream school

I still believe in special education until higher ed stage. It got me where I am. But then my school was highly academic unlike many special schools.

When I was at school, in the Sixth Form, I knew I wanted to go to University. Before the Sixth Form I didn't know... At the time, there was a Special Needs Careers Adviser employed by the Local Education Authority that came in to school on a regular basis -she helped me sort out the students grant, contacted the university - she made me able to go to the university of my choice and also sorted out the social services support and all that. I just had to concentrate on the academia and turn up for the university interview.

Several points are raised by the respondent assessments and illustrated in the voices cited above.

First, many more respondents felt that educational background was a major factor in enabling or restricting entry to post-16 education than was the case for socio-economic background. This supports the widely-held view that previous educational achievement exerts a strong influence over entry to FE or HE.

Second, where individuals felt that education made a difference, those from mainstream schools were over ten times more likely to view their education as enabling rather than restricting entry.

Third, the largest proportion of respondents who viewed their educational experience negatively had been through the segregated schooling system only. This view is supported by McDonald (1996), who writes from personal experience of going to a segregated school, mainstream FE college and university. A number of those educated in segregated schools valued their experience and felt concerned about mainstreaming for all: this was the case for respondents who either attended a private school which expected natural progression into HE and/or attended a school for Deaf children and young people which promoted Deaf culture and language.

Finally, the provision of high quality guidance and information, with full teacher/careers adviser encouragement to enter HE or FE, can be a determining factor, irrespective of school type.

The legal entitlements of all young people at the ages of 14 and 16 (set out in the *Education Act 1997*) are a positive step, assuming that careers advisers - irrespective of school type - promote the equal opportunities and capacities of disabled young people to further and, especially, higher education. However, full recognition must also (as recommended in the Kennedy Report 1997) be given to adult and lifelong entitlements of careers and educational guidance.

Debates continue about the place and worth of segregated education. The dominant message from the disabled people's movement is that mainstream education for all is the best (if not the only) way forward for the individuals concerned and the wider society (Barnes 1991).

Level, Place and Mode of Study

In this penultimate section, we outline the nature of study undertaken by respondents at the time of receiving an Award. Again, this is primarily to provide a context for the evidence used and conclusions drawn throughout the report, but it also offers an opportunity to question the aggregate picture of disabled people's participation, especially in HE.

Respondent levels of study are shown in Table 3F and the accompanying pie-chart. Immediately apparent are the low representation of respondents doing FE courses and the high representation of postgraduates (both taught course and by research). Certainly, the Snowdon Award Scheme attracts a large number of postgraduate applicants, mostly because it is one of few charitable trusts to which postgraduates are invited to apply. One would also expect postgraduates who have (for the most

part) been through the HE system to have developed more successful information networks and a stronger sense of entitlement to outsider support.

The low representation of students doing FE courses is misleading, since the total numbers of disabled students in FE are far in excess of student numbers in HE (especially postgraduates). The Snowdon Award Scheme makes clear that level of study does not affect selection. So, it is likely that, in spite of attempts to make the survey as accessible and all-embracing as possible, FE Award holders may yet have felt that their experiences did not fit the survey framework (this is confirmed by the fact that almost all "non-standard" responses were from people who had studied in further rather than higher education). Finally, it should also be noted that respondents classified as undergraduates in Table 3F include respondents studying for sub-degree qualification at colleges within the FE sector. Whilst only 13.1% of respondents are/were doing FE courses, 24.8% of respondents are/were studying at a college of FE.

Respondent places of study are shown in Table VIII. "Old" (pre-1992) universities appear the preferred option for a large number of respondents, and this is particularly marked among postgraduate students, whilst undergraduates appear to opt for a mixture of newer universities and colleges of HE or FE. A very small number of survey respondents are/were enrolled with the Open University. This is surprising given the very strong track record of the Open University in providing HE opportunities for students with physical and/or sensory impairments. It might well be the case that undergraduates with the Open University feel sufficiently supported by their university, but a more probable explanation is that they have lower expectations of getting outsider support since any and all students on Open University courses, irrespective of disability, are ineligible for statutory funding.

Respondent modes of study are shown in Table 3H, cross-tabulated with level of study. At undergraduate and postgraduate level, the vast majority of respondents were full time students (81.4% and 73.4% respectively). At further education level, 63% of respondents were full-time. Does this tally with the national picture?

At first glance, it does. In higher education, evidence from IER research (Hogarth *et al* 1997) and *Report Six* (NCIHE 1997) indicate a slightly higher than average tendency for disabled students to enrol full-time. The story appears similar in the further education sector, even though larger numbers of students in the sector as a whole are mature and part-time (FEFC 1997). However, both the *Snowdon Survey* findings and these aggregated national averages are misleading when it comes to disabled students with physical and/or sensory impairments. In Table 3B, based on HESA data for the academic year 1995/96, there is a stark difference between disabled students with physical and/or sensory or multiple impairments and disabled students with other impairments. In the former category (in which Snowdon Award holders would be placed), only 43.7% of undergraduates are full-

time, compared to 82.2% of students with other impairments and 71.6% of non-disabled students.

The often obscured fact that people with physical and/or sensory impairments are far more likely to enrol as part-time students in higher education is highly significant and must be borne in mind for the next chapter.

3.3 Conclusion

The *Snowdon Survey* respondents are drawn from a diverse range of backgrounds. As a result, and also because of the relatively small size of the sample, it is impossible and inadvisable to estimate the extent to which the respondents are "representative" of a wider population of disabled students. Nevertheless, an exploration of the participant profiles exhibited by respondents and comparison with national and aggregated data suggest that the following points should be carefully considered with regard to future research, data collection and in formulating policies designed to widen participation.

1. Are people with physical, sensory and multiple impairments more under-represented than other categories of disabled students?
2. Do disabled people with physical, sensory and multiple impairments who are also from an ethnic minority background and/or are women and/or are from socio-economic groups 111M-V, face compounded barriers to participation?
3. Do disabled young people, especially in segregated schools, have access to the academic training, careers and educational guidance, and encouragement to progress into HE and mainstream FE that many of their non-disabled peers enjoy?

Disabled people are a diverse population. Several factors conspire to facilitate and inhibit their participation in post -16 learning. These include age, gender, ethnicity, locality, income and educational experiences. However, the nature of disability, from the understanding of the social model approach (set out in the *Introduction* to this report), requires that disability be identified as a specific characteristic, common to a majority of people with impairments, and that the barriers to learning and participation be removed accordingly. We suggest that this process will necessarily entail removing barriers faced by all who have been socially, economically or educationally marginalised, for whatever reason and irrespective of impairment.

Section Four

FUNDING: EQUITY or LOTTERY?

Overview

This section is the largest in the report because it is a central concern of disabled students in general and of the Snowdon Award Scheme and Award holders in

particular. Were it not for the inadequacies of financial support for disabled students in the early 1980s, the Snowdon Award Scheme would not have come into being. Its continued existence and a growing, rather than diminishing, demand for Snowdon Awards are clear indicators that the inadequacies of financial support for disabled students remain with us in the late 1990s. So, in this section we set out the main issues which relate to financing disabled students through post-16 study.

In so doing, we summarise what funds are available, why and for whom; we identify gaps and anomalies in the current system, identifying those groups whose entitlements to funding for additional support are minimal, if any; we examine the funding profiles of survey respondents; and finally we evaluate the role of the Snowdon Award Scheme and other similar charities! trusts.

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Recommendations

1. Basic and essential support requirements should not be met by charities and trusts, such as the Snowdon Award Scheme.
2. Any funding arrangements designed to replace discretionary awards should take full account of the exceptional costs faced by disabled students across all sectors of post-16 study.
3. Full regard should be given to the role of non means-tested social security benefits in enabling disabled people to participate in post -16 education.
4. Disabled Students Allowances within HE should be extended to:
 - a) part-time students in higher education;
 - b) postgraduate students who are not funded by research councils; and c) students taking a second degree after acquiring an impairment
5. Disabled Students Allowances (DSAs) should be extended to students in further education.
6. A unified system should be introduced in England and Wales which deals with all funding support for all students, across all sectors of post -16 education
7. The FEFC and LEAs should take responsibility for disseminating appropriate and accessible guidelines on learning support for disabled students, including computers for home use and transport to and from college.
8. Where charitable support is required, charities and trusts should provide support in a manner commensurate with an equal opportunities approach to disability. The Snowdon Award Scheme is a model of good practice for charities and trusts and for all funding providers.
9. The Snowdon Award Scheme should consider extending its eligibility criteria to all disabled students irrespective of age and impairment.

4.1 Current Issues and Contexts: what financial support is available, why and for whom?

Evidence used in the Kennedy Report points conclusively to current and/or projected financial hardship as a deterrent to post-16 study for many adults who might otherwise enter or re-enter education (Kennedy Report 1997). Similarly, a survey of 2,500 graduates by the Institute of Employment Research reveals that concerns over financial hardship before and during a course of study are commonplace and, significantly, that these concerns are more evident among disabled students than non-disabled students. The explanations for this are two-fold.

First, disabled students may require additional support in order to complete a course of post-16 study. This costs money over and above tuition fees, costs of living and accommodation -money that individuals and households simply do not have.

Second, disabled students may not have the fund-raising options open to others, such as doing a student job or accumulating large debts: barriers to employment make debts too onerous, even assuming that banks are willing to lend the money.

The precise nature of additional support requirements vary considerably between individuals but might include:

1. payment for support, e.g. sign language interpreter, amanuensis, note-taker, reader or one-to-one tuition;
2. specialist equipment, such as a standard or adapted computer (especially for home use), large screen monitor, voice recognition software or scanner;
3. higher costs of photocopying and books, where access to a library is restricted or texts are not available in accessible formats; and
4. higher costs of travel between home and college.

In addition, it is commonly accepted that the general costs of living and renting suitable accommodation are often higher for disabled people.

In the light of these factors, and given that post-16 study is often crucial for disabled people who have to "prove" their abilities to prospective employers, various sources of funding have been made available to disabled students to support them through further or higher education. The main sources of outsider funding are listed below.

Mandatory Awards and Discretionary Awards: - Irrespective of disability status, mandatory awards (which cover tuition fees, may cover some maintenance costs, and bring with them entitlements to a Student Loan and the DSA) are not available for, *inter alia*, part-time courses, postgraduate courses (except postgraduate initial teacher training), courses of further education, access or conversion courses, correspondence or distance learning courses. All students not entitled to a mandatory award may apply for a discretionary award from their LEA but, as the name suggests, this is entirely at the discretion of the LEA. There are no national rules. The government is currently reviewing the system of discretionary awards which has been widely acknowledged as inequitable and insufficient to meet the needs of many students, disabled and non-disabled.

Disabled Students Allowances (DSAs):

These are available for full-time, first-time undergraduates -individuals who would also be entitled to a mandatory award (covering tuition fees and, depending on household income, maintenance costs) and a student loan. Only postgraduates on a research council studentship are also eligible for a DSA.

DSAs are intended to meet only those disability-related costs which result from being a student. From 1998/99, the level of DSAs are:

- a) £3,955 maximum for the whole of the course: specialist equipment allowance;
- b) £10,000 per year: 'non-medical helper' allowance; and
- c) £1,315 per year: general allowance to cover additional disability-related study costs, (e.g. tapes, Braille paper, books) and/or top up the other allowances.

Hitherto DSAs had been means-tested but this is no longer the case, thereby making the system far more equitable. Previously, means-testing had meant that several households ended up paying for 'non-medical help', personal assistance or specialist equipment *over and above* the standard costs of maintenance, irrespective of the costs of additional support required. We welcome the fact that means-testing of the DSA has ceased.

Student Loans:

As with the DSAs, only students eligible for a mandatory award (generally full-time, first-time undergraduates) are eligible to apply for a Student Loan. Disabled students are offered preferential repayment schemes in recognition of disability-related costs of living and barriers to employment.

Access Funds:

Access funds are available in both FE and HE sectors, although the size of Access Funds varies considerably between colleges and universities, as do the criteria on which they are distributed. Generally speaking, Access Funds in FE are intended to fund study-related costs such as travel to college or purchase of textbooks and course materials, whilst Access Funds in HE are designed to alleviate financial hardship connected with general living costs rather than costs of study. Access Funds are often small, oversubscribed and limited to full-time students (although some colleges may have flexible definitions of "full time"). Not all colleges receive Access Funds to distribute.

Social Security Benefits:

Some disabled students, including full-time students, may be considered eligible for social security benefits, especially income support and housing benefit (but not for university accommodation). Disabled people on income support face no restrictions for part-time study, although full-time study may affect entitlements to incapacity benefit or Severe Disablement Allowance (SDA). Incapacity benefit, SDA and Disability Living Allowance (DLA) are not affected by having a student grant. People getting jobseekers' Allowance may do part-time study on condition that they continue seeking work.

Charities and Trusts:

The Snowdon Award Scheme is only one of several charities and trusts which consider applicants from individuals wanting to pursue post-16 study. For the most part, however, eligibility criteria are exceedingly narrow. Several charities and trusts, like the Snowdon Award Scheme, are particularly receptive to applications from disabled students but again, eligibility criteria operate (many do not welcome applications from postgraduates or overseas students, for example) and funds are often restricted.

So, then, there are various sources of funding available for disabled students although it will already be apparent that many sources are only available to some - namely, full-time, first-time undergraduate disabled students who are eligible for a mandatory award.

4.2 Findings from the Snowdon Survey

In the sections that follow, we look in more detail at the adequacies and inadequacies of the current system of financial support for disabled students. We consider the DSAs, citing good and bad practice, and the situation of those who are ineligible for a mandatory award and therefore ineligible for DSAs. The system of discretionary awards is only mentioned briefly, since the Government has already agreed that the system is inherently flawed, unfair and must be replaced. Instead, we highlight the requirements of those who will be most affected by any decisions that the Government makes on this issue.

Other sources of funding such as social security benefits, student jobs, debts and loans (including career development loans), Access Funds, extra travel subsidies and charitable support are also examined.

