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Widening access: Outcome agreements and (troublesome?) indicators

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OR

How do we know that all those that are disadvantaged are given a fair chance to access higher education?

Three challenges (but no doubt there are more!)

- **Choice and range of indicator(s)**
- **Students included in 'measurement'**
- **Intersectionality – and possible multiple disadvantage**



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Background

- Expansion of participation in higher education since 1990s driven by both economic and social justice concerns with greater emphasis on **'non-traditional' students** particularly those from **lower socioeconomic backgrounds**
- Increase in **monitoring** of the sector through the use of performance indicators (PIs) and benchmarks using: SIMD (Scotland); NS-SEC, school type UK wide and POLAR (not Scotland)
- Post-16 Education (Scotland) Act in 2013 introduced **outcome agreements** which must include targets and action plans relating to **widening access** – targets use SIMD



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Challenge 1: Choice and range of indicator(s)



- “The Commission believes that, despite its limitations, the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation is currently the most suitable measure of disadvantage for the purposes of measuring progress and setting targets”.
(Commission on Widening Access - Technical paper on measures and targets - March 2016)
- What about ‘false positives’ (identified but not disadvantaged) and ‘false negatives’ (not identified but disadvantaged)? (identified in ‘Durham’ Report on contextual admissions, commissioned by SFC)



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SIMD: advantages and disadvantages

