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‘Disabled’ students in the UK, Sweden and Europe: who are they and what can we learn from published statistics?

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Overview

- The **European context**: the Bologna Process and ‘non-traditional’ students – to set UK and Sweden in context
- **Data gathering** across Europe and in Sweden and the UK
- **Heterogeneity and its problems** ... and comparison Disabled – Non-disabled students
- **Intersectional analysis** – why is it needed?
- What are the links between **socioeconomic background and disability** – do they matter? If so, for whom?
- And finally what else do we need to know that statistics cannot tell us...?

Bologna Process and ‘non-traditional’ students

- Social dimension developed from 2001 onwards and Eurostudent surveys produced indicator to measure progress
- 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*
- *Eurostudent Survey* examines social and economic conditions of student life in Europe and includes questions about disability which show wide variation across Europe ...

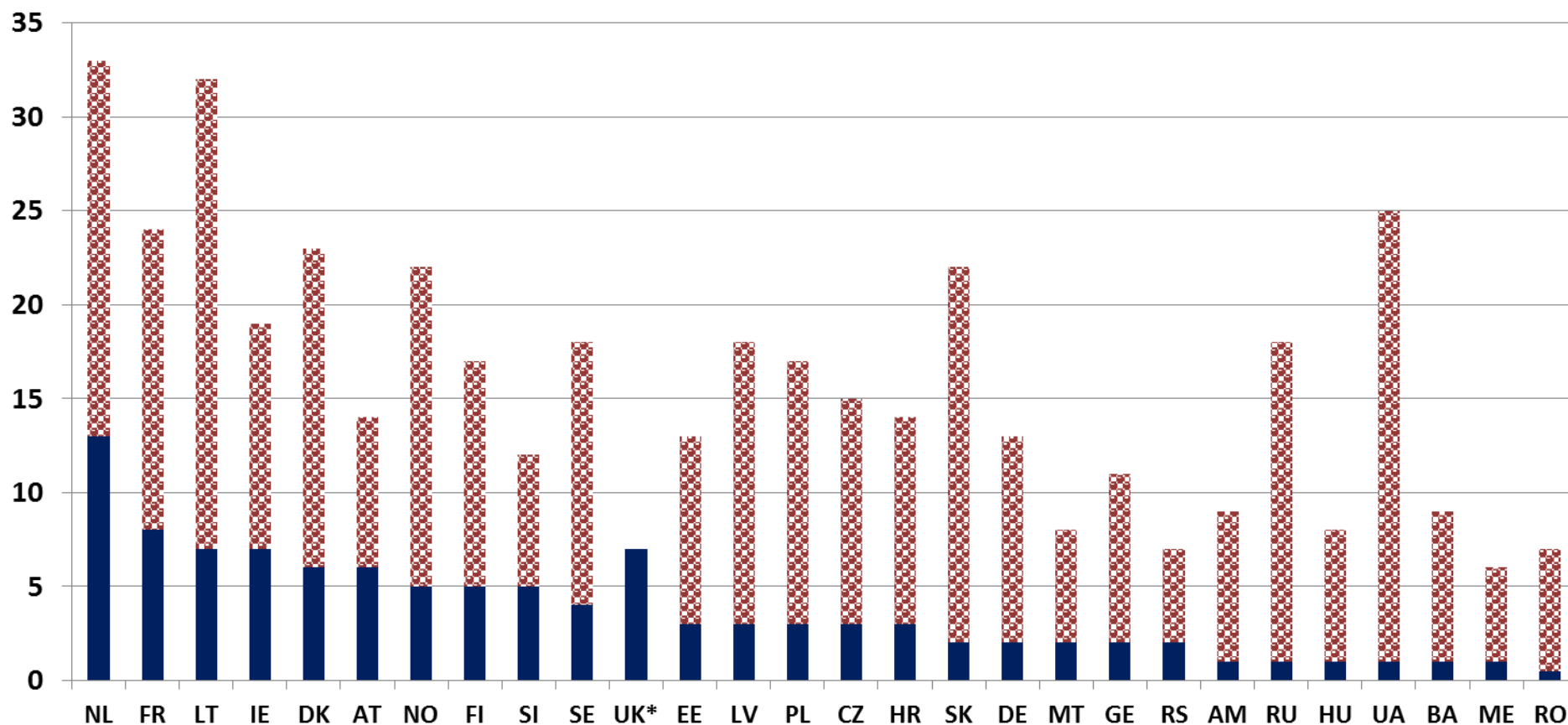


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Eurostudent V – national differences in disabled student numbers: Cultural differences in understanding of disability and/or differences in data collection?