The following sections are squarely based on the funding profiles of survey respondents and comments made by respondents in the main survey and/or in the "free space" provided. Respondent funding profiles are set out in the tables and figures at the end of this section.

Profiles of Financial Support

For most of the sub-sections which follow (with the exception of analysis of the Snowdon Award Scheme), only respondents who received an Award in or since 1990 have been selected for data analysis, simply because 1990 was a watershed in the provision of funding for disabled students: the year in which the DSA was given its present form and therefore the year which marked official and national level recognition of the additional costs of post-16 study for disabled students.

Table 4A presents brief profiles of the 1990-1997 survey respondents, by level of study, mode of study and place of study as an aid to contextualising the views and case-studies presented in this section of the report.

The total number of respondents who received their Award in or since 1990 is 163. Of these, 106 respondents were (are) full-time students, 50 were part-time students and 7 did not specify mode of study. 101 respondents attended some form of Higher Education Institution (HEI) -around half of these were based in a pre-1992 or "old" university. 41 respondents (25% of the 1990-1997 sample) were based in a college of FE, although only 23 respondents were enrolled on a course of further education. 58 respondents were postgraduates and 61 respondents were undergraduates. 11 respondents were undertaking "other" (mostly professional) courses of study.

As a general overview, Tables 4B and 4C offer a summary of respondent views on satisfaction (or not) with statutory funding systems and on the process of finding funds for additional support.

Table 4B shows responses to the statement, "My Local Education Authority (or equivalent) provided most of the financial help I needed". The dominant feeling is one of moderate or great dissatisfaction. 43% of respondents disagreed strongly with the statement compared to only 10% who agreed strongly that they had received sufficient financial help.

As expected, high levels of dissatisfaction with LEA and statutory funding are exhibited among postgraduates and people enrolled on "other" courses. Respondent assessments were almost equally split among undergraduates and FE students. However, the most marked difference between respondents (and also to be expected) is that between part-time students and full-time students.

Of all part-time students, 72% felt that their LEA had not provided the financial help needed and of these, 75% felt very strongly that they had not been supported. The relatively high levels of dissatisfaction among full-time students are partly explained by the number of full-time postgraduates in the 1990-97 sample. One

might reasonably assume that the majority of those who agreed or strongly agreed that they have been adequately funded are undergraduates in receipt of the DSA or postgraduates on research council studentships and therefore also eligible.

Table 4C shows responses to the statement, "It took me a long time to get the necessary support and funds". The picture is very similar, with 65% of respondents agreeing or agreeing strongly that fund-raising had been arduous and time-consuming. This feeling was even stronger among part-time students (70%). Interestingly, almost two-thirds of undergraduate students experienced difficulties in getting the necessary funds. This indicates a point to which we return subsequently that the administration of DSAs leaves much to be desired. Across all levels of post-16 study, approximately two-thirds of respondents had difficulties, sometimes considerable difficulties, raising funds for support.

Already, then, we have a strong indication of issues of concern to survey respondents - most of which are more than likely to be shared by a majority of disabled students in Britain.

1. Disabled Students Allowances (DSAs) are greatly valued by those who receive them but the process of getting hold of a DSA, even when eligible, can be very time-consuming and stressful.
2. Certain groups of disabled students face particular financial disadvantage - primarily due to ineligibility for a DSA: part-time students, postgraduates and students on courses of further education are among them.
3. Getting the funds to finance post-16 study is a major barrier to participation, even for those who have already taken the decision to go for it. How many more disabled people have been deterred from making that decision because of current or projected financial hardship?

In the following sections, we consider these and related issues in more detail, beginning with the Disabled Students Allowance (DSAs) and ending with an evaluation of the Snowdon Award Scheme and the role of charities and trusts in bridging the gaps and anomalies so evident in post-16 funding systems for disabled students.

4.3 Disabled Students Allowances (DSA)

Among *Snowdon Survey* respondents (and referring to data in Table 4D for full-time undergraduates who received an Award in or since 1990), 70% received a mandatory award; only 55% received a DSA. This is largely explained by the inequities of means testing the DSA which, as already mentioned, has now ceased. It must also be partly attributed to bad practice on the part of LEAs and

colleges/universities in not informing students of entitlements or not regarding the student's claims as legitimate. These data, however, are only part of the picture since it does not illustrate so many of the issues which surround getting a DSA.

Since 1990, issues relating to DSAs have been explored in depth by numerous contributors to the *Skill Journal* (formerly *Educare*) and in articles by Hurst (1996), and Cooper and Corlett (1996) among others. DSA eligibility criteria, administration, decision-making processes, application and assessment procedures and, above all, the discretionary dimension of the DSAs have all come under scrutiny through surveys based on evidence from disabled students in higher education. Their main findings are all confirmed by the *Snowdon Survey*.

1. Depending on the LEA (or equivalent body), disabled students are not adequately or proactively informed about their entitlements to the DSA. The results of this can be disastrous, leading to great difficulties -during the first -and often crucial - year of study, sometimes leading to student withdrawal from the course.

2. Depending on the LEA, application and assessment processes can be excessively time-consuming and complex. Disabled students are not always provided with sufficient support on how to apply and what to apply for, while the costs of having to payout for an external assessment, without any assurance that this will be reimbursed, serve as a barrier to applications in the first place.

3. Depending on the LEA, decision-making processes and distribution of funds can take many months, such that the student is unable to get the necessary support systems in place for the start of the course (a crucial period) -or even for the start of the second term. This is exacerbated where students are not informed about the DSA prior to a course of study and/or go through the clearing house system.

4. Depending on the LEA, definitions of entitlement, disability, types of support deemed appropriate etc. may vary widely, such that a student might be awarded money for 'non-medical help' and a laptop by one LEA where s/he would be denied that support by another. This has notoriously been the case for students with dyslexia (although the situation appears to be improving) but is also a concern for students with "invisible", progressive and/or fluctuating impairments. Definitions also vary about what support comes under the DSA and what the student would be expected to meet out of standard maintenance monies rather than DSA monies.

5. Procedures of payment also vary widely and are complex. Many LEAs require students to payout for 'non-medical help' first, and reclaim subsequently. This may not be possible where students funds are limited and students are anxious that the LEA might change its mind or not reimburse to the full. The student is

often required to keep detailed accounts of expenditure which might then be scrutinised and contested by the LEA.

6. As a result of the above, the process of applying for a DSA can be both stressful and more a question of argument, negotiation and appeal than entitlement -even where the individual finds an ally within the LEA and/or the college/university. Too much still depends on luck.

These issues are widely-known and are certainly evident in the experiences of several survey respondents. Below, we set out some of the experiences of survey respondents who applied for and received a DSA. To present a fair picture, we begin with comments which cite good and very good practice by LEAs. But we also cite at length the voices of students for whom the DSA has been a barrier as well as a facilitator of participation. Given the significance of the DSA, and the strength of the response from survey participants on the subject, we have felt it appropriate to include a large sample of voices and to cite at length.

In two cases, students were forced to withdraw from a course because they had found out about the DSA too late and were therefore without the support they needed for a considerable length of time. In many cases, respondents found the whole process complex, frustrating and disempowering, often having to find a way through the maze alone and at personal financial risk. Respondents also show the inadequacies of a system which expects them to payout first and then press for reimbursement -all of which takes time away from study and adds to stress.

DSAs: how it should be for all

They were very good, very very good. They've been brilliant all the way.

The LEA granted me everything I asked for or was entitled to and did not suggest that I turn elsewhere.

My LEA were very supportive and worked closely with Social Services to meet my needs.

DSAs: how it is for many

When I requested that part of the fund be spent on supporting my independent learning with the purchase of an electronic aid to read text with, this was initially refused by one staff member; but then granted the next year by another. The word discretionary had taken on a new dynamic!

My main concern is that there should be a radical review of DSAs and how they are calculated -in my experience it takes too much time for LEAs to consider the latter, and I don't find that acceptable, considering that my education is being hindered without the equipment I rightly need ...I applied for it last April, and after 9 months, they still haven't reached a decision on how much I receive! I find that totally unacceptable, since I struggled to cope with work during the first semester without access to equipment which I regard as a necessity. The final report of this survey should state this view, that LEAs must deal with DSA applications as quickly as possible -I am very disheartened with my LEA and although I have 'contacted them on several occasions, they seem unwilling to help.

The special fund for payment for readers I found to be almost impossible to implement as I had to spend so much time documenting payments/receipts to readers, and then wasted time chasing up the local authority for payment to these readers. They would not agree to allow me the funds to pay these readers directly. This wasted so much time that could have been more productively spent in study.

I had no idea of the parameters, no idea of what was available. The LEA was no help in that. They suggested going somewhere for an assessment which cost £300 - and of course, I had no money and had no idea of how they were going to assess me ...because they will only pay for the cost of the assessment if the assessors say that I needed the assessment. That sounded like a frighteningly expensive risk. So I didn't really know what I wanted and I hadn't done that level of education before, so I didn't know what was needed ...it was just trial and error which meant that each year I was putting in a new application, as my condition altered and I knew what I needed and what I could get. It wasn't until-the last four months of my degree that I had what I needed ..I was frightened that because I was not clearly [visibly J disabled that a) they weren't going to give it to me,' b) they were going to take it away at any second.

When I first went to Aberystwyth -I didn't realise that as a disabled student I could actually get other things paid for like I can't take notes in lectures, so I had a tape recorded: I didn't realise that they had to pay for things like that until met the student counsellor -she gave me a copy of the rules and regulations. So I actually sent off an application to my local authority ...I got a letter back which said, "well we've not heard of anything of this nature, so we're not going to pay and it can't be true ". SO I had to send my own Local Education Authority a copy of the rules and regulations and say that "it says here you do have to pay, so pay up ". Eventually - they did pay... it took about a year.

I started the course with a load of un-accessible printed course information. Not at all accessible to me without scanning every single page, which I did and it took me

hours. The university suggested they could get me a reader if I had that component of the Disabled Students Allowance, which I didn't but applied for it immediately. So I continued to struggle through as best as I could getting some assistance from other students and friends. Six months after starting the course I was granted the DSA, a full amount to buy equipment and get readers etc. By the time I was granted the DSA I had big problems in coping with the course -I therefore decided the stress outweighed the fun and gave up the course. I feel, if I was given the right support at the right time things may have been different.

[left (my course) due to a combination of health and serious financial problems. There was no support system. [had no idea I was entitled to anything other than the mandatory grant. Part of the problem was no-one (at any time) had considered to assess me as disabled ...[think the main thing in my experience with the LEA and the DSS is that you must approach them already knowing your rights and then you have a starting point -information is not forthcoming.

Finally, the following is an abridged version of a statement from a respondent who is currently completing her undergraduate degree. We cite at length because it throws into sharp relief the inadequacies, pressures and stresses of the DSA process.

1. *The forms had to be understood.*
 2. *Various quotes for all the equipment needed had to be collected.*
 3. *Proof of the quotes were needed -and two quotes were needed for the equipment!*
 4. *Evidence of the duration of the university year had to be submitted so that the estimates for the quotes for the whole year were based on an accurate time scale.*
 5. *Medical evidence had to be submitted of my disability.*
 6. *Quotes for the cost of the support had to be included -this included evidence from the R.N.I.D. for the cost of their note-takers.*
 7. *The forms had to be sent to the university for the disability officer to read, add a letter of support to and then sign.*
- All of this I had to do before the university broke up by the end of June*
8. *The forms had to be assessed by the LEA themselves, the support agreed/turned down and then if agreed the money had to be allocated, a cheque sent and then cleared.*
 9. *All the equipment had to be bought, tried out etc.*
- All this before the new term started, and as well as all the other usual university preparations*
10. *Should the support be turned down there should be adequate time left for an appeal to be mounted and then all the equipment bought etc.!*

I was told that the money for my support would not arrive until the November which was more than halfway through the first term and I would have missed all the introductory sessions and the lessons that formed the basis of the course. I was told in the last weeks that I would have to be assessed to see if I needed the support. I was so worried and in tears at the thought that I would not get everything I needed and at the right time. In the end I called the NDCS [National Deaf Children's Society] and their education officer sent a letter of complaint to the LEA. I wrote to the Dept. for Education and Employment -and I also threatened the LEA with the Ombudsman for LEAs. To their credit they rushed things along and I got everything JUST in time and with a letter of apology but still at the expense of my entire nervous system! Other people without the help of supportive parents, access to a minicom and the typetalk system could not have done this.

And that is from a respondent who feels very strongly that she has enjoyed good financial support!

4.4 Discretionary Awards

As already stated, the Government has recognised the inequities- of the system of discretionary awards for those individuals, in FE and HE, who are ineligible for a mandatory award. The Government's Advisory Group on the matter, chaired by Councillor Graham Lane, has already submitted its report to the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE). Details of the Advisory Group's recommendations are not available at the time of compiling this report. We hope that the evidence presented below will be taken into consideration by the DfEE as it seeks to create a fairer, more transparent and more effective system of supporting all students in post-16 education, irrespective of level, mode or place of study.

Given these recent changes, we do not dwell on evidence from respondents on discretionary awards. The following comments (taken from Table 4G) suffice to support the creation of a new, equitable system which is directed by clear national guidelines and not left to the whims of LEAs and individuals within. LEAs.

1. Only 14 out of 163 respondents received some form of discretionary award from an LEA. Most of these had gone to appeal, often backed up by letters from Members of Parliament, doctors, social workers and tutors. In one case, a respondent had to pay for sign interpreters out of his own pocket simply to go through the process of a court appeal!
2. 43 respondents (26%) tried to get a discretionary award but were unsuccessful. Many were unaware that they could appeal, or were dissuaded from

even trying by their LEA. Reasons for not getting an award centred on the lack of funds available or variations on a theme of "we don't give discretionary awards any more".

All of these respondents would no doubt concur with the view that discretionary awards "represent a lottery rather than an entitlement" (Kennedy Report 1997, p. 71) and would welcome the Government's decision to radically rethink the situation.

In the following part of this Section, we present evidence which, we hope, will inform the Government's decision-making as it rethinks financial support for the majority of disabled students in FE and HE.

