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# Variations in Progression of Social Work Students in England: Using student data to help promote achievement:

## Undergraduate full-time students' progression on the social work degree

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# About this report

Monitoring student progression and achievement has become an essential part of the way in which higher education institutions (HEIs) identify if they are achieving their teaching and learning outcomes.  As the regulator of social work and social care in England, the General Social Care Council (GSCC) uses data that HEIs provide on the numbers of students beginning and completing social work qualifying programmes to help monitor quality and to ensure that the GSCC meets its responsibilities as a regulator to ensure that all students are treated fairly.  Since 2005, the GSCC has been supporting research looking at progression and achievement among all those beginning social work qualifying programmes in England.  The total dataset now numbers over 50,000 students enrolling between 1995-2007.  This report is based on the analysis of what happened to all the 5,275 full-time undergraduate students who enrolled on the new social work degree programmes in England between the years 2003-05. These two cohorts were chosen to allow enough time for them to complete their three years of undergraduate study.

The project commissioned by the GSCC was conducted by the Social Care Workforce Research Unit, King's College London, with the support of the GSCC's Diversity and Progression Project Advisory Board. This has a wider remit aimed at improving and sustaining good practice in student diversity, progression and achievement.

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This is a working document and all results presented in this report should be interpreted in conjunction with other outputs from this project (see References section).

## Introduction: New degree - new students, or not?

## Students' characteristics: do they differ from those enrolled for the DipSW?

Between the introduction of the new degree in social work in 2003 and the end of 2007, a total of 18,008 students enrolled on social work degree qualifying programmes in England.  This represents a considerable success for the policy objective aimed at increasing the number of social work students in order to reduce the number of vacant social work posts (Evaluation of the New Social Work Degree Qualification in England Team, 2008).  Of these, 81% (14,651) enrolled on undergraduate (UG) and 19% (3,357) enrolled on postgraduate (PG) programmes.  The proportion of PG students is similar to that on the predecessor Diploma in Social Work (DipSW) qualification.  The exception to this was 2003-04, the year in which only one new degree PG programme had been approved and so students wishing to take a PG route in that year to qualifying as a social worker had to enrol on a DipSW programme.  The information on PG students presented here sets the scene for the more detailed information on UG students' progression. The progression of PG students will be presented in a further report.

The gender distribution in favour of women among social work students has persisted, and even increased.  Women formed nearly 80% of DipSW students. Since the introduction of the new degree, women make up 84% of social work students. As with the DipSW (Lyons *et al.*, 1995; Perry and Cree, 2003), proportionally more men enrolled on PG than UG degree programmes (20% vs. 15%, on average over the four cohorts).

In terms of ethnicity, there are proportionately more students defining themselves as being from a Black and minority ethnic (BME) group than on DipSW programmes. On average, around 70% of new degree students in any cohort define themselves as 'White UK' compared to around 76% of each of the last four DipSW cohorts.  However, the four cohorts of degree students (2003-07) have an almost identical distribution of students by ethnicity so the proportion of BME students has not increased from cohort to cohort since the new degree was introduced. The increase in the proportion of students from a BME background is almost entirely attributable to an increase in the proportion of students from Black backgrounds (see Table 1). It should be noted that the proportion of BME social work students is high compared to many other subjects.

The distribution of the new degree students by ethnicity is more or less similar among PG and UG programmes. However, one of the noticeable but small differences is the higher proportion of students identifying themselves as 'White Other' among PG programmes than UG (around 4% on average vs. 2%).  These variations will be examined further when PG students' progression is considered.

Ninety two per cent of students chose to report whether they considered themselves to have a disability in their registration documents. Among these, around 10% of students across both DipSW and degree cohorts reported having some kind of disability and this has remained almost constant. The most frequently reported disability was dyslexia (around 3 to 4% of all students), followed by 'unseen' disability (around 2%) which was similarly distributed across DipSW and degree students. Among new degree students, slightly more students report having a disability on UG than on PG programmes (9% vs. 7%).

Unsurprisingly, students' age is one of the few demographic characteristics that noticeably changed since the introduction of the new degree. This is mainly attributed to the removal of the minimum age requirement at which students were expected to qualify as a social worker. In the past, only one or two per cent of students started DipSW programmes before the age of 20 whereas the proportion of students in this age group has risen steadily to 14%; this is reflected in the reduction in the mean age of students beginning social work programmes from 33.6 years (SD 8.5) to 30.7 years (SD 9.2). Among new degree students, UG and PG students have an almost identical mean age (30.8 for UG students vs. 30.1 years for PG students).

**Table 1 Distribution of social work students by ethnicity, enrolment cohort and type of award, 2000-2007**

| Cohort and type of award | *Ethnicity* | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | White (UK) | White (Other) | Asian | Black | Mixed | Other | Total |
| Diploma in Social Work | | | | | | | |
| 2000-01 | 3242 | 62 | 209 | 463 | 3 | 164 | 4143 |
| | 78% | 2% | 5% | 11% | 0% | 4% | 100% |
| 2001-02 | 3300 | 108 | 235 | 530 | 143 | 32 | 4348 |
| | 76% | 3% | 5% | 12% | 3% | 1% | 100% |
| 2002-03 | 3683 | 128 | 199 | 625 | 161 | 27 | 4823 |
| | 76% | 3% | 4% | 13% | 3% | 1% | 100% |
| 2003-04 | 2459 | 86 | 186 | 351 | 82 | 20 | 3184 |
| | 77% | 3% | 6% | 11% | 3% | 1% | 100% |
| Social Work Degree | | | | | | | |
| 2003-04 | 1767 | 76 | 122 | 436 | 116 | 8 | 2525 |
| | 70% | 3% | 5% | 17% | 5% | 0% | 100% |
| 2004-05 | 3257 | 133 | 265 | 780 | 198 | 17 | 4650 |
| | 70% | 3% | 6% | 17% | 4% | 0% | 100% |
| 2005-06 | 3981 | 166 | 265 | 893 | 208 | 26 | 5539 |
| | 72% | 3% | 5% | 16% | 4% | 1% | 100% |
| 2006-07 | 3391 | 88 | 296 | 902 | 182 | 25 | 4884 |
| | 69% | 2% | 6% | 19% | 4% | 1% | 100% |

One of the most important policy decisions aimed at increasing the number of applicants for social work programmes was the introduction of a bursary to

fund students.  Although bursaries were available to DipSW students, they were means tested, apart from the PG student bursary. Based on students' reports on how they supported themselves financially, in 2001-2002 and 2002-2003, around a quarter of DipSW students received a mandatory grant and a fifth received a bursary. In the last year of DipSW enrolments (2003-2004), 40% of DipSW students reported that they received a bursary and around 10% reported having a mandatory grant.  Since the introduction of the degree, the bursary has proved to be the most common form of financial support for students, although this has fallen from about half of those enrolling in 2003-2004 and 2004-2005.  At 11 and 9% respectively, the proportions of students paying their own tuition fees in 2001-2002 and 2002-2003 were higher than those found in subsequent cohorts. The number of seconded students (paid for by their employers) was higher both absolutely and proportionally among DipSW students (see Harris, Manthorpe and Hussein 2008).