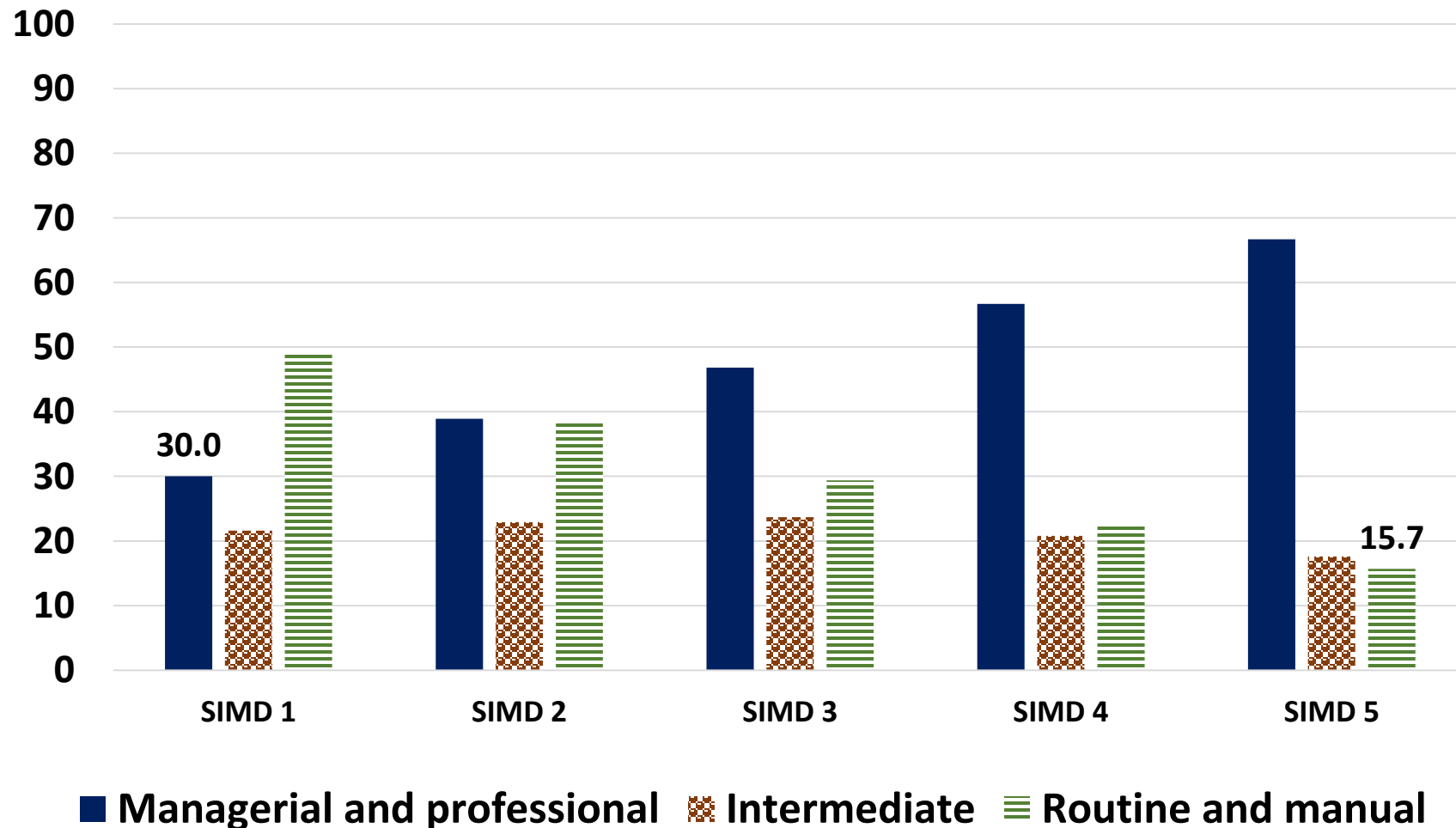


- Good coverage as it is based on post-codes and it is easily available
- Allows for comparison across groups and those living in the least advantaged areas are more likely to be socially disadvantaged
- But it is an area based measures so does not identify individuals within the area and it is not effective at identifying social disadvantage in rural areas
- Of 15% most deprived zones 0.5% are in Aberdeenshire, 2.3 in Aberdeen, 29.6% in Glasgow and none in the Western Isles
- Note: SIMD 1 = SIMD 20 SIMD 5 = SIMD 80-100



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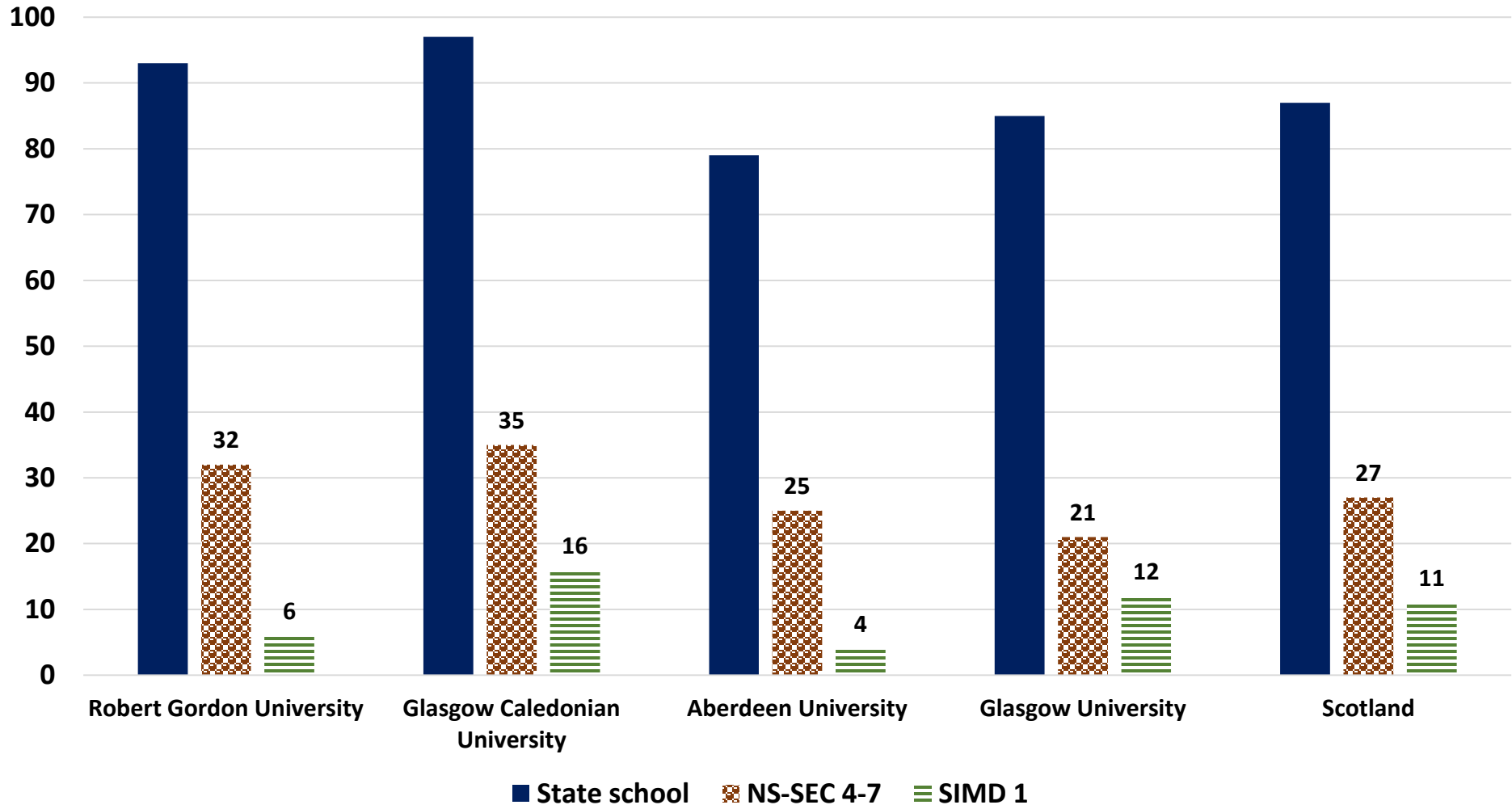
False positives/negatives: SIMD and social class, Scottish institutions, HESA, 2012-16





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Different indicators – different evaluation of success in widening access?





