



What Happens Next?

Ten Years On

AGCAS Disability Task Group
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Written by members of the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) Disability Task Group:

- **Dr Eddie Tunnah**
- **Andrew Leacy (University of East London)**

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AGCAS The voice of higher education careers and employability professionals

Executive Summary

Since 2002 the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) has funded research, undertaken by the Disabilities Task Group (DTG), into the career destinations of disabled graduates. Over the last ten years the “*What Happens Next*” report has provided, for the first time, real evidence of the effect of a disability on a graduate’s prospects in the labour market. For the most part the reports have indicated that disabled graduates generally fare better than had been assumed previous to the report’s inception. However, what has also been made clear is that certain groups of disabled graduates fare better or worse than others and, in some cases, the disparities have been quite marked.

Key findings from 2002-12

- Since the inception of the report the number of graduates declaring themselves as disabled has almost doubled, with the greatest increase seen amongst graduates with mental health difficulties.
- Overall, non-disabled graduates do fare better than disabled graduates. They have higher rates of employment and lower rates of unemployment.
- The difference in outcomes between disabled graduates and non-disabled graduates are not as marked as previously believed. However, there are clear differences in the outcomes of certain categories of disabled graduates.
- Graduates with unseen disabilities, particularly those with dyslexia, fare best among disabled groups, regularly outperforming the overall disabled graduate population and on occasions almost matching the non-disabled graduate population.
- Amongst graduates with more visible disabilities deaf/hearing impaired graduates have achieved the highest levels of full-time employment.
- Wheelchair/mobility difficulties graduates have achieved the lowest levels of full-time employment.
- The greatest level of improvement in terms of graduates finding full-time work has been with graduates with mental health difficulties.
- Unemployment levels for all groups mirror the patterns seen above.
- Non-disabled graduates have been more successful in securing graduate level jobs than disabled graduates, but only marginally so, with several groups of disabled graduates outperforming non-disabled graduates. Graduates in wheelchairs/with mobility difficulties secured the highest average figure of graduate level employment of any group over the survey period.
- Similar numbers of disabled graduates overall and non-disabled graduates engage in further study only. Within the disabled categories of graduates blind/partially sighted graduates and those in wheelchairs/with mobility difficulties are most likely to be engaged in further study only and graduates with a specific learning difficulty e.g. dyslexia are least likely to be engaged in further study only.
- Overall for all groups of graduates an upward trend was apparent in terms of achieving successful employment outcomes up until the 2006/7 survey and, with the onset of the economic downturn in 2008, a downturn for all groups though there is no evidence to suggest that the downturn has adversely affected any set of graduates more than

another. As the numbers securing full-time work has declined those securing part-time work and engaging in further study only has increased.

1 Introduction

1.1 Graduate Destinations

The *Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education* (DLHE) survey undertaken every year by UK higher education institutions provides the most valuable indicator of the worth of a degree in assisting graduates to further their careers. The survey collects data from graduates approximately six months on from completion of their studies and considers their current activities. The DLHE process is managed by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), and data from the survey is used as one of several benchmarks to rank universities on their overall performance in publications such as *The Times Good University Guide*.

1.2 Destinations of Disabled Graduates – “What Happens Next”

In 2002 the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) undertook research for the first time into the destinations of disabled graduates. It was commonly perceived at the time that graduates with disabilities were far less likely to secure favourable outcomes than their non-disabled counterparts. The first report, “*What Happens Next?*” focused on graduates emerging from higher education in the 2000/01 academic year and published in 2003, provided real evidence for the first time of the effect of a disability on a graduate’s prospects in the labour market. Over the following ten years the “*What Happens Next?*” reports have indicated that disabled graduates generally fare better than had generally been assumed previous to the report’s inception.

1.3 Evolution of the report

The first “*What Happens Next?*” report, funded by the Disability Development Network, and produced by members of AGCAS’s Disability Task Group, collected data from what was then the “*First Destination?*” survey. The report provided comparisons between the key outcomes, employment, unemployment, further study, area and sector of work, of both disabled and non-disabled graduates. The second report provided a more detailed breakdown of disabled graduates’ destinations offering, for the first time, specific data on the key categories of disability. By the time of the 2005 report the “*First Destination?*” survey had been replaced by the “*Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education?*” survey, at which point comparisons between both surveys became problematic as the categories of data collected changed slightly. The report continued to evolve in other ways offering from the 2008 report data related to graduate level occupations and from 2009 onwards information on graduate salaries. The “*What Happens Next?*” format has also been adopted by other AGCAS task groups to produce similar reports on the destinations of ethnic minority graduates in 2008 and the destinations of older graduates in 2012.

The ten year period of the survey has witnessed significant peaks and troughs in terms of the buoyancy of the graduate labour market with a general upward trend witnessed between earlier reports peaking with the 2006/7 graduating cohort - and a downward trend subsequently, mirroring the state of the overall economy in the UK.

1.4 Impact of the report

Since its inception the report has attracted significant interest from parties committed to supporting disabled graduates. It has provided, for the first time, evidence of the impact of disability on a graduate's employment prospects. The value of a degree in assisting disabled individuals to secure suitable employment was further recognised by the publication of "Getting in, Staying in and Getting on: Disability Employment Support Fit for the Future" by Liz Sayce, in 2011 which indicated far less favourable employment experiences for disabled groups generally. In 2008 the report was praised by the Secretary of State, and members of the DTG were invited to the main political party conferences to share and discuss the findings of the report.

1.5 Ten Years of "What Happens Next"

In 2012 the tenth "*What Happens Next*" report was published. By this stage it had become clear that, on the whole, trends witnessed throughout the early years of the report were largely consistent throughout the full tenure of its publication. A decision was therefore taken by the Disability Task Group to move to a biennial publication meaning there will be no new report published in 2013 covering 2010/11 graduates. Hopefully the report will return in 2014 examining the destinations of 2011/12 graduates. In the meantime, however, the report's authors thought it might be interesting to take a look back at the last ten years of the report and examine the key headlines and trends over this period. For those unfamiliar with the report this will hopefully provide a useful introduction to the reports' main findings. For those who have followed the reports over the years it might also provide an interesting summary of what those reports have captured.

This publication draws entirely on information already published in the previous "*What Happens Next*" reports – no new analysis is conducted.

A decision was also made to exclude the data from the first two years of the report as these formed part of the then "*First Destination*" survey and, as such, are troublesome in terms of precise comparisons. The report therefore only collates data from eight years of the DLHE survey, collected between 2004 and 2011 but, nonetheless, offers a very useful insight into disabled and non-disabled graduates' fortunes during a period of fluctuating fortunes in the UK labour market.