# Social Work Degree Students' Progression

## *Background*

These analyses build on previous work on the progression of DipSW students who began social work programmes between 1995-1998 (see Hussein et al, 2008 ). These highlighted several significant factors associated with progression.  The main findings were:

- Students' personal characteristics, such as their gender or ethnicity significantly altered the probability that they would not achieve a social work qualification or that their progression would be delayed, by for instance, needing to repeat a piece of course work or practice placement.
- Progression patterns also varied by type of programme (PG or UG), mode of study (part time, PT, or full time, FT) or method of delivery (college based or distance learning).
- Factors relating to the HEI in which students study also accounted for differences in progression.  Possible explanations for this included variations in curriculum content, methods of teaching and learning, and access to sufficient good quality practice placements.  However, it was difficult to establish the exact contribution of these effects using single level statistical models; this was the reason for using multi level modelling, as explained later in this report.

# Analytical framework

These important findings informed the analyses presented in this report, particularly examining which factors significantly contributed to the success of social work students. However, one of the first steps is to establish what can be considered a 'measure' of progression. There were several options available.

The GSCC records progression in the following ways:

1. Pass
2. Fail
3. Withdraw
4. Deferred (a student is permitted to take assessment items(s) at a later opportunity, usually as a result of a decision by the mitigating circumstances panel.[1])

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[1] The difference between referrals and deferrals may not be so clear cut in reality. Sometimes staff may advise students to apply for deferral if they anticipate his/her failing the module in particular when he/she has already failed other modules.  However, since the introduction of the degree, levels

5. Referred (a student is permitted to retake assessment item(s) without attendance at classes or similar, as a second attempt following initial failure.)

Previously (Hussein et al, 2008), we used the outcome 'probability of passing at first attempt' to measure student progression, meaning that a student had achieved a social work qualification without being referred or deferred. However, other types of outcome are relevant. It is also important to examine if specific student characteristics are associated with different types of outcome.

The current report focuses on full time UG students, for whom the analysis examines variations in 'result at first attempt', comparing various probabilities: passing, failing, being deferred, being referred, and withdrawing. 'Result at first attempt' takes into account the fact that different HEIs have different timetables for enrolling and graduating from a social work programme. Part time students' progression differs from that of full time students – for instance, many part time programmes are organised on the basis that students may be able to suspend their studies temporarily to coincide with other employment or family commitments. For this reason, we have treated part time and full time students separately.

Separate analysis for UG social work students focusing on the two cohorts 2003-04 and 2004-05 and PG students focusing on the three cohorts 2003-04, 2004-05 and 2005-06 were undertaken. In this report we focus on the UG students who started their new degree courses in the two academic years 2003-04 and 2004-05 (5275 students), this is to allow an elapse of at least three years (the duration of a course) at the time of analysis (summer 2008). The analysis proceeded in several 'steps', starting with single models, and then building hierarchical models (multilevel) to highlight the importance of the role of HEIs in influencing progression.

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definitions of referral and deferral are expected to conform more closely to the regulations governing each particular HEI (source: discussions with the Advisory Group including social work academics).

## UNDERGRADUATE FULL TIME SOCIAL WORK DEGREE STUDENTS' PROGRESSION

## 2003-04 and 2004-05 Intakes

### Background information on undergraduate (UG) full time social work students

In summary, details on the first two cohorts enrolling on the new social work degree between 2003-05 were as follows: 5275 students were enrolled for full time UG courses; 85% were men, around a tenth reported they had some form of disability and nearly 72% described themselves as 'White'. Only 9% of students reported being seconded or sponsored by their employers while nearly half received a bursary and 34% had mandatory or discretionary grants and just 5% had other sources of funding. In relation to ethnicity: the majoirty were White with 17% describing themselves as 'Black', 5% as 'Asian' and 5% as 'Mixed' or 'Other'. Almost equal proportions of students, 36%, studied in the North (North East, North West and Yorkshire and Humberside) and South (London, South East and South West) of England while 28% were registered in HEIs in the Midlands (Eastern, East Midlands, and West Midlands). The mean age of full time UG students at the start of their programme was 30.3 years; however, the mean age was slightly higher for men (32.5 years).

On average, students from BME groups comprised around 28% of the intake on any programme (that is the same social work UG programme in a given year and HEI), The proportion of BME students was highest in the South of England (37%) followed by Midlands (33%) and lowest in the North of England (14%). Although broadly consistent with the higher proportions of people from minority ethnic groups in London and the West Midlands (Office for National Statistics, 2002), previous work (Hussein et al., 2005) showed that HEIs within the same region had different proportions of students from minority ethnic groups.  This is not surprising as 'region' covers a large and diverse area. In terms of disability, on average, 11% of students at any course reported having any disability, again this proportion was highest in the South (12.5%), followed by Midlands (10.4%) and least in the North (9%). These differences in self-reported disability *may* indicate variable implementation of widening participation policies across different regions, as they might not be entirely attributed to possible variations in the proportions of general population with any forms of disability, thus, these figures invite further investigation.

### Students' progression: conceptualising the model

The UG social work degree is three years in length for full time students. Thus the projected years of completion for students enrolling on the two cohorts 2003-4 and 2004-5 were 2006 and 2007 respectively. Their recorded results by or around these dates are referred to as their 'result at first attempt'.

In total, 5474 students started social work programmes in those cohorts (2133 in 2003-04 and 3341 in 2004-05). Information on what happened to them was available for 96% of students. Across the two years, 50.5% passed; 1.9% failed; 14.9% withdrew; 18.9% deferred and 10.2% were referred. Information on practice placements was available for 4469 students (82%).

## Possible results at first attempt

As mentioned earlier, 'result at first attempt' was recorded in one of the following five ways:

1. Pass
2. Fail
3. Withdraw
4. Deferred
5. Referred

The outcome of interest here is an unordered categorical response (pass, fail, withdraw, deferred, referred); therefore, a hierarchical multinomial logistic model for unordered categorical response was adopted. After examining the data using single level analysis regression models, further investigations were carried out using multilevel modelling mainly to take into the account the fact that data on students' progression are dependent.  What this means is that students attending different HEIs do not have an equal chance of achieving the same result; rather there are similarities between observations from the same group of students attending the same HEI.  Such dependency is measured using the variance partitioning coefficient (VPC). The VPC also shows how much of the variance is due to each level of the model, and thus gives some insight into what extent the response is determined at each level. These are discussed after the findings from the model have been presented.

We used separate logistic models for binary responses for each of the five possible outcomes. The aim of most statistical models is to account for variation or difference in a response by a set of one or more explanatory variables.  In the case of social work students' progression, the model has two 'levels'.  The first is that of the individual student (identified through identified by a unique anonymised identifier for each student); the second is the HEI in which he or she is studying  (identified by the HEI number). Given the importance of increases in the time spent on practice learning with the new degree (Department of Health, 2002) and social work educators' perceptions that practice placements were often 'tipping points' in students' decisions to stay or leave (GSCC Diversity and Progression Group, 2008), theoretically, it might have been possible to introduce another level of analysis reflecting differences in the staging and length of practice placements across social work programmes (Doel et al., 2004).  However, in order to examine these relationships detailed and complete information on practice placements is required. Such information should include not only types, duration, user group and sectors of practice placements, but more importantly assessment process

and the outcome of different placements. Unfortunately, although the GSCC provided information on practice placements, it was not sufficient to enable meaningful analyses of the relationship between practice placements and progression.

**What individual characteristics might be associated with different progression outcome at first attempt?**

Building on our previous research (Hussein et al., 2008) and the wider literature on students' progression in higher education (for example, House of Commons Public Accounts Committee, 2008; Higher Education Academy/Equality Challenge Unit, 2008; Houston *et al.*, 2007; Mulholland *et al.*, 2008; National Audit Office, 2007; Yorke & Thomas, 2003), it is clear that individual characteristics such as age, gender and ethnicity are important in determining students' progression paths. Many of these characteristics are available in GSCC routinely collected data, but others, such as economic status or education history (including grades), are not.