4.5 Entitlements (or not) of most disabled students in FE and HE

The total number of disabled students with a physical or sensorial impairment who are eligible for a DSA is outweighed by the number of those who are not. As stated above in 'Section 3: Profiles of Participation', these students are more likely to be part-time students. They are probably also more likely to be retraining following the onset of an impairment (and therefore doing a second degree), to be located in FE colleges and doing courses of further education (where previous educational experience has been held back by segregated schooling), to require further or higher (including postgraduate) education to secure employment, and more likely to face extra costs in the process than the majority of post-16 learners. And yet, they are currently ineligible for a DSA.

In its response to the Dearing Report, the Government has stated that it is currently considering the case of disabled students in higher education who are either part-time and/or studying at postgraduate level in view of the large lobby for extension of the DSA in these cases.

There are four main arguments for the extension of DSAs to part-time students in HE, including postgraduates.

1. The issue of "choice" in deciding to do part-time rather than full-time study is more complex for disabled students. Most disabled students who enrol as part-time students do so for reasons related to their impairment -hence also the large number of disabled students who enrol with the Open University. This is shown clearly in Table 4f: almost two-thirds of survey respondents were doing part-time study for impairment-related reasons. Significant numbers were part-time because the course had no full-time option or because of their financial situation: part-time

fees are cheaper and/or certain benefits are removed if full-time study is undertaken.

2. In the light of the extra pressure on disabled people to get higher qualifications than non-disabled counterparts in order to "prove" themselves to employers, many disabled people are keen to seek -and feel they require - postgraduate qualifications.

3. Large numbers of students have to raise funds for tuition fees and/or living and study costs if they do a part-time or postgraduate course. A popular option for non-disabled people is a career development loan. But loans are more difficult for disabled people to secure and more onerous: the current climate and barriers to employment increase the risks related to loan repayment.

4. Self-financing the basic cost of study is less the central issue than self-financing the additional disability-related costs of study, as recognised by the DSA for students on mandatory awards. It seems unjust that disabled students who are prepared to self-finance *to the same extent as non-disabled students* find themselves unable to proceed because they cannot fund vital support and equipment.

All of these points are also of direct relevance to disabled students in further education or on "other" courses of post-16 study or training. Further, vocational and professional qualifications are sought to increase personal skills, knowledge and job prospects. The "choice" of course and mode of attendance is restricted by income levels, benefits entitlements and impairment-related requirements. Whilst a degree of self-financing might be accessible -again *to the same extent as non-disabled students* -additional funds are required in respect of higher living costs, higher study-related costs, requirements for 'non- medical help' and specialist equipment. It is not only full-time, first-time undergraduates who have these requirements -and it is certainly not only full-time, first-time undergraduates who will benefit from post-16 study and who will in turn contribute to society and the economy.

All of the above points are argued by survey respondents.

The Case for Extending the DSA to Part- Time Students DSA should be available to part-time students if they are part-time because of their disability (as opposed to by choice). It should also be available to those who choose the Open University.

As a part-time student I do not receive the Disabled Students Allowance, yet I still need some physical support on the days I do attend University. Having such support would enable me to make more of my time at University.

I am not eligible for course fees, grants, loans, DSA, Access or Hardship Funds because I am a part-time student. I am not part-time by choice but only because of my illness/disability. It is ironic and unfair that I need extra funding for equipment to enable me to study at all but that this is not available even though those same problems prevent full time study.

With being both Dyslexic and spinal injury I needed a lot more. As I was part-time because of my disability, I was blocked from all state funding.

The Case for Extending the DSA to Postgraduate Students

There is a ceiling effect. Deaf/disabled people are achieving degrees but don't have the same support for postgraduate studies -they have to work really hard securing charity awards -I wrote 75 letters to charity and spoke to many more people on the phone & it was worth it in the end as I have enough to pursue my chosen career but this was an extra pressure to handle during the final year of my degree.

Postgraduate study is more vital for disabled people -we have to overqualify in order to begin to compete with 'normal' people.

I was having to find a lot more money than my peers were because I had to get money for the reader as well- which was an extra £3,000 on top of fees.

I pointed it out to the Local Authority that it (an MSc) would increase my job prospects -but it made no difference to them at all.

I could not claim Disabled Student Allowance. This was granted as an undergrad, but withheld for a post-grad course even though I must pass this course to actually practise law. I think this is very unfair:

The Case for Extending the DSA to Students Retraining

I am not eligible for any kind of grant from Local Education Authority as I already have an undergraduate degree BUT due to my disability I cannot use this degree, so have to retrain for something more suitable (who would employ a blind chemist?).

Because I had a grant when I was 16, the LEA said that I couldn't get another grant even though I had become disabled and so couldn't carry on a career in dance. They said I should come under their special circumstances category but they had no money in that fund.

Because I can only study through the OU, because of my disability, I do not get anything. So as well as coming to terms with my new disabled status, and being told there is no hope of improvement in my condition, I am referred to an Occupational Therapist to help organise the rest of my life. Having decided I do not want to spend the rest of my life on benefit at home, I decide to retrain and gain a qualification which will stand me in good stead for the future. I thought that making the commitment and taking the plunge was going to be the most difficult part, boy was I wrong.

The Case for Extending the DSA to Asylum Seekers

As an asylum seeker; I'm not entitled to any state support. I went to them, they saw my passport and papers from the Home Office and said you are not eligible to fill in our forms.

I could not get the Disabled Student Allowance because I was not eligible. I think this is unfair; especially when one considers the number of disabled international students in this country -which is very few.

The Case for Extending the DSA and other Entitlements to Students on the "Wrong" Course or studying at the "Wrong" Level.

I'm not allowed the Disabled Students Allowance. I don't know why but I'm not. There's nothing that I can do about it. I've tried to get it for the last five years and they have not helped me ...not just the college but the education authority... because I'm not doing a higher level course, like a BTEC national or degree or diploma. The funny thing is -all I'll turn round and say to them is: but if you don't give me that I can't get to do a BTEC national or diploma or degree.

Because my course is classed as 'further' education I could not get the general Disabled Students Allowance.

I hope they will provide disabled student aid for ANY course -NVQ to Postdoctoral.

My trouble was that if I wanted to be a word-processor or something -a skill they'd recognise -then it would be relatively easy to get on a [credited] course but if you want to do something they don't recognise, or where your training is going to take you longer than one year -then you don't qualify for support.

To summarise so far: the case for extending DSAs, as set out by survey respondents, is strong. At base, it is unjust that disabled students are expected to

raise funds far in excess of those required by non-disabled counterparts simply to access the same opportunities for learning. On the grounds of equity and widening participation, DSAs should be available to all student, self-funding or not, irrespective of level or mode of study.

The inequity of the situation is compounded given awareness that disabled people have often been held back by inadequate schooling provision and face increased barriers to securing meaningful employment.

Also cause for concern is evidence of a "domino" effect whereby ineligibility for a mandatory award means ineligibility for a DSA which in turn means ineligibility or restricted eligibility for other sources of funding such as extra travel subsidies, Access Funds, student loans, career development loans and even charitable support.

Evidence of the "domino" effect can be found in the funding profiles of survey respondents set out in Tables 4E to 4L. The bar-charts which accompany Tables 4D and 4E show the different funding profiles of full-time students and part-time students.-It is clear that part-time students generally have fewer options for funding than full-time counterparts. They are as reliant on social security benefits, family and charitable support but other entitlements are minimal. A much smaller proportion of part-time students have been able to or attempted to secure loans, travel subsidies and discretionary funds.

4.6 Alternative Sources and Forms of Funding

The analysis that follows explores other issues of concern to survey respondents and other sources of funding used. These issues and sources relate to:

1. extra travel subsidies;
2. access funds;
3. social security benefits;
4. student jobs; and
5. debts and loans.

Travel and Access funds are dealt with briefly since the central concerns overlap with the case already made about low or minimal entitlements for students who are part-time, on non-advanced or postgraduate courses, self-financing and/or seeking to retrain following the onset of an impairment. More detailed consideration is instead given to the role of benefits in post-16 study for disabled people and issues of earning to learn (student jobs) and borrowing to learn (debts and loans).

Home-to-College Travel

Some disabled students have additional requirements relating to transport, especially where existing public transport systems are inadequate to say the least. Moreover, in order to attend a college which meets all the requirements of a student, longer travel may be impossible to avoid.

Disabled students in HE are entitled to seek reimbursement for extra travel costs between home and college, over and above the amount built in to calculations of the mandatory grant and student loan. It would appear from comments made by several respondents that this fact is not widely publicised.

The issues assume a greater complexity in the FE sector. Whose responsibility is it to meet the extra disability-related travel costs? Should the LEA provide it? Or might social services be responsible? What are the duties and powers of the FEFC in this regard.

There are policies, circulars and even books which cover this issue (see FEFC Circular, January 1997 which sets out arrangements for student requiring provision, including transport, also *Duties and Powers* FEFC 1996, and John Friel 1995). The problems arise with the interpretation and implementation of these policies and guidelines. What happens when eligibility criteria are maintained with rigorous dedication, thereby allowing no room to consider requirements on a case-by-case basis? Or when the transport costs are deemed too high and therefore not met.

The Snowdon Award Scheme regularly receives applications from disabled students in FE colleges who are seeking funds to help with essential home-to-college travel costs (see Table 4M). There appear to be considerable differences in the practice of LEAs and social services departments. Repeatedly, disabled students who, one would imagine, have a very strong case for getting home-to-college travel support, have been refused such help on grounds of ineligibility or, more often, lack of funds.

Table 4H includes data on the number of respondents who received an extra travel subsidy. Only 18 respondents (out of 163) applied and were successful -almost all of whom were full-time students, and half of whom were undergraduates; 22 applied and were turned down. It is impossible to estimate the number of students who would have applied had they known this was a possibility: several respondents stated that they had been unaware that this source of funding even existed.

There is clearly a case for a review of travel support arrangements and for the introduction of more flexible guidelines where the travel required is essential for a disabled student to pursue a course s/he is entitled to pursue.

Access Funds

Access Funds in both FE and HE have recently received a boost from the Government. In HE, Access funds are to double and eligibility is to be extended to all part-time students. In FE, Access funds will increase by 50%. In both HE and FE, eligibility criteria and the purpose of funds is being reconsidered. Early indications are that funds will be available for a wider range of purposes -possibly including purchase of support necessary to participate in learning.

All of this is very welcome news. However, Access funds are also at the discretion of colleges and universities. They tend to be oversubscribed. They tend to be small payments. They may make a difference, but not difference enough to be seen as a "mini DSA" for disabled students who do not get a mandatory award.

Table 4H shows that only 21 respondents (out of 163) applied and were successful (most of these were full-time students in higher education, only 3 were students in further education); 19 respondents applied and were turned down.

Social Security Benefits: essential support

Certain disabled students, including full-time students, may be entitled to some social security benefits. It is clear from Table 4I that this is a valuable source of income for many. 75% of all survey respondents in the 1990-97 sample were receiving some form of social security benefit. This figure was marginally higher for full-time students than for part-time students. .

Survey respondents used social security benefits to cover a wide range of study-related costs, for which they were unable to get funding elsewhere -including books, travel to college, batteries and tape cassettes, photocopying etc.

Clearly, then, social security benefits can function as a significant factor in enabling participation in post-16 learning. But they can also serve as a barrier. The following concerns were raised by survey respondents:

1. worries about losing benefit entitlements may deter students from applying for other funds (such as hardship funds or charitable support);

2. worries about losing benefit entitlements may deter students from doing the course of their choice (especially if it is full-time) -or even any course at all; and
3. worries about losing benefit may deter people from providing full information to the Benefits Agency, thereby putting them in an uncomfortable position.

The following quotations illustrate the above issues:

Initially I lost all my state benefits as they told me, "If you can go to university you can go to work". The Disability Rights Advisory Service had to fight to get them reinstated. This made me scared to ask for anything else.

I was worried because I was assessed as 80% disabled and incapable of ever working. I was afraid at first I would lose my benefits if I prove I could study a course.

I have had to put the awards in a separate bank account which I won't be declaring to the DSS because it is only for interpreters not for my income. This is a very difficult situation to be in. I feel very uncomfortable about it. They should change the rules to accommodate this. I have declared my maintenance money & savings & benefits.

Another difficulty relates to entitlements to housing benefit. Currently, housing benefit is not paid to students resident in university or college-owned accommodation. It must be noted that university accommodation is invariably more expensive than rented accommodation in the locality. Moreover, for some disabled students who require adapted accommodation, the only "option" may be to stay on campus. A student is then in the position of having to pay higher rent, with no support, rather than paying lower rent with full support *simply because of access requirements.*

Most frustratingly, I am not eligible for housing benefit even though I receive income support and am technically 'off sick' ...Like other 'students' I am, by law, not eligible for housing benefit -I live in university owned accommodation because I need to be on campus, close to teaching buildings. This is the only way that any study is possible. If I lived a mile down the road in a private flat I would be eligible for housing benefit because of being on income support. I appealed to my council concerning this but they can't change the law. So, I pay rent out of my benefits and apply to trusts for additional living costs and student costs.

Of course, all of the above concerns assume that the individual has been made fully aware of entitlements to benefit. This is not always the case. Many survey

respondents found out about their entitlements by chance. Some have even received totally conflicting information about benefits. Skill: National Bureau for Students with Disabilities, has provided excellent guidelines on benefits for students in FE and HE. The *Disability Rights Handbook* also sets out the parameters. But, as is revealed in Section 5: 'Information -The Missing Link', getting hold of information is itself a barrier to learning. Even when you do get the right information, it may take time and negotiation to get what you are entitled to.

I was totally confused about benefits until a friend handed me the Disability Rights Handbook -and I realised I was entitled to keep my disability premium etc. and Income Support in vacations. I then went through my first year of college in a lengthy battle to convince the D.S.S. this was so! At the end of a year they also agreed.

The Kennedy Report (1997) rightly recognised that the benefits system is a major barrier to participation in further education -although it does not explore the ways in which this is also (perhaps especially) the case for disabled students.

