Employment and Employability:
The Experiences and Perceptions of Deaf Graduates

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment for the requirements for the degree of Professional Doctorate in Education at the University of Central Lancashire

December 2017

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Abstract

Research illustrates that deaf and hard of hearing people generally experience more unemployment, are often underemployed and have lower incomes than the hearing population (MacLeod-Gallinger, 1992; RNID, 2006; The Papworth Trust, 2014). However, whilst there are increasing numbers of deaf students entering Higher Education (HESA 2014/15, 2013/14), there is a dearth of literature regarding the employability experiences of deaf graduates. This thesis presents an exploration of deaf graduate employability within the context of successive government policies designed to encourage HEIs to enhance the employability skills of their graduates.

This qualitative research study focusses on the lived experiences of eight deaf graduates whilst at university, and their subsequent search for employment upon graduation. Semi-structured interviews, followed by a thematic analysis of the data, were employed to explore the graduates' employability journeys. The key themes that emerged from the data included accessibility to the wider university curriculum, acquisition of employability skills, additional challenges which deaf graduates face when seeking employment, social networking and the significance of employment within the deaf community.

This thesis provides some insight into the little-researched areas of the deaf undergraduate experience and deaf graduate employment. It uncovers some of the inherent challenges of being deaf and seeking work, including the 'interpreted interview' and disclosure. It highlights gaps in the provision of support for both deaf students whilst at university and deaf graduates upon graduation, and it seeks to understand the prevalence of employment outcomes within the deaf community. Finally, this study begins a discourse on how support for deaf students and graduates must be enhanced if they are to compete with non-deaf job-seekers in entering the workplace.

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Acknowledgements

I owe a huge debt of gratitude to so many people who have supported me throughout my doctoral journey. First, thank you to all the participants, without whom this thesis would not be possible. You gave of your time so freely and generously. I feel privileged that you agreed to share your narratives with me. I hope I have done you justice.

Secondly, thank you to my supervisor, Candice Satchwell. You have been unwavering in your constant encouragement, words of wisdom and sage advice. You convinced me I could do it, kept me going and led me to the finishing line. Always with a smile. Thank you, Candice.

Thanks are also due, in no small part, to the EdD Superstars; a special group of doctoral candidates who in creating a cohort Facebook group, also created an incredible source of friendship, emotional and practical support, humour, affection and the wherewithal to see this journey through to the end. Thank you Susan, Hazel, Jacqueline, Kathryn and Riz; we made it!

Special thanks are due to Dr Martin Atherton and Dr Laura Snell for all your support. I could not have done this without you. Thank you for listening, guiding, advising, reading and generally keeping me sane. You are stars!

Finally, thanks to my family. I do not think any of you really knew what I was doing, except that I was writing a huge amount of words, and I appropriated the dining room table for far longer than any of us had anticipated. But, you knew it was important to me, and you gave me the time and space to undertake this project; you understood that I was 'working' and thus not able to give you my full attention. For this I am eternally grateful. Bryan, Ella, George, I love you.

My final thanks go to my Dad. Without you I would not be living this wonderful life within the Deaf community, nor would I have the best job in the world. Everything that I have achieved professionally has been due to you. I love you Dad. This is for you.

Abbreviations

AGCAS	Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services
AtW	Access to Work
BA	Bachelor of Arts
BIS	The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills
BSc	Bachelor of Science
BSL	British Sign Language
CBI	Confederation of British Industry
CHESS	The Consortium for Higher Education Support Services for Deaf Students
CODAs	Children of Deaf Adults
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DDA	Disability Discrimination Act
DEX	Deaf Ex-Mainstreamers Group
DLHE	Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education
DSA	Disabled Students' Allowance
DTLLS	Diploma in Teaching and Learning in the Lifelong Learning Sector
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
ECU	The Equality Challenge Unit
EdD	Doctorate in Education
EI	Emotional intelligence
ESECT	Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team
EUD	European Union of the Deaf
FdSc	Foundation Degree
FE	Further Education

HE	Higher Education
HEA	Higher Education Academy
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
IAPT	Improving Access to Psychological Therapies
LFS	Labour Force Survey
LT	Language Tutor
MA	Master of Arts
MSc	Master of Science
NDCS	National Deaf Children's Society
NHS	National Health Service
NUS	National Union of Students
RNID	Royal National Institute for Deaf People
SENDA	Special Educational Needs and Disability Act
SFE	Student Finance England
T&CM	Traditional and complementary medicine
UCLan	University of Central Lancashire
UEF	UCLan Employability Framework
UK	United Kingdom
UKCES	UK Commission for Employment and Skills
VLE	Virtual Learning Environment

Chapter 1. Introducing the Research: Context, Research Aims and Personal Motivation

This research thesis seeks to explore the experiences and perceptions of deaf graduates with regards to their acquisition of employability skills whilst at university and their job-seeking and employment outcomes after graduation. The aim of the study was to discover whether or not deaf students face particular barriers and challenges in acquiring employability skills and subsequent employment. It was anticipated that the knowledge generated from this investigation would bring new insights into the employment of deaf people and would inform both Higher Education practice and careers guidance at local and national levels. For the purposes of this study the term 'employment' is taken to mean the state of having (and keeping) paid work; following Yorke (2006), the term 'employability' is taken to mean 'a set of achievements – skills, knowledge, understandings and personal attributes that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen career' (Yorke, 2006:64). Employability skills are the actual skills and attributes that make a person employable, which are discussed in depth in Chapter 2 (see, for example Green et al., 2009; Greatbatch & Lewis, 2007). This thesis explores these terms from the perspective of eight deaf participants. It should be emphasised that this study is not a critique of employability models or theoretical frameworks, but a snapshot into the lived experiences of young deaf people whilst studying at university and whilst seeking and securing work upon finishing their studies.

This chapter begins with an overview of the context and background that frames the study. This is followed by my personal motivation and a rationale for the research, a brief outline of the research design and methodology (which will be explained in more detail in chapter 2) and the research questions which have guided this study. The chapter concludes with an explanation of the terminology used throughout the thesis, and finally an overview of the thesis content.

Context

This thesis presents an exploration of deaf graduate employability. Research has shown that, historically, disabled people have largely been unemployed or underemployed compared to the non-disabled population (Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), 2014a; Mcloughlin et al., 1987; Chabot, 2013). Whilst this research investigates the disabled population in general, there is scant qualitative data on the experiences and employment outcomes for disabled graduates. It is known that disabled graduates have lower rates of employment in comparison with their non-disabled graduate peers (AGCAS, 2015), but not the reasons behind this. Similarly, research illustrates that deaf and hard of hearing people generally experience more unemployment, are often underemployed and have lower incomes than the hearing population (MacLeod-Gallinger, 1992; RNID, 2006; Winn, 2007; The Papworth Trust, 2014) but very little has been written about the experiences of deaf graduates.

This lack of research into deaf graduates has also to be seen within the context of a sustained government drive designed to encourage HEIs to enhance the employability of their graduates by developing competencies and employability skills beyond those core to their degree discipline (Willets, 2003; Tariq et al., 2012). It is difficult to ascertain the extent to which universities have actively adopted the employability agenda; however, it is possible to find a plethora of employability models and guidelines designed to support HEIs in this undertaking (Pegg et al., 2012; Yorke & Knight, 2004; Pedagogy for Employment Group, 2006). At a local level, the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) published its own employability policies within Corporate (2013-2017) and Annual (2014-2015) Plans. Furthermore, the CareerEDGE model of employability (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007) [see page 35] was developed specifically for the university. Prior to commencing this research, I had been unaware of this model, but its implementation within UCLan led me to borrow its core themes as a framework for evaluating the experiences and perceptions of deaf graduates from the university.

Personal Motivation and Rationale for the Research

This research into the employability of deaf graduates has been the culmination of a long-held personal and professional interest in the support for deaf students in HE and the success of a number of small-scale projects designed to enhance the employability of deaf students.

During 2010-2012 I was involved in a collaborative research project funded by the Higher Education Academy (National Teaching Fellow Project). This two-year project explored how a framework of learning literacies can support learning and enhance student employability. In particular, we explored 'how the university supported the development of these literacies and whether what we do matches employers' and students' needs and expectations' (Tariq et al., 2012:52). My role in the project was to undertake a small-scale qualitative research study which explored deaf student transition from FE into HE and the acquisition of these academic literacies and employability skills. The findings from this project sparked a further interest in this field.

I began work with the University Careers Service to develop a series of employability workshops for the deaf students and graduates. As a result, a bespoke careers service for deaf students, Deaf Futures, was developed specifically to assist deaf students and graduates to build and develop employability skills. There were five Deaf Futures events held over two years; unfortunately, a diminishing number of deaf undergraduates, a lack of resources, and the loss of the specialist disability careers adviser role within the university led to its demise. However, these events had alerted me to the a) need for such a service and b) an awareness that deaf students struggled with the job-seeking process. My research therefore grew out of a real interest in generating empirical qualitative data that would shed light on the reality of deaf employability.

Whilst UCLan offers a wide and comprehensive range of support services to deaf students within the university, we know very little about their employment outcomes and experiences once they have graduated. This research will therefore seek to assess the effectiveness and suitability of

these services for deaf undergraduates and to identify whether deaf graduates face particular barriers in finding and securing employment.

Research Design and Methodology

This research employed a qualitative methodology. I interviewed eight profoundly deaf British Sign Language (BSL) users who had graduated from UCLan between 2009 and 2012, together with the specialist disability careers adviser who worked with deaf students on campus. I chose to specifically research BSL users as most of the literature regarding deaf people does not differentiate between BSL users and those with milder hearing losses, or deaf people with speech (see Harris and Thornton, 2005). In addition, personal experience over a period of over twenty years indicates that sign language users are under-represented in all HEIs. Therefore, even in the existing literature, sign language users are at best in the minority and their stories do not get told.

I propose that the employment experiences of BSL users are quite different to those of hard of hearing people, but it is very difficult to evidence this as current literature and employability statistics categorise everyone with a hearing loss as 'deaf'. One outcome of this research will be to begin the process of addressing this gap in our existing knowledge.

Research Questions

In order to pursue these aims and objectives, the following research questions were posed:

- To what extent do deaf students acquire employability skills whilst at university?
- What challenges do they face in acquiring these skills and in gaining employment?
- What support is given to deaf students whilst at university and whilst seeking work?

A supplementary research question was later added to these original questions when I realised that all of the graduates in my study were

working, or had worked (in either a paid or voluntary capacity) in a deaf-related industry:

- Do deaf people work in the deaf community by choice or through necessity?

A Note on Terminology: deaf, Deaf or D/deaf?

Within Deaf Studies there is a general convention of capitalising the letter 'D' when discussing members of the deaf community (see Woodward, 1972). This is largely a political statement, which has cultural and linguistic implications, as it reflects an allegiance to both the deaf community and to sign language as a first, or preferred, language. The lowercase term 'deaf' refers more generally to the audiological condition of deafness and covers the whole spectrum of hearing loss. Some researchers also use the term 'D/deaf' to incorporate all deaf people regardless of level of hearing loss or choice of language (see Skelton & Valentine, 2003).

Throughout this thesis I have chosen to use the term 'deaf' when writing about the deaf graduates' experiences of employability. This is notwithstanding that all of the respondents were BSL users and members of the deaf community. My reasons for doing this are both aesthetic and practical. As mentioned earlier, the literature on deaf employment does not differentiate between BSL users and non-BSL users, and so all the literature refers to 'deaf' employment and people. The only caveats in my usage are when the respondents clearly indicate that they are referring to 'Deaf', and when I refer to Deaf epistemology, as Deaf epistemology is solely about the Deaf community narrative.

Thesis Structure

Following on from this introduction, Chapter 2 sets the context for my research by exploring the literatures on employment and employability. Rather than being simply a review of the literature, it also creates a landscape of the current picture regarding the employment of deaf and disabled people. It begins with an overview of disabled people and employment and then explores, more specifically, the picture regarding

disabled graduates in order to provide a wider context for my research with deaf graduates. I then explore the literature on the deaf population as a whole, before considering the situation concerning deaf graduates. Once this scene has been set, the chapter focuses on the definitions and concepts of 'employability' and 'employability skills'. Different models of employability are discussed within the context of Higher Education, with particular attention being focussed on the CareerEDGE model (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007) as the lower tier of this model forms a framework for my analysis and findings. Finally, this chapter explores UCLan's employability policy, both at the time my respondents were studying and at the time of writing in order to place my research into the local context.

Chapter 3, *Methodology and Methods: Researching Deaf Graduates,* outlines the methodology and methods used in my research. It considers the theoretical perspectives underpinning the research and discusses the methodological choices that guided my study. Within this chapter I also discuss how my personal experiences have influenced the research. Using reflexive subjectivity I explore how the concept of 'Insider/Outsider' research became central to my research purpose and in many ways steered my direction of travel. This chapter also explores the reasons for choosing in-depth interviews as a choice of method, ethical considerations of undertaking deaf research, and how the participants were recruited. Finally, I conclude with a reflection upon the limitations of my study.

Chapter 4, *Data Analysis*, discusses the tools I used for data analysis; their appropriateness for my research and some of the issues that emerged. Within this chapter, I also discuss in detail the challenges, dilemmas and issues inherent in undertaking research with deaf people, and in particular, in the interpretation, translation and transcription processes. The decision to translate the data myself, from BSL into written English, led to unforeseen challenges and an exploration of translation theory. Within this chapter, I use examples of data transcription to illustrate some of the dilemmas and the decisions I had to make. In summary, this chapter highlights the implications of conducting research across languages, cultures and modalities and contributes to the literature on undertaking research with the deaf community.

The next three chapters present the findings from my research data. Chapter 5, *Acquiring Undergraduate Employability Skills: The Experiences of Deaf Students,* focuses on the lived experiences of the deaf participants particularly regarding their acquisition of employability skills and subsequent employment. This chapter focuses on the emergent themes of Career Development Learning, Work Experience, Degree Subject Knowledge, Understanding and Skills, Generic Skills and Emotional Intelligence. Whilst some of the generic skills were easily attainable, my research shows that other significant career development learning and job-seeking skills are more difficult for deaf students to acquire. This chapter also discusses the importance of work placement opportunities for gaining employment, and how various barriers preclude many deaf students from gaining this experience.

Chapter 6, *Additional Barriers Faced By Deaf Graduates,* examines the particular themes that emerged from the data that exemplified barriers for deaf graduates both at university and in their pursuit of employment after graduation. These barriers and challenges do not necessarily affect hearing students and include difficulties in acquiring the high level English literacy skills - essential for job-seeking and career planning development, support from peers and tutors, interpreted interviews, disability disclosure and the absence of job-seeking support after graduation. Access to Work (AtW), central to disability employment, is also discussed.

Chapter 7, *Choosing to Work in the Deaf Community: Choice or Necessity?,* is the final findings chapter. Having completed my data analysis, I was struck by the fact that all the respondents were working or had previously worked in the deaf community or in a deaf-related industry. This chapter therefore explores the reasons for this phenomenon. Social networking, homophily (McPherson et al., 2001), political motivation and role modelling are offered as possible explanations, in addition to the more practical communication considerations. This chapter also discusses the high self-employment rates amongst the deaf community and the fact that this is predominantly deaf-related work.

Chapter 8 is the concluding chapter, which summarises the three preceding findings chapters and offers recommendations for resolving some of the barriers and challenges which emerged from the data. Within this chapter I discuss the original contribution this thesis brings to the field of Deaf Studies and to the wider employability discourse and recommendations for further research are made. I conclude with a reflection on my doctoral journey and a recognition of my own personal and professional growth. The final words are those of one of the participants, whose story reflects some of the major themes of this research, and who stands as a beacon for other deaf young people considering entering Higher Education.

Chapter 2. Literature Review: Employment and Employability Skills

This chapter aims to scope the literatures in the field of my research; exploring the experiences and perceptions of deaf graduates in relation to employment and the acquisition of employability skills. In using the term 'literatures' rather than 'literature review', I recognise that the literature 'is not a monolith, it is plural' (Kamler & Thomson, 2006:35). This is particularly so when investigating a marginalised community such as the deaf community, where relatively little research has taken place. For this reason it is necessary to draw upon literatures from a wide range of disciplines, including cultural and disability fields, in addition to Deaf epistemologies. These literatures will be woven throughout subsequent chapters of this thesis.

As this research explores the graduates' experiences of acquiring employability skills whilst at university and the barriers to attaining employment upon graduation it is essential to engage with literatures which explore the nature of employability skills and their relationship to generic graduate employment. Therefore, this will be the primary focus of this chapter. However, before the concepts associated with graduate employment are explored, a brief summary of the current situation regarding disabled people and employment is necessary, in order to provide a wider context for my research with deaf graduates. Following this, I will look at the employment status of disabled graduates, before exploring employment and the deaf population. This will lead to a scoping of the scant literature regarding deaf graduate employment.

Finally, this chapter will look at the specific local university policies on employability, as this impacts directly upon the deaf graduates within my research.

Employment and Disabled People

In 2006, the United Nations Convention On The Rights Of Persons With Disabilities recognised:

> *the right of persons with disabilities to work, on an equal basis with others: this includes the right to the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in the labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities* (United Nations, 2006: non-paginated).

Research has shown that, historically, disabled people have been largely unemployed or underemployed compared to the non-disabled population (Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), 2014a; Mcloughlin et al., 1987; Chabot, 2013). Furthermore, an employment gap still exists between disabled and non-disabled people (DWP, 2014a; DWP, 2014b). Currently, there are over 12 million disabled people in the UK. More specifically, in March 2013, 20.8% of the working age population in the UK (8.3 million people) had a disability (Office for National Statistics, 2013a; The Papworth Trust, 2014). However, whilst many people with disabilities want to work (Ali et al., 2011; Boyce, 2015), they face employment barriers that have resulted in dismal employment rates (Jans et al., 2012). In March 2013, the UK employment rate among working age disabled people was 49% (4.1 million), compared to 81.8% of non-disabled people; the unemployment rate for disabled people stood at 12%, compared to 7.6% of non-disabled people (Office for National Statistics, 2013a). The remaining 39% of working age disabled people are presumably economically inactive; in education, in care, not fit for work or not claiming unemployment benefit. In short, disabled people are nearly four times as likely to be unemployed or involuntarily out of work than non-disabled people.

Whilst the literature clearly shows that employment rates for people with disabilities are significantly lower than those for non-disabled people, these statistics only tell a small part of the story. The impact of being unemployed is not simply about being unable to make a living. Whilst employment is important for increasing economic resources, being in paid employment has critical psychological benefits (Chabot, 2013). In addition to providing

increased pride, self-confidence and overall quality of life, employment is socially valued; it contributes substantially to how others see us and how we see ourselves. Just as for those without a disability, work provides a feeling that one is making a valuable contribution to society and to the local community (Boyce, 2015). Employment provides opportunities for individuals to develop or have affirmed a sense of self-identity and self-worth (Donnelly, et al., 2010). One can argue that this is especially important for disabled people who have often had to face societal barriers and negative attitudes. Employment may afford them a real opportunity to affirm their self-worth, dispel stereotypes and feel valued by society:

> *It helps incorporate people with disabilities fully into mainstream society by increasing their social networks, civic skills, independence, citizenship behaviours, and a sense of efficacy and inclusion from filling a valued social role (*Ali et al., 2011: 199).

Furthermore, for those disabled people who have found employment, many find themselves underemployed. A study by Burchardt in 2005 showed that at the age of 26, the occupational outcomes of 39 per cent of disabled people in the UK were below the level to which they had aspired ten years previously, compared with 28 per cent of non-disabled people:

> *The impact of young disabled people's frustrated ambition was apparent in the widening gap between disabled and non-disabled young people as they moved into their twenties, in terms of confidence, subjective well-being and belief in their ability to shape their own future* (Burchardt, 2005: non-paginated).

This is a bleak employment picture, twenty years after and despite the enactment of the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) and subsequent policy amendments in the Disability Discrimination Act (2005), Disability Equality Duty (2006) and more recently the Equality Act (2010); legislation which:

> *bans disability discrimination by employers against disabled job-seekers and employees […]. It is most notable for imposing a duty on employers and service providers to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people to help them to overcome barriers that they may face*

in gaining and remaining in employment (Nidirect, 2014: non-paginated).

The statistics above regarding disabled people and employment indicate that equality in employment for disabled people is still problematic. This appears to have been recognised by the Coalition Government in 2013. Apparently invigorated by the success of the 2012 Paralympic Games and the increase in the public's awareness and attitudes towards disability (DWP, 2014a), they launched the Disability Confident Campaign to increase opportunities for disabled people to gain and sustain employment. Through the Disability Confident campaign, launched in 2013, the government is working with employers to 'remove barriers, increase understanding and ensure that disabled people have the opportunities to fulfil their potential and realise their aspirations' (DWP, 2014b: non-paginated). This recent initiative suggests that government legislation alone is not working. Despite the long-term focus on promoting employment outcomes for disabled people, a significant gap remains between their employment rates and those of people without disabilities (Ju et al., 2014; Mcloughlin, 2002; Burchardt, 2005; The Papworth Trust, 2014).

Employment and Disabled Graduates

This employment gap can be further illustrated by recent statistics regarding disabled graduates. Research shows that there is a steady increase in numbers of non-traditional students, including students with disabilities, attending universities (Gibson, 2012). It has been argued that this is due to recent government policy, widening participation initiatives (Dearing, 1997; Disability Rights Commission, 2006), developments in societal thinking regarding disability (Barnes, Oliver & Barton, 2002) and 'related national and international research on the complex matter of social, educational and economic inclusion' (Gibson, 2012:354). However, whilst this increase in numbers is welcomed, little qualitative research has been undertaken on the outcomes of a Higher Education degree for students with

disabilities. The scant data that are available tend to be statistical data collated at local and national level.

The Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey is undertaken every year by UK Higher Education institutions and it is seen by some to be the 'most valuable and reliable indicator of the worth of a degree' (Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS), 2015:3), as it highlights graduate employability six months after leaving university. The data is published in terms of indicators which are calculated to show the proportion of leavers in employment, training and study and the proportion of leavers in graduate level employment, training or study. The main two indicators are:

a) Positive Outcomes: The proportion of graduates who were available for employment that had secured employment or further study six months after completion.
b) Graduate Prospects: The proportion of graduates who were available for employment that had secured graduate-level employment or graduate-level further study six months after completion (Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) (2012).

At this point, it should be noted that there is extensive debate about using employment alone as a sole measure of student achievement (Gough, 2008; Nijjar, 2009). Degrees in and of themselves are intrinsically valuable regardless of subsequent employment status, with a wide range of benefits including health, knock-on effects for graduates' children, citizenship and positive attitudes towards diversity and equal opportunities (Higher Education Careers Service Unit, 2005). There are also difficulties in determining how long it should/does take to attain such graduate level work. Yorke and Knight (2004), for example, reject the inference that employment rates taken just six months after graduation are valid indicators of employability (p9). Furthermore, using graduate employment status and categorising what constitutes graduate level activity are both problematic. However, whilst there continues to be discussion on the value of these data in determining the success of university education,

universities still tend to place great store on DLHE statistics and similar metrics such as league tables.

Indeed, since 2002, the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services has funded research into the career destinations of disabled graduates, using the DLHE statistics. This research is disseminated in an annual report entitled '*What Happens Next?'* Over the last thirteen years, these reports have provided 'real evidence of the effect of a disability on a graduate's prospects in the labour market' (AGCAS, 2013:4). The '*What Happens Next?'* report charting the first destinations of the 2013 disabled graduates demonstrates a similar picture to that of the wider disabled population. This report shows that disabled graduates continue to have lower rates of employment and higher rates of unemployment than their non-disabled peers. The most significant difference between non-disabled and disabled graduates is the percentage in full-time work, with 58.0% of non-disabled graduates in full-time employment as opposed to 50.5% of disabled graduates; a difference of 7.5%. Choosing between survey categories of full-time or part-time work and/or study, or unemployment, 8% of disabled graduates selected 'unemployed' as their destination status compared with 5.4% of non-disabled graduates (AGCAS, 2015:10). Whilst the report regards the higher percentage of disabled graduates in part-time work or engaging in further study as a positive outcome, these figures may mask what potentially is a lack of choice for these graduates, who are perhaps facing discrimination when seeking full-time work. Interestingly, graduates with social communication/Autistic Spectrum Disorders have the highest unemployment rates of all disability types. This is something to consider when discussing the employment rates of deaf BSL users. Whilst deaf graduates and those with a hearing loss are categorised by a sensory disability code for reporting purposes, BSL users who do not use speech might be also considered by employers to have a social communication disorder.

It is clear that the unemployment rates of disabled graduates is of concern to the government. In 2013, The Equality Challenge Unit (ECU), funded by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and the Department for

Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) surveyed disabled students and graduates about how universities could support them into future employment. Specifically, they wanted disabled graduates to share their university experiences in order to '*remove barriers to employment and support disabled students in developing employability skills and identifying career paths'* (ECU, 2013; non-paginated).

This is, in essence, the aim of my own research study regarding deaf graduates; to explore their university experiences regarding the development of employability skills and to investigate the barriers they have faced whilst seeking employment. The findings will then be used to inform others how to better support and inform this population of undergraduates in order that they are successful in their search for and acquisition of work in their chosen career.

Employment and Deaf People

From this wider context of disabled people and employment, it is possible to draw out general themes and statistics relating to the deaf population in general. However, relatively little research has been undertaken with regard to employment and deaf people. Much of the research that has been carried out within the UK has tended to be from deaf organisations or disability campaigners and has been extrapolated from official national or government surveys and reports (Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID), 2006; Action on Hearing Loss Wales, 2009; DWP, 2014a; The Scottish Government, 2015). Here, I will add a word of caution; whilst similar trends are reported across the literature, it is not possible to find statistics that are fully consistent. This is due sometimes to the date of publication, but also, more importantly, because of discrepancies in how data are collated and reported and where the data was found. In addition, there is a critical question of whether or not deaf people are choosing to disclose their disability. This is not new within the deaf community. There has long been a debate, for example, regarding the number of deaf people in the UK who use BSL as their first or preferred language. Findings depend upon which deaf organisation you consult. Action on Hearing Loss (http://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/) quote 50,000 sign language users in the UK; the British Deaf Association (http://www.bda.org.uk/)

quote 70,000; yet a survey of GP patients in 2010 resulted in a figure of 100,000 sign language users in England alone (The National Archives, 2013). Unsurprisingly, the deaf community was shocked when barely one year later, statistics from the 2011 Census revealed that there were, in fact, only 22,000 sign language users; of these a mere 15,000 specifically named BSL as their first or preferred language (Office for National Statistics, 2013a).

One of the main reasons for these discrepancies may well be in the way the questions are formulated in large-scale surveys. For example, the Labour Force Survey (LFS) is the main national source of data on employment and unemployment. Respondents are asked if they have any long-term 'health problems or disabilities', and only those who reply in the affirmative are asked to identify their problems from a list (Harris & Thornton, 2005). However, many deaf people who identify with deaf culture do not consider themselves to be disabled, but rather a member of a socio-cultural linguistic community (Padden & Humphries, 1988; Ladd, 2003; Lane, 1992). They may choose not to tick the disabled box. Similarly, there are a number of possibilities for the resulting low figure within the Census of 2011. This was the first census to explore the number of BSL users in the UK. Deaf people may not have known that choosing BSL as a first language was an option. In addition, the census form was a relatively complex form that was English-based, therefore not fully appropriate or accessible for BSL users who have English as a second language. Also, many deaf people use both English and BSL. Some may have stated that English was their first language, but also use sign language to a greater or lesser extent in different situations, such as with other deaf people. They would not, therefore, have been counted as BSL users in this census (The Scottish Government, 2015).

 In the absence of precise figures, it is still evident from the research that deaf and hard of hearing people generally experience more unemployment, are often underemployed and have lower incomes than the hearing population (MacLeod-Gallinger, 1992; RNID, 2006; Winn, 2007; The Papworth Trust, 2014; The Scottish Government, 2015). Regardless of over twenty years of anti-discrimination legislation being in place, deaf people

still experience discrimination and barriers at work and face further difficulties in accessing support to help them find work. Examples include lack of promotion, isolation, underemployment, lack of interpreters, conflict relating to deaf culture, minimal or no socialisation with hearing co-workers and, above all, communication difficulties (Boyce, 2015; Kendall, 1999; RNID, 2006; Perkins-Dock et al., 2015; Watson, 2016).

In 2006, a survey of 870 deaf and hard of hearing people showed that 37% of the deaf respondents were unemployed and looking for work compared with 25% in the UK labour market (RNID, 2006). This unemployment trend is duplicated across the globe. For example, in Australia the deaf unemployment rate is 37.5% compared to 10.6% for non-deaf people (Winn, 2007) and in the United States the figure varies considerably, but appears to be nearer to 60% (Gallaudet University Library, 2014).

Recently, the unemployment and underemployment of deaf people has been highlighted across the European sector, as the current international economic crisis forces budgetary cuts and fewer opportunities for employment. The European Union of the Deaf (EUD) (2013) has emphasised the huge impact this is having on people with disabilities, and in particular deaf sign language users. Whilst there are limited data on deaf people:

> *… it is known that they, like other persons with disabilities, struggle in today's labour market. Statistics have shown that deaf people are likely to have poor education because they often acquire language later in their childhood. With their limited skills, they have harder time finding a job. In addition, the services they get, such as sign interpretation or vocational training, are getting cut and that creates more barriers for them* (EUD, 2013: non-paginated).

These are recurrent themes across the literatures surrounding deaf people and employment. However, it is useful to note that the majority of the research on deaf employment has tended to focus upon challenges *within* the workplace rather than on barriers to *obtaining* employment (See Harris & Thornton, 2005; Kyle et al., 1989; Punch, Hyde & Power, 2007; Foster, 1987). Whilst this rich source of data illustrates the discriminatory practice

many deaf employees face within the world of work, I have not explored these literatures in great depth, as exploring challenges within the workplace is beyond the scope of my study. However, it is useful to note that research by Kendall (1999) amongst others concluded that many deaf people who do find employment are nonetheless frustrated because of limited opportunities for professional development, underemployment, restricted career options, lack of promotion and lack of mobility. This 'career barrier' is well-documented both nationally and internationally (see Punch, Hyde & Power, 2007: 504).

In focussing on the barriers to gaining employment, recurrent surveys both in the UK and abroad highlight the fact that the majority of deaf people believe that their deafness had an impact on their ability to find work (Bradshaw, 2002; RNID, 2006; Winn, 2007; Boyce, 2014). Common negative factors were reported as influencing job opportunities. These include communication difficulties, employer attitude and expectation, discrimination, lack of deaf awareness, the interview process, difficulties in accessing support in Job Centres and myriad problems with the government Access to Work scheme. A research study carried out for the ESF SEQUAL project in 2004 found that primary issues for deaf people were the completion of application forms and the need for and problems with interpreting (or other) support at interview (The University of Bristol, 2015). They found that family members were often used to interpret, even though they may not actually be able to sign well enough to convey critical information. This illustrates both an employer and deaf candidate lack of awareness regarding the Access to Work scheme, despite it being a government scheme of ten years standing.

Finally, it is important to mention an ideological paper submitted at the Supporting Deaf People Online Conference in 2004 (Woolfe, 2004). Woolfe posed that there were three specific categories of deaf employment: deaf people working in the 'deaf-industry' (p2), deaf people having their own businesses and deaf people on long-term welfare benefits. Whilst his supposition was that these are distinct and deliberate choices for deaf people, it could equally be the case that there is no other choice for deaf people seeking employment. Employer (lack of) awareness, barriers in

accessing the application and interview process, inaccessibility of job-seeking information, prejudice, and a lack of support by government and local agencies could all conspire to make these three avenues the only ones available for deaf people. Investigating this became part of my research focus.

Employment and Deaf Graduates

If there are limited data on deaf people and employment, finding literature specifically regarding deaf *graduates* is even more difficult. As mentioned earlier, The Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) reports and Destination of Leavers of Higher Education (DLHE) surveys provide year-on-year statistics regarding UK graduates. It is possible to extract information about deaf graduates from these sources. However, this information can be scant, and, as with most of the literature regarding deaf people (see Harris & Thornton, 2005), it does not differentiate between those with mild hearing losses and BSL users. This is a critical point to note, as it skews the figures if one wants to explore the employment of profoundly deaf BSL users, for whom English is not a first language. Their level of employment and career opportunities may be quite different to those who only have a mild hearing loss; however, it is impossible to distinguish this fact. Nevertheless, these reports do provide a snapshot. For example, data regarding the first destination of deaf graduates in 2008/9 showed an increase in unemployment levels of over 100% in just two years [a rise from 6.4% in 2007 to 13.8% in 2009] (AGCAS, 2011:17). By the following year, 2009/10, the picture had improved a little, with only 10.0% of graduates with hearing difficulties believed to be unemployed. The most recent AGCAS report on the destinations of the 2011 graduates (2015) again shows more positive outcomes, with 6.8% of graduates with a hearing loss being unemployed, compared with 5.4% of non-disabled graduates. However, whilst this is the second lowest unemployment total of any specific group of disabled graduates, it still remains significantly higher than the non-deaf graduate workforce.

Whilst these statistics give us quantitative data, little has been written about the lived experiences of deaf graduates regarding their search for employment. Even less has been written about their acquisition of employability skills and the particular challenges they face in navigating the job-seeking process. Whilst studies have been undertaken relating to deaf student support whilst at university (See for example, Luker, 1995; Nottingham Trent University, 2001; Taylor, 2002; Barnes et al., 2007) and deaf students' approaches to study (Richardson et al., 2004), I could find no qualitative data regarding the university factors which enable deaf students to succeed in the world of work. Those studies that have been undertaken with graduates concentrate largely on (American) school leavers and college graduates rather than university graduates (Schroedel & Geyer, 2000; Winn, 2007; Appleman et al., 2012; Fichten et al., 2012), or on graduate workplace experiences (Foster, 1987; Punch et al., 2007). A notable exception is an unpublished study by Fleming & Hay (2006) which aimed to track the career destinations of deaf graduates from the University of Wolverhampton over a ten-year period. The first case study, of the class of 2000, was reported at the 2006 CELT Social Diversity and Difference seminar on employment. Whilst this study did report on the career destinations of ten graduates, all of whom were employed or self-employed five years after graduation, this was largely a survey to track career destinations, and as such it is difficult to draw any significant findings regarding the graduates' qualitative experiences.

This section has been necessarily brief as it is clear there is a paucity of existing research into the both the employment prospects and employability skills of deaf graduates. This research study seeks to at least partially address this lack of knowledge and as a consequence help to improve the career opportunities of deaf graduates. The next stage in this process is to investigate what the terms 'employability' and 'employability skills' are understood to mean, in both general and deaf-specific contexts.

Employability and Employability Skills

In trying to explore what it actually is that makes a person employable, it is first necessary to unpack what the concepts of 'employability' and 'employability skills' mean in the context of Higher Education. Employability is a multi-dimensional and contentious concept which is difficult to define, leading to a plethora of micro-interpretations (Little, 2001; Lees, 2002; Harvey, 2003). Indeed, in reading the literatures, it has become apparent that the word 'employability' is often interpreted to mean the same as 'employment'. Additionally, the term 'employability' is used carelessly and interchangeably with the term 'enterprise', which in turn is confused with 'entrepreneurship' (Sewell & Dacre Pool, 2010:278). This has led to an assortment of different definitions of employability and subsequently to the emergence of a wide range of employability models and frameworks which seek to sketch out the major attributes that make up this construct (See for example, Knight & Yorke, 2004; Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007; Confederation of British Industries (CBI) & Universities UK, 2009; Bridgstock, 2009; CBI/National Union of Students (NUS), 2011).

Many of these frameworks have been prompted by government policy and action. Whilst the current policy driver for employability 'could relate to the high graduate unemployment of the 1990s, the drive towards economic competition between developed nations and the desire for society to get an economic return from investment in Higher Education' (Morley, 2001:131), it is important to recognise that the employability/skills agenda is not new. In the UK, this was acknowledged as far back as the Robbins Report, which identified 'instruction in skills to play a part in the general division of labour' (Committee on Higher Education, 1963:6), and more recently, in the Dearing Report on Higher Education (Dearing, 1997), which emphasised the importance of HE in the enhancement of the UK' s global competitiveness (Tariq, et al., 2012):

> *Since the Dearing Report, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have been expected to place a much greater emphasis on the development of employability skills in their undergraduates* (ibid: 6).

In 1998, The Green Paper, The Learning Age (Cm 3790) (The Stationery Office, 1998) identified that in order to achieve a stable and sustainable growth, a well-educated, well-equipped and adaptable labour force was needed. More recently still, in 'Robbins Revisited', David Willetts MP, set out the need for universities to provide opportunities for their students to graduate with a broad range of competencies beyond those traditionally seen as being core to their degree (Willetts, 2013). Clearly government policy seeks to embed employability skills training within HEIs as 'part of a wider strategy to extend the skills base in the UK' (Coopers & Lybrand, 1998 cited in Lees, 2002: 23). This policy direction has been intensified by economic, political and environmental pressures that have placed the issue of graduate employability centre stage. What has resulted is 'a need to ensure that graduates leave university ready and able to contribute to future economic growth through the provision of knowledge, skills and creativity in new business environments' (Pegg et al., 2012: 64). This employability agenda is consistently emphasised within government policy:

> *Embedding employability into the core of Higher Education will continue to be a key priority of Government, universities and colleges, and employers. This will bring both significant private and public benefit, demonstrating Higher Education's broader role in contributing to economic growth as well as its vital role in social and cultural development* (HEFCE, 2011:5).

It is useful at this point to explore what employability is taken to mean. One of the most popular definitions of employability appears to be that of Knight & Yorke (2004) in their seminal work on *Learning, Curriculum and Employability In Higher Education*. This oft-cited definition (see for example, Pedagogy for Employability Group, 2006; Pegg et al., 2012; Hinchcliffe & Jolly, 2011; Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007) has been adapted and adopted by the UK's Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team (ESECT). This definition continues to be the most widely used in the sector (Pegg et al., 2012). It describes employability as:

> *…a set of achievements – skills, knowledge, understandings and personal attributes that make graduates more likely to gain*

employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which
benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy
(The Pedagogy for Employability Group, 2006:3).

That this definition is adopted by ESECT is significant. In 2002, the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE) sponsored national work to raise awareness of what the Higher Education sector might do to enhance student employability (Knight & Yorke, 2004). HEFCE funded ESECT via the Higher Education Academy (HEA) to publish the Learning and Employability Series 1 and 2; a total of 10 publications, all intended to help HEIs engage with the employability agenda. It is in some part due to these publications that we can see the dissemination of this definition, and subsequently, different conceptualisations and models of employability*.*

However, one should add a word of caution about wholeheartedly adopting the ESECT definition. As Yorke (2006) points out, this definition is still problematic; there is no certainty that the range of desirable characteristics will convert employability into employment, and the gaining of a 'graduate job' should not be conflated with success in that job, especially as the choice of occupation is, in the present economic crisis, likely to be constrained. Others (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007; Harvey, 2003; Lees, 2002) have also agreed that graduates may have to accept that their first choice of post may not be a 'graduate post' or that they may have to change jobs and career repeatedly due to prevailing socio-economic variables. What actually constitutes a 'graduate job' is also not clear (Dacre Pool & Qualter, 2013; Knight & Yorke, 2004).

It is not then surprising that discussion about what actually constitutes 'employability *skills'* is also at the forefront of most of the literature relating to employability. That the terms employed within this discourse are nebulous and often used interchangeably is indicative of the confusion surrounding this subject:

What results are adjectives such as 'generic', 'core', 'key', 'enabling',
'transferable' and 'professional' being used in tandem with nouns
such as 'attributes', 'skills', 'capabilities' or 'competencies' (Green,
Hammer & Star, 2009: 19).

It is clear that policy writers are using these terms to mean different things. The official government approach to graduate employability has been skills-led, from the outset. The Dearing Report (Dearing, 1997) focused on the 'key skills' (p 64) of communication, numeracy, IT and learning how to learn. Whilst other definitions of employability skills appear to apply to the generic skills needed to undertake any kind of work (UKCES, 2009), Greatbatch and Lewis (2007) offer the following definition:

> *... transferable skills independent of the occupational sectors and organisations in which individuals work, and which contribute to an individual's overall employability by enhancing their capacity to adapt, learn and work independently. Put simply, generic employability skills are those that apply across a variety of jobs, organisations and sectors* (Greatbatch & Lewis, 2007:13).

Yet employers seem to recognise how unclear and ill-defined some of these terms are:

> *Everyone talks about transferable skills and nobody knows what it means* (Hinchliffe & Jolly 2011: 563).

Lists of employability skills abound; Knight & Yorke (2004) compiled a list of 39 skills categorised into 'personal qualities', 'core skills' and 'process skills' (p 27-28). The CBI (2011) created a skills list from the viewpoint of employers which includes, amongst others, business and customer awareness, problem solving, communication and literacy, all underpinned by a 'positive attitude: a can-do approach' (p34). Hinchliffe & Jolly (2011) in their research of employers' expectations, formulated a total of 47 statements incorporating employability skills, competencies, attributes and personal qualities. Employer expectation of 'graduateness' makes for interesting reading, as it does illustrate that different employers prioritise different skills. However, the research makes it abundantly clear that employability, in any context, is not simply about lists or categories of skills (Pegg et al., 2012; Hinchliffe & Jolly, 2011), a complexity which is exacerbated when considering employability for marginalised groups.

