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## **UNiversal Inclusion: Rights and Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities in the Academic Context**

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# Background

- Expansion of participation in higher education across Europe since 1990s driven by both economic and social justice concerns.
- Participation by students from middle class backgrounds already at saturation point
- Creation of ‘knowledge society’ therefore requires higher rates of participation by ‘non traditional’ groups, including disabled students
- Despite official rhetoric on widening participation, progress appears to be slow – this presentation asks why this is the case and what measures may promote change

# Structure

- Overview of European policy on widening access to higher education
- The construction of disability and national participation rates
- Policy and practice in the UK and Sweden
- British data on the social characteristics of disabled students, including some intersectional analysis.
- Short case studies illustrating intersections of disability and social class
- Summary and discussion of key points.

# Key policy documents and strategies

- The Bologna Process focuses on harmonisation of HE across European Higher Education Area
- Social dimension developed from 2001 onwards
- Focus on increasing participation and diversity
- ‘The student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels should reflect the diversity of our populations’ (EACA, 2012)
- Supported by the *European Disability Strategy 2010-2020* and the *Education and Training within Europe 2020 Strategy*

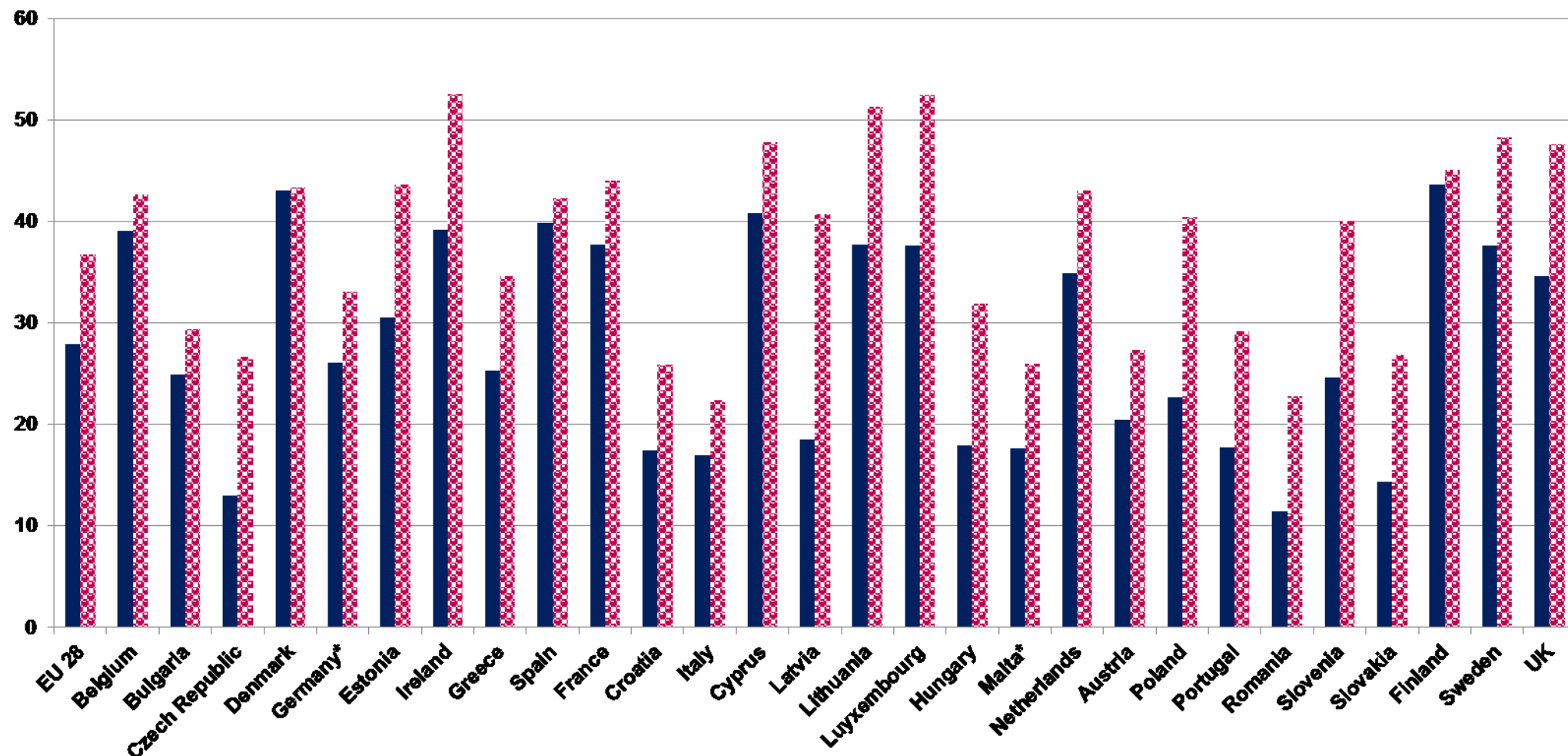


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# Progress towards EU benchmark on HE participation – By 2020, 40% of 30-34 year olds should have completed third level education



■ 2005 ■ 2013



# Understandings of ‘non-traditional’ students varies across Europe

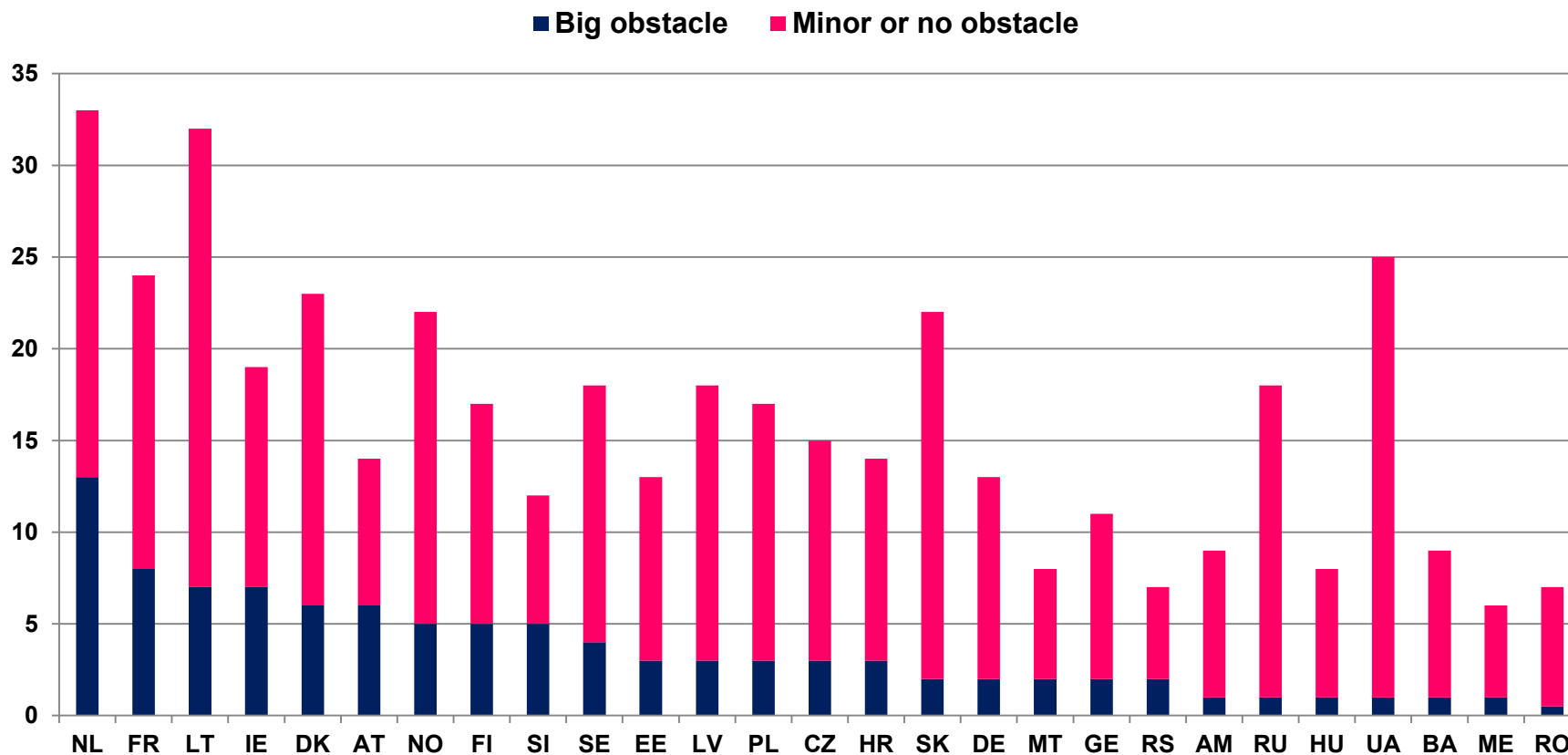
- Eurydice report suggests that most countries have few or no targets and limited data gathering.
- Data may be gathered in relation to:
  - Qualification prior to entry (27 jurisdictions)
  - Socioeconomic status (19 jurisdictions)
  - Disability (17 jurisdictions)
  - Labour market status prior to entry (13 jurisdictions)
  - Labour market status during studies (12 jurisdictions)
  - Ethnic/cultural/linguistic minority status (8 jurisdictions)
  - Migrant status (13 jurisdictions)