1.6 Notes on Terminology

The term "disabled graduates" describes those graduates who identified themselves as having a disability / learning difficulty during the period of their studies. The term "non-disabled

graduates" refers to the cohort of graduates in the survey who did not declare themselves to have a disability of any kind. Due to the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Human Rights Act, 1998, HESA implements a strategy in published tabulations designed to prevent the disclosure of personal information about any individual. This strategy involves rounding all numbers to the nearest five.

1.7 First Degree, Full-time mode of study, 2002/3 and 2009/2010 DLHE respondents

Amongst the 2002/3 graduating cohort that responded to the DLHE survey, just 6.1% were disabled. Just seven years later this figure had risen to 9.6%, see Table 1 below. The purpose of this report is simply to provide data on the destinations of graduates – both disabled and non-disabled- rather than reach conclusions on why the numbers of disabled graduates entering higher education has risen so dramatically. However, it is tempting to speculate that over the period of the report the level of concern attached to declaring a disability has lessened due to more visible anti-discrimination legislation, the level of support available to disabled undergraduates and, optimistically, the findings of this report over the last ten years which have indicated generally more favourable employment prospects for disabled graduates than had been previously believed.

Table 1: First Degree, Full-time mode of study, 2002/3 and 2009/2010 DLHE respondents

Graduating Cohort	Non-disabled graduates	Disabled graduates	% disabled
2002/3	169,440	10,960	6.1
2009/10	191,690	20,450	9.6
% change 2002/3 to 2009/10	13.1	86.6	

1.8 Disabled First Degree, Full-time mode of study, 2002/3 and 2009/2010 DLHE respondents by Specific Disability

The table overleaf indicates specifically where the increases in disabled graduate numbers have occurred. Whereas overall numbers of disabled graduates have risen by just under 87% certain categories of disabled graduates have risen at a significantly higher rate.

- The greatest increase has been in the numbers of graduates with mental health difficulties – an extraordinary 678.6% increase over the eight year period. Again we can only speculate on the reasons for this increase, though it is tempting to suggest that the stigma surrounding mental health has declined in this period, perhaps due to the concerted efforts of mental health organisations to promote more positively the realities of mental health issues.
- Graduates with a specific learning difficulty have witnessed a 147.2% increase in numbers over the eight year period. This may be due to the revision during 2007/8 of the Disabled field in HESA’s Student Record changing the “dyslexia” category to “a specific learning difficulty e.g. dyslexia”. The broadening of this category may also explain the fall in numbers in the “unseen disability” category – this being the only group to witness a decrease in numbers.
- Graduates with multiple disabilities have also increased well above average – 218.3% compared with the 86.6% increase in the numbers of overall disabled graduates.
- The lowest levels of increase in the major categories included annually in this report witnessed are with blind/partially sighted graduates and deaf/hard of hearing graduates

whose numbers have only increased by only 36.5% and 38.1% respectively compared with the overall increase of 86.6% for disabled graduates.

Table 2: Disabled First Degree, Full-time mode of study, 2002/3 and 2009/2010 DLHE respondents by Specific Disability

Disability	2002/3	2009/10	% change
A specific learning difficulty e.g. dyslexia	4905	12125	147.2
Blind/Partially Sighted	260	355	36.5
Deaf / Hearing Impairment	420	580	38.1
Wheelchair User / Mobility Difficulties	275	455	65.5
Personal Care Support	15	15	0.0
Mental Health Difficulties	140	1090	678.6
Autistic Spectrum Disorder	N/A	260	N/A
An Unseen Disability	3570	2780	-22.1
Multiple Disabilities	300	955	218.3
A Disability Not Listed Above	1080	1835	69.9
Total	10960	20450	86.6

2 Graduates Employed full-time

2.1 Main Findings

As will be seen throughout this report there is a certain degree of consistency between the employment patterns of disabled and non-disabled graduates with a general trend of improving fortunes from 2002/3 onwards peaking in 2006/7 – the latter survey would have been conducted in early 2008 - and, with the onset of the economic downturn, less impressive outcomes in subsequent surveys, the low point for most groups being witnessed amongst the 2008/9 graduating cohort (surveyed in 2010).

- The proportion of non-disabled graduates in full-time employment consistently hovered around the 55% mark in the early years of the period this report has covered, reaching a high of 55.6% in the 2006/7 survey and then dropping dramatically to 46.2% in 2008/9 though showing modest signs of recovery since.
- The figures for disabled graduates overall demonstrate similar consistency hovering around the 49/50% in the five years up to 2006/7 (peaking at 50.3% in 2005/6) and dropping off subsequently, just 42.4% in 2008/9.
- Graduates with a specific learning difficulty, primarily dyslexia, have consistently achieved the highest levels of full-time employment of any individual group of disabled graduates, reaching 52.9% in 2006/7 and, interestingly, staying almost level with the figures for non-disabled graduates throughout the economic downturn. This is echoed in this group's comparatively low level of unemployment through the same period of the survey.
- Amongst graduates with more visible disabilities deaf/hearing impaired graduates have achieved the highest levels of full-time employment throughout the survey period of this report. This positive picture is also reflected in generally low levels of unemployment for this group compared with other groups of graduates with more visible disabilities.
- Wheelchair/mobility difficulties graduates have achieved the lowest overall levels of full-time employment throughout the period, with the lowest rate on five occasions during the eight year period.
- The greatest level of improvement seen in any specific category has been with graduates with mental health difficulties. In the 2002/3 survey only 29.5% were employed full-time, a figure which rose to 38% in 2009/10.

Figure 1: Times series full-time employment by disability type (a¹)

