

Social class, cultural capital and  
departure from higher education  
before and after the Quality Reform.

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## Appreciations

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## Summary

This thesis investigates the impact the Quality Reform, social class and cultural capital have on departure from higher education.

More specifically, the aim is to investigate whether, and if, and then to what degree, the aforementioned factors influence departure from higher education for students below the age of 26, that commenced their studies within higher education at one of the following institutions: The University of Tromsø, the University of Oslo, the university of Bergen and NTNU. The study is quantitative and logistic regression is used to investigate hypotheses. The sample consists of register data that stretches from 1998 to 2005. One analysis is conducted for all educational fields, while one is conducted for the educational fields of the humanities, social sciences and natural sciences. Departure from higher education is measured at two points in students' educational career: after one semester and after three semesters.

To investigate social class and cultural capital's impact on departure, a Bourdieu-inspired class schema is applied. In brief, the schema allows us to discern fractions within the social classes according to whether their total amount of capital mainly consists of cultural, economic or more or less equal amounts of these two forms of capital. Such a schema demands that the concepts and ideas that stem from Bourdieu's theoretical body are introduced. The concepts involve his understanding of social class in addition to habitus, capital and field. In addition to Bourdieu's thinking, I also bring in another way of understanding educational choices, namely Goldthorpe and Boudon's theory of educational inequality based on rational choices and social position theory. These two theoretical directions differ in mainly two regards: How one should understand human agency and why educational inequality remains prevalent.

The main findings show that social class differences increase from one to three semesters. However, the supposition that cultural capital is beneficial for avoiding departure is not supported. On the contrary to the expectations, it is students whose parents have a great deal of economic capital that stand out with lower departure rates, even after the control for grades from upper secondary school. Further on, the findings show that the Quality Reform had a marginal effect on overall and social class related departure. In regards to overall departure rates, the University of Oslo is an exception as they experienced lower departure rates after the Quality Reform.

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# **1 Introduction**

The main aim of this thesis is investigating social class and cultural capital's affect on student departure from higher education from 1998 to 2005. In 2003 the Quality Reform altered many important aspects of the tertiary educational system and the question social class inequalities and departure, and departure in general, is therefore analysed in light of this reform.

## **1.1 Departure and social stratification**

No matter whether one's attitudes towards education have closer affinities with Tony Blair's famous quote: "Ask me my three main priorities for government, and I tell you: education, education, education." (BBC, 2007), or whether one is more drawn to Pink Floyd's famous lyrics claiming that "we don't need no education", few people dispute that education has major consequences for the individual and the society as a whole. Some people's experience with the educational system is so encouraging that they gladly spend much of their life within it. Others deplore it and obtain some of their most traumatic memories from their time spent within the educational system. Much sociological research has been devoted to describe and explain why some succeed in the educational system and others do not. By doing this they relate the educational system to the larger question of stratification in society.

Social stratification in society is basically concerned with questions of why inequality in its different forms (e.g. economic, political, social and cultural) exists, what its sources and consequences are. Grusky argues that two matching processes produce stratification in society: "The social roles in society are first matched to "reward packages" of unequal value, and individual members of society are then allocated to the positions so defined and rewarded" (Grusky 2001:3).

The tertiary educational system plays a pivotal role in distributing individuals along these different positions, and research have demonstrated a close correlation between educational level and health, earnings, cultural consumption, number of children, and many other essential factors influencing one's life. Another study on the sociology of education is not only justified through such facts, but also through the fact that the question of departure from higher education remains ill understood and less studied than other topics in the sociology of education like grades and transitions in the educational system.

## **1.2 Aim of thesis**

As mentioned at the onset, the main aim of the thesis is to uncover the relation between social class and departure from higher education. Previous research has demonstrated that some social groups have higher chances of making a particular educational transition than others, is such a pattern also prevalent when it comes to students who leave higher education? Another crucial question is whether cultural capital affects the probability of leaving one's educational career or not: Do students who originate from a family rich of cultural capital have lower probability of leaving their educational career than students with less cultural capital? Further on, how are these two questions related to time? Are social class and the assumed beneficial aspect of cultural capital just as important when we study students who leave higher education after one semester as those who leave after three? Lastly, how do these questions related to the Quality Reform that changed several important aspects of tertiary education? To examine these questions, a Bourdieu-inspired class schema is applied in the analyses. One major advantage with it is that it separates between different forms of capital, namely economic and cultural capital. Due to this, it is possible to investigate whether one of these capitals have greater impact on the probability of leaving one's educational career than the other.

The thesis consists of eight chapters. Besides shaping an idea and give a short outline of what the reader may expect in the following chapters, the aim of the current chapter is to provide an understanding of the notion of departure (often classified as dropout).

## **1.3 Defining departure**

Departure is another word for the more popular notion of dropout. Before outlining my specific definition of departure, I will use this paragraph to explain why I apply the notion of departure instead of dropout. My rationale for employing the notion of departure (or leaving, withdrawing) instead of dropout, is that the latter connotes an individual failure regardless of the institution's content and character. In one study, students were asked for their opinion as to why they left their initial place of study. One out of four gave great significance to the fact that they wanted better lectures, while one out of seven mentioned that they did not fit in as an important reason for why they went to another educational institution (Hovdhaugen and Aamodt, 2005:51). Using the notion of dropout might mislead one to believe that the student's departure first and foremost is a result of the student's foundering to meet the

institutional standards, though this is not always the case. In this sense, the notion of dropout mislabels students (Tinto, 1993).

Put shortly, departure may be discerned according to whether it is voluntarily or not, whether one changes institution/type of study, and lastly whether the departure is temporarily or for good (Tinto, 1993). Unfortunately, it is not possible to find out whether departure is voluntarily or not with the data available in this thesis and therefore an aspect of departure that is left out of the analyses.

Hansen and Mastekaasa (2005) separate between departure from a study (e.g. sociology), an institution (e.g. University of Oslo), a study at an institution (sociology at the University of Oslo), and from higher education. Social class' effect on the probability of departure is of course dependent on which one of the aforementioned definitions that is applied. It is the departure from higher education that is of interest in this thesis. The main reason for this is that I believe that departure from higher education is more serious and far-reaching in its consequences than a change of study or institution is.

Perhaps the most important line to be drawn is the distinction between departure from higher education and having a break in one's educational career. In this relation, the pivotal question is how long a student may stay out of the educational system before she is considered as someone that is not merely having a break, but abandoned her educational career. Most likely there are people who are having a break for five or six years, while someone else might be struggling with their thesis and have more or less withdrawn from their study even though they are registered as a student. In the end, this choice is more or less arbitrary. There is no final definition of what counts as a break and what counts as departure from higher education.

The question of which definition to use should of course be led by the questions one wants answered. In this thesis I investigate whether students are registered at a higher educational institution one and three semesters after they commenced their studies at university. By doing this, I am able to investigate how departure from higher education develops over time. Are students more prone to depart initially after their enrolment, or are they more liable to depart later in their educational run? And what is the relation to social class? Further on, I regard students as departed from higher education when they have at least two semesters without

registered educational activity within higher education. Nevertheless, the reader should keep in mind that some of the students that depart might have a two-way ticket.

#### **1.4 Consequences of departure**

On the aggregate level, departure from higher education, or dropout as it is more commonly referred to, may, although complex to measure, represent a loss for society as the economic resources invested within higher education do not yield the expected returns when students fail to complete their degrees. For educational institutions it is no doubt that students who leave and fail to complete a degree represents a loss. After the Quality Reform, universities are rewarded on the background of how many students complete their degrees. The impact of departure from higher education may have undesirable consequences for the individual as well. Firstly, the costs related to higher education is not merely represented through the expenses related to staying alive (food, clothing, accommodation and so on) during the period of study and repaying one's students loan afterwards, but is also, and probably mainly, constituted through the alternative costs of foregone earnings. Secondly, it is likely that opportunities on the labour market are reduced for students who leave higher education compared to what they would be with a completed degree. Thirdly, students who interpret their departure as a result of lacking ability may experience lower self-confidence. To encapsulate: Departure from higher education is likely to represent substantial costs (in a broad sense) for both the society and the individual.

#### **1.5 Theory and departure**

Sociological research has been a tremendous success in providing empirical evidence for the inertia of educational inequality across countries and time (e.g. Blossfeld and Shavit 1993). However, the explanation for this inertia remains contested. In the case of higher education, researchers have been more interested in the transition to it and the grades students achieve, than their departure from it. An obvious exception is Tinto (1993). In the following I argue that an alternative way of getting closer to a coherent understanding of departure patterns is achieved by testing theories in a more explicit manner.

Despite the fact that research on departure from higher education in Norway has intensified the last fifteen years, I believe that it would be right to say that there is a gap between the vast empirical findings and the theoretical development. In my opinion it seems that most of the

time a diplomatic approach has been put to ground, roughly saying that departure could be understood in multiple ways, and not really testing whether any assumptions or theories are more appropriate than the other. I am certainly not advocating for an approach aiming at narrowing down the scope for interpreting social action in a meaningful way, but rather suggesting that there is a need for approaches that are able to test theories in a more explicit manner. The hope being that one is able to, at least partly, reject some theoretical assumptions while accepting others. This paper represents such an approach, as it is an attempt of testing the importance of cultural capital in regards to departure by applying a Bourdieu-inspired class schema.

Capital is first and foremost associated with wealth in the form of money or property owned by a person or organization, available for a particular purpose. The notion of cultural capital signifies such a view on culture as it may give access to scarce resources like a university degree. The notion of cultural capital is first and foremost associated with reproduction theory and the work of Bourdieu. His main explanation for why educational inequality continues to exist is that educational institutions are biased in that they merit the culture found within the dominant social classes. Accordingly, cultural capital is tantamount to the dominant culture. Put shortly and more specific, Bourdieu argues that students rich in cultural capital are able to draw on earlier experiences as they encounter the educational system, while students impoverished in cultural capital are unfamiliar with the codes of conduct within the educational system and experience it as a partly hostile environment.

To examine these assertions, Bourdieu-inspired class schema developed by Flemmen and Andersen (2009) is incorporated in the analysis. The unique character of this schema is that it bases a person's class position not only on the total amount of capital, but also on the composition of capital, i.e. the relative amount of economic and cultural capital. A lawyer and a professor may have equal amounts of capital, but their relative share of economic and cultural capital may be different, for this reason they receive different class positions. If cultural capital is beneficial for continuing within higher education, those students whose parents have large amounts of cultural capital should have less probability of leaving the educational system than students with less amount of this capital.

To contrast reproduction theory and the idea of cultural capital as a valuable resource within educational institutions, I draw on social position theory, first and foremost related to the

work of Boudon and Goldthorpe. The main mechanism behind their proposal for understanding social inequalities within the educational system is that students' aspirations are relative to their parents' social position. As a result, two individuals from two different social classes may have the same level of aspirations despite the fact that they achieve different levels of educational attainment. An important implication is that individuals will seek to avoid downward mobility for anything in the world, while they are more reluctant when it comes to achieving a higher social position than their parents. Consequently, students whose parents have a high social position and extensive education, have to spend a great deal of time within the educational system to obtain the same position as their parents, while the opposite is true for students from the working-class.

Both reproduction theory and social position theory have mainly been used to explain transitions within the educational system. A reasonable question is therefore whether these theories are proper for understanding departure. This topic will be dealt with in more depth in section 4.1.

## **1.6 Samples**

The samples in this thesis all consists of all students below the age of 26 that for the first time enrolled tertiary education at on of the following four institutions: The University of Bergen, the University of Oslo, the University of Tromsø and the Norwegian university of science and technology (NTNU), between 1998 and 2005 that commenced their studies in the autumn semester. The reason for why the samples are confined to students below this age is to obtain a homogenous sample. Since the sample exclusively includes students that for the first time entered higher education, it goes without saying that it consists of undergraduate students (although some of the degrees entails that students apply directly for a five-year degree. Nevertheless, it is students' first encounter with higher education).

Prior to the reform so to speak all students, regardless of educational field, enrolled in a preparatory course that lasted for one semester. It was not until they had completed this course that they could enrol in the courses that in the end would be their degree, their specialisation. Further on, the preparatory course was open for all students, hence many students enrolled in this course without having any concrete plans of completing it. It is also likely that any plans for further studies were more or less diffuse for some of these students

(Hovdhaugen and Aamodt, 2006). An important change that the Quality Reform brought with it to higher education was the incorporation of this preparatory course into degrees that lasted for three years. Hence, it was no longer possible to enrol in the preparatory course alone, but instead students had to be admitted to a program, a degree.

These changes represents both an opportunity and a challenge for those who wish to study departure throughout the period in question. The opportunity is to investigate the Quality Reform's impact on departure, to examine whether it has fulfilled its intentions. The challenge is that students who enrolled before and after the reform are not comparable without fuss. To cope with this, students' enrolment is measured according to two different definitions:

- A definition that includes all courses.
- A definition that excludes the preparatory course.

The first definition includes all enrolments of students, regardless of which course they enrolled in, while the second definition excludes the preparatory course when this were the first enrolment students made. With these two definitions as a basis, three different samples are constructed. In the first analysis chapter, chapter six, two samples on the aggregate level (departure from all educational fields) are constructed on the basis of the two definitions, respectively. The sample that is made according to the first definition is coined the "inclusive sample", and the sample constructed according to the second definition is coined the "exclusive sample". In chapter seven, the three educational fields of the humanities, social sciences and natural sciences are analysed and constitute the "educational field sample". It is constructed with the second definition as a basis. The purpose of investigating these three fields is that an aggregate analysis may conceal interesting and important changes at a lower level. The educational field sample consists of the humanities, social sciences and natural sciences.

## **1.7 Structure of the thesis**

As mentioned, the Quality Reform was introduced in tertiary education in 2003. It changed several aspects of higher education that could affect departure rates between social classes as well as the overall departure rates. Although the available data limits the opportunity to investigate the specific effect of these different changes, it is important and interesting to see

whether students that enrolled before and after the Quality Reform to a different extent are liable to leave higher education. In chapter two I outline the main features of the three changes that the Quality Reform brought with it to higher education: changes in the study structure, further evaluation on the way, and changes in the financing system. The reason for why I put the gist of the matter on these three alterations is that I believe that they might have had an important impact on departure.

In chapter three previous researches on departure is examined. It is important to have in mind that there are several different definitions of departure, and that leaving the educational system is the one that is in question here. This, and the fact that I am investigating students that enrolled in universities and that I concentrate on social class inequalities, is reflected in the examination of previous research.

In chapter four I present the theoretical perspectives that make up the basis for analysing the results. As mentioned, this is Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital and Goldthorpe and Boudon's theory of social position. The emphasis is put on how these theories could be used to understand departure. At the end of the chapter I present the hypotheses that are to be scrutinized in chapter six and seven.

Data and methods for analysis are represented in chapter five. Both dependent and independent variables are delineated and a basic description of the quantitative techniques to be used in the analyses is represented.

The analyses stretch across two chapters. Chapter six focus on all educational fields, while chapter seven limits the analysis to the educational fields of the humanities, social sciences and natural sciences. The reason for why I divide the analysis into two chapters is that the analysis in chapter six is highly aggregated and may therefore mask interesting differences between the educational fields.

A closer discussion and conclusion of the findings and its relation to theory and previous research is presented in chapter eight.



## 2 The Quality Reform

The data used in this thesis stretches over eight years. To be able to analyse departure from higher education during this period one cannot evade the fact that the educational system experienced several changes as a consequence of the Quality Reform that was introduced in 2003. One of the goals is to investigate whether the reform led to changes in the total departure rates and whether it altered departure rates between social classes. Although the reform brought with it several changes, the gist of the matter is put on three of these, mainly because I believe that they may have an important impact on departure. These are:

- Changes in the study structure
- Further evaluation on the way
- Changes in the financing system

There are several limitations related to analysing the effects of the reform with the current data available. There are no specific data that can help us decide whether and to what degree the changes that the reform brought it with had any effect on departure rates or social class differences. For instance, the data does not contain information that may help us discern whether further evaluation on the way (seminars and mandatory hand-ins) or whether changes in the financing system made any difference on student departure. As a result we are left with assumptions, intuition and previous research when the results of the before and after the Quality Reform are displayed. Nevertheless, the changes that the Quality Reform brought with it altered many important aspects of higher education. And even though the available data are more or less mute in regards to how each of these changes affected social class differences in departure from higher education, it is important to describe the reform so that we are not left totally astray when confronted with the results of the analyses. The following chapter is devoted to give a description of what I regard as the three most important changes in relation to departure.

## 2.1 Changes in the study structure

“The degree-structure structures the length of the education, content and organization. It influences students’ behaviour and prerequisites for learning.”<sup>1</sup> (Government white paper nr. 27, 2001:25).

Perhaps the most important change following the Quality Reform is the fact that the degrees were shortened down from three and a half years to three years. The aim was never to make the studies less demanding. On the contrary, the goal was to make studies more intensive: “A new structure places stronger demands of intensity in studies”<sup>2</sup> (Government white paper nr. 27, 2001:26), and “It is necessary to examine studies’ methods of teaching and find solutions that promote greater intensity in the studies and better follow up of all students.”<sup>3</sup> (Government white paper nr. 27, 2001:30).