Employability Models

Clearly, there is no 'one size fits all' solution. A closer look at some of the current models designed to deliver employability skills can illuminate the different conceptualisations. One of the earliest and perhaps most influential models was the DOTS model. Career(s) education was defined by Watts as consisting of 'planned experiences designed to facilitate the development of:

Decision learning – decision-making skills.

Opportunity awareness – knowing what work opportunities exist and what their requirements are.

Transition learning – including job-search and self-presentation skills.

Self awareness – in terms of interests, abilities, values, etc.' (Watts, 2006: 9-10).

Since this time, both careers education and guidance have drawn much of their rationale from DOTS analysis and the model has influenced and informed numerous subsequent models and frameworks of employability (Law, 1996; Hillage & Pollard,1998; AGCAS, 2005; Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007). Whilst the 'elegant simplicity' (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007:282) of this model is recognised as one of its strengths this is also seen to be one of its major failings. Although the DOTS model advocates careers education and careers guidance as enabling choice (Law, 1999), allowing the individual to organise their own career development learning into a practicable framework, other factors are not considered. Critics believe that the model is over-reliant on a mechanistic matching of person and environment (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007) and that it does not acknowledge the complexity of contemporary career planning. They advocate for more progressive career learning which enables choice and change of mind (Law, 1999). However, Law (1999) argued that it was not necessary to replace DOTS, but to extend it into a new-DOTS re-conceptualisation termed 'career-learning space' (p51). McCash (2006), on the other hand, argued that 'the persistent and hegemonic status of the DOTS model has impeded the adoption of more innovative theories and more creative frameworks' (p432). He believed that whilst the model could be adapted in order to overcome some of its limitations, it would be better to start again from first

principle. Dacre Pool & Sewell (2007) did just this. Whilst placing value on the DOTS model, they recognised its shortcomings, in particular that the model did not extend beyond careers education to the broader concept of employability (p282). It was for this reason that they redefined employability as:

> *… having a set of skills, knowledge, understanding and personal attributes that make a person more likely to choose, secure and retain occupations in which they can be satisfied and successful (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007:280).*

This definition became the starting point for a new theoretical and practical framework for employability called the Key to Employability' model (ibid) described below.

Since DOTS, two of the most familiar models of employability in the sector are the USEM model (Yorke & Knight, 2004) and the 'Key to Employability' CareerEDGE model (Dacre-Pool & Sewell, 2007). The USEM model of employability (Yorke & Knight, 2004), is probably the most well-known and respected model in this field (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007). USEM is an acronym; Understanding (of disciplinary material and 'how the world works'), Skilful practices (discipline related or generic), Efficacy beliefs (personal qualities and attributes), and Metacognition (including reflection and self-regulation). The authors attest that it was 'an attempt to put thinking about employability on a more scientific basis' (Pegg et al., 2006:23). It recommended that academics think about these four components and to what extent they were evident or being developed within the curriculum. This was the first model to highlight reflection and self-efficacy, which became hallmarks of later models. The major criticism of this model was that whilst scientific and scholarly, it did little to explain to students and parents exactly what is meant by employability (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007). Certainly there is little evidence of it being used widely within HEIs at the moment (Pegg et al., 2012).

The CareerEDGE model emerged in 2007 and was visualised as 'The Key to Employability' model. It was said to be 'a practical model of

employability' providing a 'clear, visual answer to the simple question of what employability is' (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007: pp5-6). It was designed to be student-friendly and to be a useful tool for lecturers, personal tutors, careers advisors and any other practitioners involved in employability activities (ibid). The Key to Employment model is essentially a four-tier framework. The mnemonic CareerEDGE represents the lower tier of the model; <u>Career</u> development and learning, <u>E</u>xperience of work and life, <u>D</u>egree subject knowledge, understanding and skills, <u>G</u>eneric skills and <u>E</u>motional intelligence. The authors argue that if students are provided with access to develop all of these skills, they can reflect on and evaluate their experiences, which in turn will give them self-efficacy, self-esteem and self-confidence, which are the crucial links (the key) to employability.

The CareerEDGE Model of Employability (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007)
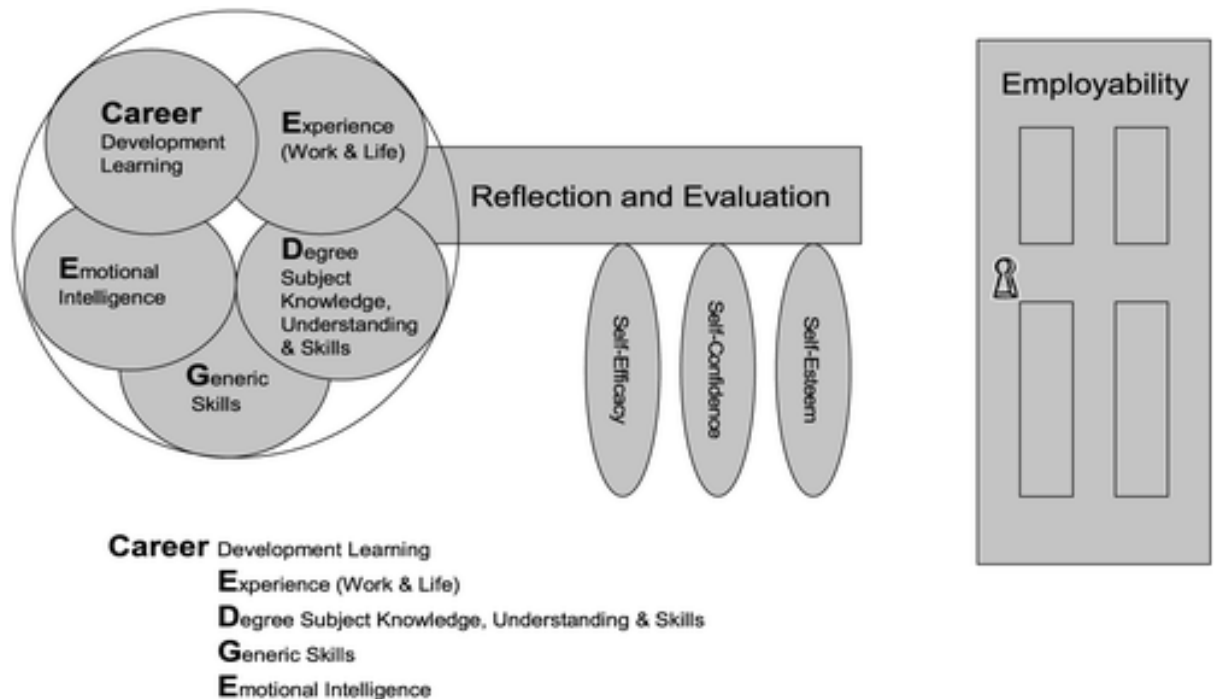
Figure 1: A metaphorical model of employability (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007:6)

Both the USEM and CareerEDGE models advance a deep learning and a broad reflective student experience as critical for employment. This reflects a movement away from the skills-led and subject-knowledge base of previous models. It is important to re-emphasise at this point that this thesis is not an evaluation of the various models of employability. However, during the data collection and analysis phases of this research, it became clear that the issues being raised by the respondents correlated very closely with the lower tier of the CareerEDGE model, as represented by the commonly used mnemonic described above. Therefore, I decided to use these elements of CareerEDGE (but not the model itself) as a framework for organising and analysing the data gathered from deaf undergraduates. The data volunteered by my respondents did not correspond with the upper tiers of the CareerEDGE model. Clearly, in asking questions during the interview stage, I engaged the students in a reflection and evaluation exercise, but this was only as a result of being asked about their experiences, rather than

a process they had previously engaged in whilst at the university and thought to disclose.

Emotional Intelligence

Arguably, one of the strengths of the CareerEDGE model lies in its emphasis on emotional intelligence (EI) and the necessity for students to reflect on and evaluate their learning experiences in the context of employability. The fact that EI is explicitly included in this model is unusual, as emotional intelligence is not often discussed in the context of graduate employability:

> *An area that has been excluded from the discussion relates to the affective domain. In the employability discourse, the world of work is represented in a highly sanitised and rational way. Graduates are hardly thought to require emotional intelligence, political skills or self-care in the face of occupational stress* (Morley, 2001, p. 135).

However, whilst EI is rarely mentioned explicitly, it is often alluded to. Many theories mention the importance of 'personal qualities'. For example, in a review of employability literature, Tariq et al. (2012), proposed that there were 'a variety of factors, which could be regarded as being related to EI, that are important in employability. These include basic social skills, self-motivation, a positive attitude to work, customer service skills and team-working ability' (Tariq et al., 2012:12). Other examples of work-related outcomes in relation to a person's EI ability include enhanced work performance, negotiation skills and effective leadership (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007), plus influencing skills and leadership skills (Greatbatch & Lewis 2007). In Hinchliffe & Jolly's (2011) study into employer expectations of graduate employability, 'interpersonal skills come out as far ahead of any other skill' (p572). This is another area of great interest within my own study, as there is very little research, if any, on EI and deaf students. Just how easy is it for BSL users to acquire some of these attributes when their learning is mediated by a third party, and their opportunity for one-to-one discourse is restricted?

Increasingly, the literature suggests that graduate employment is more than just getting a job (Harvey, 2003; Lees, 2002). Dacre Pool & Sewell (2007) believe self-evaluation is likely to be the most useful way to measure graduate employability, and advocate emotional intelligence and self-efficacy as having direct impact upon graduate employability. However, it is not only self-evaluation, but reflection of learning and the ability to articulate these experiences to meet the needs of the employer and the organisation that is important. Brown and Hesketh (2004) call this 'a narrative of employability' (p145):

> *It is vital that students recognise what they have been learning. There is quite a lot of evidence that they are often not prepared to translate their experience of 'doing a degree' into the language of achievements valued by employers* (Knight, et al., 2003:5).

This is of particular importance when considering the deaf graduate population, given that they already have limited literacy skills and access to the language of employability (See Barnes & Bradley, 2013). This is discussed in more detail in chapter 6.

Graduate Identity

Hinchliffe & Jolly (2011) take these models further and introduce an arguably more sophisticated concept of graduate identity. They suggest that we should be interested in defining the graduate experience against values, intellectual rigour, performance and engagement. They introduce this four-stranded concept of graduate identity as a way of deepening our understanding of graduate employability. Graduate identity, they argue, can be seen 'as the cultural capital acquired prior to entering an organisation' (p581). This cultural capital includes such things as personal ethics, social values and diversity awareness, and includes the graduates' ability to think critically, communicate information effectively and reflect on all aspects of their work. Finally, they advocate engagement in communities of practice, be it work placement, volunteering or other sustained situated learning; a familiar refrain throughout most of the employability literature (Dearing, 1997; Knight & Yorke, 2002; Holmes, 2001; Knight & Yorke, 2004; Harvey,

2003; Lees, 2002). Employers clearly expect graduates to have some kind of work experience. In a research study of 2012, more than half of employers commented that it was either 'not very likely' or 'not at all likely' that a graduate who had no previous work experience would be made a job offer (HighFliers, 2012). Yet, gaining a work placement might be problematic for deaf students, using BSL as a first language, competing with the hearing undergraduate population. This also became a central theme to my study, and will be explored in a subsequent chapter.

Summary

Through a scoping of the literatures surrounding employability, there is common agreement that training for employability is essential, both in terms of general education and more specifically for future employment (Lees, 2002). It is clear that employability is about developing a range of attributes and abilities, not just job-seeking skills. It grows out of a holistic, and joined–up approach to teaching and learning and is fed by the need for universities to demonstrate the usefulness of a degree, in the current fee-paying system. To this end, universities are now rapidly developing an array of approaches for explicitly enhancing the employability of their students (Harvey, 2003). This can be seen in the explosion of employability models, frameworks and case studies available to HEIs, with their emphasis on pedagogy for employment and the embedding of employability into the entire HE curriculum. A swift glance at the Higher Education Academy literature tells its own story; *Defining and developing your approach to employability* (Cole & Tibby, 2013); *Pedagogy for employability* (Pegg et al., 2012); *Pedagogy for employability* (The Pedagogy for Employability Group, 2006); *Embedding employability in to the curriculum* (Yorke & Knight, 2006) to name but a few.

Whilst it is not the aim of this thesis to explore the practical implementation of these frameworks, it is clear that government policy is affecting how HEIs support and enhance employability for their undergraduates. The models and frameworks explored within this work set clear guidelines to ensure that learning, teaching, work placement and assessment activities engage

students and enable them to develop into 'creative, confident, articulate graduates' (Pegg et al., 2012: 45), which in turn greatly enhances their employability. However, not one of these frameworks mentions how to support disabled students in this process. Nothing has been written about the difficulties disabled students (and, more particularly, deaf students) may face in accessing information about employability, finding work placement opportunities or articulating their learning experience into a language that employers require and expect. Despite the rhetoric of the Equality Act (2010) legislation, and the introduction of employability statements and Higher Education Achievement Report [HEAR] initiatives, there is little evidence of consideration of the diverse student population. This is further exemplified by the White Paper; Higher Education: Students at the Heart of the System (BIS, 2011). In this 80 page policy document, designed to 'deliver a more responsive Higher Education sector', disabled students are mentioned specifically in only three paragraphs (1.25, 1.26, 3.10). It is critical that deaf and disabled students are considered by policy makers and those affecting the employability agenda at a local level.

University Employability Policies

The final section of this chapter will briefly explore university policies on employability, in order to explore the experiences of deaf graduates in terms of their future employment. It is possible to identify the university employability strategy as being guided by national initiatives and government policy.

At UCLan this priority has been - and continues to be - embodied in a raft of employability policies and initiatives, which ultimately seek to embed employability skills across the university curriculum. I have chosen to explore the policies which were in place whilst the graduates were at university, and the policies which were in place at the time of writing this thesis. In 2005, the University successfully bid for funding to create a £4.5 million Centre of Employability through the Humanities (CETH). The overall purpose of CETH was to develop employability in UCLan undergraduate students in non-vocational Humanities subjects (specifically students of

History, English, Creative Writing, Linguistics, American Studies and Film and Media):

> *CETH will provide outstanding facilities and innovate learning opportunities for Humanities students, ensuring that our graduates are enterprising, entrepreneurial and employable* (CETH, 2007).

CETH developed structured and supported 'learning from work' opportunities through Realistic Work Experiences (RWE), Live Student Projects and CETH-enhanced modules in the museums and heritage industry, schools and volunteering. These activities offered students the opportunity to engage with employers and the local community and to enhance their employability skills in the specific career of their degree choice.

Initially, the key focus and brief of the CETH was clearly about work with the Humanities – which necessarily made this initiative restrictive and exclusive for those outside of the Humanities area (including the deaf graduates in this study). However, after two years CETH extended their work beyond Humanities to a wider range of students in different disciplines across the university, especially in the performing arts. However, it has been acknowledged that student uptake was not as high as CETH had hoped it would be (CETH, 2007). It should be noted that the deaf graduates in my study did not mention CETH or any of the initiatives on offer. One of the reasons for the general lack of student numbers on the CETH modules was thought to be the fact that the modules sat outside the students' school structure and regular curriculum. These modules were ultimately deemed to present a risk to students who might struggle with new learning experiences, which might in turn affect their degree classification. Low uptake by Humanities students was also seen to reflect 'the generally minimal emphasis on enterprise in humanities programmes' (CETH, 2007:13).

CETH was funded for a total of 5 years, with the aim of becoming fully integrated into the Department of Humanities after funding ceased. However, the Department of Humanities no longer existed after 2007 and CETH itself was disbanded in 2010. Whilst CETH was no longer a presence

after this time, it did leave a legacy of key initiatives in terms of UCLan's employability agenda. Firstly, it helped to formulate UCLan's (2007) Employability and Enterprise Strategy and embed employability within subsequent Medium Term Strategies (CETH, 2007). CETH also developed the (Humanities) Employability Framework which was 'designed to offer staff and students an easier and more flexible way to recognise and enhance employability skills both within the subject curriculum and in extra curricula learning' (CETH, 2007:12). This Humanities Employability Framework was later adopted as UCLan's Employability Framework (UEF). However, it is not possible to evaluate how extensively this framework was utilised across the university. Even though the university's employability strategy was seemingly ubiquitous and I had a senior role as Academic Lead within the university, I had not heard of this framework until I began conducting this research. In retrospect this suggests that ways of disseminating employability strategies do not always take into account the visibility of them to those who need to/are supposed to know. At the time of writing, in 2015, the website hosting the tools and further research into employability was no longer live, suggesting a change of direction.

Whilst CETH itself no longer existed, activities developed in CETH fostered the development of various other employability initiatives such as the development of UCLan's Futures Awards offered by UCLan's Careers Service. From September 2009, a structured and accredited programme of modules and mini modules was available to students - recognising learning associated with extra-curricular and off-campus activities. Students could also choose from a range of on-line and classroom-based modules such as Planning Your Career and Personal Development and build up credit for Bronze, Silver and Gold Awards. These modules were designed to incorporate the lower tier of Dacre Pool and Sewell's (2007) CareerEDGE – Key to Employability model (See page 38) and covered themes including Career Development Learning, Life and Work Experience, Degree Subject Knowledge, Understanding and Skills, Generic Skills and Emotional Intelligence (I also adopted these themes for my analysis of interview data.) Whilst almost 1,000 students benefited from the programme in the first two years (Bird, 2010), these awards ceased to be offered by 2012.

At the time of researching this study (2012 to 2015), the most recent employability policies are encapsulated in the UCLan's Corporate Plan: Implementing the Strategy for a World-Class Modern University (2013-17) [last updated for 2013-14] and UCLan's Annual Plan: Implementing the Strategy for a World-Class Modern University (2014-2015). The Corporate Plan (2013-17) is the longer-term five-year plan; the Annual Plan (2014-15) has been drawn from this and mirrors the same strategy to 'innovate and invest to ensure that we achieve a sector leading reputation as a university for graduate employability' (p41). In order to do this, the Corporate Plan states that UCLan 'will further embed employability in the curriculum' (p41). This employability theme was a central feature of the then (2012) newly launched UCLan Advantage rhetoric and discourse. (UCLan Advantage was the new brand; the package of goods and services used as a marketing tool in the face of increasing student fees). According to the Corporate Plan (2013-2017) excellent progress was reported as employability and employability skills were now embedded in all courses and available to all students. The guarantee of a structured work experience with an employer was being implemented through a renewed and focussed approach to our relationships with employers. A new service, Academic Development and Employability, had been created bringing together the Futures (careers) service, the Placement Unit and the Learning Development Unit. The Plan outlined the enhanced supply chain for structured work placements. Students' employment and skills were being developed via the 'pebble-pad' platform and the 'e-portfolio'. Finally, enhanced employment prospects were being gained from extra-curricular activities as recorded in each student's HEAR (Corporate Plan, 2013-2017: 42). All these initiatives were being supported by an army of newly-recruited personal advisers.

Only one year later the Annual Plan (2014-2015) shows a different picture. The overall strategy is the same but many of the previous innovations and policy initiatives have completely disappeared. UClan Advantage as a brand and as a concept has vanished. So too have the newly created Academic Development and Employability service, Futures (as a branded career service), the Learning Development Unit and the concept of a structured

work placement. In its place is 'a change in our pedagogical approach' (p20). Now the focus is on embedding experiential learning. The structured work placement has been replaced with a wider, perhaps more realistic, work experience opportunity – to incorporate 'placements, live projects, simulations and learning from students' own part-time working experiences'(p20). The major priority is now to improve engagement with employers. Interestingly, the university now recognises its own role as an employer in providing work experience opportunities for both graduates and undergraduates. This is illustrated, for example, by the University Research Intern Scheme and the Graduate Intern Programme.

It is not surprising that there is not a standard response to employability across the university. Module leaders and curriculum designers juggle their own module and course content, the time scales imposed by semester and central timetabling, their judgement of what constitutes a subject specialist curriculum, the expectations of professional bodies, their belief in academic freedom and so forth and thus interpret both the government policy and management vision in different ways. They might not believe that teaching employability skills is their responsibility, might find no space for work placement modules within their curriculum, or believe that Higher Education is not a suitable grounding place for vocational outcomes. The outcome is perhaps a lack of explicit key employability skills within their curricula, and an absence of an employability strategy within their degree programmes. Lipsky (1980) describes this as 'street-level bureaucracy': those who interact directly with citizens in the course of their job and have substantial discretion in the execution of their work (Knight & Trowler, 2001:4). In short, lecturers and programme leaders 'may ignore the innovation, reconstruct it, selectively apply aspects of it or just refuse to comply' (ibid:5).

In conclusion, whilst there have been numerous employability initiatives and examples of good practice developed across the university and incorporated into university strategy documents, the data collected from my interviewees and an exploration of current employability strategies suggest that employability has still not been systematically embedded into all curricula across the university.

However, as a post-script, it is interesting and somewhat timely to note that just as this research project was reaching its conclusion, the university - in Oct 2015 - established a working group under the banner 'Embedding Employability and Enterprise into the Curriculum'. The remit of this group was to set out a clear framework for enhancing undergraduate employability skills through the implementation of a revised and modified CareerEDGE model, with planned introduction as an online resource from 2017. It appears appropriate and fitting that the model which sparked my interest at the very beginning of my research journey, should now once again become the focus of university employability strategy.

Chapter 3. Methodology and Methods: Researching Deaf Graduates:

Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology and methods used in my research. It discusses the choices that I made regarding methodological approaches and a rationale for my research design. It begins with a discussion of a qualitative approach, followed by further consideration of the theoretical perspectives underpinning the research. I then situate myself within the research, exploring my own role in the development of the research design, research questions and data collection. Using reflexive subjectivity, I discuss how my personal experiences have influenced the research and debate notions of 'Insider/Outsider' research and the ethics of undertaking disability research. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations of this study.

A Qualitative Approach

The overall approach to this research has been influenced by a number of factors: a social construction epistemology and framework, my personal and professional experiences, and reflection upon the qualitative methods used by other deaf and hearing researchers who have previously undertaken research within the deaf community (for example: Preisler et al., 2005; Ohna 2004; Skelton and Valentine, 2003a; Atherton et al., 2001; Foster, 1996; Harris, 1995; Higgins 1980, Snell, 2015; Eichmann, 2008).

From the outset, I knew that I wanted to undertake a qualitative enquiry. Cronbach (1975) claims that 'statistical research is not able to take full account of the many interaction effects that take place in social settings [….] Qualitative inquiry accepts the complex and dynamic quality of the social world' (cited in Hoepfl, 1997:67). As my research aimed to investigate deaf graduates' perceptions regarding their acquisition of employability skills, their transition into the world of work and the challenges they faced in gaining employment, it necessarily had to be seen

within the context of the interpretative rather than normative paradigm. Of key importance to my research study is 'the shared social reality constructed through language' (Fox, Martin & Green, 2007: 67). This type of research requires in-depth details and narratives about individual experiences; qualitative methods which generate more than just statistics. This requirement drove my choice of a qualitative research method and, in particular, the use of interviews.

Theoretical Perspectives Underpinning the Research

This research project was designed as a small-scale study using an interpretative approach. The study is largely inductive in nature, is influenced by a constructionist ontology and draws upon a social constructionism epistemology. Ontology is concerned with our beliefs about reality and the nature of existence, which in social science, where we are examining people's lives and experiences, suggests that reality is constructed through social interactions:

> *...all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context (Crotty 1998: 42).*

In short, 'truth and meaning do not exist in some external world, but are created by the subject's interactions with the world' (Gray, 2009: 138). People engage with the world in a myriad of ways and therefore construct their reality and knowledge in different ways. So, how people make sense of their experiences of employability will vary depending upon their worldview, background, socio-economic status, hearing ability and so forth.

Epistemology is our theory of knowledge and how we can know the world: 'how do we know what we know?' (Holcomb, 2010:471). Epistemologically, I have also aligned myself with constructionism, which suggests that:

> *...the best way to understand the world is to examine how*
> *people see and define it. Constructionists believe that the*
> *social world is actively constructed through interactions and*
> *that symbols, like language, are key to interacting. The goal*
> *of research is to understand how people construct and*
> *make sense of others and of the world* (Kaloof et al. 2008:
> 195).

Following Snell (2013), my interpretation of these perspectives is that knowledge and reality are socially constructed; 'we acquire knowledge - and therefore construct our reality - through personal experiences, our use of language, and our interactions with others' (p123). How we construct our reality and extend our knowledge depends on the interactions - both formal and informal – that we have with others. Furthermore, the knowledge we acquire subsequently impacts upon how we engage with others, and in turn this affects the construction and transmission of knowledge to other people or communities (ibid). Therefore, in order to understand the world in which we live, we need to look at how others themselves experience it. For myself, in this research study, this meant that I needed to explore, for example, how social networks, communication barriers, hearing attitudes to deafness and institutional support had shaped the views and subsequent actions of the deaf graduates I interviewed.

This qualitative enquiry has also to be seen within the socially constructed reality of a cultural minority group bounded by a common language and shared experiences. For this reason, an exploration of Deaf epistemology (See Paul & Moores, 2010) provides a theoretical framework for this research:

> *Deaf epistemology is an opportunity for people to understand clearly*
> *Deaf ways of being in the world, of conceiving that world and their*
> *own place within it, both in actuality and in potentiality* (Ladd, 2003:
> 81).

This perspective is based on the lived experiences of deaf people, who form a strong and vibrant deaf community, use sign language and have learned a

deaf culture. It is the knowledge which emanates from this group that informs their reality. Deaf epistemology relies heavily on personal testimonies, personal experiences and personal accounts to document this knowledge (Holcomb, 2010:471; Miller, 2010). It is a context which eschews the practice of describing deafness and deaf people from the framework of a typically hearing model, which in turn is negative or inappropriate because of the focus on or assumptions of deficiencies or deviations from the norm (Paul & Moores, 2010). Rather, it places deaf people centre-stage and emphasises the mores, beliefs and experiences of people who are members of a sociological or cultural-linguistic group. It is only by asking and listening to deaf people that we can fully begin to understand their worldview.

In addition to Deaf epistemology, this research also draws upon a number of additional theoretical perspectives or paradigms. For example, the community being investigated is a marginalised community, with arguably, power-differentials at play. In this respect, it has much in common with feminist, emancipatory and cultural theories. Holcomb (2010) argues that in order to address the issue of Deaf epistemologies, 'it might be helpful to focus on the epistemologies of various minority, oppressed or disenfranchised communities such as feminist, African American/Black and queer/gay epistemologies' (p471).

Furthermore, it can be argued that research with deaf people is framed within disability studies. Whilst many within the deaf community would reject the notion of being disabled, emphasising instead their linguistic minority group status (Skelton & Valentine, 2003a), some of the issues relating to barriers, prejudice, stigma and exclusion remain similar. Research with disabled people also traverses emancipatory paradigms (Stone & Priestley, 1996) and is inexorably linked with reflexivity (McCabe & Holmes, 2009). In the latter study, McCabe and Holmes (2009) consider reflexivity as a concept of qualitative validity. They also demonstrate its usefulness in the context of disability studies:

> *in relation to disability studies, emancipatory research can help*
> *individuals with disabilities to become actively involved in*

defining the world in which they live, rather than having a

definition imposed upon them (p1521).

This is important for deaf people, who have largely been ignored or 'relegated to the margins' (Davis, 1997: xii) of discourses about their lives. This concept of a *'counter-narrative'* (Ladd, 2003: 80) will be explored in later chapters when discussing representations of the 'deaf voice'.

Finally, Mertens (2010) offers another theory which has resonance with my research; that of social justice. She discusses the transformative paradigm: 'a framework of belief systems that directly engages members of culturally diverse groups with a focus on increased social justice' (p470). Mertens (2010) contends that this paradigm interrogates 'unearned privileges on the basis of such dimensions as gender, race and ethnicity, disability, socio-economic status, age, religion or sexual orientation' (p3). As such it is an appropriate framework for research with deaf people. Perhaps, more importantly, Mertens (2010) argues the necessity of understanding the historical legacy of power differentials in the world of deafness and deaf people's experiences of oppression at the hands of some hearing people who saw them as less than hearing (ibid). This is a recurring theme throughout my research, and raises questions regarding ethics and who can and should conduct research with marginalised groups, or 'Others' (Ladd, 2003:83) and whether or not we can capture their reality in an ethical manner.

Positioning Myself: Reflexivity and Ethics

There are many issues which relate specifically to research undertaken with members of marginalised groups. Many of these issues, which concern power, validity and communication, are, in relation to research methods, essentially also ethical dilemmas and ethical choices. For this reason, situating myself within this research (reflexive subjectivity) is fundamental:

We need to recognise our own implication in the production of data
and must thus begin to include ourselves (our own practices and their

social and historic basis) in our analyses of the situations we study
(Ladd, 2003:273).

It is generally accepted that the starting point of reflexivity is 'being aware of the personal, social and cultural contexts within which we live and work, and realising that these aspects of our lives impact on our interpretation of the world' (Etherington, 2004:19). As Hsiung (2008) explains:

Reflexivity is a process that challenges the researcher to explicitly examine how his or her research agenda and assumptions, subject location(s), personal beliefs and emotions enter into their research (p212).

In practical terms, this meant a self-examination, not only of my personal experiences but of what is termed 'conceptual baggage' (Kirby & McKenna, 1989; Day, 2012). This entailed a careful consideration of my role in the development of research design, research questions, data collection, analysis of data and knowledge production as well as the ways my own assumptions and behaviour may be impacting the inquiry. By turning the investigative lens away from others and towards myself (Hsiung, 2008) it is possible to examine and reveal my subjectivities; how my self-location, position, personal experience, habitus, interests and research practices influenced all stages of the research process.

From the outset this reflexivity was inextricably linked with issues of ethics. The notion of 'Insider/Outsider' research (see Mercer, 2007; Griffith, 1998; Zinn, 1979) was of particular importance. Essentially, the 'Insider/Outsider' debate 'circles around the researcher's relation to those she studies' (Griffith, 1998: 362).The concept is that the researcher's biography gives her a lived familiarity with the group being researched (for example, on grounds of gender, race, sexual orientation and/or disability) which in turn gives her access to a more tacit and therefore a 'different knowledge' (Merton, 1972:33) to inform her research than that available to the 'Outsider'. The question can then be asked whether the biography of the researcher privileges or disqualifies their knowledge claims (Griffith, 1998).

Of particular significance to my research is whether an 'Outsider' could or should undertake research with members of marginalised or differently privileged groups. For example, I am a non-disabled researcher. Arguably, this creates a power differential:

> It is vital to recognize that disabled people as a group are in an oppressed position and that research is conducted within a wider context of oppressive social relations built upon the privilege and power of non-disabled people (Stone & Priestley, 1996:7).

In many ways this reflects the issues of power expressed in feminist methodologies, critical race theory and queer theory, for example, which are concerned with resisting oppression and promoting social justice (Somekh & Lewin, 2011):

> Debates on reflexivity, influenced by feminist ideas on unequal power relations, and on multiple axes of oppression and disadvantage, are crucial (Burns & Chantler, 2011: 72).

One key theoretical development in feminist research is standpoint theory. This suggests that marginalised people have different perspectives and accounts based on their experiences and struggles and are therefore best placed to undertake the research themselves, thereby privileging voices that have traditionally been silenced (ibid):

> In exploring the social relations of the research process, researchers need to interrogate their own relationship to the research context and to research participants. In part, this leads to questions about identity and the rights of researchers to be involved in certain areas of research (Truman, Mertens and Humphries, 2000: 27).

Conducting Disability and Deaf Research

As a non-disabled researcher undertaking research within the disability sector, I am both cognisant of the arguments and aware of the need to make my position transparent. Questions are often raised about the appropriateness of non-disabled researchers undertaking research in the

disability field (Johnstone, 2001; Kitchen, 2000; Branfield, 1998; Duckett, 1998). Branfield (1998) has suggested that although non-disabled researchers can have positive attitudes towards disabled people, they do not have a disability, therefore they cannot fully understand the disabled person's perspective. Branfield (ibid) further argues that this means non-disabled researchers cannot accurately understand or represent the veracity of disability.

Whilst undertaking disability research, a non-disabled researcher may take on the role of 'Outsider' which reflects the historical oppression that many disabled people have experienced at the hands of non-disabled people (Drake, 1997). In my case, this notion of non-disabled 'Outsider' is further complicated by my position as a hearing researcher interviewing deaf people, potentially positioning myself as an 'oppressor'. That the deaf community is wary of research undertaken by hearing researchers (Harris, 1995) is perhaps understandable. It has been argued that virtually all discourses about deaf people have been conceived, controlled and written by people who were not themselves deaf (Ladd, 2003), thus raising concerns of validity, ethnocentricity, intercommunity power relations and oppression. Others have discussed the perception of unnecessary intrusion into their (deaf) lives when deaf researchers might equally, and arguably, be better placed to undertake the research (Atherton et al., 2001).

Similarly, Temple and Young (2004) discuss who is best able to represent the deaf community with regards to researchers and translators. They argue that hearing people taking on researcher/translator roles are:

> *re-inforcing long-standing and dominant inter-community power-relations – namely, that hearing society 'does' things to Deaf society (in this case research) and crucially that it is hearing culture that negotiates and filters the meaning of Deaf people's lives* (Temple & Young, 2004: 169).

This is a theme I shall return to later, when discussing translation dilemmas. Whilst it is clear on the one hand, that I am an 'Other' and that it is important that I recognise my hearing status in the research process, I also take heart from Ladd's seminal (2003) work, in which he discusses the

role of hearing allies and CODAs (Children of Deaf Adults) within the deaf community. He believes that hearing allies, hearing parents of deaf children, hearing sign language learners and CODAs are creating four new discourse domains within the deaf community, and constitute 'the Third Culture' (p157). He believes that it possible for these hearing allies to have a powerful effect on wider public recognition and acceptance of deaf communities. It is here that I position myself with regards to my research.

My father is deaf and I was brought up as a native BSL user within the deaf community. This has greatly influenced both my social and professional lives. Whilst I can never fully experience what it is like to be deaf, it does give me a lived familiarity with the group being researched. My interest in researching the deaf community is born from the experiences I have lived and the knowledge I have gained whilst working professionally in the fields of deaf education and BSL and Deaf Studies.

In addition, as I work fractionally as an Adviser for Deaf Students within the university, I know all the graduates I am interviewing; as an academic delivering the BSL & Deaf Studies degree, I have taught some of them. One might say I have 'intimate' researcher knowledge (Mercer, 2007:4) as I am well known to all of the participants and very much involved with and have experience of the deaf community. Whilst this could potentially create a further power differential; that of lecturer/student, I do believe this intimate researcher knowledge facilitates the interviews and enables them to become more like 'conversations with a purpose' (Mason, 2002:67).

That I am a fluent BSL user is also a key factor in the interview process, as this resonates with what Bourdieu describes as 'habitus' (1997:72). For Bourdieu, the particular features of the habitus are formed via 'a process of inculcation which begins at birth' (Carrington & Luke, 1997). It is through the habitus that people come to know and understand the world, not in a conscious fashion, but in a taken-for-granted sense (Inghilleri, 2005). A person's habitus is acquired in part through their family, which structures their early social and educational experiences. These in turn are rooted within an individual's lived experiences and choices (Fenge, 2010). There are features of my own habitus, informed by my own personal experiences,

my family, previous professional roles (as a teacher of deaf children) which inform my practice, often on an unconscious, taken-for-granted level. Without doubt, some of this has influenced my research design and practice. A lifetime of living alongside the deaf community has made me aware of the unequal employment status of deaf people. For example, I witnessed the discrimination and humiliation my father suffered in his workplace. Rather than being treated as a co-director of the company, he went to work every day in overalls and spent all day manually rubbing down coaches, trucks and vans. No one spoke to him; neither was he afforded the perks, the business lunches, the financial rewards enjoyed by his co-directors. Eventually he lost his directorship, and simply continued doing the everyday jobs that he had always done. In fact, the hardships my father endured at work are what initially prompted me to become a teacher of the deaf. I wanted to try to enhance the education of deaf children, and subsequently improve their future prospects. This continued throughout my career, supporting deaf students in college, then developing a Deaf Studies degree, so others could continue in this field. Furthermore, my linguistic habitus, that of being a native (or near native) sign language user, also informed my decision to sign the interviews in BSL rather than use an interpreter. This will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

I am very much aware of the subjectivities that have informed my research, but believe that whilst this subjectivity could be potentially dangerous, and over-influence the direction of my research if unchecked, my personal experiences could also be 'an asset rather than a liability' (Watt, 2007: 94). I believe that my familiarity with the deaf community and with the respondents themselves, coupled with my sign language ability have led to a co-construction of knowledge based on a shared understanding of – and respect for - the language and cultural norms of the deaf world. This is illustrated, in some part, by the fact that some of my scheduled one hour interviews turned into ninety minutes, as the interviewees seemed to enjoy and therefore extended our signed 'conversations'. As Shah (2004) explains:

> *A social insider is better positioned as a researcher because of*
> *his/her knowledge of the relevant patterns of social interaction*
> *required for gaining access and making meaning* (p556).

Having undertaken the interviews, I now feel differently about the deaf/hearing binary and its power differential. I now realise that every researcher faces issues of power regardless of disability or deafness. More importantly, I believe my biography, my lived familiarity with the group being researched, facilitated and to some extent, enhanced the research being undertaken.

Semi-Structured Interviews as a Research Method

The qualitative method I selected for this research was one-to-one, in-depth, semi-structured interviews. I wanted to find out what the deaf graduates thought about the employability opportunities they were offered at university, how they felt about the employability landscape and how this impacted on them as deaf individuals. According to Punch (2005), interviews are invaluable in that they enable participants to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live, and to express how they regard situations from their own point of view:

> *The interview is a very good way of accessing people's perceptions,*
> *meanings, definitions of situations and constructions of reality. It is*
> *also one of the most powerful ways we have of understanding others*
> (Punch, 2005: 168).

In addition to the depth of narrative I wanted to elicit from the interviews, there were also ethical decisions to make regarding both methodology and method choice. Quantitative methods, such as survey questionnaires, whilst relatively cheap in terms of time and energy, have limitations especially when working with a group of respondents for whom English is not a first language. The difficulties deaf children and students face in achieving literacy have been well-documented (see for example Quigley & Paul, 1984; Walker et al., 1996; Paul, 1998; Brennan, 1999; Rodda & Eleweke, 2000; Luckner et al., 2005) and will be explored in greater detail in a subsequent

chapter. However, in brief, for deaf students, who experience a language delay, use a different language and more importantly a different modality of language, written questionnaires are not suitable, or necessarily accessible. A large number of written survey questions may be difficult to read and be off-putting from the outset, resulting in low participation rates from BSL users. As literacy includes both receptive and productive skills, the participants might also find it difficult to formulate their responses in written English.

The fact that BSL is a visual-gestural language is also an essential consideration in the choice of interview as a research method. There is no written equivalent of BSL. It has a completely different syntax to English and many of its grammatical features are witnessed in body language, facial expression and non-manual features (Sutton-Spence & Woll, 1999) which need to be seen in order to make full sense of what is being expressed. These nuances and markers of meaning would be lost in non-contact data collection. For these reasons, face-to-face interview is the only real choice of data collection for gathering in-depth experiences with the deaf community. This can be seen by its consistent use in other research with the deaf community (Ladd, 2003; Atherton et al., 2001; Foster, 1996; Harris, 1995; Watson, 2016).

Whilst I chose to undertake one-to-one interviews with the respondents, focus group sessions could also have provided the face-to-face interchange necessary for qualitative research with the deaf community. Whilst the group approach might have allowed for 'a stimulation of new perspectives' (Gray, 2009:233), this method posed problems of confidentiality, which might have inhibited responses from such a small and familiar community, and on a more practical level, raised logistical challenges regarding the filming/recording (and subsequent translating) of the participant responses. For example, a minimum of two cameras would have been needed in order to capture both myself as interviewer and all of the participants, who might have been signing simultaneously.

I first undertook a pilot study to trial the semi-structured interview guide approach I had chosen. I wanted to know if the respondents would

understand my questions, whether there were too many or too few questions, and whether the questions flowed smoothly from one topic to another. Importantly, I also wanted to check that they elicited the information I needed to answer my research questions. The pilot study also allowed me to test the practicalities and logistics of videoing the signed interaction. The pilot study was in two parts, as I also wanted to trial a back translation of the transcript after the interview had been transcribed (see Chapter 4 for a detailed discussion of this part of the pilot). I undertook the pilot study with Will as he was the first graduate to respond positively to my request for interview. As I was restricted by relatively small respondent numbers and did not have a graduate 'to spare', I had no choice but to use one of my respondents for the pilot phase. Will agreed to take part in both the pilot and a subsequent interview.

The pilot study was a useful exercise, as after undertaking this interview, I realised that I was being far too rigid in following my question prompts. I was not allowing myself the flexibility or opportunity to further probe the respondent's views and opinions. Following the evaluation of the pilot, I became more relaxed in my questioning and allowed the interviews to be more free-flowing. Furthermore, I allowed myself more time to ask additional questions depending on the direction of each interview. The result was a more conversational exchange that elicited a much richer data set, and more importantly, in line with social constructionism, allowed me to see how their personal experiences and their interactions with others had impacted upon their life and created their reality. My revised semi-structured interview guide reflects my learning on this method of data collection [See Appendix 1].