■ Big obstacle ■ Minor or no obstacle



Disabled students 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 is bedevilled by different interpretations of ‘disability’
- By categories used:
 - Disabled - non-disabled
 - Within disabled group – by type of impairment
- **But rarely by other social characteristics and disability**

Comparison in the UK often focused on disabled – non-disabled students – problematic in heterogeneous disabled population

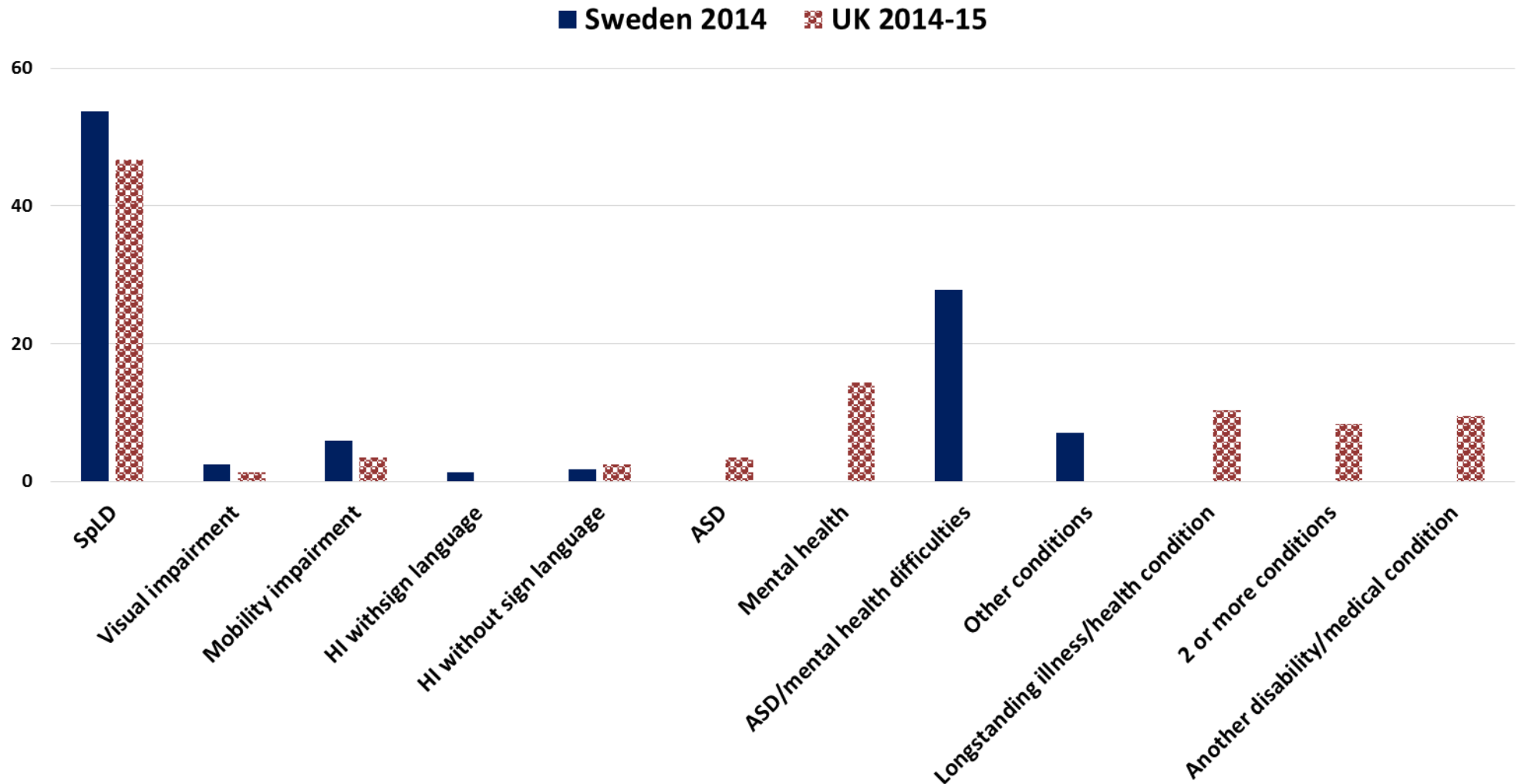
Disabled students – UK and Sweden ahead of many other European countries ...

- 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 ..**

But what about the relationship between disability and social class?