The Quality Reform did not only change the name of the undergraduate degree, but changed several aspects of this structure. First of all, students applied for a coherent degree lasting for three years as they entered university. In other words, the preparatory course was integrated in the degrees and the educational run was more or less given as students entered university. Secondly, open studies were terminated. In the wake of the Quality Reform students were admitted (or not) on the basis of their grades from upper secondary school. Thirdly, for each degree a recommended progress and courses were suggested from the university, with the hope of making the studies more predictable and preventing what is referred to as “sideways-studying”, that is going through more or less the same syllabus for different courses (Government white paper nr. 27, 2001:29). Another important step for avoiding sideways-studying was splitting courses up in smaller units. By doing this they would have a more precise content and students were not admitted to enrol in a specific degree, were allowed to take up the free slots in each of these courses. Thirdly, students had to apply for a specific degree and compete with other students for entrance, i.e. the open access policy practiced for many of the educational courses before the reform was terminated. In the wake of the Quality Reform, access to undergraduate degrees was based on grades from upper secondary school.

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<sup>1</sup> Gradsstrukturen strukturerer utdanningens lengde, innhold og organisering. Den påvirker studentenes atferd og forutsetninger for læring.

<sup>2</sup> Et nytt studieopplegg stiller således strengere krav til intensiteten i læringsaktivitetene, enten det gjelder heltidsstudenter eller deltidsstudenter.

<sup>3</sup> Det er nødvendig å gjennomgå studienes undervisningsmetoder og finne nye løsninger som fremmer større intensitet i studiene og bedre oppfølging av alle studenter.

Professional studies like medicine, psychology, veterinary science and theology were able to keep their existing length and degree structure and were therefore less affected by the Quality Reform than fields like social studies, humanities and natural sciences. In other words, the Quality Reform may and probably did have different effect depending on which educational field we are talking about. In sum the relevant goals of changing the study structure in relation to departure could be summarized in the following way:

- Promote effective educational runs
- Arrange a coherent environment that supports students' learning, understanding and maturation
- Communicate those qualifications and competence that a study provides one with

## **2.2 Further evaluation on the way**

“Absent demands of attendance, participation and the practice of traditional evaluations, as we see in some studies, do not stimulate continuous work with the studies throughout the year.”<sup>4</sup> (Government white paper nr. 27, 2001:26). By traditional evaluation, one is referring to the way these were organized before the reform; as one embarked on e.g. a basic one years study in sociology, there were so to speak no evaluation on the way, merely an exam or a larger written assignment at the end of the year. The major changes compared to the old system are:

- Additional exams
- Frequently hand-ins
- Mandatory seminars

In the same way as the government highlighted the structuring effect of how the degrees are put together, they make the same claim in regards to exams. Allegedly, the old system of evaluations stimulated extensive cramming prior to the exams. As an alternative they introduced more exams distributed throughout the year, the standard is now three exams

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<sup>4</sup> Manglende krav til oppmøte, deltakelse og anvendelse av tradisjonell sluttevaluering, slik vi ser i en del studier, stimulerer ikke til jevn studieaktivitet gjennom hele studieåret.

during a semester. The government suggests that such a system would "... contribute to shift the focus from short-sighted exam preparation at the end of the semester and be an expression of what students have understood, instead of repeating the curriculum"<sup>5</sup> (Government white paper nr. 27, 2001:32).

Further evaluation on the way also includes hand-ins and written assignments. These constitute an important feedback to the students enabling them to be aware of how they are doing, and what areas to work harder on. In addition, some of hand-ins functioned as a qualification for taking the exam.

Introducing mandatory seminars constitutes the third point that makes out the new forms of evaluation that I would like to concentrate on. Prior to the reform lectures, self-tuition and perhaps a restricted number of seminars constituted students' methods of instruction. As a consequence of the Quality Reform, seminars became widespread and attendance to them became a requirement to take exams. Implementing these sorts of evaluation is based on the following reasoning: "The degree of completion is best in those studies where students have firm arrangement and the lessons involve frequent follow up, mandatory presence and hand-ins"<sup>6</sup> (Government white paper nr. 27, 2001:27).

### **2.3 Changes in the financing system**

Following the main goal of the Quality Reform, that the student should succeed, the finance system was reorganized. The main changes that were introduced were:

- The total support (grants and loan) from the State Educational Fund was increased, and the proportion of grants increased
- Introduction of progression dependent grants
- Increased income threshold before grants are reduced

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<sup>5</sup> ... bidra til å flytte fokuset fra kortsiktig eksamenslesing på slutten av semesteret og være et uttrykk for hva studentene har forstått, framfor gjengiving av fastlagt pensum.

<sup>6</sup> Gjennomføringsgraden er best i de studiene der studentene har faste opplegg og undervisningsopplegget inneholder jevnlig oppfølging, møteplikt og obligatoriske innleveringer.

In 2001 the total annual support from the NSELF amounted to NOK 69 500. As the changes in the financing system were introduced the year after (in other words, one year before the other changes of the Quality Reform was introduced), the annual support was increased to NOK 80 000. Further on, the proportion of grants was increased from 30 percent to 40 percent of the total support (Opheim, 2008).

Prior to the reform the balance between student grants and student loans from the NSELF were not dependent on students' academic progression. This changed after the reform. As of 2002, students' financial support from the NSELF became dependent on academic progression. All student support from the NSELF was given as loan at the beginning of each semester. As the exams were completed, the university informed the NSELF whether the student had passed the exam or not. If the students had passed an exam, a proportion of the loan was converted into grants. As mentioned, the standard number of subjects/exams during one semester after the Quality Reform was introduced was three. For instance, if a student passes two out of three exams, he would receive  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the maximum amount of loan that could be converted into grants, and so on.

Lastly, the income threshold before grants are reduced was increased. As a result, students were allowed to earn more money without their support from the NSELF being altered. The threshold has been increased several times after the introduction of the new finance system, but from 2001 to 2002 the upper limit went from NOK 62 400 to NOK 100 000. Before the reform, earnings exceeding the maximum limit would affect both grants and loans, but after the reform only grants were affected (Opheim, 2008).

The intention of the changes in the financing system was to make students dependent keep up their progression, i.e. not getting delayed in their studies. First of all, the increased support from NSELF should enable students to spend more of their time studying and less on paid work. Secondly, the progression dependent grants should make it more costly to get delayed in the educational run, or make it more beneficial to keep up the progression, I you like (Aamodt et al., 2006:116).

### 3 Previous research

This chapter concerns previous research on departure. Although much interesting research has been conducted on other forms of departure and from other institutions than what the gist of the matter is put on in this thesis, my main focus as I assess previous research remains on undergraduate students at Norwegian universities that leaves higher education.

Hansen and Mastekaasa (2005) investigated departure at higher educational institutions in Norway between 1977 and 1998<sup>7</sup>. At the beginning of this period, social background differences in regards to departure rates for undergraduate students (they confined their sample to students that were no older than 25 years and who had their first enrolment to higher education, except the preparatory course) at universities were so to speak non-existing. During the first half of the eighties there was a sharp increase that lasted throughout the period they studied. Even though the relative departure rates between different social origins have been more or less stable, the total proportions have varied in this period<sup>8</sup>. One of the main causes that departure rates were low in the beginning of this period is probably due to the fact that students were more selected than in the following years.

They followed up this analysis by splitting social background up in five categories based on parents' educational level (basic education, some upper secondary education, completed upper secondary education, short higher education and long higher education) and presented the results as cumulative probability of departure three years after initial enrolment. In regards to departure from higher education, they conclude that the tendency to leave higher education is lower when parents have higher education. More specifically, students whose parents have basic education have a probability of approximately 19 percent of leaving higher education, while the same number for those whose parents have long higher education is below 10 percent<sup>9</sup>. However, they emphasize that social background first and foremost has an impact on the probability of transferring to other institutions and studies, i.e. students from high social background tend to leave their undergraduate studies to attend professional studies at

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<sup>7</sup>Their definition of departure entails that a person is without registered educational activity for at least two subsequent semesters" (Hansen and Mastekaasa, 2005:102)

<sup>8</sup> The departure rate for students whose parents had some kind of higher education has varied between 10 and 20 percent in this period. Students whose parents' highest completed education were basic education has varied between almost 30 and 15 percent (Hansen and Mastekaasa, 2005:108).

<sup>9</sup> These numbers are estimates as they are read from a figure.

universities, while students from low social backgrounds are more prone to leave for university colleges.

Further on, Hansen and Mastekaasa (2005) found a strong correlation between grades and the risk of departure that even exceeded the effect of parents' education: "Even though there is a strong correlation between parents' educational level and dropout, it is the strong correlation between grades... and dropout that stand out"<sup>10</sup> (Hansen and Mastekaasa 119:2005). This said, the connection between grades and social background is dependent on the grade level. For students with high grades from upper secondary school, the differences between social backgrounds are weak. In comparing the students with lower grades from secondary school, the effect of social background plays an important role, as the probability of leaving one's educational career is considerably higher for students whose parents have basic education as their highest completed education, than for students whose parents have some sort of tertiary education.

Aamodt (Aamodt, Studiegjennomføring og studiefravall, 2001) had a closer look on students that enrolled in higher education in 1994 and 1997. Out of all the university students that enrolled in 1994 and 1997, respectively (and approximately) one out of four and one out of five had left higher education the year after. Out of these students, approximately half of those who enrolled in 1994 had not completed their exam during the first year, while the other half had not. In 1997 the respective numbers had changed somewhat as a greater proportion of the students who left higher education the year after had not completed their exams. He found some of the same effects as Hansen and Mastekaasa (2005) in regards to structured studies. The probability of continuing within higher education one year after the initial enrolment at university was considerably stronger for these studies compared to more loosely organized degrees. Out of those who commenced their studies in 1994, he found that 9,6 percent of those who enrolled in structured degrees had left higher education the year after, while 26,4 percent of those who enrolled in loosely structured degrees found themselves in the same situation. In regards to social background, out of those students who enrolled at university in 1994, 21,1 percent of the students with high social background (i.e. at least one parent has higher education) had left higher education the year after, while the same number for students with low social background (i.e. none of the parents have higher education) 26,6 percent had

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<sup>10</sup> "Selv om det er klare sammenhenger mellom foreldrenes utdanningsnivå og frafall, er det den sterke sammenhengen mellom karakterer... og frafall som er mest slående i resultatene"

left higher education the year after. In regards to those who enrolled in 1997, the number for high social background was 20,9 percent and for low social background it was 23,8 percent. In other words the social background difference was slightly less for those who enrolled in 1997.

Næss (2003) also studied students that enrolled in higher education in 1994. More specifically, his sample consisted of students that enrolled had completed upper secondary school the same year as they embarked on university studies in the educational fields of humanities, social science and natural science. The same fields will be analyzed in chapter six. His findings point in a more positive direction than results from previous studies. After the first year, 90 percent of the student mass continued their education in one way or another<sup>11</sup>. On the contrary to the two studies described above, Næss did not find any statistical significant effect (Næss, Studieprogresjon, studieeffektivitet og frafall ved de frie fagstudiene ved universitetene, 2003) of parents' education in regards to departure or on the probability of completing one's studies. A probable reason for why this finding deviates from the other studies is the selection used: young students have lower probability for departing than older students. Further on, he did not find any differences between the educational fields in regards to the probability of leaving it after one year.

Hovdhaugen and Aamodt (2005) examined students that enrolled at three universities<sup>12</sup> in 1999. Despite a low response rate, the study was able to produce interesting results as students were able to give their own rationale as to whether they had stopped studying and why. They defined departure from higher education as those students which in the questionnaire answered that they aimed at completing a degree, but who withdrew from their studies without doing it (Hovdhaugen and Aamodt, 2005:27). Six years after enrolment the students were asked whether they had left their educational career or not. Almost 17 percent answered yes to this question. When the students were asked for important reasons as to why they left their studies, the three most popular were that they could not keep up with the studies (46,5 percent), that the studies did not interest them enough (45,4 percent), and a lack of guidance (44,2 percent). Approximately one out of three who left their studies experienced this as defeat. Another interesting finding is that the motives for enrolling in higher education or how

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<sup>11</sup> Three percent of the students who completed their first exams left the educational system after one year, while 18 percent of those who did not complete their first exams did the same.

<sup>12</sup> The University of Oslo, NTNU, and the University of Bergen.



sure students were of their choice of study had no effect on the probability of leaving one's educational career.

They also investigated how parents' educational level affected departure. They grouped parents into three categories: none of the parents have higher education, one parent has higher education and both parents have higher education. The departure rate among the first group was 22,4 percent, the second group 17,3 percent, while the third group had a departure rate of 10,6 percent. Compared to students who changed their place of study, the authors concluded in the following way: "A bit simplified one may say that the causes of change for change in place of study are primarily contextual, while it is the background factors that explains most of why students have quit their studies"<sup>13</sup>

Lastly, Hovdhaugen and Aamodt's (2005) findings are congruent with the fact that the effect of grades from upper secondary school does not need to be the same for all social backgrounds: "Students originating from a high social background have lower probability of leaving their education, regardless of grade level"<sup>14</sup> (Hovdhaugen and Aamodt, 2005:73). Additionally, they found that women have a lower risk of leaving the educational system regardless of grade level and social background.

Hovdhaugen and Aamodt (2006) evaluated the Quality Reform's impact on departure after one year, and compared students that enrolled in education in 1999 with those who enrolled in 2003. For the universities<sup>15</sup> they found slightly lower, but significant, departure rates from higher education after the reform: For those who enrolled prior to the reform the departure rates were 21, 8 percent, while it was 20, 7 subsequent to the reform. These results point in the direction of a marginal effect of the Quality Reform. However, more students stay at the university they initially enrolled in rather than transferring to other educational institutions. By separating the four universities from each other, Hovdhaugen and Aamodt were able to demonstrate quite different patterns within each of the institutions. For the University of Oslo the proportion leaving the educational system after one year was considerably reduced, while

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<sup>13</sup> "Litt forenklet kan vi si vi har funnet at årsakene til å skifte lærested primært er kontekstuelle, og ikke påvirket av bakgrunn, mens det er bakgrunnsfaktorene som forklarer det meste av hvorfor studentene har sluttet i studiene." (Hovdhaugen and Aamodt, 2005:9).

<sup>14</sup> De som har høy sosial bakgrunn har lavere sannsynlighet for å slutte i utdanning, uansett karakternivå"

<sup>15</sup> The University of Oslo, NTNU, the University of Bergen and the University of Tromsø.

it increased at all the other institutions<sup>16</sup>. In other words, the reason for why the total departure rates for universities had become lower after the reform was caused by the University of Oslo's improvement.

In regards to social background, there was a decrease in departure rates for all origins after the reform. This was probably caused by the removal of the preparatory course. Students whose parents had four or more years of higher education experienced the largest reduction in percentage points as they went from a departure rate of 12 to 6 percent, the respective numbers for other social backgrounds were: Parents with basic education: just above 14 to 10 percent, parents with completed upper secondary school, parents with short degree within higher education just above 12 to 7 percent. All of these numbers were the results after controlling for several potential confounding variables such as gender, age, immigrant background, geographical origin, to name a few. Grades at any educational level were not incorporated in the analysis.

In a more recent study, Hovdhaugen (2009) investigated transfer ("students moving from the university they commenced their studies") and dropout ("students leaving higher education without completing a degree or diploma") among undergraduate students that enrolled in the autumn of 1999 within the educational fields of the humanities, social sciences and natural sciences at the University of Oslo, the University of Bergen and NTNU (in other words, the same educational fields and universities, in addition to the University of Tromsø, that are to be analysed in chapter 7).

The main aim of the article was to examine what variables affected the risk of transfer and dropout, respectively. She therefore used two sets of independent variables: background variables and variables on choice, motivation and student effort. Students' social background was operationalised with three dichotomous variables: none of the parents have higher education, one of the parents has higher education and both parents have higher education. Students' social background did not influence the chance of transferring to another university, while students whose both parents had higher education had a statistical significant lower probability of dropout than the two other groups. It is interesting, and perhaps surprising, that going from one to two parents with higher education makes a difference, while going from

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<sup>16</sup> For the University of Tromsø the increase was small and not significant.

none to one parent with higher education does not. When it comes to grades, Hovdhaugen divides the variable into four dichotomous groups. The variables have no effect on the probability of transfer, while the effect is considerable when it comes to dropout. However, it is only the students in the fourth group, i.e. those with the highest grades, which have a statistical significant lower risk of departure than the reference group, i.e. those with lowest grades. A student in the lowest grade group whose both parents have higher education has approximately 8 (female student) and 14 (male students) percent probability of dropout, while the probability is approximately 12 (female students) and 20 (male students) percent for the student were none of the parents have higher education. Further on, the older the students is, the lower is his/her probability of transfer, while the opposite is true for dropout as older student are more prone to it. There are no differences between the educational fields when it comes to dropout, while students from the educational field of natural sciences have a lower probability of transfer than the two remaining fields.

When it comes to the second group of variables, the variable representing educational goals has three dichotomous values: uncertain of educational goal, limited educational goal and goal to complete a degree. Students with limited educational goals have a statistical significant higher risk of departure than those who aim for a degree, while uncertainty about one's educational goal does not affect the probability of departure compared to having a degree as the goal. The last variable measures student effort. It is divided into three dichotomous values: low, medium and high degree of activity. Interestingly, both a medium and high degree of activity reduces the chance of transfer and dropout to an equal extent. As a result of this finding, Hovdhaugen suggests that universities may profit from enhancing study activity within and outside the classroom. One could claim that the latter suggestion has, at least partly, been fulfilled by the changes in the Quality Reform when seminars were introduced.