To Sign or Not to Sign?

There is a growing body of literature which discusses researchers who study and interview people who do not speak the same language as they do (e.g. Temple, 2002; Williamson et al., 2011; Hole, 2007). Others ask questions specifically relating to research with deaf people, focussing on who should conduct the interviews, translate the discourse and transcribe the transcripts (Young & Temple, 2014; Temple & Young, 2004; Stone & West, 2012). Young & Temple (2014) suggest that reflexivity includes:

> *[…] the need to ask who is going to do the research, what her or his language affiliations and experiences are, and how this affects the research process* (p134).

From the outset, I had decided that I would conduct the interviews myself which would be filmed for subsequent translation, transcription and analysis. I have already mentioned my own biography; my native (or near native) sign language ability, my involvement in the deaf community, and my familiarity with the participants. Without a budget to bring in qualified interpreters, it seemed appropriate, if not necessary to do this myself. I also wanted to be present in the actual interviews, watching and processing all that was being transmitted not only in sign but in non-manual utterances too. At this time, I was not aware of any of the literature regarding the dilemmas associated with translation, representations of 'voice', and other cross-cultural research issues. I naively believed that it would be a straightforward process. It was not. I will discuss the practical challenges, methodological implications and ethical decisions that ensued in the next chapter.

Recruiting Participants and Gaining Consent

The process of recruiting participants was initially straightforward. As I was researching graduates from my own university, whom I knew, I already had most of their (last known) email addresses. The few I did not have were obtained from the university's administrative records system, Banner. This might be seen to raise ethical issues as the students had not left email addresses for the purposes of being interviewed. Whilst the university regularly uses such records to contact alumni on a range of issues, I am cognisant of the fact that such convenience should not be taken for granted. Access to their email addresses was privileged – as a university lecturer I had access to data that other researchers outside the university would not have had. In addition, I am aware of my potential position of power (discussed earlier in this chapter) in relation to the graduates. The graduates may have believed that they were compelled to become involved in the research – receiving an email request from a lecturer. I hoped that

the email I sent (See Appendix 2) would assure them that this was a voluntary exercise and one that they could discontinue at any time. There was also a possibility that the graduates would agree to be interviewed solely because we knew and were familiar with each other. Ethically this could raise concerns regarding trust, confidence and relationships (see Brewis, 2014). I could only wait and see if any graduates replied, and then re-emphasise the voluntary and confidential nature of the research.

I sent email invites to all twelve deaf students who had graduated between 2009 and 2012, believing that earlier graduates would have less recall than those who had graduated over the last three years. The initial email was designed to be as accessible as possible, thus it was short and written in plain English, and was largely just an expression of interest [See Appendix 2]. I had anticipated six positive responses, in fact, eight graduates replied to the invitation to be interviewed. Their details can be seen overleaf. Brief biographies of 4 of the participants can be seen in Appendix 4.

Table 1: Participants

Pseudonym	Age (at interview)	Graduated	Subject and classification	Employment Status
Deana	26	2010	BA Deaf Studies & Education (2.1)	Unemployed
Jack	25	2011	BA Sports Coaching (2.2) MA Sports Coaching (2.1)	Employed
Niall	23	2010	BA Graphic Design (2.2)	Unemployed
Pradeep	22	2012	BA Politics (2.1)	Unemployed
Sian	24	2011	BA Business & Management (2.1)	Employed
Tariq	28	2012	BA Games Design (2.1) MA Games Design (1st)	Unemployed
Terry	25	2009	BSc Exercise, Health & Nutrition (2.1)	Employed
Will	38	2012	BA BSL & Deaf Studies (2.1)	Unemployed

I decided to interview all those who replied. In this way the sample was self-selected, also known as 'volunteer sampling' or 'convenience sampling' (Gray, 2009:153). Convenience sampling enables the researcher to choose their sample from that part of the population that is close to hand. The researcher chooses the nearest or handiest individuals to serve as respondents and continues to recruit in this way until the required sample has been obtained. It is recognised that captive audiences such as students often serve as respondents based on convenience sampling (Cohen et al, 2000). The advantages of convenience sampling are that it is affordable, easy and the subjects are readily available. I only needed to send out one email and wait for the responses to arrive. However, there are also some significant disadvantages. Etikan et al. (2016) identify the most obvious disadvantages of convenience sampling as a) the likelihood of bias being present and b) the representativeness of a convenience sample of the population as a whole. Self-selection also increases the chance of more polarised views being represented in the sample, thus further skewing the data collected (Etikan et al., 2016).

Therefore, whilst this sampling choice was indeed convenient for myself, I was aware that this meant the respondents were not representative of the deaf population as a whole, and that I could not make generalisations from the data gathered. It is possible that the experiences of my respondents were atypical of the deaf graduate population. These might have been graduates who self-selected because they had had particularly negative experiences and wanted to 'offload' these through the research process. They might have borne a grudge against teaching staff or peers. Extreme examples might have been from an outlier, who was not representative of the data.

However, in reflecting upon my sampling strategy, I realised that my aim was not to represent anyone other than this particular group of respondents; I simply wanted to capture a snapshot of the experiences of some of the deaf graduates at my institution. I did not need, nor want to generalise about the wider deaf population. Indeed, there are too many variables to make any other approach a viable option; for example,

individual institution, degree course, peer groups, tutors, family support, school background, personal attributes and so forth.

Generalisability will be discussed in more depth in the next section of this chapter.

It is useful to consider triangulation in relation to my research study methodology. Triangulation increases the credibility and validity of the results in qualitative research (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008). Cohen and Manion (2000) define triangulation as an 'attempt to map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behaviour by studying it from more than one standpoint' (p112).

For triangulation purposes, I decided to interview the specialist careers adviser who worked with disabled students at the university and who specialised in supporting deaf students. I hoped that she might have an insight into some of the specific challenges that deaf students faced whilst seeking employment, perhaps some of which the students themselves were not aware. The career adviser had either worked individually with the students or had met them during the series of bespoke Deaf Futures workshops (see p13). Whilst she herself is hearing, she has some knowledge of BSL and is very experienced in working with interpreters. This interview took place after the graduate interviews had been completed. I felt that her years of experience as a specialist careers adviser who worked with deaf students would have given her an insight into some of the major challenges for deaf job-seekers. I was also interested to see if her perceptions were similar to those of the graduates. At no point was she asked about the particular graduates who had contributed to this study; both the questions and her answers related to her professional understanding of the broader issues faced by such graduates. The interview took 40 minutes, was digitally recorded and audio-transcribed. The nature of this interview was conversational. Essentially, I asked the adviser for her perceptions regarding the challenges and barriers for deaf undergraduates to acquire employability skills and to find employment. All my subsequent questions within this interview were guided by the comments she made.

The recruitment process was based on good practice guidelines taken from Turner and Harrington (2000); notions that included seeking explicit permission from people to 'invade their worlds' (p146). This included gaining the consent of all concerned before any data collection commenced [See Appendix 3]. It was critical that the participants fully understood the demands and implications of the research, including their right to opt out of any involvement in the project at any time. For the deaf participants, for whom English was not a first language, it was necessary to convey this written information in a concise and simple manner, but also imperative that this information was explained in BSL. Therefore, when I sent the information to these participants I explained that the interview would begin with a BSL explanation of the consent form, which was then signed in person. A copy of the form was then given to the respondent. Two of the participants opted to be interviewed via webcam using Adobe Connect software (see below) and I translated the consent form into BSL at the beginning of the recorded interviews. After giving consent, they printed and signed the form, sent it to me via mail, I signed it and scanned a copy back to them by return.

As mentioned previously, all the interviews were video-recorded and the files stored on a secure, password-protected server at the university. Six interviews were conducted on a face-to-face basis in my office, with the door closed, the phone disconnected and a notice to any potential visitors not to disturb me by entering the room. One digital camera was used to film the interviews, placed at an angle of 90 degrees so as to capture both myself as the interviewer and each interviewee. The two interviews conducted via Adobe Connect utilised the inbuilt recording software to capture a digital record of the interview. Adobe Connect is a web conferencing system used by businesses and educational institutions, similar to FaceTime and Skype. It allows for real-time interaction either by keyboard or voice and offers the option (employed in these instances) for video communication, which makes it ideal for sign language users. However, Adobe Connect, for all its usefulness, is not without its problems. One major issue with Adobe that arose during these interviews was that screens regularly froze due to interviewees not having access to high-speed

networks. These delays did not derail the interview process but did cause some frustrations and delays. Likewise, watching these recordings back in order to transcribe the data was also a long, slow process due to freeze-framing.

This chapter has detailed the methodology and methods used within my research study, and the decision-making processes and reflexivity which led to my choices. The following chapter focuses on my analysis of the data and discusses some of the broader implications in terms of methodology and the translation and transcription of data. Before this exploration of data however, I think it is appropriate to outline the limitations of this study.

Limitations of the Study

It is important to be explicit about any potential limitations of this research. There are of course, a number of limitations to a qualitative study of this kind. I have throughout this chapter, and elsewhere, mentioned my positionality and personal experience in relation to the research, and thus the potential for researcher bias and subjectivity. I am also aware of the potential for participant reactivity (Maxwell, 1996), given that I knew all of the respondents. Both of these factors present the possibility of power differentials existing – or being perceived to exist – between interviewer and interviewees. In this particular instance, my role as lecturer and theirs as former students may have been an additional factor. This power differential could be represented in several ways. It is possible that their responses may have been influenced or affected by our familiarity with each other; for example, they may have offered responses that they perceived I wanted to hear or which they thought might be helpful to me (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008).

Whilst I could not alter my personal habitus, I was, throughout the research, aware of these potential influences, and strove to minimise any impact they might have had. I feel I achieved this through the informality of the whole data collection process, from my initial contact with contributors, the manner in which they were kept fully informed of their rights to withdraw at any time and the relaxed, conversational style of the interviews

themselves. The respondents had all left the university, which put further distance between us in terms of relative hierarchy, and at no time did I feel I was being given answers that the contributors felt I wanted to hear. In fact, the candidness of many of their responses clearly indicates this was not the case.

Furthermore, I drew on the fact that social constructionism acknowledges that there is no one single truth about social reality. Different researchers may elicit different narratives from participants (Young & Temple, 2014), thus my interpretation of the data may be different to another researcher's interpretation. This is further complicated by the fact that I was working across two languages, two modalities and two cultures. Inevitably this led to interpretations of interpretations, which might again have impacted on some of the finer nuances of the data. This will be discussed in greater depth in the next chapter.

Arguably, another limitation of this study was the sample size. I acknowledge that this was a small-scale study; I interviewed only eight graduates. As such, generalisation is not possible. This is not unusual in qualitative research; in fact, many qualitative researchers actively reject generalisability as a goal (Schofield, 2002). For example, Denzin (1983) writes:

> *The interpretivist rejects generalization as a goal and never aims to draw randomly selected samples of human experience. For the interpretivist every instance of social interaction, if thickly-described (Geertz, 1973), represents a slice from the life world that is the proper subject matter for interpretative inquiry* (pp.133-134).

Generalisability, in the sense that the findings from my research could be applied to the deaf population as a whole was not my intended goal. I wanted to produce richly-detailed descriptions that would add to the body of knowledge pertaining to deaf employment, and to Deaf epistemologies. In this respect, I believe that my findings do hold validity and value. Furthermore, Schofield (2002) argues that for qualitative researchers, generalisability is best thought of as a matter of the 'fit' between the situation studied and other situations to which one might apply the concepts

and conclusions of that study (p198). By providing a substantial amount of information of the experiences and perceptions of deaf graduates at my institution, other institutions can make a judgement about whether or not this may match, and is applicable or relevant to their own situation. Goetz and LeCompte (1984) call this 'translatability':

> *… the degree to which components of a study – including the units of analysis, concepts generated, population characteristics, and settings – are sufficiently well described and defined that other researchers can use the results of the study as a basis for comparison (p.228).*

In the absence of other research into the employability opportunities and experiences of deaf graduates, I believe that the findings from my study, whilst not generalisable, can aid understanding and therefore can be useful for other institutions that support deaf undergraduates.

Chapter 4. Data Analysis

Thematic Analysis of the Data

> *Unquestionably, data analysis is the most complex and mysterious of all the phases of a qualitative project* (Thorne, 2000:68).

The aim of this section is to provide a critical analysis and evaluation of the tools I employed for data analysis within my research study. In doing so, I discuss the strengths of my chosen analytical approach, highlight the issues that emerged and illustrate how I resolved them. This chapter also explores some of the broader implications of translating and transcribing data across languages and the impact of these practices upon the research process.

My choice to undertake a thematic analysis of the data I collected was very much guided by my research aims, design and methodology. I undertook a qualitative study, using an interpretative approach, in order 'to understand from within' (Cohen et al., 2000: 22). The interpretative nature of my enquiry seemed to lend itself quite naturally to thematic analysis, and so I instinctively (and rather naively) chose this to be my method of choice. It was only through a thorough reading of the various other methods and analytical approaches that I fully appreciated the value and 'fit' of thematic analysis for my research purpose. In reading Braun and Clarke (2006), I was particularly drawn by the fact that thematic analysis is flexible, accessible for early researchers, fits with constructionist methods and is 'not wedded to any pre-existing theoretical framework' (p81). It is for these reasons that thematic analysis is popular in qualitative research. In relation to my own research purpose, thematic analysis presented a means of identifying the common themes across all interviews (the data set), rather than within one case or data item. I wanted to be able to analyse the participants' realities and constructions of being deaf and the inherent (if any) challenges they faced in finding employment. Undertaking a thematic analysis enabled me to identify repeated patterns and meanings, and in doing so, address my research questions.

This is not to say that thematic analysis is without some potential drawbacks. Identifying broad themes can mean that more nuanced elements of the data are missed and the interesting nature of some individual narratives are lost because they are not common factors across the data set. In the context of this research, examples of both these drawbacks were found when reviewing the research outcomes. For example, in hindsight Tariq's need for an interpreter to communicate with his mother was worthy of further investigation but as this was not raised by any other interviewee, this information was not picked up as a theme and therefore did not form part of the discussion or analysis. The flexibility of thematic analysis can also be problematic at times, through identifying too many avenues of investigation. Initially, this was the case in this study, with a high number of themes coded in the first stage of analysis (as is discussed later in this chapter). However, on closer examination, it was discovered that many of these themes overlapped and could be combined, which allowed for a more thorough unpacking of the issues as a result of the flexibility available through thematic analysis.

Exploring Thematic Analysis

> *Thematic analysis is a systematic and essentially taxonomic process of sorting and classifying […] data* (Green et al., 2007:545).

In brief, thematic analysis is a process for encoding qualitative information (Boyatzis, 1998). Whilst there are different ways of undertaking thematic analysis, they all seem to centre on a similar process; data immersion, coding, creating categories and identifying themes (See Green et al., 2007:547-549).

All the literature I read on thematic analysis discussed familiarisation with or immersing oneself in the data. In my case, I read and reread the data transcriptions, looking for 'the codeable moment' (Boyatzis, 1998:1), searching for meanings and patterns and so forth. However, I also realised that by undertaking the interviews in BSL, I had already processed the

information to a great extent through a translation of the responses. I now realise that during these live in-situ translation processes, I was already becoming aware of the data and had started the early stages of data analysis without being fully conscious of it. This was aided greatly by the fact that the transcriptions were incredibly time-consuming, and consisted of a constant watching of video, freeze-framing, rewinding, interpreting and re-interpreting, then typing a transcript of the data. (I will discuss some of the tensions inherent in this process in the next chapter.) This was no mean feat, and whilst the thought of the impending hours of work made me reluctant to begin a new transcription, I embraced Bird's (2005) argument that transcription is a key phase of data analysis.

Whilst my research study was largely inductive in that the codes and themes were strongly linked to and emanated from the data, I am conscious that I was also to some extent influenced by my personal experience, my academic background and the literature I had read. Seale (2012) discusses 'theoretical sensitivity' - the researchers' sensitivity to concepts, meanings and relationships within the data, which comes largely from professional and personal experience (p368). I have a wealth of personal and professional experience of working with deaf people and teaching about deaf people; this must have affected how I conducted my interviews and coded my data. Saldana (2009) frames this well as he discusses personal involvement and how it filters how one perceives, documents and codes data. I am aware of the beliefs that I hold and the theoretical perspectives shaped by my Deaf Studies and Adviser for Deaf Students academic background. Undoubtedly, these beliefs have influenced my research design, my reading of the literatures, and my coding and analysis.

Furthermore, Seale (2012) recognises that it is impossible to do research in a literature vacuum, and that a literature review will inform the design of a qualitative study. For this reason, some of the codes and themes from my data are deductive. Some of the questions I asked respondents were informed by my reading of the literature; for example, questions regarding communication skills and work placement opportunities:

Our analysis and interpretation – our study's findings – will reflect the constructs, concepts, language, models and theories that structured the study in the first place (Merriam, 1998 in Saldana, 2009:7).

This is particularly true of the Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007) model of employability that initiated my thinking about my research questions. Indeed, initially, this work threatened to overshadow the semi-structured interview guide that I had prepared. It was only after the pilot interview that I realised this, and I subsequently discarded the framework, allowed for greater flexibility in the interview process, and let the respondents tell their own stories.

Most researchers recognise that coding and analysis is not linear. It is described as iterative (Dey, 1993), cyclical (Saldana, 2009), recursive (Braun & Clarke, 2006) or zig-zag (Seale, 2012). With this in mind, I began initial coding. In beginning this process, I realised that my coding had already begun subconsciously during the in-situ interpreting/translation process, and had continued during the transcription journey. I realised I already had ideas about codes and potential themes before I reached for the highlighter pen. (Whilst this expression might appear somewhat flippant, it was a true stage in my analytical process). Then, initial reading and highlighting of the interview transcription indicated the beginning of the formal coding process. I numbered each double-spaced line. As I read, I made code 'notes' in the margins of the transcript, I also added memos to record my thoughts, ideas, links to relevant literature and links to comments from the other participants. I then re-read (multiple times) the transcripts and redefined/ re-coded the data. For example, initial coding for my first transcript elicited 69 codes; after much re-reading, and, I think, importantly, after reading and coding my second transcript, these codes were reduced to 24. I then began colour-coding these in order to find common patterns across the two transcripts and then subsequent transcripts. This second cycle coding (Saldana, 2009) started the beginning of linking the data, which in turn created coherent categories and subsequently themes. Green et al (2007) see this stage as 'looking for a 'good fit' between codes that share a relationship' (p548). In order to find clarity, I created spider diagrams, playing with the data in different ways,

grouping similar codes together to form analytical categories (See Seale 2012). Once all my data had been transcribed, coded and categorised, I began my search for themes. Initially these were potential themes, which I then reviewed and refined.

What surprised me at this point, was that many of these themes actually matched those of the lower tier of Dacre Pool and Sewell's (2007) model of employability. For this reason, I chose to consider this model as a framework for my findings. I then added other themes which were specific to deafness and the experiences of deaf graduates. These will be discussed in chapters 5, 6 and 7.

Maintaining Anonymity and Confidentiality

Anonymity and confidentiality of participants are central to ethical research practices (Crow & Wiles, 2008), especially in qualitative studies which often contain rich descriptions of study participants (Kaiser, 2009). Earlier in this chapter I discussed how I gained consent from my participants. The consent form [See Appendix 3] included information regarding how I would preserve confidentiality and anonymity. At the time, I thought that it was a straightforward process; to anonymise the transcripts, by using pseudonyms for the participants. I also thought that I would anonymise the location. However, it quickly became apparent that I could not do this, if I wished to maintain my research design. I was researching deaf graduates in a university which offered BSL and Deaf Studies as a degree subject, had a (relatively) large number of deaf students and a BSL and Deaf Studies Society. These factors made the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) instantly identifiable, not least as it is the only university in England which offers this specific degree. Furthermore, I was critiquing an employability framework which was designed from within this university, in order to see if its application was a standard factor of university life. To anonymise the location would be both impractical, given its distinctiveness in this context, and not desirable, given the research questions I wished to answer.

However, what I had not considered until after the transcription and analysis phase of the research, was the issue of 'deductive disclosure'

(Kaiser, 2009:1632). Singleton et al. (1999) argue that complete anonymity is impossible to achieve in most social research. This is often because of deductive disclosure; 'when the traits of individuals (or groups) make them identifiable in research reports' (Kaiser, 2009:1632). Whilst I replaced the names of the respondents with pseudonyms at the transcription stage of the process, I quickly realised that the contextual identifiers in the rich, detailed accounts of their lives would enable identification from those who knew them:

> *Qualitative researchers face a conflict between conveying detailed, accurate accounts of the social world and protecting the identities of the individuals who participated in their research* (Kaiser, 2009:1632).

Additional challenges arise when respondents are part of a community, rather than individuals who have no connection with each other (Ellis, 1995 cited in Kaiser, 2009). The deaf community is very small. The deaf community within a given location (such as a university, or a town) is even smaller. The unique combinations of traits, such as place of study, course, employment opportunities, would be enough to identify the respondents to other members of the local deaf community. I had to decide on how to proceed. Kaiser (2009) discusses an alternative approach to gaining consent. In doing so, she highlights, firstly, the target audience for the research. My target audience is not the deaf community. The respondents had been informed of the anticipated dissemination of the data findings at the outset. Whilst publications in journal articles and papers at conference would not rule out deaf community participation, they would not be the primary target or focus for my findings. Secondly, and of more importance to myself, Kaiser (2009) discusses The Belmont Report (1979) and its relevance to this ethical issue. In brief, The Belmont Report (1979) summarises the basic ethical principles and guidelines identified by the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioural Research that should underlie the conduct of research and assist in the protection of research participants. Above all, is the emphasis on 'beneficence' – researchers must not harm their study participants (Baez, 2002). I felt this was of relevance to my research purpose. Whilst

individual traits might render my participants identifiable, the content of their responses was not of a sensitive nature, nor would it put them in a vulnerable position, or do them harm. Whilst the participants might be identifiable, it would not be possible to attribute the majority of the data to any one person.

Nevertheless, realising that my respondents may have paid little attention to the consent form at the start of the data collection (Wiles et al., 2006) and realising that consent was obtained without knowing what information was going to be shared by the participants, I did re-contact the respondents to explain that they may be identified as being within my sample group, but that wherever possible I would try to ensure that comments and quotations would not be attributable to any one person. The graduates were asked if this was acceptable. They all agreed to continue.

Translating and Transcribing the Data

In the previous chapter, I wrote briefly of my decision to sign and translate the interview data myself. In this chapter, I explore this decision in more detail, in relation to the subsequent challenges, dilemmas and issues inherent in the interpretation, translation and transcription processes. Through the lens of reflexivity, I also consider in greater depth some of the methodological implications of conducting research across languages and cultures (Hole, 2007). These implications necessarily include issues of representation, authority and the deaf 'voice' (Hole, 2007; Temple & Young, 2004; Stone & West, 2012). This is, in essence, a methodological discussion, which perhaps has a better fit in the previous chapter. However, I believe that the knowledge and understanding I gained and the ethical and methodological decisions I had to make during the interpretation, translation and transcription stages of my study are significant to any exploration of deaf research, and deserve consideration in a separate chapter.

It has been argued that the issue and process of translation is often not identified, let alone discussed in research with people who do not speak English (Temple & Young, 2004). Temple & Young (2004) point to the fact that much of the research undertaken with minority ethnic communities in Britain, is written without any reference to language issues: 'results are published as if the interviewees were fluent English speakers or as if the language they used is irrelevant' (p163). This raises issues of representation and 'voice', which becomes particularly relevant when researching (and translating for) 'a historically marginalised community, with an unwritten language heritage' (Stone & West, 2012: 648). For this reason, I wanted to adopt a reflexive view and acknowledge the myriad issues and decisions which led to the final data findings.

In relation to Deaf Studies, not enough is written about who is doing the research and what their language biography is (Young & Temple, 2014). I have already explained that as a native, or near native sign language user, I had, perhaps naively, decided to undertake both the research and the translation myself. I had not really thought this through, nor foreseen the challenges and the impact these would have upon myself, the research process and the final data analysis. Foster (1996:17), a hearing researcher, asserts that 'research in deafness is informed by the ways researchers think about deafness and deaf persons' and in order to gain acceptance by deaf research participants, it is crucial that hearing researchers have knowledge of deaf culture, regular contact with deaf people, learn sign language and use qualified interpreters during the research process. Whilst I meet the first three criteria, I am not a qualified interpreter. This is not uncommon (see for example, Atherton et al., 2001; Harris, 1994; 2002) but it does call into question issues regarding the accuracy of translation, and how my translation within the research process could potentially introduce bias or misinterpretation:

> *Cross-language research […] is a challenging and complex endeavour, not only in terms of logistics and procedures to generate data, but also in determining the influence that the procedures have on the validity of the data, and ultimately, on the conclusions drawn from the research* (Williamson et al., 2011:382).

As I decided to sign the interview questions myself, this raised issues of duality of role. Young and Temple (2004) discuss whether it matters that the researcher is the translator. I propose that it does have an impact. On reflection, I recognise that interviewing in a second language compromises some of the messages and nuances within the interview process. During the analysis phase, I realised that sometimes I had been too pre-occupied with translating the responses (in my head) and making sure that I fully understood what was being signed that I had missed follow-up questions or prompts which could have enriched and elucidated the data. At other times, my need to clarify a sign meant I had interrupted the flow, or cut short a response.

Furthermore, I had not anticipated the incredibly time-consuming nature of the translation/ transcription process. This entailed a constant watching of video, freeze-framing, rewinding, translating and re-translating. Depending on the signing skills and fluency of the interviewee, one minute of video could easily take 15 minutes to transcribe; an hour-long video taking almost 2 working days, taking into account breaks to rest eyes and brain. In addition, one of the most frustrating aspects of the translation/transcription work was not being able to understand a particular sign when going through the video frame by frame. Atherton et al. (2001:43) experienced similar issues with their BSL interviews: 'Occasionally a sign which was understood within the context of an interview is found to be unclear during transcription'. This meant more painstaking freeze-framing, and a loss of confidence in my ability to translate. This led me to spend more time checking and rechecking for accuracy and errors. 'Translation concerns itself with fidelity or the faithfulness of a rendering' (Stone & West, 2012:648). Was I using the correct language? Had I got that right?

One example from my data transcription illustrates the nuances of the interpretation and translation process and highlights potential areas for concern regarding the generation of interview data, and subsequently the coding and analytical processes. In this example, the interviewee discussed the challenges of gaining employment. Using BSL glossing, a method of describing BSL signs, Pradeep signed

FINDING – EMPLOYMENT – CHALLENGE – CHALLENGE – CHALLENGE

I initially translated this as:

> There are many challenges in finding employment.

I thought that the sign 'challenge' was a noun, and therefore the repetition of the sign was expressing a plural. However, on a further watching of the video, I picked up nuances that I had initially missed. Whilst the signs remained the same, I noticed that the sign [for challenge] was not just repeated, but signed in a continuous circular movement, suggesting a regular occurrence, and accompanied by a facial expression which denoted a real frustration. In fact, the sign 'challenge' was actually a verb, with modulations that expressed adverbial information. I changed my translation accordingly, so that the final translation said something quite different to the one above:

> In looking for work, I am constantly confronted by challenges.

This is a different more personal and important message, which, I think, more accurately reflects what the respondent was signing. However, this did cause me to question the validity of my data as a whole, and wonder if it was compromised by my own translation:

> *The question is, therefore, whether and how translation within the research process potentially introduces bias and how to ensure agreement on the translation of source data* (Temple & Young, 2014: 163).

Back Translation

This was one of the reasons I initially decided to undertake back-translation (Brislin, 1970) with my respondents. Back translation is a type of member checking, but more specific in that it checks the accuracy of *translation* between different languages. It means taking the translated version in the target language and translating it into the source language until the two versions are judged to be equivalent (Young & Temple, 2014). In practical terms, it meant (for me) signing back to the participants my translation of

their interviews. In this way, they could validate my transcriptions and therefore my data.

Respondent validation is one of the most vital aspects within qualitative research. Without it, the research runs the risk of both excluding informants from what essentially belongs to them, and of remaining at the level of second hand description. Deaf people have, in the past, been ignored during this part of the process (Harris, 2002; Ladd, 2003.) Deaf people have little opportunity to express themselves in their *own language*. As a low-incidence minority group, they are seldom asked. Very little research has been undertaken *with* as opposed to *on* the deaf community. Whilst time-consuming, I did want to ensure that interviewees were included in the final checking. Importantly, for me, this choice of method is emancipatory in nature. By giving time and space to deaf interviewees to comment upon the research undertaken with them, it would allow them an opportunity to have a 'voice'; to be an 'informant' rather than respondent (Yin, 2009).

As mentioned in Chapter 3, I had decided to undertake a pilot study of both an interview and of a back translation. Consequently, I met once again with Will, and once again video-recorded our signed dialogue. In this instance, I signed back to him the written English transcript that I had translated from the signed video interview. My aim was to check for accuracy and to confirm that I had reproduced in written English the signs Will had used in his interview.

However, during this pilot back-translation, I realised that this process was neither straightforward nor the panacea to my translation dilemma. I had initially thought that one of the functions of back translation would be to validate my own translation from BSL to English – to check that I had used the right language. Finlay (2002) discusses reflexivity as discursive deconstruction and points to the ambiguity of meanings in language used. How could I pin down and represent the dynamic, multiple meanings embedded in language – especially if there were different languages and interpretations being used? I hoped back translation would help to solve this problem. I would sign back my transcription of the interview, so that my interviewee could see that I had accurately represented his voice. However,

I had not considered that my back translation would involve me using signs that had not been originally used by the interviewee (my signed interpretation of the written English translated from the BSL), therefore the interviewee was still not aware of the actual words that I had used to represent him. As explained by Temple & Young (2004) 'back translation cannot provide the 'correct' solution to equivalence' (p131).

This language/representation issue is clearly illustrated by an activity we undertook in class. My transcript was read by the other doctoral students, as they sought to analyse a section of my data. The ensuing analysis illustrated this translation conundrum perfectly. I realised that my peer-group's analysis and subsequent profile of the interviewee was drawn in some part from the language the respondent had used in the interview. In particular, they had formed a view of his personality based on phrases such as 'I was adamant that…' and 'I had to survive'. The tone of the interview was commented upon a number of times ('very detached sounding', 'emphatic voice', 'strong language') and yet, this was *my* language, my turn of phrase. What ensued was a different interpretation and analysis of the data from my doctoral colleagues.

In addition, my colleagues drew different conclusions from the content of the data. 'I never went to a deaf school in my life' was seen by one colleague as a badge of honour, whilst I perceived this to mean the respondent had been educationally disadvantaged. This is a cultural reference; attending a school for the deaf is regarded as a positive experience for many BSL users whilst mainstream education is often seen to be a source of oppression (Deaf Ex-Mainstreamers Group (DEX), 2003).

This example clearly encapsulates not only issues of language choice and representation, but also reflects my positionality. Clearly my knowledge, position and experience shaped my analysis (Pyett, 2003). The codes I used are also to some extent shaped by what I already brought to the data. This is not, in some respects, unanticipated. As Sipe & Ghiso (2004) note:

> All coding is a 'judgement call' since we bring our subjectivities, our personalities, our predispositions [and] our quirks to the process (in Saldana, 2009:7).

We also bring our prior knowledge, experience and the specialist knowledge we acquire via the literature review process. Whilst I can't 'unknow' what I know, I did need to be cognisant of my self-location, of my personal background, of my experience. I did need to question my own interpretations and knowledge production. I am also aware that making my positions transparent here, 'does not make them unproblematic' (Pillow, 2003:183).

Whilst my pilot back translation did not resolve issues regarding the accuracy of representation of the interviewee 'voice' (in terms of choice of lexicon), it did serve a number of other functions. In the first instance, it added another hour of signed video material to the original interview. Although another huge undertaking in terms of translation, this material added depth, respondent validity and an opportunity for mutual collaboration. It was tempting to ask more follow up questions, but this was not my aim. By signing back what I had understood from the initial interview, and my first attempts at analysis of the data, we could have a reflexive dialogue (Finlay, 2002) about the information and what it meant to both of us. However, whilst in this case, my respondent's interpretation of the data was similar to mine (or appeared to be) I was cognisant of the fact that this might not always be so, and therefore might create some difficulties. As Dey (1993) notes; 'there are as many ways of seeing the data as one can invent' (pp110-111). Conversely, and perhaps more problematically, my respondent might have agreed with my interpretation because of the power imbalance between myself as researcher/lecturer and themselves as participant/graduate. Or, more likely, he may have forgotten the original interview, and simply agreed with me out of politeness.

On reflection, I decided not to continue with back translations. The pilot had showed me that as a process, it did not help me evaluate the accuracy of my translation, my 'voice'. In addition, it added a great deal more translation and transcription to an already labour-intensive research project. In making this decision I became aware that my research was becoming as much about researching the deaf community as it was about deaf graduate employment. In positioning myself on the researcher/translator binary I became very interested in the translation process and how this impacts

upon research outcomes. This led me to delve into the field of translation studies, which, in turn started to make things easier and clearer. Rather than be hyper-critical and overly-concerned about a literal translation from BSL into English I came to accept that:

> *since no two languages are identical […] it stands to reason that there can be no absolute correspondence between languages. Hence there can be no fully exact translations (*Nida, 2000:1964).

The total impact of a translation may be reasonably close to the original but not identical. Skopos (Vermeer, 2000) is the Greek word for 'aim or goal'. The aim or skopos of the translational act is to reproduce the *meaning*, from the source text to the target text, and understand that the nuances present in the original are not all represented as we translate. Furthermore, Vermeer (and others) crucially state that one cannot translate a text unless one has a goal for the translation (therefore no 'translation just for the sake of translating'). In interviewing the respondents, I had a goal in mind, and I knew the research questions that I wanted answering; this was what needed translation. After further reading of the literatures, I realised that my role was not to provide verbatim translations (Williamson et al., 2011; Temple & Young, 2004, Temple, 2002) but to achieve conceptual equivalence (Williamson et al., 2011) and, in line with social constructionism, accept that there was no one 'correct' interpretation (Temple, 2002; Young & Temple, 2014).

In short, I needed to be able to trust my ability to translate, understand that the original data (source language) is different from a translated expression, and deliver what was important from the meaning of the signed data. I had to trust my authoring decisions.

In some respects, this process has much in common with hermeneutics; 'the elicitation and appropriate transfer of meaning' (Steiner, 2000:1975). Hermeneutics is the critical theory of interpretation (Crotty, 1998; Benton & Craib, 2001). Whilst originally related to the understanding and translation of texts, it can be argued that the whole process of translation within this research project (including six stages of interpretation) was hermeneutic (or

double hermeneutic), seeking to clarify, understand and interpret the communications of others (Cohen et al., 2000).

Whilst happy with my decision to disregard back translation, I did become more acutely aware of the lack of deaf 'voice' and deaf representation within my research. I decided to translate subsequent interviews directly from the sign language to written English, rather than to translate into spoken English and then transcribe. In many ways, I felt that this kept me closer to the original data, to the sign language. However, in producing a written version of the signed language, I realised that I was creating not only a distance between the signed interview and the textual English (see Hole, 2007) but I was also complicit in perpetuating a hierarchy of language (Young & Temple, 2014). As Young & Temple (2014) explain, 'the act of writing literally writes out (excludes) the identity of Deaf people who use sign languages' (p137):

> *The language which is the less powerful is made to disappear, and by implication, so do the users of that language and the cultural contexts in which it is produced and has meaning* (ibid: 145).

As long as academia is based around written accounts, there will always be this power asymmetry. This is not something I could resolve within my research, but I can highlight it and declare it problematic. My only solution was to render as faithful a meaning-based translation and transcription as I could, using both the video text and the subsequent written transcription together in order to draw findings from the data.

This chapter has highlighted some of the methodological issues and implications of conducting research within the deaf community, and in particular, those inherent within the processes of translation and transcription across languages, modalities and cultures. Having explored the methodology, data transcription and analysis which enabled this research study, the following chapter presents the first of three findings chapters. It explores the extent to which the participants acquired employability skills whilst at university.

Chapter 5. Acquiring Undergraduate Employability Skills: The Experiences of Deaf Graduates

According to a CBI survey (CBI, 2009a; 2009b), 78% of organisations reported that they recruit graduates on the basis of personal attributes and skills and 82% of the organisations wanted universities to do more to foster these skills. It has been argued that graduates need to be able to show they possess the skills valued by employers and must be able to demonstrate how their experience of the undergraduate curriculum developed these skills (Washer, 2007). It is also clear that students themselves are aware of the difficulties they face when entering the graduate labour market and know that they need to develop employability skills so that they stand apart from graduates with similar academic achievements (Tomlinson, 2007; 2008).

This chapter will focus on the deaf graduates and the data gathered from this study regarding the reality of acquiring employability skills whilst studying at university.

Interestingly, whilst I was analysing my data I realised that many of my emergent themes were similar to those in the lower tier of the CareerEDGE model (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007). I decided therefore to use this lower tier as a framework for organising the data; themes correlating to the elements of this model form the basis for discussion in this chapter. This does not represent an application of CareerEDGE as a model but recognises that some of the elements of CareerEDGE are very useful in identifying key aspects of the university experience in terms of acquiring employability skills and evaluating these in relation to deaf graduates.

One particular area of concern that will be addressed in this chapter is the students' perceptions and experiences of work placement opportunities within the wider context of their career development. This chapter primarily addresses the first research question, which asks to what extent deaf students acquire employability skills whilst at university.

Degree Subject Knowledge, Understanding and Skills

According to Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007), degree knowledge, understanding and skills are central concepts within their model of employability. However, they acknowledge that two-thirds of graduate vacancies are open to graduates of any discipline, and that employers generally judge graduates on the basis of how successfully they have completed their degree course, i.e. their degree classification rather than on their specific subject discipline. Similarly, research undertaken by Tariq et al. (2012) found that employers generally expected to recruit students with a 2:1 degree from what they described as a reasonably good or 'quality' university and perhaps surprisingly, none selected primarily on the degree subject. The majority of the employers indicated they were looking for 'raw material' to train within their own business, who had broad - what was described as relevant - understanding, rather than specific subject knowledge.

All the graduates in this study had achieved good degrees. Of the eight graduates, two, Niall and Jack, had attained a 2.2. Jack had subsequently achieved a 2.1 in his MA and was currently studying for an MSc. The six other graduates had achieved a 2.1 classification. Tariq had gone on to gain a 1st class MA and two further graduates (Will and Pradeep) had enrolled onto MA programmes, but whilst being accepted onto the courses, had not been able to continue with this study. The deaf graduates were clearly achieving in their studies, and yet their employment history did not reflect this. Only two graduates had found full-time employment (Jack and Sian), and only Jack had found work in an area related to his degree course. Whilst they had been employed in a non-degree subject related area, both Sian and Terry (who had part-time employment) were disappointed that they were not using the skills and knowledge that they had acquired on their courses. Terry was particularly bitter. He felt that he had not been informed fully about the career opportunities that would be available to him in the degree subject he chose, and he only discovered that his degree did not actually qualify him for the job that he wished to do once he started to apply for jobs:

> *I was never informed that the course here didn't give you the qualification you need to be a nutritionist. If I'd known I wouldn't have come to this university and saved my money* (Terry, Adobe Connect interview).

It is not clear from his interview whether Terry had simply not accessed this course information or whether the information was unavailable. Nonetheless, Terry's comment resonates with a number of other responses from the graduates regarding the importance of choosing the right course. Many were aware of the need to research their chosen courses, to 'read the small print' (Will, face-to-face interview). Will had originally enrolled on a joint Deaf Studies and Politics course, but hadn't realised how heavily weighted in theory the Politics course was:

> *I was out of my depth with this subject and decided to cut my losses* (Will, face-to-face interview).

He later dropped Politics to continue on a Single Honours BSL and Deaf Studies course.

Deana had made a more fully informed degree choice; with a BSL teaching career already in mind, she had researched the qualifications she needed. She chose to study Deaf Studies and Education:

> *So the course I chose was fine. But you have to make sure you make the right decision when you are choosing your course. It is important to think about your career before you start university* (Deana, Adobe Connect interview).

Interestingly, and perhaps understandably, one of the great deciders for these students, in their choice of university, was not their subject choice, but the support on offer for deaf students. For a deaf student, the availability of suitable communication support (such as sign language interpreters) is critical and so the choice of course may become secondary to this to some extent. They may firstly choose the institution that offers the most appropriate support and then look at what courses are available:

You have to make sure that the support is available so that you can continue with your studies. Without support you would really struggle (Deana, Adobe Connect interview).

I chose this university because I'd heard it was the best in the North West for providing access to interpreters, good note-takers and language support. Plus, they are deaf aware (Jack, face-to-face interview).

In many ways seeking institutions which offer a good level of support limits the choice of universities for deaf students. They may be basing a career choice on whether or not support is available, rather than the quality of the university degree provision, as judged, for example in university League Tables. Non-deaf and non-disabled students do not have to take support provision into consideration and therefore are potentially afforded a greater choice of institutions. Whilst, arguably, legislation has made it necessary for all institutions to provide quality support for disabled students, my own professional expertise and experience indicates that this is not yet the case.

