

How Hong Kong's Universities Recruit, Admit and Support Students with Disabilities

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Preface & acknowledgements

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Chief Executive Officer

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Executive Summary

I: The research project

This research project looks at how Hong Kong's universities recruit, admit and support students with disabilities and has two core aims:

- (i) Understand the status of students with disabilities in Hong Kong's universities today – how many apply, whether they declare their disability, what their learning and living experience is like, the obstacles they have to overcome, whether they complete and how they transition into employment; and
- (ii) Make suggestions for increasing their number and improving their university experience and transition into employment.

Project research included many interviews with universities

The research was conducted from August to November 2011. It consisted of data-gathering from universities, semi-structured interviews with admissions staff and counsellors at seven out of the eight University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded universities, as well as interviews with nine students and recent graduates with disabilities. A literature review and a handful of other interviews were conducted with key informants for background purposes.

Current status in Section 2, and findings, challenges and suggestions in Sections 3 and 4

Quantitative analysis of the data on students and a review of admissions processes are presented in Section 2. Data was provided and interviews conducted in the strictest of confidence, which has posed some challenges in the presentation of the findings and means that current practice cannot be compared across universities. The quantitative analysis can only be presented in aggregate. In addition, as there is no mandatory reporting system regarding disability, universities were limited in what they could provide. The bulk of the findings from the qualitative component are presented in Section 3 with universities and interviewees remaining anonymous throughout to protect confidentiality. Universities are only identified by name when referring to public campaigns or press stories. Suggestions for meeting the needs of the small but growing population of students with disabilities are presented in Section 4.

Section 1 provides context, methodology, terminology and policy background

For the purposes of this report, 'disability' covers all classifications recognised by the Joint University Programmes Admissions System, JUPAS, as explained in Section 1 which provides background on the project methodology, terminology and policy context. Physical disabilities, mental illness, autism and attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder and specific learning difficulties (SLDs) all fall under the umbrella term 'disability' in this report. These disabilities are in no way similar, nor can the obstacles these groups and individuals encounter be addressed in the same way. This is not a report about how to adjust ways of doing things for people with specific impairments and different disabilities. It is a report about the need for an overarching policy and system change to make our university system disability confident.

For the purpose of this report, a disability confident university system is one which:

- Understands how disability affects its students (as students during their university experience and graduates-to-be in their transition to work), its employees and the community;
- Removes obstacles which prevent people with disabilities from applying and realising their academic potential or working for the university; and
- Makes the adjustments which enable individuals to realise their academic potential and to transition into work or to be employed directly by the university.¹

II. The Status Today

Hong Kong lags behind other places in the developed world in supporting students with disabilities

Hong Kong has followed the global legislative changes, with the introduction of its Disability Discrimination Ordinance (DDO) 1996, and the policy trends of inclusive education in schools and the massification of higher education. More children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) receive early diagnosis and make it through mainstream school every year and universities are attracting a larger and more diversified student population with the number of women outstripping men each year and the number of places for overseas students growing fast.² However, Hong Kong lags behind other places in the developed world when it comes to attracting and supporting students with disabilities at its universities.

Although low, the number of students with disabilities in Hong Kong's universities is growing

Only 257 new students known to have a disability enrolled in Hong Kong's public universities in September 2011 and only 20% of those applied via the JUPAS Sub-system for Applicants with a Disability.³ This represents only around 1% of the new student population, compared to 6.6% in the UK, 4.2% in Australia and around 11% in the US.⁴ Although still low, the numbers of students with disabilities or SEN are growing and university staff report a 'social shift' taking place with regard to higher expectations on provision of support for these students. Some of this pressure is coming from overseas students expecting similar support to that which they enjoy in their home countries.

University policies vary but are largely reactive and inflexible

Hong Kong also lags behind other places in the developed world when it comes to making reasonable adjustments to teaching and living practices for students with disabilities. There is a view starting to prevail with regard to SEN that it is the teachers who have the special need of learning how to adapt their teaching so that their students can succeed whereas the students all have the same needs – to learn, succeed, and find a job. This paradigm shift has developed in other parts of the world on the back of the UN Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities, to which the HKSAR Government responded in 2008.

Although all eight universities have an Equal Opportunities (EO) statement, they vary considerably in how this converts to clear policy with defined processes for admitting and supporting students with disabilities or SEN and for employing people with disabilities as teaching or support staff. The introduction of the DDO and the Code of Practice on Education introduced to facilitate understanding of the DDO within education, and the activities of the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC), have triggered individual universities to react to individual situations, with the notable exception of one or two more strategic approaches in recognition of a growing need. Given the way the JUPAS system works, universities do not know who is attending their university until reporting day in August, which gives them little time to prepare for the students' arrival in September. This makes it difficult to cater for individual needs if flexible processes are not in place.

Current provision relies on staff goodwill. Their positive attitudes are generally not being translated into long-term, strategically planned support services

At the moment, much of what is offered to students on the ground is down to staff goodwill, except for one university which has put dedicated, adequate resources in place. All staff voiced concern about a lack of manpower and expertise, even the staff at the university that has dedicated resources. Students repeatedly said that a lack of centralised support meant that they had to rush around different departments repeating themselves every term and they often had to wait a long time for equipment or facility alterations. None of the graduates had received any dedicated support in finding employment. The inflexibility of the system was raised time and again, whether in regard to selection criteria, admissions, interview and registration processes, curricula and teaching methods or buildings access and transport systems. Whilst attitudes were largely positive, in most cases this was not being converted into student support networks, or harnessed for facilitating education amongst teachers and making reasonable adjustments to teaching methods.

III: Meeting the challenges

An overarching policy needed

Whilst impairments cannot be removed in a medical sense, barriers in social and physical structures can be overcome to enable inclusion. Hong Kong's universities need an overarching policy for admitting and supporting students with a range of impairments and they need appropriate processes and resources for supporting individual students through the key transition points of entering and exiting university to transfer to employment. The key is a mixture of high aspirations and flexibility supported by 'disability competence'. The admissions, registration and teaching processes all need to be flexible enough to enable an increasingly diversified student group to achieve their academic potential. Only then can different needs be addressed without it seeming complex and demanding to do so.

Universities need to work together, with government support and advice of NGOs and experts

To deliver adequate, flexible and efficient systems, the university community needs both to work together as a group to develop an overall policy and action plan, and to work individually to implement reform internally. A task group is needed to co-ordinate the provision of support, including training teachers, for the relevant groups of students in all post-secondary institutions. Each university needs a centralised co-ordinating body, expanded support services and the introduction of more flexible recruitment processes, selection criteria and curricula. Campus buildings need refitting, technology needs to be accessible and transport systems need improving. Teachers need training and the existing positive attitudes among the university community need converting to systematic support and the development of expertise. There should also be a dedicated fund for institutions to procure equipment and services to support the students, and greater assistance to help them transition to work.⁵ Beyond the university community, government policy must also be developed to support and fund the transition. With the universities working together, ideally in close consultation with advisors and employers, the chance for achieving quick public policy attention will be far higher.

Hong Kong already has much expertise and goodwill to harness ...

There are building blocks already in place. NGOs, community organisations and students with disabilities or SEN themselves have much specialist knowledge. The Education Bureau (EDB) has long been promoting an integrated education policy in primary and secondary schools with widespread teacher training and the development of flexible curricula.

Training materials and methods for enabling equitable access to information and evaluations could be adapted. University staff are open and receptive to change and in some cases have already developed their own pockets of expertise that could be leveraged to provide a more comprehensive support system. In addition, there is overseas best practice to review. To help students with employment, universities already offer careers advice and the Labour Department has some mechanisms in place to encourage companies to employ people with disabilities.

... but diversity needs to be recognised in a positive sense to trigger cultural and attitudinal shift

But using these building blocks to deliver a new, flexible system guided by a comprehensive policy package requires a cultural and attitudinal shift, which is intangible that can be difficult to pin down and quantify. There needs to be a language change that accepts that there are many different learning styles. The negative connotations associated with “difficulty” and “problematic” should shift to addressing diverse needs and increasing capacities. Hong Kong would be taking a leading role in Asia if it recognised diversity in a positive sense, rather than labelling disability in a negative sense. In addition, many initiatives for students with disabilities or SEN also help those who do not have disabilities.

Universities and companies can send aspirational message on equitable access to universities and jobs

Cultural change needs influencing from the top down, partly through introducing new resources and systems, but also by raising the profile of staff and students with disabilities and undertaking appropriate public education. It will involve not just universities, but schools and companies must all play a role in changing society’s attitude to people with disabilities to achieve full inclusion. There is a view that barriers for students with disabilities or SEN start at Primary One. Even if so, universities have a significant role to play in influencing what happens at primary level. Top-down aspiration created by companies and universities sends positive messages all the way down through schools and out to families.⁶ If parents and school teachers believe that children with disabilities have equitable access to university and to Hong Kong’s most successful companies, they will be encouraged to give children at primary school equitable chances, whatever their physical, mental or learning needs. The government also has a significant role to play through the UGC.

This is a defined community that can benefit quickly from targeted change

What is required is a joined-up approach by all of these bodies. But these changes require funding for both ‘hardware’ and ‘software’ changes (described in Sections 3 and 4), which presents a challenge against a backdrop of cuts to the higher education budget over recent years. Fortunately in the 2012-13 Budget the government forecasts for 2011-12 an operating surplus of HK\$38 billion and further operating surpluses are expected for the next five years. Government policies emphasise the need to tackle poverty and close the wealth gap. People with disabilities frequently end up in poverty because of the many obstacles they encounter as they attempt to prepare for learning and training for the workforce. The community of students with disabilities is a defined, marginalised community which can benefit quickly from targeted change and its success should reduce the welfare bill over the longer term. Philanthropic individuals can also step in and support individual students on their journeys.

IV. Challenges and suggestions for change

Challenges	Suggestions for Change	Party to take action
Policy/Administration		
Lack of overarching government policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Define and articulate government policy on disability in tertiary education to ensure overall policy support and funding which enables universities to become disability confident 	Government
Lack of unified disability policy in Hong Kong's universities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement a University-wide Action Plan that leverages existing expertise and consists of: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> needs analysis that audits the journeys of students with disabilities to and through university so as to assess the obstacles that exist for them at every step (see diagram at the end of this section) guiding principles for universities to collaborate and work individually manifesto for Action Plan to remove obstacles and make adjustments Actively involve students with disabilities or SEN, graduates and expert advisors Long-term aim to develop Disability Equality Schemes like the University of Bradford in the UK or Disabled Student Programmes like that at UC Berkeley in the US Establish targets and monitoring processes for Action Plan items with reporting at Council level 	Universities and government
Lack of understanding of the status of students with disabilities or SEN today and their needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In conjunction with the needs analysis, establish a data-gathering body to increase knowledge and develop awareness about the disabled community in Hong Kong's universities, including students and staff Aim to establish a group similar to the UK's Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) 	Government
Weak organisational structures Lack of manpower and expertise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a centralised co-ordinating body in each university that liaises with different departments and offices for each student with disabilities, such as Cambridge University's Disability Resource Centre Staff working in this centralised office would be trained and would build up a body of expertise Establish a university-wide co-ordination office for supporting individuals with disabilities at the key transition points from school to university and university into employment. This could be modelled on Australia's Disability Co-ordination Officer Programme but simplified significantly 	Universities and government

Lack of ring-fenced funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UGC funding for wide-scale university refit and university-wide reform plans to meet Barrier Free Access requirements⁷ • UGC funding for teacher and staff training • Individual philanthropists can support students needs such as the 'Henry Chan Inclusive Education Fund' at the University of Hong Kong (HKU) which supports many students • Government could offer matching schemes similar to Matching Grant Schemes (MGSs) first launched in 2003 in post-secondary education sector broadly to encourage targeted philanthropy • Companies can support students through universities with scholarships in return for internship employment during summer holidays 	Government, philanthropists and companies
<p>Inflexible recruitment processes and selection criteria</p> <p>Lack of support at interview and reporting day</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct an audit of the recruitment processes to identify and then remove barriers (procedural and technical) which prevent applicants with impairments from being considered on merit only • Widen recruitment and actively encourage individuals with disabilities to apply (including mature students) • Introduce flexible selection criteria and assessment methods, especially around languages • Use central co-ordination office to ensure departments talk to each other so that students who are called for interview have appropriate support, likewise at reporting day 	Universities and government
Tight preparation time after reporting day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long-term planning and refitting of facilities to remove physical barriers which prevent students with disabilities from accessing campuses is the only (and possibly the cheapest in the long term) solution for solution for being able to address student needs on day one (without changing the JUPAS system which currently means that no university knows who is attending until reporting day) 	Government and universities

Attitudes

Positive attitudes of teachers and students are not converted into systematic support and development of expertise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generate visible, top-down support for developing an inclusive culture – requires senior level support preferably at Council level • Communicate high aspirations for people with disabilities by boosting the profile of role models – both staff with disabilities and students/graduates with disabilities • Initiate peer volunteer support networks • Leverage NGOs and specialist community organisations' expertise • Facilitate the development of relationships between key university personnel and individuals with disabilities in different settings including informal social gatherings 	Universities
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Teaching and learning		
<p>Lack of training and expertise among teachers</p> <p>Student-led support is important but does not always leverage latest expertise and new technologies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a flexible model teacher training system such as the UK's Teachability framework, using the EDB's courses catering for 'Diverse Learning Needs' in primary and secondary schools as a guide for teaching materials • Establish adaptable teaching practice with core ground rules like that developed by the Cambridge University Disability Resource Centre • Develop inclusive, student-centred curricula; flexible enough to provide equitable access to materials, examinations and assessment procedures • Continue learning support as provided at primary and secondary schools 	Universities and government
Campus Life/Services		
Lack of initiatives to build a culture that embraces and supports disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Break down cultural barriers to self declaration: develop tools for students to assess themselves and encourage students to declare disabilities by positively communicating the support available and the benefits which therefore result • Publish positive marketing leaflets and information in hard copy and on web sites • Conduct awareness raising events such as HKU's wheelchair challenge, stigma free campaign, wishing wall for those with mental illness, and staff and student seminars • Use student unions as a channel for communicating commitment to enabling every student to realise their full potential 	Universities
Varying levels of accessibility in terms of campus, classrooms, libraries and transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiate a centralised, co-ordinating body, a one-time capital investment and a rolling action plan for refitting and improving university campuses to raise standards in accordance with the concept of 'universal design' (whereby the needs of all people are considered at design stage) • Invest in improved and flexible transport, including the Rehabus and low-platform buses 	Government and universities
Lack of joined-up approach by universities and companies for transition to employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Companies and universities work together with a university-wide co-ordination office (like Australia's National Disability Co-ordination Officer Programme) to support and advise students with disabilities through the transition from university to employment • Companies offer internships modelled on Australia's 'Stepping into...' programme and scholarships to support students through university, government matches funding • Companies send a top-down message of aspiration about opportunities for graduates with disabilities in the workplace to students and universities alike 	Companies, universities and government

V. Looking ahead

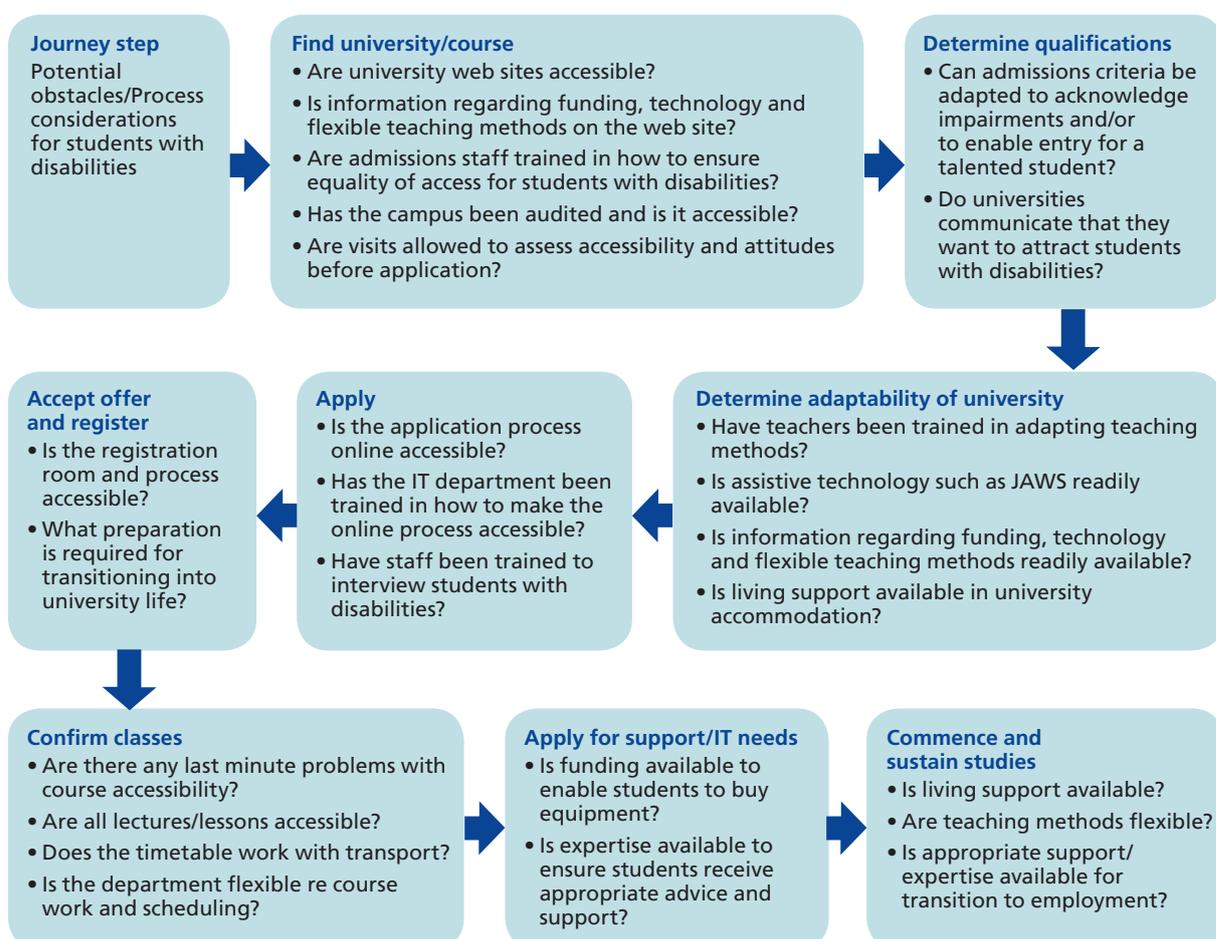
Hong Kong needs comprehensive support services, systematic accessibility improvements and dedicated funding to support social shift towards an inclusive society

In 2011, the numbers of students with disabilities are larger than ever before. Whilst diligent staff have tried to support students as best they can and buildings have been adapted on an ad hoc basis, there is an urgent need for expanded comprehensive support services, systematic accessibility improvements and dedicated funding for students with disabilities in tertiary education to support the social shift towards a truly inclusive society. Hong Kong needs disability confident universities that offer barrier-free environments and an approach to teaching, learning and living that considers students with disabilities as integral to the daily agenda and long-term goals of the institution. Government policy should support these developments and universities should work together to implement pragmatic changes to achieve them and establish appropriate procedures for monitoring improvements.

Hong Kong can emerge quickly with universities that can cater to diverse needs and keep pace with the changing expectations of companies

Even if the world economy weakens further, it is likely that Hong Kong will still be in a good enough financial position to continue to invest in its social needs. If the government and the universities act now, Hong Kong can emerge from what is likely to be several years of global recession with world-class universities that can cater to diverse needs and keep up with the changing expectations of companies with regard to diversity.⁸ In addition, the welfare bill should be lower as this marginalised group of people is better integrated into society and improves their own life chances. Moreover, to achieve the official vision of becoming a “people-centred”, “inclusive”, “knowledge-based,” “quality living area,” Hong Kong must be comfortable investing in human potential and meeting the diverse needs of its population.

Access to University: Journey of a Student with a Disability



Methodology, Terminology and Policy Context

1.1 Methodology

The research was conducted over a four-month period and consisted of two principal components:

- (a) Literature and data review, and
- (b) Semi-structured interviews consisting of open-ended questions with university staff and students.

Research conducted from August to November 2011

In August and early September 2011, a review of literature and data was conducted on disability in higher education in Hong Kong and overseas, specifically Australia and the UK.⁹ At this time, Hong Kong's eight UGC-funded universities and one self-funded institution were contacted to request interviews with admissions and administrative staff on how they recruit, admit and support students with disabilities. Seven of the UGC-funded universities agreed to put staff forward for interview, one rejected but sent some written information on the topic. The self-funded institution declined to participate. Interviews with staff members at the seven universities were carried out from September to November 2011.

In October 2011, two recently graduated university students with disabilities were contacted to request interviews with them and their classmates or friends who may also agree to participate in the research. Purposive sampling, that is the selection of students based on their appropriateness for the research, was not conducted. This was a case of convenience sampling, when interviewees are selected based on their relative ease of access, followed by snowball sampling, when a respondent refers a friend. Interviews with nine students with disabilities were conducted in October and November 2011.

Interviews were recorded and transcribed for research purposes but have subsequently been destroyed. The topic guides and open-ended questions for the semi-structured interviews are included in the appendices. The quantitative analysis of data provided by universities and the qualitative analysis of the interviews was conducted in November 2011 and the findings were written up and circulated for comments in December 2011.

1.2 Confidentiality

Confidentiality was of utmost importance to interviewees

1.2.1 Universities and university staff interviewees

All universities were explicit that interviews must be conducted and data provided in the utmost confidence. This has presented some challenges for presentation of the findings and means that current practice cannot be compared across universities. Most universities provide some information about their services on their web sites. However, because of the sensitivity about confidentiality and because of the wide range of services available

in the different universities, if the report attributed some things to specific universities and tried to keep other things confidential, it would become confusing and at times obvious which university was which and who said what, thereby betraying confidence. For the sake of simplicity, universities remain anonymous throughout the report, referred to as University A through to H, with no systematic process behind the assignment of letters. They are only mentioned by name when press stories or public campaigns are referred to. Some terminology has also been selected in order to retain confidentiality as explained below.

Interviews were largely conducted with admissions staff and counsellors. Administrative staff, as they are termed in this report, ranged from Deans of Students to Directors of Student Affairs to Admissions and Registry Office Managers. The generic term of 'administrative staff' is used so as to protect confidentiality, it by no means implies that all of the professionals in the roles mentioned above perform the same job function. In most cases a student counsellor of varying degrees of seniority joined the interview. In the instances where a university has a formal working group (see the note on terminology below) on disability, the secretary or an individual who was part of that group joined the interview and is also referred to as 'administrative staff'. At some universities, only one member of staff was interviewed, at others two or three staff members, with the maximum being a total of five staff members in three separate interviews.

1.2.2 Student interviewees

Students also requested that their interviews be conducted in confidence. They are referred to as Students 1 to 9 with no systematic process behind the assignment of numbers. Their universities are not revealed. However, light details on their disabilities are given for the purpose of clarity on the nature of the student group that has informed the findings and recommendations of this research.

The nine students were interviewed in two groups of three, and three as individuals. They represent a total of five of Hong Kong's universities. All nine students had physical disabilities: two were visually impaired, four were in wheelchairs with able upper bodies, and three were in wheelchairs with partially disabled upper bodies. None of them had any mental disabilities or Specific Learning Disabilities (SLDs) and therefore this student group cannot be considered to be representative of the disabled community in Hong Kong. Of the nine students, two were undergraduates, two were doing their master's and five were recent graduates currently in employment.

1.3 Terminology

Some terminology requires explanation for its simplicity and somewhat generic use in this report. Other terminology requires explanation because it has been used as it has in order to protect confidentiality.

'Disability' is used in a broad sense in this report

1.3.1 Disability: students with disabilities or SEN

Disability is a complicated, multidimensional word and much has been written debating its meaning. Whilst this report is about disability, only a succinct explanation of the meaning of the word for the purposes of this research can be given in the interest of avoiding digression. It is used here in the widest sense possible and although this may jar at times with experts

on specific disabilities, this is a report about overarching policy and process for a rapidly growing and diversifying group of students, it is not about procedures for any one specific disability group.

Since the 1970s, there has been a shift from a 'medical model' to a 'social model' in which people are viewed as being disabled by society rather than by their bodies. The basic premise of this shift is that the inclusion of people with impairments in society will only be possible when the barriers created by social and physical structures are removed. However, as with all things disability-related, this is not so simple. Persons with disabilities may experience problems arising from their health condition, and in these situations the social and medical models overlap.

It does not distinguish between physical and mental health

The 'International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health' (ICF), first created in 1980 and approved by the World Health Assembly in 2001, has been developed through a long process involving academics, clinicians and people with disabilities and it understands functioning and disability as a dynamic interaction between health conditions and contextual factors, both personal and environmental. It is promoted as a 'bio-psycho-social model' and is deemed by some to be a workable compromise between medical and social models.¹⁰ This report follows the ICF use of the umbrella term 'disability', which does not distinguish between physical and mental health.

It includes same classifications as JUPAS including AD/HD and SLDs

This is not to say that there are not differences in the impairments, nor in the processes and procedures required to ensure inclusion of these individuals with different impairments in society and specifically in Hong Kong's universities. However, in the context of this report, physical and mental health issues, as well as learning disabilities, are considered together. More specifically, 'disability' in this report includes all classifications listed by The Joint University Programmes Admissions System (JUPAS).

The JUPAS Sub-system for Applicants with a Disability (see Section 2), states the term 'disability' refers to the following types of disabilities:

- (a) physical handicap;
- (b) hearing impairment;
- (c) visual impairment;
- (d) visceral disability;
- (e) speech impairment;
- (f) autism;
- (g) mental illness; and
- (h) attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (AD/HD); and specific learning difficulties (SLDs).¹¹

In line with the JUPAS system, Hong Kong's universities use these categories internally. AD/HD and SLDs were added to the JUPAS categories in 2008. In 2005-2007, the working group for the Hong Kong Rehabilitation Programme Plan (RPP) defined ten categories of disability for inclusion in rehabilitation programmes as follows:

Regarding disability types for people requiring rehabilitation services, the RPP proposes, on top of the former eight categories of disability, including autism, hearing impairment, intellectual disability, mental illness, physical disability, speech impairment, visceral disability and visual impairment, to include two additional new categories, namely Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD) and Specific Learning Difficulties (SLDs).¹²

Aside from the debate about what constitutes a disability, there is also the issue of the appropriateness of the term disability at all. There is a growing argument that it is simplistic to talk about individuals 'having' this or that disability when the reality is that many of the problems associated with the impairment disappear when physical, social and attitudinal environments are accessible.¹³ According to Mr Chan Fan, Founding Chairperson of the Association for Engineering and Medical Volunteer Services in Hong Kong, "disability is an inverse function of time and invention." He gives the example of myopia, previously a 'disability', now solved by the invention of glasses; and Matthew James, the teenager from the UK born without a left arm, who persuaded Mercedes to fund a bionic arm in exchange for some advertising which now allows him to write, draw, tie his shoelaces and play sport.¹⁴

Terms used are 'students with disabilities', 'students with SEN' and 'students with disabilities or SEN'.

In addition to the complications associated with the word 'disability', an explanation is also required of the use of the phrases 'students with disabilities', 'students with special educational needs (SEN)' and 'students with disabilities or SEN'. Aside from its actual meaning, there is also ongoing debate about the different ways to describe disability. 'Disabled' is probably the most common way of describing a person with impairment under the social model since it implies that social structures and environmental barriers disable people with impairments. However, there are people who prefer to describe individuals with impairments as being 'with disabilities' because it suggests that they should be recognised as people, before their disability or condition is mentioned.¹⁵ During the process of this research, it became clear that some people interviewed for or involved in the research felt strongly that this report should use the term 'students with disabilities' rather than 'disabled students', so that is the principal term used to describe the group of students that are the focus of this report. Similarly, this is the terminology used in this report to describe other groups of people with disabilities, for example 'staff with disabilities'.