The following details were available and were included in the analyses as possible explanatory variables in relation to different progression outcomes:

1. Gender (male, female)
2. Age at starting the course in years (centred on the students' mean age; 30.3 years)
3. Intake year (2003-04, 2004-05)
4. Region/part of England (North, Midlands, South)[2]
5. Ethnicity (White [UK and other], Asian, Black, Other)
6. Self reported disability (Any, None).
7. Previous educational attainment on enrolment date (GCSE or equivalent , A level or equivalent, Diploma, Degree)[3]
8. Financial support (Bursary, Mandatory/discretionary grant[4], secondment/sponsorship, other[5])
9. P_BME: Proportion of BME students in HEI (mean=27.8)
10. P_Dis: Proportion of students with reported disability in HEI (mean= 10.6)
11. Type of route (college based, employment based).

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[2] 'North': North East, North West and Yorkshire and Humberside; 'Midlands': Eastern, East Midlands, and West Midlands; 'South': London, South East and South West.
[3] 'GCSE or equ': NVQ 2 and Non-certified learning; 'A level or equ': A level, NVQ3 and NVQ4, 'Diploma': higher or other Diploma, Degree; Degree)
[4] Mandatory grants are often issued by the LA or the former DfES and the GSCC include loans at this category as well. Discretionary grants are often issued by the local authority.
[5] Other includes overseas, private and self funding and other funding sources.

## *Variation in progression in relation to different characteristics*

As previously mentioned, just over half of all students enrolled on full time UG programmes passed at first attempt, while 20% deferred, 10% were referred, 15% withdrew and only 2% failed. Although this is a high rate of success, noticeable variations in these statistics were observed in relation to individual students' characteristics such as age, gender, ethnicity and self reported disability status. These are illustrated in Table 3. The results clearly show that progression rates vary across different types of student. Before controlling for HEIs effect but controlling for individual level variables: age, gender, financial support, ethnicity and region/part of England all seem to have some effect on the possibility of students achieving each of the possible results at first attempt.

Table 3 clearly indicates that the highest percentages of students passing at first attempt are seconded or sponsored students (72%) while the lowest are 'Black' students and those with 'Other' ethnicity (40%). In terms of failing, the highest percentage is observed among Asian students (5%) followed by men and those from Black or 'Other' backgrounds (3%).

Withdrawal rates were notably higher (around 20%) among younger students (those aged under 20 at time of enrolment), men, those from 'Other' ethnicity and students receiving 'other' sources of funding. They were lowest (11%) among Asian students and those in their 30s (12%).

Noticeable variations were also observed in terms of referral rates, particularly in relation to region and ethnicity. Fourteen percent of students enrolled in HEIs in the South of England were referred, compared to only 8% of their counterparts in the North and Midlands. Again, referral rates were considerably higher amongst students from Asian and Black backgrounds (16 and 15% compared to 9% among White students).

**Table 3 Distribution of result at first attempt by different students' characteristics, full time under graduate SW courses, 2003-05**

| Students' characteristics | Result at first attempt | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Pass | Fail | Withdrew | Referred | Deferred | Number |
| **Age at enrolment\*\*** | | | | | | |
| <20 | 425 | 20 | 169 | 86 | 136 | 836 |
| | 50.8% | 2.4% | 20.2% | 10.3% | 16.3% | |
| 20-29 | 955 | 34 | 324 | 188 | 384 | 1885 |
| | 50.7% | 1.8% | 17.2% | 10.0% | 20.4% | |
| 30-39 | 922 | 24 | 204 | 180 | 324 | 1654 |
| | 55.7% | 1.5% | 12.3% | 10.9% | 19.6% | |
| 40+ | 461 | 25 | 118 | 99 | 192 | 895 |
| | 51.5% | 2.8% | 13.2% | 11.1% | 21.5% | |
| **Gender\*\*** | | | | | | |
| Women | 2402 | 78 | 661 | 463 | 892 | 4496 |
| | 53.4% | 1.7% | 14.7% | 10.3% | 19.8% | |
| Men | 361 | 25 | 154 | 93 | 141 | 774 |
| | 46.6% | 3.2% | 19.9% | 12.0% | 18.2% | |
| Education at enrolment | | | | | | |
| GCSE or eq. | 185 | 5 | 51 | 34 | 50 | 325 |
| | 56.9% | 1.5% | 15.7% | 10.5% | 15.4% | |
| A level or eq. | 1469 | 57 | 460 | 279 | 583 | 2848 |
| | 51.6% | 2.0% | 16.2% | 9.8% | 20.5% | |
| Diploma | 772 | 30 | 213 | 186 | 279 | 1480 |
| | 52.2% | 2.0% | 14.4% | 12.6% | 18.9% | |
| Degree | 283 | 8 | 68 | 50 | 88 | 497 |
| | 56.9% | 1.6% | 13.7% | 10.1% | 17.7% | |
| **Source of financial support\*\*** | | | | | | |
| Bursary | 1377 | 42 | 429 | 275 | 487 | 2610 |
| | 52.8% | 1.6% | 16.4% | 10.5% | 18.7% | |
| Grant | 859 | 43 | 297 | 188 | 402 | 1789 |
| | 48.0% | 2.4% | 16.6% | 10.5% | 22.5% | |
| Seconded | 343 | 5 | 20 | 48 | 58 | 474 |
| | 72.4% | 1.1% | 4.2% | 10.1% | 12.2% | |
| Other | 120 | 7 | 54 | 25 | 58 | 264 |
| | 45.5% | 2.7% | 20.5% | 9.5% | 22.0% | |
| **Region\*\*** | | | | | | |
| North | 997 | 35 | 342 | 164 | 371 | 1909 |
| | 52.2% | 1.8% | 17.9% | 8.6% | 19.4% | |
| Midlands | 833 | 24 | 204 | 125 | 278 | 1464 |
| | 56.9% | 1.6% | 13.9% | 8.5% | 19.0% | |
| South | 934 | 44 | 270 | 267 | 387 | 1902 |
| | 49.1% | 2.3% | 14.2% | 14.0% | 20.3% | |
| **Ethnicity\*\*** | | | | | | |
| White | 2166 | 54 | 601 | 346 | 651 | 3818 |
| | 56.7% | 1.4% | 15.7% | 9.1% | 17.1% | |
| Asian | 121 | 14 | 31 | 44 | 61 | 271 |
| | 44.6% | 5.2% | 11.4% | 16.2% | 22.5% | |
| Black | 351 | 27 | 124 | 134 | 251 | 887 |
| | 39.6% | 3.0% | 14.0% | 15.1% | 28.3% | |
| Other | 108 | 8 | 55 | 29 | 65 | 265 |
| | 40.8% | 3.0% | 20.8% | 10.9% | 24.5% | |
| All students | 2764 | 103 | 816 | 556 | 1036 | 5275 |
| | 52.4% | 2.0% | 15.5% | 10.5% | 19.6% | |

\*\* Pearson Chi-square test is significant p<0.0001

**Which individual characteristics are significantly related to different progression aspects when controlling for other individual level variables?**

In order to establish which variables are significantly associated with each of the possible outcomes, single level regression models were conducted as a first step in the analysis. These models identify explanatory variables which are significantly associated with different progression outcomes without controlling for a HEI effect.

