

ROYAL HOLLOWAY  
University of London

**COLLEGE BOARD OF EXAMINERS  
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

**Equal Opportunities; an analysis of taught postgraduate student performance for cohorts  
2005 to 2009**

**Summary**

1. This paper examines only some of the possible ways of measuring and monitoring student admission, achievement and withdrawal relative to various equal opportunities factors at PGT level. Given the available data and staff resources, the methods used and the extent of analysis have to be limited. More detailed statistical information could only be provided by a trained statistician, and on generally larger samples of students than can be provided by a single year's intake at Royal Holloway. In many cases (for instance withdrawals), the number of students in the minority groups are so small that conclusions must be tentative at best.
2. This paper also only presents a starting point of the various factors that can be compared against one another. In particular, drilling down to faculty or departmental level has been avoided as far as possible, partly to prevent the amount of information presented from getting out of hand and partly to keep the number of students in the various minority categories at a statistically viable level. More detailed analysis of specific faculties, departments or even programmes might be of interest if directed towards areas that this general report has highlighted, although one would have to bear in mind that only small numbers of PGT students fail to complete their studies and there would be little statistical validity in drilling down beyond College level in many cases.
3. The paper confirms several of the trends that were outlined in previous reports; although given that several of these conclusions are arrived at by looking at 5 cohorts collated, this is probably not surprising given that many of the students analysed in each report are the same. The limitations of looking at PGT students are also exposed in that the only consistent measure of students' performance is to look at final outcomes. Analysis of withdrawals can be misleading, firstly because far fewer PGT students withdraw compared to students on UG programmes, and also because a vast majority do so without recording a particularly informative leave reason recorded on the student record system. Graphs have been drawn omitting these unknown leave reasons, but it must be appreciated that, as a result, they represent significantly fewer than 100 students in many cases.
4. There is once again little or no evidence of any inequalities among students with disabilities or among mature entrants (especially given the relatively small number of such students in the typical intake anyway); this is in line with conclusions drawn in previous years. There are also virtually no inequalities visible between male and female students (the former are

slightly more likely to be awarded Distinctions and slightly more likely to withdraw), certainly fewer than are found at undergraduate level.

5. There is, however, evidence of a performance gap between white and non-white PGT students- the latter are both significantly more likely to fail to complete their programme and also, even if they don't withdraw, to be awarded a bare Pass rather than a Merit or Distinction. Although over all students this performance gap has narrowed somewhat over the past few years, the situation is of concern when examining just UK-domiciled students. Here there should be fewer problems of language and cultural adjustment, but yet white students are half as likely to withdraw and half again as likely to be awarded a Merit or Distinction. Non-white students who withdraw are also significantly more likely than their white peers to have done so owing to failure. This situation, which is mirrored at undergraduate level, is clearly a significant area of concern for College.
6. Students from outside the UK (in particular those originating from outside the EU) tend to perform worse, being slightly more likely to withdraw and much less likely to achieve an outcome better than Pass. Although this is not directly an equal opportunities issue, a large proportion of these students are non-white, all pay high levels of fees and many are concentrated on a small number of programmes in a restricted range of departments in College.

#### **Introduction and methodology**

7. This paper, like its predecessors (CBEEC/07/48, CBEEC/08/09, CBEEC/09/09 and CBEEC/10/08) draws together information on student population and achievement gathered using the data set used in the Annual Review of taught Postgraduate programmes which covers the most recent 5 completed cohorts of students (in this case, those enrolling between 2005 and 2009). It examines trends related to ethnicity, gender, disability and age on entry: factors which are, or will be, implicated in Equal Opportunities legislation. The effect of student domicile is also considered, since this is a factor related to some of the above. Admissions are beyond the scope of this paper since data on applicants' ethnicity, disability *etc* are not freely available- however, the College's PGT population year on year can be examined for possible trends in admissions.
8. For clarity, note that this report analyses postgraduate students studying at Masters level only. Thus, students on Graduate Diploma programmes are omitted since these programmes are at final year undergraduate level, even though the students themselves may be postgraduates. Similarly, students on undergraduate MSci programmes are omitted even though the final year of these degrees are at Masters level. Students on MA/MMus/MBA/MSc programmes are all included, as are those studying for Postgraduate Diploma or Certificate degrees. Students studying on CAPITAL or InsTIL, or at the University of London Institute in Paris have been omitted for convenience; as have students who studied the PGDip Asian Art since this programme has now been transferred to another institution. As with the similar papers on undergraduate student performance, head-counts are used rather than FTEs. Lastly note that, as with the undergraduate student analysis, students are grouped by *entry cohort*.
9. Since PGT programmes are, virtually without exception, single-stage, analysis of performance focuses on the outcome achieved by students at the end of their study and, to a lesser extent on analysis of the recorded reason for withdrawal for students who fail to complete (*ie* whether they failed or left for other reasons). No attempt has been made to identify Part-Time students in the data set, although this is a possible area where the study might be expanded in future.

Also note that, in the current data set, there is no record of number of attempts made by students to pass their programme. With the recent pilot of Autumn resits of taught courses in the School of Management, this is an area into which this study could expand in future.

### **Benchmark student achievement data**

10. Figs. 1a and b show recorded outcomes for PGT students by entry cohort. Note the large number of Incomplete students in the 2008 and (particularly) 2009 cohorts. These students are a mixture of those studying Part-time, those who interrupted their studies, those who failed one or more courses and need to resit or resubmit, and those studying programmes which span more than one academic year (*eg* MSc Social Work, PGDip Cognitive Behavioural Therapy). Because of this, it may be more informative to ignore these students (Fig. 1b). There is a fairly consistent pattern of *ca* 15 % of students being awarded a Distinction, 20 % Merit and 7-10 % withdrawing. Note that the latter figure is apparently rather lower in the 2009 cohort; this may be because a higher percentage of Incomplete students tend to withdraw eventually (because they may interrupt and not return or because they have failed one or more courses at the first attempt). Results in the most recent two years have shown some improvement over previous cohorts, with slightly fewer students withdrawing and more students gaining an award better than a Pass.
11. Outcomes by cohort and Faculty are displayed in Fig. 1c (again omitting Incomplete students). As has been noted in previous years, students in HSS are marginally more likely to withdraw than those in other faculties but are significantly less likely to gain a Merit or Distinction- around 65 % of entrants are awarded a Pass (compared with less than one half in Arts and Science). There is some evidence that this results from the number of students in HSS who need to resit one or more elements of their programme (and therefore not normally be eligible for anything higher than Pass)- certainly a disproportionate number of students take more than one year to complete a single year programme in HSS. The situation may be exacerbated by the fact that many PGT programmes in the School of Management (by far the largest department in the Faculty at Postgraduate level) have a large number of individual course units- students generally need to pass all of these at the first attempt to be awarded a Distinction. Unfortunately, data on the number of attempts made by PGT students are not available so this statement cannot be properly quantified.
12. Fig. 2 shows grouped withdrawal reasons by cohort. One may immediately see that by far the most common reason recorded is a group called “Other” (which mainly consists of students who were “Written off After Time”). The proportion of students who fail is relatively low, although it did rise above 30 % in the 2006 and 2007 cohorts (note that this still represents fewer than 40 students per year- only *ca* 3 % of PGT entrants actually fail). The figure fell again in 2008; although there are still more than 50 students Incomplete in this year and it is not clear what the final total of academic failures will be.

### **The PGT population**

13. Figures 3 to 7 break down PGT entrants by cohort into the various categories that will be examined in this paper. Figs. 3a and b displays students by their fee-region (*ie* UK, Other EU or Overseas)- the former displaying raw numbers rather than percentages. The proportion of non-EU students has hovered just below  $\frac{1}{2}$  for the past 4 years, with a large majority of the remainder coming from the UK. A large jump in overall PGT numbers in the 2009 intake can clearly be seen in Fig. 3a, although the overall balance did not change. Fig. 3c additionally shows fee-region by faculty- here there has been a slight increase in the proportion of overseas

students in HSS over the past 5 years as well as a sudden drop (coupled with a consequent rise in the number of UK entrants) in Science in 2009.

14. Fig. 4a breaks down the student intake by declared ethnicity (as with the analysis of Undergraduate students, “White” refers to White, White- British, Irish, Welsh or Scottish and Other White Background; “Unknown/Refused” groups all students whose ethnic origin is not recorded; and all other students are designated “Non-White”). Note the significant proportion of students in 2009 who refused to declare their ethnic origin- the reason for this is unknown and it is also worth noting that 2/3 of these students come from outside the EU. This may slightly skew any analysis of this cohort since, generally, students failing to declare their ethnicity are omitted for clarity’s sake. The PGT intake generally hovers at around 50:50 white:non-white, more often than not with the latter in the majority.
15. Fig. 4b further breaks down these data by fee-region, showing that overseas entrants are mainly non-white, EU entrants almost exclusively white and home students around ¾ from white backgrounds (this figure is slightly higher than that at Undergraduate level, but still comparable). Fig. 4c instead locates students by ethnic origin and faculty and there are no real surprises, given that this figure is essentially a direct consequence of Figs. 3c and 4b- the drop in non-UK entrants in Science over the past 3 cohorts has led to a drop in the proportion of non-white students for example.
16. Fig. 4d shows the actual number of students in each faculty in each cohort. Note the very big jump in the number of students in HSS in 2009, a large proportion of which was caused by the introduction of 3 new programmes in the School of Management which recruited *ca* 180 students between them. The number of students in Arts has remained remarkably steady over the past 5 years, but as a result of the expansion of the other two faculties, only 1/7 of PGT students in College now study an Arts programme.
17. Fig. 5a shows proportion of PGT entrants by gender. There are rather more year-to-year fluctuations than those seen at Undergraduate level, but generally speaking there are roughly equal numbers of students of each gender in each year (again a contrast to the UG population where females are in the majority by almost 3:2). There is not much difference in the gender balance by fee-region (Fig. 5b), apart from an unusually large proportion of male EU students in 2008 (note that this represents a relatively small number of students and is of no great significance). Fig. 5c shows students by gender and faculty- as at UG level, female students predominate in Arts and male in Science with HSS being more evenly split, although there are fluctuations from year to year.
18. Fig. 6a shows the proportion of ‘mature’ entrants by year of entry (using the HESA definition of 25 or over). This is stable in recent cohorts at a little under 40 %, although it was rather higher in earlier cohorts (almost 50 % in 2004). Figs. 6b and 6c display these data further broken down by faculty and fee-region- these figures clearly show that students in HSS and those from overseas are much more likely to be under 25 and the increasing preponderance of students from abroad and/or in HSS in recent cohorts would explain the previous observation.
19. Fig. 7a shows that only a very small percentage of PGT students declare themselves disabled (typically 5 % or lower), which is even lower than the number of Undergraduates who do so. Whether this is a ‘real’ effect, or whether PGT students with disabilities are less likely to declare themselves as there are fewer formal examinations at postgraduate level and therefore fewer occasions on which special examination arrangements will be required, is unclear. Fig.

7b shows which disabilities are declared, although the data should be treated with some degree of caution since the categories used by HESA have recently changed and earlier students have had to be 'mapped' onto the new options; this explains why 'Other disability' is rather more common in 2005-8 than it is in 2009. 40-50 % of students who are disabled are listed as having a Specific Learning Difficulty which is line with what is found among undergraduates. As has been noted in previous years, students from outside the UK are far less likely to be declared disabled (Table 1) and there is no obvious reason for this unless one assumes that disabled students are more likely to remain in their country of origin to study.

**Table 1:** Incidence of declared disability among PGT students by fee-region.

#### **Student achievement related to ethnicity**

20. Students' level of achievement by their declared ethnicity is represented in Fig. 8a; data for UK-domiciled students is displayed in Fig. 8b. Data omitting Incomplete students (who tend to distort the more recent cohorts) are shown in Figs. 8c and d. One important measure of performance is the rate of withdrawals, and in most cohorts in all 4 figures, non-white students are rather more likely to do so than their white counterparts (although the difference is significantly less than that found at undergraduate level). If one ignores students yet to complete (Fig. 8c) then it appears that the gap in the percentage of withdrawals has narrowed significantly over the past 2-3 years. This is clearly encouraging; however the picture among UK-domiciled students is not so healthy with non-white students being twice as likely to withdraw as their white peers in both the 2008 and 2009 cohorts. Note, however, that the number of withdrawals in each group is only between 10 and 20 per cohort so it would be unwise to attach too much significance to this observation
21. A further measure of achievement is to look at what percentage of students is awarded a Merit or Distinction. Here there is a clear difference between white and non-white students in all four figures. Typically up to 50-60 % of white students gain an outcome better than a simple Pass whereas, even among those living in the UK, only 40 % or less of non-white students do so. Examine for example, the performance of the 2009 cohort in Fig. 8d (although bear in mind that *ca* 40 % of students in this cohort are Incomplete still) or the 2007 cohort in Fig. 8c.

22. This performance gap can of course be explained in terms other than bias or prejudice. For instance, a large proportion of ethnic minority PGT students originate from outside the EU and there may be problems of language, cultural adjustment or the simple fact of studying so far from home. Many UK-based ethnic minority students may well come from homes in which English is not the first language. Also, no account can be taken of prior achievement (although this is perhaps less of an issue than it might be at undergraduate level).
23. Figs. 9a and b show achievement by declared ethnicity and Faculty for UK and overseas students (other EU students were omitted since there are too few to allow valid conclusions to be drawn). All 5 cohorts have been combined to ensure there are enough students in all the groups (although there are still rather too few white overseas students for comfort). Withdrawal rates are similar across all 6 pairs of students except for UK residents in Science where non-white students are 3 times as likely to withdraw as white students (and a lot of these students have actually failed rather than leaving for other reasons). The other main difference is that non-white students in HSS are much less likely to achieve at a higher grade than a Pass (and this applies to students originating from the UK and for those from outside the EU).
24. Having seen that, among certain groups, non-white students are more likely to withdraw, recorded withdrawal reasons are analysed in Figs. 10a and b (the latter concentrating solely on UK students). “Unknown” withdrawals have been omitted as these tend to swamp the others (*vide supra*). Rather worryingly, under these conditions, non-white students are 2-3 times as likely to have withdrawn owing to failure as are white students. Although the numbers of students withdrawing is not huge at PGT level, these figures (combining as they do, 5 cohorts) do still represent significant numbers of students. For instance, Fig. 10a represents academic failures by 9 white students and 92 non-white (although the equivalent values for Fig. 10b are only 5 and 16). The large number of students from ethnic minorities who fail is worrying, although since they mainly come from overseas, this may not directly be an issue of ethnic origin. Achievement by student origin is discussed below.

#### **Student achievement related to domicile**

25. Fig. 11a shows student achievement by fee-region and cohort (and the same data is presented in Fig. 11b omitting Incomplete students). As there are so few EU students per cohort, it is of most use to compare UK students with those from overseas. Of immediate note is that withdrawal rates are very similar for UK and overseas students in all cohorts (and EU students are actually less likely to withdraw than home students). However, non-EU students are significantly less likely to be awarded a Merit or Distinction (this is easiest to see in Fig. 11b) than are home students. This may well be due to the effects of resitting one or more course units (already discussed above) precluding students from gaining a higher grade.
26. Figs. 11c and d (omitting Incompletes) additionally break the data down by faculty (combining all 5 cohorts to ensure a reasonable number of students in each group). HSS shows trends very similar to that at College level, but this is scarcely surprising given the number of overseas students in that faculty.
27. Recorded reasons for withdrawal are shown in Fig. 12 (once again omitting those that are unknown). In order to ensure sufficient students, 5 cohorts have had to be collated which means that there is little chance of tracking trends over time. As has already been intimated above, overseas students who withdraw are much more likely to have done so owing to failure than are home students (once again, for information, note that this figure contains 22 UK students who failed and 79 from overseas).

### **Student achievement related to gender**

28. Fig.13a analyses outcomes by gender and cohort (and equivalent data without Incomplete students is shown in Fig. 13b). Cohort by cohort, there are not many differences in the two sets of profiles, although there is a slight tendency for male students to be more likely to withdraw. There seems little of concern in relation to male/female equal opportunities in these data.
29. In relation to the withdrawal rates we can see (Fig. 14) that, although male students are slightly more likely to fail to complete their programme than are their female peers, they are less likely to withdraw owing to failure (and a lot more likely to have done so owing to exclusion for debt). The gap is not massive given how few PGT students withdraw for non-unknown reasons so this observation is probably not a matter for immediate concern.