This is not to say all disabilities can be handled in the same way, but this report focusses on policy and process

By using the JUPAS categories and including AD/HD and SLDs and incorporating SEN in this report, the situation is further complicated. Some people involved in this research asked how it could group physical, mental and learning difficulties together given that research exists which shows that students with a learning disability and/or behavioural problems pose more challenges to teachers than those with a physical difficulty.¹⁶ This research project is about policy and process. Given that these disabilities all come under the Disability Discrimination Ordinance (DDO) and are grouped together for administrative services by the universities and JUPAS, these research findings and recommendations can also be presented this way. However, in no way does this report suggest that students with different impairments can all be handled in identical ways for teaching and learning purposes nor for general campus life support. The terms 'with disabilities' and 'with special educational needs (SEN)' are used alone or in combination in this report but the focus of the report is on disabilities generally and not the specific educational opportunities for children with SEN. The recommendations of this report are focused on improvements in policies and processes for a currently marginalised group of students and are applicable to all these groups.

Use of terms 'working group' and 'disability co-ordinator'

1.3.2 Disability related working group/disability co-ordinator

Some of the eight universities have organisational groups dedicated to providing services for their students with disabilities. They may call that group a committee or network or working group. Each one is structured differently, has a different name and offers a varied range of services.

However, for the purposes of confidentiality in this report, they are referred to as a 'working group'.¹⁷

Similarly, some of the universities have an individual member of staff who has the specific function of supporting the students with disabilities or SEN. This ranges from being their only dedicated job, to being a small part of a much broader job, perhaps in the Student Affairs Office, in the counselling team or in the health service. However, for the purposes of confidentiality, this staff member is referred to as the 'disability co-ordinator' in this report, regardless of the scope of his/her role and which department s/he sits in, so as not to betray university identity. Just as with organisational structure, the key points on manpower can be conveyed in this way.

Use of terms
'SAO' and 'the
estates office'

1.3.3 Student affairs office/estates office

Not all universities in Hong Kong call the department which conducts the student affairs function (acts as an administrative office for the university and aims to serve the needs of the students in the many aspects of campus life) the Student Affairs Office (SAO). However, in order not to reveal individual universities identities, all university offices that perform the student affairs function are referred to as SAO without distinction.

Similarly, some universities have an Estates Office, others Campus Management or Campus and Facilities Development or some other combination of these words. Some universities have two or more offices that fulfil the campus and estate management and development functions. For the purposes of confidentiality, these offices are all referred to as 'the estates office' in this report.

Report covers
universities
only, not post-
secondary
education more
broadly

1.3.4 Universities/higher education

This is a report about universities and not a report about higher education more broadly. That is not to say that other higher education institutions are not important for people with disabilities. The reality is that for many people with disabilities in Hong Kong, university will never be an option. Hong Kong's universities are amongst the most competitive in the world; only 19.2% of university age people in Hong Kong made the cut in 2010/11, up from around 18.5% for the previous four years.¹⁸ The Grand Alliance of Parents for their children with Special Educational Needs (GAPSEN) in Hong Kong has been laudably persistent in calling for the government to develop more post-secondary institutions like Community Colleges¹⁹ and diverse courses for young people with different characters and abilities. But this report is specifically about the university system and curriculum, to explore how some of those young people with disabilities have the same opportunities to gain the higher education that their classmates without disabilities have.

1.4 Policy context

DDO (1996) seeks
to ensure people
with disabilities
have equal
opportunities in
education

1.4.1 The policy and legal context

Over the last two decades there has been a growing interest around the world in supporting students with disabilities through higher education. This has been stimulated in part by legislation, such the Disabilities Act of 1990 in the US, the Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act (1992) in Australia, and the Disability Discrimination Acts (1995, 2005) in the UK.²⁰ In Hong Kong, the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) was established in the

mid-1990s to promote the anti-discrimination ordinances including the DDO (1996). This law protects a person with disabilities against discrimination, harassment or vilification in the areas of employment, accommodation and education; access to partnerships; membership of trade unions and clubs; access to premises and educational establishments; sporting activities; and the provision of goods, services and facilities.

Code of Practice on Education (1999) issued in accordance with DDO

In pursuing its goal of eliminating various types of discrimination against people with disabilities, the DDO makes particular reference to the field of education, and seeks to ensure that people with disabilities have equal opportunities to access and meaningful participation in all forms of education, training and instruction. In order to make those in education aware of their obligations to people with disabilities as set out in the DDO and the general public aware of the significant role that educational establishments play in promoting equal opportunities in the community, the EOC issued a Code of Practice on Education (the Code) in 1999 in accordance with the DDO. It was not a new law, but “an aid to the providers and recipients of education services” and applies to Hong Kong’s educational establishments including Hong Kong’s tertiary education institutions.²¹ The purpose of the Code is to:

- assist educational establishments to develop policies and procedures that prevent and eliminate disability discrimination;
- provide educators with practical guidance on making provision for students with disabilities that are consistent with the provisions set out in the DDO; and
- enable persons with disabilities, their parents and their associates (such as family members, carers and business associates) to understand their rights and responsibilities under the provisions of the DDO.²²

Although the Code was issued in 1999, in 2001 research conducted by the EOC found that the majority of teachers in schools had little knowledge of it.²³ A survey conducted by the Census and Statistics Department in 2007 found that around three quarters (75.2%) of all the persons aged 18 and over had heard about the DDO but among them, less than half (44.6%) knew that the Ordinance contains some sections related to children.²⁴

2007 survey showed low awareness of DDO

However, staff interviewed at the universities for this research largely felt that the DDO had raised awareness about disability. Administrative staff at University G said: “With the establishment of the EOC and all the promotion and the establishment of legislation and so on I think administrative offices like the admissions office, the student affairs office, the hostels...we have become aware of the needs of students.” Staff at six out of seven of the universities where interviews took place felt that the legislative changes have had a tangible impact on opportunities for students. The counsellor at University A said: “I think it has because I see the numbers go up and maybe they are more open to declare their disability now, especially the special learning difficulty (dyslexia). Usually in the past we did not see this kind of disability but now for about ten years some parents of this kind of disability group of students have been trying to ask the government to give more assessment for their kids and now the public know more about this kind of disability too.”

UN Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities shifts disability from a charity-based to a rights-based model

More recently, in 2008 the HKSAR Government responded to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which was adopted by the General Assembly in December 2006. The convention shifts disability from a charity-based to a rights-based model and expressly states in Article 24 that 'parties shall ensure that persons with disabilities are able to access general tertiary education, vocational training, adult education and lifelong learning without discrimination and on an equal basis with others'.²⁵

Both Hong Kong and Mainland China were active participants in crafting the UN Convention. The then EOC Chairperson, Raymond Tang, called it "a milestone for the protection of disability rights" since it "prohibits disability discrimination in all areas of life, including civil rights, access to justice and the right to education, health services and access to transportation".²⁶ It is believed to provide an estimated 400 million persons with disabilities in the Asia-Pacific region with strong support which they can use to claim their rights and enjoy equal opportunities in terms of development and participation in society.²⁷ In his 2011 Policy Address, the Chief Executive of the HKSAR emphasised that "promotion of the Convention is an ongoing initiative. The Government will continue to promote the Convention in close collaboration with the Rehabilitation Advisory Committee, rehabilitation sector, District Councils and the community at large with a view to building an equal and barrier-free society."²⁸

The 2011 Policy Address also committed to: "provide additional places for rehabilitation services for persons with disabilities ... in accordance with the directions set out in the 2007 Hong Kong Rehabilitation Programme Plan," as well as improving home care, establishing specialised centres for tetraplegic patients and enhancing mental health social rehabilitation services.²⁹ The 2012-13 Budget confirmed these commitments with announcements of just over HK\$100 million to enhance rehabilitation services at residential care homes for people with disabilities and HK\$185 million in total for establishing adequately resourced centres for mental wellness. Notably HK\$900 million from the Lotteries Fund was confirmed for improving 250 elderly centres. Increased allowances (Disability Allowance and disabled dependant allowance) to people with disabilities were also announced.

Chronic shortages in services identified

A month before the 2011 Policy Address, a report published by the Hong Kong Council of Social Service had highlighted the lack of services and long waiting lists for those in poverty and with disabilities across Hong Kong. A total of 3,866 children with disabilities below the age of two years are waiting for places at early education and training centres which provide early intervention services, and one centre for handicapped children in Southern District has a 19-month waiting list. Some young mentally handicapped people can wait over six years for a place in a sheltered workshop in North District and a total of 2,477 people over 15 years old are on waiting lists for these workshops which offer job training to those people with disabilities who cannot find jobs on the open market. A total of 1,080 people with disabilities are on waiting lists for day activity centres which provide day care and training in daily life and simple work skills.³⁰

6.3% of Hong Kong population has a declared disability but true number likely higher

1.4.2 Disability in Hong Kong

Disability is widespread in Hong Kong. A recent report by the World Health Organization and the World Bank found that the proportion of the global population with disabilities stands at 15%. The ageing population and an increase in chronic health conditions are the two reasons frequently cited for the increase in the proportion of this population from an estimated 10% in

the 1970s.³¹ The latest territory-wide survey carried out by the Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department as part of the General Household Survey from November 2006 to December 2007 found a total of 6.3% of the Hong Kong population had a declared disability (including an estimated number for intellectual disability) as shown in Table 1.1 below.

Table 1.1: Number of people and proportion of population with disabilities in Hong Kong

Disability category	Number of people	Proportion of total population
Restriction in body movement	187,700	2.7%
Seeing difficulty	122,600	1.8%
Hearing difficulty	92,200	1.3%
Mental illness/mood disorder	86,600	1.3%
Speech difficulty	28,400	0.4%
Autism	3,800	0.1%
Specific Learning Difficult (SLD)	9,900	0.1%
Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD)	5,500	0.1%
Intellectual disability	67,000 to 87,000 estimate	1.1%
Total (including some cases where one person has multiple disabilities and falls into more than one disability category)	361,300 + 77,000 midpoint of estimate for intellectual disabilities = 438,300	6.3%

Source: The Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department³²

However, these numbers are likely to be low since many people with disabilities do not declare them. In addition, although data on people with disabilities should be more available now than ever before since Article 31 of the UN Convention states that 'parties undertake to collect appropriate information, including statistical and research data, to enable them to formulate and implement policies to give effect to the present Convention',³³ there are complications with comparing data across countries since data collection has not been standardised.³⁴ For instance, in Hong Kong chronic illnesses were investigated as a separate category and a total of 16.7% of the Hong Kong population were found to require long-term medical treatment, consultation or medication (the three most commonly cited diseases were hypertension, diabetes and heart disease).³⁵

Table 1.2: Educational attainment of all people with disabilities in Hong Kong

Educational attainment	Number of people with disabilities	Proportion of the population with disabilities	Proportion of the total population of Hong Kong
No schooling/pre-primary	114,600	31.7%	9.3%
Primary	135,300	37.4%	21.9%
Secondary/sixth form	89,000	24.6%	47.8%
Post secondary non-degree	10,100	2.8%	7.0%
Post-secondary degree	12,300	3.4%	13.9%

Source: The Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department³⁶

Table 1.3: Age of people with disabilities in Hong Kong

Age group	Number of people with disabilities	Proportion of the population with disabilities	Proportion of the total population of Hong Kong
60 years +	247,300	68.5%	21.5%
50-59 years	38,500	10.7%	3.9%
40-49 years	32,400	9.0%	2.5%
30-39 years	15,500	4.3%	1.4%
15-29 years	14,100	3.9%	1.0%
<15 years	13,400	3.9%	1.5%

Source: The Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department³⁷

People with declared disabilities have lower educational attainment than those without

The 2006-2007 Census also looked at the age and educational attainment of people with disabilities in Hong Kong and found that educational attainment was much lower amongst people with disabilities than without. A total of 69.2% of people with disabilities had a primary education or below, 24.6% had a secondary education and 6.2% a post-secondary education compared to 31.3%, 47.8% and 20.9% of the total population, respectively. This data shows that the starkest difference in educational attainment is at primary school level which is in part due to the fact that the majority of persons with disabilities are 60+ years and were born before the compulsory, universal, free education policies were introduced in the 1970s. Nonetheless, only 3.4% of those with disabilities hold a degree compared to 13.9% of the total population and of people with disabilities aged 15 and over, 5,100 or 1.5% of them are 'students' compared to 8.5% of the total population.³⁸

This data also shows that the proportion of the population with a disability increases significantly with age. The median age for a person with a disability is 72, compared to the median age of 39 for the total population. The majority of people who are classified as disabled are not born with a disability but acquire them later in life.³⁹ The DDO defines disability as a condition that presently exists, previously existed but no longer exists, may exist in the future or is imputed to a person.⁴⁰ Dr Margaret Chan Fung Fuchun, WHO Director General and former Hong Kong Director of Health, was reported as saying at the time of launch of The World Report on Disability: "Almost every one of us will be permanently or temporarily disabled at some point in life. We must do more to break the barriers which segregate people with disabilities, in many cases forcing them to the margins of society."⁴¹ Whilst the ageing population contributes significantly to the growing numbers of people with disabilities, early identification of mental health

issues and specific learning disabilities that are classified as disabilities have also contributed to this number.

Hong Kong has an 'integrated' education system, formally launched in 1997

1.4.3 Disability in Hong Kong's education system

As children's disabilities are identified earlier and the global model of inclusive education is developed further, so more children with disabilities have the opportunity to go through mainstream school and have a chance at entering university. In Hong Kong this is called 'integrated education'. This approach was translated into pragmatic policy in 1997 when the first 'whole school approach' pilot project was initiated.

The concept of integrated education dates back as far as the 1970s; the first white paper with a general policy on rehabilitation and integrating people with disabilities into the community was issued in 1977.⁴² What the concept of integration meant for schools education at that time was special classes and programmes in ordinary schools. A further white paper in 1995 elaborated what equal opportunities for people with disabilities meant in pragmatic terms and reaffirmed the policy of full integration into the community.⁴³

But it was not until 1997 that the government launched the Integrated Education Programme in public sector ordinary schools following recommendations of the Rehabilitation Advisory Committee in 1996. These came after the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation World Conference on SEN in 1995, which called upon governments to support special education as an integral part of all education programmes. By 2007-2008, about 500 public sector primary and 37 secondary schools had adopted the 'whole school approach' to implement integrated education.⁴⁴

But research shows concepts of inclusion not firmly embedded in primary schools

Public sector ordinary schools should try their best to provide adaptations and accommodations for students with SEN in support of their learning and students with severe, profound or multiple disabilities who cannot benefit from schooling in the mainstream sector are placed in special schools. However, research undertaken in 2007 showed that the concepts of inclusion had not been firmly embedded in many Hong Kong primary schools.⁴⁵

Teacher training is now being provided to at least 10% of teachers

In 2008, members of the Subcommittee to Study Issues Relating to the Provision of Boarding Places, Senior Secondary Education and Employment Opportunities for Children with Special Educational Needs reported in their white paper that although they support the concept of integrated education and its implementation in schools, they are concerned about "the pace of implementation and the support rendered to schools, teachers and students to ensure its successful implementation".⁴⁶ In 2007, teacher training for implementing a three-tier intervention model with increasing levels of support ranging from quality, differentiated teaching in tier 1 to more intense, specialist support in tier 3 was commissioned by the Hong Kong Institute of Education (HK IEd). A total of 10% of teachers is meant to complete the Basic Course on Catering for Diverse Learning Needs and at least three teachers in each school are meant to attend the Advanced Course.⁴⁷ It is easy to digress into the development of the integrated education system and the success or not of its implementation, but whilst important and clearly related to the issue of disability and SEN in tertiary education, it is not the focus of this paper.

Such integration policies and teacher training have not been adopted at universities

Of direct relevance is the fact that in the same white paper, the Subcommittee stated: "Members consider that like other students, students with SEN should have equal right and access to post-secondary and continuing education. They are disappointed with the current provision of post-secondary education and continuing education opportunities for students with SEN."⁴⁸ Despite a global trend of massification and diversification of higher education which took hold around the world in the 1960s in line with widespread economic growth and despite a growing and increasingly diversified university population with more women than men and more international students than ever, Hong Kong's integrated education policy adopted for primary and secondary schools has not been adopted for universities. Calls to the government and universities for innovative approaches, flexible entry criteria, increased co-ordination, more resources and funding to purchase equipment, were all raised by the Subcommittee in their white paper.

Policy Address 2011 had some incentives to employers to hire people with disabilities

1.4.4 Employment

A critical outcome of a student's university journey is the nature of employment secured. Recognising the important role that companies have in improving the life situation of Hong Kong's disabled population, in his 2011 Policy Address the Chief Executive confirmed a further HK\$100 million will be injected into the "Enhancing Employment of People with Disabilities through Small Enterprise Project",⁴⁹ and this was again confirmed in the 2012-13 Budget. It was initiated in 2001-2002 with a one-off allocation of HK\$50 million and has seeded 66 businesses being set up and 520 job positions being created for persons with disabilities. Subsidies will also be provided to employers of persons with disabilities for sourcing assistive devices and carrying out modifications to the workplace and a HK\$500 mentorship award scheme will continue to be supported by the government.⁵⁰ These initiatives were welcomed by the EOC immediately after release in the 2011 Policy Address.⁵¹ The Selective Placement Division of the Labour Department provides a free recruitment service to employers and a free employment service to job-seekers with disabilities.

Government initiatives are important for improving the chances of employment and life situation of Hong Kong's people with disabilities, but companies have a responsibility and a role to play as well. Young people go to university partly for the experience, partly for the learning, but often with the aim of securing the best job they can. Those with disabilities who manage to transition successfully into university and out the other side will currently find little co-operation between Hong Kong's companies and the universities turning out the top graduate talent.

Students with Disabilities in Hong Kong's Universities Today

Application process and status of students with disabilities at Hong Kong's universities

Disability and chronic illness are increasingly widespread as explained in Section 1. Hong Kong's services will continue to be overloaded and the welfare bill will continue to rise as the disabled population grows. In the meantime, education policy remains focused on early identification of disability and SEN and on integration. What of Hong Kong's universities? Government statistics show much lower prevalence of students and of degrees amongst people with disabilities. Although tertiary education is included in Hong Kong's DDO and the Code, universities do not appear to come under EDB integration policy and are not receiving funding and teacher training for students with disabilities or SEN in the same way that primary and secondary schools are. This section presents a snapshot of the status of current students with disabilities or SEN in Hong Kong's eight UGC-funded universities today and explains the processes and decisions involved in application.

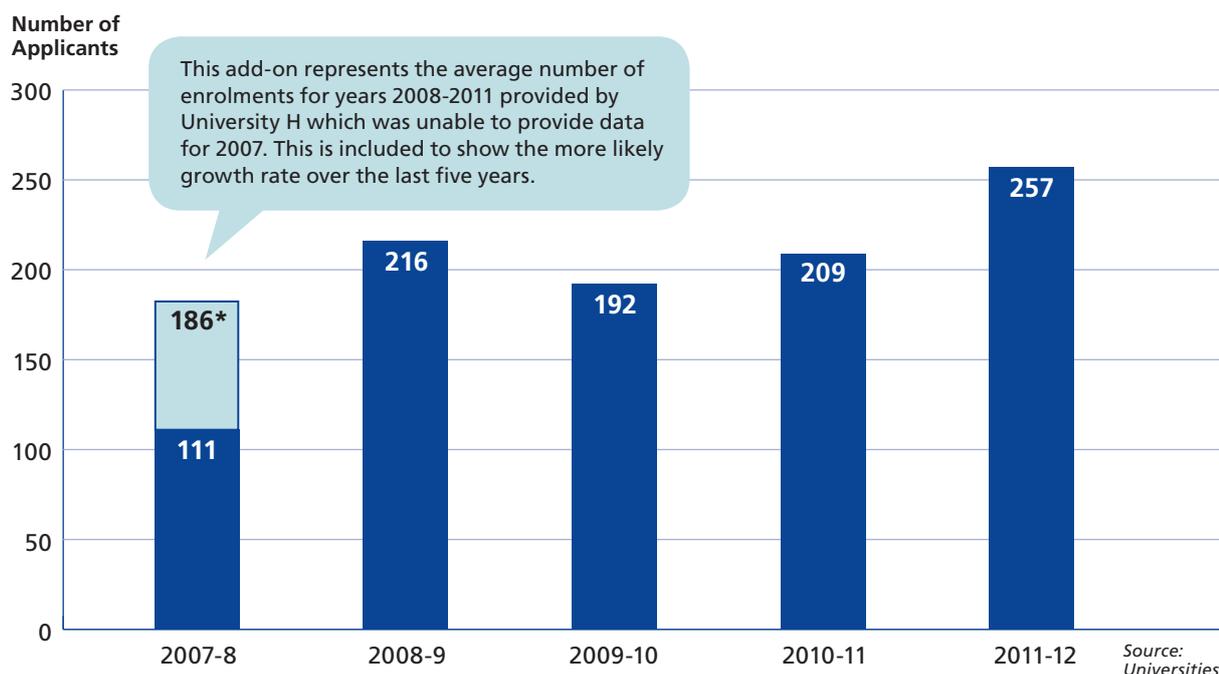
2.1 How many students with declared disabilities are there at Hong Kong's universities?

In 2011, 257 students with declared disabilities registered at Hong Kong's universities

Hong Kong's universities are notoriously competitive and difficult to get into. Approximately 19% of the university age population pursue their studies in the eight universities funded by the UGC.⁵² Many university staff interviewed talked about how "difficult" it is for children with disabilities in Hong Kong to make it into that 19% of the population. Graph 2.1 on page 26 aggregates data provided on a confidential basis by all eight of the UGC-funded universities on numbers of students with declared disabilities who have enrolled over the five years from 2006. In 2011, a total of 257 students with declared disabilities enrolled at Hong Kong's universities out of a total of 75,435 new students.⁵³ In the UK 27,756 undergraduate applicants (of which 15,526 were classified as 'Learning Difficulty') with declared disabilities were accepted at universities in 2010-2011 out of a total of 424,634 new students⁵⁴ and in Australia 9,120 domestic undergraduates with disabilities commenced studies in 2010-2011 out of a total of 218,379 students.⁵⁵

Graph 2.1: Total number of newly enrolled students with declared disabilities in Hong Kong's eight UGC-funded universities, 2006-2011

Data provided by individual universities and aggregated for this research



* Total = 186 including average for years 2008-2011 for University H

Graph notes:

1. Data is new registrations of students with declared disabilities each year, except for one university which provided total enrolments each year, so some students are counted more than once. This university had a low number of total students with declared disabilities, so its numbers do not significantly change the totals and do not change the overall growth trend that the data shows.
2. Data includes all students with declared disabilities on the universities' records. This may include exchange students and postgraduate students but data was not broken down by type by all universities.
3. University H was unable to provide data for 2007. This university has had a high number of students with declared disabilities relative to most other universities over the last five years. The omission of its data from the 2007 total would significantly affect the total number for that year so an average of years 2008-2011 has been calculated for the year 2007-2008.

Number is growing but very small proportion of total, particularly compared to other places

The overall compound annual growth rate (CAGR) is 6.8%. Of the eight universities, five show growth over the five years whilst three show a decline in numbers. Of the five that show growth, there are four which show high CAGRs from 2007 to 2011 of 29.9%, 24.6%, 19.8%, 12.5%; and one which shows very slight growth of 0.73%. Of the three that do not show any growth, one had a relatively high number but now lags behind two other universities, one has fairly static numbers that hover in the middle of the pack and the other one has very small numbers which have declined.

It is important to put these registration figures into their broader context. They represent very small proportions of the new student populations in the universities, ranging from approximately 0.2% to 1.4% at the individual universities, with one outlier at 3.2%. Across the eight universities, they represent an average of 0.9% of the new student populations, 0.6% excluding the outlier. This compares to 6.6% accepted undergraduate applicants in the UK, 6.7% of all applicants to universities for undergraduate courses in 2010-2011 declared disabilities and 6.6% of all accepted undergraduates declared disabilities.⁵⁶ In Australia 4.2% of commencing domestic undergraduates declared disabilities in 2010-2011, and in the US that number is around 11%.⁵⁷

Likely to be many more students with undeclared disabilities

Across all the universities there is thought to be a significant degree of non-disclosure which makes interpretation of the data difficult. In very general terms, the data shows that there are small numbers of students with declared disabilities at Hong Kong's universities but they are growing. This observation was echoed in all interviews. It was particularly notable that even staff who were interviewed at those universities that show no or low growth in the numbers of their students with declared disabilities, talked about an increase in numbers and their belief that a social shift is bringing more and more students with disabilities and SEN to their university. An administrative officer at University C said: "I think it is a rising trend and we have different types of disabilities coming in." As the counsellor at University E summarised: "The climate has changed of late."

2.2 Which schools do Hong Kong's university students with disabilities come from?

Most students with declared disabilities come from mainstream schools

It was not possible to get data breaking down the number of students with declared disabilities at all universities by school type. However, all university staff who were interviewed said they thought that the majority of their students with disabilities were from mainstream schools. Only University A was able to provide data which confirmed this view: just three of their 92 students with declared disabilities enrolled since 2004 were from special schools. All others were from mainstream schools except for two non-school applicants.

From a practical perspective, historically only one special school has provided education for children through to Form 7 and A-levels, so a child would have to go back into the mainstream system in order to achieve the necessary qualifications to attend university unless able to achieve admission via an associate degree or some other route. Staff from the EDB confirmed that most children who are achieving the necessary outcomes at school to attend university would move from a special school to a mainstream secondary school. Interviews with students also confirmed this view, since all students interviewed except for one had transitioned to university from mainstream schools. Of the nine students, three had spent some time in a special school but transferred back into a mainstream school, one at the start of secondary school and two for A-levels.

2.3 How students with disabilities apply to Hong Kong's universities

The JUPAS' Sub-system for Applicants with a Disability

One way for students with disabilities to apply to Hong Kong's universities is through the JUPAS Sub-system for Applicants with a Disability.⁵⁸ This requires the student to declare their disability at the time of application under the categories explained in Section 1. The application form requests relevant medical and supporting documents but some students interviewed said they did not supply these until they were admitted to a university. The Sub-system was first introduced and incorporated under JUPAS in 1997 at the request of the heads of the universities. The aim of the Sub-system is "to enable such applicants to find out as early as possible the special assistance and facilities participating-institutions could provide to them on their admission. It also helps participating-institutions to identify those applicants with a disability so that they could provide help and advice at an early stage and to give appropriate consideration to the applicants concerned."

Its intention is also to recognise the efforts made by these students over and above their peers without disabilities. The JUPAS office stated that: "The original intention of this Sub-system for Applicants with a Disability was to enable the institutions to give appropriate consideration to applicants with a disability, who acquiring the requisite requirements would be given some suitable counselling and where appropriate priority for admission to the institutions as an encouragement and recognition of their extraordinary efforts."⁵⁹

JUPAS data shows lower declared number than that provided by universities

Data provided by JUPAS shows significantly lower numbers of students applying to Hong Kong's universities each year through the JUPAS Sub-system than those that are registered with their universities as shown in Graph 2.1. In 2010-2011 for September 2011 entry, 49 students applied through the JUPAS Sub-system out of a total of approximately 37,000 total students who applied via JUPAS. Of the nine students interviewed for this research, eight applied through JUPAS with one student applying direct to his university after his associate degree. Of those eight, there were five who recalled that they definitely applied through the JUPAS Sub-system, there were two who thought they had but were not certain and there was one who applied via the Principal's Nomination Scheme. The data shown in Table 2.1 was provided by the JUPAS office.

