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# **The construction of under-representation in UK and Swedish higher education in the European context: implications for disabled students**

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## Disabled students and representation ... Who is being compared with whom and what might be missing?

- In Europe –self-identification of disability by country by large and minor obstacles to study – but comparison bedevilled by different interpretations of ‘disability’
  - By categories used:
    - Disabled - non-disabled
    - Within disabled group – by type of impairment
  - By **access** to and **progress** through Higher Education; by **outcomes** after Higher Education
  - But rarely by other social characteristics and disability
- Comparison in UK often focused on disabled – non-disabled students – problematic in heterogeneous disabled population

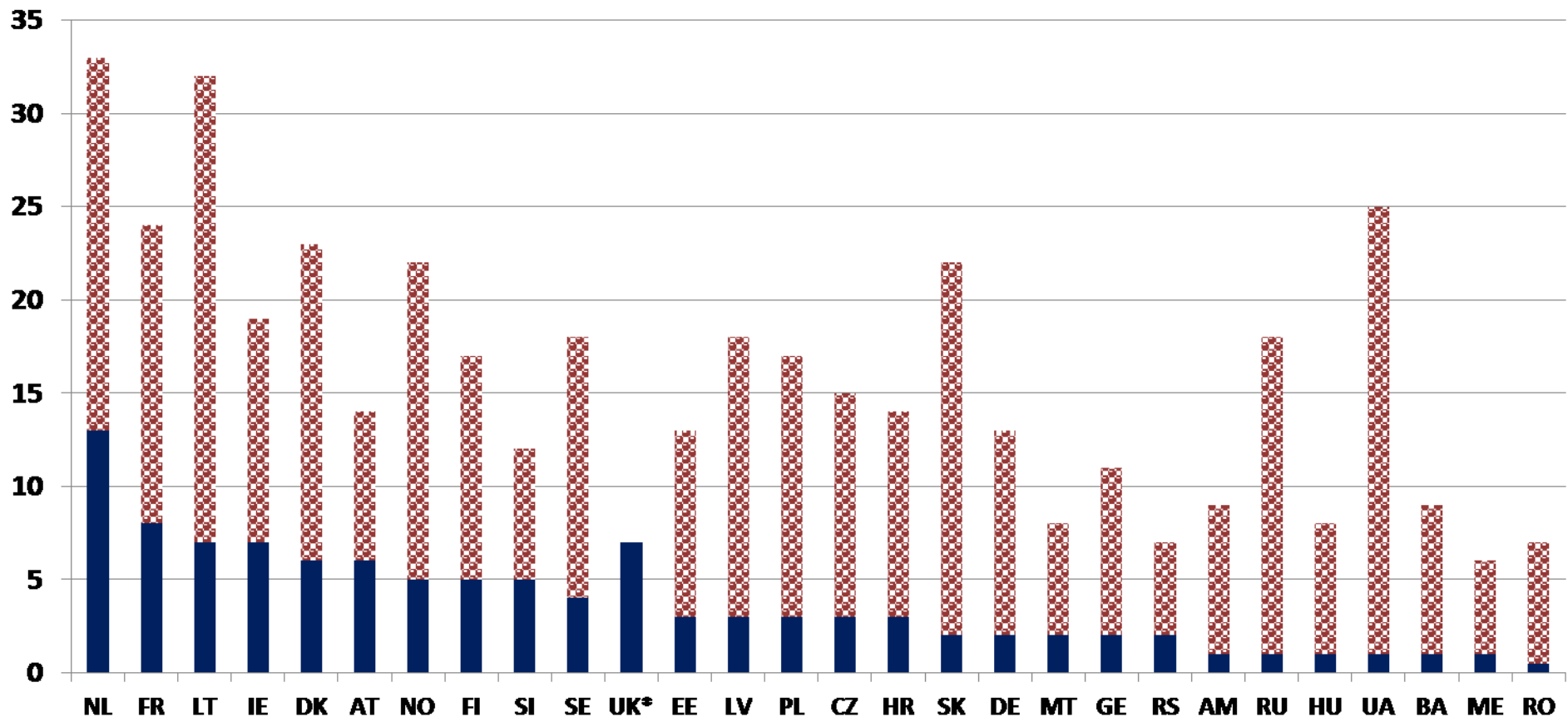


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# Eurostudent V – national differences in disabled student numbers: Cultural differences in understanding of disability and/or differences in data collection?