Generic Skills

As mentioned in chapter 2, the acquisition of generic skills, also known as transferable, core and key skills, is at the forefront of current university policy. It is now widely accepted that HEIs need to provide students with more than just the content of their academic discipline (Green, Hammer & Star, 2009). All of the respondents in this study were aware of the importance of acquiring these skills, but it became clear, during the course of the interviews, that the term 'employability skills' was not one that the students were familiar with. In each interview, for example, I had to 'unpack' and explain what I meant by this term. Whilst this may have been a communication issue (the students may not have been explicitly introduced to the concept in class), this does reflect a lack of explicit sign-posting on behalf of the teaching staff. However, this lack of awareness of the term 'employability skills' did not indicate a lack of such skills or an unawareness of the importance of these attributes for their longer-term career ambitions. When asked about the skills they had acquired at

university that helped them to find employment, the responses were very similar to those discussed in the literature:

> *We learned general things like time-keeping and organisation, communication, team work and networking. General skills, really, nothing specific* (Sian, face-to-face interview).

Furthermore, students were aware of the skills employers were seeking from them. Will, for example, mentioned employer expectations as being:

> *Theory and academic knowledge, weaknesses and strengths, whether you have organisational skills, whether you can assimilate new information, solve problems, improve your skills, use technology, understand and comprehend information, be able to explain things and deliver information through presentations* (Will, face-to-face interview).

One particular aspect of these broader skills that was highlighted by the interviewees was the confidence they had gained from being required to give formal presentations, which they saw as being invaluable for future careers:

> *Initially, I was very nervous, but I built up confidence and relaxed* (Jack, face-to-face interview).

> *I've built up my confidence through doing presentations at university, in front of an audience. That has given me the confidence in my work to meet with people and families, give talks and visit schools* (Terry, Adobe Connect interview).

Confidence was an important by-product for deaf students, who regularly comment on the lack of engagement with their hearing peers (Nikolaraizi & Hadjikakou, 2006). Although initially uncertain in such situations, the visual aspects of delivering presentations allowed deaf students to gain confidence that could then be used to underpin other aspects of their studies and careers.

Another, perhaps unexpected, by-product of delivering presentations was the acquisition of skills relating to working with interpreters. Deaf children

are not taught how to work with interpreters as they do not have interpreters in schools (they largely work with teaching assistants who have minimal sign language qualifications, or communication support workers who are not qualified as interpreters and offer a 'jack-of-all trades' type of support). When deaf students arrive at university, they are suddenly expected to know how to work with fully-qualified interpreters, who follow a professional code of conduct (see http://www.nrcpd.org.uk/code-of-conduct). What ensues is a steep learning curve, and this can result in the acquisition of a number of additional - but hidden - employability skills, beyond those acquired by non-deaf students:

> *I had to make sure that the interpreter was prepared, so that they could relay the [presentation] information accurately to the audience. I also learned about time management, because […] the interpreters had rules about punctuality. If I was more than, say, 10 minutes late, the interpreter would leave. So, knowing that there were consequences for arriving late helped me with time management skills (Jack, face-to-face interview).*

Other employability skills were discussed by the graduates as being significant, for example, communication skills. Oral and written communication skills are regarded as important skills for employability (e.g. Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007; Greatbatch & Lewis, 2007; UKCES, 2009) and these present particular and potentially significant challenges for deaf students whose primary form of communication is British Sign Language. 'Communication' (including both oral and written forms) was highlighted as one of four key skills by Dearing (1997), and 'Communication and Literacy' is one of the employability skills listed by UKCES (2009) and used by the CBI in surveys of employers' views on graduate employability (e.g. CBI, 2010, 2011). Morley et al. (2006) found that employers ranked communication skills second in importance after interpersonal/team-working skills, whilst the US National Commission on Writing (2004, cited in Kotzee & Johnston, 2008) concluded that employers regard writing as a 'threshold' skill, with graduates not being appointed or promoted without the ability to write well (Tariq, et al., 2012).

Deaf students are aware of the importance of good written communication skills and whilst these are both a requirement and an expectation of degree-level study, there is very little in the way of practical training for students to develop these skills independently. The particular pedagogical barriers deaf students face in acquiring literacy will be discussed in greater depth in the next chapter, however, it is useful to briefly highlight the literacy delay which deaf students face. Whilst changes in education policy and practice have led to increased numbers of deaf students entering Higher Education (HESA, 2014/15) many still enter universities under-prepared in terms of their literacy, numeracy and general study skills, and in particular, their ability to access/produce written English at HE level (c.f. Appendix 3 in Barnes and Wight, 2002). In short, they face a substantial language barrier; struggling to understand textual material and complete written course assignments. This is not a reflection on their intellectual ability so much as an acknowledgement that they are expected to function at a high level in a language which is not only a second language to them, but one which they do not have the natural ability to acquire (Barnes, 2006). It is perhaps worth mentioning at this point that many UK universities do not require deaf students to hold Grade C English at GCSE level as a prerequisite for entry onto their courses, as is the case with hearing students. In this way, universities are tacitly recognising the lack of English language fluency amongst deaf students.

For these reasons, deaf students (at UCLan) are supported individually by a Language Tutor (LT). Tutors undertake a variety of tasks; a breakdown of their role includes:

- Helping students prepare for assignments – i.e. checking comprehension of the task and the understanding of written materials; assisting with the planning and organisation of projects, advising on essay structure etc.
- Advising students about the presentation of written, signed or spoken work.
- Modifying the language of course materials to facilitate access to texts.

- Modifying the language of examinations and assignment briefs where appropriate.

Whilst general written communication skills are not taught at university, all of the respondents remarked on the value of working with Language Tutors to improve their English:

When I came to university, my Language Tutor really helped me to improve my written work and improve my grammar (Jack, face-to-face interview)*.*

My Language Tutor helped me a great deal. It was fabulous! I was very happy with her. My tutor had an English degree. She was excellent. She taught me vocabulary and grammar. She taught me a lot about English. I really developed and improved my English skills (Pradeep, Adobe Connect interview).

Interestingly, when I asked Will what he thought 'good communication skills' meant, his response was deaf-centred:

Being clear, being direct and to the point, having good eye-contact, making what is said accessible so that I can understand. It's about having good signing skills and the employer needs to make provision for that by providing an interpreter as I have the right to access communication and for that communication to be clear (Will, face-to-face interview).

This comment resonates with other Deaf epistemologies, where a lack of communication is centre-stage in the hearing-deaf binary (Holcomb, 2010). It also clearly articulates the point that communication is not a one-way process.

Deana was the one deaf graduate who had chosen to study on the bespoke Year 0 for Deaf Students course then offered at UCLan. This course had been designed to improve deaf students' academic written English skills and to prepare them for university life. Deana felt that her written communication skills had been enhanced by this experience, and by being part of a deaf peer group:

The Year 0 course was really interesting. I studied Study Skills which taught me skills in academic writing, which is really important, as it enabled me to write at a higher academic level. BSL is my first language, so I knew I had to really improve my English skills. This is vital for employment and for general communication in the hearing world (Deana, Adobe Connect interview)*.*

There were lots of deaf students [on the Year 0 course]. That's why I chose it. It was great. I loved it! It really influenced me. Everyone signed, so we were able to discuss things in more depth. (Deana, Adobe Connect interview)*.*

Deana also discussed how, coming from a hearing family, she had little knowledge of deaf family life. She felt she had learned a great deal about Deafhood – 'a process by which Deaf individuals come to actualise their Deaf identity' (Ladd, 2003: xviii) from her deaf peers:

Their stories were really rich, they had a lot of personal knowledge about being deaf and living in the deaf world and they shared their experiences with us. I learned a lot from them. That was good! (Deana, Adobe Connect interview)*.*

Clearly, when students are given the opportunity to study alongside other deaf students, this can make for a much more positive and fulfilling learning experience. Benefits include having access to a mutually supportive network and the sharing of ideas, experiences and resources that constitute an alternative mentoring process (Atherton & Barnes, 2012). This is rare for deaf students, who generally have to acquire written communication and other skills within a hearing environment, with interpreter-mediated, second hand access.

As mentioned earlier, oral communication skills are also highly regarded by prospective employers. This is clearly problematic for deaf students. The majority of sign language users never develop these skills and so this presents an insurmountable obstacle for deaf graduates unless an employer is willing to provide interpreter support in the workplace. However, it is clear from the interview data, that the university has enabled some deaf

students to develop effective and alternative non-oral communication skills that are not necessarily recognised and utilised by employers. This is to say that many of the respondents felt that their fluency in British Sign Language had been greatly enhanced during their time at university. Will and Pradeep had both studied on the BSL and Deaf Studies course. Whilst the course aims to develop and improve the sign language skills of hearing students, it was interesting to note that they both felt that their BSL communication skills had improved, and that they believed this would enhance their employment opportunities:

> *The BSL module taught me a great many BSL skills, which will help me in the future* (Pradeep, Adobe Connect interview).

> *When I came here I was taught more about formal BSL. I have had to really refine my BSL signing skills* (Will, face-to-face interview).

> *I learned many BSL skills from the BSL lecturers. They polished my signing skills, which improved the quality of my BSL considerably* (Pradeep, Adobe Connect interview).

This was something that I had not considered before; a taken-for-granted assumption that all deaf students would be able to sign fluently and would therefore not benefit greatly from signing classes. It also illustrates self-reflection on the part of these graduates, and an awareness that for them good communication necessarily includes honed skills in their first language. However, deaf students at all levels of compulsory education are never actually taught sign language and their language fluency is never assessed. This compares unfavourably with the situation of hearing students, who are taught and assessed in their written and oral language skills throughout their school life. Those deaf students who do learn to sign often do so through informal learning picked up from other students, without ever being checked whether they are signing correctly or not.

The 'oral' communication skills of those students not studying BSL maybe points to a gap in the provision of appropriate communication skills development for deaf students.

Emotional Intelligence

Dacre Pool & Sewell (2007) explicitly highlighted emotional intelligence (EI) as an important, yet often unrecognised or understated factor in relation to employability. Following Goleman (1998), they discuss the importance of emotional intelligence as a means to develop the prime qualities which make and keep us employable:

> *Emotional intelligence refers to the ability to identify, express and understand emotions; to incorporate emotions into thought; and to normalise both positive and negative emotions* (Matthews, Zeidner & Roberts, 2002:58).

As emotional intelligence is about human interaction, interpersonal skills and recognising the emotions of others, I was particularly interested in how this manifested itself in deaf people who face communication barriers, and who use a different, visual-gestural language. How easy is it to develop emotional intelligence when you cannot hear how spoken language is employed or easily interact in a myriad of ways with the majority culture around you? Despite being of intrinsic importance in itself, and despite the important connection between EI and employability, I could find virtually nothing in the literature specifically relating to EI and deaf people. The articles I did find related largely to resilience in deaf children (Young, Green & Rogers, 2008) and deaf people in general (Rogers et al., 2003; Stone Charleson et al., 1999). Whilst not explicitly related to emotional intelligence, there were some strong similarities and common themes; indeed, emotional intelligence is often discussed in the context of resilient behaviours demonstrated by individuals in the face of adversity (Edward & Warelow, 2005; Jacelon, 1997). However, whilst common themes include being emotionally perceptive, caring, responsible, perceptive of others and so forth (Rogers et al., 2003), Young et al. (2008) caution against defining deafness as an undesirable trait to be overcome or survived. In line with other disability studies literature (see for example, Runswick-Cole & Goodly, 2013), they maintain that by focussing on notions of achievement and success 'despite' deafness or through 'overcoming deafness' (p44) this renders any kind of achievement as exceptional, thus reinforcing the normative expectations that society may otherwise have:

Resilience, if used to indicate a remarkable or exceptional trajectory for deaf children, runs the risk, paradoxically, of reinforcing low expectations for the majority and making success unexpected rather than normal (Young et al., 2008: 44)

For this reason, it seemed appropriate to focus solely on emotional intelligence as a separate concept to resilience.

As mentioned earlier, the term 'emotional intelligence' (EI) comprises (amongst other traits) basic social skills, self-motivation, a positive attitude to work, interpersonal skills, empathy and team-working ability. Whilst EI was not explicitly mentioned by the graduates as being a useful employability trait, and during the interviews it became apparent that they did not know what the term EI meant, it was evident from their narratives that they did have an abundant capacity for this form of intelligence. Interestingly, much of this related to deaf/hearing relationships. Of particular importance to me, was the emphasis the interviewees placed on team-working solutions in deaf-hearing situations; a critical skill for them in the workplace. Many of the interviewees felt it was important for both deaf and hearing people to understand that they each perceive the world and its contexts in different – sometimes radically dissimilar – ways. This is arguably the embodiment of Deaf epistemology; the deaf way of knowing (Paul & Moores, 2010). Having been brought up in hearing families and educated in mainstream classrooms, these interviewees were acutely aware of the different world views of deaf and hearing people. They also realised that these understandings may be communicated differently so there might be a need to actively seek common ground in order for all parties to work effectively together; a clear example of emotional intelligence:

In class I might sense that others might not understand something so I would look to work with them so that we could support one another, but sometimes we would understand things differently (Will, face-to-face interview).

Maybe through a lifetime of watching hearing people struggle to communicate with them, they were attuned to body language and facial

expression which denoted, for example, a reticence to communicate. What was interesting, was their understanding of this phenomenon:

> *Some of [my hearing colleagues] weren't deaf aware and didn't know how to communicate, so they felt awkward and uncomfortable engaging with me - which I accept and understand (*Tariq, face-to-face interview).

This awareness of the attitudes of hearing people towards deaf people was mentioned a few times by the interviewees, and was epitomised by the term 'the hearing environment' (Jack, face-to face interview; Deana, Adobe Connect interview).

> *Society just doesn't understand what it is like to be deaf […] Hearing people do not understand the difficulties deaf people face* (Pradeep, Adobe Connect interview)*.*

> *Some hearing people think deaf people are stupid, 'deaf and dumb'. They don't think we are equal or the same as hearing people* (Jack, face-to face interview)*.*

However, as Niall signified, this was not always internalised negatively; the interviewees took pride in their deafness:

> *I always think, I could be in their [hearing] shoes, and I'm lucky that I am in the position I am in* (Niall, face-to-face interview)*.*

This pride is arguably a by-product of Deafhood (Ladd, 2003) [See p 85].

Another EI trait is being aware of others' needs and acting upon this. The interviewees all discussed being deaf in a hearing world and the implications of this. In each case, it is evident that they were aware of their own responsibility in making things work:

> *I was invited to be a society rep, and it was an incredibly difficult task making sure that the society suited everyone's needs, both deaf and hearing members. This was a balancing act, and a huge responsibility (*Will, face-to-face interview).

> *I am confident about meeting new [hearing] people. I can empathise*
> *well, and adapt to their communications needs* (Sian, face-to-face
> interview).

Some of the interviewees also discussed their own role in educating others
about deafness and what deaf people can do. Terry, for example,
recognised the distress many hearing parents feel when they have a deaf
child, and he considered it his role to educate these parents about the
positive aspects of having a deaf child:

> *A lot of the families with deaf children are hearing, but they don't*
> *know what it means to be deaf. I can let them know that I have been*
> *through the same things, and I can talk to them about how they can*
> *break down the barriers, and how their children can do the same*
> *things as hearing people* (Terry, Adobe Connect interview).

> *When I meet families, of course, they are all different. I explain that*
> *as my family are hearing, they have given me an insight into how*
> *they felt when they found out I was deaf. This has given me*
> *understanding that I can share with new families* (Sian, face-to-face
> interview).

This, in part, relates to a desire to be a role model for other deaf children
(and their parents), that was mentioned by all but one interviewee. This will
be discussed in more depth in chapter 7.

In summary, the interviewees showed that they had acquired interpersonal
skills, the ability to identify, express and understand emotions, self and
social awareness and a whole host of other skills that comprise emotional
intelligence. Whilst it is not possible to quantify how much of this skill they
had acquired whilst at university and how much they had brought with
them, it was clear that being deaf in a hearing majority environment had
certainly played its part in developing this trait.

Whilst this study focuses only upon deaf students, it should be noted that
many hearing students might not be familiar with the term 'Emotional
Intelligence'. This is not to suggest that they do not have this key
employability skill. However, if this term is not signposted and unpacked in

classrooms, students may not be aware of the need to evidence EI in their job applications. Furthermore, it is possible that EI may be only one of a number of hidden employability qualities which are not explicitly being discussed with students (both deaf and hearing) thus weakening their job-seeking opportunities.

Career Development Learning

As was previously highlighted in terms of degree choices, career development planning does not seem to be considered by the deaf interviewees or, perhaps more importantly, within course delivery. University policies (as discussed in chapter 2) clearly state that career opportunities and career planning should be embedded within the teaching curriculum but in the experiences of the interviewees, this has not been the case:

> *I didn't even know what having a job meant. No-one sat me down and explained it to me (Tariq, face–to–face interview).*

Sian, Niall and Tariq recall that their course tutors did not provide any support, or even information about finding employment. In fact, Niall felt that this kind of information was only given to certain students:

> *But there was nothing offered from here, maybe there were some opportunities offered to the teacher's pets, you know the favourites in the group, but for me, nothing … there was that kind of attitude* (Niall, face-to-face interview).

It is not clear if this is a reflection of the isolation Niall felt as the only deaf student on the course ('*I felt out of it, as a deaf person on the course'),* but this lack of tutor engagement was reiterated by Jack, who displaying emotional intelligence, felt that his deafness was a factor in his tutors not supporting his career development:

> *It wasn't always easy to engage with the lecturers about work, as I think they were a bit uncomfortable and thought that Deaf people would struggle to find jobs* (Jack, face-to-face interview).

Furthermore, Jack felt that any information that was shared about employment was 'word of mouth' and not presented in any visual or formal format. He believed that this was an additional barrier for deaf students seeking work.

The lack of job-seeking skills or careers guidance, was reported by several other interviewees:

> *I wish they had told me more about jobs and employment. I wish they had prepared me for the real world so it wasn't a shock* (Pradeep, Adobe Connect interview).

> *Looking back, the tutors could have done more to help us find work. They could have brought people in, who had been on the course and who had found employment. The tutors should have encouraged us to look for jobs related to our subjects* (Deana, Adobe Connect interview)*.*

However, it must be accepted that some of this failure to seek careers advice might be due to previous experiences within an overprotective deaf education system (Skelton & Valentine, 2003b) with at least one respondent seemingly expecting the university to find employment on behalf of its graduates:

> *No-one has given me a job […] I am really disappointed with the university. It's their responsibility to teach us how to get a job* (Pradeep, Adobe Connect interview).

Even as an adult, it appears that Pradeep was perhaps still influenced by what is often a less empowering environment within deaf education. In many respects, deaf pupils are not provided with the opportunity to develop the necessary skills for self-determination and, arguably, this continues to impact on their ability to take control of many areas of life (See Skelton & Valentine, 2003a).

In addition, there seems to be some degree of passivity amongst deaf students in terms of taking responsibility for their career and employment options. Whilst this does not apply in all cases, many of the above quotes

reflect this inaction. The following is another example, which illustrates a belief that someone else should have taken responsibility for their job-seeking:

> *They sent information out about events that were happening, but they didn't promote it any further or encourage us to go. Perhaps if they had told me to go, I would have done, or if they had organised for us to go to an event. […] They left it up to us to take the lead and please ourselves if we went* (Tariq, face-to-face interview).

It should be added that whilst these findings relate solely to the deaf participants in this study, if employability skills are not embedded in the curriculum, then all students will be adversely affected. This lack of knowledge is further exacerbated by the innate passivity of some students. Whilst I have suggested that this might be true of some of the deaf graduates, it could equally be true of non-deaf students.

Nonetheless, the overall picture of deaf students' experiences regarding career development in Higher Education might appear less than ideal but there are examples of good practice to address these issues, with UCLan's Deaf Futures programme being much appreciated by the interviewees. This was a bespoke programme which delivered a number of practical workshops for deaf undergraduates, covering all aspects of the job application process, such as CV writing, writing job applications and interview techniques:

> *They told us having a degree on its own isn't enough and that you need to look for work experience and developing other skills, which was useful* (Terry, Adobe Connect interview).

> *I went to a Deaf Futures session on writing CVs and applications and it was a really good session … but time was limited* (Pradeep, Adobe Connect interview).

Delivered by specialist careers advice staff who could sign and had awareness of the specific needs of deaf graduates, the scheme ran for two years and serves as a template for the delivery of bespoke careers advice for deaf students across both FE and HE. However, it has to be acknowledged that such support is very much a niche market and requires

not only specialist careers advisers but also an adequate number of deaf students to make this particular service cost effective. The presence of a specialist careers adviser for deaf students was a particular boon for these students. Whilst careers information and job-seeking skills were not evident within course programmes, the graduates did go to this adviser for advice. They knew her through the Deaf Futures events, and so were happy to see her on a one-to-one basis, knowing she could sign, or would book an interpreter. They were also aware of her expertise in deaf-related employment and the barriers deaf graduates might face in gaining work:

> *UCLan Futures service is an excellent service, so I have started to go there. I have worked with the career adviser who has given me lots of information about jobs and application forms – but it has been a bit of a roller-coaster ride, because I just can't find a job* (Deana, Adobe Connect interview).

> *[The adviser from] Futures told me how to look for a job by looking online. She helped me create my CV, and gave me advice about the structure and what information to include* (Sian, face-to-face interview).

Such was the value of this bespoke support, that Terry and Deana continued to use Futures after graduation; acknowledging that there was little other support for them once they had left university. This point will be discussed in more depth in the next chapter.

It is also interesting to note, that whilst most of the interviewees had attended the Deaf Futures events and acknowledged the value of this careers advice, they still felt that the university had not taught them about job-seeking skills or finding work. Maybe they saw the deaf-centred training as something quite separate from their university courses and therefore not as relevant, or they simply had not been able to apply this training to their own subject-related career paths. Another explanation might be that these sessions were so few and so irregular that the respondents had simply forgotten all about them until I mentioned them in their interviews. This points to a need for regular, explicit, on-going careers advice and training, which I will discuss further in chapter 8.

Work Experience

Work experience amongst graduates is highly valued amongst employers, as the results of numerous research studies cited earlier have shown (Dearing, 1997; Knight & Yorke, 2002; Holmes, 2001; Knight & Yorke, 2004; Harvey, 2003; Lees, 2002, Higher Education Careers Service Unit, 2011). To this end, the three interviewees who had found employment after leaving university had all undertaken extensive work placements or voluntary work which they also felt was a crucial factor on their success in securing a job:

> *I did three voluntary jobs […] and all of this voluntary work helped me to get the job I have now, because the jobs are clearly linked* (Sian, face-to-face interview).

Whether this message is being passed on to all deaf students is less clear:

> *When I look back, my friends had work placements offered to them but I missed out. When they were going off for a year, travelling and getting work experience, I was at university concentrating on my modules. I hadn't been taught about work and I never thought about doing a work placement* (Tariq, face-to-face interview).

Whilst it has been demonstrated that UCLan has a clearly-defined central employability agenda, it is difficult to assess just how this employability strategy is being implemented with regard to both hearing and deaf students. Despite the clear emphasis on the value of work placements, only two of the interviewees undertook formal placements as part of their course. In both instances these were compulsory modules which were highly valued:

> *I think studying and working at the same time helped to develop me. If I had just concentrated on my studies and not done any voluntary work or work experience, I think it would have been harder to develop my skills* (Terry, Adobe Connect interview).

Terry's comment reflects research undertaken elsewhere. An investigation into the longitudinal benefits of work experience for graduates' skills development was undertaken by Harvey et al. (1997). This study found that

respondents overwhelmingly endorsed work-based placements as a means of helping students develop attributes that would help them to be successful in the workplace.

Jack also took a compulsory work experience module, which he completed over the summer. He especially valued this opportunity, because he realised finding paid work experience, as a deaf student, was difficult:

> *The work experience module worked best for me […] Finding part-time work when you are deaf is hard because of the communication side of things, so this work experience was great for me* (Jack, face-to-face interview)*.*

All of the other interviewees stated their disappointment that work placements were not offered as part of their course, and furthermore, that work placement opportunities either within or outside of UCLan were never mentioned:

> *I just wish that the university had advised me more about doing some voluntary work or work placement but they didn't and I never thought about it* (Tariq, face-to-face interview).

Pradeep also felt strongly that the university could do much more in the way of providing work placement opportunities. He put this into the wider context of disability employment and the need for a proactive approach to supporting disabled students into the workplace:

> *I think the university should offer more work placements. There should be work placements, advice about filling in application forms, how to provide evidence to put onto C.V.s, because it is a huge challenge. I think for disabled people it is even more difficult. They should offer disabled people more training. It would make it fairer if this was to happen (*Pradeep, Adobe Connect interview).

Within this context, Pradeep also illustrated not only an awareness of inequality in the search for employment but also a lack of training and preparation for disabled people, which needs to be addressed:

> *We don't want people to be frightened of employing disabled people.*
> *And disabled people need preparing for the workplace* (Pradeep, Adobe
> Connect interview)*.*

Work experience was seen to encompass more than simply a work
placement, with a need to more explicitly connect theoretical knowledge to
practical applications and experience:

> *I think there should be a better balance between theory and actual*
> *employability training within the modules. We are taught the theory*
> *but not how to apply this to the workplace (*Pradeep, Adobe Connect
> interview).

This criticism of the lack of explicit links between the curriculum and its
practical application to the workplace is prevalent within the literature
(Harvey et al., 1997; Crebert et al., 2004) and suggests that this is a
university sector failing which employers are also beginning to recognise
(Bridges, 2000; Hinchliffe & Jolly, 2011; Jackson & Wilton, 2016).

It is evident throughout this research study that students found work
placements to be a critical component in their quest for employment and
whether or not they were offered or supported in finding a placement, they
fully understood their value for job seeking strategies and for inclusion on
their CVs:

> *If I had some kind of work experience, no matter what it was, it*
> *would look better on my CV. I don't want prospective employers to*
> *think I am lazy or have been to prison because I don't have*
> *employment experience on my CV* (Deana, Adobe Connect interview).

The careers adviser also recognised the difficulties deaf students faced in
getting some kind of work experience that impeded their chance of gaining
employment in the workplace:

> *I think particularly for deaf students, the lack of work experience is a*
> *real barrier to them gaining employment. For deaf students in*
> *particular, getting some kind of work placement is more than key, it*
> *is crucial. Without experience, they have nothing to put on the*

application form and nothing to sell in the interview (Careers Adviser, face-to-face interview).

She also pointed to the obvious merits with regards to informing the students' decision-making process, and to their confidence building. She told a narrative about a deaf student, who hadn't managed to get any form of work experience, which had left him, upon graduation, doubting his degree choice and his future direction:

> *We keep going around in circles; he is asking about doing another degree; he is asking what benefit he could get if he continued to study and so on. I want him to pick a starting point and he is not. Lack of real work experience has left him unable to move forward with career decision-making* (Careers Adviser, face-to-face interview).

The careers adviser in recognising the barriers deaf students and graduates faced in securing work placements suggested that one of the easiest places for a deaf graduate to turn was the deaf community '*because it is accessible'*. (This will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 7.) However, this is not always the panacea. Whilst seeking employment after graduation, Tariq had taken a number of work placement opportunities, but these had been outside of his subject area, and largely within the deaf community. Conversely, he felt that rather than enhance his employability, this work experience diluted his chances of gaining employment in his chosen career:

> *When I was looking for work in my field, I found it difficult to get a job, because I didn't have the experience that they wanted. I had experience, but only of working within the deaf community and not working in the Games industry itself. I didn't have anything relevant to put on my C.V.* (Tariq, face-to-face interview).

In summary, all of the interviewees in this research study were aware of the need for work experience, even if this awareness only became apparent after graduation, when they were actively seeking employment. However, even if such awareness is in place, interview data and personal experience

suggest that it is harder for deaf students to find adequate and appropriate placement opportunities. The 'communication side of things' as mentioned earlier by Jack, is a critical factor. For example, interpreter support, funded by Disabled Students Allowance is not available nor suitable for the work placement environment and Access to Work funding (which is discussed in more detail in the next chapter) is not applicable for student (voluntary) placements. So despite policy statements and the value employers place on workplace experience, this important employability skills development opportunity is not readily available to deaf students.

This issue was also highlighted by the specialist careers adviser, who mentioned a student who had wanted to secure a work placement in the sector he had studied and wanted to work in. Whilst the company was willing to offer the placement, they could not fund the interpreter support. Access to Work would not fund it either, because it was not paid employment, and therefore, in the end, the student could not take up the placement offer. The consequences of this are far-reaching in terms of future employability:

> *Because he [the deaf student] couldn't get the placement - that makes the area he wants to work in that less accessible because he hasn't got experience in the sector* (Careers Adviser, face-to-face interview).

This is a major barrier facing deaf students in seeking work placement opportunities; the lack of interpreter support to gain the experience that would enable them to enter the job market. Ironically, Access to Work funding would be available for this student if he got paid work, but without Access to Work support for the placement, he couldn't get the experience that would enable him to get this paid employment.

Another graduate got some voluntary work within a charity setting, in a charity shop, and whilst the staff tried to help him, there was no interpreter support:

It is whether the student can survive in that kind of environment without support, and how worthwhile that experience therefore is, without support and access (Careers Adviser, face-to-face interview).

This is an interesting point; a project by Bennett et al. (2002) showed that the most important sources of employee learning (and by extension, work placement learning) comes from the work itself and from interactions with others in the workplace. For example, graduate employees identified that the major skill to be learned was to 'fit in'. This meant, amongst other things, adapting to cultural expectations and organisational pressures, and learning the 'language of the job'. One can question whether or not a deaf student or graduate on placement can 'fit in' if there is no interpreter support. In addition, how does the deaf student on placement learn enough about the working environment that they quickly become a valuable asset, and someone the host employer might want to keep? It can be argued, for example, that hearing students on placement learn a great deal about the job, the work-base culture and the working environment through listening to others and through 'incidental learning' (see Hopper, 2015). They may use this information to make themselves useful; to get ahead in the workplace. However, for the deaf student, with no access to interpreter support, it is much more difficult. With limited access to incidental learning how do they get access to that type of informal information which will enable them to become a useful resource? Arguably, even with interpreter support, there is no guarantee that the deaf student will easily 'fit in'; a third-party-mediator is undoubtedly going to change the work colleague dynamics and in the absence of a common language, potentially lead to an 'us and them' situation in the work place.

In summary, this chapter has shown that deaf undergraduates do acquire a number of generic or transferable employability skills whilst at university. Using the lower tier of the CareerEDGE model as a framework for categorising my findings, it has been possible to assess how accessible and useful subject degree knowledge, generic employability skills and career planning skills are for deaf students in the pursuit of employment. I have discussed the notion of emotional intelligence and its relevance to the workplace for deaf employees, in the context of deaf-hearing relationships.

This is a little-researched field and deserves further attention in the literature. Of particular interest is the availability and accessibility of work experience. This chapter has shown that even if students are able to develop a wide range of employability skills whilst at university, the opportunities to obtain a work placement experience, if it is not embedded in the curriculum, leads to a lack of practical experience opportunities. This can severely hinder deaf graduates' job prospects.

The examples in this chapter serve to illustrate the wide variety of barriers that deaf graduates face in developing and enhancing their employability skills. In addition to the issues addressed in this chapter, some of which may also be common to hearing students, there are additional factors that are perhaps unique to deaf students and these will be investigated in the next chapter.

Chapter 6. Additional Barriers Faced by Deaf Graduates

The previous chapter highlighted the barriers which the deaf graduates faced in acquiring employability skills. Some of these, such as access to career development planning may also be experienced by hearing students, if tutors do not clearly signpost the skills embedded within their curricula. This chapter now examines the additional barriers which emerged from the interview data, which I feel pertain particularly to the deaf graduates, as a direct result of their deafness. Some of these are inherent, such as barriers to English language and literacy; some are more practical, such as booking interpreters for interview and disability disclosure; others are more subtle, such as tutor and peer support. External support systems are also discussed. These barriers are manifest to varying degrees across the deaf graduate experience, and are represented here to highlight the wide range of challenges deaf graduates face in seeking work.

English Language and Literacy

> *The basic deprivation of profound congenital deafness is not the deprivation of sound; it is the deprivation of language* (Meadow-Orlans, 1980: 41).

As mentioned in the previous chapter, there are often insurmountable barriers for deaf students regarding the acquisition of English language skills, which in turn affects their access to job-seeking and career planning development. Luckner et al. (2005) undertook a meta-analysis of the research related to literacy and deaf students. In examining the literature published on this topic from 1963-2003, they found a number of common themes as to why deaf students fail to become fluent readers and writers. These included obstructed access to the phonological code, limited fluency at the onset of formal schooling, inadequate literacy experiences in early childhood, delayed acquisition of vocabulary and problems with lower-level skills (p444). It can be argued that the implications of these barriers to literacy affect not only the education of deaf pupils but also their access to employment. This literacy delay is a critical factor in the daily lives of many, if not most,

BSL users and yet, many years of professional and personal experience indicate that this concept is not fully understood by many hearing people, which includes many academics in Higher Education and employers. For this reason, I have chosen to discuss this issue in greater detail.

In any study of deaf people, language use is of ultimate importance. Of greatest significance is the choice of language modality; sign language or spoken language, and the accessibility of that language for acquisition purposes. The brain of a new-born child is designed for early acquisition of language. Indeed, language acquisition happens without explicit training on the part of the already competent language user (Humphries et al., 2012). Children naturally come to be fluent in whatever accessible language(s) they are surrounded by and exposed to on a regular and frequent basis. The language or languages the child acquires during these early years are called first languages (ibid). At around five years of age, the plasticity of the brain begins to gradually decrease. A child who has not acquired a language by that time (often called 'the critical period') runs the risk of not acquiring native-like fluency in any language (Krashen, 1973). As a result, the child becomes linguistically deprived and subsequently suffers a significant linguistic delay (Brennan, 1999).

The circumstances for deaf children are different as spoken language is not accessible for many deaf infants and children. Ninety to ninety-five percent of deaf children are born to hearing parents (Lane et al.,1996). Subsequently, deaf children often have a major difficulty learning the language of their parents. The principal reason for this is the limitation of linguistic input reaching the children: the hearing loss itself acts as a drastic filter on the linguistic data (Swisher, 1989).

> *Essentially, the problem for a deaf student trying to learn an auditory based language system, is that the major channel for language learning, namely hearing, is substantially blocked, leading to reduction in both quantity and quality of available input (*Swisher, 1989:241).

Severely and profoundly deaf children, therefore, do not have plentiful exposure to meaningful linguistic interaction in early childhood; they struggle to acquire a first language. And so, while deaf children have the same potential to develop language as other children (and at the same age and rate of development), unfortunately relatively few do so (Brennan, 1999).

Therefore, it is common for many deaf children to start school with a language deficit, when compared with hearing peers (Mole and Peacock, 2006). This deficit is exacerbated by an education system where many deaf children are placed in mainstream schools and expected to access the curriculum directly through spoken English alone:

> *Their [deaf children's] English literacy development has often been delayed by an education system which has let them down, by communication methodology which is inappropriate, and by assessment strategies based on hearing norms* (Barnes & Doe, 2007: 105).

Deaf students who enter university have already broken down many literacy barriers; however, the issues do not disappear. Studying at HE level requires all students to understand and use academic language and literacies. They need to be 'fluent and confident using the spoken and written language conventions of their academic discipline' (Mole and Peacock 2006:122). Deaf students entering universities under-prepared in terms of their literacy and their ability to access and produce written English at HE level (Walker et al., 1996; Barnes, 2007) struggle to access this academic discourse.

The students in this research study were all aware of the limitations of their literacy skills. They were eager to broaden the scope of their writing, aware that their ability fell short of the ideal. Whilst the deaf students could express themselves fully, effectively and even poetically in their first language (British Sign Language) they acknowledged the struggle to convey the same depth of meaning in English; some finding it difficult to put pen to paper at all:

> *I don't understand English, if the information is not clear. I prefer to work in my first language (BSL)* (Will, face-to-face interview).

> *One difficulty I did have was with written English. I struggled with my English* (Deana, Adobe Connect interview).

> *At first, I had to write my exams in English, which was really difficult. I couldn't do it* (Pradeep, Adobe Connect interview).

> *Without language support, the lecturers would read my work and fail it. University is highly academic. My own English is not at the same standard as required by the University system* (Tariq, face-to-face interview).

As Tariq illustrates here, the deaf students keenly appreciated the support of Language Tutors who helped them to write in a more academic style. However, this language support largely focussed on coursework and not on the acquisition of employability skills.

In analysing my research data it became apparent that the difficulties the students faced with written English also adversely affected their job-seeking skills. Filling in application forms and completing CVs posed a particular challenge for these students:

> *Application forms are really difficult for me. It is so hard because it is in English, and I struggle so much with English* (Pradeep, Adobe Connect interview)*.*

Graduates need to possess not only an array of employability skills but also the ability to evidence these on their CVs and application forms (CBI & UK, 2009). Farrar (2007) discusses the difficulties experienced by students in general, in conforming to academic writing styles and adequately conveying themselves. She acknowledges that those uncertainties are increased for deaf students if 'there are difficulties with sentence structure, spelling and confident use of an academic style' (p.5) or in this case a style of writing appropriate for CVs and application forms. In order to illustrate an array of employability skills, one first needs an understanding of the language associated with these. It can be argued that deaf undergraduates who are

unable to hear discussions relating to 'employability' or who have no direct access to the language associated with career development, face a huge barrier in the understanding, articulation and demonstration of their employability skill sets. Will clearly explains this barrier:

> *Application forms are difficult to understand, especially the technical language. Also, it is difficult to get the CV to match the job description. It's about the language and the words you choose … I am not always sure what they want. If you don't put what they expect then that can disadvantage you* (Will, face-to-face interview)*.*

Tariq also highlighted this problem:

> *Filling in forms can be tricky because sometimes I don't know if I am answering things the right way. Sometimes the terminology and jargon catches me out* (Tariq, face-to-face interview)*.*

Whilst many hearing students might struggle to meet the requirements of job specifications and evidencing their skills in a written format, for deaf students, the problem is possibly exacerbated due to challenges of language and literacy. Arguably, it is also about the expectations of a hearing world; the above quotes refer to doing things the 'right way' and 'the words you use'– demonstrating an awareness that they have to fit into a system that they do not have access to. The choice of words is of paramount importance. The careers adviser explained that hearing students pick up far more of the employability-related language that is discussed in advisory sessions:

> *But when the student is not hearing, that kind of exposure to 'employability' language is not picked up. So, for example when we start discussing interpersonal skills or negotiating skills, it is more about how to unpick this term and what it means and how to provide evidence to an employer* (Careers Adviser, face-to-face interview)*.*

The difficulties deaf students face in completing application forms and CVs led myself and the careers service to offer, in 2012, a bespoke Deaf Futures career coaching session, specifically to assist deaf students and graduates to build and develop a skills-based CV. This session clearly demonstrated a

lack of understanding of specific employability skills terminology. This was not because the students lacked the experiences, they lacked understanding of employability skills terminology, and how to use written English to translate these experiences into evidence based skills. This career coaching session highlighted the fact that deaf students' understanding and articulation of their employability skills is compounded by linguistic and aural challenges.

Feedback from this session in 2012 clearly illustrated the linguistic barrier these deaf students faced, and the necessity for this type of career intervention:

- *I have learned new words e.g. interpersonal, flexibility and adaptability*
- *I have learned lots of things which I did not expect. I now know what I need to put on CVs*
- *I have learned about customer orientation and leadership, details that I can add as evidence*
- *I have learned vocabulary that I didn't know before e.g. interpersonal skills, customer orientation*
- *I admit that the event has overwhelmed me because my knowledge is so limited. It's taught me that I should be involved in work experience.*
- *It's important to know how I can express my skills*
  (Barnes & Bradley, 2013:23).

It is evident that the students lacked access to specific employability language and to general advice regarding the application process; a finding which is duplicated in this research project. In discussing the difficulties deaf students face in acquiring the language associated with employability, the careers adviser raised an issue that I had not previously considered. Whilst some deaf students did attend one-to-one career coaching sessions with the adviser, there were additional barriers due to working through a third party, the interpreter. The career adviser termed this concept as 'lost in translation'. She explained that when she gave verbal examples of what employers would be looking for in a CV or on an application form, and in particular, examples of the formulaic written expressions often used in

applications, the BSL translation changed not only the formulaic language but also the English modelling of the answer. What the student was receiving in BSL was not in an English structure, and so when they reproduced this in their own written English, it did not resemble the language of the examples given:

> *The students are not getting any real exposure to how to express themselves in written English. I think this is a real issue for the deaf students* (Careers Adviser, face-to-face interview).

The interpreter and translation process should make the information more accessible, but in this case, the interpretation/translation process actually complicates the learning and hinders the student's access to the specific language examples.

Furthermore, the careers adviser felt that creating a CV was much harder for a deaf student because it is all about articulating clearly and selling yourself to the employer:

> *When your use of English is hindered in any way, then it becomes much harder to articulate something that for a lot of us is alien anyway; the way we sell ourselves. But when you are asking someone to take this through a couple of language stages, it is incredibly hard* (Careers Adviser, face-to-face interview).