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# Eurostudent Survey shows national differences in disabled students' participation

## Cultural differences in understanding of disability?





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## Different approaches across Europe

- In most countries, legislation prohibits discrimination against disabled students.
- However, universities have much autonomy in this area and sometimes very little regulation/monitoring.
- In some countries (e.g. UK), information on inclusion of disabled students is gathered centrally – although universities operate as autonomous institutions.
- Outcomes of UK approach.....



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# Increases and changes in categories (full-time undergraduate) UK, HESA

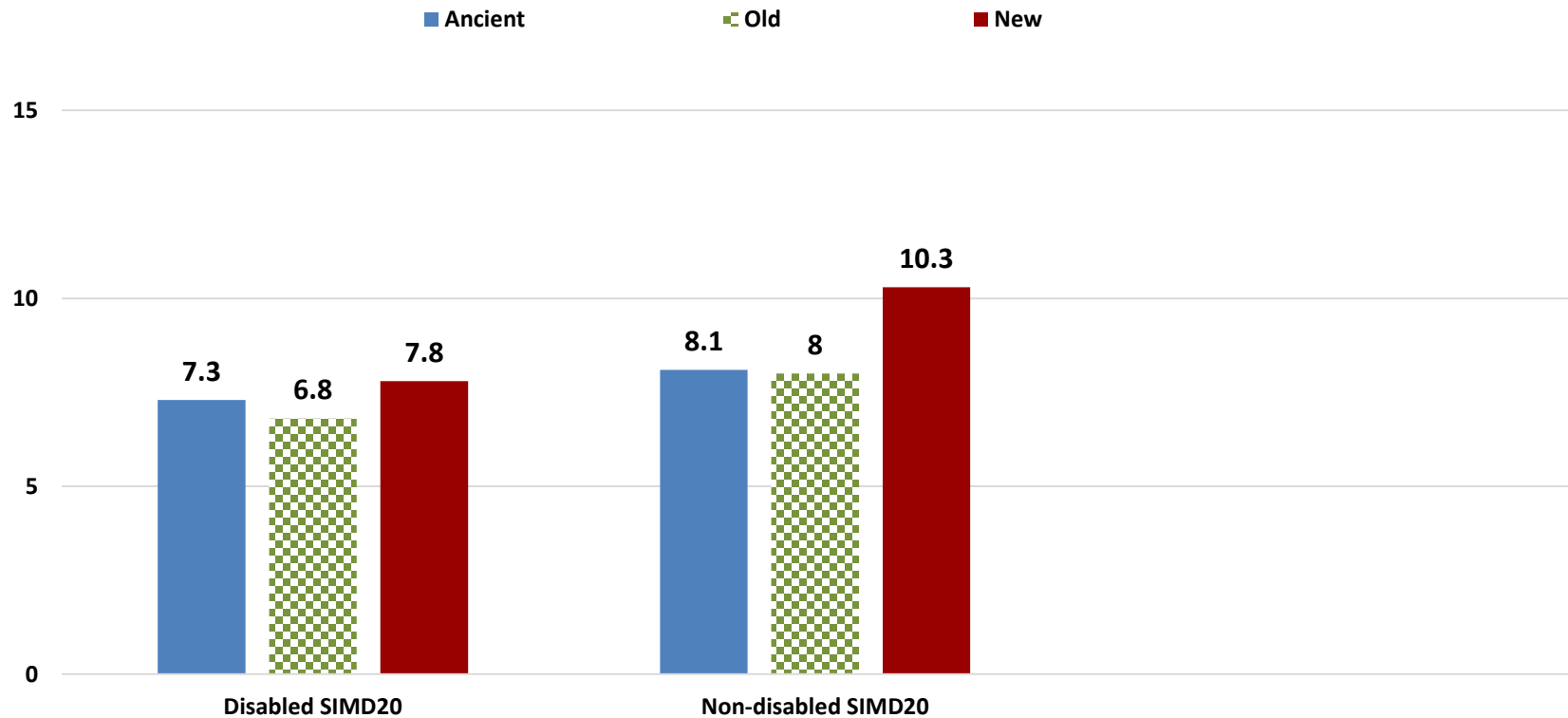


Type of impairment	1994-95	2004-05	2013-14
Unseen disability	57.5	17.1	-
Dyslexia ( <i>Specific learning difficulty</i> )	16.2	54.2	53.3
Other disability ( <i>or medical condition</i> )	8.9	10.2	8.8
Deaf/hard of hearing	5.9	3.7	2.1
Wheelchair/mobility difficulties ( <i>A physical impairment or mobility issues</i> )	2.9	2.6	3
Blind/partially sighted	3.9	2.4	0.2
Multiple disabilities ( <i>Two or more conditions</i> )	3.3	4.8	5.3
Mental health difficulties	1.2	4.0	12.5
Personal care support	0.2	0.1	-
( <i>Social communication and</i> ) Autistic spectrum disorder	-	0.9	4
Proportion of all F-T first degree students	3.6	7.1	11.3



