

## **How do staff members with disabilities experience Rhodes University as a workplace and how do students with disabilities experience Rhodes University as a learning environment?**

### **Introduction**

This document summarises the work and recommendations of the disability group in preparation for the Rhodes transformation summit to be held in July 2017. This is part of a concerted efforts to address transformation issues from different viewpoints. A total of 12 working groups are engaged in discussions around as many dimensions of transformation. We identified two distinctive aspects of disability at Rhodes which informed the work of this committee and shaped our recommendations:

Disability has been neglected in the past compared to other dimensions of diversity. Institution-wide engagement around disability is relatively new. Rhodes University has had dedicated structures and ad hoc mechanisms in place for a number of years. . However, recent efforts in updating the disability policy and an upgrade from task group to Senate committee provided a catalyst for renewed efforts to bring disability issues to the fore. This resulted, among other things, in the introduction of Rhodes disability week during which awareness raising events are held in visits to disability units at other universities, in the establishment of the enable student society and in collaborations with relevant stakeholders within the University and in Grahamstown. With the institutional and policy framework in place, we see the transformation summit as an opportunity to go the extra mile and make Rhodes University accessible by design in all aspects from building construction to curriculum implementation.

Disability is a cross-cutting issue. Disability potentially affects (directly or indirectly) everybody at some stage in their life. It often correlates with other forms of marginalisation (e.g. poverty, age etc) yet it has been relatively neglected compared to other dimensions of diversity (e.g. race, gender etc.) Various disability-related topics can be engaged with in teaching and research across disciplines. We are aware of a number of initiatives at Rhodes such as the integration of sign language in second-year linguistics and of disability policy in third year Political Studies as well as research into the use of mobile phones by visually-impaired people and special needs education. We expect the Summit to provide an opportunity to further push curriculum integration and research on disability across all disciplines as well as awareness and collaboration across administration and support. . We hope disability will attain universal recognition as a cross-cutting issue.

The first part of this paper draws on a report written by Mr Chiwandire that was commissioned by the Equity and Institutional Culture Office. Mr Desire Chiwandire, a PhD student in Political Studies, was commissioned to conduct a study on how the institution is experienced by current Rhodes staff members and students with disabilities. The final report based on the collected data seeks to provide evidenced-based beneficial information that can assist the aforementioned office and other relevant sector stakeholders in making Rhodes

University a welcoming institution for current and future staff and students with disabilities. Chiwandire also made use of his experience of teaching a second years Politics course focusing on the inclusion of persons with disabilities in higher education and the labour market in South Africa. The name of the course is *Decolonising Disability Politics Matters* and it relied on invited experts on disability in higher education and the labour market in the South African context as well as people living with disabilities from Rhodes (e.g. a staff member living with depression) and various other organisations (e.g. a teacher at Kuyasa Special School who is also a Management Committee Member of the Association for Persons with Physical Disabilities)

The second part of the paper draws on research conducted by Ms Veronica Israel. Ms Israel is a Master's student in the Psychology Department and a manager in the Division of Student Affairs. She also sits in the Rhodes Disability Committee. Her thesis investigates the extent of support for and the participation and engagement of students with disabilities in the transformation processes of the Institution. In addition to that, this background paper also draws on extensive discussions within the disability committee, experiences during two disability weeks, consultations with colleagues engaging with disability at other institutions, consultations with workers of NGOs such as the Association for the Physically Disabled in Grahamstown and nationally, the relevant international and national legal framework and the personal experiences of Rhodes staff and students conveyed by members of the working group.

The last part of the background paper draws on output from consultative discussions with staff and students. This input has been prepared by Mr Ian Sieborger. Dr Lorenzo Dalvit provided additional input and collated the submissions.

## **I. Part One.**

### **Historical context: the inclusion of persons with disabilities in higher education and the labour market**

#### **A. Inclusion of students with disabilities (SWDs) in higher education**

Having acknowledged that the racialized and discriminatory SSA's provisions have in the past discriminated against PWDs on the grounds of disability (Dube, 2005:15), upon taking power in 1994 the African National Congress (ANC) took a radical approach by enacting a new progressive democratic Constitution which according to Sandra Fredman was aimed at "making a clear break with history and healing the scars of the past" (2012:18). The new Constitution's Preamble states that its intention is to "heal the divisions of the past and

establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights ... improve the quality of life of all citizens and free the potential of each person”.<sup>1</sup>

Additionally, when South Africa became a democracy in 1994, the new Constitution (Section 29(1)(a) guaranteed everyone (including persons with disabilities) the right to education, and prohibits the state from unfairly discriminating “directly or indirectly against anyone on the grounds of disability” (Section 9(3) among other grounds). South Africa is also a signatory to a number of relevant international instruments which directly or indirectly protect the rights of persons with disabilities (PWDs) in higher education (HE) and workplace environments such as the 1994 United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (UNSREOPD) which has been a useful instrument in assisting in the policy making process (McClain, 2002). Rule Number 6 of the UNSREOPD for instance oblige Member States to ensure that special needs education is made an integral part of the education system as a way of promoting and respecting the rights of PWDs (Kisanji, 1995).

South Africa is also a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) 2006 (see DSD, DWCPD and UNICEF, 2012:19). By ratifying the UNSREOPD and the UNCRPD South Africa has assumed “an obligation to take proactive measures to ensure that the rights of persons with disabilities are promoted and protected” both in HE and work environments (South African Human Rights Commission, 2012:1). Among other things, this should take the form of “ensuring an inclusive education system at all levels” including HEIs which should be in line with the provisions of Article 24 of the UNCRPD.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, Article 24 also oblige States Parties to provide reasonable accommodations (RAs) and appropriate support services tailored to individual’ educational needs as a measure of ensuring that PWDs can participate effectively in a free society. Therefore, it could be argued that the UNSREOPD, the UNCRPD and the South African Constitution adopt a ‘human rights’ holistic approach to the inclusion of PWDs.

It could be argued that it was through the influence of these international human rights instruments and the new Constitution that the democratic ANC government was quick to pay more attention primarily on removing barriers and providing access to higher Education for the previously disadvantaged groups including SWDs (Belyakov *et al.*, 2009:1). This was done through implementing numerous disability legislations and policies (see for example: the *White Paper 3 on Higher Education Transformation* (Department of Education, 1997a); the 1997 *White Paper on an Integrated National Disability Strategy* (Office of the Deputy President, 1997); the 1997 *Higher Education Act*<sup>3</sup> (Department of Education, 1997b); the 2001

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<sup>1</sup> Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act No. 108 of 1996, 6: Preamble.

<sup>2</sup> Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Act 101 of 1997. It promotes equality of access for all, especially for those previously marginalised or excluded. When selecting members of the Council on Higher Education Section 8(2)(c) “due attention is given to representivity of the Council on Higher Education on such relevant grounds as race and disability.”

*National Plan for Higher Education*<sup>4</sup> (Ministry of Education, 2001:41); the 2001 *Education White Paper 6, Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System*<sup>5</sup>, (Department of Education, 2001a).

The same holds true in the context of the labour market environment as the ANC since the inception of democracy has also signed and ratified a number of international human rights instruments. These include the United Nation's Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities' which enjoins national governments to provide an enabling environment for PWDs in the labour market (1993). It has also signed and ratified the UNCRPD which not only prohibits all forms of employment discrimination, but also for the provision of RAs to PWDs by employers in the workplace environment (UNCRPD, 2006). Article 27 of the UNCRPD in particular "recognizes the right of PWDs to work, on an equal basis with others; this includes the opportunity to gain a living by working freely in a chosen or accepted in a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities" (UNCRPD, 2006).

## **B. Inclusion of staff with disabilities in the labour market environment**

Drawing on these international human rights instruments, the ANC government has enacted various policies and legislations most of which "deal with reasonable accommodation of people with disability in the labour market" (Modise *et al.*, 2014:580). Like the HE regulatory documents, the rationale behind the enactment of these labour market regulatory documents as noted by Modise and colleagues stemmed primarily from the fact that "workplace practices have often discriminated against...[PWDs]" (Modise *et al.*, 2014:587 see also Modisha, 2004:155). This situation was worsened by the fact that the apartheid National Party government did not enact any policy or legislation which provided for PWDs in the labour market environment, as such, the ANC saw it fit to enact policies which protected and accommodated the rights and needs of PWDs.