■ Big obstacle    ▨ Minor or no obstacle



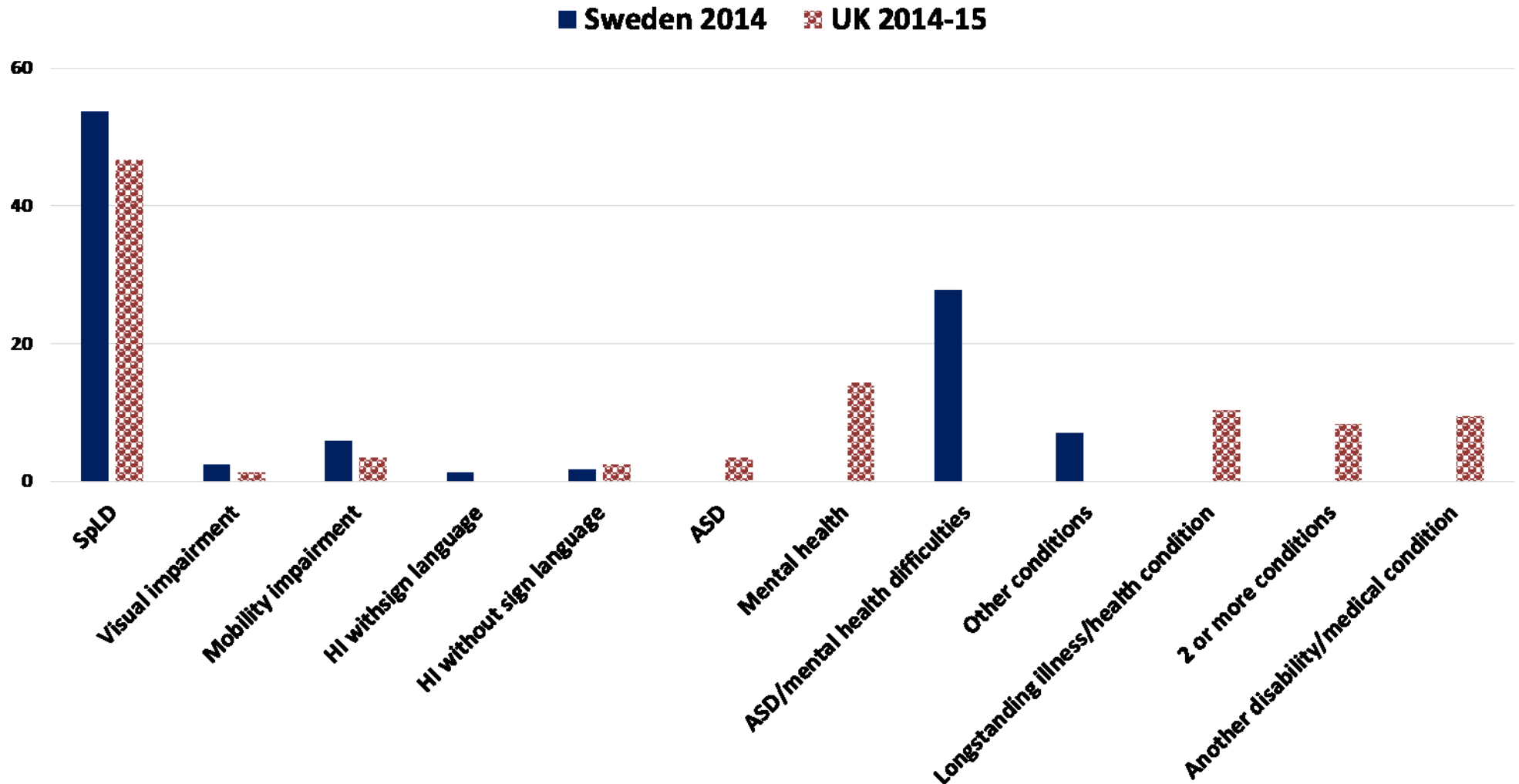
## Disabled students in Europe, UK and Sweden

- Sweden and UK generally above average and two of the few countries that monitor progress through higher education studies ...
- Both countries have comprehensive equalities legislation and both promote widening access with main emphasis on socioeconomic background.
- The number of disabled students have increased over the last 2 decades.
- Sweden – hub at Stockholm University distributes funding to institutions and collates data. Data shows students known to the coordinators. No use of benchmarks and targets. Nationwide system of coordinators.
- UK – funding is managed at country (i.e. England, Scotland, Wales, NI) level. Institutions organise own disability support.
- Strong emphasis on annual performance indicators (PIs) in the UK with legislation underpinning duties to widen access in HE – cover both disabled students and students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds



