

# **Double Discrimination? Gender and Disability in Access to the Labour Market**

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## Abstract

We asked about the experience of a group who may be doubly disadvantaged in the labour market, discriminated against through gender and disability. Available evidence does not show how discrimination works for disabled women moving out of higher education, compared with men. Something happens to disadvantage them as they move on, but we know little, if anything, about what that is. The project aimed to fill that gap and understand how disabled women's final year at university could better translate into good quality, sustainable employment and career opportunities in professional, managerial and senior official roles. Our aims were refined during the project, but remained essentially unchanged.

We used three strategies. First a literature review justified the research by showing how little is known about how disability and gender interact in disadvantaging disabled women in accessing quality employment. Then, secondary analysis of existing national data compared employment outcomes for recent male and female disabled graduates. Its first stage was to 'scope' sixteen existing datasets, assessing their usefulness for investigating disabled graduates' employment outcomes. The Census Sample of Anonymised Records (CSAR) and the Survey of Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (HESA) were then further analysed to investigate relationships between gender, disability and employment among recent graduates, using logistic regression (CSAR data), investigating both the direct association between gender, disability and outcomes, and the indirect effect, whereby differences in outcomes are associated with care-giving, ethnicity, family type, health status and region of residence. Thirdly we made a qualitative exploration of the experiences of final-year disabled students and recent graduates about career development, advice-seeking and job searching, comparing men and women, and comparing the accounts of young disabled people with those of employers and university careers officers.

Our original two-year timetable was reduced (by HEESF) to 15 months. We have adjusted the research design in minor ways accordingly. Dissemination plans have been particularly affected: we have prioritised completing the research and attached final report. We have major work on which to draw for academic publications and are giving the first research seminar at York University in October. We are also disseminating through our advisory group, publishing the final report on the website, with Findings and Recommendations to be distributed to key employers, university careers and disability departments, policy-makers and disability/equality organisations.

Our literature review about disability and gender as sources of discrimination strongly justified the current project, showing even less research than we expected on the way they interact to disadvantage disabled women in accessing and sustaining



quality employment or how higher education might offset disadvantage for disabled young women.

Disabled graduates were less likely to be in paid employment, less likely to be working full-time, and less likely to occupy higher-ranking occupations than their non-disabled peers. Disability and gender interact to bring particular disadvantage to disabled women. Degree subjects, with men predominant in mathematics, computer science, engineering and technology, and women in languages, biological sciences and health-related subjects, contribute to, but do not fully explain gender differences in employment outcomes.

Most students were positive about specialist support at university, but less positive about their home departments' accommodation to their needs. They described inadequate communication between specialist support services and departments, inexperienced departments unwilling to support students' specific learning requirements and being denied accommodation to their needs because lecturers feared giving them unfair advantage. Students felt that generic careers advice was rarely helpful for disabled students: many took their own routes through specialist organisations outside university. Specialist placement or internship schemes for disabled students were important in career choice, development and job-seeking.

Disabled graduate women were much more likely than men to have entered public sector employment. Public sector conditions may be advantageous: part-time working, flexible hours and family-friendly policies may enable women to reconcile work and family. But public sector pay may limit disabled women's lifetime earnings.

Despite being somewhat better qualified and enjoying similar terms of employment, women earned less on average than men: full-time disabled women workers earned 91 per cent of their non-disabled male peers, disabled men 96 per cent and non-disabled women 94 per cent.

These smallish differences between disabled and non-disabled graduates, and between women and men, appear to prefigure poorer employment trajectories for disabled women. More women than men had jobs, but more men than women were senior officials and professionals. Less advantageous trajectories will bring some disabled women lower lifetime earnings and pension entitlements than their male counterparts.

Childcare may limit disabled women to part-time, poorly paid employment. Whether working full-time or part-time, disabled women were less likely than disabled men to have higher ranking, better-paid jobs. Gender differences in employment outcomes persist even after taking into account mediating factors, employment rates varying in different ways according to family circumstances.

Men and women were very aware of their rights but expected to experience disability discrimination from employers. Women hoped, rather than expected, not to experience gender discrimination. Female and male disabled graduates see and experience their impairment as more important than their gender in determining likely employment outcomes.

Quantitatively, differences in employment outcomes associated with disability were harder to discern than gender differences. Disabled graduates were less likely than their non-disabled peers to have paid employment, and more likely to be actively seeking work; full-time workers earned slightly less. Many disabled graduates were enhancing their prospects through further study. Their future employment prospects are uncertain, not least because disabled graduates are a relatively new and currently small sub-group in the working-age population.

The nature of impairment seemed important. Students with specific learning difficulties (e.g. dyslexia) or visual impairments were supported at university and progressed well after graduation, deaf students less so. Discrimination was evident in some accounts of job-seeking.

Some students delayed establishing themselves in the labour market because they were 'worked out'. They described having to work much harder than their peers, and feeling unable to take time to develop careers.

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The 2001 Census Sample of Anonymised Records was made available through the Data Archive at the University of Essex. Data from the 2003/04 Survey of Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education were supplied by the Higher Education Statistics Agency. The analyses and the interpretation of the data reported here are solely the responsibilities of the authors and are not necessarily shared by any individual, government department, agency or institution.

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## Chapter 1 Introduction

The project asks about the experience of a group who may be doubly disadvantaged in the labour market, discriminated against through gender and disability. Available evidence does not show how discrimination works for disabled women moving out of higher education, compared with men. Something happens to disadvantage disabled women as they move on, but we know little, if anything, about what that is. The project aims to fill that gap and understand how disabled women's final year at university could better translate into good quality, sustainable employment and career opportunities in professional, managerial and senior official roles.

National legislation against Sex Discrimination and for Equal Pay has committed governments to improving women's position in the labour market since the 1970s. The European Commission has promoted a Social Policy Agenda and Social Agenda including gender equality, quality employment, and women's increasing labour market participation, with national governments addressing these objectives through the Open Method of Coordination. The UK government is also committed to 'extending basic rights and opportunities' through the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA), with new regulations from October 2004 designed to create wider employment opportunities for disabled people. The Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) provides employment and rehabilitation programmes in getting and retaining employment. Much policy focuses on people who become disabled in work, but government also aims to engage with employers to improve recruitment of people with health conditions and disabilities (DWP, 2005). However, issues of gender and disability appear to be almost totally absent from this policy arena. This project provides important new information about the position of disabled women students as they plan moves into employment.

We have called our study 'Double Discrimination?', because we want to ask about the impact of legislation against discrimination on the grounds of sex and disability, and about disabled women's experience of employment in a policy environment which legislates against discrimination. There would be a case for describing and discussing disadvantage (as do Berthoud and Bleckesaune, 2006), because there are real problems with seeing and measuring discrimination. The existence of legislation – whether long established as with the Equal Pay and Sex Discrimination Acts or newer Disability Discrimination legislation – may mean that discriminatory practices have gone underground, and become hard to see in practice. Students, employers and employees may well be unaware of the financial penalty women pay as women. There is much evidence of disadvantage in comparisons between men's and women's occupational levels and pay, some of which may be 'explained' in terms of factors such as women's shorter working hours and part-time work penalties and some of which cannot be explained at all. Many of these factors may reasonably be understood as discriminatory between men and women, though discrimination

may be impossible to demonstrate. Often we shall have to be content to examine the disadvantages disabled women experience, rather than the discrimination which may lie behind them. But this study is concerned with discrimination against disabled women, in the context of legislation which prohibits discrimination on the grounds of sex or disability.

Legislation outlaws discrimination, but what do we mean by it? It is easiest to see sex discrimination in employment where men and women have the same qualifications and experience and are working in similar jobs and for similar hours. Thirty years after the Sex Discrimination Act and implementation of the Equal Pay Act, differences in treatment and incomes between men and women with similar qualifications and career trajectories persist (see below). But the legislation also outlaws indirect discrimination, for example where women are less likely to be able to fulfil job criteria. There are many ways in which women's lives are different from men's: they are more likely to have discontinuous careers through care responsibilities and they are more likely to do part-time work. The disadvantages of these patterns of work are increasingly recognised. In particular European legislation has brought extensions to national legislation, widening the scope of equality legislation to cover more circumstances where women's lives and men's are different. But while the EU Directives on Part-time Work and Parental Leave have been brought into UK legislation, there remain deep-rooted divisions between men's work and women's, and many disadvantages accruing to those women whose employment patterns do not emulate men's.

Social movements of disabled people and women have questioned the importance given to paid employment, and its relationship to social rights. While some feminists have seen equality in terms of gaining access to paid employment and public life on the same terms as men, others have argued for a citizenship based on difference – accepting gender difference and arguing that women's distinctive contribution in unpaid work should be acknowledged and rewarded. Claims to citizenship based on women trying to act as if they were men, while continuing to bear the main responsibility for care, have had some success but have had limitations. Similar debates have brought criticism of the priority given to employment in government policies for disabled people: governments which prioritise paid employment may stigmatise and disadvantage those who are unable to obtain or retain employment (Parker and Clarke, 2002).

But it is not only governments that have emphasised the importance of paid employment to membership of society. For some disabled people, paid work may be seen as an important route away from poverty and social exclusion and towards membership of society (Hendey and Pascall, 2001). Joining the labour market to achieve equality with men has been an important part of women's actions as individuals and citizens, in search of economic independence, gender equality and

autonomy. Parallel social movements have developed through which disabled people and women have enhanced their position in public life, including in the labour market.

The arguments about acknowledging the contributions and rights of people who do unpaid work and of disabled people outside the labour market are important. But improving access to paid employment has been seen as important for both disabled people and women, as groups who have traditionally been disadvantaged in paid work.

Access to the labour market has increasingly been seen as a key to citizenship and membership of society, with paid work being seen as the key moral obligation for citizens, without which there should be no citizenship rights (Jordan, 1998; Lister, 2002). There are many influences behind the increasing emphasis on paid work as a route to citizenship: influential North American New Right discourse, EU concepts of social exclusion and inclusion, and a 'new contractualism' which has tied rights more tightly to reciprocal obligations.

Significant literatures and statistical evidence have developed around the labour market position of women and the employment of disabled people: both groups are seen in official documents as disadvantaged, and as needing to be encouraged and supported in joining the labour market and sustaining careers. Disabled people in the UK are less likely to be in paid employment, they earn less, and are less likely to occupy managerial, senior official, professional and technical positions than their non-disabled peers (Smith and Twomey, 2002). Transformations in the labour market have brought women into paid employment, increased their access to higher level occupations and reduced the gender pay gap (Aston *et al.*, 2004). But in all these respects there are continuing differences between men and women in their labour market experience, summarised by the Women and Equality Unit finding that women's lifetime incomes are only half men's (Rake, 2000).

Most official data are now disaggregated by gender, though analyses combining and comparing gender and disability as sources of disadvantage are rare. But official data show that disabled women experience disadvantage in the labour market in relation to all other groups (non-disabled men and women and disabled men), which may reflect discrimination. This affects their employment rates, rates of pay when in employment and the types of career they are able to achieve. Disabled women fare worse than both disabled men and their non-disabled female peers, in an analysis by Smith and Twomey (2002), discussed in more detail below. Labour Force Survey data (Spring, 2005) for men and women of working age, show the employment rate of non-disabled men as 85 per cent compared with 75 per cent for non-disabled women. The employment rate for disabled men is 52 per cent and disabled women 49 per cent (EOC, 2006: 13). The Equalities Review (Interim Report, March 2006) has commissioned research comparing and ranking the labour market experience of groups historically discriminated against on the basis of age, disability, ethnicity and

gender (Berthoud and Blekesaune, 2006). But there is very little research which addresses the question of how disability and gender relate to each other as sources of disadvantage in the labour market or elsewhere.

While one transformation has brought women into the labour market, a further transformation, in educational achievement at school and access to higher education, shows women now matching and surpassing men's educational achievements. There is a long-term trend for the school performance of girls to improve in relation to boys: now 48 per cent of girls compared with 39 per cent of boys achieve 'A' level or equivalent. But we should note that traditional subject choices have boys more dominant in computer studies, physics and mathematics, while girls are more dominant in biology, art and design and languages (Aston *et al.*, 2004: 62-3). Access to higher education has increased for both men and women over time, but has increased at a much higher rate for women than for men. Women are now 55 per cent of full-time undergraduate students, and women are now also a majority of post-graduate students (taking full- and part-time students together) (Aston *et al.*, 2004: 64). The traditional subject pattern has shifted somewhat as women have become a majority of medical and dentistry students (56 per cent) but they are still minorities in physical sciences (39 per cent), mathematical sciences (38 per cent), computer science (20 per cent), engineering and technology (16 per cent), architecture, building and planning (28 per cent) (all figures for 2001-2 and in Aston *et al.*, 2004: 65). These patterns of increasing achievement clearly bring increasing possibilities for some women, but the continued gender division of subjects will also bring limitations of possible careers.

While women's access to education, particularly higher education, has transformed their access to careers, other transformations have made access to the labour market more critical to security. Changing patterns of marriage and divorce make access to independent earning more crucial (Lewis, 2001), while the welfare state's expectations of labour market participation to underpin individual security have tended to increase. For example, New Deals, tax credits and childcare tax credits target disabled people, lone mothers and to some extent partnered mothers, operating flexibly to encourage and enable paid employment. Policy for state pensions – built on a male breadwinner model of working life – has long disadvantaged those without a continuous employment history: current plans aim to make the requirements more flexible but to keep employment conditions for entitlement to basic state pensions. All these make the situation of those without paid employment relatively disadvantaged.

There is evidence that disabled women have shared to some extent the increase in access to education described above for women together: in 2003, the proportion of disabled women aged 16-24 who had no qualifications was 19 per cent, whereas among 50-59 year olds it was 40 per cent. This change between the age groups has been steeper for disabled women than for disabled men, among whom the proportion

without qualifications was 23 per cent for the younger age-group and 30 per cent for the older (Women and Equality Unit, 2003: 3). Despite disabled women's increased access to higher education, there is little current evidence about how, if at all, this is transforming their subsequent career opportunities.

This project attempts to provide some evidence, examining how disabled women experience discrimination as they plan their future careers in their final year in higher education and move on to the next stage of their lives. Their experience is compared with that of their disabled male peers. The project also identifies the support needs of disabled women during their final university year and into their first postgraduate year and, using that material, makes suggestions for practical strategies that they and those who advise them can use to enhance employment outcomes.

## **Outline of the report**

In Chapter 2 we review existing published information about gender, disability and employment among graduates. The methods we used in the two main parts of our investigation are described in Chapter 3. We then move on to explore the relationships between gender, disability and employment among graduates using secondary analysis of data from the 2001 Census (Chapter 4) and survey of destination of leavers from higher education (Chapter 5). Chapters 6 and 7 analyse material from our qualitative exploration of third-year students' and recent graduates' experiences of career development, job seeking and early employment. In Chapter 8 we turn to the evidence that employers and careers officers provided, and conclude in Chapter 9 with our summary and overall conclusions



## **Chapter 2     Existing knowledge about gender, disability and employment among graduates**

### **Introduction**

This chapter examines what is already known about gender and employment, disability and employment, and about how these may compare and combine as sources of disadvantage. We also ask about the impact of education on graduates' expectations of employment and careers. The importance of employment to government strategies for social inclusion has generated a considerable literature, and data, about the relationship between gender and employment, and about disability and employment. But there are even fewer studies than we expected that relate these two sources of disadvantage to each other, and fewer still in the context of UK legislation against discrimination.

Straight comparisons of employment rates or income between disabled and non-disabled people, and between men and women within that, tell us relatively little in terms of cause, effect or the relative contributions of gender or disability, as against other personal and structural factors that might be influential. For example, disability is associated with older age and with lower socio-economic position, both of which are also associated with lower rates of employment and pay. In a similar way, it can be difficult to tease out the relative contributions of gender (women are less likely to be in paid work and to be paid less when they are) and disability. Education and training, which can improve employment chances and rates of pay, cut across all these other factors and confuse the position even further.

The only way to tease out some of the distinct contributions of these different influences is to use multi-variate analysis of large data sets. This approach has been used in several studies in the USA and is also starting to have an impact in the UK. We review the findings from these types of approaches in what follows, along with research that has adopted a uni-variate approach to analysis.

### **Gender and employment**

Transformations in women's labour market position bring much higher participation and more equality of rewards. But there are many ways in which gender is still a key factor in labour market experience. Where might we expect to find gender differences in employment, and, in particular, gender differences that may underpin disabled women's experience of joining the labour market after graduation?

The position according to official data is summarised by the Women and Work Commission Interim Report (Women and Work Commission, 2005) in five key points: participation, part-time employment (relating to unpaid care responsibilities), occupational segregation and hierarchies, the gender pay gap, and the part-time gender pay gap (Women and Work Commission, 2005). The final report (Women and Work Commission, 2006) is now published, but it does not offer new data. We also need to consider education, especially how graduate status affects women's labour market position.

The Women and Work Commission show that women's labour market participation increased from 42 per cent in 1971 to 70 per cent in 2004 (based on Labour Force Survey). An alternative measure in EU structural indicators, including all who are employed for one hour or more per week and using the EU Labour Force Survey, shows women's participation at 66 per cent, compared with men's at 78 per cent ([epp.eurostat.cec.eu.int](http://epp.eurostat.cec.eu.int)). Both these measures show a transformation in women's labour market participation, but women are still less likely to be in the labour market than men.

The way that women's experience of the labour market remains structured by unpaid care responsibilities, and in particular motherhood, is a second key feature. While 53 per cent of women with pre-school children are in employment, two-thirds of these work part-time (Women and Work Commission, 2005: 4). Labour market segregation, short part-time hours, and very low pay characterise this section of the labour market. Research now shows that women working part-time (mainly mothers) are 'working below potential' (Grant *et al.*, 2006).

The gender pay gap has been falling steadily since 1970, but is still 14.4 per cent for full time workers (based on the median). The EU structural indicators offer the possibility of comparison with other European countries, and give the gender pay gap - for all paid employees working 15 hours plus - as 22 per cent in Great Britain. This is among the highest gender differences in Europe, where the average across the 25 countries is 15 per cent ([epp.eurostat.cec.eu.int](http://epp.eurostat.cec.eu.int)).

The gap for part-time workers (women part-timers/men full-timers and again based on the median) is 43.2 per cent. There are over four times as many women working part-time as men. While the pay gap for full-time work has been decreasing, the gap between women working full-time and women working part-time has been increasing (Women and Work Commission, 2005: 4).

As we saw in Chapter 1, girls are outperforming boys in school, and in access to higher education at undergraduate and post-graduate level. But these achievements do not translate into well-paid occupations. Three years after graduating, women earn 15 per cent less than their male counterparts (Purcell, 2002). Women enter a narrow range of occupations, and are under-represented in managerial positions,

making up 32 per cent of managers and senior officials (Women and Work Commission, 2005).

*Women's Incomes over the Lifetime* (Rake, 2000) models incomes (including earnings, benefits and pensions) to compare the lifetime earnings and incomes of equally skilled men and women, comparing those with no qualifications, those with GCSE qualifications and those with degrees, to unravel the impact of education, gender and motherhood over a lifetime. This study finds mothers fitting employment around their children's needs and women earning around half the lifetime earnings of men, with poorly qualified women particularly likely to have interrupted working lives and to do part-time work. The biggest impact on lifetime earnings is through educational achievement, but there is also a gender earnings gap, around half explained by the hourly earnings gap, and around half by the number of hours women work over their lifetimes compared with men. There is also a 'mother gap', which is lower for women with higher qualifications, who are likely to keep a more continuous connection with the labour market. Mothers experience lost years, lost hours, lost experience, and a part-time penalty, especially if they have children when they are young and have lower qualifications. Earnings differences feed through into pensions (Rake, 2000).

How does gender inequality in earnings relate to age and to qualifications? Whichever way you look at it, the earnings gap is lower for young people. The Annual Survey of Hours and Incomes shows that among young people aged 18-21, working full-time in 2004, young women earned 94 per cent of men's hourly wage, dropping to 77 per cent of men's hourly wage among 40-49 year-olds (Aston *et al.*, 2004: 75). The qualification question is more difficult. The LFS figures for 2004 show women graduates working full time have hourly earnings at 76.1 per cent of men's, while the gap narrows for those who are less qualified, for example those with GCSE, who earn 82 per cent of men's hourly earnings (Aston *et al.*, 2004: 76). This does not fit easily with Rake's findings about the importance of educational achievement in maintaining women's lifetime incomes. It is probably best understood in terms of the differences in lifetime working patterns between those who are most highly qualified and others. While the pay gap is high for those with strong educational qualifications, earnings may also be high enough to pay for childcare and sustain a continuous labour market connection. Those with lower educational qualifications are likely to have interrupted working lives.

Gender differences among graduates are explored in *Qualifications and Careers: Equal Opportunities and Earnings among Graduates* (Purcell, 2002), to ask about gender differences in graduate earnings. Following Rake's stress on the importance of educational qualifications in protecting women's lifetime incomes, and of motherhood in reducing women's lifetime incomes, one might expect to find the least gender differences among young, highly qualified women. But Purcell finds that even in the youngest age group (20-24) male graduate earnings were 15 per cent higher

than female in 1999-2000. While women are more likely to study Arts and Humanities, and to work in the public or voluntary sector, these gender differences persist whatever the degree subject, class of degree, employment sector, or occupation. However, women with degrees gain a greater premium over non-graduates than men and are more likely than non-graduates to escape segregated jobs (Purcell, 2002).

The subsequent careers of graduates are followed over time, with additional qualitative and quantitative research, in *Higher Education and Gendered Career Development* (Purcell and Elias, 2004). This shows gender differences widening over time – from 10.5 per cent in first main job after a 1995 degree, to 18.5 per cent in 2002/3. The modal rate of earnings growth for men is from nine to 11 per cent per annum compared with five to seven per cent for women (Purcell and Elias, 2004: 9). Investigation of different factors shows that the sector of employment and the public/private sector divides are important, with degree subject also important but less so. However, these do not explain all the difference (Purcell and Elias, 2004: 16). There are interesting data here, including qualitative interviews, which explore values, family and job priorities, and help to give a feel for graduates' decision-making in the context of varied gendered worlds of public and private sectors and different occupational sectors, among graduates with qualifications in Humanities, Law and Engineering. The authors find some gender differences in the importance attributed to income in career planning, but not many others.

All this suggests that we might expect disabled women graduates to enter the labour market in nearly the same proportions as disabled men, to study Arts and Humanities and head for public sector careers. These careers might offer some protection in terms of gender pay differences and discrimination, but are likely to be lower paid than private sector careers. Similarly, we may expect graduate earnings to be higher than the earnings of the less qualified, but we should remember that the gender pay gap for graduates is higher than among less qualified men and women (Aston *et al.*, 2004). And – whatever the job – disabled women are likely to be lower paid than men (including disabled men). Disabled women graduates who do part-time work or short hours - whether for impairment or disability –related reasons or for motherhood – might particularly risk low earnings.

Graduate career trajectories might be expected to protect women from some of the losses in lifetime incomes described by Rake in terms of lost years, lost hours, lost experience, and the part-time penalty (Rake, 2000). Women's increasing labour market attachment has not been consistent across different groups and there are some indications that disability will be a stronger factor than gender in labour market participation and earnings. But the clear evidence of gender differences in earnings – with a graduate gender gap in earnings growing from ten per cent to 18 per cent during the years after graduation – shows that gender still counts, even among relatively privileged graduate women, before motherhood interrupts careers or takes

a toll of paid working hours. And we need to ask whether disabled women are able to turn their graduate qualifications into the level of graduate earnings which would enable them, for example, to pay for childcare, and maintain a measure of continuity in labour market attachment.

## Disability and employment

We turn now to look at existing evidence of the relationship between disability and employment. This draws largely on reanalysis of existing data sets which gives an overall picture of the labour market participation of disabled people. However, as we see, little of it separates out groups – women or graduates or those who were disabled before entering the labour market – in a way that could throw light on our specific research questions.

Burchardt's study (Burchardt, 2005) is perhaps the most useful; it used data from two longitudinal studies of young people – the Birth Cohort Study (BCS) and the Youth Cohort Study (YCS) - to explore the ways in which physical or sensory impairment or mental health problems affected employment outcomes for young adults. This showed clearly that by the age of 26 disabled young adults were already being 'left behind' (see Table 2.1).

**Table 2.1 Labour market status of young adults at age 26**

<i>Economic status</i>	<i>Disabled at neither age (%)</i>	<i>Disabled at 16, not 26 (%)</i>	<i>Became disabled between 16 and 26 (%)</i>	<i>Disabled at both ages (%)</i>
FT employed or self-employed	77.6	76.0	67.3	61.5
PT employed or self-employed	7.8	9.7	8.7	12.9
FT education or training	2.6	3.9	4.2	5.5
Looking after home/family	7.9	6.2	7.0	4.6
Unemployed, sick/disabled	3.7	3.9	12.2	13.8
Other	0.5	0.4	0.6	1.8

Source: Burchardt, 2005, Table 5.1

Young people disabled at both 16 and 26 were substantially less likely than their peers to be in full-time work, more likely to be in part-time work, and much more likely to be classed as unemployed, sick or 'disabled'. In bivariate analysis, the relationship between impairment and occupational social class was complex. On the one hand, young people disabled at both 16 and 26 were only slightly less likely than those disabled at neither age to be in professional and managerial/technical occupations. 'On the other hand, twice the proportion of people disabled at both ages [were] in partially skilled or unskilled jobs' (Burchardt, 2005: 41). This suggests, perhaps, the importance of higher or further education in enabling some disabled young people to escape the social exclusion that others experience.

Parental background was strongly associated with all young adults' own occupational class. However, when parental background was controlled for in multi-variate analysis, it became clear that 'for a given parental background, disabled young people [were] significantly less likely to be working in high-status occupations than their non-disabled counterparts' (p. 41). In other words, disabled young people were less likely to benefit from the higher social class of their parents than were those who were not disabled. Burchardt suggests that comparing the findings of the 18/19 years olds studied in the YCS with those of the 26 years olds from the BCS, might indicate 'that the distribution across occupations of disabled and non-disabled people diverges as they get older' (ibid), although it is also possible that there is an underlying difference between the two cohorts. Further, this analysis also shows that disabled young people earn 11 per cent less than their non-disabled peers, even when educational qualifications have been taken into account (Burchardt, 2005).

Overall, being disabled at both 16 and 26 or becoming disabled between these ages was found to be 'independently associated with worse occupational outcomes, controlling for aspirations, their own educational achievement and their parental background' (Burchardt, 2005: 45). Thus 'a disabled young person with the same qualifications as a non-disabled young person [was] less likely to be in a high-status occupation' (p. 45), even though their aspirations at age 16 had been similar. Finally, becoming disabled late in childhood (11-16) was associated with lower occupational class at age 26.

To sum up, Burchardt's work suggests that disabled young adults in the two cohort studies were achieving less in terms of occupational outcomes than would have been expected, given their educational achievements, their aspirations and their parents' social class.

In *Multiple Disadvantage in Employment*, Berthoud (2003) attempts to unravel the ways that different forms of disadvantage combine. He analyses Labour Force Survey data in terms of age, family structure, skill level, impairment, ethnic group and demand for labour, to explore access to income through employment of 16 hours or more a week, or through partners' employment. The main question addressed is

whether people 'with combinations of disadvantages fare better or worse than would have been expected if ... each of their characteristics [had been considered] separately' (Berthoud, 2003: 4). A rather unusual definition of employment was used for this work, based on a whole *family's* situation, rather than each adult's situation individually. Therefore, people were defined as 'in employment' if they themselves were in employment (or education) or if they were married or co-habiting with a partner who was in work or education. 'Non-employment' was thus having neither a job *nor* a partner with a job. However, while employment and non-employment were defined according to the family's position, analysis was carried out at the individual level, thus making it difficult to say much about married or co-habiting women's own labour market position.

All else being equal, this work showed that impairment increased the risk of non-employment by 20 per cent – the largest increase after lone parenthood, which increased the risk by 45 per cent. Simple cross-tabulation showed that people with impairments had relatively low education/skill levels, although this begs the question of the direction of causation. However, overall, particular pairs or triplets of disadvantage 'were not especially important in helping distinguish between high and low levels of risk' (Berthoud, 2003: 31). Berthoud looked separately at the group of people, constituting ten per cent of the total, who were at high risk of non-employment. Within this group almost two-thirds had impairments (the largest single grouping) while 45 per cent of those with impairments were at high risk (again, the second most vulnerable group after lone parents).

The overall conclusion of Berthoud's analysis was that characteristics that influenced the risk of non-employment were additive, rather than multiplicative. (However, this still means that people with impairments *and* low educational/skill levels will experience added disadvantage in the labour market.). However, though gender is clearly a factor in the experience of lone parents - gender is not examined as an independent element in this study. For the purposes of our study, this inability to say anything about any additional or multiplicative effect of gender is a weakness.

More recently, *The Employment Rates of Disabled People* (Berthoud, 2006) has used data from the Health and Disability Survey, and the Family Resources Survey, to which it was attached in 1996-7, to compare disabled with non-disabled people, and analyse employment according to impairment. While this study begins with unpacking impairment, it concludes with an argument for 'reducing employment disadvantage' (Berthoud, 2006: 68). The Health and Disability Survey classifies 11.5 per cent of those surveyed as disabled and finds 29 per cent of these employed (again using the criterion of 16 hours or more per week), compared with 76 per cent of non-disabled people (Berthoud, 2006: 51). The author argues that studies using wider definitions of disability than the HDS understate the disadvantage associated with impairment (Berthoud, 2006: 64). He finds stronger relationships between

employment and impairment and demography than factors in the local or national economy, which are more often highlighted (Berthoud, 2006: 47).

Smith and Twomey's work (2002) used the Labour Force Survey to examine economic activity among disabled people. This showed both lower rates of economic activity and that disabled people's rates of economic activity peaked at an earlier age (20-24 for women and 25-34 for men) than did that of non-disabled people (35-49 for both men and women). In other words, the average age of disabled people in employment was lower than that of non-disabled people. There are three possible explanations for these differences, any or all of which may be at play. First, it is possible that more young disabled people are entering the labour market than has been the case historically, and that peak employment rates will start to be more comparable to those of non-disabled people as these cohorts age. A second possibility is that young disabled people are entering employment but then leaving it soon after, particularly young women. A third explanation is the known relationship between older age, disability and leaving the labour market.

Although there is an overall 'impairment effect' evident in the material reviewed above, these studies also show a differential effect associated with type of impairment, especially in relation to mental health. Men with physical or sensory impairments, for example, have been found to be much more likely to be in employment than those with 'psychological or learning difficulties' (Kidd *et al.*, 2000: 973). Similarly, Smith and Twomey found that 'people with mental illness, learning difficulties or psychological impairments [were] less likely to be found in employment than people with physical impairments' (Smith and Twomey, 2002: 421) while in Burchardt's (2005) analysis mental health problems at the age of 26 were associated with lower occupational status. In the public sector, Hirst and Thornton (2005) showed that people with mental health problems or learning difficulties had employment rates that were 'often less than half that of disabled people as a whole, and less than one-third that of non-disabled people' (Hirst and Thornton, 2005: 197).

## **Type of labour market entered**

The type of labour market that people enter might be expected to have some impact on their employment experience. Historically, the public sector – and particularly the Civil Service – has used systems of quotas and 'reserved' occupations to ensure a certain level of participation of disabled people in that sector.

Kidd *et al.* (2000) showed that disabled men got a greater economic return to working in the public sector than did non-disabled men (p. 975). However, it is difficult to interpret what this means for our project, given that the analysis does not discriminate between those who were disabled before and after completing their education.



Hirst and Thornton (2005) used LFS data to explore disabled and non-disabled employees in the public sector. This showed that, between 1998 and 2004, disabled people's participation in all sectors of the labour market increased by ten per cent<sup>1</sup>. However, over the same period, disabled people's participation in the public sector increased four times as much as that of non-disabled people's (24 per cent compared to six per cent). Most of the growth was in local government or the health service, where disabled people experienced higher rates of growth in public sector employment than non-disabled people. Disabled women 'recorded not only the highest rate of public sector employment growth, but also a larger net increase in employment than did disabled men' (p. 191). By 2004, some 16.4 per cent of disabled, working age women worked in the public sector, compared to 8.8 per cent of disabled men.

Despite this, however, when Hirst and Thornton looked at *expected* participation rates in the public sector, they found that disabled people were relatively less likely to work in the public sector (rather than in the private sector, or not at all) than would have been expected, given their presence in the labour market. Further, this gap between expected and actual employment in the public sector was greater for disabled women than it was for disabled men.

## **Comparing gender and disability in employment**

What is known from existing studies about the relationship between gender and disability in access to employment, and quality of employment? There are official data and some studies drawing on official data, about levels of economic activity, comparing access to employment, and examining those who are 'Not in Education, Employment or Training' (NEET). Some of these offer a little evidence, first about the hierarchies of disadvantage in access to employment, and second – though very little explored – the way in which gender and disability interact in people's access to employment. None of the studies discussed in this section offers anything on the quality of employment obtained.

The Equalities Review (2006) has stimulated research comparing age, disability, ethnicity and gender as sources of disadvantage. *Persistent Employment Disadvantage, 1974 to 2003* (Berthoud and Blekesaune, 2006) uses the General Household Survey to measure 'employment penalties': the extent to which women are less likely than men to have a job, and disabled people less likely than non-disabled people, after taking account of education, local labour markets, and so on. 'Employed' is defined as paid work of 16 or more hours a week, and 'disabled' as having a 'limiting long-standing condition'. Compared with a non-disabled, partnered, younger white man, a disabled person has a 15.5 per cent employment penalty, a

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<sup>1</sup> Smith and Twomey (2002) found that in the three years to 2001 overall employment rates for disabled people increased more than for non-disabled people.

partnered woman without children 9.4 per cent, and a partnered mother of young children 37.2 per cent.

The point of this study was not to look at interactions, but the authors do note that these disadvantages cumulate, with a graph showing that over this whole period 90 per cent of those with no disadvantage are in work, compared to 80 per cent of those with one disadvantage and around 50 per cent of those with two. However, they also find that men are more disadvantaged by their impairment than disabled women are (Berthoud and Blekesaune, 2006: 5-6, 14). The authors acknowledge that the GHS lacks detailed data on disability, but they argue that the penalty of limiting long-standing conditions has risen from five to 18 percentage points since the 1970s. The gender penalty for women overall fell from 41 to 18 points over this period, but closer analysis shows that it is not so much women as a whole as mothers of young children who are disadvantaged: penalties have rapidly declined but remain around 40 per cent (Berthoud and Blekesaune, 2006: 16-17). The key conclusions of this study, from the point of view of gender and disability, are that access to employment at a level that could bring an independent or tax-credit supported income – 16 hours or more per week – is reduced for disabled people and for women: somewhat more for those who are disabled than for women, as long as women are not also mothers.

Gender was not a central issue in Berthoud's subsequent work (Berthoud, 2006) based on the Health and Disability Survey, but there are some findings *comparing* gender and disability as sources of disadvantage, and some examination of the relationship between them. Disabled people as a group were 42 per cent less likely to have a job than males with otherwise similar characteristics, and mothers with children 69 per cent less likely (Berthoud, 2006: 34). On the question of how gender relates to disability, Berthoud argues that those most severely disadvantaged by their family situation had so little chance of employment that severity of impairment could make little difference: 'severity of disability had less impact on the employment chances of mothers and older people than on people with more advantaged demographic characteristics' (Berthoud, 2006: 48). This study thus found severe disadvantages among disabled people in access to employment, and among mothers, but was not primarily concerned with the relationship between gender and disability.

Smith and Twomey (2002) used LFS data (for 2001) to explore the relationship between disability and employment, examining both men and women of working age (16-64 for men, 16-59 for women). Their analysis showed substantial differences in both economic activity and employment between disabled and non-disabled men and women (see Table 2.2). For example, in 2001, 44.3 per cent of disabled men and 51.5 per cent of disabled women declared themselves economically 'inactive', compared with 8.8 per cent and 21.2 per cent of non-disabled men and women respectively. Disabled women were more likely than disabled men to declare themselves economically inactive, but there was a somewhat greater differential

between disabled and non-disabled men than between disabled and non-disabled women.

As we saw above, Smith and Twomey (2002) also looked at working age in relation to disabled people's labour market participation. This showed that disabled women's employment rates peaked at an earlier age (20-24 years, 54.6 per cent) than disabled men's (25-34 years, 60.8 per cent). For non-disabled people, both male and female, employment rates peaked later at 35-49 years (94.1 per cent for men, 81.4 per cent women). Here, then, there is a suggestion of a *smaller* gap between disabled and non-disabled men in their labour market experience than that between disabled and non-disabled women.

Burchardt's (2005) work on young disabled adults (see above) shows Labour Force Survey data on the percentage of 18-24 year olds not in education, employment or training (NEET). Young disabled women are clearly shown at the bottom of a hierarchy; in 2004 around ten per cent of non-disabled men, 17 per cent of non-disabled women, 40 per cent of disabled men and 45 per cent of disabled women were classified as NEET (Burchardt, 2005: 9, figures read from graph). Burchardt's analysis of the BCS and YCS has very little on gender, but she does show that among disabled young people, all else being equal, being male is significantly associated with higher occupational outcomes at age 26 (Burchardt, 2005: 45).

**Table 2.2 Paid work of economically active men and women by whether or not disabled (2001)**

	<i>% disabled</i>	<i>% not disabled</i>	<i>All</i>
<b>Men</b>			
Economically active and in work	50.3	86.6	79.6
Economically active and unemployed	9.7	5.0	5.6
All economically active	60.0 <sup>1</sup>	91.6	85.2
<b>Women</b>			
Economically active and in work	45.2	75.3	69.5
Economically active and unemployed	6.6	4.5	4.8
All economically active	51.8	79.8 <sup>2</sup>	74.3

Source: Smith and Twomey 2002, Table 5

1 Figure given in original table is 55.7

2 Figure given in original table is 78.8

## **International evidence about the impact of disability and gender on employment**

Given the limitations of the UK-based work reviewed above, we turn to international evidence that has tried to tease out the relative contributions of disability and gender on employment. The most helpful recent work we identified was that of Randolph and Andreson (2004) and Randolph (2004).

Randolph and Andreson (2004) explore the relative positions of disabled men and women in the USA, using data from a 1998/9 survey of 11 States, gathered by the Centre of Disease Control and Prevention's Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS). This generated information on almost 67,000 people, of whom 13.9 per cent aged 18 to 64 were classed as disabled, using definitions comparable with those used in the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Simple, bivariate comparison showed consistent differences in employment rates between disabled men and women. These differences remained 'striking', except among the most severely disabled people, in logistic regression analyses that controlled for the effects of age, race/ethnicity, level of education, marital and parental status. The odds ratio of being unemployed if in the 'limited' category and a woman (as opposed to a man) was 1.41 (CI 1.3-1.6). However, the relative risk of unemployment was greater for non-disabled women as against non-disabled men (2.69, CI 2.5-2.8).

The authors acknowledge some limitations with the data they had available – they could not distinguish between full-time and part-time work or examine type of employment. It was also difficult to distinguish among the unemployed between those who were seeking work and those who were not (e.g. 'homemakers').

Analysis of a later BRFSS, carried out in 2000, and based this time on 23,143 people aged 16-64 from nine US states, showed broadly the same patterns (Randolph, 2004). This time, the impact on income was also examined, using linear multiple regression techniques. Again, the models controlled for gender, age, education, race, marital status and the presence of children. Separate analyses also examined whether being disabled had a differential effect on men and women. Of all the variables examined, disability had the greatest impact on employment both for the total population and for men and women separately. However, the relationship was more strongly negative for men than for women, i.e. the gap between disabled and non-disabled people was larger for men than it was for women. Disability and gender both had a negative impact on income (meaning that disabled women earned the least), but education (see below) and marital status were more influential.