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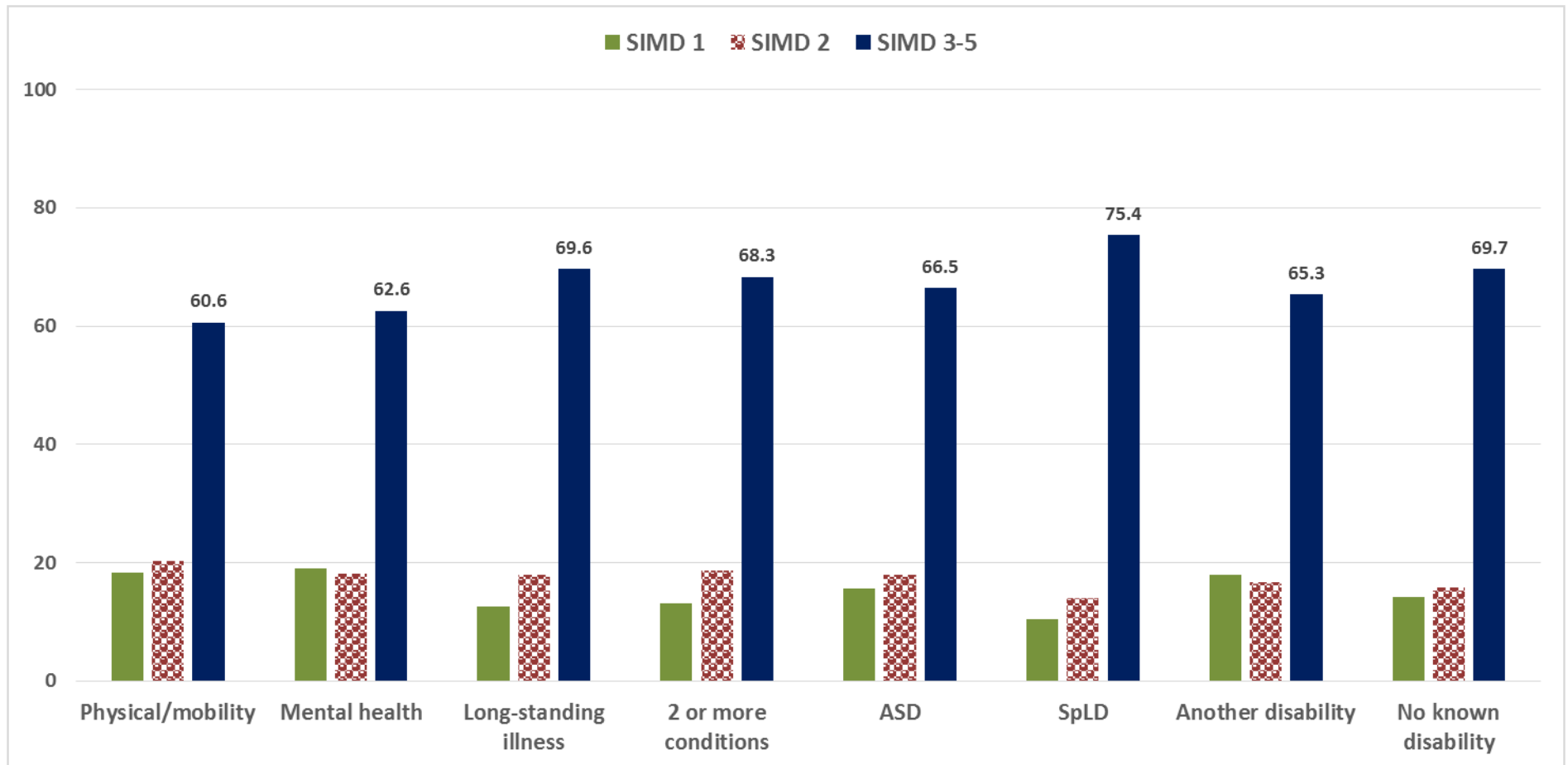
# Under-representation of disabled and non-disabled students from poorest neighbourhoods – particularly in most selective universities





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# Disabled university students come from more socially advantaged neighbourhoods – but variations by nature of impairment