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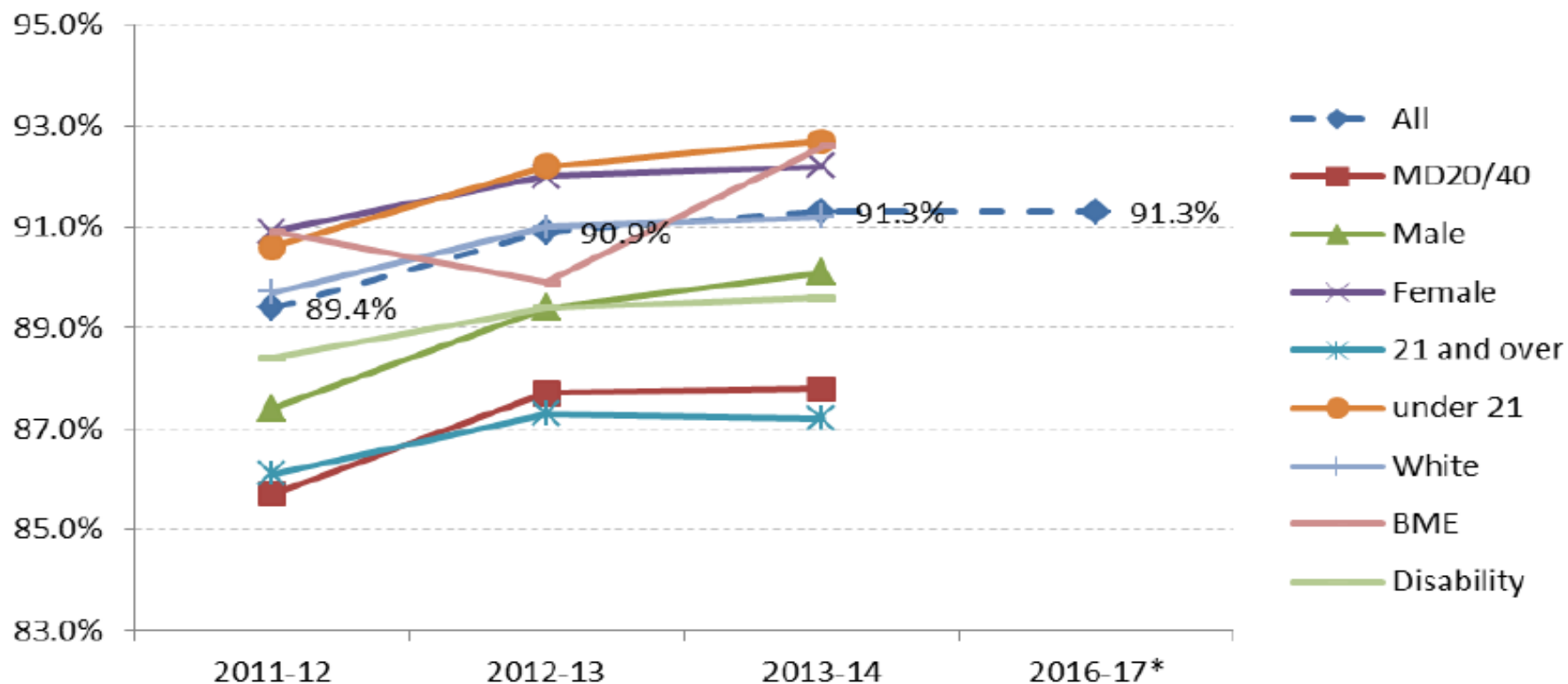
Challenge 2: Students not included in SFC Performance Indicators



- Over 21 – mature students – there is no Scottish indicator for mature students from less advantaged backgrounds. R-UK measure used is POLAR – little difference between young and mature (1%)
- SFC Report on Widening Access (2015-16) show a much higher proportion of mature students from SIMD20 but they only account for 14% of total FT entrants to First Degree
- No separate data on retention in this report but earlier report showed lower retention rates for mature students (as well as MD20/40 – SIMD 1 and 2)

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





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Challenge 2: Students not included in SFC/HESA Performance Indicators



- Disabled students – UK wide including Scotland – based on receipt of DSA – proportion of those with DSA likely to be lower than overall – HESA 2015-16 showed 4.6% for Scotland whilst SFC report stated 11.5% had declared a disability
- Retention rate is lower for disabled students from SIMD 1 than for those from SIMD 5 (SFC report)
- Disabled students as a problematic category – due to the heterogeneity of the population - which leads on to intersectionality and Challenge 3