In 1998, for instance, the ANC passed the Employment Equity Act (EEA)<sup>6</sup> 55 of 1998 to outlaw discrimination and promote affirmative action in the workplace through ensuring that employees with disabilities cannot be discriminated against or unfairly treated on the grounds of disability (Modisha, 2004:155). Additionally, the EEA also aims at "redressing the labour market disadvantages experienced by historically disadvantaged groups in employment" through equalisation of work opportunities (Modisha, 2004:155). The EEA aims to achieve this by calling "for implementation of affirmative action measures in favour of the designated

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<sup>4</sup> The NPHE outlines guidelines on the transformation of higher education in South Africa (Ministry of Education, 2001:41)

<sup>5</sup> This policy sets out a 20 year plan for the roll out of an Inclusive Education system and makes provision for the increased capacity of the general education system to accommodate wider diversity it does not in fact support the goal of full inclusion.

<sup>6</sup> Employment Equity Act (EEA) No. 55 of 1998.

groups” through facilitating their representation in all levels of occupation (Modise *et al*, 2014:583). Under the EEA, these designated groups consist of Black people (Africans, coloureds and Indians), women and disabled persons (Modisha, 2004:155). To practically achieve this, the EEA recommends that at least 2 per cent % of all employees in companies, and more than 50 workers, should be PWDs (Modisha, 2004:155).

Likewise, the other important policy is the 1994 *White Paper on the Transformation of the Public Service* which states that PWDs should account for 2% of government employees by 2005 (Snyman, 2009:1). Similarly, the *Code of Good Practice on Employment of People with Disabilities* of 2002 which supplements the EEA was passed to protect PWDs in the workplace environment against unfair discrimination and its passage marked the removal of previous policies and practices, which resulted in inequalities (Dube, 2005:19). The *Code of Good Practice on Employment of People with Disabilities* also directs and guides employers with regard to PWDs in the workplace (Dube, 2005:19). In 2004, the *Technical Assistance Guidelines on the Employment of People with Disabilities* (Department of Labour, 2004) was passed to assist employers and employees to understand the EEA and the *Code of Good Practice on Employment of People with Disabilities* on the employment of PWDs (Snyman, 2009; see also Dube, 2005:19).

### C. Methodology

The aim of this research was to investigate the views and experiences of staff members and students with disabilities both from an employment/academic and social inclusion standpoint. All participants were 18 years and older and chose to disclose their disability. Ethical approval to conduct this research was granted by the Rhodes University Ethical Clearance Committee. The informed consent of the participants was obtained by way of a consent form which stressed the voluntariness of participation in the study. The consent form stipulated that participants would not receive any form of incentive for participation in the research. Participants were assured that their provided stories would be anonymous in that all identifying information would be removed from their interview transcripts so that no particular response can be linked to a specific person and this was highlighted in participants’ consent forms and was also explained this verbally before each and every interview session. Apart from this, all participants were informed that participation in this research was entirely voluntary and if at any stage they wished to withdraw their consent for some reason they were fully entitled to do so. Before the beginning of each interview session, each participant was instructed to feel free not to answer some questions if they felt uncomfortable with some of the questions. In the consent forms, I highlighted that I will treat their stories with respect and confidentiality during the process of transcription, analysis and storage of my data.

As regards, the request to participate in this study for staff members with disabilities, I employed three strategies for recruiting them. Firstly, I used snowball recruitment or sampling where nomination of other potential participants is made by those already enrolled in the study. The other two recruiting strategies involved recruiting participants through

gatekeepers like Heads of Department as well as through the Director of Human Resources. I did so by formally writing to all Heads of Department as well as the Director of Human Resources and attached a call for participation which I kindly requested the Director of Human Resources to circulate on my behalf to all staff members whom she thought are eligible to participate in this research.

As regards, the request to participate in this study for students with disabilities, I also employed three strategies for recruiting my participants, for instance I used snowball recruitment or sampling where nomination of other potential participants is made by those already enrolled in the study. The other recruiting strategy was reaching participants through gatekeepers like the Manager of Student Services (Ms Veronica Israel) in the Student Affairs Division. I did so by formally writing to Ms Israel and attached a call for participation in which I kindly requested her to circulate on my behalf to all students whom she thought might be eligible for this sample criteria. Finally, the other recruiting strategy was posting a brief call for participation on the RU Connected page and Student Representative Council (SRC) Facebook page, and before posting these calls permission were sought first from the relevant gatekeepers.

From all recruited population, only fourteen (14) participants responded whom I then arranged to interview. To elaborate on this, I conducted semi-structured in-depth face-to-face interviews with (7) students with disabilities as well (7) staff with disabilities at Rhodes University. Following Silverman I employed in-depth face-to-face interviews because these “provide a ‘deeper’ understanding of social phenomena” (2000 cited in Gill *et al*, 2008:292), directly from the individual participants’ “views, experiences, beliefs and/or motivations” (Gill *et al*, 2008:292). Disability research, is a sensitive area of research and face-to-face interviews are appropriate “for exploring sensitive topics, where participants may not want to talk about such issues in a group environment” (Gill *et al*, 2008:292). Interviews were semi-structured because of this format’s likeliness “to yield as much information about the study phenomenon as possible and also able to address the aims and objectives of the research” (Gill *et al*, 2008:292) in a focused way with a range of different participants. All sampled staff members participants with the exception of one studied at Rhodes and this made most of their stories productive as they also talked about their then experience as students at this institution. As regards student participants, five (5) of them were undergraduate students whereas two (2) of them were postgraduate students most of these participants studied various degrees under the Faculty of Humanities. The sampled participants’ disability categories were as follows:

#### **Staff with disabilities members participants**

- Staff participant 1, Physical Disability (walking challenges due to a car accident)
- Staff participant 2, Physical Disability (cerebral palsy)
- Staff participant 3, Visual Impairment (blind)
- Staff participant 4, Visual Impairment (partially sighted 1)
- Staff participant 5, Visual Impairment (partially sighted 2)



- Staff participant 6, Hearing Impairment (Deaf)
- Staff participant 7, Intellectual/mental disability
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#### **Students with disabilities participants**

- Student participant 1, Physical Disability (walking challenges) and Visual Impairment (blind)
- Student participant 2, Invisible Physical Disability (lupus)
- Student participant 3, Intellectual/Mental Disability (bipolar 2 disorder)
- Student participant 4, Physical Disability (hand amputee)
- Student participant 5, Specific Learning Disability (dyslexia)
- Student participant 6, Speech impairment (stuttering)
- Student participant 7, Chronic illness (diabetic)

Questions in both staff members' and students' questionnaires were informed by the existing literature on the international and national debates on 'inclusive education' and 'employment equity' with respect to the inclusion of students with disabilities in mainstream educational institutions and the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the open labour market.

Data collection began on 7 August 2015 and ended on 21 August 2017 when, through a process of constant comparison of the emerging data, it became apparent that a sufficient level of saturation had been achieved in the sense that no further themes were emergent from the responses being received. Theoretical saturation, as Margarete Sandelowski suggests "is the point in data collection when no new or relevant information emerges with respect to the newly constructed theory. Hence, a researcher looks at this as the point at which no more data needs to be collected (2008:875-876). Most of staff members invited me to interview them in their offices whereas for many students I arranged to interview them in the Main Library's Postgraduate Commons sections' study booths.

The data were analysed through the lens of various concept in the philosophy of inclusive education and employment equity from an international context narrowing down to the South African context particularly Rhodes University. In addition, the national and international literature around inclusive education and employment equity was used to formulate the questionnaire for both staff members and student participants. For purposes of data analysis of this study, particular attention was paid on the data which focused primarily on both participants' experiences of being included by the institution from both an academic and social inclusion point of view in the case of students as well as from a social inclusion and employment equity in the case of staff with disabilities.

#### **D. Findings and Recommendations**

This section will discuss in greater detail the inclusive education and employment equity barriers to sampled persons with disabilities in the context of Rhodes University. All participants in this study both staff members and students with disabilities raised concerns

about Rhodes as still lagging behind in accommodating persons with disabilities in many aspects. In formulating the subsequent recommendations I drew on some participants' comments, central concepts around debates on the inclusion of persons with disabilities in higher education and the labour market and best practices from countries which are effective in supporting persons with disabilities in higher education and the labour market.