Since a student's result at first attempt can be any of five possible unordered[6] outcomes (pass, fail, deferred, referred or withdraw), we used an unordered main effect multinomial regression model with 'result at first attempt' as the response variable (meaning that it is affected by the explanatory variables) while the 11 explanatory variables (gender, age, intake year, part of England, ethnicity, disability, previous educational attainment, financial support, proportion of BME students in HEI, proportion of students reporting having a disability, type of route) were used to establish possible associations. This analysis was performed using SPSS release 15 and the results guided the multilevel analyses presented later in this document.

For the outcome variable, 'pass' was used as the reference category. This means that the probabilities of achieving all of the other outcomes are compared to the probability of passing. For all explanatory categorical variables, the last category is used as the reference category. Age (centred around the mean), the proportion with a self-reported disability and the proportion with an ethnicity other than White within a cohort are all treated as covariate (i.e. are used in their continuous form).

Table 4 summarises which explanatory variables are significantly associated with each of the possible outcomes.

## *Fail*

Gender and having any type of disability were both found to have a significant effect on the probability of failing versus passing. Men and those students who reported any form of disability were significantly more likely to fail at their first attempt than pass when compared to their counterparts. These are students who did not have a referral or deferral opportunity and had failed by the end of their three year programme. Unlike non-vocational courses, some elements of professional training programmes may not have referral or deferral opportunities, such as serious breaches of professional behaviour (Lafrance and Grey, 2004). Thus, failure may occur for both academic and non-academic reasons. However, this cannot be identified from the dataset.

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[6] This means that there is no relationship between the categories, unlike for example small, medium and large.

## Withdrawal

In relation to the probability of withdrawal, the following variables were significantly associated: age, gender, ethnicity, having any reported disability, and type of financial support. Age was negatively associated with the probability of withdrawal, meaning that the older the student was (from average age of 27.8 years) the less likely he or she was to withdraw. Men and students with any reported disabilities were significantly more likely to withdraw than their counterparts. Students describing themselves as 'Black' were significantly less likely to withdraw. The most significant result was among those who were seconded or sponsored by employers. It is this group who is least likely to withdraw; similarly those who received a bursary were less likely to withdraw than those with other forms of financial support, however, with a smaller magnitude than that observed among employer supported students.

**Table 4 Summary of results of multinomial regression model (main effect tested) comparing the probabilities of fail, withdrawal, referral and deferral to the probability of passing at first attempt**

| Explanatory variables | Probability of each compared to the probability of passing at first attempt | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | Fail | Withdrew | Referred | Deferred |
| Age (centred) | | ** (-ve) | | |
| Proportion BME | | | | ** (+ve) |
| Proportion Disability | | | ** (-ve) | |
| Gender | ** (Male ↑) | ** (Male ↑) | | |
| Starting year | | | | ** (03-04 ↑) |
| Region | | | ** (North and Midlands ↓) | * (North ↑) |
| Ethnicity | | * (White & Black ↓) | * (white ↓)[7] | * (white ↓) |
| Previous education | | | * (Diploma ↑) | |
| Any disability | * (↑) | ** (↑) | | ** (↑) |
| Financial support | | ** (secondment & Bursary↓)[8] | | * (secondment ↓) |
| Employment status[9] | | | | |

** p-value<.005; * p-value<0.05.

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[7] Borderline significance
[8] Those seconded/sponsored much less likely to withdrew than those with bursaries
[9] This variable was not associated with any of the probabilities described, probably because very few cases were coded as employment base (156, 3.4%)

## *Referrals*

The following variables were significantly associated with the probability of referral versus passing at first attempt: proportion of students with reported disability in the group, region, ethnicity, and previous education level. The proportion of students with reported disability in the student group was significantly negatively associated with the probability of being referred, meaning that students attending a course with fellow students where the proportion of students with any form of disability was high were themselves less likely to be referred when compared to students attending other programmes where the overall proportion of students with any disability was low., Students attending HEIs located in the North and Midlands of the country were significantly less likely to be referred than those on programmes in the South of England..It is not known why this should be the case. White students were significantly less likely to be referred; however, this was only of borderline significance level. Interestingly, but perhaps not surprisingly, those students who had a diploma prior to starting their courses were significantly more likely to be referred than to pass at their first attempt when compared to the reference category of students with a previous degree, suggesting that previous educational attainment may partially explain some of the variation in deferral rates.

## *Deferrals*

A multinomial regression model shows that the following variables were significantly associated with the probability of being deferred at first attempt when compared to the reference category of passing, these are: Proportion of students from BME in group, cohort of intake, region, ethnicity, having any form of disability, and source of financial support. The proportion of BME students in the group was positively associated with the probability of a student being deferred at first attempt. This means that the more BME students are in the student group the more likely a student would be deferred regardless of his/her other personal characteristics. Those who started their courses in 2003-04, who attended HEIs in the North of England, as well as those with any form of disability were significantly more likely to be deferred. White students, and those who were seconded/sponsored, were significantly less likely to be deferred.

## Probability of passing at first attempt: Single level analysis

To gain further understanding about which variables are associated with passing at first attempt while controlling for other factors, a separate binary logistic model is examined. The outcome of this model is the binary variable: 0: didn't pass at first attempt and 1: passed at first attempt. All 11 explanatory variables listed above are included in the model. The analysis was performed using SPSS release 15, forward stepwise binary logistic regression model and the results are summarised in Table 5.

**Table 5 Results of single level binary logistic regression model examining the association between different individual characteristics and the likelihood of passing on time for full time undergraduate social work students (2003-05)**

| Significantly associated variables§ | P | Odds Ratio (95.0% C.I.) |
|---|---|---|
| Ethnicity: White | <0.001 | |
| Ethnicity: Asian | <0.001 | 0.59 (0.45, 0.78) |
| Ethnicity: Black | <0.001 | 0.54 (0.45, 0.64) |
| Ethnicity: Other | <0.001 | 0.60 (0.45, 0.79) |
| Region: South | 0.002 | |
| Region: North | 0.508 | 1.05 (0.91, 1.22) |
| Region: Midlands | 0.001 | 1.31 (1.12, 1.53) |
| Finance: Bursary | <0.001 | |
| Finance: Grant | <0.001 | 0.77 (0.67, 0.87) |
| Finance: Secondment | <0.001 | 2.21 (1.75, 2.80) |
| Finance: Other | 0.188 | 0.82 (0.62, 1.10) |
| Women | 0.006 | 1.27 (1.07, 1.51) |
| Any reported disability | <0.001 | 0.63 (0.51, 0.76) |

§ Hosmer and Lemeshow Chi-square= 3.30; p=0.914, Nagelkerke R square=0.11

Table 5 shows that the following variables were significantly associated with passing at first attempt, this is on the single level of students and not taking into account the HEI effect, the latter is examined in the next sections of this report:

- **Ethnicity:**\*\*:  Those who defined their ethnicity as 'Black' 'Asian' or 'Other' were all significantly less likely to pass at first attempt when compared to 'White' students).
- **Cohort:**\*\* Those starting in 2003-04 were significantly less likely to pass at first attempt than those started on 2004-05 (OR= 0.78; p<0.001).
- **Region:**\*\* Those attending HEIs in the Midlands were significantly more likely to pass at first attempt (OR=1.32; p=0.001).
- **Financial support:**\*\* Those with grants or loans were significantly less likely to pass than those with bursaries (OR=0.76; p<0.001) while seconded/sponsored students were significantly more likely to pass at first attempt (OR=2.02; p<0.001).
- **Having any form of disability** \*\* Those reporting that they had any type of disability were significantly less likely to pass at first attempt (OR=0.6; p<0.001).
- **Gender:**\* Women were significantly more likely to pass (OR= 1.28; p=0.006).