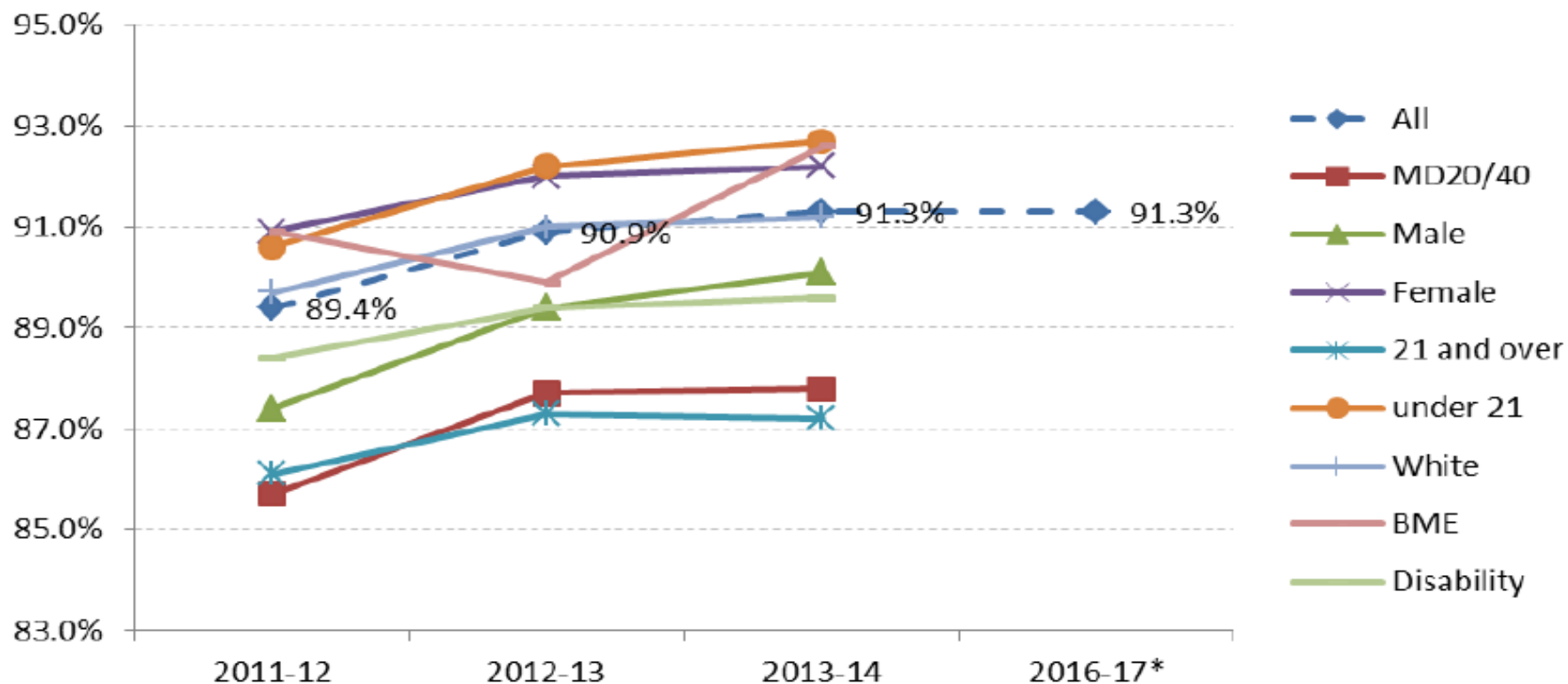


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# Comparison of students 'drop out' rates – those from poorer backgrounds mature students and disabled students particularly at risk