## **Part II**

### **A. Discrimination against students reliant on assistive technology/devices**

According to Koulikourdi, assistive technologies “refer to products, devices or equipment that are used to maintain, increase or improve the functional capabilities of people with disabilities” (Koulikourdi, 2008:387). In many higher education institutions both in South Africa and elsewhere, assistive devices are often found in the library facilities, Disability Units' computer laboratories and or in lecture theatres for the use of SWDs. Various proponents have highlighted the importance of assistive devices in creating “opportunities for building inclusive classrooms” for SWDs (Johnson and Fox, 2003:12-15), for giving SWDs “a level playing field in higher education” (Wolanin and Steele, 2004:58) as well as enabling SWDs “to achieve fuller participation in the academic venture” in mainstream educational settings (Knox *et al.*, 2000:153).

Despite this, one of the student participants with a visual impairment (blind) expressed concerns over being denied specific assistive devices such as appropriate computer software like the ‘speech to text software’ like Dragon by the university that cited budget constraints and him being an international students as a justification for that. This participant further argued that due to unavailability of assistive devices in the main library and computer laboratories and this has forced him to work only in his room on his laptop with this software that he brought from home.

#### **• Recommendations**

Given that “the use of technology in education plays a particularly vital role by enabling flexible curriculum development and assisting students with disabilities to participate as equals in the learning experience” (UNESCO, 2011:5) it follows that the denial of assistive devices to students with visual impairments among other students with disabilities becomes a violation of their right to inclusive education. Against this unfavourable background, drawing on Berkeley and colleagues Rhodes needs to employ Information Technology staff members who are “...well aware of the needs of the students and find solutions to keep pace with emerging technologies” (Berkeley *et al.*, 2007:12).

It has been argued that personalized learning requires attention to the unique needs of all students of all abilities, acknowledging that each have different learning styles including students with mild, moderate or severe disabilities (UNESCO, 2011:5). The use of technology in education plays a particularly vital role by enabling flexible curriculum development and



assisting students with disabilities to participate as equals in the learning experience (UNESCO, 2011:5). Seen from this light Rhodes should provide assistive devices if it is to meaningfully include SWDs who are mostly reliant on assistive devices.

## **B. Discrimination against students with invisible disabilities**

*Many people think of disability largely in terms of physical impairments and wheelchair users. It is important to highlight the range of impairments, especially ones such as learning difficulties, which are often overlooked (VSO United Kingdom, 2002:36).*

As regards different disability categories and types, research has found that among the South African society (as well as internationally), there is a tendency of viewing persons with disabilities as a single group...[with]...“people in wheelchairs having become the popular representation of people with disabilities” (Office of the Deputy President, 1997:6). A similar tendency is also evident in studies of SWDs in higher education, for instance Chard and Couch’s study found that many of the university personnel at the University of Liverpool “only thought of disabled students as being someone in a wheelchair” (Chard and Couch, 1998:608-621). The reason for this as noted by Napolitano could be emanating from the thorough documentation of public awareness of the needs of mobility impaired people which has also increased the level of awareness about them in the general population (Napolitano, 1996), at the cost of “awareness of the needs of people with other impairments” which seem to be less evident both in HEIs and societies in general (Chard and Couch, 1998:608-621).

In the context of South Africa, the 2016 *Ministerial Committee Report: Draft Policy Framework for Disability Framework for Disability in the Post-School Education and Training System* obliges higher education institutions to take proactive measures to support the educational needs of SWDs as follows:

*Even though it is cost intensive to cater for all disabilities, it is not advisable that certain institutions should specialise in particular disabilities and a note of caution is made that this type of strategy could lead to the exclusion of students who want to go to a post-secondary and education training (PSET) institution of their choice (Department of Government Printing Works, 2016:35).*

However because of inadequate funding in many countries including South Africa’s universities this has seen the countries’ higher education institutions resorting to selective inclusion or what Ndlovu and Walton have referred to as an ‘impairment based approach’ in supporting SWDs (Ndlovu and Walton, 2016:7) in which only particular categories of disability are accommodated by specific institutions (Ndlovu and Walton, 2016:7). In the context of Rhodes, participants argued that this approach has mainly taken the form of the institution putting more efforts on enrolling and supporting students with physical disabilities especially wheelchair users at the cost of students with other disability types particularly those with invisible disabilities. This is confirmed by four (4) student participants sampled in this study who noted that Rhodes focuses mainly on enrolling and supporting the needs of students with physical disabilities as the cost of students invisible disabilities because probably because this institution finds accommodating

students with physical disabilities much cheaper by building ramps in comparison to students with other disabilities. These participants attributed this to the fact that although the institution has made significant strides in also enrolling students with invisible disability however it's still struggling to equally accommodate this populations. Among other reasons, these participants have attributed this to the lack of awareness around invisible disabilities on the part of the institution which they believe makes the institution not to take proactive measures to enrol and fully support students with hearing impairments.

Among the students who raised these concerns are one students with an invisible physical disability (lupus) who expressed concerns about High Tech security guards who always assume that she does not have a disability each time she wants to access disabled parking as follows:

*It's difficult to get a special parking lot because most of the people will look at you and say oh yeah you can walk, but I can't walk up the hill. So that's why I need the disabled parking, so I often fight with the security guards to get into staff parking because they don't believe the sticker is real. And I say it's real, I can park there it even a little man on a wheelchair in it, but they say you look fine and I say hello, this is the sticker. Often if I want to park in the front of Barrat, you have to go in and park at Prince Alfred there is a security guard there, and he will not let me in ever,. Sometimes he tells me it's full, but you see there is parking. Sometimes he tells me I'm not allowed to because I'm a student; Sometimes he tells me it's not a real thing, the sticker, oh I fight with him all the time!! I get very angry and I have to go and park somewhere else, but yoh it's difficult. I have never thought about reporting it, it happens then you go to your lecture then your day is gone. I probably should go to the CPU. Sometimes when I get there people are parking in the disability parking and I can't Park anywhere because it's always full so I can make my own parking, but I don't want to get clamped (Student participant 2, Invisible Physical Disability (lupus).*

Likewise, two (2) students participants with invisible disabilities (one with bipolar 2 disorder and the other with dyslexia) whose views are cited below expressed concerns over lack of awareness about their types of invisible disabilities on the part of their lecturers and this has resulted in them failing to appropriately accommodate these students:

*So I have not had that routine of like go to lectures, go to practicals, I have struggled to manage my time and also I have been very anxious about coming to campus especially with police brutality recently. And one lecturer said to me, the one whose practical I could not do, she said, it sort of felt like she was dismissing my feelings, sort of just seeing it as an excuse to get out with something. Maybe a sensitivity training that it's not always an excuse (Student participant 3, Intellectual/Mental Disability (bipolar 2 disorder).*

*So I feel like the Division of Student Affairs is lacking [in raising awareness around invisible disabilities], but in that department and yeah I just feel like they need to improve it, I really think that before from here on now before you become a lecturer just a short course on knowing what the different kinds of disability are because see the thing is if there is dyslexia and dyspraxia, dyspraxia as in numbers and dyslexia as in words, so if you are gonna make a*

*mistake that dyslexia and dyspraxia are the same thing then its just, its not gonna work. And if you want good results as a lecturer just know the difference, like know even if there is a student with dyslexia, even though I l've noticed that some people know what dyslexia is but they would mistake it. I remember my History lecturer was saying to me come sit in front of the classroom where you can listen to me but they didn't educate themselves that even if its dyslexia there is 7 different types. So I can't assume that her strength is listening. Do you understand, just knowing that if you've got dyslexia which type of dyslexia do you have, ok. And then go research on it and see how best you can help your student. Because if you make the mistake and say come and sit at the front listen to me speak. That's wrong because I don't listen to anything, I rely on my eyes to do the learning for me. And this is why lecturers, lecturers is very pointless. Not because the lecturer is a bad person or bad at explaining its because I don't. A, I can't follow your slides it's too fast. But I can't listen to you because that's not the type of dyslexia I have so attending that class is pointless* (Student participant 5, Specific Learning Disability (dyslexia)).