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# What counts as being a disabled student is similar – and based on medical model – 7 vs 9 categories





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# **But what about disability and social class in access to HE?**

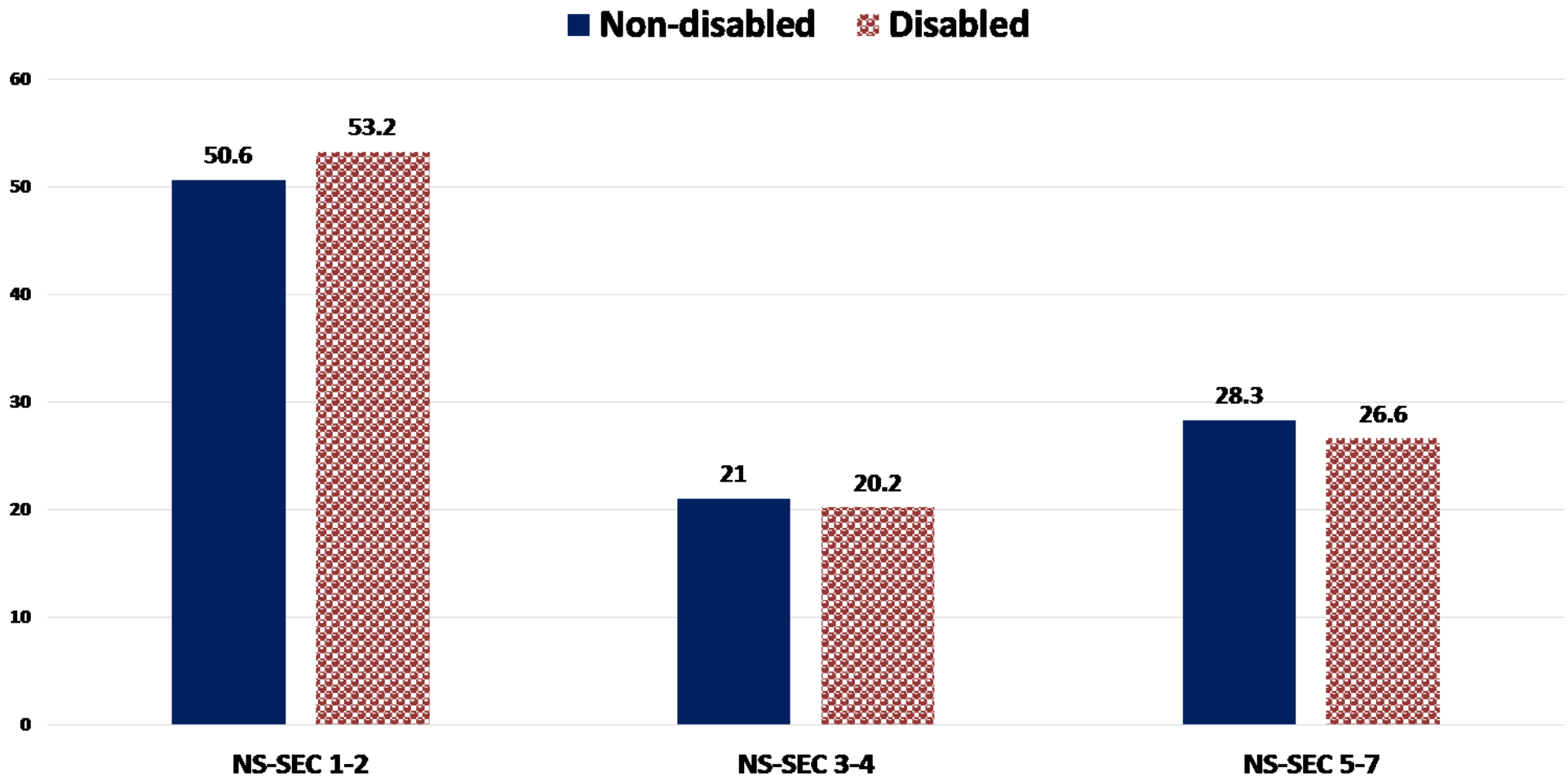
**An examination of disability and parental occupational status of ‘young’ students in the UK shows:**

