Background
This study was undertaken as part of the final year undergraduate degree programme at De Montfort University. In 2003 Code found that people with aphasia spent an average of twenty hours outside their home in a typical week. In this limited amount of time away from the family home, people with aphasia talked to family, friends and service industry workers. Brown, McGahan, Alkhaledi, Seah, Howe & Worrall (2006) conducted research into the knowledge and attitudes of these service industry workers using two small focus groups. Their research concluded that attitudes to disability and a lack of knowledge about different types of disability were barriers to social participation. These studies prompted this research question: What do service industry workers know about people with aphasia?

Method
50 questionnaires were given to employees in a single outlet of a national chain of shops. The questionnaire used in this study was based on interview questions that had been used by Simmons-Mackie, Code, Armstrong, Steigler & Elma in 2002. Simmons-Mackie et al’s (2002) survey questions had identified that members of the public across three continents had very little understanding of aphasia.


Section 1
Have you ever heard of aphasia? Please circle your answer

If no please go to section 3 on the last page of the questionnaire.
If yes or unsure please continue.

Use your own words to describe the following: Circle your answers

1 What is aphasia?
2 What causes aphasia?
3 What do you think can be done to help people with aphasia?

Section 2
4 Would you say people with aphasia...

5 Is aphasia caused by...

6 Where did you hear about aphasia...

Section 3
What can you tell me about communication problems in general? Please write anything you know about them.

Results
Section 1
37 questionnaires were returned. 31/37 84% service industry workers were unable to provide any information about aphasia. 6/37 (16%) of service industry workers were able to describe aphasia.

Section 2
All six participants identified that people with aphasia had difficulties with pronunciation (4a) and putting ideas into words (4b). These participants attributed their knowledge of aphasia to personal experience, listening to the radio or watching television. Less than three participants suggested that any of the other problems could be associated with aphasia.

Section 3
Twelve participants did not provide a response to section 3. Of the 25 participants who responded to this part of the questionnaire 11/25 identified that deafness could cause a communication impairment. 8/25 suggested that autism could cause a problem with communication. Less than 5 participants suggested that blindness, struggling to speak, not being able to understand what other people are thinking, reading and writing difficulties, brain damage, drunkenness, physical disabilities, stammering and stroke could cause communication problems.

Discussion
This small scale study has provided more evidence to suggest that service industry workers such as retail assistants, policemen, civil servants and transport employees may have very little understanding of the communication difficulties experienced by people with aphasia. This lack of knowledge about aphasia is a recognised barrier to social participation (Brown et al, 2006) and suggests that people with aphasia may have difficulty finding positive communication opportunities in the limited amount of time they spend away from home. The results of this study could be also be used to support the development of therapy interventions that are designed to help individuals with aphasia overcome the difficulties they encounter communicating with people who do not know how to support their conversational interactions.

References