## Impact of education

Part of the reason for UK policy encouraging a higher proportion of young people into higher education is the assumption that doing so enables graduates to get better jobs and earn more than would otherwise be the case (DfES, 2003). In this section we explore what is currently known about the relationship between level of education and paid employment for disabled people. As before, we are largely reliant on secondary analyses of existing data rather than research designed specifically to explore this issue.

First, we know that, overall, disabled people of working age have lower levels of qualifications than non-disabled people. Smith and Twomey (2002) show substantial differences in the proportions of people in the LFS reporting having any qualifications. This difference is largest amongst the older groups – 37 per cent of working age, disabled adults aged 50 and over reported having no qualifications, compared with 21 per cent of non-disabled adults. However, there were also substantial differences in the youngest age groups – 19 per cent of disabled people aged 16-24 had no qualifications, compared with nine per cent of their non-disabled peers.

Qualifications obtained appear to confer some additional benefit for disabled people. Kidd *et al.* (2000), in analysis confined to men, found that for both disabled and non-disabled men, education increased the probability of being in paid work, all other things being equal. However, they also suggest that disabled men obtain ‘a slightly greater return [in wage rates] to education than the able-bodied’ and that ‘this holds for each and every level of educational qualification’ (Kidd *et al.*, 2000: 975).

Berthoud’s work (2006) using the Health and Disability Survey also explored the role of education, and provides some evidence that higher levels of education may protect disabled people, especially those with the most severe impairments:

People with good economic characteristics (prolonged education, living in a jobs-rich area) were less affected by severe impairments. The two economic influences were stronger, not weaker, among severely disabled people.  
(Berthoud, 2006: 49)

Randolph and Andreson (2004) similarly show that post-secondary education for disabled people confers benefit in relation to unemployment, albeit that their work is based on US data (see above). After controlling for other factors – sex, age, race/ethnicity, marital status and having children – disabled people were much less likely to be unemployed if they had had some college education or were college graduates. Moreover, this effect seemed to be greater than it was for people who were not disabled (see Table 2.3), all other things being equal.

Analysis of later (2000) US data looked at men and women separately, to explore whether disability and other factors had any differential impact. This showed that education was a stronger predictor of paid employment for women than it was for men, regardless of disability, race, age and so on (Randolph, 2004). Although not published, further analysis of this material shows that education has a bigger influence on whether disabled women are employed than it does on disabled males (Randolph, personal communication).

**Table 2.3 Odds of those with some college education not being in paid employment by disability (1998/9)**

<i>Disability definition</i>	<i>OR of unemployment (95% CI)</i>
Limited	0.21 (0.2-0.3)
Not limited	0.35 (0.3-0.4)
Work limited	0.23 (0.2-0.3)
Not work limited	0.37 (0.3-0.4)
Severely limited	0.21 (0.1-1.2)
Not severely limited	0.33 (0.3-0.4)

Source: Randolph and Andreson 2004, Table 2

Overall, then, we can be relatively confident that the higher the level of education experienced, the more 'protected' disabled people are against not being in paid work. However, the studies reviewed here do not distinguish between those who became disabled before and after post-school education. Two 'protective' effects are possible. First, it seems likely that disabled students who enter post-school education do better than similar disabled people who do not. Secondly, it may be that people who have received post-school education are less affected economically if they become disabled subsequently than are people who have not studied beyond school. Either or both of these effects might explain the positive effect of higher levels of education identified in the studies reviewed above.

We are much more limited in what we can say with certainty about the impact of higher levels of education for those who were disabled before leaving school or who became so soon after.

Pilling (2002) has reanalysed data from the British National Child Development Survey (NCDS) - a longitudinal study of children born in a single week in 1958 - to explore adult outcomes for disabled children. This showed that the impact of impairment on employment in young adulthood was the same for those of above or below average qualifications (defined as above or below the NCDS median of 5+ 'O' levels or equivalent). The differences in employment were smallest for those with physical impairments, although these remained significantly different even when education was taken into account. Table 2.4 shows the employment patterns for men and women with 'above average' qualifications.

As the figures suggest, the differential between disabled and non-disabled women with physical impairments employed at both 23 and 33 years of age is not substantially different from that between disabled and non-disabled men, indicating that gender and physical impairment do not interact to affect paid employment for this 'qualified' group. However, we know nothing about the type of employment undertaken. While much larger differences seem apparent in relation to mental health problems, the numbers involved are too small to place much confidence on this.

**Table 2.4 Proportion of adults with 'above average' qualifications in employment at different ages, by presence and type of impairment**

	<i>Men</i>			<i>Women</i>		
	% employed at age(s)			% employed at age(s)		
	23 and 33	33 only	23 only	22 and 33	33 only	23 only
No disability	83	13	3	59	15	20
Physical	79	13	3	53	23	19
Mental health problems	33	17	-	20	40	40
Learning disability	-	-	-	-	-	-

Source: Extracted from Pilling 2002, Table 2

Rows do not necessarily sum to 100% because 'other' outcomes are excluded here

Further exploration of severity of physical impairment, in the same study, leads Pilling to suggest that its impact is greater for men than for women, although qualifications ameliorate its effect. Her overall conclusion is that disabled men, in particular, need interventions to improve educational achievement and reduce barriers to further education. However, educational provision for disabled children in the UK has changed radically since the early-1960s when the children in the NCDS should have been starting school, so it is difficult to know whether these findings would still hold.

## **Access to and outcomes of higher education for disabled students**

We now turn to what little is known about higher education, per se, for disabled students.

First, we look at what is known about disabled people's access to higher education.

Burchardt's (2005) analysis of the YCS shows that disabled 18/19 year olds were less likely to be in full-time education than non-disabled peers (36 per cent and 41 per cent) and that the non-disabled 18/19 year olds were almost twice as likely to have obtained 'A' levels as the disabled young people (30.7 per cent and 16.4 per cent). However, there was a higher proportion of disabled young people still in education who were taking 'A' or AS level qualifications, suggesting perhaps some

delay in acquiring these qualifications, perhaps due to ill-health or medical intervention. Nonetheless, 'even if all those individuals succeeded in obtaining their A levels and went on to higher education, that would not be enough to close the gap between the proportion of disabled and non-disabled young adults studying for a degree' (Burchardt, 2005: 33).

The 1970 BCS study allowed Burchardt (2005) to track outcomes into older adulthood. The picture that emerges is complex. By age 26, young adults who had been disabled at 16 and were still so at 26 were significantly less likely than other young people to have acquired *any* educational qualifications. This gap remained even after background variables, such as parental qualifications, were controlled for. Further, while there was a strong link between aspiration and achievement overall, disabled young people were less likely than their non-disabled peers to reach aspired-to higher education. Compared with others, those disabled at both 16 and 26 were least likely to have done as well as they had hoped.

By contrast, the proportions obtaining a degree or NVQ5/6 were not, overall, very different: 22.1 per cent of those not disabled at either age, 23.5 per cent of those disabled at 16 and not at 26, 20.2 per cent of those disabled at 26 but not at 16, and 22 per cent of those disabled at both ages had achieved these higher level qualifications. On first reading, this suggests that getting over the hurdle of 'A' levels serves to equalise the experiences of disabled and non-disabled young people. However, further analysis showed that young people disabled at both ages were significantly less likely than non-disabled young people *from the same background* to achieve higher educational qualifications. In other words, all other things being equal, young people disabled at both ages should have been doing better than they did.

Statistics gathered by the US Department of Education Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services (Horn *et al.*, 1999) suggest that once disabled students get to college and earn a qualification, they have early labour market outcomes and graduate school enrolment rates similar to those who are not disabled. However, disabled students are more likely not to be employed at all (11 per cent compared with four per cent) and less likely to be employed full time (67 per cent compared with 73 per cent). These figures vary by nature of impairment: those who have a hearing impairment or who are deaf report the highest full-time employment rates (77 per cent) and those with visual impairments the lowest (58 per cent). As a corollary, perhaps, bachelor degree recipients with visual impairments are those most likely to be in graduate school (33 per cent, compared with 13 per cent of all graduates and 13 per cent of those who are disabled). None of the analysis in this report separates out male and female students.

UK surveys of the outcomes of higher education have also been used to explore what happens to disabled students when they graduate (AGCAS, 2004). This work suggests that some 6.1 per cent of first degree graduates classed themselves as



disabled or with a learning difficulty in 2002. The biggest grouping was 'dyslexia' followed by 'other'. Outcomes for those classifying themselves as disabled were different from those of other students, as Table 2.5 shows. Disabled students were less likely to be in full-time paid work and were, overall, somewhat less likely to have entered professional or management/administration posts (41.7 per cent compared to 44.3 per cent for non-disabled students). On the other hand, they were also less likely to enter clerical or secretarial positions (16.7 per cent compared to 18.5 per cent). Of those in employment, disabled students were significantly less likely to enter the financial sector and significantly more likely to enter 'other community, social or personal services'. There were few other obvious differences in the employment sector entered after graduation.

**Table 2.5 Economic activity after graduation by disability (2002 graduates)**

<i>Destination after graduation</i>	<i>Non-disabled graduates (%)</i>	<i>Disabled graduates (%)</i>
UK, full-time paid work	53.4	48.4
UK, part-time paid work	6.9	7.8
UK, self-employed	1.3	2.3
Further study/training	19.8	20.1
Assumed unemployed	6.7	8.6
'Not available' for employment or training	6.1	6.9
Other employment	4.1	3.7
Other	1.6	2.0

Source: Derived from AGCAS (2004) Table 2.1

Graduates with 'unseen' impairments generally fared better than did other disabled people in relation to full-time paid employment, further study or training and entry to professional occupations. In the latter, they actually did better than non-disabled graduates. Wheelchair users and those with mobility difficulties did less well than other disabled students in relation to full-time employment, but when they were in work they did best for entry to management/administrative posts and professional posts (and did better in both cases than did non-disabled students). A similar pattern was evident for entry to the education sector (other than teaching).

Graduates with mental health difficulties did poorly in relation to all other groups for full-time paid employment, but did better for further training or study. When in paid work they did well in relation to entry to management/administrative positions but had the lowest entry to the professions of any group. They were much more likely than any other group to enter 'associate professional and technical' employment and the health and social work sector and highly unlikely to enter the teaching or education sectors.

Overall, the results presented in the AGCAS report seem positive in relation to outcomes for disabled graduates. However, this optimistic picture relies crucially on the inclusion of graduates with dyslexia or ‘unseen’ impairments or conditions (such as diabetes, asthma, epilepsy). If these graduates are removed from the analysis, employment rates for disabled graduates drop from 48.4 per cent to 40 per cent, which is significantly lower than for non-disabled graduates (53.4 per cent). Unemployment rates, similarly, change – from 8.6 per cent to 10.7 per cent, compared with 6.7 per cent of non-disabled graduates.

The AGCAS analysis was repeated for 2003 graduates (AGCAS, 2005) but changes in definitions make comparison with the earlier report difficult in some areas, for example, destination after graduation.

As Table 2.6 shows, disabled graduates were still less likely than non-disabled graduates to enter full-time paid employment and slightly more likely to be in part-time paid employment, voluntary or unpaid employment, and further training (whether combined with employment or not). Conversely, disabled graduates were more likely to be unavailable for employment or ‘assumed’ unemployed.

Overall there were few differences in the employment sectors that graduates entered but, as before, disabled graduates were more likely to be in ‘other community, social and personal service activities’ and less likely to be in the financial sector. Entry to management and administrative occupations was similar for both groups but disabled graduates were somewhat less likely to enter the professions (23.1 per cent compared to 25.8 per cent of non-disabled graduate) and more likely to enter associate professional and technical jobs (32 per cent and 27.9 per cent).

**Table 2.6 Economic activity after graduation by disability (2003 graduates)**

<i>Destination after graduation</i>	<i>Non-disabled graduates (%)</i>	<i>Disabled graduates (%)</i>
Full-time paid employment	54.6	48.4
Part-time paid employment	7.6	8.4
Voluntary/unpaid work	0.9	1.4
Work and further study	8.0	8.2
Further study only	15.9	16.6
Assumed unemployed	6.9	9.6
Not available for employment	5.2	6.1
Other	1.0	1.3

Source: Derived from AGCAS (2005) Table 2.1

As before, graduates with dyslexia or 'unseen' impairments were more likely to be in paid employment than were other disabled graduates. Only 30.3 per cent of those who were wheelchair users or who had mobility difficulties and 29.5 per cent of those with mental health problems were in full-time employment, although both groups were more likely to have gone on to further study.

The inclusion of graduates with dyslexia or 'unseen' impairments, as in the earlier survey, gives a somewhat rosy picture of outcomes for disabled people. When excluded, the full-time employment rate drops from 48.4 per cent to 40.3 per cent, a figure that is significantly lower than that for non-disabled graduates (54.6 per cent). Similarly, unemployment rates rise from 9.6 per cent to 11.7 per cent, compared with 6.9 per cent of non-disabled graduates.

The overall conclusion of the AGCAS (2005) report is that:

Disabled graduates are not achieving entry to all professions and to full-time employment as a whole to the same extent as non-disabled graduates. In addition disabled graduates continue to enter part-time employment in higher numbers [sic] than their non-disabled peers.  
(no page numbering)

The main limitation of this study for our purposes is its total lack of information about gender.

## **Disabled students' experiences in higher education**

It is easy to forget how recently the majority of disabled children and young people were regarded as incapable of benefiting from anything but the most basic education in segregated settings. This is not to deny the importance of selective schools for children with sensory or physical impairments who were 'judged to be academically able' and which 'prepared their pupils for university or entry to some professions' (Cook *et al.*, 2001: 296). However, most disabled children seem to have received poor quality education.

As a result, disabled people's participation in higher education has been historically low. Baron *et al.* (1996) refer to the lack of national figures on the numbers of disabled students in higher education but give 'unpublished figures produced by the Undergraduate Clearing House for Admission to Higher Education' that suggest that 'disabled people constituted four per cent of students in Higher Education in 1992/3' (p. 362). Riddell *et al.* (2005), using Higher Education Statistics Agency data<sup>2</sup> for the years 1995/6 to 1999/2000 suggest that the proportion of disabled students in higher

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<sup>2</sup> Based on self-declaration of impairment on application for a university place or at registration after a place is obtained.

education increased over that period. In 1995/6 disabled first degree students made up 3.7 per cent of UK domiciled students and by 1999/2000 this had risen to 4.8 per cent. As we saw above, ACGAS data suggest that around six per cent of higher education students were disabled in the early 2000s. However, given differences in how this information was collected and in definitions used, it is difficult to make any assumptions about change over time.

Riddell *et al.* (2005) suggest that the increase in disabled students may be due 'in part to increased incentives to disclose an impairment, particularly for students with dyslexia' (p.630) and demonstrate that 'students with dyslexia made up a much larger share of all disabled students in 1999/2000 than in 1995/6' (p. 631) – rising from 17.9 per cent of all disabled students to 32.7 per cent. They also show a higher proportion of all students (under- and post-graduate) declaring mental health difficulties over the same period.

Uniquely among all the evidence reviewed to date, Riddell *et al.* (2005) examine gender *and* disability in higher education. In the undergraduate population as a whole, they claim, women are in the majority – 66 per cent of the total (p. 633). However, among disabled students, women made up only 51 per cent of the total. Closer examination of the figure presented in Riddell *et al.*'s paper suggests that their text is wrong – women appear to make up 56 per cent (not 66 per cent) of the total. Even so, there is an apparent difference here, though not perhaps one with the level of statistical significance they report. They suggest that the relatively lower proportion of women among the disabled student population is because 'males were more likely to have dyslexia than females and those with dyslexia made up the largest group of those known to have an impairment' (pp. 632-3). However, again, their figure suggests a slightly different story, with male students also more likely to report sight impairment, the need for personal assistance and 'multiple disabilities'.

Moreover, whether men are more likely than women to declare dyslexia, and their higher numbers when they do, does not exclusively *explain* their higher *proportions* in the disabled student population than in the overall student population. Several explanations are possible, depending on a complex interplay of likelihood of declaring an impairment when applying for university or registering and the likelihood of getting a place at university (all other things being equal). It would be quite possible to argue from these same figures that women are more likely to declare a disability than men but less likely to get a place. However, the evidence for this explanation, as for any other to do with self-declaration and/or admission rates, simply does not exist in these administrative data.

Given their historically low rate of participation in higher education, it is not surprising to find that there is relatively little evidence about disabled students' experiences at university and subsequently.

Annable *et al.* (2003) report the first stage of a planned longitudinal study of 40 disabled students who graduated or were about to from Canadian universities in 2002. Three-quarters of the students were women, a proportion consistent with the over-representation of women in higher and other post-secondary education in Canada more generally.

Most reported that their choice of subject was driven by personal interest or other reasons unrelated to their impairment. However, some had chosen subjects that would 'fit' with their impairment, allow them to help other disabled people or enable them to raise awareness of disability issues.

Not all students chose to disclose their impairment at college; this was most common amongst those with mental health problems who were concerned about being stigmatised.

Practical placements or internships were seen as 'valuable sources of practical workplace experiences' (p. 29) and those who had not had this type of experience sometimes felt that their education had not adequately prepared them for employment. Those who had had jobs or voluntary experience found that this influenced their academic choices and/or their career direction. Those without this sort of experience felt at a disadvantage; this was particularly an issue for those who needed special equipment or adaptations.

Graduates had mixed views about college careers services, even those that were specifically for disabled students. Some used external specialist agencies that provided 'employment assistance for people with disabilities' (p. 32). Others, who were in profession-oriented schools or faculties (e.g. law) accessed careers advice and information via that route. Overall the graduates studied made little use of the career and employment services available, either because they were not aware that they existed or because their specialist disability service providers could supply appropriate advice. Interviews with those who provided careers services in the colleges and universities showed that they were sometimes not aware of how their services were not accessible to some students.

Annable and colleagues conclude that the different experiences of the graduates studied reflected, in part:

... different experiences accessing appropriate accommodations: those who were able to access consistent and appropriate supports tended to report fewer problems than those who encountered barriers to obtaining the accommodations they required.  
(Annable *et al.*, 2003: 57)

Although disability service providers in the educational setting were important, students also reported that 'despite the support of [these providers] their educational

experiences were directly affected by their professors/instructors/teachers, who may or may not facilitate needed accommodations and support' (p. 57).

Although there are many parallels with our study, this Canadian one is largely descriptive and makes no reference to differences between students (gender, ethnicity etc) that might influence their experiences. Indeed, gender is 'disguised' in the report for confidentiality reasons.

As we saw earlier, Burchardt (2005) has explored the transitions from compulsory education to early adult life, comparing the experiences of disabled and non-disabled young adults. She refers to 'early evidence' that further and higher education institutions were not well informed about their new duties to 'actively promote equal opportunities for disabled people' under the Disability Discrimination Act. Preparations, 'such as they had been, had taken the form of policy reviews and disability awareness training rather than substantive changes in practice' (Burchardt, 2005: 6). She also refers to studies of disabled students at university that show:

... most disabled students experience barriers including the physical environment (which also affects their choice of course and institution), adjustments that are agreed in principle but not implemented in practice, and lecturers who are reluctant to make adjustments for fear that doing so would provide an 'unfair' advantage.  
(p. 31)

## Conclusions

Despite legislative change, patterns of lower rates of employment and lower incomes persist among disabled people of 'working age' in the UK and in other European and non-European countries. Within this overall pattern of disadvantage, women seem to fare the worst.

The studies reviewed in this chapter show clear evidence of disadvantages in accessing employment among those who are disabled, and among women, especially those who are mothers. There is some evidence that graduate status may protect employment access for people with severe impairments. There are also some indications that gender and disability may interact in producing a worse employment experience for disabled women than for disabled men, or for women without impairments. But these studies have little to tell us about the impact of gender *and* disability on employment, or about how access to higher education influences long-term outcomes, if at all. Furthermore, these studies focus on access to employment, not on its quality.

## **Chapter 3     Research strategies: existing data sets and qualitative investigation**

### **Scoping existing data sets – potential for further analysis**

A wealth of quantitative information is routinely collected at the national level about employment patterns and the labour market. These data are widely used to monitor and investigate trends in economic activity, unemployment and earnings; investigate employment outcomes and inequalities; and examine the characteristics and circumstances of the working age population. In most cases, the data sets are made available to researchers wanting to investigate topics beyond the purposes for which the surveys were originally conducted. Secondary analysis, as it is called, now provides a rich source of data and hypotheses for policy related research.

It was felt that existing data sets might throw light on how disabled graduates currently fare in the early years of their careers. A review of currently available data was therefore undertaken. The following sections describe how relevant data sets were identified.

### **Aims and scope**

There were two main aims in scoping existing data sets:

- To identify and review surveys and data sets, and assess their usefulness for investigating disabled graduates' employment outcomes.
- To rework the most promising data sets and investigate relationships between gender, disability and employment among recent graduates.

The criteria for identifying data sets centred on their content and the design of the original surveys:

#### **1. *Survey content***

An important requirement for inclusion in this review was that surveys and data sets should use commonly accepted definitions of economic activity, educational qualifications and disability. Most official surveys collect good quality information on employment patterns and occupational details, often using the standard classifications promoted by the International Labour Office (ILO). By comparison, the quality of information on educational qualifications is rather patchy and not always well geared to the needs of the present study. Survey classifications of people with a first degree may include those who (also) have other higher educational or professional qualifications, making it difficult to investigate the labour market experiences of first-time graduates. However, survey information on disability is often

most problematic. Definitions of disability vary widely: some concentrate on health complaints; others focus on physical, sensory and mental impairments; some identify limitations in activities of daily living; and some attempt to replicate disability criteria enshrined in legislation and official regulations. All surveys appear to adopt a medical standpoint that emphasises health problems, impairments or deficits to represent the experience of disability. This approach sits uneasily alongside the social model of disability, which emphasises society's role in creating disabling barriers to personal autonomy, social inclusion and material well-being. Difficulties in carrying out everyday activities seem to fall between the definitions implied by the social and medical models of disability but, as we shall observe, the use of existing data sets is heavily dependent on the definitions and measures adopted in each survey.

## **2. Survey design**

Two important requirements for any data set were that they should be representative of the population of disabled graduates and provide sufficient sample numbers to cover a range of personal characteristics and labour market experiences. Our interest centred on young disabled graduates: those in their 20s who had recently graduated with a first degree. This focus was adopted in order to concentrate on people who had entered university soon after leaving school or college and who had little prior experience of the labour market.

Young disabled graduates are a very small minority and easily missed in household surveys, but samples large enough to produce statistically robust findings are essential. Many of the national surveys reviewed here, although individually well designed, contained no more than a handful of young disabled graduates. Apart from considerations of sample size, a desired element was for respondents to be followed up over time in a longitudinal survey design. The present study focuses on the early labour market experiences of first-degree graduates. The volume, pattern and timing of moves from higher education into paid employment might be expected to follow different trajectories, as individuals move into and out of work, and progress in their chosen careers. A baseline survey around admission to higher education or on graduation would be ideal for identifying pre-disposing factors; regular follow-up surveys after graduating could then monitor employment outcomes over time.

## **Methods**

The review of existing data sets proceeded in four stages:

First, a list of data sets that gathered information on employment and the labour market in on-going surveys (using ILO measures as far as possible) was drawn up. This search was largely informed by an official guide to large-scale surveys produced by the Economic and Social Data Service (Higgins, 2005). Additionally, researchers



in the field of employment and disability were asked about the relevance and usefulness of ad hoc surveys and other sources of data.

Secondly, the data sets identified in stage one were subject to preliminary examination of achieved sample sizes, information on educational qualifications, and measures of disability and impairment. Consideration was also given to the timing and geographical coverage of each data set, and the identification of respondents. A basic distinction was drawn between surveys that interviewed all adult respondents in sampled households, and those that interviewed an informant who answered on behalf of other household members. Interest focused on the former group of surveys because it was felt important that respondents should talk about their own labour market experiences and identify themselves as disabled or not. Surveys that relied on household informants were unlikely to interview many young disabled graduates.

Thirdly, the most promising data sets identified in stage two were examined in more detail. This usually meant downloading survey data and associated documentation from the Data Archive based at the University of Essex.<sup>3</sup> At this stage, analysis concentrated on the feasibility of identifying recent, first-degree disabled graduates and establishing sample sizes. The quality of survey information on disability status or educational qualifications was often variable; however, lack of adequate sample numbers was the more usual reason for deciding not to use a particular data set.

Fourthly, data sets from stage three that met the study criteria were analysed to find out what they could reveal about the early labour market experiences of young disabled graduates.

## Results

In the event, 16 data sets were initially identified and considered for further review. They included: cross-sectional surveys repeated on different samples at regular intervals; panel surveys of the same individuals at quarterly or annual intervals; a birth cohort followed up at periodic intervals; and data collected for administrative purposes. Six data sets were eventually selected for detailed scrutiny:

- British Household Panel Survey (BHPS)
- Census Sample of Anonymised Records (SARs)
- Family Resources Survey (FRS)
- General Household Survey (GHS)
- Labour Force Survey (LFS)
- Survey of Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE).

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.data-archive.ac.uk/> or <http://www.esds.ac.uk/>.

In many respects, the LFS was the preferred data set. It collects detailed, reliable and up-to-date information on the educational qualifications, employment circumstances and earnings of a large, nationally representative household sample of individuals. Moreover, the LFS definition of disability is broadly consistent with the concept of disability used in the 1995 Disability Discrimination Act.

An important advantage of the LFS is that it facilitates both cross-sectional and longitudinal analysis. Although the data are used primarily to provide cross-sectional information at quarterly and annual intervals, they can be organised to form short-run panels spanning 12 months. Respondents are interviewed over five successive quarters; thus, a panel of newly graduated respondents identified in the summer or autumn quarters could be followed to monitor their early employment experiences.

A potential drawback is that LFS interviewers accept a high proportion of proxy interviews during follow-up to maintain the integrity of the panel design. However, further examination found too few disabled respondents who had recently graduated in any single panel. Pooling panels that start in the summer or autumn quarters across successive years would not have produced a sufficient number of recent first-time graduates for robust analysis.

The BHPS aims to interview the same individuals at annual intervals and has been running since 1991. However, the BHPS sample is relatively small; pooling data from the 14 interview waves currently available would have produced insufficient numbers of young disabled graduates for investigating the transition from higher education to paid employment.

Three of the surveys considered here, the FRS, GHS and LFS, each provide cross-sectional information at regular intervals: annually in the case of the FRS and GHS, and quarterly in the case of the LFS. Although individual cross-sectional surveys invariably identify no more than a handful of young disabled graduates, pooling successive surveys would increase sample sizes. In the event, there was insufficient project time to pool cross-sectional data from these surveys.

However, the Office for National Statistics has recently begun to pool LFS data from the four successive quarterly surveys in each calendar year to form the basis of what is called the Annual Population Survey (APS). We proposed to use the APS for investigating disabled graduates' employment outcomes, but our intentions were thwarted. The first APS data set placed in the public domain was subsequently withdrawn because it contained coding errors; its replacement some months later did not contain the variables required to identify respondents with a degree. Although that information is contained in a 'special licence' version of the APS, we were unable to satisfy the criteria for gaining access.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Access to the special licence APS requires researchers to demonstrate that they need to conduct their analyses across local labour markets.

By a process of elimination, two surveys remained: the Census Sample of Anonymised Records and the Survey of Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education. Both were considered potentially useful for investigating disabled graduates' employment outcomes. These two data sets were therefore subject to further analysis. Their scope, content and sample design are described in the sections immediately preceding the presentation of findings in Chapters 4 and 5.

## **Qualitative investigation**

The second main element of the project was a qualitative investigation of the experiences of disabled men and women who were about to or had recently graduated. For those who graduated in 2005 it was intended that they would be followed up during their first post-graduate year, to allow some exploration of early labour market outcomes and experiences. There was also a small, qualitative investigation of employers' and university careers officers' views of employment opportunities for disabled graduates.

## **Sample**

The original intention was that the research sample should consist of disabled men and women under the age of 40 who had graduated in 2005 or were due to graduate in 2006. There was no restriction by subject studied or by length of course, or by whether or not the student had taken another degree course at an earlier stage in their life. The sample selection criteria in relation to impairment were based on the following codes used on UCAS<sup>5</sup> application forms: blind/partially sighted (UCAS code 2), deaf/hard of hearing (UCAS code 3), wheelchair user/mobility difficulties (UCAS code 4), mental health problems (UCAS code 6), and individuals with two or more of the above (UCAS code 8). For reasons explained below, the final sample included people with a wider range of impairments than this.

The sample was located using a variety of methods. Initially it was intended that it would be drawn from the eight universities in the East Midlands and South Yorkshire regions who had all agreed to participate in the research project.

The disability support service at each university was contacted by telephone and agreement was sought to send out a standard letter with an attached consent form, for each service to distribute to students that they identified as fitting the sample criteria. A project outline was also included to further inform the universities about the project.

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<sup>5</sup> UCAS – Universities and Colleges Admissions Service.

The invitation letter to students asked them to contact the Senior Research Fellow (NH) by telephone or email and asked that they return the consent form electronically. In the case of visually impaired students information was sent electronically by the student's university with the necessary adaptations.

Each university was asked to locate six disabled 2005 graduates initially, followed by six disabled final year undergraduates five months later. All had to be aged under 40 years.

The trawl for 2005 graduates yielded 14 responses from across the East Midlands and South Yorkshire. The response rate was extremely slow due to the pressure of work on participating university staff, and delays in replying on the part of the students.

Three respondents subsequently proved to be unsuitable as they were outside the sample age range. Eleven people participated, representing the impairments outlined above, plus epilepsy and a specific learning difficulty.

Locating individuals due to graduate in 2006 proved problematic as there was also a low response from this group to the letters and emails distributed via university disability support teams. As a result, we were forced to amend the sampling strategy and a snowballing approach was adopted, and the geographical location widened to encompass the whole of the UK. This meant that people with a wider range of impairments than originally intended, including specific learning difficulties, was drawn into the sample.

Recruitment problems caused significant delays to the project as the Senior Research Fellow spent many hours on the telephone contacting major disability organisations in the UK, placing posters on web sites, and approaching graduate recruiters in the hope that they would pass the project details on to suitable individuals. This process took approximately six months.

Eventually we located 29 individuals who fitted the sample criteria and had a wide range of impairments, from across the UK. It eventually transpired that some of these had graduated before 2006, so we do have some evidence of slightly longer-run labour market outcomes for this group also.

Delays in recruitment, plus time constraints imposed by the HEESF, also meant that the researchers had to change the type of interview used, from a combination of telephone, face to face interviews and focus groups, to mainly telephone interviews. We also made innovative use of MSN messenger to run on-line focus groups and one-to-one MSN 'interviews'. These internet-based approaches were especially useful in gathering the views of people with impaired hearing, or who were Deaf.

Respondents who had graduated in 2005 participated in an initial telephone interview, followed by a second, either by telephone or MSN chat, soon after graduation. They were then interviewed again a year later. Respondents who graduated in 2006 participated in only one telephone interview, on-line focus group or one-to-one MSN 'interview', around the time of graduation.

Telephone interviews were also conducted with seven employers and four careers officers. Because of the smaller numbers interviewed and the resulting lower level of saturation of data, we have tended to use longer extracts from these interviews in Chapter 8 than is the case in other chapters.

## **Topic guides**

Topic guides were developed after scoping conversations with recent disabled graduates and are included as Appendix 3.

## **Analysis**

All face-to-face and telephone interviews were recorded and then transcribed. MSN Messenger generates its own transcripts.

A slightly modified version of the framework approach (Ritchie and Spencer, 1994) was used to analyse the material generated from the interviews and group discussions. This is an approach developed specifically for qualitative data analysis for applied policy research.

The transcripts were read through first to inform the development of a coding index that was agreed between the three researchers involved in this element of the project. The index was then applied to the transcripts and material lifted to the analysis charts.

In the analysis presented below we use square brackets [] to indicate where minor changes or additions have been made to improve understanding of the quoted material or to disguise material that might identify respondents. Round brackets () indicate that the recording was unclear and the material in the brackets is our best guess at the words actually spoken. For the MSN Messenger material we have, where necessary, changed 'text speak' to English. Ellipses (...) indicate omission of materials from the same 'block' of interview material. A line between quoted material from the same person indicates that the quotations are from different 'blocks' in the same interview.

We assigned each respondent a fictional first name and use these throughout to identify their quoted material. Because the number of disabled graduates is very small we have decided not to include an appendix giving details of subjects studied, age of respondent, nature of impairment and so on as we believe that this would compromise our promise of confidentiality. We were anxious, nonetheless, that details of individual's lives included in some of the material we quote could still allow identification, should someone wish to attempt this and in places we have therefore deliberately omitted identifying material.

## **Chapter 4     Evidence from the 2001 Census**

### **Introduction**

In this chapter we report findings from the first of the two data sets identified as potentially useful for explaining disabled graduates' employment outcomes. The chapter describes the economic activities and labour market position of graduates under 30 years. It concentrates on gender differences in disabled graduates' employment outcomes and identifies some of the factors involved. Employment outcomes of disabled and non-disabled graduates are also compared.

### **Methods**

#### **The sample**

The analysis uses data from the Individual Sample of Anonymised Records (SAR) drawn from the 2001 Census by the Office for National Statistics. The SAR is a three per cent sample of individual census returns from which identifying information has been removed to protect confidentiality. It is a nationally representative sample, covering all countries of the UK, and contains data on the characteristics of over 1.5 million people, including their health, education, employment and household circumstances.

For present purposes, a sub-sample of disabled individuals recently qualified at graduate level was required. Three criteria defined the sub-sample: age, level of highest qualification and disability. In the absence of information about when respondents obtained their highest academic qualification, age was used to restrict the sample to younger adults who would have qualified at graduate level no more than seven or eight years prior to the Census. Two five-year age groups were selected, 20 to 24 years and 25 to 29 years, because individual ages are not recorded in the SAR. The sample was further restricted to respondents who had at least a first degree; some had also obtained professional qualifications or a higher degree because the SAR does not identify these in separate categories. In the Census, disability is self-defined by whether or not a person has any long-term illness, health problem or disability which limits their daily activities or the work they can do. Only respondents who replied in the affirmative to the question on disability were included.

Applying these three criteria identified 1,921 respondents: 987 women and 934 men.

## **Key variables**

As well as age and gender, the sample was further classified according to five factors known to affect employment outcomes. These additional variables were defined as follows:

### **1. Caregiving**

In the Census, respondents were asked whether they looked after or gave any help or support to someone because of physical or mental ill-health or disability, or problems related to old age, and if so, how much time they spent doing so during a typical week. The question was intended to identify caregiving that was not provided as part of paid employment. Unpaid carers were recorded as providing care for up to 19 hours a week, 20 to 49 hours, or 50 hours or more a week. Very few respondents in the sample selected for analysis provided 50 or more care hours a week so the last two categories were combined. In some analyses it was necessary to merge all three care categories and compare carers and non-carers.

### **2. Ethnicity**

Although the Census invites respondents to record their ethnic identity according to a detailed classification, very few individuals in the sample selected for analysis said they belonged to one of the smaller minority ethnic groups. Detailed consideration of ethnicity was therefore impossible and only two categories were retained for analysis: one group containing those who described themselves as White British or Irish, and one containing all remaining respondents described here as belonging to minority ethnic groups.

### **3. Family type**

Respondents were classified into different family types depending on whether they were living in a couple, whether they had any dependent children, and their relationship with other household members. Families were defined as a group of people consisting of a married or cohabiting couple with or without dependent children, or a lone parent with dependent children. Cohabiting couples included same sex couples. Dependent children were aged 0 to 15, or aged 16 to 18 and in full-time education, and living in a family with their parent(s). An adult was any person who was not a dependent child. Five family types were distinguished in which respondents were defined as:

- a) Lone parents with dependent children
- b) Couples with dependent children
- c) Couples without dependent children
- d) Adult children living with adults (usually parents) of an older generation
- e) Not living in a family (living in halls of residence or nurses' hostels for example).

This typology contains two important contrasts: between respondents with and without dependent children (a) and b) versus c), d) and e)), and between respondents living in a couple or not (b) and c) versus a), d) and e)). These contrasts



were evaluated in the analysis and were substituted for the full typology where they more clearly discriminated between respondents' employment outcomes.

#### **4. Health status**

General health status was assessed by respondents themselves according to whether they described their health over the 12 months before the Census as 'Good', 'Fairly good' or 'Not good'.

#### **5. Region or country of residence**

This refers to respondents' usual region of residence or, if they normally lived outside England, their country of usual residence – that is, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Ten English regions were distinguished: North East, North West, Yorkshire and Humberside, East Midlands, West Midlands, Eastern England, South East, South West, Inner London and Outer London.

Information on additional factors known to affect employment outcomes, such as hourly wage rates, years of labour market experience, length of time in current job, local labour market characteristics and employment status of partner or spouse, was not available from the Census. The aim then was not to develop a fully descriptive or even an explanatory model of employment outcomes, but rather to investigate whether and to what extent employment outcomes differed between women and men, and between sub-groups of women and men when described by the factors defined above.

### **Outcome measures**

Six employment outcomes were derived from the SAR data:

1. The employment rate was defined as the proportion of all respondents who were working in the week prior to the Census, or would have been but for illness, maternity leave, holiday or being temporarily laid off. The denominator includes all respondents whether actively seeking work or not; this formulation recognises that many disabled people described as economically inactive, including those recorded as permanently sick or disabled, would work if suitable jobs were available.
2. The number of hours usually worked each week was used to distinguish between full-time and part-time working. Part-time working covers respondents who worked under 30 hours a week in their main job as a proportion of all those currently in paid employment.<sup>6</sup> The 30-hour cut-off was chosen because it is used to define part-time work for tax credit purposes. In the tax credit scheme, part-time workers are further divided into those working under 16 hours a week and those working 16 to 29 hours; however, sample numbers were too small to include this distinction in the analysis.

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<sup>6</sup> Information about paid employment other than respondents' main job was not collected in the Census.

3. The industry in which people work was based on a description of their employers' activities, or their own businesses if self-employed. After the Census, responses were coded according to the Standard Industrial Classification (SIC92). This classification contains 17 major industrial sectors. These were merged into a four-fold typology: 'Public' (includes public administration and defence, education, health and social work, other community, social and personal work); 'Financial services' (financial intermediation, real estate, renting and business activities); 'Other services' (wholesale, retail and motor trade, hotels and restaurants, transport, storage and communication); and 'Manufacturing and construction' (agriculture, hunting, forestry, fishing, mining quarrying, manufacturing, electricity, gas and water supply, construction).

4. Socio-economic status is based on the National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC) of respondents' main job. Sample numbers were insufficient to use the full NS-SEC classification and only four categories are distinguished here: 'Higher managerial and professional', 'Lower managerial and professional', 'Intermediate', and 'Other' occupations. 'Other' includes many routine and semi-routine jobs. Although the socio-economic status of their most recent job is coded for respondents currently not in employment, the analysis concentrates on those who were actually working at the time of the Census.

5. Supervisory status refers to the proportion of respondents in work who were responsible for overseeing the work of other employees on a day-to-day basis in their main job. Although this information is also used to derive the NS-SEC, supervisory responsibilities were considered a sufficiently important aspect of job status to warrant separate examination.

6. 'Ever worked' is defined as the proportion of respondents not currently in paid employment who had ever had a paid job.