- **Recommendations**

It could be argued that Rhodes's approach of focusing attention only on enrolling and supporting students with physical disabilities as they are easy to accommodate violate the central tenant of inclusive education which obliges educational institutions to "...accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions" (UNESCO, 1994:6). Similarly, proponents of inclusive education like Morina have argued that one ways of achieving inclusivity within universities is if these institutions honour their "responsibility to respond to the needs of all students" (Morina, 2016:4) regardless of their disability. Given Rhodes's failure to address the educational needs of SWDs, we recommend the need on the part of the institution to radically move away from its 'impairment based approach' in providing access and supporting students with disabilities in favour of a 'needs-based approach' which according to Naaz "...requires integrated strategies that enlarge their ability to deliver appropriate services and support to all students and to cope with diversity within the [university] community" (Naaz, 2012:27). It is hoped that by taking this needs-based approach seriously this will also enable this institution to raise awareness around invisible disabilities as well as adapting its built environment to accommodate the needs of students with diverse invisible disabilities.

### **C. Staff and students with disabilities do not want to be pitied**

Many authors have written at length about the impact of pity on the inclusion of persons with disabilities in mainstream society and many of these authors have argued that pity has negative consequences on the full inclusion of PWDs. In his paper, *How an Ideology of Pity Is a Social Harm to People with Disabilities*, contemporary philosopher Joseph Stramondo questioned whether pity perpetuates negative consequences, such as socially harming and further marginalizing PWDs in societies (Stramondo, 2010:121). Likewise, in *Pride Against Prejudice*, Jenny Morris drew on her personal experience as an academic living with a physical

disability to highlight this unequal power relation between the pitied and pitier; a relation which often results in the latter seeing the former as an object of pity.

Likewise, when participants were asked “how they would want the Rhodes non-disabled community to relate to them?”, most of them were of the view that they would not want to be pitied by their peers on campus or anyone in general. Rather, they would want to be regarded as normal, independent people with urgency to make sound decisions about their lives as well as capable to do everything that non-disabled people can also do. For instance, independently and professionally doing their jobs in the case of staff members with disabilities as well as independently doing their academic work in the case of SWDs. That being said, however most students expressed concerns about being pitied by their colleagues, acquaintances and even their close friends whereas staff members applauded their workmates and their Head of Departments (HoDs) for holding positive attitudes towards staff members with disabilities and also stressed that they feel fully welcomed in their departments. It should be noted that pity may lead to tolerance and acceptance, but not necessarily to full recognition and development. While it is relatively easy to make a reasonable effort to accommodate and help a colleague living with a disability, it may require a general awareness to accept that such colleague might progress faster through the academic and administrative ranks and assume leadership positions.

- **Recommendations**

As people with lived experiences of living with disabilities, the sampled students and staff members seem to know how they would want to be treated or how they would want other people to relate to them if they are to feel welcome like able-bodied people at Rhodes. Hence, Rhodes particularly the Office of Equity and Institutional Culture and or the Division of Student Affairs should work in collaboration with these participants and arrange workshops or public dialogues where they can speak about their disabilities in order to sensitize the non-disabled community on the needs of persons with disabilities. Furthermore, we recommend the need on the part of the institution to raise awareness or sensitisation workshops as an ongoing process and not only during Disability Week because there is minimal awareness about persons with disabilities among the Rhodes non-disabled community particularly lecturers. In addition to that, we also recommend the need for ongoing Departmental seminars which also focus on disability issue.

Many academic departments hold regular seminars by their own staff/students or by guest lecturers. These events could be exploited to give space to the disability-related experiences (teaching/research/community engagement) of students and colleagues. Ideally, such seminars should take place during disability week to take advantage of guests from outside Rhodes. We also recommend the need for the integration of a disability slot in orientation week for students and a course for lecturers. Disability should be mentioned when welcoming new members of our community. This will make people living with disabilities feel welcome and will equip new students and lecturers to engage with disabled colleagues and students.

Existing staff and students could bring their experiences and provide practical guidelines, tips and suggestions.

#### **D. Provision of inappropriate reasonable Accommodations (RAs)**

Article 2 of the UNCRPD defines reasonable accommodation as:

*Necessary and appropriate modification and adjustments not imposing a disproportionate or undue burden, where needed in a particular case, to ensure to persons with disabilities the enjoyment or exercise on an equal basis with others of all human rights and fundamental freedoms (UNCRPD, 2006:).*

Given this, it has been argued that failure to timeously provide appropriate RAs on the part of universities amount to denial or discrimination of SWDs on the grounds of disability (Krishnan, 2012:6) because the provision of RAs to SWDs is aimed at giving “them a level playing field in higher education” (Wolanin and Steele, 2004:58). In light of this, four (4) participants in this study raised concerns about Rhodes’s failure to provide appropriate RAs particularly during Exams as negatively impacting on their academic success of SWDs. For instance, one participant who is visually impaired commented on how the provision of extra time during his Exams was actually inappropriate and helpless as it did not fully compensate for his disability and he suggested he would have preferred to be provided with a laptop with an appropriate software which the university failed to provide him with by then. The other participant who has a specific learning disability (dyslexia) expressed concerns over the university’s failure to provide her with appropriate RAs in the form of writing her Exams in a separate venue on her own with a scribe and a note taker because of financial constraints as the institutions’ justification. The other student who has a physical invisible disability expressed concerns over having to write her June Exams in Allec Mullins especially during winter because this venue is very cold which often aggravates her sickness and would have preferred to write in a separate warm venue. Finally two other student participants one with a speech impairment and the other with a mental disability expressed concerns about often getting anxiety during Exam period because of the workload in preparing as well as writing the actual Exams.

#### **● Recommendations**

Rhodes University needs to take seriously the issue of providing appropriate RAs if the institution is to ensure the academic success of SWDs not only during the course of the term in essay or test writing, but mainly during Exam period. Particular attention should be paid on adopting appropriate assessment criterion for SWDs who may apply for extra time during exams. This is useful for certain types of impairments (e.g. partial sight). In other cases, however, it is unnecessary (e.g. students on a wheelchair) or pointless (e.g. completely blind students). Alternative solutions such as the use of a computer, the possibility of writing in a separate room alone etc. should be explored with the student.

## **E. Provision of inaccessible curriculum**

Some proponents of inclusive education have stressed the importance of both the availability and accessibility of a curriculum<sup>7</sup> which equally addresses the diverse needs of all students (including those with disabilities) in lecture theatres as another effective way of implementing inclusive education. Tony Booth for instance, stresses the usefulness of thinking about inclusion in education as involving “the process of increasing the participation of pupils within the...curricula of mainstream schools” (1996:34). This process should take the form of adapting the curriculum in such a way that it copes with the diversity (Mittler, 2000). The present study’s data reveals that although Rhodes has taken proactive measures to provide access to students with disabilities, however, the institution is still lagging behind in supporting the needs of some students with disabilities in fully participating in the curriculum. One student participant who is visually impaired is a case in this point as this student raised concerns about not being allowed to study the subject that he had applied for coming to Rhodes because none of the Departments lecturers had an adapted curriculum tailored to also accommodate blind students.

### **• Recommendations**

Rhodes should conduct awareness raising workshops with lecturers and try to encourage them to adapt their curriculum in such a way that it address the educational needs of students with diverse abilities and disabilities in the classroom setting as a way of facilitating their meaningful inclusion for students. Recent literature on disability inclusion in mainstream educational institutions has emphasised that in designing their curriculum lecturers can practically achieve this by employing such inclusive universally-designed (UD) concepts as universal design (UD)<sup>8</sup>; universal instructional design (UID) (Higbee, 2003; Higbee and Goff,

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<sup>7</sup> “Curriculum is understood in a broad sense. It includes what is taught, the medium of instruction, how the curriculum is organised and managed, the methods and processes used in teaching, the pace of teaching, the learning materials and equipment used, the nature of required fieldwork experiences, as well as how learning is assessed” (DoE, 2001b:9).

<sup>8</sup> Universal Design “means the design of products, environments, programmes and services to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialised design” (United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. 2006:4).