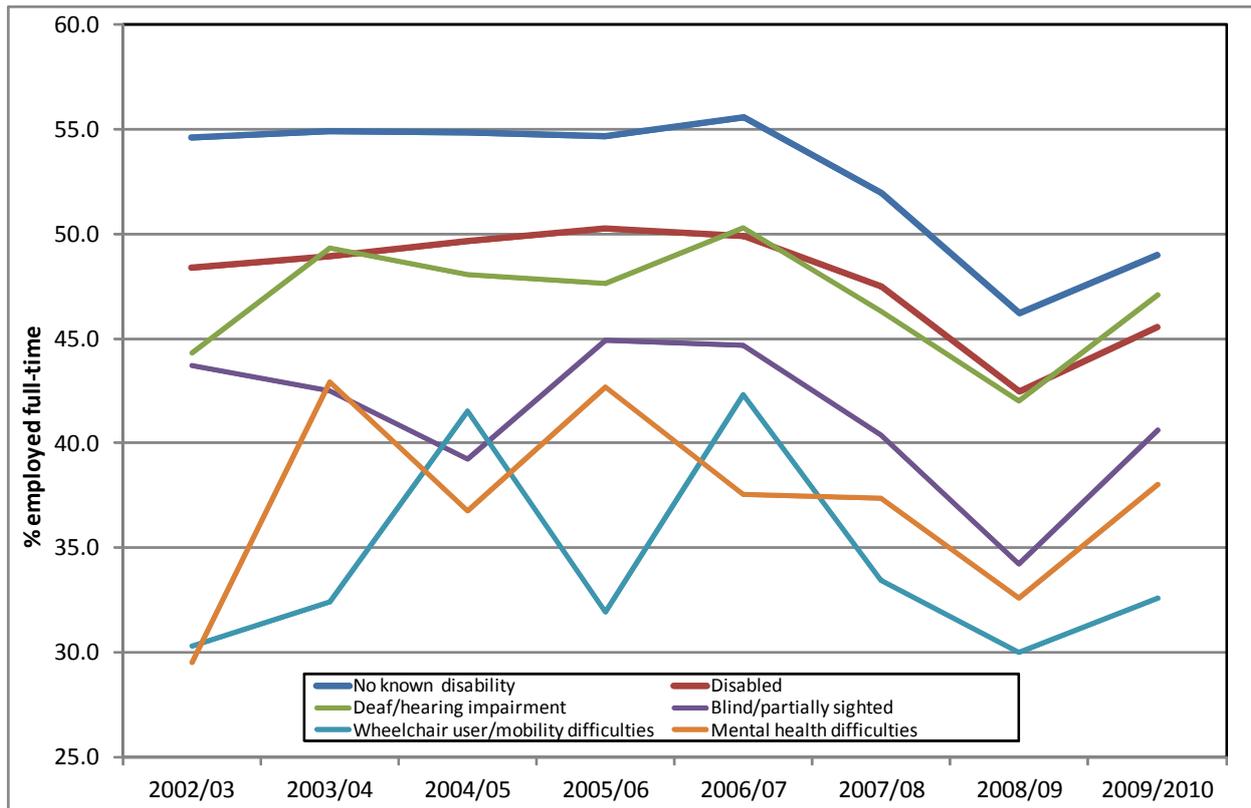
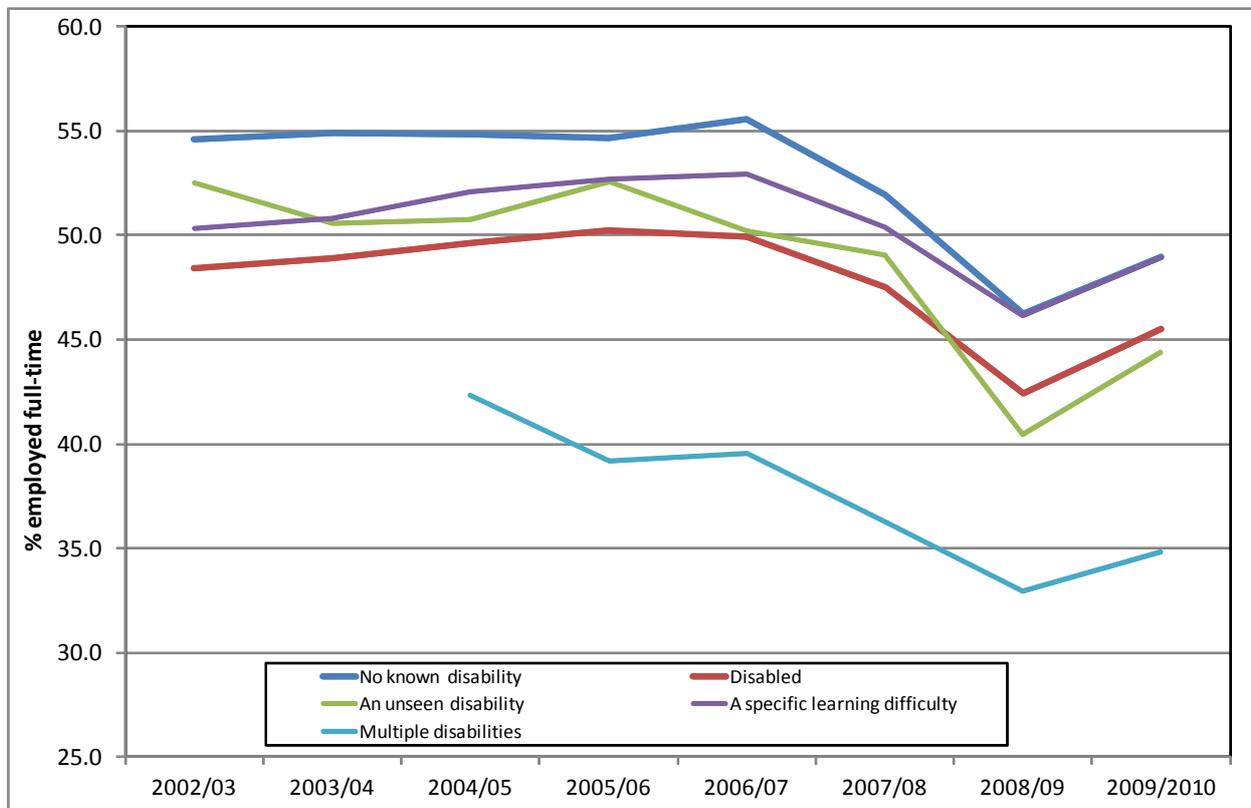


Figure 2: Times series full-time employment by disability type (b)



¹ The data has been split over two figures to enable the graphs to be more easily read.

3 Employed part-time

3.1 Main Findings

The level of consistency between the fortunes of disabled and non-disabled graduates in relation to their finding full-time employment is mirrored in the numbers securing part-time work. However, whereas the economic downturn produced clear decreases in those engaged in full-time work it has had the opposite effect on part-time figures with significant increases witnessed across every category of graduate surveyed.

- In the five year period leading up to the 2006/7 survey there was little variation in the proportion of non-disabled graduates engaged in part-time work, with a low of 7.3% in 2003/04 and a high of 8.0% in 2005/6. However by 2009/10 the proportion had risen sharply to 12%, this increase coinciding with the decline of the same group in terms of engagement in full-time employment.
- The situation was similar for disabled graduates over the period up to 2006/7, with a low of 8% in 2004/5 and a high of 8.6% in 2005/6. By 2009/10 the proportion of disabled graduates engaged in part-time employment had also risen to 12%.
- No specific group of disabled graduates emerges as the most likely to be in part-time employment though several groups are clearly experiencing higher rates than others – this includes deaf/hearing impaired graduates and graduates with mental health difficulties.
- Over the eight year period graduates who are blind/partially sighted and those in wheelchairs/with mobility difficulties experienced the lowest levels of engagement in part-time employment, though the rate for the blind/partially sighted group rose sharply in the last year.