### **Student achievement related to age on entry**

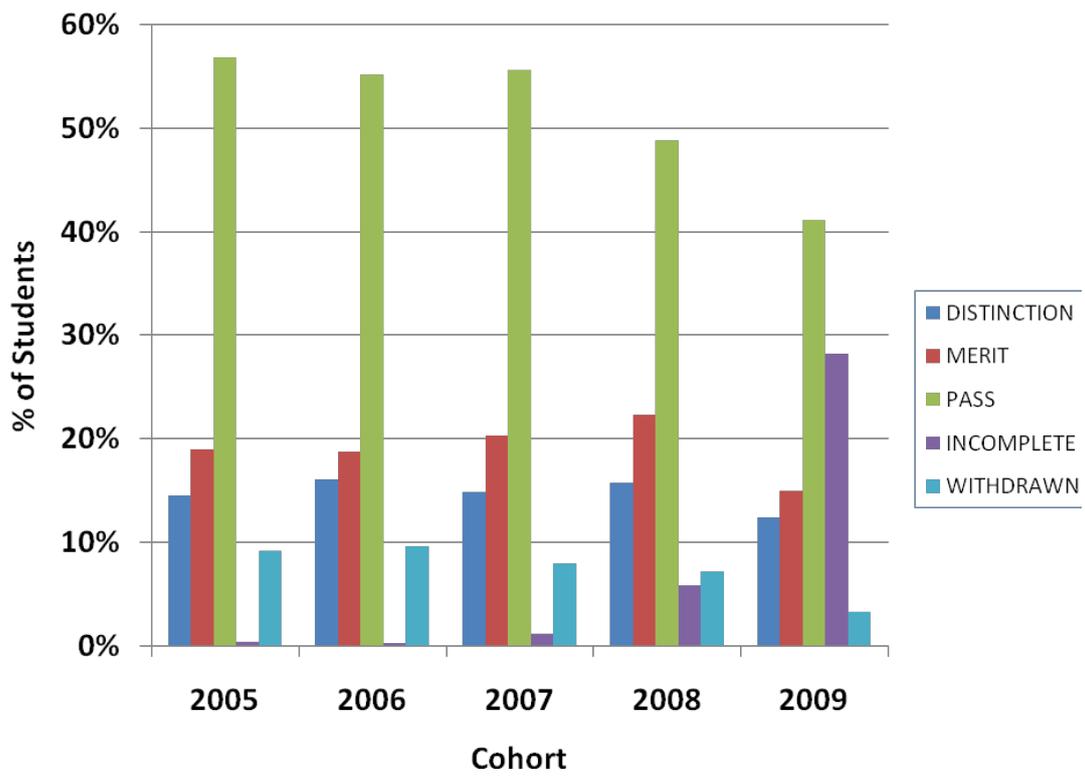
30. Achievement by age on entry is shown in Figs. 15a and b (the latter once more omitting students yet to complete their study). In recent cohorts, mature students are far more likely to be Incomplete than 'young' entrants, but it is assumed that such students are more likely to be studying part-time (and also the MSc Social Work which lasts for 2 years also attracts a fairly high number of mature students). Examining completed students only, mature entrants are rather more likely to withdraw (up to twice as likely in fact), but those that complete successfully are significantly more likely to be awarded Merit or Distinction. All of these observations are consistent with what was noted at undergraduate level.
31. Fig. 16 analyses withdrawal reasons (again omitting those who left without a reason being recorded) and shows that mature entrants are slightly less likely to have withdrawn owing to academic failure than 'young' entrants; although the shortfall is made up in exclusions for financial debt. As has been shown above, mature students are least likely to come from overseas or study in HSS (where there are most academic failures) so this is not wholly surprising.

### **Student achievement related to declared disability**

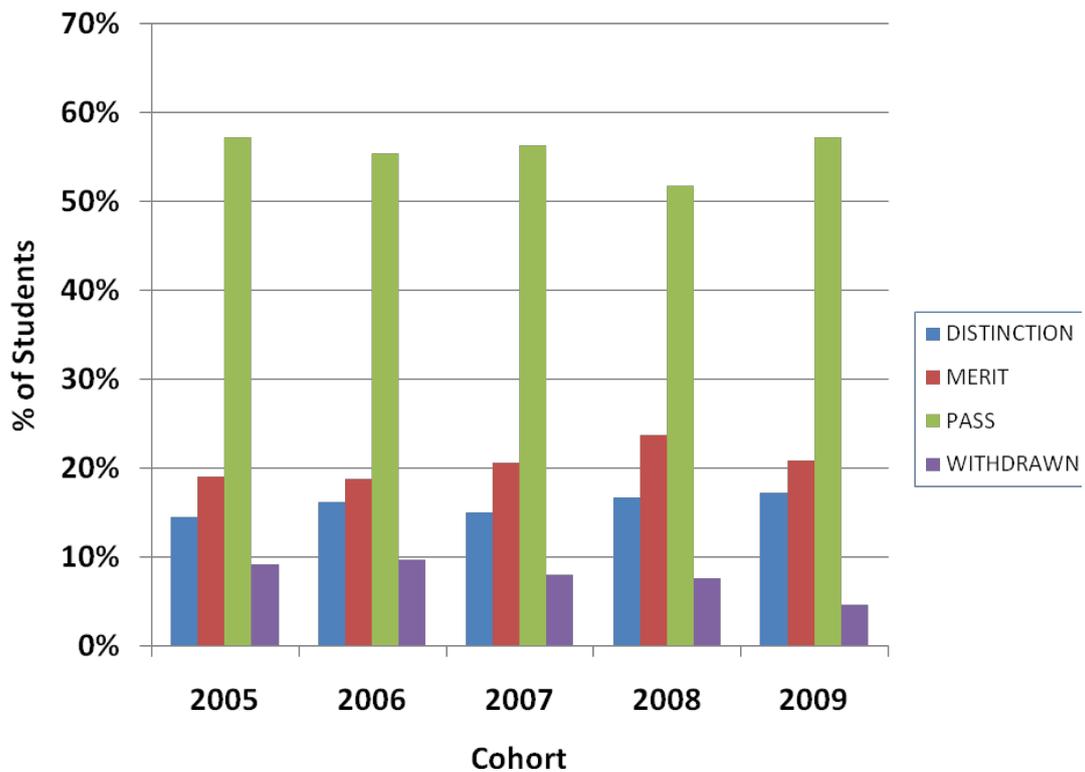
32. As there are so few disabled PGT students, all 5 cohorts have been combined when comparing levels of achievement (Figs. 17a and b). There is no great difference in the two sets of profiles and as there are so few withdrawals of disabled students, a comparison of recorded leave reasons would be almost totally meaningless.

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16 February 2011

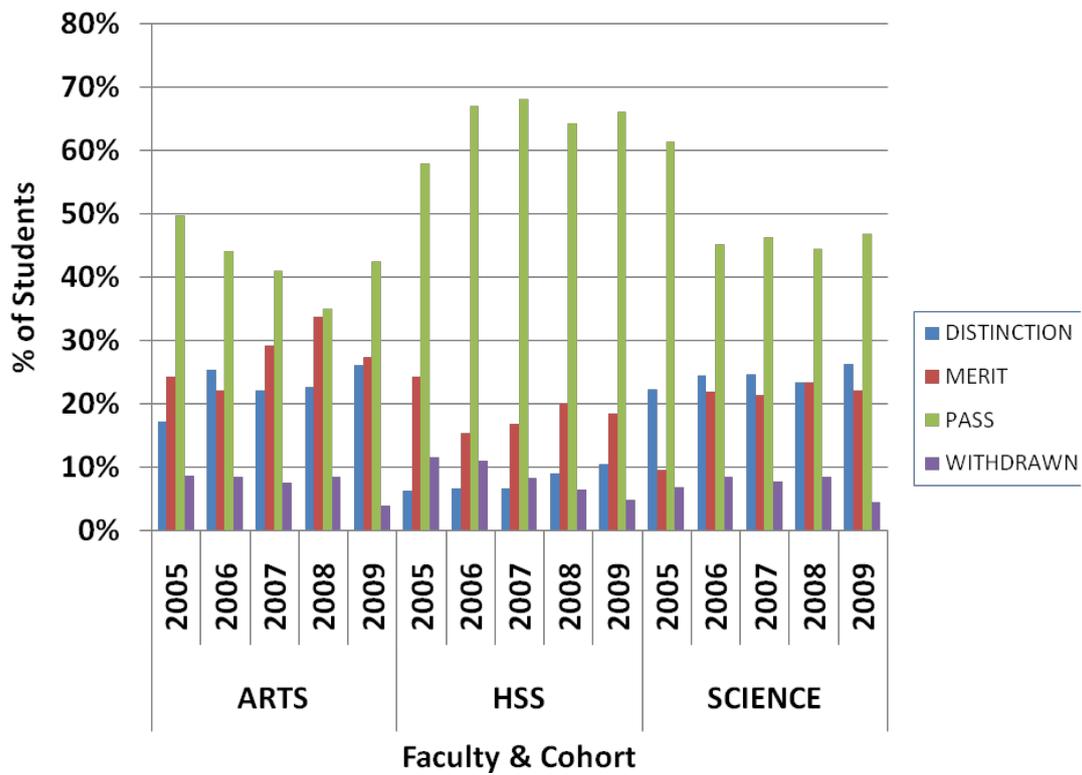
## Figures



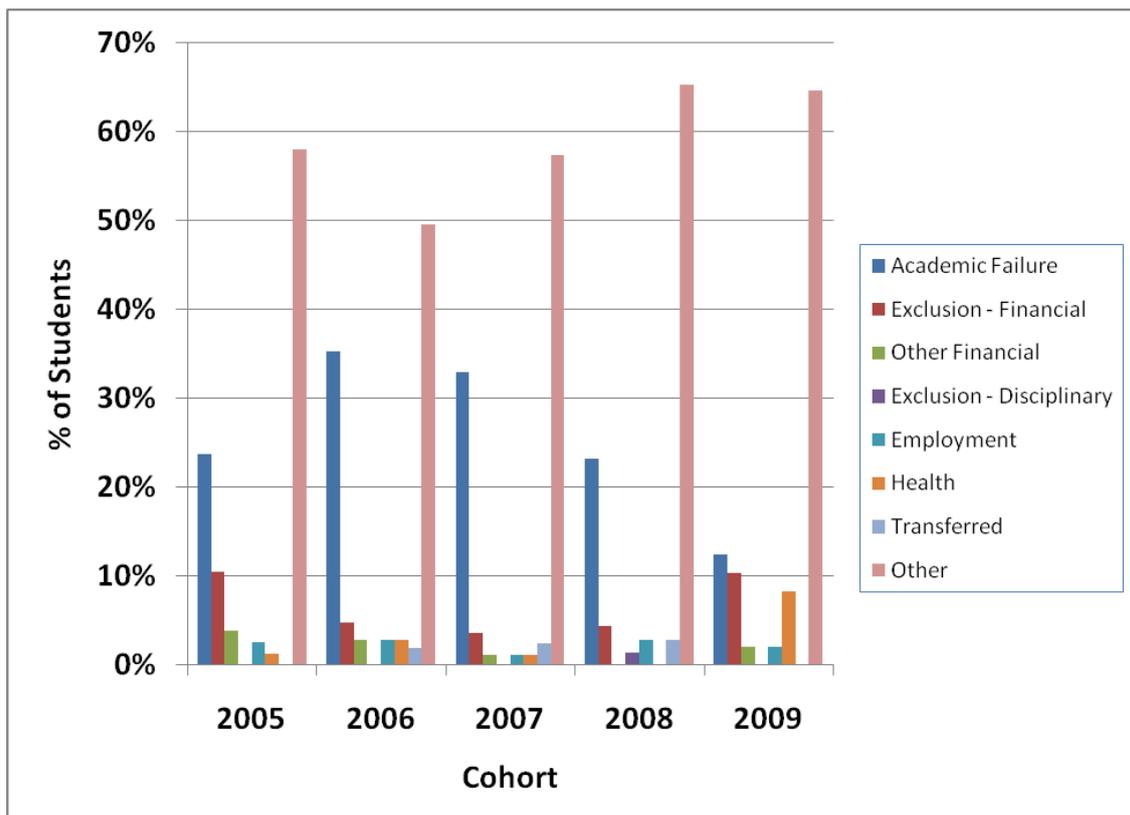
**Fig. 1a:** Outcomes for PGT students by cohort, 2005-9.



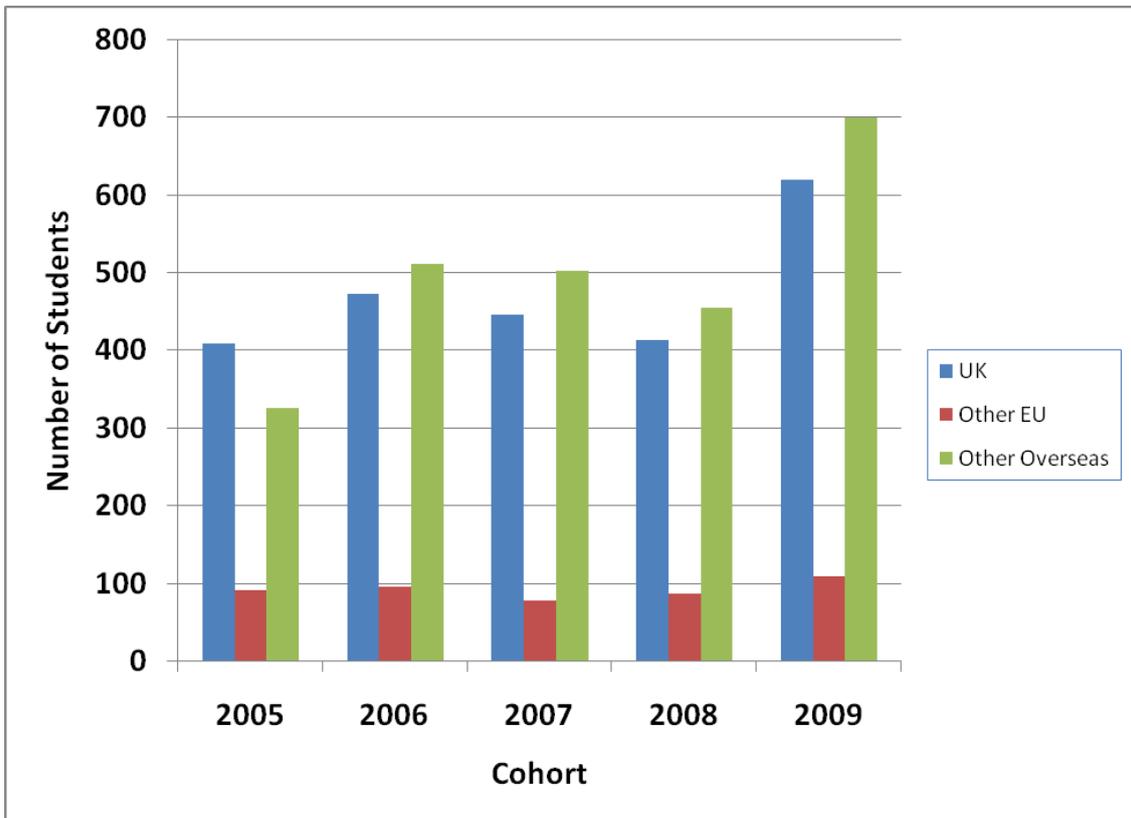
**Fig. 1b:** Outcomes for PGT students by cohort, 2005-9 expressed as a percentage of *complete* students in the cohort.



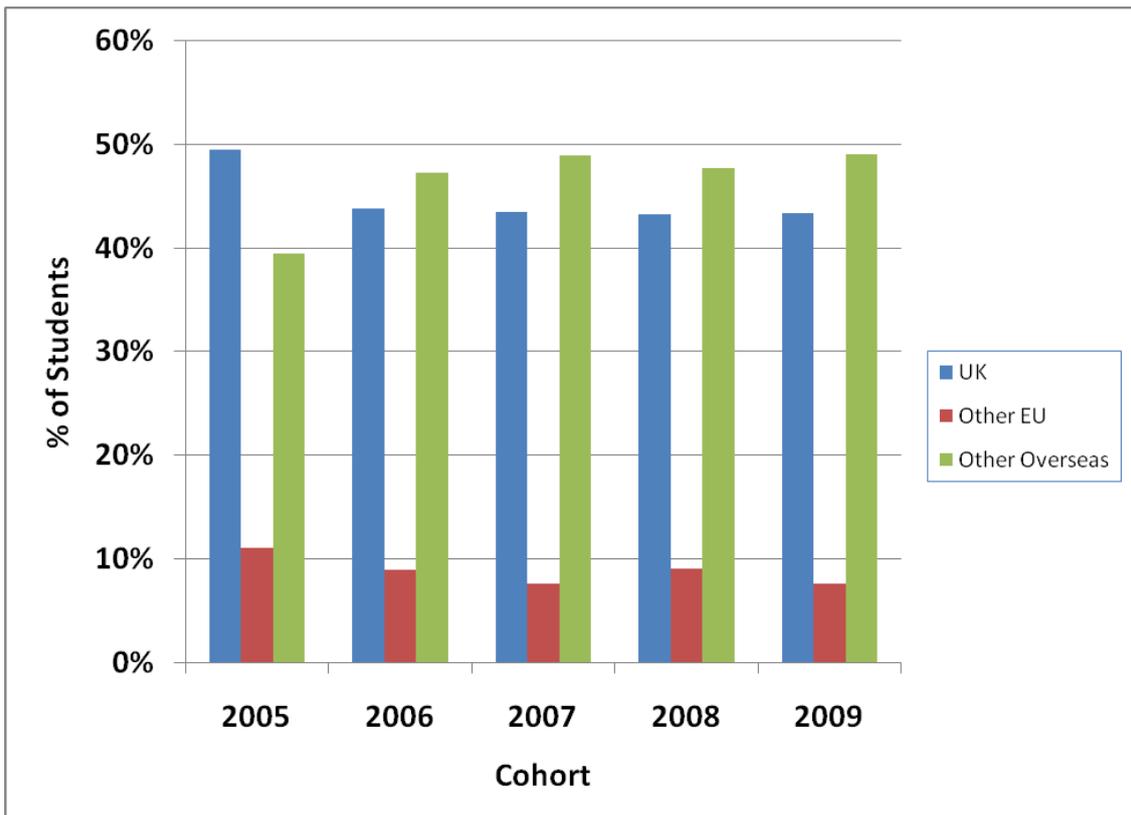
**Fig. 1c:** Outcomes for PGT students by faculty and cohort, 2005-9 expressed as a percentage of *complete* students in the cohort.