It is important to consider that these difficulties present themselves whilst the students are at university, where they do receive support. Once they leave university and return home, there is often no local careers adviser to support them with the application process. Whilst UCLan offers a lifelong careers service, this is difficult to access at a distance, especially as E-Guidance (on-line/email careers advice) may present difficulties because of the literacy deficit mentioned above. The deaf student may not be able to fully express their request in written English. They may not have the specialist language to describe or evidence their skills. E-guidance may also be problematic for the careers advisers if the user is asking a question. It may be difficult for the adviser to unpick and understand exactly what is being asked. The E-guidance query is usually accompanied by a CV or an

application form which is presented for feedback. Even if they have understood the question, the adviser's written feedback could be confusing and possibly incoherent to the deaf graduate, especially if the adviser is not 'deaf aware' or aware of inherent linguistic barriers. Consequently, non-local deaf graduates are often left with no accessible or practical careers advice or support once they have graduated:

> *When I was at University, I used to ask my Language Tutor to help me. But now I've left, I don't know. There is no-one* (Will, face-to-face interview)*.*

Pradeep discussed going to the employment centre for support, but was disappointed that there was no one there to specifically help deaf people. He believed that there should be more places:

> *where deaf people can just walk in and get support with their English, to help them find employment, help them with application forms, letters and so on* (Pradeep, Adobe Connect interview).

The absence of specific deaf-related careers advice and support will be discussed in more depth later in this chapter. However, perhaps unsurprisingly, in the absence of such support on their return home, the interviewees relied on interpreters (Tariq) and family members (Jack, Sian and Niall) to help them with their CVs and application forms. Whilst this solved the problem in the short-term, the careers adviser was concerned that this led to other people writing the CVs for them:

> *This adds another layer of language decay, because it is not the students' interpretation of what they know and what they understand; it's through someone else's view of the world, so I think this is an issue* (Careers Adviser, face-to-face interview)*.*

She was particularly concerned about parents writing their applications for them:

> *It is the parents' perception of what skills the deaf graduate has got. It will be written how the parent feels an application form should be*

written. And there's possibly a certain level of control going on
(Careers Adviser, face-to-face interview)*.*

Furthermore, the careers adviser posed that because the students are not actually writing their own application forms, this potentially affects them in the interview:

Part of writing the CVs and application forms is part of the preparation for the interview itself; for selling yourself at interview. If someone else has written the CV, there is a good chance that the information on the CV does not come back at interview (Careers Adviser, face-to-face interview)*.*

Niall also expressed a different shortcoming of asking others to help him; that of appearing dependent, which clearly frustrated him:

First of all, I'd fill in the application form, and then I would have to ask my mum, my sister, my dad for help… but it is a thankless task. They never ask me to show them how to sign something, so why should I ask them to help me with English? I can't be bothered! (Niall, face-to-face interview).

Deana was the only interviewee who continued to see her Language Tutor after she had graduated. She saw this as a positive experience, and one she could not do without:

Without her I would be really stuck. No-one would think of offering me a job because of my English; my application form would look terrible. It is really important for me to have that support (Deana, Adobe Connect interview).

This, however, was not the norm amongst the interviewees. This support was undertaken as a favour by the Language Tutor, as being a graduate, Deana was no longer eligible for Disabled Students' Allowance or alternative funding to pay for this activity. As discussed in the previous chapter, the lack of funding to support deaf people into the workplace is a huge challenge, especially when they fall between the financial support systems. Neither Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) nor Access to Work (AtW)

funding is available for students seeking voluntary positions whilst at university, or for seeking and applying for jobs post-university.

It is not only on application forms that these linguistic challenges present themselves. Niall had set himself up as a freelance graphic designer and did a great deal of his advertising and job-seeking by email. He had hearing clients who had contacted him asking him to undertake work. He would reply by email, but always added a postscript apologising for his written English and spelling:

> *N.B. I am profoundly deaf. BSL (British Sign Language) is my first language. English is my second language. Please accept my apologies for the poor grammar and spelling* (Niall, face-to face interview).

Acknowledging both his deafness and the fact that his written English may be weak, was not an issue to Niall. He was proud of being a British Sign Language user. However, he did recognise that this open disclosure may have been detrimental to his job-seeking potential:

> *Many people came back to me afterwards saying that they had changed their minds. Maybe they thought 'if his English is poor, maybe his graphics will also be poor'* (Niall, face-to-face interview).

In summary, deaf students face a number of particular challenges due to their literacy delay. These are manifest most clearly in their non-acquisition of specialist employability language and in the subsequent difficulties they face in completing CVs and application forms. For the respondents in this research study, completing the application form also posed a further area of concern. Of critical importance was the question of whether or not to disclose their deafness, and whether this should be on the application form, at interview, or in the case of Niall (above) in any correspondence regarding the securing of work.

Disclosure

Very little has been written about disclosure of disability, and even less from the perspective of people with disabilities. However, expert opinion

generally supports 'effective disclosure of disability status to potential employers' (Jans et al., 2012:156). It can be argued that whilst disclosure is a complex and personal decision to make, for deaf applicants, the visible and logistical implications of their deafness makes disclosure on application more of a necessity than, perhaps, for someone with a hidden disability. For example, the need to book interpreters for interview, the organisation and arrangement of AtW funding, and the potential communication requirements of the post, arguably make disclosure at application a sensible option. The careers adviser I interviewed felt that the deaf students were more open to disclosure than many other disabled students:

> *Especially if they need an interpreter. You can't hide your deafness* (Careers adviser, face-to-face interview).

However, the majority of graduates in this research study had grappled with this decision. For Will and Sian this decision was complicated by the wording on the form. It has been argued that the way in which application forms are worded does not encourage students to disclose (Blankfield, 2001). Application forms ask if the applicant is disabled; however, many culturally deaf people do not consider themselves to be disabled (Bienvenu & Colonomos, 1989; Skelton & Valentine, 2003a; Hole, 2007; Harris & Thornton, 2005). Skelton & Valentine (2003b) pose that part of the political and cultural identity of deaf BSL users is to 'affirm being Deaf and to actively *reject* the label of disabled' (p 453). This was true for Sian:

> *Normally there is a question about whether you are disabled and I can argue that I am not. I always put down that I am deaf. I'm just open about it […] I do not feel I am disabled. I have a disability, yes, but am I disabled? No, I am not. It is different* (Sian, face-to-face interview).

Jack had no problem with his decision to disclose. In many ways his decision was part politically motivated and part pragmatics. He was proud of his deaf identity:

> *I prefer to identify myself as Deaf on the CV* (Jack, face-to-face interview).

Jack signed this as 'Big D Deaf', in order to denote a cultural, linguistic affiliation with other BSL users. As was discussed in the introductory chapter, the capitalised term 'Deaf' here is inextricably linked to 'a social construction of identity, involvement with a Deaf community, a concept of Deaf culture and the use of BSL' (Skelton & Valentine, 2003a: 455). In other words, Jack was making a political statement about his cultural identity, or what Ladd would term his 'Deafhood' (Ladd, 2003).

However, Jack also recognised that in order to discuss some of his achievements in the deaf sporting world, he would have to disclose his deafness:

> *It explains why I was part of the England Deaf Cricket team, and in the Deaf World Cup* (Jack, face-to-face interview).

Whilst this was a positive move on Jack's part, the fact that deaf people may not be able to keep their deafness undisclosed sets them apart from some other disability groups and may disadvantage them in the application process. For example, in a research study undertaken by Jans et al (2012), respondents with hidden disabilities said that they would never reveal their disability, even in an interview, fearing it would jeopardise their chances of even being considered for the job (p159). Deaf people often do not have this choice. Whilst under equality legislation this type of discrimination should not happen, it is certainly a fear:

> *Application forms are very difficult for me. I'm deaf – do I put that on the application form or not? Employers might look at the fact that I am deaf and think again about employing me. I'm never sure whether to put that I am deaf on the application form. Should I? Shouldn't I? It's a really difficult decision* (Pradeep, Adobe Connect interview).

> *Also, me being deaf, it puts people off. I don't include that information on application forms* (Tariq, face-to-face interview).

This reluctance to disclose was also reported by Boyce in her 2015 research study with deaf people in Wales:

I'm not comfortable saying I am deaf on a CV (Boyce, 2015:21).

These comments regarding disclosure are mirrored in the literature regarding general disability and disclosure. Jans et al (2011) support the notion that disclosure decisions are strongly influenced by the nature of the disability. People with hidden disabilities tend not to disclose for fear of being considered 'thick, problematic and costly' (Blankfield, 2001:23). For deaf people, the necessity of requesting an interpreter at interview, or explaining a lack of English proficiency or qualification often precludes non-disclosure, although some of the respondents clearly waited until they had been offered an interview before they informed the employer about their deafness.

 As the respondents above have shown, there is a great deal of emotion and anxiety attached to disclosure. There is evidently no clear consensus as to when and how to disclose, and it remains a deeply personal and sometimes political decision. That disclosure remains a cause of such concern despite twenty years of anti-disability legislation is worth comment.

Interviews

Another significant challenge for these deaf graduates, and arguably, for deaf people in general, is the interview process. There is a wealth of literature on the nature, processes, validity and value of the employment interview (see, for example, Arvey & Campion, 1982; Eder & Ferris, 1989). Whilst there is a body of knowledge based on employer attitudes towards disabled people, and the experiences of disabled people in the workplace (see chapter 2), there is considerably less written about disabled people and the actual interview process (Christman & Slaten, 1991). A notable example is an article by Vedeler (2014) which explores job interviews with mobility impaired people in the US and Norway. I could not find any literature at all relating to deaf people and employment interviews. Given that the interview is still the most popular device employers use in order to select and recruit employees (Posthuma et al., 2002) and given the relatively unique circumstances of interviewing deaf people who use BSL, this is an area which warrants further research. For most people, the interview is a

nerve-wracking experience, for deaf people there is an added layer of anxiety; the interpreted interview. All of the respondents in the research study had a great deal to say about interpreters and interviews. It appears that, in addition to having the usual concerns about the interview process, the deaf graduates also had to worry about whether or not an interpreter would turn up, and if they did, whether or not they would be competent, qualified and prepared. All too often it appears that this is not the case.

It was clear from the interview data that all the respondents were acutely aware of the impact and influence that the interpreter has on the interview experience. For this reason they wanted highest quality interpreting:

> *I am absolutely adamant that the interpreters I use have excellent voice- over skills. That's my priority when I book interpreters. The voice-over has to match my BSL exactly. What they say is going to influence the interview panel, so it needs to be of the highest quality* (Pradeep, Adobe-Connect interview)*.*

The emphasis on voice-over skills was a common refrain; as within any interpreting situation, the deaf signers have no mechanism with which to check the accuracy of their signed response in translation. For this reason some of the respondents organised their own interpreters (Jack, Terry, Sian), choosing someone they knew, who had a good knowledge of themselves, their background and their subject area:

> *When I applied for a job, I asked if I could bring my own interpreter and they were fine about it […] I used my interpreter of choice, so the interview process was smooth. She [the interpreter] works well with me, allowing me to communicate freely. Imagine a situation where there is a panel plus an unknown interpreter that they have booked. In that situation communication can break down, information can be misinterpreted and there can be difficulty understanding because of regional variations in sign language. Yes, I feel more confident with my interpreter. If it is someone I don't know and they don't know about sport, then I could potentially lose the job* (Jack, face-to-face interview).

What Jack has highlighted here, is the importance of interpreter familiarity, which generates trust, and subsequently, confidence. It is unlikely that the employer has booked an interpreter before. If this is the case, he or she might not know about the importance of familiarity, or that the interpreter requires preparation or even about the qualifications an interpreter should hold. They might not understand that a poor interview could be the result of poor interpretation, not weak interview performance on the part of the deaf applicant.

Pradeep had not booked his own interpreter and had had a stressful experience:

> *I once had a terrible experience, the worst experience possible, where the interpreter kept asking me to repeat what I was signing. The interruptions and repetitions interrupted the whole interview process. I was so frustrated! It affected my interview greatly. She was only qualified to Level 1 or 2, which I really object to. Then I had another interview and she turned up again. I have been bitterly disappointed with some of the interpreting* (Pradeep, Adobe-Connect interview).

However, Pradeep was also pragmatic; aware of the fact that if an interview is called at short notice, it is going to be difficult to find a highly qualified interpreter. This shortage of qualified interpreters clearly needs to be taken into consideration when interviews are scheduled, and is a strong argument for early disclosure.

The booking of interpreters for interviews is clearly a contested issue. Whilst some interviewees booked their own interpreters, logistically perhaps this can only happen if the interview is local. Whilst some employers do appear content to book interpreters themselves, they may not have the knowledge or expertise to enquire about qualifications and credentials. My interview with Will exposed yet another area of concern. Whose responsibility it is to prompt the booking of interpreters appears to be a particularly grey area. Is it enough for deaf applicants simply to state on the application form that they are deaf and a BSL user and hope that the employer books an interpreter, or is it the applicants' responsibility to contact the employer

themselves and request an interpreter? The data from my interviews highlights the lack of any hard and fast rules. As Will explains:

> *Recently I went to an audition. I had written clearly on the application form that I was deaf and used sign language, but when I turned up, there was no interpreter. It was nerve-wracking, as I was the only deaf person there. I had the confidence to say something and they were quite shocked and wanted to know how I would cope in the theatre without an interpreter. I had to give it a go, but I failed to get the part* (Will, face-to-face interview).

Will had expected the employer to book the interpreter as he had clearly disclosed his deafness and language choice. That an interpreter had not been booked was another common refrain amongst the respondents throughout their interviews. This issue will be discussed in more depth shortly, in relation to the support the deaf graduates received once they had left university.

It is interesting to note that on reflection, Will wondered whether the lack of an interpreter had lost him the part:

> *Would I have failed if there had been an interpreter present? I don't know* (Will, face-to-face interview).

He did not blame the lack of interpretation for his failure to secure the position. What he highlighted was his inability to ever know. This resonates with the earlier views of Pradeep and Jack. Was it the lack of an interpreter or interpreter incompetence/lack of experience and so forth that had cost them the interview or was it their own performance? Clearly, in the majority of cases, the interpreter would be qualified and prepared for the interview, and the deaf applicant confident that they would be represented accurately. Nevertheless, some of the respondents in this study had also had experiences which were not as positive. The fact remains that deaf interviewees cannot check on the accuracy of the voice-over. What might have been a very strong, in-depth response to an interview question might have been inadequately or inaccurately interpreted. This makes post-

interview self-reflection and evaluation of performance very difficult, which in turn might affect their confidence at next interview.

One final consideration regarding the interpreted interview, is the possible effect the presence of an interpreter has on the potential employer. Personnel literature suggests that many interviewers make their selection of employees during the first four minutes of an interview (Hatfield & Gatewood, 1978). If this is so, it is likely that employers' predictions of future employment potential and behaviour are formed largely on the basis of non-verbal cues, particularly physical appearance (Christman & Slaten, 1991). Therefore, it can be argued that any kind of difference may place individuals with physical disabilities, for example, at a relative disadvantage during a job interview. Stereotypes, formed in early life, may lead employers to assign certain traits to applicants with a disability; to pre-judge whether or not they will be able to perform a specific task (Johnson & Roach Higgins, 1987; Vedeler, 2014). When the applicant is a BSL user, this situation is further complicated. Rather than one person walking into the interview room, there are two. This is an immediate change of dynamics. The interpreter and interviewee may well manoeuvre the seating arrangements for optimum communication and visual access. This is an immediate change of power. The fact that the interviewee is 'disabled' is quite apparent, as is their need to communicate through an interpreter. What message does this mediated communication send to the employer? Which work-based tasks might he or she already be mentally crossing off the job specification, before the interview has even begun? Additionally, the employer might never have worked with an interpreter before and may, first of all, engage with the interpreter (as the person who is speaking), rather than the interviewee, thus losing all eye-contact and the other facial and non-verbal cues which are critical in a selection process. Once they have been advised on the etiquette of speaking to a deaf person, they then may feel uncomfortable looking at the interviewee, whilst the voice or the response is coming from elsewhere. This all happens within the first few minutes of interview, and has the potential to negatively impact upon the interview situation and outcome.

Accessing Support

It can be argued that all students need support whilst at university and whilst seeking employment. However, for the deaf graduates in this research study, support was a significant factor, which was mentioned in a variety of different contexts. The respondents discussed support from within the university, from tutors, support services and peer groups, and support from outside of the university, once they had graduated. Whilst not all of this support relates directly to employability, support is a key factor in facilitating success for deaf students who wish to attain a good degree via a curriculum and learning environment which is not readily accessible to them. The following sections discuss both the formal and informal support networks and services that impact upon the students' university lives and their lives after graduation.

Support from within the University

Formal Support Services

In preparation for entering the job market, it is vital that deaf graduates receive support from within the university in order to develop the employability skills and derive the benefits that the acquisition of a good degree brings. This includes being able to fully access the curriculum, participate within the classroom, understand and produce assignments; in short, to gain equality of access in both academic and non-academic environments. The support offered within UCLan needs to be seen within the wider context of disability legislation, namely the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA) (2001), the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA)(2005) and more recently the Equality Act (2010) and the SEND Code of Practice (2014). Whilst the legislation makes it unlawful for universities to discriminate against deaf students by treating them less favourably when offering places or providing services, of particular note and value is the requirement to make 'reasonable adjustments' so deaf students are not significantly disadvantaged when compared with hearing students (Gov.uk, 2005; SFE, 2015). In the context of the inclusive university these adjustments include the provision of sign language interpreters, notetakers and language tutors, all of whom are instrumental in overcoming the

education barriers deaf students encounter within university (Lang, 2002; Saunders, 2012; O Neill & Jones, 2007).

UCLan has a national reputation for supporting deaf students, and has one of the largest BSL-using populations in the UK. As mentioned earlier, many of the graduates had chosen to study at UCLan simply because of its reputation for providing high quality support. Throughout the interviews, most of the graduates praised the support they had received. Typical comments include:

> *At university, the support has been excellent; everything has run very smoothly. I've had interpreters, notetakers and a language tutor. The university knows exactly how to support deaf students* (Deana, Adobe Connect interview).

> *My language tutor really helped me to grasp things, and helped me to understand more clearly. That one-to-one support was a real help, very useful* (Tariq, face-to-face interview).

Interpreter support was highlighted as being particularly significant. Most of the graduates had nothing but praise for their interpreters. Niall unfortunately had not had such a good experience:

> *I didn't gel with some of the interpreters … I took a year out, which was partly because of my lack of confidence in the interpreters (well, some interpreters), and partly due to the fact that I was going through a difficult time* (Niall, face-to-face interview).

Niall's comments illustrate a number of interesting points. Whilst all the interpreters employed at UCLan are highly qualified and experienced at working in the HE environment, they can still make mistakes and misunderstand. Access to interpreters does not mean an equality of access to the learning environment. Seven of the eight respondents had good relationships and/or positive experiences with the interpreters, yet these were the same interpreters Niall had used. It would appear that preference of interpreters is a deeply personal choice:

Well, it depends on the person and the interpreter. It's like when I had to deliver a presentation to the whole class, and the interpreter kept interrupting me to ask what I had just signed. It just put me off, and I couldn't continue (Niall, face-to-face interview).

There clearly has to be trust and confidence between the deaf students and their interpreters for communication to be successful; once that confidence has been lost, it is very difficult to regain. These are issues which were mentioned earlier by Pradeep and Jack in the context of the interpreted employment interviews. Niall's lack of confidence in the interpreters appears to be a) very personal and b) very significant to him; so much so, that he took a year out of university. Undoubtedly, one cannot over-estimate the strength of the interpreter/client relationship in enabling success at university.

In more general terms, all the students recognised that support was an integral part of their university life, and they were open and confident when discussing accessing and using their available support services. Importantly, these support services were also critical if the students were to acquire employability skills, meet with careers advisers and undertake other job-seeking activities. As mentioned earlier, the Disabled Students' Allowance only covers classroom and curriculum activities and does not necessarily include, for example, access to careers guidance. At UCLan, the students are fortunate in that the interpreters are employed as in-house, salaried interpreters. This means that they can interpret for students outside of the classroom, at careers sessions, meetings with tutors, medical appointments and so forth. UCLan is one of the few institutions in the UK where this happens, as many other HEIs rely on free-lance interpreters who are booked on a sessional basis, for support solely in the classroom. At UCLan, access to interpreters outside of the classroom meant that the deaf students could, if they chose, attend careers sessions, Deaf Futures, one-to-one coaching sessions and other job-seeking activities.

However, having access to unlimited interpreter support and a comprehensive support service may, conversely, have a downside. The careers adviser raised an issue which I had not previously thought about

and which is worth serious consideration. She wondered whether the level and quality of support offered by UCLan actually made some students dependent upon support:

> *Because the students are here at university and the support is so good, so streamlined, does that make some students dependent on the support? Have they become a little too dependent upon them?* (Careers Adviser, face-to-face interview).

She placed this question within the context of employability. Whilst she acknowledged the need for Access to Work support in the workplace, she wondered if the students having been so well supported at university, perhaps created a different perception of their actual support needs and the potentially available support within the workplace. Good quality support makes the university accessible but the students could become dependent on it, and this will negatively impact on their decisions and self-perception. In short, students might think that they need more support than they actually do.

This has substantial implications for both work placements and employment. The student may not take up a voluntary work placement because of the lack of funding for interpreters, when in reality, they may not need that interpreter support at all. More worrying, perhaps, they may tell a potential employer about the amount of interpreter support they require at work, which might a) be an inflated estimate based on their support at university and b) cause concern for the employer, who has to make a contribution to the Access to Work cost:

We set up an opportunity for a deaf graduate, and it was very much a given. He went to the interview and they were even saying 'where is the best place for you to sit'? Then the employer came back to us and said 'no'. Was this because they had discussed what kind and amount of support that the graduate might need?' (Careers Adviser, face-to-face interview).

The careers adviser raised the possibility that this rejection might have been due to the amount of support that the graduate had asked for. Whilst

this is only conjecture, it is an interesting supposition based on her extensive experience of supporting deaf graduates into employment .

No-one would deny the right to interpreter support for deaf employees. There are times and roles when interpreter access is an absolute necessity. However, perhaps this is more about managing expectations and the need for bespoke Access to Work training for all deaf undergraduates. This will be discussed in greater depth in chapter 8.

Informal Tutor and Peer Support

In addition to the support offered by disability services and funded by the Disabled Students' Allowance, students also valued the more personal support offered by lecturers and peer groups, although the experiences of the graduates varied considerably. Most of the graduates had supportive lecturers, especially those lecturers who had taught deaf students before:

> *They know about deaf students - they are deaf aware - because before me there was Billy, and after me there was Sanjay* (Jack, face–to-face interview).

Sian, Will and Deana also mentioned tutors being deaf aware and supportive during their studies. For Deana, it was something more. Being on the BSL & Deaf Studies course, she had deaf lecturers:

> *At UCLan I had excellent lecturers, who inspired me to teach. They were good role models. I wanted to teach like they did* (Deana, Adobe Connect interview).

Not only were they supportive, but Deana's lecturers were role models to her. I found this interesting as the term 'role model' appeared in almost every interview transcript. Maybe, because there are so few teachers who are deaf, deaf children seldom see such role models in the classroom. This was an opportunity for Deana to watch lessons being delivered in BSL and to be inspired to do the same:

> *I wanted to teach like they did. I wanted to use the experience I gained at UCLan to teach* (ibid)*.*

This concept of being a role model is a fascinating one which will be discussed in more depth in chapter 7.

Whilst most of the graduates reported that their tutors had been supportive, both Niall and Tariq had had less positive experiences of tutor attitudes. As an example, Niall felt that his tutors did not understand him, nor his difficulties:

> *I didn't feel encouraged to do the work. If I handed something in, where I had missed the point, they [my tutors] just ignored it, and took it that I was a slacker … the tutors seemed to think I was a slacker, so I couldn't be bothered* (ibid).

Niall's comments clearly illustrate the need for tutors to be trained in deaf awareness. Because Niall's tutors were unaware of the difficulties Niall faced as a deaf student, they did not fully support him. This, at least, was his perception, and his repeated use of the term 'slacker' denotes, perhaps, something that has been spoken about, or alluded to. Whether his tutors thought this of him, or not, it led to a lack of motivation on his part, and amongst other factors led him to intercalate for a year.

Peer Support and Social Isolation

Overall, university was a negative experience for Niall and this highlights some of the issues regarding support available from fellow students, such as interaction with other students, informal learning through socialisation, and access to culturally aware peers. Niall was the only deaf student on his course, and throughout his interview he repeatedly referred to being isolated and 'left out':

> *I feel that university was a waste of time. I ended up in debt and was isolated and out of it, as a deaf person on the course* (Niall, face-to-face interview)*.

> *I felt a bit awkward; I felt a bit like a monster because I was deaf* (ibid).

> *I was the only deaf student on my course. Being the only one was difficult* (ibid)*.

Niall felt that he did not have the support of either his tutors or his peer group. He was socially isolated which in turn affected his confidence, his motivation and potentially influenced his decision to interrupt his studies. The social isolation many deaf students feel within a mainstream setting is a common refrain throughout the literature (DEX, 2003; RNID, 2002; Powell et al., 2014). The consequences of social isolation are far-reaching - affecting not only one's enjoyment of university, but also one's learning, achievement, potential for networking (see chapter 7) and employment, and in Niall's case, mental health.

Tariq also found integration with his peers to be difficult. He explained that he had tried to interact with the other students on the course, but they did not have the confidence or the ability to communicate with him:

> *When I try and engage with the group it can be hard as we can't always communicate with one another. Sometimes it's me, sometimes it's them* (Tariq, face-to-face interview)*.*

Tariq understood that communication is a two-way process, and that he also had a responsibility to engage with his peers. However, he felt that the presence of interpreters made things difficult, and that his peer group felt awkward and uncomfortable engaging with him. Tariq also highlighted the difference between his hearing peers and himself, implying that they had a different learning experience within the classroom:

> *They [his hearing peers] chat amongst themselves more and they have more access to information … They work together more in small groups. Also, sometimes when the tutor starts talking about something, when I am concentrating on my work, I just miss out on that spontaneous information* (ibid).

What Tariq has highlighted here is incredibly significant, and yet not often discussed within deaf-related literature; the importance of interaction in learning and more specifically interaction for informal learning. Lev Vygotsky emphasised the importance of interaction in learning (Vygotsky, 1997). In Vygotsky's view, dialogue is an essential part of learning and education. This is epitomised by a kind of talk called "scaffolding" which,

according to Martin (2005) 'helps learners complete a task they couldn't have managed on their own' (p103). The teacher is aware of the student's level of understanding, and through dialogue builds on this to help the learner achieve the next step. The task becomes more manageable and the learner internalises the strategies for completing the task, which will allow them to become more independent in the future:

> *With "scaffolding", learners do not just learn facts or information – they also learn ways of thinking and strategies to help them in the future* (Mercer, 2000:74).

Learners also learn from each other, without a teacher being involved. A learner who is more skilled or knowledgeable can scaffold another learner. Groups can work together to discuss their ideas and develop new ones. If it is these interactions with others, through language, that most strongly influence their learning, there are clear implications for deaf students:

> *Educational success or failure does not depend only on the individual ability of the learner – it also depends on the quality of the interaction between learners and teachers, and between groups of learners* (Martin, 2005:100).

It might be argued, therefore, that deaf learners do not have access to the learning conversations around them. Even where an interpreter is present, the student is not directly involved with the learning experience as it has been filtered, is subject to a time-lag delay, and is appropriately termed 'second-hand-learning' (Harrington, 2001). Furthermore, much of this peer learning and support happens serendipitously rather than in the classroom situation, when there may be no interpreter present.

The deaf student is clearly at a disadvantage. Unlike any one else in the classroom, they have no peer group; or at least, no accessible peer group. It is easy therefore to perceive the marginalisation of deaf students during informal interactions with hearing peers. This results in a reduction in informal learning opportunities (Hopper, 2015), which are often forgotten about by teaching staff, but which are invaluable and the norm for hearing students. This marginalisation may be one of the reasons some – but by no

means all - of the deaf graduates in my study felt particularly isolated when studying alongside their hearing peers.

This social isolation is also the major reason that deaf students value a deaf peer group, as mentioned by Deana in chapter 5. The value of a deaf peer group was also mentioned by Niall, who discussed his wish to study at Gallaudet University, currently the only university, world-wide, which caters solely for deaf students:

> *I wish I could have gone to Gallaudet, where everyone is deaf. Wow! I would have loved to have gone there* (Niall, face-to-face interview)*.*

The dream of a fully deaf environment is understandable, given some of the negative experiences felt by the respondents who, like the majority of other deaf students in the UK, are studying in a fully hearing environment.

Jack, however, had had a more positive experience, especially on his MA course. He had struggled to engage with his tutors and peer group on his BA course, but felt the benefit of working within a smaller group for post-graduate study. In his reflection on this learning experience, he reveals significant information regarding the specific pedagogic needs of deaf learners; namely that the size of the group makes a difference not only to peer interaction, but also to learning in general:

> *There were less people on the MA course and it was a more informal style of teaching. This meant that there was an opportunity to engage with others on the course, and to work together. That wasn't possible in the same way on the BA course, as there were so many students packing out the lecture theatres […] I think it suits deaf students to work in a smaller group environment, compared to a course which is full of hearing students, because then there is limited opportunity for the deaf student to get access to the lecturer to ask questions and so on* (Jack, face-to-face interview)*.*

The smaller class size had enabled the interaction that many of the other respondents had lacked. It also facilitated tutor 'scaffolding', as Jack had more opportunities to engage with teaching staff.

Will, too, had a different experience on his course; one which highlights how deaf students need not be isolated, if hearing students learn to sign. Will studied on the BSL and Deaf Studies course where all members of the course signed. Because they could sign, the hearing members of the group became the valued 'deaf peer group' who scaffolded and supported Will's learning:

> *On the course we all used BSL. We had great debates and discussions, and as a group we shared our knowledge and views, agreeing and disagreeing about things, learning from each other's experiences and so on. It is important that we share information as a group* (Will, face-to-face interview)*.*

Whilst it is not realistic to expect all hearing peer groups to learn to sign, Will's experience does point to the benefits of peers becoming deaf-aware and understanding the communication and linguistic barriers deaf people face. This finding was also replicated in an unpublished piece of research undertaken with the hearing peer groups of deaf undergraduates (Domagala-Zysk et al., 2015). This research found similar conclusions from hearing students studying alongside deaf peers to those outlined above from the deaf students themselves.

This section of my thesis has explored the support that the graduates received from their tutors and peers, and the support offered by the university disability support services. In particular it has highlighted the effects that social isolation can have upon deaf students. Without an accessible and/or supportive peer group, some deaf students might become marginalised and miss out on spontaneous incidental information which informs their learning. They may also lack opportunities for scaffolding from peers – which is not only socially bonding, but also instrumental to problem solving and independent learning. Social isolation also leads to a much smaller network of friends and acquaintances, which, in turn, has the potential to affect future employment prospects. This will be discussed in more depth in the next chapter.

Whilst not directly linked to employability, it can be argued that without access to support, deaf students are unlikely to succeed at university, and

this has the potential to indirectly affect their ability to secure employment on graduation. That support issues pervaded the respondents' narratives points to the importance of this support in their lives. Perhaps, unsurprisingly, the support they received on leaving university was also a significant factor of their employability journey. This support (or lack of support) will be examined in the next section of my thesis.

Support Outside of University

As we have seen, deaf students benefit from a range of support provision whilst studying at university. Not least of these is the provision of interpreters, which enables them to access not only their courses but also meetings and coaching sessions with the careers service. On graduation the situation is quite different. Whilst graduates may still be supported by the university careers service, this is not realistic nor practical for deaf students. Non-deaf graduates typically use email (what is commonly known as E-Guidance) for continued careers advice. Many deaf students, due to their level of literacy, require interpreted face-to-face interaction. This is not possible for non-local graduates, who move back to their home town. This means that they are reliant on external services to provide this support. In particular, Job Centres and Access to Work should provide specialist support to help people who are deaf to find jobs (Boyce, 2015). However, the respondents' experiences of these organisations were unanimously negative.

Job Centres

According to the deaf graduates, the major weakness of these organisations was the almost total ignorance of the needs of deaf people amongst what is supposed to be specialist staff:

> *The problem is that they are not deaf aware at the Job Centre* (Tariq, face-to-face interview).

Many of the respondents had visited the Job Centre, only to find that an interpreter had not been booked, and they had to reschedule appointments.

Will found himself at a second appointment, but again, with no interpreter. Tariq was told that someone would contact him when an interpreter had been booked, but he never heard anything more from them. The careers adviser also mentioned this problem in her interview:

> *The student I saw yesterday had had an interview at Job Centre Plus, but there was no interpreter. I told him to go back and request that he has another appointment and that an interpreter is present* (Careers Adviser, face-to-face interview)*.

Many of the respondents felt that they were being passed from pillar to post, and were frustrated by fruitless attempts to attend meetings with their Job Centre advisers. These are common refrains, and yet unemployed deaf people are required to keep appointments at the Job Centre and attend interviews in order to claim allowances; failure to do so can result in benefits being stopped.

In order to gain a job interview, students first have to successfully apply for a job. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, deaf graduates often need support with the practical aspects of finding employment such as writing application forms or CVs. Job Centres simply do not provide this type of support:

> *Well, I can't see much help coming from Job Centre Plus, unless they have some staff who have experience of working with deaf people. They are few and far between though. The Job Centre wouldn't help you to write a CV. Maybe the students will need to find a deaf club that has a job club? There are not many of these though* (Careers Adviser, face-to-face interview).

The experiences outlined here are not uncommon and have been replicated in other studies (RNID, 2006; Boyce, 2015). In a study by Boyce (2015), participants consistently stated that Job Centre staff did not provide appropriate support specific to their hearing loss. All seven interviewees in this study believed that Job Centres were 'unhelpful and most staff they encountered were very poorly informed on how to provide services for deaf people' (p18).

All this paints a bleak picture for deaf graduates seeking employment after university. The lack of support and understanding in Job Centres results in many deaf graduates, including those in this study, being left to fend for themselves, despite a clear lack of knowledge and understanding of the process of how to find a job. Arguably, the consequences are higher than average unemployment and under-employment amongst deaf graduates, an over-reliance on benefits and a lack of opportunities to act as positive role models for other deaf people (Woolfe, 2004; RNID, 2006; The Scottish Government, 2015).

Access to Work

One of the most contentious issues in contemporary disability employment discourse is the ongoing changes to Access to Work funding. It is not the intention to discuss these changes and the history of Access to Work here, but rather to show how Access to Work is largely failing to support deaf graduates in accessing employment opportunities.

History

Access to Work is a UK government programme that provides employment support to people who have a disability or long term physical or mental health condition, to allow them to find and stay in work. Support can be provided where someone needs help or adaptations beyond the reasonable adjustments required under the Equality Act 2010. Funding covers the costs of providing extra equipment and services that may be needed (such as interpreters for deaf people) and which are above and beyond the requirement for employers to make reasonable adjustments when employing a disabled person. Over 35,000 people claimed Access to Work funding in 2013/14, 5,620 of them because of hearing difficulties. Deaf claimants were awarded more than one-third of Access to Work spending in 2013/14 (www.gov.uk; Boyce 2015). Changes introduced in 2015 capped funding at £40,800 per person per year, with employers expected to take on an increased percentage of overall costs. The implications of this for deaf graduates were unclear at the time of writing but were the cause of great concern amongst deaf and disabled people generally (See for example

https://stopchanges2atw.com/;
http://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/tag/access-to-work/).

'The Best Kept Secret'

Despite being introduced in 1994, Access to Work has been called 'the best kept secret' of UK benefits funding. Boyce claims that 'the government does not want people to find out' about Access to Work (Boyce 2015:2-18). Significantly, research by other organisations such as Action on Hearing Loss, has shown that many potential claimants (as many as 46% of respondents) are unaware of the existence of Access to Work (Arrowsmith, 2014).

This situation is borne out by the interviewees for this research, who indicated similar levels of unawareness:

> *[Someone] helped me to get an interpreter at work because he explained to me about Access to Work. I didn't know about it, it was news to me (Jack, face-to-face interview).*

> *I would need to know how to apply for* Access to Work *to help with accessing information … I only found out [about* Access to Work *] from talking to friends and then I googled some information (Tariq, face-to-face interview).*

Even for those students who know about Access to Work, problems still arise for those not actually in work but seeking to enhance their employability. Although Access to Work is intended to help people with disabilities to find work, it cannot be claimed by deaf undergraduates wishing to spend a period on work experience or in voluntary work. Unless the work placement is part of their degree curriculum, Disabled Students' Allowance is also not available, so deaf students either have to self-fund the costs of a placement (which can be prohibitive) or more often, miss out on this opportunity. As has been demonstrated earlier in this thesis, both employers and graduates recognise the importance of gaining work experience but this is problematic for both deaf and disabled students.

Having negotiated the stresses of undergraduate life, together with the additional challenges faced by students who are deaf, the agencies charged with helping deaf graduates move into the workplace are largely failing in their responsibilities to these clients. There is a widespread lack of awareness of the particular requirements of deaf graduates; this includes ensuring deaf jobseekers have their communication needs recognised and addressed when arranging appointments and interviews; promoting the availability of Access to Work funding to those looking for and gaining employment; providing a greater degree of practical support with the logistical elements of seeking and applying for jobs, such as completing application forms and compiling CVs. As an example of the issues faced by deaf people wishing to use government employment services, a recent change in policy saw Access to Work changing their first point of contact from email to telephone (Boyce, 2015). Whilst a video-relay service has now been added as an option, the implications of this action for people who cannot hear had clearly not been thought through or possibly even considered. As such, it is a clear indicator that deaf people are often disenfranchised from gaining careers advice and support, not as a result of their own actions but as a result of the institutional lack of awareness and consideration of their situation by those best placed to respond.

This chapter has explored additional challenges that deaf graduates face both whilst studying at university and once they have graduated and seeking work. Whilst there are challenges all young people face in finding work in times of austerity, this chapter has highlighted specific barriers which I believe concern deaf students and graduates solely because of their deafness. These challenges may make finding employment more difficult, and may lead to a more limited choice of future careers. The next chapter will discuss such limitations and explore the career destinations of the graduates, with particular reference to working in the deaf community.

Chapter 7. Choosing to Work in the Deaf Community: Choice or Necessity?

Choosing to Work in the Deaf Community?

In 2004, Tyron Woolfe wrote an ideological essay posing that there are three main categories of deaf employment: deaf people working within the deaf field; deaf people having their own businesses; and deaf people on long-term welfare benefits (Woolfe, 2004:1). Clearly, my research study has shown that there are also many deaf people working in mainstream employment, and deaf people who are unemployed and actively seeking work (see chapter 2) but these were not the focus of Woolfe's essay. I had not read this article by the time I started interviewing; but having found it, I was fascinated. How true was this of my interviewees, who via 'volunteer sampling' (Gray, 2009:153) had self-selected to be interviewed, and thus represented a somewhat random assortment of graduate employment outcomes? One of my interview questions was designed to elicit information about the respondents' graduate destinations. At the time of interview, I did not pursue this question any further than to find out where they worked and whether they had a preference for working in a hearing or deaf environment. It was only during the analysis stage of my study that it came to light that *all* of the graduates had either worked or had undertaken voluntary work experience in the deaf community or in a deaf-related industry. I became fascinated by the recurrence of deaf community work amongst the graduates, and so this became a significant part of my research study. In retrospect, I realise that I should have included specific interview questions relating to their choice of work environment and their motivations for this choice. Nonetheless, the data generated by the other research questions gave me scope to create my fourth research question, exploring the extent to which deaf people work in the deaf community by choice or through necessity.

This chapter, therefore, explores the employment outcomes for the eight interviewees in this study, and poses the question of whether they had chosen to work within the deaf community, and if so, what might have been

the reasons for this choice? I was particularly interested by the notion of whether deaf-related employability was an active choice or a necessity due to barriers in gaining 'mainstream' employment.

The table overleaf (Table 2) summarises the graduate destinations of the interviewees and their preference, if any, for working within the deaf community (or in a deaf-related industry), or in a mainstream environment.

Table 2: Preference for Working in the Deaf Community or in a Mainstream Environment.

Graduate	Employment Setting Preference			Destination at time of interview	Voluntary Experience in Deaf Community or Deaf-Related Industry
	Deaf Community or Deaf-Related Industry	Mainstream	No preference		
Deana	X			Unemployed	X
Jack	X			Deaf Community & Mainstream	X
Niall	X			Unemployed	X
Pradeep		X		Unemployed	X
Sian		X		Deaf Community	X
Tariq		X		Unemployed (Vol./ad hoc work with the Deaf Community)	X
Terry		X		Deaf Community	X
Will	X	X		Unemployed (Vol. work at the university and in the Deaf Community)	X

The first finding to note is the fact that, regardless of personal preference, all of the graduates were either unemployed or working within the deaf community. Furthermore, all of them had at one time undertaken voluntary work within the deaf community. Deana and Jack wanted to work specifically within a deaf-related industry; Deana as a teacher of BSL and Jack as a Sports Coach for deaf cricketers and deaf Olympians. Both Deana and Jack had chosen degree courses which would lead to this type of employment; BA Deaf Studies and Education, a BSL Teacher Training Course, followed by a Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector (Deana), and a BA and MA Sports Coaching and an MSc Strength and Conditioning (Jack). At the time of interview, Jack was teaching sport to deaf children, disabled children and hearing children in three different part-time jobs. Deana, on the other hand, was unemployed, desperately seeking work as a BSL teacher:

> *I have just been so disappointed, because there is no work out there. I can't find a job … I have sent my CV out to so many places where they teach BSL, but I have not had one response at all* (Deana, Adobe Connect interview)*.*

Deana recognised the competition amongst BSL teachers seeking work (see below), and identified cuts in FE funding to be an additional barrier to her gaining employment. After a year of seeking work, she now realised that she would have to look further afield and try and find any kind of work, in order to have a salary, and to have something significant to put on to her CV:

> *I'm even looking at shop assistant roles. I can always give that up if a BSL teaching job came up. I think that if I had some kind of employment, no matter what it was, it would look better on my CV* (ibid).