Benefits are essential for many disabled students -and therefore the fear of losing benefits or of going through the stress of a benefits review is a source of considerable anxiety. Hardly surprising, then, that most survey respondents cited anxiety over the future of disability benefits as their greatest concern for the future of post-16 study for disabled people (a point to which we return in the concluding section of this report).

Finally, worry about losing benefit entitlements may deter students from work placements or work experience during a course of study. We explore this next.

Earning to Learn

First, work placements and work experience are an increasingly important part of further or higher education. The last five years have witnessed a flurry of reports about "core skills", "graduate skills" and "employability". Qualifications may now not be enough for employers, who are eager for evidence of work experience.

Secondly, paid work takes on ever greater importance in the funding profile of all students. This is especially noticeable in HE, where students expect to leave university having accumulated a good stock of debts. Working during term-time and especially vacations is viewed as essential for many, and desirable for many more, on the basis that it cuts down on debts whilst also providing experience.

"Student Employment Offices", a new and growing component of HE institutions, attest to both these trends, as do numerous comments which promote work as part of learning, or work as the basis of learning, which have been made in the Dearing Report (1997) and in the Government's response (DfEE 1998). The link between the worlds of work and learning could not be better encapsulated than in the concept of a 'University for Industry'.

Where does this leave disabled students? For some, term-time or vacation work may not be a viable option: the demands of undertaking a course of study and the nature of an impairment may mean that average studying hours are longer than those of non-disabled students and vacations are therefore invaluable for catching up on term work.

For others, the chance to undertake paid work and get work experience would be welcomed but is rendered a near impossibility by three factors:

1. unsuitability of standard student jobs for some disabled people;
2. barriers to employment (employers' attitudes, work environments etc.); and
3. fear of losing benefits -an essential and (relatively) stable source of income.

I have not tried to get experience because as already mentioned I fear for my benefits as this is my only means of supporting myself

I would have liked to take up a part time vacation teaching job but this would have taken me out of the Benefit System and lost me my method of supporting myself for the rest of my course.

It is assumed by LEA that all students can work during the holiday, this is not possible for all students with disabilities. Employers are not keen to take on people with disabilities for short term work as there is very little financial help to fund alterations.

The Government seem to forget that we cannot work like average students can. I am profoundly deaf and cannot work as a waitress, in a shop, in a bar or hundreds of other jobs that hearing people can do because of the nature of my disability. One could argue that I could do some of them but it would be a great strain on me and would eat into my spare time a lot. Unlike hearing students, I cannot just leave the lecture and file my notes away. Because they are typed out, I have to spend at least two hours modifying the notes that the typist has taken, correct any mistakes, print them out and add any relevant diagrams, all this is before I can do any assignments or revision.

Having to do a job on top of all this because of cuts in my benefit etc. would, after a time wear me out to such an extent that my studies would suffer a great deal.

As a result, several respondents did not apply for or accept paid work which was offered, including jobs which would have helped towards future employment.

According to survey responses (see Table 41) only 22% of all 1990-97 respondents used termtime or vacation work to meet the costs of post-16 study. Several more would have done, were it not for the reasons set out above.

Borrowing to Learn I'm in debt up to my ears at the moment -I kept taking out all the Student Loans and everything I was entitled to. I incurred the full student loans grant so I've got £5,000 of debt for that and then I had to borrow £7,500 on top of that. Its not as if I go out or can go out partying and spending a fortune on CDs. A lot of the money I borrowed was to be spent on additional help -taxis and whatever I could afford as a nominal fee for amanuenses.

Debts are a real and growing part of student life, especially for HE students. Debts are also a barrier to disabled students' participation in post-16 study. Given the current climate and persistent nature of barriers to employment, many disabled people are averse to incurring large overdrafts and debts, given the worrying prospect of what happens if debts cannot be repaid.

Two arguments emerged from survey respondents -which appear contradictory but are in fact both in keeping with a desire for increased equalisation of opportunities.

The first view relates to difficulties faced in taking out a loan for post-16 study, including career development loans. Several respondents felt that disabled people are in a far weaker position than non-disabled people because they are viewed as higher risk and more likely to default on repayment. This is partly confirmed by survey findings (Table 4J) which show that eleven applicants were rejected and nine were successful. Of the nine, one respondent admitted that information about disability was withheld, for fear of rejection. So, the argument is for equity in providing loans as an option for disabled people should they want to take it.

There s no reason why they shouldn't have a loan scheme for disabled people ...If they've made it this fat; if they've got a good enough degree to do an MA, PhD or whatever; then they're not going to stop – they're going to be employed.

A more widespread view, however, is a concern about loans as the only option and a fear that the DSA might even be introduced on a loan and repayment basis. The following voices highlight different points made in this regard.

I tried everywhere to get grants from government sources and they just wave the loan form at you now and the trouble is that with the training I'm doing and my sight -they're all unknown quantities really... I didn't want to be saddled with a loan and not be able to pay it back.

*If the Government can charge students for education fees and are considering cuts in benefits, how long will it be before they decide that disabled people can take out a loan and pay for all the disability support themselves?
Its a huge scary amount to borrow... there's no safety net.*

One-third of survey respondents (most of whom were full-time students) made use of loans, debts and overdrafts. Some respondents described themselves as seriously in debt as a result. For two-thirds of respondents, that was not a situation they felt comfortable about getting into, even where it was a possibility. So, for most respondents (and conceivably for most disabled students in Britain), debt is not really an option -and if it were to become seen as such, this would without doubt constitute a huge barrier to learning across all sectors and all levels of post-16 study.

4.7 The Role of Charities and Trusts: an overview

Finally in this section we turn to the role charities and trusts in providing support for disabled people in post-16 study. We outline several of the issues raised by survey respondents and findings, before turning to a more specific evaluation of the role and contribution of the Snowdon Award Scheme.

Findings from the *Snowdon Survey* (presented in Table 4K) show that almost 60% of respondents had received charitable support in addition to a Snowdon Award. In these cases, small sums were usually received from two or three charities. There were only a handful of cases in which funds were raised from more than four charities.

Almost 75% of respondents specified that they had applied for charitable support other than the Snowdon Award Scheme. Of these, almost 70% had contacted up to 25 charities, while the remainder (38 respondents) had written anything from 25 to over 100 letters applying for funds. The record number of letters (including approaches to companies and businesses) was a staggering 623.

Students in further education appear to have been less successful in securing charitable support (only 35% got funds other than a Snowdon Award) compared to postgraduates and students on other (mostly professional) courses -around half of

whom had secured monies additional to a Snowdon Award. This is partly explained by the number of applications made: only 65% of FE students attempted to raise funds from other sources, while over 90% of postgraduates and students on "other" courses approached several charities. One explanation for this is the amount of funding required by students on professional or postgraduate courses to pay for tuition fees. Another explanation is that FE students may exclude themselves or be excluded from applying to many charities and trusts. As the Kennedy Report notes, prevailing British attitudes seldom acknowledge the value of FE.

Where charitable monies other than the Snowdon Award Scheme had been used, it was provided by a range of national (invariably disability-related) and local charities. The national donors cited most frequently were:

Royal National Institute for the Blind
Electronic Aids for the Blind
Gardner's Trust for the Blind
Action for Blind People
Peter Greenwood Memorial Trust
The Lord Ashdown Charitable Settlement
Lawrence Atwell's Charity

All of the above are listed in the Skill information pamphlet, 'Applying to Trusts'

Several respondents raised other issues on charities and trusts in general. So, before turning to an evaluation of the Snowdon Award Scheme (which is considered a model of good practice by all respondents bar one), it is worth outlining the main issues raised.

1. Charity is a last resort and an undesirable necessity. Disabled people have long been arguing for entitlements to statutory funds rather than forced reliance on charitable support and goodwill. Aversion to relying on charity is compounded if the attitudes of administrators are patronising or aloof.
2. With few exceptions, charities and trusts are only able to give very small sums of money (seldom more than £200). As a result, disabled people have to apply to several charities and are still left short of funds: £200 is better than nothing but is a long way of the cost of a laptop or the salary of an academic reader.
3. Again, with few exceptions, charities and trusts only provide one-off payments - thereby leaving the individual without further financial support if the

course is longer than one year. For some individuals, this necessitates an endless' round of fund-raising, information seeking, and rejections from charities and trusts which are heavily oversubscribed and have narrow eligibility criteria.

4. Information about charities and trusts is hard to come by, especially where it is compiled in standard print and located in a library. Several respondents found the RNIB and Skill sheets to be invaluable in this regard.

5. The whole process of finding out where to apply, getting application forms, writing letters, providing medical, educational and character references, building a solid case for requiring the funds and detailed budgets of how the money will be used etc. etc. takes considerable time and energy. This is exacerbated where forms are inaccessible (not available on disk, in large print or Braille, for example) and where forms use unduly complicated language.

6. The success rate is low and most respondents do not even get a reply from the charities or trusts they take the time to write to. The considerable effort involved may reap very poor returns indeed.

It would appear that fund-raising for charities, as with Access funds, travel subsidies, DSAs, discretionary awards and career development loans, is also down to chance.² Some of the above issues are highlighted in the following voices.

I am very grateful for the Snowdon Award, but I only received it for one year of my course, while other students will be studying this year, I will be studying, coping with my disability and looking for funding for next yea!; and I already know its near impossible. The Snowdon Award is a charity, and they can't help everyone.

Most of them didn't help or were overwhelmed by applications.

Six months before the course started, [literally -and this is no word of a lie -spent several weeks pick-axing concrete in a friend of mine's garden in order to buy her time to fill in the charity application forms like the Snowdon Award Scheme etc. because I can't read the forms -and I had no money to pay for somebody to do it. So [d buy her time, she'd fill the forms in. [was doing that and trying to raise money until the last minute ...I tried for anything I could hear about but you've got to appreciate I can't read and everything is in print.

The biggest problem I found with applying to charities is that every single form has such different requirements in terms of the information they require that its a very laborious, time-consuming process doing the applications ...extremely time-

² it is important to note that the Snowdon Award Scheme is now available on the Internet (snowaward@aol.com)

consuming and totally inaccessible ...All of the money I raised came from charities for disabled people and a lot of those, particularly the blind charities -its like £200, £300 -and after all that work, filling in all of these really finicky forms asking for every detail! In a way I feel appalled that I've been put in the position and its increased my cynicism in terms of government support that I was actually put in the position to cap-in-hand to all these feudal Victorian organisations.

I've never worked so hard, done such good research etc. for such a pathetic return. What I've got back wouldn't have paid for one person's help ...months I've spent researching this and finding the right people and the addresses ...and its humiliating ...because you find yourself without funds does not make you a lesser person.

Trusts and/or Charities ask a great deal of information before giving basic consideration. This is costly in time, effort, finance and physical and mental strength. To do this while attempting entry to education or whilst complete education, is not productive ...While I appreciate Trust time is valuable, so is student time.

4.8 The Snowdon Award Scheme

In the main survey, respondents were asked for information on the size of Award received, how many Awards had been received and how they had used the money. The findings are presented in Tables 4L, 4M and 4N. The main findings, which are based on the entire survey dataset of 206 respondents rather than the 1990-1997 dataset, can be summarised as follows:

Number and Size of Awards

Seventy five per cent of respondents had received a one-off, one year Award only, and 22% of respondents received an Award which spanned two, or very occasionally three, years.

Twenty three per cent of respondents received an Award which was less than £500; 46% of respondents received between £500 and £1,500; 26% of respondents received monies totalling over £1,500.

On these findings alone, and given the generally small size of charitable funds, the potential impact of Snowdon Awards is already clear.

Use of Awards, 1981-1997

Thirty per cent of 1997 award recipients applied for a personal computer -a figure which is between twice and three times that of previous years. This is not surprising given the enabling role that Information Technology has for many (but by no means all) disabled people and increased use of IT in study and training generally. Indeed, the Dearing Report (1997) recommends that by 2005/6, all students in HE will have access to their own laptop.

35.7% of 1997 award recipients used some or all of their Award to pay for readers, notetakers, personal assistants and so forth, compared to 19% of recipients in 1994/95 and 1996, and fewer recipients still in previous years. Explanations for this include: high costs of 'non-medical help', increased availability and acceptance of 'non-medical help' for disabled students, and the fact that more disabled students who require this assistance are entering post-16 study.

Both the above make sense, given wider trends in post-16 study -as do the constant demand for help with tuition fees and specialist equipment (such as voice recognition software, screen readers etc.). Of more serious concern are the constant and even rising numbers of applications received from people looking for help with travel costs (24.3% in 1997), purchase of textbooks and photocopies (23.2% in 1997), basic living costs (15.4% in 1997, 20.5% in 1996) and mobility aids.

The Snowdon Award Scheme, alongside other charities and trusts, provides bursaries to meet the unmet requirements of disabled students. The next question we must ask is "how well does the Snowdon Award Scheme do this?"

Evaluation of the Snowdon Award Scheme by Award Holders

The evaluation of the Snowdon Award Scheme has been very positive indeed, as is evident in Table 4N. There is still, of course, room for improvement -particularly in terms of the eligibility criteria and the provision of application forms on disk, in Braille and on tape. The findings are summarised below:-

Application forms and application process: 152 out of 206 respondents made a comment. Of these, 77% found the forms and process to-be good ~!: very good, only 2% gave a negative evaluation, whilst 21 % found it satisfactory but suggested improvements -mostly relating to the accessibility of the application forms and a desire for forms on disk, in Braille and on tape.

Eligibility Criteria: A significant minority of respondents suggested that the current (although flexible) age restriction be removed or at least raised. A similar number (almost 40% of all respondents) felt that no changes were necessary. The point was made that disabled students are more likely to enter FE or HE at a later

stage in life, either through negative previous experiences of schooling, or because of late onset of impairment and a desire to retrain.

Snowdon Office Assistance: An overwhelming majority of those who commented on the assistance and attitudes of Award Scheme administrators were very positive. 136 respondents commented (most who did not comment noted that they received their Award too long ago to give an accurate evaluation). Of these, almost 80% referred to the assistance provided in very positive, if not glowing, terms. Administrators were frequently described as "supportive", "wonderful", "excellent", "very efficient" and "very helpful". As one respondent (and the sentiment appears widely shared) put it, "They're just stars! I can't say enough how wonderful they've been".

