

ROYAL HOLLOWAY
University of London

**COLLEGE BOARD OF EXAMINERS
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

Equal Opportunities; an analysis of undergraduate student performance for cohorts entering the College between 2004 and 2010

Introduction and methodology

1. This paper draws together information on student population, achievement and progression, mainly gathered from data used for the annual review of undergraduate programmes. It seeks to examine trends relating to ethnicity, gender, disability and age; factors which are, or will be, implicated in equal opportunities legislation. Data are also examined relating to students' domicile (or, more accurately, their fee-region- UK, Other EU and Overseas) since Equal Opportunities could equally well be applicable to students coming from overseas.
2. Data was used covering seven entry cohorts, 2004 to 2010, allowing for 5 cohorts that are likely to have fully completed their studies (this was also the case in the equivalent analysis in the last four years, CBEEC/07/49, CBEEC/08/60, CBEEC/09/68 and CBEEC/10/64). Comparison with national data is almost impossible since there is no freely available data relating gender, ethnicity and disability to student progression and achievement. Taught postgraduate students will be analysed in a future report, once the outcomes for the 2010 cohort are fully recorded.
3. Generally speaking, the data are analysed only at the lowest level of a single cohort in the whole College (sometimes all 7 cohorts are combined to give a sufficient sample size to make conclusions meaningful). Some of the analysis is also extended to Faculty level; however note that in general, individual departments/subject areas contain too few minority students in the categories analysed (*eg* non-white, overseas or disabled students) for analysis at this level of detail to have any statistical validity. Conclusions in any case have to be tentative since only a full multi-variable analysis on a much larger sample of students could make them statistically sound.

Undergraduate student population and benchmark data

4. Proof of a fair admissions policy at RHUL is, largely, beyond the scope of this paper since most relevant information on applicants (*eg* declared ethnicity) is only provided by UCAS for successful candidates. One can instead monitor the student intake over time although if there is a consistent bias against one particular sort of applicant, this would not be picked up by such an analysis.
5. The percentage of non-white UG entrants has been stable at just below 30 % for a number of years. There was a perceptible fall (of nearly 5 %) in this value in the most recent intake; however this was accompanied by an almost equivalent rise in the number of students who failed to declare their ethnicity and, since students who thus fail to provide information are

nearly all overseas-domiciled, it may be reasonably assumed that these two facts are connected. Nearly 40 % of overseas UG students do not declare their ethnicity upon enrolment; the proportion of UK students is tiny (less than 2 %).

6. Despite an increase in the number of overseas students in the past 10-15 years, UK entrants still comprise over 70 % of a typical UG cohort (note the contrast with PGT level where over half the students originate from outside the EU). These non-UK students (particularly from outside Europe) are concentrated in the HSS Faculty (note that, since this paper covers events up to Sumer 2011, the old Faculty groupings are used).
7. The proportion of ‘mature’ entrants (aged 22 or over upon initial enrolment, as defined by HESA) (*ca* 7 %), male students (*ca* 40 %) and entrants with a declared disability (slightly under 10 % per year) are all remarkably steady over the past 7 cohorts. Of those declaring themselves disabled on entry, somewhere between 40 and 50 % have a specific learning difficulty, the most common category by far.
8. In a typical year, 13-15 % of students who complete their studies are awarded 1st class degree, 55-57 % a 2(i), 22-24 % a 2(ii) and the remaining 5 % a 3rd class or Pass degree. These classification profiles have been relatively stable over time, although it may be worth noting that students who completed in 2009 and 2011 (therefore, approximately speaking, the 2006 and 2008 cohorts) performed rather better than the long-term average.
9. In terms of student progression, typically 85-87 % of 1st year students progress to stage two at the first attempt and 92-94 % in total, after 1 or 2 attempts (note that, for the sake of clarity, all progression data excludes students yet to attempt a stage at all- it is assumed that they will progress or withdraw in similar proportions to the other students). These values have both shown consistent improvement over the past 4 entry cohorts. Progression from years 2 to 3 is rather higher (91-94 % at attempt 1 and 97-98 % overall) and has again risen in recent years (although there was a big drop in progression rate between the 2005 and 2006 cohorts which has still not been fully recovered). Students who get as far as year 3 are almost all awarded a final degree, although just under 5 % of students require a second attempt. Since the 1st year is where most students fail to progress, first-year progression will be the measure used for comparisons in this paper.
10. Of students who do withdraw, typically 20-30 % do so for reasons of academic failure (this figure is currently much lower for the 2010 cohort as many students who failed at the 1st attempt are still Incomplete rather than Withdrawn). The most other common recorded reasons for withdrawal are miscellaneous ones such as “Other”, “No Wish to Study” or “Written Off After Time” (this latter reason often used when students fail to re-enrol).

Analysis of achievement and progression related to ethnic origin

11. It has been noted in previous analyses that there is a clear and consistent achievement gap between white and non-white students with regard to final classification, with the former up to twice as likely to be awarded a 1st class degree and nearly twice as many of the latter failing to gain at least a 2(i). The performance gap is rather less when considering UK-domiciled students (and thus removing competing factors of language difficulties and studying far from home) but it is still significant. This may be seen in Fig. 1- although the final achievement of non-white UK students in 2011 showed appreciable improvement on the previous year, this was also true of white students (it has already been noted above that students who complete in 2009 and 2011 performed noticeably better than those who

finished in 2010). This worrying trend has therefore persisted; although it is worth noting that the performance of non-white students from *outside* the UK has improved significantly over the past 3 years, in particular a sharp reduction in the number of students being awarded a 2(ii) (See Fig. 2).

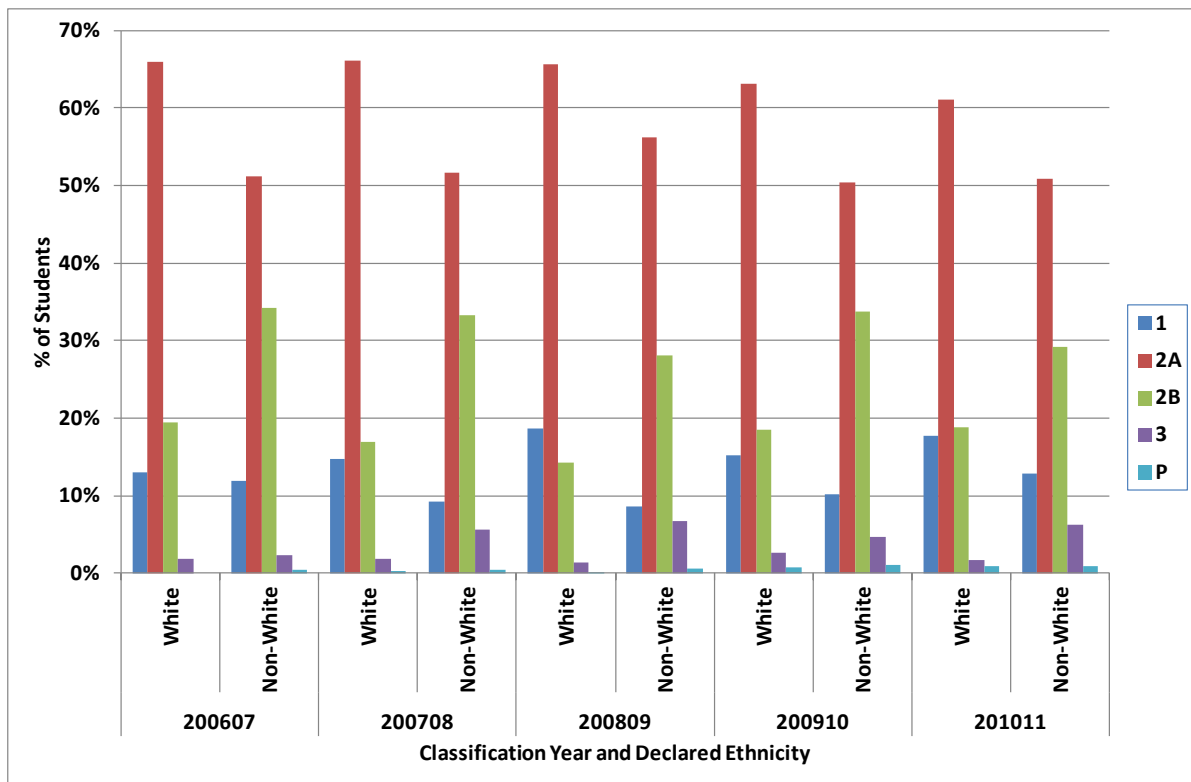


Fig. 1: Classification profiles by year of completion, 2007-2011, and declared ethnicity *for UK-domiciled students* only. Students who failed to declare their ethnicity are excluded.

12. Examining instead 1st-year progression, it has been previously noted that white students are *ca* 10 % more likely to progress at the first attempt and 4-5 % more likely to progress overall (with the figures being reduced to 5-7 % and 2-3 % respectively when considering UK-domiciled students only). The lower difference in overall progression does imply that poor performance at attempt 1 is partly mitigated at attempt 2, but this is another area of concern, even though it has been shown in the past that non-white students enter College with a significantly lower tariff score than their white peers (these data are no longer made available to us by UCAS). Fig. 3 shows that the performance gap in 2009 was the lowest for some years; however among 1st year students who entered in 2010, there was a huge discrepancy in the proportion of white and non-white home students who progressed 1st time. Nearly 1 in 5 (which corresponds to 97 students) of the latter had to resit part of their programme which is very worrying and the figures are still worse for Overseas students.

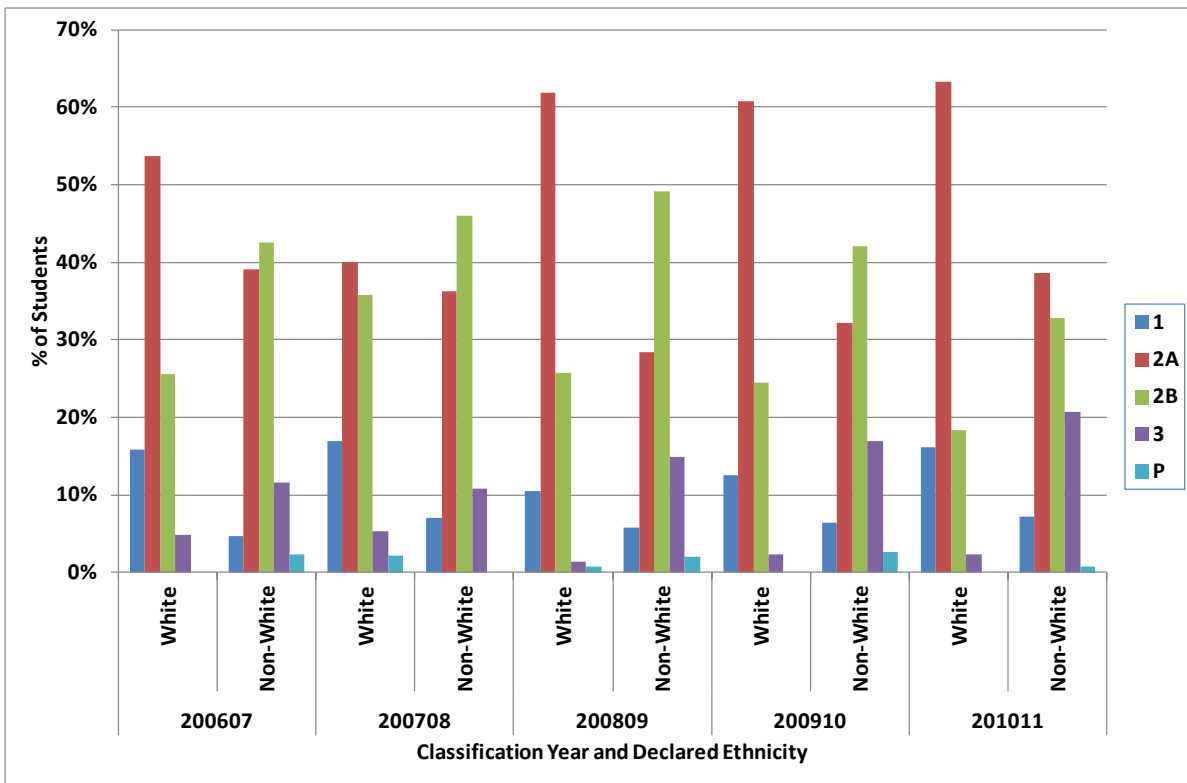


Fig.2: Classification profiles by year of completion, 2007-2011, and declared ethnicity *for non-UK-domiciled students* only. Students who failed to declare their ethnicity are excluded.

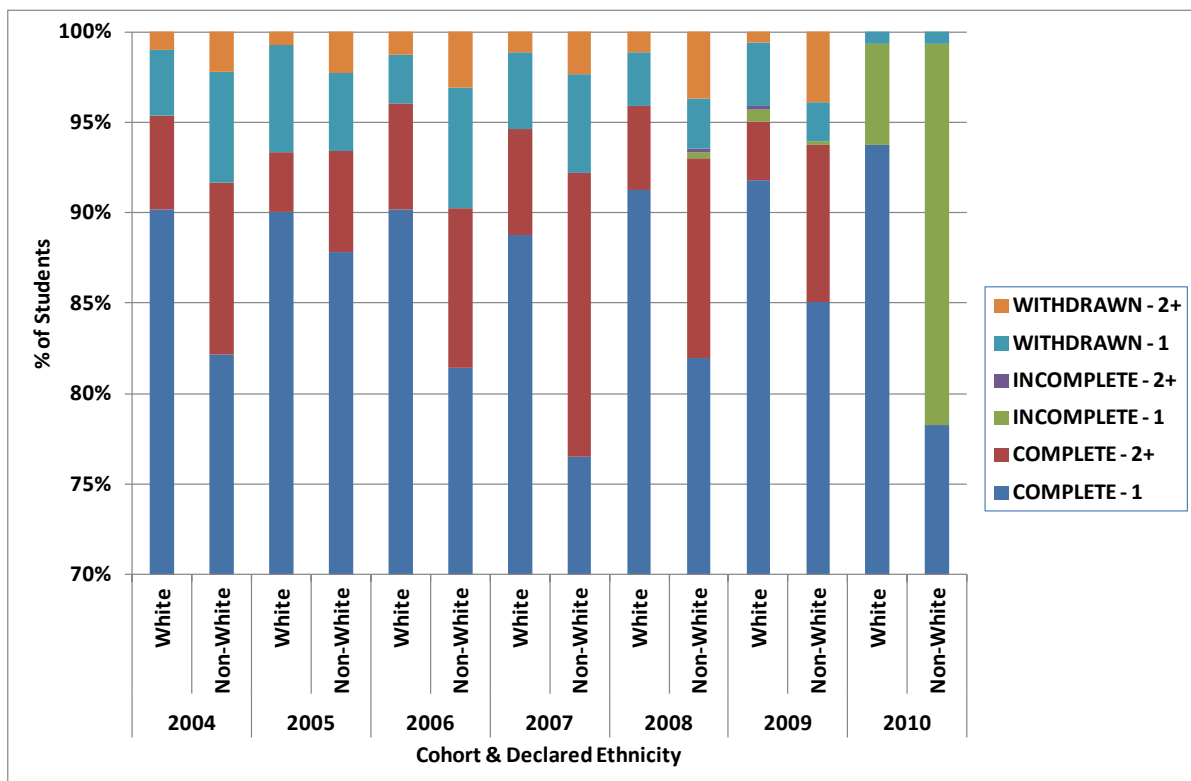


Fig. 3: First-year progression rates by declared ethnicity and entry cohort, 2004-2010 *for UK-domiciled students*. Students yet to make an attempt are excluded as are those who failed to declare their ethnicity. Note break of scale on the y-axis.

13. Of students who withdraw, those from ethnic minorities are more than twice as likely to have done so owing to academic failure than are white students (although this statement should be qualified by adding that *relatively* few students withdraw so this observation has less statistical weight than the ones mentioned previously). This trend is persistent in the data and the gap worsened from the 2008 cohort (20 % vs 43 %) to 2009 (22 % vs 51 %)- there are, as yet, insufficient withdrawn students in the 2010 cohort to include this in the analysis.
14. Following the paper submitted to this Committee last year, a drill-down on individual departments concerning the progression and achievement of UK non-white students was undertaken (CBEEC/11/10). This paper noted that, although the issues are complex and that very few departments have sufficient non-white UG students in a cohort to make valid conclusions (Biological Sciences, Management and Social Work being the only ones), there was some evidence of a problem in the School of Biological Sciences. Specifically, there was a bigger gap in first time progression from year 1 than the College norm (with ethnic minority students 15 % less likely to progress)- albeit mitigated to a significant degree by progression at attempt two- and a big gap in final degree performance with white students being four times as likely to be awarded a 1st class degree than their non-white peers (although the white students who completed in 2010 also performed poorly).
15. The School made a response to these observations (CBEEC/11/22) acknowledging that they were valid, but performing additional analysis which noted that the low achievement and progression were primarily confined to the BSc Biomedical Sciences degree (which has a large number of UK non-white students) and to entrants with non-standard entry qualifications. The achievement gap in Biomedical Sciences had narrowed over 3 years and the School had instigated a new policy on admissions covering non-standard entry qualifications. It is obviously too early to say for sure whether any measures have been successful, but progression and achievement data for the School are presented below (Figs. 4 and 5) for information. Note that Fig. 5 supports the supposition made in last year's report that the poor performance of white students in 2009-10 was a temporary blip- the classification profiles for 2010-11 are much closer to those seen over the previous few years. Overall 1st year progression in the 2009 cohort was rather closer between the two groups of students than had been seen in previous cohorts; although one must also acknowledge there was a big gap in first-time progression among students who started in 2010. This, however, only reflects the picture at College level (Fig. 3 above).

Student achievement related to gender

16. It has been noted previously that male students are more likely to be awarded a 1st, 2(ii) or 3rd class degree and less likely to be given a 2(i) than are female students; this trend being also seen at national level. The gap was particularly big in 2009-10 (when the cohort as a whole performed poorly, but where male students, particularly in Science where less than half were awarded a 2(i) or better, performed even worse). Fig. 6 shows that 2010-11 did show some improvements on the previous year, but that 1 in 3 male students are still not achieving a 'good' degree. Once again, the gap was biggest in Science where 55 % of male students were awarded a 2(1) or 1st compared with 70 % of female students- the problem does also exist in the other two faculties, albeit to a smaller extent.

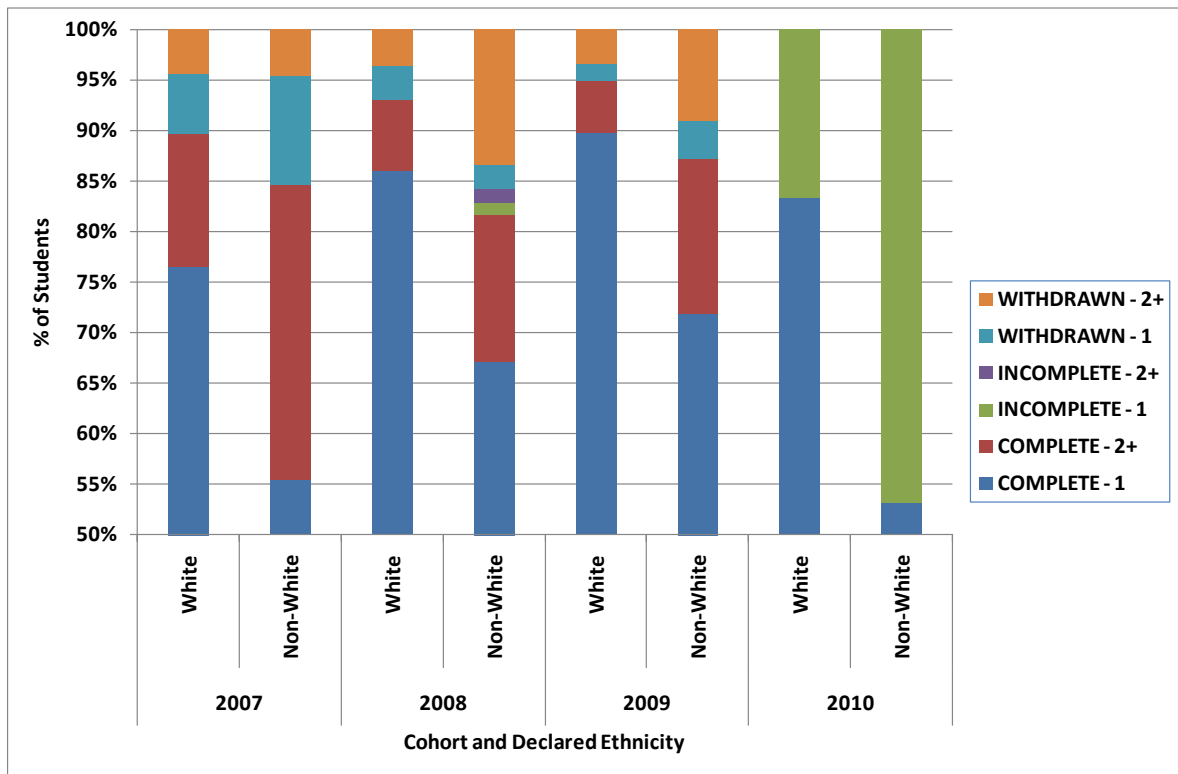


Fig. 4: First-year progression data for UK-domiciled students in the School of Biological Sciences from cohorts 2007-2010. Students who failed to declare their ethnicity are excluded.

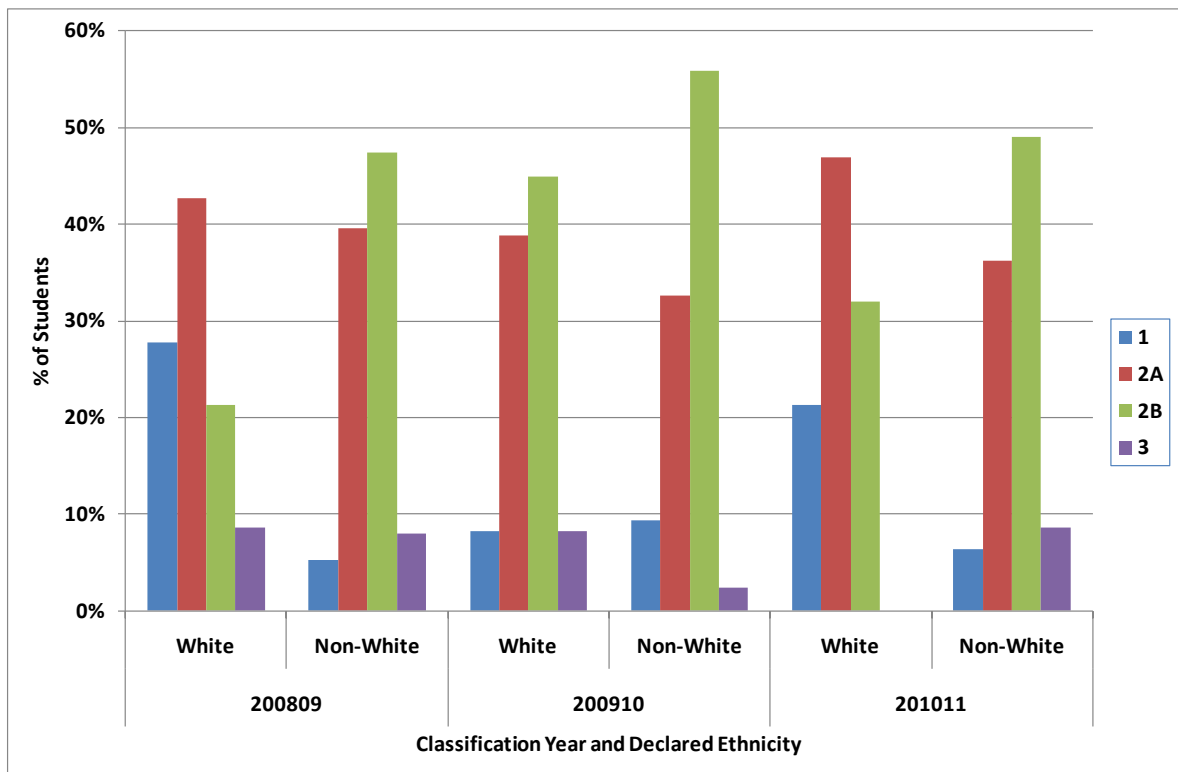


Fig. 5: Classification profiles by year of completion and declared ethnicity for UK-domiciled students in the School of Biological Sciences. Students who failed to declare their ethnicity are excluded.