**Fig. 2:** Withdrawal reasons, expressed as a percentage of PGT students who failed to complete their programme, by cohort 2005-9.



**Fig. 3a:** Fee-region of PGT students by cohort, 2005-9.



**Fig. 3b:** Fee-region of PGT students by cohort, 2005-9, expressed as a percentage of students in the cohort.

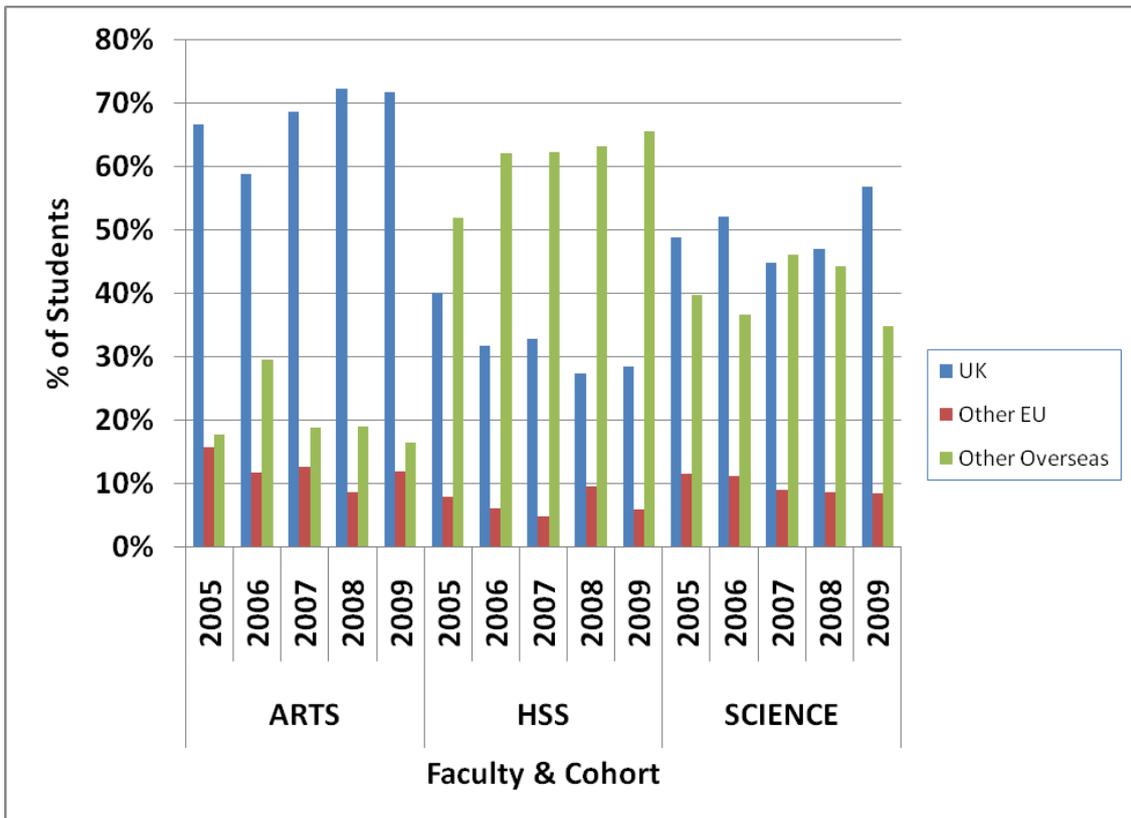


Fig. 3c: Fee-region of PGT students by faculty and cohort, 2005-9.

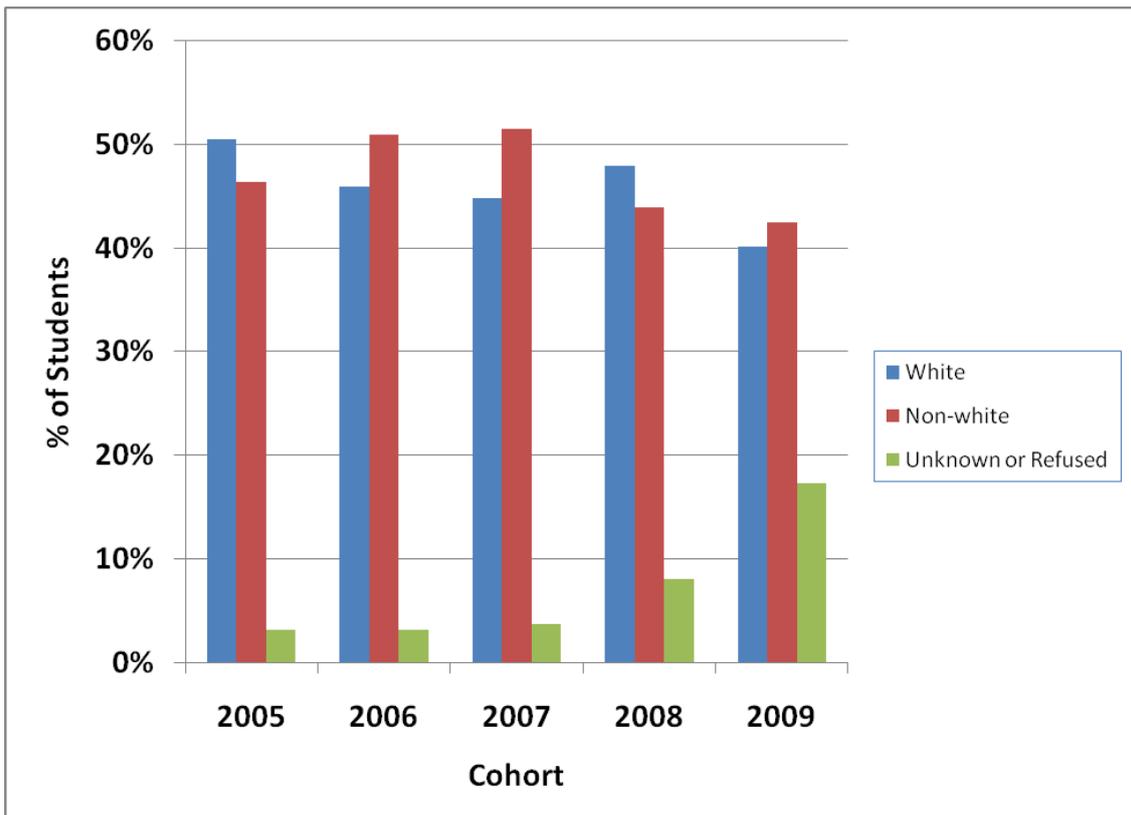
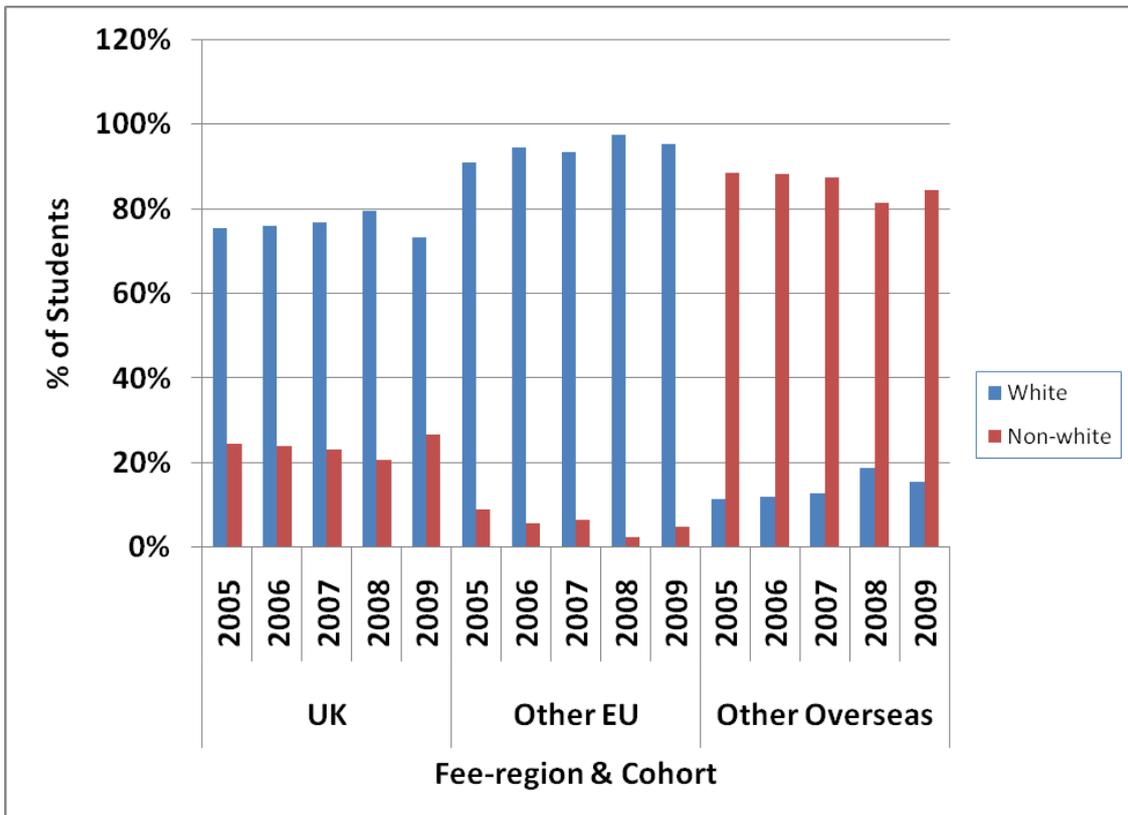
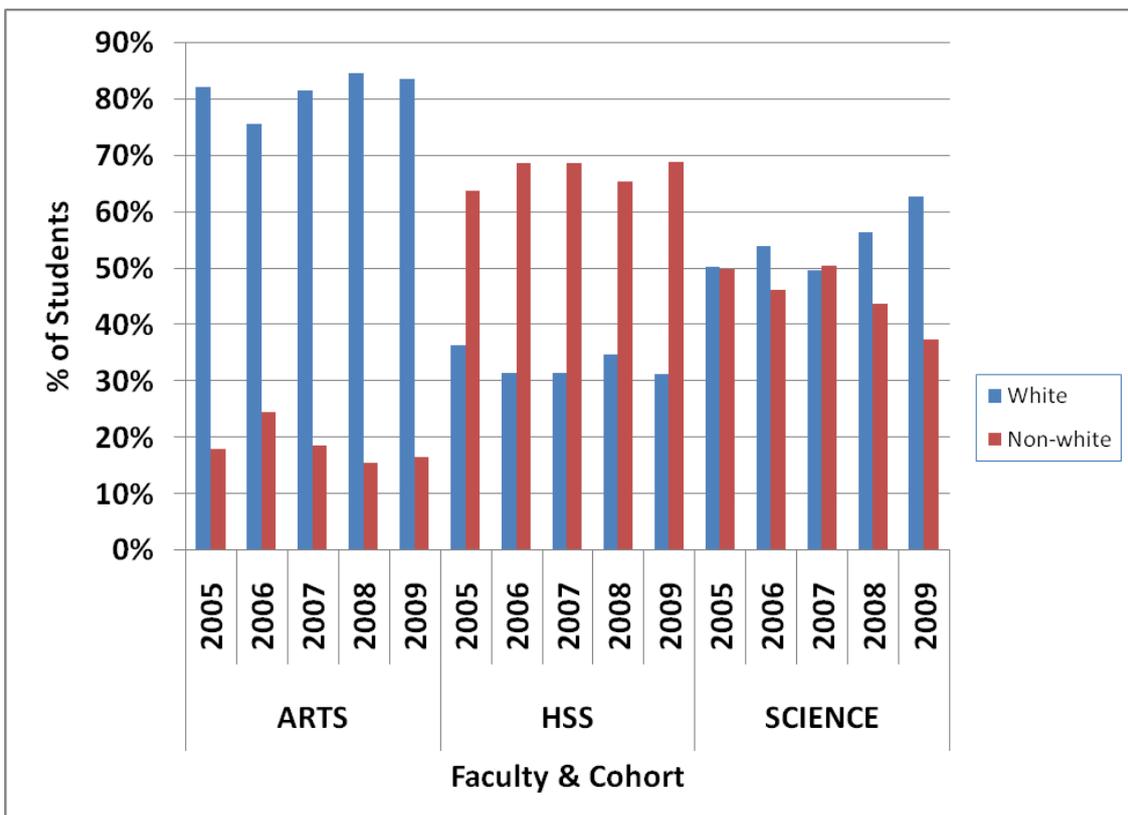


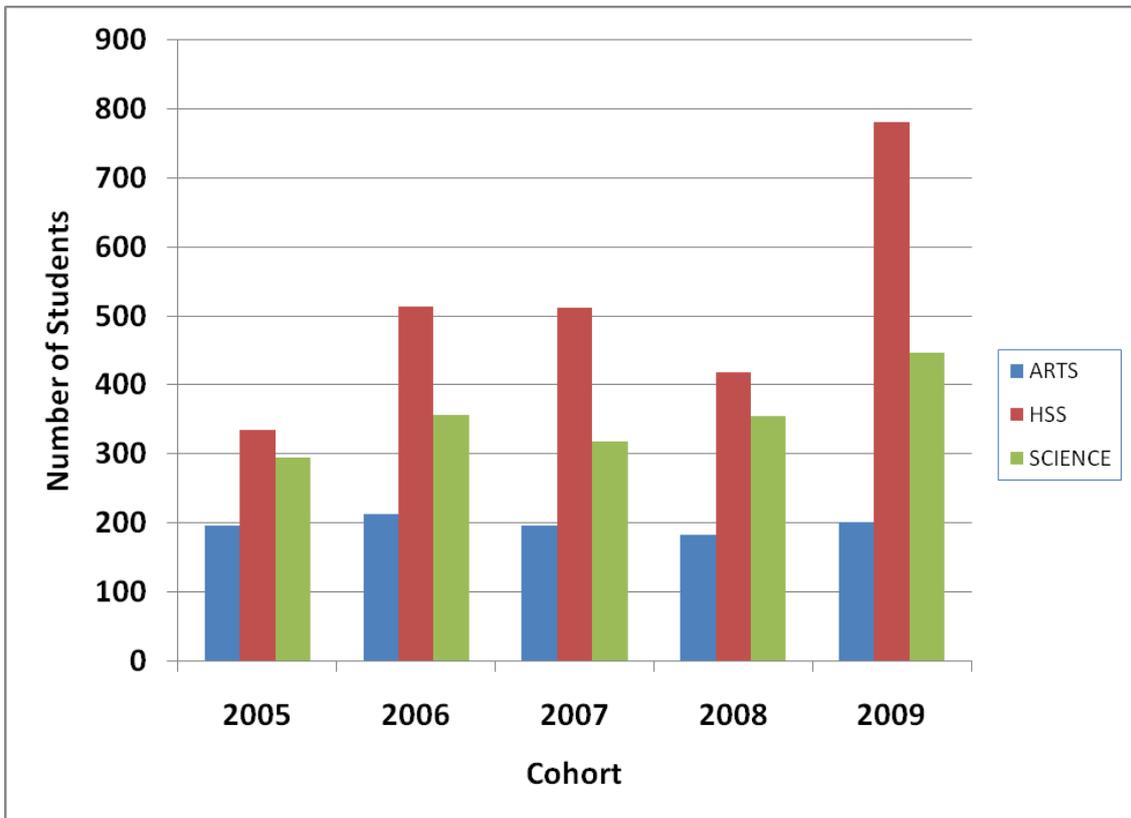
Fig. 4a: Declared ethnicity of PGT students by cohort, 2005-9.



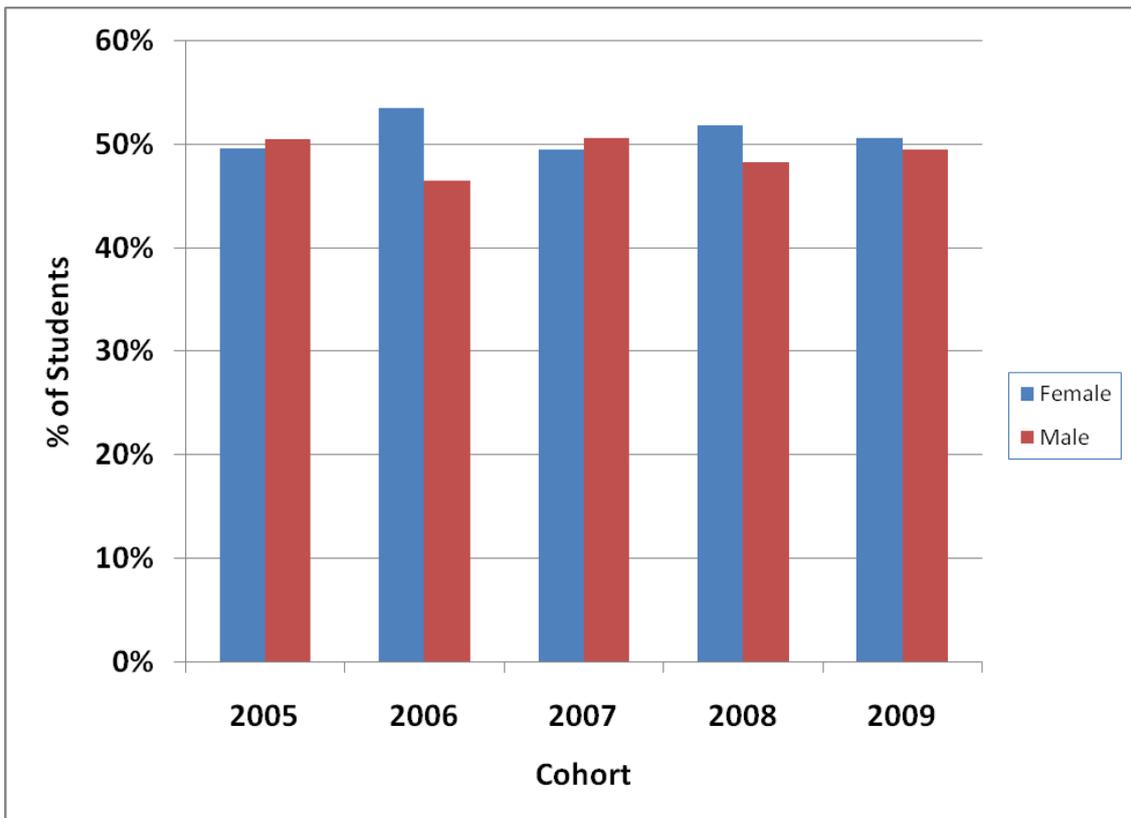
**Fig. 4b:** Ethnicity of PGT entrants by fee-region and cohort, 2005-9. Students who failed to declare their ethnicity are excluded.