- **Disabled students from higher social class but**
- **Type of impairment matters ..**

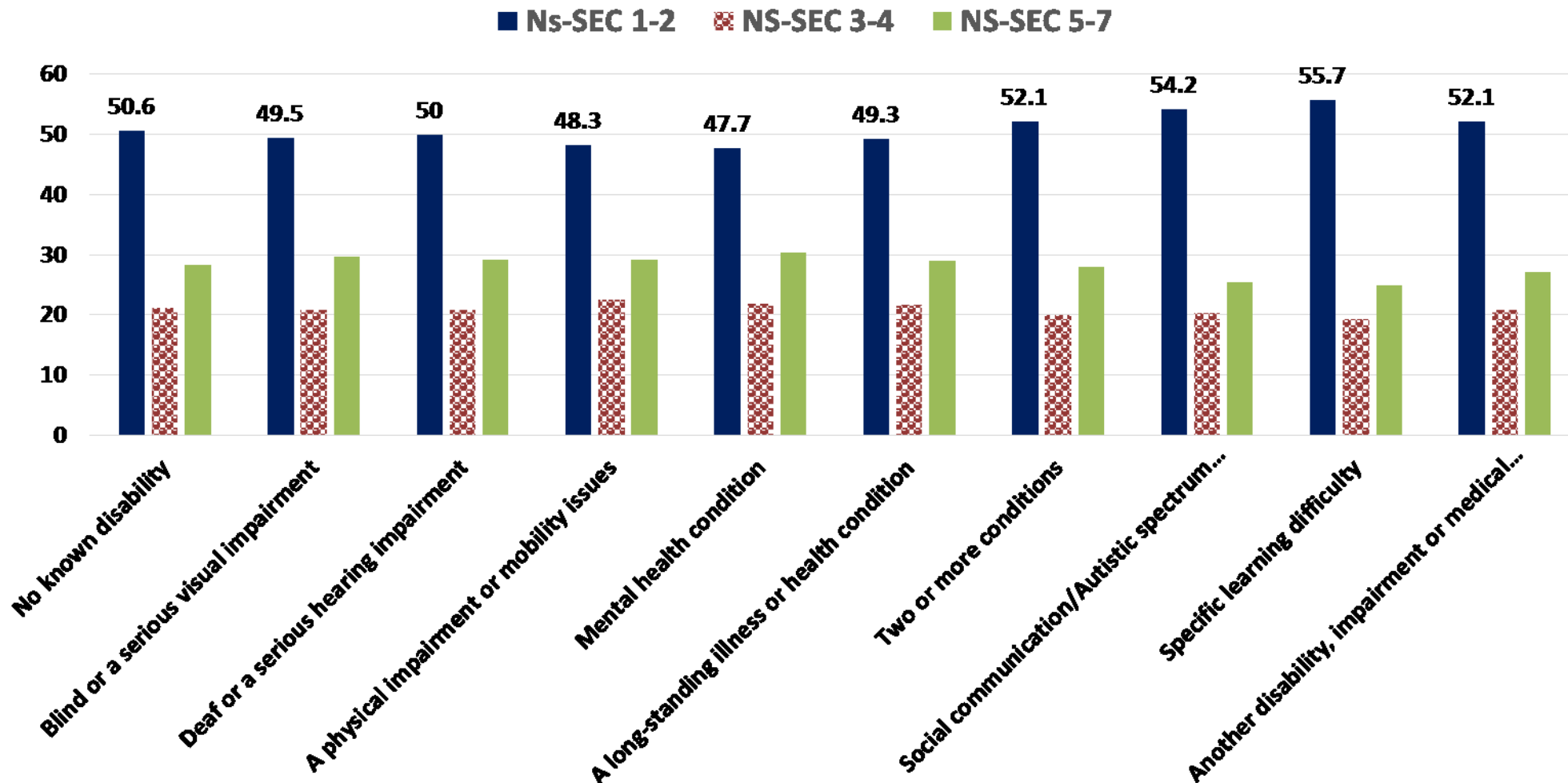


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## Disabled and non-disabled students by occupational status (NS-SEC) of parent/carer, 1<sup>st</sup> year UG students



## Different measure: by type of impairment: occupational status of parent/carer 1st year UG students, different picture





# Progression – Scottish students – by different social characteristics

Data on progression by social characteristics of students includes no examination of the intersection between disability, social background and type of impairment

- Disabled students are more likely **not** to return to study in year 2 than average
- MD20/40 (students from most deprived neighbourhoods) even less likely to return to study

What about disabled students from MD20/40 backgrounds?