The first two outcome measures represent the extent to which respondents participated in paid employment; the third measure distinguishes industry sectors broadly offering different terms, conditions and types of employment that are often associated with gender differences; the fourth and fifth measures reflect the status and quality of jobs; and the last measure represents the labour market experience of respondents not currently in paid work.

## **Analysis**

Each outcome was evaluated by logistic regression using binary and multinomial models according to whether outcome measures were dichotomous or categorical variables. Attention focused on identifying gender differences in outcomes by investigating both the direct association between gender and outcomes, and the indirect or interaction effect of gender whereby differences in outcomes between

women and men are influenced by, or associated with, caregiving, ethnicity, family type, health status and region of residence.

The direct and indirect effects of gender on employment outcomes were evaluated alongside each of these factors in turn, and with all factors considered together. In the latter approach, the effects of gender and the other observed factors were evaluated in a stepwise manner, such that the most significant factor enters the model at each step. This process continues until no more factors are significantly associated with the outcome under examination.

Statistical significance was decided according to the five per cent level ( $p < 0.05$ ). Odds ratios (ORs) were estimated to indicate the size and direction of the effects of gender, interaction terms and other factors on each outcome measure. Odds ratios greater than 1.0 indicate that a variable is associated with an increased likelihood of an outcome occurring; odds ratios less than one indicate that a variable is associated with a reduced likelihood of an outcome occurring. An odds ratio of 1.25, for example, indicates that the outcome under consideration is 25 per cent more likely to occur in association with a factor than in the sample as a whole; an odds ratio of 0.75 that it is 25 per cent less likely to occur than expected. Ninety-five per cent confidence intervals (CIs) were estimated to indicate the range that is most likely to include odds ratios that would be obtained if the total population were studied. Statistically significant odds ratios have confidence intervals that do not encompass the value 1.0 which indicates no effect on the outcome.

## **Results**

### **Sample characteristics**

Table 4.1 compares the distribution of women and men by age group and the other observed characteristics described above. Most respondents were aged 25 to 29 years, did not look after someone who was sick, frail elderly or disabled, described themselves as White British or Irish, and reported their health as 'good' or 'fairly good'. They lived throughout the UK although more than a third lived in London and the South East. There were no statistically significant differences between women and men apart from their family circumstances: more women than men were married or living as married (40 and 27 per cent respectively), and more women had dependent children (15 per cent compared with seven per cent of men), whether as lone parents or living with a co-resident partner or spouse. In contrast, more men than women were living in their parents' household or with unrelated others not part of a family. The expectation is that having dependent children will affect women's chances of being employed and working full time, and possibly other employment outcomes.

**Table 4.1 Disabled graduates' sample characteristics by gender (per cent)**

	<i>Women (n= 987)</i>	<i>Men (n= 934)</i>	<i>Chi-square test*</i>
<b>Age group</b>			ns
20 to 24 years	33	34	
25 to 29 years	67	66	
<b>Caregiving</b>			ns
Provides no care	89	92	
1 to 19 hours a week	7	7	
20 or more hours a week	3	2	
<b>Ethnicity</b>			ns
White British/Irish	80	81	
Other ethnic groups	20	19	
<b>Family type</b>			P<0.001
With dependent children	15	7	
Lone parents with dependent children	4	0	
Couples with dependent children	11	7	
Without dependent children	85	93	
Couples without dependent children	29	20	
Living with parents (mostly)	23	32	
Not in a family	33	41	
<b>Health status</b>			ns
Good	39	43	
Fairly good	34	35	
Not good	27	23	
<b>Region or country of residence</b>			ns
North East	3	4	
North West	10	9	
Yorkshire and Humberside	8	7	
East Midlands	4	5	
West Midlands	7	9	
Eastern England	7	7	
South East	13	13	
South West	6	7	
Inner London	13	12	
Outer London	11	11	
Scotland	10	8	
Wales	4	4	
Northern Ireland	3	2	

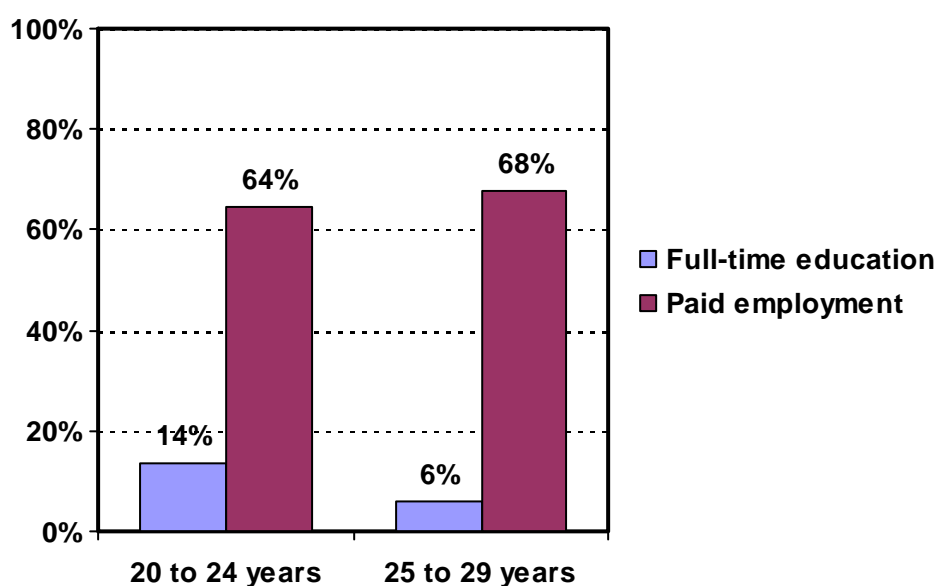
\* ns=statistically not significant (p&lt;0.05)

## Employment rates

Two out of three people reported that they had been working during the week prior to the Census, or would have been but for illness, maternity leave, holiday or being temporarily laid off. The proportions of women and men with a job were almost identical, 66 and 67 per cent respectively, and the difference in employment rates between them was not statistically significant.

However, some groups of respondents were more likely to be in paid employment than others and, as we shall observe, these groups were associated with differences in the extent to which women and men participated in the workforce. The analysis identified six factors associated with variations in employment rates and this section discusses in turn the effects of age, ethnicity, family structure, health, care giving, and region of residence.

**Figure 4.1 Participation of disabled graduates in paid employment and full-time education by age group**



Older respondents were generally more likely to be working than younger respondents: 68 per cent of those aged 25 to 29 said they had a job compared with 64 per cent of those aged 20 to 24. This age difference probably reflects the transition from higher education to paid employment. As Figure 4.1 shows, the increase in employment rate with age mirrored a decrease in the proportion of respondents in full-time education.

The age difference in employment rates (four per cent) was only half that of the age difference in the proportions in full-time education (eight per cent), suggesting that other transitions or change of circumstances may have offset the move from higher

education into paid employment. The findings suggest that women and men followed different trajectories after leaving higher education. Table 4.2 shows that the age-related increase in employment rates was mostly experienced by women; in addition, declining participation in full-time education with age was associated with an increasing proportion of women looking after home or family. By comparison, the age-related decline in men's participation in full-time education was mostly associated with an increasing proportion who said they were permanently sick or disabled, suggesting that they faced particular barriers in finding or keeping paid employment.

Employment rates also varied by ethnicity: from 53 per cent of those in ethnic minority groups to 70 per cent of those who described themselves as White British or Irish. These proportions were more or less repeated among both women (52 and 70 per cent respectively) and men (54 and 70 per cent respectively), and there was no significant gender difference in employment rates according to these broad ethnic identities.

**Table 4.2 Economic activity of disabled graduates by age group and gender (per cent)**

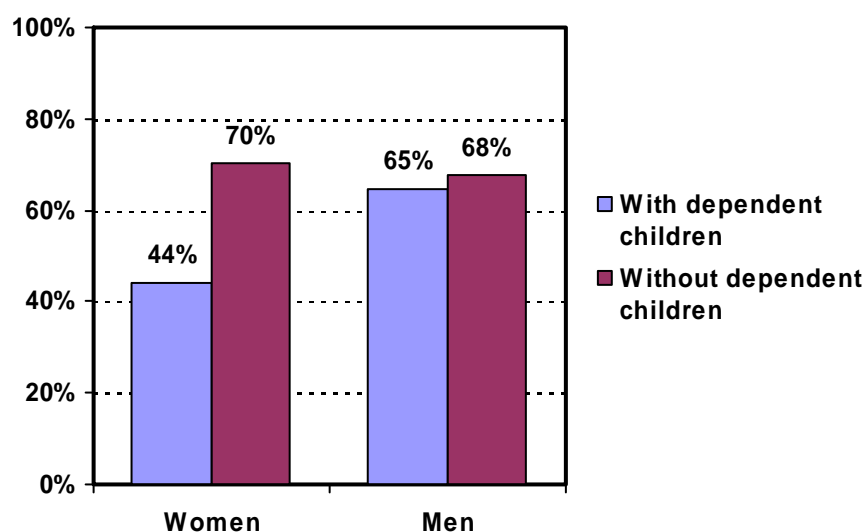
	<i>Women</i>			<i>Men</i>		
	20-24	25-29	All	20-24	25-29	All
<b>Economically active</b>	70	73	72	75	76	76
In paid employment	62	68	66	67	68	67
Unemployed*	8	5	6	9	8	8
<b>Not economically active</b>	30	27	28	25	24	24
Student	13	6	8	14	6	9
Looking after home or family	1	7	5	0	1	1
Permanently sick or disabled	9	8	9	5	10	8
Other	6	6	6	5	7	7
<i>Base (= 100 per cent)</i>	326	661	987	320	614	934

\* Includes those actively seeking work and available to start within two weeks; and those waiting to start a job already obtained.

As might be expected, variations in employment rates by family circumstances affected women and men differently, reflecting the gendered pattern of childcare responsibilities typical of the general population. Caring for dependent children was associated with a reduced likelihood of women having a job, especially in one-parent families. Overall, 50 per cent of respondents with dependent children were working compared with 69 per cent of those without such responsibilities, but the difference largely reflected the experience of women. They were more likely than men to have

dependent children: 15 and seven per cent respectively. Moreover, women's employment rates were disproportionately affected by childcare responsibilities: 44 per cent of women with dependent children were working compared with 65 per cent of their male counterparts. Men's participation in employment was barely influenced by having dependent children in their families and, as Figure 4.2 shows, women without dependent children were marginally more likely than men to be in the workforce.

**Figure 4.2 Employment rates by dependent children and gender**



Almost all lone parents were women, 42 out of 43, or 98 per cent, and they were less likely to have a job than other women with dependent children (38 per cent compared with 46 per cent of women living in a couple).

Table 4.3 shows employment rates by all family types distinguished here. Those living in a couple but without dependent children were most likely to be working (79 and 84 per cent respectively of women and men). Around two-thirds of respondents, women and men alike, who still lived at home with their parents, or who were living on their own or with unrelated others, were in paid employment – that is, more or less to the same extent as the overall sample employment rates.

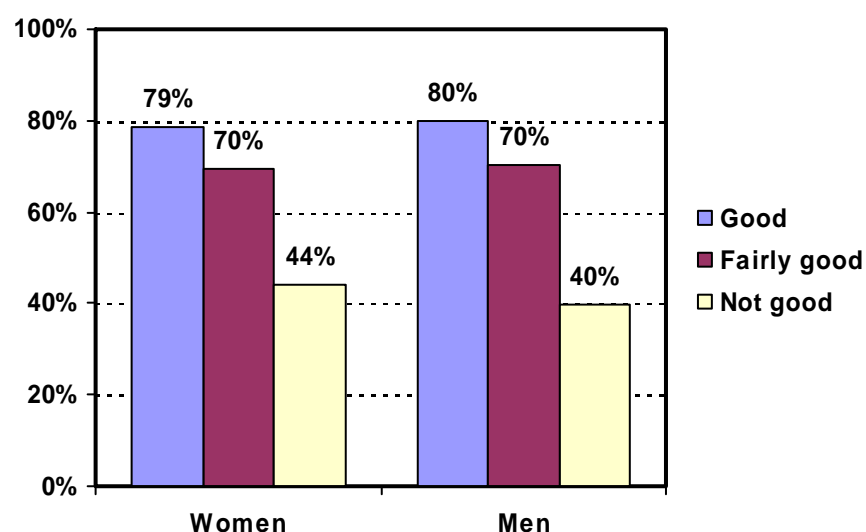
Respondents who described their health as 'not good' were less likely to be working than those who considered themselves to be in 'good' health. Figure 4.3 shows that employment rates declined with worsening health and this happened more or less to the same degree in both women and men.

**Table 4.3 Employment rates of disabled graduates by family type and gender (per cent)**

	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>All</i>
<b>With dependent children</b>	44	65	50
Lone parents with dependent children	38	(1)*	40
Couples with dependent children	46	64	53
<b>Without dependent children</b>	70	68	69
Couples without dependent children	79	84	81
Living with parents (mostly)	67	62	64
Not in a family	65	64	64
<b>Total</b>	66	67	67

\* One man, who was in paid work, identified himself as a lone parent.

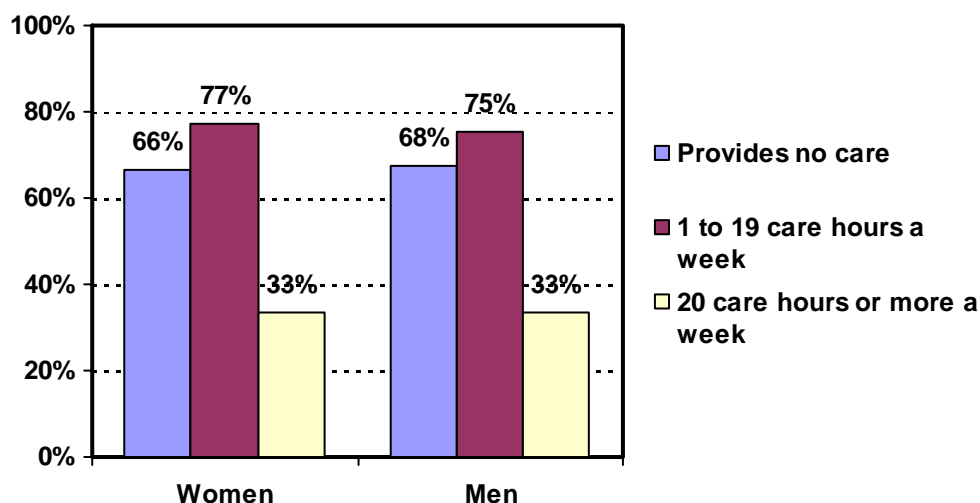
**Figure 4.3 Employment rates of disabled graduates by health status and gender**



Providing 20 or more hours of care a week for someone who was ill, frail or disabled was associated with significantly reduced employment rates. As Figure 4.4 shows, however, respondents who were less heavily involved in care giving were more likely to be working than those who were not providing any care. Although women were somewhat more likely than men to provide care – 11 and eight per cent respectively described themselves as carers – the relationship between care giving and paid work was remarkably similar for women and men alike.



**Figure 4.4 Employment rates of disabled graduates by care giving and gender**



Employment rates varied across the English regions from 46 per cent in the North East to 76 per cent in the South West. Such variation suggests that labour market conditions, including the supply of suitable jobs, support services, and public transport, are more conducive to disabled graduates finding employment in some areas than in others. Women and men appear to have been favoured by local labour market characteristics in different parts of the UK (Table 4.4). For example, 71 per cent of women in the North West were in paid employment compared with 60 per cent of men. The situation was reversed in the Eastern region where 64 per cent of women compared with 80 per cent of men said they were working.

Each of the six factors considered so far, age, ethnicity, family structure, health, care giving, and region of residence, were independently associated with variations in employment rates. That is, each of these factors had a statistically significant, independent effect on the proportion of respondents in paid employment when evaluated together in a multiple logistic regression model (see Appendix 1, Table A1.1). Gender does not enter the final model; statistically, there was no significant direct association between gender and employment rate, confirming that there was no overall difference in young, disabled, graduate women's and men's employment rates.

**Table 4.4 Employment rates of disabled graduates by region, country and gender (per cent)**

	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>All</i>
North East	50	43	46
North West	71	60	66
Yorkshire and Humberside	68	59	64
East Midlands	74	63	68
West Midlands	62	59	60
Eastern England	64	80	71
South East	71	78	74
South West	75	77	76
Inner London	65	66	66
Outer London	67	69	68
Scotland	63	68	65
Wales	51	62	57
Northern Ireland	58	83	69
Total	66	67	67

As we have observed, however, differences in women's and men's employment rates depended in part on their family circumstances and region of residence. This type of association is known as an indirect or interaction effect, and the interaction between gender and region described above (see Table 4.4) appears in the final model reported in Table A1.1 in Appendix 1.

However, no statistically significant interaction between gender and respondents' family type entered the final model despite marked gender differences in employment rates associated with family type described above (see Table 4.3). One explanation is that the classification of family types used here is based on several considerations – partnership status, dependent children, generation position, blood relationships – each of which influences the effects of gender on employment rates to varying degrees or in different ways. When that classification is broken down into specific aspects of family structure, differences between women's and men's employment rates become more apparent. As shown above (Figure 4.2), women with dependent children were significantly less likely to be working than men with dependent children (44 and 65 per cent respectively). As most women with dependent children were living in a couple (76 per cent), gender differences in employment rates were also found among respondents with a spouse or partner. Thus, fewer women than men with a spouse or partner said they were working (70 and 79 per cent respectively). Although, this difference mainly reflected the gendered pattern of child care

responsibilities in two parent families, married or cohabiting women without dependent children were also less likely to be working than their male counterparts (79 and 84 per cent respectively). Among respondents without dependent children *and* without a spouse or partner, gender differences were reversed: more women than men were in paid employment (66 and 63 per cent respectively), especially among those still living with their parents (67 and 62 per cent respectively). These complex interactions between gender and family circumstances could not be captured by the model once other factors had been taken in account.

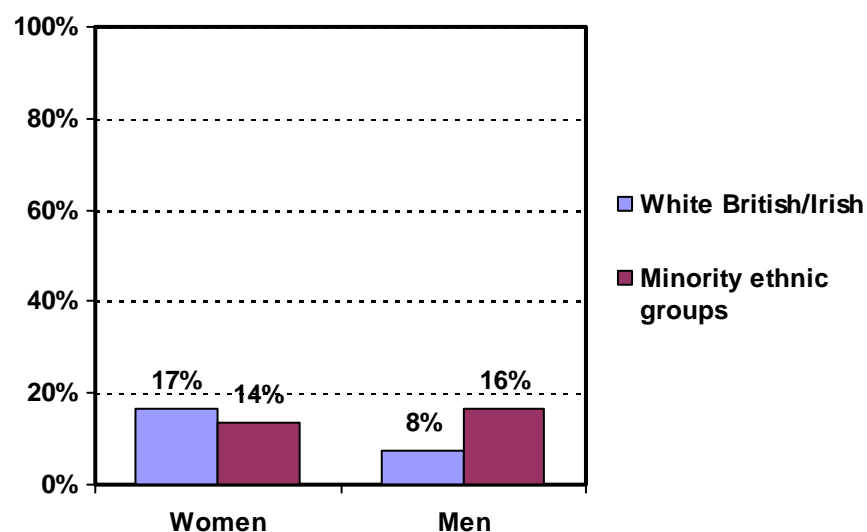
### **Hours worked per week**

Almost nine out of ten respondents in paid employment, 87 per cent overall, said they worked full time, that is 30 or more hours a week. However, women were more likely than men to work part time, 16 and nine per cent respectively, and the difference was statistically significant. In addition to gender, part-time working was associated with four factors: ethnicity, family type, self-assessed health, and the provision of unpaid care. Each is discussed in turn below.

Overall, respondents from minority ethnic groups were more likely to work part time than those from the White British or Irish group (15 and 12 per cent respectively), but the difference reflected men's employment patterns. As Figure 4.5 shows, men from minority ethnic groups were twice as likely to work part time as their White British or Irish counterparts. In contrast, women from minority ethnic groups were *less* likely to work part time than White British or Irish women, although the difference was small and not statistically significant. In other words, the extent to which women and men worked part time differed according to ethnic identity.

Unsurprisingly, child care responsibilities were associated with an increased likelihood of working part time but this association largely reflected women's circumstances, whether lone parents or living in a couple (Table 4.5). Overall, women with responsibilities for dependent children were more than twice as likely to work part time as those without child care responsibilities (32 and 14 per cent respectively). In contrast, men with dependent children were actually *less* likely to be working part time than those without dependent children, 5 and 9 per cent respectively. Most men worked full time whether they had dependent children or not, reflecting the fact that they were probably the main breadwinners in two parent families.

**Figure 4.5 Proportion of disabled graduates working part time by ethnicity and gender**



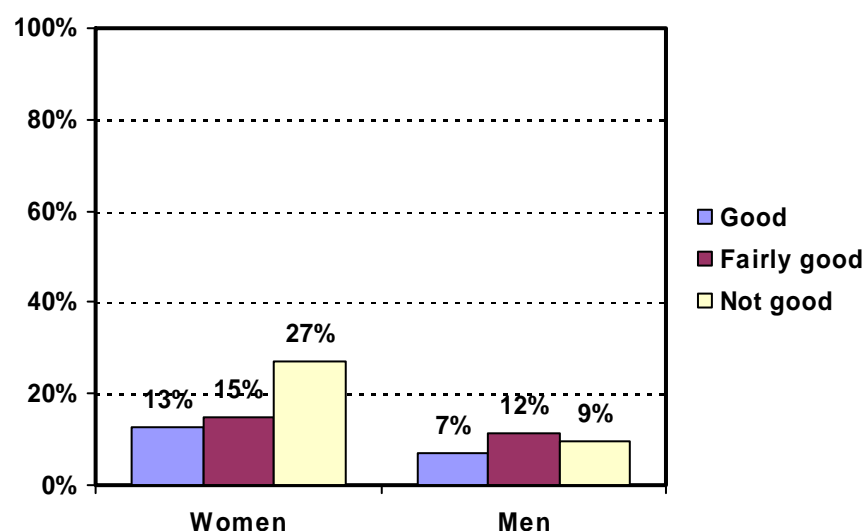
**Table 4.5 Proportion of disabled graduates working part time by family type and gender (per cent)**

	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>All</i>
<b>With dependent children</b>	32	5	21
Lone parents with dependent children	25	.*	24
Couples with dependent children	34	5	21
<b>Without dependent children</b>	14	9	12
Couples without dependent children	14	8	12
Living with parents (mostly)	17	10	13
Not in a family	12	9	11
<b>Total</b>	16	9	13

\* One man, who worked full time, identified himself as a lone parent.

Respondents who assessed their own health as ‘good’ were less likely to work part time than those in poorer health, but evidence of an association between poor health and part-time working was most obvious for women. The proportion of women working under 30 hours a week increased with worsening health and a substantial minority of women who described their health as ‘not good’ worked only part time (Figure 4.6). By comparison, variations in part-time working according to men’s health were not linear: those whose health was described as either ‘good’ or ‘not good’ were *less* likely to work part time than those in ‘fairly good’ health, although the differences were small and not statistically significant.

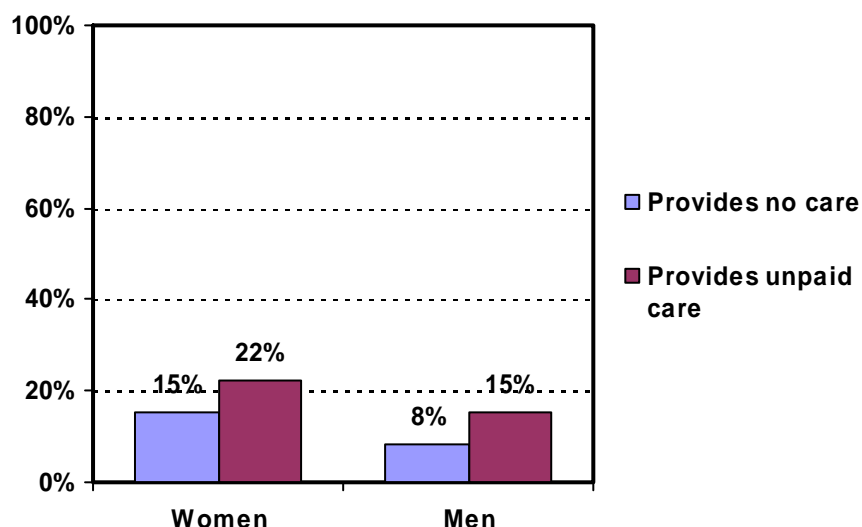
**Figure 4.6 Proportion of disabled graduates working part time by health status and gender**



Providing unpaid care was associated with an increased likelihood of both women and men working part time. The effect on their employment patterns was similar in relative terms in that providing care increased the proportion working part time by seven percentage points in both cases (Figure 4.7). Few respondents provided 20 or more care hours a week whilst in paid employment so it was impracticable to examine the association between part-time working and level of involvement in care giving.

Of all the factors considered here, gender, ethnicity, family type, self-assessed health, and care giving showed a statistically significant association with the propensity to work part time. They were subsequently evaluated together in a multiple logistic regression model. Respondents' age and region of residence were also included in the model to check whether they might be associated with part-time working when other factors were taken into account. When specifying the model, the presence or absence of dependent children was substituted for family type because, as noted above, child care responsibilities was the key family characteristic influencing the extent to which respondents worked part time.

**Figure 4.7 Proportion of disabled graduates working part time by care giving and gender**



The results are set out in Appendix 1 (Table A1.2). They show that parental responsibilities for dependent children and poor health (described as ‘not good’) significantly increased the likelihood of working part time, independently of the other factors considered in the model. Differences in part-time working associated with gender and ethnicity affected each other; they are represented in the model by an interaction term. Thus, differences in the proportions of women and men working part time depended on their ethnicity, and differences in part-time working associated with ethnicity depended on respondents’ gender. In particular, ethnic minority women were less likely to work part time than expected (see Figure 4.5 above).

Although the extent of part-time working varies markedly between women and men, gender does not enter the final model shown in Table A1.2. It would seem that the inclusion of variables representing families with or without dependent children, and the interaction between ethnicity and gender, have largely incorporated variations in part-time working attributable to gender.

Whether or not respondents provided unpaid care was no longer significantly associated with working part time when taking account of other factors in the final model. The most likely reason is that the association between care giving and working part time is ‘covered’ by the other variables. Thus, carers were more likely than non-carers to report poorer health; and carers were somewhat more likely to have dependent children than non-carers, although this latter association was not statistically significant. Hence, the inclusion in the final model of variables representing self-assessed health and responsibilities for dependent children incorporates or masks the association between care giving and part-time working.

## Industry sector

Table 4.6 confirms a widely-reported observation that women are more likely than men to work in the health, education and social services and public administration.<sup>7</sup> Jobs in the 'public sector' have traditionally attracted women workers and the findings reported here show that disabled women were more than twice as likely as their male counterparts to work in the public sector (51 per cent and 24 per cent respectively). In contrast, disabled men were more likely to be working in financial services: this was also the most popular employment destination for disabled male graduates although they were widely dispersed throughout all four sectors identified here.

**Table 4.6 Disabled graduates: industry sector by hours worked and gender (per cent)**

	<i>Women</i>			<i>Men</i>		
	Part time*	Full time	All women	Part time*	Full time	All men
Public sector	63	48	51	34	23	24
Financial services	13	26	24	14	38	36
Other services	21	15	16	41	18	20
Manufacturing / construction	2	10	9	11	20	20
<i>Base (= 100 per cent)</i>	<i>104</i>	<i>548</i>	<i>652</i>	<i>56</i>	<i>572</i>	<i>628</i>

\* Under 30 hours a week.

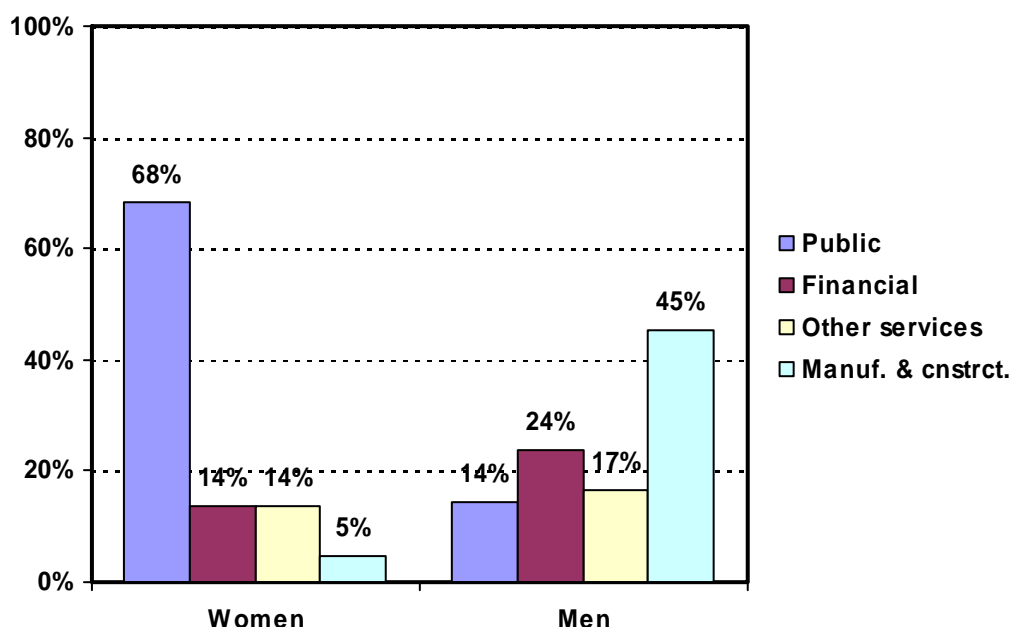
Table 4.6 shows further that disabled women were even more likely to work in the public sector when working part time than those in full-time employment (63 and 48 per cent respectively). This suggests that women were attracted to public sector employment not just because of the type of work offered but because the terms and conditions of employment, including possibilities for working part time, suited their circumstances.

As we have seen, part-time hours enabled women to combine family responsibilities with paid employment (Table 4.5). Over half the part-time jobs reported (53 per cent) were found in the public sector. Not surprisingly, therefore, women with dependent children were overwhelmingly found in public sector employment (Figure 4.8). Multivariate analysis confirmed that having responsibilities for dependent children was associated with working in the public sector; and an interaction between gender and dependent children showed that women with dependent children were much

<sup>7</sup> Four industry sectors were combined to represent a rather loose approximation to public sector employment: 'Public administration and defence', 'Education', 'Health and social work', and 'Other community, social and personal work'. Hicks *et al.* (2005) provide a more precise definition of public sector employment.

more likely than men with dependent children to work in the public sector (see Table A1.3 in Appendix 1).

**Figure 4.8 Proportion of disabled graduates with dependent children by sector and gender**



### Socio-economic status

As might be expected in a well qualified population, most respondents were employed in higher status occupations. However, there were differences between women and men in the socio-economic classification of their occupations. Table 4.7 shows that women were more likely to be employed in 'Lower managerial and professional' and 'Intermediate' occupations (63 per cent compared with 45 per cent of men). In contrast, men were more likely to be working in 'Higher managerial and professional' and in 'Other' occupations (55 per cent compared with 37 per cent of women). In other words, women were most likely to be found in the middle ranking occupations of this four-fold classification, and less likely than men to be found in occupations of higher or lower rank.



**Table 4.7 Socio-economic status of disabled graduates by gender (per cent)**

	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>All</i>
Higher managerial and professional	17	30	23
Lower managerial and professional	45	31	38
Intermediate occupations	18	14	16
Other occupations*	20	25	23
<i>Base (= 100 per cent)</i>	<i>653</i>	<i>629</i>	<i>1282</i>

\* Includes 'Lower supervisory and technical', 'Semi-routine' and 'Routine' occupations.

Differences in the socio-economic status of women's and men's occupations were statistically significant when other factors were taken into account. Four additional factors were independently associated with socio-economic status – age, ethnicity, family type and health (see Appendix 1, Table A1.4). Thus, older workers were more likely than younger workers to be found in 'Higher and Lower managerial and professional' occupations (66 per cent of those aged 25 to 29 compared with 53 per cent of those aged 20 to 24 years), suggesting occupational progression over time. Respondents from minority ethnic communities were more likely than White British or Irish respondents to work in 'Other' occupations (31 and 21 per cent respectively), and less likely to work in higher-ranking occupations (for example, 32 and 40 per cent respectively in 'Lower managerial and professional' occupations). The association between family type and socio-economic status indicated that respondents living in the parental home were under-represented in managerial and professional occupations (49 per cent compared with 66 per cent of respondents in other family situations). Self-assessed health had a small residual effect on respondents' socio-economic status indicating, for example, that respondents describing their health as 'not good' were under-represented in 'Lower managerial and professional' occupations (33 per cent compared with 39 per cent of those in better health). However, consideration of these four factors – age, ethnicity, family type and health – did not alter the gender differences in socio-economic status shown in Table 4.7.

It was further hypothesised that socio-economic differences in women's and men's occupations might be attributable to differences in the hours they worked. Higher status occupations were more likely to be full-time, and men were more likely than women to work full time (under 'Hours worked per week' above). Hence, more men might be expected to have higher status jobs by virtue of being able to supply longer hours of work. Despite that, controlling for differences in hours worked did not diminish the gender gap in access to high status occupations: 19 per cent of women who worked full-time held 'Higher managerial and professional' occupations compared with 32 per cent of their male counterparts. The difference in proportions

(13 percentage points) was identical to that shown in Table 4.7, which includes all respondents whether working full or part time.

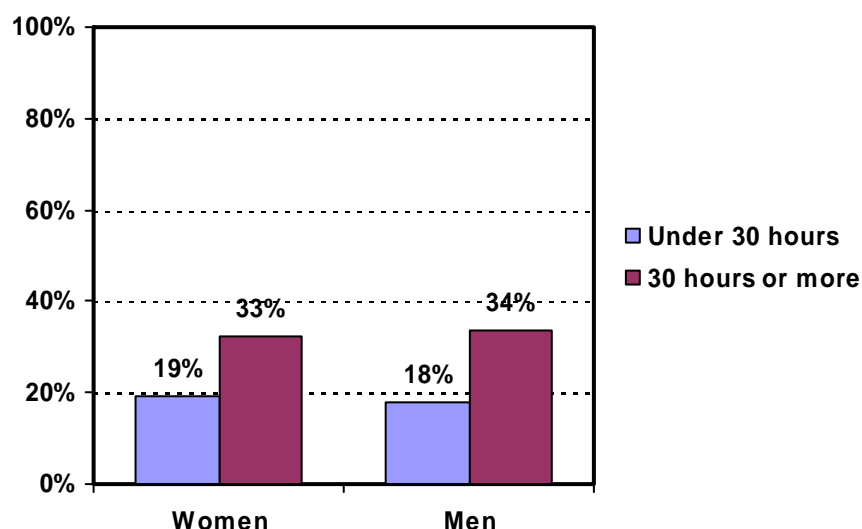
### **Supervisory status**

An important consideration in the socio-economic classification of occupations is whether someone is a supervisor or foreman responsible for overseeing the work of other employees. Most jobs with a supervisory element are classed as 'Higher and Lower managerial and professional', that is higher in status than 'Intermediate' occupations (see Table 4.7).

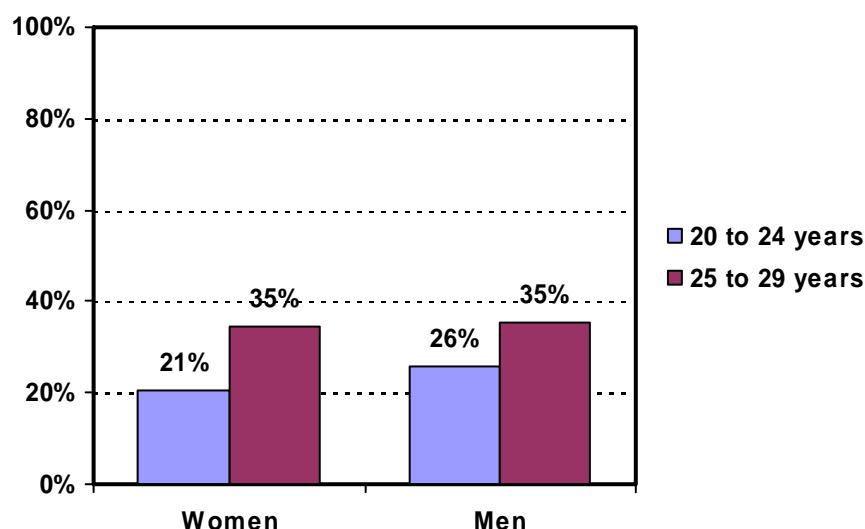
Almost identical proportions of women and men were employed in both 'Higher and Lower managerial and professional' occupations (62 and 61 per cent respectively). The absence of a marked gender difference in the proportions employed in such occupations was reinforced by responses to the question about supervisory responsibilities: 30 per cent of women compared with 32 per cent of men said they had a supervisory role at work, a small and statistically non-significant difference. Supervisory responsibilities depended in part on hours worked in that full-time workers were more likely to exercise a supervisory role. Although women were more likely than men to work part time, when hours worked were taken into account, gender differences in supervisory responsibilities narrowed even further (Figure 4.9). Almost identical proportions of women and men exercised supervisory responsibilities irrespective of whether they worked full or part time.

Supervisory responsibilities were associated with respondents' ages and, as might be expected, older respondents were more likely than younger respondents to supervise other employees: 35 per cent of those aged 25 to 29 compared with 23 per cent of those aged 20 to 24. Figure 4.10 shows that age differences in supervisory responsibilities affected women and men alike. Younger men were somewhat more likely than their female counterparts to be supervisors but there were no significant gender differences among younger or older respondents in exercising that role. By age 25 to 29, women had 'caught up' their male counterparts in terms of the proportion with supervisory responsibilities.

**Figure 4.9 Proportion of disabled graduates with supervisory responsibilities by hours worked and gender**



**Figure 4.10 Proportion of disabled graduates with supervisory responsibilities by age group and gender**



Considering all factors together confirmed that there was no significant difference in the proportions of women and men with supervisory responsibilities at work. Respondents' age had the only significant independent effect on the proportion of respondents who exercised a supervisory role, indicating that this responsibility was held predominantly by older employees (Appendix 1, Table A1.5).

## Proportion ever worked of those currently not in paid employment

As noted above under 'Employment Rates', one in three respondents were not in paid employment during the week prior to the Census. They included those who were actively seeking work, those who were waiting to start a job already obtained, and those who were considered not economically active. Men were more likely than women to be seeking paid employment or had already obtained a job (26 and 18 per cent respectively – Table 4.8). In contrast, women not in paid employment were more likely than men to report that they were looking after home or family (14 and two per cent respectively). However, similar proportions of women and men said they not working because of illness or disability, or were in full-time education.

**Table 4.8 Economic activity of disabled graduate respondents not in paid employment (per cent)**

	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Total</i>
Unemployed*	18	26	21
<b>Not economically active</b>	82	74	79
Permanently sick or disabled	25	25	25
Student	24	27	25
Looking after home/family	14	2	8
Other	19	21	20
<i>Base (= 100 per cent)</i>	334	305	639

\* Includes those actively seeking work and available to start within two weeks; and those waiting to start a job already obtained.

Most of these respondents said they had worked in the past (79 per cent). Women were more likely than men to have previously had a job, 80 and 77 per cent respectively, but the difference was too small to be statistically significant. Age, ethnicity, marital status and region of residence were each associated with variations in the proportion of respondents who had ever worked. However, classifying respondents by these factors did not identify any significant sub-group differences in the proportions of women and men who had previously had paid work.