Deana was unemployed despite gaining a good degree, completing a specialist BSL teacher training course (incorporating introductory teaching qualifications) and completing a Diploma in Teaching and Learning in the Lifelong Learning Sector (DTLLS). However, it appears that her

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unemployment status may have been due, in some part, to career choice, and the lack of teaching opportunities due to changes in funding and policy.

Niall's preference to work in the deaf community was a little more complex. He had studied Graphic Design, with a goal of setting up as a freelance graphic designer. He had quickly become disillusioned with this, as he felt he was being judged negatively as a deaf person (see chapter 6). His choice was dictated by a strong reluctance to work in a hearing environment due to his belief that he would be discriminated against:

> *I don't want to work in a hearing environment … I still have an interest in Graphic Design, but it's the contact and engagement with hearing people that is the problem … I have never bothered to apply to a hearing company, because I know there is no point. I read somewhere recently, that over 85% of deaf people are discriminated against. It is that mentality of them looking down on us, thinking we are not intelligent because we are deaf. No, I know if I did apply I'd be wasting my time* (Niall, face-to-face interview).

This perception of discrimination has been reported within the literature. For deaf people not in work, discriminatory attitudes from employers is seen as the main barrier to getting a job (Boyce, 2015; RNID, 2006; Action on Hearing Loss, Wales, 2009). For example, a research study in Wales found that 59% of working age people believed that their deafness makes it harder to get a job, whilst two-fifths identified the attitude of employers as a barrier to work (Action on Hearing Loss, Wales, 2009). Pradeep exemplified this employer attitude in his interview:

> *Employers are fearful and reluctant to employ someone deaf* (Pradeep, Adobe Connect interview).

Pradeep also identified a wider societal discrimination, well documented within the literature (Ladd, 2003; Foster, 1987; Harris & Thornton, 2005; RNID, 2006; Lane, 1992):

> *Society just doesn't understand what it is like to be deaf. [Hearing] people are not aware of the struggle that deaf people have to endure*

in order to find employment. Hearing attitudes can destroy a deaf
person's confidence. It can be so frustrating looking for work (ibid).

By contrast, Sian, Tariq, Pradeep and Terry had all expressed a preference
for working in a mainstream working environment and yet, were either
unemployed or working within the deaf community. Pradeep and Tariq were
both unemployed at the time of interview, although Tariq had undertaken
both voluntary and ad hoc paid work with the local deaf organisation:

When I finished my MA … I was approached by [Deaf organisation] to
do some video work with them. The work I do for them is only ad
hoc. I don't have a contract or anything. I just work with them when
they need something doing (Tariq, face-to-face interview).

Pradeep had studied Politics at university and was passionate about a future
career working in politics:

My heart is in politics; I would like to work as a political assistant or a
research analyst within the political field (Pradeep, Adobe Connect
interview).

However, he was currently unemployed. He had found it very difficult to find
work, and was frustrated by the lack of opportunities open to him:

I really want a job but [finding work] has been a huge struggle; it's
been really difficult. It's a constant challenge. Everywhere I turn
there are more and more barriers… The last two years have been
very stressful. I am exhausted; really weary (ibid)*.*

Pradeep also felt that being disabled added to the burden of searching for
employment:

It is a huge burden trying to find employment. In fact, it is a double
burden; the burden of finding work and the burden of being disabled.
It is such a struggle and so stressful (ibid)*.*

It is worth noting that whilst Pradeep had not secured work within the wider
political arena, he too had undertaken work placements within a deaf-

related industry, providing deaf awareness training and administration support in an interpreting agency.

Both Sian and Terry had wanted to work in a mainstream environment, and yet at the time of interview, both worked as Family Support Officers for the same regional deaf organisation. On graduation, both had wanted careers in their respective degree disciplines; Business and Management (Sian) and Food Nutrition (Terry) but because neither had been able to secure employment in these areas, both had subsequently found work within the deaf community.

Will is a slightly different case, in that he expressed a desire to work in both hearing and deaf environments. He was very clear that this was not a case of having no preference; he wanted to work in both. At the time of interview, Will was working as a voluntary fitness trainer with the university sports centre, which was a continuation of the voluntary work he had undertaken as an undergraduate student. He also ran a fitness class for the deaf community (Deaffit). He was quite happy to offer his services in this way, as he saw it as a means of gaining full employment in this field in the future. This was a complete change in career direction for Will. Will had previously worked in a deaf theatre group and upon graduation he had wanted to continue work in the theatre. However, having joined an exercise 'Boot Camp' whilst at university, he became interested in a career in the fitness industry. Whilst Will wanted to become a mainstream fitness instructor, he had originally been motivated by a concern for the deaf community:

> *Whilst at Boot Camp, I started thinking about the lack of access to fitness programmes for deaf people, so I applied to undertake some further training to become a personal fitness trainer* (Will, face-to-face interview)*.*

Will wanted to work with both hearing and deaf clients. He delivered two to three fitness classes a week, as part of the university sports programme. However, as mentioned previously, as this was a voluntary commitment, there was no funding available for interpreters to support him in this role.

Luckily, there were students on the BSL and Deaf Studies course who were happy to provide voluntary interpreting services.

In summary, all of the graduates wanted to work within the deaf community or in a deaf-related industry, had worked or volunteered there in the past or were currently working there. For some this was a conscious and deliberate choice, for others, it appears to be more of a necessity due to their inability to secure mainstream employment. Sian's experiences were typical of all the interviewees who had sought work in the hearing world:

> *I tried to apply for hearing jobs [in Business and Management] but did not get any responses, I did not get offered any interviews or anything. So, then I tried applying for deaf jobs and got more responses. Maybe it is just easier to fit into a deaf organisation. For now I am in a deaf organisation because it was easier to get in* (Sian, face-to-face interview).

The relative ease of gaining work experience within the deaf community is illustrated by the fact that all of the eight graduates had, at some point, secured paid employment or voluntary work placements within the deaf field. The importance of students finding work placement opportunities and experiences has been discussed in chapter 5. The difficulties accessing funding for interpreter services for voluntary positions has also been highlighted. This means that the deaf community is a more accessible option, as deaf students do not require interpreter support, interviews are delivered in the applicants' first language and communication barriers are not an issue. Deaf applicants for deaf-related jobs also do not face perceptions (either real or imagined) that they will be discriminated against or rejected solely on the grounds of their deafness. Furthermore deaf-related industries know about Access to Work and its processes, procedures and challenges and 'would be more willing to adapt and make reasonable adjustments' (Boyce; 2015:11). This accessibility was recognised by the careers adviser:

> *One of the easiest places for graduates to turn to, is working or gaining experience in the deaf community, because it is accessible. If*

they can't get experience in the deaf community, where do they go?
Where do they fit? (Careers adviser, face-to-face interview).

Woolfe (2004) argues that whilst deaf organisations offer a range of employment opportunities for deaf people, this should not be the default or even the only option: 'shouldn't we be trying to have deaf people employed in the mainstream?' (p2). Boyce (2015) reinforces this point by stating that whilst disability organisations should be employing people with disabilities, they should not be the only organisations employing people with disabilities. The participants in her study spoke of working in deaf organisations because of poor opportunities elsewhere:

> *You don't want to [work in the deaf community], but you have to*
> (Participant in Boyce, 2015:10).

Social Networking and Employability

For the students in my research study, it appears that working within the deaf community was, in the main, inherently linked to opportunities afforded by social networking. Generally speaking, the deaf community, and by extension, local deaf communities are very small and extremely well connected internally; everyone knows everyone else and networking on all levels is an important aspect of community life. Will, Pradeep, Niall, Tariq and Jack all provide evidence of this happening in terms of employment, as they had all found work or voluntary opportunities through contacts within the deaf community. When asked how they had found employment, typical comments included:

> *How I got work was through the connections I had with the deaf*
> *world, cricket friends and family connections* (Jack, face-to-face
> interview).

> *I left university and did some decorating work with [a deaf friend],*
> *and I did a bit of electrical work with [another deaf friend]. I then got*
> *offered a job with [a third deaf person], doing some editing work for*
> *a sign language project* (Niall, face-to-face interview).

> *I was approached by [a local deaf organisation] to do some video work with them* (Tariq, face-to-face interview).

> *I have done some voluntary work … teaching BSL with [deaf teachers] I knew* (Will, face-to-face interview).

The exposure to close social networks within the deaf community and amongst deaf-related industries clearly helped these graduates to find employment. This finding led me to explore the literature on social network theory and in particular, homophily; the notion, explored later in this chapter, that 'similarity breeds connection' (McPherson et al., 2001:415). Research has long emphasised the importance of social networks in the job search process (e.g. Langford et al., 2013; Granovetter, 1973; Patacchini & Zenou, 2008). Hawkins (2004) presents the 80:20 rule, whereby he has calculated that 80% of job opportunities are communicated through informal sources such as social networks, word of mouth and so forth, with only 20% of jobs being publicly advertised. This has significant implications for deaf people who may be socially isolated a) at university and b) upon graduation. Their lack of a wider network of friends and acquaintances within the hearing community may lead to fewer mainstream job opportunities. However, evidence suggests that little research has been undertaken regarding the application and implications of social networks as they influence the employment opportunities of disabled people (Kulkarni, 2012; Langford et al., 2013):

> *Disability research has largely overlooked this issue and little is known about the successes or limitations that those with a disability have in leveraging social networks for finding and securing employment* (Langford et al., 2013:296).

Langford et al. (2013) (amongst others) pose that it is difficult for disabled people to form the types of social networks that lead to employment opportunities. In many ways, this mirrors the situation some of the interviewees experienced as students, with little or no contact or interaction with their hearing peers. Subsequently, they did not have access to the informal learning and social networks of student life and this continues as they search for work:

Most of the information about employment [amongst students] was by word of mouth (Jack, face-to-face interview).

Granovetter (1973) proposed the concept of 'weak tie theory' which argues that people who have many acquaintance relationships (classified as 'weak ties') are more likely to gain information about jobs from this wider network than people with a smaller group of friends with whom they share 'strong ties' or close relationships. Essentially, weak tie theory contends that the more 'friends of friends' someone has, the more incidental employment opportunities they will learn about. It is argued that disabled people are more socially marginalised and as a consequence have smaller social networks and fewer weak ties and are therefore more likely to make use of strong ties in finding employment (Langford et al., 2013:305). However, these strong ties are not necessarily with other disabled people. By effectively occupying an 'outgroup status', through their dislocation from wider social networks, disabled people have less access to informal learning about a range of issues, which include employment opportunities (Langford et al 2013:229). One consequence of this might be the high levels of unemployment and underemployment for disabled people, as discussed in chapter 2.

As surveys by the RNID (2006) and Boyce (2015) have shown, the same is true of deaf people seeking work in the hearing world, with whom they also have fewer weak ties. It can be argued that social isolation and communication barriers make it more difficult to develop connections with hearing employers and employees, which in turn makes it more difficult to receive information about jobs, and reduces the likelihood of being recommended for employment. This lack of networking can seriously disadvantage deaf job-seekers. Pradeep recognised this, adding that the lack of interpreters for this kind of activity compounds the issue on a practical level:

I have really struggled. I have done a little networking, but it is very difficult. I want to network, but there are no interpreters, so how is it possible? This presents a huge barrier… There is no opportunity for me to meet potential employers, or people who might help me to find

work. Networking, getting in touch with people is incredibly valuable
when looking for work. Deaf people are limited; without interpreters
we are really limited. It is incredibly difficult and adds to the struggle
to find employment (Pradeep, Adobe Connect interview).

Deaf people's weak ties within the hearing world are as restricted (if not
more restricted, due to communication difficulties) as those of disabled
people generally. However, as the interviewees for this research have
shown, their connections to friends and people they already know in the
deaf world (strong ties) can and do lead to employment opportunities. The
deaf community is a close-knit community, usually described as being 'a
small world'. The ties that are formed by this community are strong ties,
which are bound by a common culture, shared experiences and an ease of
communication via a natural sign language. That the deaf graduates chose
or gravitated towards employment in the deaf community is a perfect
example of homophily; 'the degree of similarity based on identity or
organisational group affiliations' (Kulkarni, 2012:146). Homophily is the
principle that contact between similar people occurs at a higher rate than
among dissimilar people (McPherson et al., 2001). Finding work via these
homophilic social networks should not be surprising. Interestingly,
homophilic employment is also a common trait amongst other minority
groups, such as those based on race or ethnicity (Kulkarni, 2012; Patacchini
& Zenou, 2008; Clark & Drinkwater, 2000). Some of the benefits of
homophilic groups are that they provide trust, identification and ease of
communication and for deaf people, these are at the heart of their
communal life and make working with other deaf people a particularly
attractive option. Rydberg et al (2011), focussing on Sweden, found that
deaf people are three times more likely to work for organisations, such as
deaf associations, than the general population. Although not looking at the
UK, the reasons they give for this situation can be applied to deaf people
everywhere: ease of gaining employment, context-specific knowledge and
language fluency. Granovetter (1983) argues that minorities 'are more
likely to have a dense set of strong tie relationships, given their greater
need for social and emotional support' (Kulkarni, 2012:142). In the case of
deaf people, I would also add the need for communication that is accessible

but equally importantly stress-free. The corollary of this, of course, is that these strong ties do nothing to help those who wish to work in the hearing world.

Alternative Forms of Employment Outcomes

Woolfe's research (2004) identified two other main forms of employment outcomes amongst deaf people: being self-employed or being dependent on state welfare benefits. Significantly, six out of the eight interviewees (75%) in my study had either been self-employed or discussed becoming self-employed. Similarly, in Fleming and Hay's (2006) survey of deaf graduate destinations, six out of the ten graduate respondents (60%) declared themselves as self-employed. It is possible that this high incidence of self-employment is a result of the high levels of unemployment and underemployment that deaf people face:

> *I think an easier option is to become self-employed* (Pradeep, Adobe Connect interview).

Interestingly, minority ethnic groups are also over-represented in self-employment when compared with the majority community (Clark, 2015). Clark's (2015) research with ethnic minority groups could shed some light on the reasons for high self-employment rates amongst the deaf community. Whilst self-employment can be seen as a sign of a healthy entrepreneurial culture, Clark felt that:

> *On balance the evidence suggests that poor prospects in paid employment push minorities into working for themselves, and that this form of activity may not provide high rewards* (Clark, 2015:1).

Clark believed self-employment was possibly a response to discrimination in paid employment; this type of discrimination has also been highlighted by deaf people throughout this thesis, and within the wider literature.

It is worth noting that even when deaf people set themselves up in business, this is still predominantly deaf-related work, rather than mainstream enterprise. Woolfe (2004) cites deaf media, deaf theatre and

deaf consultancy as common options, with even more deaf people working as self-employed sign language tutors, deaf awareness trainers and deliverers of services directly to other deaf people, particularly via the medium of sign language. This often means that in what remains a quite specialist field with not a huge amount of demand, there is nevertheless a lot of competition for business:

> *I have decided that I will become self-employed and set up my own business but there is a huge problem in doing this. There are lots of deaf people who have set up their own businesses delivering a variety of deaf awareness services, so what could I do that was different?* (Pradeep, Adobe Connect interview).

> *Some people have advised me to set up my own business but I think that is risky. There is a lot of competition out there between self-employed BSL teachers so it is really stressful* (Deana, Adobe Connect interview).

Language teaching (in this instance sign language teaching) is proportionally higher as an employment option amongst deaf people than is the case amongst the general population (Dye & Kyle, 2000). Although a suitable option, the fall in demand for BSL teachers has only increased the chances of not being able to find sufficient work, which is further compounded by the essentially part-time nature of much of this work (Eichmann, 2008; Atherton and Barnes, 2012). This does not apply solely to sign language teaching, as there is also only finite demand from within the deaf community itself, especially as technological advances impact on the very nature of deafness itself:

> *… the deaf world is getting smaller and job opportunities are going to become even more limited* (Deana, Adobe Connect interview).

One advantage of being self-employed as a deaf person is that at least there is some degree of control over one's own working practices and choices, which might make this seem more attractive. However, there are still drawbacks:

> *If you are [self-employed], you can create your own opportunities but you need support to do so* (Pradeep, Adobe Connect interview).

> *I would rather work in a team than on my own. I know in myself I prefer working with others; bouncing ideas off one another is what motivates me. I am not the sort of person who likes to work in isolation* (Tariq, face-to-face interview).

The data collected from the interviewees demonstrates that self-employment still appeals to many deaf people but there are numerous barriers and disincentives to pursuing this alternative to a successful outcome.

Given the high levels of unemployment amongst disabled people, it is possibly unsurprising that many end up on benefits. The system itself inadvertently supports this, as when the school leaving age was 16, deaf school leavers could claim unemployment benefits, but were not assessed for disability-related employment support benefits until they were 18 (Atherton, 2011). This gave many unqualified deaf school-leavers little option but to claim benefits as their sole income option. This was acknowledged by some of the interviewees, whilst rejecting this an option for themselves:

> *Deaf people don't always choose to go to university as they are seduced by benefits … If I was going to recommend anything, it would be to tell deaf young people not to go down the route of claiming benefits but to work hard to achieve their dreams* (Jack, face-to-face interview).

It will be interesting to see how the recent extension of the minimum school leaving age to 18 will affect young deaf people, as this would seem to offer them the chance to avoid entering a benefits culture at the age of 16. Whether this will have any more beneficial consequences in terms of better employment opportunities cannot be assessed at this stage.

This chapter so far has explored some of the reasons that 100% of the deaf graduates in this study might have been working in or had at one time undertaken a voluntary placement within the deaf community or in a deaf-

related industry. Some of these reasons have included ease of communication, no requirement (or concern) for interpreter funding or services, strong tie social networks, homophily and a lack of alternative work opportunities within the hearing world.

Additional Outcomes of Deaf Employment

However, it is possible to add further possible reasons for the gravitation towards the deaf community as a place of work:

> *The spaces created by the deaf community play an important part in providing a place apart from the hearing world, where deaf people can communicate and just be away from the invariably discriminatory gaze of hearing people* (Skelton & Valentine, 2003a:118).

In many ways, working within the deaf community is a political decision, which relates back to the theoretical frameworks outlined in chapter 3 and, in particular, 'the shared social reality constructed through language' (Fox, Martin & Green, 2007: 67). Campbell & Oliver (2010) argue that identifying oneself as 'capital D' Deaf; 'being involved in the deaf community, feeling a resonance with deaf culture, rejecting the label of 'disability' and experiencing or recognising discrimination against deaf people, is in itself political participation and the expression of what might be termed a 'politics of political identity' (p20). Skelton and Valentine (2010) add a further dimension to this discussion surrounding political activity. They argue that volunteering is in fact political action and recognise that being involved in deaf clubs in a voluntary capacity has a long historical tradition within deaf culture. They argue that by volunteering within the deaf community, deaf young people:

> *… are doing something which connects with their identity of being Deaf and which is also about offering support and bringing about change* (Skelton & Valentine, 2010: 126)*.*

I think the concept of bringing about change is an important one for deaf young people. In considering this political activity in light of the interviewees, who had all worked or had volunteered within the deaf

community, I began to recognise the deaf graduates as being 'agents of political action' (ibid:132). In reading the interview transcripts, I had been struck by the fact that almost every deaf graduate had talked about or alluded to being a role model to other young deaf people, or to others. On reflection, this appears to be a political statement; one which affirms self-belief, a positive identity, a desire to challenge society's negative and stereotypical attitudes. Jack explained this in detail:

> *It's politics, equal rights. I think deaf people are often ignored and overlooked. Some hearing people think deaf people are stupid; 'deaf and dumb'. They don't think we are equal to hearing people. But at the end of the day, it is just that deaf people can't hear... I think it is important to show people what deaf people can achieve...*

> *I aim to be a good deaf role model for deaf children* (Jack, face-to-face interview).

What is interesting is that the graduates wanted to be models in a range of different roles; role models for deaf children, for hearing parents of deaf children, for other new deaf students who arrive at university and are unsure of how to 'fit in'. Here are a few of their comments:

> *I want to become a teacher or a teaching assistant supporting deaf children. I want to be a role model for deaf people* (Deana, Adobe Connect interview).

> *In my role as Family Support Worker, I go into families and talk to them [hearing parents] about being deaf. I let them know that I have been through the same things, yes, as a role model, and I can talk about how they can break through the barriers and do the same things as hearing people* (Terry, Adobe Connect interview).

Rogers and Young (2011) acknowledge that the experiences of being a deaf role model have been 'little explored within the literature' (p2), but having undertaken a deaf role model project, explain the importance of deaf role models, for both deaf children and for hearing parents. For deaf children, deaf adult role models help them to build their confidence and self-esteem and show them how to be comfortable with their own deaf identity. For

hearing parents, who have never met a deaf person before, benefits include positive attitudes towards deaf people, feeling more able to parent their deaf child, learning sign language and having access to information about growing up deaf. Both Terry and Sian recognised that they fulfilled this role:

> *A lot of families are hearing with deaf children, but they don't know what it means to be deaf, so I give them information about what it means to grow up deaf, what deaf culture is, what sign language is. I reassure them that they don't need to worry for the future, as their deaf child will be fine, because they can do everything* (Terry, Adobe Connect interview)*.*

This comment resonates with many of the other interviewees' perspectives; a reflection of a 'can do' attitude:

> *It is important to promote positive experiences … and to show people what deaf people can achieve* (Jack, face-to-face interview).

Above all, it appears that a deaf role model allows both parents and deaf young people to see what deaf people can achieve; from going to university, being successful in sport, having a good job, being happy and confident, or as Rogers and Young (2011) found out; 'simply *being* who they were as individuals and showing that d/Deaf people can do what hearing people do' (p14). This can be further illustrated by the regular feature within the National Deaf Children's Society magazine 'Families', which has a page entitled 'When I am a Grown-Up'; featuring stories from young deaf role models employed in various jobs (NDCS, 2016).

Jack, in particular, raised a different aspect of role modelling; that of being a role model to new deaf students arriving at university. He discussed this in terms of transition and the difficulties deaf students may face in mixing with hearing students. He had overcome these challenges, had finally mixed well with both deaf and hearing people (reflected in his subsequent employment in both deaf and hearing environments) and wanted to support and encourage others to do the same:

> *I think that one thing that could be promoted is that of deaf role models, who have had the student experience. Younger deaf students*

may struggle if they are living and sharing with hearing peers, who they can't communicate with. They may choose to try and turn their backs on these hearing peers and stick with their deaf friends and not mix. I'd like to show them that with confidence, they can get involved and mix well with their hearing peers …

Yes, I'd be keen to become a deaf role model for young deaf students … I just want to use my experience of being a student at university (Jack, face-to-face interview)*.*

This section of my thesis has looked at employability trends within the deaf world; in particular, the tendency for deaf people to find work within the deaf community and the reasons this may be so. The chapter has concluded with a discussion of role models. Whilst being a role model is not directly related to employability, I concur with Skelton & Valentine (2010) that volunteering within the deaf community can be seen as a political act and therefore understand how young deaf people might be drawn to this type of work through wanting to be a role model. There may also be an argument that the graduates who found themselves working in the deaf community were also using other deaf professionals, particularly deaf community leaders as their own role models. This might be another reason for the gravitation to the deaf community.

It is possible to link the concept of working as a role model to 'possible selves theory' (Markus & Nurius, 1986). The concept of possible selves is defined as how an individual views himself or herself in the future; what they might become, what they would like to become and what they fear or dread becoming. As such, possible selves are important motivational forces on present behaviour (Rossiter, 2009; Strahan & Wilson, 2006). Furthermore, Rossiter (2009) argues that the range of possible selves held by any individual is very much influenced by 'her or his past experiences, socio-cultural life context and current situation' (p61). Negative experiences of schooling and education and the lack of role models in their own young lives might well be motivational forces for the graduates wanting to become role models for other deaf youngsters. It is the social world, and particularly people's relations with others, that is the source of material for the creation

of possible selves (Strahan & Wilson, 2006). If deaf people have communication difficulties within the hearing world, and have strong social, linguistic and emotional ties with other deaf people, this is where they will find their information and influence. It is quite easy, therefore, to appreciate why they might see their possible selves working alongside other deaf people.

It is not a simple task to understand the reasons that the deaf graduates found paid or unpaid work within the deaf community. In retrospect, I feel that there are a number of contributory factors for this phenomenon, both push and pull influences, which as outlined above, include poor employment prospects in the hearing world, strong tie relationships within the deaf community - which lead to more job opportunities, homophily, a political possible selves desire to become a role model for others and, perhaps above all else, access and communication:

> *There are barriers [to working in the hearing world]. We both, hearing and deaf have the same skills, as far as being educated and gaining degrees … but it doesn't matter if we meet all of the necessary skills criteria if we don't have access and communication. Access and communication are key* (Will, face-to-face interview).

Chapter 8. Conclusion

Introduction

This chapter will bring together the major findings of my research study and draw some conclusions regarding the research questions outlined in Chapter 1. Within this section of my thesis I demonstrate how my research questions have been addressed and how the original aims of the research have been achieved. In order to do this, I highlight the key analytical points identified across my 3 data chapters, discuss their significance and impact and where appropriate I offer recommendations which might address the challenges and barriers which deaf graduates face in acquiring employability skills and in gaining employment.

This research has fulfilled the original aim of investigating the experiences and perceptions of deaf graduates in relation to their acquisition of employability skills and their subsequent employment. It has explored to what extent deaf students acquire employability skills whilst at university, formal and informal support provision, both from university services and by government agencies, the role of social networks in securing employment and finally, the graduates' employment outcomes.

Ultimately, in undertaking this investigation, I wanted to explore whether or not more intervention is required to enable deaf undergraduates to acquire the skills and attributes they need for securing employment, and to support deaf graduates into the workplace, once they have left university. I also wanted to examine the implications of my findings; is there evidence of discrimination, albeit unconscious at times, from the hearing world? Does the support we offer prepare the graduates for the reality of the workplace? What are the major barriers for deaf job-seekers and can these be overcome?

The research questions at the centre of this thesis were designed to address the aims of this project:

- To what extent do deaf students acquire employability skills whilst at university?

- What challenges do they face in acquiring these skills and in gaining employment?
- What support is given to deaf students whilst at university and whilst seeking work?
- Do deaf people work in the deaf community by choice or through necessity?

Synthesising the Key Findings

Employability Skills

Chapter 5 specifically focussed on the graduates' acquisition of employability skills and therefore primarily addressed the first research question. The CareerEDGE model of employability (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007) that has subsequently been used within the university includes various themes that provided a useful framework for organising and discussing deaf graduates' views and opinions on their experiences of gaining these key employability skills whilst undergraduates. As many of the themes identified in CareerEDGE were being raised by the deaf graduates themselves during the interviewing process, it seemed remiss not to use these themes as the overarching organisational framework when discussing graduate outcomes. That these themes *were* in fact raised by the graduates does in many ways endorse the validity of the CareerEDGE model and explain why the university is continuing to use this model as the basis of its employability strategy. However, many of my respondents felt that, rather than being an explicit academic process, much of this learning was both incidental and accidental; they reported picking up these skills in a haphazard and informal manner. This is not intended as a criticism of UCLan's employability strategy or as an assessment of the success of its outcomes amongst UCLan's graduates. What the data does show is that the answer to the first research question is not straightforward and is complicated by a multitude of variable factors.

The graduates' acquisition of employability skills varied across degree subjects and courses. All respondents indicated that they had developed numerous generic or key employability skills whilst at university; for

example, organisation skills, team work and time management. Presentation skills were mentioned by all of the respondents, with confidence building being one of the most valued outcomes. Whilst it is possible to argue that presentation skills and confidence are developed by all students whilst at university, this has a particular resonance for deaf students, as they are to some extent working in a foreign environment. That each respondent mentioned increased confidence is perhaps illustrative of their initial unease in joining a large hearing environment, especially if they have come from a school for the deaf, or a deaf base in college (Will, Jack). Interestingly many of the skills the graduates mentioned were acquired partly through working with interpreters: time management, organising preparation materials, practising presentations, cancelling/booking sessions, checking and signing timesheets. These could perhaps be entitled 'hidden' employability skills; opportunities not readily available to hearing students, nor explicitly taught as part of their course.

The acquisition of communication skills, highly valued by employers (as detailed in chapter 2), is a more complex aspect of employability skills, as the deaf graduates do not have or necessarily value oral communication skills. Conversely, all those who had studied on the Deaf Studies course did mention that their BSL skills had improved, and they saw this as important for their career development. This was something that I had not considered, and points to a lack of Deaf Studies/BSL education for young deaf people, who often, within a mainstream education placement, do not have deaf role models in their lives. Others may come to sign language later in their lives (Deana, Niall) or simply have had no interaction with BSL language models who could help them to improve their signing skills. This points to a language gap in the education of young deaf people, which needs to be addressed. It is somewhat ironic that those who might be seen to be in most need of teaching in specific language and communication skills are not actually taught the most appropriate language for their situation, namely sign language. Without access to good language models, BSL users may find themselves in the situation of having neither a strong first language (L1) nor a strong second language (L2). This has clear implications within a learning environment.

As mentioned in chapter 5, many of the models of employability allude to Emotional Intelligence (EI) as being an important employability trait (Dacre Pool & Qualter, 2012; Lees, 2002; Dacre Pool and Sewell, 2007; Holmes, 2001). Whilst there is a dearth of literature on this subject as it relates to deaf people, the interviewees in this study demonstrated high levels of emotional intelligence. It is worth noting that this most often manifested itself in their comments relating to deaf/hearing relationships; an awareness of difference and an acceptance of others' feelings, needs and attitudes, particularly relating to communication barriers. I propose that this may be due to a lifetime of being on the periphery (as expressed by Niall in chapter 6), watching the body language and facial expressions of the hearing community and becoming attuned to their emotional state. Whilst it is certainly not possible to quantify EI, or ascertain exactly how and when the deaf graduates acquired this skill, I believe that being deaf in a hearing majority environment has played its part in developing this trait. The deaf graduates were clearly able to demonstrate different levels of EI; the difficulty that deaf graduates may face is not in acquiring the skill, but in recognising this in themselves and expressing this attribute on their application forms. This will be explored shortly.

Another important finding within chapter 5 was the graduates' lack of access to career development learning or job seeking skills, which are key skills within many of the employability models discussed in chapter 3. Despite CETH and the later Futures Award and mini modules and despite the university's employability strategy, the students did not appear to have been offered any advice on how to find work. All the respondents mentioned being disappointed about the lack of guidance in this area; they felt that their tutors could have done much more to help them with employability. Furthermore, it would appear that employment is not actually discussed in the classroom, which is surprising given the high profile that the government and national policy has afforded employability within Higher Education (as discussed in chapter 3). It can be assumed that hearing students are similarly denied this information, although a number of comments from the respondents suggests that there are additional challenges for deaf students. There was a clear indication from two of the

interviewees (Terry, Jack) that information about jobs was disseminated via 'word of mouth'. Conversations amongst students can readily reveal who is hiring and where job adverts may be found. As Jack pointed out:

> *Hearing students have access to what they hear and what they read in the newspapers, which may not be accessible to deaf students… Hearing people can hear what is said, deaf people can't; they need to receive information visually* (Jack, face-to-face interview)*.*

In many ways this lack of access to informal conversations, where interpreters are not present, for example during breaks, links directly to the lack of access to informal learning mentioned in chapter 6 and also to weak tie theory (Granovetter, 1983). Hearing students may hear about jobs from friends of friends and share this job-related information conversationally amongst their peers. Deaf students may not have access to this wider social network and arguably, this puts deaf students at a disadvantage. There are deaf–related websites – for example, deaf-uk-jobs, where jobs are advertised within the deaf community - but these might not be the graduate jobs that deaf undergraduates are seeking.

Whilst tutors did not explicitly refer to job opportunities in class, some of the respondents were sent emails regarding job fairs or careers events (Tariq, Will). However, it appears that links between these emails and finding employment were not made explicit. Tariq, for example, did not realise that he should be following up on these opportunities himself. He was not told to go, so he did not. Whilst this is a good example of the passivity seen throughout some of the interview data, this could also have been a literacy issue; perhaps Tariq did not fully understand the language of the email. Furthermore, it could have been a cultural issue; the written word having more importance and immediacy for hearing students than for those who rely on a visual language. Deaf epistemology suggests that this is a hearing-centred approach in which 'the core of deaf-cultural values has been de-emphasized' (Holcomb, 2010:474).

What has emerged from this research is the fact that tutors need to be much more aware of the needs of their deaf students regarding employment. This lack of awareness manifested itself in different ways

according to the respondents. For example, Jack felt that his tutors were unsure about the employment prospects of deaf people; Pradeep felt that his tutors did not understand the difficulties he faced in finding work, and that they should have offered him more support because he was disabled. Tutors need to be aware that deaf students find it harder to access information about jobs; they cannot hear incidental information about course-related events and employment opportunities (Jack), they have a more restricted network of people to help them source jobs (Pradeep), and some do not have the literacy skills to access written information about employment, or do not read the broadsheet newspapers which advertise jobs (Jack). For these reasons, tutors need to be more pro-active in giving the deaf students explicit job-related information and news. They also need to make specific links with the careers staff, in order that a more joined-up approach can be utilised.

One of the major areas of common concern amongst the respondents was a lack of work placement opportunities. Whilst the majority of students had understood the value of undertaking work placements as a step towards gaining employment, most felt disappointed that work placements had not been offered alongside their degree courses, or that they had not been actively encouraged to find placements themselves. Whilst the latter, once more, illustrates some degree of passivity, it has to be acknowledged that there are particular challenges for deaf students in finding placements. Again, these challenges can be categorised as access and communication. There are immeasurable barriers caused by the fact that students undertaking voluntary work are not eligible for funding to pay for interpreters. This means many deaf people do not have access to mainstream work placement opportunities, and therefore this may be one of the reasons that deaf people undertake voluntary work in the deaf community in such large numbers. Without interpreters, work placement opportunities are fewer. This lack of work experience is a real hindrance for deaf people needing to acquire and provide evidence for their CVs.

One easy way to resolve this problem would be for universities to provide work placements as a compulsory component of their degree programmes. The majority of the respondents had recommended this themselves and

were disappointed that this was not the case. They wanted the opportunity to put degree knowledge and theory into applied practice (Pradeep, Deana, Will). If the placement was a compulsory part of the course, Disabled Students Allowance would cover interpreter costs.

Whilst none of the interviewees had received job-seeking advice or skills as part of their course, all of the respondents mentioned the value of attending the Deaf Futures workshops which taught deaf undergraduates and graduates how to write CVs, complete skills audits, fill in application forms and so forth (see chapter 6). There are a number of key factors which can be learned from being involved in this bespoke development. Firstly, that this type of deaf-centred intervention is necessary for deaf students, who may not be accessing employability information or skills elsewhere in the curriculum. The language barriers discussed in chapter 6 make this an essential service, if students are to engage with and fully understand the language of employment and complete CVs and application forms and so forth. Understandably, universities can only provide this type of provision if there are relatively large numbers of deaf students, which is seldom the case.

An alternative is to provide regional events, where deaf undergraduates from a number of local universities can come together to share their experiences, to network and to gain employability advice and skills. This is important, especially for isolated deaf students. These events would require specialist input from careers advisers and experts in the field, and would need central or government resources. Other organisations are beginning to see this need. A charity, Deaf Unity, which was set up in 2012 and which 'aims to improve the quality of life of deaf people in the UK and worldwide' (http://deafunity.org/about-us/) held a Deaf and Disability Careers Fair on 9th September 2016 in Bristol. It is essential that university careers advisers become appraised of national events of this nature, and deaf undergraduates are encouraged to attend.

Additional Challenges for Deaf Graduates
Whilst chapter 5 discussed the difficulties the deaf graduates faced in acquiring employability skills, chapter 6 sought to answer my second

research question by exploring the additional challenges which the respondents encountered, specifically because of their deafness. These findings highlighted barriers at all stages of the job-seeking process. These included linguistic challenges, the difficulties posed by what I have termed 'the interpreted interview', and the dilemmas relating to disclosure.

That deafness is often accompanied by a linguistic delay is paramount when discussing barriers to finding employment. A lack of academic literacy is a considerable challenge when one is seeking and applying for jobs. Completing application forms is a skill itself, and familiarity with the language of employability is essential. Hearing students, who have ready access to this language often find the application process difficult. That deaf people have difficulty accessing this language – even through an interpreter – is even more problematic. The careers adviser explained this as being 'lost in translation'; the formulaic language of employability and skills audits, the mechanism whereby graduates can market themselves in the application process, has often been lost in the translation from English to BSL. This makes reproducing 'stock' answers or the written evidence expected by employers all the more difficult. During their time at university, the students could access literacy support from language tutors and careers staff to aid this process, but unfortunately, once they had graduated, they found very little support from Job Centres. This left the graduates relying on friends, family and (volunteer) interpreters for assistance, which sometimes meant their own input was sidelined in the CV writing process (Careers Adviser).

There are no easy solutions to the challenges brought about by the linguistic delay many deaf students face, and to try and explore these is outside the scope of this thesis. However, it is clear that bespoke support with seeking employment opportunities is required by deaf students following graduation, to enable deaf job-seekers to complete the application process. This will be discussed later in this chapter.

A number of the respondents had struggled with the dilemma of whether or not to disclose their deafness on their application forms. Disclosure of disability has been a source of considerable attention in the literature (see

for example, Blankfield, 2001; Pearson et al., 2003; Jans et al., 2012), however the majority of the literature refers to hidden disabilities, where one might not need to disclose at all, and certainly not until offered the post. For deaf BSL users, the need to organise interpreter support makes disclosure more necessary, although some respondents (Tariq, Pradeep) did not disclose until an interview was offered. For some of the respondents, they had no choice but to disclose, in order to illustrate their involvement and achievement in the deaf community. Disclosure was something that each of the respondents discussed in their interviews. That disclosure is such a source of anxiety demonstrates that anti-discrimination legislation has not led to peace of mind for job-seeking applicants. Not being appointed on grounds of their deafness is still a very real fear for deaf people (Boyce, 2015).

Another major finding from the research study was the anxiety that engulfed the interview process. Job interviews are a nerve-wracking experience for many people, regardless of experience, ability, qualifications and so forth. For deaf BSL users there are added layers of complexity and concern, which chiefly surround the use of interpreters in the interview process. In addition to concern regarding the interview process per se, respondents worried about whether the interpreter would actually turn up, if they knew them, if they would be adequately qualified, competent and prepared.

 The negative experiences involving interpreters at interview was a major finding. The respondents were very much aware of the influence an interpreter could have on their job-seeking and subsequent appointment, and were worried about the consequences of having a poorly qualified interpreter. Such were the concerns that some of the respondents, when invited for interview, had nominated an interpreter of their choice, who was familiar to them and knew their background, their signing style and with whom they felt comfortable. Whilst this is not often practical or possible, the importance of familiarity with the interpreter is a key factor to emerge; it allows for a sense of confidence that otherwise is not necessarily present. As mentioned earlier, an interview is all about interviewee responses. This means that success in the interview rests heavily on the 'voice-over' skills of

the interpreter, notoriously the weaker skill of many interpreters, especially novice interpreters (Nicodemus & Emmorey, 2015). And yet, there is no mechanism for the deaf interviewee to check the accuracy of this interpretation. This comment is not meant to undermine the remarkable skills of the majority of interpreters, nor does it mean that the interpretation was necessarily poor, rather that the interviewee does not know what is being said on their behalf. It can be argued that if the interviewees do not have confidence in the interpretation, they cannot fully evaluate their interview performance, and thus improve their performance for the next time. For example, the frustrating issue for Tariq was never knowing if it was his deafness that prevented him from finding work, his performance at interview or the quality of the interpretation. The need to have confidence in the interpreter is clearly of paramount importance. This point was also raised by Niall in the context of his university studies (see chapter 6).

There are no easy solutions to this problem. Whilst employing a familiar interpreter was an option chosen by a few of the respondents, this is not necessarily practical nor realistic for non-local interviews. In addition, deaf interviewees may not be aware that this is indeed an option open to them. A more realistic solution is employer awareness training, so that employers become aware of the importance of using only highly skilled and trained interpreters who are given adequate time to familiarise themselves and prepare for all aspects of the interview. In short, they need to understand the complexity of the interpreted interview, including the practical dynamics of interviewing a deaf person through the medium of an interpreter. However, this would necessarily only be a longer-term solution as there is currently no legislation that would require employers to undertake such training or implement good practice within their business.