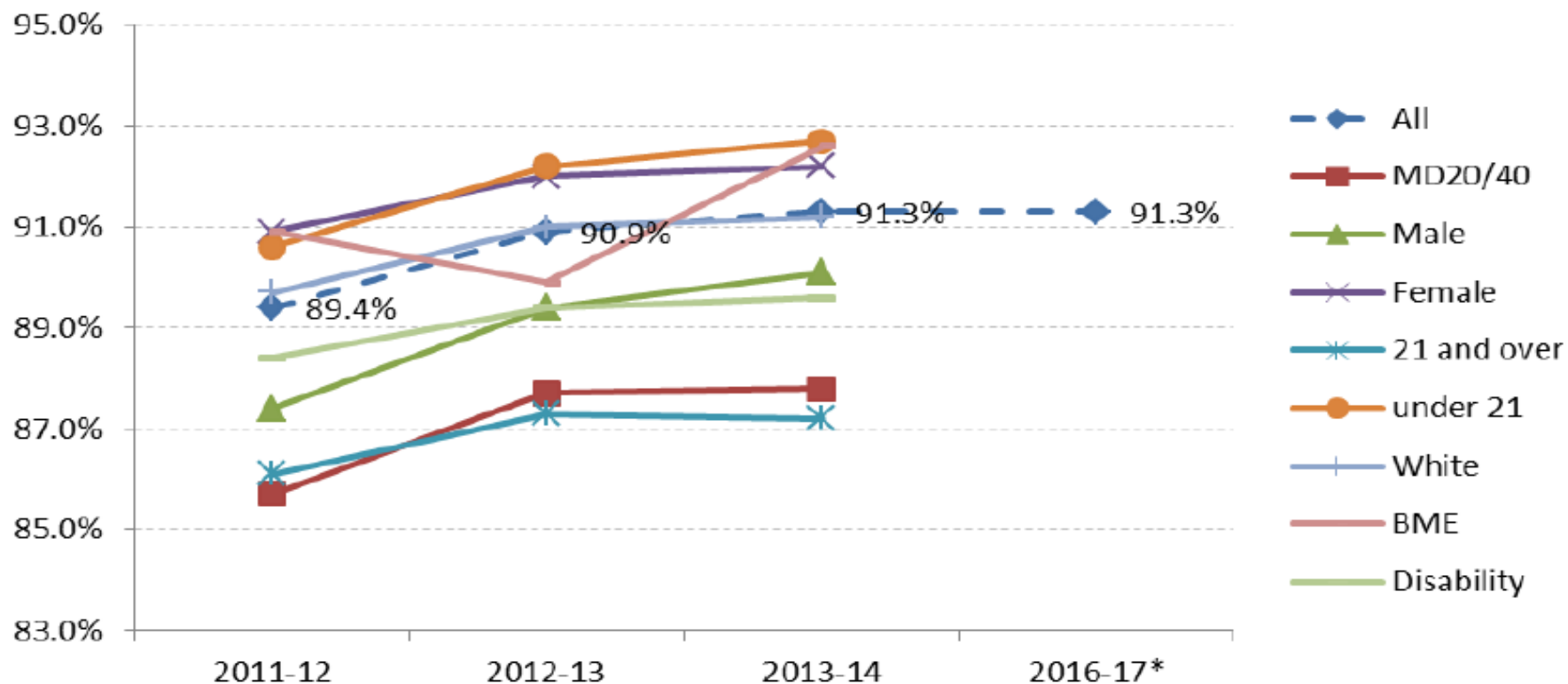


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# Returning to study in year 2, Scottish Funding Council, 2015



The proportion of full-time first year Scottish-domiciled entrants from different protected characteristic groups returning to study in year two



Source: HESA

## Outcomes: UK wide

Outcomes are analysed by type of impairment but no examination of social background