Not surprisingly, older respondents were more likely to have had a job in the past: 83 per cent of those aged 25 to 29 compared with 71 per cent of those aged 20 to 24. Respondents who described themselves as White British or Irish were also more likely to have worked than those from minority ethnic groups: 84 and 64 per cent respectively. Classifying respondents by age or ethnicity did not reveal any significant gender differences in the propensity to have ever worked, although women in the

younger age group were more likely to have worked in the past than their male counterparts (75 and 66 per cent respectively).

The proportion who had ever worked was also shaped by family formation, in that those who were living in a couple were more likely to have worked in the past than those who were living single lives: the proportions were 86 and 76 per cent respectively. Differences between those living in a couple or not, in the proportion that had ever worked, was somewhat greater for men than for women (89 and 75 per cent compared with 85 and 78 per cent respectively). However, the association between marital status and the proportion of respondents who had ever worked did not differ between women and men; there was no significant interaction between marital status and gender when evaluating their effect on the proportion who had ever worked.

Regional variations in the proportion that had ever worked drew attention to a marked contrast between London and the South East. In the South East region, 91 per cent of respondents said they had had job in the past whereas in Inner and Outer London combined the proportion was 67 per cent, influenced perhaps by the high proportion of full-time students in that city. However, regional differences in the proportions of women and men who had ever worked varied only slightly and were not statistically significant.

When all factors were considered together age, ethnicity and marital status were each independently associated with the extent to which respondents had formerly participated in paid employment (see Appendix 1, Table A1.6). As we have observed, the proportion of respondents who had previously worked was higher among those aged 25 to 29 and those living in a couple; it was lower among those from minority ethnic groups. The analysis confirmed that there were no gender differences in the proportion of respondents currently not in paid employment who had worked in the past.

### **Comparing disabled and non-disabled graduates<sup>8</sup>**

Gender differences in employment outcomes among both disabled and non-disabled respondents were broadly comparable and generally small; however, there were two exceptions (Table 4.9). The largest gender gap was in public sector employment. Women were employed predominantly in public sector jobs, and both disabled and non-disabled women were more likely than their male counterparts to work in the public sector. The findings suggest that disabled women relied more on public sector employment than did non-disabled women.

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<sup>8</sup> Non-disabled graduates were defined in the same way as disabled graduates except that they had answered the question about limiting long-term illness, health problem or disability in the negative (p. 44).

Secondly, there were marked gender differences in socio-economic status. Both disabled and non-disabled men were more likely than their female counterparts to work in 'Higher managerial and professional' occupations. In contrast, both disabled and non-disabled women were more likely to occupy 'Lower managerial and professional' jobs and, to a lesser extent, 'Intermediate occupations'.

Additionally, women were more likely than men to work part time although gender differences (around six or seven percentage points) were smaller than gender differences associated with industry sector or socio-economic status.

Apart from these gender differences, the findings in Table 4.9 indicate that disabled respondents faced greater difficulties in finding and keeping paid employment than did their non-disabled peers. Disabled women and men were less likely to be working, more likely to be working part time, and more likely to occupy lower status jobs ('Intermediate' and 'Other' occupations), than their non-disabled counterparts.

Further examination of Table 4.9 shows that labour force participation rates varied more according to disability than gender. Differences of around 16 or 17 percentage points separated the proportions of disabled and non-disabled respondents in paid work, whereas only one or two percentage point differences separated women's and men's employment rates. In other words, disability was a more important driver of labour force participation than gender. Disabled respondents were far less likely to be in paid employment compared with non-disabled respondents than were women compared with men. Disabled women were least likely to be working but only marginally less so than disabled men.

**Table 4.9 Employment outcomes for graduates by disability and gender (per cent)**

	<i>Disabled</i>			<i>Not disabled</i>		
	Women	Men	Difference	Women	Men	Difference
<b>Employment status</b>						
In paid work	66	67	-1	82	84	-2
Not in paid work	34	33	1	18	16	2
<i>All respondents (= 100 per cent)</i>	987	934		30448	27720	
<b>Hours worked per week</b>						
Under 30 hours	16	9	7	11	5	6
30 hours or more	84	91	-7	89	95	-6
<i>Respondents in paid work (= 100 per cent)</i>	653	629		25117	23369	
<b>Industry sector</b>						
Public sector	51	24	27	45	23	22
Financial services	24	36	-12	28	39	-11
Other services	16	20	-4	17	18	-2
Manufacturing and construction	9	20	-11	10	20	-10
<i>Respondents in paid work (= 100 per cent)*</i>	652	628		25080	23349	
<b>Socio-economic status</b>						
Higher managerial and professional	17	30	-13	20	36	-16
Lower managerial and professional	45	31	14	49	35	14
Intermediate occupations	18	14	4	16	11	5
Other occupations	20	25	-5	15	18	-3
<i>Respondents in paid work (= 100 per cent)</i>	653	629		25117	23369	
<b>Supervisory status</b>						
Yes	30	32	-2	31	36	-5
No	70	68	2	69	64	5
<i>Respondents in paid work (= 100 per cent)</i>	653	629		25117	23369	
<b>Ever worked</b>						
Yes	80	77	3	78	77	1
No	20	23	-3	22	23	-1
<i>Respondents not in paid work (= 100 per cent)</i>	334	305		5331	4351	

\* 59 cases missing: 2 disabled, 57 non-disabled

By contrast, gender was the more important driver of socio-economic differences in respondents' occupational positions. Between 13 and 16 percentage points separated the proportions of women and men in 'Higher managerial and professional' occupations; differences associated with disability in the proportions occupying these high ranking jobs ranged from three to six percentage points. Again, women were 14 percentage points more likely to occupy 'Lower managerial and professional' occupations than men, whereas only three or four percentage points separated the proportions of disabled and non-disabled graduates in these occupations.

Differences in part-time working appear to be driven by gender and disability more or less to the same extent. Thus, differences in the proportions of women and men in part-time work were around six or seven percentage points, whereas differences of four or five percentage points separated disabled and non-disabled graduates' part-time rates.

Whether disability or gender was primarily associated with differences in these employment outcomes, disabled women always came 'worst-off'. This is illustrated in Table 4.10 which ranks respondent sub-groups according to the supposed advantage associated with each outcome; thus:

- Being in paid employment, as opposed to not working, is associated with higher standards of living and greater financial security.
- Part-time work is associated with lower hourly pay rates and poorer terms and conditions than full-time work.
- 'Higher managerial and professional' occupations are associated with higher earnings and status, and often better terms and conditions, than other jobs.

According to these criteria, non-disabled men were most advantaged: they were most likely to be working, least likely to be working part time, and most likely to have obtained 'Higher managerial and professional' jobs. By comparison, disabled women were three times as likely as non-disabled men to work part time while non-disabled men were twice as likely as disabled women to hold 'Higher managerial and professional' jobs; and disabled women were least likely to be in paid work. Disabled men and non-disabled women were found in the middle, their relative advantage determined by whether disability or gender was the dominant factor. As we have observed however, the employment rates of disabled women and disabled men were virtually identical.



**Table 4.10 Ranked employment outcomes by disability and gender (per cent)**

	<i>Proportions in:</i>		
	Paid work	Part-time work	Higher managerial and professional jobs
Non-disabled men	84	5	36
Disabled men	67	9	30
Non-disabled women	82	11	20
Disabled women	66	16	17

Although factors associated with disability and gender (including child care responsibilities, ethnicity, educational qualifications, social class background, employment expectations, discrimination, local labour markets, and so on.) may 'explain' the differences illustrated in Table 4.10, it remains the case that disabled women graduates were most likely to experience the personal, social and economic disadvantages those employment outcomes often entail.

## Conclusions

This analysis of individual Census records has focused on the early labour market experiences of disabled graduates. The findings show the extent to which gender differences in employment outcomes persist even after other factors that differentiate the employment experiences of women and men were taken into account. For example, disabled men were found predominantly in higher status jobs irrespective of women's child care responsibilities and their higher rates of part-time working. The findings also show how other factors sometimes mediated the influence of gender on graduates' employment outcomes even when no difference in outcomes between disabled women and men was apparent. Overall, for example, disabled women and men participated in paid employment to the same extent; however, women's and men's employment rates varied in different ways depending on their family circumstances and region of residence. Geographical variations suggest that local labour market conditions, including the supply of suitable jobs, recruitment practices, employment support services, childcare provision and public transport influence disabled graduates' employment outcomes.

The findings draw particular attention to the influence of child care responsibilities in limiting the amount of time that some disabled women can devote to paid employment and confining them to part time, often poorly paid jobs. Moreover, whether working full time or part time, disabled women were less likely than disabled men to take up higher ranking and better paid jobs. Soon after graduating, it seems that women's and men's employment experiences have diverged, and that a

substantial minority of women were following less advantageous trajectories. If these trajectories were to continue over the longer term, some disabled women would find it increasingly difficult to attain the lifetime earnings and pension entitlements typical of their male counterparts.

A key gender difference in the employment outcomes of disabled graduates is that women were much more likely than men to have entered public sector employment. Although a majority of public sector jobs have traditionally attracted women, there may be mixed benefits. On the one hand, the terms and conditions of public sector employment, including greater contractual security and occupational pension rights, are often seen to be more advantageous than those in the private sector. Greater opportunities in the public sector for part-time working, flexible hours and support for family carers may also suit women's domestic arrangements and family responsibilities. On the other hand, public sector pay awards often fall below those of equivalent jobs in the private sector, and may limit women's lifetime earnings.

Comparisons with their non-disabled peers suggest that disabled graduates may be further disadvantaged in the labour market. Disabled graduates were less likely to be in paid employment, less likely to be working full time, and less likely to occupy higher ranking occupations than their non-disabled peers. Although these outcomes were disproportionately experienced by disabled women and disabled men compared with their non-disabled peers, they interact with gender such that disabled women were most often disadvantaged in the labour market.

## **Chapter 5      Evidence from the survey of destinations of leavers from higher education**

### **Introduction**

In this chapter we turn to the analysis of the second source of data identified as potentially useful for explaining employment outcomes for disabled graduates. Here we describe the labour market experiences of graduates six months after leaving higher education. This description uses data provided by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) which is responsible for the collection, analysis and dissemination of quantitative information about higher education in the UK.

Information about students leaving higher education is compiled each year by HESA from two sources:

1. Individual student records provide socio-demographic information (e.g. age, gender, ethnicity, disability) and details of their study programme (e.g. qualification obtained, subject area, location of institution).
2. A postal or telephone survey of leavers from higher education institutions gathers information about their employment, further study and training approximately six months after completing a programme of study.

The survey targets all higher education leavers in any one year (August to July inclusive) as identified from administrative records. The HESA data set therefore represents a total enumeration rather than a sample survey. However, not all leavers from higher education were included in the present study. The study group was initially defined as graduates under age 30 who normally lived in the UK and had obtained a first degree after completing a full-time course of study. Age is recorded as at 31 July 2004. First degrees include first degrees with eligibility to register to practise (as a doctor, dentist, or veterinary), first degrees with qualified teacher status, enhanced first degrees, and first degrees obtained concurrently with diplomas.

As described in Chapter 3, these criteria were intended to focus analysis on UK graduates who had entered higher education soon after leaving school or sixth form college with little or no prior experience of the labour market. The upper age limit was chosen as a somewhat imperfect compromise. It aimed to exclude 'mature' students who might already have spent many years in paid employment, but include students whose admission to higher education may have been delayed or deferred through poor health or serious impairment, or whose course of study may have taken longer than anticipated for similar reasons. As well as excluding overseas students, the criteria exclude part-time first degree graduates (who might have combined paid work

and further study), postgraduates, and those who had returned to full-time higher education in later life.

These criteria initially identified a study group of 184,340 graduates out of 414,477 higher education leavers between 1 August 2003 and 31 July 2004. They could have left higher education at any time during that period; however, the inclusion criteria described above are likely to focus on those who graduated during the latter half of that period, typically June and July 2004. They would have been surveyed in January 2005.

A key aim of this study was to compare the early labour market experiences of 'disabled' and 'non-disabled' graduates. Type of disability is recorded on the basis of students' own self-assessment. It covers a fixed set of categories that variously reflect medical conditions, functional impairments, health problems, care needs, and specific learning difficulties related to reading and spelling (dyslexia). The classification is consistent with that used by the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service. Some students did not complete a disability record (1,045), or reported an unspecified disability (1,209). These categories were excluded from further analysis because the study aimed to differentiate the labour market experiences of disabled graduates according to type of disability. Students reporting dyslexia, by far the largest disability category (6896), were also excluded, because it is arguable that using a wide definition of disability may understate the disadvantage associated with disability (Berthoud, 2006: 64, and see Chapter 2). In this particular case, casting the net widely enough to include dyslexia has already been shown to reduce the apparent employment disadvantage of disabled graduates and paint too optimistic a picture of their opportunities (see Chapter 2). These exclusions resulted in a study group of over 175,000 graduate leavers of whom almost three per cent defined themselves as disabled (Table 5.1).

## **Results**

### **Survey response rates**

More than four out of five of the graduates in the study group participated in the survey of leavers from higher education. There was no difference in overall response rates between disabled and non-disabled graduates. Table 5.2 shows that women were somewhat more likely than men to participate; men with mental health problems or multiple disabilities were least likely to respond; women with multiple disabilities were also under-represented in the leavers' survey.

**Table 5.1 Study group by disability and gender**

<i>Type of disability</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Total</i>
Autistic Spectrum Disorder	1	9	10
Personal care support	8	6	14
Mobility impairment	143	75	218
Mental health problems	174	96	270
Seeing impairment	146	162	308
Hearing impairment	257	194	451
Multiple disabilities	287	263	550
Unseen disability (e.g. diabetes, epilepsy)	1674	1118	2792
Total disabled	2690	1923	4613
Not disabled	96360	74217	170577
Total	99050	76140	175190

**Table 5.2 Survey response rates by disability and gender (per cent)**

<i>Type of disability</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>All</i>
Multiple disabilities	79	74	77
Mental health problems	84	73	80
Seeing impairment	86	80	82
Hearing impairment	86	80	83
Mobility impairment	87	80	84
Unseen disability	85	84	85
Total disabled*	84	81	83
Not disabled	83	81	83
All	83	81	83

\* Includes Autistic Spectrum Disorder and personal care support.

Further analysis showed that graduates who might be disadvantaged in the labour market on account of ethnic identity or level of degree were least likely to participate in the leavers' survey. Thus, graduates from minority ethnic groups were less likely to respond than those from the white majority (77 and 84 per cent respectively).

Graduates with a lower class of degree were also less likely to respond: 87 per cent of those with a first class degree, 84 per cent of those with an upper second and 80 per cent of those with a lower second or undivided second participated compared with 74 per cent of those with a third class degree.

As well as missing information on graduates who did not take part in the survey, some participants did not answer every question applicable to their circumstances. Where question non-response might affect the robustness of the survey findings, this is drawn to the reader's attention.<sup>9</sup>

## **Subject and class of degree**

Two of the factors that might influence employment outcomes are subject and class of degree. Findings relating to these characteristics of a degree qualification are shown in Tables 5.3 and 5.4 for all graduates, whether or not they responded to the leavers' survey. Further breakdowns of these findings by different types of disability can be found in Appendix 2 (Tables A2.1 to A2.3).

Table 5.3 organises degree subjects into three categories according to gender differences. Degrees in the first subject group were predominantly gained by women, those in the second group predominantly by men. In the third group of degree subjects, women and men obtained degrees more or less to the same extent. These findings tell a familiar story, especially the predominance of men graduating in mathematical sciences, information technology and engineering.

Gender differences in degree subjects were more or less comparable among disabled and non-disabled graduates alike. Indeed, gender differences in degree subjects were generally larger than differences between disabled and non-disabled graduates, with two exceptions: degrees in 'Business, administrative and information studies' were more often gained by non-disabled graduates, whereas disabled graduates more often gained degrees in 'Creative arts and design'.

One implication of these findings is that degree subject is likely to influence gender differences in graduates' employment outcomes irrespective of disability. Apart from the exceptions noted, differences in employment outcomes between disabled and non-disabled graduates will be relatively less influenced by the subject of their degrees.

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<sup>9</sup> Base numbers may also vary due to rounding weighted data. The data set supplied by HESA is organised as a case file of degree subjects. As a consequence, graduates who obtained a degree comprising more than one subject appear more than once in the data set. The data must then be weighted to represent the number of graduates.

**Table 5.3 Subject of degree by disability and gender – all graduates (per cent)**

	<i>Women</i>		<i>Men</i>	
	Disabled	Not disabled	Disabled	Not disabled
<b>Group 1</b>				
Languages, historical and philosophical studies	18	17	13	11
Biological, veterinary and agriculture sciences	14	14	8	9
Medicine, dentistry and allied subjects	10	11	5	6
Education and combined studies	6	6	2	2
<b>Group 2</b>				
Mathematical and computer sciences	3	4	15	14
Engineering, technology, architecture, building and planning	2	2	10	12
Physical sciences	3	4	6	7
<b>Group 3</b>				
Business, administrative and information studies	12	15	13	16
Creative arts and design	17	12	15	10
Social studies	10	10	10	10
Law	4	6	4	4
<i>Base (= 100 per cent)</i>	<i>2690</i>	<i>96360</i>	<i>1923</i>	<i>74218</i>

Although there were no gender differences in the proportions of graduates obtaining first class degrees, Table 5.4 shows that more women than men gained upper second class degrees, whereas more men than women gained lower second, third class or unclassified degrees. Gender differences in degree class were more pronounced than differences between disabled and non-disabled graduates. These findings suggest that, disabled or not, women were generally better qualified to take up opportunities for graduate employment or further study. As noted above, men with poorer qualifications were less likely to respond to the leavers' survey, so these findings may underestimate gender differences indicating the relatively disadvantaged position of male graduates.

**Table 5.4 Class of degree by disability and gender – all graduates (per cent)**

	<i>Women</i>		<i>Men</i>	
	Disabled	Not disabled	Disabled	Not disabled
First	9	10	10	10
Upper second	49	51	42	42
Lower / Undivided second	32	30	34	33
Third / Pass / Unclassified	9	10	14	14
<i>Base (= 100 per cent)</i>	<i>2690</i>	<i>96360</i>	<i>1923</i>	<i>74217</i>

### Employment rate

Table 5.5 shows the proportion of graduates in paid employment at the time of the leavers' survey. The distinction between full-time and part-time work was defined by respondents themselves, and self-employed graduates have been combined with those in full-time work.

Disabled men were least likely to have moved into paid employment six months after graduating and non-disabled women were most likely to have made the transition from higher education to the world of work (63 and 72 per cent respectively).

Between these two groups, disabled women and non-disabled men had similar overall rates of employment (69 per cent) but disabled women were more often found in part-time jobs.

**Table 5.5 Employment rates by disability and gender (per cent)**

	<i>Women</i>		<i>Men</i>	
	Disabled	Not disabled	Disabled	Not disabled
Full-time employment	56	62	53	59
Part-time employment	13	10	10	9
In paid employment	69	72	63	69
Not in paid work	31	28	37	31
<i>Base (= 100 per cent)</i>	<i>2270</i>	<i>80321</i>	<i>1564</i>	<i>60444</i>

Disabled or not, more women than men were in both full time and part time employment. However, gender differences in full-time rates were small, with no more than a three percentage point difference indicating that more women than men were in full-time work. Part-time rates were somewhat higher among disabled graduates, especially disabled women. As a consequence, gender differences in overall employment rates were greater among disabled graduates (a six percentage point



excess of disabled women over disabled men compared with a three percentage point excess among their non-disabled counterparts).

Disabled graduates were less likely to be in full-time employment than their non-disabled peers and, despite generally higher rates of part-time working, were no more likely to be in paid work. Differences in overall rates of employment associated with disability were greater among male graduates (a six percentage point excess of non-disabled men over disabled men compared with a three percentage point excess among their female counterparts). Graduates with mobility impairment were least likely to be in full-time work and had the lowest overall rate of employment (see Table A2.4 in Appendix 2).

### Previous work experience

Some graduates may have found the transition from higher education to paid employment relatively easy if they had previously worked for their current employer. Around one in four graduates said they had such experience, either before or during their degree programme, or both – although response to this question was low (Table 5.6).

Differences between disabled and non-disabled graduates, and between women and men, in whether they had previously worked for their current employer were small and would not account for variations in employment rates (reported in Table 5.5). This was also the case for those working full time, suggesting that lack of prior work experience with their current employer presented little impediment to obtaining paid employment after graduation.

**Table 5.6 Whether previously worked with employer by disability and gender (per cent)**

	<i>Women</i>		<i>Men</i>	
	Disabled	Not disabled	Disabled	Not disabled
Yes, before programme of study	2	2	3	3
Yes, during programme of study	17	17	15	17
Yes, before and during study programme	6	6	9	7
No	75	75	73	73
<i>Base (= 100 per cent)</i>	<i>1169</i>	<i>43393</i>	<i>722</i>	<i>29129</i>

## Further study

At the time of the leavers' survey, a substantial minority of graduates were studying for a postgraduate or vocational qualification, or professional accreditation. Table 5.7 shows that around one in four graduates were engaged in further study, either on a part-time or full-time basis. Disabled graduates were somewhat more likely than their non-disabled peers to engage in further study, especially disabled women who were more often engaged in part-time study. Disabled men were most likely to be studying full time, which would explain in part their relatively low employment rate (Table 5.5). Men with a seeing impairment, mental health problems or an unseen disability were most likely to be studying full time (Table A2.5 in Appendix 2). Overall however, differences by gender or disability in the proportions engaged in further study were small.

**Table 5.7 Further study by disability and gender (per cent)**

	<i>Women</i>		<i>Men</i>	
	Disabled	Not disabled	Disabled	Not disabled
Full-time study	18	18	19	17
Part-time study	10	7	7	7
Not in study, research or training	72	75	74	76
<i>Base (= 100 per cent)</i>	<i>2270</i>	<i>80321</i>	<i>1564</i>	<i>60444</i>

Most of those engaged in further study reported that this was their principal or sole activity. However, around one in three combined paid employment with further study; put another way around one in eight combined further study with paid employment (Table 5.8). Women were more likely than men to be studying and working at the same time, especially disabled women. As we have observed, the latter were more likely to be working and studying part time (Tables 5.5 and 5.7).

**Table 5.8 Combining paid work and further study by gender and disability (per cent)**

	<i>Women</i>		<i>Men</i>	
	Disabled	Not disabled	Disabled	Not disabled
Proportion working of those in further study	37.2	34.5	28.1	32.6
Proportion studying of those in paid work	15.3	12.1	11.6	11.4

## Not in paid work or further study

Graduates not in paid work or further study were mostly looking for a job, further study or training (Table 5.9). A substantial proportion said they were ‘taking time out to travel’. Smaller proportions were engaged in unpaid work or due to start a job in the next month.

Disabled graduates were more likely than their non-disabled peers to be looking for employment, further study or training, rather than taking time out to travel. The difference between disabled and non-disabled graduates was most striking among women because non-disabled women were so much more likely to be taking time out to travel. Overall, men were more likely than women to be looking for employment, further study or training.

**Table 5.9 Circumstances of those not in paid work or further study by disability and gender (per cent)**

	<i>Women</i>		<i>Men</i>	
	Disabled	Not disabled	Disabled	Not disabled
Looking for employment, further study or training	46	36	53	49
Taking time out to travel	21	37	21	31
Voluntary / unpaid work	8	9	8	5
Due to start a job within next month	5	5	5	5
Not looking for employment, further study or training	4	4	2	5
Temporarily sick or unable to work	10	2	5	1
Other*	6	8	5	4
<i>Base (= 100 per cent)</i>	<i>299</i>	<i>8890</i>	<i>288</i>	<i>9155</i>

\* Includes: permanently unable to work; looking after home or family; something else.

In much of what follows, the analysis concentrates on graduates in full-time employment because working full time within six months of graduating is likely to represent an initial career move for many graduates and may set the course of their future employment trajectories. In contrast, part-time employment may be combined with further study or other opportunities for personal development, and is less likely to be a long-term career choice.

## Industry sector

The leavers' survey asked graduates in paid employment about the organisation they worked for and its principal activities. This information was used to describe their jobs according to the Standard Industrial Classification (SIC). Most graduates in full-time employment worked in three major service divisions: public sector services, financial services, and other services which include retail and wholesale trade, hotels and restaurants (Table 5.10).

Overall, gender differences by industry sector were more marked than differences between disabled and non-disabled graduates. As we might expect given the results reported in Chapter 4, women worked predominantly in the SIC categories that largely cover public sector employment: 'Public administration and defence', 'Education', 'Health and social work', and 'Other community, social and personal work'.<sup>10</sup> Men were generally more evenly distributed between public and financial services.

**Table 5.10 Industry sector by disability and gender – full-time work only (per cent)**

	<i>Women</i>		<i>Men</i>	
	Disabled	Not disabled	Disabled	Not disabled
Public sector	53	50	33	32
Financial services	21	24	33	34
Other services	17	18	21	20
Manufacturing and construction	9	8	12	14
Other	0	0	0	0
<i>Base (= 100 per cent)</i>	<i>1272</i>	<i>49656</i>	<i>825</i>	<i>35871</i>

More women than men worked in public services irrespective of disability whereas more men than women worked in financial services and other service sectors. However, gender differences across industry sectors varied between disability categories. For example, relatively more men with mental health problems (44 per cent), and relatively fewer women with seeing impairment (41 per cent), worked in the public sector (Table A2.6 in Appendix 2).

<sup>10</sup> These four industry sectors were combined to represent a rather loose approximation to public sector employment. Hicks *et al.* (2005) provide a more precise definition of public sector employment.

## Occupational position

Graduates' jobs were classified according to the Standard Occupational Classification to provide an indication of occupational rank or status. As might be expected in a well-qualified group of employees, most graduates, women and men alike, were found in the first four rankings (Table 5.11).

**Table 5.11 Occupational position by disability and gender – full-time work only (per cent)**

	<i>Women</i>		<i>Men</i>	
	Disabled	Not disabled	Disabled	Not disabled
Managers and senior officials	7	7	10	11
Professional occupations	25	25	30	29
Associate professional and technical occupations	30	28	25	26
Administrative and secretarial occupations	19	21	15	15
Other occupations*	19	18	20	19
<i>Base (= 100 per cent)</i>	<i>1275</i>	<i>49643</i>	<i>824</i>	<i>35847</i>

\* Includes: Skilled trades, Personal service, Sales and customer service, Process, plant and machine operatives, and Elementary occupations.

Men were more likely than women to occupy the higher ranking jobs, outnumbering women in managerial, senior official and professional occupations. In contrast, more women than men occupied associate professional, technical, administrative and secretarial positions.

Gender differences in the four highest occupational positions were generally more striking than differences associated with disability. Although the distribution of occupational positions varied across disability categories, no clear pattern is evident to indicate that disabled graduates were more or less likely to occupy higher ranking jobs than their non-disabled peers (Table A2.7 in Appendix 2).

## Terms of employment

Almost six out of ten graduates in full-time work were employed on permanent or open-ended contracts. There was little difference between women and men, or between disabled and non-disabled graduates, in the proportions employed on these terms (Table 5.12). Although the proportions are small, women were somewhat more

likely to be employed on fixed-term contracts of over 12 months than men who were rather more likely to be self-employed.

**Table 5.12 Terms of employment by disability and gender – full-time work only (per cent)**

	<i>Women</i>		<i>Men</i>	
	Disabled	Not disabled	Disabled	Not disabled
Permanent or open-ended contract	59	59	58	59
Fixed-term contract: 12 months or more	15	14	11	12
Fixed-term contract: under 12 months	11	11	12	11
Self-employed / freelance	3	2	6	4
Temporarily, through an agency	7	8	9	8
Temporarily, other than through an agency	4	5	4	5
Other	1	1	1	2
<i>Base (= 100 per cent)</i>	<i>1042</i>	<i>41071</i>	<i>667</i>	<i>28561</i>

Larger variations in terms of employment were associated with different types of disability (Table A2.8 in Appendix 2). For example, a sizeable minority of men with mobility impairment (24 per cent) were self-employed. Women with seeing or mobility impairment or with multiple disabilities more often had permanent or open-ended contracts, as did men with hearing or mobility impairment or with multiple disabilities. Gender differences in employment terms were most marked among those with sensory impairment: men with hearing impairment were more likely, and men with sight impairment less likely, to have more secure contracts of employment compared with their female counterparts.

### **Gross annual salary**

Graduates who participated in the leavers' survey were asked to estimate to the nearest £1000 their annual salary before tax and national insurance deductions. HESA subsequently grouped these estimates into £5,000 income bands. More than seven out of ten graduates in full-time employment said they earned between £10,001 and £20,000 and gross mean salaries varied around £15,000 a year (Table 5.13).<sup>11</sup> It should be noted that just over half of those who said they were in full-time

<sup>11</sup> A midpoint value was imputed for the income band recorded for each respondent, with £72,500 representing the open-ended band '£70,001 and above'. To offset their skewed distribution, a log transform of these midpoint values was used to calculate mean salaries; the latter estimates were subsequently back transformed to the values shown in the text and in Table 5.13.

employment (52 per cent) did not provide information about their income, so these findings should be treated with caution.

**Table 5.13 Gross mean annual salary by disability and gender – full-time work only**

	<i>Gross mean annual salary</i>	<i>Per cent of salary of non-disabled men</i>
Disabled women	£14,251	91%
Non-disabled women	£14,636	94%
Disabled men	£14,919	96%
Non-disabled men	£15,605	100%

Overall differences by gender and disability confirmed the broad pattern of earnings often found in other studies. Non-disabled men earned most (£15,605 on average) and disabled women earned least (£14,251 or 91 per cent of non-disabled men's average salary). Disabled men and non-disabled women came between these two extremes (£14,919 or 96 per cent and £14,636 or 94 per cent, respectively).

Overall, men earned more than women (£15,590 and £14,627 respectively) and non-disabled graduates earned more than disabled graduates (£15,006 and £14,495). These findings indicate that gender differences in annual salaries were generally greater than differences associated with disability (£963 compared with £511). Gender differences in annual salaries were most marked between non-disabled men and women (£969). Gender differences in the earnings of disabled graduates were smaller (£668) and, as Table A2.9 in Appendix 2 shows, sometimes contrary to what might be expected. Thus, women with multiple disabilities, mobility and seeing impairments earned more on average than their male counterparts. It is worth noting, however, that these variations are comparatively small and probably lie within the margin of error that might be expected from the single, rather simple income question asked in the leavers' survey.

### **Whether qualification was required for the job**

To assess the value of having a degree qualification, graduates in paid employment were asked whether they would have got their job without their degree. Table 5.14 summarises the responses of those in full-time employment. The three response categories indicating that a degree was a formal requirement, an expectation or an advantage, represent more positive evaluations of graduates' qualifications.

**Table 5.14 Whether would have secured current job without a degree qualification by disability and gender – full-time work only (per cent)**

	<i>Women</i>		<i>Men</i>	
	Disabled	Not disabled	Disabled	Not disabled
No, degree was a formal requirement	34	35	29	32
No, degree was expected	8	8	11	11
Possibly, degree was an advantage	24	22	21	22
Yes	31	32	35	33
Don't know	2	2	3	3
<i>Base (= 100 per cent)</i>	<i>1005</i>	<i>39701</i>	<i>622</i>	<i>27342</i>

Most graduates felt that their degree had helped in getting their current job, although a degree qualification had been a formal requirement in only around one in three full-time appointments. A similar proportion reported that they would have been able to get the job without a degree.

Women were somewhat more likely to indicate that their degree had been a formal requirement. This reflects women's predominance in public sector jobs such as teaching, health and social care where formal accreditation is often required. Over half the women worked in public sector jobs (Table 5.10) and half of these (49 per cent) said their degree had been a formal requirement. By comparison, one in three men worked in the public sector (Table 5.10), of whom 40 per cent said they required a degree to get their current job.

Differences in the extent to which disabled and non-disabled graduates felt that having a degree had helped secure their current job were negligible. Variations are often greater across different types of disability, although it is difficult to detect any consistency between disabled women and men in their views about the labour market value of a degree (Table A2.10 in Appendix 2). For example, men with seeing impairment or mental health problems were more likely than their female counterparts to report that their degree had been a formal requirement. In contrast, women with mobility impairment, an unseen disability or multiple disabilities, more often said their job required a degree.

### **Reason for taking current job**

Table 5.15 summarises graduates' responses to a question asking why they took their current job; a breakdown by different types of disability can be found in Table A2.11 in Appendix 2. In the survey, pre-determined response categories were



offered although respondents were invited to tick as many as applied to their situation. However, fewer than half those eligible answered the question so too much should not be read into these findings.

Response patterns of non-disabled women and men were similar although somewhat more men than women felt they had taken the best job on offer at the time (28 and 24 per cent respectively), or that having a job was better than being unemployed (23 and 18 per cent respectively).

Similarly, disabled men were more likely than disabled women to report that they took the best job on offer (29 and 23 per cent respectively), or that having a job was better than being unemployed (28 and 19 per cent respectively). In contrast, disabled women were more likely than their male counterparts to report that their current job gave them experience to progress in their chosen careers (37 and 27 per cent respectively).

Gender differences in other responses to the question about why respondents took their current job were small and unremarkable, as were differences between disabled and non-disabled graduates.

**Table 5.15 Reason for taking current job by disability and gender – full-time work only (per cent)\***

	<i>Women</i>		<i>Men</i>	
	Disabled	Not disabled	Disabled	Not disabled
Fit into career plan/was type of work wanted	52	51	55	52
Broaden experience/develop general skills	43	43	46	42
Experience in order to get another job	37	33	27	31
Best or only job on offer	23	24	29	28
To pay off debts	23	22	23	23
Experience of this type of work	21	21	17	20
Better than being unemployed	19	18	28	23
Opportunity to progress in the organisation	15	18	18	19
<i>Base (= 100 per cent)</i>	<i>469</i>	<i>18167</i>	<i>265</i>	<i>10316</i>

\* Percentages sum to more than 100 because two or more response categories could be selected.

## Seeking paid work

Among those not in paid employment, disabled graduates were more likely than their non-disabled peers to be seeking paid work, and generally more men than women were seeking employment (Table 5.16). In large measure, these findings reflect the lower employment rates in these data among men in general and disabled men in particular (see Table 5.5).

It is possible to estimate how many jobs would have been required to find employment for all those seeking work in January 2005. Table 5.17 presents these estimates. The column headed 'Known' shows the number of graduates in the leavers' survey who said they were seeking work. The column headed 'Estimated' indicates the number of graduates not responding to the leavers' survey who would have been seeking work if the proportions seeking work estimated from the survey data applied to non-respondents.

**Table 5.16 Proportion of non-working graduates seeking paid employment (per cent)**

	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>All</i>
Hearing impairment	25	47	34
Mobility impairment	31	30	31
Mental health problems	28	32	29
Multiple disabilities	24	31	28
Seeing impairment	26	25	25
Unseen disability	20	27	23
All disabled	23	30	26
Not disabled	17	26	21

**Table 5.17 Number of graduates seeking work by disability and gender**

	<i>Women</i>			<i>Men</i>		
	Known	Estimated	Total	Known	Estimated	Total
Seeing impairment	11	2	13	14	4	18
Hearing impairment	17	3	20	23	6	29
Mobility impairment	17	3	20	9	2	11
Mental health problems	15	3	18	9	3	12
Unseen disability	82	15	97	88	16	104
Multiple disabilities	18	5	23	25	9	34
All disabled	160	30	190	172	39	211
Not disabled	3826	764	4590	4946	1127	6073

These estimates indicate that around 400 jobs (190 women, 211 men) could have met the employment needs of disabled graduates who were seeking work six months after graduating in the summer of 2004. That figure represents less than five per cent of the 10,600 plus jobs required to employ non-disabled graduates seeking work.

## Conclusion

This section has examined the labour market position and employment patterns of graduates six months after leaving higher education. On the whole, differences in employment outcomes between women and men, and between disabled and non-disabled graduates, were comparatively small, and no clear picture emerged when different types of disability were considered. That may not be surprising if employment patterns were in a state of flux.

Although most graduates had entered paid employment, their reasons for taking their current job suggest that a substantial minority had yet to embark on a longer term career trajectory. Almost one in five were continuing in full-time studies; many were still seeking paid employment; some were combining further study with paid employment; and others were not currently 'economically active'. One in three saw little connection between their current job and their recently acquired degree qualification. The vast majority of those in paid employment appeared to be at the minimum of their earnings potential as a graduate, and around one in four were currently employed on short-term or temporary contracts.

In short, the survey of leavers from higher education captures no more than a snapshot picture of early pathways from higher education to graduate employment. That transition is probably best considered to be more of a process than a discrete

turning point; it will take longer for some graduates than for others, and the number of intermediate stages through which they move will vary. Some graduates may have a succession of jobs before 'settling down'. Six months after graduating, employment trajectories for many graduates have scarcely formed and longer term outcomes are uncertain.

Despite that, the employment patterns that emerge from the analysis seem to reflect the beginnings of what might happen later. Differences between graduates with and without disabilities, and between women and men, appear to prefigure the employment circumstances of their older peers described in the literature and in Chapter 4. Although more women had obtained paid employment, they were less likely than their male counterparts to have entered the higher ranking jobs of managers, senior officials and professionals. Despite being somewhat better qualified and enjoying similar terms of employment, women earned less on average than men. If these differences, small as they are, foreshadow future employment outcomes, we can infer that the employment trajectories of this graduate cohort will diverge over time along gender lines.

Two factors were identified that might help explain gender differences in employment outcomes. One was degree subject, with men predominant in mathematics, computer science, engineering and technology, and women predominant in languages, biological sciences and health-related subjects. The second factor was industry sector with women more likely than men to work in public sector employment. Both factors have been identified in the literature as important determinants, though not fully explaining, the gendered experiences of graduates in the labour market (Purcell and Elias, 2004).

Differences associated with disability in employment outcomes were generally harder to discern than those associated with gender. Disabled graduates were less likely than their non-disabled peers to have entered paid employment, and those in full-time work earned slightly less on average. These differences anticipate the employment disadvantages experienced by older cohorts of disabled people (see Chapter 2). However, disabled graduates were more likely to be actively seeking work and many were engaged in further study to enhance their employment prospects. Their future employment prospects are therefore difficult to anticipate, not least because disabled graduates are a relatively new and currently small sub-group in the working age population. Firm evidence on the longer-term labour market experiences of disabled graduates is currently lacking.

## **Chapter 6      Evidence from qualitative research: university and careers development**

This chapter presents findings from the qualitative interviews and group discussions carried out with 35 students, most of whom graduated in 2005 or were 2006 final-year students. It concentrates on their choice of particular subjects and career paths, gaining a place at university, and their experiences once there, both in general and in relation to career choice and preparation in particular. Issues of impairment and gender are considered throughout.

### **Expectations and assumptions**

As we saw in Chapter 2, parents' aspirations for their children have an impact on the children's own educational achievements, particularly if they are disabled. In our study, too, parents had clearly played a large role in influencing some of the younger students' expectations about going to university. Their role in helping their children achieve could be over many years and sometimes in the teeth of opposition from school:

My parents were fantastic ...

... my mum really fought for me to get my statement, to get everything for me that I needed in my education and they really were a massive support for me. And it really was, don't settle for what they [the school] say, try your best and always go above what they say, because you are better than what they say.

(Millie)

... They wanted me basically to have the opportunities to reach my full potential so they were quite keen that there was a, that the secondary school had a special needs department ...

(Tom)

By contrast, some female students experienced low expectations from their families, especially where gendered and/or cultural assumptions interacted with impairment:

... I suppose first and foremost it would be culture, it would be coming from my mother who wouldn't really expect her daughter to have a career but also it was seen in regard to me doubly that I wouldn't either because I had a disability ...