Figure 3: Times series part-time employment by disability type (a)

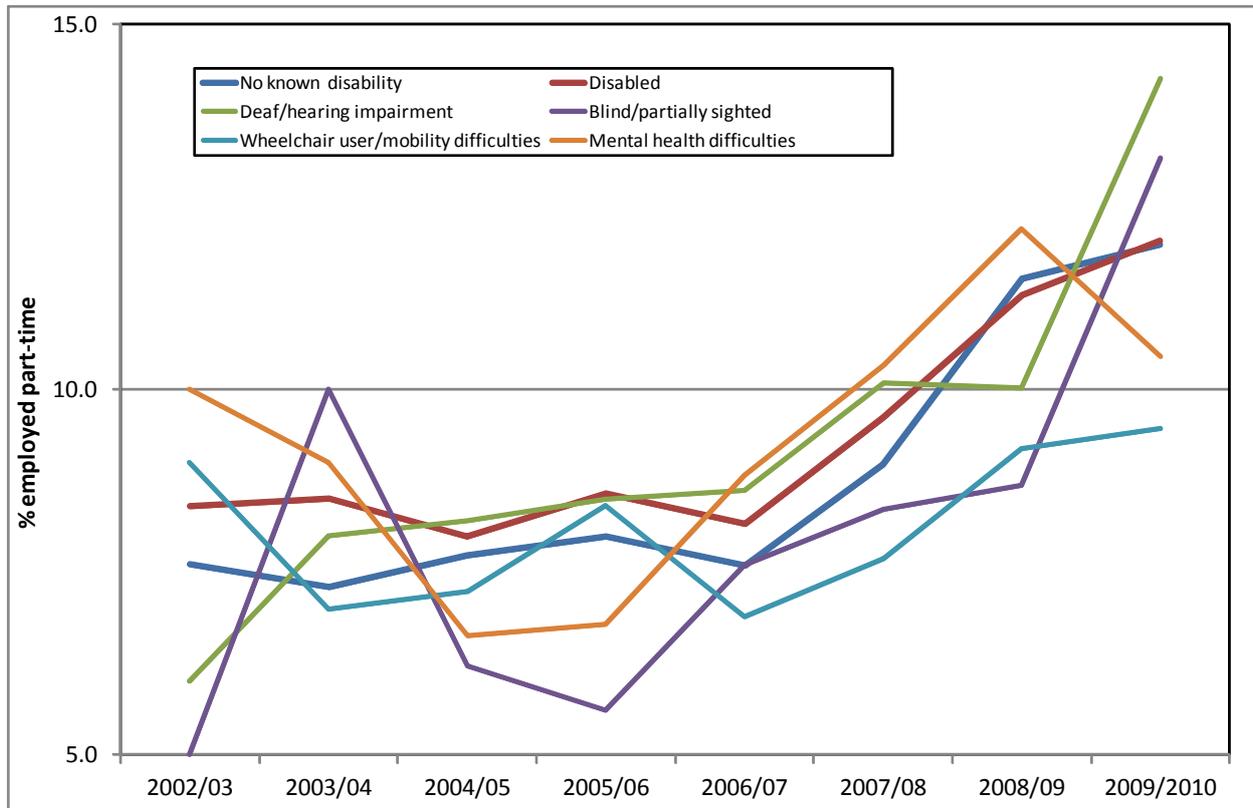
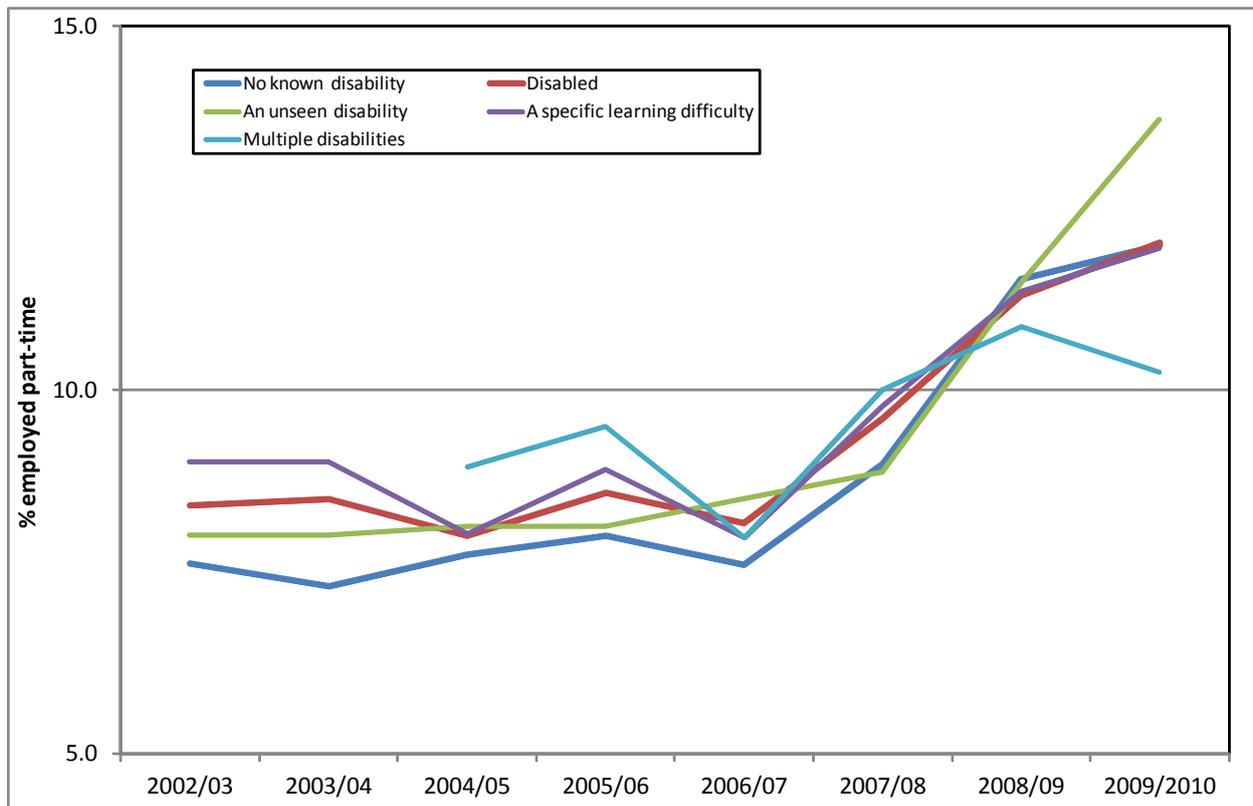


Figure 4: Times series part-time employment by disability type (b)



4 Unemployment rates

4.1 Main Findings

Overall there is great consistency in the patterns of unemployment of both disabled graduates and non disabled graduates with general gains being made by all groups between 2002/3 and 2006/7 and a downward trend settling in after that.