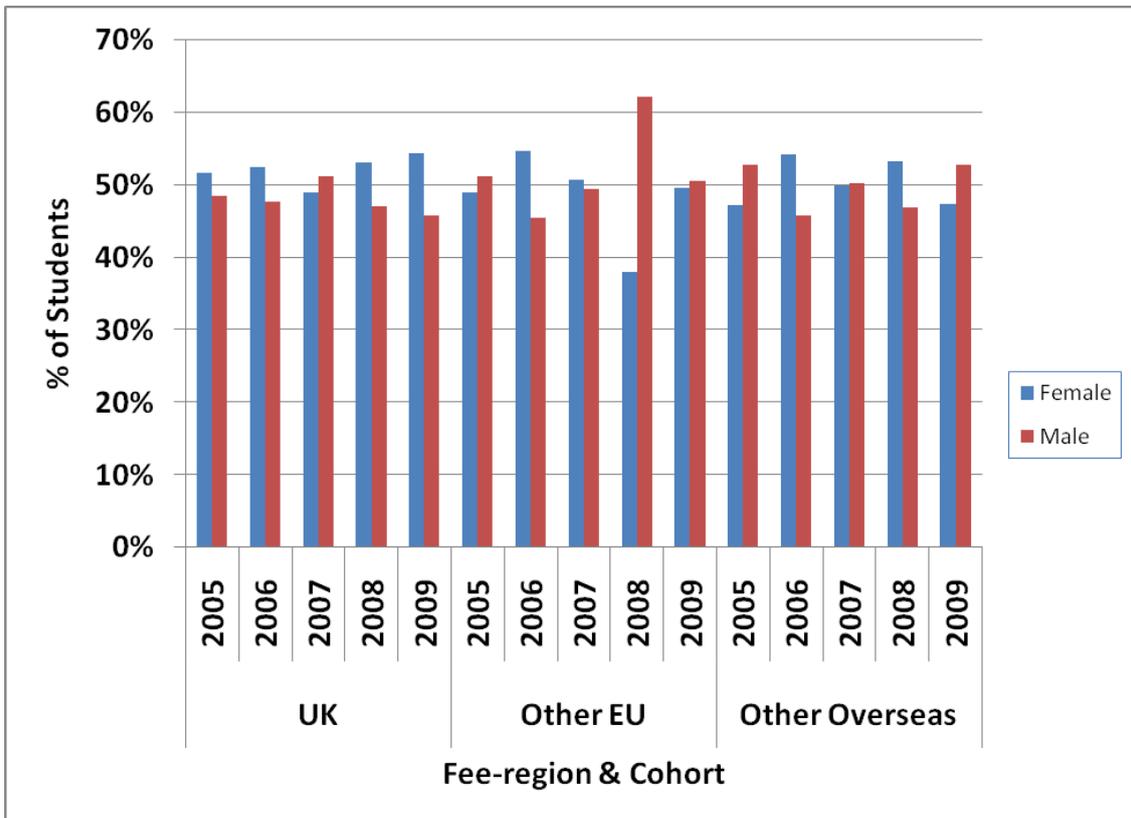
**Fig. 4c:** Ethnicity of PGT entrants by faculty and cohort, 2005-9. Students who failed to declare their ethnicity are excluded.



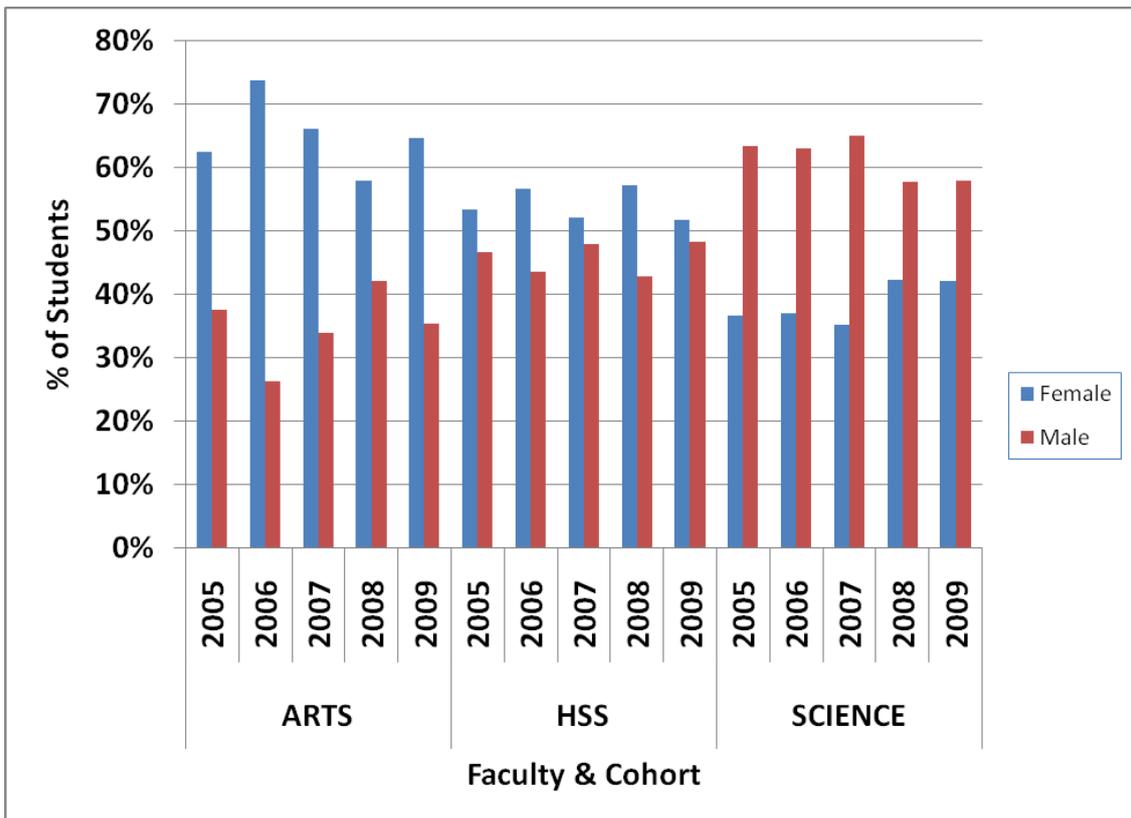
**Fig. 4d:** Number of students in each faculty by cohort, 2005-9.



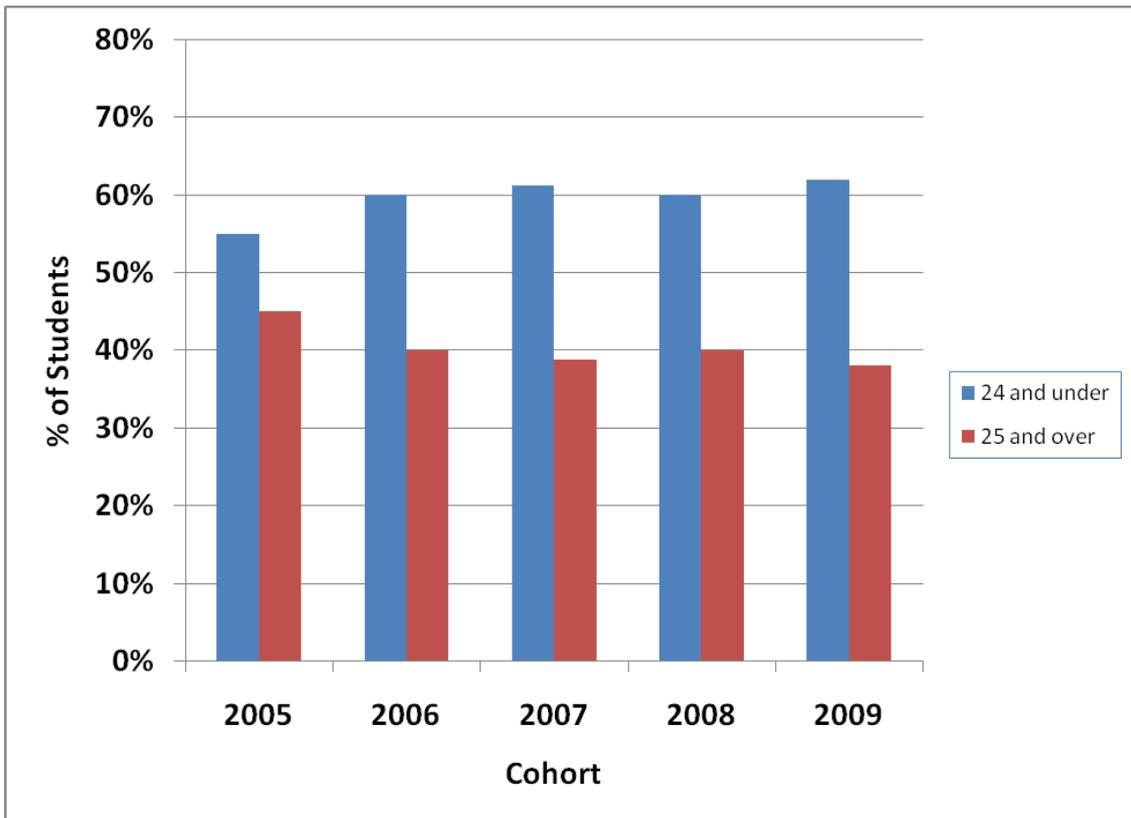
**Fig. 5a:** Gender of PGT entrants by cohort, 2005-9.



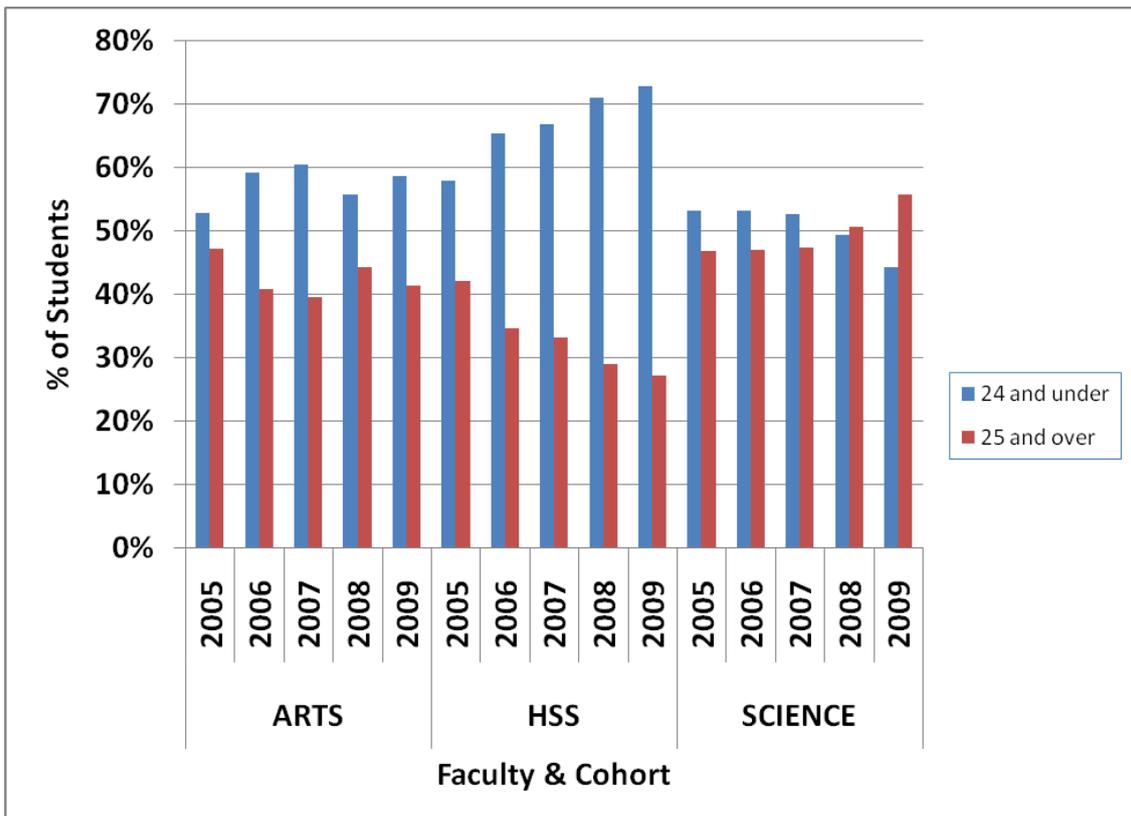
**Fig. 5b:** Gender of PGT entrants by fee-region and cohort, 2005-9.



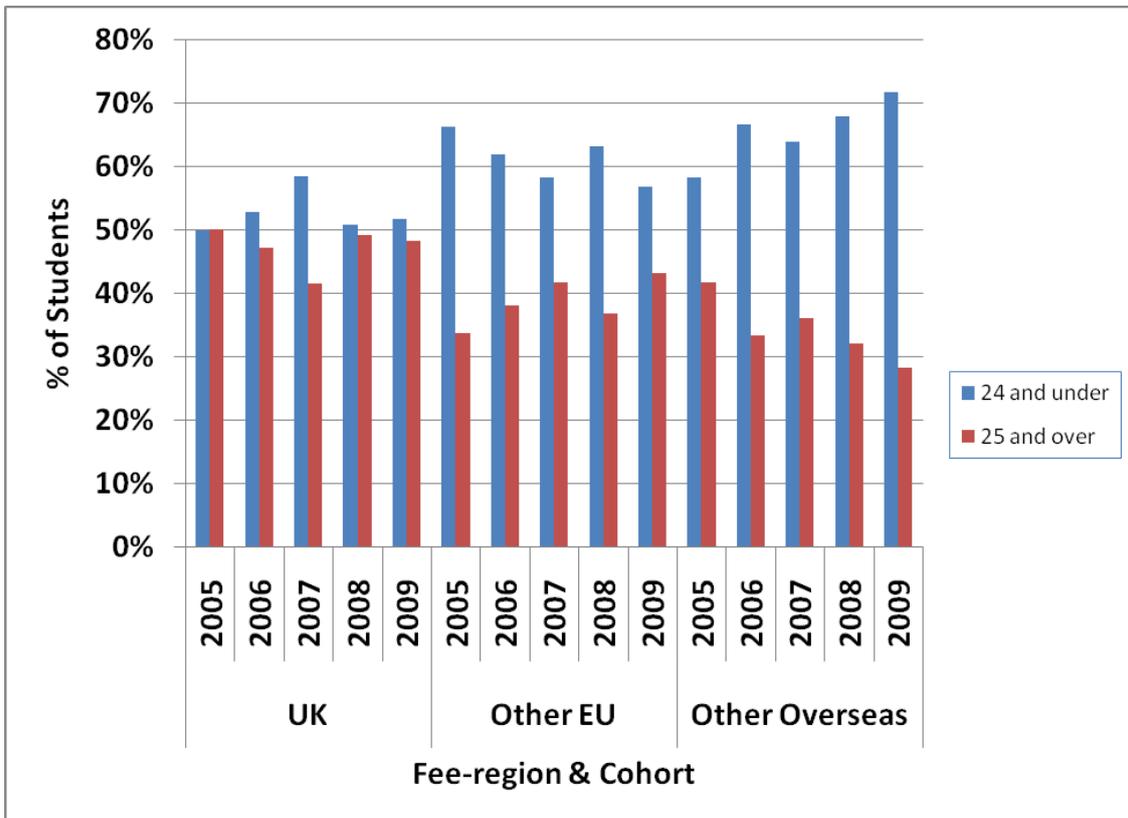
**Fig. 5c:** Gender of PGT entrants by faculty and cohort, 2005-9.