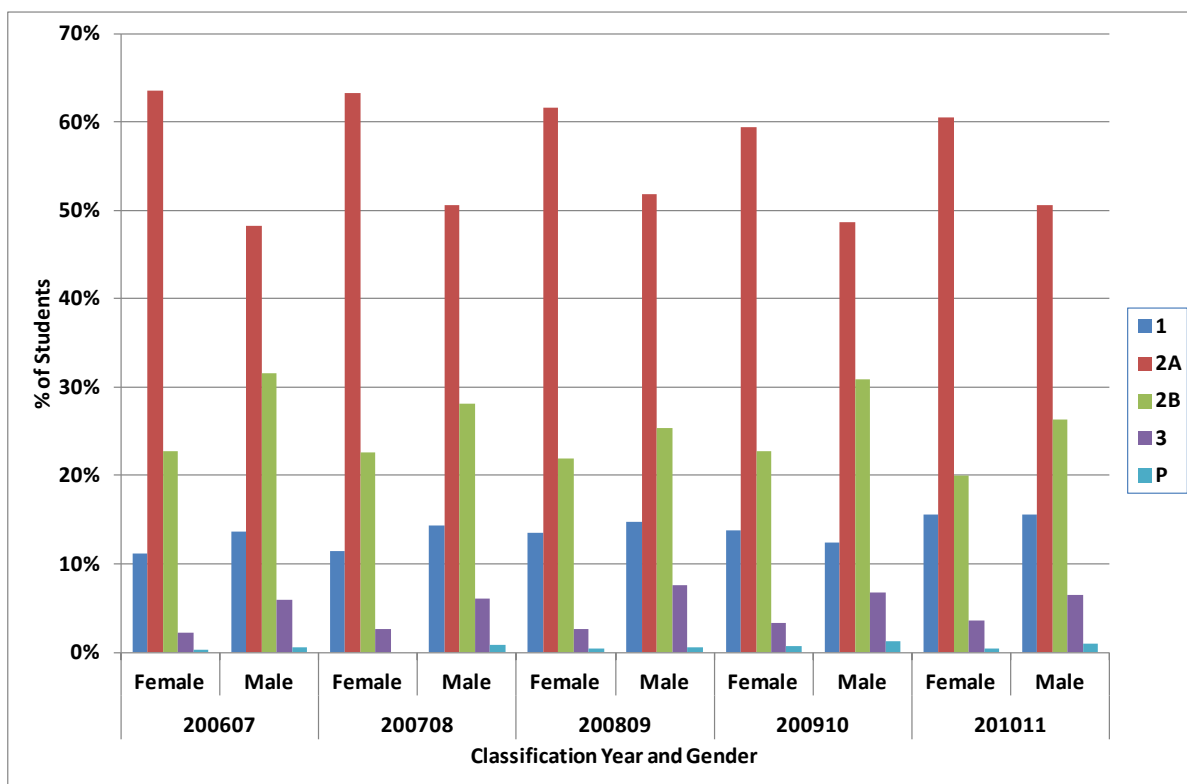


Fig 6: Classification profiles by gender and classification year.

17. There are some differences in first-year progression between male and female students, although they are much smaller than those noted between white and non-white students (*vide supra*)- ca 5 % at the first attempt and 2-3 % in overall progression. It should also be noted that first-time progression is significantly higher in Arts subjects and this faculty has a 2:1 female:male ratio. Possibly following on from this is the greater proportion of academic failures among male students- in most cohorts, failures make up twice the percentage of failures among male students that they do among female students.

Student achievement related to declared disability and age on entry

18. As has been noted in previous reports, there are relatively few disabled or mature entrants (9-10 % and 6-7 % respectively) and so it is difficult to make any valid statements about achievement without combing several cohorts- and therefore rendering it impossible to track progression over time. Certainly for disabled students who completed between 2007 and 2011, there is no discernable difference in classification profile and only a slightly lower progression rate than is seen for non-disabled students.
19. Mature entrants are rather more likely to be awarded a 2(ii) at the expense of a 2(i) (the percentages of 1st class degrees are very similar), but the differences are small here- of more concern is probably the consistently lower 1st year progression rate (at both first attempt and overall) of mature students (the difference is nearly 10 %). It should, however, also be noted that mature students are significantly more likely to be male than non-mature entrants are- in fact in the 2009 cohort, 54 % of mature students were male (against 40 % in the cohort as a whole). As we have already seen that male students have poorer progression rates and are more likely to be awarded a 2(ii) or lower, this may be the underlying cause of these observations.

Achievement related to student domicile (fee-region)

20. Although not specifically an equal opportunities issue, the large number of non-white students originating from outside the EU means that, indirectly, fee-region needs to be considered here. The degree classification profile for overseas students in 2009-10 was particularly concerning (with fewer than half gaining a ‘good’ degree), but the gap to the performance of UK students seems to have narrowed in the most recent cohort to complete (Fig. 7). The number of 3rd-class degrees obtained by overseas students is particularly worthy of note. 30 % of overseas students in the Science faculty in 2011 were awarded a 3rd, although numerically the main contributor is HSS- 31 overseas students got a 3rd in 2010-11. There is also a significant gap between 1st-time first year progression rates between home and overseas student; although this difference is, to a large extent, mitigated at the second attempt.

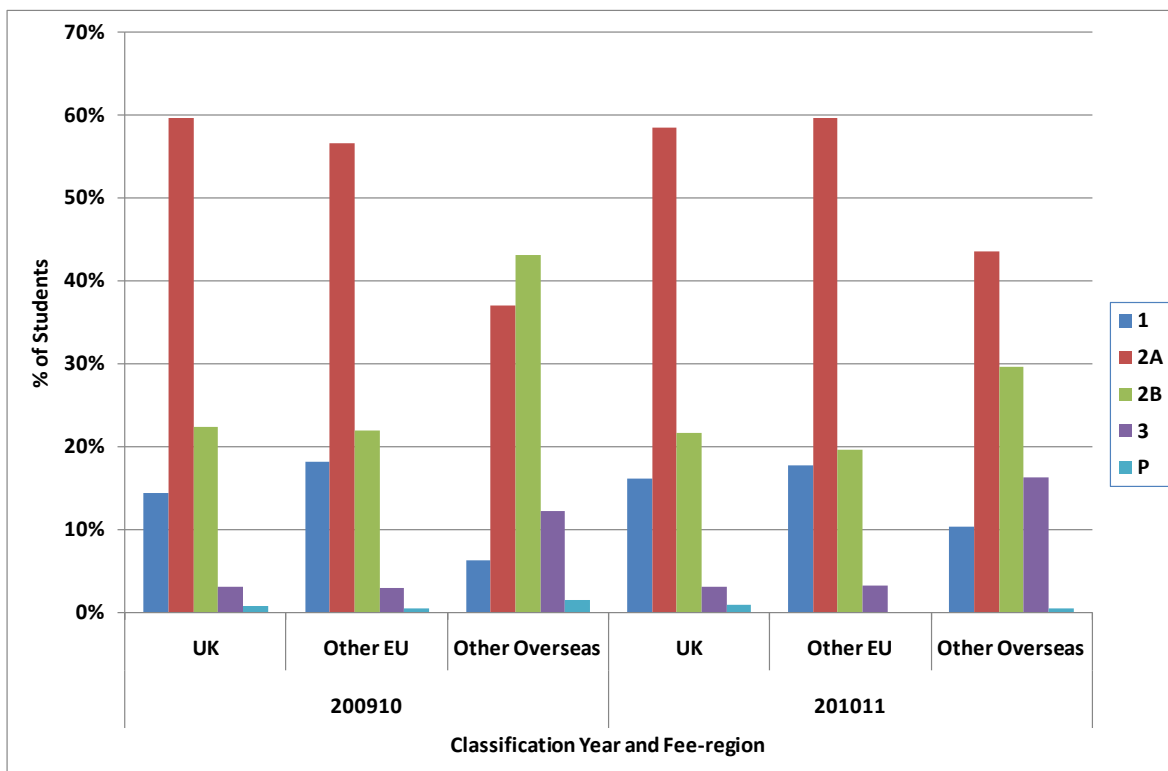


Fig. 7: Classification profiles by fee-region for students completing their studies in 2010 and 2011.

Summary

21. To a large extent, conclusions made in previous years’ reports have been supported. Namely that there is no difference in performance between disabled and non-disabled students and that, although there are some differences between mature and non-mature entrants, these can almost certainly be explained by the greater preponderance of male students in the latter group.
22. Students at RHUL show some evidence of inequality based on gender, namely a greater likelihood to fail to progress from year 1 at the 1st attempt and a greater tendency not to be awarded a ‘good’ final degree. To some extent, these trends are explained by differences in the subject areas studied by male and female students (and are also mirrored at national level) but the situation may still be of concern. In particular 70 % of female Science students were awarded a 1st or 2(i) in 2010-11 but only 55 % of male students.

23. Students originating from outside the EU tend to perform worse than their UK-domiciled peers. There is a significant (at least 10 %) gap in 1st-time first year progression rates (at least partially mitigated at attempt 2) and a weaker performance in final degree classification, with a particularly large number of 3rd-class degrees- of the 98 awards made in this class in 2011, 44 were to overseas students (and a further 7 to non-UK EU students). Since a large majority of non-EU entrants are non-white this is an important equal opportunities issue.
24. There is also evidence of a significant gap in performance between UK-domiciled white students and those who declare themselves to be from an ethnic minority. This is particularly in evidence in progression from year 1 to year 2 (especially at attempt 1) and in final degree classification. Although previously it has been shown that this may be due to lower prior levels of achievement among non-white students, tariff scores are no longer available to confirm this and, in any case, 'adding value' to students is a key component of equal access policies. There are some signs of this performance gap narrowing over time (for instance the progression rates of the 2009 cohort) but improvement is not consistent as can be seen from the poor performance of home ethnic minority students in the 2010 cohort. As the response from the School of Biological Sciences (CBEEC/11/22) correctly states, the situation is complex and it is simplistic to pretend that only one factor is involved in any of the figures displayed above. It is also the case that any measures that have been put in place to address the issues outlines above may take a few years to show significant effects in the data.
25. A full set of figures has been produced as an Appendix to this paper; these are intended for information and as a starting point for potential additional investigations. These include benchmark data showing the performance of the student population as a whole with respect to final classification, progression and withdrawal.

Dr Andrew Graham
Academic Development Officer
21 November 2010

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APPENDIX

This Appendix contains other relevant figures relating to the College entry profile, reference data and equal opportunities that are not included in the main paper. These may be of interest or stimulate more detailed investigation.

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21 November 2010

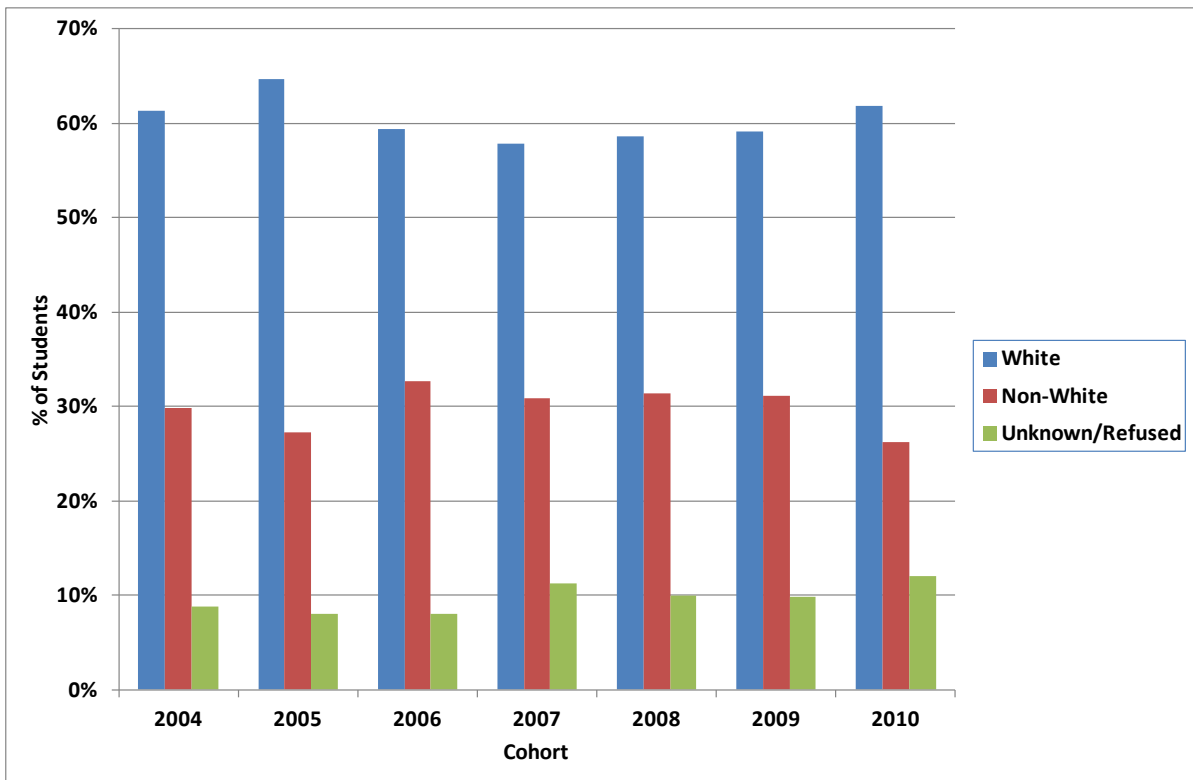


Fig. 8: Percentage of entrants by declared ethnicity and cohort, 2004-2010.

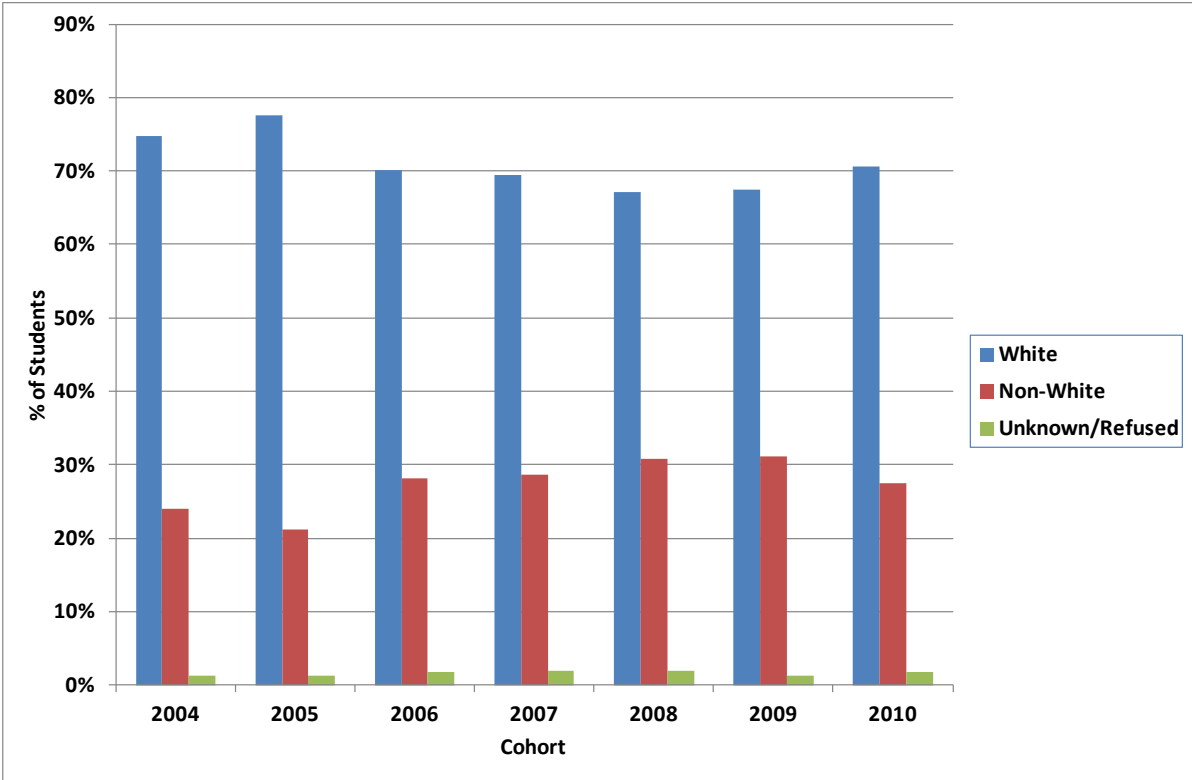


Fig. 9: Percentage of UK-domiciled entrants by ethnicity and cohort, 2004-2010.

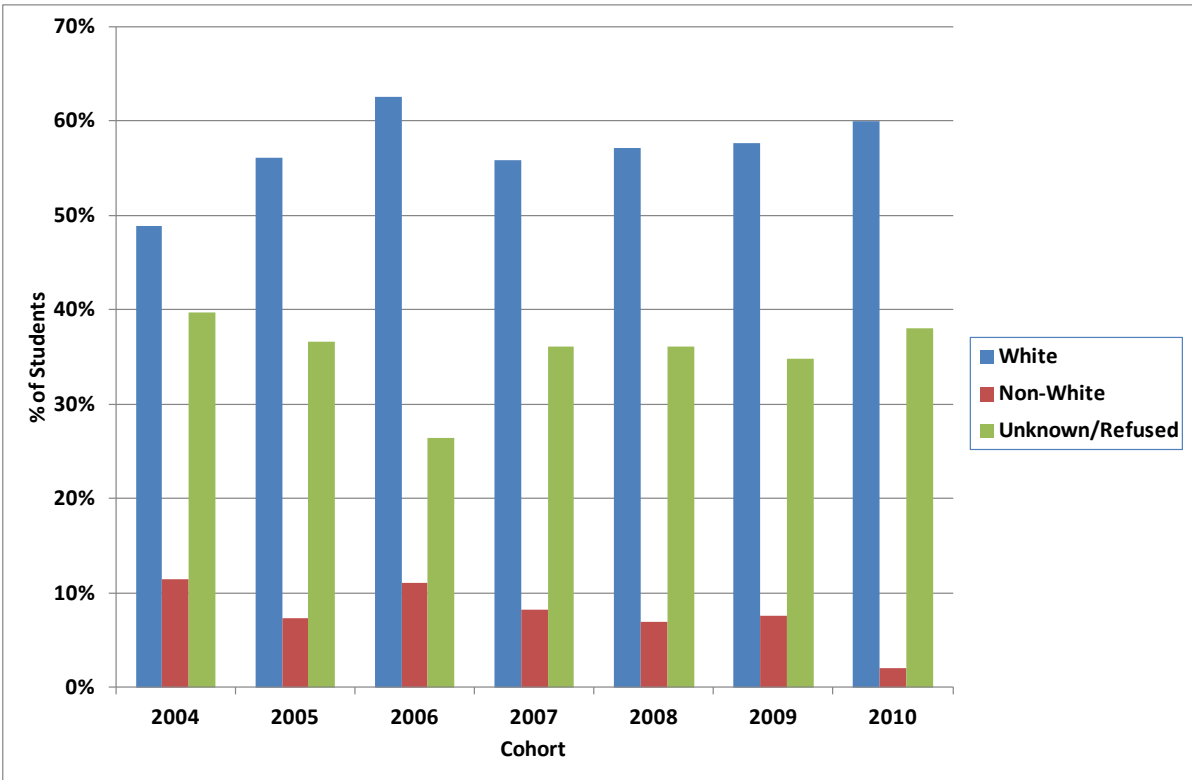


Fig. 10: Percentage of Other EU-domiciled entrants by ethnicity and cohort, 2004-2010.

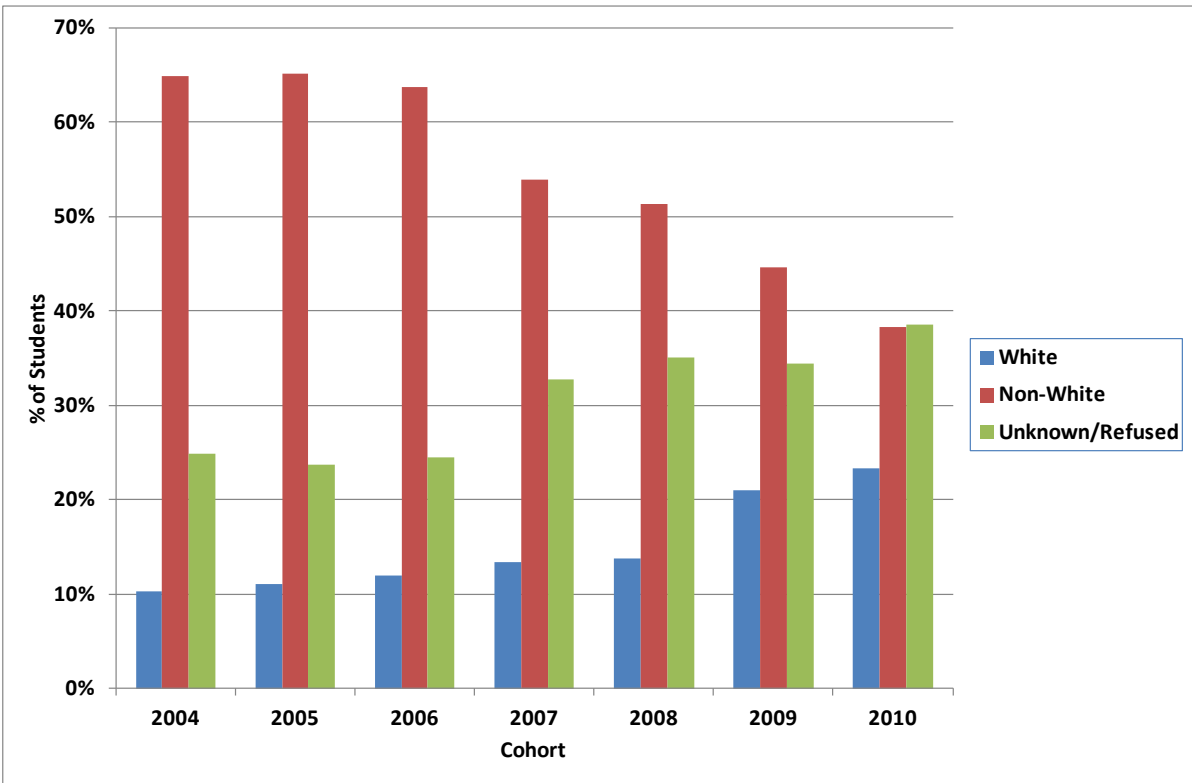


Fig. 11: Percentage of Non- EU-domiciled entrants by ethnicity and cohort, 2004-2010.

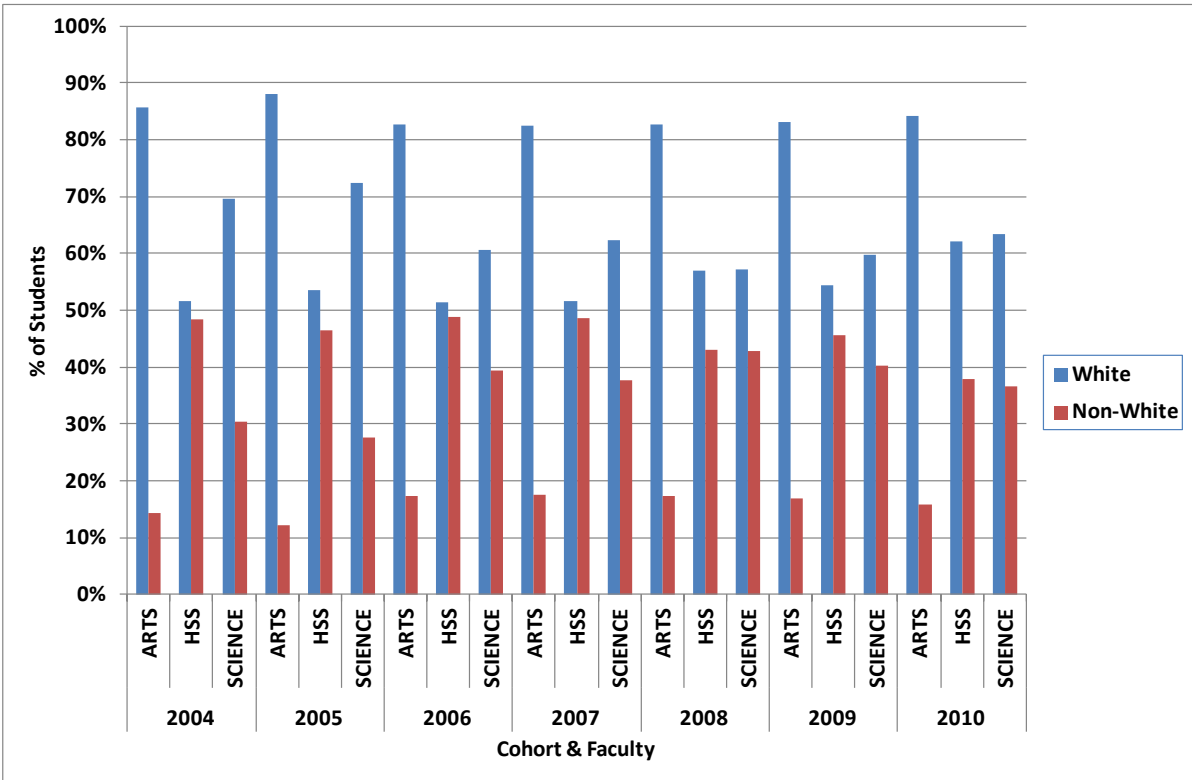


Fig. 12: Percentage of entrants by declared ethnicity, faculty and cohort 2004-2010. Entrants who failed to disclose their ethnicity are excluded.

