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Disabled International Students in UK Universities

### Original Citation

Soorenian, Armineh (2009) Disabled International Students in UK Universities. In: Degrees of Independence: Providing inclusive learning in Higher Education, 16th - 17th April 2009, University of Huddersfield, Huddersfield, UK. (Unpublished)

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**Disabled  
International  
Students in UK  
Universities**

# ***What the research is***



- ⌘ Looking into 30 disabled international students' experiences;
- ⌘ Highlighting barriers that they face;
- ⌘ Producing a list of recommendations for removing these barriers;

# ***Impetus for the research***



- ⌘ My personal experience of being a disabled international student;
- ⌘ The desire to have a positive impact on disabled international students' educational life;
- ⌘ An acute shortage of literature on both disabled international students' experiences, and on the application of policies for their inclusion;

# ***Disabled domestic students***



- ⌘ **Categorization of 'disability' in the UCAS form;**
- ⌘ **Barriers to the physical environment;**
- ⌘ **Uncertainties around the provision of, and funding for, appropriate support;**
- ⌘ **The inaccessible information on support available;**
- ⌘ **Non-inclusive teaching and assessment procedures;**
  - ⊞ **I didn't specify what, I just told them [name of the impairment]. Yeah, I wasn't straight forward to the point because I didn't know what they needed the information for and I thought that could have been used against me, in a way or other, so I didn't [disclose]. (Gloria)**

# ***Non-disabled international students***



- ⌘ Practical challenges: time-management, visas, provision of information pre-/post-arrival, accommodation, policies relating to financial support;
- ⌘ Emotional and affective issues: stress, homesickness, lack of confidence, participation in support services;
- ⌘ Cultural adaptation and integration: developing adequate cross-cultural skills, English language acquisition/competence;
- ⌘ Pedagogic difficulties: unfamiliarity with the UK system and academic conventions, seminar, study and writing skills, teaching and learning experiences, linguistic diversity;
- ⌘ Curriculum and assessment: appropriate course delivery design, performance and outcomes;
  - ☒ ... writing assignments was enough for me because in the UK they ought to be more comprehensive than in my country. It has something to do with English academic writing tradition. To write well in English you have to think in it, which is sometimes quite difficult for a foreigner. My essays were not perfect in terms of style and grammar, and they lacked the knowledge of the British argumentation tradition, I suppose. (Sova)

# ***Disabled international students***



- ⌘ Possibly disadvantaged because of belonging to both disabled and international students' groups;
- ⌘ Disabled international students may face the same barriers as their disabled domestic and non-disabled international counterparts;

# ***Cultural differences of 'Disability'***

- ⌘ A general cultural shock;
- ⌘ The level and type of academic/disability support required and provided;
- ⌘ Physical and informational inaccessibility;
- ⌘ Different cultures of 'disability';
  - ☒ Yes, indeed. People in the UK are more disability friendly and helpful. They don't think of you as of an alien. Say, some 20-15 years ago disabled people of any Soviet Republic were segregated in special boarding schools, factories, resting homes and hostels. They had to do their shopping in special shops and would have rarely participated in mainstream life. Recently the situation has been improving (anyone would hardly prevent you from going where you want, somebody even may try to help!), though most people in the street would still try to pass you as quick as they can. Generally, my compatriots perceive disability as handicap. (Sova)

# ***Language barriers related to disclosure of impairments***



⌘ The identification of international students' impairments (e.g. dyslexia) and related support needs may be difficult, due to language and cultural barriers;

☒ ... I didn't want to bother to explain ... problems to the Disability Services staff in English, it was quite tiring to speak in English when I first arrived. (Olivia)

# ***Financial barriers***



- ⌘ Lack of available specific grants like DSA;
- ⌘ The additional financial and personal burdens associated with impairment related support can make the transition particularly difficult;
- ⌘ Even, when impairments are disclosed, disability support is not always offered, due to limited funding issues;
  - ☑ The disability services assessed my needs but they did not provide support due to funding. I think it is about my disability and my status as international student as well. (Ed)

# ***Barriers in social life***



- ⌘ Having the opportunity to socialise is fundamental for all students;
- ⌘ Barriers faced by disabled international students in this area include:
  - ⌘ Inaccessible information;
  - ⌘ Physical access issues;
  - ⌘ Lack of confidence;
  - ⌘ Attitude of others;
  - ⌘ Transport;
  - ⌘ Health reasons;
  - ⌘ Study pressures;
  - ⌘ Funding issues;
  - ⌘ Reliance on friends and personal assistants;
  - ⌘ Differences in the cultures of social activity;
  - ⌘ Social life and participating in sport activities is not possible - due to isolation and no one to take me I have... zero involvement in social life. I'm in extreme isolation. (Tanjy)

# ***Lack of a support organization and ways forward***



- ⌘ Between 2001/02 to 2004/05, the percentage increase in disabled international students entering British Higher Education (HE) exceeded both disabled domestic students and non-disabled international students;
- ⌘ There is no designated organisation responsible for this group's affairs;
- ⌘ Disabled international students may consider themselves as invisible, and that their difficulties are either "irrelevant" or "added on as an optional extra".
- ⌘ They may feel discriminated against and rejected from such disabled domestic students' groups as Students With Disabilities (SWD), within the National Union of Students' (NUS), and also from non-disabled international students' groups such as the Council of International Students (CIS);
  - ☒ Social life is quite bad actually because if you are a disabled student it is always hard anyway, but then if they see that you are an international disabled student, they even shy [away] a lot more, thinking probably you are different. (Tony)
  - ☒ ... by creating a good support system, a circle so that international disabled students know where to go for advice and understand what rights they have. At the moment advice and help is too fragmented. (Tanjy)

# Conclusion



- ⌘ I have provided an overview of only a small number of the key issues here;
- ⌘ My actual research takes this further;
- ⌘ If you would like to read in more detail about disabled international students' concerns, please read my chapter in:
  - ☑ Campbell, T., Fontes, F., Hemingway, L., Soorenian, A. and Till, C. (eds), 2008: Disability Studies: Emerging Insights and Perspectives. University of Leeds: Disability Press.