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

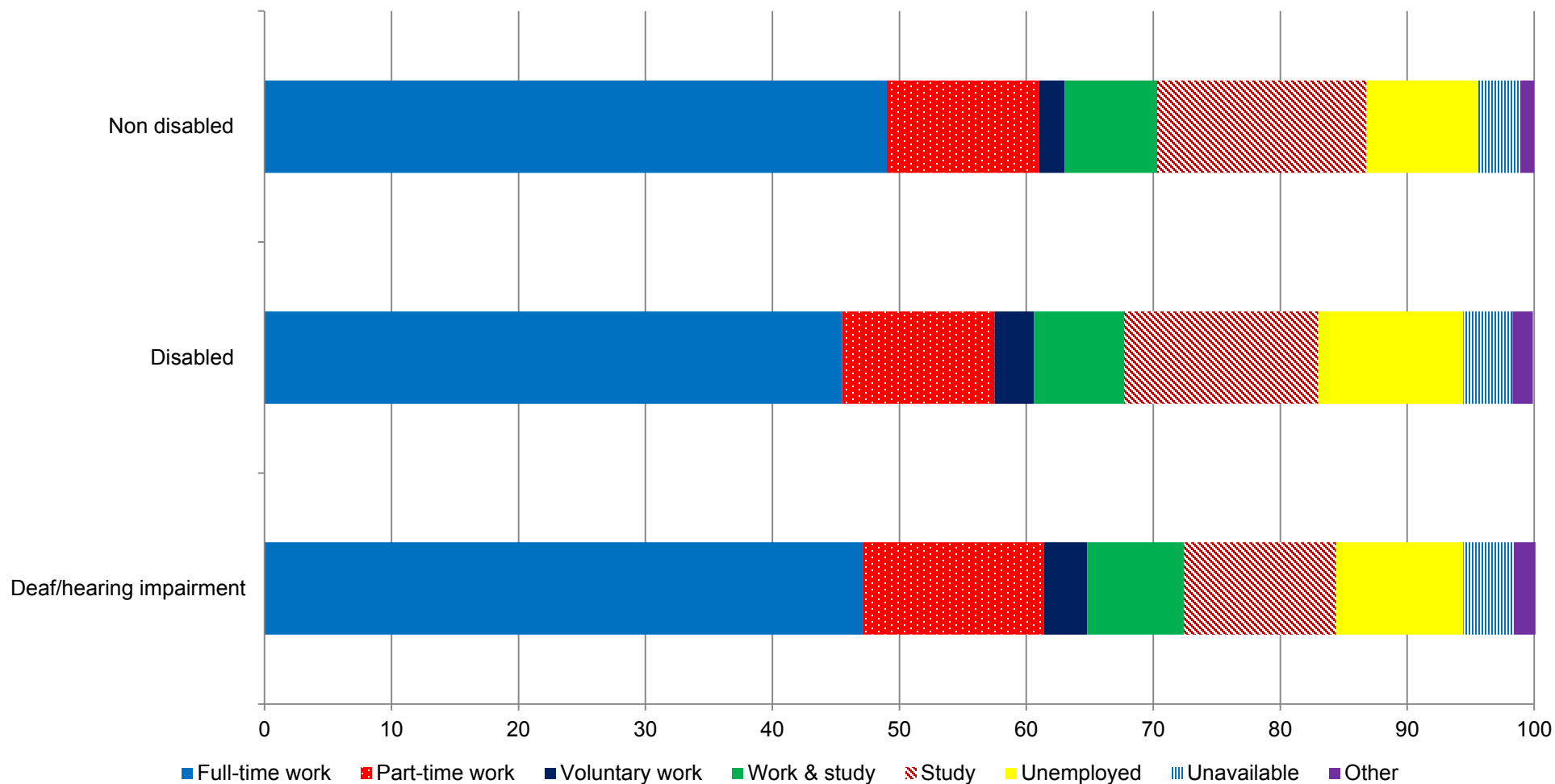


Source: HESA



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# Labour market outcomes of disabled graduates only slightly worse than those of non-disabled graduates – disabled people with few or no qualifications fare much worse



# Case studies of deaf students from different social class backgrounds – varying access to economic, social and cultural capital

## ▪ Sophie – more advantaged social background

The social networks and advocacy power of parents are closely related to their socio-economic status and are important not just during the school years, but into post-school education and the labour market. Sophie –severe hearing loss. Used hearing aids and attended mainstream school. Ambition – to be a PE teacher. Work experience arranged by aunty. Family members helped choose a university, supported her during her academic course and helped her find work after graduating. Other middle class parents in our study moved house to support the young person and actively intervened – e.g. arranged meetings with university staff to ensure that a student who had dropped out of a course was readmitted. Professional work networks were very important in obtaining graduate level work post-graduation.

Fordyce, M., Riddell, S., O'Neill, R. & Weedon, E. (2014) 'Educational outcomes of young people in Scotland who are deaf or hard of hearing: Intersections of deafness and social class.' *International Journal of Inclusive Education*. DOI: [10.1080/13603116.2014.929749](https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2014.929749)