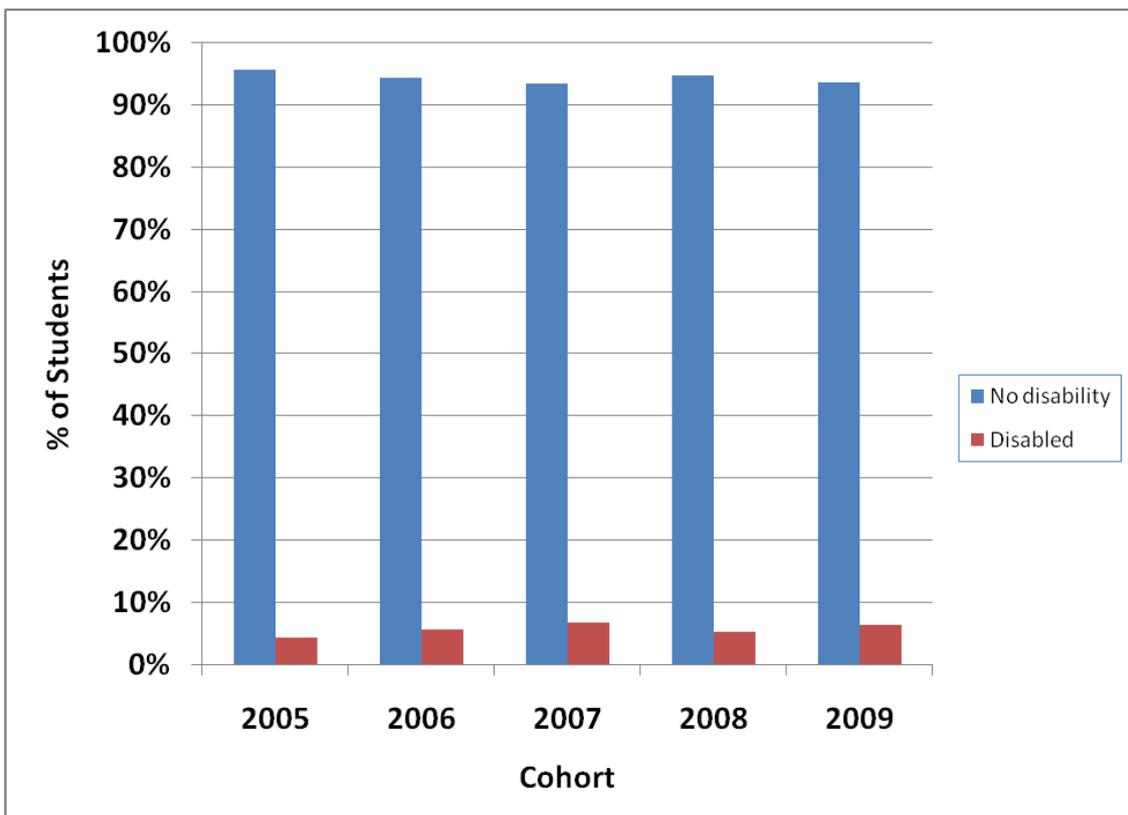
**Fig. 6a:** Percentage of PGT entrants under and over the age of 25 by cohort, 2005-9.



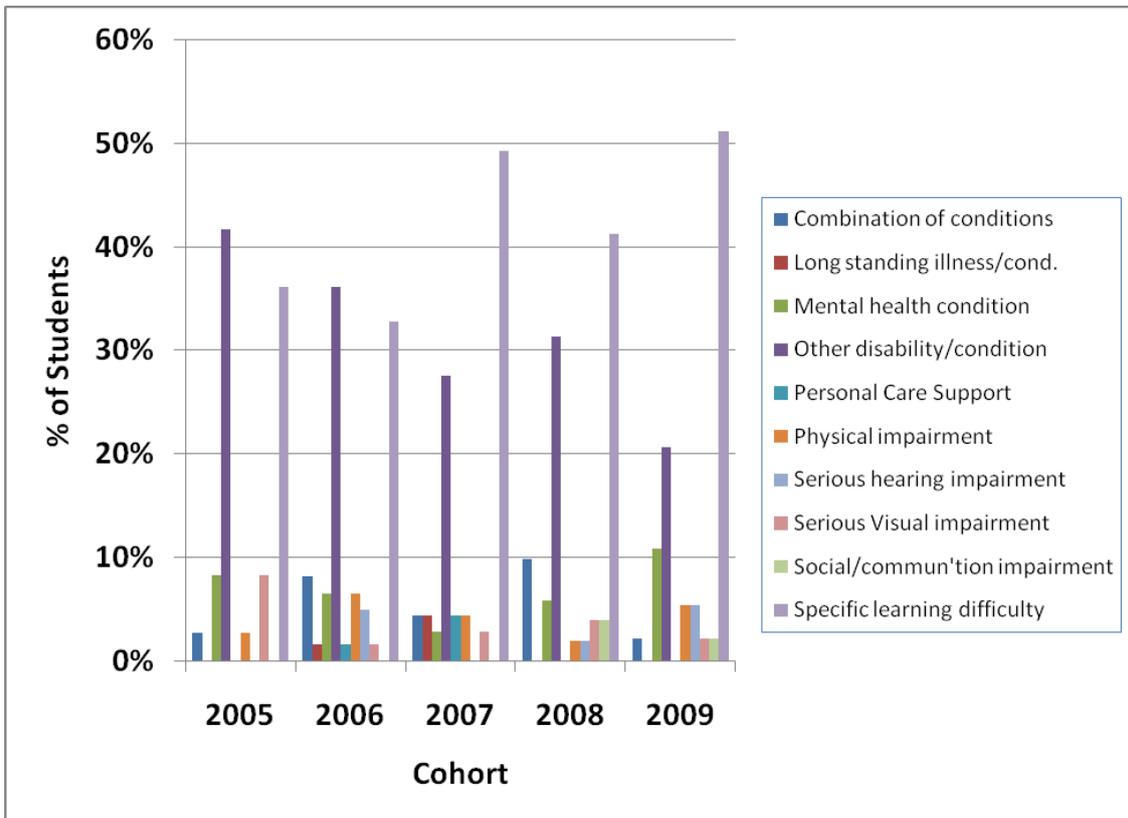
**Fig. 6b:** Percentage of PGT entrants under and over the age of 25 by faculty and cohort, 2005-9.



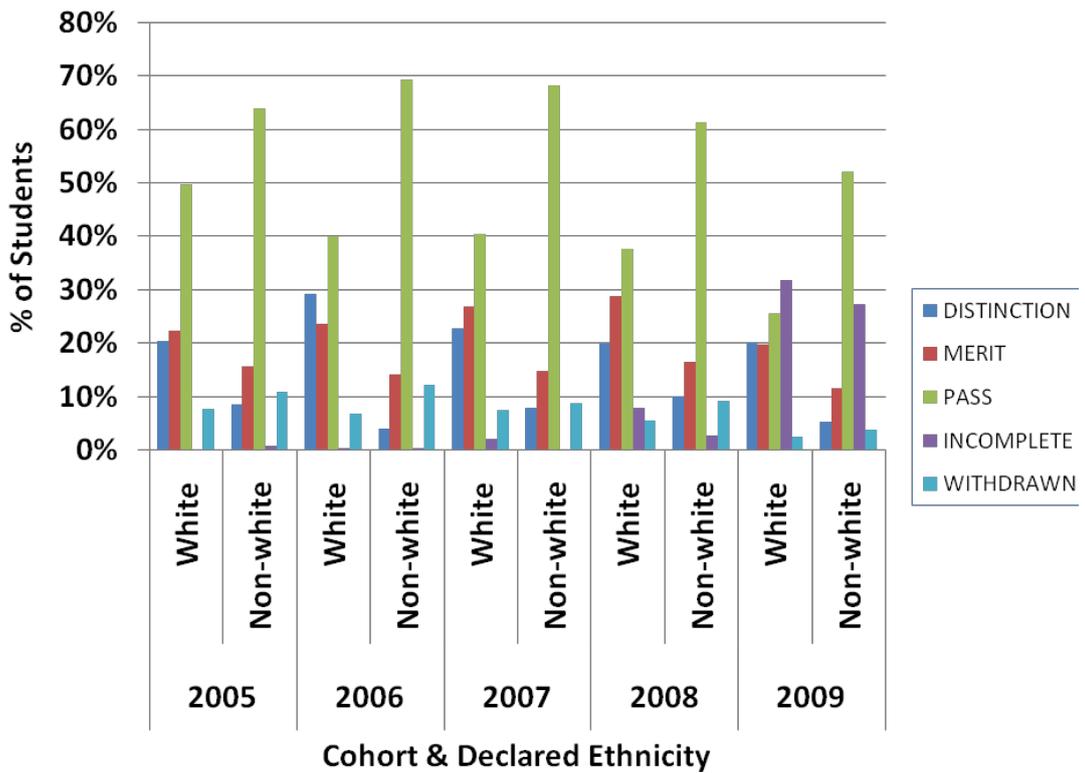
**Fig. 6c:** Percentage of PGT entrants under and over the age of 25 by fee-region and cohort, 2005-9.



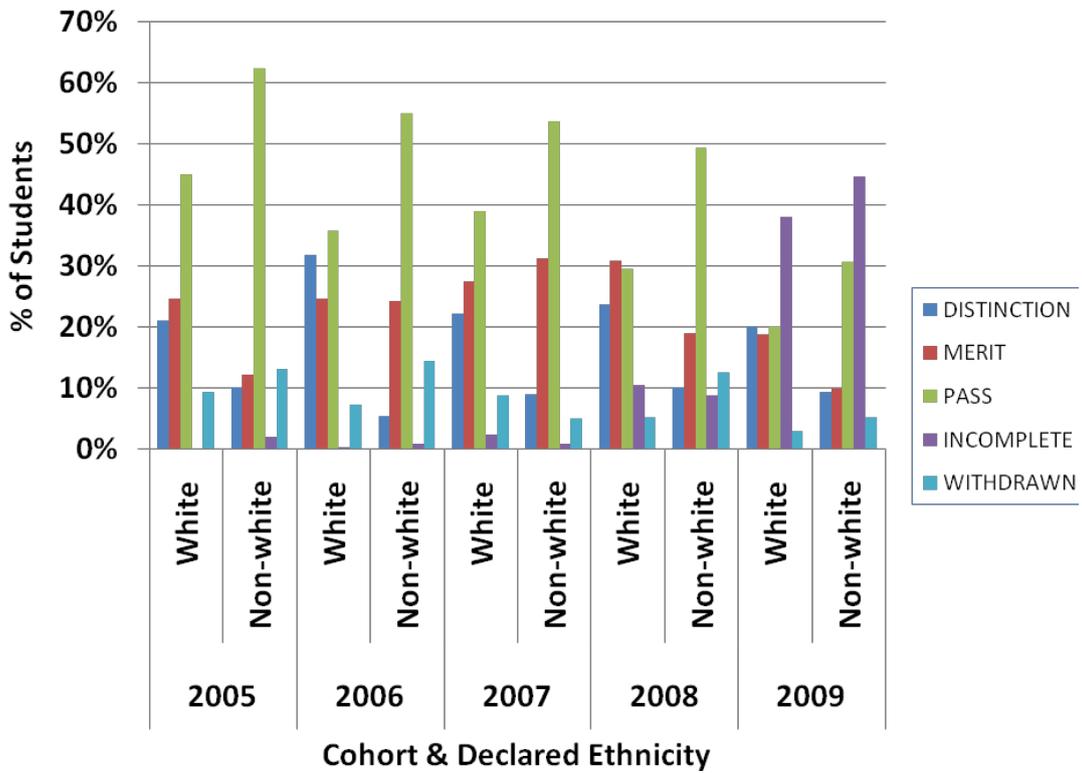
**Fig. 7a:** Percentage of PGT entrants declaring themselves disabled by cohort, 2005-9.



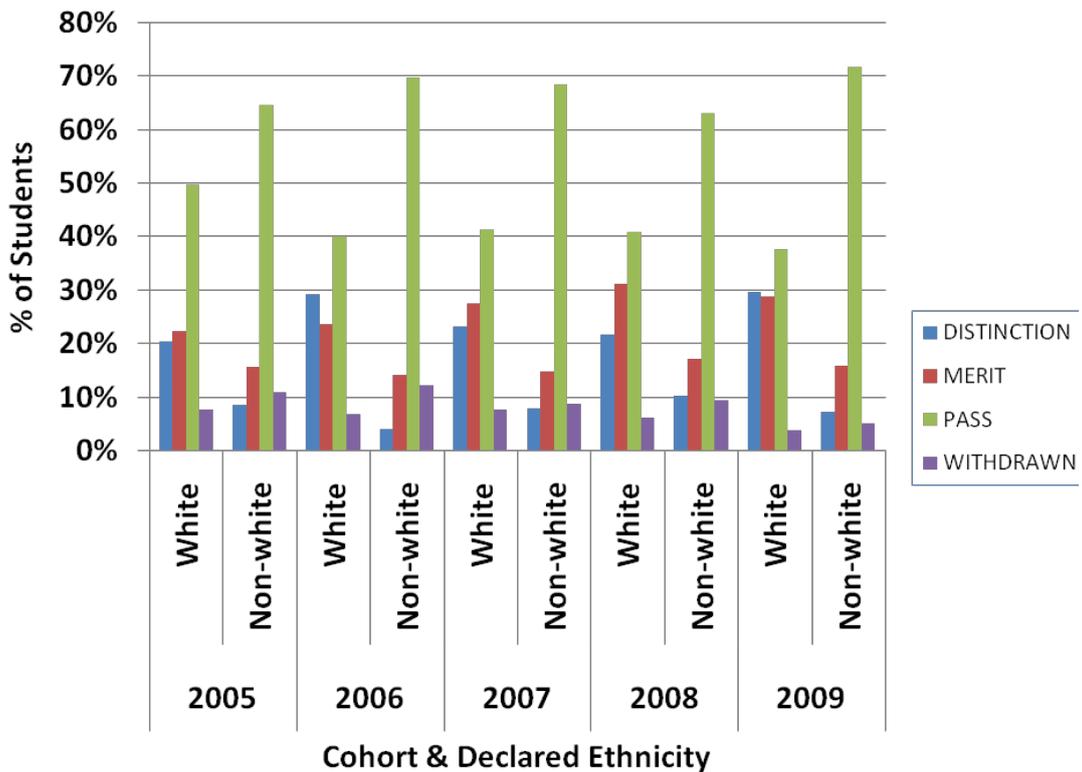
**Fig. 7b:** Breakdown of declared disabilities by PGT students in cohorts 2005-9, expressed as a percentage of students in that cohort who declared themselves disabled.



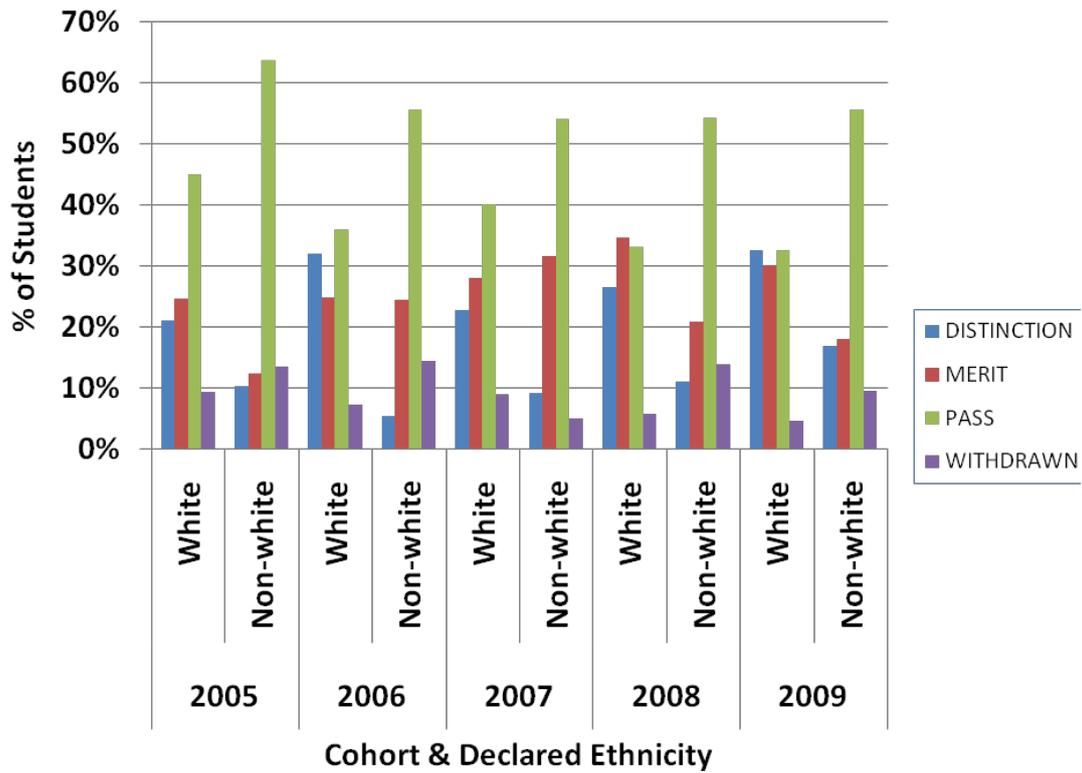
**Fig. 8a:** Outcome by declared ethnicity and cohort, 2005-9 for PGT students. Students who failed to declare their ethnicity are excluded.