On a more negative note, a few respondents felt uncomfortable with the Snowdon Award Scheme Presentation Ceremony before 1997³ -although these comments were outweighed by approval of the Ceremony and of the attitude of Lord Snowdon towards Award holders and disability issues in general. One respondent was very critical of the way in which correspondence was conducted on first-name terms.

It is clear from the survey responses that the Snowdon Award Scheme stands out as a model of good practice for charities and trusts who provide financial support for disabled students. The following represent a fraction of the positive comments made about the Scheme, the Awards received, the assistance provided by Scheme administrators and the contribution made by Lord Snowdon.

It has made a truly fantastic difference by enabling me to buy an electric wheelchair so I can live in self-catered flats, be more independent and visit the union more often!!

I did gain a place on the University's Foundation Course and am now half way through a part-time Combined Honours Degree. I use the computer almost everyday for tasks relating to many aspects of my life -as an aid it must come in the top three of those playing the most significant part in my life.

It made all the difference. If I hadn't had a significant sum like that I just would not have met my financial targets and would not have been able to have done my course.

I really liked where (Lord Snowdon) was coming from and I found the whole ethos of the Award Scheme very supportive -I was impressed by him and I was impressed

³ The Snowdon Award Scheme Ceremony was re-organised in 1997

by the organisation. I feel that communication with me has been very good. The way it was handled, certainly by him, it wasn't patronising. As a 'social model person', I thought "good on you, Lord Snowdon, didn't realise you were quite such an ally"!

From the first contact with the Snowdon Awards, I felt like a human being again and not a cap-in-hand nuisance. Any questions they asked were entirely pertinent and non-judgemental and paid attention to individual need and did not categorise me ...very often I felt that I was reading a letter from a friend ...I cannot recall ever once having to leave a message on an ansaphone.

The Snowdon Award Scheme was very understanding. Its funny how many people in charities don't really listen to disabled people.

The Snowdon Charity is the only charity that has actually been decent about this.

The voices used above are typical of comments received from respondents about the Snowdon Award Scheme. On the basis of response, the hallmarks of good practice among charities and trusts appear to be:

1. an understanding of disability as an equal opportunities and human rights issue which is evident from the highest echelons to the day-to-day administration;
2. good channels of communication and willingness to listen;
3. speedy and efficient decision-making and follow-up;
4. straightforward application form and clear procedures;
5. significant sums of money, where applicants are successful;
6. regard for the time and effort put in by the applicant; and
7. commitment to make a difference and influence policy-making.

To judge from the survey responses, the Snowdon Award Scheme offers a model of good practice for other funding providers -not only charities and trusts. The Snowdon Award Scheme does its job well. But is it a job which should be done by a charity?

4.9 Should Charities and Trusts Meet Basic Support Requirements? or Should Disabled Students Spend More Time Fund-Raising Than Studying?

The ways in which Award recipients have used their Award monies leads to the crucial question: how far should charities and trusts meet the basic support requirements of disabled students in post-16 study? A few examples -highlight the inadequacies of the 'system' in meeting very basic support requirements.

1. Should it be the case that travel costs between home and college are met through charitable bursaries rather than by the LEA, social services or FEFC?
2. Should it be the case -even in 1997 -that disabled students seek charitable funds to purchase an electric wheelchair suitable for outdoor use?
3. Should it be the case that a college of FE is entitled, at its own discretion, to turn down a request for use of computer equipment at home, where such support is necessary to complete coursework and achieve full potential?

Eight survey respondents who received an Award in 1996/1997 used some or all of their Award to support mobility -including the purchase of electric and manual wheelchairs. Fifteen years ago, in 1983, Lord Snowdon's speech at the Snowdon Award Scheme Presentation Ceremony asked why it was still the case that the 'system' fails to provide electric wheelchairs suitable for outside use. Regrettably, the question appears as relevant in 1997 as it was in 1983.

On the point of computers for home use, it is interesting to note that the Dearing Report (1997) recognises the trend towards student ownership of PCs within HE and proposes that all students have their own portable laptop by 2005/6. Surely there is an even stronger argument for providing computers and adapted equipment for home use by disabled students, who may need to use computers and Information Technology more intensively and more flexibly than non-disabled peers?

The Snowdon award enabled me to purchase a computer for home, which helped enormously with my studies, enabling me to keep up with the college work and complete my course.

The comment above was made by a student studying in a college of FE. This leads us to the question of entitlements to support within FE colleges in particular. Several of those who used their Awards to pay for computer equipment for home use are studying at FE colleges which enrolled them in full knowledge of support requirements and which are entitled to receive funds from the FEFC to cover depreciation costs of such equipment. Whilst it is not yet the case (although the Tomlinson Report makes clear recommendations to this effect) that FE colleges (and, ideally, HE institutions) are also placed under legal duties to have regard to disabled students, nevertheless -there should surely be a mechanism by which students who disclose their disability, discuss support requirements and are then accepted on a course of study are entitled to receiving the support required to do that course -including, where necessary, use of equipment at home.

The fact that it is only possible for colleges to claim depreciation costs of items of equipment as part of the additional support costs claimed is less than ideal: it may

conspire against the requirements of the student, where the college does not have funds to or is unwilling to purchase equipment. Also less than ideal is the fact that it is up to the discretion of the college whether or not disabled students may use purchased equipment at home for the duration of the course. Where the option to use equipment at home, flexibly and intensively, would make all the difference between a positive and a negative learning experience -then the entitlement should be the student's entitlement to receive such support rather than the college's entitlement to withhold such support.

The question of entitlements to receive and to withhold support cuts to the heart of all the issues raised in this section.

At present, many disabled students have no entitlements to the financial support they require in order to purchase essential 'non-medical help' and equipment, in order even to get around campus and travel between home and college. In this context, the only real "entitlement" that students have is to spend hours researching and applying for charitable support. There is a limit on how much time and effort any individual can or should be expected to put to this end:

Once again I'm faced with the full time job of raising the funds. This is a dilemma I've always got. Do I spend my time trying to facilitate myself being able to junction -and then before you know it, you've spent your whole life trying to facilitate yourself to function ...or do I just try and do what I want to do but with far fewer resources?

Everyone wanted to pass the buck. No one wants to help you. It gets to the point where you spend more time trying to sort out finances than studying.

Several respondents have curtailed their study and thereby career progression simply because of financial hardship. Many others have been forced to make choices between essential items of support -do you pay for a note-taker or a sign interpreter when both are vital but you can only afford one?

These are "choices" that disabled people should not be faced with.

4.10 Conclusion

I think that anybody should get DSA regardless of whether they are self-funding or not. It is discrimination to expect me to fund raise and pay for my own support when other self funding students only have to worry about their fees and maintenance costs.

The lady said she was sorry, but there was nothing she could do. The Secretary of State makes the rules.

The evidence presented points conclusively to the need to take the recommendations proposed by respondents (summarised at the outset of this section) and turn them, into real policy, real funds and real practice.

Quite simply, charities and trusts should not have to meet the basic support requirements of any disabled student. Equally, disabled students -or prospective students -should not have to spend valuable time and energy raising funds and negotiating with funding providers. In the light of the evidence set out in this report, it is hardly surprising that FE and HE are failing to attract more disabled students. If funding providers and governing bodies are committed to a concept of wider participation, then more resources will have to be made available to make it possible.

Section Five

INFORMATION -THE MISSING LINK

Overview

The paucity of accessible and appropriate information is a huge barrier to learning for many people, but especially for disabled people. With information, the door to post-16 education is unlocked and passage into and through the system is made possible. Without information, "choice" is irrelevant: only an informed choice is a real choice. In this section we draw wider lessons from respondents' experiences of information-seeking, identifying the main weaknesses in current information systems. We also evaluate existing sources and providers of information, especially Skill: National Bureau for Students with Disabilities and LEAs.

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Recommendations

1. The recent Government proposal to research the information requirements of students should prioritise the information requirements of disabled students and prospective disabled students.
2. More resources should be targeted at the proactive provision of information about information.
3. Government commitments to improving information provision for all young people and adults must be accompanied by a clear commitment to produce information in accessible formats and to disseminate that information in a proactive manner. How far have the information requirements of disabled people who cannot read standard print or get to a library been taken on board by the promoters of Learning Direct, the national learning helpline?
4. Significant improvements need to be made in the quality of impartial careers and educational advice provided to disabled young people, especially if they are in segregated schools.
5. The services provided by Skill and the Disability Rights Advisory Services (via the *Disability Rights Handbook*) are valued by those who get to hear of these services. Resources should be channelled into publicising the existence and nature of these key information providers.
6. The role of academic staff and non-academic staff as potential gatekeepers to information must be recognised and resourced, especially through staff development and information provision.
7. LEA personnel should be equipped with the information necessary to help all who seek information, irrespective of entitlements to LEA funding.

5.1 Current Issues and Contexts

At long last, information is on the agenda of post-16 education providers. The inadequacies of current information provision and the critical role of quality information and guidance in widening participation in FE and HE have been given due regard in both the Kennedy Report (1997) and Dearing Report (1997).

To widen participation, potential learners need to be able to get information about available opportunities. They need advice and guidance before, during and at the end of their learning experiences ...Current provision is inadequate,' it is patchy in location, in the range of services offered and in its quality ...A national entitlement to information, advice and guidance for all should form part of the national strategy for post-16 learning (Kennedy Report 1997, p. 89)

For students to make well-informed decisions about the higher education programme that they wish to follow, they need clear information and guidance ... Improving counselling and guidance for students is a recurring theme throughout our report (Dearing Report 1997, paragraph 7.28).

As mentioned in Section 3 on 'Profiles of Participation', the dearth of positive and equality-based careers guidance has held back many disabled young people and adults. Entitlements to younger people have recently been enshrined in the *Education Act 1997*, whereby full and impartial guidance on available options is to be provided in schools by the careers service at ages 14 and 16. This is very welcome on condition that equal entitlements and good quality guidance are also provided to disabled young people, in both mainstream and segregated schools.

The Kennedy Report further argues that all adults, whether they are in or out of education, employment or the benefits system, should have a minimum and lifelong entitlement of free initial information and guidance (by telephone, in person or via the internet).

The Government has responded well to the recommendations made by both Kennedy and Dearing reports on information. A free, national help line ~ Learning Direct ~ is now up and running as part of the government's strategies for Lifelong Learning and a University for Industry (DfEE 1998). In addition, and with regard to higher education in particular, the Government has made a commitment to establish a working group to research the information requirements of all students and identify areas where information and its dissemination can be improved.

We hope that the evidence presented here will be taken on board by the Government's working group. If access to information is a barrier for many students, it can be a particular barrier for disabled students -whose information requirements may also be greater than those of non-disabled people.

5.2 Findings from the Snowdon Survey

Several questions relating to information were included in the *Snowdon Survey*. Respondents were asked to stipulate and evaluate the individuals, organisations and publications they had consulted for advice about additional support or sources of funding. These included Skill, careers advisers, students' unions, disability-related organisations and publications such as *Disability Rights Handbook* or *Educational Grants Directory*. Specific information was sought about the information provided by staff at LEAs and within colleges or universities.

In the first half of this section, we set out some general, recurring themes relevant to all information sources and providers. In the second half, we look at the information-seeking strategies of survey respondents. Which sources were used most frequently? Which proved least or most helpful? Are key information providers, such as LEAs, Skill, college/university staff and libraries, rising to the challenge of providing accessible and appropriate information?

The Key Information Issues for Disabled Students

i) Available information and accessible information are two different things.

It would be true to say that, at present, anyone who wants initial advice and guidance can generally get it. The snag is that they need to have the self-confidence and awareness of what is available, to seek it out and to present themselves for it (Kennedy Report 1997, p. 92).

There is another "snag". There may well be several sources of available information. But what if they are located in inaccessible buildings? Produced in inaccessible formats? Depend on having access to typetalk or a Close Circuit Television- (CCTV)? Depend on getting hold of an information provider who "doesn't hang up when you tell them you are deaf? In all these cases (based on the experiences of respondents), available information becomes inaccessible to disabled people.

The predominance of standard print as the sole media for publications on sources of funding and support has proved a particular barrier for survey respondents with 'visual impairments, thereby preventing access to useful (even crucial) information. As a result, several respondents felt they had repeatedly missed out on learning, support and funding opportunities simply because the information they seek does not exist in large print or on tape.

*So, information must be accessible, not simply available. Even more importantly (and this is a factor which is all too often overlooked by service providers), information about information needs to be accessible. Services need to be publicised widely and in ways which will reach disabled people. The "snag" that people need awareness of what is available should lead providers to consider *how people get to hear about available information services in the first place.**

ii) Information-seeking is an uphill struggle

Data presented in Table SA illustrate survey responses to the statement "It took me a long time to get the right information". Over 60% of all respondents agreed or

agreed strongly that information-seeking was time-consuming, compared to 24% who disagreed and a mere 6% who disagreed strongly. This is a clear illustration of the extent to which survey respondents feel they have been let down by information systems.

No information has been readily available. I had to search very hard for any advice or organisations. I feel it is all a very isolating experience.

Several respondents commented on the amount of time they spent running around for the information, being passed from one source to another with no joy, receiving conflicting information from different organisations and so forth. Respondents were concerned that information-seeking took valuable time away from study or training, and made it difficult to get support systems in place prior to starting a course. Information-seeking, as with fund-seeking, costs time and energy.

At this stage, it is important to add that the kind of information sought is not necessarily about basic entitlements to student grants. Indeed, as Table 5B illustrates, a majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they were clear about their eligibility for state funding when they started their course. This finding, combined with the data set out in Table 5A, reflect the likelihood that disabled people's requirements for information extend beyond those of many non-disabled students, since they relate to fund-raising, accessing and organising additional support, etc.

iii) Information-seeking is a greater barrier for part-time and/or FE students

Closer examination of Table 5A shows that part-time students are more disadvantaged than full-time students when it comes to accessing information. Only 22% of part-time students felt they had received good information without too much bother, compared to 35% of full time students. Part-time students were also twice as likely to feel uncertain about whether or not their information-seeking had been smooth and successful -probably reflecting uncertainty about personal entitlements to information and guidance services. Indeed, what can part-time students expect? The Kennedy Report picks up on this issue, arguing that part-time students, many of whom are adult learners, must be brought firmly within the circle of information provision and careers guidance.