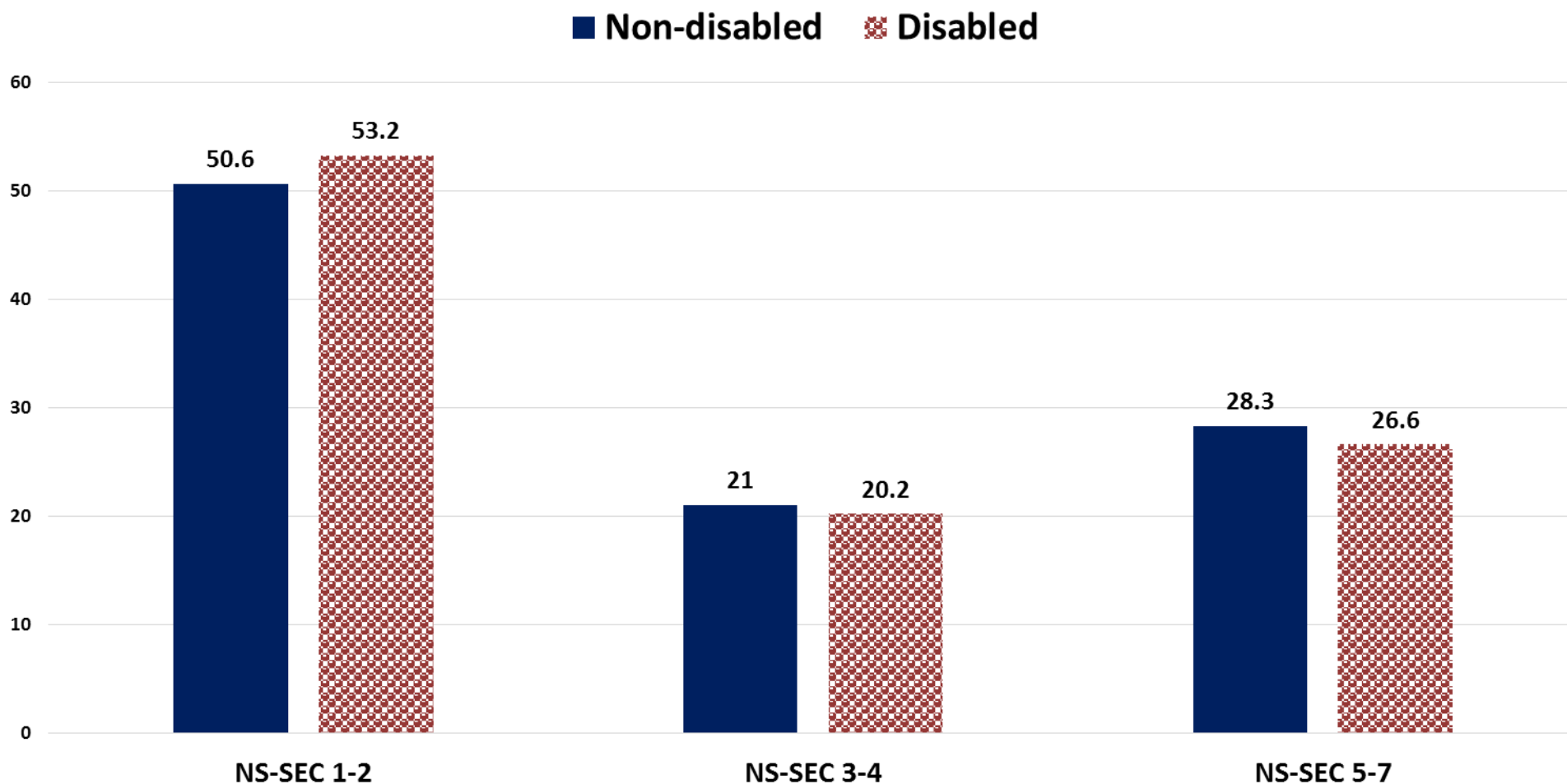
An examination of disability and parental occupational status of 'young' students in the UK shows:

- Disabled students overall tend to come from more advantaged backgrounds but
- Type of impairment matters .. not only in relation to social class but in outcomes – but no (limited?) data on progression by type of impairment using statistics