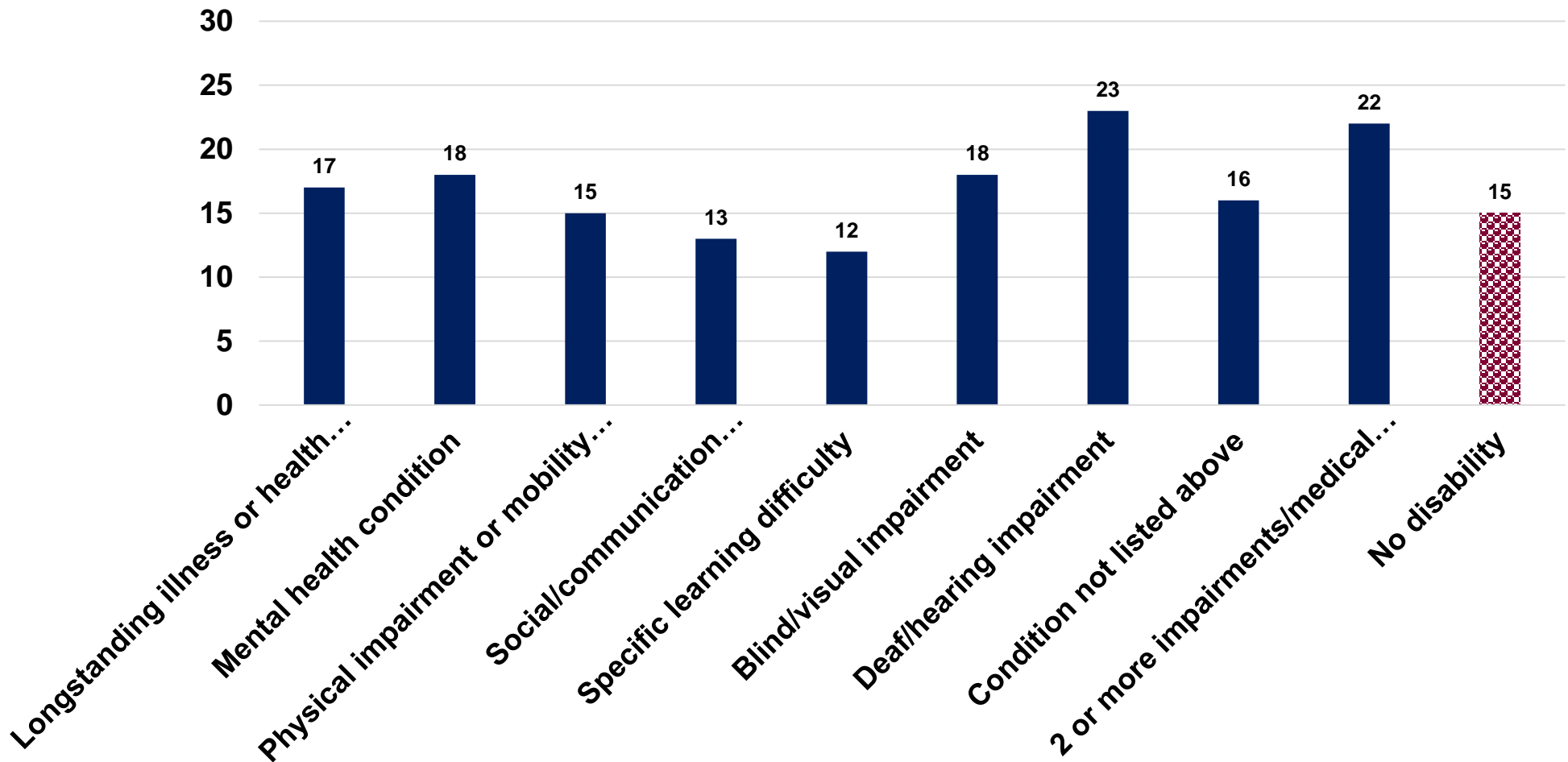


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Challenge 3: Students vary by more than one characteristic (caution low numbers in some categories)



SIMD 1 by type of impairment





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So what might some of the next steps be?



- Identify further indicators that can be used in conjunction with SIMD, e.g. EMA – only 34% of students in receipt of EMA 2015-16 lived in SIMD 1 area
- Develop individual level pupil identifier that allows tracking from school to further and higher education
- Access for all to **all** universities and consider ‘ring-fenced’ measures, e.g. more use of APR for mature students (Sweden used to have 25:4 rule)
- Consider the role that part-time study with same level of support and fees as full-time students (Sweden currently provides this for those studying 50% of time or more)
- Consider the impact of capped places and the structure of the Scottish university sector (far fewer lower tariff places than England) – this potentially disadvantages those with lower grades from schools