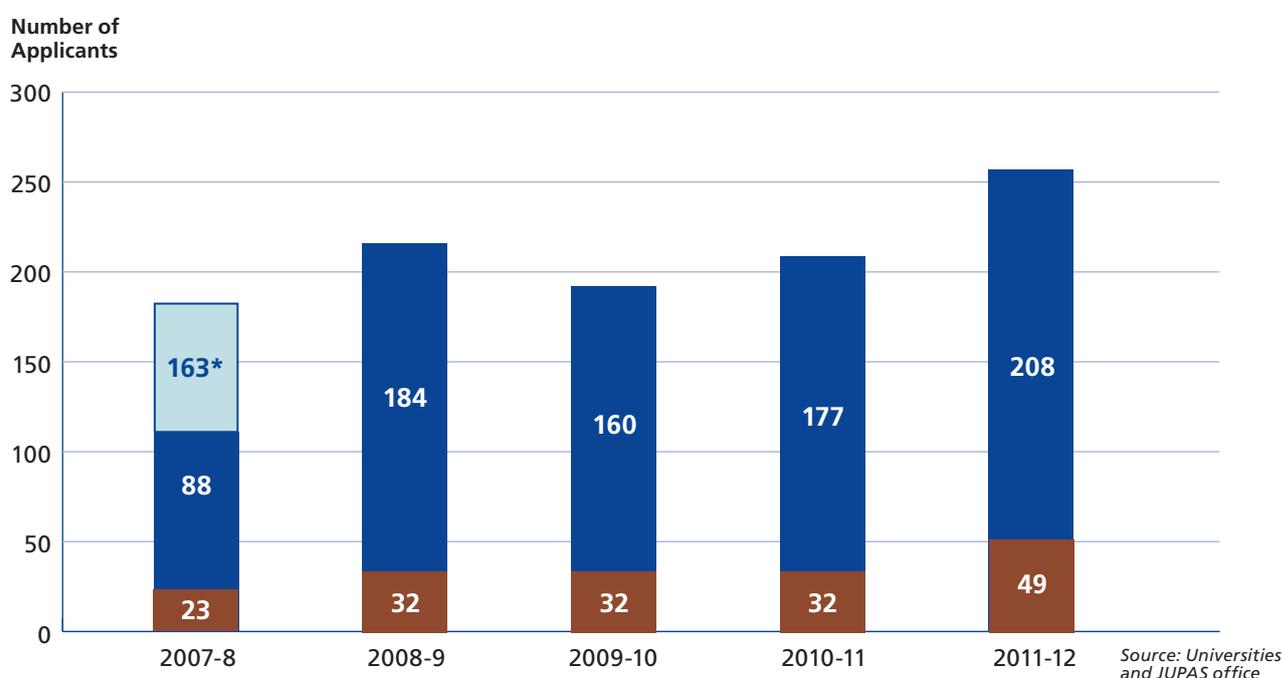
Table 2.1: Number of students who applied via the JUPAS Sub-System for Applicants with a Disability, 2006-2011

Types of disabilities	2006-7	2007-8	2008-9	2009-10	2010-11
Attention Deficit					2
Attention Deficit + Specific Learning Difficulties				1	
Autism	1		2		2
Hearing Impairment	9	11	11	10	15
Hearing Impairment + Mental Illness					1
Hearing Impairment + Speech Impairment	1		2	1	1
Hearing Impairment + Visual Impairment					1
Mental Illness			1	1	4
Physical Handicap	6	15	8	9	10
Physical Handicap + Dyslexia	1				
Physical Handicap + Hearing Impairment				1	
Physical Handicap + Hearing Impairment + Visual Impairment			1		
Physical Handicap + Speech Impairment	1				
Physical Handicap + Visceral Disability	1			1	2
Physical Handicap + Visual Impairment			1		
Specific Learning Difficulties				1	3
Speech Impairment				1	1
Visceral Disability			1		2
Visceral Disability + Visual Impairment					1
Visual Impairment	3	6	5	6	4
Total	23	32	32	32	49
Total number of applicants via JUPAS	34,076	35,176	35,140	36,106	37,555

Source: JUPAS Office

The fact that these numbers are significantly smaller than the total of those numbers provided by the universities shows that many students with disabilities do not apply through the JUPAS Sub-system. This may be because they apply through another route at JUPAS, for example the Schools Principal's Nominations, or because they apply through the general JUPAS system and do not declare their disability at the time of application. Or it may be because they do not apply through JUPAS at all, but they apply directly, either because they do not possess the Hong Kong A-level results but they possess some other qualifications (High Diploma or International Baccalaureate, for example). One administrative staff interviewee at University E said: "In my experience, we have many local students with disabilities who do not admit via the Sub-system." Graph 2.2 below shows the total number of students with declared disabilities as provided by the universities (see Graph 2.1) and the proportion of those that applied via the JUPAS Sub-system.

Graph 2.2: Total number of newly enrolled students with declared disabilities in Hong Kong's UGC-funded universities showing proportion who enrolled via JUPAS Sub-system, 2006-2011



■ JUPAS applicants

* Total includes average for years 2008-2011 for University H as in Graph 2.1

All student interviewees felt it was straightforward applying through JUPAS Sub-system

Nonetheless, all students who were interviewed and had applied through the JUPAS Sub-system said that the process was straightforward. Student 1 said: "I went through JUPAS. I think it is quite accessible. I did apply through the Sub-system." Some said their teachers at school had helped them to navigate the system. However, Student 5 said that he felt it was not very useful for him: "But the Sub-system is not really useful. They didn't show any help or any information. I just put my information on and then they don't provide me with any other information or assistance. They want my information and supporting documents proving I am disabled but then they don't do anything."

2.4 Completion

Staff interviewed felt completion was high across the board

It was not possible to gather academic records for students with disabilities in order to determine how their academic achievement compared to students without disabilities. Generally, all staff interviewed said they had good completion rates for students with and without disabilities. Student interviewees had either all recently graduated, were studying for their master's/doctorate certificates or were fully expecting to complete their undergraduate degrees. This runs counter to research conducted in the UK, which shows that students with disabilities have lower completion rates and achieve lower academic outcomes than students who do not have disabilities.⁶⁰ But completion in Hong Kong generally is very high. Specific data on completion rates could only be gathered from University A since interviewees generally considered this a 'non-question' and as such did not prioritise finding this data. Administrative staff interviewed at University D said: "Our retention rate in Hong Kong is very high across the board, not just students with disabilities." The following data provided by University A confirmed high completion rates of students with disabilities from 2004-2008 with a maximum of one student withdrawing from each year's intake:

Admission Year	Number of new students with declared disabilities	Number of those who have graduated/ Graduation rate	Number of those still studying/ Still studying rate	Number of those who withdrew/ Withdrawal rate
2004	5	5/100%	0/0%	0/0%
2005	9	8/89%	0/0%	1/11%
2006	7	6/86%	0/0%	1/13%
2007	5	3/60%	1/20%	1/20%
2008	10	6/60%	3/30%	1/10%

Staff interviewed felt stress, usually undeclared, was often cause of non-completion

The topic of completion tended to raise the issue of mental illness again in some interviews. There was speculation by staff that non-completion was more often than not down to stress, which may be considered a 'non-declared disability'. Counsellors may know that a student has withdrawn from university due to stress, but this would be confidential information that would not be revealed. Administrative staff at University H said: "There are some students who get mental issues at the end. They may not disclose it because they don't want people to know about it but that may be the reason they don't finish."

2.5 Categorisation of disabilities

Many different types and levels of severity of disability

The current method of categorisation does not capture the degree of disability and within these categories there are different types of disability and degrees of severity. For example, visual impairment may cover colour-blindness, partial blindness and total blindness. The type and severity of the disability often dictates the nature and degree of support services required. So the total numbers of students with disabilities shown in Table 2.2 on page 31 are probably higher than the number of students actively seeking or needing individual support. University H, which has 67 new students with declared disabilities enrolled in 2011-2012 estimates that only eight of them are "under the care of the student counsellors".

Table 2.2: Declared disabilities by category in seven UGC-funded universities, 2007-2011

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Physical Handicap	30	37	34	44	48
Visual Impairment	28	31	28	21	45
Hearing Impairment	38	35	41	31	41
Others	5	5	2	7	18
Special Learning Difficulty	3	4	11	15	16
Mental Illness	1	2	3	3	7
Autism	1	2	-	1	5
Attention Deficit Disorder	-	-	1	-	3
Visceral Impairment	1		-	1	3
Multiple Types of Disabilities	-	-	-	1	2
Speech Impairment	1	2	-	7	2
Chronic Illness	-	-	-	1	-
	108	118	120	131	190

Source: Universities

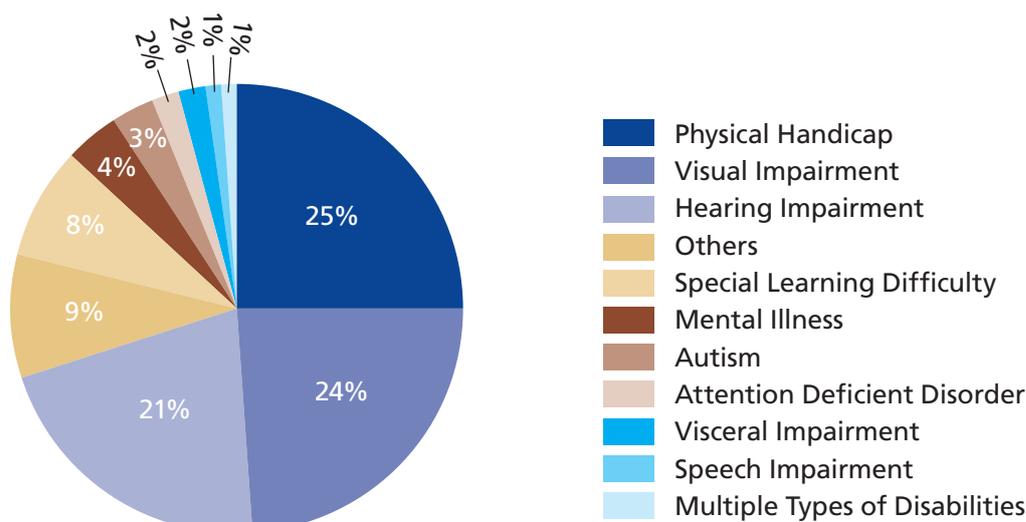
Table notes:

1. These totals differ to those shown in Graph 2.1 because one university provided total data only and did not break it down by disability category, so their data had to be excluded from this table. This university had high numbers of students with declared disabilities relative to relative to other universities so the exclusion so the exclusion of its data significantly changes the total numbers.
2. The universities conducted their own categorisations which were broadly similar and concur with the JUPAS categories (the data provided by JUPAS in Table 2.1 is broken down into more detail than the categories of disability given on their web site and presented in Section 1). In some cases, physical handicaps were broken down further when provided, but they were aggregated back together for the purpose of this table.
3. Data is new registrations of students with declared disabilities each year, except for one university which provided total registrations each year, so some students are counted more than once. This university had a low number of total students with declared disabilities, so its numbers do not significantly change the totals.
4. Data includes all students with declared disabilities on the universities' records. This may include exchange students and postgraduate students but data was not broken down by type by all universities so the proportions are not known.

The three largest and highest growth categories are physical handicap, hearing impairment and visual impairment

The data provided by the universities in Table 2.2 shows that there has been a significant increase in the three largest categories of disability: physical handicap, hearing impairment and visual impairment. It also shows a gradual increase in the non-physical disabilities over the five-year period. There was one case of declared autism in 2006, but there were five in 2011. There were only three cases of SLD in 2006 but 16 in 2011 and there was one case of mental illness in 2006 and seven in 2011. Chronic illness, visceral disability, speech impairment and multiple disabilities have remained infrequent throughout this time period.

Graph 2.3: Breakdown of declared disabilities by category, 2011 enrolments



Graph notes: See Table 2.2

Source: Universities

The data provided by the JUPAS office in Table 2.1 showing applications via the Sub-system shows broadly similar trends although to a less significant degree. Although the groupings have been done differently from the way the universities group their data, physical handicap, hearing impairment and visual impairment (often alongside another impairment) are the largest categories with physical handicap and hearing impairment experiencing the highest growth rates. The JUPAS Sub-system data also shows a gradual increase in the same non-physical disabilities over the five-year period: no SLDs in 2006 but three in 2011, no cases of mental illness in 2006 but four in 2011. Autism has not changed much with one case in 2006 and two cases in 2011.

2.6 Declaration of disability upon application

Staff said if students do not declare disability through JUPAS they tend not to declare at registration but later on

All universities have their own process for students to declare their disability either through a section of their own application form or through a separate form. The counsellor at University A said: "...when in fact students are admitted to [this university], there is a questionnaire for students and they can choose whether to declare their disability or not." The data shows that more students declare directly with the university than via the JUPAS Sub-system. Generally, staff interviewed said that if students have not used the JUPAS Sub-system, they tend not to declare at registration, but declare later. An administrative officer at University C said: "We seldom identify students with disabilities through the registration day but sometimes they are referred by counsellors to contact us afterwards or by staff of the academic departments and the staff realise they need support." Some administrative staff said that they thought most students who did not use the JUPAS Sub-system did not want to declare their disability up front at the time of application. There were several reasons suggested for this.

Some students do not declare because they do not want to

For example, some students may not want to be labelled as being 'different', or they may worry about being discriminated against. A counsellor at University D said: "One student did not want to declare because she did not want others to know that she has a chronic illness, but I explained to her

be 'labelled', or they think they can cope on their own

that only the staff who provides support to her will know, so it is better for her to disclose and get support." That counsellor also said: "A few students have mentioned to me that if people will know they have a disability then they will be labelled." Another reason not to declare may simply be that the student thinks they can cope or does not want to bother staff. A counsellor at University A said: "Usually they just think that maybe they don't want to trouble other people so they don't declare."

More declarations for physical disabilities

Both the JUPAS Sub-system data and the data gathered from the universities directly show that there are many more declarations of physical disabilities, hearing impairment and visual impairment than chronic illness, speech impairment, mental illness, autism, AD/HD or SLDs. Many students with physical disabilities or visual or hearing impairment are unable to conduct their studies without support on campus and therefore they have to declare. All student interviewees for this research had physical disabilities or visual impairment and all of them said they were not worried about being labelled or discriminated against. Student 9 said: "I was not worried about declaring my disability. I think it was a good thing because I want the university to know my body condition so they can prepare some accommodation in advance. I was not worried it would count against me."

An administrative officer at University H said: "...if they think it won't affect their studies then some may not disclose it. Of course, physical disability can really affect access to facilities, classroom, their studies, so then they will disclose or they don't get access to the support they need so they have to." Similarly, a counsellor at University A said: "There are lots [of students] who don't declare. Usually they do not declare a kind of mental illness. Physical disabilities they usually declare because they need support and if they don't declare they don't get support."

In fact the intention of the Sub-system is to give these students an earlier offer than they might receive under the Main Round applications system. The JUPAS office explained in an email: "Such applicants will be given special consideration by the JUPAS participating-institutions and may receive an offer before the Main Round offer. However, they are not required to make a decision based on such an offer and their applications will continue to be considered by the participating-institutions in the Main Round exercise to see if an even "better" offer could be made to them. If they received a better offer in the Main Round, the "better" offer would replace the offer made under the Sub-system. In other words, these applicants would be "guaranteed" of the offer made under the Sub-system and be offered the best possible choice."

2.7 How students with disabilities prioritise their decisions when selecting universities

Individual university support services not necessarily commensurate with the number of students with disabilities on campus

The level of support services provided for students with disabilities or SEN by the universities varies significantly as discussed in Section 3. It is not always the case that those with the largest number of students with declared disabilities provide the most comprehensive support services or have the most accessible campuses. The needs of the students with disabilities vary depending on the nature of disabilities in any one year. At the most basic and general level, students with physical disabilities tend to require support for their life on campus, students with learning difficulties may require teaching and learning support and students with hearing impairment or visual impairment may require both.

Students with disabilities have additional priorities when determining their university such as accessibility, location, facilities and attitudes

All students go through a process of prioritising their decisions regarding university choice. For most students these decisions are based on courses offered, university reputation, and tutor/teacher (in no particular order). But in general terms, students with a physical disability also have to factor in the accessibility of the university and students with a mental illness or special learning need have to consider teaching and learning support available. Whilst generalisations cannot be drawn from the nine students interviewed for this research because they all had physical disabilities and none had mental illness or learning needs, their responses regarding how they chose their universities show that the support services and facilities on offer form an important part of the decision making for them.

Of the nine students, four were emphatic that location and accessibility were the most important decision-making factors. For example, student 3, a wheelchair user with an able upper body, said: "So the first thing is wheelchair accessibility and I don't really care about the second and third thing. I can do any programme if I can get there." Other student interviewees said location and accessibility were important, but they considered it together with other aspects. Student 5, a wheelchair user with an able upper body, asserted: "Location is very important. And course offered is very important... I cannot rank transport, accessibility, course, university. It is a whole decision." However, three students felt that academic considerations were the most important. For instance, Student 2, who was visually impaired, said: "In my secondary school life I did not have much accommodation to me. Both the teachers did not give me notes or hand-outs before the lesson or something like that. So I get used to such kind of environment in Hong Kong so I think I have to adapt to it so when I chose a university I just consider the academic standards and the course I liked. I didn't consider any attitude or facilities." Student 1, who was visually impaired, felt that the attitude of the university was also important: "Academic is first and the second is the attitude of the teaching team... and then the facilities."

2.8 The complexities of declaring and supporting mental illness and other non-physical disabilities

The data provided by the universities and the JUPAS Sub-system shows that there has been a gradual increase in the number of cases of mental illness, autism and SLDs. Staff interviewed at every university talked about the difficulties associated with these disabilities. Words such as "complicated", "different" and "tricky" were repeatedly used when talking about disclosure of these three disabilities. All staff said that they believed the number of students with mental illness was much higher than that declared via the applications system.

The counsellor at University E said: "I don't look at the declared number, I look at my counselling statistics and that is more relevant. And I am getting more and more people and I expect more and more people. I don't think that admissions is the best way to look at them, for physical yes maybe, I think it catches the most important cases, but for mental it changes. The moment they enter they have nothing or don't know they have anything, and then they develop the mental illness after a year or so." Administrative staff at University H said: "To us the mental issue probably is more widespread than the physical because of stress and more complicated."

The SLD figure is notably low. A survey conducted in 2009 by two specialist groups in Hong Kong also found that less than ten students were registered as having SLDs in the ten universities surveyed.⁶¹ However, a research study conducted in 2007 found that SLD has a population prevalence of 9.7%-12.6% in Hong Kong.⁶²

Students overseas have high expectations on support services and flexible systems given experiences in their own countries

Staff at University E mentioned the significance of overseas exchange students on the growing number of SLD cases. The administrative staff explained: "I notice more students, especially those coming from overseas, with disabilities and with SLDs. This is especially so for the exchange students because in their own universities, especially coming from Western countries, their education system is more open and then it is more flexible and in terms of entrance they can more easily enter the university so when they come to Hong Kong they would like to see support in terms of their academic adjustment." The staff member went on to explain that they declare their special need with an expectation of receiving similar support and flexibility to that which they receive from their home university, saying: "I think there is one big challenge that we are going to face, especially those from overseas, they are more used to a stronger and full range of support and they might be expecting us to provide exactly the same thing. We are trying to meet this challenge but it is definitely a challenge."

Challenges for Universities and for Students along the University Journey

Challenges students with disabilities and their universities face today

The students who were interviewed showed themselves to be very determined and strongly supported by their families. Student 9 said: "I would say I am so strong and determined and that is mainly because my family is very supportive." Their experience on their journey to and through university is extremely challenging with daily obstacles that need to be overcome. This section explores the challenges these students face and the challenges the universities face in delivering a flexible system that provides adequate support for an increasingly diversified group of students.

3.1 Policy/Administration

No overarching policy for how to recruit, admit and support students with disabilities or SEN across Hong Kong's universities

Whilst all eight universities have EO statements and offer some sort of support service to students with disabilities in order to honour this statement, there is no overarching policy, neither from the government nor amongst the university community, for how to recruit, admit and support students with disabilities or SEN across Hong Kong's universities, nor any overarching standards and mechanisms for administration. Even at the individual university level, there may be an EO policy, and there may be some support on the ground for students with disabilities, but that does not mean there is a clear strategy and university policy for meeting the needs of such students entering the institution in order to ensure they have a successful university experience.

EO policy varies considerably across universities

3.1.1 Disability policy

Very few universities are attempting to embed EO policy into their overall university vision and strategy; most handle EO issues as they arise on a reactive basis. The extent to which there is a clear policy with defined processes for admitting and supporting students with disabilities varies considerably at each of the eight universities. Some feature their EO policy statements and related documents prominently on their web sites and administrative and promotional booklets, others do not. And whilst all eight universities have a unit or a person responsible for equal opportunities, this is, in all but one case, the responsibility of a person with another full-time job and often it is a staff member on rotation. Only University E has a dedicated Equal Opportunities Officer.⁶³

Staff differed in views on effectiveness of DDO, Code and EOC

Although almost all staff felt the DDO and EOC had raised awareness as explained in Section 1, when asked whether they felt these legal changes had influenced the practices and policies their university had developed to support students with disabilities, staff gave a variety of responses. Administrative staff at two out of the seven universities where staff were interviewed said that they believed the legislation had played an important role in developing their service, as had the establishment of the EOC. Staff at two universities said that they did not believe legislation had influenced their university policies and procedures, they believed the development of their services was demand driven, and staff at the remaining three universities said

they could not comment on the role of the DDO, the Code or the EOC in such developments.

But they largely agreed there is a 'social shift' happening with how disability is viewed and handled

Despite their differences in opinion on this topic, they were largely united in their view that there is a change happening in the Hong Kong community with regard to growing numbers of university students declaring disabilities and a growing focus on the issue. Admissions staff at University D said: "I think in society there is more debate and people are more aware of this area so [our university] is taking some proactive measures to address this in case there are more cases in this area or whatever." And the administrative staff at University G felt a "social shift" was happening. Only one member of staff at University H said: "I don't see a major difference". The interviews with staff revealed that the challenges presented in forming policy and delivering support services for students with disabilities were similar across the board. Staff interviewees repeatedly referred to a weak organisational structure or even a total lack of infrastructure, a lack of manpower and a lack of dedicated funding.

Four out of eight universities have a dedicated working group for their students with disabilities although remits vary considerably

3.1.2 Organisational structures

Out of the eight universities, four have an organisational group dedicated to providing services for their students with disabilities. Even though structure and function differ, those four groups will all be called 'working groups' in this report. Of those four universities, two have had such a group since the 1990s and two set them up recently, one in the last five years and one in the last two years. All of these four groups have a stated Terms of Reference and hold regular meetings with members from different departments of the university. All of the groups have members that range from SAO to the health services to the teaching departments to estate management. Out of the four universities, two have student representatives on their groups and one has two students, one of which must have a disability. It is not the case that the four universities with the dedicated groups are the ones with the highest numbers of students with declared disabilities. Out of the eight universities, the four that have dedicated groups rank 1st, 3rd, 4th and 7th. The two universities that rank 1st and 3rd are the ones that set up their group in the 1990s and the two that rank 4th and 7th set theirs up more recently.

The working groups' remits vary. All four of them operate at a strategic level and provide some administrative functions with differing levels of commitment. Of the four, two have a separate, dedicated staff member providing practical support to students. At University E, that is the prime role of that individual, for university G, it is part of her job within the health service. For the other two universities, University C uses the working group to operate support services, and University D reverts to the counselling team to provide those services.

The secretary of University E's group, which has been in operation for a long time operating at a pragmatic and strategic level, articulated its remit as follows: "...to work towards the achievement of social inclusion in the university, promotion of disability rights in employment and educational opportunity for our stakeholders. The [group] will promote the equality of opportunity for persons of different abilities including staff, students, visitors and contractors and the [group] will enforce in the university, for staff and students, policies, good practices and positive steps such as affirmative action for enhancing integration and diversity."

University G, whose group has also long been in operation and provides mostly grass roots level services to students but has recently supported a separate strategic working group at the university, articulates the role of its group as follows: "To advise, supervise and co-ordinate implementation of disability service policy...To co-ordinate equipment acquisition and administration of service/facilities...To co-ordinate provision of information on all aspects of services...To advise the University on all aspects of the provision of services to disabled persons."

The Terms of Reference for University D's group, recently incorporated to provide both strategic and ground level support, state: "To formulate policies and guidelines related to support services for students with special needs...To review and enhance support services...To co-ordinate effective information flow and smooth operation of support services...To advise on resources needed for the long term development, and the implementation plan of the related supporting services".

University C's group Terms of Reference states: "To share information and experience, to co-ordinate the implementation of policy, and to facilitate the solicitation of expert advice." This group provides on-the-ground student services and strategic level support within the university.

Those without a working group provide their services through their SAO

Those universities that do not have a dedicated group of some sort and do not have dedicated personnel providing disability services, generally manage their SAO services for students with disabilities or SEN through their SAO and specifically through their counsellors. As numbers of students with disabilities increase, this puts increasing pressure on the staff members and on the systems.

Manpower in short supply; rely on staff goodwill. Centralised services in one university only

3.1.3 Manpower and expertise

Lack of manpower and scant dedicated services for students with disabilities means that in many cases current services rely on the goodwill of the staff who are providing support on top of their 'day jobs'. This means that in most instances, they are only able to react to immediate, solvable needs. Centralised services providing a co-ordination role across teaching and administrative departments only seem to exist in full in University E, but even in that university, staff interviewed said that their biggest challenge was "Time. I think [staff member] needs time to get herself familiarised with the different demands and needs of different groups of students and the team of counsellors need time to develop their different interests and expertise and I hope we can keep them as long as possible so we can keep the service going." At this university, staff recognise the size of the challenge relative to the scale and experience of the manpower currently in place. However, at this university the function is provided by an individual in a dedicated role with a separate title and that individual not only co-ordinates all aspects of the students' lives but is also responsible for integrating disability into university culture and services. It is ironic that they are worried about time and experience when theirs is the only institution offering this service.

At University G, the person who is responsible for supporting the students with disabilities is stretched in her daily support duties for such students and she does not have a broad, strategic remit integrating disability into the university culture. The administrative officer interviewed said: "[The group] mentioned some difficulties, notably they mentioned they are short of manpower, not having enough resources to serve the disabled community... funding shortage and so on...Right now there is no central co-ordination...".

Even though University G has a working group that operates at the strategic level and some manpower at the grass roots level, it has still identified a lack of manpower to provide adequate resources to students with disabilities or SEN.

Student interviewees said they had to run around explaining same things to different people

Some student interviewees confirmed that there was a general lack of co-ordinated support and resources in their universities. Student 1 said: "During my first year I have to run around to different departments to arrange my study, examinations, accommodation and so on". Student 5 highlighted that it is often a simple question of manpower and capacity: "The first year I am in a big department so the office does not have any time to help me. After I transfer to a smaller programme then the office always asks me if I need any help." University A has someone who supports students alongside her 'day job' as a counsellor to all students. Although she appears to do her utmost to support her students, and one student with a physical handicap from that university said she received good support from the counsellors in the SAO, the level of service provided relies entirely on this one person's goodwill. This can only stretch so far as the numbers of students with different needs increase. She said: "I have told my director [that the numbers are growing] and tried to fight for more expertise and manpower for these services. In fact I don't think I have good expertise in different kinds of disability. We need a disability office or something."

Lack of expertise also a hindrance to providing adequate support

The counsellor's comment raised the issue not just of manpower, but of lack of expertise. Even if basic manpower is cobbled together to provide support, a lack of expertise is a further hindrance to providing adequate service. Admissions staff at University D said: "Internally we will go with all the programme people to make sure they arrange everything and externally we will check with other organisations like the EOC etc to make sure we are doing it all equally for them...For the practical things we will check with the Society for the Blind for example because we really don't know how to do these things."

In terms of specialised support, the universities tend to have at least one clinical psychologist as well as social workers in their counselling team. They confirmed that students with a disability can have access to counselling just as any other student. Most universities said that they have a single counsellor who supports all students with disabilities who want support. This is not his/her only role, but s/he consistently supports all those students so as to develop his/her experience and understand the needs of people with SEN better. In terms of specialised support for those with physical disabilities, only one university, Polytechnic University (Poly U), is well-known for having a rehabilitation clinic on site and has at times in the past offered physiotherapy to its students with disabilities but this has depended on the economic climate of the day. Teacher expertise is an area that generates much debate and will be covered later in this section.