(Kris)

... I was the first person in my family to go to university so that was difficult anyway and then given the [condition] and so there was yes a definite worry of me going ...

... I mean clearly there was the idea that women don't go to university and why wouldn't I be happy going and doing what my cousins had done and work in Tesco's or whatever but it was all linked up together so it was difficult to say which was due to what reasons really.  
(Susan)

You know, the Indian family they believe that the woman cannot really ... take part in issues that are [in] the family and, you know, they believe the woman is the second place and so, you know, you can't really speak ...

I had to stand the ground on my own to say, I need to be educated and I need to go to school and I felt that at that time that ... would be the only way I can improve myself is to go away, I can prove that, you know, being disabled does not really affect my [abilities] ...  
(Sheralyn)

As the experience of Millie suggests, schools sometimes held low expectations about what pupils with impairments might achieve.

... people were very much saying don't expect much from this child ... to ever go to university, to ever go to higher education, just to be happy with her lot really in life, just generally to get through her GCSEs will be pretty amazing for this child really.

[the school] think that you're going to do your GCSEs and then go home and sit on your bum for the rest of your life and you know live off benefits

...  
(Millie)

Millie's analysis of these low expectations was that schools concentrated on two groups – the high achievers and those who were truanting. While she 'applauded their efforts' in this, she felt that pupils like herself '... are trying their best every day, they are trying 100 per cent and they are slogging their guts out and generally they're getting nothing ...'.

Bina felt similarly; at her special school she had observed that unless someone was very good in a subject they were unlikely to be encouraged to pursue it further:

... you were either in the GCSE [group] or you were in the other, there was no kind of, you know, there was no sort of middle. So that I feel now ... if I'd had a mentor or something like that in certain subjects I could have [achieved more] ... they just basically leave you to it.

By contrast, Harriet had been at a special school for children with visual impairments where there had been very high expectations:

It was a ... grammar school type place and ... you took an entrance exam to get in there ... and the whole focus for us was to get into university anyway.  
(Harriet)

Others experienced low expectations at school related to their gender *and* their impairment:

... I was sent to a very small special needs school, the careers advice we got there was if you were a man you went and did manly things, like carpentry and woodwork experience and the girls were automatically sent on nursery schools and placements so I think that that was more to do with the special school ethos.

... There was an idea that if you'd gone to that type of school then obviously you weren't intelligent at all so there was no suggestion of going to college or hopefully going to university ...  
(Susan)

Older students, who had entered university later in life, sometimes after the late onset of disability, reported even more obviously gendered assumptions. One had wanted to study law at university but had been told by her careers teacher that there was no chance of that because she was a woman. She 'lost interest' in school at that point and failed her 'A' levels. Another, now in her late 20s, reported that while her school encouraged girls to do woodwork and metalwork, career choices were still influenced by gendered expectations. She had a clear desire to join the police force but was 'definitely encouraged away from that'. When asked why this was she said:

Pretty much because girls don't do that. ...

... once you got to your careers talk and I said that I wanted to be a police officer it was like 'well I don't think that you should follow that path, it's very male, it's very this and very that'. At that age sort of fourteen, fifteen you don't really understand what they're going on about so I did go with the cliché female subjects, children and cooking.  
(Amy)

She did join the police after school but hoped that younger women would possibly have a different sort of experience from her:

... young women's schooling has changed and perhaps they're positively encouraged now to go after their goals whereas I was pushed in the opposite direction.

... I think that young women nowadays are saying, hang on, I do want to do this and I'm going to do it.

One student had internalised gendered assumptions to such a degree that she believed that women were at a disadvantage in relation to university admission:

... generally men are slightly more intelligent than women according to the IQ national tests and research so I suppose that is a bit of a barrier because universities tend to accept people with highest grades regardless of sex ...

(Deborah via MSN Messenger)

Some people referred to individuals (other than their parents) who had supported them on the path to higher education, whether at school or subsequently. Again, aspirations for the student were clearly important:

... it was two very special teachers really in my educational career that opened the doors for me, they said just because this child had things wrong with her it doesn't mean she you know she can't go beyond the capabilities.

(Millie)

... there was a lovely lady at the college. The head of the access [course] and she basically was my mentor, ... mentoring me through my two years of access course. She was like a, she was a lovely lady and a good example for me.

(Kris)

A group of students in this study had gained entry to university without any impairment 'label' but had been subsequently 'diagnosed' just before entry or while in higher education. This applied predominantly to people with specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia, but also included autism, ME and mental health problems. In almost all cases, there had been specific learning issues that had not been picked up at school:

... all the way through primary school, secondary school and college ... there were comments about, specially my spelling and structure ... but no one actively did anything to find out if I had a disability.

(Philip)

... I only relatively recently got diagnosed with dyslexia so, so although I was struggling I didn't have a reason for why, as to why I was struggling, I didn't understand it ...

(Cherrie)



... when I applied to university ... it was before I had been diagnosed as disabled, I mean I had the problem, [it was] very manifest but it was only in the year before that, I had actually been accepted by [university] by the time I was diagnosed ...  
(Tim)

## **The right subject in the right place**

Students were asked what had influenced the subjects they had studied at school and university and whether they felt that they had been 'channelled' in any way towards particular subjects.

### **GCSEs**

Beyond studying subjects at GCSE level that were 'compulsory', few of the younger students felt that they had experienced anything other than a general steering towards subjects in which they were likely to do best:

... if you were doing well in a subject at key stage three they'd channel you into that I suppose ...  
(Tom)

Others, however, found that their impairment influenced the choice of courses in ways that were not helpful. Millie, for example, explained how she enjoyed and was good at music and had hoped to pursue this at GCSE level. For reasons that are not entirely clear, however, she was directed towards a course intended to improve 'life skills' that prevented her also doing music:

... the [dyslexia] co-ordinator at my school very much said, 'Millie has to do this course'. So which I did.

I think that it was trying to get me some life skills, perhaps, you know, 'This is what happens in real life'. My thinking was just because I'm dyslexic don't think I'm no fool, don't think that I don't know what happens in the real world, ... don't think that I don't know what a red bill is ...  
(Millie)

A similar experience after her GCSEs found her doing a GNVQ in health and social care when what she had asked to do was to be helped to go to college to do art (in which she had excelled at GCSE level). Again, her school seemed to have made judgements about her based on her impairment (and perhaps her gender). Further, as she pointed out, there were days when the condition that caused her physical impairments was so bad that she could not look after herself:

What is the point in me doing a social course and learning how to look after other people and looking after their physical and social needs when sometimes I can't do it myself ...?

(Millie)

In a similar situation, but with more success, Tom had managed to persuade his school to let him drop French and spend extra time with a learning support assistant in order to improve his maths, which was more important to him in terms of his future career. This had been a more difficult fight than it might otherwise have been because his statement of educational need had said that he should do French. This is, perhaps, an example of where trying to achieve equality of treatment was over-riding the need to see the pupil's individual needs.

### **A levels and choice of university subject**

When it came to careers advice, choice of 'A' levels and university subject, there was no real sense of any undue channelling for most students, although several did feel that some topics were seen as intrinsically or historically more appealing to girls than to boys, and vice versa:

... like sociology and psychology, I think just the ideas behind it are more interesting to females, just like females develop, maybe they just read more books or they find people more interesting than the way things work, something along those lines.

(Hazel)

I think that politics has been a very male dominated domain for centuries and ... when you study it I think that more men apply.

(Richard)

... because I did sociology ... I think to a degree they actively encouraged more males to do sociology 'cos I think it's generally a female dominated subject, but ... I think the two together, sort of politics and sociology sort of worked out quite well for me. Again politics being mostly dominated by males, so ... they sort of work very well together the two subjects but also I think to a degree sociology can be seen as a more feminine dominated [subject] and when it came to sort of careers, job-wise, you know, I can say that I've got the social policy part as well as the more political side which, you know, sort of people assume is a lot more hard-nosed.

(Philip)

... people ... believe that, you know, certain courses are meant for male and certain courses are meant for females so ... when I was reading Economics, now people tell me, 'You read Economics, oh no, I can't do that course, it's too difficult, it's for men', and I say, no but, you know, it depends, some other person might be reading English, for me English is

difficult and you know, it might be easy for someone else, it depends on the individual not the course itself.  
(Sheralyn)

... politics is a, a, I mean it's a science as well as, I mean history was definitely fifty/fifty [female to male students], if not more girls and I guess history [is], you know, an art or humanity ... so it's more typically girls, whereas politics is more to do with power and things like that and girls aren't really, try to keep away from that sort of thing I guess.  
(Harriet)

Further, the gendered nature of some university subjects could prove challenging once people actually got to university, particularly for women:

... straight politics is mostly men, but the international studies side is female dominated.

I liked the fact that it is mixed, I have been in all male groups before and felt alienated, they tend to be more aggressive debaters and I felt particularly vulnerable in this environment because I am dyslexic and say the wrong things sometimes.  
(Susan)

... I didn't make as many friends in politics as I did in history.  
I: Why do you think that was?

Well, I guess it was more of a, the atmosphere was different, it was more of a sort of, all the lads, you know, stick together and mess around like you used to do at school. (Laughs).

... but in history sort of ... get together and work rather than get together and mess about.  
(Harriet)

[an obstacle to study is] like trying to get on with the guys and everything, 'cos they're quite a rowdy bunch ...

... when you have group projects and everything, trying to get along with them or anything, rather than trying to do different things ...

I find it quite difficult socialising. So therefore I find it very sort of hard to socialise with guys who are then on my degree as well. And that affected me in terms of, throughout my group work projects and things like that.  
(Kam)

... my course is male, very male dominated, there's not many women on the course. So it's like a challenge that way, that you have to compete against the guys and stuff like that, and again the lecturers, most of the lecturers are male orientated as well, so it's, that way it's difficult.

... it's just that I find it's very hard to talk to, if you have problems within your course and everything, it's harder to talk to a guy, that's what I find.  
(Kam)

Those who had a clear idea of the career they wanted to pursue needed relatively little support in choosing a path beyond school. Others chose because of enjoyment of the subject:

... what I enjoyed is what I did and then I went for...  
(John)

... I just looked for a degree that I would enjoy myself rather than er in terms of career.  
(Tim)

I just loved it, eventually had a, a real passion for it. So, so when it came for thinking what courses to take there wasn't really much deliberation, because I loved [subject] so much ...  
(Cherrie)

Some, however, gave the impression of accepting what seemed to be available, particularly if they had re-entered education via Access or Foundation courses:

... partly because I'd done my foundation course at [college] and there wasn't very many subjects on offer, I think that you had a choice of literature, psychology, sociology, that is about it really, so I sort of did what was on offer.  
(Susan)

Choice of subject could be restricted by impairment-related needs or anxieties:

I wanted a course that had less students in it, so that there was more time for support, and weighted more to practicals rather than lectures, which I found stressful.  
(Oliver)

I knew history and politics would be quite easy to do at university. I mean if I'd carried on with my languages I probably would have liked to pick up a new language. If I was fully sighted I probably would have wanted to do [language] but I know I wouldn't have had the guts to do that with my impairment.  
(Harriet)

... certain degrees I knew I wouldn't be able to do. When I was young I wanted to be a nurse, but being visually impaired really it's not an option because I have difficulty with hand/eye co-ordination such as, you know, stitching people up, giving needles, injections. So there are certain things which I think you have to appreciate that, you know, there's certain

degrees that I just wouldn't be able to do, and even though they say equal opportunities.  
(Hazel)

I think I probably would have chosen something along the lines of, of like being a doctor or something along those lines if I didn't have the dyslexia, or if I'd realised I had it earlier, 'cos then I would have been able to find better ways or get more help in terms of education and that ... I think it did impair me quite a bit 'cos it's, I think it's made me limit what I thought I could actually do.  
(Robert)

I worried a lot about getting employment if I studied a degree other than deaf studies. For example I did think about studying psychology at university as just one subject and doing a master's in psychology to become a psychologist, but I realised it would be so difficult for me so decided to go with deaf studies and limit myself to helping deaf people.  
(Deborah via MSN Messenger)

Pursuing a subject that appealed without further advice could sometimes lead to students having to change courses or university:

... it was something [subject] that I had wanted to do from a very early age, or I thought I did but to be honest it would probably be hard to think of a less appropriate course for someone with (mental health problem) really because of the very nature of the subject ... is probably about the most stressful demanding thing that you can do.  
(Tim)

I was not happy with the [subject] course at [university] because of maths, logic and it is more like science in computing, too hard for me and I also don't like programming ... [he was looking for something more creative involving computing, like web design].  
(Alan)

Some students, by contrast, had pursued their interests in a particular subject regardless of its 'suitability':

... people have said that I was a little bit silly to go to university and do [subjects] with a visual impairment because obviously there is an awful lot of reading involved, but I've always said my disability it never going to hold me back, you know.  
(Olga)

Access issues, the presence of support services and general orientation to disability issues were important for most students in choosing a university:

It didn't affect my choice of course but it did affect my choice of uni.

When I visited unis I went to accessibility centre to see what support I was offered. Some offered more support than others which did affect my choice.

(Holly, via MSN Messenger)

... most of them had a desk set up [on Open Days], particularly the university I went to was pretty good when I went to look round, they were directly helping out and sending out large print letters, etc.

I mean there's no point going somewhere that on the first time you go and look round they're not particularly clued up, so I think it's a big influence [on choice of university].

(Hazel)

... the disability co-ordinator herself actually got in contact with me and said, you know, what do you need, this is what we've got, this is what we could do ...

(Olga)

... I discounted some universities 'cos they didn't have [a good infrastructure]

I: Could you give me examples of the ones you discounted and why?

[University] didn't seem all that geared up to be honest.

I: Why was that?

Well they told me not to go because there was too many hills, which I wasn't quite sure what relevance that had [had a visual impairment].

(Harry)

For some, impairment issues or access or both meant that their choice of university was also restricted:

Well I think [choice of university] was largely all dependent on location unfortunately, I don't think I had the same level of choice that perhaps someone else would ...

Impairment, yeah, played a huge, a huge, a huge part, mainly location and access to the actual, physical access to the course.

(Henry)

Well I was limited on, in what universities I could apply to as there was no point applying to a university that had no support for deaf people to access the course. [University] and [University] had support, whereas if I wanted to go to [University] for example they didn't have support, I would have struggled accessing the course information to be on an equal level with my hearing peers.

(Deborah via MSN Messenger)

... the main thing that you have to find out is ... what the access is like at the university that you're going [to] ... rather than going to the university that's got the best grades or pass marks on the course ...

... the main reason I went is because it was local ...  
(Bina)

... given the [condition] ... there was a definite worry of me going also it meant that I was restricted to [University] in that it was the closest.  
(Susan)

Very few reported having considered access and support as less important than the choice of course. Harriet was one who did. She could have chosen a couple of universities that were very well set up for students with visual impairments. However, the courses there were not quite what she wanted so she opted to go for the best course, regardless of the university's experience in supporting students with special requirements:

If I'd gone to either of those two my special needs would have been a lot easier to cope with. But I made the conscious decision that that didn't really bother me ... I'd have to get to grips with dealing with my own special needs at work so I thought I might as well start at university ... and work it out myself really.

Bruce had made his choices in a similar order:

Firstly, of course, it's the course I chose and then the location.

I: So which course did you choose?

[Subject]. So obviously that was the first priority so that brought it down to about four or five universities and then mainly it was the package and the location and the other facilities available.

However, if a student was keen to do a course that was not offered in many places, and access and support were important, this could leave them with very restricted choices:

... my course that I chose was very limited in terms of universities as well, and also because of my disability, me moving away from home and everything. I didn't know how to deal with that so I kind of chose the university which is not too far from my home.  
(Kam)

Richard felt that his impairment had not made it any harder for him to get a place at university, but did suggest that one of the UK's older universities' physical layout had played a part in his not getting a place there:

It was very difficult but when I went to [university] for my interview it had virtually no wheelchair access and the only disabled toilet was down a spiral staircase. I couldn't have eaten or gone to the toilet or the bar, so I think that in [university's] case it was the access, but I can't say that that was the reason I got rejected, it was not proven but I don't want to say anything.

Restrictions on choice did not necessarily finish once a student was at university. Sheralyn reported having to take different courses from the ones she wanted to or needed to because physical access to where they were taught was difficult:

... I was going to take a course in economics which is going to take in analysis and I couldn't ... because of the distance it was, and I missed out three or four times and ... I had to change to a [different] course.

This course seemed less well fitted to her abilities and she felt that this had affected her overall results.

## **Getting the right support at university**

### **Level of preparation for arrival**

As we have seen above, students who realised that they would need good physical access and/or specialist support at university were already bearing this in mind before they chose their university. Despite this, the level of preparation in place for students when they arrived at university for the first time varied considerably. By and large, those entering higher education directly from school did better than those who went later, but there was also clear variation between universities and even within the same university.

For example, despite having alerted his university to his impairment, Tom found no support in place for him when he arrived (he had been at FE college). He had to make an appointment on a different campus from the one where he was studying and waited three weeks for a slot. After the appointment, there was further delay while he was assessed, equipment ordered and payment sorted out. As a result, equipment was not in place until the end of the first term. While Tom did not mind letting lecturers know about his impairment, he pointed out that others might feel differently. His summary was that 'they could have been a bit more prepared and I think it would have been a lot more difficult if I had different disabilities, it might have been a lot longer'.

Kam, similarly, reported that her university had not initiated contact with the disability adviser until after registration. This was in contrast to another university that she had



been considering that had rung her before she attended for an open day and had spent an hour or so then discussing her potential needs.

Kris, who also had a visual impairment, did better than Tom, at a different university. She applied for help before starting university and received the equipment she needed in time for the beginning of the academic year. A system of note-takers was also in place for her. However, she felt that having this level of support was as much down to her own persistence as anything else: '... [support] was there if I went out and got it, it wasn't going to come to me. Erm I had to go out of my way to get it...'.

John had a much better experience, despite being at the same university as Tom. He already had his 'A' levels when he applied to university and had been offered a place without interview. During the summer before he started, the university contacted him about assessment for the Disabled Student Allowance and he went in to talk to them about his needs. There was an induction course a few days before normal first-year induction, and he found all the necessary physical accommodations had been made for him and that equipment was in place.

Susan, too, felt that all that could be done for her had been: '... it was all put in place by the time I reached here and that was really good'.

Bina had perhaps the worst experience of all those we interviewed. She had planned to start an HND course at the local college associated with the nearby university, with a view to 'topping up' to a bachelor's degree. Meetings well before the course started ensured that the college was aware of her needs and it had promised to arrange teaching so that ongoing building works would not impede her access:

... it was on the Friday and I was meant to start on the Monday ... I came home and there was a message on the answering machine from college saying, 'Unfortunately you can't start your course this year because there's been a delay in the building work, if there's a problem, phone us back'.

Only after Bina had been to the press was she able to secure a meeting to discuss her situation. A compromise was reached that saw her offered an open learning course in computing and a six month work placement (in an area totally unconnected with her planned course). Subsequently, the campus where she would do her 'topping up' three years later asked her to visit and comment on access issues. While she was grateful that this would mean that there was no repetition of the previous problems, she commented:

We went round the campus, you know, doing all the effort ... and saving them the effort of employing somebody else ...

Harriet, too, had to put a lot into getting the specialist support she needed for her visual impairment but, as we saw earlier, she had opted to go for the course she

really wanted to do rather than a university that was known to be good in this sort of support. As a result:

... I did get support from them but it was obviously me coming up with ideas and then putting them in place ...

She had lots of contacts and friends from her time at special school who had 'been through it all before' and used these to find out how they had managed.

Entering higher education later in life, perhaps after the late onset of impairment and without having gone via an access course or Foundation degree, seemed to create problems for some students.

Amy left her first career after the onset of impairment and had a series of unrewarding jobs before deciding to apply to university. Although ramps were in place when she started and all her teaching was at ground level, she did not discover until towards the end of her first year that she was eligible for equipment that could help her studies. Once assessed, she received a lap-top computer, a digital recorder for lectures, an ergonomic chair and a reading board. She was surprised that, having made one set of adaptations for her, the university had not also been alert to other sorts of help that might be useful. She suspected that this might be related to the route she had taken into higher education:

I don't know what the situation is for school leavers, I'm sure they go for interviews [to assess their needs], but as I say I was well into my, I was practically at the end of my first year and I didn't get my stuff until I was half way through my second year.

The later onset of impairment and entry to higher education seems a likely explanation given the very different experience that Millie had at the same university in relation to equipment, all of which was ready for her when she started her degree, after doing a Foundation course at FE college. Her local education authority had made all necessary preparations to ensure that the equipment was ready for her and kept in touch with her throughout her course to ensure that everything was all right.

If students did not perceive their impairment as disabling before entering university they might find themselves under-prepared for the different expectations of higher education. This seemed particularly the case for those who had specific learning impairments:

... because it wasn't marked down on my UCAS forms ... they didn't approach me with the information and I'd never really considered my disability as that much of a disability so ... if there was a Student Support Services ... station at the open day I would find out what it, what, what kind of response I would get from them ... because I've never seen it

really as, you know, holding me back, I've never actively sought, I never at that point sought out what kind of support I would be given. Obviously, you know, in, you know, retrospect I probably should.  
(Matthew)

Fiona, another mature student, had notified her university of her impairment but was not aware of any preparations being made for her. None of her lecturers appeared to have been told of her impairment and, because she preferred not to bring their attention to it, she was not sure that they necessarily ever knew. She made sure that she always sat at the front of the room 'somewhere where I was happy to lip read so they thought I could hear ...' Fiona had coped with her impairment in this way for years and only alerted others to it if the physical environment made her strategy untenable.

### **Becoming disabled after starting university**

Students who had a condition that started or was recognised after they had started university faced a different set of challenges.

Cherrie acknowledged that having dyslexia and studying English was always going to be problematic but she seemed to have received relatively little help at a departmental level after her condition was confirmed. She felt that at university there was much more emphasis on individuals dealing with 'their own luck, effectively and responsibly on their own'. Her confidence had then suffered when she found herself doing less well in a subject she had loved for many years:

... it has knocked my confidence ... because my ability I feel has been affected or my performance has been affected, I haven't done as well as experienced, you know, with my GCSEs and A levels because I was, there was doubtless more support there, my family and the environment was a lot more secure. When you're at university, because you're all on your own, it's so much more difficult.

Jean, similarly, had been disadvantaged by her department's apparent reluctance to acknowledge the special needs that emerged after she started at university. She found the increased emphasis on 'coherency and expression' between 'A' level studies and university 'colossal'. Half way through her first year she realised that she was having significant problems and approached the specialist support service and was assessed during the summer term. Despite the assessment that identified specific learning difficulties she had no sense that anyone else, other than her personal tutor, was ever told this. Indeed, the personal tutor:

... said she didn't know what to do and I'd have to sort it out myself which, like reading what the disability policy's supposed to be, I mean that's

unequivocally wrong. And she made me feel a bit silly about it to be honest as well ...

As a result other lecturers continued to assess her work without taking into account her situation. When Jean raised the issue again, 'they kind of said, "Oh yeah, no, we do know", but I, I really don't think they did'.

Only when she entered her third year and received, as did all students, more sustained and individual support with her dissertation did it become clear just how serious this lack of support in other areas of the degree was:

... we had sort of hour long meetings once a fortnight and, and she sort of obviously realised even though, you know, may be [she had] given me poor marks for essays before when she didn't really know me. But, you know, I had some quite, sort of good ideas and she was always ... just really worked really hard with me from that, that stage but [it] was a little bit too little too late. I mean it meant that I came out, I know that I got a First for my dissertation but I mean I never got higher than 2.2 for anything else I did ...

Christina also experienced initial difficulty getting the level of support she required when she developed a long-term health condition:

Initially ... they didn't really understand, it was difficult 'cos I went and met them and, and I looked so well and then I got ... the access study thing.

And they did a really good assessment and they said all these things that I needed and that was brilliant and they got me a computer and loads of equipment ... and said I could work from home ...

### **Communication between specialist support and home departments**

While students' experiences of the physical preparation for their arrival – whether adaptations or equipment – varied, almost all mentioned problems caused by poor routes of communication between the specialist support services and home departments.

When both equipment and communication were problematic, new students could be left very exposed:

So then you've got three weeks of lectures where there is nothing in place, the lecturers only know if you tell them, I mean I don't mind going up and telling people but I presume some people wouldn't like that ...

... I did a lot of it myself in terms of speaking to lecturers and saying, look if you've got handouts can you let me have a copy of them ...  
(Tom)

Even if other preparations had been very good, lecturers and tutors who were unprepared for the student and departments who would not co-operate in relation to specialist support could cause problems:

... don't get me wrong, my tutor was absolutely brilliant. But I had to communicate with her all my problems and the learning support team said, 'Oh don't worry, we'll tell them ... that you're dyslexic, so they know not to get, when I hand in assignments it'll be a bit late etcetera'. But when I actually got there ... there was no information, I was telling all the tutors my disability.

I'd say the support at university when you just talk to them they're fantastic but they need to communicate with tutors.  
(Millie)

... I still had to push and push for support alongside my course in form of handouts etc but this was not fault with accessibility [office] but communication in the ... department.

Support could have been improved with more communication and better support in the form of handouts, reading materials etc.  
(Holly, via MSN Messenger)

... there's a disability centre there but I'm not quite sure how the institution, the approach taken by individual departments was in dealing with individual lectures on a day-to-day basis, they may or may not have any experience of it.  
(Harry)

... I had to take a whole module in visual perception and I remember reading it thinking I haven't got a clue about this 'cos I don't see like this and they wouldn't take it on board ...  
(Hazel)

... I don't think they really, sort of I, I never directly was asked about it and this is why I was wondering, you know, how aware they were. Because for instance I received an essay back and, you know, the usual comment about structure and how it didn't flow very well and when I saw the lecturer about it I said, 'You know that I'm dyslexic?', and it's like, 'Well, I wasn't aware of that...'

So I wondered where the sort of information [about impairment] was not being passed on to the actual lecturers.  
(Philip)

Hazel, who had a visual impairment, had been impressed with the forward planning that her university had shown when she was admitted. However, her department seemed much less supportive. She had the extraordinary experience of the department refusing her access to lecture notes in advance:

... because they felt it would put me at an advantage to other students, they didn't seem to think that because I'm at a disadvantage, they didn't take it from that point of view ...

Again, this seemed to be because of failed communication:

... there was a report sent out [specialist assessment carried out by RNIB] and I think they should have followed that more ...

... this report said there's no way that this student can read ... as much as other students can do and they wouldn't give me basically a specific reading list 'cos they said that puts you ... at an advantage to the other students.

Anxieties about seeming to give disabled students some kind of advantage over others were also evident in Kam's department's response to her request for information about her final year. She had not received any ongoing support from the specialist services and was worried about how she was going to cope in her final year:

... I've spoken to one of my lecturers and I'm saying, 'Look, I want, I just want, I would like to speak to someone 'cos I have some concerns about my final year, especially with my hearing and everything'. This is the most important year ...

All my friends have gone, so I don't have anyone to rely upon if I miss something from my lectures, yeah?

So I contacted my lecturer about it, I just said that I would like to speak to someone face-to-face about my concerns and to find out who my final year tutor was, so I could speak to that final year tutor ... and he goes, 'Well, everyone's in the same situation, the final year's the final year', and I found that really rude that they do not know what my concerns were and he wrote back in an email, like, the final year is the final year. I know it's a final year but I just want to talk to someone before I start actually going into my final year and if someone could put my mind at ease.

Matthew did not discover until he had left university and was exploring further professional training that other universities would have dealt with his impairment in different ways. He was dyslexic and although he was given extra time for exams, his course work was assessed in exactly the same way as was other students. When the support he received with course work did not work out as planned the impact was considerable:

... our work wasn't noted as being dyslexic whereas other universities ... marked your work as being that of a dyslexic. So, almost as if [University] was in its atmosphere and approach was kind of, it wasn't blind as much as trying to ensure that the, the playing field was blind to disability.

... like, I was on course for a First and had one tutor who, ... I'd had a proof reader, the proof reader hadn't done a particularly good job and the work was, the spelling was basically a bit poor on it, some of the grammar was poor .... But the tutor marked it down, I'd gone from like a seventeen ... to a twelve [out of a possible 20 marks] because of this guy's, you know. And that was the only thing wrong with the essay ... and it basically brought down my entire mark.

Susan found the specialist support at her university very good but experienced problems with one lecturer who did not want her in his class because of her condition:

He was concerned that I was going to have a fit in his class and he wasn't going to know what to do and he was very worried ...

This problem was eventually 'solved' by a system that involved a first-aider summoning a more supportive lecturer who would then 'take care of' the anxious lecturer if Susan had a fit.

Other students felt that communication had been good, but if the department had not had prior experience of their type of impairment, things might still not go smoothly:

... they learnt as they went along but they didn't have a clue when I got there.

... I would sort of say I can't see that on the board, will you read everything out as you say it.  
(Kris)

The lecturers got a lot better as I got through ... and the younger lecturers seemed to be, well they were a lot happier to email me stuff.

... [by] my third year all the lecturers were emailing stuff [handouts etc] out but the first year I think it was quite a new sort of idea for them ...  
(Harriet)

... the disability co-ordinator contacted all my lecturers and just said, 'Look, if you're going to put overheads up, photocopy it and give it to Olga'. But some lecturers were really bad at it.  
(Olga)

Lack of understanding of the impact of particular impairments, and particularly mental health problems and specific learning difficulties, could cause problems even if the home department was otherwise helpful:

In the first year I got a massive backlog of work again because I think the people didn't know how to handle me ... and it was a bit of a learning curve for the department and myself really ...  
(Tim)

There were some instances in which tutors didn't really, I don't think got the issue of dyslexia. Like there was one tutor when I was in the second year she showed me a piece of paper and went, you know, 'Can you read this?' ... my dyslexia had never ... it'd affected my ability to write out and punctuate ... but it's never affected my ability to read. So I think [University] could have done with ... a better educated approach to the problem ...  
(Matthew)

... although the actual disability advice was very good, I don't think lecturers themselves are very clued up on the issues people have with a disability ...

... I still don't think many lecturers are as clued up as to what a dyslexic student, you know, and also just because there's so many varieties as well, I think they ... assume it's one thing rather than a whole selection of things.  
(Philip)

There was only a, a few lecturers that weren't as, as helpful but the majority were.

... there was my pharmacology lecturer ... it was like he didn't really want to spend time in terms of showing me what kind of things I needed ... just explaining things a little bit more, ... in more detail to me and because he never did that for me I never got to get the grade I think I would have got if I'd have got support in that.

... I think he probably thought I was just being lazy or just thought I was just looking for a scapegoat, easy way out or not really wanting to do the work. But that really wasn't the case 'cos I found it extremely difficult ...  
(Robert)

Several students felt that not only was communication needed, but also some training for lecturers and tutors so they would understand better the impact of given impairments or conditions:

... I think that the tutors themselves ought to go on courses, whether it's dyslexia, visual impairment, hearing impairment, other physical disabilities,



even dysphasia. I really do think they ought to go on courses so that they know what they are dealing with.  
(Millie)

... they should have read up on the problem, they didn't have a clue ...  
... I think I would like them to have been a bit more clued up and sorting things out without me having to go and waste time trying to sort things out with them and taking time off. I think they need to be a bit more proactive.  
(Hazel)

Such training seemed particularly necessary where impairments were more subtle in their effects on academic achievement. Jean, for example, felt that the attitudes of the staff in her department were influenced across the board by their uninformed views about her performance:

... you don't realise how ... much it affects your mark in other ways because I think it has this kind of sub-conscious effect that people [are] just thinking that you're lazy or that things have just kind of been written off the cuff when actually, you know, God they would take me so long to plan ...

Only one student conveyed any sense that their presence in their home department was nothing out of the ordinary:

... I assume [the lecturers] were [aware] 'cos there has never been any issue to do with it so I can only imagine that they were, they didn't really make a big deal of it, I was just another student really ...  
(John)

## **Getting the right level of support**

Getting the level of support right for individual students is probably more of an art than a science. Some students felt almost overwhelmed by the support they received:

... they helped with note takers, it got on my nerves, got in the way ... I used them too much and I didn't need to but they were sort of in my face and I couldn't keep away from it really, I was sort of bombarded and they took over a little bit.  
(Kris)

Kris felt that she had become too dependent on the note takers and rather resented this. Similarly, Ivana, although at a university that had good support for deaf students and a large deaf community, had to rely on interpreters for much of the time. She disliked this and said that it made her feel 'like I had no independence' (via MSN Messenger).

Some students also felt that they had got more equipment than they actually needed. When assessed John had been told by the assessor that his university 'tend to give what we ask for'. He had received a lap-top computer, which he found very useful, but reported that there was 'other stuff ... but to be honest I didn't really need it and barely used them'. Olga reported a similar situation:

... I got so much more than I'd ever had or ever dreamed of having and some of it I still can't work (laughs).

Others, as we saw above, had been left initially under-supported, while still others chose not to identify themselves as disabled and consequently did not expect any accommodation to their impairment. For some students, however, even when support was established, it did not always meet their needs. One problem was the level of knowledge of a subject that support workers could bring:

... when I was doing essays, the suggestion was that you get it checked over by someone to help you with your structure, but the problem with this is the people who are checking it have no idea about the topic areas ... so they can't really help you in the sense that they're clueless as to what's missing or, you know, what should go where because they're not sure what argument I'm on.  
(Philip)

... things like making sure that scribes have the correct knowledge of the subject they're scribing for.

... if they don't understand what you're asking them to do then they can't do it.  
(Richard)

Having no eyesight I need competent support workers, helping with legal research, notes and a large amount of reading of legal texts. Most of the support workers were not able to cope with the demand placed on them, and throughout the three years I was under-prepared and not able to get involved in the course as much as the other students.  
(Harvey via MSN Messenger)

The lack of support for Harvey had severe consequences for him when he was unable to complete a compulsory part of his degree course and came away from university with a lower class of degree than he needed for future professional training.

Hazel also referred to lack of appropriate support having affected her final performance. She had spent time having the specialist recommendations made for her support into a reality, had had a battle over alternative forms of assessment for a visually-based examination, and had missed a 2.1 by one mark:

... all these people walked out with 2.1s who hadn't had half the trouble I'd had ... and only done half the work I had and I was like, 'Oh my God'.

All the above suggests the absolute requirement to identify students, understand what it is that they want and deliver it. This may mean delivering more or less support initially than might otherwise be the case, and having systems established for ongoing review, rather than assuming that a uniform approach at the beginning will meet all needs.

This need for *ongoing* specialist support and review was central to several students' recommendations for change:

... they asked you what you want and stuff and then that's it then until I think the next year or whatever, they think that you're sorted. It might be good again just for that, maybe further contact at the end of semester one and say right, this is what we gave you, how has it impacted on you, is there anything else that we can do, that sort of thing might be helpful.  
(Tom)

... I only [had] contact with [disability advisor] last, in summer 2005 to find out if my exams were taken in a special needs room where I get extra time and that the only [contact] I had. She didn't even ask that, if you're OK or anything like that and I found that very rude ...  
(Kam)

... I've had no support of how is everything going, I've had no support of any services I can get in touch with as a disabled person.  
(Millie)

The lack of ongoing or regular contact meant that some students were left wondering how new demands in their second or subsequent years would be dealt with:

Regular assessing with the head of support would have helped a bit more because needs does change yearly depending on the course.  
(Ivana via MSN Messenger)

And so maybe if I'd had a bit more input later on, as I went through and then I probably would have, well it would have made my dissertations easier anyway.  
(Harriet)

... I did see my disability advisor ... she put it all down on my records and everything ... she was able to give me that piece of paper which I was able to show to my lecturers in my first year and from that I think I was able to build up a kind of good relationship [with] my lecturers and everything in that first year. ... But [in second year] when I got new lecturers I didn't know what to do in terms of, do I give this sheet again, even though it was one year out of date ...

... I'm going into my final year, I don't have any support, I don't have a note taker or anything. I haven't actually, I haven't even seen my disability adviser for two years ...

(Kam)

More recognition of the very hard work required to keep on top of work would also have helped some:

... difficulties of actually getting the work done and wanting a bit of understanding and acknowledgement, handing in assignments, 'hey, this is f\*\*\*ing difficult, it took me a long time [to do the work], and having no support or acknowledgement I guess for that kind of stuff.

(Kris)

This was an area where getting support at the right level was likely to be difficult. Kris later spoke about how she was:

... seen as an ordinary member of society. I don't look like I have an official disability, I don't look like I have any disability so therefore I ploughed along with the rest of the other students and ... I don't know, it was just tough really ...

Millie, too, pointed out that she was not just 'another student' handing in an assessment late because she 'had a booze-up last night' but because she needed the extra time to complete it.

By contrast, others felt no need for active contact or ongoing support, but were pleased to feel that it was there in the background should they need it:

I don't really have anything to do with the disabled support team or anything, erm, I'm sure if I had an issue with anything I would be able to go to 'em and they'd be there, fine ...

(John)

[the specialist support] was very accessible, very approachable once I'd got my equipment and was happy in what I was doing and settling in, I didn't really feel I needed to keep going back. ... But I know that [specialist adviser] was very accessible, he did contact me later on once I'd sort of got everything, is everything OK? Are you happy? And he always made it clear, if you need anything else contact me do, I know that it was there if I needed it but I just didn't feel that I needed further support, I was just very much left to get on with my own devices really.

(Amy)

## Type of support provided

We have already seen above some of the range of supports provided in universities for disabled students. This included physical adaptation of the environment and the provision of a wide range of equipment, including lap top computers and specialist software, large computer screens, printers, scanners, scanning pens, digital recorders, ergonomic chairs, reading slopes and so on. As we also saw above, students had varied experiences in accessing support at the start of their courses and this was reflected for some in an inappropriate physical environment or the lack of technical support:

... not many of my lectures have induction loops and things like that.

... a lot of university rooms are now, come carpeted and everything but also even lecturers not wearing a microphone, if there's no induction loop or something like that they should wear a microphone.  
(Kam)

... there are public buildings which still don't have wheelchair access to this day, there were, will be lift[s] operating that are unsuitable and ridiculous so access issues like that but I think there is a general inertia about dealing with impairments at university.  
(Richard)

Multi-campus environments could cause particular problems when courses were arranged some distance away:

... you streamline your courses to, this is what I want to study for this year ... and all of a sudden you hear that this course is situated at this place where you, you know, you look at the distance from where you're staying to where it is ...  
(Sheralyn)

The range of personal support provided was also wide: note takers, readers, signers, interpreters, English support, people to carry bags from place to place, first aiders to help during epileptic fits, learning support, proof readers, providing copies of handouts on computer discs, and someone to do photocopying were all mentioned:

I had learning support ... like an additional sort of tutor ... he was really good and he would help me ... with the planning out of my assignments and, you know, do timetables and things like that and then, you know, eventually ... you just sort of learnt ...  
(Bruce)

Harry had access to a specialist transcription service for students with visual impairments:

It was all fairly seamless, they would all sort it out like, if you told them what books you wanted and they'd arrive ...

... sometimes you'd get them late or occasionally not at all but when it worked it was fairly seamless, you didn't have to find your own readers unless you wanted to.

Problems occurred sometimes when students did not know about services that were available. For example, Olga had equipment beyond her dreams but did not know about the book fetching service in the library (her visual impairment made it impossible for her to read the catalogue numbers):

So I didn't get a book out in my first year, I got books out in my second year with the help of friends and then in the final term of my second year I found out about this book fetching service.

(Olga)

However, even when using this service she found that communication could be poor and she would have to go up to the library specially to find out if the books were ready: 'see whether they had got them on the off chance and especially during my revision period it was a huge chunk out of my time.'