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

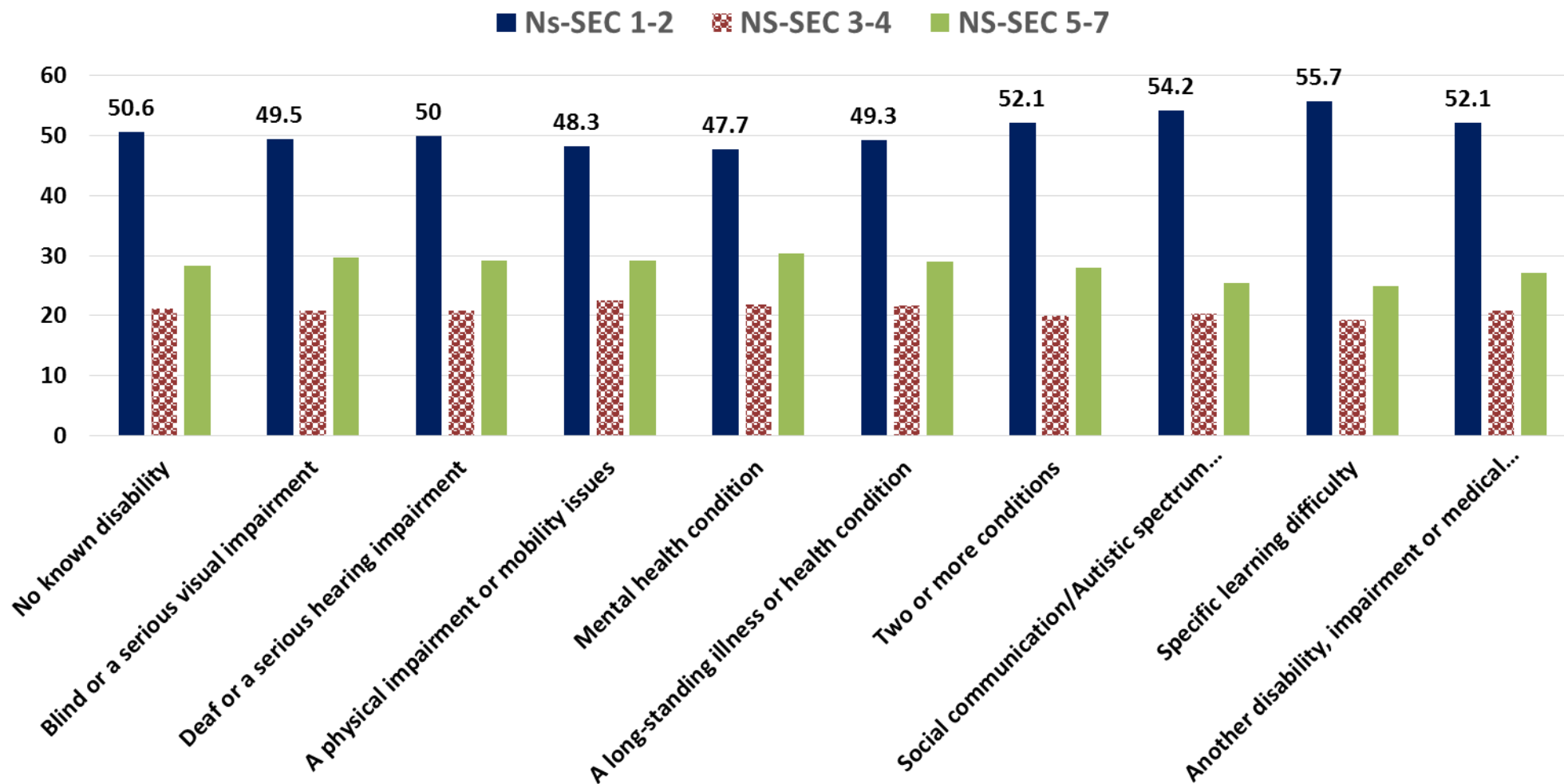




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But breakdown by type of impairment shows a different picture -



Scotland: SIMD quintiles

And the same pattern can be seen when
looking at Scottish students in Scottish
institution using SIMD quintiles