# The Hierarchical Effect: does it make a difference which HEIs social work students are enrolled in for undergraduate full time courses?

All the above models relate at the level of individual students and do not take into account any unobserved factors that may relate to individual HEIs where students undertook their studies. sixty-two different HEIs in England offered social work qualifying programmes between 2003-2005. They varied in size, location, history, and resources. So far, beyond the proportion of BME students and students with any reported disability in each cohort, the institutional context for students' teaching and learning has been missing. In this section, we use multilevel modelling techniques, which allow us to take into account the hierarchical effect of the fact that several students are enrolled in any one HEI, therefore, there is a separate HEI effect. Such models allow us to measure the variance between the probabilities of different outcomes at first attempt which relate to the level of each single individual student as well as the HEI level. The following diagram in Figure 1 sets out the hierarchical theoretical framework of progression among social work students.

Figure 1 clearly shows that students are 'nested' in HEIs; at the end of their course any student can leave the social work programme in three ways: 1) pass as a member of the profession; 2) fail at the end of the three years; 3) withdraw at any time. Any student also has the possibility of remaining on the programme if he/she been referred or deferred. The later group (those referred or deferred) may again face any of the five possible outcomes.

**Figure 1 Hierarchical effect of HEI and individual characteristics and possible outcomes at first attempt**
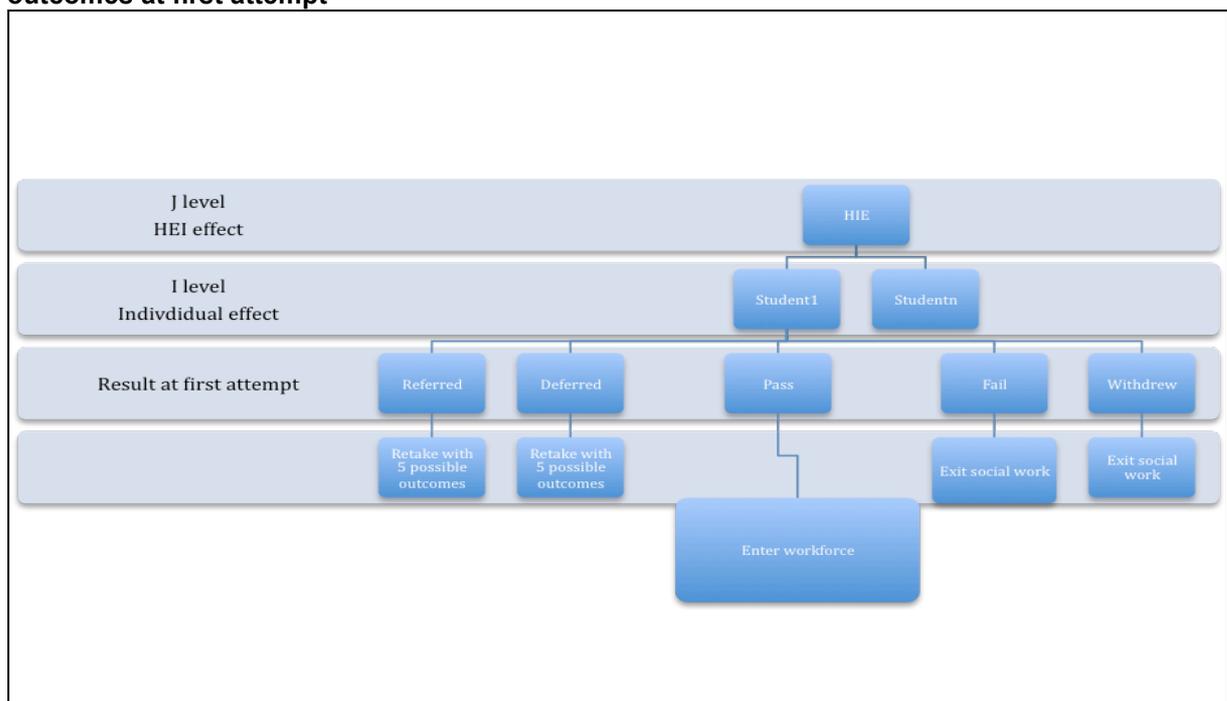
## Multilevel models of different outcomes at first attempt

We also undertook a random effect model using Monte Carlo Markov Chain (MCMC) methods with a logit link function. This method of approximation (which transforms a discrete response model to a continuous response model) is designed to produce more stable and less biased results than those which may be obtained using marginal quasi-likelihood (MQL) or the predictive (or penalized) quasi-likelihood (PQL) methods.

The following model presents the probability of passing at first attempt using explanatory variables which were found to be significantly associated with the probability of passing at first attempt on the single level model (see logistic regression models in previous section).  This model is a random intercept model, i.e. it allows the intercept to vary randomly across HEIs. We can see the variables included in the model in the next equations. All multilevel models analysis was performed using MLWin for windows release 2.01.

### *The likelihood of passing at first attempt*

The following are the results of the multilevel model examining the likelihood of passing on time while controlling for both the hierarchical effect of place of study (HEI) as well as characteristics observed at the student level. Equation 1 presents the results of the fitted model examining the association between different explanatory variables and passing at first attempt.

**Equation 1: Results of the multilevel model of passing at first attempt**

$$\text{Pass}_{ij} \sim \text{Binomial}(\text{denom}_{ij}, \pi_{ij})$$

$$\text{logit}(\pi_{ij}) = \beta_{0j}\text{cons} + 0.322(0.091)\text{GenderN:Female}_{ij} + -0.513(0.104)\text{Anydisability}_{ij} + 0.010(0.004)\text{agecen}_{ij} +$$
$$-0.336(0.072)\text{finance:Grant}_{ij} + 0.793(0.132)\text{finance:Seconded}_{ij} + -0.232(0.152)\text{finance:other}_{ij} +$$
$$-0.198(0.126)\text{North}_{j} + 0.000(0.113)\text{Midlands}_{j} + -0.478(0.149)\text{Asian}_{ij} + -0.634(0.105)\text{Black}_{ij} +$$
$$-0.500(0.150)\text{c39}_{j} + -0.003(0.002)\text{P\_BMEcent}_{j} + -0.011(0.012)\text{P\_Discent}_{j}$$

$$\beta_{0j} = 0.122(0.117) + u_{0j}$$

$$[u_{0j}] \sim N(0, \Omega_u) : \Omega_u = [0.389(0.078)]$$

$$\text{var}(\text{Pass}_{ij}|\pi_{ij}) = \pi_{ij}(1 - \pi_{ij})/\text{denom}_{ij}$$

$$\textit{Deviance(MCMC)} = 6091.605(4847 \text{ of } 5475 \text{ cases in use})$$

Chi-square Wald test for HEI is 24.60, indicating a significant difference between HEIs in relation to the likelihood of students passing at first attempt. HEI variance is estimated as 0.389 (SE=0.078). Calculating the Variance Partitioning Coefficient (VPC), 8 to 10% of the residual variation in pass rate was attributable to differences between HEIs.