Further education students and students on courses which are not eligible for LEA funding consistently find information-seeking more time-consuming and less successful than counterparts within the undergraduate and postgraduate systems. 90% of respondents on "other" courses had difficulty getting the right information - which is cause for serious concern given the role of "other" course providers in

developing the vocational and professional skills of Britain's labour force. Almost 70% of further education students felt likewise -which is again a troubling finding, given recent debates on widening participation and raising the skills profile of the British people via further education colleges.

iv) Information comes too late

A sizeable proportion of respondents were concerned that information comes too late - often once a student had already commenced a course. Respondents felt that the most critical periods for getting hold of the right information were prior to making a decision about where to apply and which course to follow, and prior to starting the course. Yet respondents (especially part-time students) had repeatedly been unsuccessful in this regard.

It was just hard getting the information in the first place. It took me nearly four months to get all the information and by then it's too late.

A common story among respondents was only finding about useful organisations (including Skill), support resources (such as transcription centres), funding sources or entitlements during or even after finishing a course. "If only I'd known..." and "If only I'd had the right advice" were not uncommon sentiments.

v) Not getting the right information can be disastrous and disempowering

Given the complexity of funding, support and general post-16 education systems, it is also not surprising that some respondents have been misinformed, or received contradictory information from different sources.

I was informed that a person couldn't claim Income Support and receive a mandatory grant -but since I have been at University, I have been told that as a disabled student you can ...but I do not know whether this is correct.

Also, several respondents had experienced "false starts" in entry to post-16 education, which they felt were largely attributable- to not having had sufficient information about support, funding, what they could apply for, what their entitlements were and so on. They felt they had made decisions which were not informed -because the information was not available or accessible -and they were then left to struggle on with the consequences, or even withdraw from the course. If cases like these are widespread, then information provision is more than inadequate. How many potential learners, irrespective of disability, end up with a wholly negative experience of post-16 education, sufficient to serve as a deterrent

to future study, because they did not have access to the right information or guidance?

vi) Getting the right information is down to chance

Some respondents reported that their information-seeking had been dependent on luck - coming across information "by accident", "bumping into it", "stumbling across it", even after spending considerable time actively seeking the information but with limited results. Chance also plays a role in whom you get hold of within an organisation or department. Many respondents had found good allies on the "inside" who had greatly facilitated the information-seeking process. Others were not so lucky. In short, there is a widespread feeling that information is patchy and *ad hoc*, making the process of information-seeking a hit-and-miss affair.

5.3 Sources of Information

Table 5C shows the main information sources used by survey respondents. Note that the list below shows the number of respondents who used particular sources, irrespective of whether they found them to be helpful or not.

The most widely used sources of information (individuals or organisations) were

LEAs (63.6%)

Academic Staff (61.2%)

Family/friends (52.4%)

Disability Co-ordinators (51.5%)

Skill Information Service (48.5%)

A significant number of individuals (between 20% and 40% of all respondents) had contacted careers services, students unions, libraries or disability-related organisations. Disability-related professionals (such as social workers, occupational therapists, employment advisers) were mentioned in only 9.2% of cases – but where mentioned, there was often praise for the support received and the work put in by social workers in terms of information-seeking and fund-raising.

The data show the high levels of information seeking routinely conducted by disabled people: most respondents approached several different sources of information. But the data also show that larger numbers of respondents are not going to their LEA for information, are unaware and/or not making full use of Skill's information service, do not regard academic staff as potential sources of information and so forth. Even more troubling are findings on respondent evaluations of information and guidance received.

5.4 Respondent Evaluations of Information Providers

The following is a brief summary of respondent evaluations based on data presented in Table 5C (for all information providers), Table 5D (for LEAs only), Table 5E (for college or university staff only), Tables 5F and 5G (for Skill only) and Table 5H (on publications).

Local Education Authorities

Whilst LEAs were top of the list in terms of the number of students who contacted LEAs to get information, they fared badly in terms of respondent evaluations. 40% of those who contacted an LEA felt they were no help at all. Only 20% found LEAs to have been very helpful and informative, although a further 40% found LEAs to have been of some help. These findings are more or less confirmed in Table 6.4, which shows responses to the statement "Staff at my Local Education Authority (or equivalent) were helpful". Only 34% of all respondents and, importantly, only 26% of part-time students, agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. Over half of all part-time students were dissatisfied or strongly dissatisfied with LEA staff.

If we consider respondent views according to level of study, postgraduate students and students following "other" courses of study were most dissatisfied with LEA staff. This is not, of course, surprising given that LEAs do not provide funding for most postgraduates and students on "other" courses. However, given the important place of LEAs in the sphere of information providers, might it not be possible to hope that they could provide information for individuals even where they are not eligible for LEA support? Nearly half of those respondents on a course of further education or undergraduate study found LEA staff to be fairly or very helpful- a significant minority, then -but nevertheless, a minority.

Academic and non-academic staff at colleges/universities

Academic staff (tutors, lecturers) were consulted by 61.2% of all respondents as a potential source of information and in 80% of cases, they proved to be very or fairly helpful and informative.

Disability co-ordinators were consulted by 51.5% -a high figure given the relatively recent emergence of disability co-ordinators on the post-16 scene (especially in higher education institutions). In almost half of these cases, disability co-ordinators were evaluated as being a big help, and a further 28% of cases viewed them as some help.

A different slant is placed on this positive evaluation by data in Table 5E, which shows responses to the statement "My college or university were/are well informed about provision and funds that disabled students might get from Local Education Authorities and/or social services". Fifty four per cent of all respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that staff were informed on these counts, and a significant number (nearly 20%) were uncertain. Only 21% felt that staff (including non-academic staff) could advise students on LEA or social service provision.

If there is a clear lesson to be learnt it is that academic and non-academic staff are in a prime situation to give information to disabled students and that more can be made of that situation by ensuring that staff are aware of where disabled students can turn to for information and what the basic support entitlements of disabled students might be.

Skill: National Bureau for Students with Disabilities

One of the aspects of Skill's work is to provide information for current or potential disabled students, family members, service providers, disability co-ordinators in colleges and universities, and so forth. Skill's information service is unique in that it exists to provide information across both HE and FE sectors on a range of issues, not least accessing support and financial entitlements. The Skill information service is telephone and email based. In addition, Skill produced several information packs, including clear and accessible details on sources of funding for students in both FE and HE.

Given this unique remit, the number of respondents who were aware and/or utilised the information service or information sheets is less than might be expected (although, as with the situation of disability co-ordinators it has only really been in the 1990s that Skill has expanded its services). Furthermore, it is now the policy of the Snowdon Award Scheme to inform all applicants about the existence of Skill and its services. Nevertheless, only half (48.5%) of all survey respondents claimed to have contacted Skill (although this does not necessarily mean that only half had heard about Skill).

Of those respondents who contacted Skill, almost 80% found them to have been a big help or some help. In addition, Skill was selected out for special comment by several respondents who had been particularly impressed with the information service offered, as the following voices attest:

I spent hours phoning various people, getting passed from pillar to post -not very helpful. I "found" a number for Skill in a handbook for Lupus that I had. I rang and

gained more information from Skill in ten minutes than from any of my immediate and local support centres. Skill were extremely helpful.

I think Skill is a wonderful service -its all there -its a very sensible way of putting out information.

Tables 5F and 5G, both of which are based on responses from 1996 and 1997 Award recipients only, present more detailed information which, hopefully, will be of use to the organisation in developing its role.

Almost 60% of part-time students were not aware of or did not use Skill's information service or get hold of Skill's information packs, even though all of those who used the service and most of those who used the information packs found them to be some help or a big help. On this basis, it can be seen that the problem lies not in the quality of information provided by Skill for part-time students, but in the fact that fewer part-time students are made aware of Skill's services or, if they are aware that Skill exists, they may feel that Skill (along with so many other services in FE and HE) is less interested in part-timers than full-timers.

An even more significant problem lies with Skill's apparent failure to reach students in further education and/or the failure of the FE sector to make its students aware of Skill's existence. 10 of the 16 respondents who had received an Award in 1996/1997 and were studying at FE level did not approach Skill, while of the six who did approach them, two found them to be unhelpful. Again, given the proactive way in which the Snowdon Award Scheme promotes Skill's work to applicants, this figure is troubling. The most likely explanation revolves around perceptions (real or misplaced) that Skill is more interested in and geared towards undergraduates and universities. If this is the image that Skill is generating, then clearly something has to be done to correct that image and ensure that FE students are as likely to see Skill as a service for them as for HE students. Certainly, most HE students, both undergraduate and postgraduate, appear pleased with Skill's service, as do students on "other" courses -who no doubt derive particular support from Skill given the lack of support that seems to be experienced when they approach LEAs for information!

Other Publications As illustrated in Table 5H (also based on 1996/97 Award recipients), Skill's information sheets top the list as the main publication used by survey respondents to get information on funding entitlements and sources. They also top the list in popularity with 79% finding them useful. The Disability Rights Handbook comes a close second in terms of popularity, although only one-quarter of all respondents were aware of it or used it as a resource. So, as with so many

information providers, the message is that available information may be good quality but it is not accessible -it is not sufficiently publicised to its target audience.

The *Educational Grants Directory* was well used and well appreciated -which is unsurprising given the amount of fund-raising so many Snowdon Award holders have to do. Far fewer respondents used the Charities Digest. Finally, it is regrettable that only one-quarter of respondents made use of *Higher Education and Disability*, even though 70% of respondents were in the HE sector. Also, of all the publications listed, Higher Education and Disability is least valued: just under half of those who consulted it found it unhelpful.

Other Information Providers

Almost 90% of respondents who approached the R.N.I.B. were pleased with the information and support received -several respondents mentioned hearing first about the Snowdon Award Scheme through the R.N.I.B. student information pack or charity listings.

Less positive evaluations were made of the capacity of R.N.I.D., SCOPE or Guide Dogs for the Blind to provide information on post-16 study. In addition, several respondents had found local organisations and disability networks helpful. The Foundation for Communication of the Disabled was also cited frequently as a good source of guidance.

Careers Services (including those provided in 5schools) and Student Unions appear to be particularly poor at providing information. 45% of those who used a careers service were dissatisfied, whilst 60% of those who went to the Student Union for help felt that they were given no help or information at all. This is compounded by the tiny fraction of survey respondents who felt they received any form of support from their Students Union.

Last, but by no means least, due recognition must be given to the role of friends and family in providing information and guidance, and assisting in information-seeking. Only a tiny fraction of those who turned to family and friends for guidance were disappointed with the results.

5.5 Conclusion

We conclude, in line with findings presented by the Kennedy Report (1997), that current information provision is wholly inadequate and ineffectual. We argue that this is especially the case for disabled people, whose access to information is restricted.

Inadequate information provision is a major barrier to widening participation. It also compounds the difficulties presented by inadequate funding provision, where individuals are not aware of their entitlements (no matter how few) or of alternative sources of support. If widening participation is on the agenda, then a coherent system of information, advice and guidance is not simply desirable -it is essential. Clear, readily available, straightforward information in fully accessible formats and proactively disseminated to disabled people, among others, is essential for people to make the right choice, or to have any choice at all.

There is no choice without information.

Everyone should be entitled to obtain the help they need to make sound decisions (Kennedy Report 1997: 89).

Section Six

MEETING THE "CHALLENGE"

Overview

In this penultimate section, we move away from the macro-issues of funding, getting support and finding information, and focus instead on the actions of disabled students and the experiences of survey respondents during and after post-16 study.

Disabled students are active in processes of change, within the colleges and universities they attend, in wider society and in the workplace. Whilst recognising the value of individual action and achievements, we also argue that the specific "challenges" faced and met by disabled people are barriers to their participation which exist over and above the standard challenges of post-16 study faced by all students. Thus, steps must be taken to ensure that future students be enabled to meet the challenges expected of all students, irrespective of disability, without the added struggle of overcoming social, attitudinal and financial barriers.

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- 6.1 Current Issues and Contexts
- 6.2 Findings from the *Snowdon Survey*
- 6.3 Why Post-16 Study?
- 6.4 What is the Current Situation of Award Holders?
- 6.5 Advice from the Frontline

What advice would you give to prospective disabled students?

Is it worth it?

6.6 Conclusion

Recommendations

1. Give full recognition to the role *of* disabled people (as individuals and collectively) in bringing about change and removing barriers to post -16 education.
2. Recognise and, as a matter *of* urgency, redress the inequities *of* a system which demands far more from a disabled student than a non-disabled student.
3. Introduce enforceable civil-rights based legislation to recognise the equal entitlement *of* disabled people to post -16 education and employment opportunities.

6.1 Current Issues and Contexts

By now, whether from this report or others, it will be clear that the barriers to disabled people's participation in FE and HE are considerable. It will be equally clear, again from this report and others, that disabled people are seeking entry to FE and HE, are gaining qualifications, and are contributing socially and economically where they are given equal opportunities to do so.

Without doubt, much of the progress in dismantling disabling barriers must be attributed to the activism, thought and practical achievements which have sprung from disabled people's movements and individuals who have been through the system, changing it from the inside. This is true also for FE and HE. Evidence from the Tomlinson, Kennedy and Dearing Reports all point to rising demand for higher level qualifications across the board. This is no different for disabled students, as Cooper and Corlett (1996), Hurst (1996) and Johnstone (1995) affirm.

Disabled students are seeking or considering access to FE and HE in ever larger numbers. They are increasingly seeking outsider support, developing a stronger sense of entitlement to equal opportunities for learning, and demanding better services and awareness of disability by providers of teaching, services and funding. All of this makes for a positive case scenario: a constant and, hopefully, growing stream of disabled entrants to FE and HE *should* make for a constant and growing awareness of system strengths and weaknesses. This trend is confirmed by the sudden rise in research into post -16 provision and funding for disabled students. We might therefore conclude that disability in FE and HE is on the agenda, because disabled students are @n the enrolment registers.