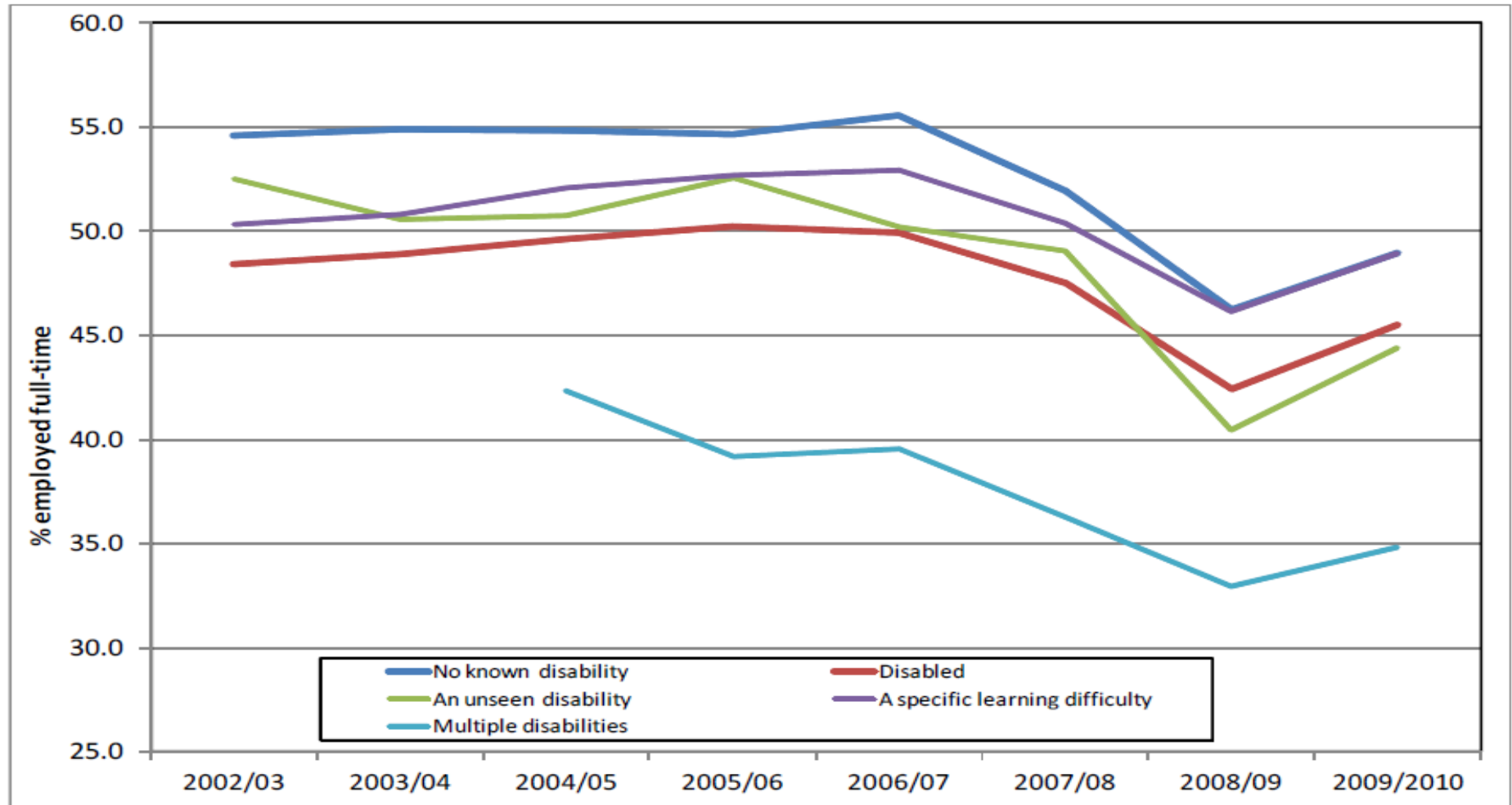
- Non-disabled students and those with SpLD (generally higher social class backgrounds) are most likely to be in FT employment
- Students with mobility problems and those with mental health difficulties have far lower rates of FT employment

What about students with mental health difficulties from low socioeconomic backgrounds?