2008); universal design of instruction (UDI)<sup>9</sup>; differentiation<sup>10</sup> (Tomlinson, 2001); universal design for learning (UDL)<sup>11</sup> and curriculum differentiation right from the outset when designing their curriculum as all these concepts enhances inclusive teaching. This has been confirmed in the literature that these universally-oriented concepts will also equally benefit non-disabled students in accessing and participating in the curriculum in the classroom setting (Myers *et al.*, 2014:7). It is hoped that if the institution were to enjoin lecturers to inform their teaching, learning, instructional and assessment strategies with these UD-oriented concepts might have a potential of these lecturers to adopt positive attitudes towards supporting SWDs in the classroom setting.

Apart from enjoining lecturers to deliver a universally designed curriculum, we also recommend Cross-curriculum integration within the institution. Lectures (and in some cases entire modules) on disability-related topics are already part of Rhodes courses. This should be expanded to ensure that all students at Rhodes, no matter their chosen field of study, learn about disability as part of their degree. Reflections on disability should extend beyond the syllabus to include teaching and assessment strategies. Considering that any student may become temporarily disabled during a course, such reflections should be part of the courses offered by CHERTL and specifically assessed in tenure and promotion portfolios.

## **F. Inaccessible physical built environment**

On an international level, signatories of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Physical Disabilities (UNCRPD) including South Africa are under Article 9 obliged to be physically accessible to PWDs by applying the accessibility principles of ‘universal design’ and ‘inclusive design’. Accessibility refers to ‘the degree to which an environment, service, or product allows access by as many people as possible, in particular people with disabilities’ [World Health Organization (WHO); World Bank 2011:303]. ‘Accessibility’ entails making it possible for ‘persons with disabilities to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life’. In the South African context, the right to education, and inclusive education policies such as the *Education White Paper 6, Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System* impose an obligation upon all higher education institutions (HEIs) to ensure that there is appropriate physical access for all learners. South Africa’s 2008 *National*

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<sup>9</sup> According to Sheryl Burgstahler, “the goal of UDI is to maximize the learning of students with a wide range of characteristics by applying UD principles to all aspects of instruction” (Burgstahler, 2015:1).

<sup>10</sup> According to UNESCO “Curriculum differentiation, then, is the process of modifying or adapting the curriculum according to the different ability levels of the students in one class” (UNESCO, 2004:14).

<sup>11</sup> According to David Mitchell the concept of “UD had its origins in architecture and engineering, and has been increasingly emphasised in education, where it is usually referred to as Universal Design for Learning (UDL)” (Mitchell, 2010:13).

*Building Regulations and Building Standards Act* provides for minimum standards of accessibility to be applied in the design of new buildings. Central to the accessible built environment to PWDs is that this population often face barriers because they have to negotiate an environment which was not designed for them, and if they are to enjoy equality of access it is this deficit in environment which must be overcome (Tinklin and Hall, 1999).

Likewise, the findings in the present study clearly shed light on the fact that Rhodes's new and old buildings are still not built in compliance with the country's building regulations. This is clearly evidenced from most participants' (both staff members and students with physical disabilities as well as those with other types of disabilities) comments on the inaccessibility of the institutions' physical built environment spaces as well as the inside and outside of buildings.

From an outside space perspective, two (2) staff member participants expressed concerns about the uneven surface of pavements and walkways on campus and this has and continues to pose a serious safety risk as they have fallen several times because of this. Additionally, these same participants also expressed concerns about several improper ramps which cannot be easily navigated by persons with physical disabilities particularly wheelchair users. Likewise, two (2) student participants expressed concerns about the flight of steps around the campus which forces them to take inconvenient longest routes which does not have many steps when navigating the campus. It should be further noted that all these participants with physical disabilities expressed concerns about limited disabled designated parking spaces as these are central to persons with physical disabilities and where these parking spaces are available they are often situated in inconvenient spaces far away from buildings. In some parts of campus there seems to be a blatant disrespect for designated parking lots by both staff and students. Moreover, most participants (both staff members and students) pointed to old buildings as the most inaccessible ones particularly the university's main Administration Building as well as lecture theatres in old buildings.

From the inside of buildings perspective, the same two (2) staff members participants raised concerns about the availability of only one staircase banister or railing on steps inside many buildings and this poses a serious safety risk when they go up and down the stairs as they have fallen down. Both the same participants noted that they raised this concern when they were surveyed in between 2011 and 2012 in a study of Rhodes staff members about to date the institution has not addressed these challenges and they are frustrated about this. Additionally, most participants with physical disabilities also raised concerns about the limited availability of adapted wheelchair user toilets particularly in older buildings whereas those in newer buildings although they are accessible, however they are still not fully accessible inside as they do not have appropriate water taps with extensions. Likewise, in Israel's study one participant who is diagnosed with muscular dystrophy highlighted that she was unable to take up a specific subject because she could not physically access the lecture venue because of its many stairs. This is evident when she argued that:

*I was asked not to take French as a subject in my first year because the University was struggling to move it to an accessible floor. I was coerced into taking up Classics – a subject I didn't enjoy at all.*

Moreover, some participants also expressed concerns about lifts and disabled toilets in new buildings as not fully accessible as they do not have enough space inside for the wheelchair user to turn around his or her wheelchair. In the context of residences, one staff member participants expressed concerns about the unavailability of Common Rooms on the ground floor where SWDs are normally situated especially given the fact that none of the institutions' residences has lifts. Lack of visual alarms in residences and computer laboratories among other buildings on campus to notify persons with hearing impairments in the event of fire was also raised as a matter of great concern by some participants who are concerned about the inclusion of persons with hearing impairments. Given this unfavourable circumstances on the part of students with hearing impairments, as a general rule, we recommend that the affected staff members or students be given opportunities to explain how they would like to be equally accommodated as this is an inclusive approach which will be in their best interest.

- **Recommendations**

There is general consensus in the literature that poorly designed physical environments exclude persons with disabilities (PWDs) from participating in mainstream society (DSD, DWCPD & UNICEF, 2012:20). Likewise Gal *et al.*, also argues that architectural or physical environmental barriers (e.g., lack of elevators, ramps, automatic doors, Braille signage, and telecommunication devices)"can hinder the full participation of SWPDs (Gal *et al.*, 2010:91). Likewise, the findings of this study shows that this is exactly the case at Rhodes as most participants expressed concerns about the inaccessibility of the built environment as hindering their full participation on campus life.

Hence, we recommend that Rhodes University address the issue of inaccessibility of old buildings, new buildings and campus spaces as an urgent matter through employing the concept of universal design whose goal is to "put a high value on both diversity and inclusiveness" (Burgstahler, 2013:10). David Mitchell defines "the design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for subsequent adaptation or specialised design" (Mitchell, 2010:13). In the view of Imrie and Hall the concept of universal design enjoins building planners, engineers and designers or architects to properly design "buildings that are suitable for all users, and the removal of inadequate or inappropriate design solutions to disable users" (Imrie and Hall, 2001:335). The concept of design for all requires all key stakeholders such as architects, designers and accessibility officers and other experts to work in collaboration and consultation with PWDs in order to arrive at innovative solutions and achieve optimal results. Rhodes University is not yet at this point as evident from most of the participants' comments.

Given Rhodes's inaccessible built environment to persons with hearing impairments particularly the life safety risk imposed on this population, we recommend the needs for staff members responsible with infrastructural maintenance to adapt these buildings in line with the concept inclusive design (ID) which enjoins universities to make their architectural

structures accessible not only to students of one type of disability, but rather to students from diverse disability categories (Chard and Couch, 1998:607). As defined by Chard and Couch inclusive design (ID) “includes designing features that will benefit as many people within our society as possible and means understanding the design needs of a wide cross section of society—wheelchair users, those with visual [accessible signage in Braille] or hearing impairments” (Chard and Couch,1998:607). Central to the concept of ID is that it enhances the quality of life for everyone who uses the built environment” (Chard and Couch, 1998:607) and it also “addresses physical barriers in a way which ‘respects diversity’ (Howell and Lazarus, 2003:68). From an inclusive design standpoint, following Chard and Couch Rhodes can accommodate the needs of students with hearing impairments by using such hearing aids as induction loops in lecture theatres (Chard and Couch, 1998:621). As regards, students with albinism the institution can address the educational needs of this population by installing the appropriate bulbs which does not affect the sight of students with albinism.