Within this positive case scenario, there is also cause for concern: how far will disabled people's individual successes in participating in FE and HE, despite the social, attitudinal and financial barriers, be deployed as an excuse by funding providers, governing bodies and so forth to leave current systems in place, or only address barriers on an *ad hoc* basis, as and when individual disabled people enter a department or college?

In the light of this potential paradox, this section attempts to tread a fine line: to acknowledge the achievements of respondents, and disabled students in general, in accessing areas of education and employment which have long been inaccessible, and continue to be less than inclusive ... BUT, at the same time, to flag up what might be regarded as the central message of this report: that there is no justification for leaving intact the specific "challenges" of post-16 education faced by disabled students alone. Further, there is no justification for requiring disabled people to go to extreme lengths and display skills beyond that which would be expected of their peers simply to access the same opportunities to succeed and achieve that are the entitlement of non-disabled people.

6.2 Findings from the Snowdon Survey

Questions in the main survey and attached flyer (which was used to solicit more qualitative data from respondents and provide an opportunity for respondents to shape the report agenda) generated the following information: why respondents had sought entry to post-16 study, what respondents gained from the experience, what advice respondents would give to potential disabled students, and whether or not they felt post-16 study was worthwhile, based on their own experiences. Information was also generated about the current situation of former Award holders.

6.3 Why post-16 study?

The question "why post-16 study" has been included in a small number of research projects. In the IER survey (Hogarth *et al* 1997), findings suggest that disabled people were significantly less likely to enter HE for reasons of "natural progression" (that is, expected progression from school to university) than non-disabled counterparts: only 50% of disabled graduates cited this as a reason compared to 65% of non-disabled graduates. Meanwhile, disabled graduates were more likely than non-disabled graduates to see HE as a way of enhancing self-esteem, social status and/or employment prospects or as an alternative to unemployment.

The *Snowdon Survey* findings produce a similar picture. Table 6A and the accompanying figure give a good indication of what respondents were hoping for

and/or have gained from FE or HE. The chance to gain knowledge and the chance to improve job prospects are top of the list for 88.3% and 83.5% of respondents respectively. These are followed by "opportunity for self-development" (77.7% of respondents) and a "chance to prove my own ability and worth" (73.3% of respondents).

Knowledge

The desire for knowledge is matched by the diverse nature of the knowledge sought by survey respondents. The following examples give a taster of the courses pursued by survey respondents:

| | | |
|---------------------------|------------------------|---------------------|
| Development Studies | Jewellery Design | Biological Sciences |
| Marine Laboratory Studies | Information Technology | Social Work |
| Theatre Studies | Journalism | Hairdressing |
| Catering | German | Syriac Studies |
| Business Studies | Accountancy | Legal Practice |
| Electrical Engineering | Physics | Osteopathy |

Source: *Snowdon Survey Findings*

The comment was made by a few respondents that the desire for knowledge should be reason enough to do a course of study, but that the current climate tends to gloss over this for all students, irrespective of disability. As has been mentioned (in earlier discussions of funding sources), the Snowdon Award Scheme does not use "future prospects" as a basis on which to distribute Awards. That said, it is clear from the findings that a majority of respondents see their chosen course both in terms of acquiring knowledge and as inseparable from their chosen career path.

Improving Employment Prospects

In Table 6B, the link between further or higher education and opportunities to gain employment in 1990s Britain could not be clearer. Only 44% of survey respondents who received an Award in 1981-87 regard their course of study as very important to their career, compared to almost twice that number for 1996 and 1997 recipients (80% and 78.5% respectively). The view that higher qualifications are crucial for future employment is shared by over half of all respondents who received an Award since 1990.

The importance of post-16 qualifications to the job prospects of disabled people is widely recognised, given the barriers to equal employment opportunities that continue to characterise the British working environment. Later in this section, we consider the post-study situation of former Award holders to see how far facilitating participation in FE and HE has enabled individual Award holders to follow a career.

Self-Development and Proving Self-Worth

Earlier, in analysis of the profiles of survey respondents and of disabled students in general, reference was made to the lower expectations that society in general and significant others in particular (including family members, peers and professionals) often have of, and impose on, disabled people whether by design or default. Mention was also made of the inadequacies of much segregated schooling when it comes to encouraging disabled young people to progress to further and higher education, as a matter of course and a route towards widening career options.

Given pervasive negative attitudes towards disabled people and assumptions of inability, ineducability, unemployability and dependency, it is not surprising that so many Award holders should view entry to FE and HE as a chance to prove, to themselves and others (including prospective employers) that they are equally capable if given equal opportunities.

Other Hopes and Gains from Post-16 Study Around half of all respondents viewed one or more of the following as an important reason for their entry to study: social life, social status, life and/or vocational skills and higher earnings. For 69 respondents, post-16 study was a valuable alternative to and route out of unemployment. 45 respondents were looking to retrain after the onset or progression of an impairment, and 55 respondents were eager to move out of a parental home and (in most cases) have the chance to get the whole university experience of living away from home. Several respondents added their own comments on what they had been looking for and gained from study, including: self-confidence, assertiveness, respect, credibility, academic challenge, and as a vital stepping stone to higher levels of study (e.g. doing an Access course to make the crossing into HE, or doing an MA with a view to undertaking doctoral research).

It gave me that extra bit of higher qualification to enable me to compete -you have to prove yourself a little bit more when you're disabled.

Although I've never worked, I feel my studies are helping me greatly towards my aim of employment in the future.

I hope to prove to people that I can get a respectable job regardless of my disability.

A good qualification is almost a must for getting a job.

If you're not well educated, you get passed over ...[never had a very good start - working class families never encouraged it -but I'm working at it.

In my day there was never a chance to go to a 'normal' school, so I feel I missed many opportunities. I have made up for it in studies as a mature student.

A chance to prove that when given equal access I can achieve my full potential.

A vindication after being told to give up education

6.4 What is the current situation of Award Holders?

As part of the evaluation element of the *Snowdon Survey*, the Trustees and Research Team felt that it would be appropriate to learn the current situation of Snowdon Award holders. This information serves the crucial purpose of emphasising the relationship between access to post -16 education and access to employment opportunities. This relationship is central to the socio-economic justification of extra funding and support for disabled students. The expansion of the DSA (Disabled Students Allowances) to part-time, postgraduate and pre-graduate learners would be a sound investment for the current government to make. The current situation of *Snowdon Survey* respondents is testimony to that.

Table 6C and the accompanying chart give some idea of the value of Snowdon Awards to survey respondents with respect to employment. 45% of survey respondents are engaged in study or training (not surprising given the composition of the sample); 31 % are in full-time or part-time employment; 12% are actively seeking work and 8% are out of the labour force.

The large number currently in study or training is to be expected given the nature of the survey sample (higher levels of participation from recent Award recipients). It is also, however, symptomatic of the quest for higher level qualifications in order to compete in the current, and exclusionary, labour market:

Preferably I would be working and would have already established the beginning of my employment history. Instead I find myself continuing to study in the hope that academic qualifications will lead me into appropriate employment.

Several respondents also point to the "benefit trap" as a factor which exacerbates the need for disabled people to remain on benefits unless they can find a secure and relatively well- paid job:

I feel more disabled students need higher education in order to achieve employment in high paid jobs ...only high earners can afford to get out of the benefit trap.

I'm working full time now. But it took me- a long time to take up a job because I was frightened of losing the security of benefits and hence my home and income ...I am now frightened of losing my job and having to rely on benefits which are insecure.

The situation of the small but still significant number of individuals currently seeking work is a situation shared by at least one million disabled people of working age in the UK and is symptomatic not of individual inability to work but of social inability to grant full employment rights to disabled people and to dispel prevalent myths about what disabled people can and cannot do. Almost without exception, respondents who felt that their hopes for employment had not been fulfilled expressed concern and anger at the attitudes of non- disabled employers towards them ...even (perhaps especially?) in areas where disabled people have traditionally been cast as service-recipients rather than service-providers, such as social work and counselling. There was also a widespread feeling that things will not improve unless and until there is an adequate and rights-based legislative framework which can be enforced.

Frustration at the difficulties of getting work for which respondents were fully qualified also came out in responses to the question "What else might the scheme consider funding (other than study or training)?" Top of the list were suggestions that related to employment, provision of work experience, support for business initiatives by disabled people, and funding a better careers guidance service.

Several respondents felt that their potential has not been tapped and that attitudinal and structural barriers to equal opportunity are the root cause of this.

It seems that disabled people are able to get into places for study and training, and they succeed. But the community is not prepared to use these skills.

The barriers to employment, then, are as entrenched as barriers to education, if not more so. Despite this, disabled people are getting jobs and pursuing careers across the whole range of employment possibilities -as is neatly illustrated in the

following examples, which lists some of the occupations engaged in by former Award holders.

| | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Research Fellow | Forensic Scientist |
| Primary School Teacher | Financial Systems Analyst |
| FE College, Head of Department | Graphics Illustrator |
| Tax Inspector | Trainee Solicitor |
| Management Consultant | BBC Producer |
| Sales Assistant | Adult Education Tutor |
| Actuarial Software Developer | Social Worker |
| Computer Programmer | Administrative Officer |

Source: *Snowdon Survey Findings*

Several respondents provided further information on their current situation and how further or higher education, itself made possible by a Snowdon Award, had been the major factor in getting employment or creating opportunities to make a voluntary contribution to society:

I believe it helped me get my first job and of course then you can "prove yourself" ...now I have been working full time for 6 years and have excellent prospects in my current job.

I recently heard that I have got a traineeship at the BBC ...I start after I finish my post-grad. I know that doing the radio course will have helped me get the job.

Being qualified helps you get your foot in the door:

For me, it has been the key to my life ...If someone had told me prior to 1985 that I would reach a position where I managed other people, conducted their annual appraisals, got up at all hours of the night to sort out problems in some of the most critical computer systems ...I think I would have laughed. Now I can say with pride "been there, done that one" .. a degree can really make a difference.

Finally, and given the high number of survey respondents who are currently in study or training, it seems only fitting to include some of their voices on the value of post-16 study, irrespective of employment opportunities.

I 'm enjoying college. Sometimes I find it hard going but [I'm determined to succeed. I enjoy descriptive writing most of all and the actual thing of going to college and having a purpose to me day -plus the sense of achievement and the friends I've made.

No-one believed I could be educated. I am now working towards an M.Phil.

I enjoy education again now -I may not be in the higher echelons, but I do enjoy it -its given me something to go for.

6.5 Advice from the Frontline

In this final section, we present some of the advice offered by respondents to those who considering entry to FE or HE. Indeed, the questions "Is it worth it?" and "What 'advice do you have for other disabled people considering further or higher education?" (both of which appeared in the flyer rather than the main survey) were consistently questions which generated detailed and personal responses.

The advice of survey respondents is important" on several counts. First, the fact that the request for advice triggered so many responses is sufficient justification for disseminating some of that advice. Secondly, the advice is based firmly on the experiences of current and former students and speaks volumes about the ways in which individual disabled students have approached -or, more accurately -have had to approach post-16 study.

Here we return to comments made at the outset of this section. As a result of social, financial and attitudinal barriers to FE and HE, disabled students have to rise to "challenges" which far exceed those normally expected ~f non-disabled peers. Whilst this attests to the capabilities and capacities of disabled people, it remains inequitable and insupportable. Barriers must be removed so that disabled students can face and enjoy the same challenges faced by non-disabled students.

The following words have all been used by survey respondents to describe the personal qualities, skills and characteristics they have required simply to make it into and through college or university:

self-confident
pleasant

assertive
persistent

motivated
firm

articulate
friendly

| | | | |
|-------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------------|
| make no enemies | enthusiastic | organised | know your rights |
| tough | strong | professional | hard to intimidate |
| politically aware | determined | thorough | a step ahead |
| honest | adamant | optimistic | strong-minded |

Source: *Snowdon Survey* findings.

These qualities have been necessary to make the initial decision to go for further or higher education, to gain entry, organise human support, organise specialist equipment, raise funds, liaise with student services and academic staff, secure access to buildings, course materials, lectures and tutorials, make exam arrangements, get information about entitlements, learn who to approach for support and how to approach them, solve problems when support systems go wrong, etc

So, then, the following voices offer more than advice. They are a reminder to colleges and universities, funding councils, student support workers, non-disabled students and, above all, to funders and decision-makers in government of the capacities of disabled people and the inequities of the current system.

What advice do you have for prospective disabled students?

Don't take no for an answer: Go and see somebody else because another person might have a different attitude.

Make sure that you help to make the system regarding disabilities work by being honest and outspoken about your disability. Be frank about your needs and do not hesitate to complain if you think that your needs are not being met ...It is not our fault that we have got a disability and we have the right to education and employment just as much as any non-disabled person.

Make yourself known and ask for help -although initially this could be very difficult and intimidating. Make sure before you start your particular course that you have all the grants and social security benefits you are entitled to.

Wherever possible stay ahead of the game ...it is important to consider the worst case scenario and build in as many safeguards as possible... what happens if the book isn't available, your reader has left, you are ill, the equipment is broken, the carer hasn't turned up and you have no transport -the essay is due to be handed in tomorrow. It seems far-fetched but it isn't?

With forward planning, research, adequate support, relevant funding and ; organisation it can work and in fact does work successfully for many students. Make sure you know your needs and have everything in place to meet them when you commence your course. I believe that being organised is the key aspect.

Don't let anyone or anything put you off

There are a lot of people who are ignorant to what disabled people can and can't do ...and its not because they're trying to be difficult, they just don't know what its like. I think you need to be very assertive as a disabled student ...you've got to be know what you want.

Keep fighting and don't let people wear you down.

I would make sure I had a greater understanding of the time required -over and above a full week in the classroom -for study and extra work.