Recruitment processes do not include visiting special schools

3.1.4 Recruitment

Hong Kong's universities all use similar methods of student recruitment. Generally speaking, they all conduct 'Open' or 'Information' Days and they all go out to a number of schools to make presentations. They have their 'top 20 schools'-type list where they go every year and they respond to individual school requests. When asked about recruitment from special schools, staff responded either that nobody from their university had been to a special school or they were unable to answer. Only one member of staff from University A was able to say that someone from that university had visited a

special school to make a presentation, and only University C was able to recall that students from a special school had attended their Open/Information Days. Admissions staff interviewed at University A also recalled that at a recent Open Day a teacher from a special school attended and asked some questions about the potential for a flexible curriculum for students with SEN.

Staff interviewees felt secondary schools needed higher aspirations for children with disabilities but student interviewees said they were well supported at secondary school

Several staff interviewed mentioned that they felt that secondary school teachers needed to have higher aspirations for children with disabilities regarding making it to university. A staff member interviewed at University H said: "I have the impression that when [these students] are in high school they need to develop the mind-set that they are a normal student and they can excel, I have the impression that they don't have that message." However, some students' comments countered this. Student 8 said she could not have got to university without her family, and her school teachers were equally supportive: "I think the teachers in my secondary school are quite similar to my family. They are always very supportive saying 'we are very confident in you and your academic performance but please don't stress yourself too much'." However, she has of course made it to university and is one of the few that have. There are far greater numbers who do not and may not be experiencing this type of support.

One student interviewee did not apply to one university where he felt a professor he met did not display appropriate sensitivity to his situation

Student experiences highlighted that in fact it is the universities who do not always promote a positive and informed attitude towards students with disabilities. Student 1 explained a bad experience when he visited one university during the time he was selecting which universities to apply for: "I went to several seminars for programmes in the universities before I choose a university but I get a very bad impression from [one university] actually. I asked once at beginning of year and again in May, do you have any special arrangements or special facilities and they just said: 'If you get our minimum requirements then talk to us,' and I go home and I feel discriminated and then I just took [that university] off my list." This was as a result of a professor who did not display sensitivity as to how this student may be feeling regarding his potential to get to university. Despite an excellent academic track record the student was concerned about whether he would have support at the university and the professor who he spoke to made him feel like this would not be the case.

Meeting proficiency in Chinese and English can be problematic for SLDs

3.1.5 Selection criteria

Staff at all universities stated that as part of their EO policy, students must meet the university's academic requirements. That is the first and foremost requirement and after that, no discrimination is permitted. Without delving deep into the pros and cons of the so-called massification of university and the debate over levels of academic excellence required, there is an issue relating to academic qualifications for admission that is relevant to this discussion regarding students with disabilities.

Under the EDB's New Academic Structure (NAS), students applying via JUPAS must achieve four core subjects and one to three elective subjects in order to attend university. Of those four core subjects, two must be Chinese Language and English Language, at which students must achieve the top mark, level 3. The other two must be Mathematics and Liberal Studies at which students must achieve level 2.⁶⁴ Students with SEN may follow the ordinary New Senior Secondary (NSS) curriculum and multiple pathways have been designed to try to accommodate students with different strengths and skills and to enable them to take different routes via sub-degree programmes and vocational programmes.⁶⁵ However, in order to attend university via JUPAS, a student

must be highly proficient in both Chinese Language and English Language as well as in Mathematics and Liberal Studies. This means that an outstanding mathematician who is not proficient at both English and Chinese may never make it to one of Hong Kong's universities via JUPAS. Speaking multiple languages can be particularly problematic for students with SLDs and generally for students with disabilities.

Student 8, who is wheelchair-bound with a partially disabled upper body but has no learning difficulties, explained how problematic this language issue was for her under the old system. She was at a special school but she had to transfer to a mainstream school to take A-levels because her special school did not go up to Form 6 for A-levels. At her special school she was taught in Chinese, but at the mainstream school she was taught in English. This made for a very difficult time for her and she felt she was not adequately supported in her English at the mainstream school. She was only sleeping for four hours per night and working as hard as she could but the teacher did not offer any assistance or solutions, she just told her to 'train harder'. Because her A-level results were weak due to her English, she had to apply for an associate degree which took three years before she took a bachelor degree. She said: "I had to do the associate degree because I didn't get good enough A-level results because my English is not good enough. My writing and listening is not good. I write more slowly than other people and so then I can't concentrate on listening enough. I just can't write quick enough." This meant that her whole university experience took her six expensive years to become a trained social worker. Several of the students mentioned the time spent in speaking two languages fluently was particularly hard for them given that they generally take longer either to read, take notes or study, depending on their disability.

Student 9 said she found her A-levels to be her biggest obstacle to university life: "The biggest obstacle for me was the A-level exams. The usual examination hour is already very long for normal students and then I am given the extra time allowance so I have to take my exam period from 8.30 a.m. to around 6 p.m. in the afternoon with only around one hour lunch break, but the examiner stayed in the room with me so I couldn't take a rest in that room. ...We have two choices, first is time extension, second is abridged version of the paper...but I didn't prefer having abridged version because I don't want others misunderstand that my paper is easier than the others...I remember while I was having my biology examination I was nearly fainted at that time...I still kept on working on my essay though."

Challenges for students with disabilities in achieving four core subjects; and other talents in areas not given appropriate consideration

Maria Wong, former Principal of Hong Kong Red Cross John F. Kennedy Centre, now a freelance consultant on education for students with physical and multiple challenges, is concerned about the essential admission criteria to universities. She said: "The four core subjects (English, Chinese, Mathematics and Liberal Studies) may pose unnoticed difficulties to people with dyslexia, dyscalculia and brain damage that affect spatial relationships. The needs for experiential learning are somehow unfair to youngsters facing access barriers of all kinds. On the other hand, their talents in other areas such as Arts or Physical Education would not be given place for consideration. For students who rely heavily on Information Technology, their strengths in this area were only recognised prior to the new admission criteria." Ms Wong is well-known for being the inspiration behind several students from the Hong Kong Red Cross John F. Kennedy Centre who successfully entered the computing department at Poly U under her tenure several years ago. One of them graduated with a First-Class Honours and many awards for outstanding work.

All but one of the student interviewees were called for interview and most of them did not enjoy any special arrangements

3.1.6 Interviews and registration

Whether applying through the JUPAS system or applying directly, some students are called for interview to some universities. Of the nine students interviewed, all but one were called for at least one interview, although this was not necessarily because of their disability. Student 2 recalled that it was because of his disability: "Just one interview because of my disability. They told me that other students would not have such an interview but as I am visually impaired I was asked for the interview to understand my needs and to try to accommodate my needs." But Student 6 said: "I had the interview because of my HKCEE result, not my disability."

Most of the university staff interviewed said they tried to provide extra support when necessary. University D was able to provide an example of allowing a visually impaired student to have an assistant sit next to her in the interview and to use her own computer with special software for her test. Student 2 recalled of University A: "I actually got quite a few interviews because of my academic results but I got one because of my disability at University A. At that time they prepared quite well. They asked me if I need help to get to the interview room and whether I need any Braille or soft copy papers for the written test. Actually, finally they chose to give me a face-to-face interview but not any written test in that sense."

However, there were no special arrangements made for any of the eight other students who were interviewed despite the fact that they had all but one declared their disability via the JUPAS Sub-system so the admissions and teaching departments ought to have known they had a disability. For example, Student 1 explained: "There are no special arrangements. They did not know I was visually impaired before I went in. I think when I introduced myself the first time, they looked down on my performance and the professor has the judgement that the others are better than me because of my visual impairment." Student 8 was called for interview at short notice which made transport difficult.

Registration experiences were similar to interview experiences; administrative staff not knowing which students had impairments

This lack of support was echoed by students with regard to their registration experience. Student 2 said: "During the registration there is nobody who knows I am visually impaired in advance and I am going through the whole process like how the students see it but luckily I can ask my friend to come with me so I can go through it very smoothly." As with the interviews, these administrative and registry staff should have known about their disabilities given they had applied via the JUPAS Sub-system. Departments appear not to be speaking to each other about students' individual needs.

Universities only have a short time between registration and commencement to prepare for students' arrival

3.1.7 Preparation after registration

Because of the way the JUPAS application and acceptance system works, universities do not know until 'reporting or 'registration' day exactly how many students with disabilities or SEN they will have and with what needs and often do not uncover them even then, particularly those with less visible physical difficulties and learning difficulties or mental illness. Generally, reporting day takes place in early August prior to the start of term in early September. Of the nine students interviewed, six said that they were called to a meeting after reporting day to discuss their needs with either a member of SAO, a counsellor or the dedicated disability member of staff; one student received a phone call and two were unclear as to whether they had a specific meeting regarding their needs or not. There was only one student who had a member of staff from the academic department also present at the meeting. This is an omission in terms of introducing the teachers and administrative

staff most involved with the students to their needs at an early stage. As student 9 said: "I can't say it was not a helpful meeting but actually I wanted officers from my department to attend the meeting. Because after I have talked about the situation to the disability co-ordinator, she got to know my body situation, but then no officers from my department got to know about it so then I have to explain about it a lot later on."

Whilst it is positive that these phone calls and meetings are being voluntarily conducted by some university staff, the time frame is tight for getting around to all students with declared disabilities at the universities. This will become a greater challenge as numbers of students increase. It is particularly tight for making changes to facilities or building infrastructure. When asked whether they have any targets in place for fulfilling students' needs once they have started at the university, most staff interviewed said they try to just do their best. The counsellor at University A said: "I try to contact all the new [disabled] students within the second or third week of September. I get my clerical staff to call them and mark my calendar and I try to see them all in this time but it is very busy."

Staff tried their best but students often had to wait a long time for study aids and equipment

The tight preparation time means that students have to wait quite some time for their special facilities to be arranged. Student 1 said he waited a long time for a special computer to be set up in the library for him. Student 8, who is in a wheelchair, said: "I need a separate desk in the lecture hall and I have that...but to be honest I had to wait a while for it." Student 7, a physically handicapped student, mentioned that the tables at the correct height in his classroom and in the canteen took six months to be installed.

At another university, the estates office staff mentioned that they had received a call saying that a new student needed somewhere to charge his electric wheelchair just one week before that student was arriving on campus. The staff member said: "Actually we usually get notified at quite a late stage. He has already been admitted and told that it is OK and then we got the call one week before he came saying that this must be available for him. So they just ask us to give him some help and we do our best."

Staff at three universities mentioned that they hold an orientation talk especially for students with disabilities or SEN once they have started at the university. Generally, they explain all the facilities available to such students and introduce the staff members from SAO, counselling teams, estates/campus management offices and the library who can assist the students to fulfil their studies. All staff who organise these meetings said that they are well attended by students who need additional support.

Funding is required for 'hardware' and 'software'

3.1.8 Funding

There are two types of funding to consider with regard to students with disabilities. The first is for 'hardware': the university funds required to pay for changes to buildings or facilities to cater for the needs of students with physical disabilities. This is generally done via the estates office. The second type is for 'software': the funds required for students to purchase necessary study aids and for universities to provide training to teachers to enhance the students' individual learning experiences. Awareness raising and public education would come under the software budget.

Quick fixes can be expensive and inefficient, not

Hardware changes can be expensive as well as time-consuming. Currently, partly due to the nature of the JUPAS system and the problem of tight timing between enrolling at the university and starting studies, quick fixes

providing long-term solutions

are often implemented. Older infrastructure requires constant changes to work towards the Barrier Free Access requirements first published in a design manual by the Buildings Department in 1997 and updated in 2008.⁶⁶ New builds are already accessible. The funds for these quick fixes seems to be found either from an internal budget or the UGC. One university reported recently coming to the end of a one-off grant provided by UGC for the acquisition of equipment for students with disabilities or SEN.

In a Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) Varsity newsletter in 2004, Rebecca Lai, executive co-ordinator of the UGC Secretariat, was reported as saying that over the previous ten years, a total of about HK\$100 million had been given to UGC-funded institutions to carry out improvement works to existing campus facilities for the disabled. Other expenses for developing disabled-friendly facilities and services are incorporated into the annual budgets of Capital Works Programmes and Alterations, Additions, Repairs and Improvements (AA&I) projects of universities.⁶⁷

UGC provides funding for campus facilities but not enough to overhaul facilities

The UGC is responsible for providing funding for campus facilities, as the web site explains: "the UGC ensures that institutions are provided with the necessary resources to meet their academic aims and objectives, space requirements as associated with approved student number targets and statutory safety and health requirements. Capital funds also maintain and enhance institutions' space and facilities in an appropriate state to support their educational and research missions."⁶⁸ Given that all universities have an EO policy as part of their education mission, UGC is responsible for providing capital for them to fulfil that.

However, this does not mean that universities always get what they need. Some universities mentioned that they did not get as much government funding as hoped when they had made requests. Staff from the estates office at University A said regarding the purchase of some sensor-operated door systems: "We submitted this item to the government but were not successful because we were asking for HK\$20 million for barrier-free access devices and it is low priority. If high priority [things are] all handled and they have some money left over, they will give it, but these few years the major priority has been the 3+3+4 education system...So we bought a few trial pieces from our own budget. We can only do a few."

Staff generally squeezed money from their budgets where they can

Generally, the universities with particularly small numbers of students with physical disabilities did not see the need for dedicated funds to make hardware changes. Those with higher numbers of students with disabilities said they respond as needed and can generally pull funds in from somewhere in the university when necessary. Staff from the estates office at University A said: "We observe the need each year and take from our budget where we can. It depends on the scope of work. If we can do it within our budget, it is up to us to do it or not, but if it involves huge funding, we have to seek management permission." Administrative staff at University C said: "The buildings department has to make some special considerations every year, the [working group] gets together every year to make these proposals...I am not sure if [the estates office] sets aside a special budget, but every year there are some new things."

Some staff highlighted the problems with this somewhat informal approach of taking funds from where possible when possible and explained that they would rather have a specific pool of funds to draw from. The counsellor at University A explained how they make their decisions on funding: "It is

very difficult. Usually ...it depends whether there is an urgent need for the current student." A counsellor at University D said: "When there is a request we will make alterations. I will speak to the estates office and they will do it...We want to have the specific budget for the students with disabilities but we don't have it yet."

Software funding for teacher training and study aids varies considerably across universities

The second type of funding, the software requirements such as teacher training and study aids, tends to differ more markedly by university. Although one university has a dedicated fund for students and another has a pool of funds managed by the health service, the others appear to be mostly drawing money from the general SAO budget. As one head of SAO said when asked who would pay for a notetaker should a student need it: "It is not a huge amount so I can still absorb it in my budget. But if there is a need for a larger sum of money then the university will need to consider supporting it at a higher level." The counsellor at university A said: "Usually [the academic department] would not have a specific budget assigned for students with disabilities...Sometimes my director will say if the student really needs that instrument then maybe we can pay and buy the instrument for them if it is not too much money but I try to persuade him maybe if the instrument is for the lecture theatre then we ask [the estates office] because I think it is more suitable. Otherwise all those things should be bought by [SAO] so I don't think it is very suitable."

Some students said they had to work hard to get what they needed

What the current approach to funding means, is that although all the staff who were interviewed stated that they do their best to provide everything that an individual student needs, some students who were interviewed felt that they had to work very hard to get what they needed. Student 1 had to confirm three times the equipment that he needed, it took a long time to come, and when it did it was the wrong equipment. Eventually he contacted a community organisation with expertise on his needs and asked them to explain to the university what he needed. This may not have been specifically a funding issue, it may have been more to do with a lack of on-campus expertise and resource, but with more adequate funding there would be more adequate expertise and resources for students, teachers and administrative staff.

Almost no teacher training is provided except for at one university

One thing that is common to all universities is that there is little to no funds spent on teacher training as teachers are not formally trained in how to deal with disability and SEN. University E holds some seminars and workshops organised by a department within the broader SAO, others have their health service or counselling professionals advise teachers as and when required. It is unclear whether this is a funding issue or a demand issue. Several interviewees said there was not enough demand to warrant teacher training, as there are so many departments and teachers and a department may only have one SEN student within several years. Administrative staff at University H said: "Nobody will be precluded from coming because of financial pressures associated with disability...We can still absorb it in our budget. But if the number of students increases, there is a trend, then we need to set up a fund. I can see that."

Only HKU has a dedicated, ring-fenced fund, the 'Henry Chan Inclusive Education Fund'

In terms of teaching and learning aids for students, only one university has a dedicated, ring-fenced fund which students can tap for buying learning aids. That university is HKU and the information is on the HKU web site. The 'Henry Chan Inclusive Education Fund' was established in 2006 by a donation from Mr Henry Chan "to promote inclusive education of students with a disability within HKU and inclusive education in or outside of Hong Kong".

Individual grants may not exceed HK\$50,000.⁶⁹ There is also the 'HKU 81 Inclusion Fund' whose purpose is: "to promote equal opportunity and social inclusion in and outside Hong Kong through programmes organised by and/or for the university."⁷⁰ This fund was set up by the class of '81 HKU graduates as part of the Silver Jubilee Reunion Programme in 2006. The Organising Committee chose the theme of equal opportunity for people with a disability because 1981 was The International Year of Disabled Persons as declared by the United Nations. HK\$1.4 million was donated as seed money. There is one other university which has a pool of funds within its health service that it can draw on to purchase study aids and equipment, however that university said many students bring their own study aids with them. In addition, the Hong Kong Institute of Education offers four types of bursaries, of approximately HK\$5,000-6,500 each, to "needy full-time local students" and one of these types is specifically for "disabled students".⁷¹

There are a variety of bursaries students with disabilities in Hong Kong can apply to

Local full-time UGC-funded students with financial needs can apply for grants and loans from the Government Tertiary Student Finance Scheme – Publicly-funded Programmes (TSFS). Applications are means-tested and different amounts are awarded according to applicants' family size, income and assets level. Applicants receiving a Disability Allowance from the Social Welfare Department may be granted a special loan equivalent to 50% of the maximum loan on top of the original entitlement. All of the universities guide students to lists of funds on their web sites. There are some funds which specifically provide bursaries and scholarships for students with disabilities as shown in Box 1.

There have been cases reported in the press of students with disabilities who could not get the support they needed to complete a university course. On 26 September 2011, the media carried the story of a young man with hearing impairments who was accepted to study cinema by the Vocational Training Council and the School of Professional and Continuing Studies of CUHK. Neither was able to hire an interpreter for him and he could not afford to hire one himself. CUHK said they checked with two NGOs that support people with hearing impairments and two education funds but it could not find any financial assistance for the student.⁷²

3.2 Attitudes

Administrative staff appeared supportive but no teaching staff were interviewed

3.2.1 Staff and teachers

All administrative staff interviewed gave the impression of being positive and supportive in terms of efforts to admit and support students with disabilities. All staff gave examples of where they felt their departments had done their best for individuals. Those who do not have a formal system or structure in place for providing services to students with disabilities gave the impression of trying their hardest to support their students, and the services provided currently rely extensively on their goodwill.

When asked if they felt teaching staff in general had positive attitudes towards having students with disabilities in their class, the administrative staff had generally positive but varied responses. Administrative staff at University C said: "All the teachers probably feel they have to put in additional time and make a special effort but I don't know of anybody who has made a complaint so far." Administrative staff at University G also felt this: "Some [teachers] are better than others. Some will think that this

Box 1: Examples of special funding for students with disabilities in Hong Kong

Sir Edward Youde Memorial Fund Council

- To purchase personal aids or study aids for students with hearing impairments, visual impairments or physical handicaps
- Fellowships of HK\$38,000 and scholarships of HK\$25,000 as one-off grants

Sir Edward Youde Memorial Overseas Fellowship/Scholarship for Disabled Students

- For one outstanding student with disabilities in Hong Kong for overseas studies
- Maximum value of the award per year is HK\$283,000 for the Fellowship and HK\$262,000 for the Scholarship

The Association for Engineering and Medical Volunteer Services – Independent Living Fund

- To support people with disabilities when they are learning to live independently by providing interest-free loans of up to HK\$60,000 to purchase equipment
- Sponsored by individual foundations such as the Marden Foundation as well as the Hong Kong Jockey Club and the Tsim Sha Tsui East Rotary Club

Zonta Club of Victoria Bursary

- A bursary of HK\$6,500 for a full-time student with a disability and financial need

Li Kwan Hung Education Fund

- To assist students with disabilities to study with their able-bodied counterparts in local educational institutes at various levels

- Administered by the Hong Kong PHAB Association

Simon K. Y. Lee & Lee Chi Hung Scholarship Fund for the Hearing Impaired Students

- An award of scholarship to students with hearing impairments for pursuing post-secondary education in Hong Kong

- Administered by the Hong Kong Society for the Deaf

Jockey Club IT Scheme for People with Visual Impairment

- Supports non-governmental and not-for-profit organisations providing services/schooling to tertiary institutions to acquire advanced Chinese screen readers and Braille displays
- Subsidises individuals who require the usage of high-performance IT for the purpose of studies or employment, but has genuine financial difficulty in purchase of the aids
- Subsidised amount not more than HK\$9,800 for screen reader and not more than HK\$27,000 for Braille display

Miss Li Ching Memorial Fund

- Providing financial assistance to students with physical disabilities to purchase rehabilitative equipment or study material
- HK\$1,000 per award

Vitasoy and KS Lo Foundation Bursary for Students with a Disability

- Bursaries for full-time undergraduate or postgraduate students

Paul CK Wong Memorial Fund

- Geography undergraduate student(s) who is/are: (1) Physically challenged and have a good academic record; (2) In the absence of (1), other students with an outstanding academic record or with excellent extra-curricular services to the community
- HK\$5,000 per recipient

Eden & Ling Kwok Scholarship

- Full-time undergraduate or postgraduate student with disabilities, good academic standing and financial needs
- HK\$4,000 per recipient

HSBC Scholarship for Students with Disabilities

- Scholarships for local students with disabilities in Business, Communication, Education, Science (applied and basic), Social Science, and Arts (Linguistics & Language, Translation, History, Geography, Fine Arts & Applied Arts), with GPA higher than 3.30
- Priority will be given to students from disadvantaged backgrounds
- HK\$1,000 per recipient

student is disruptive for my class and I have to make all these adaptations. Of course, this is normal that one or two of these teachers have these sentiments but in general, this is a law-abiding university, there is a piece of legislation out there and we have to do what we can to serve the students. At the same time the sense of equal opportunities is high in the university and we want to make it higher. But I would say that the majority of our teachers provide sufficient services."

Students mostly spoke about their positive experiences with secondary school teachers rather than university teachers

Some staff questioned whether perhaps secondary school staff had a lack of aspiration for students with disabilities. But some students specifically spoke about their teachers at secondary school and how positive an experience they had had with them and when they compared the attitudes of staff at secondary school to staff at university, their secondary schools fared better. Student 3 said: "In secondary school my class teacher inspired me a lot. Before my accident she is already my class teacher and afterwards she still teach me and she always help me any way she can. People [at my university] are still helpful, but just helpful, not the same." Student 2 said: "The teacher in the first year of my secondary school life inspired me so much. She gave me the opportunity to see how I can integrate into the mainstream society. She taught the students that everyone has some defects...I am so lucky to have this teacher and I get a lot of good friends from this school."

But no student mentioned staff attitudes as a specific bottleneck to their academic career

Only student 8 mentioned that she had a difficult teacher at a mainstream school, who was not supportive of her and did not give her the help she felt she should have had with her English. In her special school she felt the teachers were supportive but not necessarily convinced by her determination to get to university. She said: "I think the teachers were 50/50 on whether I would make it to university." But generally none of the students mentioned staff attitudes as a bottleneck to their progression through their academic career. That said, all of those students interviewed had made it to university so they represent a very narrow segment of the community of individuals with disabilities of university age.

And some student interviewees felt university staff were very helpful to them

Although the students talked more about their secondary school teachers providing them with aspiration and support, there were some positive comments about university teachers too. Student 6 said: "My professors always ask if I need any help or extra time." Student 2 said: "At my university, lots of professors and teachers are very open-minded and tried to accommodate my needs by providing suitable support to me." There were also positive comments from administrative staff interviewed about the teaching staff at their university. For example, administrative staff at University E said: "The teachers are all really helpful, especially within the faculties." In fact, most students had positive experiences with the teachers at secondary school and at university.

Student 3 said that he felt the fact he was in the social science department had a positive impact in terms of teachers' attitudes towards him: "I am from the department of social science and I think the people are more open-minded in that department." Student 8 also mentioned several times that her teachers were "really nice" to her and that perhaps this was because she studied social work.

Despite positive attitudes, only one university could recall

However, positive attitudes and warm welcomes do not always translate to adequate practical support. One student said that he was shouted at when he asked for equipment three times because it took so long. And despite all the positive sentiment voiced by staff members who were interviewed,

having staff with disabilities

there was little evidence of leading by example in terms of visibility of staff with disabilities in the institutions. Out of all seven universities interviewed, none could recall whether they had any staff with visible disabilities except for University E, which thought they had around 10 such members of staff. University E is also the university with the highest number of students with disabilities. This does not mean that the other universities do not have any staff with visible disabilities, it just means that they did not stick in the minds of the staff interviewed which suggests that even if they exist, they are not prominent on campus. An academic study in the UK several years ago explored the positive impact that staff with disabilities have on the student community in terms of acting as role models and promoting a culture of inclusiveness.⁷³

All student interviewees said other students were kind to them

3.2.2 Students

A research survey conducted on primary school children in 1997-1999 showed that although most of the SEN children who responded had made some good friends in school, they suffered incidences of maltreatment, teasing and ignoring.⁷⁴ More recently in 2011, the EOC announced the results of a study they had commissioned on local preschool children's attitudes on discrimination which found that many pre-schoolers had already developed prejudices about different races and disability. At the same time the EOC launched a new on-line training module to assist parents and teachers to instil values of equal opportunities in children at an early age, with Mr Lam Woon-kwong, the EOC Chairperson, saying, "In today's globalised world, discriminatory attitudes can only impede one's own development potential...We must ensure that our children do not risk falling behind due to inadvertent or acquired prejudices."⁷⁵

But all of the students interviewed for this research said that other students were kind to them, they had many friends and they had never suffered any bullying or abuse from another student. They all received plenty of help and support from their friends. Staff also commented that students in general are open-minded and supportive of those who need help. The counsellor at University A said: "Students are helpful to students with disabilities. For visually impaired students they have difficulty to see the words and their classmates try to copy down the notes for them." Administrative staff at University G said: "For many of these students we try to mobilise their fellow students to help them...Usually we talk to the teacher or the head of the department or those best acquainted with the situation in each of the departments." Student 2 explained: "I need to use Braille. I need to use computer to answer examination questions. Then they recruit a group of student helpers to scan the books so I can read them through the computer display and the student helpers also help me to find the e-books."

Only three out of eight universities mentioned they run student volunteer programmes to support those with disabilities

Nonetheless, such positive attitudes were not always leveraged to provide appropriate support. Only three out of the eight universities mentioned that they run specific student volunteer programmes. At the start of the year they ask students to enrol in the programme which is specifically designed to support students with individual needs.

3.3 Teaching/Learning

No teaching staff were interviewed, but administrative staff and students mentioned lack of expertise amongst teachers

3.3.1 Teacher expertise

Several administrative staff who were interviewed talked about a lack of expertise in general in their university, although no teaching staff were interviewed. Only three universities have educational psychologists available to provide services on campus. Whilst students said teaching staff are generally positive and helpful, this does not necessarily mean that appropriate teaching methods are employed if there is a lack of expertise. Student 1 mentioned: "Not much support from teachers...Even there is one teacher told me she likes to write on the whiteboard and I said I cannot see what she writes and she said there is no way to have the soft copy because she likes to write on the whiteboard and she said: 'listening is good enough, I am not going to give you other materials to study'." Student 4 said: "Actually I can go to the theatre but it is quite difficult to see the powerpoint because I have to sit in the front and I have to look up high...I can ask for slides before but sometimes I don't...Depends on the lecturer though."