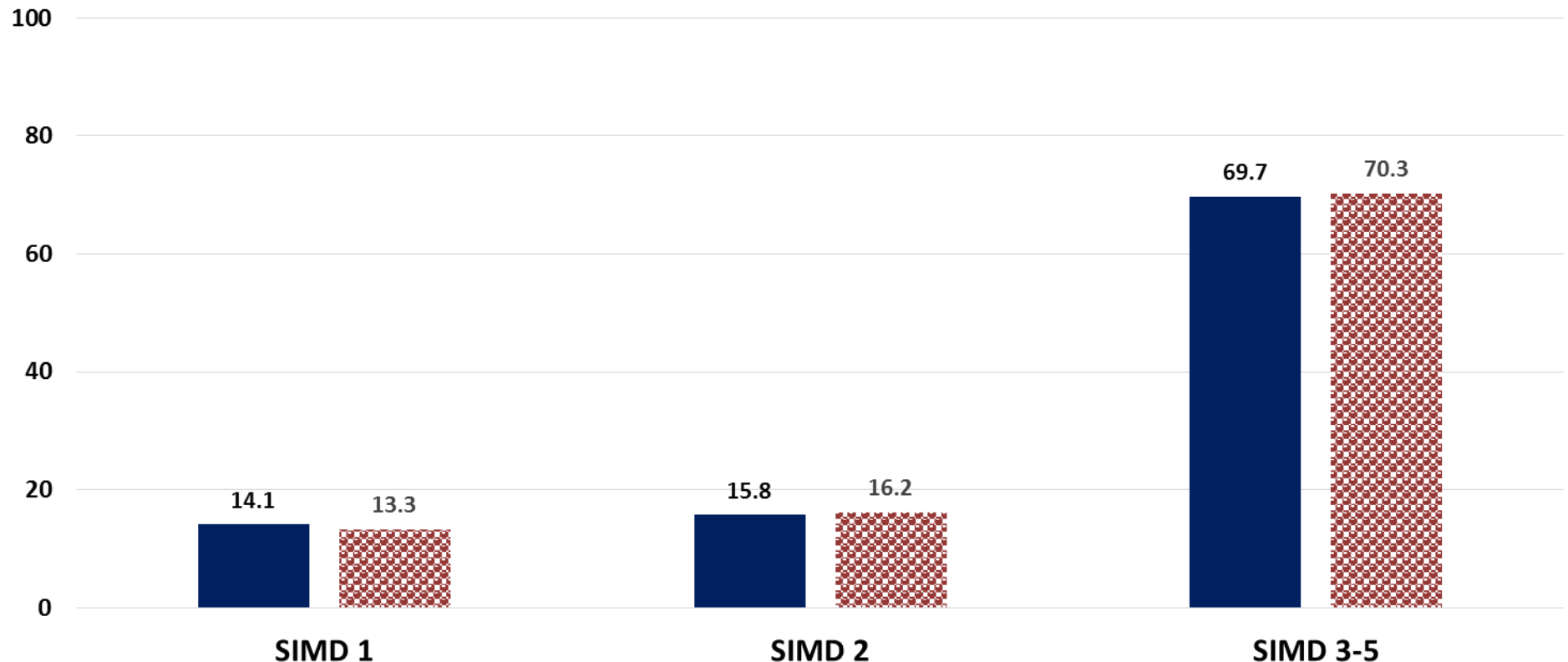


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Disabled and non-disabled students by SIMD quintiles, HESA, 2015