At an individual level and after controlling for HEI effect; the following are significantly associated with the odds of **passing** at first attempt:

- Gender (women more likely to pass)
- Being seconded/sponsored and not receiving a bursary (more likely)
- Being older than average (more likely)
- Reporting any disability (less likely)
- Receiving a grant not a bursary (less likely)
- Being from an Asian ethnic minority (less likely)
- Being from a Black ethnic minority (less likely)
- Being from a Mixed or Other ethnic minority (less likely)

*The narrative of passing at first attempt*

*Taking into account both HEI and individual effects; it makes a significant difference where students are studying social work on their likelihood of passing on time. The results clearly show that students who are white women, older than average (30 years) or have no disabilities are very likely to succeed. Indeed, their odds of passing on time are higher than not at every HEI in England, this is regardless of any other characteristics they possess (or not). However, the results also suggest that some HEIs have a significant role to play in improving pass rates of students. In addition to developing admissions decision making processes, it is important for personal supervisors or tutors to take account of these variations and understand the different needs of diverse students and to put in place suitable support strategies while encouraging all students, but particularly those who are less likely to pass at first attempt to seek and make use of such support.*
*Academic staff need to be aware of additional difficulties faced by students who are not receiving bursaries or who are not seconded; putting in place early possible interventions, such as contact with student welfare services or local money or debt advice agencies, and making sure these are known and available to students.*

### *The likelihood of failing at first attempt*

As seen in the single level analyses, failure was the rarest possible outcome. However, some individual characteristics were significantly associated with the probability of failing at first attempt. Here we examine if there is also any HEI effect and whether, after controlling for this level of variation, there are still individual variables, which are significantly associated with it. Equation 2 presents the results of a multilevel binary logit model similar to that employed when examining the probability of passing in the previous section.

**Equation 2 Results of the multilevel binary logit model of the probability of failing at first attempt**

$$\text{fail}_{ij} \sim \text{Binomial}(\text{denom}_{ij}, \pi_{ij})$$

$$\text{logit}(\pi_{ij}) = \beta_{0j}\text{cons} + -0.654(0.274)\text{GenderN:Female}_{ij} + 0.310(0.336)\text{Anydisability}_{ij} + -0.002(0.013)\text{agecen}_{ij} +$$
$$0.343(0.243)\text{finance:Grant}_{ij} + -0.406(0.520)\text{finance:Seconded}_{ij} + 0.024(0.523)\text{finance:other}_{ij} +$$
$$-0.069(0.295)\text{North}_{j} + -0.411(0.312)\text{Midlands}_{j} + 1.410(0.390)\text{Asian}_{ij} + 0.902(0.313)\text{Black}_{ij} +$$
$$0.188(0.573)\text{c39}_{ij} + -0.007(0.006)\text{P\_BMEcent}_{j} + 0.017(0.028)\text{P\_Discent}_{j}$$

$$\beta_{0j} = -3.938(0.347) + u_{0j}$$

$$\begin{bmatrix} u_{0j} \end{bmatrix} \sim \text{N}(0, \ \Omega_u) \ : \ \Omega_u = \begin{bmatrix} 0.010(0.007) \end{bmatrix}$$

$$\text{var}(\text{fail}_{ij}|\pi_{ij}) = \pi_{ij}(1 - \pi_{ij})/\text{denom}_{ij}$$

$$\textit{Deviance(MCMC)} = 821.120(4847 \text{ of } 5475 \text{ cases in use})$$

Chi-square Wald test for HEI is 2.12, indicating that the effect of HEIs on the likelihood of failure is not significant; HEI variance is estimated as 0.010 (SE=0.007). This is confirmed by the VPC that indicates that from only 0.2 to 0.6% of the residual variation in failure rates was attributable to differences between HEIs.

However, after controlling for the HEI effect the following individual characteristics are significantly associated with the odds of **failing** at the first attempt:

- Gender (women less likely)
- Being of Asian ethnicity (more likely)
- Being of Black ethnicity (more likely).

*The narrative of failing at first attempt*

*Taking into account both HEI and individual effects, it does not make a significant difference where students are studying social work on their likelihood of failing at first attempt. However, those who are supervising students who are men, or from Black or Asian backgrounds, may need to consider their academic and placement progress with care as their chances of failure are higher than those of women or White students. This is true regardless of where the student is studying or whatever other characteristics students possess. Academic staff at a HEI should have a range of support strategies to suggest to students and these need to be communicated to new staff. Some social work teams in HEIs have very proactive systems to identify specific progress issues and work in close contact with student services within the HEI.*

### The likelihood of withdrawing at first attempt (not after deferrals or referrals)

Again we examined whether individual characteristics were still significantly associated with the chances of withdrawing after taking into account the effect of HEIs. The results are presented in Equation 3 below.

**Equation 3 Results of the multilevel binary logit model of the probability of withdrawing at first attempt (not after being previously deferred or referred)**

$$Wdrew_{ij} \sim Binomial(denom_{ij}, \pi_{ij})$$

$$logit(\pi_{ij}) = \beta_{0j}cons + \text{-}0.464(0.110)GenderN{:}Female_{ij} + 0.358(0.133)Anydisability_{ij} + \text{-}0.021(0.005)agecen_{ij} +$$
$$0.037(0.094)finance{:}Grant_{ij} + \text{-}1.596(0.275)finance{:}Seconded_{ij} + 0.431(0.180)finance{:}other_{ij} +$$
$$0.211(0.133)North_j + 0.031(0.134)Midlands_j + \text{-}0.347(0.226)Asian_{ij} + \text{-}0.049(0.139)Black_{ij} +$$
$$0.268(0.184)c39_{ij} + \text{-}0.006(0.003)P\_BMEcent_j + 0.010(0.014)P\_Discent_j$$

$$\beta_{0j} = \text{-}1.536(0.150) + u_{0j}$$

$$\begin{bmatrix} u_{0j} \end{bmatrix} \sim N(0, \; \Omega_u) \; : \; \Omega_u = \begin{bmatrix} 0.274(0.079) \end{bmatrix}$$

$$var(Wdrew_{ij}|\pi_{ij}) = \pi_{ij}(1 - \pi_{ij})/denom_{ij}$$

$$Deviance(MCMC) = 3870.472(4847 \text{ of } 5475 \text{ cases in use})$$

Chi-square Wald test for HEI is 11.94 indicating that HEIs have a significant effect on the chances of students withdrawing from social work undergraduate full time courses; HEI variance is estimated as 0.274 (SE=0.079). VPC indicates that from 4 to 5% of the residual variations in withdrawal rates is attributable to differences between HEIs.

Moreover, the following individual characteristics are still significantly associated with the likelihood of withdrawal even after controlling for HEI effect:

- Gender (women less likely)
- Being on a social work course with a higher BME proportion than average (less likely)
- Being seconded/sponsored (less likely)
- Having any disability (more likely)
- Being younger than average (more likely)
- Having other sources of fund (not bursary; more likely)

Withdrawal seems to be the one aspect of progression aspect that is significantly associated with many individual and peer group characteristics as well as individual students' characteristics.

Some of these findings are not surprising. A secure and sizeable source of funding provides both financial security but instils obligation to the funder (employer), in most cases. Thus obligation to the seconding or sponsoring employer and major efforts to gain such support (Harris et al 2008) make withdrawal almost out of the question.

The fact that students attending courses which contain a higher proportion than average of other BME students are significantly less likely to withdraw may suggest that inculcating an inclusive ethos and good practice around mentoring or role modelling to encourage all students to keep trying might be productive. However, these explanations need further qualitative investigations.