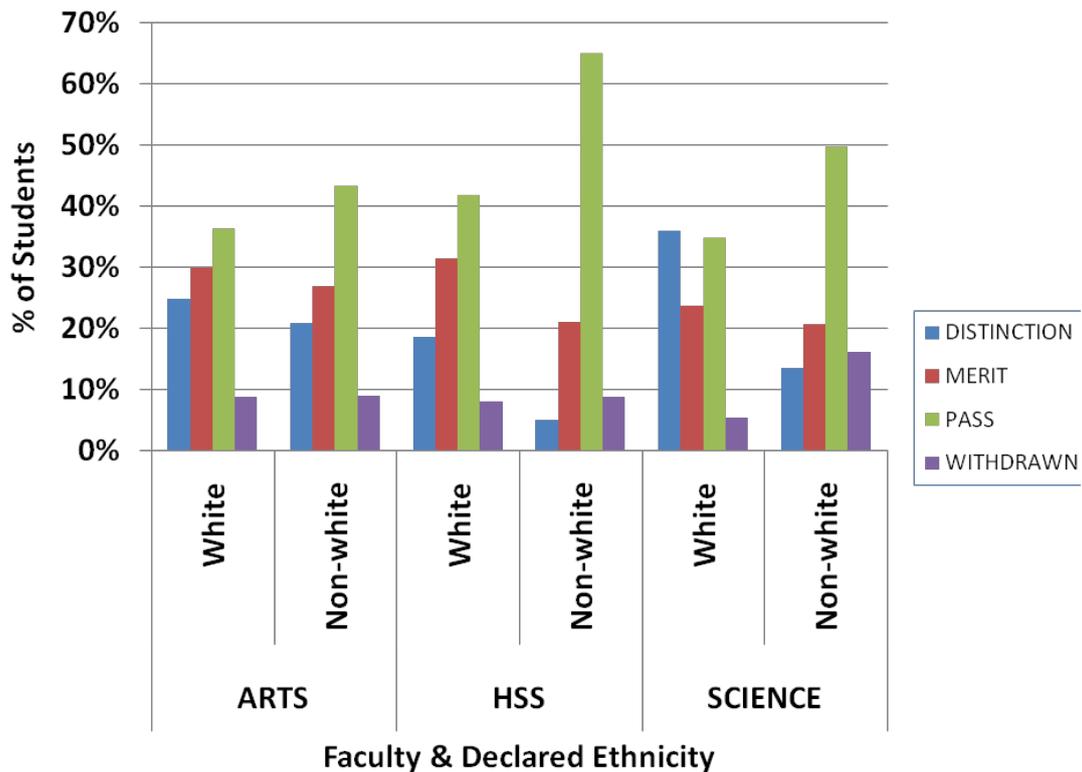
**Fig. 8b:** Outcome by declared ethnicity and cohort, 2005-9 for UK-domiciled PGT students. Students who failed to declare their ethnicity are excluded.



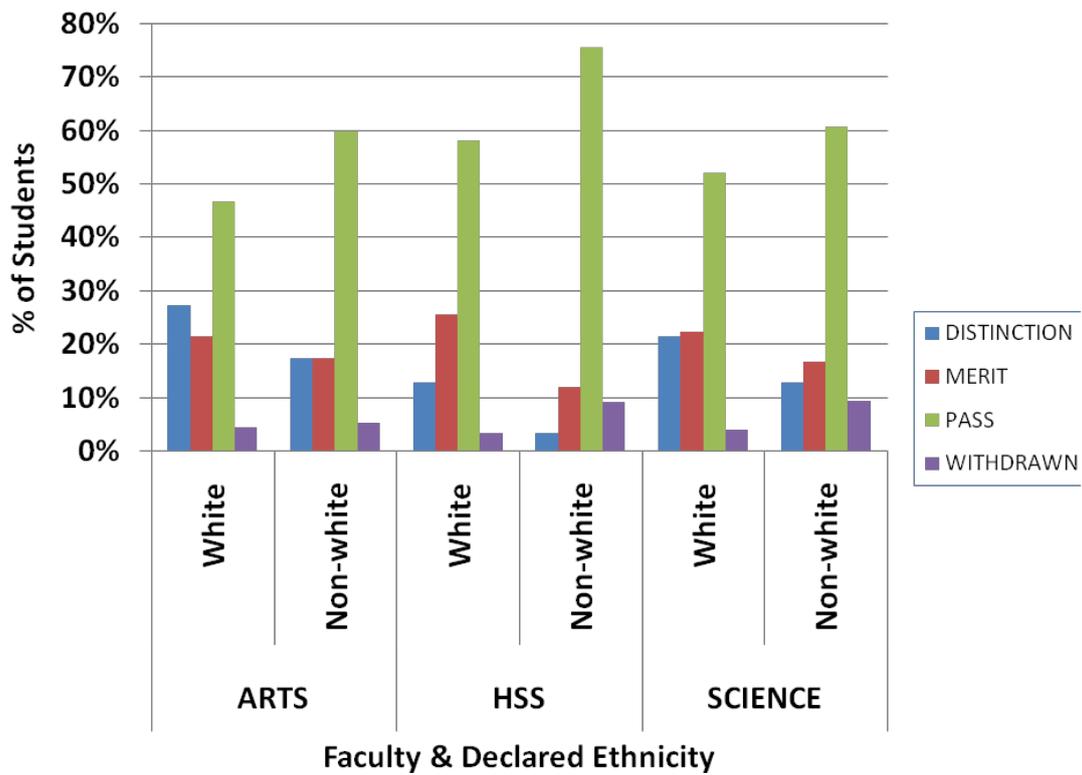
**Fig. 8c:** Outcome by declared ethnicity and cohort, 2005-9 for PGT students. Incomplete students, and those who failed to declare their ethnicity are excluded.



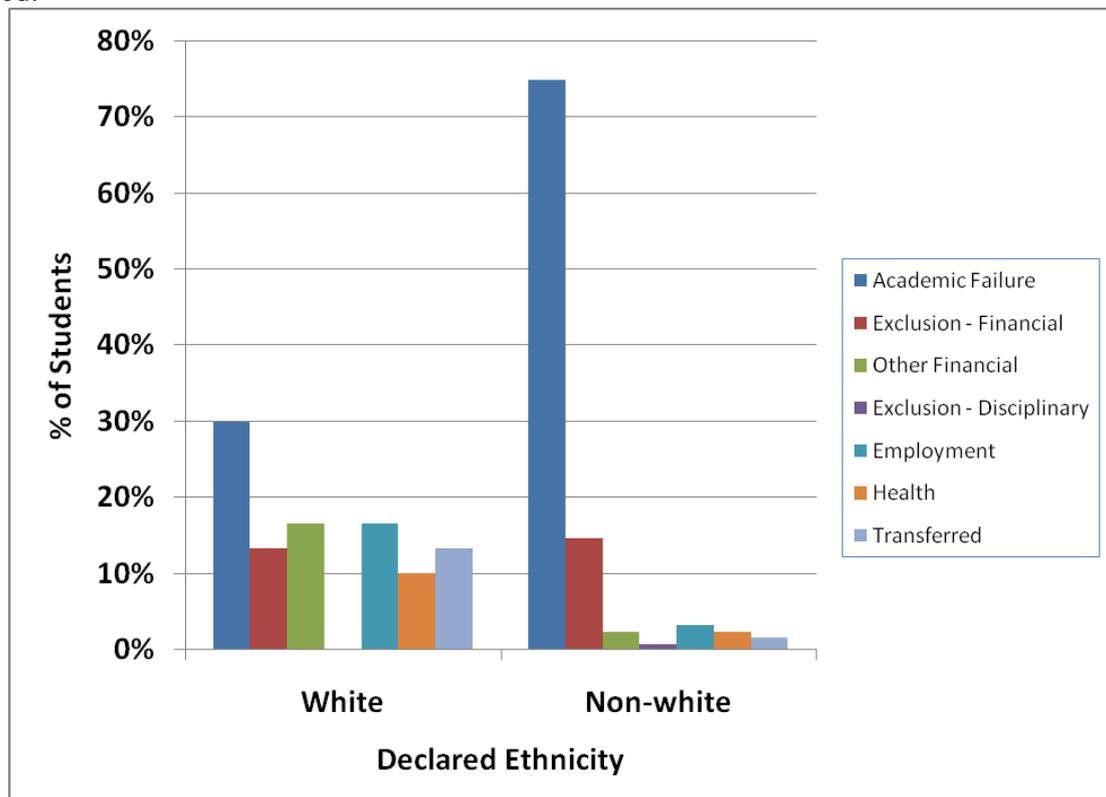
**Fig. 8d:** Outcome by declared ethnicity and cohort, 2005-9 for UK-domiciled PGT students. Incomplete students, and those who failed to declare their ethnicity are excluded.



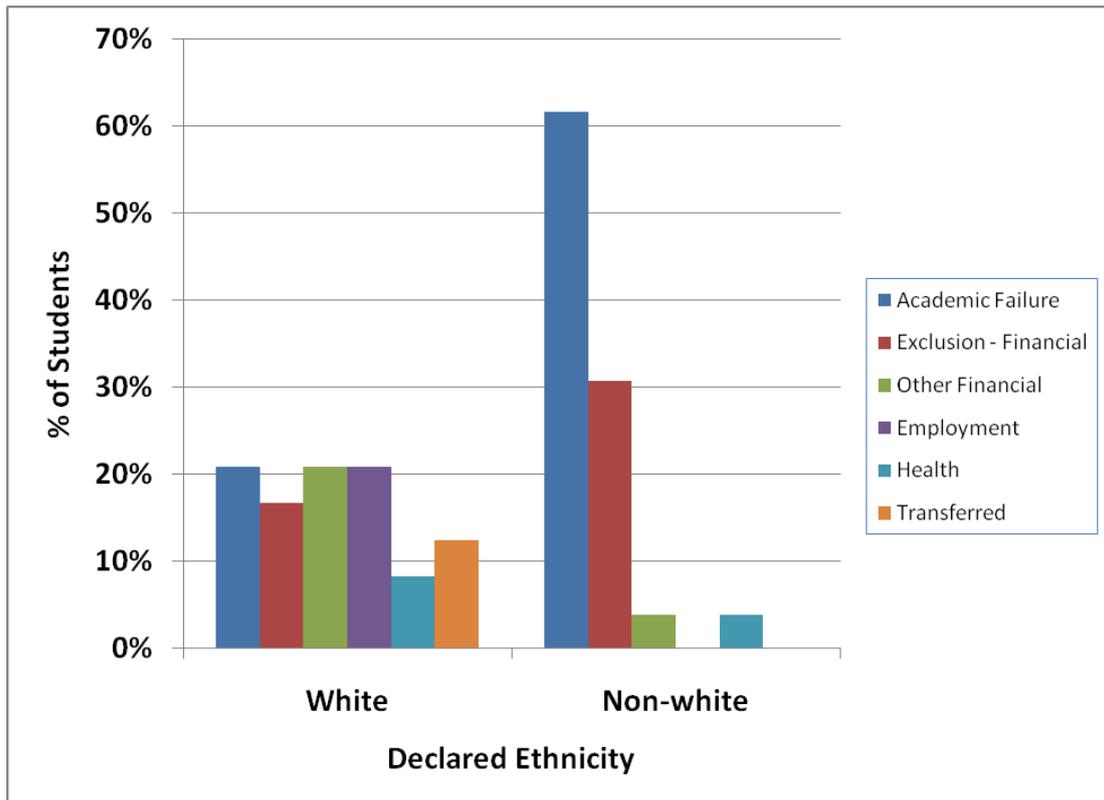
**Fig. 9a:** Outcome by declared ethnicity and faculty for UK-domiciled PGT students in cohorts 2005-9 combined. Incomplete students, and those who failed to declare their ethnicity are excluded.



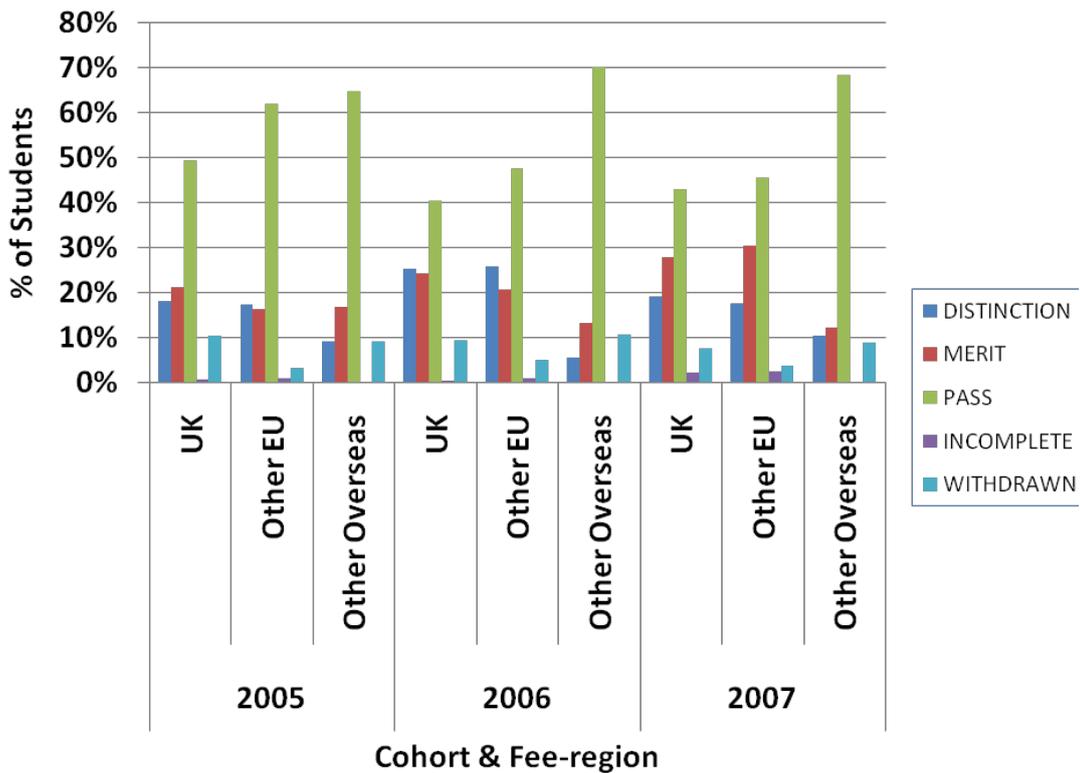
**Fig. 9b:** Outcome by declared ethnicity and faculty for overseas-domiciled PGT students in cohorts 2005-9 combined. Incomplete students, and those who failed to declare their ethnicity are excluded.



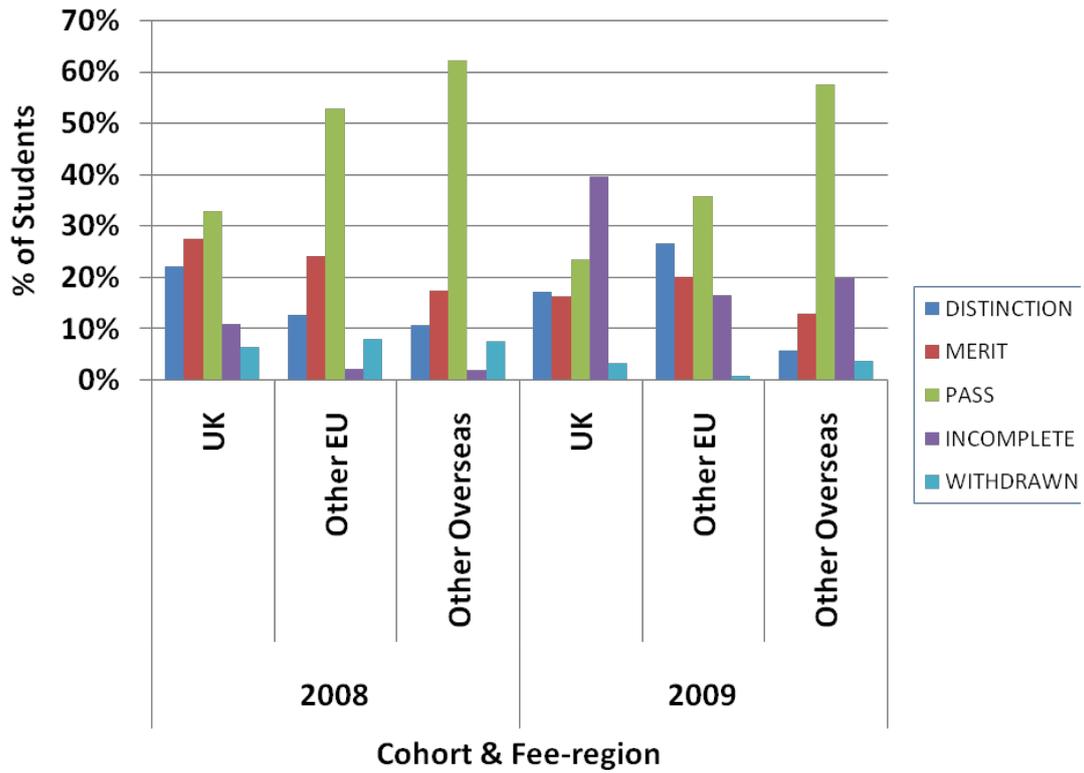
**Fig. 10a:** Withdrawal reasons by declared ethnicity for PGT students in cohorts 2005-9 combined. Students who failed to declare their ethnicity are excluded. Percentages are of students who withdrew and for whom a non-unknown withdrawal reason is recorded.