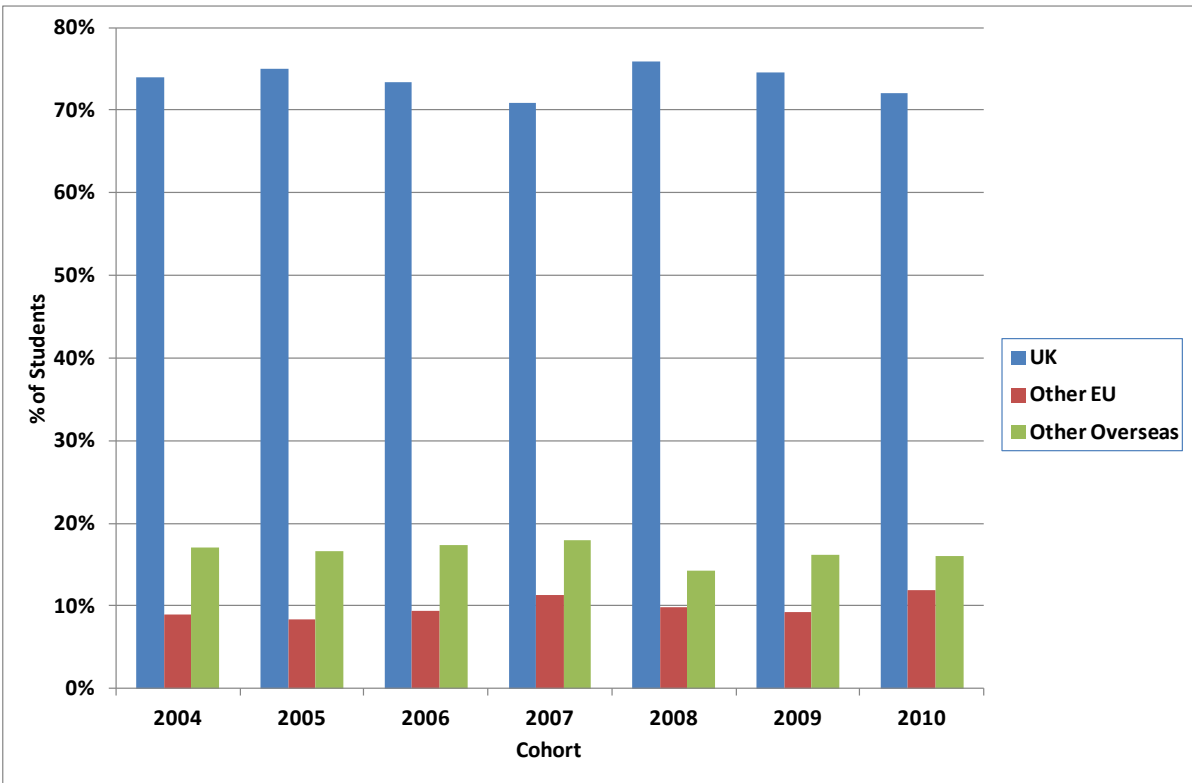


Fig. 13: Percentage of entrants by fee-region and cohort, 2004-2010.

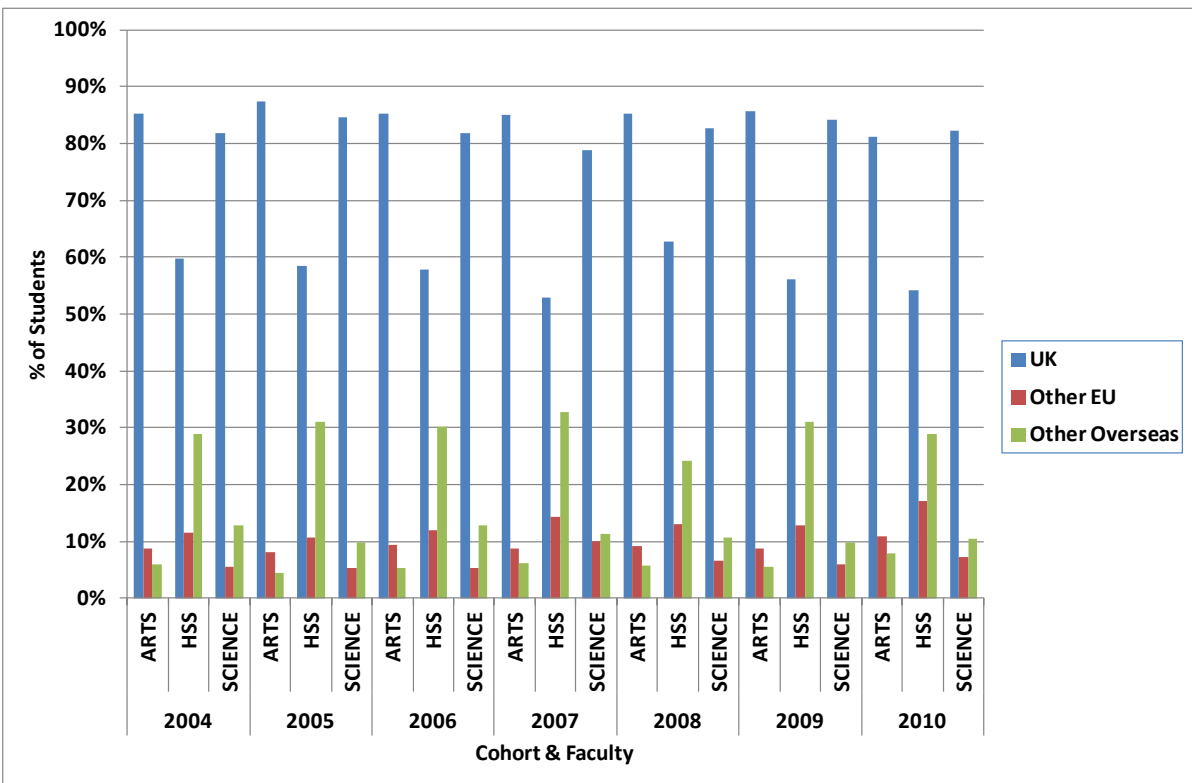


Fig. 14: Percentage of entrants by fee-region, faculty and cohort, 2004-2010.

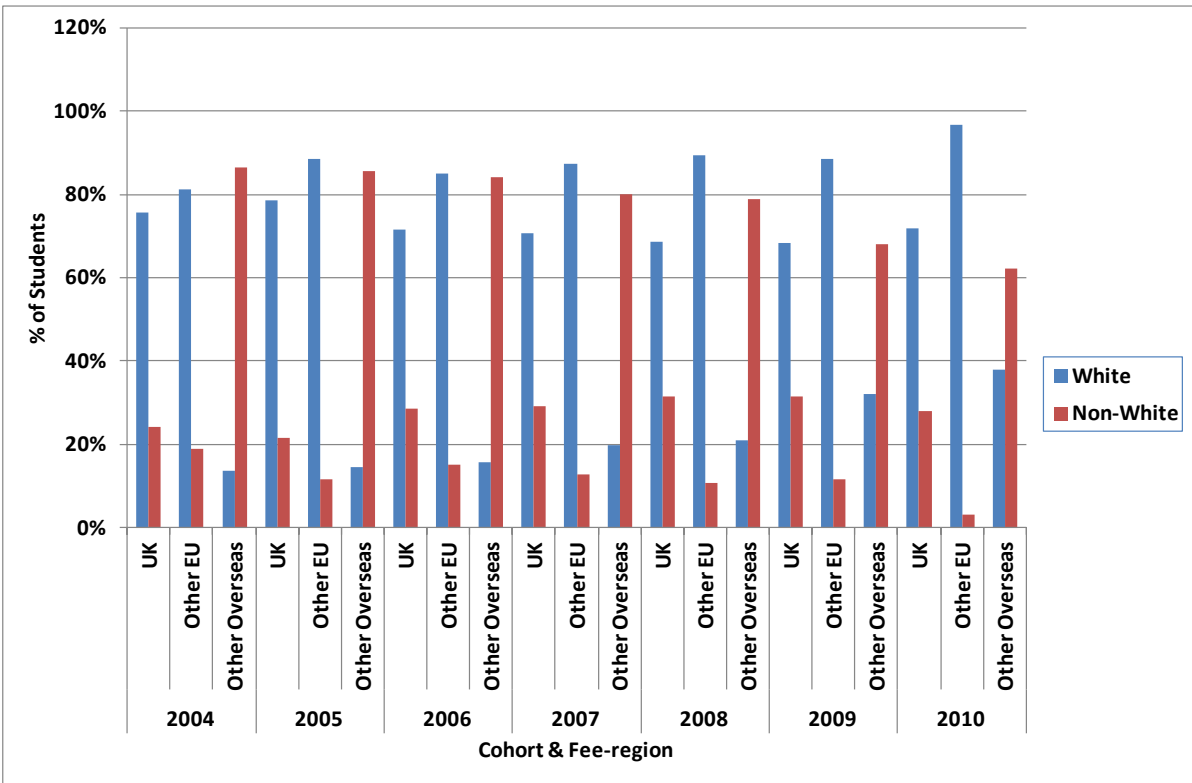


Fig. 15: Percentage of entrants by declared ethnicity, fee-region and cohort, 2004-2010. Entrants who failed to declare their ethnicity are excluded.

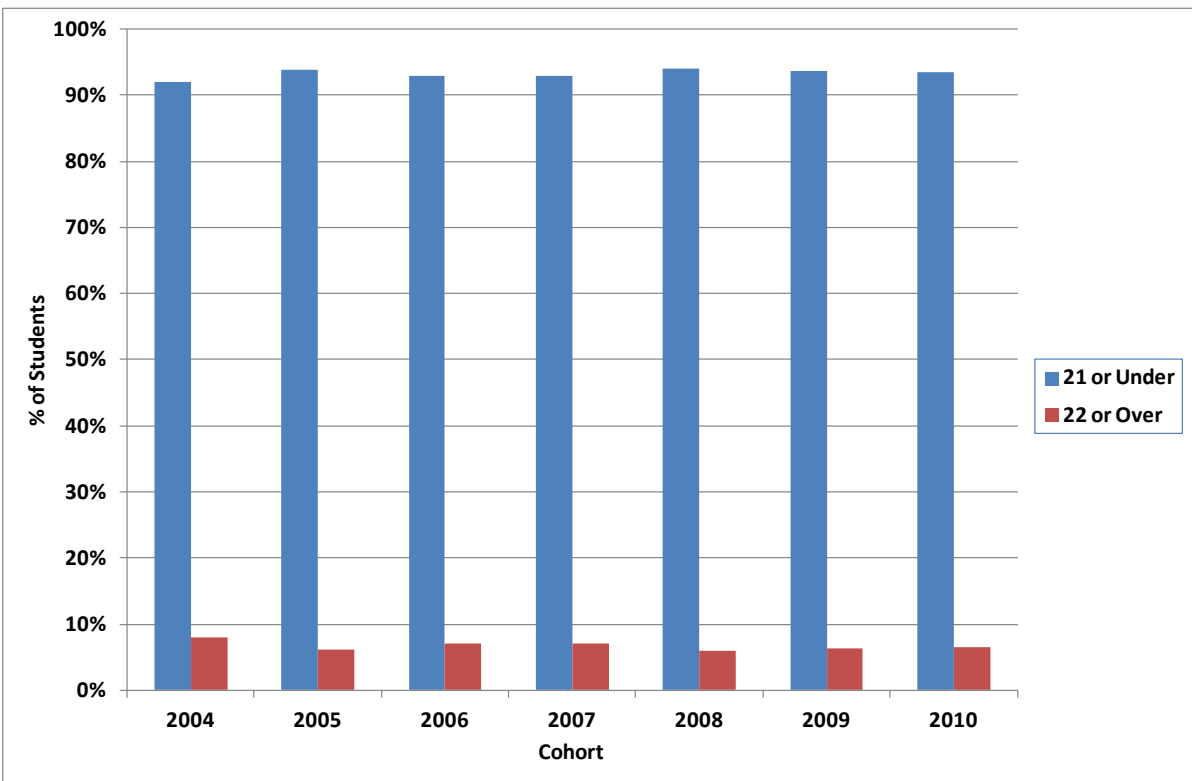


Fig. 16: Percentage of mature entrants by cohort, 2004-2010.

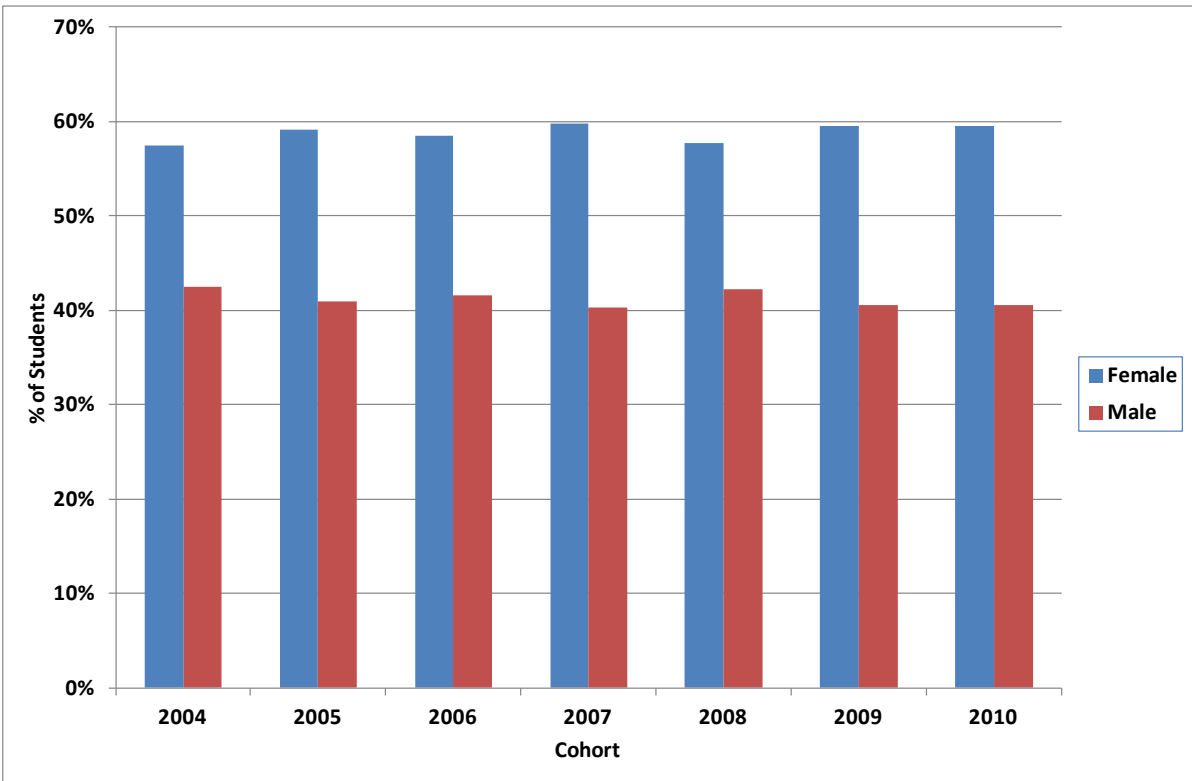


Fig. 17: Percentage of entrants by gender and cohort, 2004-2010.

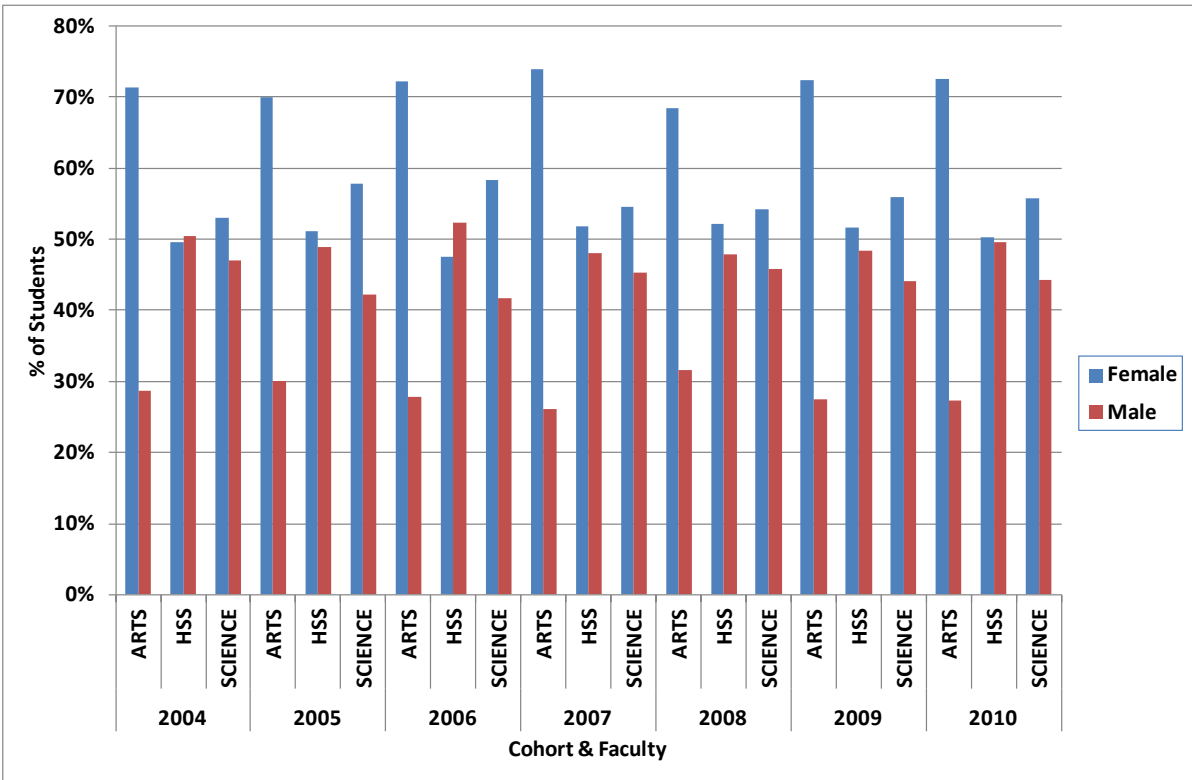


Fig. 18: Percentage of entrants by gender, faculty and cohort, 2004-2010.

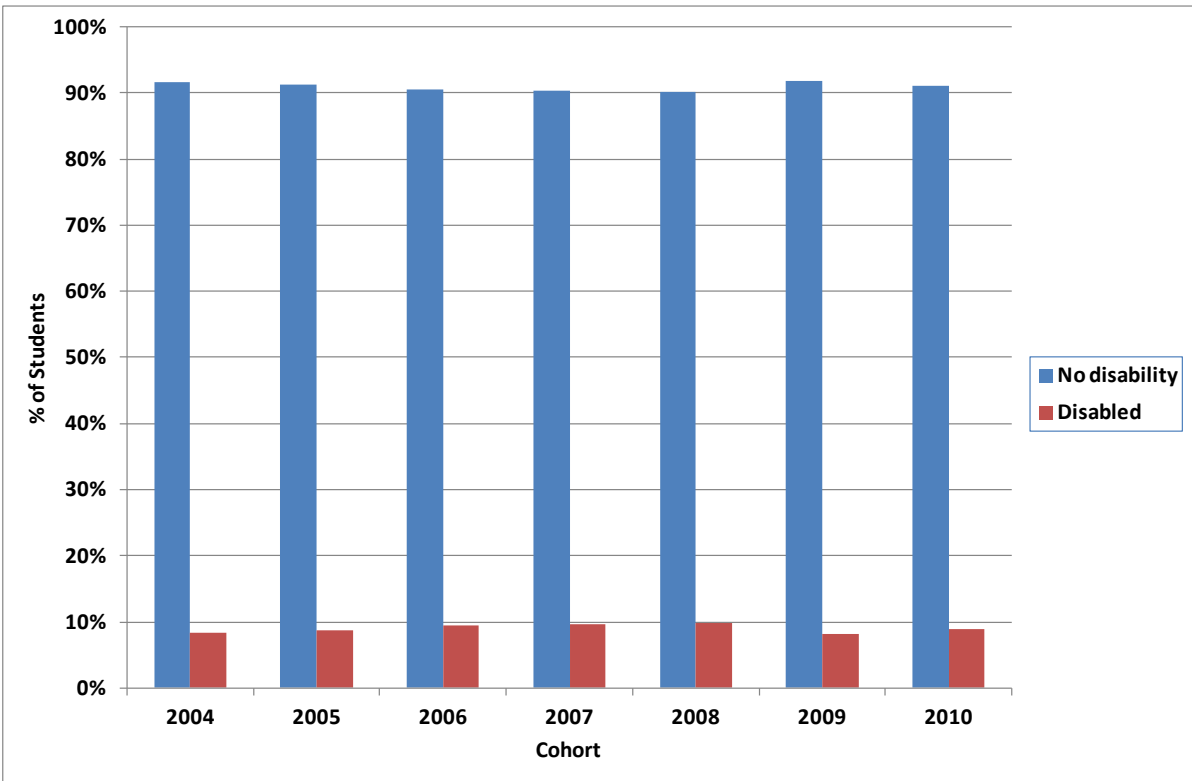


Fig. 19: Percentage of entrants with a declared disability by cohort, 2004-2010.

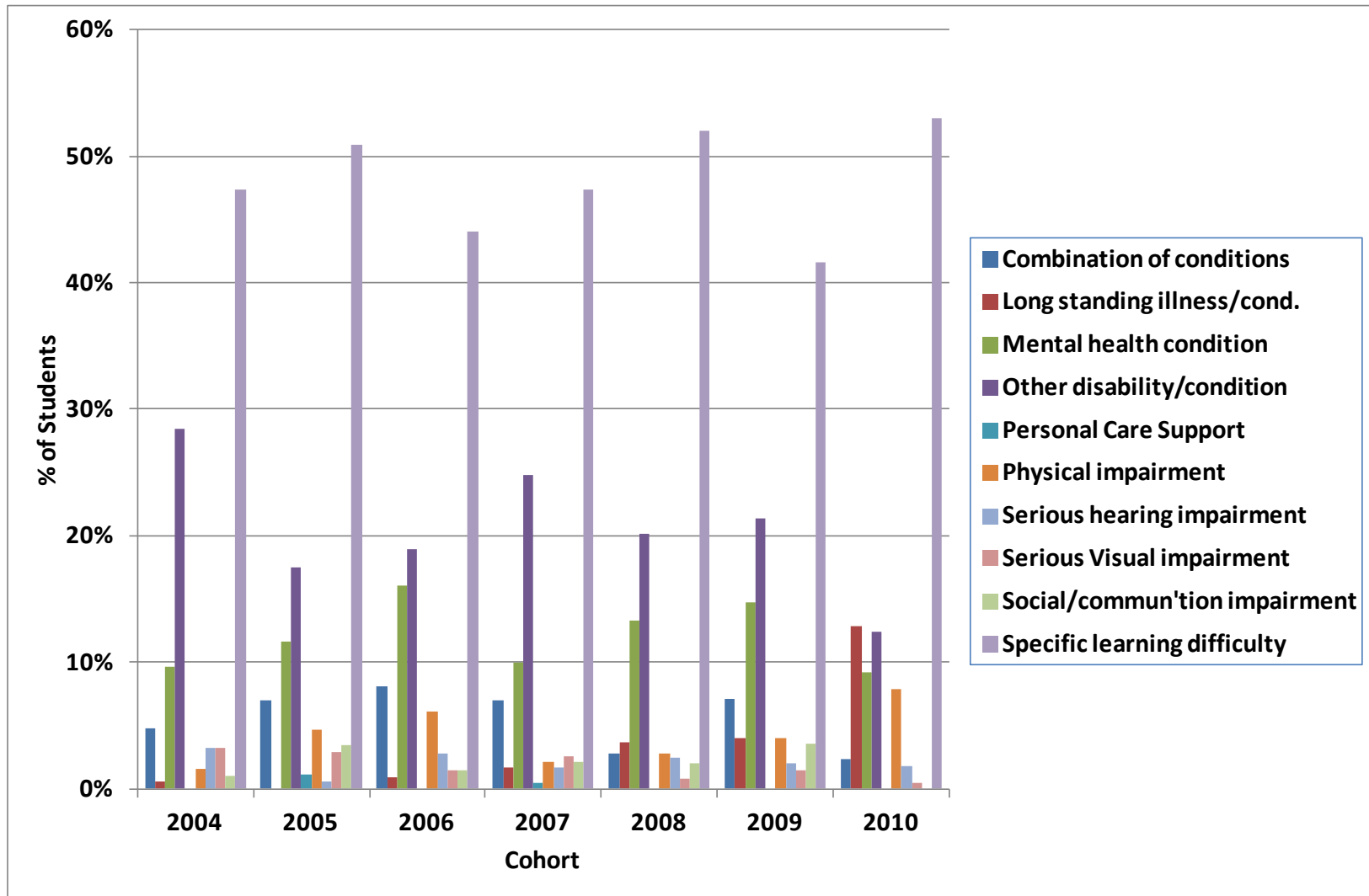


Fig. 20: Percentage of entrants (of those with a declared disability) by disability in cohorts 2004-2010.