Student 9 said: "The main problem is that they do not have a centralised body or designated co-ordinator for this so whenever a student or teacher wants to ask questions on this disability service they do not know who to approach." So it is not just that teachers do not have expertise, but because of the general lack of centralised support services explained earlier in this section, they do not even know where to go to get it.

Adaptations to teaching methods are student-led and teachers react on a case-by-case basis

Even if teachers could find the appropriate administrative or counselling staff, these staff often said they felt they themselves lacked expertise. Several staff interviewed, either in administrative or counselling positions, said they felt they not only lacked resources in terms of manpower, but they lacked expertise in terms of how to handle the individual needs of students with disabilities or SEN and how to help teachers adapt their teaching methods to suit different requirements in the classroom. Generally, any adaptations to teaching styles are student-led and teachers are reactive on a case-by-case basis. Whilst case-by-case consideration will always be required to a degree for students with individual needs, there is a basis of expertise that can be developed after some time of dealing with teaching and learning issues for specific disabilities. But the organisational structure needs to be in place to allow that expertise to build up and to allow the institution to leverage it.

The counsellor at University A explained: "[The students] will fill in the questionnaire and [it will be forwarded] to the department, so for example for the hearing impaired student the lecturer will try to speak in front of him and will try to let him to see his mouth movement. Surely I will try to ask the student you should also try to notify the lecturer. For visually impaired students they will send powerpoint in advance, although it is not policy to do it here in advance but it is quite usual practice for the lecturer even without the disabled student." When asked whether she felt this was an adequate way to provide the teachers with appropriate expertise and whether they received enough support in this regard she continued: "I don't think it is enough. Usually they will get the consultation from us...One of my counsellors will try to communicate with them in advance and, for example send them information on Asperger's or something. They will usually seek help from us."

Staff interviewed at University D were worried about their lack of expertise in determining process issues such as how much extra time to give a student

for one of their internal exams, explaining: "...since we are not the expert we don't know how much time needs to be extended but now [there] is the agreement between the student and the teacher and the student has some experience in the past and he requests for the extended time to be double and the teacher agrees. But actually we think it is better if there is some expert recommendation on that. If there are disagreements it will be difficult to come to a consensus."

The counsellor at University D also explained that they often depend on the student's view: "If the programme leader doesn't know what to do, we just think about what can be done and also ask the student." This does not build up a depth of expertise in a systematic manner that others can draw on. The head of SAO at University G said: "We will provide some support and ideas after there is a case rather than general training for all teachers on campus as there are just not enough students."

Other universities also talked about being student-led. Administrative staff at University G said: "[Our health officer] will have a kind of a check-list for each student because the needs of these students differ. So by the start of the academic year [the health officer] will try to liaise with the teaching department...or the counsellor in my office or so on and then ask us to come up with a plan for that particular student and then for counsellors or for doctors or for those people [in the administrative departments] who...have to deal with these students all the time...all have expertise in giving advice to teachers about the teaching process, the learning process and then because this also be related to the examination and to the assessment, so the [registry office] will try to talk to the teachers about the whole process, not only the teaching but the evaluation also. The student is also involved in all this."

Whilst student involvement is important, university staff felt more expert advice was required

The danger of being student-led is that the student is set in his/her ways and may not be open to change or new technologies. Certainly the student should be involved and should take the lead on articulating his/her requirements, but experts should also provide advice so as to ensure the best teaching and study processes and aids are used. The counsellor at University D sounded like she takes a more structured and organised approach: "There was one case this year I accompany the student to talk to the programme leader and we discuss what will become in the following three to four years and what areas they may have difficulty and we discuss how to support the student in different areas. The counsellor who does that meeting sticks with the student for the rest of the time. That counsellor is responsible for communicating with teaching department, hostel, library, and buildings department. That counsellor is the 'case manager'. We don't have the term 'disability advisor'. The case manager is responsible for taking care of all the needs of this student."

Inflexibility in selection criteria was repeatedly raised in discussions about curriculum

3.3.2 Curriculum

Discussion about university curriculum with both university staff and key informants almost always circled round to the inflexibility of the selection criteria. The conclusion was generally that until the selection criteria are made more flexible, there is no point making the curriculum more flexible because students with differing learning styles and needs will not make it into the universities. However, the growing number of such students shown in Section 2 is evidence that they are starting to make it into the universities, ranging from exchange students from overseas who are accustomed to learning under adaptive curricula, to local students who have managed to fulfil the rigid entry requirements after successfully completing mainstream

schooling under Hong Kong's integrated education policy. Whilst EDB has been promoting and guiding on flexible curricula at primary and secondary schools for over a decade (although this research does not delve into the effectiveness of such guidance), that has not yet filtered up to Hong Kong's universities.

A rigid curriculum is particularly problematic for students with SLDs. As a counsellor at University A said: "I think for dyslexia students it is very hard to enter the university. It is not a matter of intelligence it is just for the examinations we need the student to memorise so much. They get extra time for exams but even with that it is very difficult for them as in Hong Kong the examinations are mainly based on essay writing."

Discussion about flexibility in assessments and exams focused on extra time to complete exam papers

When asked questions about flexibility for assessments and exams, staff focused their responses on exams. As they were all administrative staff, not teaching staff, they may not be so familiar with individual alterations teaching staff make to their ongoing assessment procedures for individual students throughout the course. All students who were interviewed said that they were given extra time when they requested it to complete assignments. Student 9 said that he was only allowed extra time for his first semester, after that he found the course too busy and if he did not complete the assignments in the time allocated to all students he would fall behind. Also he said his teaching staff believed he could complete the assignments in the appropriate time. He said he was able to do this with some very hard work.

Generally, the standard procedure with regard to extra time or alternative arrangements, such as use of a laptop or an isolated room, for public examinations is requested through the Hong Kong Examination and Assessment Authority. As an administrative staff member at University B said: "The student can apply for special arrangements during examinations to his/her subject teacher and provide the necessary supporting documentation. The subject teacher/academic department/programme office concerned will then consider rendering him/her with special support during examinations."

But one staff member felt that the extra time did not provide much flexibility

An administrative staff at University C, having previously been a member of teaching staff who set exams, queried how much flexibility there really was in the examination system: "The students will be given an additional one hour. The guidelines tells us we cannot give any examination paper that will require more than four hours as it will be very unfair to the students even though they probably wouldn't mind. So then we cut down on the number of questions. But then the papers must be more or less the same so in this regard they aren't getting much advantage except for one or two questions shorter. I wouldn't say it is really flexible." Student 8 said: "...usually I write the [lecture] notes by hand but I am slow. In exams I have to write by hand and I get around 55% extra time. I have to apply to the disability co-ordinator for that and then she will help me to apply to the examination department."

Field work may also require flexibility

Fieldwork is an important part of the assessment process and in the case of students with disabilities may require some creative thinking and flexible procedures. Only University D reported a case where they had had to carefully think through how to ensure a physically handicapped student undertook appropriate work at an accessible venue. In this situation, the staff had thought ahead and had conducted a meeting soon after he had enrolled at the university. He was wheelchair-bound and during that first meeting they discussed the fact that he needed to go off for an internship/fieldwork in year 3 of his study. This gave them plenty of time to figure out

where he could do his fieldwork. He undertook his fieldwork in a location very close to the university campus that was highly accessible and carefully reviewed by counsellors and teaching staff.

3.4 Campus Life/Services

A lack of resources and expertise, which has been presented earlier in this section, has a significant impact on the quality of the student experience and the support services delivered.

Although attitudes seemed positive, only one university reported undertaking activities aimed at changing culture and mind-set

3.4.1 Culture and social integration

Although staff and student interviewees largely said they felt the attitudes towards students with disabilities was generally positive within the staff and student communities, and students said they had many friends and both teachers and students were kind to them, only University E seemed to undertake activities aimed at enabling the university to embrace that social shift and allow it to permeate the university culture and lead a change of mind-set. This is the university that has the largest number of students with declared disabilities, and that is able to say definitively it has staff with visible disabilities, and that holds teacher training seminars and special tutor programmes for SLD students.

Whilst several universities have dedicated individuals or groups working on meeting the needs of students with disabilities as explained earlier in this section, it is a question of mind-set, not just procedures. As student 9 said: "Physical facilities are important but students and teaching staff should have an open mind in recognising the different abilities of students – not only students with disabilities but all students in the university. We have to promote the awareness of recognised diversity."

Only two universities showed brochures about facilities and support for students with disabilities during the interviews

During the research interviews, only two universities showed brochures about facilities and support for students with disabilities published in hard copy and posted in soft copy on the web site. The other universities did not produce any brochures or examples of campaigns or events which aim at bringing the inclusion of people with disabilities into the heart of the university activities and culture. Generally policies and practices for students with disabilities are not prominently displayed on university web sites. Student 9 summarised clearly: "The situation is very different from HK to overseas, for example if some students want to find some information from the web site of a HK university they have to go through many pages to look for a word related to disability service. Even if we input disability in the search engine then not many relevant information will be given. You have to click through so many pages to get any information and it is not all together. It is no good."

Staff felt students with disabilities were largely well integrated socially, but it was character dependent

In terms of social integration, most staff interviewed said that they felt their university was a 'friendly' place. They generally said students with disabilities were well integrated into their student community. The counsellor at University A said when asked about the social integration of the students with disabilities: "It's OK. Maybe sometimes it depends if the disabled student is open and communicates with the other students. Sometimes they don't, they keep to themselves." The counsellor at University E put it succinctly: "I would say yes, but it depends on character."

Student interviewees were positive about their ability to integrate into the university community

All of the students interviewed were generally positive about their ability to make friends and integrate and almost seemed to consider questions on this unimportant, giving simple responses like 'very nice', 'no problem', 'very helpful', when asked about fellow students. However, by nature of them being willing to be interviewed, they can be assumed to be outgoing individuals. In addition, the interviews were arranged based on students volunteering by word of mouth so they can be deemed to be of a similar social network. Earlier this year *FACE* magazine ran the story of a third-year CUHK student with impaired vision finding it difficult to make friends.⁷⁶ Although the staff who were interviewed felt they were largely quite well integrated if their character allowed it, none of them were able to recall a student with a visible disability being a prominent figure in the university such as being on the Student Union or Student Council except for one university where the staff recalled a student who had lost a lower limb being the Chairman of the Student Union.

Accessibility differs widely depending on location and when the campus was built

3.4.2 Accessibility and facilities

Building accessibility is a particular issue in Hong Kong and has already been touched upon in this section under 'Funding' since the biggest obstacle to improving access is often the expense involved in altering university 'hardware'. Some of the university campuses are on steep hills, some are in places with poor public transport access and some of them have very old buildings, built long before the term 'barrier-free access' had entered our lives. But there are also some recently built campuses which adhere more closely to the barrier-free guidelines. In general, accessibility varies widely given that Hong Kong's universities were all built at different times ranging from 100 years ago to 20 or so years ago. A detailed survey of building accessibility was not undertaken as part of this research but in general, staff at the more recently built universities felt their campus was quite accessible and staff at the older campuses said that alterations were made as and when necessary under the concept of 'universal design', whereby the built environment is to be both aesthetic and usable to the greatest extent possible by all people. Almost all staff cited the fact that new buildings had to meet regulations published in the government's Design Manual since 1997 and that adaptations are made to older buildings on a 'needs' basis.

Most universities are reactive to individual needs with little time or resources to make changes, pulling bits of budget from wherever possible to meet immediate requirements. This reactive approach can mean students having to wait several months for changes to be made, and short-term solutions are often not the most efficient or effective ways of bringing about change. It also means that small jobs fall by the wayside. As student 9 said: "The fire exit door is difficult to open and the university said they would improve it by putting a button there but they didn't."⁷⁷

Student interviewees generally felt their campuses were accessible but then mentioned specific problems

Students were not interviewed from all universities but represented five out of the eight universities. Generally they felt their university was largely accessible, had disabled toilets they could use and a combination of lifts and ramps which they could navigate successfully. However, it is challenging at times. Student 8 said: "For getting around, personally I cannot press the buttons in the lift as my wheelchair cannot get close enough to the buttons. I can ask others to help me but if I have to wait for someone else to come along, it may take a long time."⁷⁸ All of the visually impaired students who were interviewed said that main thoroughfares have tactile flooring which is helpful but that the use of tailored signs for toilets and lecture theatres is limited. One had problems with needing to use a lift that had to be unlocked

every time she wanted to go in it. This required making a call to the estates office to request that they come and unlock it and although she emphasised that they always seem to try to come as quickly as possible, occasionally it took a while.

However, recent news articles reported a barrier-free campaign launched by a group of City University students who were requesting the university to improve its facilities. The students said there is not enough tactile guide paths, the lifts do not have audible signals to signify the closing of the doors and the Braille marking does not match with the control buttons (floors), and the slope is too steep at the main entrance. A social work student with visual impairment said she always gets knocked down by others on campus, especially when it is very crowded. She also finds the words on classroom signs too small, and the corridor lights too dim, but she feels lucky studying social work as the teachers are nice and willing to help.⁷⁹

Library facilities vary but largely accessible and functional

All of the university libraries tend to have some facilities tailored to users with disabilities although the facilities vary enormously. Generally they have a separate room, they have screen readers for the visually impaired, higher tables for the wheelchair-bound and listening devices for the hearing impaired for example. All universities publicise these facilities on their web sites although with widely varying degrees of detail; some simply mention that there is support for users with disabilities, while some give details on all of the facilities and technologies available. A review of library facilities was not undertaken as part of this research and it is difficult to tell how appropriate each university's library facilities are. It was a debatable topic amongst students. Most said they preferred to work in their rooms anyway, and given that it is now possible to access materials on-line, use of the library is not so frequent. But largely they said their libraries were accessible and functional and their family member who supports them was allowed to take out and return books for them. However, Student 1, who is visually impaired, did not have a dedicated disabled room to work in and had ongoing problems at his library. Having taken a long time to get the computer and software he needed, it was put in a room he had to share with some other people and he found that it was very inconvenient given that his software enables him to listen instead of read which naturally can disturb other people. He was continually being told to be quiet, especially when trying to clarify things with his classmates if he could not read instructions.

Universities all felt classrooms were accessible and hostel rooms appropriately adapted

All of the universities felt their classrooms were adequately accessible and enough of them had space for wheelchairs. Staff from the estates office at University A said: "We have renovated about 70% of the lecture theatres. The big classrooms and theatres that can sit 80 or more can fit a wheelchair and have access and space for them... In some of the lecture theatres and classrooms they have fixed chairs so we have to reserve the area for the wheelchair. But the other classrooms don't have fixed chairs or split levels so there is no problem."⁸⁰ However, one student said: "For my [subject] course I have to go somewhere where there is no lift. But as the course is not necessary I decided not to do the course. But if it was in a place I could have gone to, I would have taken it. But if it was compulsory I would have made sure the place was changed and I would have done it." This has significant implications for learning, as even though it was not critical, the lack of accessibility narrowed this student's learning choices.

Living at home vs. living in hostel

All universities said that they have adapted rooms in hostels and if they found they did not have enough rooms to meet demand they would

adapt more. All students interviewed for this research were living at home during their studies except for two students who lived in hostels. Student 2 explained, "I did manage to live in the hostel in the end but actually there is no support or special arrangements."⁸¹ Student 6, who was wheelchair-bound with an able upper body, was more positive, saying: "I have a big room, two people, I chose my friend to live with me. I can do most things myself. I don't need special equipment."

Those who live at home reported having significant help from their families because of the extra assistance and support they require to travel to and from university, to carry books around and to access the campuses successfully. One visually impaired student said his cousin helped him to orientate himself around his university. Two students in wheelchairs have their mothers take them to university every day and wait in a room watching TV or in the canteen having something to eat whilst they do their studies. Staff who were interviewed echoed this, repeatedly saying that families of students with disabilities were more involved than families of other students. For those who live at home, the principal accessibility issue with any university is getting to campus. Some campuses are certainly more accessible by public transport than others. This was a major consideration for some of the students. As explained in Section 2, when asked how they prioritised their decision making when making their university choice in terms of university reputation, course, tutors and campus accessibility, six out of nine said that location and/or accessibility was the most important thing or ranked first together with course choice.

Transport is an issue because of the time taken on public transport or inflexibility of Rehabus schedule

Students all seemed to travel to their university in different ways: either on the MTR, on a public bus with a ramp, on the Rehabus, or in one case, driven by a relative. Those who use the Rehabus, either to get to their campus or to travel around their campus, mentioned that the schedule is very rigid and has to be booked far in advance; student 8 even said it had to be booked four months in advance. However they recognised that they could not manage without the Rehabus so this was just something they had to factor into their daily life. They often have to take a Rehabus several hours before their lessons start or several hours after they end, using up valuable time and effort. However, these types of transport and mobility issues become a greater concern when transitioning into employment. Student 8 said: "I need to go to my job on the Rehabus every day but I have to book it many, many weeks in advance and I can never say, 'tomorrow I need to go to another place'.⁸²

Accessibility is a significant concern for people with physical disabilities when looking for employment

3.4.3 Transition to employment

Student 5, who is wheelchair-bound but with an able upper body, summed up the challenges of finding employment: "But finding a job is difficult... Because for what I am studying, business world, most of the companies are located in Hong Kong side and there is really a concern that most of the buildings on Hong Kong side are not wheelchair accessible...I went to [an HR company] in Wan Chai and there is a few steps in the entrance...so finally I have to get into the car park with the security man go with me into the park to get into the lift. And also there is no disabled toilet in that building. So I cannot work for that company...Government will be one of the best way to find a job, like the Inland Revenue Department because usually the government department will offer a lot of money to the department to change their facilities."

In the Chief Executive's 2011 Policy Address, it was confirmed that about 3,300 out of 3,700 premises and facilities that are part of the government's HK\$1.3 billion retrofitting programme will be complete by June 2012.⁸³ Whilst it may be true that government buildings and employers can offer better flexibility for employees with disabilities, this narrows their options considerably for future employment.

Interviewees still studying said they were "very worried" about getting a job and majority of those in employment said they experienced high anxiety when trying to secure a job

Of the nine students interviewed, five had graduated, three were conducting further studies and one was still an undergraduate. The five who had recently graduated all had jobs although four out of those five said they had been through a period of high anxiety about securing employment upon graduation and they had sent out many letters. Student 7, who did not express concern, had been employed by his university department. Student 1 had only been given a three-month contract at first and he felt this was so that his employer could determine whether they really wanted an employee with a disability. That contract was recently extended and he expressed deep relief at that. Most of the students also said that they had worked part-time and done summer holiday work to supplement their Student Financial Assistance and Disability Living Allowance which was not enough to support them through university. None of these internships or temporary posts had translated to full-time jobs.

There is a Selective Placement Division of the Labour Department which "provides free recruitment service to employers and free employment service to job seekers with disabilities, including the visually impaired, hearing impaired, physically handicapped, chronically ill, intellectual disability, emotionally ill as well as people with specific learning difficulties and attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder."⁸⁴ It provides counselling, matching, referring, and follow-up services. It also runs a scheme called the "Work Orientation and Placement Scheme" whereby an employer of a person with a disability receives a financial incentive as well as pre-employment training and on-the-job coaching by a mentor for the employee with a disability.⁸⁵ None of the five students who had recently graduated and were in employment had used the Selective Placement Division although Student 7 had considered it before he was employed by his department.

Of the four students still studying, two said they are "very worried" about getting a job and one said she is worried about how she will cope with the long hours and demands of working. University staff confirmed that students with disabilities do not receive any different careers support to students without disabilities. When discussing this topic they generally just explained the standard careers advice that all students are entitled to.

Students reported a lack of support from universities in seeking employment

Student 2 was generally positive about the support he received from the university to help him study, however he said this support seemed to evaporate when the time came to look for employment, saying: "But no support for finding the job. They didn't help me to fill the application forms and I have to find the opportunities myself. My friends help me fill in the forms actually." Student 5 said: "I went to the careers office to ask for help with looking for employment but they didn't help me." Student 4 also explained: "I didn't get help...I asked my teacher about this because nobody in the careers office gives me any advice."

These comments about lack of support in the careers office highlight again that without a dedicated resource centre for students with disabilities, expertise does not spread throughout the university faculties

and departments. Careers offices appear to be uninformed, yet finding employment is a critical component and outcome of university life.

Press reports on struggle to find regular, long-term employment

Recently there have been several reports in the press about graduates with disabilities struggling to find employment. The story mentioned earlier in *FACE* magazine in April 2011 about the CUHK student who said he struggled to make friends also said that he was worried about not being able to find a job after graduation although he hopes to get a job related to human resources so as to help other people with visual impairments.⁸⁶ In October 2011 the *South China Morning Post* reported that a 27-year-old who graduated from CUHK in social work two years ago and who 'suffers from spasms' has not yet found employment and a 31-year-old graduate from CUHK in business administration with visual impairments has only managed to stay in employment for a maximum of six months at a time and has done so three times since he graduated in 2002.⁸⁷ Earlier in the year, the *Hong Kong Daily News* ran a devastating story about a graduate with hearing impairments who sent over 200 job application letters but stayed at university doing part-time work after graduation. Finally she found a teaching job but three years ago, at the age of 26, she killed herself.⁸⁸

Lack of co-ordination between universities and companies

Universities and companies do not appear to be working together in a co-ordinated and targeted manner to provide students with disabilities the opportunities they deserve after university. These students who have successfully made it through university, often due to exceptional determination and unparalleled support from their families, transition out of university with little dedicated support from their institution and no direction to Hong Kong's best companies. The students with disabilities who make it through university are likely to be intelligent and determined and they could make excellent employees. A lack of co-ordination between companies and universities denies them the fruit of their determination and labour and denies Hong Kong's companies and economy the benefit of some exceptionally talented graduates.

Addressing the Challenges for Universities and Students

Suggestions for addressing challenges

Adaptations to policy, support services and facilities have so far been made on a reactive basis in Hong Kong's universities. Whilst this means some students get adequate help some of the time, it has not brought about the systematic development of an overarching policy, support infrastructure and high quality resources, both 'hardware' and 'software', to enable Hong Kong's universities to cater for their increasingly diversified student base today. This section makes suggestions for addressing some of the challenges raised in this research, as well as looking at best practice in other countries which are more progressive in this area. The aim of these suggestions is to help develop a long-term strategy and a flexible, adequately funded and resourced university community for students with disabilities in Hong Kong's universities.

4.1 Policy/Administration

Universities need overarching policy and government funding together with university-wide initiatives. At the moment, quick solutions are found as situations arise

Hong Kong's universities need overarching policy direction and funding from government together with university-wide initiatives to meet the needs of the growing number of students with disabilities and SEN. Whilst all universities have their EO statements in accordance with the DDO and in compliance with the Code, this has often been interpreted and implemented in a piecemeal fashion. What is generally happening at Hong Kong's universities is that, as a situation arises, a solution is found and this may be a quick fix or a longer-term initiative depending on the time and resources available at that moment.

There will be greater need for system-wide change rather than quick fixes that rely on staff goodwill

Most of the staff on the ground, without realising it or meaning to, give the impression of quite literally making it up for their university as they go along, in order to meet needs as they emerge. All staff interviewees came across as highly committed professionals who try to do their best for their students but they lack resources and experience and their infrastructure is weak. It is their actions that constitute the actual service delivered and they have had to develop their own techniques to salvage the service.⁸⁹ The result is that the services in most of the universities currently rely on the practitioners' goodwill which is not an appropriate strategy for ensuring long-lasting, consistent implementation of a service that meets the needs. Whilst this may have been adequate in the past, as numbers of students with a range of different needs increases, it is time to question whether it can meet the needs of the future. It would be unfair to say that none of the universities have adequate resources, experience and infrastructure. Most of them have some resources or infrastructure or some flexibility in their system, but it is inconsistent. Hong Kong's universities need a system-wide policy, guided by government and implemented by the institutions themselves, together with dedicated infrastructure and resources to cater for needs of the growing number of students with disabilities or SEN.

Universities would benefit from collaborating on a needs analysis, guiding principles and manifesto that form an overall Action Plan

4.1.1 Launching a university-wide action plan

Universities would benefit from working together, with government policy guidance, to develop an Action Plan that incorporates:

- (a) needs analysis
- (b) guiding principles
- (c) manifesto for how to meet the needs of an increasingly diversified group of students in higher education in Hong Kong.

Each of these steps should be clearly documented, circulated for stakeholder consultation and publicised on university, UGC and EDB web sites where it is currently difficult to find information on disability policy and resources.

The analysis would audit students' journey through university to determine how to remove obstacles and meet needs

The needs analysis is a critical stepping-stone to creating a coherent manifesto. It is clear from the analysis laid out in Section 2 of this report that the real numbers of students with disabilities is unknown. This means that little is known about the real needs of Hong Kong's student community. What is clear is that the community is increasingly diversified and as the integrated education system starts to push more Hong Kong children through mainstream schools and onto university, and as growing numbers of students come to Hong Kong from overseas, individual needs will grow and vary. A needs analysis would gather and analyse the current status at Hong Kong's universities in terms of student requirements, but also in terms of systems and staff expertise; it would identify the key individuals and positions that need to be engaged in the process to design principles and form policies going forward. One way of systematically conducting the needs analysis would be to audit the journeys students with disabilities typically take as they try to access universities and transition into employment and determine which obstacles at which stages of the journey can best be removed.

Involve students and experts from NGOs in the needs analysis

It should engage professionals inside and outside the universities. Inside the universities it should include staff and students. The counsellor at University A explained how they had tried to engage the community of students with disabilities previously: "From a few years ago we try to arrange some meetings with the students with disabilities each year and try to reflect their needs to various officers." University D has a student on its internal working group. The staff interviewed said it was hard to find one as they were all so busy keeping up with their studies, but that they felt it was important. University E's working group has two students on it, one with a disability, by charter. Inclusive policy making in which affected students have a voice will result in policies most suited to both the student community and the staff.

Outside the universities, the needs analysis should include NGOs and specialist community organisations that meet the needs of people with disabilities more widely in Hong Kong. The 2008 White Paper on SEN also called for the inclusion of NGOs in the development of support services.⁹⁰ Estates office staff at University A said: "Last year someone from Society for the Blind paid us a visit to our university and gave us some recommendations for those tactile things." If universities engage with those who have technical expertise in specific areas they will form a better understanding of the needs and be able to plan for the longer term with the latest equipment. This is particularly the case with regard to computer experts who are aware of the latest software solutions for leaning needs as well as other augmentative communication devices. Networks of experts like the Joint Council for People with Disabilities have a host of expertise and access to many different organisations. These types of expert organisations should be tapped into for assessing needs on a more strategic basis and for establishing long-term strategy and policy change.

Some universities are already conducting their own individual needs analysis and responding to the findings

This type of needs analysis is already being conducted in different ways by some universities with a view to improving their services and their campus facilities. University G already has a working group but recognised that its scope and services could be stronger and is therefore conducting a needs analysis and review of services to inform the group's remit and university policy with regard to students with disabilities going forward. University D conducted a needs analysis of its own two years ago before recently establishing a formal working group. It now has detailed flow charts of responsibilities and actions required for supporting students with SEN during admission, interview, registration and during the course of study. Roles and responsibilities are articulated for the SAO, faculty offices, registry and counsellors, and there are specific details about what to do if a special need is identified after the student has commenced study.

Guiding principles to establish Action Plan and practical policies

Guiding principles for Hong Kong's universities regarding how they address the needs of students are important for developing an overarching policy. These are critical steps before establishing the framework and practical policies that will enhance the university experience for students with disabilities and SEN. In Australia, the Vice-Chancellor's Committee established 'General Principles' for their 'Guidelines Relating to Students with a Disability' which were established in 2006 (see Box 2 for the general principles as they appear in a more extensive publication on the guidelines). These help to put all universities on the same page when forming their own practices and policies. They help to generate system-wide change and they should be developed alongside the needs analysis so that both the need is identified and the guidelines are established before drilling into the details of a practical manifesto.