In addition to this sort of help, many students also experienced a range of 'accommodations' to their impairment in the way they were assessed, for example extended deadlines for course work and dissertations, separate examination rooms, more time for exams, use of laptops during exams, rest breaks during exams, assignment checking, and alternative forms of assessment:

... for exams you could have stickers that go on your work to say that like you're dyslexic so, you know, it'd be nice (laughs).

(Bruce)

For some students, such accommodations really did seem to make the difference between completing a degree successfully and not:

... giving me extra course work in lieu of examinations ... as far as I know is pretty much without precedent [at other universities] but they really enabled it for me to get a degree which I thought I never would have been able to so that has been excellent. In terms of giving me extra support and giving me extra time they've been absolutely fantastic ...

(Tim)

However, no matter how good specialist support was, some students simply did not have access to the same resources as did those without impairments:

... I mean theoretically, you know, anyone can take an article off a book shelf, go and pick it up whenever they wanted to, whereas [I] would need

to commission it ... not that I would want to read everything the university published but you couldn't actually do it anyway, not everything would be available, you know, the choice of having it there, having anything there just wasn't, wasn't available to me.  
(Harry)

One student reported resentment from her peers about accommodation to her needs:

I get some trouble off my peers who claim that needs adjustments are too much.

When I received my laptop last year my friend said that it was a waste of tax to give so much and other things like I draw attention to myself sitting at the front with a voice recorder. They see it as me not having to work so hard, that they work hard and get nothing.  
(Susan)

As we saw above, some students had to be proactive in getting their home departments to adjust their practice. Given the relative newness of large numbers of disabled people entering higher education, some had clearly felt like 'pioneers':

I could visibly see things getting better, while I was at university, it was definitely changing.

I: Was that as a result of your input or just, you know, the whole thing evolving?

I think both really ...  
(Olga)

## **Careers development and advice at university**

### **Career choice**

We have already seen that some students chose subjects to study at university because they were interested in the topic for its own sake, with no obvious link to a particular career choice. Others, usually mature students, had embarked on their course with very clear ideas about their future. As a result, they made relatively little use of career advice while at university:

... when I went to university I was very focused in what I needed to do and I knew what I needed to do in order to reach that goal and so I just got on with it.  
(Fiona)

For others, their career path became clear to them while at university and they, also, needed relatively little help at that stage:

... it was always clear to me that I was going to go on and do postgraduate study [so] I was probably looking for advice on different areas than perhaps other students might have been.

... I was fairly single-minded as to what I wanted so I didn't feel the need to go off [to careers service] and look any further.  
(Susan)

Those who were planning to enter one of the professions such as law, again, seemed to need relatively little formal help:

... the network within the university and the city ... was very good in as much as there were a lot of law firms that they were in contact with and you were forever told where there were opportunities for work placements, that is how I have ended up getting my training contract.  
(Amy)

For the majority, however, career choice and advice were important. We asked them about both career development training (job searching skills, interview skills, placements and similar) and careers advice, per se.

## **Career development**

The experience of career development was very varied, from those who were doing 'sandwich' courses to those who felt that they had received no relevant input. At both extremes, this seemed in part due to the type of course followed.

John, for example, was following a technical course that required a year's placement with an employer. This was clearly benefiting him in terms of career preparation. Before going on the placement he had not been sure whether he would find the type of work on offer interesting but had done so and was now wondering about a permanent post of the same sort. In addition, he had received extensive career training throughout his course via mandatory professional and communication skills courses that concentrated on finding a placement and thereafter a job.

By contrast, Millie was following an arts course where most graduates were expected to be self-employed at the end. Career development was therefore focused on how to run a small business. While this might be useful to most potential graduates, Millie pointed out to the university that, as a disabled person whose condition was unstable, she could not guarantee that she could run a business from week to week. She kept asking for information about other career options but said 'that really was trying to get blood out of a stone'. She felt that information about how to 'home in your skills' on other options, such as teaching, would have been helpful.



Holly had also received nothing she could identify as career development or advice but this again seemed in part due to her subject:

I don't even know if there is a career department at [university].

With [subject] you only have chartered basis after graduation, information on how to become chartered, what options there are in terms of training etc. Even at a lower stage what module options are recommended for the different paths in [subject].

Some universities appeared not to offer career development opportunities to undergraduates at all, giving the impression that a degree from them was enough to secure a career somewhere or other:

[University] is really quite minimal on, kind of like, career abilities until we get to a postgraduate level. So ... it's something that they only really offer at, to PhD students. I think [university] expect, you know, oh you've got a degree from [university], that should be enough, off you go, apply to like, you know, the Civil Service.  
(Matthew)

Others had a more middle of the road experience – 'a bit about career development' in the third year and careers fairs (Tom). Courses that offered formal teaching on CV development and the like were also mentioned:

... I ... found my module useful, you know, like CVs, all that kind of stuff.  
(Henry)

I: ... were you offered opportunities for career development such as ... things like making presentations, ... CV writing, using Powerpoint?

Yes, I went ... to all of those.

... they were really helpful there and also, because proof reading is, is possibly the most difficult thing for me to do they were quite happy to proofread my CV a million times.  
(Olga)

Some students were honest about not having used the opportunities for career development that were on offer:

... I don't think I used it as well as I could.

... they offer, you know, sort of individual interviews and, you know, all these sorts of skills workshops and stuff and I think I arranged a lot of work by myself and then, obviously, getting this ... placement I sort of haven't thought past it whereas, you know, in hindsight I could probably have asked them if there were opportunities after that ...  
(Philip)

... I was aware that they were there but I wasn't particularly aware of what they did or what they could offer which I think is partly my fault in that I never went to find out, but also it could have been advertised better. Again I was fairly single minded as to what I wanted so I didn't feel the need to go off and look any further.  
(Susan)

Like Millie, Tom felt that being disabled meant that standard career development or careers advice was unlikely to be suitable and felt that the specialist services could have played a greater role at this stage:

... that is something that the [specialist support] department could have done in my final year, pulled me in and said, look, I know that you're now finishing your degree and you need to look at other avenues, what has your course provided ... and then they could say, right, is there anything specific that you think, that might be difficult, ... say interviews, this is [what] some people ... with your disabilities that has gone through, as a sort of example, that kind of think might have been useful.

## **Careers advice**

As with career development activities, students' experiences of careers advice were very varied:

... the careers advisers there just seemed to know what they're talking about and it was like, because I did my placement I'd been to loads of interviews, [they] just gave me good advice and they knew what was going on ...  
(Christina)

Overall, it seemed that careers advice worked best when students already had some idea of what they wanted to do, as long as it was fairly 'main stream'.

... I found out what I wanted to do and then asked them about it really.  
(Olga)

... I think the problem is because I still haven't really chosen what I want to do, they can't really guide you anywhere until you have a, you know, area, let alone a more specific job [in mind] and unfortunately because I haven't sort of even decided what I want to do, they couldn't really help.  
(Philip)

... I mean the problem with that was they always asked me what, the thing you wanted to do, direction you wanted to go in and I never had a clue. I still don't (laughs).

Just fell into a job.  
(Harriet)

I think the careers department need to build up on [information about more unusual careers]. OK, they can still build upon the core common ones like becoming a doctor or programmer or whatever or anything else like that, but they don't know too much on hidden careers.

(Kam)

I have never really had careers advice from university, because I did my own research really, using the net etc and job centre.

I: Why did you not use the careers service – did something put you off?

No, it was because I did not know what I wanted to do with my career really, I was too busy trying to get over depression and focus on [my] studies.

I had no idea what I wanted to do, just that I knew I was interested in deaf issues.

(Deborah, via MSN Messenger)

Less positive experiences could be associated with specific accessibility issues:

... I went to see them [careers service] but I didn't find them very helpful.

I mean, they're not ... willing to sit there and read you all the stuff and they just give you a few, I mean the problem with that was they always asked me what, the thing you wanted to do, direction you wanted to go in and I never had a clue.

I guess I just needed ... as many sort of different ways of finding out information as possible and, as almost all of it in a career centre is in a sort of shiny brochure ...

(Harriet)

While Kris reported that she had been sent emails from the careers service she felt that the opportunities and information would have been inaccessible to her, because of her impairment and that she did not feel:

... ready or ... able to teach ... members of staff how to make stuff accessible to me, so I was sort of you know just ploughing along with my own degree trying to get that out of the way rather than trying to help others to er identify my needs, so I missed out everything really.

Her pessimism about this was reinforced when she did see a careers adviser:

... she was nice enough and said apply, like any other person, look in the papers and apply for a job, see you later, sort of thing and that was it.

It was like, you look OK I'm sure you can get a job, so for heaven's sake get on.

Kris's analysis of why things were like this was that the careers advisers did not see enough disabled students to be able to understand how to cater for them and that their training on disability issues was 'patchy'.

Others reported the same problem:

... the main problem that they had was because [they] didn't have experience of giving careers ... help, careers advice to somebody with a disability.

(Bina)

... but I don't think they're specialists, they, I don't know how ... much training they've received about ... disabilities because for me the one big issue is whether I disclose my disability to employers ...

(Cherrie)

... the advice was very much targeted to people that could go and do any job, anywhere, any time, any place, regardless of access or ... that kind of thing ...

(Henry)

In Bina's case, the careers service had suggested that she should approach a specialist organisation with experience in helping disabled people into employment. Like Kris, however, Bina had worked so hard to finish her degree that she had not had time to do much career planning in her final year. She was also concerned that, having graduated, she might not be able to access even the generalist careers advice service of her university.

Several students referred to using specialist careers advice, either at their own university or, more likely, somewhere else:

I used the university careers service and I [also] used Blind in Business.

I: Why was that?

Just 'cos they were more geared up like that, I mean, don't get me wrong I didn't need the careers service 'cos I didn't think it would be, but it's just it [Blind in Business] was there and someone recommended it and it seemed sort of to be aimed at, you know, my sort of, a person in my situation so I just used it because it's, you know, there. I figured they'd have more expertise, well they ought to have more expertise anyway.

(Harry)

... I'm in contact with the charity Blind in Business ... I went and did a job search with them and the lady there suggested I might be very suitable for management consultancy.

(Olga)

... I joined up a scheme on my own and from that scheme I was able to get career advice such as CV help, interview skills, other core business skills and stuff like that.

I: Is that run by the university or is it sort of ...?

No, it's private, charity organisation.

(Kam)

I think that they [are] not really geared up to advise disabled students when it comes up to career.

(Izzie)

That's why I don't look for jobs with the university's career service. I look with RNID which is an organisation which specialises in helping deaf people look for jobs.

(Izzie/Ivana via MSN Messenger)

... at university ... an organisation called Scope for leadership recruitment and they put me forward to a lot of organisations that were very helpful and where they were tolerant towards people with disabilities, and through them I managed to get the opportunities to have interviews ...

(Robert)

The best outcomes seemed to be when careers advice was both properly individualised and facilitated access to specialist job preparation or job searching:

... it's very much, on a one-to-one level, it was very much targeted to getting, finding you placements that were suitable for me in terms of location, access and really kind of personal, personal aspirations on what I wanted for a job and I found they were very kind of attentive to that. But it was very much individually led, if you get me there?

They were very much, 'Tell us what you need from, from a job and we'll match our, match our positions with that', and that's really where the SCOPE recruitment scheme came in.

(Henry)

## Conclusions

This chapter has shown the very varied experiences that disabled students had of preparation and ongoing support for their individual needs at University. Some of this seemed to be related to the route they had taken into university; those entering later in life were less likely to be plugged into assessment processes automatically and had to find their way in themselves. However, this does not seem to be the whole experience. Some universities appeared to do better than others, and sometimes the same university did better with one student than with another. There is a strong feeling from the material presented here that students with hearing impairments tended to fare the worst.

While there is no outright reporting of gender discrimination at university, we also see from this material that gendered career paths start to develop very early. Women and men report choosing gendered university subjects to study, thus cutting themselves off from other possibilities. Some buck the trend, but women who do so often report uncomfortable experiences.

The interviews with disabled students also identified a number of issues about the ways in which their universities handled their individual needs within their home departments. Even those who had good experiences of specialist support services were sometimes perplexed by the apparent lack of communication between these services and the departments in which they were studying. Some reported clear examples of poor practice and, one suspects, discrimination on the part of some lecturers. There is a clear need here for universities to be as active in advertising and enforcing disability rights issues across the board as they are in relation to issues of sex or race.

Generic careers services seemed rarely able to meet disabled students' needs and many of them simply looked elsewhere for specialist help. For those who were not aware of this specialist help, careers advice and support with job searching could be hard to find.

The overwhelming message of the material analysed in this chapter is the need for universities to make individual responses to individual needs. Disabled students make up such a small proportion of the total undergraduate population that it is difficult to understand why this is not always possible.

## Chapter 7      Evidence from qualitative research: job seeking and employment

In this chapter we move on to explore students' experiences of job seeking and paid employment, both while they were still at university and afterwards. We include here their experience of work placements, internships and sandwich courses as well as 'real' paid employment.

### Work experience, placements and sandwich courses

It seemed very clear from the interviews that the opportunity to undertake some kind of placement in a work setting before or during higher education or work experience during vacations was important for subsequent job searching.

It is hard because it is so competitive, there are a lot [of] [subject] students out there fighting for a very few places, so in that sense it was hard [getting a job]. I saw the notice, I think it was coming towards the end of my second year, I saw the notice that these placements were being offered and I got a placement at a [place of work] and I got the placement at the firm that I'm going to be with now.  
(Amy)

... going there, to that Business School, they were very keen on, you know, sorting out a good placement.  
(Christina)

... that's what the SCOPE [recruitment] scheme showed me is that there's lots of different possibilities out there and you just have to be open to the possibilities and there's lots of interesting work out there.  
(Henry)

... I did two internships one at [a government department] and the other in a European investment bank and I've also got a graduate contract with (consultancy firm) and I've got two jobs starting tomorrow. The [consultancy firm] one is working for [firm] and updating mail group publisher and the other is a freelance thing.  
(Richard)

Placements could also bring confidence in the whole business of applying for jobs:

... because I did my placement I'd been to loads of interviews ...  
(Christina)

But as with finding a job later on, the ease with which students found a placement varied:

... I did apply for a few [placements], I didn't really get anywhere.

I: And what do you think the problem was?

Erm, I don't know, I think it was quite possible just a lack of experience, that situation where you're trying to get work but you can't get work because you've not done it erm, so I think that it was that, I don't think it was anything to do with my disability or anything.

(Steve)

I had been having a lot of trouble obtaining a placement – the university starts trying to match people to jobs that they already have [access to] and when more come in they match suitable people to that job and pass them over to the employers to interview them, this all starts in October/November of the second year of study. For me it came to May/June and I had only had about three interviews.

I: OK, why were you having such problems?

I don't know. Sometimes I do think it might have been because I was deaf but other times I think it might have been because I didn't have the right knowledge/understanding for the job.

(Lucy, via MSN Messenger)

Lucy ended up with a placement almost by accident, via a part-time summer job, but her experience with it was positive:

All my work was done either via email or face-to-face. It was a small team that I worked in so communication was not a problem for me. All staff were aware of my hearing impairment and spoke to me face-to-face and in the appropriate way.

(Lucy, via MSN Messenger)

Although placements and internships could be helpful in subsequent job searching, some students found them very challenging, if not supported properly. Alan had been the only deaf student on his university course and although the practical support had been good during his course work this did not seem to have followed him into the placement:

... the communica[tion] between me and the boss was awful. We did not get on well, but I don't understand why he gave me a first class, because he sympathy[sed] with me. I have made some work but I was not satisfied. It was good learning experience.

... thought I don't do the work well because there is no interpreter ...

(Alan, via MSN Messenger)



Izzie had had a similarly dispiriting experience:

[I had] a bad experience on [my] second year placement. They told me to sit in the school library away from everyone else because I couldn't physically get in the staff room.  
(Izzie via MSN Messenger)

Several of the students had done internships in the public sector, arranged via a scheme especially for disabled students:

... in the second year specifically in respect of disabled students ... there was an advert for a disabled undergraduate to go into the Civil Service and I won like an internship there and that was, like, really that was excellent, so I've been offered plenty of things, definitely.  
(Tim)

However, many work experience placements seemed to come after students had graduated:

... I've got a placement coming up with the Civil Service ...

So that will enable me to, to ascertain our, our mutual suitability and to find out whether I could conceivably work for them and enjoy it and, and vice versa, whether they get on with me.  
(Cherrie)

... this summer thing that I'm going on is for disabled students and graduates and like their [Civil Service] presentation was saying, you know, we're trying to recruit more from the [disabled] sector as it's a side of society that we don't represent enough, so.  
(Olga)

Such experiences after graduation were clearly going to be very important for people who had not yet done much career planning:

... I sort of haven't thought past [the summer placement scheme] ...  
... I could have probably asked them if there were opportunities after that, you know, year placements or, or things along those lines because again I haven't really decided what I want to do and so I think I'm going down the placement route for as long as possible until I really find something that I find interesting in an area, in a country, in a place that I find interesting, you know. I think maybe I suffer from the idea that I can find the perfect job very quickly ...  
(Philip)

## Level of focus on specific career

There is some suggestion from this study that a course focussed on a specific career or profession might confer benefits in terms of job searching:

... I'd done [subject] GCSE, [subject] 'A' Level and then the university I chose was, like the top four [subject] schools and that was the whole point, that's why I was better off to go there. So it was that decision, it was part of the decision I guess to go into [career]. I always wanted like as I say, like a high powered job and be successful in that way.  
(Christina)

However, *not* having that focus was not necessarily a barrier to success, if students were able to be flexible:

... I've applied for every sort of job you could apply for and I don't see that it [degree subject] restricts me. But ... when I started at [firm] there was only three of us out of twenty or whatever who didn't have some sort of business or management or something with their degree. ... But obviously employers are looking for business or management or something like that which I would never have wanted to do ...  
(Harriet)

I didn't determine my current career path, it's just the application that got accepted.  
(Harry)

... I'd like to get some experience in ... some areas of [degree subject] using ... my knowledge base, but ... I don't think I need to be in a job in [subject] to use the transferable skills that I have acquired and I ... wouldn't like to restrict my, I mean 'cos it's hard enough to get work experience as a disabled person anyway, ... without restricting yourself further, kind of saying, oh I need to be really doing this, you know.  
(Henry)

It's [degree subject] open ended and so you can apply for a lot of things that involve in-house training ...  
... however, on the negative side it's not a vocational course so it never really offers you a job or an idea of a job you want to do because it's so open ended.  
(Philip)

However, some students did feel that their choice of subject could influence the options open to them:

... you've also got the problem of it [subject] not being specific enough to go into a direct career line. Like say you'd studied law, I think you've got

more direction of where you, and also you feel, you know, you're going somewhere more specific.  
(Bruce)

... the general sense is that it's quite, it's a ... restrictive degree subject, people do tend to scoff at [subject] graduates, I don't know why.

But I'm, I'm very much new to the job search and from like fellow graduates that have got [subject] degrees I know that some have found it difficult to get jobs with a degree in [subject].  
(Henry)

I joke that I wanted to do a degree that gave me a big debt and no transferable skills! I would say [subject] is not the safe choice if you want to go straight into gainful employment.  
(Susan)

One student talked about this issue in the context of explaining why there were mostly women on the course she had studied:

Perhaps there might be a, a little bit of a stigma attached to, to men doing a course like [degree subject] because it's so communication based and in some ways it's feelings based. That's one reason possibly. ... Another reason is because I think it doesn't ... lead to a specific field of work and I think men on the whole might be more tempted to follow a path, a degree course which was going to lead somewhere.  
(Cherrie)

Despite this, however, Cherrie did believe that her degree subject opened up a number of options for her in terms of a career.

### **Searching for a job**

As with career development and careers advice, students' experiences of searching for and obtaining a job (or not) were very varied, from those who secured a post very quickly to those who were still without work a year after we first interviewed them.

Those who did well were either in clear professional career paths or had applied for posts via graduate schemes:

I was very lucky, it was the first one I applied for, went through the process and got the job on the first interview.  
(Amy)

... the ... head[teacher] came to observe me at work and in the classroom and I went for an interview with the governing body and they offered me a job.

(Fiona)

... I applied also to [organisation] ...

And I got offered, well I got through to the next stage of their leadership programme which was very good and also I applied for Civil Service, like a summer placement and I got through to the next round of that as well but I had to let these go because then I was getting all these offers from the banks and I preferred that really.

(Christina)

... I just applied to all the big companies, big, well the, all the graduate schemes and that's, that's the route I took ...

(Harriet)

... I got called to a few sessions. ... I got a few telephone interviews, a couple of [assessment] centres and some rejections.

(Harry)

Tom also found a job, but with rather more effort: he applied for around ten jobs and was short-listed for three. He had interviews for two of the posts but was not successful and then succeeded with the third. In neither case did he feel that his lack of success was related to his impairment and by the time of the third interview he was feeling 'very confident and more relaxed than I had been and I was of the belief, well if I get it I get it, if I don't I don't'.

Millie, by contrast, felt sure that her initial lack of success in obtaining interviews was related to her disability. She recounted applying for 'lots and lots of jobs and every time I just came up with a block'. She recounted how for one job she failed to declare a disability on her application form and was actually granted an interview:

... because by that time I'd done more than twenty application forms, I thought I'm not just doing it anymore, so I went there, I had quite an obvious limp ... and erm I just sat down and they looked at me and I said, this is who I am and these are the skills, I have just completed a degree. Then they asked, they went straight in and said 'can we but quite blunt and ask do you have a disability?' and I said yes. ... So I was very honest and I had all the requirements and everything and I never heard back from them and quite frankly ... I could have done the job standing on my head.

She went on to report that the only positive response she had had was from public sector employers, with one of whom she was now working:

... because it's very pc [politically correct] there, they have people there from all different walks of life and different kinds of disabilities which is absolutely great.

Other students had depressing experiences of rejection, often apparently related to their impairment:

I: Does your degree subject theoretically give you lots of job opportunities?

I thought it was, but it was not.

All the hearing [students] from my course get a job easily, but not to me.

I: What do you think is the problem?

Cos of my deafness. Believe me I try my best to look for a job ... but they put off as soon as they found out about my deafness.

(Alan via MSN Messenger)

... because I am deaf too I have to say that I am not that restricted when I apply for deaf-related [deaf issues] jobs. However, I did apply recently for non-disabled people jobs and most of them have not even granted me an interview.

(Deborah via MSN Messenger)

Later in the interview when Deborah was asked why she thought she had not got interviews she said:

Because I would imagine hundreds of people applied and even though they say they operate by equal opportunities, say for example someone not deaf and me had same qualifications and experience I feel they would always go for the other one, as even though there are schemes out there to help them pay for costs incurred by disabled employers [sic] they would rather the less hassle.

(Via MSN Messenger)

Other students, however, had deliberately gone down the 'disability route' and found it helped them get jobs or post-degree placements:

... I can't do exactly what I want because of it [impairment] and I'd gone down the route of, I sort of went to sort of like disability events, and a lot of how I kind of got the job ...

... I got the job. I got offered lots of jobs so, yeah, in the end it did pay off.

(Christina)

To be honest [placement] was very much to do with the scheme that I saw which, you know, was for disabled graduates ...

... the scheme that I'm on is just much, much more set up for somebody in my position than for example going, you know, I just didn't want to undergo the same experience again [as at university].

(Jean)

... I just randomly got an email about January time from Student Support Services and it wasn't to do with any, it wasn't highlighted towards dyslexic

students but it was highlighting the, there was a disabilities programme that the Civil Service runs ...

... runs over the summer and I applied for that and I'm now like in about two weeks starting, you know, a couple of months with the [government department].

... So like it's ... positively helped me ... [I] also got some placements for firms as well ...

(Matthew)

Matthew made a very interesting observation about the 'attractiveness' for some students of going down the 'disabled route' and of dyslexic students to employers trying to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act:

I think when they're confronted just as you have to be with the Disability Discrimination Act, between a dyslexic student ..., dyslexic candidate, ... a disabled candidate and, you know, a normal candidate, you know, the Disabilities Act works in your favour in that, you know, they should, you know, theoretically, you know, choose you over them.

... that's why I think the Civil Service will love dyslexic students because, you know, you don't, you don't have to alter anything, you don't have to, you know, create access to the building, you don't have to give them anything else.

Philip, who was also dyslexic, expressed a similar unease about his summer placement:

... the programme's been very helpful for me, I mean I have to admit at some stages I think I'm a bit cheeky for applying for it, 'cos again I, I think my disability is a lot more minor than obviously more physical disabilities

...

As we saw earlier, specialist recruitment schemes seemed particularly helpful for some students, both in widening the scope of the job search and in facilitating access to job opportunities:

... the SCOPE recruitment scheme seems to be largely geared towards the private sector, so many of the job offers that I've received ... are actually in big multi-national, ... private sector organisations ... I'm going in a direction which I hadn't anticipated but, yeah, I'm kind of relishing the challenge.

(Henry)

As for any job-seeker, past experiences and overall approach to job searching are likely to influence outcomes for disabled students, as well as any specific impairment or disability-related issues. Kris, for example, was a mature student, and before she entered higher education had a long history of seeking work successfully but then not

being able to keep the jobs. In part this seemed to be related to her reluctance to declare her impairment:

... when I left school I didn't tell anyone I had a disability. I just tried to go through as a sighted person. In some cases that worked and in some cases it didn't ...

She had found herself too occupied with finishing her degree to do any job searching before graduation and was now doing work experience and using a 'job broker' to help her. However, the way in which she recounted her experiences and the negative expectations she brought from her previous employment history gave her account a rather pessimistic feel:

... but again I'm just going to go through that route of being told what to do, you've got to go through this course, get some work experience, if the employers like you then they'll employ you, if they don't then I go on like a New Deal scheme and I get a lady to, helps me fill out my application forms and support me to getting a job. Basically, if they see any jobs in the paper, if I like them I'll go for them, if I don't I won't. So that is what is going to happen after the second period of work experience is over I suppose.

### ***Constrained/restricted choices***

There were similar sorts of constraints on job seeking and choices as there had been in relation to choice of university and course.

Bina, for example, wanted to find a job in tourism, but close to her home initially. However, this meant that she was further restricted because of the types of buildings in which she would be likely to work. Her careers adviser pointed out that tourism in that area of the country inevitably involved working in listed buildings where 'they can only like do alterations to a certain extent in certain buildings ...' Despite the DDA, Bina still felt that physical access to buildings was going to constrain her future choice of work.

Others also referred to impairment-related issues that were restricting their job searching:

I am currently looking for a job and finding it very hard 'cos of my deafness. It had really restricted my choices. It shouldn't be really but I am not confident enough to apply for jobs that consist ... [of] communicating with hearing people all the time.  
(Ivana, via MSN Messenger)

I find people don't want to know because of my disabilities.

My disability makes me get tired eas[ily] so some[times] I have to take two weeks off to rest.  
(Izzie via MSN Messenger)

... [impairment] really, really, really affected what I decided I wanted to do or what I'm making decisions about what I want to do. Because in my last year, I mean things were just such a struggle and I sort of realised I never wanted to be in that position again ...

... those [placements] that I've got is a good compromise in the fact that it's something that probably would use a lot of those skills [from degree] but they ... know about the kind of nature of my disability so therefore I've got the kind of support in place which was one of the reasons I took it as a placement ...  
(Jean)

Others also referred to some constraints, but not ones that they felt affected their choices in any substantial way:

I mean, obviously there was some careers that probably aren't all that suitable, you know, I guess your choice is, by definition, slightly limited but not in any, in any way that I was particularly concerned about.  
(Harry)

... there are lots of things that I wouldn't want to go for, like I don't think I'd ever consider PR. My boyfriend works in PR and he has to read about five newspapers a day, which is not something I could ever do, and I think my vision does kind of rule out a few sectors, but they're not sectors that I'd really want to go into anyway.  
(Olga)

... I wanted to go into straight investment banking ... and that's obviously not very advisable because of the [health condition] (laughs).

... It's meant to be one of the most pressurised ... jobs you can get really.  
(Christina)

Even when students appeared to have undertaken job searching in an unconstrained way, further questioning sometimes revealed more subtle influences being played out that could affect their careers in the longer term:

[firm] don't shift you around the country ... you know there's ... lots of graduate schemes pick you up and dump you in an area and then change you ...  
... obviously it makes life difficult because you've got to learn your whole mobility all over again. I mean, I'm sure a lot of graduate schemes, if I'd got on them and then they'd have been saying, I'll move you in three months and I'd have said, no you can't, just change me to a different job or something ...  
(Harriet)



Say I had a job offer that was using my degree subject ... but it was five storeys high in a skyscraper in London and there was a job that was equally well paid perhaps not using my degree that was on the ground floor of an office block in [home town] then I would, I would plump for the job in the office block in [home town].

(Henry)

... I think my impairment does make me slightly concerned about how easily I will find it to join, ... get involved with the subjects that I do find interesting. I mean I don't know how true it is of yet but I've always got that slight concern because of the problem I have writing and things like that, I do find it, you know, it may, it may impair the choices that I make when it comes to jobs because maybe I'll feel that I don't want to apply for something. ... ' Specially when it comes to writing skills.

(Philip)

### ***Choice of sector***

There was a perception among some people that they were likely to get a better deal as a disabled person if they targeted the public sector in their job searching. This was both in terms of being considered on their own merits, rather than on the basis of their impairment, and in the adaptations and accommodations employers would be likely to make:

... working for the council or somewhere like that, I suppose they've got, you know, certain rules and equal opportunities ...

(Bina)

I would assume the public sector have been more, more supportive ...  
... they can see all the pros and cons of disabilities or disadvantages and also I suppose because they've got more time, because they're not racing towards profits. They're just, what, spending taxpayers' money so they're not focussed so much on the bottom line.

(Bruce)

... obviously the public sector has certain obligations ... on how they respond to disabled people.

(Henry)

I don't know but I've heard that the public sector organisations ... would be more disability aware and adaptable to people with disabilities compared to the private sector – and I feel this is probably true.

(Lucy via MSN Messenger)

... maybe Civil Service and the reason I think I've gone into, chosen to go down that route is that they are very, very disability friendly. Well, having said that I actually applied and failed the in-tray exercise because they didn't give me an enlarged version, it was size 8 font.

But apart from that they are, they sort of are very disability friendly ...

(Olga)

In Millie's case, the *only* positive response she had had to many job applications was from the public sector:

... the only people I have had any kind of response from have been from public sectors and hence now where I work ... it is very pc there, they have people from all different walks of life and different kinds of disabilities

...  
(Millie)

Others were attracted to the public sector for wider reasons:

I'm interested in, in helping society at large and, and the population who are not extremely well off, I guess ...  
(Cherrie)

I think it's just working with people ... working with people to help ... I'm not too familiar with it to be honest but working in a business environment it's just a bit, doesn't attract me at all to be honest.  
(Hazel)

... one of the reasons I wanted to work in the Civil Service [was] I specifically wanted to work, you know, somewhere that ... had fairly equal kind of gender balance.  
(Jean)

Richard, by contrast, had been put off the public sector by one of his internship experiences:

... my worst experience with an employer was with the [government department] who at the Civil Service, who obviously placed emphasis on diversity.

... basically they just wanted to try and be helpful ... and really kind of strangled you in their approach, whereas [bank] and other ... companies have been a lot more, 'While you're here we'll solve the problems as (they occur)'.

... when I went to the induction for the internship which was on [a] disability and ethnic programme, erm, where the head of policy told us all that we had suffered and struggled, and I might have suffered and struggled with many things but I didn't think that.  
(Richard)

Later in the interview Richard said that working in government would be about 'fitting in' and would involve a career where 'you can very much be a token and be treated as such'.

There were others who were attracted to the private sector, sometimes for its intrinsic rewards, and sometimes for the perceived likelihood of delivering equal opportunities:

I: What attracted you to the private sector then, to the [employers]?

A lot more money and it kind of seemed a bit more glamorous (laughs), that's partly because of the money as well really I think.

(Christina)

Richard, whose poor experience in the public sector had rather set him against employment there, explained further why he had chosen the private sector:

... I get really annoyed when certain disabilities organisations almost suggest that you can't get work in the private sector, that they are the worst to work for. I don't think that is true at all, I think that if you bother to write the application you might be pleasantly surprised.

... the motive [of the private sector] is really clear ... I know that it sounds really bad, but if you're working for bastards but they say that they're bastards [and] you need to make them a profit, if you make them a profit ... then I think that nothing else matters and if they think you can make them a profit then they'll come quite a long way to accommodate you.

(Richard)

The size of an organisation, regardless of sector, was more important for some:

I am applying to any organisations looking for someone of my expertise, no matter what the organisation. However, if I had a choice I would go for the large organisations, probably health service or government as I know I could have a potential of more money and a better job security for the future.

(Lucy, via MSN Messenger)

... I would really rather work for a big company because a big company is necessarily going to have more at its disposal to deal with my visual impairment and find a way to get around it.

(Olga)

... obviously working for a big company you expect their sort of equal ops policy to be rock solid.

... I wasn't feeling really comfortable with applying to, applying to small companies.

I: Why is that?

Well it's just, you know, your equipment costs a lot of money, and I know the Government obviously pay Access to Work and so on but it's still, I mean I started at [firm] and within three days I had (Jewels?) already on my laptop ...

(Harriet)

However, Harriet also felt that the fact that the firm had previously been in the public sector still showed in its employment practices, particularly in its support for home working and flexi-time.

## **Taking the next step**

Some of those 2005 graduates we interviewed had already moved into the world of work and we were able to follow them up a year later to see how things were developing for them. Others had failed to get paid work or were delaying job searching for a range of reasons. Those who graduated in 2006 were, obviously, not able to comment on the realities of career progression, but did have views about how this might be for them. It is to this crucial next step that we now turn.

### **Impact of impairment on career progression**

Many of the people we interviewed had clear ideas about progression, whether that was in terms of 'climbing the ladder' or simply doing the best job possible:

I wouldn't want to see myself in [this job] the next six years. I feel that I would want to move on, to progress up the scale and go for senior management position.  
(Fiona)

I'm finishing my graduate programme in about a month so I should get promoted to the next grade up. I like [job] because it's ... got a really clear career path basically ... the grades are very clear which I guess is a bit like the Civil Service. It's not always the same through the rest of [firm] but where I am at the moment ... it's quite nice, got lots of, lots to aim at.  
(Harriet)

To be the best [professional]. No, I mean, I'm not a particularly ambitious person, I don't want to climb to the top of the tree. I just want to be the best that I can be. That is my aspiration, to come home at the end of the day and know that I've done my job well.  
(Amy)

... one step at a time really but [in the] future, yeah, I'd like to take on roles and responsibilities at some point.  
(Tom)

Others were rather more tentative:

I don't know ... initially I just wanted to do my [higher degree] and that was it ... I'm not sure ... I do want to stay in [profession] but I do sometimes worry that it might not be the most [sensible] place for me to be in. At the

minute I'm working towards getting an actual salary, contracted and a permanent position as a [professional] but long term I'm not sure ...  
(Susan)

Susan's tentativeness appeared partly related to the 'long hours' culture she had found herself in. She had received the clear view that in the world she had entered long hours were essential at the start of a career if people wanted to progress:

... some of my colleagues ... work ridiculously long hours and I'm aware that I can't do that because if I do then I'm going to be ill.

Others were also finding the long hours of preparation associated with the early years of paid work difficult:

... it takes me a long time to read things and then I have to write them down and think about them ...  
... just before Christmas I was teaching two lessons of A level a week, just planning it was taking me so long to plan just 'cos it was new subjects ... it was something I hadn't done at college so it was new to me ...

... I mean in the future [if] I teach a lot of new A level topics I think that I'd struggle a little bit and I think that that maybe something that would be a difficulty ...  
(Tom)

Tom then went on to suggest that he might have to limit the number of new subjects he could teach in any given year – something that could have an impact on his opportunities for progression. However, he was thinking ahead and was aware of other routes to progression, perhaps through taking on a greater administrative or managerial role in the future.

Those who had needed to take part-time jobs to accommodate their impairment were soon aware that this was likely to affect their progression:

... one year from now ... I want to do ... the [profession] Training Programme, where you do rotations and things. It's kind of like if you get onto that it's really good, so, for your career prospects and thing. So I'd like to be doing that.

Because you've got to be very good to get on this [...] programme and it's difficult to get that good when I'm, you know, doing less hours. So I'll probably have less experience, less knowledge probably and also ... they work you really hard and it's long hours and it's most competitive ... and it's like tailored as well to certain timeframes to do things in and sometimes working less hours so I won't be able may be to meet those targets ...  
(Christina)

The graduates who had taken 'stop gap' jobs or who had not yet entered paid work seemed a lot more vulnerable to the possibility of never making the right next step.

... I think that it is a gap stop [sic] but in general for disabled people you do take whatever is first open to you because you think, oh thank god, someone bit, and you think you know a lot of the time it is so much under your capabilities and you are worth a lot more ...  
(Millie)

University seemed to have done little to increase Kris's career aspirations. She had had a long history of poor employment experiences before attending university and this seemed more important than anything she had gained through higher education:

... I might do a post-graduate degree. I might do that for my own sanity ... but if I worked, you know, I could say all I can do is work in an office and yeah that is probably all I can do that I'd want to do, so yeah, some kind of admin work would suit me.

Some of those we interviewed were already clear that their impairment was going to limit their career progression. Deborah, for example, said that she would like to move within a year to a job in management or a senior position in a charity but, in reality, felt that she was actually likely still to be doing the job she had initially taken on. Part of the reason for this, she believed was that, despite working in a charity related to deaf issues, most of her managers were hearing:

... they would be deaf aware mainly but still communication will be limited as most are only very beginners in sign language. I feel I won't be able to move up for years.

However, she also felt that her lack of 'life experience' which was also 'indirectly linked with my deafness' also played a part. This is an issue we return to in the next main section of this chapter.

Alan had also experienced discrimination related to his deafness, despite the specialised nature of his degree:

Believe me I have [tried] my best to look for a job for many years ... but they [are] put off as they found out about my deafness. That [is] why I do freelance myself to build my career[.]  
(Via MSN Messenger)

Despite his disappointments he was continuing to search for paid work with an employer.

Similarly, Ivana was experiencing difficulties related to her hearing impairment:

I am currently looking for a job and finding it very hard.

'Cos of my deafness, it has really restricted my choices. It shouldn't be really, but I am not confident enough to apply for jobs that consists with communicating with hearing people all the time.

(Via MSN Messenger)

Bina, who had not yet settled on a job, recounted experiences before university indicating that employers' attitudes and willingness to accommodate were crucial to success for disabled employees:

... as long as you get in with a good company then you shouldn't be, you know, it shouldn't be an issue. But from the experience I've had, you know, before, you always, you always seem to hit that, you know, stumbling blocks ...

Nearly all the people we interviewed anticipated some form of overt or covert disability discrimination in the world of work. Some expected to experience this as others underestimating their abilities:

... discrimination from ignorance rather than sort of malice or anything like that.

Just, if people don't understand about your visual impairment and what you can do and things like that then they might, they might not mean to but they might not expect the same level [of performance].

(Harriet)

[discrimination] based on misconceived problems related to my disability.  
... [such as] fitting in with work place health and safety issues

... doubts as to my ability to cope with pressure and hold the job down.

(Harvey via MSN Messenger)

Others simply expected to be discriminated against, regardless of their qualifications:

... if you've got somebody who's got the same qualifications as me, has got a driving license or something along them lines then I think people, to be honest, will say this person, you know, I think it's all part of it, it's always going to happen, isn't it?