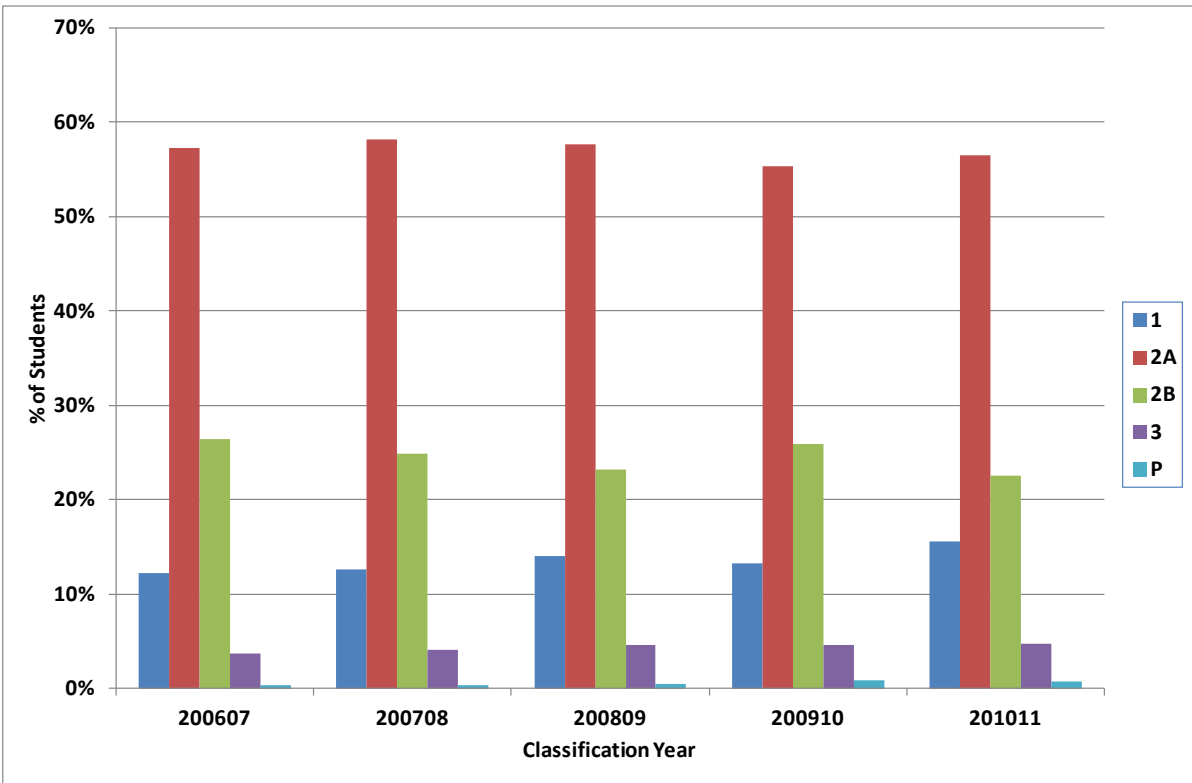


Fig. 21: Classification profiles for students completing their studies between 2007 and 2011.

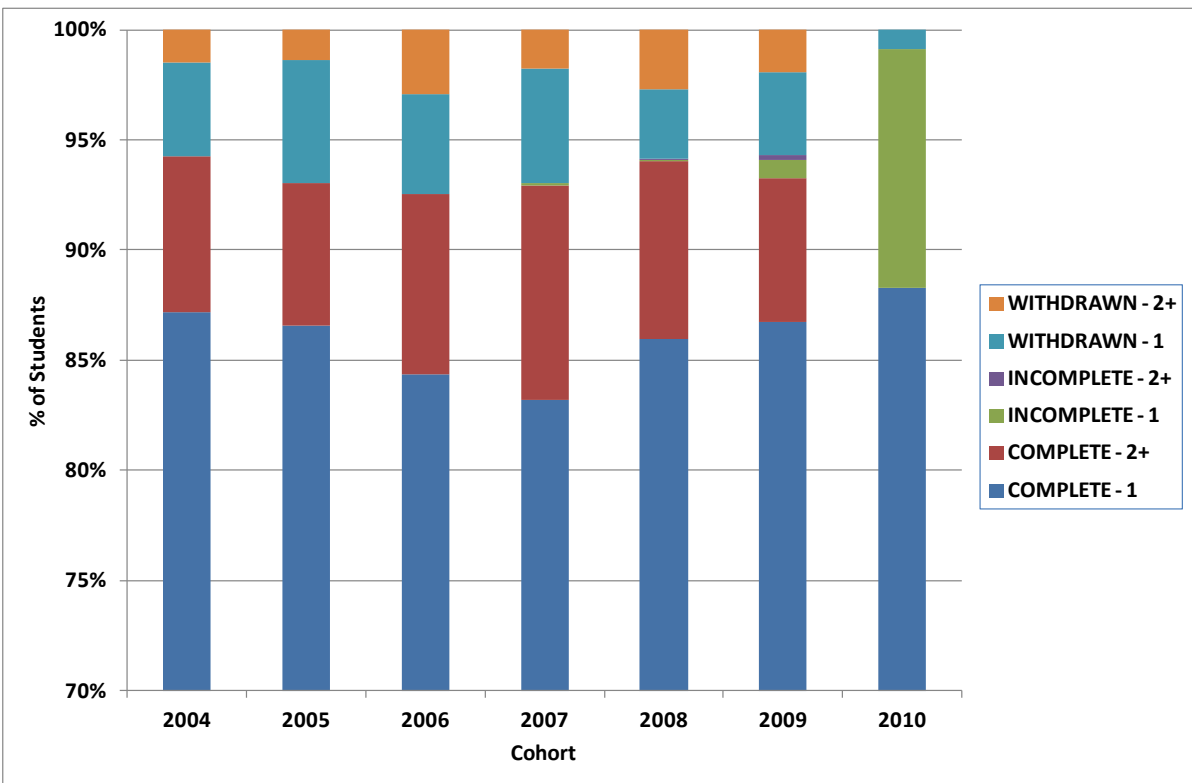


Fig. 22: First-year progression rates by cohort, 2004-2010. Students yet to make an attempt are excluded. Note break of scale on the y-axis.

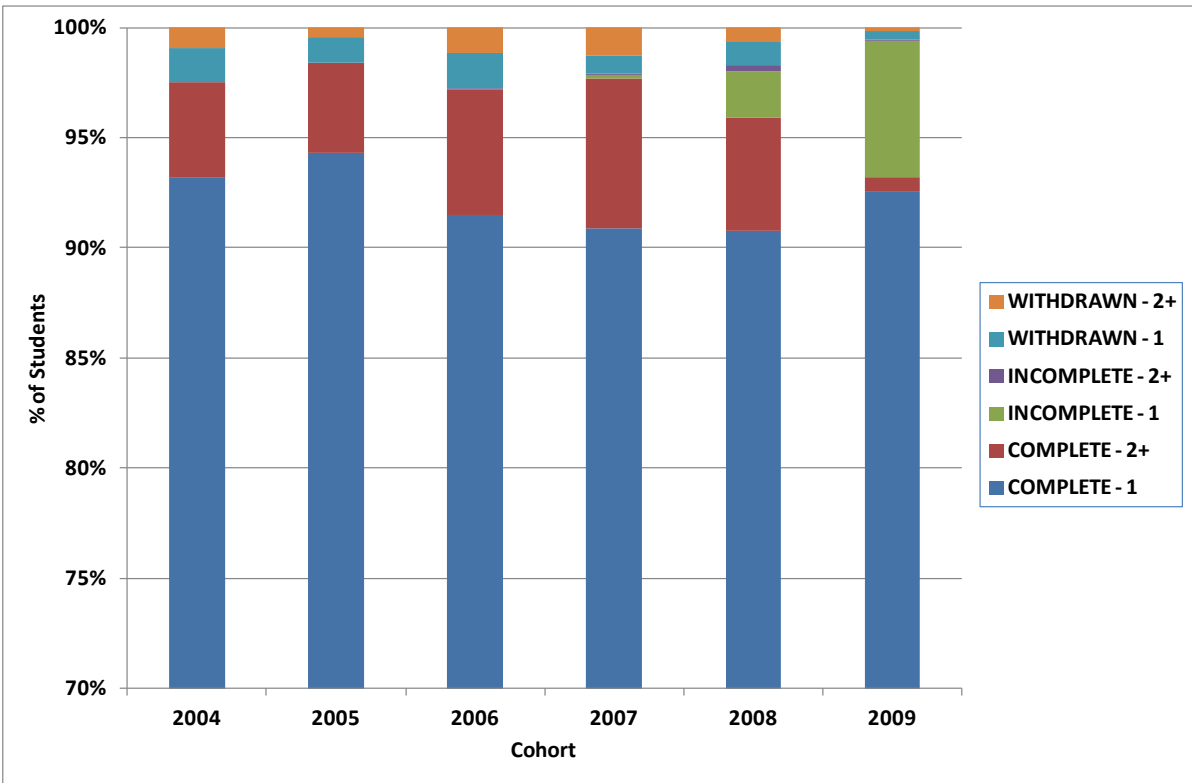


Fig. 23: Second-year progression rates by cohort, 2004-2009. Students yet to make an attempt are excluded. Note break of scale on the y-axis.

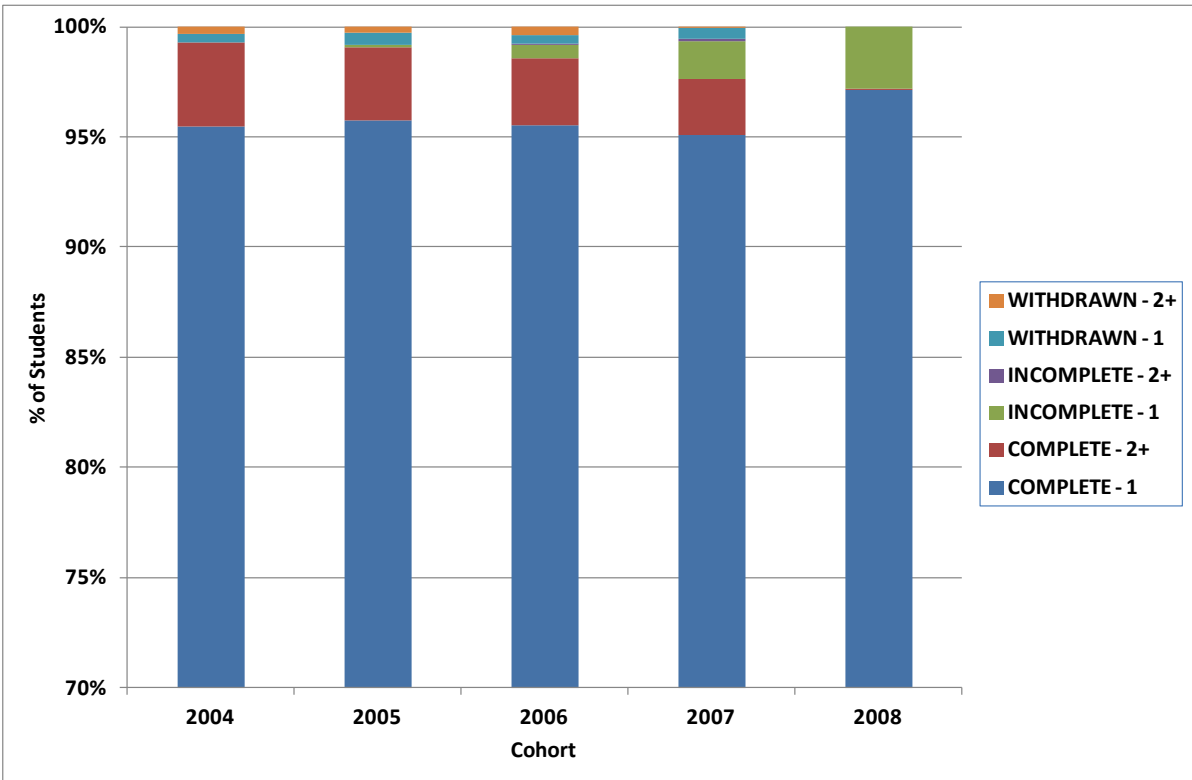


Fig. 24: Third-year progression rates by cohort, 2004-2008. Students yet to make an attempt are excluded. Note break of scale on the y-axis.

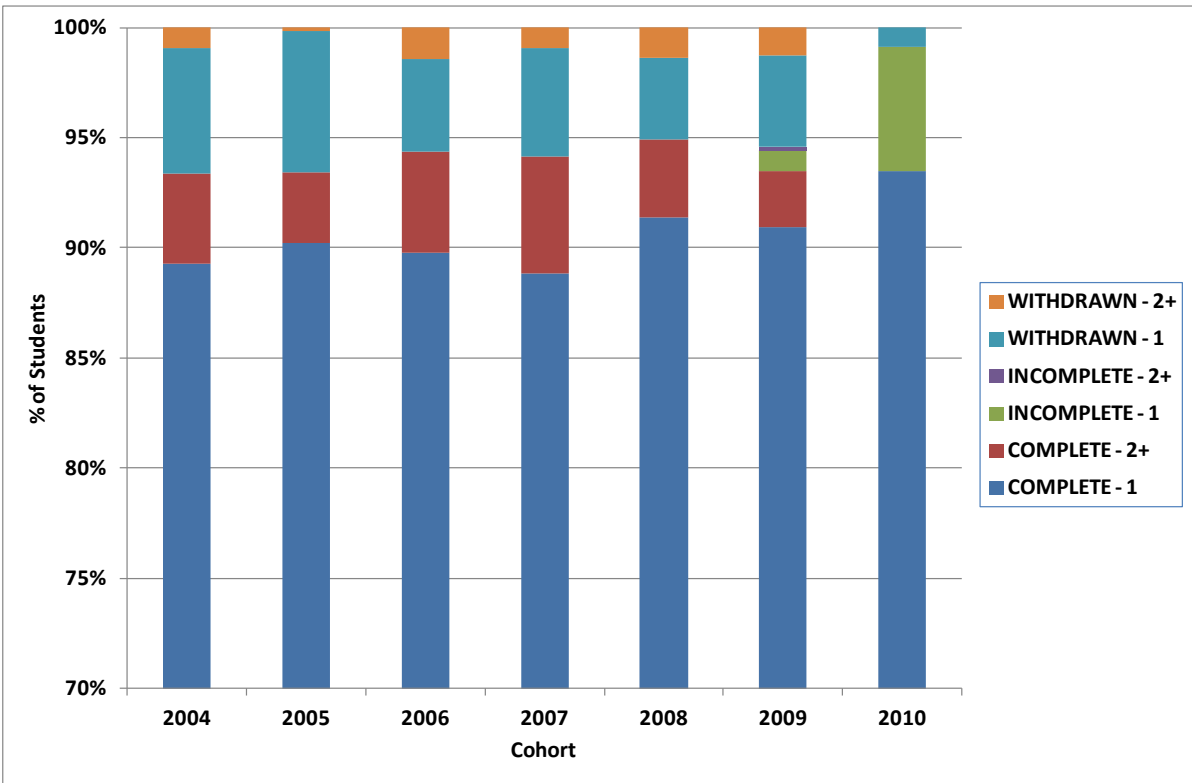


Fig. 25: First-year progression rates by cohort, 2004-2010 *for Faculty of Arts*. Students yet to make an attempt are excluded. Note break of scale on the y-axis.

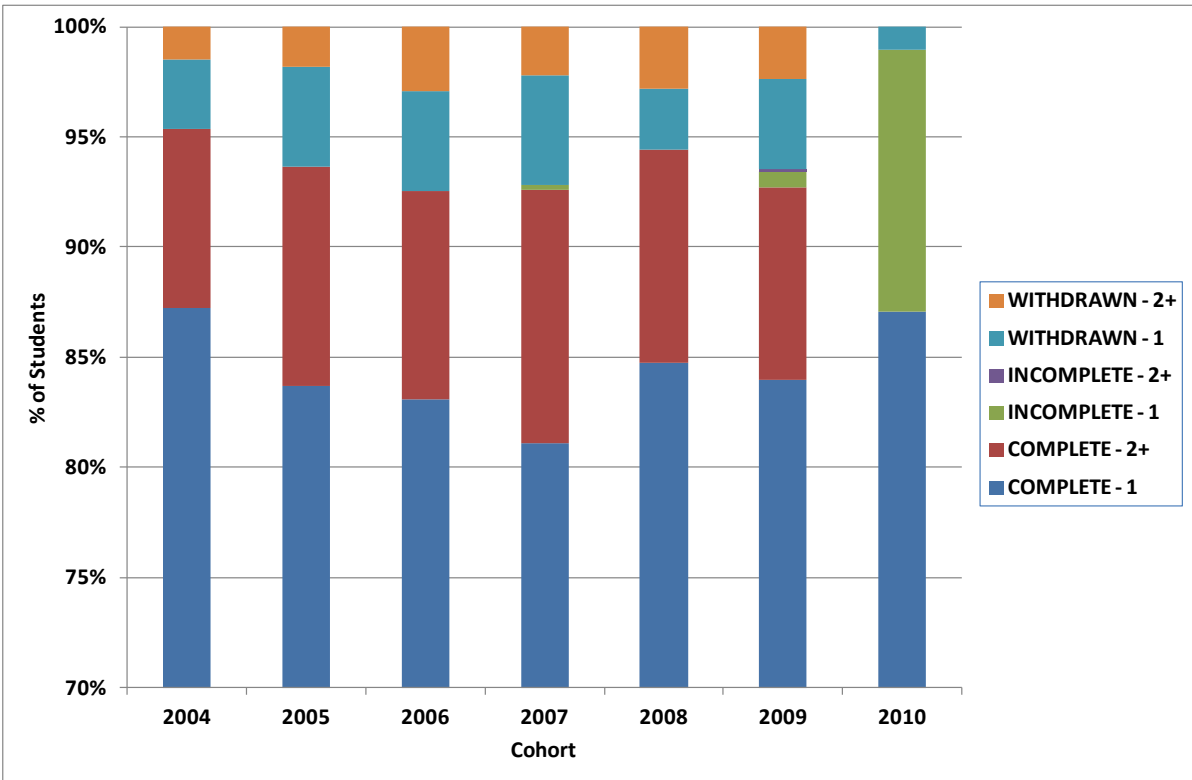


Fig. 26: First-year progression rates by cohort, 2004-2010 *for Faculty of HSS*. Students yet to make an attempt are excluded. Note break of scale on the y-axis.

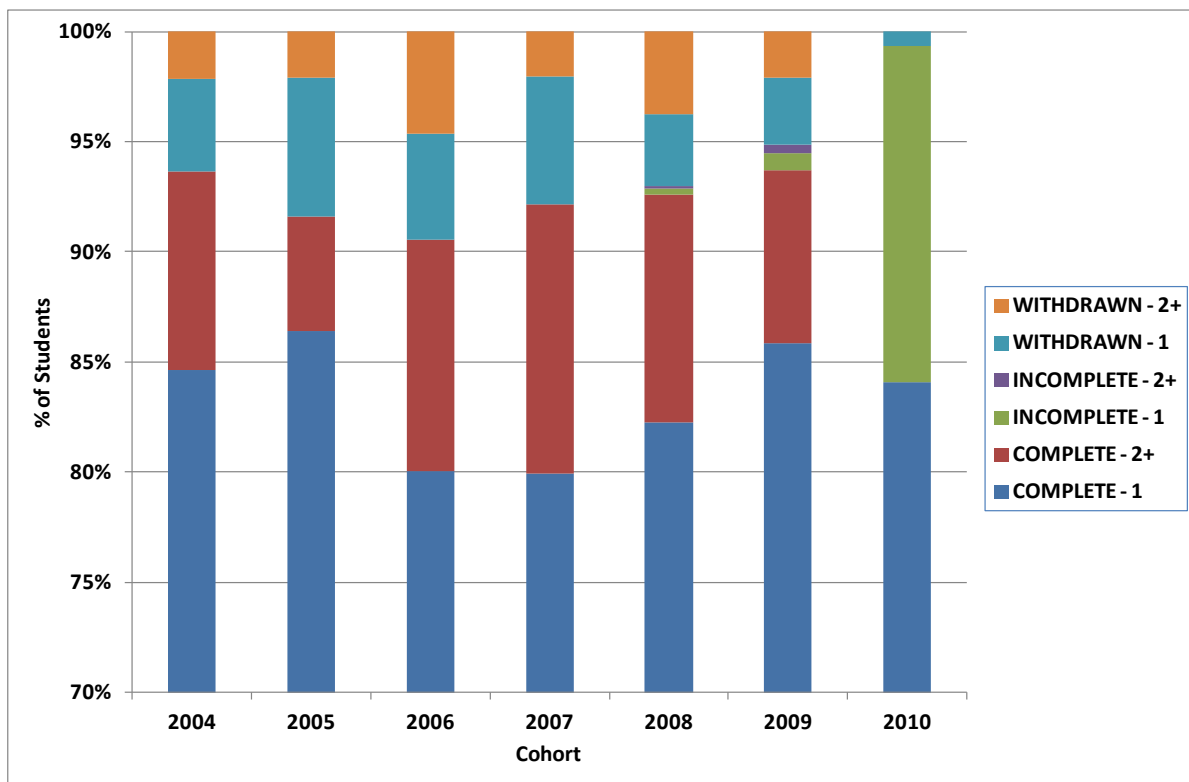


Fig. 27: First-year progression rates by cohort, 2004-2010 for Faculty of Science. Students yet to make an attempt are excluded. Note break of scale on the y-axis.

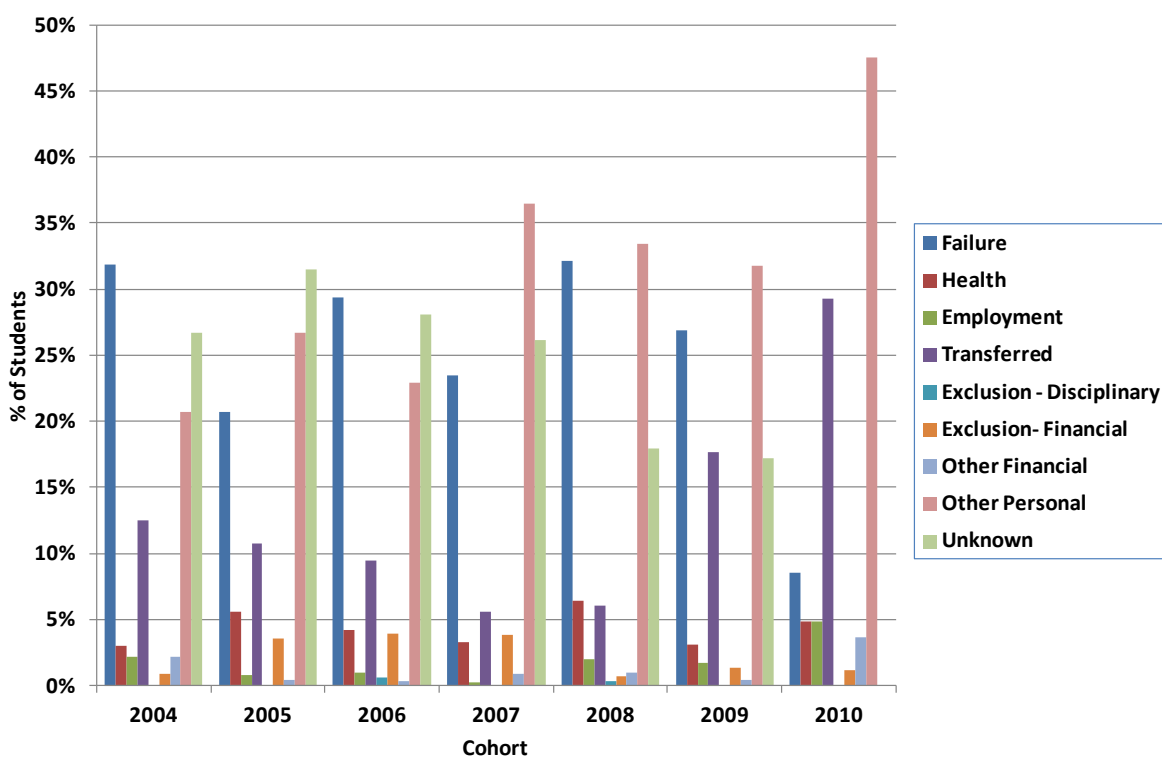


Fig. 28: Reasons for withdrawal (as a percentage of students in the cohort who withdrew) for students entering between 2004 and 2010.