You will, on occasions wonder why you are doing what you are doing. The pressures of your disability, the attitudes of others, or just the course itself will make you want to give up. Staying focused on your true original aims will help you reach the goal.

To succeed -they must make themselves' heard'! If they feel they're being treated unjustly, they must talk to someone about it and not keep quiet. They must, like myself, visit all of their prospective universities before applying, and meet a Disability Officer to discuss any additional requirements ...if possible speak to disabled students to find their views on the university and whether or not they are fully supported.

Approach Student Services before you start. How can someone help, if you don't tell them you need any help? -find out who to speak to and talk to them.

- 1. Researching about what resources there are available either from local authority sources, college access/hardship funds, college tutors or private charities etc. is an essential part of embarking on a course and one that must be undertaken thoroughly and as early as possible before the course starts.*
- 2. It is important to find an ALLY among either staff or students, someone who understands or sympathises with the problems faced by disabled students. Such people do exist! and if you find such people then it will make your time at college all the easier: Forget about people who discriminate or sideline you, there are plenty of those around, but don't get upset by them. If anyone*

really discriminates against you, you should always report them -you don't have to put up with that.

3. *Always remember that the teaching staff actually want you to succeed and obtain your course qualification. Have the CONFIDENCE to approach them. To get their advice and help is your right but they are often extremely over- worked so it is good to be aware of this.*
4. *It is a good idea to find out straight away whether there is any kind of group for disabled students, either a working group or just a social club -I did not realise there was a disability working party at my University until my last year:*

(abridged citation)

1. *Actively seek skills in information technology. With a visual impairment, IT has proved essential for course work, note-taking and exams.*
2. *Actively seek help and assert your individual needs with each tutor and lecturer. Very often they are unsure of how to broach potentially difficult areas of concern and you can actually allay their fears by demonstrating your own confident attitude. With my tutors, I told them openly that it would be OK for them not to worry about making mistakes, some accepted this willingly others were intent on being infallible, but then you can't win them all!*
3. *Introduce yourself personally to library staff. Again if you demonstrate that you can manage your own disability then it helps them to understand that they also need not fear it. Libraries can be notoriously "user unfriendly" to the visually impaired, and some students will require more help than others in sourcing material/text, depending on what residual vision there is. So don't be afraid to explore your needs in the context of what is available and don't be surprised if you discover that you may have to teach the librarians a trick or two also. Yes, you can ask them to stretch their activities to arranging for photocopying to be done in the format best suited to you and in digging out dusty old exam papers etc. Where possible always try to find a more senior librarian who can perhaps arrange your needs with one particular member of the staff in the library.*
4. *Actively seek course booklets well in advance of the course. This is probably one of the most difficult concepts for lecturers to understand, as often they are so disorganised that it is weeks into the course before the booklet is issued. For the visually impaired student to keep up with the course, they MUST have ample time in which to source reading texts, journals etc.*
5. *Ensure that you are familiar with exam conditions and formats of exam papers. (abridged citation)*

Is it worth it?

I believe it is worth it in the long run as I feel I've really achieved something -BUT it hasn't been easy and if you are thinking about going into a mainstream college then you really need to make sure that the college is fully aware of your needs.

To other disabled people considering taking up further education -do it!! I am enjoying the academic challenges of my course and the improved social life I have gained as a result. The Snowdon Award has been terrific and has let me enjoy the opportunities even more.

I have only one piece of advice go, do it... whatever else happens go for it. Its hard, but great fun and a massive learning experience, academically and socially. The important thing is don't let anyone or anything stop you.

Study or further training is worth it! It made all the difference to me -the chance to see what I could do and to succeed.

Do not give up, the end result is worth a thousand times more than one might think.

6.6 Conclusion

Disabled people are currently expected to overcome significant barriers simply to get the chance to face, and enjoy, the standard challenges of post-16 education. This is not equitable and, given the evidence provided here of the value of FE and HE to survey respondents in terms of career progression, nor is it justifiable on socio-economic grounds.

The relationship between getting higher level qualifications and securing suitable and well- paid employment is even more important for disabled people than it is for most non- disabled people. A qualification acts as a foot in the door, proof of ability in the face of negative social attitudes, and a key factor in building the confidence, ambitions and capabilities of disabled people whose careers have often been held back by low expectations, poor quality schooling and careers guidance.

Finally, as several respondents noted, having a qualification is only part of the struggle. Disabled people still face considerable barriers to equal opportunities in employment and will doubtless continue to do so until such time as disability is fully recognised -as an equal opportunities issue and a legislative framework commensurate with that approach is established.

Section Seven

LOOKING AHEAD

Overview

This section serves as a conclusion to the *Snowdon Survey*. We provide a brief discussion, at the request of the Trustees of the Snowdon Award Scheme, of the potential numbers of disabled students likely to enter post-16 study in the immediate and longer-term future, who might require support from charities and trusts. We then collect and list all the recommendations made in the report, before concluding the *Snowdon Survey* with a summary of respondent views on what the future might hold for disabled students in post-16 study.

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- 7.1 Looking and Planning Ahead: how many? how much?
- 7.2 Hopes and Fears for the Future
- 7.3 Conclusion

List of Tables (included in Appendix 1):

Table 7A Respondent Views: "Do you feel informed about proposed or possible changes"?

Recommendations

The Government and funding bodies should act on the following points:

1. over three-quarters of *Snowdon Survey* respondents, including many currently in post-16 study, do not feel informed about imminent or possible changes to funding post-16 study and are concerned about this;
2. survey respondents are concerned that the increased financial contribution expected of all students will disproportionately affect disabled students, deterring many of them from seeking entry to higher education; and
3. survey respondents are concerned about possible changes in the benefits system which might compound the financial disadvantages already faced by disabled students in FE and HE.

- 7.1 Looking and Planning Ahead: how many? how much?

Questions of "how many disabled students will there be?" and "how much will it cost to support them financially?" remain unanswered and unanswerable.

The most obvious, and well-recognised, factor which prevents reliable estimates of *current* student numbers, let alone accurate projections of future student numbers, is the dearth of accurate and comparable statistics.

Recently, attempts have been made to increase the quality and quantity of statistics on disabled people's participation in FE and HE. In the FE sector, the very recent FEFC *Mapping Provision* project was designed to establish current numbers of disabled students in FE, and preliminary estimates of "internal" and "external" unmet support requirements. In the HE sector, part of the remit of the Higher Educational Statistics Agency, still only a few years old, is to improve statistical data on the participation and progression of all students, including disabled students.

Where any data is based on institutional returns, reliability is suspect since many students may elect not to disclose a disability for fear of "paper rejection". Around 20% of the *Snowdon Survey* respondents did not disclose their disability' at application, preferring to wait until an interview was secured or, even, a place was secured. Also, institutional capacity to collect accurate data varies widely. **In** addition, there is the question of *comparing* statistics that are generated: have the same definitions of impairment and disability been utilised? are all students, including part-time students, included in the dataset? do institutional figures include students who are registered as disabled or students who require additional support because of an impairment?

The paucity of reliable data has meant that both the Tomlinson Report and the Dearing Report have been unable to provide statistical projections for the future. Indeed, the Tomlinson Report states that:

Regretfully we have had to conclude that it is possible at the moment only to make incomplete estimates of the incidence of learning difficulties and/or disabilities in the population. The data we would need in order to do better have not been collected, presumably because public policy has not hitherto embraced the desire to offer further education to adults with learning difficulties [and/or disabilities] (Tomlinson Report 1996, p. 7)..

The Tomlinson Report goes on to indicate the huge difference in available estimates of the number of disabled people in the population as a whole. The OPCS disability surveys, conducted in the mid-1980s, estimated that there were 49,000 disabled 16 to 19 year olds, although the 1991 census calculated that there

were around 72,000 16 to 19 years olds "with a limiting long-term illness". Statistics on the number of disabled people of working age are also markedly different: anywhere from 2 million (1991 census) to 3 million (1993 Labour Force Survey) to 6 million (1992 General Household Survey).

Recent estimates suggest that there are less than 30,000 undergraduates who declare a 'disability' in HE, with around 130,000 disabled students in further education. The only conclusion to draw is that the potential for growth in participation is significant, given the clear under-representation of disabled people in all sectors of post-16 study.

Current figures for school attendance (DfEE 1997) are also difficult to use in order to predict entry into FE and HE, since not all young people with statements of special educational needs would, for example, fit into the remit of the Snowdon Award Scheme were they to enter FE or HE, nor would they necessarily require the kinds of additional support funded by the DSA. So, the basic data that there are 87,330 pupils with statements on roll in segregated schools and 70,080 pupils with statements on roll in state secondary schools do not, in fact, help charities and trusts like the Snowdon Award Scheme plan ahead and make an informed decision as to how (if at all) to publicise the Scheme. Nor are government funding providers any the wiser as to what the take-up of DSAs might be if they were extended to part-time students, postgraduates and those taking a second degree to retrain.

Again, there are also difficulties in ascertaining the amount of monies required by disabled students. As has been stated, disabled people are individuals with differing requirements. Not all disabled students require 'non-medical help'. Not all disabled students require expensive specialist equipment. So, again, it is all too easy to dig up data which encourages alarmist projections from which funding providers shrink.

There can be little doubt, given the views set out in this survey, that more disabled students would make use of the DSA or a Snowdon Award if they were entitled to or aware of such provision. No doubt, the Trustees of the Snowdon Award Scheme should prepare for a rise in applications following publication and dissemination of this report. Already, several respondents have expressed surprise that the Snowdon Award Scheme is open to providing bursaries over 2 or 3 years, and an intention to approach the Award Scheme again.

Certainly, it will involve additional funding -especially in the short-term -to widen and support the participation of disabled people in post-16 study. Equally, in the longer term, it will cost society and economy far more dearly if this is not done. Surely the alarmist projections and fears upon which reluctance to provide

entitlements to support for all disabled students are founded are less than significant compared to the much more alarming realities of massive under-representation and financial hardship which are so clearly the experience of Britain's disabled students?

7.2 Hopes and Fears for the Future

From the concerns of funding providers, to the concerns and expectations of disabled students. By far the overwhelming concern of respondents relates to funding - a concern exacerbated by lack of information: 75% of respondents do not feel informed about imminent or possible changes to funding post-16 study (Table 7 A).

More specifically, the concerns expressed by respondents relate to the following questions..

- What will the impact of tuition fees be on future disabled students?
- What will the impact of increasing student debts be on future disabled students?
- What will the impact of alterations in the Benefits system be for current and future disabled students?
- Will the government ever take the dangerous step of making the DSA a loan rather than a grant?
- Will colleges and universities, increasingly oriented to profit and/or financial survival, become even less willing to accept and accommodate disabled students? Will calculations of projected financial hardship make the prospect of FE or HE too risky to contemplate, given barriers to employment beyond study? Will funding continue to depend on luck rather than on rights?
- Will only disabled students from wealthy backgrounds find themselves in a position to undertake post-16 study?
- Is all the talk of participation simply talk, which lacks political will and financial commitment?

How will disabled students pay for carers on top of fees? If disabled students can't get to university, won't this decrease their chances of getting a job even more?

Many disabled students will be put off going on to higher education, due to the financial cost.

The competitive nature of educational establishments may result in more reluctance to accept people who need extra support.

It is going to be much more difficult for all students -how disabled students will cope really worries me.

Lets face it -they're cutting the grants of able-bodied students -what can disabled students expect?!

The respondents expressed hopes that policy-makers would address the following issues:

- enforceable legislation with full entitlements to equality;
- equal opportunities for education and employment;
- a one-stop shop for information on and provision of funding for study;
- increased provision of DSAs for other students;
- disability equality training across all staff in all colleges and universities;
- provision of work experience opportunities which do not incur benefit loss;
- accessible environments;
- larger numbers of disabled people in higher education;
- a duty on colleges and universities to provide for disabled students;
- increased choices for mainstreaming at school age;
- better information;
- better careers advice;
- financial support for any disabled student who can only study part-time as a result of impairment-related requirements;
- removal of financial barriers to learning for all disabled people; and
- proactive encouragement to enter HE.

As society comes to see us as fellow human beings, the system will work better.

I think it can only get better.

We should have the same opportunities as all other students -anyone who wants to study should be able to and not be restricted by disability or financial situation.

I hope that disabled students will come to be seen as 'normal' in the sense that with the right support they can do just as well as non-disabled colleagues.

In summary, concerns -exacerbated by a lack of information -centre on funding and the ways in which financial pressures will deter future students from entering FE or HE. Expectations are as high as the concerns are real -and this is surely a catalyst for positive change and a more enabling and learning society.

7.3 Conclusion

When I was at university, there was nothing beyond the maximum student grant. Now I know that you can get up to £6000 on top of the student grant through the three kinds of disability grant. The only question I've got is: is the Snowdon Award really necessary any more?

The existence of a (now non-means tested) Disabled Students Allowance for full-time first-time undergraduates has firmly established the principle that disabled students should be entitled to sufficient financial support to meet the additional study costs related to a disability or impairment. The inequity of applying this principle to only those who are full-time and first-time undergraduates has become increasingly apparent over recent years - and has certainly emerged from the responses to the *Snowdon Survey*.

It is insupportable that the decision, even the necessity, to enrol in part-time study, in postgraduate study, on a course of non-advanced study or to retrain following onset of an impairment, remove the individual from the sphere of entitlement to support required for post-16 study. To self-finance fees and living costs is one thing - to self-finance fees, living costs, 'non-medical help' or specialist equipment or extra photocopying or extra travel costs - that is quite another; There can be little doubt that projected financial hardship and the risks of leaving the "benefit trap" only to end up in a "debt trap" have deterred disabled people from taking advantage of opportunities for post-16 study.

So, regrettably, the answer to the question posed by a former Award holder is, "Yes:

Snowdon Awards are still necessary". What is more, they are necessary to meet basic and essential support requirements without which further study would be inadequately supported and, in some cases, impossible. There is a limit on how far charitable trusts like the Snowdon Award Scheme will be able to, or should be expected to, make up for these large-scale inequities.

In an ideal world, Snowdon Awards would not be so crucial to our survival in the education system.

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