(Hazel)

... I feel that employers might have a negative attitude towards disabilities and ... if I was up against someone with the same qualifications who had more or less the same experience ... I genuinely believe that they would probably choose the person that didn't have the disability over the person with the disability.

(Cherrie)

I think there will definitely be [discrimination]

I: In what way?

I think people not, not knowing how to handle it. OK, my hearing impairment is not acute ... they still make a huge deal out of it sort of thing.

I: In what way?

Well, they exaggerate when they're talking and things like that, or they kind of shout sometimes.

The same is going to happen in any working environment you go in to.

(Kam)

By contrast, Henry was expecting to be taken at face value and enabled to achieve whatever he was capable of:

I feel very well supported by the ... SCOPE itself and also by [firm], so I really do have faith in them that they're going to do the best, the best they can in making sure that my disability isn't a limit to my advancement within the company. That could be me being incredibly naïve, but well, only time can tell.

However, in an astute summary of the current reality, he was also fairly sure that he would not achieve earnings comparable to those of non-disabled men, thus acknowledging that he would, indeed, experience discrimination:

... probably unfortunately I'll receive slightly more [than the opposite sex] but equally slightly less than an able-bodied male, but slightly, slightly more than a disabled female purely because that's the way it works at the moment ...

Those who had not yet engaged with the world of paid work tended to have a slightly more rosy view of what they might experience:

... generally I'd say impairment isn't an issue because I think that because of the legal provisions that are in place now, like employers have a duty and are probably quite proactive in responding towards disabled students positively so ... in the limited experience that I've had I wouldn't say that it has been ... a negative factor ...

(Tim)

I do not expect to experience discrimination in employment as I am able to communicate with my residual hearing and lip reading skills ...

I am aware that there are other people out there who haven't got the same level of communication skills that I have and would find it harder and therefore would have more issues.

(Lucy)



... I don't think I would ever receive, well I might receive discrimination on being employed, whether I'm going to be employed or not, because of my disability, but I would sincerely hope not because, you know, I always try and stress that it's completely not an issue, but at the same time I do need to tell people about it.  
(Olga)

Some of those interviewed also spoke about experiences or expectations of resentment from fellow workers at what they might perceive as 'favourable' treatment of disabled employees:

I was offered the same [help] as everybody else which is a really good thing.

I think if we were in ... industry, if you are being given extra help and you're being paid for it then the other workers start to think 'why is that happening?', just 'cos you're this, just 'cos you're that. I think that could lead to something else ...  
(Millie)

There's always going to be someone that kind of takes, maybe might take against my being give this opportunity perhaps to be fast tracked into, into management but, I don't know. I guess people might sort of feel threatened by that, I don't know, I hope, I hope not but I think it's discrimination of, some kind of discrimination is almost inevitable because people are, people are scared of the unknown, yeah?  
(Henry)

I think there might be [discrimination] if I had to attend hospital, like there was a period of time that I had to attend hospital on a regular basis, that might be difficult in terms of other working people that are saying, why does she need all that time off within the month?  
(Kam)

Some people had already experienced employers or their own colleagues making judgements about them and their abilities based on untested assumptions about the impact of their impairments:

... there was an instance a few weeks ago when I had the 'flu and I was only off for a week and I think that people were worried that I was going to stay off long-term. I'm not sure that they necessarily [would have] worried about that so much had I not got [condition] or whatever, they might, but I think that it is always in the back of their mind.

... if I do become unwell then people are going to look on it more negatively than [if] I need to take a week off because of a bad cold or whatever.  
(Susan)

Harriet's anxieties about whether she was making too many demands on her colleagues for support with checking text had driven her to approach the Access to Work scheme again and ask for a personal reader:

It's just a matter of asking my line manager or one of the team, which they're always happy to do it but, you know, I should be able to manage that on my own so that's why I've got the reader.

While there was no indication that asking for support from others had been problematic there is a clear sense in Harriet's account that she felt the need to be proactive to ensure that it did not become so.

There was a small group of people who had been diagnosed as dyslexic when they were at university. By and large, this group seemed to be doing well after university. In part, this seemed to be because of their access to special schemes for disabled graduates and their classification as disabled for the purposes of the DDA. As we saw earlier, both Matthew and Philip were honest about what they saw as their privileged position *vis a vis* both non-disabled and other disabled graduates:

I think my disability is a lot more minor than obviously more physical disabilities. ... But it's just been a help for the simple fact it's a way of getting into things ...  
(Philip)

## **Adaptations, accommodations and equipment**

Some people who moved into paid work had entirely positive experiences of the preparation for their arrival and subsequently:

... they've been great really, before I started they asked me to go in for a work station assessment ... but all the training and stuff is exactly the same as everyone else had had, so yeah they've treated me just normally really, it has been really good.  
(John)

[firm] just bought [equipment] and, and so I could start work.  
(Harriet)

Others had only just begun to explore what support might be available to them:

... we're looking into Access to Work to help me out but I'm very much new to all this game and so, what they'll be able, able to offer me, I'm unsure yet, but we're looking at some assisted (sic) technology for typing and stuff, so that kind of thing and maybe a PA if necessary.  
(Henry)

As with support at university, one or two people had felt that they had been provided with too much support at work:

... when I started they got me a support worker two days, eight hours a week but I didn't need it ...  
(Harry)

Working arrangements that would be helpful to any employee, such as home working or flexitime could make a significant difference to disabled employees, and those with a specific learning difficulty were largely catered for via technology that was becoming standard in most work places:

I mean there are certain issues and things [I] need to be helped with but they're not, you know, most businesses now employ like, you know, Palm pilots, IT, you know, decent IT services ...  
(Matthew)

For others, their impairment had led to significant changes *after* they had started work:

I got offered initially, a different role and they knew about my, my illness but then I had a 'reasonable adjustment' thing, they didn't know the extent of it. When they found out about it they completely changed my role, and my hours and things like that so that's why I'm working part time now, part time and it's in a much steadier role. I'm kind of like in charge of my own projects ... and I've got this rest room I can rest in and they're quite flexible and hopefully I'll be able to be working from home as well ...  
(Christina)

It was not clear why the firm had not been fully aware of Christina's condition before she started work and she had clearly been through a difficult period when she was not really able to do the job to which she had been appointed:

... they were a bit shocked about how, when it came to the reasonable adjustments meeting they kind of thought, that's not going to be practicable in the business ...

Employers who had clear support structures were able to continue adapting to the needs of employees:

I did a year in my post which was internal, I didn't get as much support there and then ... over the last few months I've found this, because I'm [now] customer facing, I found it a bit harder ... so that's why I applied to Access to Work again in April for a bit of an upgrade.  
(Harriet)

... it's good that I seem to have a supportive team, they're sort of nice about disability so that's fine.  
(Christina)

Most people were clear that employers had an obligation to support them and make 'reasonable adjustment' to their impairment-related needs:

I do expect [support in the workplace]. I expect to have everything I need to help me to do my job properly.  
(Harriet)

I: Do you expect support in the workplace?  
Yeah, I think so, reasonable adjustment and everything.  
(Harry)

Yeah, I do through ... Disability Discrimination Act ... I kind of know by law they have to. In terms of physical things especially ...  
(Christina)

I expect support to be available when I need it – I will be getting this through Access to Work, so I don't think I will have problems with that.  
(Lucy)

I expect whatever the traditional company policy is to support me in whatever way is needed for me to maximize my job role for the company and that might involve some consideration of my physical and gender needs.  
(Richard)

I would expect it, whether I'll get it at the level that I expect ... I would be surprised, put it that way, if I do get it at the level that I expect.

..I don't know what to expect ... I've been on a Blind in Business, ... I went to the [employer] and they were saying how, how great they are and supportive, if you need it you get it nowadays and everything, so I would like to expect it but I'm not sure whether to expect it, if you see what I mean?  
(Henry)

One or two, however, sounded unsure about this:

... I don't know to be honest [if expects support in employment], that's, that's a very difficult question to answer because, I don't think that I would need more support than anyone else would need really and I don't, I don't expect extra support for having a disability at all ...

... perhaps I would need support but I don't know what support.  
(Cherrie)

I do need support and I think that in any other job than what I am doing I don't think I could expect it.  
(Jean)

I: Do you expect support in the workplace?  
No. I don't see that many companies offer support.  
(Kam)

Kam's reticence may have been related to the low level of support she received at university. With no experience of adequate support there and no advice about career selection and development she had no apparent knowledge about potential sources of support once she moved into work. This was in contrast to Lucy who also had a hearing impairment but had felt well supported both at university and on a placement year, which had given her the confidence to ask for what she needed when the occasion arose:

All my work [on the placement] was done either via email or face to face. It was a small team that I worked in so communication was not a problem for me. All staff were aware of my hearing impairment and spoke to me face to face in the appropriate way. In that occasion I never used Access to Work but when I obtain full time employment I shall be using this service. If I was to become a full-time employee I would have requested a minicom put in but as I was only going to be there for 13 months I didn't think it was necessary

Also I would request an interpreter for formal meetings ...  
(Lucy via MSN Messenger)

Deborah, by contrast, had experienced what she believed was clear discrimination in the world of paid work. She had worked in a deaf association but recounted an event that suggested differential treatment of her as against hearing colleagues and also reported that people 'spoke in front of me so I wouldn't hear them'. Later, when money was in short supply she was the one to lose her job, not the hearing people.

### **Impact of gender on career progression**

As we have seen throughout, few of those we interviewed felt that they had any real experience of their gender affecting their experiences at university or in initial job searching. Some, however, had already experienced or were very clear that they expected to experience gender discrimination in the world of paid work.

... in the department that I'm in it is very male dominated ... so it is difficult for a women anyway, for a woman with any kind of disability issues it is going to be four or five times more difficult. There is also the feeling that I've got to work an awful lot harder than any of my colleagues, particularly my male colleagues in order to get anywhere.  
(Susan)

... I think maybe if you start getting competitive and you try to get into management ... then people will have certain, you know, preconceptions, in my opinion like a man can do a job better or just from the point of view, you know, oh, she's going to go off and have a family and she's not, you know, they might have seen the man as more, I don't know, reliable and stronger ...  
(Bina)

I think ultimately it, it's a man's world that we're living in and patriarchal attitudes still exist in the world and the workplace and that's something that probably will, will always exist. I do expect to ... come up against discrimination in ... one form or another ...  
(Cherrie)

I did hear from one of the recruitment companies yesterday that in the banking business there could be a lot of sexism and it can get quite, yes it can get quite nasty. But apparently they're trying to stop that because they've got so many law suits against them.  
(Olga)

When women had gone into male dominated careers there were tensions. On the one hand, Christine said that she did not let the male dominated work environment 'get to' her. However, she also recounted how:

... when I did work experience [...] all the guys, I mean you got a lot of tension, it was quite a funny atmosphere and to work in that would have been quite, quite difficult. Where I work at the moment it isn't like that, so it's a woman thing.

Jean expressed, very tentatively, the possibility that gender and the type and sector of employment might work together to disadvantage women:

... my partner does the same job that I do, which is a bit disgraceful in the Civil Service but he does earn more than I do ... although not a huge amount different, but he does ... and I know that, OK in the Civil Service as you climb that does equal and they do have it sort of dead ... equal. But ... what I mean by saying this is that, that's supposed to be kind of the place for equality and, and even that's not, I mean even, even if they say they are ...  
... and definitely if I was doing the same thing at a private sector [employer] ... I don't think that, that would be equal ...

... I do have this slight feeling that because there certainly less kind of men involved in certain creative things that somehow (laughs) they kind of come across as if they might be a bit more serious about it ...

Similarly, Susan, who was in her final year, felt that soon after moving into the world of work she would have to make a choice between a career and having children, because she wanted to enter politics:

... soon I will face a serious choice whether to fulfil career dreams or have children. I do believe it is a choice, in politics it is nearly impossible to do both, debates last until 11.  
(Via MSN Messenger)

Other women were hopeful, believing that the world had changed in their favour, but still anxious about the future:

I think it's certainly getting better now for women in work, I don't think that is really as big an issue as it was, maybe it is, maybe when you're in the workplace a bit more then I'll change my mind about that, but I don't think it's, I don't think I've come across the problem yet.  
(Hazel)

I think it's always going to be a challenge because it's, kind of the world is improving now ... more and more women are going to work into these specialist areas, so I think it'll still be a slight difficulty, but people are more open about it now.  
(Kam)

However, some of the women interviewed were adamant that gender had not played a role in their experiences in job seeking or subsequently:

... for me I'd say definitely my impairment has been an issue but never my gender, never my gender.  
(Millie)

I don't anticipate my gender being an obstacle as I am aware that it is now harder for organisations to discriminate against such things and I am aware that some organisations are crying out for more women in IT.  
(Lucy)

As with the earlier questions about the impact of gender on subject and career choice, few men were aware of any gender issues. Richard, by contrast, was clear that his sex might be an advantage in the world he was intending to work in:

... within the financial world I'd say it's [being male] more of an advantage maybe.

I: Right, would you like to enlarge on that?

Well it's just the, when you see all the, there seems to be much more like male world, like the fast moving business world in the city at the moment. And there still is, 'cos there's still a lot of like old school people still around, so yeah.

Matthew, with tongue firmly in his cheek, similarly acknowledged that being male would probably advantage him in his career:

I: Do you anticipate your gender being an obstacle to entering your particular career?

Yeah. White, heterosexual male, so it will be really hard!

And Richard was also fully aware that his gender would most probably advantage him in relation to pay:

Well we all know that women earn only 75 per cent of what men do, so.

## **Taking longer/working harder**

An issue that ran through many accounts in this study was the longer timetable that disabled people run to during both school and university. This has an impact in its own right, but also had knock-on effects on opportunities for work or more general life experience, which could then influence the outcomes of job seeking. The longer timetable and having to work harder also took its toll on social life and friendships.

First, people talked about how it had taken them longer to get to university in the first place.

... I then had a year out between ... finishing my HND and going onto the degree course but that was because when I did the HND everybody else finished in the summer ... so they can go [on] in September, but I took a bit longer to finish my work so I handed in my work after the deadline ... So I didn't graduate [with the HND until] the following February ...  
(Bina)

... I missed quite a bit of college and stuff through operations so I was advised by college not to bother applying in my second year of college because, so I got my A levels before I even thought about applying.  
(John)

In John's case the delay had been short and had some advantages:

So when I did apply I'd got my results in the bag and so I got my place straight away, I didn't have to have any interviews or anything.



For Tim, however, the combination of taking longer to do A levels because of his condition and a change of course after arriving at university had made getting a degree seem like a marathon:

I feel like the last three years has been like climbing a mountain. ...

... I know that for an undergraduate it seems like a long time for anyone but because of all these problems that I've had, I've been like getting here for the last eight years.

(Tim)

There were others also who had taken longer to complete their university studies for health-related reasons:

I became very depressed for quite a few years due to socialisation problems with hearing people which put a halt on my studies and career development. I had to have extensions all the time and I was supposed to have finished my masters in [university] in 2004 as it was supposed to be one year full-time but 'cos my depression got so bad I had to change it to five years part-time.

(Deborah via MSN Messenger)

I had bouts of it and things but there's, well, yeah, ups and downs, that's it, but I didn't declare originally, I just kind of got on with it and got them to take notes and just missed lectures and did what I needed to do myself. But then on my placement year I became seriously ill and had to, oh I wasn't able to go back for my final year at that point.

(Christina)

Some were aware that the delay in getting to university might be construed negatively once it came to searching for a job:

... I'm a bit older than the others at university and I think obviously if you don't explain why that is, then they might assume it's for another reason ...

(Tim)

Older respondents who, for various reasons had not entered university soon after leaving school, talked about having to 'catch up'. This catching up could mean even further training after graduation. Kris had embarked on a post-graduate course:

... what I'd like to do is [job], I'd like to be competent to be able to do that, instead of having a good education at school I'm doing it now and I'll do it as long as it takes ...

Those who had gone to university as mature students might find access to some professions limited by their age:

... a lot of firms don't want mature students, they want school leavers, college, uni leavers so they can shape them, mould them themselves.  
(Amy)

Secondly, there was the issue of having to work harder, both at school and university. In some cases this was seen as a consequence of impairment, in others the result of discrimination, and in yet others a mix of the two.

[impairment] meant that I had to work very, very hard and push myself extremely hard and, and work a lot harder than perhaps some of my peers ...

When you have a disability you ... tend to have, well I think personally sometimes lowers confidence and so it's difficult because everything can feel like an uphill struggle really and it's hard not to internalise something, OK, there's something wrong with me.  
(Cherrie)

... you don't realise how, how much it affects your mark in other ways because I think it has this kind of sub-conscious effect that people just [think] that you're lazy, or that things have just kind of been written off the cuff when actually, you know, God they would take me so long to plan ...  
(Jean)

... there was a delay in my English language [because of hearing impairment] and I think that made it slightly difficult. I had to work slightly harder to get my grades and things like that, revise more and stuff.  
(Kam)

In some cases, this experience of having to work very hard influenced views about paid work and could delay entry into the world of paid work:

... to be honest I had like so much work to do trying to finish [my degree] it's a whole another project [seeking paid work] and I'm only eventually getting onto that now, so.  
(Bina)

... I had limited contact [with the careers service] ... because I was pretty much busy doing my degree and I was like focussed on that and it's hard to focus on getting a job as well at the same time.  
'Cos in the final year to be honest I was like a few percent either way for a 2.2/2.1 border. I just got a 2.1 by that one per cent (laughs).  
Yeah, so obviously if I'd diverted my attentions away from that, I wouldn't have, well, you never know, you know?  
(Bruce)

I think especially towards fourth year when you're, you know, working on top of that [job searching] ...

... we've got a lot more reading to do. So like I kind of, I left it to be honest to the last minute ...

(Matthew)

... I only finished [university] two weeks ago and I went straight into work [placement] for eight weeks and then I'll just sort of give myself that breathing space to find out what other people are doing ...

But I mean obviously during ... my internship I'll be hopefully applying for other internships and just work experience that I can get, you know, paid or unpaid to keep the CV sort of ticking over ...

(Philip)

As we saw earlier, Bina had experienced considerable access problems at her university; she recounted how much time she wasted moving from place to place and how this reduced the time she had available for study. This had clearly influenced her desire to seek paid work straight after university and the nature of the work she would look for:

... I don't want to be under ... as much stress as how I found it ... in university. So that's why I'm thinking I would like to do part time and, you know, also have a bit of a life, you know, as well.

(Bina)

Similarly, Hazel's university had failed to meet her needs throughout her course. As a result she had spent time 'sorting things out' when she felt that her time would have been better employed studying. There was a particular problem with the mode of assessment used for her exams and this, she felt, had meant that she missed a 2.1 by a single mark:

... when all these people I know walked out with 2.1s who hadn't had half the trouble I'd had ... and only done half the work I had ...

Once in paid employment, the exhausting round simply continued for some. Tiring easily or having to work harder to maintain the same position as others could start to affect career progression. For example, Susan was clear that her gender and her disability combined to make the world of work an exhausting place:

I think there is the constant nagging worry that you've got to work twice as hard and be twice as good just to get anywhere, in itself [that] would be fine but give the fact that I get very tired if I don't get enough sleep and you know it is hard to work those extra hours ...

Tom talked about the extra work he was putting into lesson preparation. As a result he was thinking of not taking on a full 'A' level load but repeating the same classes two years hand running. He was aware that this could create 'a problem in the future' Thirdly, many people reported the ways in which limited work/life experience before and during university had an impact on their 'employability':

... I applied for Saturday jobs and things like that, you know, sort of supermarkets and clothes shops and stuff like that when I was sixteen/seventeen ... I would fill out an application form and it was just, oh sorry we're not looking for people at the time ... and they don't actually say, you know about that [impairment], 'cos they wouldn't, and then I'll go into the shop and then I'll see, you know, they've employed a, you know, normal people.  
(Bina)

... I think that it [not being successful when applying for jobs] was quite possible just a lack of experience, that situation where you're trying to get work but you can't get work 'cos you've not done it, so I think it was that, I don't think it was anything to do with my disability or anything.  
(John)

... disabled people [are] sometimes more in an unfortunate position 'cos a lot of disabled people can't work and do full-time education at the same time, so when we do go out to the big wide world we literally have lots and lots of qualifications but no job. Employers look at that and it's like, 'Well, you've never worked?' 'Well we've been in education, we've been trying to prove ourselves.' 'Yeah, but you've never worked'. Not a lot of disabled people could hold down two jobs, I know I couldn't. I never had a job until last September and that does go against you big time and I think that is a big barrier employers have got to get through'.  
(Millie)

... I applied for public [sector jobs] but I feel so many applied that I didn't get a look in and a lot of people my age or younger probably have a lot more experience than I do 'cos I couldn't be at the same level 'cos of my depression before due to daily problems with deafness.

I couldn't even bring myself to do voluntary work which is a big factor in getting employment so I started work late in life.  
(Deborah via MSN Messenger)

Mature students who had worked before going to university or those who had managed to engage in activities while at school or university felt themselves to be at an advantage when it came to work skills:

I used to be ... actively involved in church as a youth leader when I was younger and so that helped me learn different skills in terms of presentations and taking lessons and, and working with people of different age groups and, so, in terms of ... development in that sense, I think I

would [have skills] to a level, sort of [for] some jobs in the areas I wanted to go in to.  
(Robert)

Finally, people spoke about how they had found it much more difficult than their peers to have a social life and develop friendships at university.

For some, social life and friendships were limited by the amount of work they found themselves doing:

I ploughed along with the course, it's the hardest thing I've ever done ...

... I spent my whole life basically doing the work so I got it done, whilst everyone else was I'm sure having a bloody good time.  
(Kris)

Others found that impairment related issues got in the way of making friends and forming networks. Tim, for example, had moved away from home for his first year but his condition had meant that he found himself rarely able to leave his flat. He returned to live at home, but this also had an impact on his social life:

I still had really good friends at university but obviously I didn't do the whole moving out with everybody aspect of it and you know that is a real, when everyone lives in [student area] and they're all next door neighbours and things I guess that to an extent I missed out on that a little bit.

One might have hoped that a deaf student doing a deaf studies degree would have been in a better place for making friends and networks than some other students. Deborah, however, did not have this experience:

[depression was] also due to the fact that I was oral on arrival at the university as deaf people don't accept other deaf people for ages into their community ...

... If the education system had not instructed my mother to ban signing from my life I would have had no problems accessing the deaf community.  
(Deborah via MSN Messenger)

Other deaf people experienced similar difficulties making friends, but this time because of prejudice among hearing people:

My course mates are very narrow minded, they never really made the effort to talk to me, so it was difficult joining them to the pub etc after lectures 'cos I would often miss out what they were talking about. That made uni a lot harder for me.  
(Ivana via MSN Messenger)

This separateness from her peer group made Ivana reluctant to participate in some aspects of her course:

I was supposed to go to [city] on a [subject] field trip last year but I refused to go and had to be give special permission from the leader to do some other piece of fieldwork.

However, unlike Deborah, Ivana did have the support of deaf friends:

I feel disabled when I'm around hearing people but when I'm with my deaf friends I feel like me, a normal person.  
(Via MSN Messenger)

Only one person felt that issues around social life were influenced by her gender (and possibly her culture):

... most of them are proper, proper party people whereas I'm not, I like to study and everything and I find, in terms of going out, I find it quite difficult socialising. So therefore I find it very, sort of hard to socialise with guys who are then on my degree as well. And that affected me in terms of, throughout my group projects and things like that.  
(Kam)

## Conclusion

In this chapter we have seen that, generally speaking, disabled graduates get off to a slow start as they move into a career. Some are served poorly by generic career services at university and find it difficult to make the first successful step. Those who entered higher education later in life seemed to do worse than those who become students soon after leaving school.

Other people engage with specialist schemes and do a range of placements, but not usually until after graduation. In one sense this is welcome, because the very hard work that many disabled students have to do to achieve a degree can leave them with little time or energy for career development activities and job searching in their final year at university. However, and especially for those who have already taken longer to get to university in the first place, it puts them a step behind their non-disabled peers before they have even started in the world of paid work.

However, we also talked to people who had very different experiences – moving into the world of paid work with relative ease (albeit supported via specialist schemes in some cases) and with a clear zest for whatever the future held for them. We hope to follow these graduates up in further research, in the hope that their enthusiasm and

optimism is rewarded by the social inclusion that government policy so clearly wishes for.

Impairment, of itself, did restrict some graduates' choices about the nature and demands of paid work that they felt they could do. But some had already begun to experience the impact of *disability* – whether via covert or overt discriminatory practice - or expected to do so soon after leaving university. People with hearing impairments in our sample seemed particularly likely to report poor practice or discriminatory behaviour.

Some graduates tried to counter the possibility of discriminatory practice by targeting their job searching on the public sector, where they perceived that they would receive more equitable treatment.

The women we interviewed were also beginning to experience or sense the impact of gender on career progression. Those moving into jobs in a 'man's world', or that were seen as 'competitive' were aware that they would have to prove themselves many times over in order to progress at the same rate as their male colleagues. Some had already begun to recognise that choices about having children or not would most likely affect their careers. Some of the men interviewed were also aware that they were in a relatively privileged position.

What we have identified here, then, is the first, tiny movements of graduate women's career trajectories away from men's. Combined with the disability-related disadvantage both sexes were beginning to experience, it is perhaps not surprising that, over time, disabled women – despite their qualifications – find themselves at the bottom of the employment and pay hierarchy.

The findings in this chapter are based on a small qualitative study, with an heterogeneous group of graduates, but they echo the larger scale findings reported in Chapters 4 and 5, allowing us a degree of confidence about their generalisability. It seems clear that getting disabled young people - and women more generally - over the graduation hurdle is insufficient to guarantee the equality of opportunity that social policy hopes will come with the expansion of access to higher education. Our work suggests that the final years at university and first years in the world of paid work are crucial to the further extension of equal opportunities for disabled women *and* men.

The ways in which employers and university careers officers are responding to the need to continue expanding opportunities for these groups is the subject of the next chapter.

## **Chapter 8      Evidence from qualitative research: employers and careers officers**

### **Introduction**

We have already established that disabled graduate women achieve lower earnings, even early in their careers than graduate women and non-disabled graduate men. We have also offered perspectives from students and graduates about their experience of disability and gender, as they plan careers and graduate. We sought to understand from careers officers and employers different perspectives on the situation of disabled women graduates, their commitments to gender equality and disability equality in recruitment, assumptions about the situation of disabled women graduates, and sources of any disadvantage graduate disabled women might suffer in achieving graduate level employment. We sought an insight into careers officers' and employers' ideas about responsibility for enabling disabled women graduates to achieve equal occupational levels and incomes. We also wanted to understand good practice in relation to gender and disability equality policies.

Our respondents included employers in local authorities, telecommunications and transport, financial and building society services. They included a Head of Diversity in financial services, whose existence showed traditional employers making at least gestures – and possibly more serious policies - towards a more varied workforce than has been customary in financial service employment. We also interviewed university careers officers from a variety of institutions.

### **Benefits of a diverse workforce**

In interviews employers expressed a commitment to a diverse workforce, including ethnic minorities, men and women, disabled and non-disabled. They argued the case in terms of recruiting from the available pool of talent, building a creative workforce, retaining qualified and able workers who become disabled, and being responsive to consumers, themselves a mixture of ethnic groups, men and women, disabled and non-disabled. While most arguments made a business case for diversity, from the perspective of positions such as Head of Diversity, some went beyond the business case, arguing in principle for a balanced, representative workforce.

The need to draw from the whole 'pool of talent' was the foremost argument:



I'm always feeling that it's quite an untapped source of, you know, good quality people for us that perhaps we haven't explored.  
(Building Society)

I think it just comes straight out of our diversity model here ... if we recruit talented people they will be black and white they will be male and female, they will be young and old, you know, it's that kind of, if we're not, if we've not got a variety of talent, if that makes sense, and a variety of backgrounds how on earth do we serve twenty million customers?  
(Telecommunications company)

... the main incentive's about employing anybody with a disability, whether it's a man or a woman, is that we don't want to miss out on recruiting talented people, so there are a huge number of talented people with disabilities out in the market.  
(Financial services)

It's widening our talent pool, which is ... a huge advantage.  
(Transport company)

Some employers saw diversity in their workforce as a creative force:

... there are advantages in terms of, you know, things like creative team innovation that you get from just, you know, from having diverse perspectives ... here is something about, well employment, you know, the whole of this area of diversity which encourages you to kind of identify better, you know, and hopefully to sort of challenge where things are not going so well.  
(Financial Services)

Retaining people who become disabled was also a consideration for employers:

I think we miss the point around the retention of people in work ... there's a lot more people who are likely to become disabled during their employment ... they are successful people before they became disabled, will be successful people after they become disabled ... reasonable adjustment is relatively simple at that stage ... employing a disabled person is not that difficult, lots already do, you know, I would suggest that if you've got twenty employees you've probably got somebody who's got some sort of disability in there haven't you?  
(Telecommunications company)

... it makes us think more clearly about what we need to do in order to retain talent, so it's about the cost of, you know, reducing the cost of turnover.  
(Financial services)

A strong business case was made about companies' need to reflect the diversity of their customers:

I think there's cases made about the spending power of people with disabilities, there's cases made about the spending power of people from ethnic minorities, there's cases made of spending power of women and of men ... because we are diverse we are stronger.  
(Telecommunications company)

... a big button phone is probably the most commonly used example, big button phone was invented by a guy who's got arthritis, an employee here who'd got arthritis who couldn't use the miniaturisation that was going on at that stage and it became our fourth best selling phone.  
(Telecommunications company)

Careers officers made a similar argument about employers needing to reflect the diversity of the population:

if your, your customers and clients or staff are, are from a diverse range ... then it makes sense to have people who can relate more easily to, to those, to those people as well.  
(Careers officer - older university 1)

Another argued that employers had been forced to change, through globalisation, and companies having to work in 'broader markets, be more reflective of the cultures that they're working in'. They were also becoming more aware of the 'disabled pound' or the billions of pounds to be made by 'Giving people access to facilities'.

I think if ... those kind of structural changes which have, in many cases have, have brought about, you know, these kind of, these diverse, I wouldn't really call them friendly policies, but policies which are seen to be accommodating because, because they can't attract the typical, as it was, white whatever male who may say fifteen years ago hitherto dominated that kind of market.  
(Careers officer - older university 2)

Less tangible benefits of a diverse workforce were described by some employers who gave a principled justification for employing a 'workforce represent[ing] the area that we were employed within and the culture and ... the population generally (Building Society) and 'employing disabled people but employing disabled women as well as, as part of the culture' (Transport company).

A woman building society executive argued for 'balance and a richness' and

... moving away from the all white male kind of domain of, you know, of executives into, you know, a, a real representative mix of, of, of our society and that, that's kind of ignoring talent because it doesn't actually fit what is deemed to be, you know, able bodied, normal or whatever you want to describe them as, ignoring talents and skills that should be, we should be able to dip into.

(Building Society)

These arguments for a diverse workforce show employers as accepting in principle that they can benefit from inclusive employment practices, in terms of the quality of their recruitment, their ability to retain workers, their creativity and relationships with customers. Similar arguments were made by university careers officers to support a case for a diverse workforce, including women and disabled people. As we shall see later, respondents also accept that, in practice, employers often fall short of these ideals.

## **Expectations and assumptions**

Some employers saw gender and disability as problems that were out in society rather than in themselves:

... a young physically disabled woman would not be likely to be encouraged either by her parents, by her careers at school, by the role model that she sees in society or indeed by the University Careers Service into doing particular roles, yeah. So I think that just kind of stacks up and stacks up and stacks up and then we as employers come along on the, on the kind of opposite end of the game and we're not quite the good guys, but certainly are trying to say now hang on here a minute and all of those interventions then are too late to give, you know, I don't know hard to reach, would that be an OK phrase to use I suppose?

(Telecommunications company)

From this point of view, employers were trying to widen their recruitment, encourage women into science and technology and enable them to achieve roles in management:

I don't know many employers now who are not trying to increase women in their industries in all roles, and I don't, I think it's society that's got the issue rather than the employer and I think Government's coming at it the wrong way when it's, when it's, when it's still pushing the employer to change it.

(Telecommunications company)

While employers were putting efforts into employing women, this employer acknowledged that disabled people's relationship to the labour market could be one of disadvantage:

I struggle with the, with the concept of women being disadvantaged but I can accept that there are quite a lot of models in society that perhaps disadvantage people with disabilities.  
(Telecommunications company)

A transport company employer was more open to seeing gender differences in employment, explaining them in terms of innate personal qualities and of education, but was similarly clear that as an employer he would consider applicants equally, without positive or negative discrimination:

Some of it may be inherent, some of it down to schooling... as far as our operations are concerned no, just to reiterate that ... there's no kind of barriers to employing men or women in whatever jobs they apply for.  
(Transport company)

From the point of view of a university careers service working for a public sector employer, 'self-confident about equal opportunities issues' another respondent emphasised the differences between individual disabled women:

Do they think that the world out there doesn't want them? ... you come across some people who are, who are looking for opportunities and respond positively and if you tell them there's something available over there and they'll say 'Oh yeah, fine, how do I get in?' and others will say, 'Nobody wants me' and will have a real downer on it ... I've seen a mixture of positive and negative people.  
(Careers officer - older university 1)

Later he argued that 'sometimes the employers have not advertised well enough, sometimes the client group if you like are not, are not on the ball quite enough'. This was echoed by another careers officer explaining why disabled women might not apply for private sector jobs, partly through their own 'self-confidence' but:

I think some people are actually put off because they think well they won't look at me will they ... because they don't see or don't necessarily initially see positive role models or, or people with disabilities doing things in those organisations they tend to see kind of well there's nobody there like me, whereas there probably, either through deliberate intent or not, they've probably come across or heard of maybe someone with a disability or women having better like working conditions in say the Civil Service or Local Authority.  
(Careers officer – older university 2)

A Building Society employer, working as the only female executive among 17 men, was more attuned than most respondents to gender disadvantage in employment:

... the traditional roles that we have, up until now, been brought up to be expected to do and, you know, link into the care, more of the caring professions, the, the service professions and I think it is changing and

that's good and it should change but it's slow. I think we know from our own statistics that things like female advancement into managerial positions is happening but it's happening so slowly it's almost undetectable.

(Building Society)

Personal experience as a lone parent also underpinned the understanding of a male local authority employer who was sensitive to the constraints within which women restricted their employment choices:

Women probably perceive certain areas as being more demanding of time and are therefore perhaps looking for work in areas that more easily accommodate their needs.

(Local authority)

This employer emphasized the restrictions in job searching and opportunity that came with responsibility for children and/or older relatives:

I actually know this being a single parent and I've had to do this myself so in effect I've been in the situation that many women with caring responsibilities, whether it's childcare or relative care or whatever the responsibilities are ... all your job opportunities are restricted by considerations about travel to and from work, and I have had to take posts below my qualification experience level that I had at the time, because I couldn't find anything within a reasonable travelling distance. ... If you've got caring responsibilities that's two hours a day that you can't, you can't afford to take out of the day, you've got to be somewhere you can get to in your car or can walk to in fifteen/twenty minutes.

(Local authority)

An employer from financial services could also see problems with developing a diverse workforce. She started with women's choices, but acknowledged that employers' ideas of appropriate employees were also important in recruiting from a narrower band:

I think that the gender segregation definitely plays a part in the kind of roles that women choose, definitely ... I know that there's a kind of image of an accountant which is, you know, white middle-aged, tends to be white middle-aged men and I'm sure that image plays in the heads of both people who think about joining the profession and indeed people within the profession who, who recruit as well, I'm sure it's that for some of them, yeah, I think it'd be naïve to say it wasn't.

(Financial services)

Several employers acknowledged difficulties in recruiting disabled employees, which might overlap with the difficulties of recruiting women to this sector:

... where our problem is, is in attraction because I don't know that we, you know, as an employer (...) I don't know that we have sort of something that would say to disabled people in the community that here's a company that would be a great place for you to work, I'm not sure that we have that attraction capability.

(Building Society)

... we certainly don't attract that many disabled graduates. I think it's partly because of image of professional services which, you know, a lot of the things which might put women off are, you know, might well also be disincentives for people with disabilities, the kind of images they could be in the past but, you know, much more aggressive kind of environment.

(Financial services)

... we don't positively discriminate at all, we simply pick best performers and the people most suited to the job. Having said that we also actively try and recruit disabled people, not just women but men as well and, you know, we have some success with that but it is fairly limited, we do have difficulty in finding the candidates.

(Transport company)

... it's a reflection of wider social issues and the status of women ... and therefore people think they can get away with paying less to, to, you know, areas that are predominantly women.

(Local authority)

## **Responsibilities of universities?**

Employers and careers officers acknowledged that connections between universities and employers could be developed, in relation to recruiting a diverse workforce in general, and particularly in relation to recruiting disabled students. A telecommunications company employer saw university careers departments as 'still very gender orientated', albeit subconsciously. On the other hand, a financial services employer saw specialized programmes designed to make better links between employers and potential women employees as a model for disability:

It would be great to be able to set up a better dialogue, you know, between employers and universities. So that, so there's a, there's a programme for example called, there's a network called Where Women Want To Work, and it would be great to have similar things for disabled graduates as well, you know, which disabled graduates could look at and choose employers that they wanted to go and work for and there may well be something like it, but it certainly doesn't have the profile of Where Women Want to Work. I mean in terms of women themselves I think that clearly women, you know, whether they have a disability or not, have an important role to play. Employers have an important role to play because we need to make sure that we're reaching out to people who have disabilities and sending the

messages out loud and clear that what we want is talented people and, and, you know, talented people irrespective of disability status.  
(Financial services)

None of our employers thought that the links between universities and employers served disabled graduates well. One tried to 'get in touch with disability officers at universities but that usually is just a kind of no-go area'. This employer had experience of good quality disabled students on placements, and looked for better ways to recruit them. He found disability officers pre-occupied with students, while careers services did not have the specialised skills needed to support disabled students into employment. He saw a need for more specialized services for disabled students:

Well firstly have some point of contact with either someone in the Careers Service who deals specifically with disability, well disability, disabled students, who would also be a contact for employers, because at the moment I find that, I mean at the moment I'm visiting a lot of careers advisers who have an employers' representative and that's who I see but I wouldn't go and see the disability rep because they just deal totally with the students, they may be having someone who, as a go-between between the two ... at the moment I'm using Employment Opportunities but having to pay for their services, cos they have fantastic links and they've got fantastic ... networkers, students who are very, very good quality and the right calibre and we've been really pleased with those that we've seen for our summer placements. But I find it frustrating, why can't I get access to these students as well, why can't I attract them?  
(Transport company)

A financial services employer agreed about the need for more positive links to support disabled graduates into employment, again in the context of recruiting a more diverse workforce:

I'm just not sure that we are as proactive about, or not sure that universities and employers are as proactive at working together and identifying potential recruits, groups with disabilities and other areas, other areas of diversity.  
(Financial services)

University respondents acknowledged gaps in links with employers:

I haven't had this kind of discussion with an employer other than, you know, occasionally at a two-yearly conference and I don't think the relationships between careers services and employers in terms of strategically the bodies that they're members of isn't good for either of us. I'd like to see something which brought us much closer together.  
(Careers officer – newer university 2)

Only one of the university careers advisors we interviewed was specialised in disability, and some lacked core detailed knowledge of government supports, such as Access to Work. One careers officer learnt how to access support through becoming disabled himself rather than through specialised training and was able to use his experience: 'When I've seen other people who've got disabilities I can talk about Access to Work' (Careers officer – newer university 2).