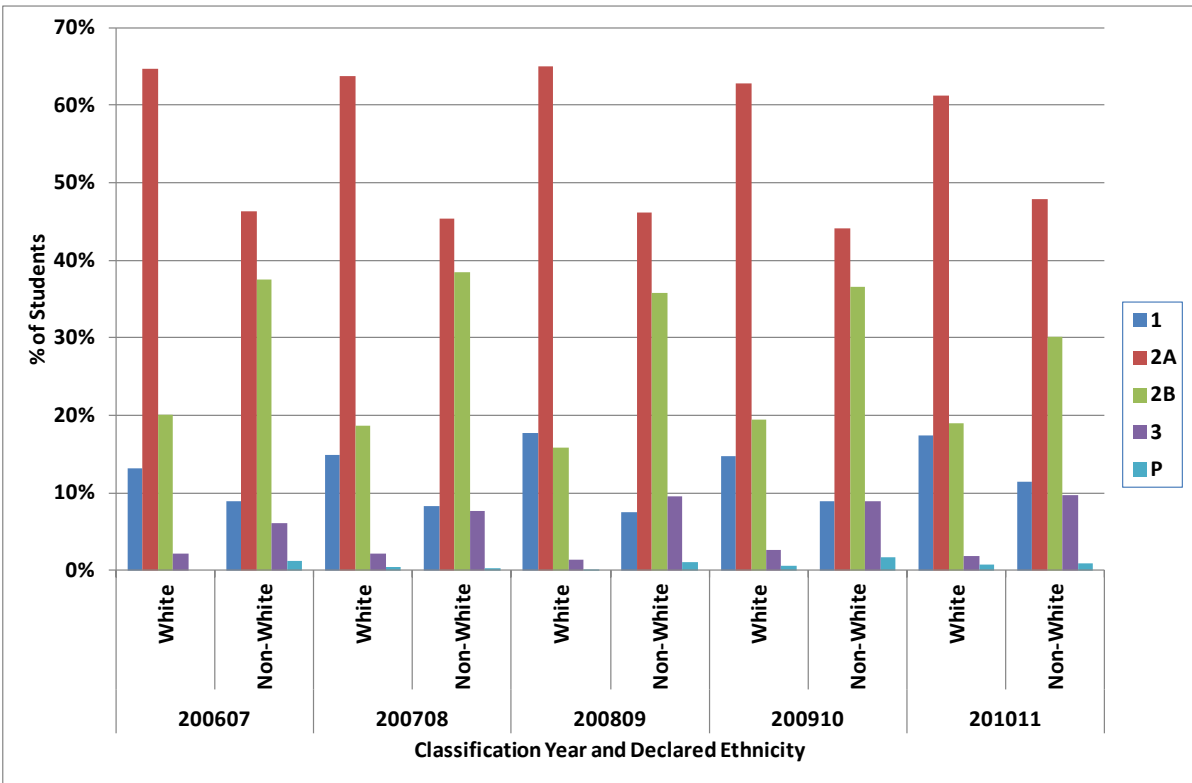


Fig. 29: Classification profiles by year of completion, 2007-2011, and declared ethnicity. Students who failed to declare their ethnicity are excluded.

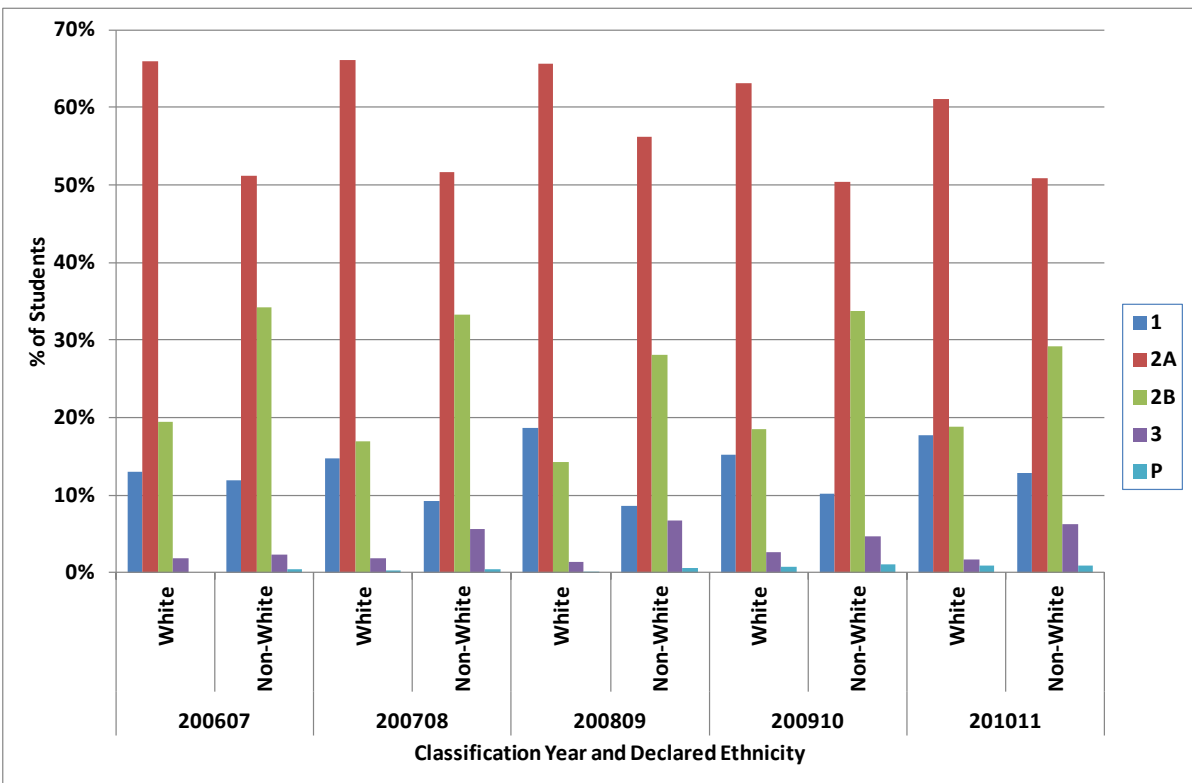


Fig. 1: Classification profiles by year of completion, 2007-2011, and declared ethnicity *for UK-domiciled students only*. Students who failed to declare their ethnicity are excluded. (*Figure included in main paper*).

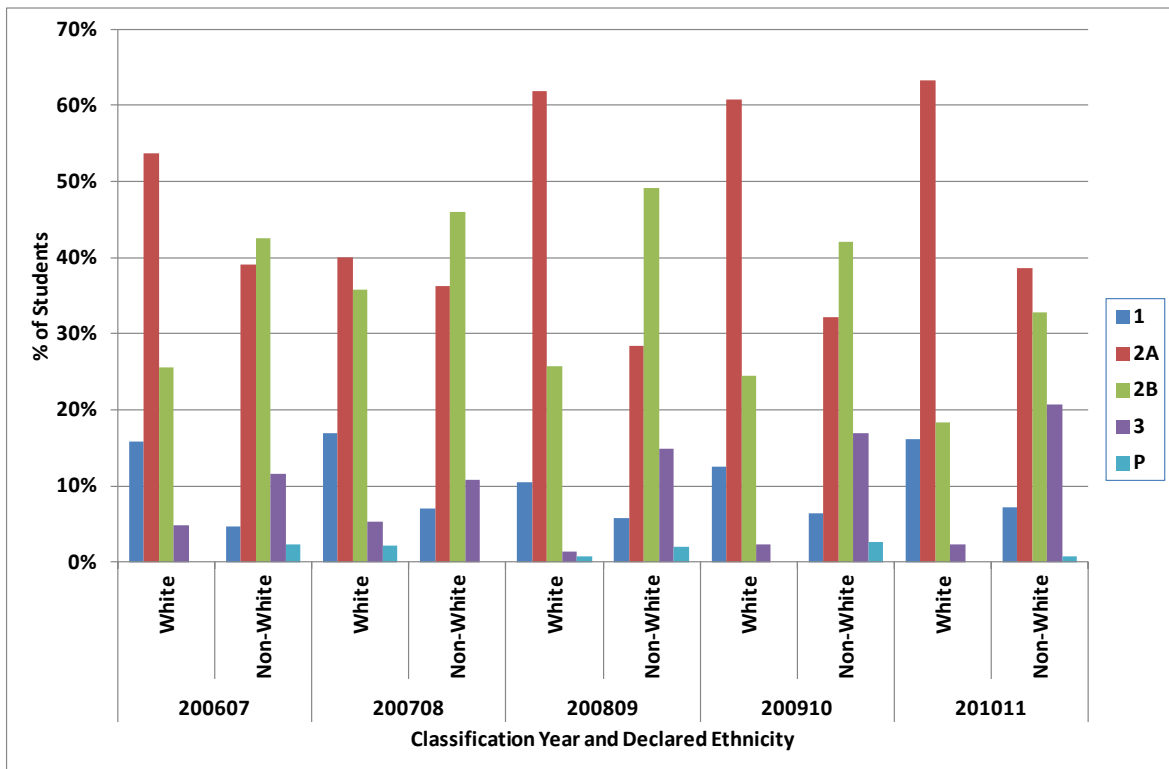


Fig. 2: Classification profiles by year of completion, 2007-2011, and declared ethnicity *for non-UK-domiciled students* only. Students who failed to declare their ethnicity are excluded. (Figure included in main paper).

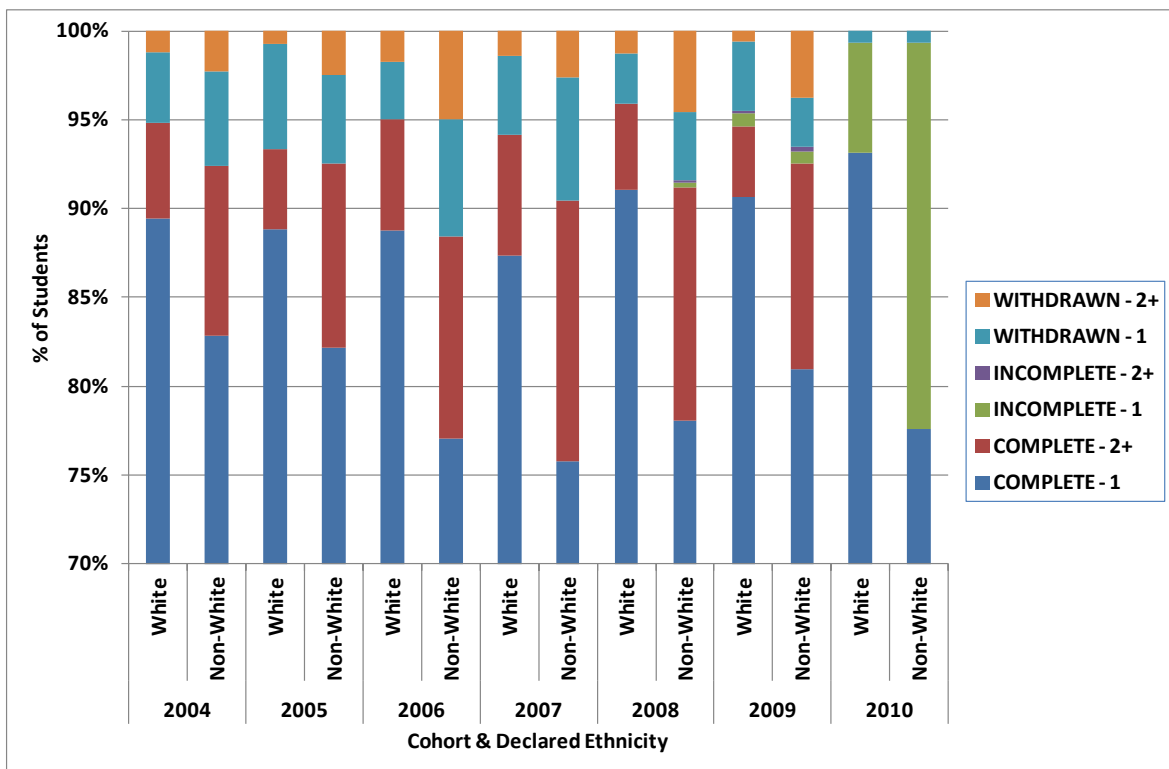


Fig. 30: First-year progression rates by declared ethnicity and entry cohort, 2004-2010. Students yet to make an attempt are excluded as are those who failed to declare their ethnicity. Note break of scale on the y-axis.

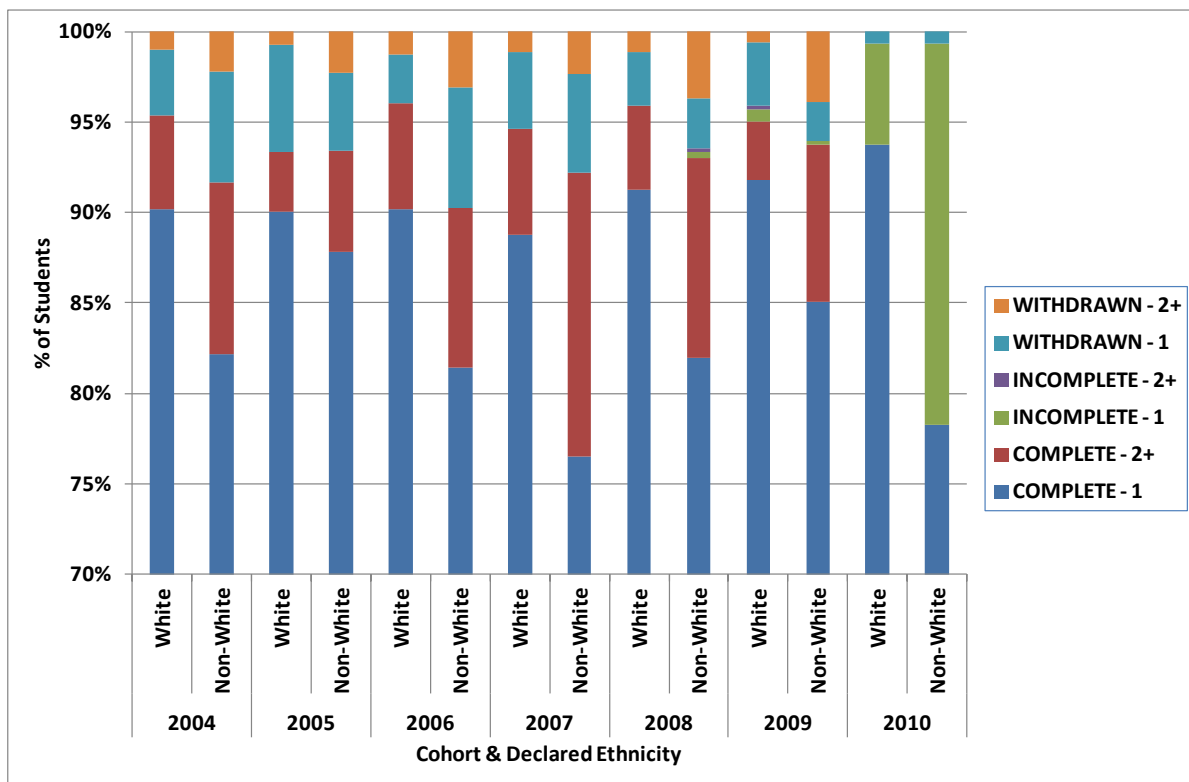


Fig. 3: First-year progression rates by declared ethnicity and entry cohort, 2004-2010 *for UK-domiciled students*. Students yet to make an attempt are excluded as are those who failed to declare their ethnicity. Note break of scale on the y-axis. (Figure included in main paper).

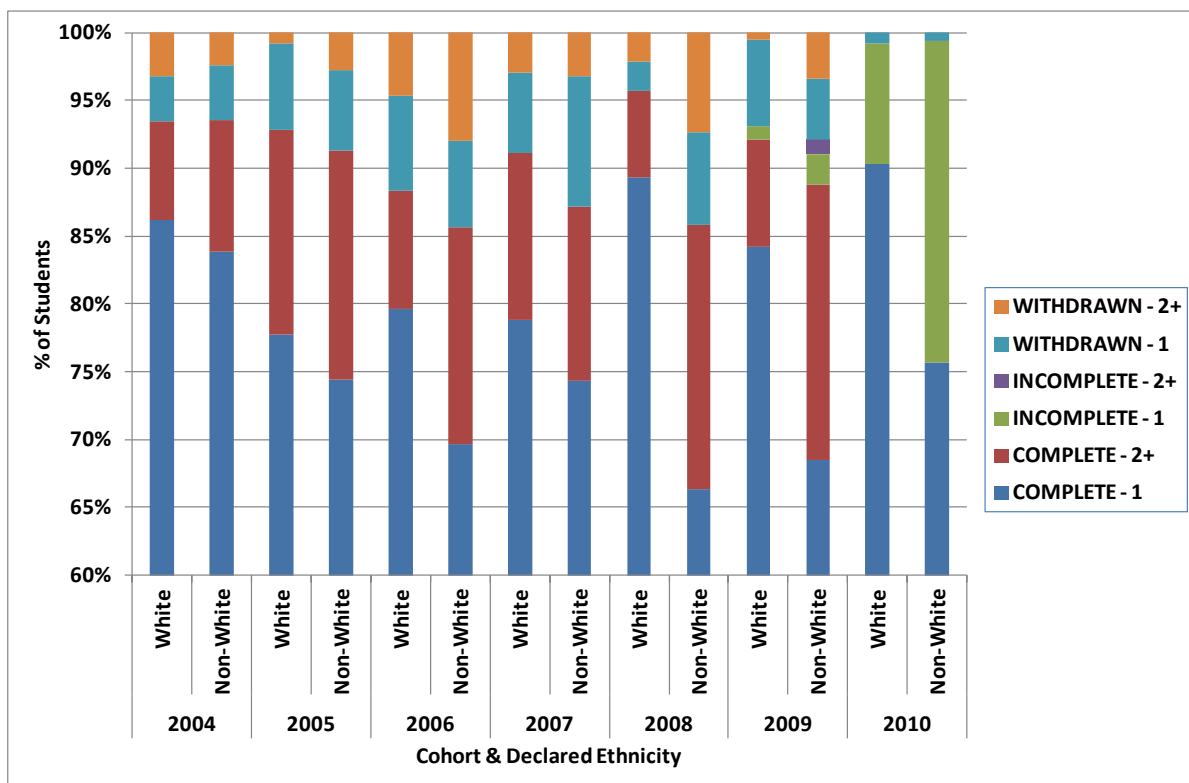


Fig. 31: First-year progression rates by declared ethnicity and entry cohort, 2004-2010 *for non-UK-domiciled students*. Students yet to make an attempt are excluded as are those who failed to declare their ethnicity. Note break of scale on the y-axis.

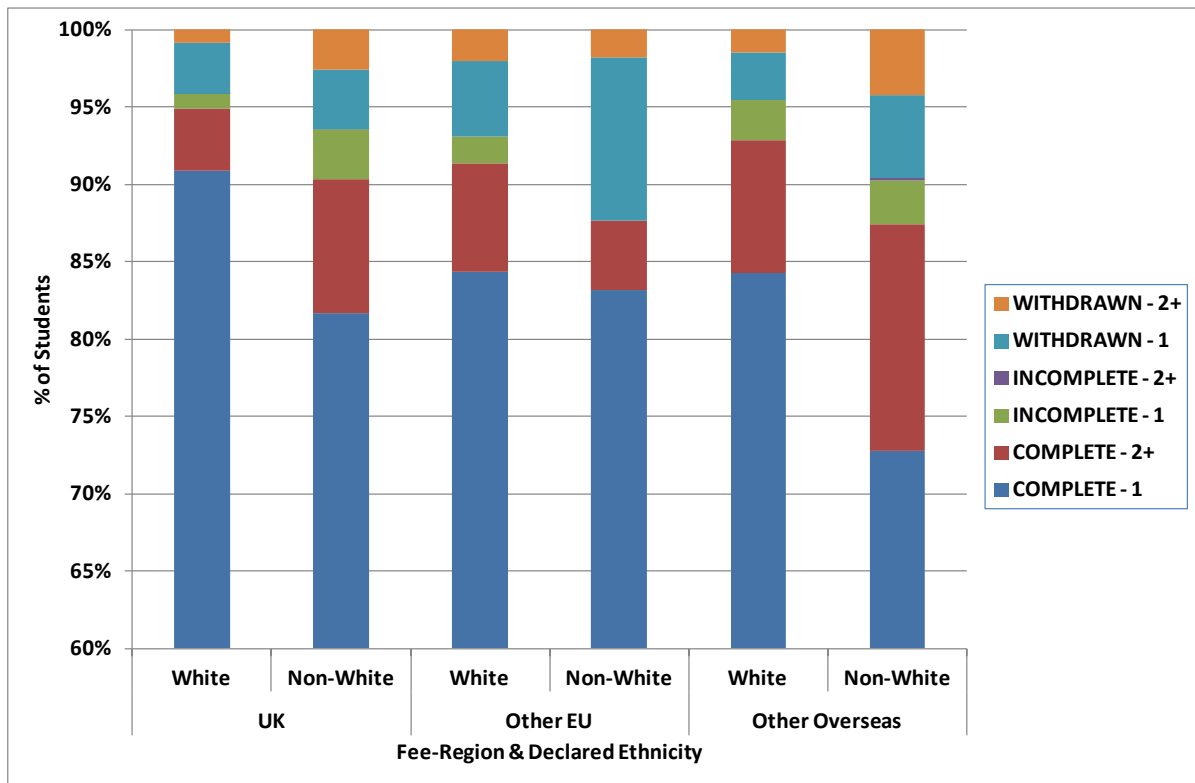


Fig. 32: First-year progression rates by fee-region and declared ethnicity for cohorts 2004-2010 combined. Students yet to make an attempt are excluded as are those who failed to declare their ethnicity. Note break of scale on the y-axis.

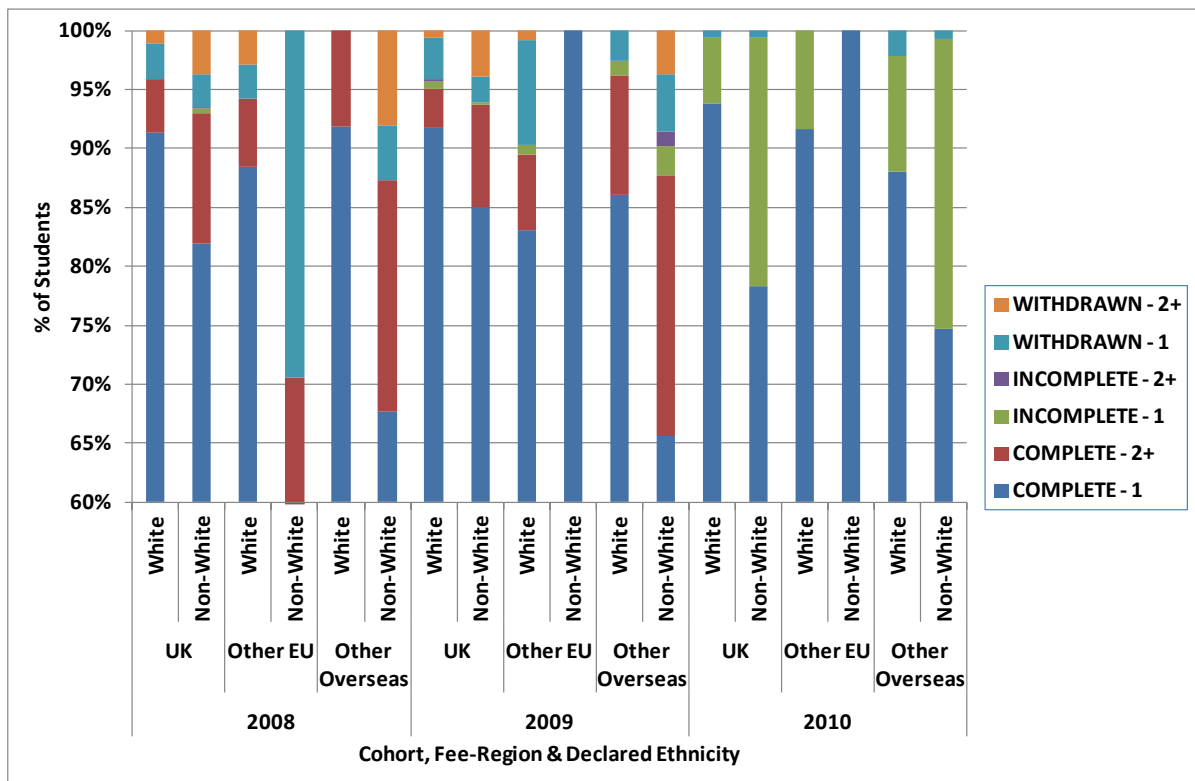


Fig. 33: First-year progression rates by fee-region and declared ethnicity for cohorts 2008-2010. Students yet to make an attempt are excluded as are those who failed to declare their ethnicity. Note break of scale on the y-axis.