Hovdhaugen summarizes her finding in the following way: "Background characteristics, such as parents' educational level and previous achievement, have an effect on the probability of dropping out of higher education, but have no effect on transfer. Correspondingly, variables on motives and choice have no effect on dropout, but are important for understanding transfer" (Hovdhaugen, 2009:14). Lastly, it should be noted that her sample consisted of 3537 students where 50,2 percent of them responded to the questionnaire that was distributed in 2004/05 (as mentioned, the students enrolled in 1999).

The conclusion we may draw from previous research is that the results differ substantially in regards to social background differences in departure from higher education. The reason for this is mainly threefold. First of all, departure from higher education has been defined in different ways. As there is no final way to measure the concept of departure, it has been measured in different ways. Some have focused on whether students still are registered at university one year after they enrolled without any other criteria, while some, like Hansen and Mastekaasa (2005) has added students need to be out of higher education for two subsequent semesters. In addition, the results may cause some confusion as they are presented in different ways, e.g. some present cumulative ratios while others do not. Secondly, another source to the difference in the reported results is that social background is operationalised different ways. All of the outlined studies use parents' educational level as a proxy for social background, but they differ in the ways they use this variable. Some focus on whether none, one or both parents have higher education (e.g. Hovdhaugen, 2009), while others are more concerned with the highest educational level of the mother or father. An interesting aspect in this regard is that none of the researchers (as far as I can see) provide a rationale or argument for operationalising social background in one or the other way. I believe that there is much to gain by providing a theoretical argument for measuring social background in one way or another. This is because I believe that at best such an argument may help us provide better explanations for why the categories we provide bring out the outcomes we find. Thirdly, the results may differ because the samples differ. Some have focused on students that enrolled at university the same year as they graduated from upper secondary school, some have confined their sample to students that are no older than 25 years, and others have focused on certain educational fields. These are the three main reasons for why we find different results in regards to social background's impact on departure from higher education. Of course, other factors may influence the result as well, like when and how data were collected and what variables researchers have controlled for.

## 4 Theory

In regards to theories for explaining the perennial inequality of the educational system, Gambetta (1987) posed an important question that constitutes what I believe to be the main division in explaining departure from the educational system:

... to what extent can educational behaviour be represented as a product of intentional choice or, conversely, to what extent is it the result of processes which, in one way or another, minimize the scope for a socially meaningful choice at the individual level? (Gambetta,1987:7).

The question put forward by Gambetta opens for a distinction between two different perspectives, a distinction that is going to be followed through this thesis. The first putting the gist of the matter on rational choices committed by the individual, the second perspective focusing on dispositional behaviour related to one's social class. More concretely, the first perspective includes Boudon and Goldthorpe's social position theory, while the second perspective is presented through Bourdieu's theory of reproduction. The main aim of the following chapter is to describe, explain and discuss Bourdieu's theory of reproduction and Boudon and Goldthorpe's theory of social position. These two theories divert on the question of how one should explain educational inequality and on the question of how to best understand human action. Since the social mechanism that causes educational inequality and the way human action is understood are strongly interrelated in both of these theories, both aspects are devoted space as the theories are laid out.

It is far from a well-kept secret that these theories have mainly been concerned with understanding social class inequalities in regards to grade attainment and educational transitions. Considering this, an important question is whether these theories are fruitful when it comes to understanding departure from higher education. I will argue that they are. In the following section I will lay out my most important arguments as to why I believe so. This section is followed by an outline of two hypotheses (the life course hypothesis and differential selection hypothesis) that rival to explain why there are stronger effects of social origin on early transitions in the educational run as opposed to later transitions, a finding that may have important implications in regards to departure from higher education. Lastly, I clarify the distinction between primary and secondary effects of stratification before I embark on laying out the theories. At the end of the chapter I spell out the hypotheses that are to be investigated in chapter six and seven.

#### 4.1 Theories and departure

In the following I will argue that both departure and transitions within the educational system may be a result of both constraints and choices made according to one's preferences, or push and pull effects, if you like. This is also the argument as to why I believe that reproduction theory and social position theory can be fruitful for understanding departure.

Departure may be defined as the act of leaving the educational system at a non-institutionalized point. In higher education this is typically the completion of the undergraduate degree or the graduate degree<sup>17</sup>. If the act of leaving the educational system at a non-institutional point is experienced in more or less the same way as the act of continuing or not continuing one's educational career at a institutional point (i.e. transitions within the educational system), I see no reason for why the same theories that are used to explain inequalities in regards to educational transitions should not be appropriate to explain inequalities in regards to departure. However, a widespread view is that students who leave their educational career in the midst of it do it as result of various constraints that hinder them from continuing the educational ladder, while students freely choose which path to follow according to their desires when they are standing at an institutional branching point.

Gambetta (1987:47) represents two common arguments as to why departure should be the result of a push effect. In accordance with Norwegian research on departure (Hansen and Mastekaasa 2005) he refers to the finding that students with low grades tend to leave the educational system at a higher rate than students with higher grades. A reasonable interpretation of this pattern is that students with low grades are ill prepared for the educational run they have enrolled in and therefore quit. In this sense, students with low grades are more or less pushed out. Secondly, leaving the educational system before completing one's degree is normally associated with negative consequences e.g. reduced labour market opportunities. As a result, students should not willingly leave their educational career. However, he argues, these two arguments are at least partly refutable. First of all, the correlation between grades and the probability for departure does not necessarily mean that the former causes the other. Secondly, whether there is a net benefit of, say three years at university (which after the Quality Reform would in most cases result in a bachelor's degree) compared to one or two years, is an empirical question. Gambetta refers to findings from

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<sup>17</sup> What constitutes an institutional point may be extensively discussed and problematized, I believe that defining it as the completion of a degree is suitable as this is what enables the student for further studies and provides the students with a credential for use in the labour market.

international literature on the topic and writes “... an incomplete university education is by no means a complete economic waste... Usually this is attributed to the fact that more education is useful in itself because it raises productivity” (Gambetta 1987:48).

What I tried to demonstrate in the preceding paragraph is that departure from higher education is not necessarily caused by a push effect or that the consequences of leaving necessarily are negative. In the same manner, one should not a priori assume that the act of continuing or not continuing one’s educational career at an institutional point (educational transitions) is a purely free decision. Pressure from parents may for instance represent a push factor for continuing one’s educational career, regardless of one’s own desires. Even though many tend to think of departure as a push effect and transitions as a pull effect, I believe that the reality is much messier than this. Many mechanisms may operate to cause one outcome, e.g. one could for instance imagine that a small push (depending on the context, but e.g. a negative comment from a professor) combined with a heavy pull (a great job offer) could result in the student leaving its educational career. Secondly, different persons may make their decisions according to different mechanisms: While students from the higher social classes may choose to continue or leave university based on their preferences and expected advantages, students from the working-class may be pushed out of university as a result of not fitting in.

An important argument against the use of these theories is that although leaving could be said to be an educational choice, it is committed in a different context than those educational choices one make before entering the social life of higher education. It is plausible that other factors than the resources mediated through one’s parents and one’s scholastic aptitude are just as, or perhaps more, important for understanding departure. Tinto (1993), for instance, highlights that students’ lack of social integration is the main cause for student departure. This counter argument is probably more relevant for social position theory than reproduction theory as the latter gives much attention to the social setting of higher education.

## **4.2 Transitions to higher education: Two hypotheses**

Departure from higher education is related to the opposite process of arriving higher education. In Norway, students who wish to enrol in university are solely being assessed on the background of their grades from upper secondary school. So for instance, let's imagine that the number of applying students was immensely vast a given year. The outcome of this would most likely be that the competition for admission to higher education would increase. As a result, only students with the highest grades from upper secondary school would be admitted (given that the number of seats within higher education is not increased). Since grades influence the probability of departure (Hansen and Mastekaasa, 2005), fewer students would probably leave higher education, compared to those years where also the students with middle and lower grades are admitted. Admission, or transition, to universities is not an issue in this thesis, but since it is related to departure, the topic will be devoted some space in the following.

In relation to transitions within the educational system, the work of Mare (1980) is indispensable. In brief, he proposed a model that rendered it possible to study inequality of educational opportunity, i.e. the chance of making a particular educational transition, over time despite expansions or contractions in the educational system. His findings demonstrate stronger effects of social origin at the beginning of the educational ladder, than in the upper end of it. According to this finding it is expected that social origin will play a greater role in the chance of making the transition from compulsory education to secondary education, than say the transition from secondary education to tertiary education.

This pattern has been demonstrated to exist in many countries as well as Norway (Shavit and Blossfeldt 1993, Hansen 1997). Hansen (1997) demonstrated that 76,6 percent of the offspring of higher grade professionals (teachers, engineers, administrators) made the transition from compulsory education to upper secondary level education, while 20,1 percent of the students whose parents were unskilled workers made the same transition. In regards to the transition from upper secondary education to tertiary education the numbers for the respective classes were 21,1 percent and 5,8 percent. The strong effect of social background on recruitment to higher education has been demonstrated by Næss and Støren (2006) as well. They found diminishing proportions of students whose parents had no higher education at



Norwegian universities between 1991 and 2003<sup>18</sup>. In the beginning of this period the proportion was above 45% while in the end it was closer to 40% (Næss and Støren, 2006:22). Further on, students whose age was between 25-29 when they enrolled were mainly from the working-class, while a larger proportion of students below the age of 25 had parents with tertiary education of some kind (Næss and Støren, 2006:24). The main implication of these findings is that the effect of social origin decreases for each transition that is made throughout the educational system.

Two hypotheses compete trying to explain these findings. The first one, coined the life-course hypothesis, claims that this pattern emerges because the older the student becomes, the less he is dependent on the preferences and economic situation of his parents: “students will increasingly be able to decide on their own what they want and will rely less on parental resources” (Blossfeld and Shavit, 1993:9). The other one, the differential selection hypothesis, points to another mechanism, namely that students from lower social classes experience severe barriers at each educational transition. As a result, only the brightest students from the lower social classes are able to make it through the last educational transitions. Furthermore, students become more homogeneous in regards to unmeasured variables (motivation, ability, and motivation).

The hypotheses are also relevant in when it comes to departure from higher education. In regards to the first hypothesis, students who enter higher education are at least eighteen years old, and many of them older, and we could therefore argue that they should carry out educational choices more or less independent of their parents. Considering the second hypothesis, Hansen and Mastekaasa (2005) have shown that grades from upper secondary school are more important for understanding departure from higher education than social background. This could imply that students from different social classes within universities are homogeneous in regards to their academic abilities and that this is the main factor that decides who stay and who leave higher education. The main implication of both of these two hypotheses is that educational transitions committed late in the educational career (e.g. transition to or departure from higher education) are, for different reasons, less affected by students’ social class origin than former transitions. As a consequence, departure from higher universities could first and foremost be related to other factors than social class.

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<sup>18</sup> They measured the proportions for the following years 1991, 1995, 1999, and 2003.

### **4.3 Primary and secondary effects of stratification**

An important distinction to bear in mind with regards to educational research is what Boudon (1974) has coined the primary and secondary effects of stratification in the educational system. The primary effects refer to cultural differences that influence children's school achievement, like grades. The secondary effects refer to the levels of aspiration which also varies among social groups. Boudon's main assertion is that the primary and secondary effects may operate independent of each other. He exemplifies this with two children, one from the lower-class and the other one from the middle-class. In regards to the primary effects, they have obtained the same results, but despite this, these two children are likely to execute different choices at their next transition in the educational system, e.g. the choice between staying or dropping out of school. In relation to this thesis an interesting question will be whether students that perform equally well in school to a different degree are liable to leave the educational system.

### **4.4 Reproduction theory**

On the contrary to a game of roulette, a game where the players have equal chances of winning every time the board is spinning and the ball is rolling, Bourdieu asserts that the chances of success are unequal distributed in the social world. His major concepts for explaining how social reproduction takes place are habitus, field and capital. The notion of habitus refers to what people in different social locations regard as comfortable and natural. Field is the different social settings in which habitus operate in. Capital, first and foremost economic and cultural capital, refers to the resources that a person brings with her. Together these concepts represent an answer to one of Bourdieu's central questions: "...how can behaviour be regulated without being the product of obedience to rules?" (Bourdieu, 1990:65). His formalized model of practice is [(habitus) (capital)] + field = practice. In what follows, the main ideas behind Bourdieu's understanding of social classes are presented. Following this, his main concepts (habitus, capital and field) are outlined.

#### **4.4.1 Bourdieu's construction of social classes**

Bourdieu's construction of social classes diverges from Marxist and Weberian approaches. While the former of these construct classes on the basis of the social relations of production, the latter does it on the basis of life chances, i.e. the chances individuals have of gaining access to scarce and valued outcomes. Bourdieu, on the other hand, constructs social classes on the basis of the conditions of existence that people live under. The conditions of existence has wide ranging consequences for individuals as it is not merely decisive for their access to certain resources, but they also create dispositions which in turn creates practices. In other words, individuals living under similar conditions of existence make out the social classes according to Bourdieu and, furthermore, individuals in the same social classes tend to be socialized and (therefore) disposed to act in similar ways, their habituses are more or less the same. Similar habitus forms, those located close to each other in the social space (more about this notion later), amounts to a specific class habitus.

The question is then what constitutes the conditions of existence and social classes? The answer is different forms and amount of capital. Bourdieu insists that social class analysis cannot be reduced to economic relations alone, but must include multiple factors such as cultural, social and symbolic capital. Out of these four, economic and cultural capital remains, although in different ways, the main stratifying factors of society. On the basis of these two forms of capital, Bourdieu constructs social classes and fractions within them<sup>19</sup>. By using various measures to measure individuals' volume and composition of capital, Bourdieu is able to place individuals in specific positions in a Cartesian coordinate system called the social space. The total volume of capital, regardless of its composition, constitutes the interclass divisions in the social space. At the top of the hierarchy we find occupations like university teachers, senior state officials, big business owners and executives, artists and writers. At the other end we find different occupations that are typically associated with the working-class, e.g. manual labour in industry and agriculture. As a coordinate system consists of continuous axes, Bourdieu's social classes are to be understood as gradational rather than categorical. Further on it is worth mentioning that the social classes in Bourdieu's sense are not real classes in themselves, but constructed entities.

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<sup>19</sup> A third factor is the social trajectory of individuals and social classes. This dimension designates how the volume and composition of capital change over time. In next turn, this shapes the practice of the individual and social classes in question. It is important to emphasize that the volume and composition of economic and cultural capital of an individual or social class may function differently depending on the social trajectory. E.g. it is not without importance whether one's origin is that of a professor or mechanic, despite the fact that one's occupation, education and income remain the same (Swartz, 2005).

Individuals at the top of the hierarchy enjoy great volumes of both economic and cultural capital, but at the same time there is a division in the composition of capital. Despite the fact that a writer and a big business owner may have the same volume of capital, they differ in the composition of capital. While the writer is rich on cultural capital, she is less affluent when it comes to economic capital. The opposite is true for the big business owner. The senior state official may find herself somewhere in between these two poles as she has more or less equivalent quantities of cultural and economic capital. The different compositions of cultural and economic capital make out intraclass fractions within the social classes. In regards to the working-class, there are no intraclass fractions as it is defined by its relative lack of both economic and cultural capital. Even though the class probably is far from homogenous in regards to the composition of capital, Bourdieu has not made any further distinctions within it as he paid most attention to the dominant classes.

#### **4.4.2 Habitus**

Habitus is, together with field, Bourdieu's main concept for explaining how behaviour can be regulated without being the product of obedience to rules<sup>20</sup>. In addition to rejecting approaches that emphasize individual's rule obedience as a way of understanding human practice, e.g. structuralism, he discards approaches that view human action as mainly consisting of rational choices.

Instead he stresses that individuals are disposed to act in certain ways. The notion of disposition conveys the idea that individuals and groups are structured and as a result of this has a tendency, propensity, inclination or predisposition to act in certain ways instead of others. Habitus is a system of such durable, but not eternal, dispositions that allow the actor to proceed on a pre-reflexive basis under typical circumstances<sup>21</sup>. The systems of durable dispositions, or habitus, stems mainly from the prevailing conditions of existence that was current during one's early socialization experiences and represent "*master patterns* of

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<sup>20</sup> The most common definition of habitus is: "Systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. Objectively 'regulated' and 'regular' without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, they can be collectively without being the product of the organizing action of a conductor" (Bourdieu, 1990:53)."

<sup>21</sup> Weininger (2005) exemplifies the way habitus works with how "an accomplished musician is able to improvise within the context of a given harmonic structure without having to mentally rehearse alternative variations prior to actually playing them." (Weininger, 2005:91).

behavioural style that cut across cognitive, normative, and corporal dimensions of human action. They find expression in language, nonverbal communication, tastes, values, perceptions, and modes of reasoning” (Swartz, 2005:108). During these years individuals internalize the objective structures and acquire a sense of what is probable, possible, and impossible<sup>22</sup>. In other words, individual’s and group’s expectations and aspirations tend to match their objective probabilities for achieving a particular good. This internalization happens more or less unconscious and is therefore taken for granted by the individual or group of individuals in question.