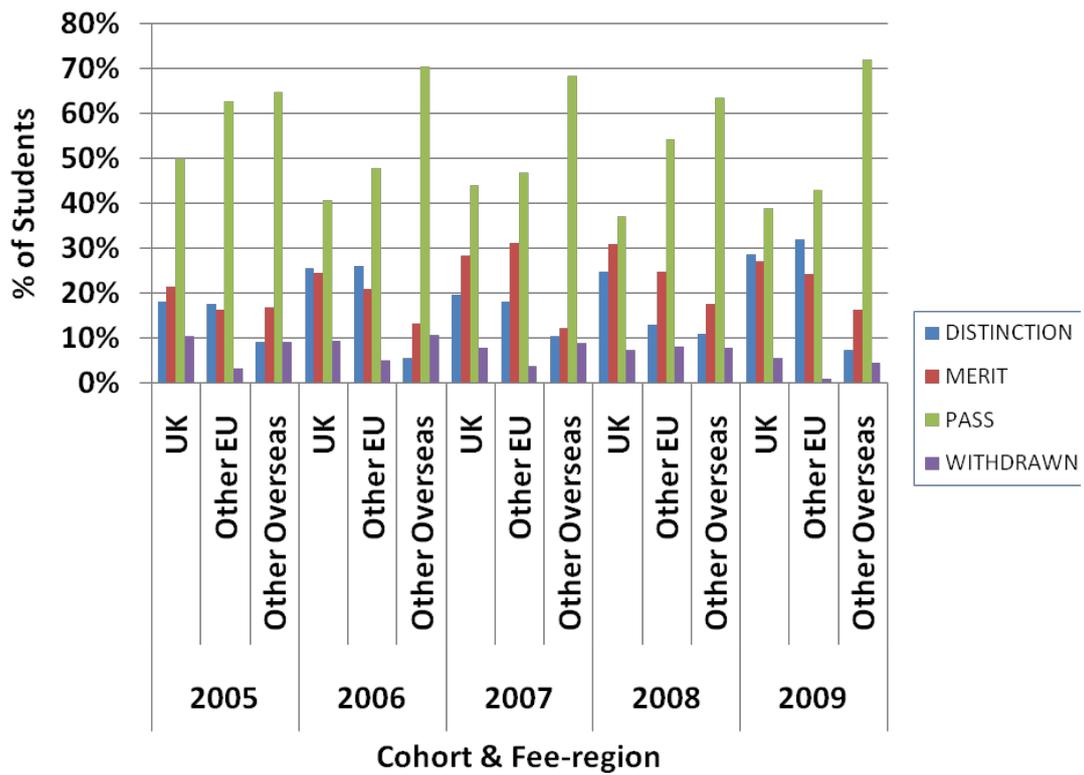
**Fig. 10b:** Withdrawal reasons by declared ethnicity for UK-domiciled PGT students in cohorts 2005-9 combined. Students who failed to declare their ethnicity are excluded. Percentages are of students who withdrew and for whom a non-unknown withdrawal reason is recorded.



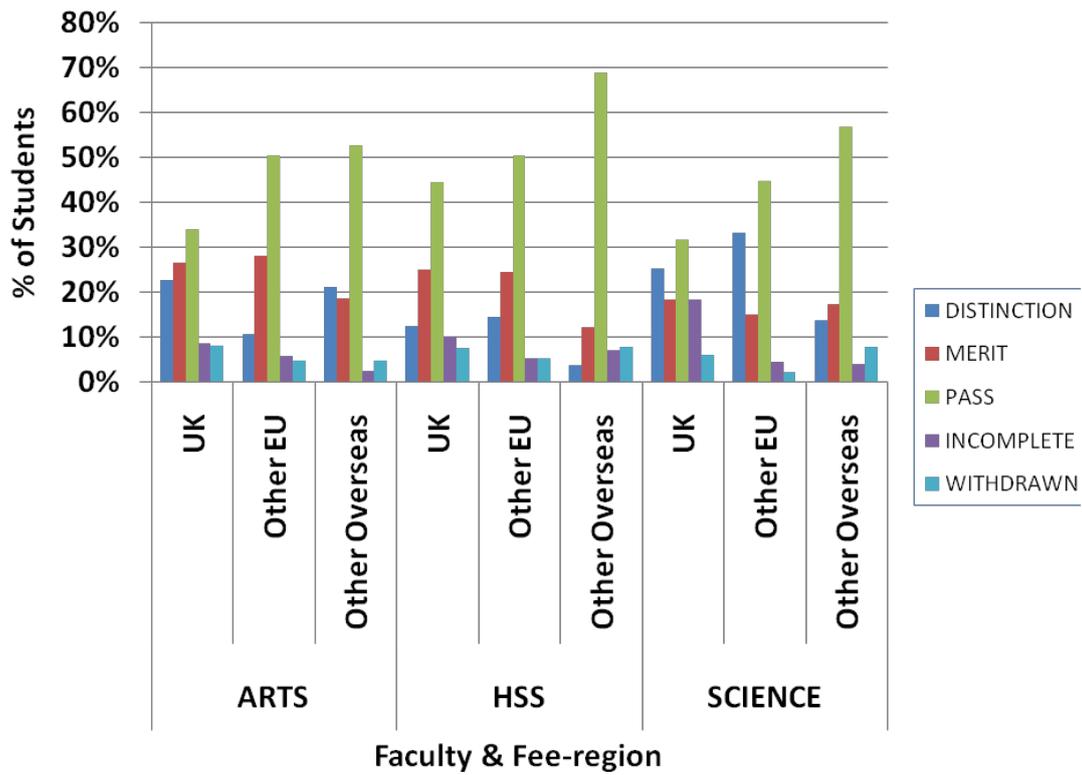
**Fig. 11a:** Outcome by fee-region for PGT students in cohorts 2005-9.



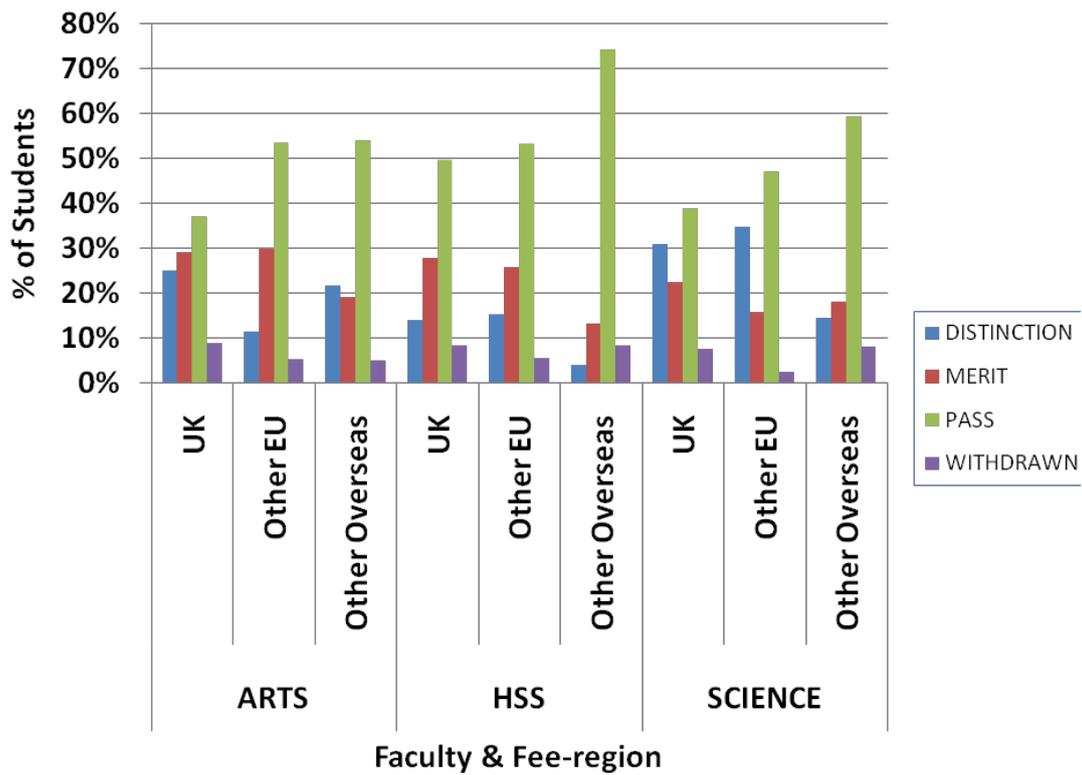
**Fig. 11a (cont.):** Outcome by fee-region for PGT students in cohorts 2005-9.



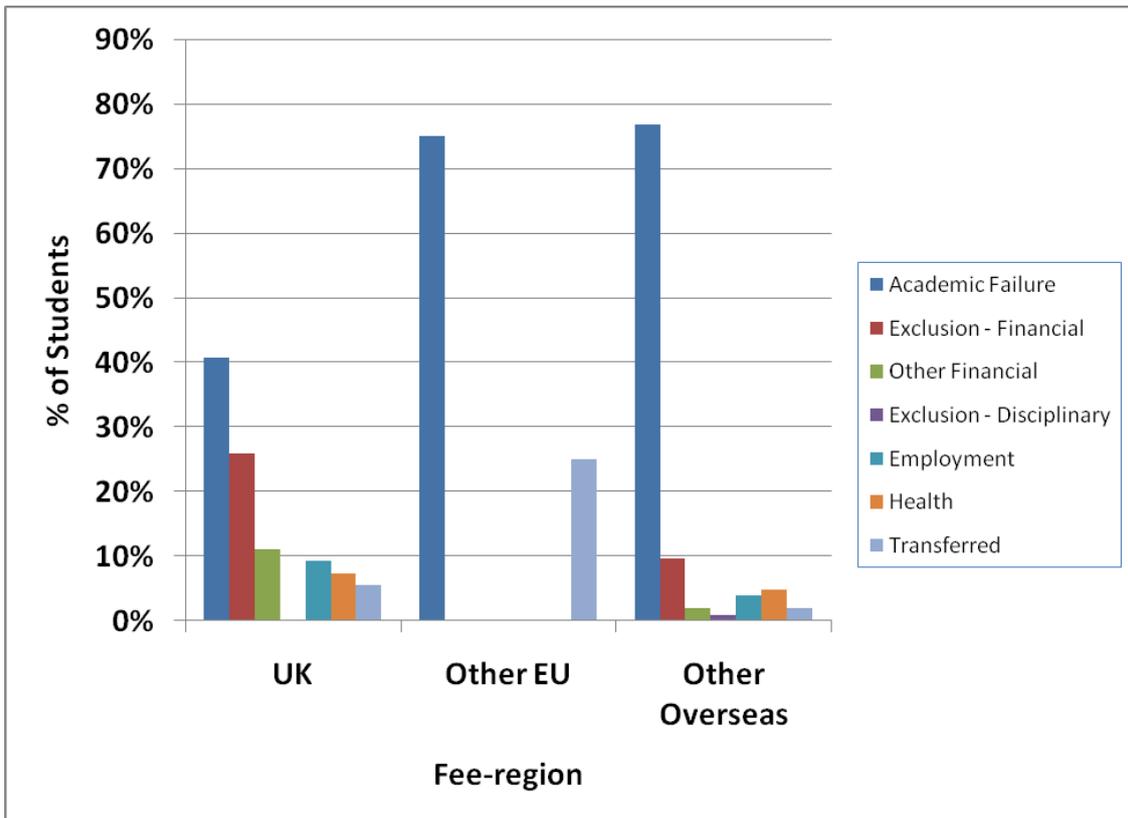
**Fig. 11b:** Outcome by fee-region for PGT students in cohorts 2005-9. Incomplete students are excluded.



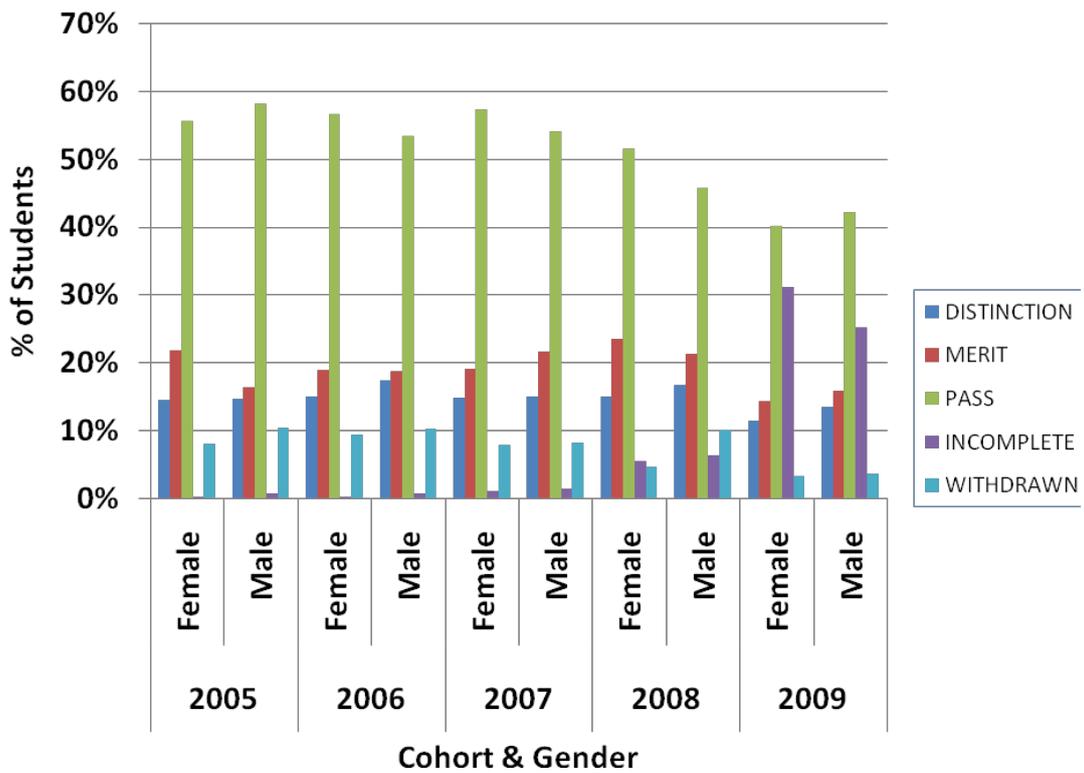
**Fig. 11c:** Outcome by faculty and fee-region for PGT students in cohorts 2005-9 combined.



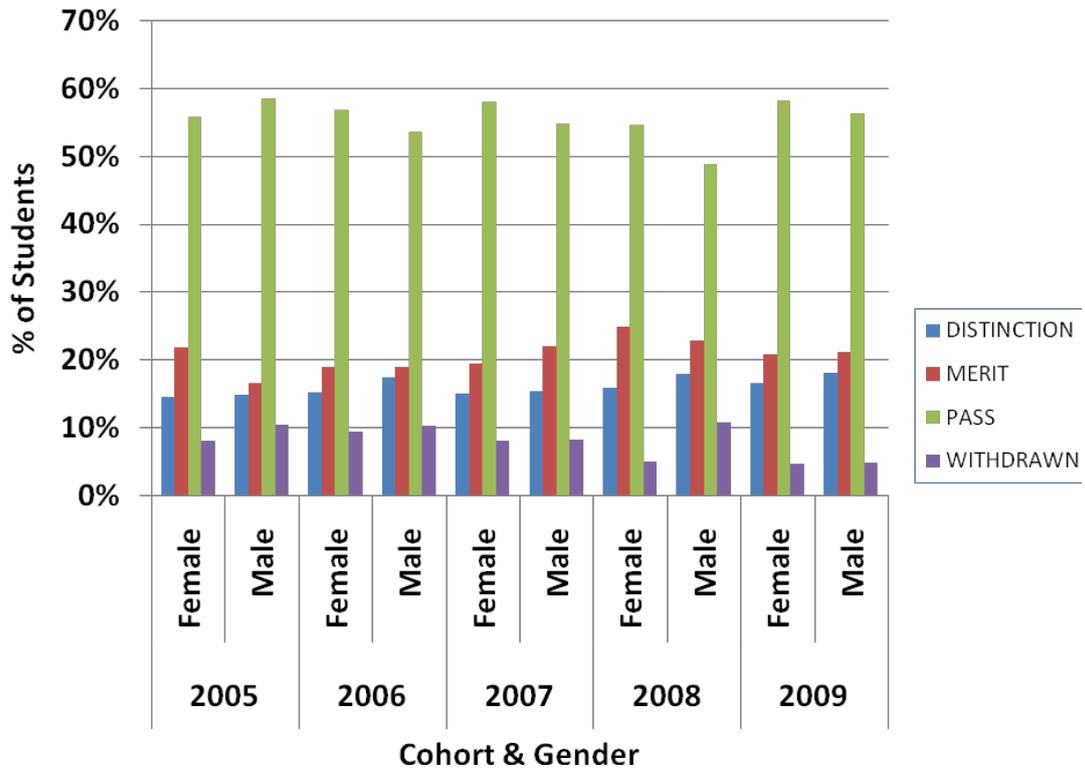
**Fig. 11d:** Outcome by faculty and fee-region for PGT students in cohorts 2005-9 combined. Incomplete students are excluded.