It is for this reason that designers of the built environment who draw on the principle of inclusive design should ensure that other disability categories are also equally accommodated. For instance, in order to cater for students with hearing impairments, the installation of induction loops in lecture theatres to be used by those with a hearing impairment is vital (Chard and Couch, 1998:621). In his study of deaf and hard of hearing students at one Australian university Matthew Brett recommended the modification of the physical infrastructure of learning environments in order to accommodate hearing augmentation devices as this will result in the full participation of these students with hearing impairments (Brett, 2010:8).

#### **G. Sensitize lecturers on educational needs of students with disabilities**

*What happens in those classrooms is equally critical to achieving genuine inclusive education...the numbers say nothing about how the teachers share, or fail to share, responsibility for students’ learning and instruction, or how students are succeeding as learners (Ferguson,2008:11).*

The above quote sheds light on the importance of lecturers in achieving inclusive education for SWDs and this is because lecturers are central because they interact with SWDs on a daily basis in the classroom setting. In this light, it follows that the successful implementation of inclusive education is also highly dependent upon the availability and active role of teachers in primary and secondary settings as well as lecturers in post-secondary settings who are disability sensitive and well-trained to teach SWDs. On the contrary, this does not seem to be the case at Rhodes as most student participants raised concerns about the fact that most lecturers hold negative attitudes towards SWDs which make these lecturers to be reluctant to provide reasonable accommodations among other supportive measures.

- **Recommendations**

Most of the student participants recognise the need for the formation of a Society for students with disabilities that should take a leading role in awareness raising alongside the management, the Institutional Culture Office among other stakeholders. These participants suggested that these awareness raising or sensitization workshops initiatives should target lecturers most so that they can promote positive attitudes in addressing the educational needs of SWDs particularly in the classroom setting. Globally, research in both Global North and Global South universities has found that the progress of students with disabilities in higher education is affected by the attitudes and willingness of academic staff to provide reasonable accommodation (Leyser *et al.*, 2000). As such, with the provision of these sensitisation workshops it is hoped that lecturers can promote positive attitudes towards supporting SWDs.

It has been argued that “personalized learning requires attention to the unique needs of all students of all abilities, acknowledging that each have different learning styles including students with mild, moderate or severe disabilities” (UNESCO, 2011:5). Under inclusive education, diverse learners should have access to equivalent learning opportunities (OECD, 2004). As pointed out by Hodge and Preston-Sabin “providing reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities is part of good teaching practice” (Hodge and Preston-Sabin, 1997 cited in Johnson and Fox, 2003:10). Against this background, I propose that sensitisation workshops should be an ongoing exercise on campuses and for future Orientation weeks. It is hoped that through these sensitisation workshops lecturers will likely to have positive attitudes towards supporting disability inclusion which will then enable them to modify their teaching and learning practices by making them to be “as inclusive as possible” (Moriña *et al.*, 2013:3) which is then central to effectively support the educational needs of SWDs in the classroom setting.

Apart from sensitising lecturers, we also recommends the need for the institution to give a disability award either to an individual or a department for their contribution to making Rhodes a welcoming place for people living with disabilities. This is because Rhodes tends to recognise excellence in relation to teaching, research, community engagement, environmental awareness, internationalisation etc.. In addition to that, we also recommend the need on the part of this institution also needs to invest in disability research especially given the fact researchers and postgraduate students across various departments at Rhodes are currently engaged in disability-related research. It is hoped that such research attracts positive interest by the academic community and by potential funders. Rhodes should explore the possibility of establishing a research chair and eventually a Research Unit in disability Studies.

## **H. Urgent need for a Disability Unit**

Some participants supported the idea of Rhodes having an established Disability Unit that will address the educational needs of SWDs with the exception of one staff member participant

who objected to the idea of having a Disability Unit as promoting indirect exclusion and isolation of SWDs as follows:

*If there will be an office for persons with disabilities, and I would never go there, I would never go to an office where there is a person who now does support for people with disabilities, no. It stigmatises people with disabilities. I can say straight that if there was a Disability Office I will never go there and I would ask them for help unless I was desperate. I would work with the people around me first and sit down and say look I have this problem can you help me with doing the bigger fonts when you print out or can you sent me an electronic copy. I think it should be more organic, by organic I mean somebody in the Student Bureau who is trained and understands how it works, somebody in the Postgraduate Office who is trained and understands how it works and some sensitisation in the departments with the academic staff* (Staff participant 4, Visual Impairment (partially sighted 1).

- **Recommendations**

Most South African universities have Disability Units (DUSMs) that are charged with the responsibility for protecting and promoting the interests and rights of SWDs and research noted that universities with established Disability Units have good practices of accommodating SWDs. This is particularly the case with those established Disability Units like the University of Cape Town, University of the Witwatersrand and University of the Free State and Pretoria University among others. This is because Disability Unit Staff Members in these institutions plays an important role “disability documentation and determin[ing] reasonable accommodations for these students” (Bryan and Myers, 2006:18-19). Apart from this, DUSMs play an important role in providing SWDs with direct and indirect support necessary for them to flourish in HEIs. According to Matshedisho, this direct support is usually comes in technical and material form through the provision of assistive devices, services and assistance with administrative procedures whereas indirect support comes in the form of training lecturers, and work collaboratively with them in teaching students with different categories of disabilities (Matshedisho, 2007). The importance of Disability Units has also been noted in the South African literature where authors like Pretorius and colleagues have argued that Disability Units can and should play an important role in ensuring fair and equitable policies and practices for SWDs (Pretorius *et al.*, 2011:2). Therefore, Rhodes is likely to benefit from having a Disability Unit. Conceptualising the Disability Unit as both a support and a research division would contribute to addressing the stigma associated with a specialised office for disabled people and open possibilities to attract external funding.

Apart from having a Disability Unit, since Rhodes approach to disability inclusion is still in its infancy, we also recommend the need for the institution to forge external collaborations with a number of organisations dealing with disability in Grahamstown, such as the National Library for the Blind and the Association for People with Disability. A stronger collaboration could be tapped into for teaching/research and community engagement activities as well as



joint initiatives during disability week. Recognising the value of such collaborations, budget allocations should be made to sustain them.

### **I. Putting disability at the center of transformation agenda**

The call for transforming higher education institutions in South Africa has been highlighted in the 1997 *White Paper* and the 2008 *Soudien Report* which indicate that there is need for immediate response from institutions to transform their spaces in order to promote a sense of belonging and comfort for various individuals who come into contact with these institutions (Munyuki, 2015:129). However, these transformation initiatives have tended to target only the able-bodied students at the cost of SWDs. For Ntombela, this is because “when the obvious needs of the minorities are not prioritised, it can be interpreted as if they are insignificant, and it can easily compromise the process of transformation” (Ntombela, 2013).

The South African *White paper on post-school education and training* (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2013) notes that despite national attempts at policy level to include PWDs, however, most higher education institutions still manages disability support in a fragmented way, as if it is separate from existing transformation and diversity programmes. Against this background, the *White paper on post-school education and training* points to the importance of including support staff, management and lecturers in the process of disability inclusion, thus pointing to a systemic approach to inclusion (Lyner-Cleophas *et al.*, 2014:1). In this study, most staff participants raised concerns about the institutions’ failure to include disability issues in the institutions’ transformation initiatives making the needs of this population not to be taken seriously because they are the minority. To elaborate on this, one of the staff member participants argued that Rhodes could effectively support the educational needs of SWDs if the institutions were to also address disability as a transformation issues.