Habitus is then a product of history and thereby it “ensures the active presences of past experiences” (Bourdieu, 1990:54), with “disproportionate weight to early experiences” (Bourdieu, 1990:54). Even though Bourdieu gives disproportionate weight to the primary years of socialization, subsequent experiences may contribute to shape habitus. However, this “process tends to be slow, unconscious, and tends to elaborate rather than alter fundamentally the primary dispositions” (Swartz, 2005:107). The reason for this is that habitus prefers the familiar over the unfamiliar:

Through the systematic ‘choices’ it makes among the places, events and people that might be frequented, the habitus tends to protect itself from crises and critical challenges by providing itself with a milieu to which it is as pre-adapted as possible, that is, a relatively constant universe of situations tending to reinforce its dispositions by offering the market most favourable to its products (Bourdieu, 1990:61).

Although enigmatic, the notion of habitus represents one of the main concepts Bourdieu uses to explain human agency.

#### **4.4.3 Economic and cultural capital**

Capital is power (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:97, Danielsen, 1998:77) and the notion highlights that different forms of capital may be converted into each other, e.g. a master degree in sociology could be used to obtain economic capital and social status through an occupation. Even though different types of capital have tended to proliferate throughout

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<sup>22</sup> Bourdieu writes that “In reality, the dispositions durably inculcated by the possibilities and impossibilities, freedoms and necessities, opportunities and prohibitions inscribed in the objective conditions (which science apprehends through statistical regularities such as the probabilities objectively attached to a group or class) generate dispositions objectively compatible with these conditions and in a sense pre-adapted to their demands (Bourdieu, 1990:54).

Bourdieu's authorship, economic and cultural capital remains the key forms of capital. Economic capital is the form that Bourdieu writes least about. Bourdieu asserts that it is the root of all other types of capital and that these are disguised forms of economic capital. As an example, he writes that the "... transformation of economic capital into cultural capital presupposes an expenditure of time that is made possible by the possession of economic capital" (Bourdieu, 1986:54). In relation to education, cultural capital has stood out as the most important one.

The point of combining "culture" and "capital" is the aim of presenting a concept that takes up the idea of culture as something that provides access to limited assets, like a university degree. According to the theory, social institutions are not neutral institutions, but reward a certain form of culture, namely the legitimate culture. The legitimate culture is also the dominant culture, and those endowed with it are in possession of cultural capital. However, cultural capital is not a characteristic of an individual or a substantial concept, i.e. an invariant type of cultural attitudes, preferences, behaviours, and goods, but a set of relations, in this case between individuals and educational institutions (Danielsen 1998:79). Family and schools seems to have a perennial changing nature (e.g. Gullestad 1997 and Karabel, 2005)<sup>23</sup>, and despite this, reproduction theory finds a more or less constant homology between the dominant culture in society and the educational system.

Cultural capital may exist in three different forms; the embodied state, objectified state and institutionalized state. The latter is more or less educational credentials, while the second is cultural goods like books, dictionaries, instruments and so on. The embodied state represents the most important form in regards to this thesis as it is this state of cultural capital that I regard as relevant in explaining why someone would leave their educational career. Bourdieu describes it as "long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body" (Bourdieu 1986:47), and is therefore inseparable from habitus.

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<sup>23</sup> Gullestad (1997) highlights the changing character of norms and interaction within families in Norway. Her main assertion is that there has been a shift in childrearing patterns among families during the past fifty years from emphasising "obedience" to "finding oneself". Karabel (2005) investigates the changing admission criteria at Harvard, Yale and Princeton from 1900 to 2005. He writes that the reason for why these institutions tend to have low numbers of working-class students is the product of a "powerful, if hidden, social process common to all societies – that the qualities that come to define "merit" tend to be attributes most abundantly possessed by dominant groups" (Karabel, 2005:549).

#### **4.4.4 The academic field and social class inequalities in departure**

An intuitive way of thinking about the notion of field is that it is a social microcosmos.

However, a social microcosmos is not necessarily a field. What amounts to a field and where the boundaries of it should be drawn is an empirical question. Such an empirical investigation is not within the scope of this paper. However, in much Bourdieu's work he has referred to the workings of the educational system as a field. In the following I am going to put the gist of the matter on some of the most important properties of the academic field and link these to the notions of habitus and capital and to elucidate how we may understand departure from the perspective of reproduction theory. One of the main functions of the academic field (and fields in general) is that there is a struggle over certain forms of capital, a competition. The agents engaged in this struggle employ different strategies to maintain or improve their position by acquiring the form of capital that is at stake. In regards to the educational system it is first and foremost institutionalized cultural capital that is at stake (often referred to as academic capital). The more you possess of cultural capital, the greater the chances for success are, as it enables you to accumulate more and faster than individuals with less cultural capital. As a result, the field is hierarchised, consisting of dominant and subordinate agents. And the interactions between agents in a field are shaped by their relative location in the hierarchy of positions.

One of Bourdieu's main features concerning the sociology of education is his insistent assertion that social class inequalities are mediated through the academic field. He discards approaches that "reduce educational inequalities to social inequalities" (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977:155) and argues that researchers should pay attention to the relation between the structure of class relations and the school system and the specific form they take in the logic of the educational system. Even though habitus is the product of the socialisation within one's social class, this does not necessarily mean that the action it generates is a direct result of one's early socialisation and possession of capital. Rather, habitus, capital and field are interrelated in ways that opens up for numerous practices, depending on the relation between these three concepts. For instance: despite the fact that the economic fractions of social classes dominate the cultural fractions in the social space, the cultural fraction has an advantage within the academic field.

With the notion of cultural capital, Bourdieu claims that the cultural experiences children (and later adults) acquire at home differentially facilitate them for school and the academic field.

As children from the middle-class and working-class enter the academic field, their experiences and culture from family life are given unequal value. The former have a natural ease, and are able to draw on earlier experiences and cultural resources, and by doing that, transforming elements from family life into cultural capital, while the latter have a sense of constraint and feeling of unease in the same social arena (Lareau, 1989:8; Bourdieu, 1986).

The coherence between the educational system and the dominant culture manifests itself in several ways, from the implicit codes of conduct, how instructions are given and so on. In regards to language, Bourdieu writes that bourgeois language has a tendency towards “abstraction, formalism, intellectualism and euphemistic moderation” (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977:116), while the working-class language “manifests itself in the tendency to move from particular case to particular case, from illustration to parable...” (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977:116). The former one being more advantageous as students’ examinations are mainly, or at least as much as mastery of subject matter, being assessed on their ability to elaborate their essays and oral formulations in a highbrow and academic manner. According to Bourdieu, it is the relation to language that stand out as the most important factor when it comes to success in the educational system, but also other characteristics are current “bearing, clothes, way of being and similar signs and signals, that in a subtle way reveals the student’s social origin...”<sup>24</sup> (Priour et al, 2006:84).

Further on, he asserts that students and teachers are worshipping a charismatic ideology where intellectual competence is viewed as a gift rather than something that is acquired through hard work (Priour et al, 2006: 82-83). However, this varies as some educational fields are more prone to the require talent of their students (e.g. mathematics), while others studies require hard work (e.g. geography). Students who are rich in cultural capital are assumed to have greater probability of success in the former type of field. This is mainly because the “... tasks within the ‘talent’ fields are diffuse and imprecise and the signs of success are unclear” (Hansen and Mastekaasa, 2006:280). Another aspect of the educational fields that are important in regards to social class and cultural capital, is what end they are located in according to two principles: power hierarchy and scientific status. The argument is quite lengthy, but Hansen and Mastekaasa (2006:280) argues that “... social class will have the greatest impact in fields that score high in the power hierarchy, and that emphasis on

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<sup>24</sup> “... kropsholdning, klæder, omgangsform og lignende tegn og signaler, der på subtil vis røber studentens sociale herkomst...”



scientific standards will weaken the impact of class". According to them, the humanities, social sciences and natural sciences are located in the scientific status end. Hence, this might entail that social class differences are less pronounced within these educational fields.

With the notion of habitus we could describe the middle-class experience within the educational system the following way: "... when habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it is like a "fish in the water", and it takes the world about itself for granted... It is because this world has produced me, because it has produced the categories of thought that I apply to it, that it appears to me as self-evident." (Wacquant and Bourdieu, 1998:127-128). Conversely, the habitus of working-class students encounter an adverse environment and are generally misfit to the social life in educational institutions, like a fish out of water. Due to the fact that social classes are unequally endowed with cultural capital and adapted to the academic field, the struggle is not a levelled playing field.

In addition to the assertions that students with a habitus ill fit to the academic field and poor in cultural capital will have a hard time succeeding within it, Bourdieu also claims that the educational system functions as a cognitive machine. More precisely, he argues that at a taken for granted level, the educational system functions as a social classifier, i.e. labelling students according to their social origin. Swartz (2005:204) exemplifies it in the following way: "Social and personal insults, such as 'you are only a worker's son' or 'you are crude', which would be judged unacceptable in academic culture, can nonetheless be expressed euphemistically as academic judgements in the 'misrecognized form': 'correct, but nothing more', 'lacks style,' or 'unremarkable work'. In addition, different tracks and studies within the educational system contribute to the classification of individuals according to their social origin, as these often are homologous to the social class structure, e.g. the high prestige studies often consist of students from high social class origin.

In regards to departure from higher education, the notion of selection becomes highly important. Bourdieu sees departure as a just another version of selection as he specifies it as "continuous selection" (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977:154). Allegedly, the most common way of leaving the educational system at a non-institutional point is through self-elimination. In the same manner as all other educational choices, self-elimination is not based on a rational calculation, but is rather dispositional. As habitus ensures a high correlation between objective opportunities and subjective aspirations and expectations, students' choices of whether continue their educational career or leave it, is made according to the expectations of

the probability that students from one's own social class will succeed academically: "The subjective expectations which leads an individual to drop out depends directly on the conditions determining the objective chances of success proper to his category, so that it must be counted among the mechanisms which contribute to the actualization of the objective probabilities (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977:156). This said, habitus also opens up for adjusting its expectations according to other acquaintances than one's social class: "... the subjective expectation of these classes is never independent of the objective probability characteristics of the acquaintance group... a fact which helps to increase the educational chances of the working classes..." (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977:157).

In sum, there are mainly four factors that may contribute to departure from higher education. Firstly, students who possess only small amounts of cultural capital have a major disadvantage compared to other students as they lack the academic language and implicit codes that the educational system demands for success. Secondly, working-class habituses are ill at ease and generally misfit to the academic field, like a fish out of water. Thirdly, the educational system labels students in a tacit and euphemistic way according to their social origin, and thereby stigmatizing students from lower classes. Hence, this could lead to higher dropout for these social groups. Fourthly, students shape their own subjective expectations of departure from higher education according to their practical expectations of the likelihood that students of their social class will succeed academically. Accordingly, if the probability of failing is especially high within one social group, this would increase the risk of departure for a student in this category. It is important to bear in mind that the reproduction theory first and foremost point to the primary effects of stratification when it points to what affects students' probability of departure. To encapsulate, student departure from higher education may be seen as the result of an intricate interplay between habitus' fit/misfit to the educational system, cultural capital, expectations, and selection processes.

#### 4.5 Rational choice and social position theory

Drawing on Keller and Zavalloni (1964)<sup>25</sup>, Boudon created a model for explaining inequality of educational opportunity called social position theory (Boudon 1974:22). In this section, social position theory will be presented in a general manner, before I continue sketching out the differences between Boudon's and Goldthorpe's conception of the theory in more detail. But prior to this, I will outline the two sociologists' conception of rational action theory.

Bourdieu wants to understand how behaviour can be regulated without the obedience to rules. Goldthorpe's mission is quite similar, as he wants to understand social regularities: "I take it that the phenomena with which sociologists are concerned are social regularities of some kind... The typical explanatory task is then to show how these regularities are created and sustained or, perhaps, modified, transformed, through the action and interaction of individuals." (Goldthorpe, 1998:168). Despite the fact that Bourdieu and Goldthorpe to a large extent agree in regards to what they want to explain, they disagree on how to explain it. Together with Boudon, Goldthorpe adopts rational choice theory (or rational action theory (RAT) as Goldthorpe prefers to call it)<sup>26</sup> for his explanatory task.

Rational action theory (or rational choice theory) is not a highly unified intellectual entity, but constitutes a family with both resemblances as well as significant differences, as Goldthorpe puts it. In this family, I believe that it would be fair to say that Boudon and Goldthorpe are closely related, although, as the following text hopefully will clarify, they have their differences. One general definition of the rational action family is "any theoretical approach that seeks to explain social phenomena as the outcome of individual action that is construed as rational, given individual's goals and conditions of action, and is in this way made intelligible" (Goldthorpe, 1996:109).

Some argues for strong rationality requirements, while others argue for weak rationality requirements<sup>27</sup>. The former is sort of an objective approach where the criteria for rational action is imposed on beforehand: "it extend to actors' goals in themselves, as well as to their

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<sup>25</sup> Keller and Zavalloni (1964) "Ambition and social class: a respecification"

<sup>26</sup> Goldthorpe writes that "I prefer to speak of rational action theory rather than rational choice theory because the latter term is sometimes understood in a narrower sense than would suit my purposes; and further, while rational choice entails choice in that one course of action rather than another is taken, I do not wish to imply that rational action always follows from implementation of a formal and explicit decision-making procedure" (Goldthorpe, 1998:187).

<sup>27</sup> In reality we are talking about a continuous line between stronger and weaker rationality requirements, rather than one strong and one weak approach.

beliefs and the action they take towards their goals on the basis of their beliefs” (Goldthorpe, 1998:169). This and related approaches of rational choice theory has been heavily criticized by Boudon. He argues that they are too narrow and not able to explain important forms of social actions and that one should expand the scope of what should be regarded as a rational: “... social actors should be considered as rational in the sense that they have strong reasons of believing what they believe, of doing what they do, and so forth...” (Boudon, 1998:825). This is then what we might call a subjective approach, where the rationality requirements are weak. Goldthorpe is sympathetic to Boudon’s ideas and believe that weaker rationality requirements are more appropriate for sociology. However, he suggests that one should hold on to the idea of rational action as being consequentialist, i.e. that actions contains some cost-benefit evaluations, despite the fact that actors often deviate from perfect rationality and follow other courses of action than what they know is rational (Goldthorpe, 1996:485).

The focal point of social position theory is how educational choices are being affected by social position. As students confront educational decisions Goldthorpe argues that: “considerations arising from the relationship between class origins and envisaged destinations – educational and in turn occupational – become crucial” (2000:171). Two aspects of one’s social position are crucial when educational choices are committed: That educational aspirations and costs and benefits are relative to one’s social origin.

First of all, social position theory entails that aspirations and ambitions are relative to one’s social position. Hence, two individuals, one originating from the upper class, and one from the working-class, may have the same level of aspirations despite the fact that they achieve different levels of educational attainment. On the other hand, if the same two persons have ambitions of accomplishing a doctorate in a certain discipline, the person from the working-class is perceived as having greater aspirations than the one from the upper class. This is because the former has to travel a longer social distance than the one from the upper class. Social distance is a metaphor for opportunities and constraints. It is important to bear in mind that aspirations first and foremost are demonstrated through the secondary effects of stratification, i.e. the choice of which path to follow at different educational transitions or whether to leave one’s educational career. According to Boudon, the influence of primary and secondary effects of stratification is different according to different levels in the educational system. The impact of primary effects diminish throughout the educational run as students from lower classes leave chooses to leave the educational system or embark on an vocational

education. Secondary effects, on the other hand, are present at each educational choice committed in the educational run.

Secondly, it is assumed that the costs and benefits of higher education are unequally distributed among social classes. Even though the absolute costs related to education are the same across social classes, the relative costs are not due to the fact that the economic capital is unevenly distributed among social classes. Benefits are also relative to one's social origin. This is because students from higher classes will have greater benefit of further education since it will help them achieving the same social position as their parents. In regards to students from the working-class, additional years of education compared to parents' social position will have decreased marginal utility.

In the same way as Boudon and Goldthorpe diverged on some points in regards to rational choice theory, they diverge on the topic of social position theory in three ways. First of all, as mentioned in a previous section concerning primary and secondary effects of stratification, Boudon regards primary effects of education as being influenced by class culture. Goldthorpe's criticizes Boudon's stand and asserts that he "largely underwrites the idea of the *famille educogène*" (Goldthorpe, 1996: 490), i.e. placing him in the same tradition as Bourdieu. Goldthorpe proposes an alternative where he incorporates primary effects in a way that he does not need to have an answer as to whether they first and foremost are genetic, psychological, or cultural in character (Goldthorpe, 2000:183). He simply makes the assumption that for some reason or another, the mean ability is higher among the service-class children.

Secondly, Boudon underlines that in addition to monetary costs, educational choices may also entail social costs. These costs may be substantial for the student originating in the middle class who ponders whether to enroll in a less prestigious curriculum than his friends, and for the student from a lower class family who risks separating himself from his friends by choosing a more prestigious curriculum. Further on, he asserts that there might be social costs related to family solidarity. According to Boudon, students from the middle class may increase solidarity within the family by embarking on a prestigious curriculum, while the opposite counts for the student from the working-class (Boudon, 1974:30). Once again, Goldthorpe rejects Boudon's suggestion. First of all because he is sceptical to the notion of social costs of mobility, and secondly because he believes that the working-class communities of the

solidaristic kind that Boudon's ideas entail have more or less dissolved in modern societies. As an alternative, he accentuates economy and information as the two fundamental resources.