- Unemployment rates for non disabled graduates reached a low of just 5.6 % in the 2006/7 survey, a time when graduate employment was at its most buoyant. Subsequently unemployment for this group has hovered around the 9% mark – 9.3% in 2008/9.
- The figures for disabled graduates overall reveal that unemployment levels dropped from 9.6% in 2002/3 to just 7.8% in 2006/7 but then began to rise, reaching a peak of 12.1% in 2008/9.
- Graduates with unseen disabilities have consistently performed better than any other category of disabled graduates with unemployment rates just 6.1% in 2006/7 and, although rising to 11.1% in 2008/9, this is a lower rate of unemployment than for other disabled graduates.
- Dyslexic graduates have experienced similarly low (relatively speaking) levels of unemployment compared with other groups of disabled graduates.
- Of the remaining groups of graduates those who are deaf or hearing impaired have overall experienced the lowest levels of unemployment – as low as 6.4% in 2006/7 and although this figure had more than doubled to 13.4% just two years later they have continued to perform better in recessionary times than other groups of graduates with more visible disabilities.
- The highest levels of unemployment experienced across the entire survey period from 2002/3 to 2009/10 have been experienced by graduates in the wheelchair/mobility difficulties category, reflecting their lower levels of full-time employment.

Figure 5: Times series unemployment by disability type (a)

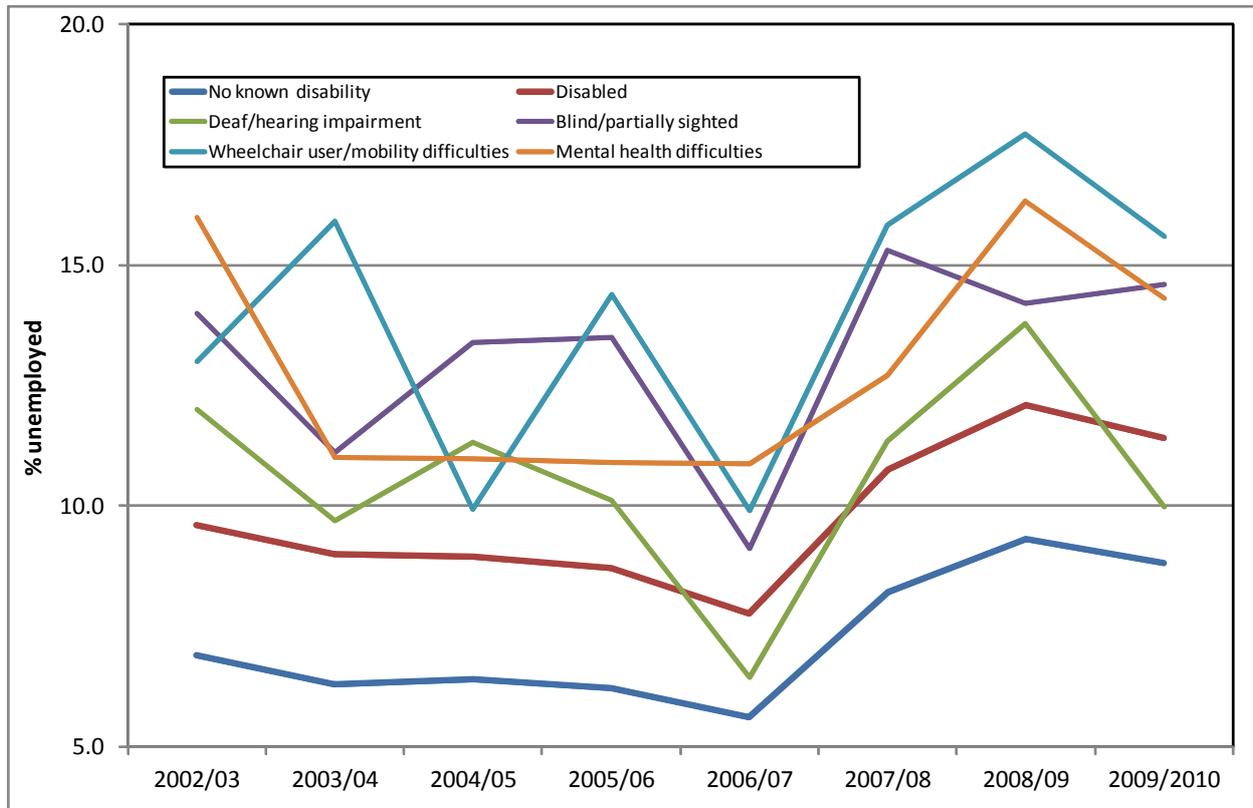
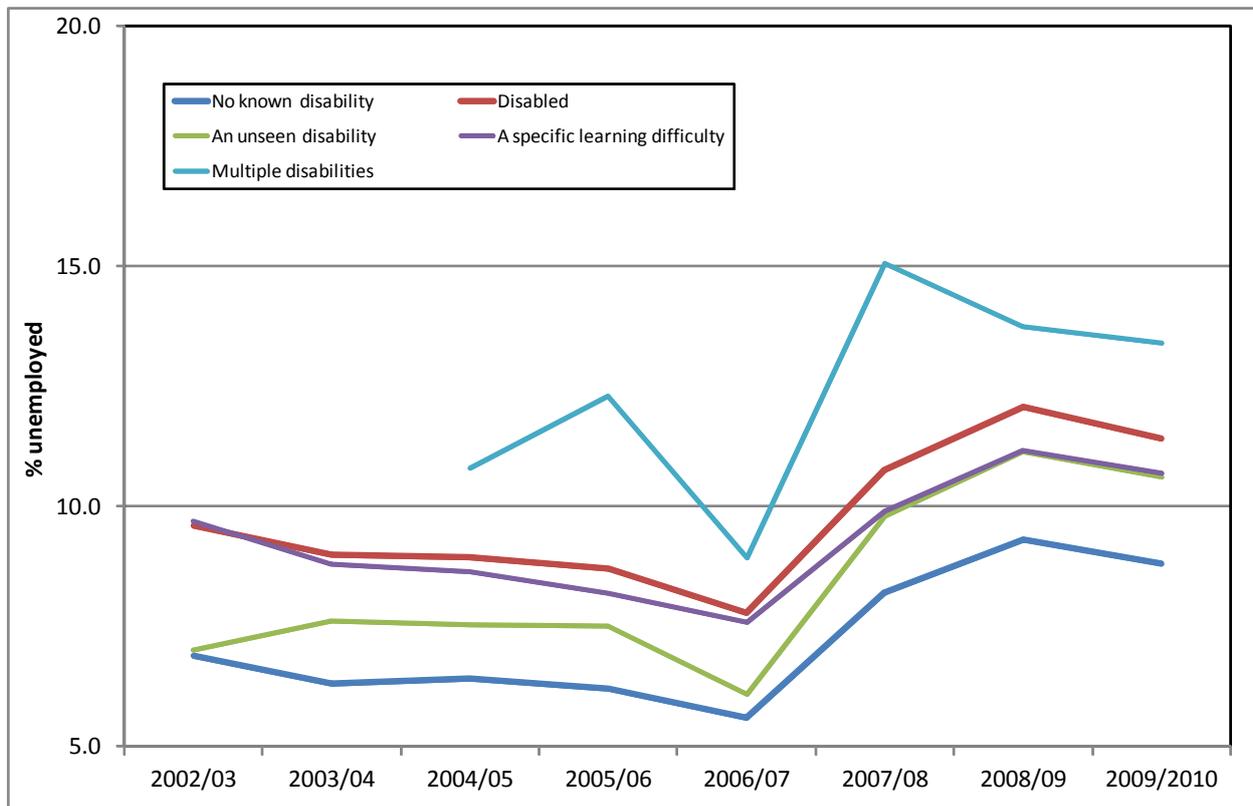