# Case studies of deaf students from different social class backgrounds

## ■ Isla – less advantaged background

Diagnosed with profound hearing loss at the age of two. Lived in a relatively disadvantaged area with her hearing family. Attended mainstream school and used oral communication. Attended a new university. Despite contacting university prior to arrival, no communication support arranged. Tutors were repeatedly asked to wear the loop system microphone, but microphones rarely worked and tutors often forgot to use them. In a laboratory session, Isla asked to be allowed to sit at the front so she could lip read, but the tutor was not supportive:

As time went by, Isla realised that she was missing most of the content of her course, but unlike more assertive students, she did not go back to the Disability Office to ask for help. She dropped out at Christmas, just before she was due to hand in her first assignments.

# Conclusion

- Marked expansion of higher education systems across Europe since 1990s
- Strong emphasis on inclusion in policy rhetoric – but difficult to know which groups have benefited due to lack of comparable data
- Disability particularly complex area because of differences in cultural understandings
- British data shows importance of inter-sectional analysis – increase in participation rates of disabled students, but disproportionately from middle class backgrounds and with diagnosis of specific learning difficulties/dyslexia

# Lessons for the future

- Policy rhetoric must be accompanied by robust data gathering systems
- Targets and benchmarks may encourage change
- Additional resources need to be targeted at institutions and disabled students
- Social class remains the major cause of unequal participation – affects both disabled and non-disabled students
- Inter-sectional analysis essential
- Public sector austerity may reduce or halt progress