It is interesting to note that an individual student's own ethnic background is not significantly associated with the probability of withdrawing after controlling for other individual characteristics and HEI effect.

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*The narrative of withdrawing at first attempt*

*Taking into account both HEI and individual effects, it makes a difference where students study social work on their chances of withdrawing. Risks are higher for men, for students with any form of disability and those who are younger than 30 years old. Younger students are particularly at higher risk of withdrawal. If a HEI has above average proportions of BME students, this significantly improves students' chances of staying on their course. If a student is seconded or sponsored by an employer he or she is significantly more likely to stay on the course, regardless of other characteristics or where they study. Most students can't secure this and some do not have either or a bursary or a grant so early discussion of financial positions with student services looks a very sensible approach to recommend. Social work staff need to be aware of such variations in withdrawal rates and that some HEIs significantly do better in keeping students than others, therefore strategies in supporting different groups exist and should be adopted. Both recruitment and teaching and learning strategies need to adequately address such variations.*

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### The likelihood of being deferred at first attempt

As explained earlier, deferral occurs when a student is permitted to take assessment items(s) at a later opportunity, usually as a result of a decision by the mitigating circumstances panel, after a student has missed assessment because of illness, for example. Around a fifth of all new degree full time UG students were deferred at their first attempt, there were also observed variations in relation to individual characteristics even when controlling other factors. Here we examine whether these characteristics continue to be significant if the HEI level effect is removed. The results of a multilevel hierarchical model examining this are presented in Equation 4.

**Equation 4 Results of the multilevel binary logit model of the probability of being deferred at first attempt**

$$\text{DEF}_{ij} \sim \text{Binomial}(\text{denom}_{ij}, \pi_{ij})$$

$$\text{logit}(\pi_{ij}) = \beta_{0j}\text{cons} + 0.148(0.127)\text{GenderN:Female}_{ij} + 0.449(0.128)\text{Anydisability}_{ij} + 0.008(0.005)\text{agecen}_{ij} + $$
$$0.282(0.095)\text{finance:Grant}_{ij} + -0.404(0.184)\text{finance:Seconded}_{ij} + 0.131(0.198)\text{finance:other}_{ij} + $$
$$0.577(0.206)\text{North}_{j} + 0.154(0.175)\text{Midlands}_{j} + 0.318(0.195)\text{Asian}_{ij} + 0.399(0.133)\text{Black}_{ij} + $$
$$0.204(0.193)\text{c39}_{ij} + 0.008(0.003)\text{P\_BMEcent}_{j} + 0.040(0.018)\text{P\_Discent}_{j}$$

$$\beta_{0j} = -2.484(0.191) + u_{0j}$$

$$\left[u_{0j}\right] \sim N(0, \Omega_u) \; : \; \Omega_u = \left[1.191(0.225)\right]$$

$$\text{var}(\text{DEF}_{ij} | \pi_{ij}) = \pi_{ij}(1 - \pi_{ij})/\text{denom}_{ij}$$

$$\textit{Deviance(MCMC)} = 3883.640(4847 \text{ of } 5475 \text{ cases in use})$$

The Chi-square Wald test for HEI is 28.08, indicating that there is a significant level effect attributable to HEIs which is associated with the odds of students being deferred at first attempt; the HEI variance is estimated as 1.191 (SE=0.225). The VPC range from 11 to 15%, indicating that from 11 to 15% of the residual variation of deferrals is attributable to differences between HEIs.

After controlling for the HEI effect, the following individual characteristics are significantly associated with the odds of being **deferred** at first attempt after controlling for the effect of HEI:

- Being seconded/sponsored (less likely)
- Having any form of disability (more likely)
- Receiving a grant not a bursary (more likely)
- Studying in a HEI in the North as opposed to the South (more likely)
- Being from a Black ethnicity (more likely)
- Studying in a social work course with higher BME percentage than average (more likely)
- Studying in a social work course with higher proportion of students with disabilities than average (more likely)

The effect of peer group characteristics (in terms of proportions from BME and those with reported disabilities) are intriguing and may reflect the practice of the teaching staff in these institutions and perhaps either the overwhelming responsibilities they face or challenges in meeting any other needs than 'average'. The question of why this is reflected in the odds of deferrals invites further investigation. Observed associations between region and deferrals' rate also require more qualitative exploration.

Deferrals usually occur following requests from students themselves because, for example, they find themselves in unforeseen circumstances. However, the significant variation in deferral rates both on the individual and HEI levels and

that students with certain characteristics are significantly more likely to be deferred, may suggest that recorded 'deferrals' in reality do not necessarily follow the definition given earlier. It may be that some students who are anticipated to fail are 'encouraged' by academic staff to apply for deferrals. It is also possible that difficulties in securing practice placements may account for some of the deferrals; this may account for the lower levels of deferrals among sponsored students. More qualitative research, supported by the Diversity and Progression Group, might shed more light on possible explanations.

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*The narrative of deferrals at first attempt*

*It makes a significant difference which HEI a student enrols in for an undergraduate social work degree, on their chances of being deferred regardless of any other personal characteristics. No matter where students are studying, if they have any form of disability, or are from a Black ethnic background they are significantly more likely to be deferred than not when compared to people with no disability or from a White background. Moreover, if the HEI has above average proportion of BME students, or of students with reported disability, students are significantly more likely to be deferred regardless of ethnicity or disability status. On the other hand, they are significantly less likely to be deferred if they are seconded or sponsored by an employer while the opposite is true if they have a grant and not a bursary. Staff need to work as a group to think about the implications of this for their own courses and share experiences of what works well at social work education events, possibly with the support of the GSCC. Variations in deferrals rates by HEIs are large, indicating the important role HEI staff can play in identifying student groups who are more likely to defer and put in place suitable prevention strategies.*

</div>

### The likelihood of being referred at first attempt

A social work student is usually 'referred' when he/she is permitted to retake assessment item(s) without attendance at classes, as a second attempt following initial failure. Overall, 10% of full time undergraduate students were referred at first attempt; i.e. had failed some elements of their work. We examined whether the likelihood of referrals significantly differs according to the place of study as well as whether (and which) individual characteristics were important after controlling for any HEI effect. The results of the multilevel model are presented in Equation 5.

**Equation 5 Results of the multilevel binary logit model of the probability of being referred at first attempt**

$$\text{REF}_{ij} \sim \text{Binomial}(\text{denom}_{ij}, \pi_{ij})$$

$$\text{logit}(\pi_{ij}) = \beta_{0j}\text{cons} + -0.080(0.147)\text{GenderN:Female}_{ij} + -0.054(0.181)\text{Anydisability}_{ij} + -0.002(0.006)\text{agecen}_{ij} +$$
$$0.017(0.120)\text{finance:Grant}_{ij} + -0.216(0.214)\text{finance:Seconded}_{ij} + -0.435(0.269)\text{finance:other}_{ij} +$$
$$-0.675(0.198)\text{North}_j + -0.646(0.180)\text{Midlands}_j + 0.747(0.225)\text{Asian}_{ij} + 0.553(0.161)\text{Black}_{ij} +$$
$$0.300(0.247)\text{c39}_{ij} + 0.000(0.004)\text{P\_BMEcent}_j + -0.042(0.019)\text{P\_Discent}_j$$

$$\beta_{0j} = -2.218(0.193) + u_{0j}$$

$$\begin{bmatrix} u_{0j} \end{bmatrix} \sim N(0, \Omega_u) \; : \; \Omega_u = \begin{bmatrix} 0.969(0.214) \end{bmatrix}$$

$$\text{var}(\text{REF}_{ij}|\pi_{ij}) = \pi_{ij}(1 - \pi_{ij})/\text{denom}_{ij}$$

$$Deviance(MCMC) = 2739.294(4847 \text{ of } 5475 \text{ cases in use})$$

Chi-square Wald test for HEI is 20.52 indicating that the HEI level has a significant effect on the odds of a student to be deferred regardless of other characteristics; HEI variance is estimated as 0.969 (SE=0.214). VPC indicates that from 10 to 14% of the residual variation of referral rates is attributable to differences between HEIs. The calculations also indicate that variations are at the top range among students from BME groups and/or with any reported disabilities.