It should be noted that the Employment Equity Act (EEA) recommends that at least 2 per cent % of all employees in companies, and more than 50 workers, should be PWDs (Modisha, 2004:155). However, most universities in South Africa are failing to meet this job reservation quota and one staff member participant argued that Rhodes’s approach to transformation is not genuine as it partially includes employees with disabilities in the form of employing them only in administration jobs and not in managerial jobs. Consideration of level in employment equity targets. Representation of staff members living with disabilities is currently below the set target. While achieving the required proportion of staff members living with disabilities within the whole population is important, as such, we recommend that attention should be paid to the level of these appointments. It is a common trend worldwide and across sectors to hire and maintain disabled people at relatively junior levels and in relatively low-paid positions to pay lip service to labour requirements. There should be an explicit strategy and concrete efforts to have people living with disabilities as senior academics and administrators. An example of a practical suggestion could be explicit recognition of the specific challenges and additional contributions associated with disability within the promotion criteria. The current provisions are too vague to be effective. A successful model in this respect could be

applied to other dimensions of diversity. This raises concerns because the level of appointment issue is extremely important from the transformation point of view, as it makes it difficult to just pay lip service to the policy by hiring disabled people at the lowest levels and keeping them there instead of also giving equal promotional opportunities.

- **Recommendations**

It could be argued that the exclusion of persons with disabilities in the institutions' transformation agendas is a violation of one of the aims of the Employment Equity Act (EEA) aims which is to achieve the "implementation of affirmative action measures in favour of the designated groups [including persons with disabilities]" through facilitating their representation in all levels of occupation (Modise *et al.*, 2014:583). Hence, we recommend the need on the part of the institution to also take seriously disability issues by equalizing educational and employment opportunities to PWDs at Rhodes. This is because doing so will be in line with the provisions of the 1997 National Integrated Disability Strategy policy emphasizes the involvement of PWDs themselves in the process of transformation (Office of the Deputy President, 1997:5), and one ways of achieving this is giving them and the voice to share their experiences as to how they are included by these higher educational institutions. As argued by Ohajunwa and colleagues this is one ways of achieving meaningful disability inclusion from a transformation and diversity standpoint (Ohajunwa *et al.*, 2014:115).

The other way of practically putting disability in the center of transformation agenda is through ensuring the representation of staff members and students with disabilities on relevant committees. In this context, we recommend that people living with disabilities should be represented in selection and promotion committees where disabled candidates or applicants are involved. This also applies to grievance, disciplinary and harassment committees. At least one disabled person should be present where crucial decisions about disabled staff members are taken. It should be recognised that these are relatively closed committees where prejudice is particularly difficult to recognise and detect. As a general note, transparency and participation in deciding the composition of these committee would greatly contribute to overall transformation.

In addition to that, we also recommend the need for persons with disabilities representatives on Faculty Boards and Senate. Each Faculty should be encouraged to elect a disability representative to report regularly [could be once a year?] on progress made in relation to the recommendations made in this document. While various members of the disability committee sit in Senate, it is important to have at least one Senate representative whose mandate is specifically to represent the interest of people living with disabilities at Rhodes.

## **J. Exclusion of SWDs from a social perspective, sports and recreation**

Article 30 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) provides for the participation of persons with disabilities (PWDs) in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport. Section 5(b) of this Article specifically obliges signatories to take appropriate measures "to ensure that persons with disabilities have an opportunity to

organize, develop and participate in disability-specific sporting and recreational activities and, to this end, encourage the provision, on an equal basis with others, of appropriate instruction, training and resources” (UNCRPD, 2006:23). As a signatory to the UNCRPD, the South African government has enacted various policies to address the sporting and recreational needs of student with disabilities (SWDs) in higher education institutions (HEIs) as one of the ways of socially including this population. Article 6 of the *South African Disability Human Rights Charter*, for instance, provides that “disabled people shall have the right to engage in sport and recreational activities and resources, such as sports facilities and financial assistance, as well as opportunities for participation, shall be made available to support this initiative”. Despite this supportive and enabling policy framework being in place, research indicates that SWDs have low participation opportunities in comparison to their non-disabled peers in sports and recreational activities on South African campuses, with universities tending to focus more on the academic needs of SWDs than on the social inclusion of SWDs.

This is consistent with Israel research findings where one student participant raised concerns about Rhodes ableist exclusionary culture as a barrier to providing equal opportunities for SWDs to participate in sport and recreational activities as follows:

*Terrible! The entire University’s culture is ableist. Many students with disabilities have to go out of their way to be included particularly in social events and sport. I didn’t do serenades both as a first year and house committee member. No one cared that dancing and standing were strenuous to me. So instead of being asked how I could be incorporated into the performances, I was asked to just sit out serenades and many other physical house events. Disabled sport shouldn’t be considered on the demand of it. It should be an automatic offer to those interested. You cannot invest in disabled sports because five students are interested in it. For non-disabled athletes, that’s certainly not the case so why is acceptable for ‘disabled’ athletes?*

- **Recommendations**

Against this background, we recognise the need on the part of the institution not only to focus on academic inclusion of SWDs, but also to provide an enabling environment for SWDs to flourish by also participating in sport and recreational activities. This is because research has noted that higher education institutions’ focus on academic inclusion has the potential of exacerbating the social exclusion which subsequently prevents SWDs from reaching their full potential at university (Lunsford and Bargerhuff, 2006:40; see also Jameel, 2011:15).

#### **K. Good practices of disability inclusion**

Although many participants expressed concerns about Rhodes University’s exclusionary practices towards persons with disabilities (both staff members and students with disabilities), however, some participants applauded the institution for taking proactive measures in supporting their specific needs. For instance, 2 (two) students whose disability requires them to follow a specific diet applauded their Dining Halls for effectively meeting

their nutritional needs. Other two students applauded their wardens in residences as well some of their lecturers for being very sensitive towards their educational needs. As regards staff members, most of them noted that they have good relations with their co-workers and their Head of Departments (HoD). The efforts by support and administrative divisions (e.g. finance and research office) are also recognised. Those staff members who depend on assistive devices appreciated the fact that the university always responds quickly each time they request these assistive devices. Other staff member participants even openly noted that unlike SWDs, they do not necessarily need the help of the university to flourish. While all sampled 6 staff members participants applauded the institution for addressing their needs, it should be noted that one staff member participant raised concerns about unfair discrimination from his superiors as follows:

*They shout at me here and it makes me stressed. They give me instructions, and I tell them that I am going to sweep I have been sweeping for years now. They should speak to me in a normal way. They need to talk to me in a proper way and not shout at me because I always do my job. One of my bosses taught me how to do welding. Now the problem is that they don't want me to weld a lot here. The white people don't want me to weld a lot. I don't know why, they only want me to sweep. Well I learnt how to weld, so I want to weld and not only sweep. yes. I have been sweeping for ages. Even now, I just swept. I really don't like it, I want to be like my other colleagues and weld not to sweep all the time (Staff Participant 7, Intellectual/Mental Disability).*

- **Recommendations**

While it is evident from the findings of staff member participants that the institution is playing an important role in addressing the needs of this cadre, however, given the fact that some participants are still being discriminated against as is the case with the above cited participant. Hence, we recommend the need on the part of the institution to set up a separate structure to report discrimination (e.g. through Equity and Institutional Culture) with actual power of redress would go a long way.

## **Conclusions**

From the findings of this study, it could be noted that although Rhodes has disability policies to facilitate the inclusion of both staff and students with disabilities, this inclusion only remains on paper and not in practice as most persons are still discriminated against on the grounds of their disability. Hence, the institution needs to find way to address all the above mentioned recommendations if it is to make this institution a welcoming environment for present and future persons with disabilities. We recognise the efforts made thus far either in terms of existing structures (e.g. disability committee), processes (e.g. ad hoc assistance) or mechanisms (e.g. extra time allocation for exams) either formally or informally by the University. We also acknowledge the efforts of committed individuals who, often going

beyond the “call of duty” make or have made a positive difference in the experience of people living with disabilities at Rhodes. Based on our background work and the findings presented above, we would like to propose four guiding principles:

- 1) Existing policies, resolutions by formal structures and existing rules should be enforced. In most cases this is a simple matter of civility and common sense, e.g. not to use designated toilets or not to park in designated spaces unless one is entitled to. In other cases it is a matter of ensuring that disability features along other dimensions of diversity (e.g. gender, languages etc.) in strategic documents and that people living with disability are represented in high-level committees.
- 2) Informal efforts should be streamlined. Existing initiatives by departments, individuals etc should be supported and formalised. This ensures that the level of support currently enjoyed by people living with disabilities is guaranteed to continue in the future.
- 3) Engagement around disability needs to go beyond the minimum requirements. We recognise that respecting the current legal framework as well as basic rules of civility and human dignity is necessary but it is not enough. Real transformation requires a shift from a reactive approach, informed by a medical model of disability, to a proactive one which sees disability as a challenge (at worst) and an opportunity (at best).
- 4) People living with disabilities should be involved in decisions affecting them. “Nothing about us without us” is a popular slogan of the disability movement. People living with disabilities are the ones who know best what they can do, what their limitations are and how to overcome them. Prejudice, paternalism and discrimination (overt or covert, conscious or unconscious) cannot be overcome until people living with disabilities are empowered to make decisions. Given the relatively small number of people living with disabilities at Rhodes and the relative neglect of disability in the past, current processes do not seem to ensure this.
- 5) The principle of universal access by design should inform all planning and development activities. This includes major infrastructural projects as well as curriculum design and assessment strategies for individual courses. Adherence to this principle should be engrained in the relevant evaluation processes.