Figure 6: Times series unemployment by disability type (b)



5 Work and study

5.1 Main Findings

Generally there is parity between the numbers of disabled graduates overall and non-disabled graduates in work and further study throughout the eight year survey period, with a decline in levels for both groups in the wake of the economic downturn.

- Between 2002/3 and 2006/7 the proportion of non-disabled graduates engaged in work and further study ranged from 8% in 2002/3 to 8.7% in 2006/7. Since then this figure has dropped steadily to 7.3% in 2009/10.
- Similarly, between 2002/3 and 2006/7 the proportion of disabled graduates engaged in work and further study ranged from 8.2% in 2002/3 to 9.1% in 2003/4. Since 2006/7 this figure has fallen to 7.1% in 2009/10.
- Over the entire time range graduates with mental health difficulties were the group with the highest levels of engagement in work and further study.
- Over the entire time range blind/partially sighted graduates were the group with the lowest levels of engagement in work and further study.

Figure 7: Times series work and study by disability type (a)

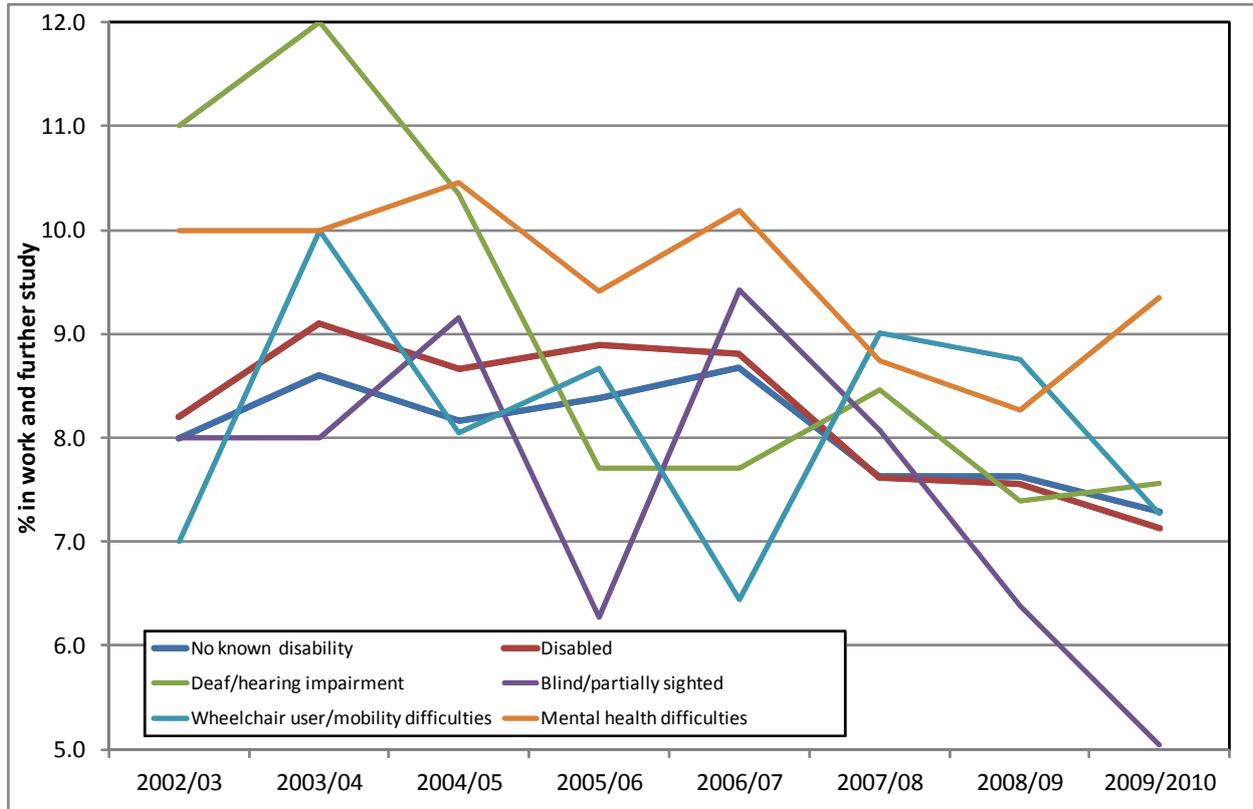
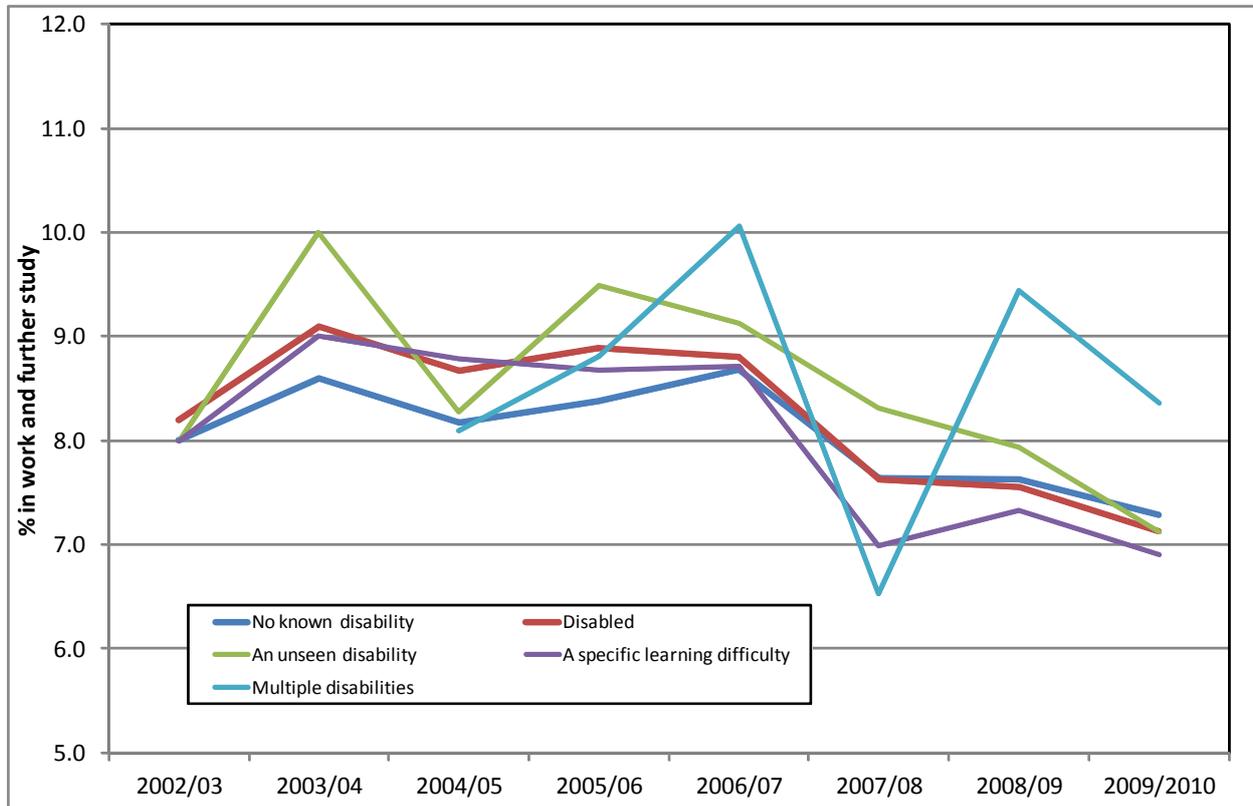