On the individual level, after controlling for the HEI effect, the following characteristics are significantly associated with the odds of being **referred** at first attempt:

- Studying in an HEI in the North compared to the South (less likely)
- Studying in an HEI in the Midlands compared to the South (less likely)
- Being of Asian ethnic background (more likely)
- Being of Black ethnic background (more likely)

*The narrative of referrals at first attempt*

*It makes a significant difference at which HEI a student undertakes the undergraduate social work degree on their chances of being referred, regardless of any other personal characteristics. Students are significantly more likely to be referred if they are studying in an HEI in the South of England than in other regions. At a personal level and regardless of where they are studying, if they are from a Black or Asian ethnic background they are significantly more likely to be referred than not when compared to students from a White background. Moreover, if the social work course has above average proportion of students with reported disability then students are significantly less likely to be referred regardless of their own disability status. The implications of this for the social work teaching staff need to be discussed, and the GSCC would be pleased to hear of specific instances of good practice and of ways in which the wider HEI supports departments of social work. Again the results highlight the significant effect of HEIs in relation to referral rates suggesting that some HEIs are putting in place more effective strategies than others.*

- Studying in a social work course with higher proportion than average of students with any disability (less likely)

# Summary of Results

It is important to set the results of this study in context. Research reveals differential progression among students in higher education, depending on where they study, the subject they are studying, and their individual characteristics. For example, this study found that up to 15 percent of the variance in terms of the proportion of students whose progression was delayed by the need to defer their studies was explained by the HEI in which students studied. By contrast, HEI effects accounted for less than one per cent of failures. This suggests that HEIs play a vital role in promoting students' achievement. However, as the key results show, more can be done to understand which students face particular difficulties and to think about possible ways of supporting them. This is important in reducing the likelihood and impact of failure in higher education and, ultimately, in creating a diverse and effective workforce.

## Key findings are:

## HEI effect

- ➢ There is a significant HEI level effect on all aspects of progression except for failing at first attempt, although the highest HEI variance relates to deferrals (delay) followed by referrals (failure with permission to reset assignments or practice).
    - o This is a very important finding and qualitative research should aim to explore what aspects of learning and teaching can enhance students' progression while keeping standards high.

## Students' level effect

- ➢ After controlling for HEI level effect, the following findings are true regardless of where students study and their characteristics:
    - o Previous education level was not significantly associated with any of the possible progression outcomes, which demonstrates how social work programmes have had some successes in promoting achievement among all students, whatever their previous levels of academic attainment.
    - o Men are significantly less likely to pass at first attempt, significantly more likely to withdraw (before being referred or deferred) and to fail their undergraduate social work courses when compared to women.
    - o Students with any form of disability are significantly less likely to pass at first attempt, significantly more likely to withdraw or to be deferred at their first attempt when compared to students without any reported disabilities.
    - o Students from 'Black' ethnic minorities are less likely to pass at first attempt, significantly more likely to fail, be deferred or referred at their first attempt, than not, when compared to White students.

- o Asian students are also significantly less likely to pass at first attempt and significantly more likely to fail or get referred, than not, when compared to White students regardless of other characteristics.
- o Students with 'Mixed' or 'other' ethnic background are significantly less likely to pass at first attempt when compared to White students.
- o Younger students (younger than average of 30 years old) are significantly less likely to pass on time and more likely to withdrew than not, when compared to students aged 30 or over.

## Source of funding or employer support effect

- ➢ After controlling for HEI level effect and taking into account all individual characteristics, the source of funding or relationship with the funder is significantly associated with different elements of progression:
  - o Seconded or employer sponsored students are significantly more likely to pass at first attempt, less likely to withdrew and less likely to be deferred than not when compared to students receiving bursaries (the great majority).
  - o Students who finance their study through grants (small in number) are significantly less likely to pass at first attempt and more likely to be deferred, than not, when compared to students in receipt of bursaries.
  - o Students who are financing their study through other sources of funding, such as students' loans, (small in number) are significantly more likely to withdraw than other students.

## Peer-group effect

- ➢ After controlling for HEI level effect and taking into account all individual characteristics, peer-group (other students on the course) composition is significantly associated with progression:
  - o Students enrolled in courses with higher percentages of Black and minority ethnic (BME) students than average are significantly less likely to withdraw and more likely to be deferred, regardless of students' own ethnicity or other personal characteristics.
  - o Students enrolled in courses with higher percentages of BME students than average are significantly more likely to be deferred regardless of students' own ethnicity or other personal characteristics.
  - o Students enrolled in courses with higher percentages of students with reported disabilities than average are significantly more likely to be deferred.
  - o Students enrolled in courses with higher percentages of students with reported disabilities than average are significantly less likely to be referred regardless of students' own characteristics including disability status.

## Geographical effects
> Region, where HEI is located, has a significant effect on some of the progression elements regardless of HEI and students' levels effects:
>> o Students enrolled in HEIs in the North of England are significantly more likely to be deferred and less likely to be referred, than not, when compared to those enrolled in the South of England.
>> o Students enrolled in HEIs in the Midlands are significantly less likely to be referred when compare to those studying in the South.

## Practice placements
> Practice placements affect students' experiences, including their progression, however, further data are needed to reveal associations. We need more information in relation to different practice placements' assessment and support. The qualitative research supported by this group, led by Goldsmith's College, is investigating this further.

## Messages for HEI staff based on these findings
> Personal supervisors or tutors need to consider these variations and understand the different needs of diverse students. They may be able to put in place tailored support strategies which encourage all students, but particularly those who are less likely to pass at first attempt, to seek and make use of support.
> Academic staff need to be aware of additional difficulties faced by students who are not receiving bursaries or who are not seconded; putting in place early possible interventions, such as contact with student welfare services or local money or debt advice agencies, and making sure these are known and available to students.
> HEIs should make available a range of support strategies for students and these need to be communicated to new staff.
> Social work staff may need to adopt proactive systems to identify specific progress issues and work in close contact with student services within the HEI.
> Social work academic staff need to be aware of variations in withdrawal rates and that some HEIs significantly do better in keeping students than others.
> Both recruitment and teaching and learning strategies need to address such variations. Ways of sharing successes in supporting different groups should be encouraged.
> Staff may need to work as a group to think about the implications of significant variations in progression for their own programmes and share experiences of what works well at social work education events, possibly with the support of the GSCC.
> Variations in both deferral and referral rates across HEIs are noticeably large, indicating the importance of the contribution of HEI staff in helping social work colleagues to identify student groups who are more likely to defer and put in place suitable prevention strategies.

➤ Previous work from this group has highlighted that practice placements can give rise to particular challenges to some groups. Therefore, academic staff need to work closely with practice assessors to ensure fair and effective supervision and support while maintaining the standards of the profession.

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