Box 2: General principles for Australian vice-chancellor's committee (AVCC) guidelines relating to students with a disability⁹¹

Underpinning the 2006 AVCC Disability Guidelines are two key principles that:

- Universities will uphold academic standards such that students graduate with the requisite skills and knowledge associated with the degree conferred.
- Universities provide students with a disability with the opportunity to realise their academic and social potential and to participate fully in university life.

In the following guidelines, it is assumed that approaches to the development, delivery and evaluation of teaching and services for students with a disability should be:

- **Inclusive** – Core activities of the University are designed and implemented in order to accommodate the needs of all students including those with a disability.
- **Comprehensive** – Provision for students with a disability should cover all core university activities in recognition of the right to participate fully in the academic and social life of the University.

- **Equitable** – University responses to the needs of students with a disability should recognise the rights and responsibilities of all parties and ensure that solutions are equitable for all concerned.
- **Explicit** – Policies should clearly identify student and staff responsibilities in relation to provision of services and adjustments, the procedures whereby these will be implemented and the mechanisms for resolving disagreements.
- **Systemic** – Consideration of the needs of the diverse student population should be embedded within University-wide planning, administrative support and quality assurance processes.
- **Respectful** – Universities should ensure that all their interactions with students with a disability are characterised by respect for their rights to dignity, privacy, confidentiality and equity.
- **Consultative** – Students and staff should be engaged in planning and evaluation of teaching and support strategies.
- **Resourced** – Universities should provide adequate resources to enable the provision of learning environments and services that address the needs of students with a disability.

Take joined-up approach with strategic thinking and long-term objectives; develop manifesto to unite efforts of all universities

The needs analysis would determine these guiding principles and the ensuing manifesto since it would determine which obstacles can best be removed at policy level by the universities and which obstacles need the government or other bodies to address them. The manifesto would form the basis of a united effort by Hong Kong's universities to work together to improve the overall experience for students with disabilities in Hong Kong's higher education system and would involve the government and other organisations where necessary. Other higher education institutions such as the Open University could join. This would be a way of bringing Hong Kong's higher education system up to a standard closer to other developed countries. By working together and with other experts and relevant bodies, the universities would learn from each other's experience and would also send out a positive message with regard to Hong Kong's higher education opportunities for students with individual needs. This is important at home and overseas.

It is not that universities are not doing anything; most have started new initiatives or tried to make improvements to services over recent years. For example, the counsellor at University A said of one of their recent initiatives: "We try to establish the formal procedure. The questionnaire is newly revised this year for example." This is a positive initiative and those working on the ground are trying to improve their understanding of student's needs and their service. But an individual change like this is not enough to bring sweeping change across the system. A joined-up approach with some strategic thinking and long-term objectives behind it would vastly improve the situation across Hong Kong. This ethos would form the essence of the practical manifesto. Piecemeal initiatives may make some specific improvements, but a bigger, further-reaching approach is necessary for the scale of change that is required to make Hong Kong's universities competitive on this front.

Articulate necessary changes, describe the reform process and create accountable system with indicators for success

The manifesto should clearly lay out a reform process that will focus on integrating the needs of students with disabilities or SEN into universities, thereby increasing access, enhancing the experience and enabling a successful transition to employment. The changes should be clearly articulated and they should determine how changes in the universities can link to broader disability reform in Hong Kong and how this will be communicated across universities and more broadly. The manifesto needs to tackle all stages of the university journey from opening the door, improving the learning experience and achieving employment. It should help to create an accountable system in all areas, every step of the way and should have indicators or measurements of success.

As an example, the EDB published 'indicators for inclusion' for schools in 2003, 2004 and again in 2008⁹², which can be summarised as follows:

- A self-evaluative tool for critical analysis and reflection in all areas of school life.
- A highly interactive tool to facilitate a collaborative team approach in the school.
- An agent of change in educational culture, policy and practice.
- A set of support materials designed to assist schools to set targets and success criteria in the self-evaluation and school-development processes.⁹³

Ultimately, this type of University-wide Action Plan should help individual institutions to develop their own programme for students with disabilities and SEN. The University of Bradford in the UK has a detailed 'Disability Equality Scheme' which is carefully documented in a report starting with an opening statement by the Vice Chancellor and ending with an appendix articulating a step-by-step Action Plan commencing from 2008. The report outlines the University of Bradford's principles and policies with regard to equality and diversity, the number and status of staff and students with disabilities, the support services that exist and the awareness raising, training and education that has been conducted as well as the monitoring of processes that is in place.⁹⁴

An example is the Disabled Student's Programme at UC Berkeley

The University of California (UC) at Berkeley, in the US, is an example of a university that has a dedicated Disabled Student's Programme (DSP) which ensures all students with disabilities have equal access to educational opportunities at the university.⁹⁵ It offers a wide range of individually designed services based on the specific needs of each student as identified by the university's own Disability Specialists. It has guidelines for defining and documenting all types of disability; it publishes a handbook for students explaining what the programme is and how to make the most of what is available (see Box 3); it also publishes detailed communication and teaching tips for students with all types of disability and offers an advisory service to teaching departments. Under the overall programme umbrella, there are other sub-programmes such as the TRIO/Student Support Services Project which is designed to support new students who are at academic risk or whose disabilities are particularly challenging, with a focus on providing support at the point of transition to employment (see Box 4), and the Disabled Student's Residence Programme which provides independent living skills training for those with severe physical disabilities.

Box 3: UC Berkeley's 'Handbook for new students with disabilities'⁹⁶

The handbook, published by the Disabled Students' Programme, includes the following content:

- What the Disabled Student's Programme is
- The student's, the faculty's and the DSP's responsibilities
- Confidentiality and freedom of information
- Qualifying for and accessing the services
- The services and how they work including
 - Academic accommodations and auxiliary services
 - TRIO/Student support services project – funded by the US Department of Education to provide services to ensure retention and graduation of students with disabilities
 - Co-curricular, extra curricular, and non-academic accommodations
- How to get permission to take a reduced course load
- How to facilitate priority enrolment so as to predict course schedule and make arrangements in advance
- Assistive technology available
- Financial assistance
- Other support and independent living services including personal attendant service
- Library and careers services
- Getting around the campus
- Making appointments and handling emergencies
- Academic reminders regarding expectations of UC Berkeley with regard to its students
- Complaints procedures
- Useful resources
- Staff directory

Box 4: A summary of UC Berkeley's TRIO/Student support services project⁹⁷

The UC Berkeley TRIO/Student support services project is funded by the US Department of Education to provide services to ensure retention and graduation of students with disabilities. It is designed as a critical component of UC Berkeley's Disability Support Programme's services to provide supplemental support services to students who are new to UC Berkeley, students who are at academic risk, students whose disabilities are particularly challenging, and students who are preparing to make the transition to graduate school or careers.

Support Services that TRIO Provides to undergraduates include:

- Assistance making the transition from high school or community college to university.
- Disability-management counselling.
- Academic advising and individual consultations on reading efficiency, study skills, test anxiety, and initial academic planning.
- Tutoring for some courses through a cooperative programme with the Student Learning Centre.
- Disability-specific problem-solving groups in which students support one another as they share strategies for success.
- For students with learning disorders, a two-unit class that increases understanding of disability and promotes academic success.
- Assessment and instruction in assistive technology.
- Financial aid counselling for all TRIO students and student grant-in-aid awards for eligible Pell Grant recipients in their first two years of college.
- Peer mentors and alumni mentors who can serve as role models and provide useful information.
- Newsletter and e-mail announcements of TRIO/campus events and opportunities.
- Post-graduation planning including workshops, group for students planning on attending graduate school, and an interactive alumni web site.

Intertwine resources at the strategic level and on-the-ground at the operational level

4.1.2 Restructuring and improving resources

There are two types of resources that need developing, although their work should be intertwined. There are the resources at the strategic or policy level and there are the resources at the on-the-ground, daily support level. Those operating at the pragmatic level must be involved in forming policy and advising on the strategic direction of the university with regard to disability policy. Those forming policy must understand the needs of the disabled community and challenges for staff in providing the service.

University G has understood the importance of these two different types of resource and how they need to work together to review and improve services. Administrative staff at University G said: "Even though we have this [working group], we don't have a piece of co-ordinated policy about our services for students with disabilities so an objective of this [new group established to review the current procedures] is to draw up central university policy." University G has recognised that it has some resources, but not enough, and in the process of allocating new funding and resources to services for students with disabilities or SEN, they have established a group whose remit is to develop a co-ordinated university policy for tackling the needs of such students.

Students suggest centralised support on all aspects of campus life. The team

At the on-the-ground support level, some sort of centralised, co-ordinating body is advisable. All of the students said that some sort of centralised team who could support them in all aspects of campus life would be a critical facility for improving their university experience. Most of them volunteered this as a suggestion before they were asked. The aim of such a team, who would develop their own expertise in the area of disability and SEN, would

would develop expertise, mobilise resources, raise awareness and provided education/training

be to mobilise resources for the disabled community in an organised and supportive manner. Such a team would also be able to raise awareness, provide education and training for staff and other students. There is one university that has developed this role so far. The individual's daily job function is to co-ordinate all the different departments and facets of the life of a student with a disability or SEN, as well as raising awareness and educating the university community on the issues as she develops her own expertise.

As an administrative staff member at University C summarised: "Support requires the co-ordination of different offices, hence the [working group]." Student 2 explained how his support at university worked well because he had a dedicated resource to co-ordinate all his needs: "I had a student advisor from the student office who managed and monitored the arrangements for me. I didn't need to contact the exam unit, but instead the exam unit will call me before the exam to ask me what extra time and equipment I need." The administrator at University E explained how it offers a one-stop service whereby students can request a 'Letter of Introduction' from the disability co-ordinator which states the recommendations of 'reasonable adjustment' for them with regard to their assessments and exams. On this basis, the student does not need to go and talk to individual professors or departments to explain their unique situation and negotiate arrangements. The administrator summarised: "By doing this, we are more likely to be fair and equitable for all students."

Student 1 said directly: "Centralised support service needs to be built." While there are issues with regard to protection of rights to privacy of students with a disability which must be carefully managed, this type of centralised support service should facilitate confidential disclosure of disability-related information to staff as required to ensure the provision of services and accommodations. This would address the issue of students feeling they have to constantly repeat their needs to every teacher and for every test or exam.

Specific offices and programmes: Cambridge University's Disability Resource Centre and London School of Economics' Disability and Well-being Office

Whilst several of Hong Kong's universities have groups or committees of some sort, some overseas universities have specific offices and programmes for students with disabilities or SEN. UC Berkeley was one example shown earlier. In the UK, the University of Cambridge has a Disability Resource Centre (see Box 5) and the London School of Economics (LSE) has a 'Disability and Well-being Office' with seven staff members which regularly publishes progress reports. It conducts support for students, training for teachers, awareness raising and strategic advice in the university. Over 400 students per year are supported by Individual Support Agreements (ISA) co-ordinated by this office. These agreements detail the nature of the student's disability, backed up by appropriate documentation, and reasonable adjustments to be undertaken by various departments including the teaching department, the disability office, the accommodation office, the library and the special exam panel. It is circulated to the relevant departments as agreed by the student for reasons of confidentiality and it is signed by the student so as to give their consent. Even the smaller universities like the Institute of Education in the UK has a dedicated Disabilities Support unit with two staff members.

Box 5: Disability Resource Centre, University of Cambridge, UK⁹⁸

The University of Cambridge in the UK has a Disability Resource Centre (DRC), which exists to provide a confidential, professional, and accessible service to support the needs of students and College staff with disabilities. The Service supports the mission and core values of the University and Colleges by:

- Providing advice and guidance for prospective and existing students with disabilities to enable them to access a wide range of services
- Developing and implementing support programmes and strategies for students with disabilities to enable equal opportunity, access and attainment
- Providing advice, guidance and training for University and College staff in meeting the institutions' duties to students with disabilities within the context of disability equality legislation
- Developing University disability policy and practice
- Promoting disability awareness – The DRC is an accountable body with more than 10 members of staff and which publishes service reports and annual reports

Creating a centralised system can happen relatively quickly in Hong Kong

Whilst the numbers of students with disabilities or SEN in Hong Kong are obviously much lower than at US and UK universities, the difference in organisation and co-ordination of services is stark. A jump to these types of resource centres may seem like a big leap, but baby steps can get an institution there quite quickly. Of the eight universities, four already have some sort of working group on which they can build a more practical and co-ordinated service. And out of the remaining four universities, one has, for example, a counsellor who deals with all students with disabilities or SEN and a member of staff who specifically handles the applications that come through the JUPAS Sub-system for Applicants with a Disability. She handles other applications as well, but the point is that she is developing an expertise which could be harnessed if there was a centralised service to support these students. These strengths can be leveraged rather than starting from scratch to develop a service. Similarly, universities have other strengths they can leverage to provide support to students with disabilities or SEN. Administrative staff at University C said: "We have in-house expertise in the field of rehabilitation; we would like to take a leading role to providing special support and special assistance to this group of students."

Universities can benefit from the specialised expertise available at Hong Kong's special schools

In Hong Kong's various special schools, provision is available in the form of varied support teams comprising a range of paramedical staff including nurses, speech therapists, occupational therapists and physiotherapists who are meant to work collaboratively together. The schools also seek help from psychologists, psychiatric doctors and the community more broadly. However, mainstream schools tend to lack such expertise and resources even for students who are at what the EDB would classify as the Tier 3 end of the spectrum – meaning that they require specialist support for severe learning difficulties.⁹⁹ This is certainly mirrored in universities. Although there are counsellors generally available, not all universities have a clinical psychologist available, and there is currently a lack of educational psychologists. Just as at secondary schools, either these resources should be made more available in universities or there should be adequate relevant resources, in the form of experienced social workers and counsellors, who are able to initiate practical solutions in these specialised areas.

Hong Kong can benefit from developing network of

Beyond individual universities, just as with the proposed University-wide Action Plan, there is a wider resource gap that needs filling and a more systemic change that needs to take place. Hong Kong could benefit from a broader network of experts who can advise individuals with disabilities

experts to advise on the school-job transition, like Australia's National Disability Co-ordination Officer Programme

on the two key transition points of their life, from school to university and from university to employment. This type of network would be specifically designed to promote inclusive practices for people with a disability. In Australia, the National Disability Co-ordination Officer (NDCO) Programme was established in 2007. This was designed to improve support services for people with disabilities when transitioning from school to higher education and from higher education to employment (see Box 6). Such a network across 31 regions in Australia is a vast organisational undertaking. In much smaller Hong Kong, it could be more contained and smaller to manage, but the impact could be far-reaching for the disabled community.

Box 6: A summary of Australia's National Disability Co-ordination Officer Programme¹⁰⁰

The Australian Government's NDCO Programme targets the barriers that people with disability face in successfully accessing and completing post-school education and training and subsequent employment. A national network of NDCOs works within 31 specific regions across Australia to improve the coordination and delivery of support services to help make it easier to enrol or participate in post-school education or training and then subsequent employment. It has evolved from the Regional Disability Liaison Officer Programme and the Disability Coordination Officer Programme and was announced in the 2007-2008 Budget.

The goals of the NDCO programme are to:

- Improve transitions to help people with disability move from school or the community into post-school education and training and subsequent employment.
- Increase participation by people with disability in higher education, vocational education and training and employment.
- Establish better links between schools, universities, TAFEs (Training and Further Education Systems), training providers and disability service providers so that they can work together to provide the best possible assistance for people with disability.

In terms of practicalities, this national network of officers offers information, co-ordination and referral services for people with a disability who are interested in, or enrolled in, post-school education and training. Individuals with disabilities, educational institutions and employers are all target groups for the programme.

NDCOs perform a range of functions to help people with disability gain access to and

successfully complete post-school education and training, and employment. NDCOs can provide practical assistance and advice to individuals with disability and their families, education and training providers, as well as employment and community support agencies. They also:

- Arrange forums, activities and training related to the transition of people with a disability into further training, education or employment
- Produce information and resources where gaps on transition issues are identified
- Organise professional training, advice and assistance
- Establish local networks and links with appropriate people in the region
- Conduct advocacy to improve a region's services
- Distribute newsletters
- Establish and maintain cross-sector mailing lists
- Maintain a regional NDCO web site for professionals, parents and the community
- Attend career expos
- Conduct presentations at schools, conferences and forums
- Develop activities that promote employment for people with disabilities

The guidelines state that KPIs have been designed to measure the success of the programme with regard to participation of people with disabilities in post-secondary education, attainment of such people with regard to academic achievement and gainful employment, quality of services to support transition.¹⁰¹

As numbers of students with disabilities increases, more funding is required for 'hardware' and 'software'

4.1.3 Diversifying and increasing funding

Hong Kong's universities need a funding plan to deliver reform under government policy guidance and to implement the University-wide Action Plan. Funding is required to provide appropriate 'hardware', adequate 'software' and support individual students, as described in Section 3. To date universities have drawn funds on request from general UGC funds or from charitable foundations. In some cases, funding is squeezed from the estates office, in others from the SAOs and at times from 'higher level' university budgets. This may have worked so far, but as numbers of students with varying needs increases, the cracks in this methodology may start to show.

Whilst funding can be squeezed from existing budget lines, this does not provide long-term solutions

Administrative staff at University C said: "So whenever there is a qualified student they will never be turned away because of facilities or because we don't want to be helpful." But the same staff member said that if ten students in wheelchairs suddenly enrolled for, say, Year One in the computing department it would struggle to cater for them all. Whilst this rate of increase is unlikely, the exaggeration makes a point. Quick fixes may not be the most effective and cost-efficient strategy in the long term. Staff in the estates office at University A specifically said regarding their numbers of students with physical disabilities: "It is a small number but it is increasing – especially those students who didn't have the ability to move the wheelchair. Now they can move around so that kind of student is increasing. For that kind of student ten years ago they did not have that kind of opportunity."

Capital injection catering for long-term accessibility may be more cost effective in the longer term and address specific needs on campuses

Changes to 'hardware' to increase accessibility can be expensive. A capital injection for older campuses to implement broad infrastructure changes catering for long-term campus-wide accessibility, rather than reactive fixes, may be more cost effective in the longer term. Some quick fixes will still need to be made to meet immediate needs, but longer-term planning and implementation will likely result in better facilities. It will also address the current 'waiting' issue that arises from universities not knowing how many students with disabilities they have until after reporting day under the JUPAS entry system discussed above. This results in some students waiting a long time for their necessary facilities. Longer-term planning and provision of facilities would mean that universities were ready to address individual student needs on their arrival.

Administrative staff at University G, when asked how it prioritises and implements changes to buildings and physical infrastructure, explained their plan: "Our [campus/building/estates office] looks after all the building projects at the university, so in fact they do have a plan in trying to make adjustments to all of our buildings and trying to do that before a certain time. But of course such kind of renovation work is very expensive, so they do it by stages. If a certain disabled student comes and he or she needs special help then of course they do that first, especially for that student." This type of approach is both practical for dealing with immediate needs and long-term in its strategy. But of course it requires significant funding and it is the level of funding that is prioritised for these needs that drives the timetable.

Fully funded programme addressing hardware and software issues need government

To bring about university-wide change in this area as well as cultural and attitudinal change, tinkering around the edges with fragmented policies funded by pockets of money is inadequate. There was concern voiced about the level of funding, HK\$115 million, earmarked to support the operation of Applied Learning programmes and senior secondary classes in special schools during the transition period leading up to the introduction of the new 3+3+4

support, such as the Higher Education Disability Support Programme in Australia

curriculum in 2009 by the Subcommittee to Study Issues Relating to the Provision of Boarding Places, Senior Secondary Education and Employment Opportunities for Children with Special Educational Needs. It was intended to encourage the growth of diversity of curriculum, assessment and pathways in senior secondary schools, but it was deemed to be inadequately funded.¹⁰² To truly design a flexible curriculum, to train teachers and ensure adequate 'software' is in place as well as appropriate 'hardware', a fully funded programme needs to be developed for universities with government support. The Higher Education Disability Support Program in Australia is an example of a pragmatic, funded, implementation plan for improving access to higher education and employment for people with disabilities across the country. This was put together by the Higher Education Department of the Australian Government's Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. It has three core components:

- Additional Support for Students with Disabilities (ASSD) to provide funding to eligible higher education providers to assist with the high costs incurred in providing educational support and/or equipment to students with disabilities to enable them to participate in higher education; and to encourage efficient and effective use of equipment and education resources to support students with disability.
- Performance-based Disability Support Funding to encourage higher education providers to implement strategies to attract and support students with disabilities.
- Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education & Training (ADCET) to provide information.

This Australian funding and support programme notably covers both 'hardware' and 'software'. Infrastructure changes can be expensive and are 'visible'. Teacher training and support may not be so expensive and are not so 'visible' but are also crucial components of any disability support programme that requires dedicated resources and funding. In Australia, a specific Clearinghouse for education and training and information has been established. Teacher training is covered in more detail later in this section under 'Teaching and Learning' but in this section on funding, the role of the UGC in financing and supporting future teacher training at the tertiary education level should be pointed out. Schools with children identified as having a disability or SEN on the register receive additional funding support from the the EDB so as to provide learning support for them. Why not provide such funds and support from the UGC to universities? If the integrated education model and the special education services being provided at school level are working, more and more of those children with SEN will make it into university where they may still need some support.

Philanthropists have a large role to play; government can match funds; HKU's Henry Chan Inclusive Education Fund and HKU 81 Inclusion Fund are important

A further component of funding is that for students themselves and their study aids or learning equipment. For students at HKU, the 'Henry Chan Inclusive Education Fund' and the 'HKU 81 Inclusion Fund' are invaluable resources for students with a disability, providing them with a dedicated pool of funds to tap for their individual learning needs, as explained in Section 3. Student 8 mentioned that she had received some financial support from a charity which is a group of women who club their money together to support disadvantaged young people through their education. It was the social worker at home who introduced her to this opportunity, not her school or university which has no centralised support for students with a disability. There is certainly the potential for individual philanthropists to step in and support disadvantaged young people through university today. There is also

a role for government in supporting individuals as well as programmes and institutions, perhaps through matching schemes similar to the Matching Grant Schemes (MGs) that were first launched in 2003 on a wide scale in the post-secondary sector to help institutions tap funds, improve education and foster a philanthropic culture.¹⁰³

The UK's Disability Students Allowance (DSA) recognises extra living expenses incurred by students with disabilities

In the UK, students benefit from the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) to support them through university in recognition of the extra expenses their lives incur. Directgov, which delivers practical information about public services, explains: "DSAs are grants to help meet the extra course costs students face because of a disability. For example, DSAs can help pay for:

- specialist equipment you need for studying like computer software
- non-medical helpers, such as a notetaker or reader
- extra travel costs you have to pay because of your disability
- other costs such as photocopying or printer cartridges"¹⁰⁴

A mandatory reporting system, like UK's Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), would develop knowledge and increase understanding

4.1.4 Data gathering

A mandatory reporting system on numbers of students with disabilities and SEN, broken down by categories across all universities, would develop knowledge and understanding in this area. This would have the double effect of better informing policy going forward and increasing awareness about the issues involved. The EDB publishes data on the number of students with special educational needs each year in primary and secondary mainstream and special schools. This could be continued through university and tertiary education. Countries such as Australia and the UK established agencies dedicated to providing and analysing data on students. The UK has the Higher Education Statistics Agency (see Box 7) and Australia has the University and Statistics Unit of the Policy and Analysis Branch which is a government initiative responsible for the collection and dissemination of statistics relating to the provision of higher education in all Australian universities.¹⁰⁵

A mandatory reporting system that includes data on disabilities would not mean that all students with disabilities or SEN are captured since some would not declare. But as increased knowledge and better informed policy making brings the topic into more open discussion, the social stigma may in turn be lifted and more students may be willing to be more open about their needs. The UGC currently publicises data by institution on level of study, academic category, gender, place of birth, religion, travel time between home and campus and distribution of financial support.¹⁰⁶ Information on registrations and outcomes of students with disabilities could be added to such data and analysis.

Flexible selection criteria and examination requirements would open up opportunities for a more diverse group of students while maintaining standards

4.1.5 Introducing flexible selection criteria

Introducing flexibility into the selection criteria, whilst maintaining academic standards, would open up more university opportunities for students with individual needs. Does a brilliant mathematician need to be proficient in two languages? Whilst it is important to retain academic excellence if Hong Kong's universities are to retain their worldwide reputation, if the entry requirements are more flexible, it may allow those who are especially talented in one area to gain entry. This could significantly enhance the opportunities for those with SLDs or those with an autism spectrum disorder who may be strong learners in one part of the curriculum, but not in all. A

Box 7: The Higher Education Statistics Agency, UK

The UK's Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) is the central source for the collection and dissemination of statistics about publicly funded UK higher education. It was set up by agreement between the relevant government departments, the higher education funding councils and the universities and colleges in 1993, to support the advancement of UK higher education by collecting, analysing and disseminating accurate and comprehensive statistical information in response to the needs of all those with an interest in its characteristics and a stake in its future.¹⁰⁷

Some of the official free statistics currently produced by HESA are:

- Performance indicators
- Destinations of leavers
- Student enrolments, including by institution, subject, gender, ethnicity and *disability*

- Student qualifications, including by subject
- Non-continuation rates
- Accommodation type

Furthermore, the UK's University and College Admissions Service (UCAS) analyses and publicises significant amounts of data on applications and accepted applicants by degree course, by country and by tertiary education institution over the last fifteen years.¹⁰⁸ The data is presented on the web site in a way that allows a user to customise it for their own requirements or in a range of user-friendly statistical tables for the previous six years. It includes, for applicants and accepted applicants, age, gender, ethnicity, *disability*, socio-economic status, tariffs, time taken between application and decision, regional analysis, school or college type and deferrals. It also breaks down such data by institution and region.

counsellor at University B said: "We use very different eyes to look at each student. We want to make sure they have equal access to every opportunity in the university and that they can do everything. We need a selection system to support that thinking."

The JUPAS Sub-system, described in Section 2, aims to provide students with disabilities an advantage in terms of the application and selection process. As admissions staff at University A said: "Actually it is a special consideration whether they give the student an offer before the main round offer is announced. It is a way to help so I encourage the students to apply through the JUPAS Sub-system." But this type of system on its own is not enough; flexibility needs to be built into the selection criteria, not just the admissions process. The Legislative Council (LegCo) paper on children with SEN submitted in 2008 recommended that: "To enhance the opportunities for students with SEN for pursuing post-secondary education, members are of the view that the Administration should formulate policies and devise special measures to encourage the Hong Kong Institute of Vocational Education (IVE) and the UGC-funded institutions to admit students with SEN. IVE and the UGC-funded institutions should set aside certain places for students with SEN. Given that students with SEN are weak in certain aspects, members have suggested exempting them from fulfilling certain entry requirements, taking into account their specific disabilities."¹⁰⁹

So far, no changes appear to have been made. However, there is a view that the Hong Kong Test of SLD in Reading and Writing which was jointly developed by CUHK, HKU and EDB for primary school pupils could be used as a basis for developing appropriate assessment criteria for adults with SLDs at university. This type of initiative needs profile and it needs support, from EDB, UGC and universities themselves.

Creative initiatives, such as one university's web-based tool for students to assess themselves in private, are required to break down barriers to self-declaration

4.1.6 Breaking down barriers to self-declaration

Declaration of disability is a key part of the admissions process that needs to be addressed. As discussed in Section 3, students with significant physical disabilities cannot avoid disclosing them if they require support to get through university or if their disability is very evident. It is the mental illnesses, those with SLDs and those with an autistic spectrum disorder who may try successfully to go under the radar. One university is developing a web-based tool that will allow students to assess for themselves, in private, whether they have SEN or not. This is a vast step forward which may give students the confidence to feel they can take the next step to disclose their needs more publicly.

But a cultural shift so that society has a more positive message on disability is also needed

However, for self-declaration to change markedly, there needs to be a cultural shift in acceptance of individual needs. If society had a more positive message on disability, students might be more willing to declare. This requires changes at all levels: wider acceptance of individual needs throughout school, public statements on recruitment by the universities and visible messages on employment by Hong Kong's companies. Hong Kong's universities could group together to sign a recruitment protocol on their desire to cater openly and warmly to students with diverse needs. But breaking down these sorts of barriers requires broader cultural change.