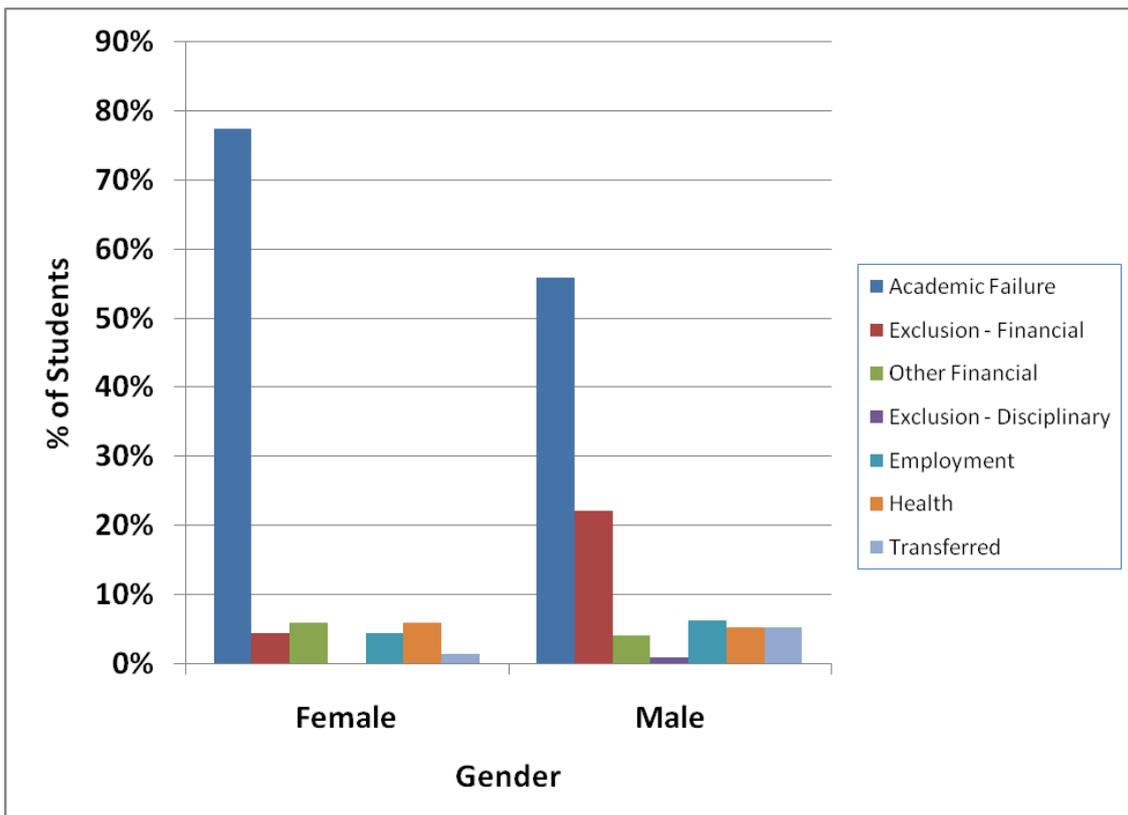
**Fig. 12:** Withdrawal reasons by fee-region for PGT students in cohorts 2005-9 combined. Percentages are of students who withdrew and for whom a non-unknown withdrawal reason is recorded.



**Fig. 13a:** Outcome by gender and cohort, 2005-9, for PGT students.



**Fig. 13b:** Outcome by gender and cohort, 2005-9, for PGT students. Incomplete students omitted.



**Fig. 14:** Withdrawal reasons by gender for PGT students in cohorts 2005-9 combined. Percentages are of students who withdrew and for whom a non-known withdrawal reason is recorded.

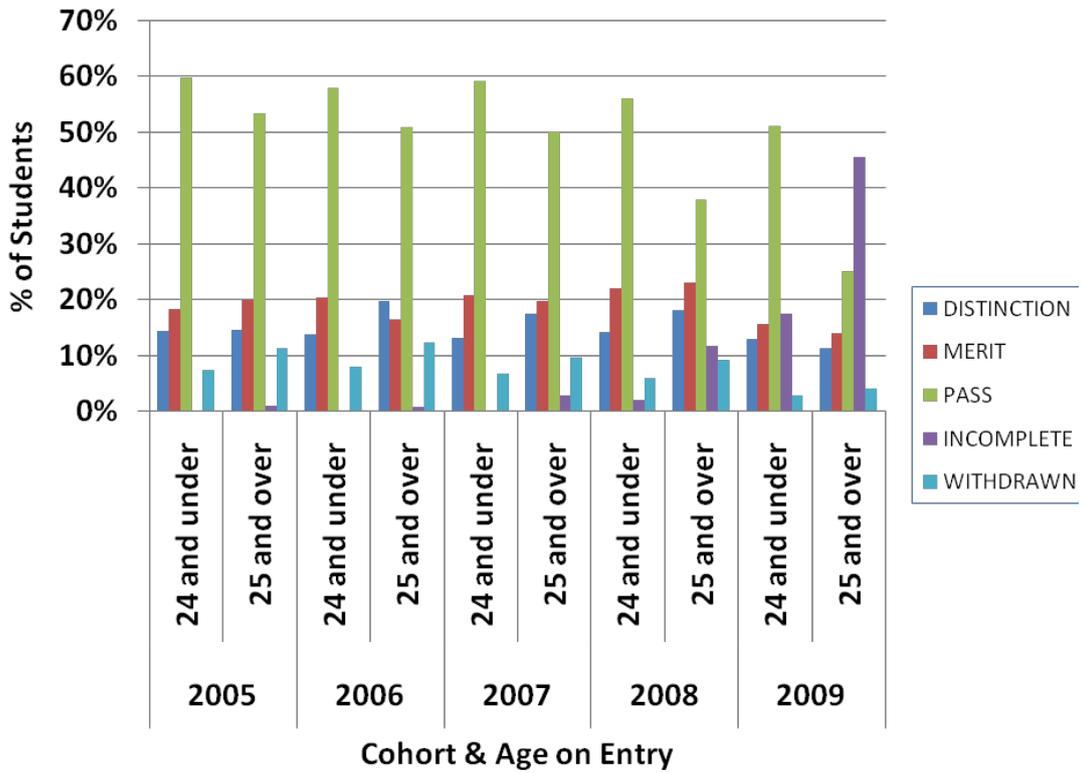


Fig. 15a: Outcome by age on entry for PGT students by cohort, 2005-9.

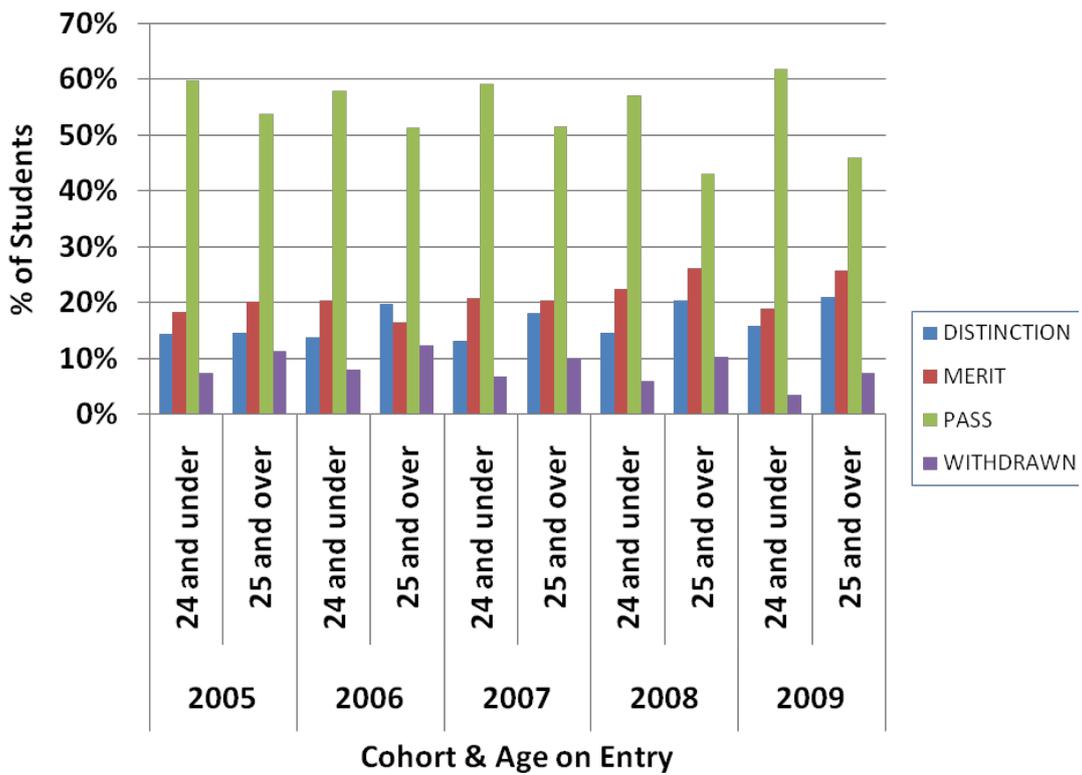
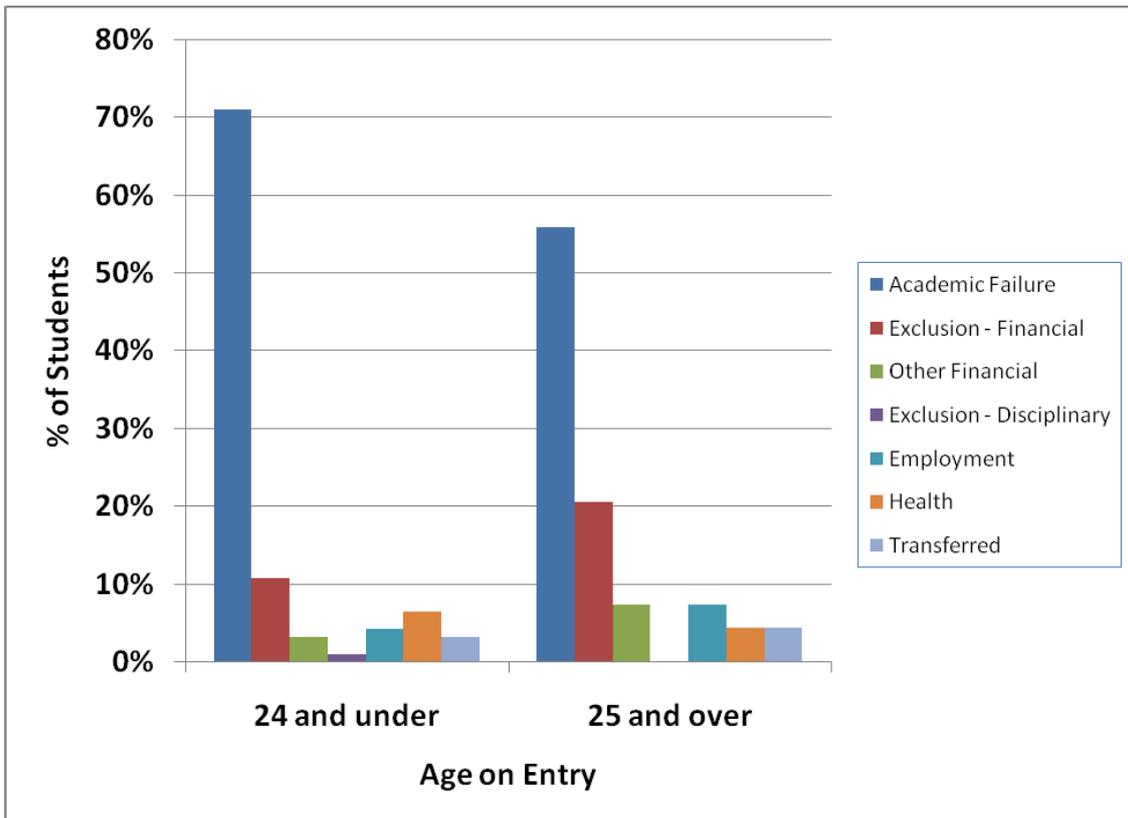
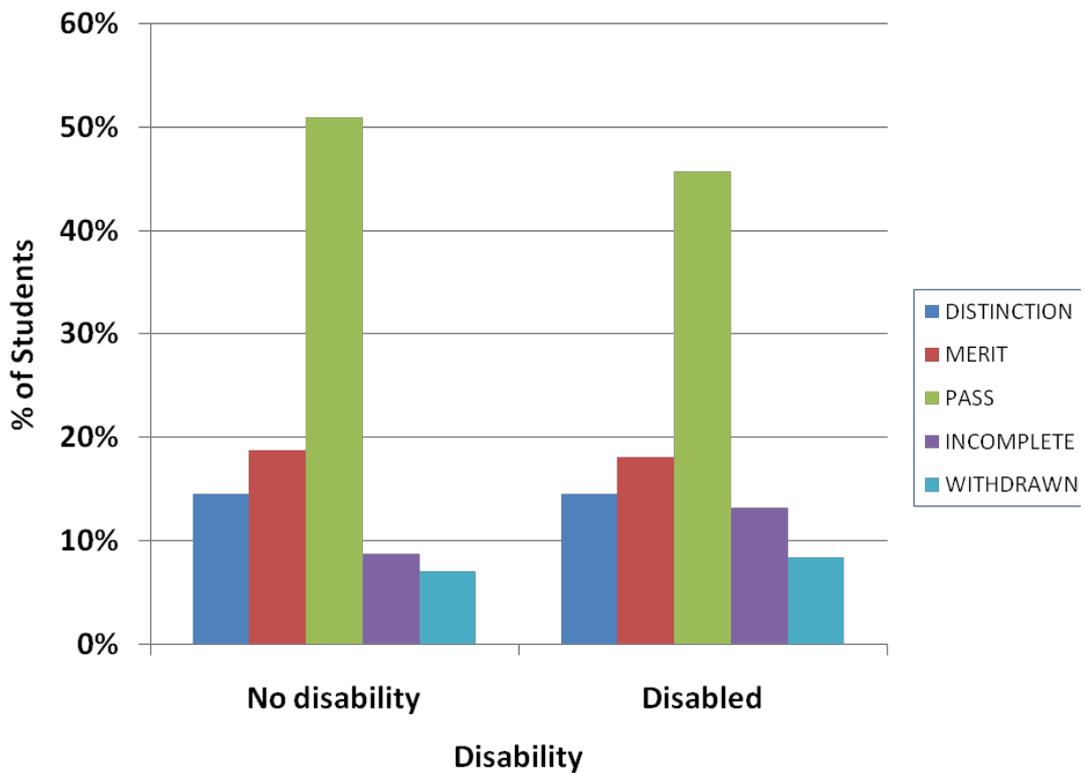


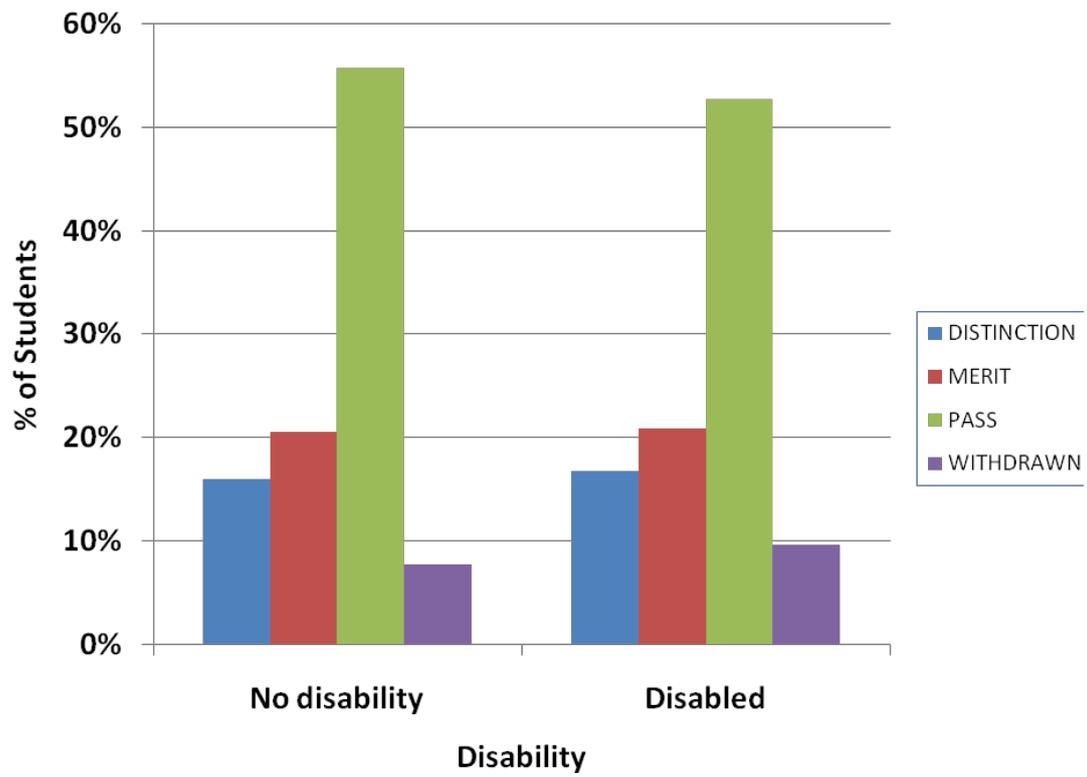
Fig. 15b: Outcome by age on entry for PGT students by cohort, 2005-9. Incomplete students omitted.



**Fig. 16:** Withdrawal reasons by age on entry for PGT students in cohorts 2005-9 combined. Percentages are of students who withdrew and for whom a non-unknown withdrawal reason is recorded.



**Fig. 17a:** Outcomes by declared disability for PGT students in cohorts 2005-9 combined.



**Fig. 17b:** Outcomes by declared disability for PGT students in cohorts 2005-9 combined. Incomplete students omitted.