Support
Chapter 6 also discussed the type and quality of support the respondents received from within the university and from external agencies such as Job Centres. In response to my third research question, the appropriateness and suitability of this support in preparing deaf graduates for the workplace was assessed. The whole area of support provision and the subsequent

implications for the students both in terms of studying for a degree and in seeking work, is an area of particular interest to me. My professional life has been very much steeped in the provision of support in the education of deaf learners; firstly, as a teacher of deaf children, then supporting deaf students in FE and finally, setting up a support service for deaf students at university. I was therefore curious to know how the respondents felt about the quality, nature and value of the support they received at UCLan.

This support included structured support from Student Services (in the form of interpreters, notetakers and language tutors), and more informally constructed support from tutors and peer groups. The quality of support provision at UCLan had been a primary factor in many of the students' choice of university, even though it had potentially limited their degree/course options. Whilst support provision is undoubtedly a consideration for all disabled students, few universities specialise in support for deaf students in the numbers catered for at UCLan, and the reputation UCLan had gained in providing this type and quality of support was a key factor mentioned by many of the respondents.

The quality of support offered by the interpreters and language tutors was significant for the respondents, with only Niall experiencing difficulties with the interpreters. This highlights once again, the personal nature of the interpreting situation and the importance of trust and confidence in the interpreter/client dynamic.

The university's provision of in-house interpreter support was of huge value to the students, as this allowed them to access support outside of the classroom. This was significant if they were to arrange careers advisory sessions, or wanted to attend ad hoc, extra-curricular career coaching events, such as Deaf Futures workshops. Interpreter provision and working standards are of high quality at UCLan, with all the interpreters being fully-qualified and listed on the national register of interpreters. However, it had not occurred to me that the relative ease of access to the interpreting team at university might raise expectations regarding the level of support that would be available to graduates once they entered the workplace, and paradoxically, negatively impact upon finding a job (Careers Adviser). If

this is true, it is quite ironic that the high levels of support offered at the university might give students an unrealistic expectation of a) what support they actually need in the workplace and b) what support is available. This finding highlights a gap in the provision of specific careers advice for deaf undergraduates and graduates who will be utilising Access to Work funding. This gap will be discussed shortly.

Whilst interpreter, notetaker and language support were standard across the university, during the interviews it became evident that support from tutors and peer groups was far more variable across courses. It is clear that many tutors still do not fully understand the barriers to learning, communication and access to information that deaf students face. As mentioned earlier, this was particularly apparent with information regarding employability and employment opportunities. A number of respondents felt that their tutors simply did not know about deaf employment or how to support their students into the workplace.

Another important finding was the inconsistency of support for deaf students from their hearing peers. Of particular significance was the social isolation some of the graduates experienced. This manifested itself in a lack of communicative exchanges, opportunities to share information and social exchange. This was particularly the case when the student was the only deaf student on the course. Niall, in particular, had a very difficult and isolating experience whilst on his course. By contrast, one can look at the positive experiences of those on the Deaf Studies course, where the hearing peer group is fully deaf aware, and can communicate with ease with the deaf students. In many ways this replicates the deaf peer-group that so few deaf students ever experience, but which, as Deana explained in chapter 6, is so important and so highly valued by BSL users. Not only does this Deaf Studies peer-group enable a sharing of experience and a communicative bond, it also provides a rich learning environment, and the opportunities for incidental learning and scaffolding, which hearing students (and tutors) perhaps take for granted, and which are missing in many hearing/deaf learning environments. It is not realistic to imagine Deaf Studies courses as the panacea to this peer-support issue, but I believe there are lessons that can be learned from this provision. What happens on the Deaf Studies

course could be seen as an exemplar that could be reproduced to some extent and applied across universities and other hearing/deaf environments including the workplace. This would include deaf awareness training to tutors and peer groups and the proactive promotion of deaf/hearing interaction.

Finally, chapter 6 explored the support that respondents received from outside the university, once they had graduated. Unanimously, this support was found to be lacking. In the absence of specialist one-to-one support with literacy during their time as undergraduates and in light of difficulties accessing the life-long careers guidance offered by the university, graduates were dependent upon the services of their local Job Centres and Job Centre Plus. However, the negative experiences of all the graduates highlight a glaring lack of awareness, forethought or empathy from these government-funded agencies. The experiences of the respondents echoed those found elsewhere in the literature (see RNID, 2006; Boyd, 2015); a lack of deaf awareness (Tariq, Pradeep), interpreters not booked (Will), interpreters not turning up (Will), follow-up appointments not being made (Tariq, Careers Adviser). Add to this the lack of support to actually find a job (Terry), or to complete a written application (Pradeep, Careers Adviser), and the picture looks depressing for deaf graduates. One should also bear in mind, that these are very successful graduates; how much more difficult will it be for those deaf people who have not achieved degree qualifications? This situation must be addressed.

Access to Work is also problematic, not least because it is currently undergoing changes which may have startling implications for the deaf community (https://stopchanges2atw.com/). Regardless of these changes, Access to Work as a government programme is arguably not working; it is failing those it is intending to serve. This is in part due to the lack of publicity about this grant. As discussed in chapter 6, Access to Work has been called 'the best kept secret' of UK benefits funding (Boyce, 2015: 2-18); a fact borne out by deaf organisations (Arrowsmith, 2014) and the respondents of this study themselves. There appears to be a woeful lack of training, understanding and marketing about this essential source of funding, not only for the clients themselves, but also for the employers

(Boyce, 2015). If employers knew about this funding, they may have a different outlook when considering a deaf person's application, or contemplating support in the workplace. It could be argued that the government simply expects all disabled people to find out about AtW for themselves, but this is more difficult for BSL users, for whom English is not a first or accessible language. In many ways this opens the discussion as to whose responsibility it is to provide this information to deaf people. Is it the government's responsibility alone? Given the ad hoc way many of the respondents found out about AtW, maybe this is something that schools, colleges of further education and universities could and should be providing. How this can be done in a systematic and comprehensive manner, and by whom, is still problematic given the low-incidence of deafness across the education spectrum. Nevertheless, specialist advisers for deaf children, deaf organisations and careers advisers all have their part to play in disseminating this type of information.

Employment Outcomes

Chapter 7 investigated the employment outcomes of the graduates interviewed for this research study. Initially, I was simply interested in the graduate destination of the interviewees; whether or not they were employed and in what capacity. Following Woolfe's paper (2014), I was also interested to know if they were working within the deaf community. It was only during the data analysis stage of my research that I became fascinated by the fact that every graduate was working, had worked or had volunteered within the deaf community or a deaf-related industry. This led to me to consider the motivations for them doing so, and for me to add an additional research question, pertaining to whether or not deaf people work in the deaf community by choice, or through necessity due to the challenges they face in acquiring 'mainstream' employment.

Firstly, it is interesting to note that despite attaining good degrees, 50% of the interviewees were unemployed three years after graduating from university. It is difficult to pinpoint a specific reason for this, and whilst it might simply be a reflection of the general employability picture for

graduates in times of austerity, a Higher Education Statistics Agency survey found that 'only 2.6 percent of the UK-domiciled class of 2011 were unemployed three and a half years later' (Times Higher Education, 2015: non-paginated). The DHLE survey published in June of this year, revealed that 90% of the UK 2014-15 graduates were in work or further study six months after graduation (Times Higher Education, 2016). There is a clear discrepancy in the employment outcomes of these deaf graduates. This degree of unemployment may well be the result of discrimination as perceived by some of the respondents (Niall, Pradeep, Tariq) and discussed within the literature (see chapter 2), or it could be the result of a combination of other challenging factors, as discussed within chapters 5 and 6; namely the lack of work placement experiences, difficulties in interview, poorly expressed application forms, lack of weak-ties or social networks and so forth. Further research with employers, and more importantly potential employers of deaf people, is critical in gaining a fuller picture. Within the current legislative framework and the rights afforded to deaf and disabled people by the Equality Act (2010), I seriously doubt one could ever find out why potential employers did not employ deaf applicants.

At the time of writing, 6 out of the 8 interviewees were currently working (either in paid or a voluntary capacity) within the deaf community. This included Sian, Tariq and Terry, who had all recorded a preference for working in a mainstream environment. In chapter 7 I outlined a plethora of reasons for why this might be the case. Certainly, as mentioned by both respondents and the careers adviser, it is simply easier to get a job within the deaf community. Here, there is no evidence of social isolation, no discriminatory attitudes, no communication barriers, and no fear of disclosure – in fact disclosure could be seen as a positive attribute. Working in the deaf community also means there are less Access to Work issues; deaf employers know the system, know what the process is and can further support the deaf employee.

Whilst the above arguments reveal practical reasons for choosing to work within the deaf community, for me, there is a far more compelling reason, that of homophily; a tendency to gravitate towards people who are similar, have similar identities and affiliations (Kulkarni, 2012; McPherson et al.,

2001). This is particularly resonant of BSL users, who are a small linguistic minority group, bound by a common language. In a majority hearing environment based on hearing norms, it is understandable that BSL users would feel most at ease finding employment with people they can trust, communicate, and identify with. Furthermore, because of the strong social networking that exists within the deaf community, it is far easier to find out about work within the deaf world than within the wider mainstream community. Deaf people find it difficult to network with hearing people (Pradeep); they have fewer weak ties (Granovetter, 1983) and thus less opportunity to hear of mainstream employment opportunities from friends of friends. However, because of the close-knit nature of the deaf community, deaf people can more easily find out about employment opportunities from each other; five out of the eight respondents had found jobs via people they knew. This is only a very small-scale research project, but this concept has fascinated me. It would be useful to undertake further research looking specifically at the influence of social networks for finding employment in the deaf world.

This research study revealed another interesting argument for why deaf people decide to work within the deaf community; that of politics. For me, this was a significant finding, which shone light on a little-researched area of deaf culture. For deaf people, the deaf community is a 'deaf space' (Skelton & Valentine, 2003a:118), where deaf people are not discriminated against, where they have stress-free communication, where they are not perceived as disabled and where they can celebrate deaf culture and deaf cultural norms. In applying to work in the deaf community, one can argue that deaf people are expressing a political identity, their Deafhood (Ladd, 2003). Skelton & Valentine (2003a) argued that volunteering in the deaf community was in itself a political action. That all of the graduates had volunteered to work in the deaf community supports this concept. It is also possible to argue that the deaf graduates involved in this research study wanted to effect change. The vast majority of the respondents discussed being a role model, both for deaf children and for hearing parents of deaf children. Their overriding aim was to show what deaf people can achieve.

This was not only to give deaf children confidence and a sense of their own identity, but also to encourage parents in supporting their deaf child.

There is scant research on being a role model within the deaf community, or on the effects role modelling has on deaf children and their parents, but this is something that deserves to be pursued. From my perspective, the concept of being a role model was very much linked with the 'can-do' attitude that pervaded the interview data, and can be explained in some part by 'possible selves theory' (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Perhaps the negative experiences of their own schooling and education, and the lack of role models within their own lives had motivated the graduates to go on to university, to prove what they could achieve, and to show others what was possible.

All the graduates had been successful at university; all but one of the graduates (Niall) were very happy that they had gone to university, taken a degree, and regardless of their employment status, valued the opportunity and the recognition that being a graduate bestowed (See Hinchcliffe & Jolly, (2011) in chapter 4). Add to this their involvement in the deaf community and their strong aspirations to become good deaf role models and I believe it is possible to identify the graduates' self-confidence and self-worth. They had proved that 'Deaf Can Do'.

Some Final Thoughts

And so we come full circle. What seems to be a very long time ago, I began my research journey. Following my previous research studies and my work with Deaf Futures, and given my professional interest in the lives and lived experiences of deaf students, I decided to explore employability and employment in relation to deaf graduates. Did the skills and support we offered at UCLan prepare deaf graduates for employment? Furthermore, were there additional challenges that the deaf graduates faced which prevented them from securing work? As outlined above, it was heartening to see that whilst studying, the deaf students did acquire many of the skills as espoused by Dacre Pool & Sewell (2007), but it was also apparent that much more work needs to be done regarding awareness training for tutors

and peer groups. It was also evident that on graduation, the students faced many barriers to gaining employment, despite twenty years of anti-discrimination legislation. The lifeline for many of the deaf graduates has been the deaf community. The graduates have gravitated to the deaf community for a whole myriad of reasons, perhaps not least is that:

> *… they are doing something which connects with their identity of being D/deaf and which is also about offering support and bringing about change* (Skelton & Valentine, 2003a: 126).

Nevertheless, despite the many positive and political motivations for working within the deaf community, one cannot escape from the fact that for some of the respondents, accepting employment within the deaf community was through necessity. It was simply easier to find and secure employment within the deaf world or in a deaf-related industry. The fact that barriers continue to impede deaf people and deaf graduates, in particular, from mainstream employment needs to be challenged.

Original Contributions of this Study

This thesis forms an important contribution to the field of deafness and Deaf Studies research, particularly in relation to the lived experiences of young deaf people, both in the context of HE and once they have graduated. Whilst the focus of the research was employability, the research study also explored the university experiences of the respondents, shedding light on this little-researched area. Most studies of deaf students in HE focus on the nature of support provision (see Barnes et al., 2007; Fuller et al., 2004; Taylor, 2002) rather than on student narratives and perspectives. The data collated within this study adds to this scant body of knowledge and will hopefully inform HEI staff and services, with a view to aiding further understanding of the pedagogy of deaf learners and the optimum ways to provide comprehensive support both within and outside of the classroom.

This thesis has demonstrated the unique needs of deaf students with regards to job-seeking and careers advice and planning. This is a little-researched area, and whilst deafness is low-incidence for most HEIs, this

knowledge should contribute to a greater awareness of how bespoke or specialist careers coaching is necessary for this, and potentially other marginalised populations. Careers services, including JobCentre Plus and other government agencies designed to support deaf and disabled people into the workplace will benefit from the findings of this research study.

The major contribution of this thesis is to the literature surrounding deaf employment. As the literature review in chapter 4 demonstrates, there is a body of knowledge based on statistics, HESA returns, employment figures and so forth. There is also an existing narrative which explores the experiences of deaf people *within* the workplace (Foster,1987; Steinberg et al., 1999; Punch et al., 2007; Watson, 2016), but there is a lack of empirical research which explores the challenges that deaf people experience in seeking, applying for and securing employment. As far as I am aware, there has not been any previous qualitative research of this nature undertaken with deaf graduates. The graduates' narratives allow a story to unfold, one that perhaps feels familiar as they recount common themes such as a lack of access, an absence of awareness and frustrating communication barriers, which have pervaded deaf people's lives at school, at college, at work.

In terms of research, deafness is predominantly medical-focussed. As such, this educational research contributes to the sparse literature about the lived experience of successful young deaf people, who have overcome many challenges in order to enter Higher Education and gain degrees. The findings will add to the constantly expanding body of Deaf Studies research and Deaf epistemologies which serve to educate and inform not only non-deaf audiences, but also deaf researchers and the deaf community.

The methodology used within this research also makes a significant contribution to the field. Even as a proficient BSL user, when I began my research, the logistics of the translation process did not occur to me. It was only when I became embroiled with the intricacies, complexities and dilemmas involved in translating and transcribing across cultures, languages and modalities that I realised that undertaking deaf research is a field unto itself. At that time, I had (somewhat naively) not read any literature

regarding this practice, and felt completely out of my depth. I also felt (again naively), that my musings and experiences were unique. However, after a good deal of reading (see chapter 4) I realised that this was not the case. Nevertheless, as I have reflected upon the whole experience, I do realise that as researchers of deaf people, we all approach and report the data collection, analysis and translation process differently. As Young & Temple (2014) point out, when publishing research with deaf people, researchers often do not discuss the translation process in great detail, nor explain their language background, credentials or choices. In exploring and describing the minutiae of the processes I undertook and the choices I made, this thesis will add to the growing body of literature on deaf research methodology and serve to support new researchers in the field.

In terms of dissemination of these findings and recommendations, I aim to undertake a number of activities. Firstly, I will produce a summary of findings which will be signed and sent to the deaf graduates who participated in this study. The recommendations from this research (outlined below) will be fed into two main sectors; a) HEIs and the university disability support and careers services and b) public bodies such as Access to Work and Job Centres. This will be both on a local and national level. I will work with the disability support services, careers advisers and academic tutors within my own institution, aiming to enhance the support and employability training we offer deaf students. Working with CHESS (The Consortium for Higher Education Support Services for Deaf Students) I can disseminate guidelines for supporting deaf students across the sector. Working with AGCAS (The Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services) I aim to publish good practice guidance for supporting deaf graduates (and deaf people in general) into the workplace. Finally, I aim to present conference papers and publish articles which will serve to inform the HE sector, the discipline of Deaf Studies, the deaf community and the careers services.

Recommendations from the Study

Drawing on my findings, detailed in chapters 5-7, in this section I sketch out a series of recommendations for stakeholders working with and for deaf students and graduates.

Recommendations for HEIs and Disability Support Services

- All HEIs to encourage and enhance deaf awareness training for academic and service staff across their institutions. Awareness training should be mandatory for teaching staff, and should include information on deaf student literacy, optimum teaching and assessment practices and guidance on how to improve employability opportunities for deaf students. The latter could include explicitly fostering and highlighting employability skills within the curriculum, clearly sign-posting job-seeking opportunities and using visual media to advertise careers information.

- Deaf awareness training should be delivered to the deaf students' peer groups. This should be on-going as the students progress through their three years of study. This training will not alleviate all the barriers caused by a lack of communication but will go some way to a) help hearing peer groups understand the challenges deaf students face in a non-deaf academic environment and b) to appreciate cross-cultural differences which will hopefully lead to improved social interactions and less social isolation for deaf students.

- Programme and course leaders to consider the adoption and utilisation of a work placement module within their programmes. By making work placement an integral part of the course, students will be eligible for Disabled Students' Allowance and thus not face the challenges presented by the current lack of funding for interpreters in voluntary work placements. The opportunity to undertake work placements will enhance the students' employability skills and be used to evidence their CVs, thus making them more employable.

- HEIs to consider appointing a specialist careers adviser for deaf students, or given the small numbers of deaf students in individual HEIs, train a current member of staff in deaf awareness, BSL and

issues pertaining to the employability of deaf people. They could also research deaf-friendly employers and find (ideally, deaf) employment mentors for their deaf students. Interpreters would need to be booked for careers sessions with BSL users. Funding would need to be made available for this.

- Bespoke and discrete employability training – such as the Deaf Futures workshops we held at UCLan – are essential. These workshops could comprise mock interviews (considering cross-cultural behaviours), skills audits with Plain English and BSL translation of terminology, advice on writing personal statements, discussions on whether/when to disclose their deafness, working with interpreters in interviews, information on Access to Work and so forth. If there is only a small number of deaf students within the HEI, careers advisers should consider liaising with other local HEIs and holding regional workshops. CHESS could advise and help co-ordinate.

Recommendations for the Careers Services (including Job Centres)

- Much more deaf awareness training is needed for staff in Careers Services and in Job Centres and other employment agencies. This training needs to go beyond the basics of communication requirements and focus on the real challenges deaf job-seekers face. Careers Services and Job Centres should be equipped to support BSL users in seeking employment, completing application forms and so forth. Job Centres could work in conjunction with deaf clubs and more specifically deaf job clubs where possible. Centre staff must be knowledgeable and inform job-seekers about Access to Work and the processes for seeking this grant. Training for Careers Services and Job Centre staff must be on-going and updated regularly to account for staff turn-over.

- All employment services must have a robust system in place for the booking and provision of interpreters for deaf clients. This can be done in a number of ways, such as a regular interpreted slot, one afternoon per week/fortnight. In this way, deaf clients know there will be an interpreter present and be more likely to attend, the

careers staff become familiar with the working practices of interpreters, and the centres can become more 'joined-up' with other employment services which can tap into this resource.

Recommendations for Others

There are a number of recommendations which fall outside of these two main arenas. These are longer-term recommendations and not so easy to resolve. However, I recognise that the challenges that deaf jobseekers face are deeply-ingrained and greater consideration must be afforded to improving their opportunities for employment.

- In order to comprehend the true scale of the unemployment/underemployment figures for deaf people and deaf graduates who use BSL, more detailed statistics are required. More accurate data is needed from census collection, so that we have true data on the deaf and BSL-using populations. General employability/employment surveys, such as the Labour Force Survey and General Household Survey should differentiate between BSL users and non-BSL users. This is also true of the DLHE survey and other undergraduate and graduate data collection. By using the one term 'deaf' to cover all levels of hearing loss, the narrative surrounding the BSL-using population is obscured, and cannot be drawn upon to raise awareness and promote action.

- Government bodies and agencies need to address the national shortage of interpreters. This is a long-held aspiration from those working and teaching in the deaf-related sector. In order for there to be more interpreters there needs, first of all, to be a significant increase in the number of qualified BSL teachers and teacher trainers. Currently there are no BSL-specific teacher training courses; there are no national BSL teacher training qualifications. This gap needs to be addressed at government level, as a substantial investment needs to be made in order that a) appropriate accredited and recognised qualifications can be developed and b) BSL users can be funded (given their current unemployment and underemployment) to undertake the requisite training to pursue this career path.

- Changes need to be made to the current regulations relating to funding for voluntary work placement activities. Presently, neither DSA or Access to Work will finance interpreters in the voluntary workplace. As seen in chapter 6, this severely disadvantages deaf graduates and other deaf job-seekers from gaining the experience and skills they need to make them more attractive to employers.

- Finally, another long-term recommendation lies with employers themselves. Employers need to be educated about the benefits of employing a deaf person. They need awareness of the challenges deaf employees face in the workplace, and strategies to overcome them. They also need to understand clearly the processes, issues, protocols and limitations of an interpreted interview. It is difficult to see how this can be achieved in a systematic and robust manner. Deaf organisations and charities will have their part to play in delivering this instruction, but ultimately, the drive for this type of awareness training must come much earlier in the education chain, beginning in schools and continuing through college education as part of employability training and instruction.

Recommendations for Further Research

Following on from this research, there are several areas which could be developed in future projects. Firstly, this study could be replicated with more participants from across the whole Higher Education sector. This was a snapshot of what happens in one university. It would be interesting to see if the experiences and perceptions of these respondents was duplicated across other HEIs to ascertain if the experiences of the interviewees are unique to this university and geographical location, and whether these challenges are found across the UK. A larger study would further strengthen the recommendations and policy changes proposed in this study.

More information on the attitudes and awareness of employers towards deaf graduates as potential employees is another obvious area for further research. Topics to be investigated could include employers' awareness of deaf people, Access to Work and British Sign Language and employers'

reactions to less traditional application forms and the 'interpreted interview'. Realistically, I think it would be difficult, if not impossible, to reach the employers who turn away deaf applicants. Nonetheless, the experiences of deaf-friendly employers could inform the business world and demonstrate good practice.

Thirdly, it would be fascinating to investigate deaf people's motivations for working within the deaf community or in a deaf-related industry. As mentioned previously, gravitation towards employment in the deaf world was not an initial area of interest, but it soon became a large part of my investigation, as I discovered 100% respondent involvement in deaf-related employment. It is not surprising that deaf organisations employ deaf people (Rydberg, 2010). What is more surprising, for myself, is that deaf graduates, who have undertaken degree-level qualifications, and for some, Masters level study, do not pursue a career within their chosen discipline, but seem to prefer to take a non-graduate post within the deaf community. Whilst I have argued possible reasons for this within my thesis, I would like to undertake a research project which specifically addresses this issue.

Final Words: Reflecting on the Journey

> *'Learning to reflect on your behaviour and thoughts, as well as on the phenomenon under study, creates a means for continuously becoming a better researcher'* (Watt, 2007:82)

When I started this Professional Doctorate journey, I had no idea what to expect in terms of the research experience, the course assignments, the empirical data collection or time-frame management. I remember clearly one of the first articles we were asked to read; Forbes' (2008) article on reflexivity. Entries from my Reflective Journal indicate bafflement:

> *At the moment, I don't understand reflexivity. After Forbes – I still don't. A few random thoughts: If this is the kind of reading I have to do – I'm on the wrong course. I can't do this. I don't understand a word.*

> *I'm sure there is something in the article – but I can't grasp it. I need to try and find its value.*

And

> *I'm still not 100% sure about all this discussion about identity? I have never thought about this before now. Why would I think about identity? What has identity got to do with research? What changes take place? What is this?*

Now, at the end of my doctoral journey, it is interesting to reflect upon this article and on its resonance with my academic development. Of course Forbes (2008) has something of value to say. She talks about shifting, changing identities; how she had once viewed the nature of the self as 'essential, stable and unchanging' (p453); this is an implicit reference to that fact that during her doctorate journey she has undergone a huge personal shift, an identity change. I clearly could not see this at the beginning of the course, however, it is fascinating now to see just how much I have changed. I have grown professionally; particularly in confidence as a researcher. This is quite a significant change and resonates well with Fenge's (2010) discussion about identities and self-knowledge. I know that through my research, literature review and data collection I have developed a more critical appreciation of the whole field of employability. I can speak with authority on the themes that have emerged from the data. I understand more about myself and my research and I have come to accept that I have developed the skills, abilities and knowledge expected of a doctoral candidate.

This change is also due, in no small measure, to the other members of my doctoral cohort. We were a small group of six students, who quickly became astounded by the enormity of the task ahead of us, and then formed a firm and fast friendship group, which became a bedrock of personal and professional support. We set up a closed Facebook group to 'offer a space in which to vent, sympathise, and share our triumphs and disasters' (Satchwell et al., 2015:5). At the outset, we did not foresee the additional benefits that this Facebook group would bring; not least of these was an opportunity for academic reflection and professional learning. In sifting

through the Facebook conversations over the period of 4 years, what at first appears to be a random melee of trivial and inconsequential postings; 'a frozen capture of questions, expressions of despair, congratulations on a job well-done, pleas for help and the ever-present 'thumbs up' emoticon,' (Satchwell et al., 2015:13) actually represents a linear representation of a long and emotional doctoral journey. The reflection and reflexivity inherent in our postings identify us as doctoral candidates and we can witness ourselves as evolving and growing researchers.

I believe that the support shared within our cohort and exemplified by our continual use of social media to reflect, question, affirm and reaffirm has been key to my professional identity development and learning. That together we published an article detailing this reflection is evidence of our collective professional growth (See Appendix 5).

My final thoughts lie with the graduates themselves. What began as a series of interviews with a set of individuals, has become over the course of this doctorate a tribute to the students who gave their time and personal narratives so freely. The lived experience of being deaf in a hearing world is beset with challenges. The graduates in this research study have had to overcome many educational and societal barriers in order to succeed at university, and succeed they all did. Just as this thesis was being completed I received a reference request for Pradeep for an MSc in Diplomacy, Statecraft and Foreign Policy; the fifth Master's degree application from this small cohort. Whilst they may not all have secured employment or the employment of their choice, they remain as beacons of inspiration for countless other young deaf people. They serve as positive role models, agents for change; and show that 'deaf people can.' I want to close with an article published in the British Deaf News in June 2016.

> *I was born in […], and my family moved to London when I was three years old. Our family struggled financially, and I was the only Deaf person in it; unfortunately, my other family members did not use Sign Language like myself. Despite the barrier in communication and information exchange, my parents encouraged me to pursue my interest in politics.*

As a Black, Deaf individual, however, I just couldn't believe that there would be any opportunities possible for me since there were very few people like myself in political positions with whom I could identify or relate to. I therefore squashed any inner hopes of becoming involved in politics.

When Barack Obama began his campaign for the presidency, all of that began to change. I will never forget the moment it was announced that he had won. I literally burst into tears with the realisation that the social barriers I had experienced were being broken down and the inspiration I felt is beyond words.

I began to study politics [at university] and I became involved in Deaf organisations and undertook a Leadership Programme. In the future I hope to be involved in successful campaigns for advancing the rights of Deaf people, international development, and generally enacting social change.

I was privileged to be one of 500 youth leaders to meet President Obama in London on 23rd April 2016. He actually signed 'Thank you' to me, which gave me a new shot of motivation (British Deaf News, June, 2016).

This is Pradeep's story. I have reproduced this in full, as I believe that this narrative underscores many of the themes raised within this thesis; barriers to communication and information; a lack of role models in the lives of many deaf children and young people and the subsequent suppression of career aspiration; the huge inspiration a role model can provide, and the self-determination to become successful, break down barriers and effect political change for the deaf community. As a postscript Pradeep emailed again today, to say that he had won a scholarship to study the MSc Diplomacy, Statecraft and Foreign Policy at Loughborough University's new London campus:

I'm the first deaf person in history to be given this bursary! I've managed to break down the barriers I faced in applying and was successful in the end (Pradeep, personal email).

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Appendix 1

Interview Guide

Employability and Employment: The Experiences and Perceptions of Deaf Graduates

- **Introduction**
- Clarification (and translation of) consent form

Tell me about your degree…
- What was your degree?
- When did you study here?
- Why did you choose to study here?
- What classification did you get?
- Were you happy with your choice of degree?
  - a. Why
  - b. Why not?

University life
- Did you enjoy your time at university?
- What support did you receive?
- What did you think about the support you received?
- Support from tutors?
- Support from peers?
- Any barriers?

Life after University
- First job? Further study?
- What is your current employment?
- Are you using your degree subject knowledge in your job? Explain.
- Is the subject knowledge you acquired at university useful for employment?

Employability Skills

- What skills do you think employers look for in graduates?
- What skills did you learn at university that you think are useful
- for gaining employment?
- Did your lecturers discuss employability/employability skills with you

Communication Skills

- What do think of communication as an employability skill? What does it mean to you? Are communication skills important? Do employers want oral skills? Writing skills?
- Do you think it has it affected your potential to get a job?

Career Development

- What did the university teach you about career development? How to get a job? What jobs were appropriate for your degree? Where to look for work?
- Did you access the careers service? Seek careers advice? How? When? Was it useful? Where the staff knowledgeable?
- Did you go to Deaf Futures events? Discuss

Work Experience

- Did you undertake work experience/ work placement as part of your course?
- Have you had any work experience? Discuss
- Have you undertaken voluntary work? Discuss
- Did you face any difficulties/barriers in getting this experience?
- Was the work experience valuable?
- What did you learn from this?

Finding Employment

- Were there any difficulties/barriers to applying for jobs/ finding employment?
- Discuss application process. Do you find it difficult to complete application forms? Have you support to assist you?
- Discuss disclosure
- Discuss interviews. Do you take an interpreter? Do you pay? Do they pay? Who organises it?
- Do you/did you get any support regarding finding work after leaving university?

Reflection

- What more could the university have done to support you?
- What worked well for you at university? What didn't?
- What has helped you move forward since you left university?
- Looking back, what do you wish someone had told you about university/employment?

- Anything else you would like to tell me about your experiences at university or at work?

Appendix 2

Expression of Interest (Email)

Dear Graduate

I am doing some research called 'Employment and Employability: The Experiences and Perceptions of Deaf Graduates.'

The overall aim of this research project is to explore the experiences of deaf graduates in relation to employment and employability. I want to investigate the employability skills and advice about employment deaf undergraduates receive when they are studying at UCLan. Is there anything we can do better?

I would like to interview deaf graduates who left university between 2009 and 2012.

The interviews will be held in BSL. I can come to you, or you come here to UCLan. Or if you prefer we can do the interview via webcam?

All information will be kept anonymous.

I would very much appreciate it if you would be willing to be interviewed.

If you are happy to be interviewed, I will contact you with more information and an initial meeting to explain in BSL what it is all about.

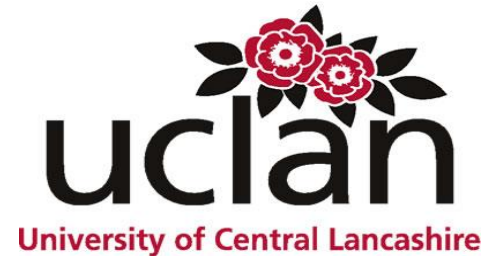Please can you let me know if you would like to be involved?

Many thanks.

Lynne

Lynne Barnes
BSL & Deaf Studies
UCLan
lbarnes@uclan.ac.uk

Appendix 3

Information and Consent Form

Information Sheet & Consent Form

University of Central Lancashire

> **Employability and Employment: The Experiences and Perceptions of Deaf Graduates**

Dear Graduate

You are being invited to take part in a research study.

Before you decide if you want to be involved, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve.

Please take time to read the following information carefully. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Thank you for reading this.

[If you decide to take part, this form will also be explained to you in BSL at the beginning of the interview, to make sure that you have understood everything clearly].

What is the purpose of this study?

The aim of this research is to investigate whether or not deaf undergraduates have access and opportunity to acquire employability skills, and whether these skills produce positive employment outcomes, such as graduate level jobs.

Currently, there is very little research data or training materials specifically designed to support deaf students in their transition into the workplace. Neither are there materials to support those tutors who trying to teach deaf students the skills for employment. It is hoped that the research findings from this study will help in the design of tools for UCLan and for other universities, so that deaf undergraduates are more effectively supported into employment.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been invited to participate in the project because you are a deaf graduate from UCLan. We value your experience of UCLan and life after UCLan.

I would like to interview you in BSL about your experiences.

Do I have to take part?

No. Also, if you do choose to take part, your participation is voluntary and you can withdraw at any time, for any reason, without having to provide any explanation.

What will happen to me if I take part?

If you do agree to take part, you will be invited to attend for interview, which will take approximately one hour. The interview will be recorded onto video and then transcribed into English. The transcript will be anonymised, and I will give you a false name.

If you are happy to take part, please complete the attached consent form.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

We do not consider that there are significant risks to taking part. Care will be taken to ensure confidentiality and your anonymity throughout.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

You will be that you are contributing to knowledge on this subject, and helping to develop good practice for future deaf undergraduates

What if something goes wrong?

It is very unlikely that anything will go wrong. If something goes wrong or you become concerned, you should contact myself, Lynne Barnes (lbarnes@uclan.ac.uk) to discuss this.

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?

Yes. Digital recordings and interview transcriptions will be dealt with in strictest confidentiality and anonymised.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

As part of the research I will look at the data you provide in your interview. This data will be analysed alongside that of other participants and written up into a thesis.

The findings of the study will be reported in conference papers and journal articles in order to inform the development of HE practice with regards to

supporting deaf students and graduates in attaining employability skills and employment.

Who may I contact for further information?

If you wish to find out more about this research study, please contact Lynne Barnes, Academic Lead for BSL & Deaf Studies, UCLan (lbarnes@uclan.ac.uk)

Thank you for your interest in this research.

Consent form

Employability and Employment: The Experiences and Perceptions of Deaf Graduates

Name of Researcher: Lynne Barnes (University of Central Lancashire)

1.   I confirm that I have read and understood the participant information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. ☐

2.   I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason. ☐

3.   I give permission for my interviews to be recorded and the data to be used in publications and conference papers. ☐

4.   I understand that any transcriptions or recordings will be securely and anonymously stored according to the requirements of the Data Protection Act. ☐

5.   I agree to take part in the above study. ☐

Name of Participant   Date   Signature

_____   _____
_____

Name of Researcher   Date   Signature

_____   _____
_____

Appendix 4. Short Biographies of Four of the Participants

It should be noted that I did not specifically ask participants for biographical details, and so what is entered here is what they volunteered in response to other interview questions.

Information about their experience of applying for jobs and being interviewed is contained and analysed within chapter 6.

Niall

Niall studied BA Graphic Design between 2006 and 2010. At the time of interview he was 23 years old and unemployed. Niall had attended a mainstream primary school which had a unit for deaf children. He was educated orally and wore a box hearing aid. At the age of 11, he attended Burwood Park School for the Deaf. At this time he did not use sign language, however he recalls that within a week he had absorbed deaf culture, identity and language and felt a huge sense of relief as he felt…'normal'. Unfortunately, Burwood Park closed down when Niall was in Year 9, and he went on to Mary Hare Grammar School, which he did not enjoy at all. He left school with 2 GCSEs in Art and Graphics. Niall then attended college in the west of Scotland, but was hugely disappointed by the communication support he received and he soon left college. He worked with his father for the remainder of the year, before starting a HND in Graphic Design at Glasgow Metropolitan College, where the interpreters were qualified and he excelled. Interestingly, whilst at college, Niall enrolled on an evening English course which was taught by a BSL user. Although the course was only eight weeks long, Niall believed that it taught him more about English than all the previous years at Mary Hare. He believed the reason for this was that it was taught directly in sign language, not through an interpreter which made a big difference to him and his learning.

Niall did not enjoy his time at UCLan. He was socially isolated on his course. He felt that he received neither peer nor tutor support. He also felt that his tutors did not understand him nor his needs. He became clinically depressed

and intercalated for a year. When he came back, he completed his degree –
and achieved a 2.2. He was the only graduate who felt that university had
been a waste of time and money and he regretted ever coming.

Unfortunately, Niall was also socially isolated at home. His parents had not
learned to sign. He appeared to be bitter about this – to the point where
there was little communication at all at home. Niall discussed his isolation
growing up in a hearing family where family members all chat to one
another:

> I don't 'fit.' It's an oral environment and I'm always the one trying to
> communicate with them rather than them communicate with me or
> even meeting me half way and it is tiring. Really, I needed them to
> have learned to sign in the first place and then it would have been
> fine.

 It is possible to see how the social isolation Niall felt at university and at
home affected his health, his enjoyment of university and his choice of
career. On graduating Niall decided to work as a freelance graphics
designer. His choice was dictated by a strong reluctance to work in a
hearing environment due to his belief that he would be discriminated
against because of his deafness (see p 137). His own business was
unsuccessful; Niall again felt that this was because of the discriminatory
attitudes of potential hearing clients and their perceptions of his ability to
design. As I was completing my thesis, I learned that Niall was moving
back to Preston (from Scotland) and seeking work in the deaf community.

Tariq

Tariq studied BA Games Design between 2007 and 2010 and an MA in
Games Design between 2010 and 2012. He achieved a 2.1 and a First-Class
degree respectively. At the time of interview Tariq was unemployed,
although he had undertaken some volunteering work within the deaf
community. He had not had one interview since graduation. Tariq was not
only disappointed by this fact, but also frustrated as he had not had one
reply from a gaming company, and did not know if this was because of his

deafness or because of something else that he was doing wrong. Tariq was realistic and in some respects, resigned to the fact that the longer he was unemployed the more difficult it was going to be to get a job in the gaming industry. He felt a little ashamed that he had not kept up his gaming skills – but he required an expensive licence for the software, which he could not afford. Consequently, he was losing motivation in his chosen career.

Tariq's educational experiences resonate with the communication difficulties faced by Niall. Tariq's parents didn't use sign language and had sent him to a mainstream school, where he was socially isolated and 'didn't understand what was going on'. He was extremely unhappy and became depressed. He eventually withdrew himself from school. He tried to explain this to his parents, but they couldn't communicate:

> *Luckily, one of my mum's friends could sign, so I was able to explain it to her in BSL and then she relayed this in English to my parents. Then they understood* (Tariq, face-to-face interview)*.*

That Tariq had to find someone to interpret for him, in order for him to explain such an important life-changing decision to his family is extremely poignant. It is also illustrative of the continuing education debates regarding educational placement for deaf children and the difficulties of choosing the right communication methodology for your child. Whilst it is outside the scope of this biography to detail these debates here, it is clear that Tariq's parents were not alone in choosing not to sign with him. For example, in a study of communication choices in US families with deaf children, Kluwin and Gaustad (1991), reported that English was the primary language being used at home by 83.7% of their responding families.

Tariq's reflection of this event was both astute and revealing of the difficulties parents face in making communication and educational placement choices for their deaf children. He understood that his mother had wanted to provide him with the best education by placing him in a successful mainstream school. He, on the other hand knew that what was important for him was the access; good eye contact and being taught through sign language. Subsequently, Tariq attended a school for the deaf

where he engaged immediately with peers and teachers, his results improved and he flourished.

That this was the right move for Tariq is perhaps illustrated by his success at university. Whilst he struggled socially on his undergraduate course, he thoroughly enjoyed his MA course. In a similar fashion to Jack (see below), the smaller classes, more independent study, and more access to tutors helped him to achieve a first-class degree. Unfortunately, this has not as yet translated into full-time graduate employment.

Pradeep

Pradeep studied BA Politics between 2009 and 2012. He also took some Deaf Studies modules as electives. He achieved a 2.1. At the time of interview Pradeep was unemployed, but unlike Tariq, he had many interviews since graduation; however, he had not been successful. Pradeep was extremely frustrated by this, as he did not know why he was failing at the interview stage. This points to a common refrain regarding the lack of feedback regarding job applications and interviews, which could inform and therefore amend performance.

Pradeep, whilst passionate about politics, was also aware how difficult this subject was in terms of securing employment. In his view, the politics lecturers should have done far more to support students in seeking work placements and helping them to find jobs. He also believed that a compulsory work placement would have been hugely beneficial to him in his search for work.

Pradeep was the only deaf person in his family. He went to mainstream schools for the whole of his education, and unlike Niall, praised the support that he had received. Pradeep acknowledges his indubitable confidence which he believes grew out of adversity, namely through standing up for himself in a mainstream environment and challenging the attitudes of his hearing peers. Furthermore, he believes this confidence helped him throughout his university career, both in interactions with his hearing peers, but also in his pursuit of work; travelling extensively, meeting the Lord

Mayor, attending Youth and Leadership training courses, meeting the Prime Minister and so forth.