4.2 Attitudes

Attitudinal and cultural change must come from the top down

A change of attitude requires a change of culture, with influence from the top down. Culture change is covered later in this section under Campus Life/ Services, but should also be considered alongside the suggestions here for changing attitudes campus-wide. Teacher training is a critical component for influencing attitude change and is covered below under Teaching and Learning.

Staff with disabilities on campus act as role models

4.2.1 Boosting the profile of role models

Whilst all staff interviewed as part of the research displayed positive attitudes towards students with disabilities and all students said they had mostly been supported as well as the staff could manage, role models were definitely notable by their absence. Staff with disabilities working in the university community send a message that the university is open to and catering to different needs. It is unlikely to be a coincidence that the only university that could recall having staff with disabilities was the one that has the most developed support infrastructure for students with disabilities and the highest number of such students.

Publicising success of existing students with disabilities also sends positive messages

Universities can also harness the success of existing students with disabilities or SEN to send positive messages to the university community and more broadly. Students with disabilities notice other students with disabilities. Admissions staff at University B said: "There has been evidence that another student from the same school entered on another consecutive year." And at University C there is evidence of students with disabilities from the same school attending the university for several years in a row. Activity that raises the profile of role models would add to the growing sentiment that change in society is emerging with regard to acceptance of individual needs and what people with disabilities can achieve.

Box 8: HKU's educational and awareness raising leaflets¹¹⁰

"Disability Discrimination Ordinance, Code of Practice on Education" which explains the DDO and the Code, what it means for students and where they should direct their enquiries.

"Accessibility Support" which explains how the university can help support students with disabilities, the funds available and where students should direct their enquiries.

"Website Accessibility" which includes tips on how to make web sites more accessible, where and how to test a web site's accessibility and a point of contact for advice.

"The Equal Opportunity Unit, the Equal Opportunity Committee and the Disability Action Committee" which explains what each committee does and what it has achieved to date.

HKU also publishes a quiz to test disability awareness similar to the LSE, which publishes an 'Accessible Education Matters' resource to raise awareness about disability across the university, including key learning areas and quizzes.

Positive marketing and information leaflets raise profile and understanding across university community

4.2.2 Raising awareness

Universities should take responsibility for raising the profile and understanding of disability in their institutions. Only two universities produced positive marketing and information leaflets on the topic of disability. HKU has produced some that explain EO, building accessibility and web site accessibility. These are publicly distributed leaflets and are therefore listed in Box 8. HK IEd has published one entitled: "Support Services to Students with special needs" that details what constitutes a special need, the process to go through to get support and who to contact, in both English and Chinese.

HKU holds events like the Equal Opportunities Festival, wheelchair challenge and Stigma Free Campaign

HKU's Equal Opportunity Unit and Counselling and Person Enrichment (CoPE) Section in Centre of Development and Resources for Students (CEDARS) are active in addressing social change and hold annual awareness raising events to try to bring disability into the mainstream thinking and culture of the university. Each year the HKU Equal Opportunity Unit organises an Equal Opportunities Festival. The HKU Equal Opportunity Unit and CEDARS jointly hold an annual wheelchair challenge which makes people aware of the accessibility of the campus, traditionally considered inaccessible because of its mountainside location and poor public transport infrastructure. CEDARS has a 'theme' each year and in 2011-2012 it is a 'Stigma Free Campaign'. A 'Wish Wall' was introduced which enabled students to put a post-it note with a wish on it up on the wall. The aim was to help those with mental illness understand that there are others out there in the same position, as well as to educate the wider university community that there are people who live with mental illness. At a pragmatic level, CEDARS has also implemented a small shop called the 'HEA Kiosk' where mental illness patients in recovery work alongside students to sell fair-trade and other products to the university community. This is a valuable life experience for the student and provides an opportunity for those in recovery.

HKU also publishes tips on how to communicate with people with disabilities

Awareness raising is as important among the staff community as the student community. Staff need to be aware of services and university expectations with regard to inclusion. Staff must be able to provide consistent, accurate and useful information to students. HKU publishes tips on how to communicate with people with disabilities.

Box 9: HKU Tips on how to communicate with persons with a disability (as published on the HKU web site)¹¹¹

GOLDEN RULES

Generally, when meeting people with a disability:

- Treat a person with a disability just like any other person.
- Do not stigmatize them for their disabilities.
- Treat them and those accompanying them with courtesy and respect.
- Ask before helping them.
- Do not focus on personal or medical issues.
- Respect their choice and do not be offended by a refusal.

When meeting people with visual impairment:

- Take the initiative to introduce yourself and other people.
- Describe what you are doing and avoid relying on eye contacts and body gestures etc. Remember to tell the when you wish to leave.
- Use “left” or “right” or clock directions to describe positions. E.g. The chair is at one’s right. When the object is not exactly at one’s right or left, you may wish to describe its position by using clock directions. E.g. Eggs are at the two o’clock position and a toast at the five o’clock position on one’s plate. Avoid using words like “here” or “there” etc.
- When leading them to walk, let them hold your upper arm from behind. By doing so, they can sense your body movements and follow you when going up or down or turn round. Please do not grab them when leading them.
- Terms/phrases such as “look” or “see you later” are acceptable. They are not taboos for people with visual impairment.
- When furniture has been moved to a familiar place, describe the changes and walk with people with visual impairment around that place once.

When meeting people with hearing impairment:

- Attract their attention by waving your hand. Do not shout at them.
- When you speak to someone who knows lip-reading, please speak clearly and naturally. It is not necessary to exaggerate your mouth movements. Do not speak too fast, cover your mouth or chew gum. Please slow down when asked.
- Facial expressions and gestures may help to convey your message.
- Talk to them directly even though there is a sign language interpreter.
- Listen attentively to what they say. Some of them may not be able to speak clearly.
- When you do not understand what they say or their sign language,
 - ask them politely to repeat, or
 - try to work out alternatives such as using a pen and paper.

When meeting people with a physical disability:

- Talk to wheelchair users at their eye level. Please sit down if possible but please do not lean on their wheelchairs as wheelchairs are parts of their personal space.
- Ask before you wish to push their wheelchairs.
- People with limited hand movements or artificial limbs can usually shake hands with others.
- Offer help if they have difficulties in opening a door.

When meeting people with a mental disability:

- Do not presume that they are more prone to violence than other people.

4.3 Teaching/Learning

Flexibility is key in the teaching and learning experience so students’ needs can be accommodated

Students with physical or mental disabilities or SLDs all require flexibility in the teaching and learning experience in order to have a successful university experience. The challenges for each category of student are different, hence a flexible system is required that can accommodate all students. For students with physical disabilities it tends to be the more practical side of teaching and learning such as needing extra time to complete assignments and do exams, or needing to sit in a special place in the classroom. For students

with mental difficulties, it may be that significant counselling is required and some flexibility in learning styles. For students with SLDs, organisation and presentation of work can be challenging in different ways, and exam technique can often be a struggle.

Staff at University E mentioned that they are seeing a growing number of students with disabilities and SEN, particularly SLDs, coming from overseas on exchange programmes. Those students come to Hong Kong with the expectation of its universities providing similar support and flexibility to that which they receive from their home university. This is a challenge that requires a huge effort by the universities and significant input from teaching staff. As the counsellor at University E said: "...from overseas, they are more used to a stronger and full range of support and they might be expecting us to provide exactly the same thing."

Adaptable curricula should be inclusive and student-centered, meet individual needs and have requirements, assessment and learning outcomes explicitly stated so goals are clear to all

4.3.1 Designing a flexible curriculum

Earlier in this section, flexibility in selection criteria was discussed. Flexibility in curricula is just as important and needs to be developed alongside adaptable selection criteria to take into account the diversity of student needs. Curricula should be inclusive and student-centred, able to adapt to students' individual needs, strengths, weaknesses and learning styles, without compromising academic standards. This means that essential course requirements, assessment criteria and learning outcomes must be explicitly stated so that the goals are clear to all parties. But course reviews and evaluations must enable equal access and course materials must be made available in accessible formats with enough time to allow equitable participation by students with a disability.

For example, administrative staff at University H said: "We will suggest to students not to take a high load at first, just take three courses for example, take an easier way to start at the beginning and try to gradually break in." Such advice requires flexibility in the curriculum and can greatly enhance a students' university experience. Whilst it is true that the completion rates of Hong Kong's university students with disabilities are high, as explained in Section 2, as more students with differing needs enter the system, retaining them through to completion may be more difficult if the curriculum is not made more flexible.

Flexibility also needs to be built into examination and assessment processes

Examinations and assessments are a core component of any university course and they were frequently mentioned in interviews with staff and students as being problematic. At University C, administrative staff mentioned that cutting a couple of questions was not flexible enough as discussed in Section 3. However, the member of staff dedicated to support for students with disabilities or SEN at University C added that there had been some flexible procedures allowed for exams in the past: "We had students with hearing impairment who are not suitable for listening tests so for those students it has been the case that they do not need to sit for the oral test. That is determined by the academic department." The staff member did not elaborate as to how such procedures were determined or implemented.

Most universities offer extra time, laptop use and a separate room for students with disabilities to take their exams. However, the administrator at University E explained that they offer additional alternative arrangements. In response to the question about what sort of flexible examination arrangements they have made in the past, she said: "...extra time, isolated exam room, not count spelling and grammatical errors, alternative

assessment..." She also mentioned their one-stop service 'Letter of Introduction', mentioned earlier in this section, which means the student does not need to negotiate their arrangements every time for each exam.

This type of approach to examinations and evaluations in Hong Kong needs to become standard practice. For example, if hearing impaired students were able to conduct less group work and more e-learning, or students with dyslexia less written work and more oral work, the university experience would be more equitable for them. Likewise, fieldwork and practical placements must be carefully planned so as to provide equal access without restricting the learning opportunities for a student with a disability. Students working in laboratories or research posts should be allowed to negotiate alternative research methods if required.

Universities should produce materials to assist academic staff in designing more flexible curricula

Hong Kong's universities, as part of their manifesto and using existing EDB materials as a guide, should produce materials to assist academic staff to consider curriculum design that meets the learning needs of students with a range of impairments more effectively. And it is not just students with impairments. As Student 9 said: "...students and teaching staff should have an open mind in recognising the different abilities of the student, not only students with disabilities but all students in the university." These new materials should inform the development of departmental action plans for meeting more effectively the teaching and learning needs of students with various impairments. The EDB has long been publishing booklets on developing a flexible framework for the curriculum in kindergarten, primary and secondary schools, why not continue such efforts through tertiary education? In a booklet published by the EDB in 1999 on the Hong Kong school curriculum, in a section entitled "Open and flexible framework for different curriculum organisations/courses rather than 'teaching syllabus'", the EDB announced that: "To meet the changing needs of society, the curriculum has to be renewed flexibly at appropriate intervals to improve the quality of teaching and learning."¹¹² This research has focused on universities, not schools, and is therefore not going to engage in the debate on the effectiveness of such initiatives in the school system, but the ethos of designing flexible curricula in schools has been around for a long time and it needs transferring up to the tertiary education system as well.

There are groups and individuals working on developing more flexible curricula, similar to the more flexible assessment criteria mentioned earlier, but they need support. The UGC and individual universities need to come out and openly support these initiatives to give them traction and get them off the ground. Maria Wong said: "We need a change of mind-set and some creative imagination. We need a vision that the less able youngsters should have opportunities to gain benefit from tertiary education and thus become a real integral part of the community". She added, "We need to have an open, participatory discussion to do it. The composition of the tertiary curriculum for these youngsters may even adopt the new curriculum framework intended in universities nowadays." She also mentioned a territory-wide survey on the views of parents and youngsters graduating from special schools being in process. It is hoped that the findings of this survey may help to shed light on what the core and elective components of the curriculum should be.

'Reasonable adjustments' must be made to teaching delivery and assessment to accommodate individual needs without compromising standards or essential components of programmes

4.3.2 Delivering teacher training

Competence in catering for diversity should be an essential component of teacher education at all levels.¹¹³ Course delivery and assessment should be inclusive and enable students with disabilities to demonstrate equitably their academic achievements. This means teaching must be inclusive and flexible with 'reasonable adjustments' made to delivery and assessment methods to accommodate the needs of individual students without compromising the standards or essential components of programmes. 'Reasonable adjustments' is a technical term used in many countries. The UK Government's digital service, Directgov, which delivers practical information about public services, explains 'reasonable adjustments' as follows:

"Education providers must also make 'reasonable adjustments' to ensure that students with disabilities aren't discriminated against. Making reasonable adjustments could include:

- changes to practices or procedures
- changes to physical features
- changes to how learners are assessed
- providing extra support and aids (such as specialist teachers or equipment)"¹¹⁴

Students with a disability must be actively encouraged to discuss their learning and support needs directly with teaching staff but in a co-ordinated manner so that they do not have to repeat themselves every step of the way.

Some teacher training is currently being conducted in some universities but in a sporadic manner

There are different ways to go about training administrative and teaching staff in how to apply 'reasonable adjustments' to handle the varying needs of students with disabilities and SEN. Currently, some training is being conducted in some Hong Kong universities in a sporadic manner. University C has some general 'top tips' for teachers on how to support students with disabilities and some specialist tips for those with hearing impairments, visual impairments and physical impairments in particular. In very special cases, University C assembles a group of people consisting of those with relevant expertise and those who will be providing key services to the student to determine how to support that student. As the administrative member of staff said: "We don't have any specific training for teachers but in our web site, although it is password-protected, we have some general tips for teachers. For complicated cases we have set up a task force involving colleagues from different departments to discuss what kind of support we can provide."

University E conducts seminars and workshops on disability topics and advises teaching staff when they request it. The counsellor said: "Some teachers come and ask how do I help the student this year? We think that is a much better way than saying 'Do this, do that'. It is not such a good way as their way is: 'It is none of my business, I don't have a student like that'. Then they are too busy and not interested." She went on to describe the way their training works specifically with regard to support for teachers who may have SLD students in their class: "So our educational programme is focused on: 'OK, there is something called SLD in this world, university students have SLDs, they can have that problem and if they do, you can come to us for advice and these are some of the supports you can have'. So they just have a rough idea and then when they have a student that needs help they can come for advice."

This is something of a chicken-and-egg situation. Whilst University E is more proactive than any other Hong Kong university in the way it has embraced disability and SEN, and it has the highest number of students, it still does not see enough demand and therefore interest from teaching staff to warrant broad-based, even compulsory, training. However, the administrator at University E argued that perhaps it has been more inclusive by having built strategies such as placing powerpoint teaching slides on the web in advance of lectures, allowing students to audiotape lectures, providing comments and feedback on draft assignments, allowing extensions of assignment deadlines, using continuous and multimodal assessments (including essays, presentations, tutorial performance, group projects for example) into its universal teaching practices. She emphasised that these procedures are applicable to all students, and not only to the students with disabilities. She also said: "Our students with disabilities have repeatedly told us that they prefer to be treated as everyone else than to be constantly receiving special

Box 10: HKU Guidelines on preparing teaching materials for persons with visual impairment (as published on the HKU web site) ¹¹⁵

Reading using the PC

- For persons with visual impairment (PWVI) using a PC, a software known as a "screen reader" is used. The output is in the form of synthesised speech and/or Braille through a refreshable Braille device. The most common screen reading software is "JAWS" which is available in many languages including English and Chinese.

Readable Format

- Essentially, JAWS will read anything on the screen that has a text base. It will not read images-based material, e.g. graphics and photos. File formats containing text components (hence readable by PWVI) include, MS Word (doc), simple text (txt), email (eml), Excel (xls), Power Point (ppt), webpages (htm/html) and text-based (called searchable) PDF (PDF). Of these, the most readable ones are the doc and txt, the doc being preferred for its ease of navigation with the cursor keys.
- If there is a choice, it is infinitely preferable to provide the doc format to students with visual impairment.

Figure caption (or ALT Tags)

- A brief text descriptive caption by an image or figure would be immensely helpful to readers with visual impairment. This would inform them of the existence of an unreadable image.

PDF format

- Files in such formats as Microsoft Office, plain text and searchable PDF are readable by the Braille devices used by people with visual impairment. PDF files produced by most scanners are not readable by Braille scanners.

We can produce a searchable PDF file simply by clicking "save as" in Microsoft Office.

- Any PDF file containing a pure image has no text base and hence unreadable by PWVI. This is said to be unsearchable. A sighted person just looking at the screen cannot tell the difference as an unsearchable PDF image may appear to contain text although, in actual fact, the apparent text is part of an image. The screen reader JAWS would say "empty document" as it sees no embedded readable text base.

Documents from Scanning

- Most older scanners will scan a document and generate an image (unsearchable) PDF file. This is definitely useless to students with visual impairment. In fact, this is the major source of undesirable (unsearchable/unreadable) PDF files.

attention". On top of this University E still ensures that it advocates necessary special arrangements, such as seating arrangements and larger font size for instance, for the students with disabilities.

HKU publishes tips on its web sites for how to prepare teaching materials for students with disabilities and Cambridge University provides extensive guidelines for teachers

HKU is the only university in Hong Kong which publishes tips for how to prepare teaching materials with students with disabilities on its web site (see Box 10 for guidelines on preparing materials for students with visual impairments). One other Hong Kong university publishes tips internally for teachers on the university intranet regarding how to support students with disabilities in their classes. As an example of more extensive guidelines for teachers, Box 11 summarises the UK's Cambridge University Disability Resource Centre guidelines on teaching practices in the classroom that cater to individuals with all types of needs.

Searchable PDF from Scanning

- With newer models of scanners, the user has a choice of either an ordinary (unsearchable) or a good searchable output. The latter is normally obtained under the option called "scan document" rather than "scan picture". Basically the latter (searchable option) has built in an additional text-recognition procedure known as optical character recognition (OCR) which embeds the text base in the PDF file making the latter searchable for PWVI.

Converting from Bad to Good PDF

- For the technically minded, it is possible to convert an image (bad) PDF into searchable (good) PDF format using an OCR software. The software called Omnipage or Omnipage professional would perform this task. This procedure is only used as last resort (e.g. if the original doc file has been lost) as, apart from being time consuming, the accuracy of (OCR) is always limited.

Good Practice Re PDF

- To avoid the trouble mentioned in 6 and 9 above, it is infinitely preferable and more efficient to have a good PDF (searchable) file generated using the direct technique mentioned in 5. This would do away with the extra procedures of printing, scanning and OCR with an inferior output.

Online Electronic Materials

- Most online electronic materials, e.g. electronic journals, online newspapers and library resources are text-based, hence readable for PWVI.

Non ASCII (non-text) Characters

- In MS Word, apart from standard ASCII text characters, most of the symbols entered under the "insert/symbol" menu are readable with a special keystroke.

Accessibility Requirements

- It will be absolutely vital that e-mails and websites consistently implement and comply with accessibility requirements not least those for the visually impaired. This normally means screen reader readability (non-image) for all web elements (e.g. properly labelled links, graphical links and buttons) and also all downloadable documents (e.g. searchable/readable PDF files and doc/docx/txt/xls/xlsx text based files).

Box 11: Teaching students with disabilities: enabling them to participate in lectures, seminars and supervisions

Summarised from the University of Cambridge Disability Resource Centre web site¹⁶

- Ground rules: establish communication ground rules to make group sessions accessible to students with disabilities
- Consistency of times for teaching sessions: those with support workers or personal assistance or transport schedules may struggle with changes of schedule
- Hand-outs: distribute in advance in formats that work for all students
- Taking notes and recording lectures: be willing to allow lectures to be recorded as notetaking is often problematic
- Seating: consistency of seating can be important
- Seminars and presentations: consider excusing some students from making presentations
- Study skills: consider providing these from teaching department or disability unit
- Practicals: can be problematic and may require a support worker
- Examinations: consider alternative methods of assessment or special arrangements
- Teaching people with hearing impairment, SLDs, visual impairment or physical disability: all require special consideration and adaptation which is explained in detail on the web site

UK's Teachability Project helps academic staff evaluate their course provision and how to improve it

One way of addressing the growing need for teaching practices to be more flexible without imposing compulsory training on teachers who may not yet feel that the demand warrants it, is to follow the UK's Teachability model (see Box 12). Although only just over ten years old, many of the initiatives proposed in this project have become standard practice in the UK, such as providing lecture notes in advance via the web. It was launched in the late 1990s and was the first comprehensive set of advice provided to higher education teaching staff in the UK regarding how to make their courses more accessible. The Scottish Higher Education Funding Council funded it and the University of Strathclyde produced its educational materials. Such a structure could be replicated in Hong Kong between the UGC and/or one of Hong Kong's universities, or a working group across several universities, to deliver a set of materials to guide teachers on how to ensure that their teaching styles and their courses anticipate diverse needs of students rather than reacting to needs as they arise on an ad hoc basis. This requires dedicated resources and that means funding that is spent on developing expertise and designing training materials. Such a project would be the tangible output of an explicit policy on teaching that caters to students as individuals.

Training courses should include objectives for developing positive attitudes

However, none of this needs analysis, training or curriculum change will alter the university experience and subsequent life chances of students with disabilities or SEN unless there is a change of attitude amongst teachers. That said, all of these initiatives help to change attitudes. Research published in 2003 found that teachers in mainstream schools with extra funding for SEN provision, teachers trained to teach SEN children and counselling resources and support dedicated to SEN children expressed more accepting attitudes towards children with SEN and their admission into the mainstream school system.¹⁷ Nonetheless, attitude change has been identified as the most challenging task of the current Basic Course on Catering for Diverse Learning Needs and Advanced Course and Thematic Courses being implemented by HK IEd and the EDB in primary and senior schools. Whilst teachers recognise the value in addressing individual needs, they have resistance to curriculum change or instructional differentiation in view of the time and effort sometimes required. However, when pre- and post-course evaluations

Box 12: The Teachability Project in the UK¹¹⁸

Teachability assessed curriculum provision for students with disabilities in Scotland and designed a set of workshops and publications to enable staff in Scottish higher education institutions to improve access to the curriculum. It was initiated in 1999 in direct recognition of the challenges for teaching staff in higher education in meeting the requirements of accessible teaching at a time when institutions were considering the implications of the recently issued Quality Assurance Agency Code of Practice: Students with Disabilities, and the anticipated legislation. This Code extended to students with disabilities in higher education similar rights to those enshrined in the Disability Discrimination Act. Teachability was a response to the need for ensuring that every curriculum had anticipated reasonable rather than ad hoc, reactive provision, in the interests of meeting appropriate levels of accessibility.

Phase 1: Disability Needs Analysis

An audit to obtain information for institutions and the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council on the existing provision for students with disabilities.

Phase 2: Help staff create and deliver an accessible curriculum

This involved the publication of Teachability: Creating an Accessible Curriculum for Students with Disabilities (2000), a booklet which helps academic staff to evaluate the accessibility of their course provision for students with disabilities.

<http://www.teachability.strath.ac.uk/original/downloads/teachability.doc>

The framework of questions published in this booklet enabled teaching staff to consider accessibility in all aspects of their course:

- Information about the programme
- Features and design of the whole programme
- Induction of students to the programme
- Lectures
- Seminars/tutorials
- Practical classes including those in laboratories or studios
- Placements/field trips/study overseas
- Information and communication including e-learning
- Assessments

Subsequently a series of more detailed booklets have been published providing advice to teachers on how to improve accessibility on each of the above topics individually.

Research in 2005 showed that Scottish higher education institutions demonstrate widespread use of Teachability as an audit tool and it had established itself as a way to demonstrate compliance with current disability legislation.¹¹⁹

Teachability was established so as to:

- be informative, grounded in real experiences of students with disabilities
- be persuasive and not prescriptive
- recognise that different subjects and disciplines may require different teaching techniques; just as different impairments require different techniques
- promote awareness of what curriculum accessibility for students with disabilities means for course design and delivery¹²⁰

are assessed, the majority of participants have demonstrated positive thinking after the course. So for any training courses, the inclusion of objectives for developing positive attitudes and change is important.¹²¹

Section 3 explained that most students have experienced positive attitudes from teachers at both school and university. In particular, those in social work departments felt that their teachers were especially kind and accommodating of them because of the department they are in. This sort of positive and more informed attitude can be leveraged university-wide across other departments by using these teachers as role models and having them participate in training to set an example. This will help to change attitudes faster and to enhance any training that is conducted.

Whilst Hong Kong embarks on journey to achieving flexible teaching, adequate learning support should be provided at universities as at schools

4.3.3 Offering student learning support

Adequate learning support is a further important component of providing a more enabling university experience for students with disabilities, on top of curriculum and teaching. There is an argument that as curricula become more flexible and teaching methods adapt to make 'reasonable adjustments', so the demand for learning support should diminish. Whether this is so or not, such a situation is a long way off in Hong Kong and in the meantime, there will be students who would benefit from learning support in university, just as in primary and secondary school.

University E has in academic year 2011-2012 launched an SLD tutoring service which the counsellor described as follows: "I have come up with an idea of how to start a support service for students with SLDs...We look for [existing] staff or postgrads who are interested in giving tutorials to students with SLDs. We screen [them], give them some training and supervision monitoring. So we started that in 2009. Take-up is a very small number...partly due to a change of personnel..." The disability-dedicated member of staff continued: "But whenever I introduce the service to students they are very excited. Especially those from overseas who are used to have this kind of service."

One university set up a well-received SLD tutoring service, and academic advising system whereby all first-year students have a teacher acting as advisor to uncover problems

This same university has recently launched an 'academic advising system' whereby each faculty has some teachers assigned to do the work of the faculty advisor. All first-year students, not just those with a disability, will meet with this faculty advisor twice in the first year and the advisor will determine what the students are interested in, their choice of major and course selection. If they envisage some difficulties they can work them out with the student early on. This type of one-to-one and continuous advisory system is an excellent way of uncovering difficulties that might otherwise go undetected and offers solid ongoing support to students.

4.4 Campus Life/Services

Earlier in this section, under Policy and Administration, suggestions for improving manpower and resources to support students with disabilities were suggested. They form an integral part of the suggestions for improving campus life since the quality of student experience hinges significantly on the nature and level of support services delivered.

Postive messages on university web sites and offer of tours to determine campus accessibility send welcoming messages to would-be students

4.4.1 Developing an inclusive and supportive culture

The first impression a student gets of a university is often a look at its web site followed by an open day. None of Hong Kong's university web sites give prominence to accessibility and to disability issues. Section 2 touched on the low visibility disability issues are given on the university web sites in Hong Kong. Only one student said that one university offered him a tour before he applied. Student 1 explained how much positive sentiment this generated in him: "[University B] was the only university that invite me to have a school tour to look at their facilities and I think that is good practice because if I notice they have good facilities I can choose their university." This sort of tour sends a progressive message about the university's attitude to students with disabilities. Again, there are lessons to be learned from other universities overseas.

Some overseas university web sites expressly state visits are a good idea for students with disabilities

On the Cambridge Disability Resource Centre web site there is a section on 'Before Applying' which encourages students to attend an open day, or arrange a college visit: "For applicants with significant physical difficulties we can arrange personal visits to a range of colleges and academic sites so that you can see for yourself whether Cambridge would suit you. If you would like to do so, please contact the DRC as early as possible in the application process to arrange some College visits".¹²² The site also includes an access guide to every college. For potential applicants browsing university sites prior to selecting universities to apply to, this is welcoming, accessible and practical. On the LSE web site on the Disabled Students page it says: "If you are thinking of applying to LSE, you should be aware that the School's campus is made up of a mixture of old and new buildings with a variety of access solutions. If you feel that physical access may be an issue, it is a good idea to arrange a visit to us. This can be arranged at any point, before or during the application process, by emailing the Disability and Well-being Office..."¹²³

Universities could send aspirational messages by marketing more effectively to children with disabilities in schools

When asked if they had ever been to a special school to recruit, all universities said they had not or could not recall going. Administrative staff at University D said: "I am not sure if we have ever been asked to go to a special school but we treat them equally and if they ask us we will go." Given that few special schools provide education up to the level required to enter Hong Kong's universities, it is not surprising that staff either have not or cannot recall a dedicated outreach effort to such schools. However, if universities did engage in this type of outreach to special schools, it may have the effect of raising the aspirations of children with disabilities and mobilising them to try to reach university. At the moment, many such children probably think that university simply is not an option. If universities could engage in a bit of 'pull' instead of waiting for the 'push' implied by the statement 'if they ask us we will go', then such a proactive approach would give strong messages about equality and opportunity for students with disabilities.