### **Part III.**

**Based on the report presented above and on discussions leading up to the summit, the following recommendations are also tabled for discussion:**

1. Integration of a disability slot in orientation week for students and course academic orientation for lecturers. Disability should be mentioned when welcoming new members of our community. This will make people living with disabilities feel welcome and will equip new students and lecturers to engage with disabled colleagues and students. Existing staff and students with disabilities could bring their experiences and provide practical guidelines, tips and suggestions. Action: Division of Student Affairs and CHERTL?
2. Creation of campus accessibility map. Using the Geography Department’s GIS-enabled computers, we should build a spatial accessibility database and create a large pictorial map

of campus, indicating accessible routes and entry points into buildings, and accessible facilities such as toilets, etc. Make this map available online, and also put up large printed copies of the map – with a tactile element – in key positions on campus, together with durable signage around campus indicating accessible routes. This will help people living with disabilities to quickly access services, rather than spend time trying to navigate unnecessary barriers, thus making them feel welcome on campus. Action: Infrastructure & Operations Division in collaboration with Geography Department.

3. Improved infrastructure and facilities to increase campus accessibility. For those with mobility impairments, we should ensure that ramp gradients are correct and/or put up railings, maintain pathways and pedestrian crossings so that they are even and smooth, ensure the correct height for tables, door handles, light switches, food serverly counters, emergency equipment (fire extinguishers and alarms), etc, and provision of suitable evacuation options (e.g. horizontal evacuation, stairway evacuation, *Evac Chair*, etc) in the event of emergencies. For those with hearing impairments, we should install loop systems in lecture venues, install lights in venues and residences that flash when the fire alarm goes off, etc. For those with visual hearing impairments, make audio feedback available, provide assistive software and equipment – and publicise the areas where it is available, gradually introduce braille on doors to buildings, etc. This will help people living with disabilities to feel welcome and accommodated on campus. Action: Infrastructure & Operations Division and Facilities Office.
4. Creation of dedicated RU accessibility webpage. Disability considerations and accessibility information should be readily available online to all members of our community, by creating, for example [www.ru.ac.za/disability](http://www.ru.ac.za/disability) or [www.ru.ac.za/accessibility](http://www.ru.ac.za/accessibility). This will serve as a ‘one-stop-shop’ of resources and ideas that will also make people living with disabilities feel welcomed and accommodated. Action: RU Disability Committee?
5. Disability representatives on relevant committees. People living with disabilities should be represented in selection and promotion committees where disabled candidates or applicants are involved. This also applies to grievance, disciplinary and harassment committees. At least one disabled person should be present where crucial decisions about disabled staff members are taken. It should be recognised that these are relatively closed committees where prejudice is particularly difficult to recognise and detect. As a general note, transparency and participation in deciding the composition of these committees would greatly contribute to overall transformation. Action: RU Senior Management?
6. Disability representatives on Faculty Boards and Senate: Each Faculty should be encouraged to elect a disability representative to report regularly [could be once a year?] on progress made in relation to the recommendations made in this document. While various members of the Disability Committee sit in Senate, it is important to have at least one Senate representative whose mandate is specifically to represent the interest of people living with disabilities at Rhodes. Action: RU Senior Management?
7. Consideration of level in employment equity targets. Representation of staff members living with disabilities is currently below the set target. While achieving the required proportion of staff members living with disabilities within the whole population is important, attention should be paid to the level of these appointments. It is a common trend worldwide and across sectors to hire and maintain disabled people at relatively junior levels and in relatively low-paid positions to pay lip service to labour requirements. There should be an explicit strategy



and concrete efforts to have people living with disabilities as senior academics and administrators. An example of a practical suggestion could be explicit recognition of the specific challenges and additional contributions associated with disability within the promotion criteria. The current provisions are too vague to be effective. A successful model in this respect could be applied to other dimensions of diversity. Action: Human Resources Division.

- 8.** Cross-curriculum integration. Lectures (and in some cases entire modules) on disability-related topics are already part of Rhodes courses. This should be expanded to ensure that all students at Rhodes, no matter their chosen field of study, learn about disability as part of their degree. Reflections on disability should extend beyond the syllabus to include teaching and assessment strategies. Considering that any student may become temporarily disabled during a course, such reflections should be part of the courses offered by CHERTL and specifically assessed in tenure and promotion portfolios. Action: CHERTL and RU Faculties.
- 9.** Assessment. Currently, students who live with disabilities may apply for extra time during exams. This is useful for certain types of impairments (e.g. partial sight). In other cases, however, it is unnecessary (e.g. students in a wheelchair) or pointless (e.g. completely blind students). Alternative solutions such as the use of a computer, the possibility of writing in a separate room alone, etc, should be explored with the student. Action: Division of Student Affairs, and RU Faculties.
- 10.** Disability research. Researchers and postgraduate students across various departments at Rhodes are currently engaged in disability-related research. Such research attracts positive interest by the academic community and by potential funders. Rhodes should explore the possibility of establishing a research chair and eventually a Research Unit in disability Studies. Action: RU Faculties.
- 11.** Departmental seminars. Many academic departments hold regular seminars by their own staff/students or by guest lecturers. In one Disability Week, these events could be exploited to give space to the exploring disability-related experiences (teaching/research/community engagement) of students and colleagues. This practice should become a regular feature of the academic calendar. Ideally, such seminars should take place during Disability Week to take advantage of guests from outside Rhodes. Action: RU Faculties.
- 12.** External collaborations. In Grahamstown there are a number of organisations dealing with disability, such as the National Library for the Blind and the Association for People with Disability. Further afield, provincial structures such as the Eastern Cape branch of the Deaf Federation of South Africa (DeafSA) provide useful opportunities for collaboration. A stronger collaborations could be tapped into for teaching/ research and community engagement activities as well as joint initiatives during Disability week. Recognising the value of such collaborations, budget allocations should be made to sustain them. Action: Research Office and RU Faculties.
- 13.** Disability award. Rhodes recognises excellence in relation to teaching, research, community engagement, environmental awareness, internationalisation, etc. A disability award should be established, which could be, given either to an individual or a department for their contribution to making Rhodes a welcoming place for people living with disabilities. Action: RU Disability Committee.

- 14.** Creation of Disability Support Officer position. Rhodes University is one of the few universities in South Africa which does not have a separate Disability Unit. While the cost of establishing such a unit at this point in the university's history may be prohibitive, a single Disability Support Officer working in the Division of Equity and Institutional Culture could do much to facilitate access to the university for both students and staff with disabilities and ensure the implementation of the recommendations made above. Action: Institutional Planning Unit
- 15.** Mobilizing of resources. If the university is to make significant progress towards accommodating people with disabilities, then it needs to commit towards mobilizing resources both for alteration of existing buildings to ensure access to people with mobility impairments, and for human resource needs related to disabilities, such as sign language interpreters to allow the accommodation of Deaf students. The difficulty of ensuring accessibility without a dedicated allocation of funds towards disability-related projects was made clear through the process of installing a lift in the Bantu Stephen Biko Building; there were frequent debates about which source of funding within the institution should be used to pay for the lift. We recognize the university's current financial difficulties, but we recommend that the university begin to consider allocations for improving accessibility for people with disabilities as part of its financial planning for the future. Action: Institutional Planning Unit, Budget Committee