Thirdly, Goldthorpe puts more emphasis on the distinction between maintaining one's social position and achieving a higher one. In cases where conflict between these two arises, Goldthorpe asserts that individuals will maximize the chances of avoiding downward mobility. Further on, this must be combined with the idea that education presents different costs among social classes, as the available resources for children's education varies among them. The cost of enrolling in or continuing one's educational career is relative to the resources available and therefore more expensive and involves greater risk for the working-class than for the service-class. For the offspring of the working-class, there is therefore a much greater probability of conflict between maintaining and improving one's social position.

#### **4.5.1 Social position theory and departure**

Educational choice has often been associated with transitions in the educational system, i.e. the choices one makes after completing a certain level of education. However, the choice of leaving one's educational career while one is in the middle of it could also be regarded as an educational choice. In this sense, the social position theory should be relevant for understanding departure, an assumption that is explicitly supported by Goldthorpe: "The model present is intended to be generic: that is, one applicable in principle to the entire range of decisions that young people may be required to make over the course of their educational careers as regards to leaving or staying on or as regards which educational option to pursue" (Goldthorpe, 2000:185).

As previously mentioned, according to the social position theory, most families want to avoid downward mobility at any cost. Considering this, the main explanation for why students from high social origins would have a higher probability for staying in school, rather than leaving, would be that it is more or less the only way to avoid downward social mobility. In a society like ours, where the population has generally become better educated, Goldthorpe asserts that families from the service class are experiencing more pressure to provide education for their offspring as this minimizes the possibility for downward mobility. In chapter three we saw that low grades' impact on departure were different for social backgrounds, while high grades' impact were more or less the same for different origins. This supports the idea of

social position theory which suggests that families in the upper end of the social class hierarchy will invest in higher education despite the fact that the investment might be a risky one.

In relation to departure we could easily imagine that not only were the service-class parents willing to support their offspring into higher education, but also willing to give them extra support as they have entered the educational system. It is important to have in mind that Boudon and Goldthorpe divide on the question of what kind of support students may receive from their parents. While the former would argue that children from higher classes may profit socially in addition to the monetary support from their parents, the latter more or less rejects social costs/benefits as an explanation and emphasizes that parents may help their children staying in school by providing them with information and money (Boudon 1974:30, Goldthorpe 2000:175). The reason for why parents from higher classes are able to provide their children with information is due to the fact that many of them have been students at the very same institutions themselves. Their offspring are therefore knowledgeable about the content of different degrees and courses and what is expected from them. In regards to lower class families, Goldthorpe assert that they view educational investment in a more guarded way than the service-class, as there are other more affordable options for maintaining one's relative class position than, in this case, enrolling in university. Further on, the costs of failing in higher education are likely to have more serious consequences for lower class students as it entails opportunity costs and perhaps lost opportunities for being admitted to other educational alternatives. Following this logic, students from lower classes would try to avoid departure from higher education for anything in the world.

## 4.6 Hypotheses

In the following section the rationale for six hypotheses is provided. The hypotheses are to be examined in chapter six and seven. Chapter six includes all educational fields while chapter seven focus on the humanities, natural sciences and social sciences. The main questions of this thesis is whether social class differences exist in regards to departure from higher education, and whether cultural capital decreases the risk of departure. Before I embark on investigating these questions, I am going to have a closer look on the Quality Reform and examine whether the total departure rates and social class differences in departure from higher education has changed as a result of the reform.

Neither reproduction theory nor social position theory makes any claim to explain whether overall departure rates may increase or decrease as a result of changes in the educational system. Both theories aims at explaining why some groups have less success in the educational system while other more. As a result, the theories are more relevant for the last five hypotheses and not this one. As demonstrated in chapter three, the main aim of the Quality Reform was that students should complete their studies. In relation to this, I highlighted three changes that the reform brought with it that I believe may have an important impact on departure: changes in the study structure, further evaluation on the way and changes in the financing system. Considering that these alterations were aimed at making students complete their educational run, we could expect that the departure rates were lower after the Reform than before the reform. This said, Hovdhaugen and Aamodt (2006:25) found statistical significant, but small changes in departure from higher education when they compared students that enrolled in 1999 and 2003. As they compared students from all higher educational institutions, they found that 21,5 percent of those who enrolled in 1999 had left higher education, while the same number for those who enrolled in 2003 was 20,6. This thesis concerns students within universities and the respective numbers for these institutions in Hovdhaugen and Aamodt's (2006) study was respectively 21,8 and 20,7 percent. In other words, the changes were small. These findings indicate that the Quality Reform did not succeed in fulfilling its intentions. Even though the samples and operationalisation of departure in this thesis differs from that of Hovdhaugen and Aamodt, the following hypothesis is based on their findings:

H1: The change in total departure rates remains the same after the Quality Reform.



The next hypothesis examines whether the Quality Reform altered social class differences in departure. One could argue that the changes that the Quality Reform brought to higher education might reduce social class differences in departure. For instance, the increased follow up of students through mandatory seminars, frequently hand-ins and exams within shorter time span, are changes that especially the lower classes may benefit from. The seminars might increase solidarity among students and as a result, students who experience universities as an unfamiliar arena may become more integrated. Frequently hand-ins may help students to crack the codes of the academic language. Additional exams, where each counts less compared to the old system, substantially decreases the cost (i.e. all costs except economic costs) of failing on one. This is because there are six exams during one year of study after the Quality Reform, compared to one, before the Quality Reform. Through the eyes of social position, the restructuring of the degrees might reduce social class differences in that it may be more tangible to apply for a coherent degree than building a degree year for year, i.e. the informational gap between students whose parents have experience from higher education and students whose parents are workers might shrink. This may lead to more students making the right choice in regards to their degree, and as a result the risk of departing decreases. All the changes that the Quality Reform brought with it, might actually contribute to decrease the informational gap, as much of the information that academician parents possess might be outdated and therefore devaluated. The changes in the finance system might also contribute to decrease social class differences as the total support is increased.

Notwithstanding, one could also imagine that many of these changes operate to increase social class differences. Mandatory seminars might increase working-class students' feeling of being stigmatized. Frequently hand-ins may also contribute to this as they go under the "diffuse label" in regards to evaluation criteria, something which students rich in cultural capital benefit most from. Additional exams could be experienced as additional pressure and therefore not prove to be beneficial for students from lower classes. It is possible to continue in the following way in regards to all the changes that were introduced as a result of the Quality Reform. However, it is difficult to shape any clear image of which direction each of the changes would affect social class differences. This said, from the way habitus is described by Bourdieu, I do not find it likely that the "durable dispositions" of lower-class habituses will respond to the changes of the Quality Reform by adapting to the social arenas of higher education in a different and more beneficial way than what they did before the reform (or the

other way around, i.e. that habituses higher up in the social class hierarchy will benefit less from the way higher education is organized following the reform). Consequently, the following hypothesis goes as follows:

H2: Differences in departure rates between social classes remain the same before and after the Quality Reform.

It is assumed that students whose parents possess a great deal of capital, regardless of whether it is mostly economic or cultural capital, have less chance of leaving the educational system than students whose parents possess small amounts of these two forms of capital. Students with the same total amount of capital constitute social classes in the Bourdieu-inspired class schema that is used to inform the analyses. Both reproduction theory and social position theory provides arguments that supports the supposition that social class differences in departure may be prevalent. At the same time, students become more homogenous in several aspects throughout the educational run, something that may suggest that social class differences are small or non-existing. However, as demonstrated in chapter three, many investigations of the relation between social origin and departure from Norwegian universities show that there is a correlation between parents' educational level and the risk of departure. With this as a background, the next hypothesis follows:

H3: There are social class differences in departure.

In addition to the total amount of capital, the composition of capital may play an important role when it comes to leaving higher education. Put shortly, the argument is that cultural capital is the dominant capital within the spheres of the academic field and a great amount of it reduces the risk of departure. Hence, the following hypothesis is presented

H4: The greater the proportion of cultural capital a student possesses, the smaller the risk of departure is.

Departure from higher education is going to be measured two times after the initial enrolment to university: after one semester and after three semesters. The point of measuring it at two different stages is to see how social class differences develop over time. To my knowledge

previous research has not measured departure at more than one point after enrolment, so we do not get any help from it to adjust our expectations. Nevertheless, what I want to investigate is summarized in the following hypothesis:

H5: Social class differences in departure remain the same after one semester and after three semesters.

A binary correlation between social class and departure could hide the fact that one of the main reasons for this correlation is that some social classes have lower grades from upper secondary school than others, i.e. social class has an indirect effect on departure from higher education, i.e. that it is the primary effects that mainly determine whether students from different origins remains within higher education or not. This is the postulate of reproduction theory. Social position theory, on the other hand, gives greatest significance to the secondary effects, i.e. the relative aspirations that students from different social classes hold. The assumption of reproduction theory and previous research on grades' effect on departure (Hansen and Mastekaasa, 2005; Hovdhaugen and Aamodt, 2005) provides the basis for the sixth hypothesis:

H6: Social class differences in departure are to a large degree a result of different grade attainment among social classes.

## 5 Data and methods for analysis

The main question of this study is whether students with different social class origin leave university to a different extent. To answer this question a number of variables have been constructed and the aim of the following chapter is to provide a thorough description of them and the procedure that is to be followed in the analyses. To achieve this, I start off by presenting the data that constitute the basis of the variables. Further on, I describe the variables and how they were operationalised. Lastly the methods for the analysis are presented.

### 5.1 The data

The data that makes up the basis of the analysis is public population data gathered from FS<sup>28</sup>, The Norwegian Universities and Colleges Admission Service and Statistics Norway, population and housing censuses by Statistics Norway, tax and income registers and The National Education Database (NUDB). It was initially put together in connection with the “Educational Careers” project that was funded by The Research Council of Norway. The project lasted between 2003 and 2007 and was a collaboration between researchers at the University of Oslo, Oslo University College, and the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU).

There some advantages of using public register data compared to standard surveys. First of all, the samples are usually larger. Prior to any selective criteria, my initial data consisted of more than hundred thousand individuals that enrolled Norwegian universities between 1998 and 2005. Secondly, there are no systematic missing units<sup>29</sup>. Thirdly, the data is objective in the sense that one does not rely on the person’s subjective interpretations of e.g. her or his social background (not saying that this is not important or interesting). This makes it particularly suitable for investigating events over time. Lastly, I would like to emphasize that all individuals are anonymised by Statistics Norway. This said register data is not without its weaknesses. It remains mute about the reasons as to why someone would leave their educational career and how they feel about it. This is highly relevant for understanding why

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<sup>28</sup> ”Felles studentsystem”, there exists no english translation.

<sup>29</sup> The exception is grades from secondary school. This is dealt with at a later stage in this chapter.

someone leaves and whether they were “pushed out” of the educational system, or whether they had other opportunities that “pulled” them out of higher education. To sum up in a rather tautological way, the main weakness of register data is that one’s analyses are confined by the variables covered by registers.

**5.2 Samples**

The rationale for using two different definitions for constructing three samples was provided in section 1.6. The main characteristics of the samples are also provided in figure 5.1. Two samples will be analysed in chapter six, while the third will be analysed in chapter seven. The analyses in chapter six concern all educational fields, while the analyses in chapter seven include the humanities, social sciences and natural sciences. All samples consist of students that were no younger than 18 and no older than 25 (this amounts to approximately 90 percent of the student mass) when they for the first time accessed higher education at any of the following institutions: The universities of Bergen, the university of Oslo, the University of Tromsø or the Norwegian university of science and technology (NTNU) between 1998 and 2005.

**Figure 5.1 Definitions of the three samples**

Inclusive sample	Exclusive sample	Educational field sample
To be analyzed in chapter six		To be analyzed in chapter seven
Includes all educational fields		Includes the humanities, social sciences and natural sciences
Measures enrolment as the first course one embarked on.	Measures enrolment as the first course one embarked on that was not the preparatory course. Consequently, students who enroll in the preparatory course and leaves higher education afterwards are excluded in these two samples.	

The three samples are constructed according to two different definitions, as shown in the lowest boxes in figure 5.1. The inclusive sample includes all students that had their first enrolment to higher education regardless of what courses they enrolled in. The exclusive and educational field sample include all students that entered higher education for the first time and that enrolled in a course that was not the preparatory course, i.e. the preparatory course is excluded. The exclusive and educational field sample may then include students that have accomplished the preparatory course, but it is their enrolment after this course that is measured as their first enrolment. Hence, students that came to university and completed the preparatory course and then left the educational system are not included in these two samples.

Lastly it is important to emphasize that all the samples contained missing values. All samples varied between having four and five percent missing values on parents' social class. These were deleted and do not constitute a part of the analyses.

**5.3 Dependent variable**

The variable was operationalised by using the codes from the Norwegian Standard Classification for Education (NUS). This is a six-digit code where the first digit represents one's educational level (where six signifies undergraduate in higher education) and the second digit one's educational field. For each semester the code is registered, making it possible to see what sort of education the student is attending at specific moments. If there happened to be no information (missing) about the person one year or semester, it means that the person is not in the educational system at the time (Statistics Norway, 2000).

**Figure 5.2 Definition of departure after one semester and three semesters**

<b>One semester</b>	<b>Activity</b>	Studies	Left higher education	Left higher education		
	<b>Time</b>	Autumn, first semester	Spring, second semester	Autumn, third semester		
<b>Three semesters</b>	<b>Activity</b>	Studies	Is studying in one or both of these two semesters		Left higher education	Left higher education
	<b>Time</b>	Autumn, first semester	Spring, second semester	Autumn, third semester	Spring, fourth semester	Autumn, fifth semester

Because our interest is directed towards social class and those who leave university before finishing a degree, the dependent variable measures whether a student leaves higher education at different points subsequent to their enrolment. More concretely I measure whether the students were in the educational system one and three semesters after their first enrolment (see figure 5.2). If their standard classification code was missing or if the first digit was nine (which indicates that the education cannot be classified in any of the categories) or less than six (which indicates that the person has enrolled in an educational program at a lower level than tertiary education) at any of the aforementioned moments, I assume that they have left higher education educational system.

## 5.4 Independent variables

All dichotomous independent variables for the three samples are presented in table 5.1 while continuous variables are presented in table 5.2. The only variable with missing values is the grade variable (grades from upper secondary school).

**Table 5.1 Dichotomous independent variables used in the analyses for all three samples**

	Inclusive sample				Exclusive sample				Educational field sample			
	Before Quality Reform		After Quality Reform		Before Quality Reform		After Quality Reform		Before Quality Reform		After Quality Reform	
	N	Pro-portion	N	Pro-portion	N	Pro-portion	N	Pro-portion	N	Pro-portion	N	Pro-portion
<b>Social class</b>												
Upper class, culture	1173	0.03	726	0.03	1075	0.03	700	0.03	993	0.03	638	0.03
Upper class, middle	2696	0.06	1778	0.07	2391	0.07	1723	0.07	2165	0.07	1524	0.07
Upper class, economy	2445	0.06	1591	0.06	2086	0.06	1508	0.06	1878	0.06	1367	0.06
Upper middle class, culture	3984	0.10	2446	0.09	3517	0.10	2365	0.09	3248	0.10	2124	0.09
Upper middle class, middle	8464	0.20	5552	0.21	7377	0.21	5338	0.21	6797	0.21	4810	0.21
Upper middle class, economy	4517	0.11	3006	0.11	3831	0.11	2848	0.11	3502	0.11	2556	0.11
Lower middle class, culture	1536	0.04	990	0.04	1316	0.04	952	0.04	1197	0.04	845	0.04
Lower middle class, middle	3085	0.07	2044	0.08	2563	0.07	1950	0.08	2346	0.07	1748	0.08
Lower middle class, economy	5164	0.12	3330	0.13	4367	0.12	3178	0.12	3963	0.12	2826	0.12
Skilled workers	2302	0.06	1382	0.05	1933	0.05	1326	0.05	1767	0.05	1172	0.05
Skilled and partly skilled workers	2877	0.07	1848	0.07	2422	0.07	1774	0.07	2194	0.07	1579	0.07
Social welfare	3511	0.08	1878	0.07	2927	0.08	1782	0.07	2676	0.08	1580	0.07
<i>Total</i>	41754	1.00	26571	1.00	35805	1.00	25444	1.00	32726	1.00	22769	1.00
<b>Gender</b>												
Male	16490	0.39	11636	0.44	14337	0.40	11035	0.43	13301	0.41	10130	0.44
Female	25264	0.61	14935	0.56	21468	0.60	14409	0.57	19425	0.59	12639	0.56
<i>Total</i>	41754	1.00	26571	1.00	35805	1.00	25444	1.00	32726	1.00	22769	1.00
<b>The Quality Reform</b>												
Enrolled before the Quality Reform	41754	1.00	0	1.00	35805	1.00	0	0.00	32726	1.00	0	0.00
Enrolled after the Quality Reform	0	0.00	26571	0.00	0	0.00	25444	1.00	0	0.00	22769	1.00
<i>Total</i>	41754	1.00	26571	1.00	35805	1.00	25444	1.00	32726	1.00	22769	1.00
<b>Structured studies</b>												
Enrolled in a standard structured degree	36960	0.89	21625	0.81	29618	0.83	19938	0.78	29022	0.89	19109	0.84
Enrolled in structured studies	4794	0.11	4946	0.19	6187	0.17	5506	0.22	3704	0.11	3660	0.16
<i>Total</i>	41754	1	26571	1	35805	1	25444	1	32726	1	22769	1
<b>Universities</b>												
University of Oslo	15474	0.37	8679	0.33	11432	0.32	8085	0.32	10546	0.32	6999	0.31
University of Tromsø	3701	0.09	2582	0.10	3142	0.09	2335	0.09	2365	0.07	1710	0.08
NTNU	11908	0.29	9015	0.34	11340	0.32	8921	0.35	10387	0.32	8380	0.37
University of Bergen	10671	0.26	6295	0.24	9891	0.28	6103	0.24	9428	0.29	5680	0.25
<i>Total</i>	41754	1	26571	1	35805	1	25444	1	32726	1	22769	1
<b>Educational fields</b>												
Humanities	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	7668	0.23	6277	0.28
Social sciences	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	15141	0.46	10515	0.46
Natural sciences	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	9917	0.30	5977	0.26
<i>Total</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	32726	1	22769	1

**Table 5.2 Continuous independent variables used in the analyses for aall three samples.**

		Median	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Standard deviation	N	N missing between 1998-2004	N omitted of those who enrolled in 2005
<b>Age</b>									
Inclusive sample	Before Quality Reform	20	20.0	18	25	1.2	41754	-	-
	After Quality Reform	20	20.1	18	25	1.3	26571	-	-
Exclusive sample	Before Quality Reform	20	20.0	18	25	1.2	35805	-	-
	After Quality Reform	20	20.1	18	25	1.3	25444	-	-
Educational field sample	Before Quality Reform	20	20.0	18	25	1.2	32726	-	-
	After Quality Reform	20	20.1	18	25	1.3	22769	-	-
<b>Grades*</b>									
Inclusive sample	Before Quality Reform	43.3	43.1	20	60	6.4	34466	7288	-
	After Quality Reform	43.8	43.4	21.7	60	6.5	16144	1330	9097
Exclusive sample	Before Quality Reform	43.9	43.5	20	60	6.3	30233	5572	-
	After Quality Reform	43.9	43.6	21.7	60	6.5	15613	1102	8729
Educational field sample	Before Quality Reform	43.7	43.2	20	60	6.1	27415	5311	-
	After Quality Reform	43.8	43.3	21.7	60	6.3	13970	1003	7796

\*Those who enrolled in 2005 are omitted from the calculation of grades' median, mean, minimum, maximum and standard deviation due to a high level of missing values.