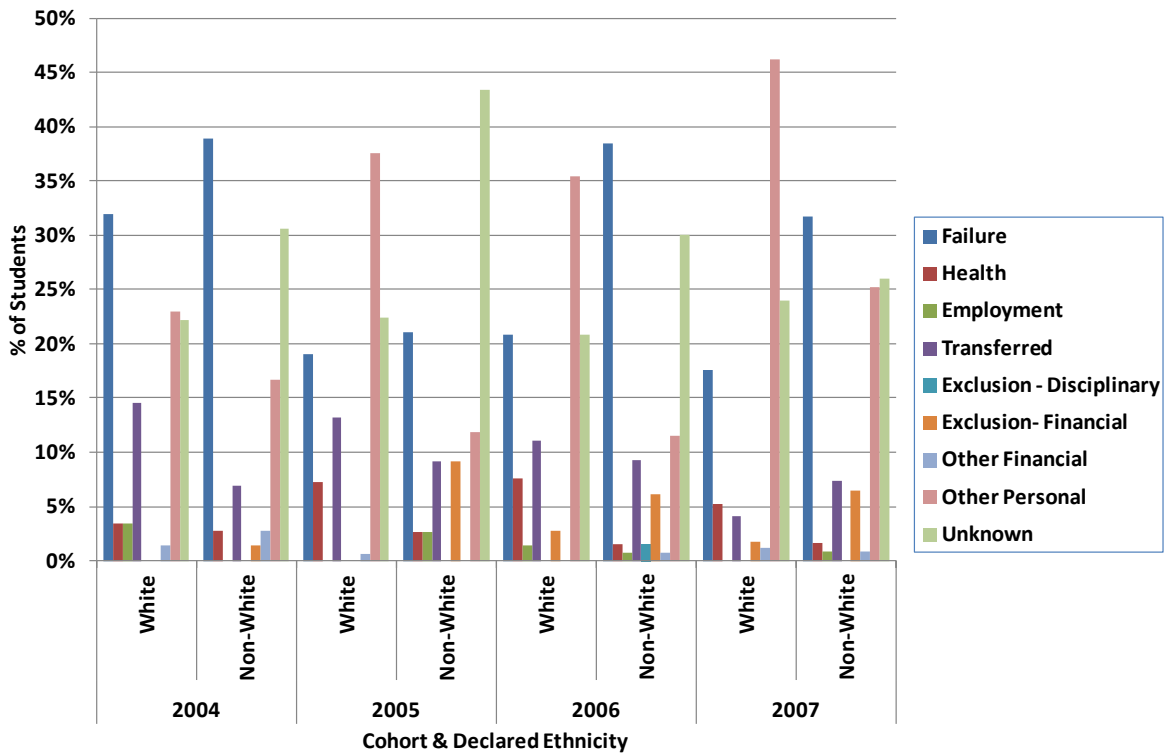
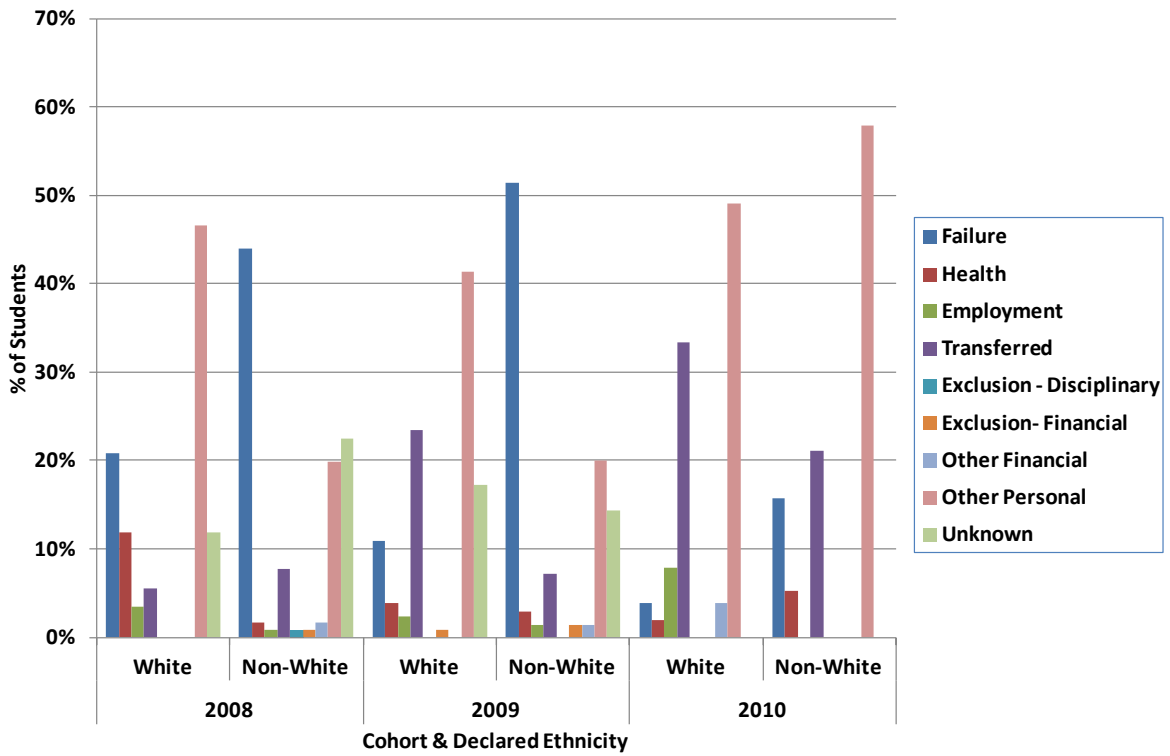


Fig. 34: Reasons for withdrawal (as a percentage of students in the cohort who withdrew) by declared ethnic origin for students entering between 2004 and 2010. Students who failed to declare their ethnic origin are excluded.

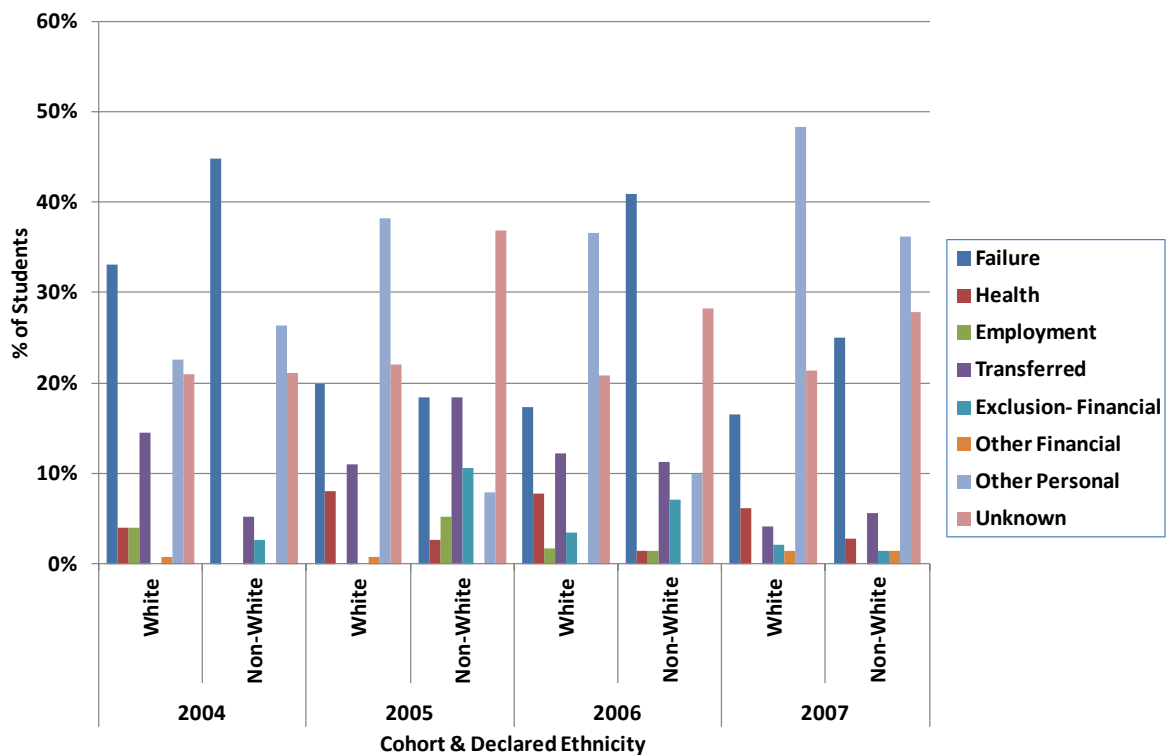
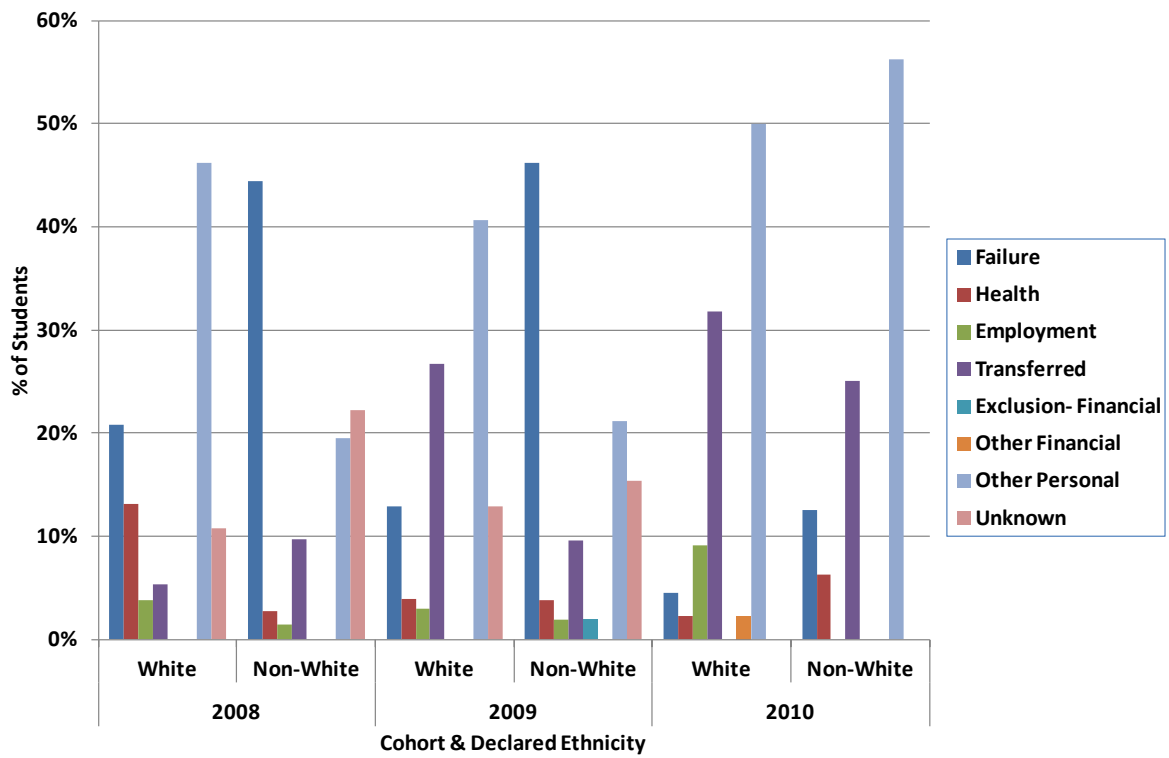


Fig. 35: Reasons for withdrawal (as a percentage of students in the cohort who withdrew) by declared ethnic origin for *UK-domiciled students* entering between 2004 and 2010. Students who failed to declare their ethnic origin are excluded.

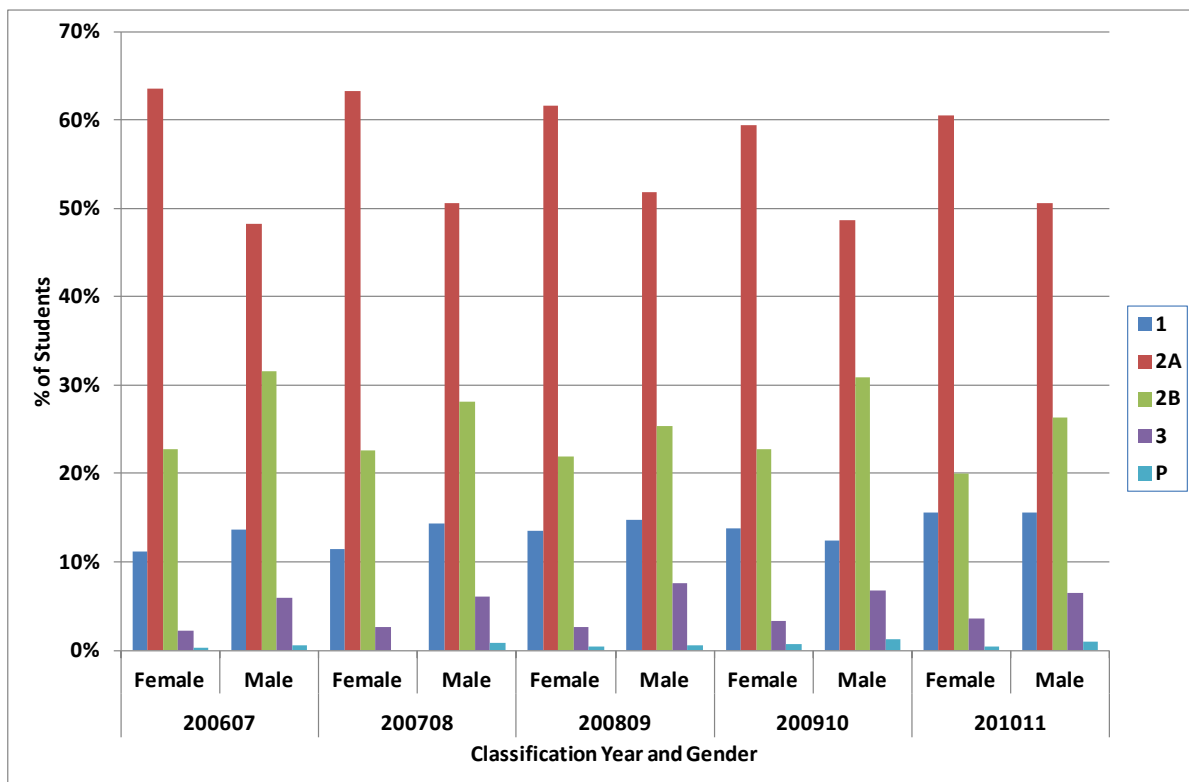
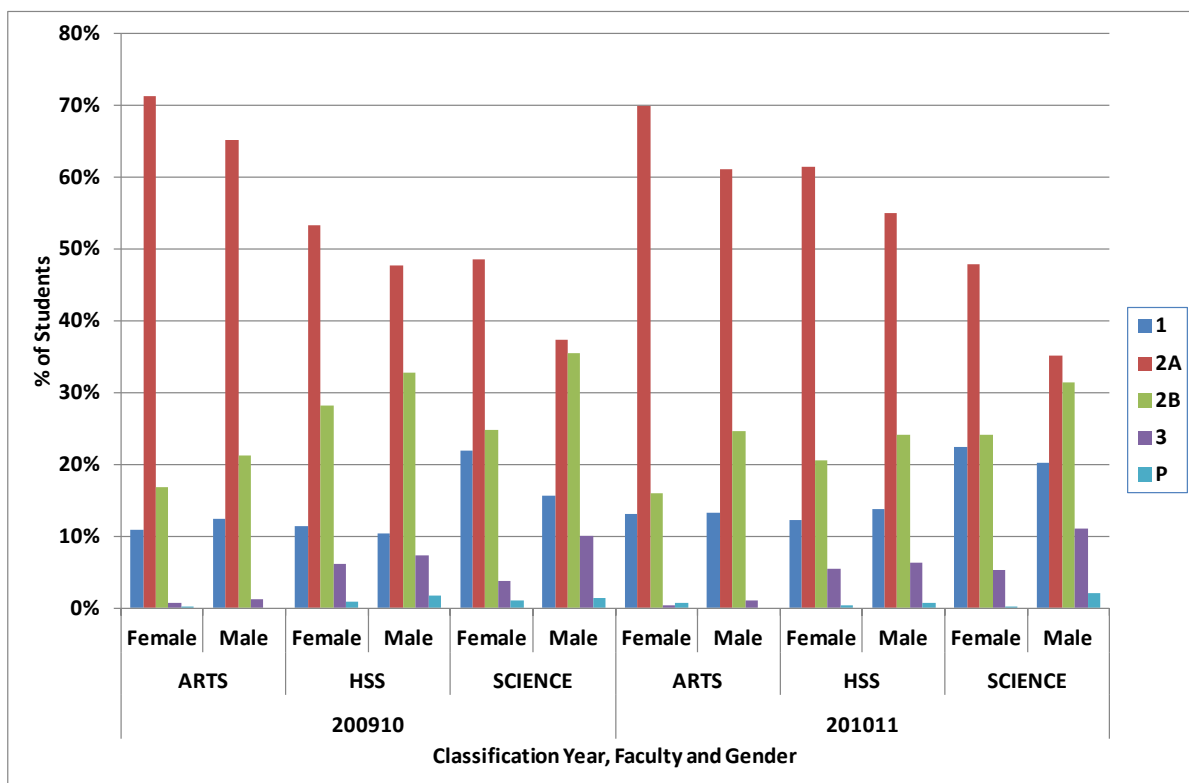


Fig 6: Classification profiles by gender and classification year. (*Figure included in main paper*).



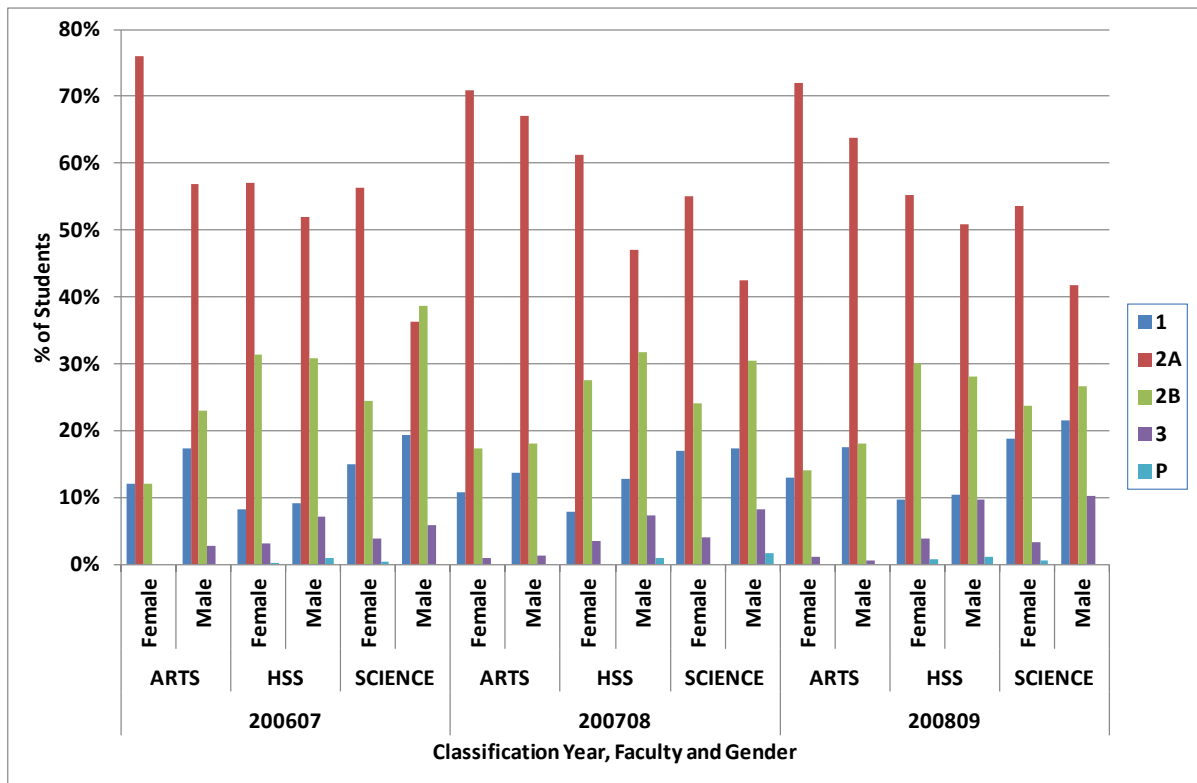


Fig. 36: Classification profiles by gender and faculty for students completing between 2007 and 2011.

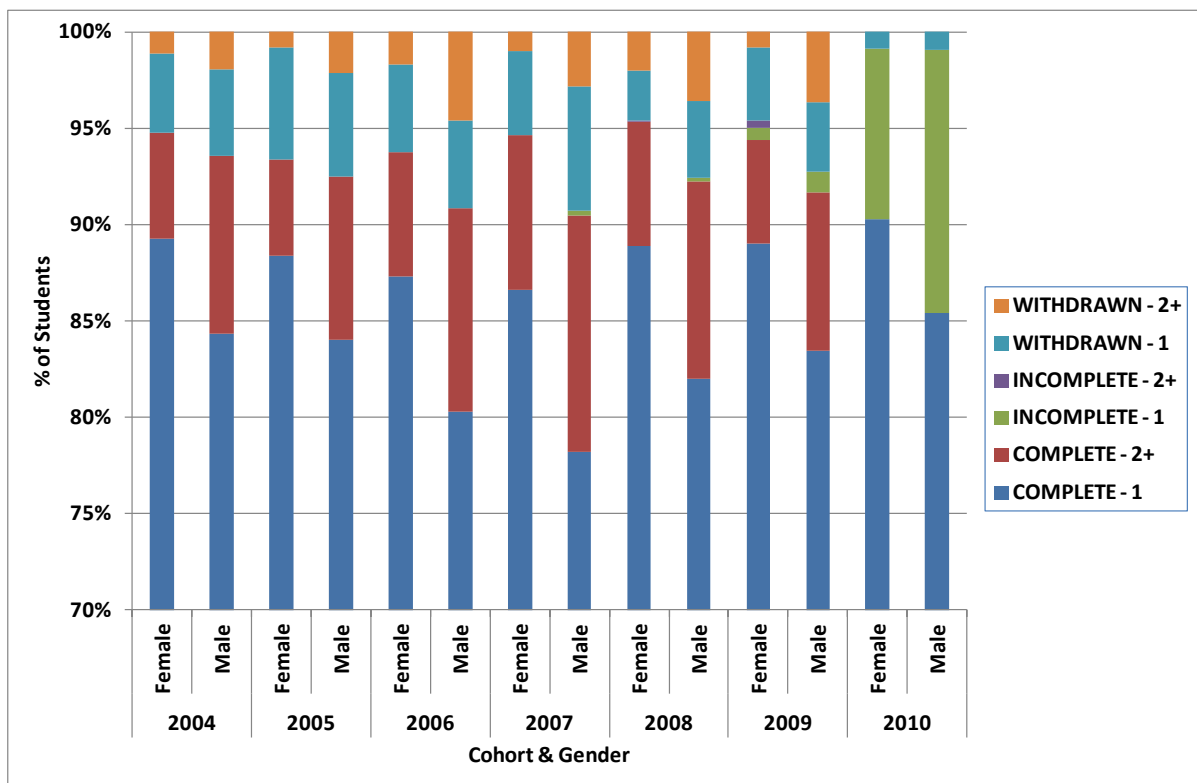


Fig. 37: First-year progression by gender and cohort, 2004-2010. Students yet to make an attempt are excluded. Note break of scale on the y-axis.

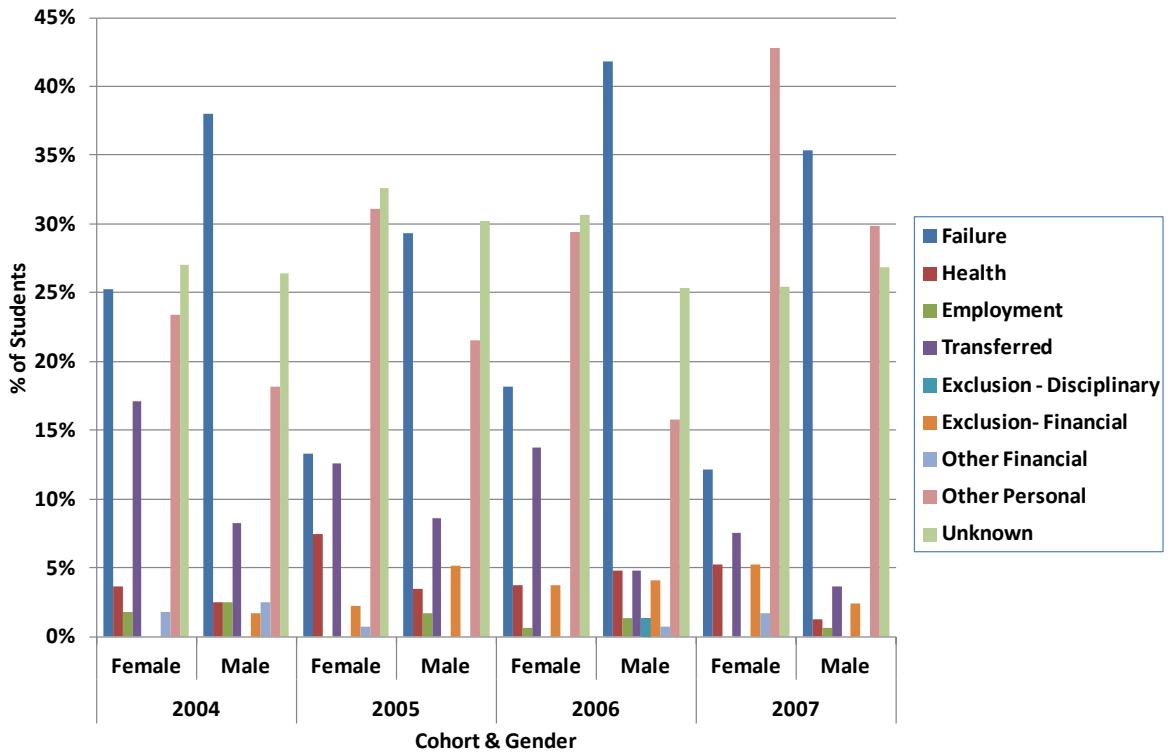
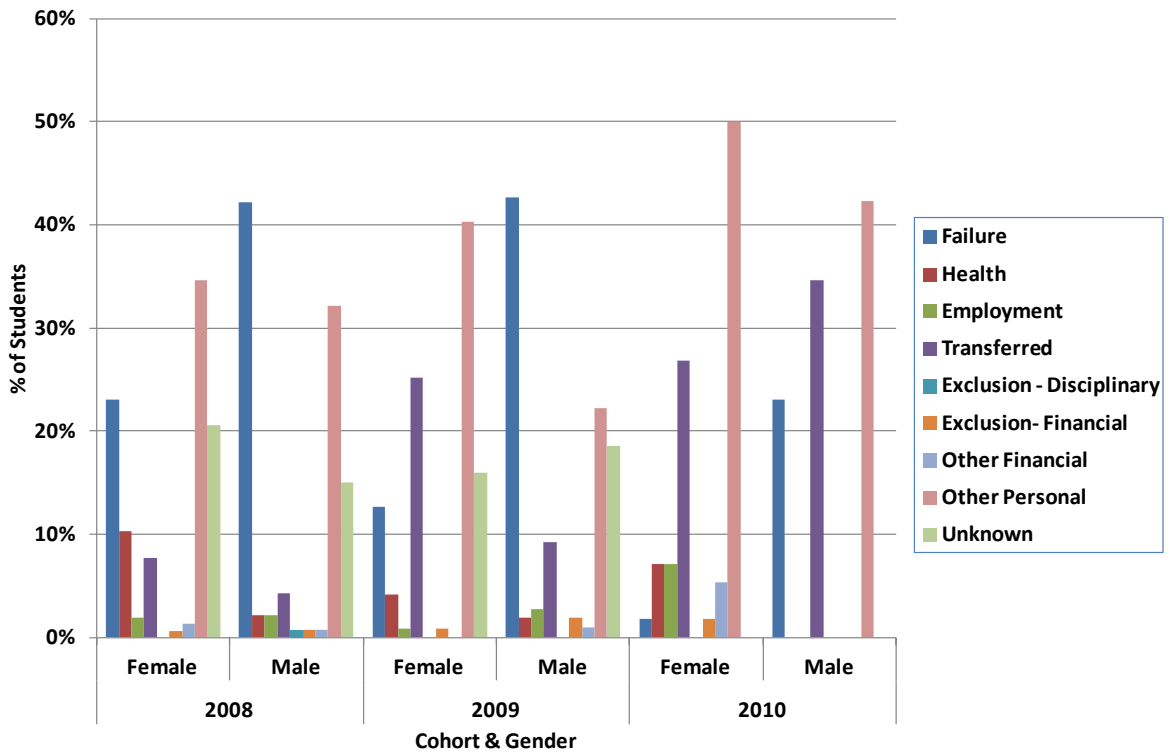


Fig. 38: Reasons for withdrawal (as a percentage of students in the cohort who withdrew) by gender for students entering between 2004 and 2010.