Interestingly, Pradeep was a failing student in his first year. His struggle with written English masked his profound knowledge of his degree subject. Subsequently, he was one of UCLan's first deaf students to undertake his exams in BSL. His written exam paper was graded at 29%; his signed exam paper was awarded 65%. The practice of undertaking exams in BSL is unusual across the higher education sector, but Pradeep's experience clearly raises questions regarding the accessibility of university assessments for deaf students and can be held up as an example of good practice in an inclusive learning and teaching environment.

As mentioned in chapter 8, as I completed this thesis Pradeep had just won a scholarship to study an MSc in Diplomacy, Statecraft and Foreign Policy at the Loughborough University Campus in London. He is still pursuing his dream.

Jack

Jack studied BA Sports Coaching between 2007 and 2010. He then studied for a Masters degree also in Sports Coaching 2010-2012. He achieved a 2.2 and a 2.1 respectively. At the time of interview Jack had three jobs which were all part-time with flexible hours. He worked with the National Deaf Children's Society sports coaching with deaf children. He also provided PE cover as a cricket coach in mainstream schools funded by local councils. His third role was as a Disability Sports Coach at Greenbank in Liverpool. Jack was also studying for an MSc in Strength and Conditioning at Bolton College

Although Jack's parents learned sign language and communicated with him using Sign Supported English, Jack attended an oral school for the deaf. He lip-read and used his hearing aids in order to 'get by'. He struggled at school. He then went to the local college, supported by a Teacher of the Deaf and a Communication Support Worker (CSW). By this time Jack had been playing in the Deaf Cricket Team and had developed his signing skills and identified as 'D'eaf and as a BSL user. He recalls that neither the

Teacher of the Deaf nor his CSW had good signing skills so he struggled to access information.

Jack chose to study at UCLan because of the reputation of the Sports Coaching degree course. During the course of his interview, it became apparent how much Jack's family had influenced his decision to become a sports coach:

> *I was born into a family who are keen on sport, so it was a natural progression for me to want to become a sports coach.*

> *As a child I learned about sport from my father, both football and cricket. He was the coach at the cricket club that I was a member of, when I was young, and I thought I'd follow in his footsteps.*

Throughout this interview, Jack commented often on the support he received not only from his father, but from his wider family; *'my father helped me to get on', 'so he [my father] encouraged me to get involved', 'it was my brother who recommended university to me'.* Jack's brother and cousins had all gone to university, and in many ways, this further encouraged Jack, not least because he was competitive, and he wanted to get a better degree classification than his brother:

> *I like to compete with him, I like the challenge. Now we both have jobs.*

Alongside this friendly sibling rivalry, I believe there is a strong political message. Jack was not going to let his deafness hold him back. He had a lot to prove. His interview was spattered with phrases expressing his belief in what deaf people can accomplish:

> *I feel it is important to show people what deaf people can achieve.*

Jack mixed well with both deaf and hearing students at university. In many ways, this was a reflection of his life outside of the university; his participation in both deaf and hearing sports teams and his working life with deaf and hearing children. He wanted to be a role model for other deaf children and encouraged other deaf students to mix with hearing peers.

Jack was both popular and successful at university. The UCLan sports team nominated him twice for the (disabled) Sports Personality of the Year which he won in 2010 and 2011. He was also nominated for the (mainstream) Red Rose Sports Personality Award in 2011. He came second. As he was in the England Deaf Cricket Team, he was offered a UCLan Sports Scholarship in order for him to improve his skills and physique. He was also nominated to carry the Olympic flame.

Jack's experience at UCLan was a positive one, very much influenced by his interests and friendships outside of the university. The fluidity of his belonging to both the deaf and hearing worlds was not only apparent, but in many ways a factor for success.

Jack's aim is to become a Strength and Conditioning Coach in order to coach deaf Olympians. Ultimately he would like to become Head Coach for the England Deaf Cricket Team.

Appendix 5

'Our Breadcrumb Trail through the Woods': Reflections on the Use of a Secret Facebook Group as a Strategy for Surviving and Thriving on the Doctoral Journey'

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Abstract

This article explores the value of attending to the emotional side of the doctoral journey by focusing on the use of a 'secret' Facebook group amongst a cohort of EdD (Professional Doctorate in Education) students at

one English university. Presented as a piece of action research in which the participants created an intervention to address a perceived problem and then reflected on its effectiveness, it is co-authored by the cohort of six students and their tutor. The stresses and loneliness of the doctoral journey have been well documented and constitute the 'problem' addressed by this cohort of students. Their inception and use of a Facebook group was a response to challenges experienced in their studies, with the expectation of facilitating peer support. As will be shown this aim was successfully met with enhancements in academic, social, and emotional support. However, unexpected benefits arose from the interactions within the group including a normalization of the challenges of the doctoral quest and the advantage of being able to follow the 'breadcrumb trail' found in the group postings as group journal and aid to reflection. Further, both tutors and students have noted the development of a strong sense of 'cohortness' and inclination to work collaboratively. Through a process of individual and group reflection on experiences of the intervention, combined with analysis of the content of the postings, this article examines the characteristics of the Facebook intervention and considers some ethical implications. We suggest that key characteristics that have contributed to its success include the student ownership, the protection of the secret format, and the combination of emotionally supportive, academic, and irreverent exchanges between group members. It is hoped that these insights may be useful to future doctoral candidates and their tutors as they negotiate their own way through the doctoral woods.

Keywords: Reflection, cohort, emotion, social, Facebook, support, secret

Introduction and Review of the Literature

This article explores the value of attending to the emotional side of the doctoral journey by focusing on the use of a 'secret' Facebook group (Khare, 2011) amongst a full year cohort of six EdD students at one university in the North-West of England. The Doctorate in Education (EdD) at this university is a taught programme, using a closed-cohort model (Bista & Cox, 2014). There are currently around 40 students enrolled on the programme, with an intake of approximately eight students per year. The participants in each year's cohort come into the university once a month,

with occasional additional weekend meetings or workshops and some opportunities for cross-cohort interaction at joint workshops and conferences. The students study taught modules alongside reflective participant-led modules facilitated by tutors, at the same time as working on individual research and developing the final thesis with support from a supervisory team. This means that each group comes together relatively infrequently, and the opportunity for peer sup-port is therefore also relatively infrequent, and the loneliness of the long-distance researcher (Gannon-Leary, Fontainha, & Bent, 2011) can be inescapable.

This article is co-authored by one complete cohort of six students who have instigated the Face-book group and their tutor in an attempt at performing the collaborative nature of the topic we discuss. The students and tutor in this instance are all female, and although half the teaching team is male, there is a predominance of female students on the programme as a whole. While we do not address the factor of gender at length here, it is likely to have had an impact. Indeed, in keep-ing with this paper, there is 'a growing literature on female students' experiences of doctoral study which portrays emotion as an integral part of the process' (Aitchison & Mowbray, 2013, p. 860). All authors have agreed to the use of first names and are aware that they are clearly identi-fiable as simultaneously authors of this article, EdD students, professionals, and contributors to a Facebook page. One member classified herself as predominantly an 'Observer' rather than a 'Sharer', but her reflection in the section on 'cohortness' makes clear that she is firmly established and fully accepted as a group member.

This absence of anonymity may appear ironic in the face of our assertion that the 'secret' nature of the group is paramount. However, this secrecy relates to the fact that the Facebook 'group' is closed and only members of it can contribute or view posts. Indeed, the tutor amongst the present authors has still not accessed the Facebook postings and feels that this would be a significant breach of the boundaries that have been especially constructed. This issue of 'identifiability' or 'anonymity' is also highly relevant to the topic of this article, in that the authors are all lecturers and aspiring academics as well as doctoral candidates. They, therefore, have

conflicting identities as both students and professionals, and each of these identities has different needs and expectations. While research participants and students are entitled to confidentiality, academics have an increasing need to exhibit a public profile and to be named on publications. Exploring a way of fulfilling the requirements for both personal safety and academic endeavour is largely the subject of this article.

Isolation of post-graduate students is commonly commented on (Ali & Kohun, 2006; Pauley, 2004; Trujillo, 2007), although there is limited literature available examining the experiences of doctoral students. However, that which is available suggests that doctoral students frequently assume that they will become a part of a vibrant, supportive research scene, when in fact they are often disappointed in this belief and may even feel isolated in their studies (Janta, Lugosi, Brown & Ladkin, 2012). A review of the literature also shows an acknowledgement that different kinds of support are required for doctoral education. For example Brooks and Fyffe (2004) examine the use of online resources, Dabbagh and Kitsantas (2011) focus on the use of 'personal learning environments' to blend social and academic elements of the course, and Gannon-Leary et al. (2011) consider the benefits of a 'Community of Writers' in the context of lonely researchers engaged in academic writing. While these interventions touch on the social and emotional side of learning, they tend to be provided by institutions rather than led by students.

Hadjioannou, Shelton, Rankie, and Danling (2007), however, describe how student-led doctoral groups can create a dynamic supportive community, which provides its members with essential emotional sustenance (cited in Janta et al., 2012). The use and benefit of social networking sites to provide such learning spaces is also acknowledged (see for example Elllison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; Gray, Annabell, & Kennedy, 2010; Selwyn, 2009). Derks, Fischer, and Bos (2007) reviewed studies of the communication of emotion in computer-mediated communication and concluded that 'social sharing' (p.5) can be just as successful on-line as face-to-face. The im-portance of socialisation in building on-line learning communities or 'communities of inquiry' is reinforced by Garrison (2011)

and Preece (2000) who suggest that socialisation of learners can be a significant factor in both student retention and ultimately successful outcomes of their studies.

All of this supports the present authors' own experiences; however, here we explore the creation of a 'secret' space instigated by the students themselves *outside* of the institution, which seems to give the intervention its special identity. We consider the importance of the various strands of support that can be provided – and that seem to be needed by part-time doctoral students in particular. Within the course, as exemplified by the learning outcomes, relationships between personal, academic, and practitioner aspects of self are frequently referred to as part of the EdD journey. The journey metaphor is well-worn (see for example, Batchelor & Di Napoli, 2006; Fenge, 2012; Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2011). Its pertinence is partly because, for those who have completed a doc-torate, there is a significant difference between the start and end-points with numerous obstacles to be negotiated along the way. This difference is not just in terms of qualification or status; it is also a deeply personal and emotional change. The experience of sharing with others these changes and this growth is in itself an expression of change and growth. This article will contribute to understanding how the social side of doctoral study can improve the quality of that journey in terms of personal, practitioner, and academic development. Recognising the different facets of ourselves and our various needs can help us to meet those needs. Recognising them in others can be reassuring and liberating in that we feel less alone, more connected, and therefore more able to continue on the journey.

Methodology

The literature and our own reflections have covered notions of individual and group identity, including student, academic, and practitioner identities. We have also addressed different kinds of support and uses of technology. A discussion about how to nominalise the topic of our paper highlighted methodological considerations. Are we most interested in the participants, the technology, or the function? While all of these aspects are relevant, we find the notion of an 'intervention' the most useful, carrying as it does an

intimation of a methodology of action research. The students – who as it happens are all also lecturers – identified a problem (feelings of isolation on their doctoral course) and then devised an innovation to help them overcome the problem (a secret Facebook group) and to reach their goal (achieving a doctorate). The students then both individually and collectively reflected on the effectiveness of the innovation, which in turn both revealed and inspired further reflection in and on their postings on Facebook. As Newby (2014) explains, action research is particularly popular with educators because, "Action research embeds reflective practice in its processes. Reflective practice raises the question for action research to answer and may even determine the nature of the action" (p.630). Further, action research "is designed to improve outcomes and/or processes while, at the same time, enabling personal and professional development" (Newby, 2014, p.631). The EdD course is clearly designed to do just these things, and both the intervention and the writing of this article have contributed further to improving outcomes of the students' own educational development. While the authors have ad-dressed a problem identified by themselves as students, the fact that these students are also lecturers, and the inclusion of their own tutor in the writing of this article, means that the 'usefulness' of the research is that it has implications for curriculum development both for the authors in their various contexts and for the readers of the article.

An initial group analysis of written and spoken reflections on the value of the intervention provided the themes of Support, Humour, Affection, Reflection, and Emotion, which conveniently made up the acronym SHARE. Further analysis of and reflections on the postings subsequently produced the headings presented here. A collaborative (sharing) process of re-writing, editing, and revision was then undertaken to such an extent that different reflective headings emerged, and the article became fully 'co-authored'. Our article is mainly reflective, synthesising perspectives from each writer, but using the framework of action research we first present 'the problem' and 'the intervention'.

The Problem

The production of a doctoral thesis is often referred to as a lonely affair (e.g. Janta, Lugosi, & Brown, 2014). It requires concentration, focus, representation of one's self as a trustworthy re-searcher and academic, and also – when it is for a professional doctorate – practitioner. It means extensive periods of time grappling with concepts, complex texts, collecting data from the field, writing, and re-writing. By definition, most of these activities are done by oneself. For the students in this study, the research is usually carried out alongside holding down a full-time job in Higher Education.

This cohort of six began studying together on the EdD course in January 2013. Originally there were seven, but the one male member of the cohort moved to a professional doctorate programme within his own discipline. In some respects this event was a catalyst for the remaining students experiencing feelings of unease. Although they remained (and still re-main) in contact with this member, the loss of one of the group appeared to both expose insecurities and encourage bonds to form. Several months into the doctorate, the group began to experience difficult times: some were still in the process of refining research pro-posals or applying for ethical approval, others had tentatively begun their research field-work, and all were working to complete assignments and trying to balance the demands of doctoral studies with work and personal lives. Classes were once a month and, whilst the cohort apparently worked well together and were beginning to get to know one another, it seemed that it was easy to lose touch in between sessions, leading to feelings of isolation and struggle.

Doctoral study is intense by its very nature and the doctoral candidate often runs the whole gamut of emotions during the process due to the personal investment in the research (Burgess, Siemenski, & Arthur, 2006). During the professional doctorate this is further intensified as professionals are investigating their own professional practice, ensuring that feedback from the course team on submitted work is sometimes met with an inordinate amount of dismay (Aitchison & Mowbray, 2013). Doctoral candidates often feel that feedback is a very personal criticism of their abilities, and this,

once more, can create feelings of isolation and questioning of knowledge and skill (Cox, Carr, & Hall, 2014)

The group members have professional identities; between them they hold senior or principal lecturing positions, teach undergraduate and postgraduate students, support and guide students through dissertation and Master's level study, give conference papers, and undertake national and international consultancy work. It is therefore not easy to admit to feelings of inadequacy, of an inability to write or to understand, of frustration at course materials and assignment briefs, or of marking criteria and deadlines, especially where the doctoral supervisors are university colleagues. The group felt the need for a safe space in which to offset the emotions that could not comfortably be displayed in class; somewhere for the students to feel comfortable and confident enough to share their lack of confidence.

The Intervention: Evolution of the Facebook Group

As a senior lecturer who worked with e-learning students, one of the group had previously looked into the use of social media as an aid to socialisation and knew of the potential advantages of a Facebook group, including the familiarity and ease of use for many students, the scope for creativity, and the ability to foster a sense of belonging and exploration of identity (Mason & Rennie, 2008). She felt that a Facebook group might offer the students a way to enhance their social processes and to facilitate and strengthen peer support (Brooks & Fyffe, 2004). There were also potential drawbacks, however, for example with issues of boundaries and confidentiality and the realization that not everybody might be keen to join such a group (Beninger et al., 2014; Lupton, 2014; Mason & Rennie 2008). As professional people it felt essential to set the group up as secret; no-body but members could see the group's existence or any of the postings. The initial implicit agreement of confidentiality within the group enabled a sense of trust and security to develop, but the secret nature of the group was also a significant factor in the way the students regarded it as a safe space, ensuring that its members knew where they could turn to for support in any circumstance.

The original purpose was to offer a space in which to "vent, sympathise, and share our triumphs and disasters" (Hazel on 25.10.13). However none of the group at the outset foresaw the addition-al benefits that it would afford the cohort as use of the group evolved over time. As Hazel reflected later:

"Scrolling through the posts provides a group journal – it reminds us of the triumphs and disasters, the story of our journey – it's like our breadcrumb trail through the woods. I didn't expect that messing around on Facebook would provide an aid to reflexivity, I didn't see that one coming!"

The importance of reflection and professional learning is examined in the next section, followed by the group's reflections collected together under four broad headings.

Academic Reflection and Professional Learning

For all members of the group, reflection is a vital and purposeful activity, giving momentum to their learning and their continuing evolution as educators and doctoral candidates (K. Williams, Wooliams, & Spiro, 2012). Brookfield (1995), writing of the importance of critical reflection for educators, identifies four interconnected lenses which may facilitate or trigger reflective processes: the autobiographical lens, the lens of students' perspectives, the lens of colleagues' perspectives, and the lens provided by perspectives drawn from the literature.

The facility for reflection within the group appears to work on two main levels: on-the-spot, sur-face reflection, often taking form as ironic, self-affirming, or self-deprecating declarations (or sometimes a combination thereof); and the deeper more considered reflections arising from re-viewing and revisiting the trail of postings which engages with the autobiographical lens (Brookfield, 1995).

Shades of the ironic may be found in Susan's posts referring to reflection, where she plays with the concept of reflection and in doing so reflects on her own reflective processes and the resulting impact on her evolving and multiple identities:

'*"On reflection, I have lost the will to live"* (Susan, 12.1.14)

or

"I have done so much reflecting on professional, academic and personal self, I no longer know who I am!" (Susan, 11.3.14)

A further example combining irony and self-deprecation can be found in Hazel's 'rant' prior to preparing for a critical discussion to be presented in class, in which she expresses frustration with the difficulties of balancing assignments and fieldwork, and reveals feelings of inadequacy when assessing progress so far:

"So I started looking at what we have to do for the critical discourse on 25th and it seems that my talk will be very short and will consist of 'I have hardly done any research be-cause I am busy doing assignments. I don't have a clue about impact, significant contributions to practitioner knowledge or change theory because I am too busy doing assignments. I don't know what the foundations and rationale behind my research are anymore because I have been too busy doing assignments and have forgotten what I said in the first place.' Can you base some good questions on that Lynne? It's a good job we didn't do this in June; I'd have had even less to say then!" (Hazel, 31.8.14)

However, being able to address feelings of inadequacy in a safe space and receiving 'mirroring' comments from peers allowed Hazel both to reflect on her achievements to date and also to realize that she could address feelings about the assignment load within her presentation.

Lynne's post a few days later about the same critical discussion assignment also demonstrates self-deprecation: by describing her draft discussion as 'Jackanory' (a children's television story-telling programme) she is reflecting on her sense of not having anything important to say at this stage in her journey:

"I've started the critical discussion - but am at a loss. Is anyone using theory here and how? In 7 minutes? I am trying to answer the Learning

Outcomes but my discussion is looking like Jackanory ... i.e. just a story of where I am up to - and the fact that I don't have anything significant yet to say. Any advice?" (Lynne, 17.9.14)

The response from the group here showed a resonance for many: the term 'Jackanory' provided a commonly agreed metaphor for the discussion scripts, but also, engaging with the lens of col-leagues' perceptions, helped the group members to see that their position in the research process was appropriate and acceptable.

Self-affirming postings within the group are often simple declarations of achievement, as in "I've got data" or "I've submitted my assignment", not necessarily including reflection; however, on occasions a reflective tone can be detected as in Susan's post about her first forays into thematic analysis where her postscript expresses her enjoyment of the process and her surprise at that enjoyment:

"Wow just applied a little thematic analysis (I think) to first interview in readiness for next assignment! Would have been nice just to be able to do more analysis rather than consider the essay. However, the weekend calls so everything shelved. There's always next week. Have a good week end x PS actually enjoyed it but don't tell anyone!" (Susan, 15.8.14)

As can be seen, within these postings reflection has been with a light touch. However when three of the group decided to collaborate on a poster presentation about the benefits of the Facebook intervention in facilitating peer support, they discovered that sifting back through the posts in or-der to code them became a reflective and reflexive process in which they were able to see their identities as doctoral candidates and researchers evolving and growing. For example, Hazel was surprised to realise that when she wrote:

"Tying myself up in Foucauldian knots - why do I keep going deeper and deeper when I was nearly finished?" (Hazel, 22.2.14),

although using a joking tone she was also establishing her scholarly identity. The sub-text was "I am a scholar and a researcher who is trying to

engage with difficult concepts." Looking back at another post reveals uncertainty about the significance and value of individual research:

"Anyone else suffer from project envy? I was talking to two people today who are doing doctorates, one was doing the temporal perceptions of online students, and the other was looking at the assessment of competences in social workers. They both sounded much more important and interesting than mine." (Hazel, 10.12.13)

Yet, a year on from this, it is clear that progress has been made with fieldwork, and Hazel is feeling more confident of her own contribution. As the concepts of personal and professional identity feature strongly in professional doctoral research, the facility to review postings within this group and to compare them to entries in reflective journals has provided the students with an invaluable – and unpredicted - tool with which to monitor and track their own multiple and evolving identities as educators, doctoral candidates and researchers (Fenge, 2010). An important aspect of the reflective and reflexive process for practitioner researchers is to understand one's professional self in relation to one's personal self (Costley, Elliot, & Gibbs, 2010); collectively examining the postings in the Facebook group has given the group a further tool for understanding themselves and each other and for forging a strong group identity. This, in turn, strengthens all of their individual identities as doctoral candidates and researchers.

Reflection 1: Bonding of the Group – The Value of 'Cohortness'
Although many prospective doctoral students look forward to engaging with a supportive academic community, this group appeared to have few such expectations. As Susan wrote:

"When I began my doctoral journey, I really didn't see a breadcrumb trail through the woods. It seemed to me more like being parachuted into a jungle with only a penknife to cut through the tangle of vegetation. I saw a dark and lonely path ahead, filled with obstacles and setbacks; a perception fuelled by doctoral folklore and backed up by col-leagues undergoing or recently ending their own doctoral journeys".

Therefore the group's experience has been 'surprising', an epithet each member has applied in their reflection on the success of the group. Jacqueline, for example, states:

"It was a surprise, therefore, from the outset, how the cohort became a cohesive, support-ive whole, and the introduction of the Facebook group, during a difficult time for the stu-dents, only cemented this and allowed our group to become ever more supportive of each other";
and Susan concludes:
"So how is it that two years into this cold and lonely journey I am actually really enjoying it and have completely banished these dark images and replaced them with scenes of pleasure and laughter? The obstacles are still there but I view them as challenges that I will overcome, not as a single combatant, but as part of an eager band bound by commitment, a sense of community and not least through laughter."

Their experience concurs with Fenge (2012) and Bista and Cox (2014) that 'cohortness' is key to a successful professional doctorate journey. We suggest that the support offered among the doctoral colleagues in this Facebook group has enhanced the cohort identity (Fenge, 2012): each knows what is happening in others' lives external to the doctoral process, and such knowledge allows the group to be caring on both an academic and a personal level. Whatever one of the members is undergoing, the others are party to it if they post on Facebook and therefore can be supportive in many ways, whether it is a good or bad experience. This type of behaviour is typically described as 'mutually empowering' (Fletcher, 1995), where members of the group are "keen to demonstrate genuine care for others and proactively avoid conflict" (Devenish et al., 2009).

It is significant that the relative non-user of the group also considers herself to have benefited from the group membership. Her own perspective on Facebook generally is that it is unwieldy and overwhelming, and her limited experience fuels her lack of engagement. Regarding herself as an 'Observer' (with some 'Sharer' characteristics) (as defined by Benninger et al., 2014),

Ridwanah (known as Riz) has made only seven posts, mainly to demonstrate support or to share in-formation, for example:

"Just catching up on all your comments, ha ha, u guys r ace! x" (6.12.13)
"I am teaching [...] 2moz and I will miss the session. Will c u all afta 4pm" (22.1.14)

However, Riz describes an experience in a face-to-face meeting, which demonstrates the far-reaching beneficial effect of the Facebook group:

"I feel that my lack of engagement with the site has not made me feel isolated from my peers in any way. We are a very close-knit team with the shared experience of completing a doctorate and there are many times when I have received advice and felt extremely supported by my colleagues; for example, a recent revision of a data analysis paper was completed through the support and encouragement of my doctoral peers. They picked up on my low levels of enthusiasm and kindly stayed behind past 6pm after a long day's workshop to give me direction on how best to make improvements and boosted my motivational levels. I was very much overlooking the positive feedback that I had received and my peers were central in helping me recognise the many good comments on my work. This would not have been possible if we did not have this sharing and caring ethos cultivated by the Facebook group."

Benninger et al.'s (2014) finding that social media helps facilitate rather than replace in-person contact appears to be borne out by this experience. The bonding that has occurred through the use of Facebook is reflected both within facilitated workshops and in social interactions outside of the academic environment.

Reflection 2: The Benefits of Peer Support

If we accept the definition of support as "to bear all or part of the weight of; to hold up" ("Support," 2015), we can see by reflecting on the posts in the Facebook group that members have employed different means of "holding each other up" and preventing each other from falling – frequently through

humour and by showing affection. Support has been provided for different ends: to support academic endeavour or emotional unease, to provide practical assistance, or to empathise as a peer. Although the initial intention may have been to provide emotional, practical, academic, or peer support, the posts usually transformed into humorous expressions of encouragement and empathy, signalling that the problem could be overcome:

Jacqueline*: Well here goes… One day to write my presentation… Done the reading now just need to sort it out in my head – Could get messy!*
Hazel*: You can do it Jacqueline! May the force be with you.*
Susan*: Go Jacqueline You'll ace it!*
Hazel*: [X] will be missing such a treat listening to our ramblings, sorry erudite discourse in policy.*
[Later]
Jacqueline*: We are all exhausted –post traumatic presentation disorder!*
Lynne*: That's what I'm feeling … Post traumatic presentation disorder! Like it… Will wine remove the symptoms?* (April 2014)

Within this example can be seen something of the difference between the support offered from the course team and that from peers. The students, in this safe Facebook environment, are able to express emotions which they know will be shared by their peers. Jacqueline explains:

"Personally, it was a relief for me to know that other people were experiencing difficulties with ethical procedures, assignments, time limitations, data collection, and more, but I believe we all were relieved when we began to understand that we were all undergoing a collective experience and could empathise and support one another throughout."

The Facebook group offered and continues to offer a safe, informal, non-competitive space. This stands in contrast to other alternatives, such as formal discussion boards available on the university's virtual learning environment where students often feel there is a sense of rivalry among their cohort as they endeavour to intelligently answer posed questions and

comment in a competitive way since they are in the public domain
(Aitchison & Mowbray, 2013).

The Facebook intervention has had the effect of diluting negative feelings
for this cohort, as they are able to vent feelings, thoughts, and worries to
the group, without fear of reprise or sarcasm. In fact, the opposite is true:
although members may feel upset or angry at times with the doctoral
process, the other group members' supportive insistence that "we are all in
this together and will all pull each other through" is both impressive and
very reassuring. No one will sink, because the other members will be there
to prevent it. As Devenish et al. (2009) explain, a study group encourages
its members to "keep going, to reinforce that the studies are worthwhile
and that completion is an attainable goal" (p.61). One of the ways this
group has kept such encouragement going is through emotional support,
with a specific emphasis on humour.

Reflection 3: The Value of Emotional Support and the Importance of Humour

Whilst there are multitudinous theories of emotion (see, for example,
Denzin, 2009; Strongman, 2003), the concept most relevant to the
emotional journey we describe is that of emotional labour. This was first
defined by Hochschild in 1983 in relation to service workers who need to
maintain emotional responses appropriate to the service users with whom
they are interacting and is later encapsulated by Aitchison and Mowbray
(2013) in their research into emotional management amongst female
doctoral students. Emotional labour can be defined as when one disguises
and suppresses one's true feelings and puts on a 'public face' that all is well.
In reflecting upon this female cohort journey through the doctorate via
social media, it is possible to see that the Facebook site is frequently used
to express emotions that remain hidden during taught – or even facilitated
– classes.

The emotional themes coming from the posts can be classified in many
ways, but largely they fall into the following categories:

• *frustration* at things not going right, at an inability to write, to understand, to get on with it

• *fear* that others are doing better, collecting more data, beginning transcription; of being left behind

• *guilt* at not spending enough time studying, undertaking fieldwork and writing juxtaposed with the ever-present conflict with work pressure, the changing, unsettling HE climate and general family life of birthdays, births, deaths, and holidays

• *anger* at tutor feedback, a perceived lack of direction, a lack of clarity

• *confusion* at not knowing what was supposed to be done, by when, and how

• *joy* and (a shared) celebration at getting the work completed, the data collected, the transcription finished, the essay passed

• *affection*; a sharing of 'likes', smiley emoticons, photographs, and metaphorical pats on the back.

Lynne readily admits to using the Facebook group as "a huge emotional crutch". A typical comment from Lynne reflects a number of the above themes: a fear of being left behind, that others know what they are doing, a plea for moral and literal support:

'*Ok guys, now I'm panicking! No idea what I am meant to be doing or for when :-(Seriously behind on all things EdD. Can we meet up?*' (Lynne, 7.1.14)

On reflection Lynne realises that many of her comments reveal similar doubts: despair at not being able to submit work on time, inability to engage with an assessment, needing reassurance. In return came encouragement, motivation, and a vindication of her ability to complete the task. This resonates well with research undertaken by Selwyn (2009) with 909 students using Facebook for educational use. He discusses supplication and the seeking of moral support as being a major theme:

"Students would often present themselves as rendered helpless in the face of their university work in the expectation that their peers would offer them support and comfort." (p.167)

Whether or not this was the subconscious strategy, it appears to have worked, for Lynne and for the rest of the cohort. Clearly, they share emotions as a means of motivation. This might be all the more meaningful and significant because they see each other only once a month and need not only encouragement to keep them on track, but congratulations and a recognition that they have managed to do doctoral study in the midst of competing demands:

"*Well done Hazel! Just going to shout this, NOT STARTED YET!! .. Enjoy your feeling of satisfaction, I will take inspiration from you*" (Susan, 17.7.14).

The development of the Facebook group enabled the cohort to communicate with each other and engage in banter "as though we were actually talking to each other" (Susan). This is an interesting perception as a positive characteristic, as often online forums are seen as beneficial for some students precisely because they avoid face-to-face contact (e.g., Cox et al, 2004) and provide an 'anonymous' space for students to contribute to a discussion.

When considering academic views on building resilience it is evident that humour is seen as a key component. Humour is defined as a general positive attribute and is one of the character strengths that contribute most strongly to life satisfaction (Peterson, Ruch, Beermann, Park, & Seligman, 2007). Looking at a small selection of the group's posts we can see how, by the use of what Kuiper (2012) describes as affiliative humour, a warm, witty but respectful banter, the use of Face-book has enhanced this group's cohesiveness and morale and has itself developed into a positive presence within the group. A typical post would involve cries of panic about feeling unable to grasp the learning outcomes for an assignment or even feeling

unable to begin to write. This is an excerpt from a post concerning the writing of a literature review:

Susan*: "Hi Gang, finally made a start on lit review! 375 words – not that I am counting – and already, on reflection, have lost the will to live! It's going to be a long day x"*

Lynne*: "Just realised that in order to write a literature review, you should first have read something? Oh God!!! xxx"*

Hazel*: "You gonna reflect on that Lynne? How is the literature affecting you? It's making me read…I think that would go down well don't you?"*
(05.07.14)

What at first seems like just a few words of banter can in fact be seen to be a very supportive discussion; the humour in 'not that I am counting' and 'lost the will to live' acknowledge the stress of trying to even begin an essay and imply a request for sympathy. The supportive response, with the comforting implication, "You are not alone", and the joke about reflection bring everything into perspective – it is an essay, not the end of the world. As the group began to prepare their assignments relating to methodology, Hazel posted a semi-serious question:

"When discussing methodological choices is it acceptable to say I decided not to do this because it looks too hard?"

Kathryn*: "I think that would be OK as long as you made it sound reflective lol."*

Jacqueline*: "I'd definitely say yes "*

Susan*: "Yes. Definitely! I'm thinking along the same lines! X"*

 Hazel*: "Not that I'm writing you understand, just thinking about it "*
(05.07.14)

Again the posts begin with a request for help, and again the responses work in a light-hearted fashion to normalise the situation, i.e., all the group are in the same position and therefore it is 'OK'. Reference is made to general feelings of inadequacy and hesitancy in embarking on assignments, and again encouraging responses appear that help to put this into perspective.

The use of humour within the group's postings clearly confirms Kuiper's (2012) findings that affiliative humour supports the development of group cohesion and support. As Windle (2011) suggests, a sense of humour is one of the most important facets of personal resiliency that an individual can draw on when confronted with stress.

So, reflecting on the use of humour within the Facebook group it is clear that it has played a major part in sustaining and developing the cohort. It has enabled the creation of a distinct and vibrant identity within the doctoral programme, a group that is now renowned to be enthusiastic and happy and who will laugh and work together to find a solution rather than cry and withdraw in isolation:

"It has seen us through some quite dark times but more than that, it has banished those dark times to a distant memory and for me, the forest is now full of opportunity and good natured company." (Susan)

Reflection 4: Academic Endeavour and Social Support: A Balance

A need for support is most clearly evident in the Facebook group when individuals have received feedback on assignments and presentations. Academic feedback is not always perceived as positive, and the Facebook group is seen as a place to vent frustration and receive emotional support. While a positive supportive response is evident in the interactions, there is also a realistic engagement with the feedback received and its potential to assist development. Rather than a universal rejection of the feedback, there is encouragement to engage with it and offers of help from other members of the group who have fared better. Kathryn reflects:

"I have found this particularly useful, as confirmation of my initial negative feelings would only have limited my engagement with the feedback and further prevented me from valuing comments aimed at my development. The responses from the group recognise the effect of the feedback and the resulting expression of emotion but avoid the establishment of a reversal of the 'halo effect' where individuals receive only confirmation of their own frustrations."

The affectionate yet challenging support that is evident in the Facebook group is what distinguishes the use of social media to support academic study from the use of social media in general and, also, from a more conventional academic online forum. A typical comment, which incorporates encouragement, advice and offer of further support, is:

Susan: "*Of course you can do it but I think there is some good advice on the earlier comments. Try to look at it in bite size chunks and do a bit at a time. Want to meet up soon?*"

There is a need in academic study for analysis and reflection that results in interactions that engage emotions differently from within purely social interaction. When expressing disappointment within a social environment there is the expectation that other participants will concur and con-firm individual experiences; whereas within an academic support group there will be critique and analysis. The key to continued engagement in this Facebook group appears to be that useful critique is given but within an affectionate, supportive framework. Yet the participants also appreciate the 'mirroring' comments they receive which have the function of reassurance. A highly positive aspect of the Facebook group is being able to celebrate academic success, where, especially following disappointment, an emotional response is warranted:

Kathryn: "*Passed my resubmitted lit review Yayyyy. So back on track. Now need to get my head around what I am supposed to do next!!!!*"
Hazel: "*Hooray!*"
Jacqueline: "*Well done! X*"
Lynne: "*Well done. Not done mine yet ...*"

Lynne's admission of inadequacy in this context both contributes to the group cohesion and offers up a request for confirmation that she too might need emotional support. It is this realistic, grounded, 'we are all in this together' approach that has cemented the group together and kept each individual using it as they have pulled and pushed each other along the doctoral pathway.

Discussion

As we have said, a great deal of the literature detailing doctoral education uses the metaphor of a journey. In re-reading the Facebook posts from 2013, in a linear and chronological sequence, it is very much evident that this is indeed a journey. It is easy to chart the emotional experience of the doctoral process along a series of outpourings largely related to anxieties surrounding assignments and confusion compounded by academic discourses and unfamiliar literature. In reviewing the past eighteen months via a frozen capture of questions, expressions of despair, congratulations on a job well-done, pleas for help and the ever-present 'thumbs up' emoticon, it is apparent how emotional the journey has been so far, and how the social media space has become a sanctuary for emotional expression and, perhaps more importantly, emotional support.

In this piece of action research the students have addressed "a felt need … to initiate change" (Elliott, 1991, p.53) by creating a space in which to communicate with one another on a regular basis in a different context and space from the academic/work-based setting. It is a collaborative space, rather than an individual writing space, and it allows conversation on a variety of themes. While the individuals are brought together by their academic ambition, the virtual space enables a combination of academic, social, and personal issues to be discussed, shared, offloaded, and explored. The eclectic nature of the posts highlights the multiple identities of the participants – as academics, teachers, nurses, practitioners, students, etc. – but also as parents, friends, and individuals with their own complex lives. We suggest that this specific 'secret society' use of Facebook al-lows these aspects of self to intermingle and inform one another, but in a different way from more usual uses of Facebook. The social space enables communication on different levels, while also contributing to the original purpose of the group, i.e., completing their doctorate.

We have identified several characteristics of this intervention that contribute to its success. One of these is the 'secret group' setting. While some (e.g., Barnes, 2006) have identified a fear of intrusion into one's private life due

to the public nature of social media platforms and the potential risk of sharing online content, some professionals are using social networking in educational contexts and consider it to be important for student development (Davis, 2010). The choice to make the EdD group secret obviates these risks but also differentiates the group from other uses of Facebook, either academic or social.

The spontaneity of the group's development as such suggests that it is a true requirement of the students and one that they have defined themselves. We suggest that the student-initiation element is crucial to its success, in that it is truly 'student-centred' and exclusive. As the participants have pointed out, there is no competitive element to the posts; there is also no surveillance from tutors. Attempts have been made at institutional level to introduce VLE spaces to encourage social interaction on this course as well as many others. However, the scenario of the unpopulated discussion forum is familiar to many tutors, and the forum provided by tutors for students on this EdD programme is little different. Williams (2013) explains that "digital media, by themselves, do not make the contemporary university a more participatory and creative educational space" and further makes the point that, conversely, VLE systems actually work "to reinforce traditional conceptions of the university as hierarchical, controlling, print-based, and obsessed with assessment" (p.182). The characteristics of the Facebook intervention are the opposite of these; and unlike a formal academic forum, continued use and engagement in this group is de-pendent on the usefulness it has for them as individuals.

We are also given insight into the impact of Facebook interactions on face-to-face relationships. It is clear that the group works as an extension of a face-to-face group; it is doubtful that it could be effective as the only means of communication, but it is rather a supplementary resource. These part-time professional doctoral candidates might be considered to have a particular need for this supplement, in that they are not full-time students located in departments or faculties with other PhD students with access to research groups and their facilities. However, it also seems that this use of social media has impacted positively on how they interact as a group, to the

extent that the relative 'non-user' of the group also benefits from the inclusivity it engenders. Terms that are repeated in these students' descriptions of the Facebook group include safety, empathy, and familiarity, along with the original headings of Support, Humour, Affection, Reflection, and Emotion. Ultimately the acronym SHARE sums up the value both in terms of its constituent elements and the notion of 'sharing' in its own right. It seems to be the egalitarian, non-judgmental, giving, and receiving in equal measure that contributes to the success of the group. The use of 'we' in some of the posts, such as "We are all exhausted" and "We are a great group" is truly inclusive, rather than the pseudo-inclusive 'we' as often employed by teachers. The tutors for these students can never genuinely include themselves in synchronous reflection on the experience of the doctoral journey. The inclusivity and equality that arise from using this medium to share the lived experience of the group is what lends the Facebook group its effectiveness as an emotional tool. The sharing can only really be undertaken by members of the group who are experiencing the same journey at the same time, with comparable reactions to the demands and challenges of that journey.

Conclusion

The Facebook intervention introduced in order to address the problems of isolation, loneliness, and academic challenges has been successful in overcoming these negative phenomena. All six of the students are currently writing up their theses and comprise the first cohort to have completed all assignments without recourse to extensions on deadlines. They continue to communicate as a group using their Facebook intervention for support during the potentially isolating phase of individual writing-up.

As a piece of action research the project has had the benefit of providing insight for the participants that, as practitioners in education, it is crucial to pay attention to the emotional aspects of learning. To celebrate the success of the intervention, the EdD programme provides the opportunity for existing candidates to inform new recruits of strategies that have helped them. This has inspired other groups to design and implement their own interventions, the outcomes of which are yet to be seen.

Perhaps the significance of this Facebook intervention is most relevant for other students on similar programmes, i.e., part-time, professional doctorates. All the same, there are implications here for the value of student-led networking, and some indications of what might make it successful. One of our conclusions must be that the group ought not to be tutor-led, nor even tutor-influenced. Its secret, irreverent nature, which excludes outsiders, itself gives rise to the inclusivity within the group that has been so productive. While the posts quoted here might appear trivial and inconsequential, the writers have been surprised by the value of the group, surprised by its usefulness as a reflective tool, and surprised by how much they have enjoyed being a part of it and how this has been reflected in their academic engagement. The relevance of irreverence should not be underrated. As one participant said, "The doctorate is really serious. This isn't", and yet the humour and affection expressed has had an effect of normalisation, providing a safe place of hidden depths. The knowledge that there is recourse to this safe space has been enabling in that no-one has given up or fallen down: they have all supported one another over and around the obstacles, laying down for one another the breadcrumb trail that will eventually lead them out of the woods. The production of this article has been an extension and manifestation of the characteristics of the group, albeit with the concession of allowing a tutor to collaborate.

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