■ Non-disabled ■ Disabled

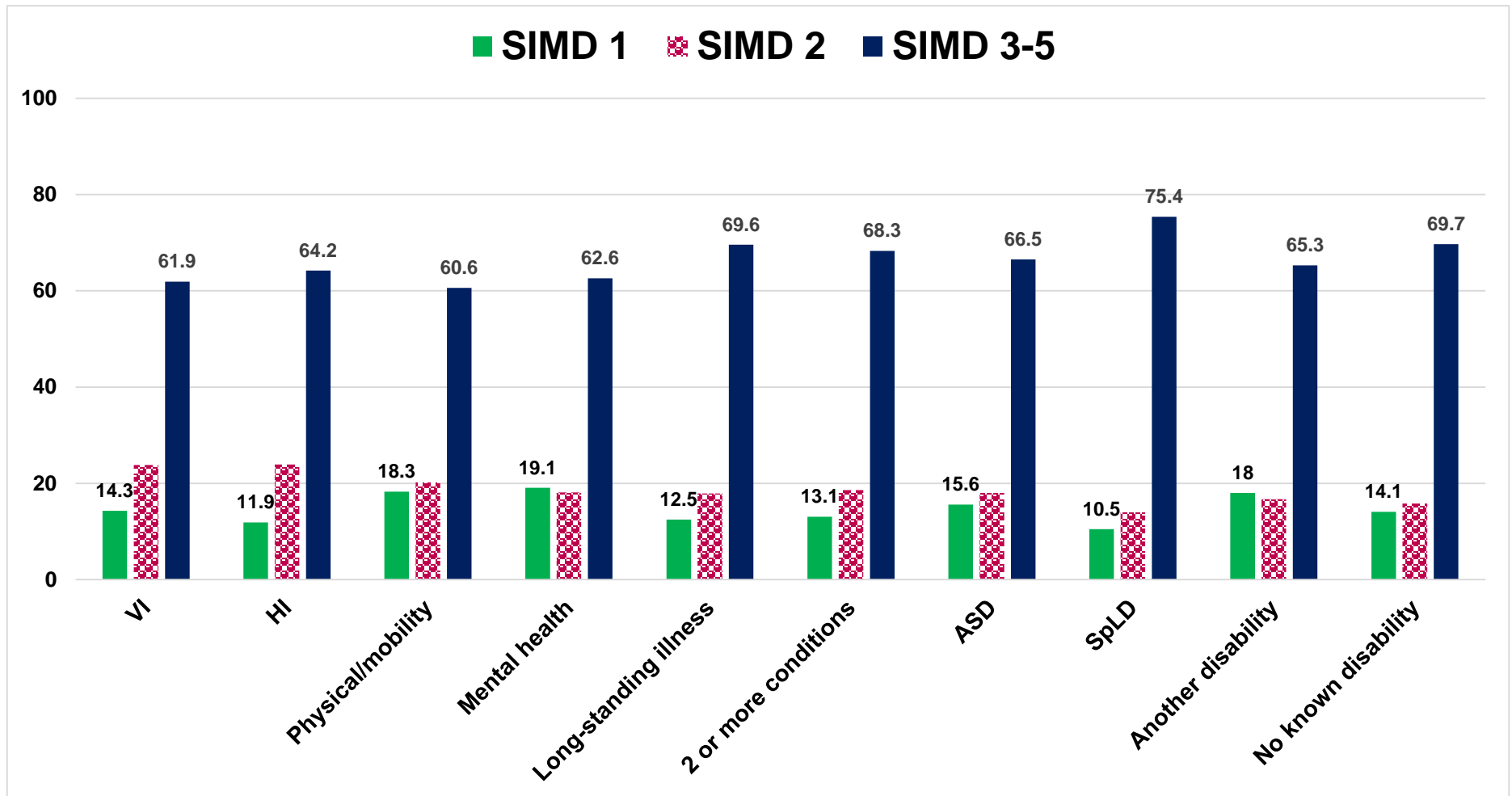




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Disabled students by type of impairment and SIMD quintiles,

HESA, 2015 – caution low numbers in some categories



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? (from SFC)

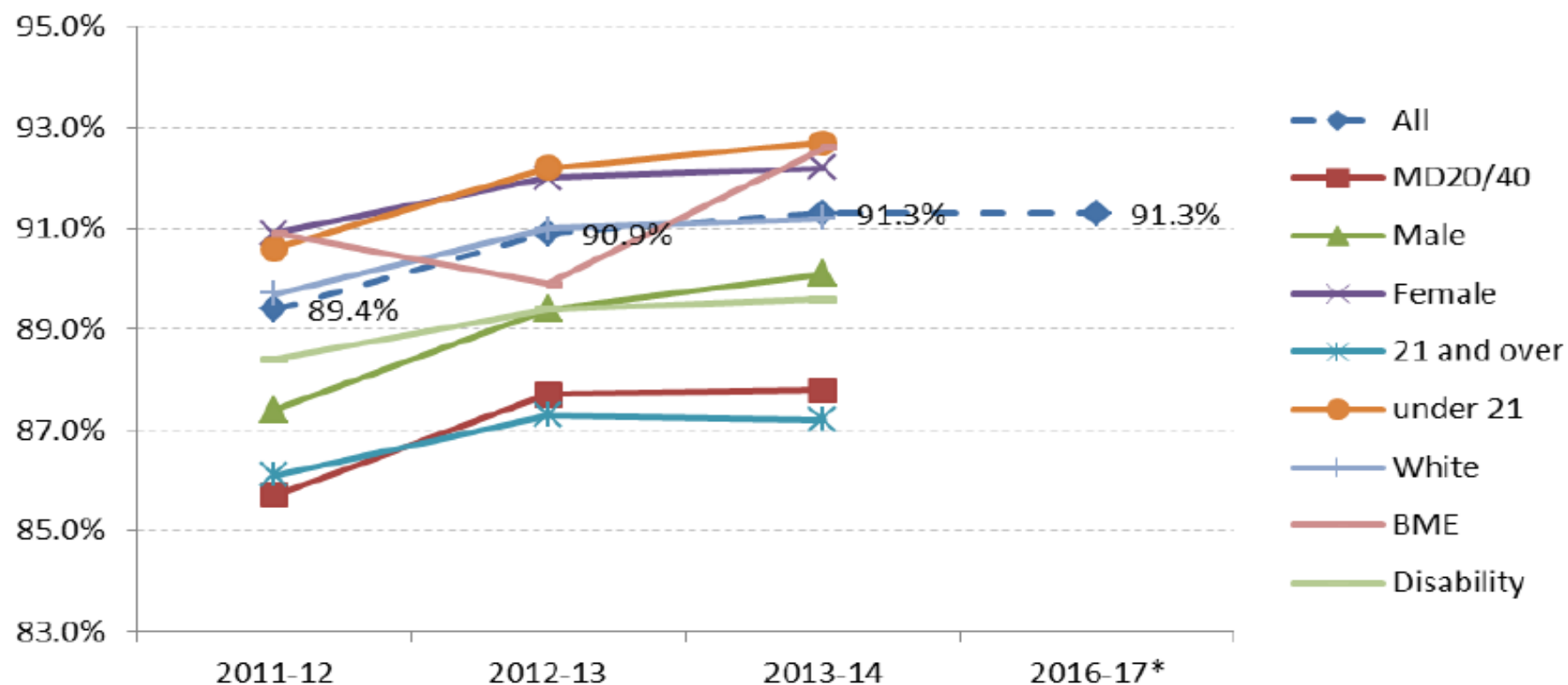


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Returning to study in year 2, Scottish Funding Council, 2015