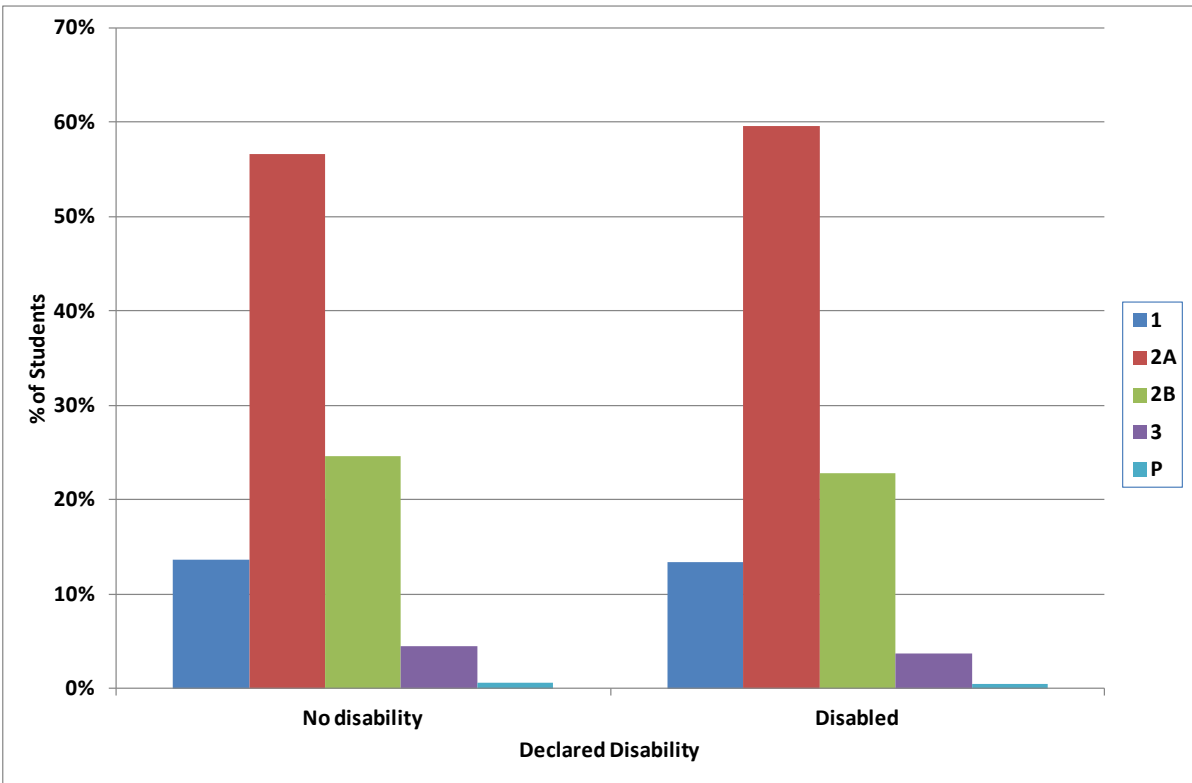


Fig. 39: Classification profiles for disabled and non-disabled students for those completing their studies between 2007 and 2011, collated.

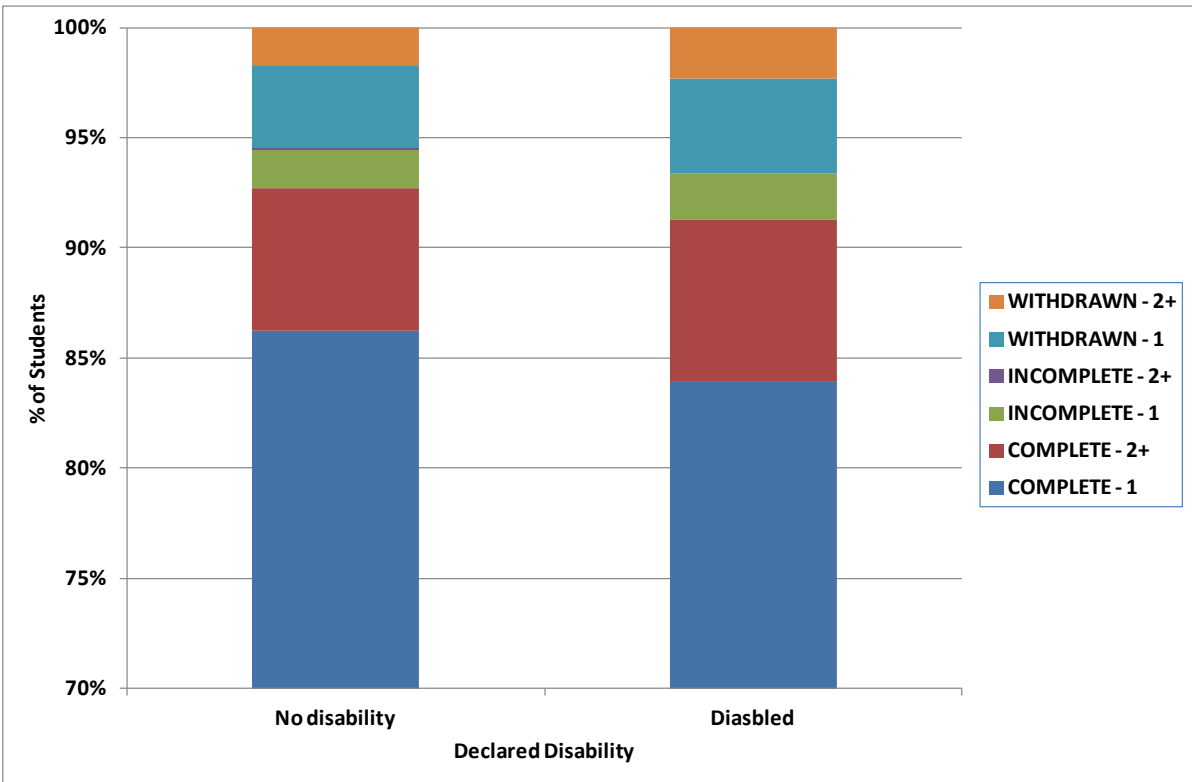


Fig. 40: First-year progression rates for disabled and non-disabled students for cohorts 2004-2010 combined. Students yet to make an attempt are excluded. Note break of scale on the y-axis.

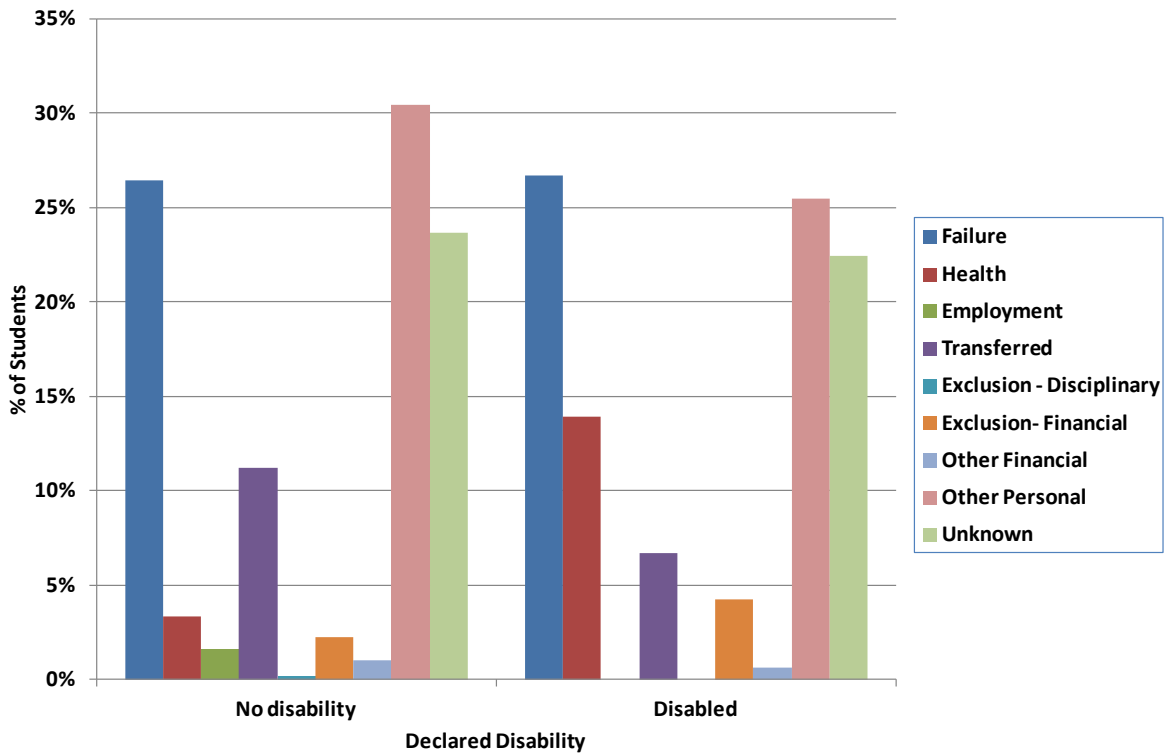


Fig. 41: Reasons for withdrawal (as a percentage of students in the cohort who withdrew) by declared disability for students entering between 2004 and 2010, combined.

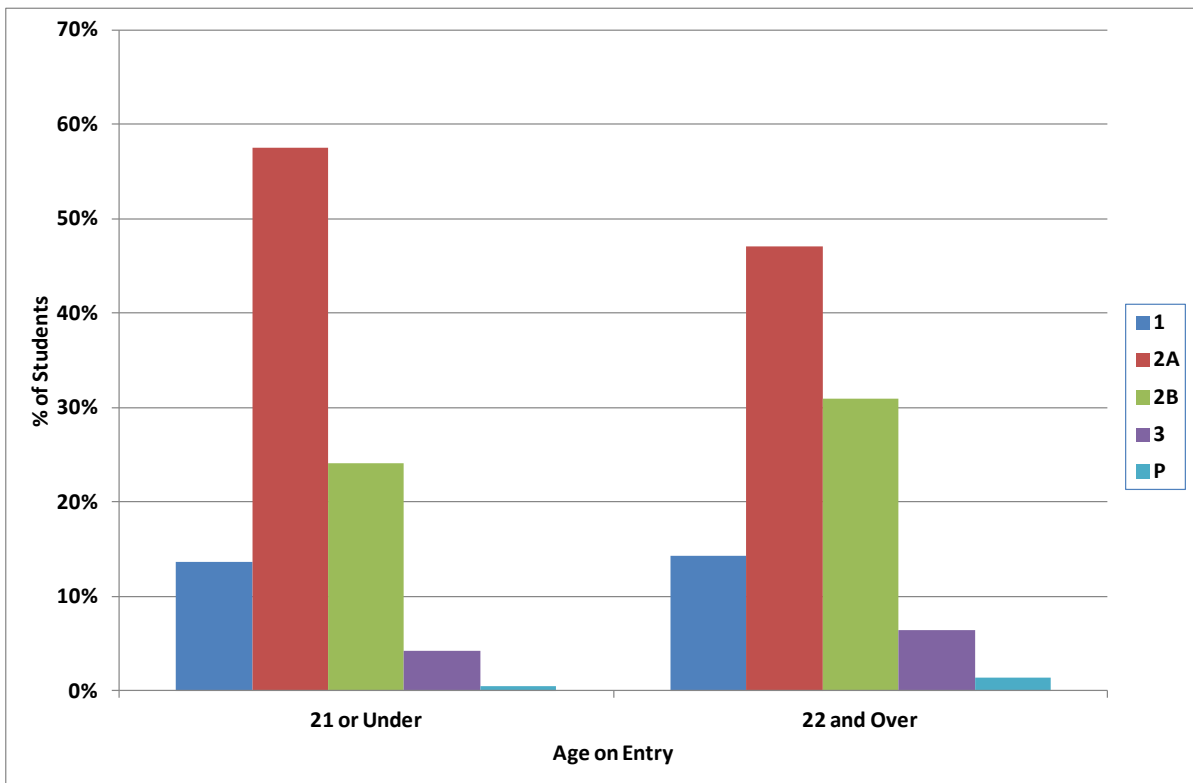


Fig. 42: Classification profiles for mature and non-mature entrants for those completing their studies between 2007 and 2011, collated.

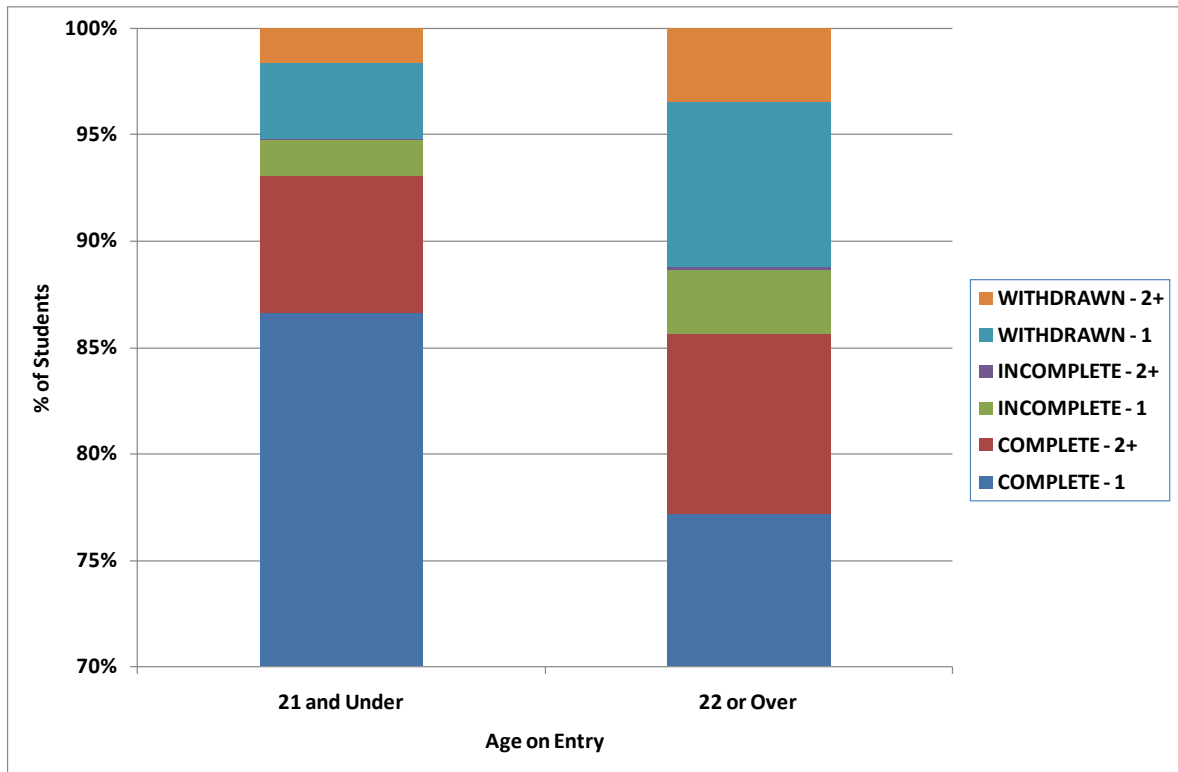


Fig. 43: First-year progression rates of mature and non-mature entrants from cohorts 2004-2010 combined. Students yet to make an attempt are excluded. Note break of scale on the y-axis.

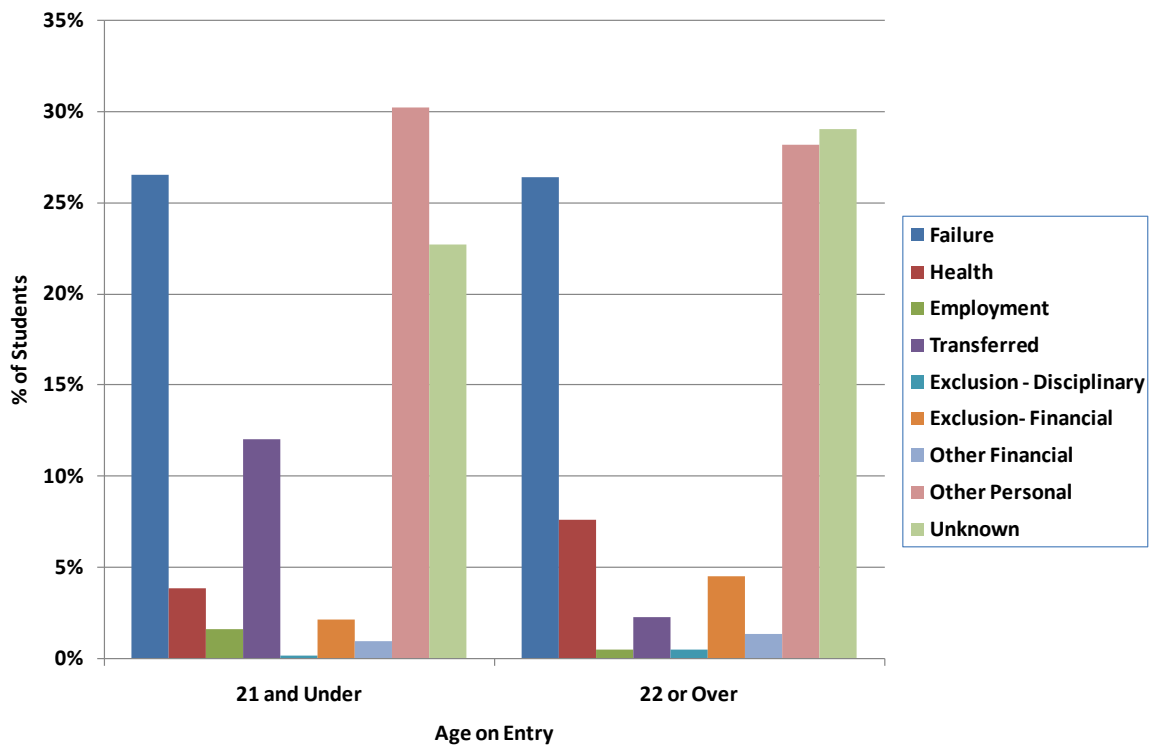


Fig. 44: Reasons for withdrawal (as a percentage of students in the cohort who withdrew) by age on entry for students entering between 2004 and 2010, combined.

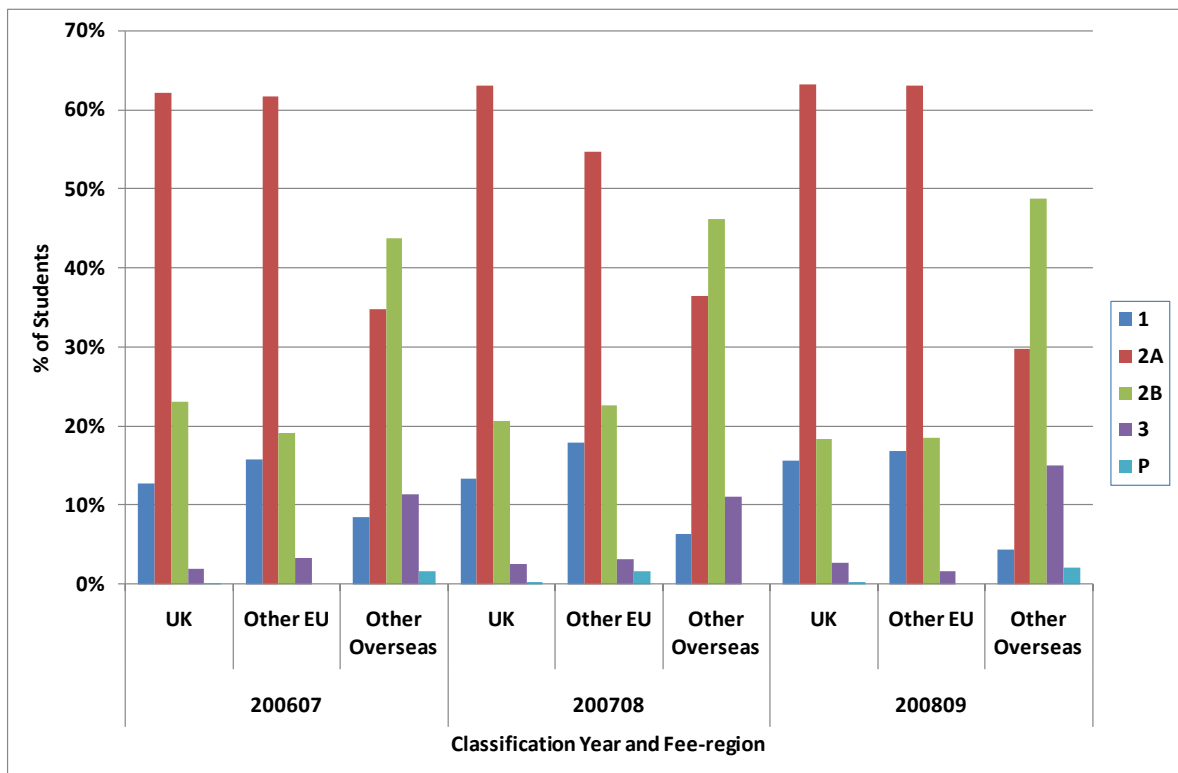
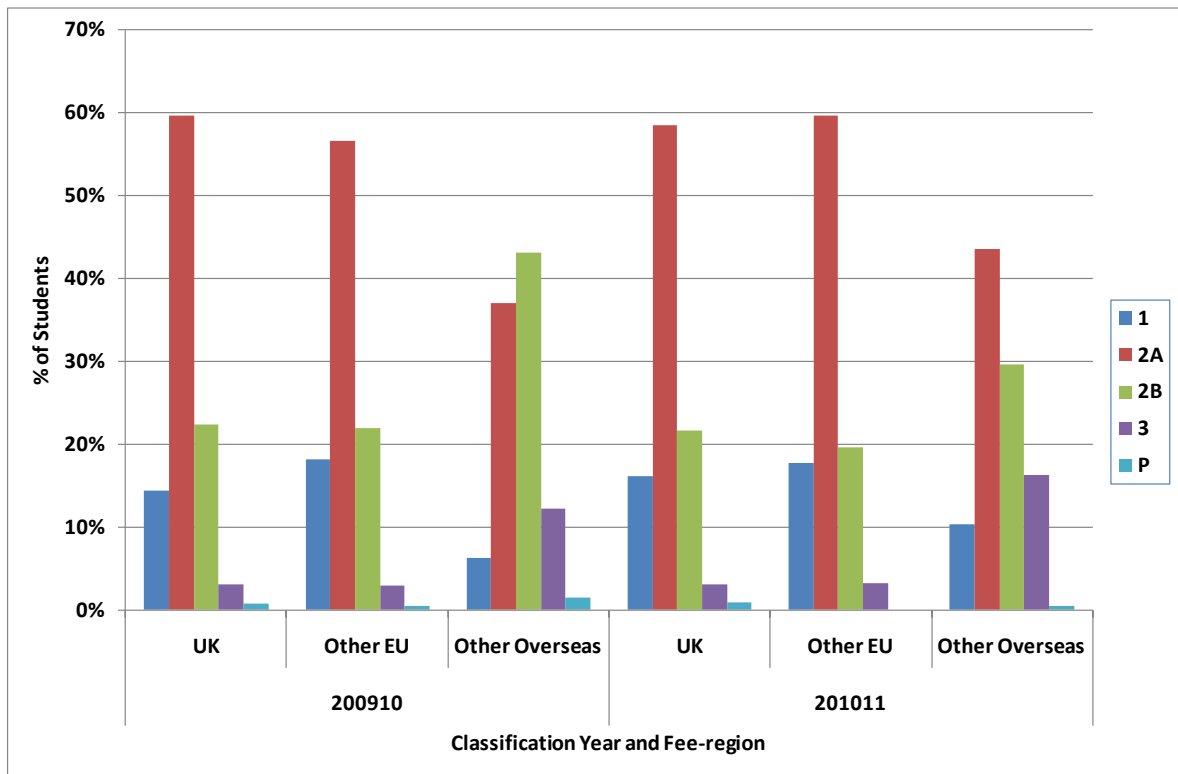


Fig. 7: Classification profiles by fee-region for students completing their studies between 2007 and 2011. (Figure included in main paper).