### **Social class: A Bourdieu-inspired class schema**

In the previous chapter I gave an outline of Bourdieu's notion of the social room, i.e. his construction of social classes. In putting this mode of thinking into research, Bourdieu has used a certain quantitative technique, i.e. correspondence analysis. According to Bourdieu it is "... a technique which "thinks" in terms of relations..." (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992:96). The quantitative technique used in this thesis is not correspondence analysis, but a linear modelling technique, and the Bourdieu-inspired class schema (thoroughly described in Flemmen and Andersen, 2009) is constructed to adjust linear modelling.



**Figure 5.3 The Bourdieu-inspired class schema and examples of occupations in it (Flemmen and Andersen, 2009:11).**

Upper class		
<i>Cultural fraction</i>	<i>Middle fraction</i>	<i>Economic fraction</i>
Professors, researcher, senior research fellow, translator, organist	Physician, assisting physician, priest, judge, pilot	Same job titles as those located in the economic fraction of the upper middle class, but with incomes exceeding one million Norwegian kroner.
Upper middle class		
<i>Cultural fraction</i>	<i>Middle fraction</i>	<i>Economic fraction</i>
Teachers with further education, special teachers, librarian, journalists, musicians within the entertainment business	Consultant, engineer, advisor, manager, nurses with further education, midwife, physiotherapist	Leaders and executives in private sector, money broker, house economist, accountant with an income between a half and one million Norwegian kroner.
Lower middle class		
<i>Cultural fraction</i>	<i>Middle fraction</i>	<i>Economic fraction</i>
Teacher, pre-school teacher, child welfare officer, social workers, children's nurse	Nurse, social educator, cook, chef, machinist	Same job titles as those located in the economic fraction of the upper middle class, but with an income below half a million Norwegian kroner.
	<b>Skilled workers</b>	
	Auxiliary nurse, milieu therapist, electrician	
	<b>Skilled and partly skilled workers</b>	
	Assistant, cleaner, security guard, janitor, waiter	
	<b>Social welfare</b>	
	Persons who receive more money from the welfare system than what their income amounts to.	

Flemmen and Andersen (2009) have used Bourdieu's conception of the social room as the guiding principle when they constructed the Bourdieu-inspired class schema with the presumption that the same principles, i.e. that social classes are composed of both economic and cultural capital, are current in Norway. Their approach consists of grouping occupations according to their perceived amount of cultural and economic capital: "The basis is a qualitative assessment and categorization of occupations according to their occupational title... One assumes that the occupational title says something about the work's *content*, further on it indicates the educational level and income"<sup>30</sup> (Flemmen and Andersen, 2009:11&12). This has been done on the background of Statistics Norway's occupational code system, STYRK, which categorizes occupations with seven digits and three other public registers<sup>31</sup>. To designate an occupation's position in the social room, a leading idea has been

<sup>30</sup> "Til grunn ligger først og fremst en kvalitativ vurdering og kategorisering av yrker ut fra deres yrkesbetegnelser ... Man tenker at yrkesbetegnelsen sier noe om arbeidets *innhold*, videre indikerer dette også utdannings- og lønnsnivå."

<sup>31</sup> Stat- og kommunekoder, Oslo kommunes koder og koder fra maritimt register.

that one's composition of capital is determined of whether one is employed in the private or public sector. The main argument is that people in private sectors are oriented towards an economic mindset and material values, while people in the public sector emphasize cultural aspects and moral stances (Flemmen and Andersen, 2009:10). In addition to occupation, tax-information was used to allocate individuals in their specific location.

It is important to emphasize that the class schema is based on the occupational titles that parents of the students held in 2005. As a consequence, the social class origin of a 19 year old student that enrolled in 1998 is gathered seven years later, when the student is 26 years old, while a 19 year old student who enrolls in 2005 is 19 years old when the social class origin is designated.

Figure 5.3 is an illustration of the class schema and examples of occupations that are found within the social classes and the different fractions of them. The schema consists of twelve classes. There are six vertical classes, signifying the volume of capital regardless of composition: Upper class, upper middle class, lower middle class, two levels for workers and one for persons who receive more social benefits than what their total income amounts to. Moreover, the three upper levels are horizontally divided into three classes, and this is where the composition of capital first and foremost is brought up to date, as the classes are constructed on the background of their relative amount of the two ingredients: The one's whose principal share of capital consist of cultural capital (culture), the one's whose composition consists of proximate portions of cultural and economic (middle) and the one's whose main share of capital consists of economic capital (economy). In regards to the remaining categories, workers are coded according to their total volume of capital and not their composition. The same counts for individuals who receive social benefits. In the following chapters, the notion of social class is used when I refer to the vertical dimension of the schema, i.e. the notion includes all three fractions of the schema. To designate any of the categories within each class, I refer to e.g. the cultural fraction of the upper class.

Initially there existed two schemas, one for the mother's class and one for the father's class. In my study I wanted to combine these into one schema. As a starting point I used father's class position to identify students' social origin. Further on, I wanted the parent with highest social class position to count. On the lower levels, i.e. skilled workers, unskilled and partly skilled workers and persons on social welfare, substituting father's position with mother's position where she obtained a higher position easily solved this object. However, the aim of collapsing the two schemas into one does not make sense on the horizontal level where both parents have the same amount, but different composition, of capital. The different fractions of the class schema constitute a dichotomous variable, where value one indicates that the parents of the student belongs to a given fraction of a class, and value 0 indicates that (s)he does not belong to it.

### **Gender**

Grusky (2001) holds that gender is one of the main stratifying factors in society. Even though gender is not the main explanatory variable in this thesis, previous research has demonstrated that there are several good reasons for incorporating it in the analysis. Educational choices in regards to student recruitment and dropout have a gendered nature (e.g. Hovdhaugen and Aamodt, 2005). On the whole, both theory and previous research demonstrate that there are good reasons for including gender as a variable. The variable is dichotomous where male students have value 1 and female students have value 0.

### **The Quality Reform**

To be able to discern the departure rates of students who enrolled before and after the Quality Reform, a dichotomous variable representing the Quality Reform is introduced. Students who enrolled before the reform have value 0, while students who enrolled after the reform have value 1.

### **Structured studies**

The variable structured studies include all degrees at tertiary level that lasts for more than four years, e.g. professional studies and studies where students can apply directly for a master, i.e. the undergraduate and graduate degrees are incorporated constitute a coherent run (e.g. graduate engineer<sup>32</sup>, master of teaching<sup>33</sup>, master of economics).

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<sup>32</sup> Sivilingeniør

<sup>33</sup> Lektorprogrammet

To operationalise structured studies, I have used the first digit in the six digits NUS classification that signifies educational level. While six indicates students in higher education at undergraduate level, seven refers to students that have enrolled in studies whose duration is four years or more. The variable is dichotomous and those who enrolled in structured studies have the value 1 and those who did not have the value 0.

### **Educational institutions**

There are four universities incorporated in this thesis. At the time when the reform was incorporated in tertiary education, these were the only ones that existed in Norway. The main reason for incorporating these as independent variables is based on the assumption that the reform might have worked in different ways at these institutions. Additionally, there could be factors that are not dependent on changes related to the educational reform that affect the rate of students leaving the institution. Perhaps exciting job opportunities are more prominent in Oslo than in the other cities, leading students to leave their education in favour of a job. An interaction variable between universities and the Quality Reform is also introduced.

The universities are part of the Norwegian Standard Classification for Education and each educational institution has its own distinctive code. Each university is operationalised as a dichotomous variable, with the value 1 if the student attended the university in question and the value 0 if (s)he did not.

### **Educational fields**

In the same manner as there might be institutional related reasons for why students leave, there might also exist patterns that are related to the specific field of study. In the first analysis chapter, all educational fields are included. Due to the fact that these educational fields in different aspects might be heterogeneous, the sample in the second analysis chapter is further narrowed down to students belonging to the faculties of the humanities, social sciences and natural sciences. Another important reason for confining the sample to the mentioned faculties is that the initiated reform most likely had greatest impact on these fields due to the fact that they have been organized in a much more loose fashion than say the faculty of medicine or law, where the reform has led to fewer changes.

To conclude, three distinct variables representing the humanities, social sciences and natural sciences are included in the analyses in chapter seven. Each of these fields are dichotomous

variables were those students who enrolled in any of the aforementioned educational fields have the value 1, while a student who did not attend the educational field in question has value 0.

### **Age**

The variable age is continuous and centred around the mean in the analyses, i.e. approximately twenty years for all three samples. I have chosen to focus on social class differences among young students and the sample is therefore confined to students under the age of 25. Further on, the variable is multiplied with itself to investigate whether it is curve linear or proportional, i.e. whether the relation between age and departure changes at a constant or intermittent rate.

### **Grades from upper secondary education**

Grades from upper secondary school are the second continuous variable. It ranges from 20 to 60, where the former number presents the lowest possible score and the latter the highest possible score. The variable is converted into a z-score in the analyses<sup>34</sup>. When a variable is converted into a z-score, the original mean value of the variable (e.g. 43.1 in the case of the grade variable for the inclusive sample before the Quality Reform) equals zero. While values above the mean are positive and values below are negative. Regardless of this, presentations of the grade variable's impact on departure will be presented according to the original values since these are more intuitive than the z-score. The grade variable is, in the same manner as the age variable, multiplied with itself to investigate the relation between it and departure more closely.

As previously shown in table 5.2, the grade variable has a considerable amount of missing values. These missing values stem mainly from the fact that the data used are not completely updated. More specifically, most of the grades from upper secondary school for students that completed this level in 2005 are missing. In addition, many students from previous years have missing grade information. If these missing values are unevenly distributed according to one or more variables that are included in the analysis, it might represent a problem. Since this paper concerns social class differences, my main concern is whether the distribution of the

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<sup>34</sup> Mathematically a z-score is defined the following way:  $Z = X - M / S$

Where X is the individual's grade, M is the average grade and S is the standard deviation.

missing values of the grade variable is unevenly distributed according to the social class variables. Table 5.3 provides an overview and we see that the missing values are more or less equally distributed between the social classes.

**Table 5.3 Proportion of missing values for the grade variable according to social class\***

<b>Social class</b>	<b>Inclusive</b>	<b>Exclusive</b>	<b>Educational field</b>
Upper class, culture	0,17	0,16	0,17
Upper class, middle	0,11	0,10	0,11
Upper class, economy	0,12	0,09	0,10
Upper middle class, culture	0,13	0,11	0,12
Upper middle class, middle	0,12	0,10	0,11
Upper middle class, economy	0,12	0,09	0,10
Lower middle class, culture	0,14	0,13	0,13
Lower middle class, middle	0,12	0,11	0,11
Lower middle class, economy	0,12	0,10	0,11
Skilled workers	0,12	0,11	0,11
Skilled and partly skilled workers	0,13	0,11	0,12
Social welfare	0,15	0,14	0,14

\* Those who enrolled in 2005 are omitted from this calculation.

In the forthcoming regression analyses (more about this soon), the variables presented in this chapter are introduced stepwise over five models. The grade variable is the only variable that is introduced in the fifth model, and due to the high number of missing values on the grade variable (and therefore a greater chance that these missing values will be unevenly distributed according to the other variables) in 2005, the students who enrolled in this year are omitted in model five of the analyses.

#### 4.5 Method and quantitative techniques

“Regression of a dependent variable on an independent variable is per definition the average value of the dependent variable in the different groups that are defined by the independent variable”<sup>35</sup> (Skog 2004:353). How number of years with education varies between ethnic groups is an example of this. For the dependent variable I have constructed, the case is somewhat different. Since this variable is dichotomous with the values, 1 (departure) and 0 (stay in higher education), the average is the proportion of individuals with value one. When the dependent variable is dichotomous, some of the main assumptions of ordinary least squares (OLS) regression are not fulfilled. Most importantly, the dispersion around the average value of the dependent value (or Y) is not the same for low and high values of X. Also, the predicted proportions based on ordinary regression might turn out lower than zero and higher than one. Lastly, the residuals are not normal distributed.

An alternative regression model is therefore preferred, namely the logistic regression model. This model allows a geometric relationship to be represented conveniently by a straight line. The model shares its basic ideas with ordinary regression, but deviates to a certain degree, making it possible for us to avoid the problems mentioned above. Firstly, one does not have to make any restrictive assumptions in regards to the residuals’ distribution. Secondly, by transforming the dependent variable to odds, the variable may have infinite positive values. And by taking the natural logarithm of the odds, infinite negative values are allowed in the model (Tuft 2000). The relation between the dependent variable and the independent variables in logistic regression is expressed in the following formula:

$$\text{Logit}(\tilde{Y}) = b_0 + b_1 \cdot X + b_2 \cdot X + b_3 \cdot X + \dots$$

To predict the coefficients that provide the best fit to the data, a method called “maximum likelihood” is used. This model estimates (and chooses) the coefficients that maximize the probability for observing the data. The coefficients are estimated by constantly revising the estimation (also called iteration process) until the likelihood of getting the data set we have is unnoticeable.

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<sup>35</sup> ”Regresjonen av en avhengig variabel på en uavhengig variabel er pr. definisjon den gjennomsnittlige verdien av den avhengige variabelen i de ulike gruppene som defineres av den uavhengige variabelen”

Logistic numbers are by definition a quantity representing the power to which a fixed number must be raised to produce a given number. The problem with this way of presenting results is that few of us think in terms of logistic numbers. A more intuitive approach is therefore adopted when results are presented in figures. Transforming logistic numbers into probabilities does this<sup>36</sup>. Notwithstanding, some of the tables in the following chapters will use logits to present the results. The constant ( $b_0$ ) is the average logit when all the other independent values are zero. The regression coefficients ( $b_1, b_2, b_3 \dots$ ) shows how much the logit increases/decreases when the independent value increases one unit. If the logit is positive, the chance of leaving the educational system increases. Conversely, the chance of leaving the educational system decreases if the logit sign is negative.

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<sup>36</sup> This is achieved with the following formula:  $\tilde{Y} = 1/(1+e^{-(b_0 + b_1 \cdot X + b_2 \cdot X + b_3 \cdot X + \dots)})$





## **6 Analysis of departure from all educational fields**

The following chapter concerns student departure from all four universities and educational fields between 1998 and 2005. The main goal is to investigate social class differences in departure from higher education in general and in light of the Quality Reform. To do this, two samples are used, the inclusive sample and the exclusive sample. These are described in section 1.6 and 5.2. Departure is measured one and three semesters subsequent to the initial enrolment at university. The chapter is organized in the following fashion: I start off by presenting the descriptive statistics for both samples. From thereon I embark on analyzing the six hypotheses in successive order.

### **6.1 Descriptive statistics**

Table 6.1 displays the descriptive statistics for the main variables to be used in the analyses. Grades from students that enrolled in 2005 are, due to a high number of missing values, omitted in table 6.1 and the forthcoming regression models where the grade variable is included (i.e. model 5 in the regression tables). Where the numbers are more or less the same for the inclusive and exclusive sample, I comment them as if they were one sample.