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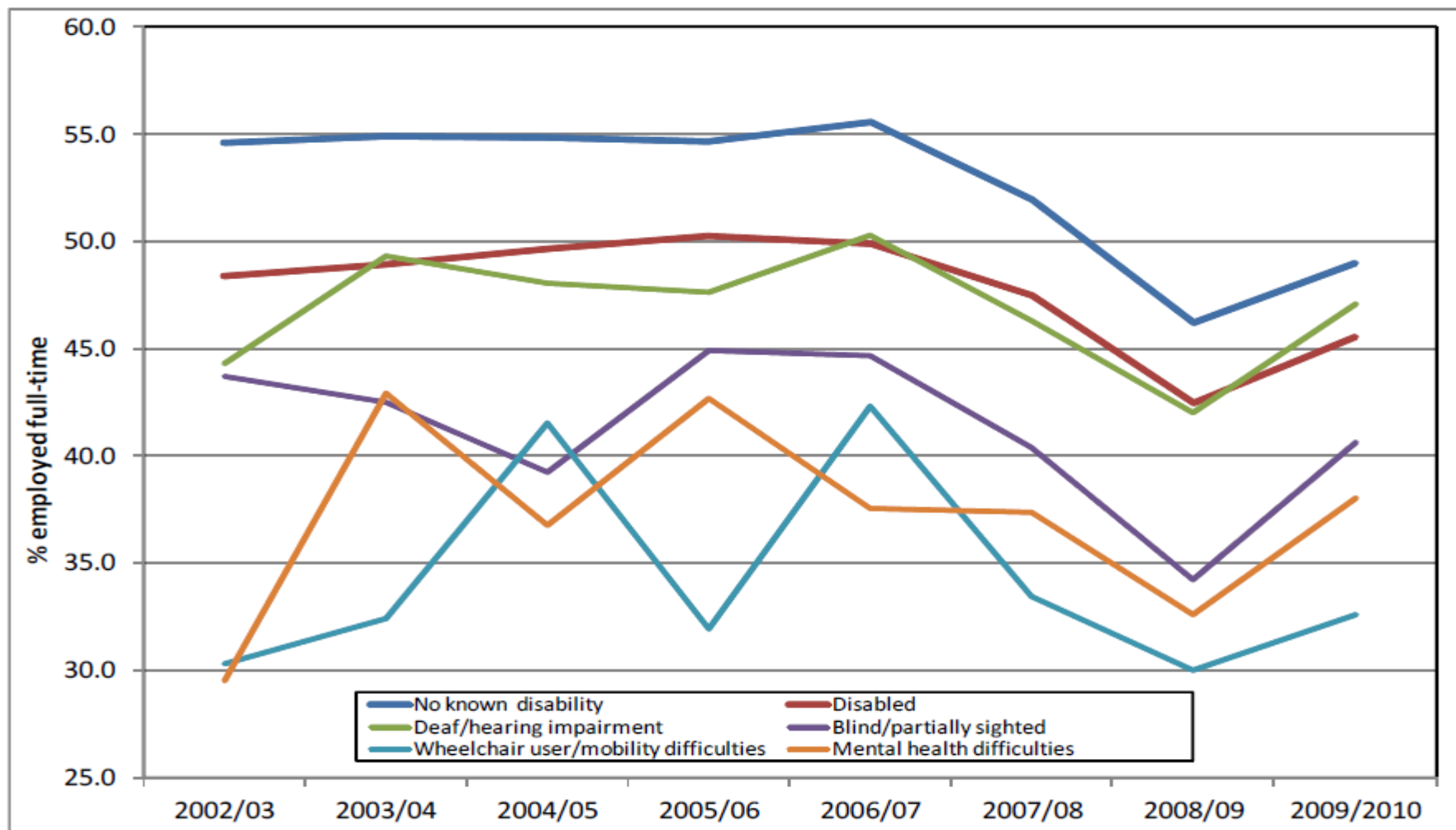
# Outcomes: employment rates continued





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# Outcomes: employment rates (FT), AGCAS, 2013



# Qualitative data show

- Different impairment leads to different educational experiences and different outcomes

AND (and a but)

- The impact of socioeconomic background plays an important role – but does not always lead to better outcomes

# The impact social background on educational experiences of deaf students

*‘the social networks and advocacy power of their parents were closely related to their **socio-economic status**. They played a significant role in shaping the young people’s experiences of school education, as well as their post-school journeys’ (Fordyce, et al, 2013, p.113)*

# Issues and challenges

1. Disabled students are not a homogeneous group – they have:
  - different impairments which lead to different needs
  - different outcomes
2. Disabled students from disadvantaged backgrounds are potentially doubly disadvantaged because:
  - they do not necessarily have access to social networks that can help them
  - they are probably at greater risk of dropping out
3. Indicators that only focus on one characteristics may leave out other factors that are important in ensuring equal access, relevant support and fair outcomes for all disabled students