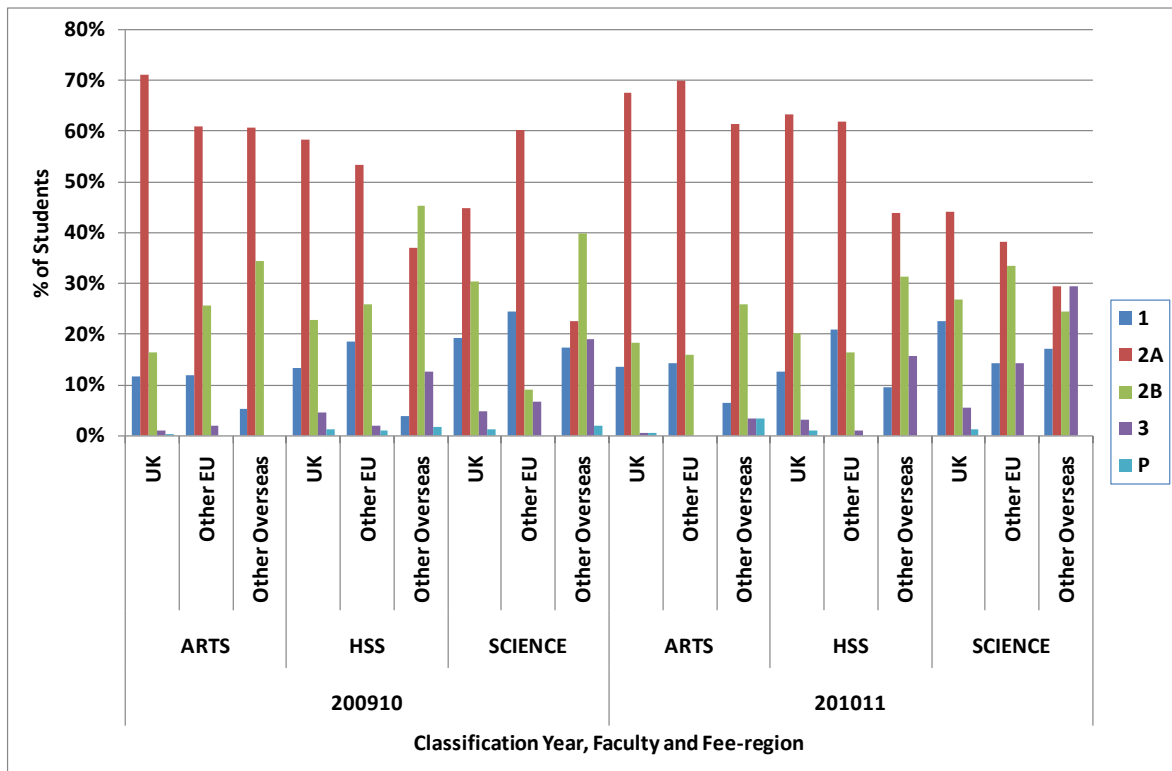


Fig. 45: Classification profiles by Faculty and fee-region for students completing their studies in 2010 and 2011.

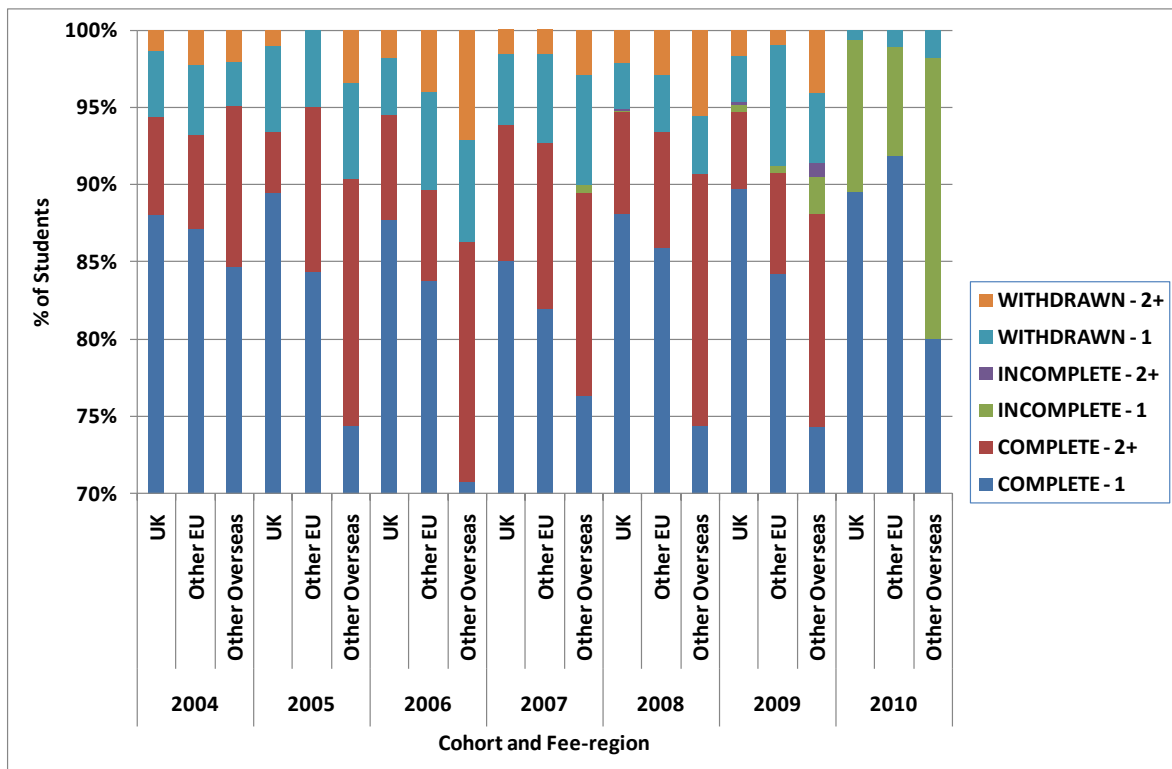


Fig. 46: First-year progression rates by cohort and fee-region. Students yet to make an attempt are excluded. Note break of scale on y-axis.

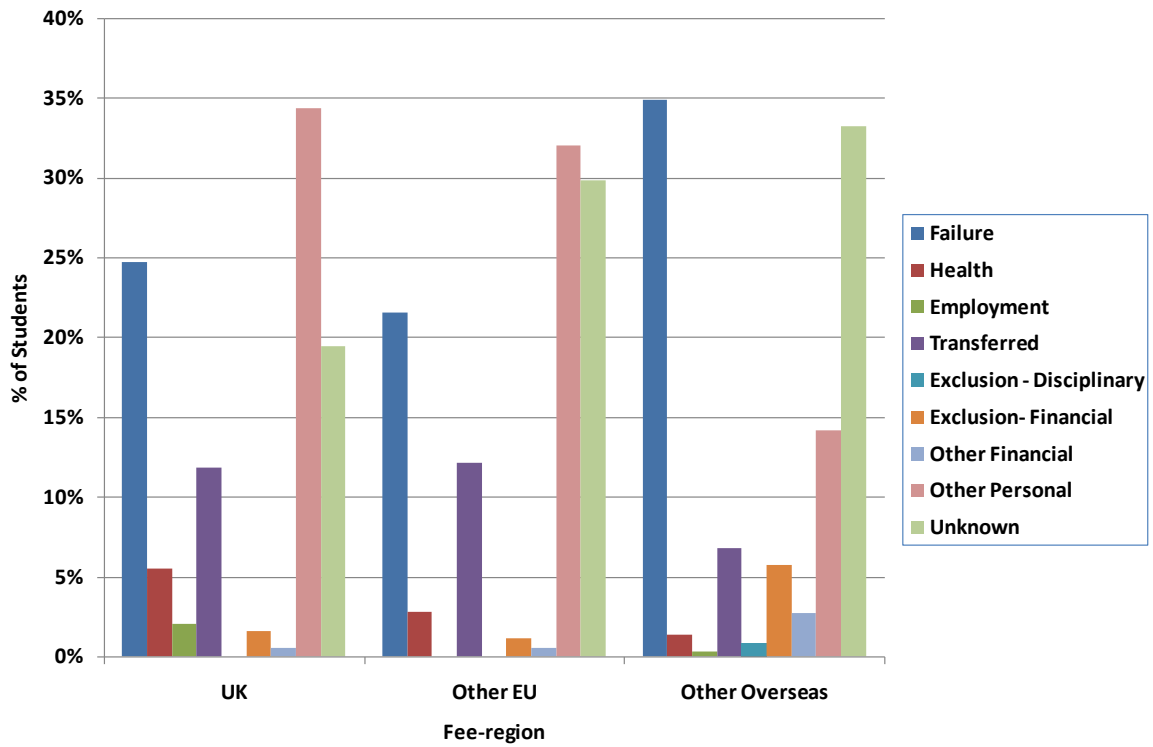


Fig. 47: Reasons for withdrawal (as a percentage of students in the cohort who withdrew) by fee-region for students entering between 2004 and 2010, combined.

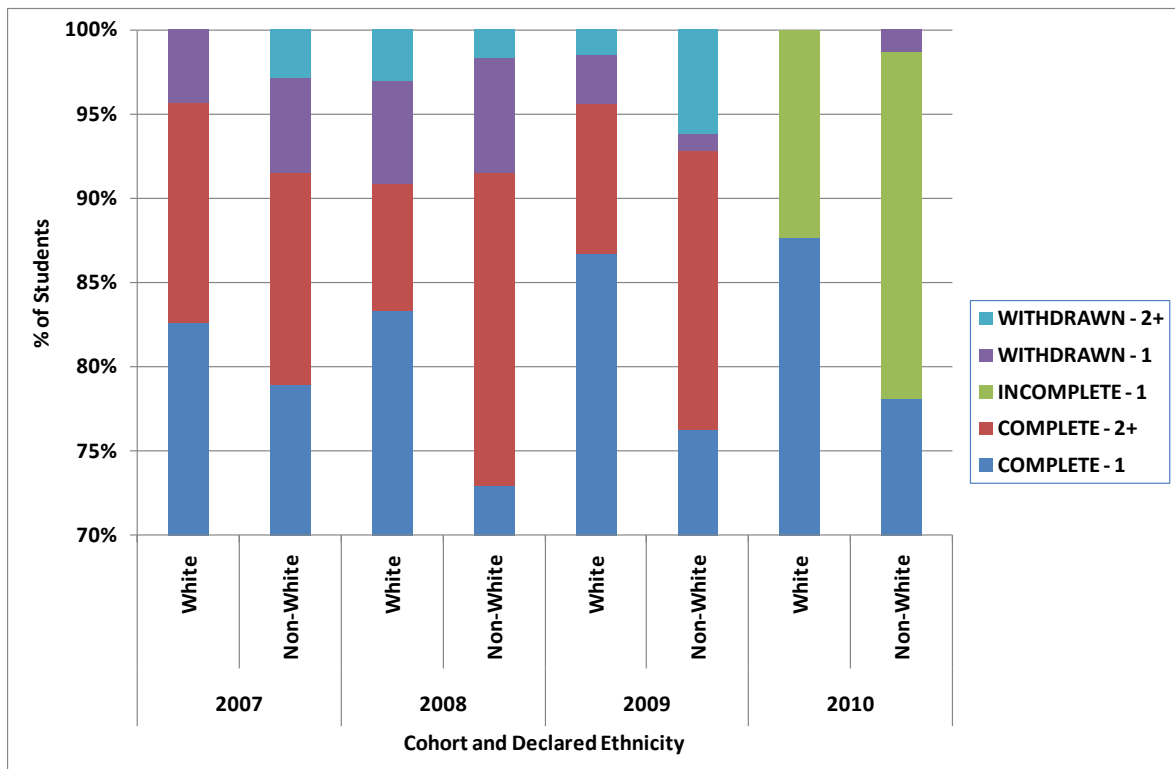


Fig. 48: First-year progression data for UK-domiciled students in the School of Management from cohorts 2007-2010. Students who failed to declare their ethnicity are excluded.

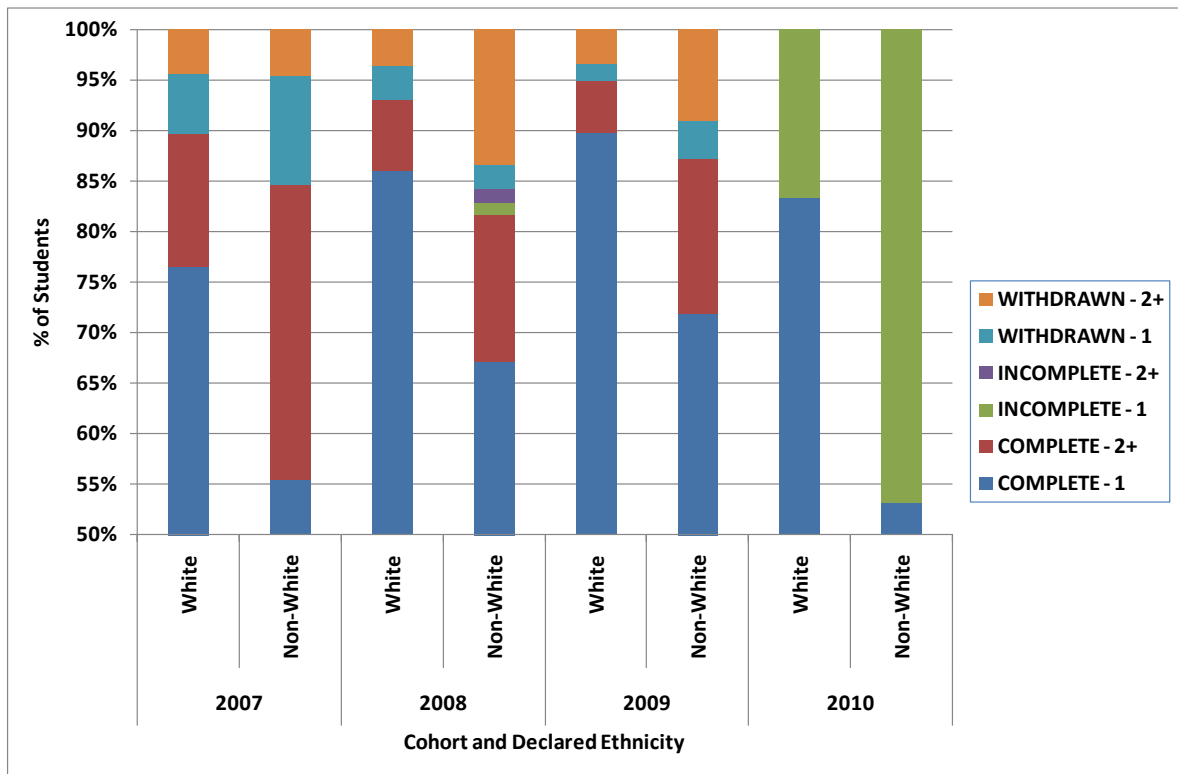


Fig. 4: First-year progression data for UK-domiciled students in the School of Biological Sciences from cohorts 2007-2010. Students who failed to declare their ethnicity are excluded. (*Figure included in main paper*).

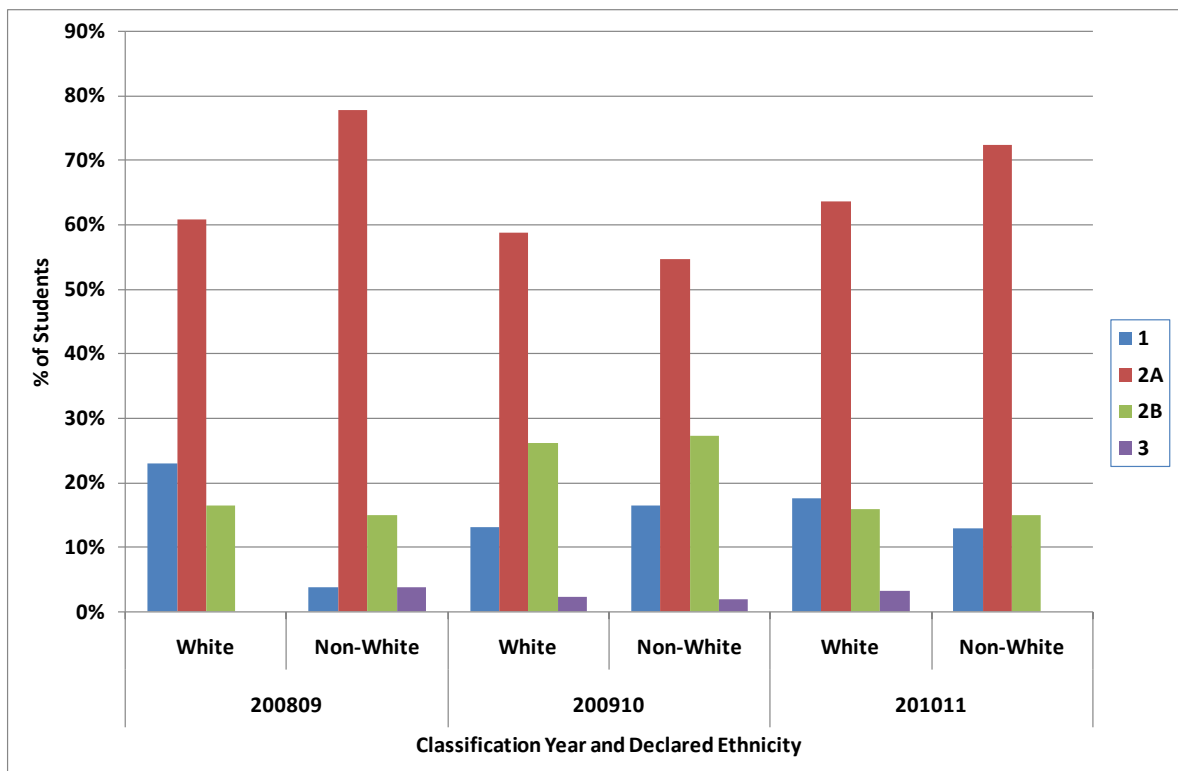


Fig. 49: Classification profiles by year of completion and declared ethnicity for UK-domiciled students in the School of Management. Students who failed to declare their ethnicity are excluded.

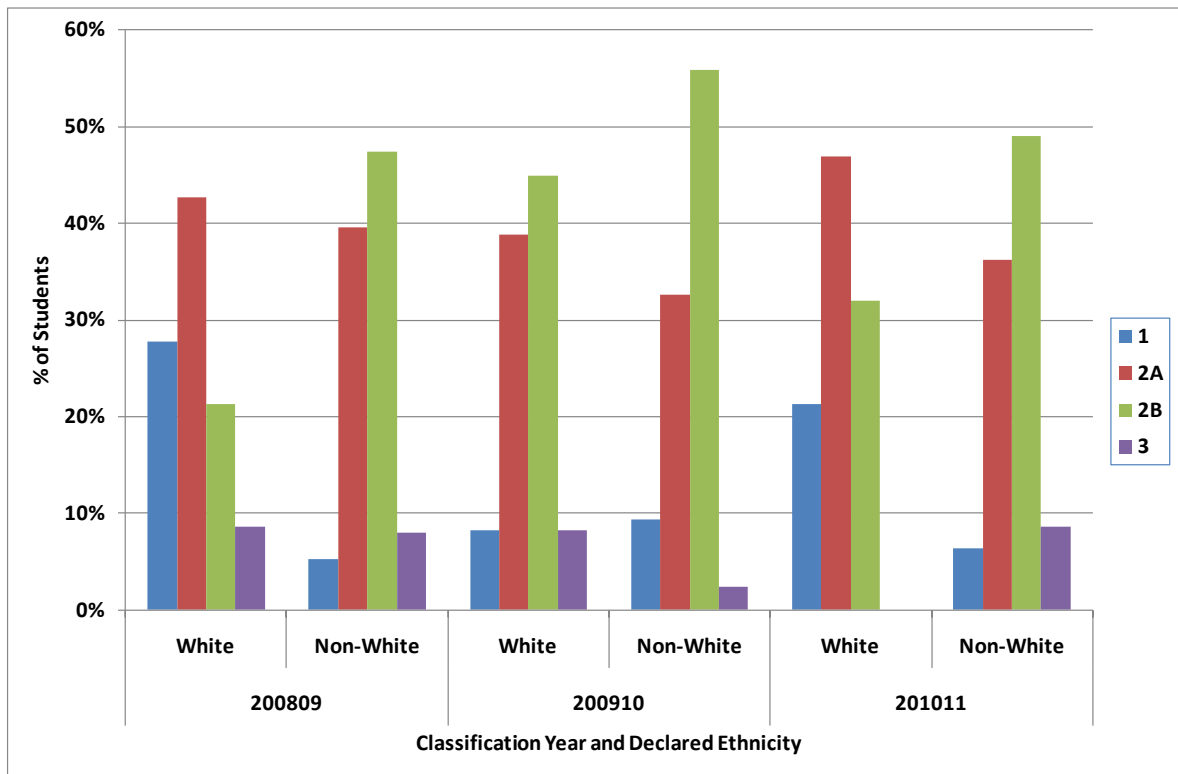


Fig. 50: Classification profiles by year of completion and declared ethnicity for UK-domiciled students in the School of Biological Sciences. Students who failed to declare their ethnicity are excluded. (*Figure included in main paper*).

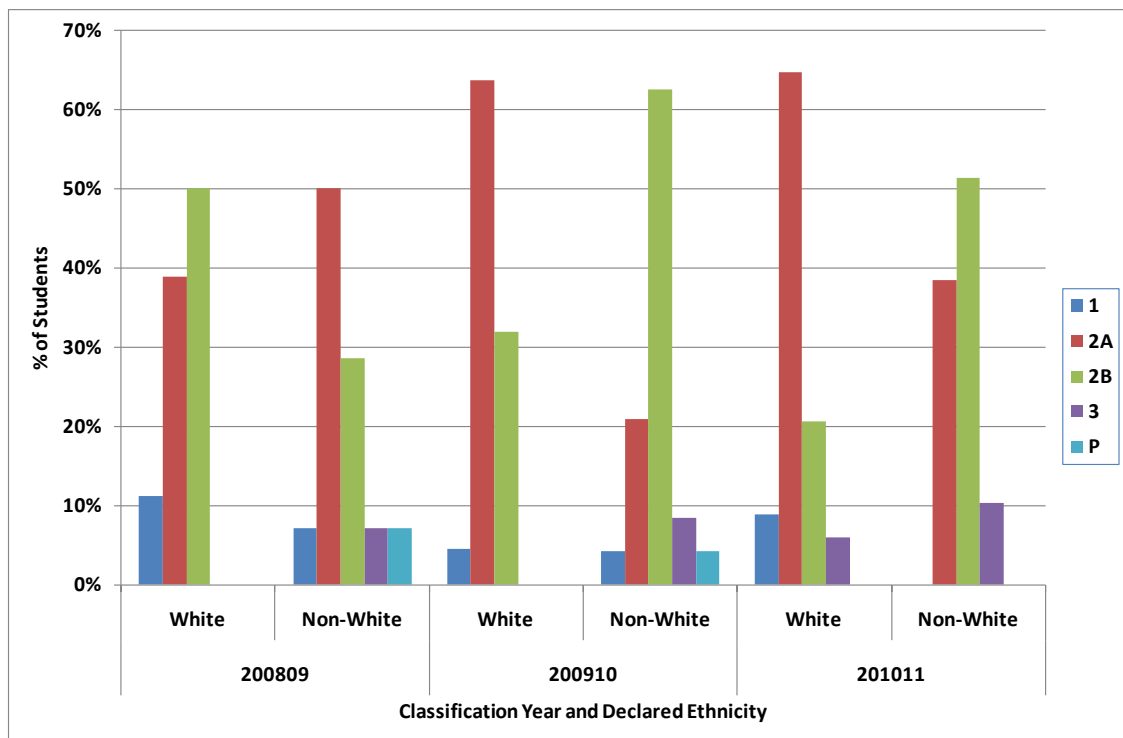


Fig. 51: Classification profiles by year of completion and declared ethnicity for UK-domiciled students in the Department of Social Work. Students who failed to declare their ethnicity are excluded.