In regards to social class and grades from upper secondary school, we see that within each of the three upper social classes the students with greatest proportion of cultural capital have highest grades, although the differences in most cases are rather small. There is also a correlation between grades and social class (i.e. the vertical level of the class schema), the higher class one originates from, the higher one's grades are. Further on, female students have higher grades than male students. Age and grades are inversely related; as age increases, grades decreases. In other words, students with high grades apply for university right after or within few years after finishing upper secondary school, while students with lower grades await their enrolment. Grades are slightly higher for the students that enrolled after the reform than before the reform.

In the next column we see that a greater proportion of students enrol in structured studies for the exclusive sample than in the inclusive sample. The main reason for this pattern is probably that many students complete the preparatory course before they embark on structured studies. The proportion of students enrolled in the structured studies is smaller for the cultural fraction in the upper class and upper middle class, than that of the middle and economic fraction of the

same social classes. In the lower middle classes, the proportions are smoothened. There is also a vertical relation as the proportion commenced in the structured studies becomes smaller as one move down the social classes. Female students are twice as likely to enrol in structured studies as male students are. Further on, there is a strong relation between age and being enrolled in structured studies. Approximately one out of five 18-year-old students enrol in structured studies, while the proportion is one out of twenty for the students who are 25 year old. The proportion of students enrolled in structured studies has increased after the reform.

**Table 6.1 Descriptive statistics**

	Proportions/means for both samples							
	Grades from upper secondary school		Proportion enrolled in structured studies		Proportion of female students		Mean age	
	Inc.	ex.	Inc.	ex.	Inc.	ex.	Inc.	Ex.
<b>Social class</b>								
Upper class, culture	45.4	45.5	0.15	0.19	0.50	0.50	19.9	19.9
Upper class, middle	45.0	45.3	0.20	0.27	0.54	0.54	19.9	19.9
Upper class, economy	44.5	44.8	0.20	0.27	0.58	0.58	19.9	19.9
Upper middle class, culture	44.4	44.7	0.14	0.19	0.56	0.56	20.0	20.0
Upper middle class, middle	43.6	43.9	0.16	0.21	0.58	0.58	20.0	20.0
Upper middle class, economy	43.8	44.2	0.16	0.22	0.57	0.57	20.0	20.0
Lower middle class, culture	43.1	43.4	0.13	0.16	0.60	0.60	20.1	20.1
Lower middle class, middle	42.0	42.4	0.12	0.16	0.60	0.59	20.2	20.1
Lower middle class, economy	42.9	43.3	0.13	0.17	0.61	0.61	20.1	20.1
Skilled workers	41.1	41.4	0.09	0.13	0.63	0.63	20.3	20.3
Skilled and partly skilled workers	41.1	41.5	0.10	0.13	0.64	0.63	20.2	20.2
Social welfare	41.2	41.5	0.10	0.13	0.61	0.60	20.4	20.4
<b>Gender</b>								
Female students	43.5	43.9	0.20	0.28	-	-	19.9	19.9
Male students	42.7	43.0	0.10	0.13	-	-	20.3	20.3
<b>Age</b>								
18	46.4	46.7	0.18	0.23	0.71	0.71	-	-
19	44.8	45.2	0.16	0.20	0.71	0.71	-	-
20	43.5	43.8	0.16	0.22	0.55	0.55	-	-
21	40.8	41.0	0.11	0.15	0.46	0.46	-	-
22	38.9	39.2	0.08	0.10	0.46	0.44	-	-
23	37.9	38.1	0.06	0.07	0.46	0.45	-	-
24	37.9	38.1	0.06	0.08	0.50	0.48	-	-
25	37.9	38.1	0.05	0.07	0.49	0.49	-	-
<b>Quality Reform</b>								
Before the reform	43.1	43.5	0.11	0.17	0.61	0.60	20.0	20.0
After the reform	43.4	43.6	0.19	0.22	0.56	0.57	20.1	20.1

note: Students who enrolled in 2005 are omitted in the calculations of grades' mean due to missing values

Female students remain in majority in all social classes except the cultural fraction of the upper class, where they amount to half of the student mass. In regards to age and gender, female students are heavily overrepresented among the 18 and 19 year old students, where they amount to 71 percent. The plausible explanation for this large proportion may be that many potential male students are carrying out their military service during these years. The proportion of female students has decreased some after the Quality Reform.

The mean age increases the lower down in the social classes we move. The largest difference occurs as we compare students from the social welfare class with students from the upper class, a half-year. Students who enrolled after the reform are slightly older than those who enrolled before the reform. It is important to keep in mind that the selection is confined to students under the age of 26.

## **6.2. Departure rates before and after the Quality Reform**

This section examines hypothesis one and two. The first hypothesis states that the change in total departure rates remains the same after the Quality Reform. Hence, the interest is directed towards the overall departure rates before and after the reform, and not differences between social classes. Regression tables after one semester for both samples is found in the appendix, table A6.1 and A6.2. Further on, the regression tables for departure after three semesters are displayed below.

Table A6.1 and 6.2 provides an answer to hypothesis one after one and three semesters for the inclusive sample. In model 2 in both tables, the variable representing the Quality Reform is introduced and it is statistical significant lower both after one and three semesters. The risk of departure in the wake of the Quality Reform is lower after one semester than three semesters, indicating that the reform has had a stronger effect on short-term departure.

In regards to departure from higher education after one semester, we are able to discern departure rates according to educational institutions in model four, table A6.1. All institutions, except the University of Tromsø, have experienced slightly reduced departure rates after the reform. However, as grades are introduced in model five in table A6.1, all the coefficients related to the Quality Reform turns statistical insignificant. Consequently, it is higher grades among students who enrolled after 2003 that contribute to lower departure rates after one semester subsequent to the Quality Reform.

When it comes to departure after three semesters for the inclusive sample, model four in table 6.2 shows the results for all educational institutions. In this model, the University of Oslo is the only institution with lower risk of departure after the Quality Reform. The University of Bergen experiences so to speak interchangeable risk of departure, while departure at the University of Tromsø and NTNU increases. As we control for grades in model five, we see that this picture remains the same. For the reference group in model four, the reduction in departure following the Quality Reform at the University of Oslo is about three percentage points. After controlling for grades in model five, the reduction after the Quality Reform is reduced to approximately one percentage point for the same group. In other words, the decreased risk of departure found at the after the Quality Reform at the University of Oslo in model four, is partly caused by the fact that students who enrolled at this institution had higher grades after the reform.

**Table 6.2 Departure after three semesters for the inclusive sample**

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	coef	se	Coef	se	Coef	Se	coef	se	coef	se
<i>Social class (constant: Skilled and partly skilled workers)</i>										
Upper class, culture	-0.706***	0.105	-0.708***	0.105	-0.589***	0.106	-0.591***	0.106	-0.263*	0.128
Upper class, middle	-0.679***	0.076	-0.679***	0.076	-0.553***	0.077	-0.512***	0.077	-0.258**	0.090
Upper class, economy	-0.818***	0.082	-0.818***	0.082	-0.690***	0.083	-0.661***	0.083	-0.527***	0.099
Upper middle class, culture	-0.654***	0.067	-0.655***	0.067	-0.567***	0.068	-0.558***	0.068	-0.302***	0.080
Upper middle class, middle	-0.505***	0.055	-0.505***	0.055	-0.421***	0.056	-0.397***	0.056	-0.237***	0.066
Upper middle class, economy	-0.486***	0.063	-0.486***	0.063	-0.382***	0.063	-0.366***	0.064	-0.205**	0.074
Lower middle class, culture	-0.329***	0.083	-0.462***	0.099	-0.398***	0.100	-0.258**	0.085	-0.200	0.102
Lower middle class, middle	-0.152*	0.064	-0.152*	0.064	-0.119	0.065	-0.127	0.066	-0.123	0.077
Lower middle class, economy	-0.285***	0.059	-0.285***	0.059	-0.235***	0.059	-0.232***	0.060	-0.091	0.069
Skilled workers	0.010	0.068	0.010	0.068	-0.003	0.069	-0.008	0.069	-0.031	0.080
Social welfare	0.058	0.061	0.056	0.061	-0.018	0.062	-0.032	0.062	-0.042	0.073
<i>The Quality Reform (constant: before the reform)</i>										
			-0.078*	0.031	-0.113***	0.031	-0.248***	0.051	-0.115*	0.058
<i>Gender (constant: female students)</i>										
					0.163***	0.029	0.037	0.029	0.158***	0.035
<i>Age (constant: 20 years)</i>										
Age					0.296***	0.016	0.275***	0.016	0.108***	0.020
Age <sup>2</sup>					0.074***	0.012	0.061***	0.013	0.048**	0.015
Age <sup>3</sup>					-0.017***	0.003	-0.014***	0.003	-0.008*	0.003
<i>Structured studies (constant: not structured studies)</i>										
							-1.939***	0.096	-1.381***	0.103
<i>Institutions (constant: Univ. of Oslo)</i>										
University of Tromsø							-0.475***	0.066	-0.649***	0.087
NTNU							-0.308***	0.044	-0.336***	0.051
University of Bergen							-0.261***	0.040	-0.330***	0.049
Univ. of Tromsø*Quality Reform							0.445***	0.115	0.479***	0.139
NTNU*Quality Reform							0.433***	0.078	0.297***	0.087
Univ. of Bergen*Quality Reform							0.230**	0.079	0.218*	0.090
<i>Grades from upper secondary school</i>										
Grades									-0.634***	0.024
Grades <sup>2</sup>									-0.037**	0.014
<i>Constant</i>	-1.822***	0.045	-1.799***	0.046	-2.060***	0.052	-1.696***	0.057	-2.189***	0.069
Probability of departure for constant	0.139		0.142		0.113		0.155		0.101	
Number of observations	59 228		59 228		59 228		59 228		50 610	
Aic	38 615.795		38 608.117		37 698.640		36 769.013		27 212.752	
Bic	38 723.665		38 733.965		37 860.445		36 984.753		27 442.381	

note: \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05

note: The constant is a 20 year old female student originating from the skilled and partly skilled working class, who enrolled before the who did not enroll in structured studies, and with mean grades from upper secondary school.

The analyses for the exclusive sample after one and three semesters are displayed in table A6.2 and 6.3, respectively. Model two in both tables show the aggregated result of the Quality Reform. The Quality Reform variable demonstrates that there is no statistical significant effect of the Quality Reform after one semester, but after three semesters the variable is positive, signifying that departure from higher education has increased after the reform.

**Table 6.3 Departure after three semesters for the exclusive sample**

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	coef	se	coef	se	coef	Se	Coef	se	coef	Se
<i>Social class (constant: Skilled and partly skilled workers)</i>										
Upper class, culture	-0.616***	0.120	-0.610***	0.120	-0.500***	0.121	-0.465***	0.121	-0.235	0.144
Upper class, middle	-0.614***	0.089	-0.613***	0.089	-0.494***	0.089	-0.384***	0.090	-0.165	0.102
Upper class, economy	-0.819***	0.099	-0.817***	0.099	-0.692***	0.100	-0.576***	0.100	-0.430***	0.114
Upper middle class, culture	-0.612***	0.080	-0.608***	0.080	-0.524***	0.080	-0.489***	0.081	-0.226*	0.091
Upper middle class, middle	-0.492***	0.066	-0.491***	0.066	-0.408***	0.067	-0.348***	0.067	-0.193*	0.076
Upper middle class, economy	-0.579***	0.077	-0.578***	0.077	-0.476***	0.078	-0.404***	0.078	-0.228**	0.088
Lower middle class, culture	-0.321**	0.100	-0.543***	0.128	-0.483***	0.129	-0.228*	0.101	-0.168	0.118
Lower middle class, middle	-0.189*	0.078	-0.191*	0.078	-0.159*	0.079	-0.148	0.079	-0.120	0.090
Lower middle class, economy	-0.258***	0.070	-0.259***	0.070	-0.210**	0.071	-0.182*	0.071	-0.058	0.080
Skilled workers	0.014	0.081	0.016	0.081	0.002	0.082	-0.009	0.082	-0.012	0.093
Social welfare	0.016	0.074	0.024	0.074	-0.042	0.075	-0.019	0.075	-0.022	0.085
<i>The Quality Reform (constant: before the reform)</i>										
			0.218***	0.035	0.179***	0.035	0.289***	0.062	0.360***	0.068
<i>Gender (constant: female students)</i>										
					0.139***	0.034	-0.019	0.035	0.114**	0.040
<i>Age (constant: 20 years)</i>										
Age					0.280***	0.019	0.236***	0.019	0.097***	0.023
Age <sup>2</sup>					0.074***	0.015	0.069***	0.015	0.054***	0.018
Age <sup>3</sup>					-0.017***	0.003	-0.015***	0.003	-0.008*	0.004
<i>Structured studies (constant: not structured studies)</i>										
							-1.630***	0.082	-1.206***	0.091
<i>Institutions (constant: Univ. of Oslo)</i>										
University of Tromsø							-0.106	0.088	-0.275**	0.107
NTNU							0.167**	0.055	0.020	0.063
University of Bergen							0.251***	0.052	0.088	0.061
Univ. of Tromsø*Quality Reform							0.161	0.137	0.122	0.159
NTNU*Quality Reform							0.032	0.087	-0.032	0.096
Univ. of Bergen*Quality Reform							-0.264**	0.089	-0.211*	0.099
<i>Grades from upper secondary school</i>										
Grades									-0.570***	0.027
Grades <sup>2</sup>									-0.022	0.016
<i>Constant</i>	-2.119***	0.054	-2.195***	0.055	-2.430***	0.062	-2.346***	0.071	-2.698***	0.083
Probability of departure for constant	0.107		0.100		0.081		0.087		0.063	
Number of observations	52 520		52 520		52 520		52 520		45 846	
Aic	28 403.055		28 348.840		27 771.209		27 118.500		21 325.168	
Bic	28 509.482		28 473.005		27 930.850		27 331.355		21 552.227	

note: \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05

note: The constant is a 20 year old female student originating from the skilled and partly skilled working class, who enrolled before the the Quality Reform at the University of Oslo, who did not enroll in structured studies, and with mean grades from upper secondary school.

When it comes to departure after one semester we see that the Quality Reform variable remains statistically insignificant as structured studies and institutions are introduced as variables in model four. As grades are introduced in model five, the variable becomes positive and statistical significant. The interaction variables between institutions and the Quality Reform indicate that the risk of departure has increased at all institutions except at the University of Bergen, controlled for grades.

After three semesters, model four in table 6.3 shows that the risk of departure is higher in the wake of the Quality Reform. This is true for all educational institutions, except the University of Bergen, where the interaction variable between the Quality Reform and the university is nearly just as strong negative as the Quality Reform variable is positive, i.e. they more or less neutralize each other. In the same manner as departure after one semester, the coefficient of the Quality Reform variable is strengthened as grades are introduced in model five. The departure rates remain more or less the same among the institutions as they did in model four, except for the fact that the interaction variable for the University of Bergen is statistical insignificant.

These findings do not support hypothesis one, which stated that there was no change in overall departure rates after the reform. Although the effects of the Quality Reform in many cases is marginal and absent for some of the institutions, the analyses show that overall departure rates changed after the reform. The two samples showed quite opposite trends. For the inclusive sample, the main picture of the analysis showed that overall departure rates after one and three semesters decreased after the reform. In regards to the exclusive sample there was no difference after one semester, but after three semesters the analysis showed that departure had increased in the wake of the reform. As a result, the hypothesis is disconfirmed for all samples after one and three semesters, except for the exclusive sample after one semester.

The second hypothesis holds that differences in departure rates between social classes remain the same before and after the Quality Reform. To examine this, I created an interaction variable between the Quality Reform and the social classes. The attentive reader will notice that these variables are not included in any of the regression tables. The reason for this is that only one of these variables were, although weak, statistical significant (the cultural fraction of the lower middle class in model 6.2 and 6.3, i.e. departure after three semesters for both samples). On the whole social class differences therefore remain largely the same before and after the Quality Reform and hypothesis two is therefore upheld.



### **6.3 Social class and cultural capital's impact on departure**

The aim of the following section is to scrutinize the main questions of the thesis that were encapsulated in hypothesis three, four and five. If we compare the regression tables for both samples, we see that the social class coefficients to a large degree are similar in strength, although the social class coefficients generally look slightly weaker in the exclusive sample than the inclusive sample. Initially, the idea was to present the results for both samples, but to avoid a repetitive framework where similar results are being commented for both samples, I am going to put the gist of the matter on analysing the inclusive sample, but at the same time emphasizing those places where the results from the two samples differ to a great extent.

The third hypothesis states that there are social class differences in departure. Table A6.1 concerns departure after one semester. In model 1 of the table, we see that social class differences in departure exist. However it is only the upper class and the upper middle class that have a significant lower probability for departure than the reference group (skilled and partly skilled workers), hence, the lower middle class, skilled workers and social welfare's probability of departure is not statistically significant different from that of the reference group. Notwithstanding, the statistically significant coefficients of the upper class and the upper middle class are barely negative and close to zero; consequently they only have slightly less probability of departure. The statistically significant social class variables evaporate as additional independent variables are introduced in each model. In model four and five there are no statistically significant differences left. The results of the exclusive sample correspond with the results of the inclusive sample. The main difference being that social class differences are even more compact.