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



Source: HESA

Outcomes by type of impairment (not social class): UK wide

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

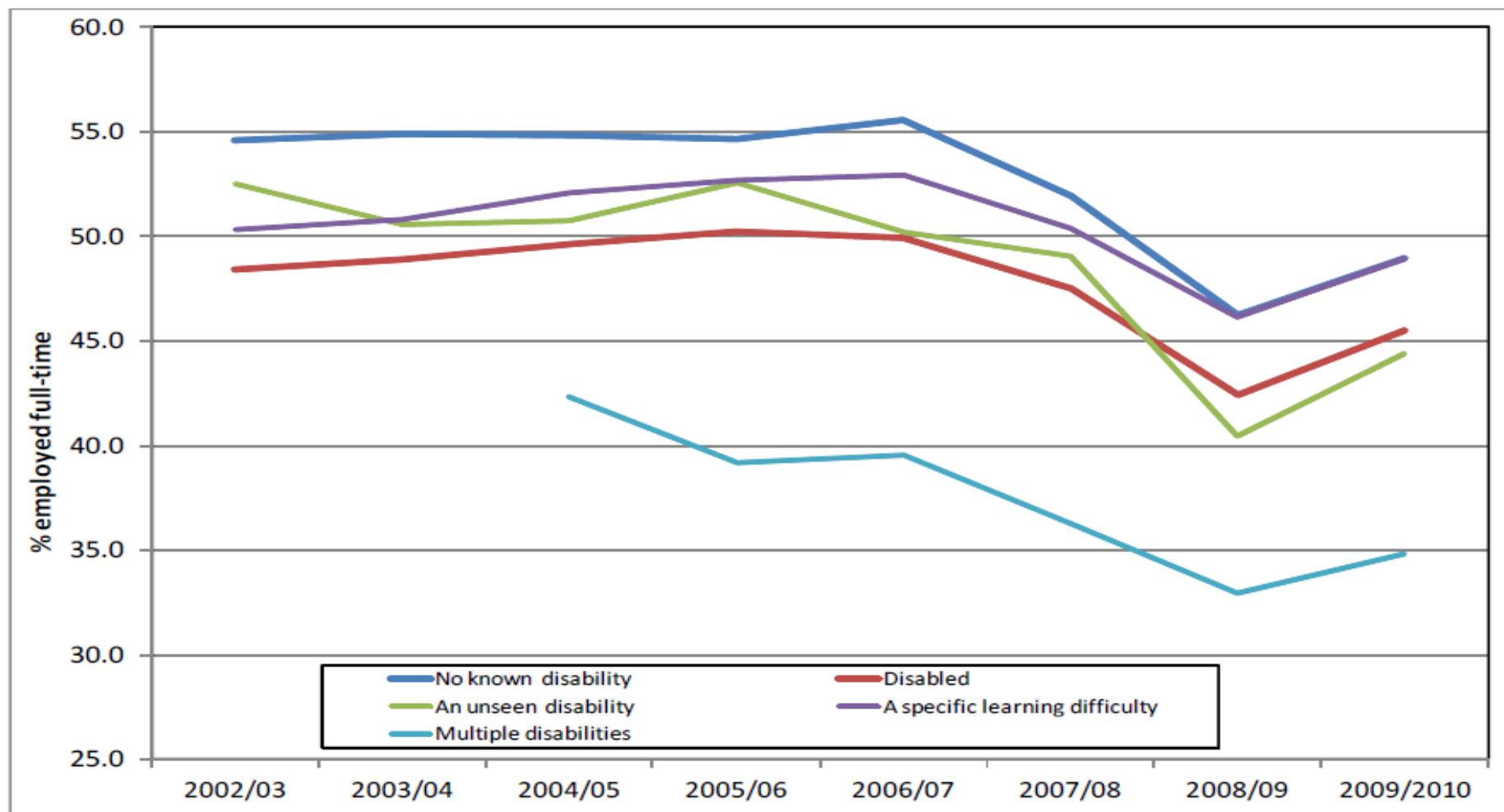
- Non-disabled students and those with SpLD (generally higher social class backgrounds) are most likely to be in FT employment
- Students with mobility problems and those with mental health difficulties have far lower rates of FT employment