Figure 8: Times series work and study by disability type (b)



6 Further study only

6.1 Main Findings

Overall there has been general consistency between the numbers of disabled and non-disabled graduates engaging in further study only. Furthermore there has been little differences in these numbers pre and post economic downturn.

- There was little variation in the proportion of non-disabled graduates engaged in further study only between 2002/3 and 2006/7, ranging from 15.9% in 2002/3 to 16.2% in 2006/7. Since then the figure has been higher each year, peaking at 18.5% in 2008/9.
- No clear pattern was noted amongst disabled graduates, with rates of engagement in further study only ranging from lows of 15.2% (2005/6) and 15.3% (2009/10) and highs of 17.9% (2008/9) and 16.8% (2006/7).
- Over the entire time range blind/partially sighted graduates and those in wheelchairs/with mobility difficulties were the groups with the highest levels of engagement in further study only.
- Over the entire time range graduates with a specific learning difficulty e.g. dyslexia was the group with the lowest levels of engagement in further study only.

Figure 9: Times series further study only by disability type (a)

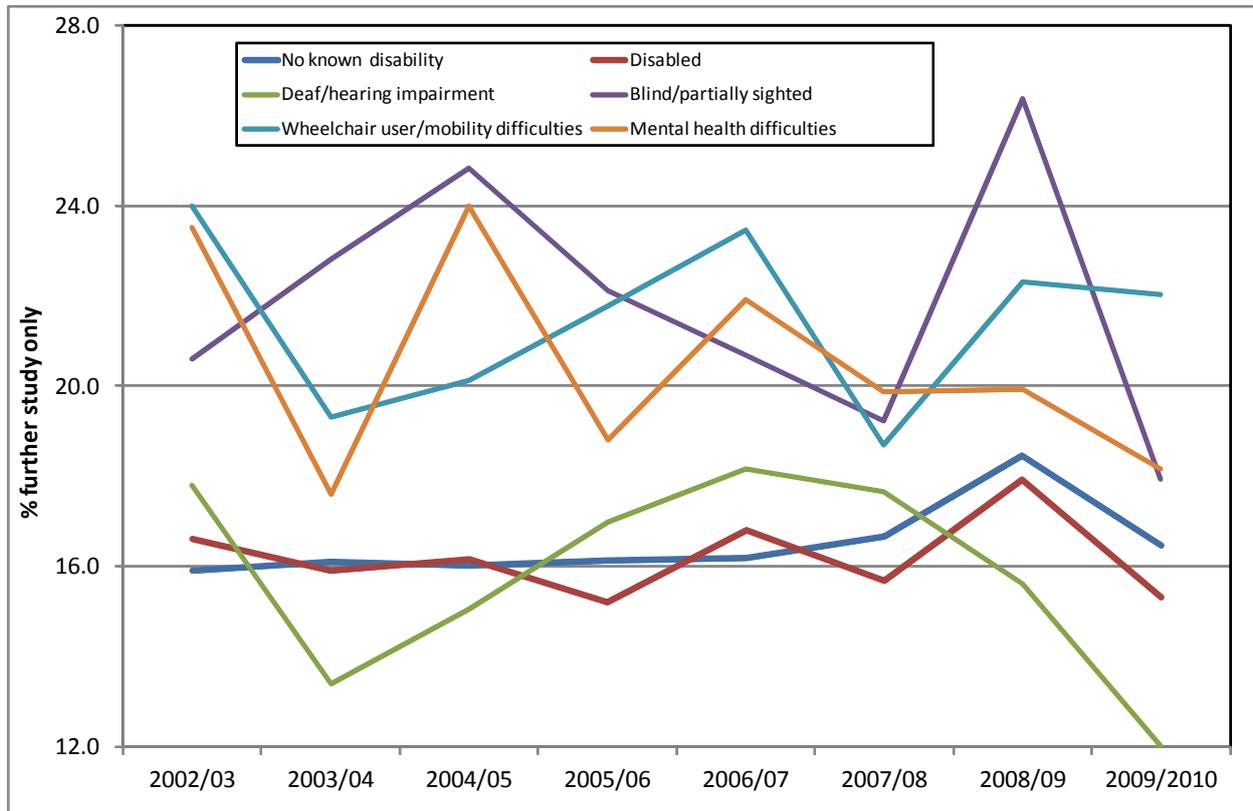
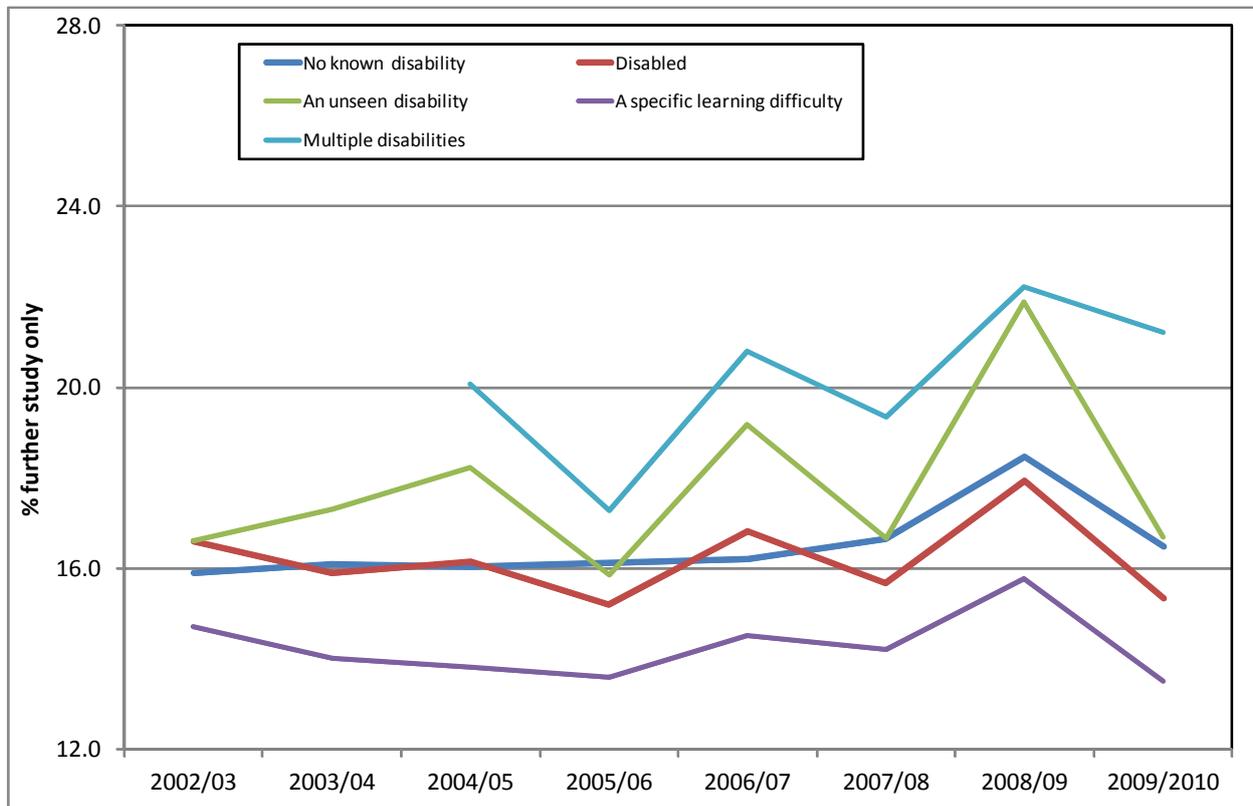