Raising awareness across all administrative and teaching staff and all students is important for changing culture of a university

Teacher training has been discussed earlier in this section, but there is also a need to raise awareness generally across all staff and teachers. Not all teachers will have a student with a disability in their class and not all administrative staff will have a student with a disability in their department, but all teachers and staff should be aware of university policies and of expectations regarding their behaviour. They all need to understand the issues and how to communicate with students with disabilities. Student 1 would not have struck the university off his list where he met the professor at an open day who made him feel discriminated against, as told in Section 3, if that professor understood how to communicate with a visually impaired student and understood his university's EO policy and the opportunities his university provides for students with disabilities. A small amount of awareness and training on how to respond about disability matters would have prevented this student from applying elsewhere.

Living independently is a big step for students with disabilities; UC Berkeley has a dedicated Disabled Student's

University is a life experience as well as an academic experience. It is about morphing from a school age adult to an independent member of the working population. It should provide that experience for all students, whatever their individual situation. However, such a rich life experience also brings with it strains and stresses. Living independently and reaching the stage of supporting oneself is a big life step and even more so for students with disabilities and SEN than others. As mentioned earlier in this Section, UC Berkeley in the US has a special Disabled Student's Residence Programme which provides independent living skills training for those with

Residence Programme

severe physical disabilities. This is something which the UGC should consider establishing for Hong Kong students.

Student volunteer programmes in some of the universities have high take-up; peer-to-peer mentoring schemes are important

Universities should take note that that peer mentoring or counselling has proved to be successful in all the cases mentioned during the research interviews. The three out of eight universities that run student volunteer programmes to provide support services to students with disabilities or SEN all reported high take-up and positive attitudes by all students involved. The dedicated disability member of staff at University E said: "We do have a mentor system, a buddy system, and our students are very good. Actually we have that system pilot this summer and...even during summer break I think about 30 students come back to the training session. They are really eager to learn about the needs of students with disabilities." This is something that all universities could consider. Programmes should not be made mandatory. First, based on the response universities that have existing programmes have experienced, it is not necessary to make them mandatory. Second, that would take away from the positive and social message that such a programme aims to generate.

Such volunteer support and buddy systems can serve to be simple but highly effective tools for making students with different needs feel supported and integrated at their university. It is also a pragmatic way of teaching the volunteer students valuable life skills. The student-to-student relationship is important in many ways. Student 1 said: "And I would like [my university] to have a more concrete student peer mentor network. In my first year I was very lucky because one of the leaders in the orientation camp walked me around the whole [campus] once in order to let me know the environment. This was not a programme from the university but it was very valuable. Student-to-student is most important, more than teacher-to-student." Building networks of friends is also a way of helping integration and a freshman one-to-one orientation is a good way of establishing a first friendship. Administrative staff at University C said: "We have arranged some peer support groups for students with certain disability type so some have their own network."

Student 9 commented on how students of some subjects need more help than others, saying: "I think a student helper programme is especially important for programmes like science and engineering. For psychology we mainly attend the lecture. But for sciences there is a lot of practical work. At the moment it is difficult for a disabled person to have a science career. If they have a student helper or designated researcher, that would give them the flexibility and support they need to have that career."

All students reported having good friends and a positive experience with the student community, so there appears to be a platform of positive sentiment that could be leveraged for further volunteer support. Student 8 explained what her classmates do for her: "They all help me, the students and professors. Sometimes the classmate always come to the school early to accompany me because they worry if I am the only one in the school if there is any accident what can I do. My classmates are so supportive of me."

Ultimately a culture will not change unless there is senior management

Discussing how to change culture is a difficult topic. It encompasses everything in this report and it is somewhat intangible. A university can seem as if it is doing everything right, improving facilities, setting up working groups and so on. But that does not mean that it has a welcoming culture for students with disabilities. As student 9 said: "Physical facilities

support at Council level and appropriate messages which pervade a university

are important but student and teaching staff should have an open mind in accepting different abilities of all students. They should be better at recognising diversity." This type of cultural change takes a long time and has to come from the top down. Senior management support is critical, as is broader community support. Administrative staff at University C, which has made many changes in the last two to three years, said: "I think there is senior management support. Obviously this is very important. It has to be top-down." This is also an area where companies can make a significant impact from the top down. If companies are visibly seen to be offering equal opportunities to students with disabilities, it will raise their profile and status in the universities, which will in turn feel pressure to meet their needs. This is another form of top-down support.

A centralised co-ordinated body and UGC capital investment is required to raise standards in campus accessibility and transportation into campuses across all universities

4.4.2 Improving accessibility

Transport and access to buildings and facilities are repeatedly cited as the major obstacles for students in wheelchairs and with other physical disabilities. In Section 2, the discussion about how students prioritise their decisions showed just how important location, transport and accessibility are, with some students ranking it the number one priority in their decision making regarding which university to select. Hong Kong's university campuses differ markedly depending on when they were built, but the government should consider developing an overarching policy on the renovation of university campuses to improve accessibility and inclusiveness by adopting the principles of universal design whereby the built environment is to be both aesthetic and usable to the greatest extent possible by all people.¹²⁴ This will require a centralised, co-ordinating body, a one-off capital investment from UGC and a detailed refitting plan which raises standards in terms of campus accessibility and transportation into the campuses. Student 8 felt strongly about this saying: "The government should give more money to support the disability. More money for me to get around. The disabled person is a disadvantaged group and the government always advocates how to support the disadvantaged group and integrate them into society but they don't do any actions on it. Or they do a limited policy."

This research is not a detailed analysis of the accessibility of Hong Kong's campuses so cannot propose specific building amendments and plans, but this refitting should avoid the quick fixes and reactive changes which can be expensive and wasteful in the long term and should raise the standards of Hong Kong's campuses to a more appropriate level. Whilst University G's approach, explained in Section 3, of having a long-term plan that is interrupted by quick fixes when necessary, is laudable, it is not the most efficient. And the long-term plan requires significant planning and funding. Estates office staff at University A said regarding their last-minute requests to provide access for wheelchair-bound students: "We need more notice and we need to try to talk about these things earlier." The refitting plan proposed above would require a rolling action plan with time-lines linked to the release of capital for the improvement works and managed by the proposed centralised body.

Administrative staff at University E said: "We have started a consultation programme by stages on campus by seeking departments and offices to nominate a disability access co-ordinator to provide a feedback for needs to improve a barrier-free campus." The university is conducting its own needs analysis of the campus accessibility to determine how to improve it. This should be the starting point across all universities as a way of conducting a

university-wide approach to improving access for people with disabilities, meaning staff, teachers and stakeholders. In terms of transport to university, in his 2011 Policy Address, the Chief Executive committed to “continue to enhance the Rehabus Fleet by adding new vehicles and replacing old ones”.¹²⁵ This is critically important to the physically disabled community given the repeat comments from student interviewees about how restricted they are by the Rehabus timetable. However, a further solution is to increase low-platform buses in number and in capacity. The current policy of only allowing one wheelchair per low-platform vehicle restricts wheelchair users’ movements all over Hong Kong rather than providing a reliable means of public transport for them.

Improvements should facilitate access by all people with disabilities, and include signage and information, such as large print and Braille notices, tactile maps and maps showing wheelchair accessible routes. In addition, on an ongoing basis, any new building work, refurbishment of existing buildings, landscaping, car parking or transport arrangements should pay explicit attention to legislative requirements for physical access.

Not just physical accessibility, but information access is also critical to learning. UK’s Open University is an example of a forward-thinking web-based higher education institution

But it is not just accessibility to buildings and improved physical infrastructure that is required. Access to information is a critical component of the learning experience. Library resources, learning management systems and on-line learning resources should also be fully accessible to students with a disability. Staff responsible for training and supporting students with a disability in IT literacy should have appropriate expertise. Hong Kong’s universities have inclusive library policies on the whole and only one of the students interviewed mentioned that using the library or learning resources was problematic for them. However, there were comments about the difficulty of finding relevant information on the university web sites. As an example of a forward-thinking web-based higher education institution, Open University is included as a case study here (see Box 13).

The Employer’s Forum on Disability in the UK is soon to launch a self-assessment tool for recruitment agencies which allows the company to determine whether it is barrier-free in terms of its property, communications and human resources.¹²⁶ Universities could also have such a tool. Given that every year they undergo an enormous recruitment exercise greater than any company, this would be a significant step towards changing the culture of Hong Kong’s universities to one that is inclusive and adaptable to students’ widely differing needs.

Hong Kong’s companies must work with the universities to send inclusive messages and actively recruit this group of students

4.4.3 Easing the transition to employment

All students mentioned that this was their biggest fear, except for one who was employed by his university upon graduation. Hong Kong companies must send a positive, inclusive message to students with disabilities and to the disabled community and the broader community at large that equal opportunities exist for such students. Moreover, that they are open and willing to employ graduates with disabilities and to be flexible with their working procedures. This type of top-down message is important for raising aspirations and encouraging children with disabilities from their earliest school days to work towards entering university and going on to a good job.

Box 13: The UK's Open University (OU)¹²⁷

OU is a leader in flexible, distance learning. It uses teaching and learning methods which enable people to achieve their career and life goals studying at times and in places that suit them. Nearly all of the undergraduate courses have no formal entry requirements, allowing people from under-represented groups, such as those with disabilities, to experience higher education. The UK's OU has more students with disabilities than any other UK or European university: the flexible nature of OU study and the way it harnesses technology enables almost 12,500 people with a wide range of disabilities – including mental health issues – to study with them each year. OU has an Access Centre dedicated to ensuring its students with disabilities are provided

with whatever technical and practical support they need to study successfully which can mean anything from special computer software to sitting exams in their own home, having a personal assistant at day or residential school, and advice on available funding support.

Recognising the importance of having a truly accessible web site and web-based learning platforms, given the mission of OU to provide flexible, distance learning, a high level appointment to the Chief Information Officer role was made in 2010. The current CIO was previously the Chief Technology Officer for Directgov, the UK government's web site which delivers practical information about public services, and had held IT Director and

Managing Director positions in the insurance and financial services sector where he led the creation of award-winning systems, including the UK's first real time internet banking service. The OU web site, which aims to achieve W3C WAI Priority 2 level, has an 'Accessibility' button on its home page and gives immediate directions for how to access the web site for the visually impaired or dyslexic, including details on how to fill in forms or change settings and access to other helpful resources. The OpenLearn platform, on which learning materials for OU courses are released, has been reviewed and tested using a range of assistive technology and computer settings to ensure it meets the needs of a wide variety of users.

Companies could consider scholarships linked to internship programmes in university holidays such as Australia's pioneering 'Stepping into...' programme

One practical initiative for companies to consider is to provide scholarships for students with disabilities, with commitments to internship programmes in the summer holidays. As an incentive, the government could match funding for the scholarships. Or if economic times are too tight for scholarships, internships alone would send a powerful message and would provide new opportunities for graduates with disabilities. The combination of a scholarship and internship would both support students with disabilities through an expensive period of their life, and would provide them with valuable work experience as well as bringing new, open-minded, inclusive values to the company. This report is not about disability in the workplace, but research shows that people with disabilities are hard-working and loyal employees.¹²⁸

In Australia, a pioneering programme called 'Stepping into...' run by the Australian Network on Disability provides students with disabilities with an internship opportunity at a company (see Box 14). It is notable that the success of such a programme is in part dependent on the willingness of the companies to employ such students, but is also highly dependent on the universities reaching out to their students with disabilities, which also assumes that the universities know who such students are. Susan Scott-Parker, Chief Executive of the UK's Employers' Forum on Disability said: "The way companies can create a talent pool of students with disabilities is to offer highly publicised internships backed by barrier-free processing. If the universities get the powerful message that companies expect to see students

Box 14: A summary of 'Stepping into...'¹²⁹

Implemented by the Australian Network on Disability (AND)

The programme

'Stepping into...' is a paid internship programme in Australia for university students with a disability. The program provides a "step into" practical work experience for students with disabilities or SEN who may otherwise face significant barriers to finding employment. The programme is designed to provide university students with an opportunity to showcase their skills as well as enhance their practical skills and experience. This helps them to obtain long term employment within their chosen profession.

It started in 2005 as a 'Stepping into...Law' programme with 4 law firms who were keen to participate given that they were already members of AND. It now involves 19 companies and has expanded into Stepping into... Accounting, Finance, Assurance, Marketing Policy, Human Resources, IT and other disciplines. There are about 70-80 opportunities per year and most of them are successfully filled. The Australian Taxation Office has taken about 10 students each year for the last 4 years and between approximately 30-40% of those are retained according to AND.

The success of the programme depends on AND sustaining strong relationships with the universities so as to be able to distribute information effectively to the eligible students via posters, web sites and career forums. The Disability Liaison Officers, careers offices and faculty staff are all important channels for communicating the programme to students.

Suzanne Colbert AM, Chief Executive of AND said:

"The right work opportunity has can change a person's life trajectory and that's why it's so important that universities and businesses support this valuable internship programme. Talent without opportunity will come to nought. Talent and opportunity can facilitate brilliance!"

Benefits

Participating organisations benefit by meeting skilled and talented people with disability as well as identifying and eliminating some of the barriers faced by people with disability within

their organisation. Over the period of the internship many of the myths and stereotypes that are often associated with people with disability in the workplace are eliminated. Students benefit through gaining experience of the job application and interview process, developing a network of contacts within a professional organisation, undertaking valuable hands-on work experience which they can include on their resumes and having the opportunity to showcase their skills and knowledge.

Requirements and mechanics

Applicants must have a disability and must provide relevant information upon application. They must be in full time study in the final or penultimate year. The programme criteria states that it is 'preferable that students are registered with the Disability Support Unit/ Office within their university.'

Internships are a minimum of 4 weeks, although due to the nature of some disabilities, some students may require a longer period, with fewer days worked each week, however the total hours worked equate to four weeks full time, 152 hrs. They run during the winter and summer term breaks.

It is a joint partnership initiative of AND and the participating organisations. Applicants apply to 'Stepping into', not directly to an organisation, stating which sector they are applying for, their location and any preference of organisation if they have one. The participating organisations notify candidates for interview and for offers of placement or not.

AND conducts access reviews and disability awareness training where appropriate within participating organisations. AND maintains regular contact with students and participating organisations throughout the programme.

with disabilities coming through their graduate pools then the universities will start reaching out to these students.”

Investment bank UBS is known amongst the students with disabilities in Hong Kong for providing internship opportunities to students with disabilities or SEN whilst they are in full-time study. This is considered a valuable opportunity. As Student 1 said: “I think it is a very critical programme for me to learn about the office job, the workplace, a very good reference for the industry.” However, there was disappointment expressed about the fact that none of the students interviewed or any of their friends with disabilities who had worked there had been offered a full-time job.

Student interviewees said they would have benefited from targeted support in finding employment

Students repeatedly mentioned a lack of careers advice at the most stressful transition point of their lives. Many of them said that they felt they would have benefited from targeted support in finding employment. Universities should also offer a dedicated service and this should be part of the centralised support team for students with disabilities. At UC Berkeley, there is a specialised service called Cal Transitions, a programme which offers career counselling and job placement services for eligible students with disabilities.¹³⁰

Student 1 went a step further and suggested the following initiative: “I think it is good to have a kind of union for this kind of support for disabilities because we sometimes think that it is more difficult to get a job and if the universities could work on that together to get different information from different universities would be very, very helpful.” This could also manage an on-line chat room that allows graduates with disabilities to say why they feel it is so difficult to gain employment, to post their experiences and discuss them. A virtual meeting point on the topic would provide an anchor for discussion and build a community that companies could then access for employment, with appropriate input regarding how to manage the processes.

Companies can adopt best practice to provide equitable access to employment

But companies also need to undertake best practice. In China, the Shenzhen Canyou Software Company employs around 200 IT engineers with physical disabilities. It employs about 40-50 of the 12,000 graduates with disabilities entering the labour market in China each year. Its facilities are all set up for people with physical disabilities and therefore it does not tend to employ able-bodied IT engineers on the basis that they can find job opportunities elsewhere. It reports low staff turnover and high client satisfaction, although it appreciates that it has to work harder at client management and after-sales service because it is more difficult to get clients than it is for other firms.¹³¹

Hong Kong’s culture needs to change too, the seeds of which have been sown

Practical initiatives can only go so far, however. Opening access to graduates with disabilities at Hong Kong’s top companies is also a cultural issue, and as mentioned in Section 3, changing culture is difficult. It is only a groundswell of many different movements and many different changes that ultimately brings about the change in culture. People find jobs in a multitude of ways. Student 1 in this research secured a lucrative internship which he said was absolutely invaluable to his university experience and to his getting his ultimate job after graduation. He secured that internship because he met the right person when he was volunteering at Dialogue in the Dark in Hong Kong, a unique exhibition enabling visitors to experience parts of Hong Kong in the way that a visually impaired person might do. Without that foresighted exhibition and the opportunity it provided the student to participate, or without that foresighted individual who went to experience

that exhibition and happened to chance upon an outstanding guide who he thought could work successfully at his company, that internship would not have happened. So this is not just about universities, about setting up organisational bodies or careers advice centres. It is about all of that and more. It's about a pincer movement on Hong Kong society that starts to revolutionise our culture, so that disability is no long an obstacle, it just happens to be part of an individual with different needs to their neighbour, and we are all individuals with different needs.

4.5 Conclusion

All topics raised in this report are intertwined and necessarily so if a true cultural shift is to take place

This section makes suggestions to address the challenges raised in the previous section. Both Sections 3 and 4 were divided into Policy and Administration, Attitudes, Teaching and Learning and Campus Life/Services. But the reality is that all four of these topics are intertwined and necessarily so if a true cultural shift is to take hold in Hong Kong's universities. Policy determines support services, accessibility of facilities, funding available and teaching methods and standards. Attitudes are influenced by policies, on-the-ground support initiatives, public education and training. The learning experience is dependent on the teaching practices and the overall campus life experience is dependent on all of these things put together.

Many of building blocks for change are in place and if proposed changes are broken down into manageable initiatives, they can be implemented quickly

This is why the initiatives required to change the system can sometimes seem overwhelming. But there is already much in place to build on, and if proposed changes are broken down into manageable initiatives, they can be implemented. What Hong Kong needs is overarching government policy and top-down direction, together with university-wide co-operation to implement these changes. Only then will Hong Kong deliver a flexible university system which embraces diversity and integrates support services for the growing numbers of students with disabilities or SEN into daily life, teaching and learning.

Endnotes

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Appendix 1

Topic Guide for University Staff Interviews

Introduction regarding: purpose of research, role of Civic Exchange, status of research process, use of data, confidentiality. Staff introductions including: title, role, career history at university.

1. Interpretation of full inclusion/organisational structure

- How does the university interpret disability equality legislation in relation to access, teaching, learning and assessment? What impact have (i) the Disability Discrimination Ordinance, DDO (ii) the Code of Practice on Education under the DDO, and (iii) The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol had on the inclusion of disabled students and on teaching policy at the university?
- Does the university have published policy documents or a published plan of action for offering integrated education in line with schools? [If yes, name, year of enactment, brief description of what and how, annual funding for disabled students, quota.] If no, what are the aims of the university with regard to integrated education?
- Organisational structure of disability services: Is there a dedicated EO officer? Is there a dedicated Disability Office or Disability Services, perhaps managed through the Student Affairs Office? What is its role? Is there a Disability Advisory Group? [If yes, what is its role? Strategic or operational or both?]
- Does the university have a co-ordination mechanism across departments? Specifically does each faculty/department have a named Disability Co-ordinator? Does that individual have a strategic, advisory role or a pragmatic support role or both?

2. Recruitment

- Does the university have a policy of reaching out to students with disabilities? [Special and mainstream schools]
- Does the university have specialist communications during recruitment and admissions for disabled students who may need them?
- Does the university have quotas in place for recruiting and accepting students with disabilities?
- How does the university categorise applications from students with disabilities? [According to JUPAS categories?]

3. Admissions

- How are the applications from students with disabilities handled? What proportion of applications from students with disabilities come via the JUPAS Sub-System for Applicants with a Disability?
- Is it considered the individual students' responsibility to disclose their disability upon application? Do you have any experience of this deterring them from applying? How does the Admissions Office advise these students?
- How does the interview process for a student with a disability compare to a student without a disability?
- Are disabled students subject to a medical to determine fitness to practice? At what stage of the application process does this take place?
- Are the individual departments involved in determining whether students with disabilities may be admitted to their department? Are some departments notably more flexible and accepting than others? Which ones?
- Once admitted, are students expected to contact the Student Affairs Office/Disability Office (if there is one) in order to plan for their arrival at the university? How are course teachers and staff informed and involved in pre-arrival planning?

- What procedures and targets are in place for establishing appropriate support for students in the time between having their application accepted and commencing their studies?
- What financial support is in place for students with disabilities? Does this affect admissions of disabled students in any way?

4. Demographic data on applicants and registered students

- What collection vehicles does the University use: e.g. registers, surveys?
- Is the following data available over the last five years:
 - Population of persons with disabilities in your university, divided by undergraduate and postgraduate
 - Categories of disability
 - Gender
 - Age
 - Secondary educational establishment (differentiating between mainstream and special schools)
 - Applications
 - Acceptances
 - Completion
 - Academic/employment outcomes

5. Support services/teaching/library/extra-curricular/built environment

Support services:

- What type of support services exist at your university for students with disabilities?
- Do individual students have specialist Disability Advisors? If so, how are they 'categorised' to enable them to have such support? What role does the Advisor fulfill (liaising with faculty staff and organising living support) and does the Advisor stay with the individual throughout their university life?
- Are there any specialized support rooms/areas available for students with disabilities where they can go for advice, assessments, individual instructions, speech and language therapy for example, general emotional support?
- What is the availability of experts such as educational psychologists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, speech therapists for example?
- How does the university involve parents and family members?
- How do disabled peoples' organisations work with your university? Does your university have links with disability NGOs/charities/community organisations? If yes, do they provide rehabilitation support, care, strategic input to policies and procedures?

Teaching:

- Does the university adopt a flexible curriculum including flexible teaching methods, materials, class management systems?
- Is training/technical guidance provided to teachers to learn how to differentiate instruction, group students, use peers to provide assistance and adopt other low-cost interventions to support students with disabilities?
- Is it university policy that lecture notes are routinely provided in advance of lectures via web to all students?
- In general do teachers have adequate support and time to meet the individual needs of disabled students?
- How do assessment and evaluation take students' disabilities into consideration? How much flexibility is incorporated into the assessment process?
- How much support can be provided for fieldwork? Is this something that is considered at application?

Library

- Do library services provide Braille, audio and large print materials, screen readers, captioning services and magnification equipment for example?
- How has ICT been used to make enhance the learning experience of students with disabilities?
- Are there customized desks and/or rooms for students with disabilities?

Extra curricular activities

- Do students with disabilities join in extra-curricular activities? Are there activities specially designed for/aimed at disabled students?
- Are there networks/groups for disabled students?

Built environment

- Do your university buildings adhere to barrier-free guidelines? How was this achieved? What year was your campus built? Have adaptations been made? If no, what steps might the university be willing to take?
- Does the university provide tailored accommodation to students with disabilities? Is this assessed at the time of application and determined based on need? What are the criteria?
- Transportation: does the university provide accessibility to special or flexible transport services for students with disabilities (shared vans with folding ramps etc, taxis)?

6. Attitudes

- As well as training/guidance on teaching methods, are teachers and personnel given training to equip them with appropriate attitudes and values as well as skills?
- Do you have any teachers or staff with disabilities on campus?
- Do you think staff generally accord with integration and what that means for teaching, learning and assessment?
- Has there been any incidence here of physical or verbal threats or abuse from teachers or students to other students with disabilities?
- Has your university ever been involved in any court proceedings with regard to a disability case / non-discrimination legislation / investigation by Human Rights Equal Opportunities Commission?
- What experience has the university had with social integration of disabled students?
- Are students with disabilities consulted and involved in decisions about their education and the education of students with disabilities generally?
- Do disabled students generally have a voice at the university? Are any measures taken to ensure the inclusion of students with disabilities in policy-making decisions and processes?
- Do disabled students have representation on student councils?
- Does the university undertake social marketing campaigns on stigmatized issues?

7. General questions:

- What policy change do you think would most improve the access and support of disabled students at university? Where is the most obvious bottleneck for these students in terms of access to university and receipt of adequate support at university?

Appendix 2

Interviews with Students

Introduction regarding: purpose of research, role of Civic Exchange, status of research process, use of data, confidentiality.

Student introductions including: name, age, disability category, university and course, secondary school, current status including academic outcome/employment.

Topics grouped into themes:

1. Accessibility of the application process:

- Did you need to contact JUPAS during the application process? How helpful was the JUPAS office? How user-friendly is the JUPAS application sub-system for students with disabilities?
- Was the web-based application form user-friendly? Were you able to complete it on your own or did you require assistance?
- Were the admissions staff at your chosen university able to answer your questions and provide the assistance you needed?
- Were you interviewed by any universities/colleges? Was the interview process comfortable for you?
- Was the process of registration accessible to you at the start of your university life?

2. What is the process of decision-making and establishing priorities with regard to choice of:

- University/college
- Campus
- Course
- Tutor

In other words, when you consider your options, what are the most important things to you and how did you come to your decisions?

3. How would you describe the support services made available to you and the flexibility in the processes with regard to:

- Secondary school for the transition to university
- Applications process
- Daily life and study
- Transition to employment
- Financial sustainability

4. Attitudes and aspiration

- What educational aspirations did your family have for you?
- What role did your secondary school teachers have in fulfilling your ambition to go to university?
- How would you describe the attitudes of university teachers with regard to your learning experience and those of administrative personnel with regard to your daily life?
- How would you describe the attitudes of the student community towards you in general?

5. What positive changes would you propose in the following areas?

- Secondary school in order to improve accessibility and transition to university
- University policies and procedures for admissions and support through to employment
- Government policies and support for university study and employment

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Abbreviations

AA&I	Alterations, Additions, Repairs and Improvements
AD	Attention Deficit
ADCET	Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education & Training
AND	Australian Network on Disability
ASSD	Additional Support for Students with Disabilities
AVCC	Australian Vice-Chancellor's Committee
CAGR	Compound annual growth rate
CEDARS	Centre of Development and Resources for Students
CIO	Chief Information Officer
CoPE	Counselling and Person Enrichment
DDO	Disability Discrimination Ordinance
DRC	Disability Resource Centre
DSA	Disabled Students Allowance
DSP	Disabled Student's Programme
EDB	Education Bureau
EO	Equal Opportunities
EOC	Equal Opportunities Commission
GAPSEN	Grand Alliance of Parents for their children with Special Educational Needs
GPA	Grade Point Average
HD	Hyperactivity Disorder
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
HKCEE	Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination
HKIEd	Hong Kong Institute of Education
HKSAR	Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
HR	Human Resources
ICF	International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health
ISA	Individual Support Agreements
IT	Information technology
IVE	Hong Kong Institute of Vocational Education
JUPAS	Joint University Programmes Admission System
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LegCo	Legislative Council
LSE	London School of Economics
MTR	Mass Transit Railway
NAS	New Academic Structure
NDCO	National Disability Co-ordination Officer
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NSS	New Senior Secondary
OCR	Optical character recognition
PC	Personal computer
PHAB	Physically Handicapped and Able-Bodied
PWVI	Persons with visual impairment
RPP	Hong Kong Rehabilitation Programme Plan

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