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



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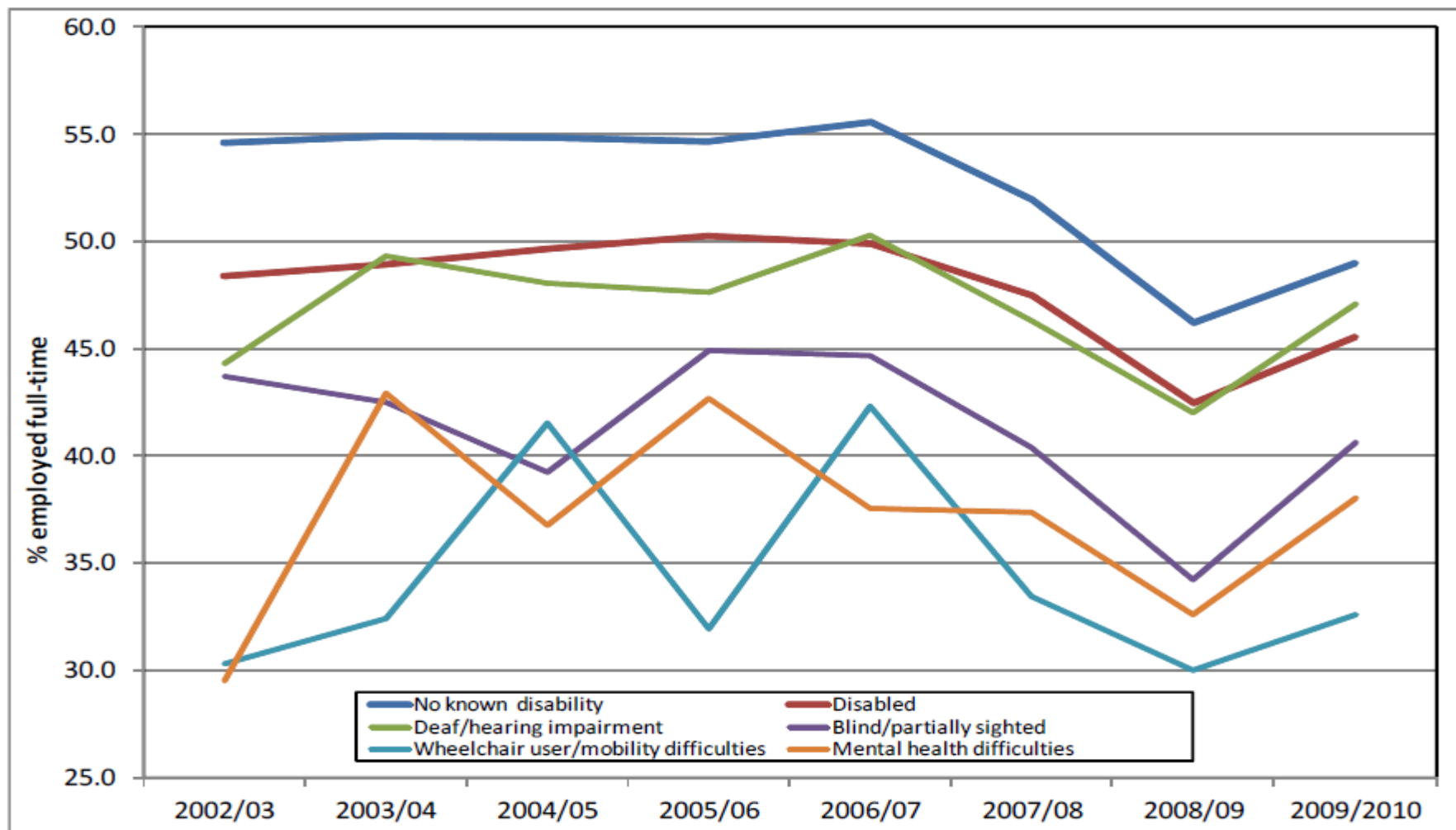
Outcomes: employment rates continued





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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

Different students – different needs – different outcomes (from Fuller, et al, 2009)

Teresa:

Had epilepsy, was a mature student from a privileged background who had gone to a private school. She was studying biological sciences and loved her studies. However, her epilepsy caused problems and she fell behind. She did not have a close network of friends and did not 'want to bother her family'. Outcome: non completion

Andrew:

Was studying education, had cerebral palsy and came from a disadvantaged background. He studied at college to gain entry to university, had a break in study and struggled at one point. He had a close network of friends at the university and his mother, although not well and his aunt supported him. Outcome: completion of honours degree and work

Staff were supportive in both of these cases



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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
 - Come from different social backgrounds
 - Are more likely to drop out
 - Have 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 – though this is not always the case
 - they are probably at greater risk of dropping out

Issues and challenges continued

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
4. Quantitative data are useful in showing general trends but we also need qualitative data to understand the experiences of disabled students and the differences between different disabled students – not only according to disability status but other social characteristics – as well as access to social capital/social networks