Another described the intensive work needed to see a disabled student through the process of application, in the context of a service to the wider student population, who were expected to be covered in a fifteen-minute appointment:

There's a lot of issues wrapped up in the disability or, or whatever that need to be helped with over a period of time and, you know, some students will take time. We worked with one, one student who was a [subject] and it was almost like we adopted him in a sense that he, he was very time consuming and I'm not, not saying it in a negative way, but the time that he wanted from us was quite excessive and three or four of us over a period of time must have seen him for at least individually for four or five separate sessions apiece ... and it was hard. Worked with him, got, got his, helped him with his applications, we got him onto a [subject] course at [university] and then when he was there he actually came back to us to help with job applications ... and helped him finally to get a job at a College ... it's quite intensive one-to-one work.  
(Careers officer – older university 2)

This account of long-term investment in a student who had special needs was of one that justified itself for the student, and probably for society, if the graduate would otherwise be unemployed. But there was a problem for this careers officers, and others working in a careers environment planned primarily around non-disabled university students, of developing the skills and finding the time. This careers officer saw a gap for young disabled people who needed long-term support, especially over the period after graduation: 'once they graduate they've gone, they've actually got nowhere to go'. While he had clearly continued to act for a student who had graduated, he saw a need for more extended support, which might not be appropriate for universities to provide:

If there was a specialist who could devote the time and I think you've got, not just dealing with them in the here and now but you can manage the process and also the exit, cos I think the exit tends to be overlooked and what's the kind of after care in a sense. And there's a question, you know, would a university like ours actually invest in someone's time to actually do follow-up once they go out of the doors in June with a piece of paper which says they've got a degree?  
(Careers Officer – older university 2)



Careers officers described a working environment in which most had little time to take specialised training or to provide the intensive support for disabled students on their way to graduation or – even more so – after graduation. Some employers could identify useful models for programmes to enable more diverse recruitment in organisations promoting women's labour market access. But employers, and university careers advisors themselves, perceived a lack of specialised expertise in university career services to further the development of disabled students, a lack in programmes supporting disabled students in their move into employment, and a wider lack in links between universities and employers in enabling them to recruit the diverse workforce they all argued for.

## **Responsibilities of governments?**

Employers expressed support for the principles behind Access to Work, which gives government funded support for employing disabled people. With state support for making reasonable adjustments, meeting disabled employees' needs through Access to Work, the best attuned employers have much less reason to avoid employing disabled people:

Access to Work is excellent ... really helpful, it has helped us a lot in terms of making reasonable adjustments. I think that's an excellent initiative because, you know, there's no reason why, with an Access to Work scheme in place why you can't employ a disabled person.  
(Transport company)

However, there were less enthusiastic accounts of Access to Work in practice:

Around the funding for reasonable adjustments, you know, it's not too bad but at times it can be very bureaucratic.  
(Telecommunications Company)

This employer, working in a large firm, had resources to enable the company and its employees to use the funding. But he thought smaller employers struggled with it:

If I was a smaller firm, whenever I've spoken to a small employer about it they haven't got a clue, they don't know about it at all and I think they, some of that work could be done through the accountancy industry rather than trying to get to employers, you know, I think that's the way in.  
(Telecommunications company)

This rather mixed picture was supported by a financial services employer:

The experiences we've had ... have been really mixed ... some people who've had pretty straightforward and very supportive dealings with Access to Work and other people are saying it's just been a complete

bureaucratic nightmare ... delay in responses ... about who to contact and what's available.

Another employer thought delays put barriers in place:

... from when they sort of get their act into play and you get agreement to do things, depending upon how much it is, it's far too long for most employers, you take somebody on and six months later you're still waiting, they're still faffing about, about whether you can, they're going to assist you putting in a ramp ... or a toilet, you know, six months. I've had to have a temp in for six months.

(Local authority)

Employers supported Access to Work in principle, but argued that in practice it needed to operate more consistently and with a higher public profile:

I think all of those areas need to be addressed really ... greater consistency across Access to Work areas, better, simpler lines of communication so that, so that people in employment know exactly who to go to and what for and less kind of procedurally heavy if you like, something that kind of comes across as more supportive.

(Financial services)

... that whole process could do with a national advertising campaign aimed at both employers and, and potential employees.

(Local authority)

Employers were invited to comment on other ways in which government could or should support employment for disabled women graduates. A local authority employer saw a need for a 'high profile national initiative' after what he saw as the relative failure of the New Deal for Disabled People:

I think there's something that needs to be specific and dedicated around particular issues and that, that would be around disability but also I think around ethnicity and also I think around issues for specific groups of women. I don't want to say all women because there are some women who do very well, thank you very much, but women who for example are, are returners, women whose ability to work is restricted to less than full time hours ... there needs to be more resources, it needs to be more explicit and it needs to be well publicised so that people know, I can go to this place and they are going to help me. At the moment if you say to somebody 'Oh have you been to Job Centre Plus?' you know, you can see their face sinks, yeah, because you go in there and they're not necessarily, even, even when they've got a disability employment adviser they're not necessarily geared up to you, to your needs and I'm not sure how helpful they particularly are. I mean my, my image, particularly of the disability employment advisers, it's only, it's changing because of the DDA

but there is still that undercurrent there of sort of 1940s type of stuff, oh we'll find you a little job cos you're a disabled person.  
(Local authority)

Inclusion in education was one theme, though it was acknowledged that effective transition from education to employment would need specific support:

Going back to school, education base, you know, from primary through to higher education and ensuring that disabled children are integrated into the educational system and have the same chances and opportunities as non-disabled children and adults. But also I think it's all very well kind of creating that level playing field so to speak but then it never really is a level playing field and, and disabled students, adults will need that extra support and then making the jump from education to the workplace ... there are ways in which the Government could help to do that.  
(Transport Company)

Another employer who started with education also recognised a variety of levers which government could use:

Something in the education system, something in the 'it's OK to' system, yeah, there's something in the representation of women at ministerial level throughout the different departments, yeah. There is something in the roles within the Civil Service itself, etc, etc, that women are employed in and ... the way roles are described in schools and the way work is described in schools, etc, etc, etc, I think the Government has some control over all of those levers.  
(Telecommunications company)

Making the benefits system more flexible for disabled people entering work and reducing the risks of coming off benefits were seen as important ways governments could help employers to take on employees, and employees to move into employment:

... (the) whole benefit system which is, appears immediately people start to talk about work to get, and I'll use their words 'threatening' so as soon as (...) starts talking about entering the labour market they are threatened with the removal or the reduction or whatever of some of their benefits and then the process of getting back on benefits is equally long-winded. So the risk is very high and we did some work ages ago with ... Job Centre Plus ... we did a bit of a trial up in Newcastle where we said, look let's just, let's just say to people you'll get your benefits and your employment for six months and if after six months it doesn't work out you just, you know, you'll stop getting your salary in effect. And that was quite empowering for people cos they kind of, you know, they could see the profit (...) for them.  
(Telecommunications company)

Employers saw a range of difficulties in transition from university to work for disabled people. Work experience was important for a number of our student and graduate respondents. As we showed earlier, they may have concentrated on their studies more than other students, and be particularly lacking the work experience that employers valued. So from an employer's point of view giving disabled students placement, and enabling employers to offer placements for disabled students was important in overcoming the difficulties for disabled graduates seeking employment:

... providing work experience and providing incentives for employers to provide disabled students with work experience would be one way.  
(Transport company)

Disabled job-seekers were seen as having a particular need at the crucial juncture between education and employment, and governments as being able to meet this, improving disabled people's opportunities, by providing 'to maximum whatever they need to get their, their career path going, that would be rather where I would see it progressing' (Building Society). This might include access to specialist expertise in 'writing CVs and interviews and giving the confidence to disclose their disability, giving the confidence to ask for reasonable adjustments' (Transport company). From some employers' point of view, Access to Work could be bureaucratic, but where it worked it gave disabled people the support they needed to enable their employment. But there appeared to be a lack of connections between universities and employers to smooth the path of graduates and enable employers to recruit disabled employees, even if they were positively looking for them.

## **Responsibilities of employers?**

The ideals employers expressed about recruiting a diverse workforce went with a sense of their responsibility to recruit fairly, to make opportunities available:

I think it's our responsibility to make our opportunities available to all, of which disabled women are a small ... segment. ... The point where I don't think it is an employer's responsibility is to try to do a social engineering piece that I'm talking about, to use a weird phrase. We can make the opportunities available if, for a million and one reasons, that aren't to do with the employer, disabled women decide not to apply, yeah, we can't actually turn that type. We can, we can influence it a little bit I believe by our recruitment strategies, by, by the way that we use our main advertising budgets and things like that.  
(Telecommunications company)

A financial services employer also stressed women's own responsibility, but moved on to make an uncompromising statement about employers' responsibility to make sure that their employment policies were inclusive and were understood as inclusive:

I mean in terms of women themselves I think that clearly women, you know, whether they have a disability or not, have an important role to play. Employers have an important role to play because we need to make sure that we're reaching out to people who have disabilities and sending the messages out loud and clear that what we want is talented people and, and, you know, talented people irrespective of disability status.

(Financial services)

A Building Society employer was even more emphatic about employers' responsibility to reach out to potential employees, including disabled employees:

... it has to start with the employer, it has to start with people like me saying, you know, come on, we have got a responsibility here to look across all sections of our community, to say there are opportunities for all, not to kind of let the logistical barriers (...) obviously what people have in terms of needs to help them work within the workplace, not to be put off by that because it's a bit of technology or whatever, all those things can be overcome. It, it starts with the employer being open minded and broad in their outlook and then actually being able to celebrate when, you know, you have been able to, to succeed in that cos I think, I'm sure there are, you know, some good practices going on but you never hear very much about them.

(Building Society)

Employers were aware of some limitations in their recruiting in practice, and that they could pursue diversity, and especially enable disabled recruits, more positively:

I read earlier on this year that there were something like four hundred disabled users of the University of Cambridge Careers Service and, and, you know, exactly those kind, those kinds of talented people in the country we want to work for us, so even that would be quite a straightforward step to take. So I think absolutely be more proactive, making sure that in terms of all our communications that we represent, you know, that we represent the, the fact that we welcome people with disabilities, and making sure that we train our recruiters as well.

(Financial services)

A Building Society employer confessed to a degree of stereotyping in her organization's recruitment policies, and recognized that they needed to change if they were to reflect the whole of society in the way that she thought they should:

I think it's not being so narrow in terms of what our recruitment policies and (...) are, you know, we don't just follow the, the easy or the tried and trusted but ... looking at a labour market across the whole community and trying to embrace some new and different approaches and, you know, the kind of richness that diversity brings to an organisation. So yeah, I mean it's actually quite pricked my conscience ... thinking about our, our discussion today, it really has made me think just how, how ... stereotypical we've been in respect to our

recruitment. ... But we haven't, we've not been smart at it really. So yeah, absolutely our responsibility to, to do that.  
(Building Society)

Careers officers were concerned about strategies used by some employers to sift applicants, in particular using A-level scores. This was seen as by-passing students' experience of Higher Education, but also disadvantageous to disabled students:

Some employers, admittedly on the blue chip big company side, are kind of thinking how can we differentiate from, from this mass of people. OK, ooh let's, let's go for the A Level points ... not everybody, not everybody is, is necessarily hot on A Levels, but those who are, I think that is not so good for, for mature students and for disability.  
(Careers Officer - Older University 1)

Employers varied in their perceptions about responsibilities. All recognized employers' responsibility to recruit fairly, making opportunities available to a diverse range of suitably talented potential employees. Some emphasised potential employees' responsibility to come forward as much as they emphasized employers' responsibility to recruit fairly across men and women, and the disabled and non-disabled population. Some saw themselves as doing everything possible to recruit a diverse, workforce, in the context of negative 'built in' gender assumptions and disability assumptions. Some emphasised employers' need to reach out much further than they currently did, to make sure that employment was equally accessible to different groups of potential employees. Careers officers were more critical about the ways that employers recruited in practice. They saw change, but they also saw traditional employment practices which limited access to employment for disabled graduates in particular.

### **Policies for diversity, gender, disability**

The employers we interviewed took policies for diversity for granted, as part of their agenda of recruitment policies. This did not necessarily mean that they would target disabled women, but it did mean that they had a framework within which they approached recruitment, which took gender and disability into account:

... we don't have a particular strand that says we are doing this to attract more disabled women. What we know is if we put good flexible working policies in place we will attract more people and that will include more disabled women, it will also include disabled guys, it will also include able bodied guys and mentally well guys, do you know what I mean?  
(Telecommunications company)

An employer representing a rather traditional Building Society acknowledged that their traditional practices were only just being challenged:

... we probably follow a pattern in terms of recruitment in that we have a method of a tried and trusted route, recruitment is not always that easy, so we follow our, our normal patterns and I think one thing actually, one good thing recently is we've taken a new lady into our recruitment area who has come with some real invigorating fresh approaches to things.  
(Building Society)

But employers offered a wide range of strategies as evidence of their activity and interest in broadening their recruitment. Employers could use inclusive advertising to show their credentials as employers of disabled people and make them more attractive:

... it's fantastic to see people with disabilities represented in mainstream advertising and we've done quite a lot of that.  
(Telecommunications company)

So far we've done it in ways such as trying to get, trying to get disabled representation at careers fairs, for example trying to ensure that in the material we use we have good representation from people with disabilities. So for example in our annual report last year we had ... two case studies of people with disabilities, one, one very senior in the firm and one just starting off in the firm.  
(Financial services)

A telecommunications employer was promoting his company as an employer of women, through work with schools:

... work that we're doing in schools which is about promoting our industry, women in science/engineering (...) but that whole kind of piece about actually, you know, we're not an up poles/down poles industry any more, we're a software based industry, guys can work there, girls can work there.  
(Telecommunications company)

Meanwhile a transport employer was actively recruiting disabled students, through a number of schemes:

Well we have the summer placement scheme, which is for disabled students only, we go to specialist recruitment agencies for disabled people and. ... We advertise on websites specifically for disabled candidates as well and I mean actually at the moment we've got a disability working group set up and there is a group which I'm part of, looking at other ways in which to attract disabled people.  
(Transport company)

Employers described programmes such as 'Retaining Talented Women' for mothers after maternity leave through flexible working and support, and a 'Disability Forum' designed to enable networking, which was beginning a mentoring programme. The

same employer had just 'produced a video on disability in the company, which we are circulating to five hundred of our managers to give them some guidance' (Financial services).

A summer placement scheme for disabled students served two purposes, giving the students work experience, and the company a means to develop employees' confidence in dealing with disabled employees and customers:

The benefit for us in doing that is actually in terms of giving their leaders and their colleagues who they're working with confidence in dealing with disabled people. So they are conversant should they get disabled applicants applying and their roles in the future and they're happy to take them on and they understand that making reasonable adjustments is no big deal at all, once it's in place they just get on with it.  
(Transport company)

A local authority employer was considering placement schemes for disabled graduates following experience with women and ethnic minorities:

... they can sort of sign up with us, we offer them guaranteed work ... during the holiday period which is sort of reasonable, getting to the bottom of the scale for the careers that they're aiming for. ... We also offer them mentoring through the programme with, with people based here. It's only small numbers at the moment cos there's, there's funding issues around it obviously, and obviously when they've finished the course they're in an ideal position to come into a post for us. What we've had is a problem ... where people have started this and then because of reorganisation and budgetary cuts that came out of the blue, we're not sure that there's necessarily a post for them at the end of the process.  
(Local authority)

Employer respondents had ideas for future programmes, for mentoring, and enabling women to reach senior management positions. Financial services and local authority employers saw gender and disability as more established in terms of such programmes than disability:

It would be good to, to establish, things like mentoring programmes and buddying programmes, the kinds of seminars and events that one sees in relation, more in relation to gender and ethnicity ... targeting disability networks in universities.  
(Financial services)

We have a number of schemes and it, one of them is that in terms of internal promotion, management development we prioritise particular groups and includes disability. ... We're actually undertaking literally at the moment a survey of disabled employees throughout the organisation looking at their aspirations and what they think the barriers are to their



progression into more senior posts ... we did a similar exercise for women.  
(Local authority)

Our employers debated the merits and disadvantages of specialised recruitment agencies compared with strategies to develop a diverse workforce through more inclusive practices in general graduate recruitment. Employers in transport had used specialist agencies, such as the Diversity Milk Round and Employment Opportunities, while a financial services employer was considering targeting disabled graduates through a specialised graduate recruitment fair. The transport employer had reservations about specialised 'diversity recruitment fairs' on the grounds of expense, limited achievement, and that disabled graduates would prefer to go through mainstream agencies. However, he acknowledged that while in principle 'integrated would' be ideal but ... I don't think we're probably at that ideal state yet anyway so we still have to use specialist agencies (transport company). Similarly, a Careers Advisor argued for a mixture of recruitment strategies:

So I don't think there's necessarily a case that it should be all specialist or all generalist ... I always encourage students to look at the, the advocacy route because I see it as, if it's giving you, if it's giving you an advantage and an opening into an area where you might have found it difficult to do it on your own. ... So I would encourage them to use it but I wouldn't necessarily say, you know, it's compulsory or, you know, that you should do this at the expense of say applying to KPMG in the normal fashion through an application form.  
(Careers officer – older university 2)

A transport employer was sceptical about the service general recruitment agencies gave to disabled people:

High Street recruitment agencies I don't think probably ... do enough for supporting disabled candidates who they meet and getting them into organisations, and I only say that because when we've had disabled people come through a kind of High Street recruitment agency they've messed up in a lot of ways in terms of what they should have done and checking access to our building, etc, etc. Partly that's our responsibility to brief them as well but, you know, again I've got feedback from others that think it is something that all employers need to do, but the recruitment agencies need to take some responsibility as well ... I do worry that a lot of disabled people would just go to a mainstream recruitment like everyone else, like they should be, but they're not getting the same support.  
(Transport company)

This employer did think that employers could and should improve High Street recruitment agencies through imposing conditions on them:

I think that's actually an employer's responsibility really because, you know, their clients, their revenue will come from, from the employers themselves. So it's the employers making it part of their service level agreements system that they have to do X, Y and Z, make reasonable adjustments of this, that and the other, you know, actively look to bring in disabled candidates.

(Transport company)

Employers speaking to us were keen to show positive attitudes and practices towards recruiting and retaining a diverse workforce. But they also recognised a need for much more among employers in general, sometimes including their own organisations:

... where are the opportunities to go along and talk about this with likeminded people or to convert people who aren't, you know, likeminded? I think what happens often is you get people together who are very much ... diversity and trying to live that ethos. But then it's well where are all the other people that are in that room and how did you get to them and again it's actually through education, communication and, and sharing of best practice.

(Building society)

In terms of attracting recruits, which I think is probably where we fall down, they're not specifically targeted by the work we do with some of the organisations for the long-term unemployed but they do make up a disproportionate number.

(Local authority)

## **Equal opportunities or not doing enough?**

Employers agreed that disability was a source of discrimination or disadvantage at work, though there was less consensus about gender, where some respondents thought enough had already been done to bring equal opportunities. A telecommunications company employer saw gender as no longer a problem, while he pointed to systems of measuring performance as potential obstacles for disabled people, whose delivery might not fit the performance objectives precisely:

... we have managed to do women's development training, you know, recruiting the right sort of, the right calibre of women into our organisation and now that's starting to flow through. So I kind of disagree with the female piece here ... here at times it can be a disadvantage to be disabled, I think we struggle, I think the meritocracy and the concept of objectives and measurements means that, for whatever reason and, and disability is just one reason but if for whatever reason you cannot deliver exactly as is expected, then the system rejects you.

(Telecommunications company)

But employers generally accepted that women employees were less likely to be represented at the highest levels:

Twelve per cent of partners are women and about the same per cent of people on the UK Board are women as well, actually more, about twenty per cent on the UK Board are. So yeah, I mean clearly women are under-represented at senior level.  
(Financial services)

The situation of women as mothers was also acknowledged as a source of difficulties for women developing careers, even as a building society employer described her efforts to make her organisation see that mothers' needs and business needs could be compatible:

... whether we like it or not there is still this view that oh, you know, she's early/mid-twenties, at some point she's going to go away and have a baby, can I really afford, and I'm sure in some companies these days there is really a question of economics, can we really afford all that goes along with people having families? Course that's just not females now is it, but, you know, are they going to go and leave me for twelve months, will I have to find a replacement, are they going to phone up every time the child has a spot? So I do still think there's that kind of decision making process that goes on, no matter how, you know direct we try to be around selection, it still occurs, you know, if you, if you were a man running a business that's (...) the sort of thing you're going to ask. And I think there's, you know, again we're quite good here in terms of flexible working patterns and certainly as a member of our women employees group we've really championed that to try to get people to understand that this can work, you know, commercial environment, term-time working, four days instead of five can work and it can work job share. But again it's an education process and I think people need to actually understand that that can be made to work but can still fit with the business needs.  
(Building Society)

Care responsibilities were seen as damaging to women's prospects, whether as mothers, or as carers of older people, though there was some acknowledgement of men as potential carers too:

... increasingly we are seeing those requests for flexible working coming through and we are starting to see actually from men as well as women traditionally (...) that a female would want to take advantage of it, the ground force is there but again it's, it's slow.  
(Building Society)

... we're going to have more employees with caring responsibilities than what we are with parental responsibilities. So society's really happy and can cope with people bending their working lives to take care of their children, society struggles in the UK, you know, in the UK society

struggles with the concept of people bending their working lives in order to look after their elderly parents.  
(Telecommunications company)

While there were disagreements about gender as a source of disadvantage, there was a consensus about disability and disadvantage:

I think our main, you know, our challenge is to actually get disabled people into the company ... all the statistics that I've read about disability, you know, disabled people and qualifications, just that there's a huge number of disabled graduates out there who are really keen to look for, you know, fulfilling work, I suspect it's more around some of the stereotyping assumptions kind of made of people with disabilities basically ... people with disabilities are not able to do certain roles but, you know, clearly, you know, there have been very high profile examples of people in public, like David Blunkett.  
(Financial services)

A university careers officer pointed to the AGCAS data (see Chapter 2) to argue that the situation of graduates with profound disabilities was masked in the data by the very high proportion of people with less severe impairments:

A very high proportion of those numbers which have dyslexia and who obviously sway the figures and succeed, the people who may have more profound disabilities that, that need more understanding, mediation, you know, the statistics really shift them and they are not advantaged in the job market at all.  
(Careers officer – newer university 1)

Employers were all aware that access to quality employment was still a problem, with relatively recent legislation compared with gender. Disability was seen as a new source of activity for employers, with organizations gradually waking up to their obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act, with many such as blue chip city firms still entrenched in traditional recruitment practices:

... this is a relatively new area of our work on diversity so we haven't made, you know, we're sort of right at the beginning and trying to make them the target if you like for disabled people.  
(Financial Services)

... there'll be a bunch of enlightened people who will, you know, absolutely, you know, DDA will have made a difference or perhaps they were already at that place, but there'll be another group who sadly aren't, and who are still not I'm sure. So I guess my answer is in general it's probably still not as good as it could be.  
(Building Society)

I was actually at a meeting yesterday discussing the topic on recruiting disabled students and a lot of the other employers there, which were more kind of blue chip city firms, they don't have that culture embedded at all and so I know they find it very difficult to convince line managers that there is any incentive, I mean the only kind of argument they have is the DDA as backup, it's legal and you've got to do it.

(Transport company)

A careers officer saw a problem in getting 'progressive' policies through to people making decisions:

Getting through to, to the powers that be and the decision makers, you know, the people who, who do the recruiting, the people who are in charge ... maybe it's nature that people recruit people like themselves, you know, but I think, I think people who are more professional, the bigger employers, the people who are more professional, the people who are more sort of trained and self-aware try and, try and overcome that and say what, what is the criteria that we're after and who meets that criteria. But, you know, I'm sure there's an element of if you've got the right look and the right face, the right, you know, you know, I've seen some big law employers and, you know, and the blokes all look the same, the women they recruit, they're all blonde, pretty and good looking, you know, you do see these kind of things. So yeah, there is an element of, of, that we bring people in and give people hope and opportunity but, you know, the, the fact of the matter is that the rest of, the real world isn't, isn't as progressive as, as we would like it to be ... it's not so much a problem of diversity, it's a, a problem for the wider society, in the way society is.

(Careers officer – older university 1)

Another careers officer drew on his own experience as a parent of a disabled child to contrast the surface concern with equal opportunities, with more 'aggressive culture' which made it difficult to ask employers to be flexible:

What worries me generally about ... particularly sort of gender issues or particularly disability issues, it's kind of the survival of the fittest type of culture. ... On the one hand they're trying to be all, you know, all caring, all encompassing, you know, you know, come on in, this is how we'll look after you, then the next minute it's oh well, you know, you've got to do this by such-and-such and, etc, etc, and it, it seems that there's such mixed messages about and hence you get this kind of hesitancy and this kind of insecurity of those people that have definitely got issues that, you know, almost like kind of capitulate really and think well I'll just, oh I'd better just keep my nose down then and I won't complain or I won't ask. They don't want to be seen as I'm not as strong as the next person or, or whatever. So it is, it's a very strange kind of aggressive culture at the moment.

(Careers officer – older university 2)

Smaller employers were seen by careers officers as more difficult to reach with policies about 'a fair chance regardless of race, colour, creed and disability':

To keep abreast of these kind of things you have to have, you have to do, you have to be a bit of a thinker, you have to have time to reflect and soak in what's going on and, and I think some small employers they're just too rushed to do anything, they're just too busy getting along. So I think ... they just need to be more aware and, and, and to be aware that actually there's quite a lot of support and they probably are unaware of that, that if you need to change things, you know, you can get some money for it and, but I think, you know, employers who are hard pressed maybe who might not look further than their nose.

(Careers officer - older university 1)

I think there's a lot of good practice going on but a lot of that good practice is with organisations who've got the resource and the muscle to actually engage in activities and invest in time and money and resources to actually publicise directly to particular groupings of people and/or to put on typical events like, examples, you know, things like taster courses for women into management, disabled students into management, etc.

(Careers officer – older university 2)

The first careers officer argued that smaller employers needed more help:

... [they] have other things on their plate and, and you've got to keep abreast of it and it's hard to keep abreast of everything. So yeah, as I say the smaller and medium employers don't, don't quite know enough and, and I don't think they ever will unless they have some extra support because they haven't got the resources ... it could even be people coming in and personally giving advice and information, you know, it could even be that. Working through Chambers of Commerce to put on, you know, to get, to hitch a ride on the back of some events that are actually advantageous to small business and get onto those, you know, hitch a ride on those.

(Careers officer - older university 1)

Employers were asked whether gender and disability added together to bring double disadvantage to disabled women. Not all respondents felt they had the evidence to respond, and there were doubts about the concept of double disadvantage:

... partly it's, we're talking about relatively small numbers but also partly that the patterns that I've observed don't suggest that there is any, that there are any more barriers or more difficulties to the employment of women with disabilities than there are men, I don't, I just don't kind of empirically get that basically.

(Financial Services)

But other respondents could see reason for these disadvantages to add up, even if they could not point to evidence:

It depends a lot on the employer doesn't it? Because if you've got an employer who's willing to make reasonable adjustments for any disabled person that's fine, some employers still have difficulty making reasonable adjustments for non-disabled women who have childcare responsibilities. So if you've got a disabled woman who also has to do part time working, I can see that would certainly be, you know, a double disadvantage and an employer could ostensibly think oh, you know, that's too much effort on my part and too costly, etc. I suppose that's where I would see it being more of a double disadvantage than anywhere else.

(Transport company)

I guess you would have to say, given what I've just said about, you know, people progressing in their careers and the, you know, potential barriers from the female perspective, I would guess you would have to say that yes potentially that could be, you know. It's very disappointing when you sort of sit back and think about it but that would be the case. But I guess, you know, for women to make their way in their careers is, you know, just still that little bit more difficult than men and, you know, if you do have a disability to, to work with then yeah, I'm sure it must be even harder.

(Building Society)

... certainly every organisation I've worked the representation of disabled people in senior conditions has been lower than it has elsewhere. So to me that suggests that there are, whether it's sticky floors or glass ceilings or whatever, but that's operating in terms of disabled employees. Now therefore those two things have to, I would think, bring a disadvantage. [In previous employment] we actually had that, small though the figures were, there was a tendency for male disabled employees to nevertheless progress further in their career than female employees.

(Local authority)

## Conclusion

The ideals expressed by all the employers and careers officers we interviewed were about an inclusive workforce, where careers officers supported and employers recruited a diverse workforce, representing different ages, ethnic minorities, disabled people and women, both to represent the culture and to bring awareness of the needs of service users and consumers. The gaps identified in practice related to disability more than to gender. Some employers and careers officers were acutely aware of work cultures and practices that discriminated against women, especially those with caring responsibilities. But they could all identify ways in which the system failed disabled people. In particular, they described a lack of specialised careers support for disabled people in universities, and a problem providing the amount of support needed, for the period of time needed, which could extend after graduation. Careers services saw larger employers as well tuned into a diversity discourse, though an aggressive competitive culture might well compete with disabled people's

needs, and women's needs for a more flexible approach to working time and conditions. They saw smaller employers as more difficult to reach, and less likely to know about the government support available through Access to Work, for example. Employers described varied experience of Access to Work: while it was seen as crucial support for disabled people, it was also seen as inconsistent and bureaucratic in operation, as well as lacking a sufficiently high profile among employers and employees. Everyone acknowledged that recruitment to the workforce did not favour disabled women, and that there was a gap between the ideals they expressed about recruiting more widely to represent the population and the experience of disabled women approaching employers.



## Chapter 9      Summary and conclusions

This project asked about the experience of a group who may be doubly disadvantaged in the labour market, discriminated against through gender and disability. Available evidence did not show how discrimination works for disabled women moving out of higher education, compared with men. Something happens to disadvantage them as they move on, but we knew little, if anything, about what that was. The project aimed to fill that gap and understand how disabled women's final year at university could better translate into good quality, sustainable employment and career opportunities in professional, managerial and senior official roles.

The literature search for relevant studies found even less material than we expected that brought together the two sources of discrimination to study the relationship between gender and disability in access to high quality employment. This was particularly the case for material that could throw light on the ways in which higher education might offset disadvantage for disabled young women. We reviewed both earlier statistical data and research studies and drew on literatures about disability and gender as sources of disadvantage. This part of our project showed how little research has focused on the way disability and gender interact in disadvantaging disabled women in employment.

The second part of the project involved secondary analysis of existing national data to explore and compare employment outcomes for male and female disabled graduates who had completed their higher education relatively recently. The first stage here 'scoped' existing data sets to:

- identify and review surveys and data sets, and assess their usefulness for investigating disabled graduates' employment outcomes;
- rework the most promising data sets and investigate relationships between gender, disability and employment among recent graduates.

Sixteen data sets were identified and considered. They included: cross-sectional surveys repeated on different samples at regular intervals; panel surveys of the same individuals at quarterly or annual intervals; a birth cohort followed up at periodic intervals; and data collected for administrative purposes. After extensive testing, two surveys remained: the Census Sample of Anonymised Records (CSAR) and the Survey of Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (HESA). Both were considered potentially useful for investigating disabled graduates' employment outcomes. These two data sets were then used for further analysis.

Logistic regression was used with the CSAR data to explore gender differences in the early labour market experiences of disabled graduates. This investigated both the

direct association between gender and outcomes, and the indirect or interaction effect of gender whereby differences in outcomes between women and men are influenced by, or associated with, care-giving, ethnicity, family type, health status and region of residence.

The findings showed the extent to which gender differences in employment outcomes persist even after other factors that differentiate the employment experiences of women and men were taken into account. The findings also showed how other factors sometimes mediated the influence of gender on graduates' employment outcomes even when no difference between disabled women and men was apparent. Overall, for example, disabled women and men participated in paid employment to the same extent; however, women's and men's employment rates varied in different ways depending on their family circumstances and region of residence. Geographical variations suggest that local labour market conditions influence disabled graduates' employment outcomes.

Child care responsibilities are highly influential in limiting the amount of time that some disabled women can devote to paid employment and confining them to part time, often poorly paid jobs. Moreover, whether working full time or part time, disabled women were less likely than disabled men to take up higher ranking and better paid jobs. Soon after graduating, it seems that women's and men's employment experiences diverged, and that a substantial minority of women were following less advantageous trajectories. If these trajectories continue over the longer term, some disabled women will find it increasingly difficult to attain the lifetime earnings and pension entitlements typical of their male counterparts.

A key gender difference among disabled graduates was that women were much more likely than men to have entered public sector employment. Although public sector jobs have traditionally attracted women, there may be mixed benefits. On the one hand, the terms and conditions of public sector employment are often seen to be more advantageous than those in the private sector. Greater opportunities for part-time working, flexible hours and support for family carers may also suit women's domestic arrangements and family responsibilities. On the other hand, public sector pay awards often fall below those of equivalent jobs in the private sector, and may limit women's lifetime earnings.

Comparisons with their non-disabled peers suggested that disabled graduates overall may be further disadvantaged in the labour market. Disabled graduates were less likely to be in paid employment, less likely to be working full time, and less likely to occupy higher ranking occupations than their non-disabled peers. Although these outcomes were disproportionately experienced by disabled women and men compared with their non-disabled peers, they interacted with gender so that disabled women were most often disadvantaged in the labour market.

The HESA data were used to describe the labour market experiences of graduates six months after leaving higher education. The study group was defined as graduates under age 30 who normally lived in the UK and who had obtained a first degree after completing a full-time course of study.

On the whole, differences in employment outcomes between women and men, and between disabled and non-disabled graduates, were comparatively small, and no clear picture emerged when different types of disability were considered. That may not be surprising if employment patterns were in a state of flux. Although most graduates had entered paid employment, their reasons for taking their current job suggested that a substantial minority had yet to embark on a longer term career trajectory. Almost one in four were continuing in full-time studies; many were still seeking paid employment; some were combining further study with paid employment; and others were not currently 'economically active'. One in three saw little connection between their current job and their recently acquired degree qualification. The vast majority of those in paid employment appeared to be at the minimum of their earnings potential as a graduate, and around one in four were currently employed on short-term or temporary contracts. In short, six months after graduating, employment trajectories for many graduates had scarcely formed and longer term outcomes were uncertain.

Despite that, the employment patterns that emerged from the analysis seem to reflect the beginnings of what might happen later. Differences between graduates with and without disabilities, and between women and men, appeared to prefigure the employment circumstances of their older peers described in the literature. Although more women had obtained paid employment, they were less likely than their male counterparts to have entered the higher ranking jobs of managers, senior officials and professionals. Despite being somewhat better qualified and enjoying similar terms of employment, women earned less on average than men. If these differences, small as they are, foreshadow future employment outcomes, we can infer that the employment trajectories of this graduate cohort will diverge over time along gender lines.

Two factors were identified that might help explain gender differences in employment outcomes. One was degree subject, with men predominant in mathematics, computer science, engineering and technology, and women predominant in languages, biological sciences and health-related subjects. The second factor was industry sector, with women more likely than men to work in public sector employment. Both factors have been identified in the literature as potentially important determinants of the gendered experiences of graduates in the labour market.

Differences associated with disability in employment outcomes were generally harder to discern than those associated with gender. Disabled graduates were less likely

than their non-disabled peers to have entered paid employment, and those in full-time work earned slightly less on average. These differences anticipate the employment disadvantages experienced by older cohorts of disabled people. However, disabled graduates were more likely to be actively seeking work and many were engaged in further study to enhance their employment prospects. Their future employment prospects are therefore difficult to anticipate, not least because disabled graduates are a relatively new and currently small sub-group in the working age population. Firm evidence on the longer term labour market experiences of disabled graduates is currently lacking.

The third stage of the project was a qualitative exploration of the experiences of final year disabled students or very recent graduates in relation to career development activity and advice and job searching. Both men and women were interviewed and their experiences compared. Employers and university careers officers were also interviewed about issues related to the employment of disabled graduates.

The qualitative material is rich and paints a picture of enormous variation. Some disabled students were well-supported while at university, others were not. Some had many opportunities for career development, including work placement and internships (although not all took up these opportunities), others did not. Some seemed to have met their immediate aspirations in terms of post-graduation employment or post-graduate study, others had not.

The reasons for these differences are sometimes difficult to pin down. As with all students, there was variation in the students' own abilities; some seemed to have struggled throughout their degree courses, while others revelled in the challenge of higher education and sailed through it, achieving highly throughout. However, the nature of impairment also seemed to play a part. By and large, students with specific learning difficulties (e.g. dyslexia) or with visual impairments were supported at university and progressed well immediately after graduation. Deaf students appeared to do less well overall, as did some of those who had entered higher education as mature students and after a long history of poor employment experiences. Discrimination in the labour market is evident in some of the students' accounts of their job seeking.

While most students were positive about the specialist support they had received while at university, there were often problems with the ways in which their home departments accommodated their needs. Sometimes this was because of inadequate communication between specialist support services and departments. On other occasions it was because older lecturers and those in departments that had no previous experience of a disabled student seemed unprepared or unwilling to support students' specific learning requirements. In a few cases students had been denied accommodation to their needs because lecturers were afraid of giving them an advantage over other students.

Generic careers advice was rarely helpful for disabled students and many took their own route through specialist organisations outside university. Specialist placement or internship schemes for disabled students were important in career development and choice and subsequent job seeking.

Gender played a part in the different experiences of disabled graduates, but largely in the same way it plays a part for all young people. Most women studied subjects that were seen as 'female' and seemed rather more likely to be considering careers in the public sector. However, there were exceptions in both directions. Overall, men were much less likely to perceive that their gender had influenced their choice of subject or career aspirations; indeed, few understood the question! Similarly men never expected to be discriminated against in employment because of their gender while women hoped that they would not be but were less certain that this would be the case. Most, regardless of their sex, expected that they would experience some discrimination in relation to their impairment, although most were also very aware of the legislative requirements of employers.

The area where women were most likely to point to gender influences was in their path to university. A small number recounted the ways in which family and cultural values led to lower expectations about girls' educational achievement. In some cases, these expectations were even lower because of the girls' impairments. Some schools had also had low expectations for their disabled pupils.

Overall, then, the qualitative material underlined the findings of the secondary analysis. Female and male disabled graduates see and experience their impairment as more important than their gender in determining likely employment outcomes. However, many disabled women had already taken their first steps on the path that could result in their being paid less, in less prestigious jobs than either their female non-disabled or their male disabled peers. But it is still too early to say whether this will happen; even among those who had already graduated many were barely in the labour market – they were planning to travel, were still doing placements or internships, had obtained places for post-graduate study or were simply waiting to see what came along.

In part, the delay in establishing themselves in the labour market was because some students were frankly 'worked out'. They talked about how much harder they had had to work than their peers, and how they had not wanted to take time out from concentrating on their degree work to pursue career development opportunities or job searching. It would be interesting to know whether this delayed entry has longer lasting effects on disabled students than it does on others. It would also be interesting to know whether the delay has more of an impact on women, if they marry or have children soon after graduation. Unfortunately, the current study, constrained as it was by a shortened timetable, does not allow us to do more than speculate about such effects.

Interviews with a small number of employers and university careers officers identified similar issues to those identified by the students and recent graduates. The lack of specialist careers advice within universities was acknowledged, as was the usefulness to students of specialist agencies, internship and work placements. While those interviewed were largely reluctant to acknowledge any remaining gender discrimination issues among larger employers, some could point to the way in which employment practices might lead to double disadvantage for disabled women.

Overall, we believe that the work reported here has begun to illuminate the relatively minor differences in immediate post-graduate experience that will lead in the longer term to disabled women still being at the bottom of the employment and pay hierarchy. Their graduate status may prevent them arriving at the further reaches of social exclusion experienced by other disabled women, but it is clear that higher education, by itself, is not sufficient to eradicate both gender – and disability – related inequalities.

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