Figure 10: Times series further study only by disability type (b)



7 Graduate employment rates

7.1 Main Findings

There has been remarkable consistency between the percentages of graduates, both disabled and non-disabled, entering graduate level employment over the eight years of the survey.

- Whilst non-disabled graduates have been more successful in securing graduate level jobs most years, the difference between their outcomes and those of disabled graduates has been relatively minimal.
- In the 2002/3 and 2009/10 surveys disabled graduates secured higher levels of graduate level employment than non-disabled graduates.
- Three categories of disabled graduates – deaf/hearing impaired graduates, wheelchair/mobility difficulties graduates and graduates with a specific learning difficulty achieved, on average, higher levels of graduate level employment than either disabled graduates overall or non-disabled graduates.
- Graduates in the wheelchair/mobility difficulties category were particularly successful in achieving graduate level employment, with the highest recorded rate on five occasions.
- Graduates with mental health difficulties consistently recorded the lowest rates of graduate level employment.

Figure 11: Times series graduate employment rates by disability type (a)

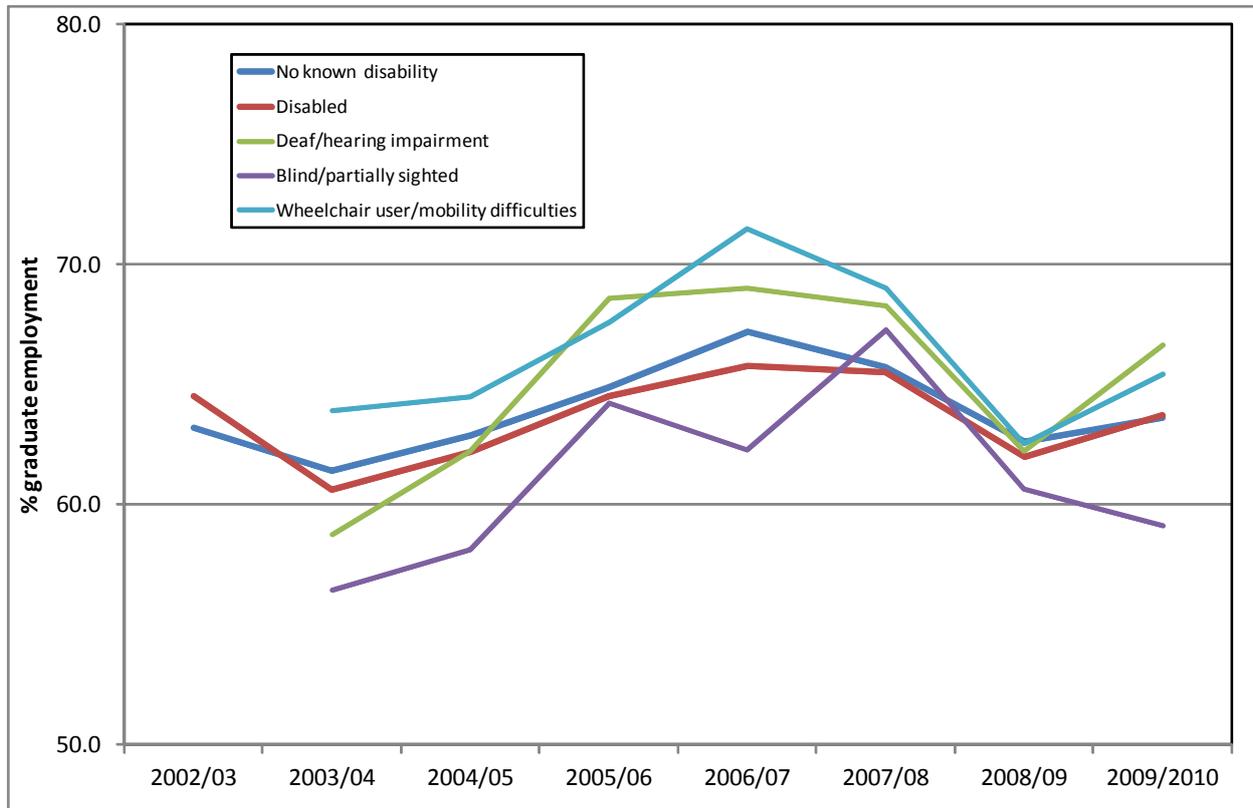


Figure 12: Times series graduate employment rates by disability type (b)