In regards to departure after three semesters, model 1 in table 6.2 shows that social class differences accelerate. They are weakened as gender and age variables are introduced in model 3<sup>37</sup>. This is also where the middle fraction of the lower middle class loses its statistical significance. There are small differences in the social class coefficients from model three to model four, but the strength of the coefficient of the constant is weakened. In other words, as

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<sup>37</sup> Since age and gender in theory separately could cause the aforementioned social class variables to become insignificant, I carried out analyses where these variables were introduced one at a time. As gender was introduced as the first variable, there were so to speak no changes in the social class variables, while the opposite was the case for the age variable. The reduced strength of the coefficients from model 2 to model 3 is in other words mainly a result of students' age. The same procedure has been conducted on all following regressions.

we control for structured studies the risk of departure increases for all groups. Lastly the strength of social class coefficients further weaken in model five as grades from upper secondary school is introduced. Despite this, all coefficients of the upper class and upper middle class remain statistical significant. It is interesting to see that in model 1, all social classes from the lower middle class and up have statistical significant lower risk of departure than the remaining social classes, while in model five it is the upper middle and upper class that distinguish them from those below. Once again, the results of the exclusive sample accord with those of the inclusive. The most important deviation between the two samples is that the cultural and middle fraction of the upper class turn statistical insignificant as we control for grades.

As a result of these findings, we may conclude that social class differences in departure are minimal after one semester. The greatest difference with no control for other variables (model 1) is found between the middle fraction of the upper class and skilled and partly skilled workers, they have 3,1 and 4,5 percent risk of departure after one semester, respectively. As mentioned there are no statistical significant social class differences in departure after all control variables are introduced. After three semesters, social class differences have intensified and the greatest difference without any control variables is found by comparing skilled and partly skilled workers to the economic fraction of the upper class. Students belonging to the former of these groups have a 13,9 percent risk of departure, while the latter group has 6,7 percent risk. As a result, students originating from skilled and partly skilled workers have more than twice the risk of departure after three semesters than the economic fraction of the upper class. The odds are modified as all independent variables are introduced in model five, but remain substantial as skilled and partly skilled workers have a risk of 10,1 percent while the economic fraction of the upper class has 6,2 percent risk, i.e. the skilled and partly skilled workers have approximately 63 percent higher risk of departure. Despite the fact that social class differences are minimal after one semester, there are social class differences. After three semesters social class differences have increased. This is true for both samples; hence hypothesis three is confirmed for both samples after one and three semesters.

In regards to cultural capital's influence on departure we now turn to the fractions within the social classes. In regards to departure from higher education after one semester, I described the social class differences as minimal. In regards to the difference between the fractions within the social classes these are, naturally, even smaller. Considering cultural capital's

influence on departure after three semesters, we see that the economic fraction of the upper class has the lowest probability of departure, followed by the cultural and middle fraction. Departure within the upper middle class follows a pattern that is consistent with the expectations as the cultural fraction has least risk of departure followed by the middle and economic fraction. In regards to the lower middle class, it is the cultural fraction which has least probability of departure, followed by the economic and middle fraction. At the bottom we find students originating from skilled workers and social welfare, which do not have statistical significant different risk of departure as the reference group. This pattern remains consistent when all variables are incorporated in model 5.

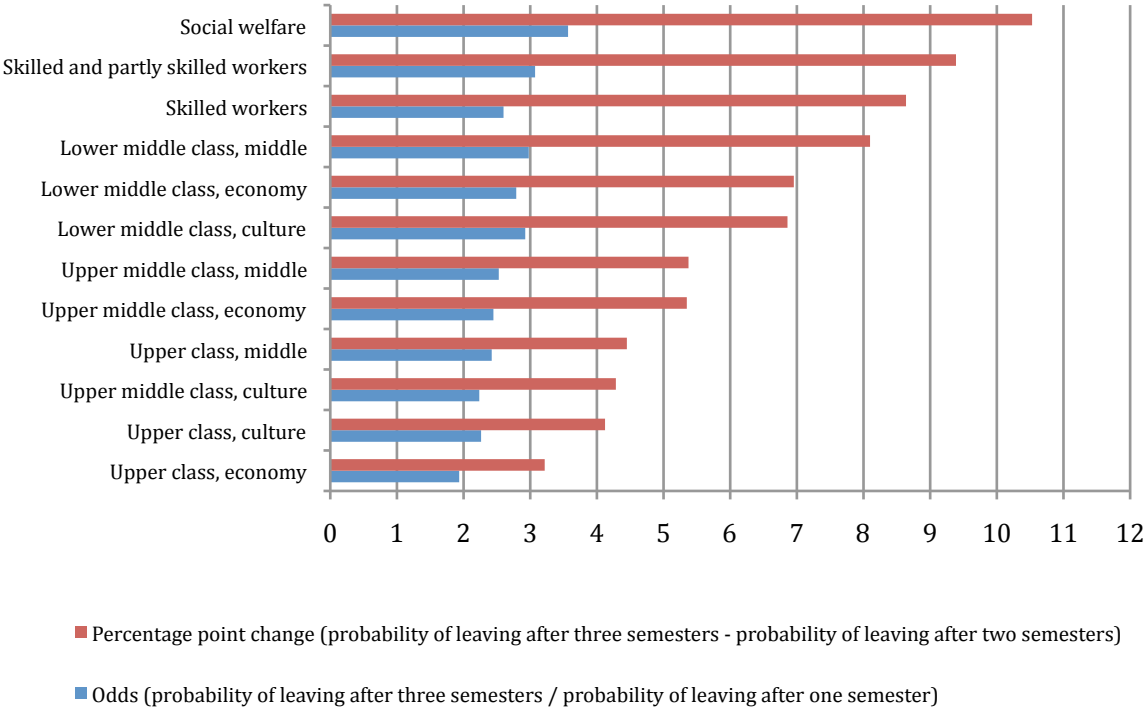
Although many of the social class variables are statistical significant different from the reference group (skilled and partly skilled workers), the differences between the fractions within the social classes remain small. The greatest intra-class difference is found in model four (the reference group is now students at the University of Oslo that are not studying structured studies) within the upper middle class where the cultural fraction has 9,5 percent risk of departure, while the economic fraction has 11,3 percent risk. I would argue that this is a small difference, but considering that there are twelve groups in the class schema, we cannot expect much difference between the social classes when the highest risk of departure is 15,5 (reference group) in the same model. Nevertheless, I would argue that in sum the main impression of these findings should lead us to question the beneficial aspect of cultural capital when it comes to departure from higher education. I do not find any clear evidence for the assumption, and I therefore discard hypothesis four for all samples after one and three semesters.

Hypothesis five claimed that social class differences in departure remain the same after one semester and after three semesters. Figure 6.1 shows how the risk of departure develops from one to three semesters for each fraction of the social classes by using percentage change and odds. The calculation is based on the departure rates of model 1 in the two regression models for the inclusive sample.

The results are sorted according to descending percentage change from one to three semesters. Students originating from the social welfare class have the greatest change as the probability of leaving exceeds ten percentage points from one to three semesters. Together with the two working classes (skilled and partly skilled workers, skilled workers) and the middle fraction

of the lower middle class it is the social class where the percentage point change is above eight. The cultural and economic fraction of the lower middle class have approximately seven percentage point change from one to three semester, while the number is just above five for the middle and economic fraction of the upper middle class.

**Figure 6.1 Percentage point change and odds of leaving after three semesters compared to one (calculations based on model 1 in table A6.1 and 6.2).**

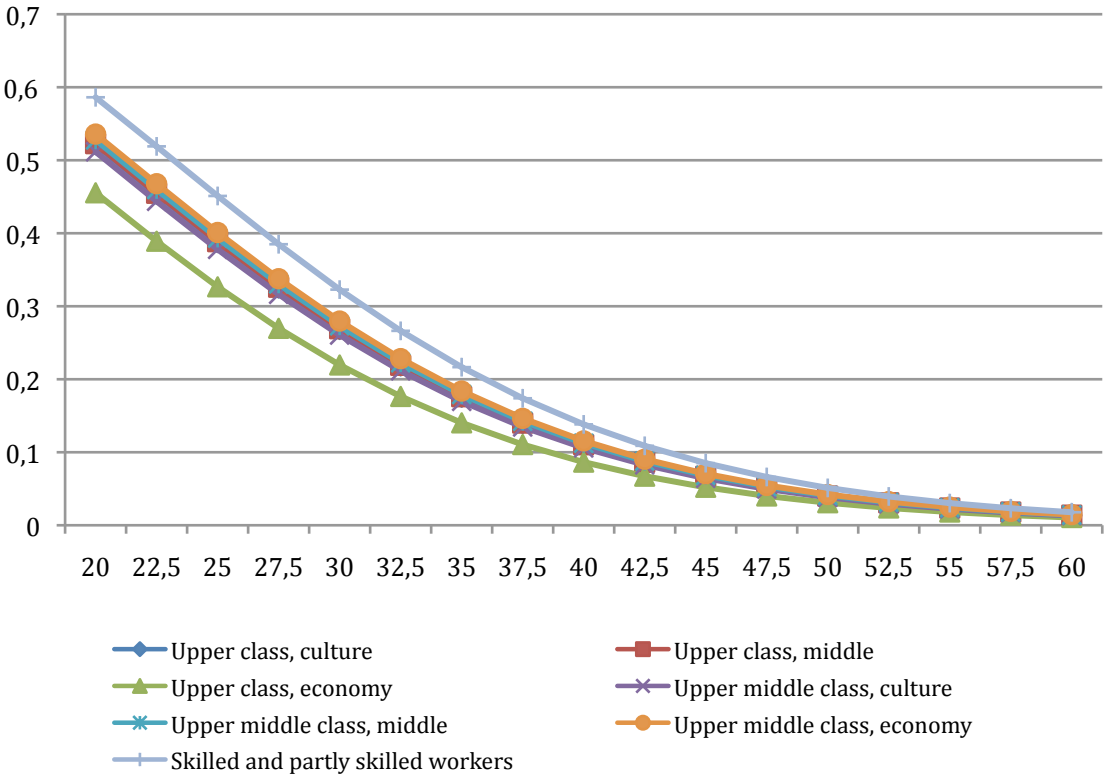


The cultural fraction of the upper middle class distinguish itself from the other fractions of the class as it is accompanied with the middle and cultural fraction of the upper class with a percent point change of approximately four. Lastly, the economic fraction of the upper class has the smallest percentage change, just above three. On the overall a pattern of social class differences emerges. The main impression is that as we move downward the figure, the percentage change and odds of leaving become smaller, while the social class origin becomes higher. To conclude, figure 6.1 shows that social class differences increase considerably from one to three semesters. Hypothesis five is confirmed for both samples.

### 6.4 Grades' impact on departure

In the preceding paragraph, we saw that social class differences in departure existed after one and three semesters. Nevertheless, when it comes to departure after one semester, they had evaporated before the introduction of the grade variable. Consequently, departure after one semester is not current in regards to investigating the next hypothesis, which states that social class differences in departure are to a large degree a result of different grade attainment among social classes.

**Figure 6.2 Social class and grades' from upper secondary school's impact on the probability of departure.**



Note: Calculations are based on the coefficients in model five in table 6.2. Only statistical significant variables are presented.

Table 6.2 shows that all social class variables are reduced as a result of introducing the age variable in model three. By introducing variables for educational institutions and structured studies in model four, the social class coefficients are barely affected. However, in model five many coefficients are considerably reduced. Most importantly, the coefficient of the constant

has become much stronger; hence the risk of departure for all social classes is reduced. I also tried to incorporate an interaction variable between social class and grades from upper secondary school, but none of the variables turned out to be statistically significant and were therefore not included in the regression tables.

Figure 6.2 demonstrates how the risk of departure is related to social class and grades from upper secondary school for the statistically significant class variables in model five, table 6.2. There are two main conclusions to be drawn from this figure. First of all, there is a strong correlation between students' grades from upper secondary school and the risk of departure, regardless of which social class students belong to. Secondly, the lower the grades are, the greater difference we find in the risk of departure among the social classes. Such a pattern may be consonant with the assumptions of reproduction theory and social position theory. On the one hand, students may not feel like they fit in, regardless of grade attainment. On the other hand, the pattern may also be explained by the fact that students from higher social classes aspire to achieve the same educational attainment as their parents.

Both figure 6.2 and the social class coefficients in model 5 in table 6.2 support the assumption that grades from upper secondary school are responsible for different risks of departure among social classes. For instance, the cultural and economic fractions of the upper class are the groups that distinguish themselves most from the reference group in regards to lower risk of departure. In model 1 in table 6.2, the cultural fraction had 6,5 percent lower risk of departure while the economic fraction had 7,3 percent lower risk of departure, compared to the reference group. After controlling for all variables, where the grade variable had the strongest effect, the difference was reduced to 2,2 percent and 3,9 percent for the cultural and economic fractions, respectively. The findings demonstrate that social class origin has the strongest indirect effect on the risk of departure. Less of the effect of social class origin affects departure directly. To conclude, after controlling for grades from upper secondary school, social class differences in departure are substantially reduced. Hypothesis six is therefore confirmed for both samples after three semesters.



## **7 Analysis of departure from three educational fields**

In the following chapter, departure from three educational fields is to be scrutinized. These are the humanities, social sciences and natural sciences. The main reason for choosing these educational fields is that we are able to investigate a more homogenous sample. The two samples investigated in the previous sample were at a highly aggregated level and may therefore have masked interesting differences between various educational fields. Further on, the typical professional studies (e.g. medicine, psychology, veterinary science) do not belong to any of the three educational fields investigated in this chapter, hence a greater proportion of the degrees in this sample have been loosely structured before the reform. The chapter is fashioned in the same manner as chapter six, starting off with the descriptive statistics and then continuing to the analyses of departure from higher education after one and three semesters.

### **7.1 Descriptive statistics**

Table 7.1 displays the descriptive statistics for the main variables to be used in the analyses. Grades from upper secondary school are the first variable presented in the columns of table 7.1. The average grades are much the same as for the descriptive table in chapter six, to recap: As we descend the rows of social class the grades are getting lower, the cultural fractions have highest grades within each social class, female students have higher grades than male students, there is a strong negative relation between age and grades, students within the natural sciences have higher grades than those who find themselves within the humanities and social sciences, lastly the average grades are more or less the same before and after the reform.

In regards to students who enrol in structured studies there is not a systematic pattern when we consider the fractions within the social classes. However, it seems as though there is a greater proportion of students who enrol in these studies when we consider the social classes on the whole, i.e. there is a greater proportion of students from the upper class who embarks on structured studies compared to the upper middle class, and a greater proportion from the upper middle class than from the lower middle class, and so on. This said, the cultural fractions of the upper class and upper middle class have considerably lower attendance at within the structured studies than the remaining two fractions. Male students are much more



likely to enrol in structured studies than female students. This may seem contradictory to what we saw in chapter six (table 6.1), where female students outnumbered male students in the structured studies. The reason is most likely that the current sample excludes many of the professional studies where female students are heavily represented.

**Table 7.1 Descriptive statistics**

	Proportions/means for both samples			
	Grades from upper secondary school	Proportion enrolled in structured studies	Proportion of female students	Mean age
	Exclusive	Exclusive	Exclusive	Exclusive
<b>Social class</b>				
Upper class, culture	45.1	0.15	0.49	19.9
Upper class, middle	44.8	0.22	0.53	19.9
Upper class, economy	44.5	0.23	0.57	19.9
Upper middle class, culture	44.4	0.15	0.56	20.0
Upper middle class, middle	43.7	0.18	0.57	20.0
Upper middle class, economy	43.9	0.19	0.57	20.0
Lower middle class, culture	43.3	0.14	0.59	20.0
Lower middle class, middle	42.3	0.13	0.58	20.1
Lower middle class, economy	43.1	0.14	0.60	20.1
Skilled workers	41.3	0.10	0.62	20.3
Skilled and partly skilled workers	41.3	0.11	0.62	20.2
Social welfare	41.3	0.11	0.59	20.4
<b>Gender</b>				
Female students	43.7	0.09	-	19.9
Male students	42.6	0.25	-	20.3
<b>Age</b>				
18	46.0	0.16	0.71	-
19	44.8	0.15	0.71	-
20	43.6	0.20	0.54	-
21	41.0	0.13	0.44	-
22	39.0	0.09	0.43	-
23	38.0	0.05	0.43	-
24	38.3	0.06	0.47	-
25	38.3	0.05	0.47	-
<b>Educational fields</b>				
Humanities	42.7	0.002	0.65	20.2
Social sciences	42.6	0.06	0.66	20.0
Natural sciences	44.7	0.47	0.37	20.0
<b>Quality Reform</b>				
Before the reform	43.2	0.14	0.59	20.0
After the reform	43.3	0.18	0.56	20.1

note: Students who enrolled in 2005 are omitted in the calculations of grades' mean due to missing values

Further on, among the three educational fields in the current sample, most of the structured studies are found within the natural sciences and male students constitute the main body of the students who embark on studies within this educational field. There is a relation between age and the probability of studying structured studies. Students who are 20 years old have the highest likelihood as one out of five embark on such degrees. When students become 23 years or older, the likelihood is considerably reduced to one out of twenty students. My previous point on the distribution of structured studies among the educational fields is made explicit in the three next rows as we see that almost half of the students who enrol in natural sciences enter into structured studies, while 6 and close to zero percent is true for the social sciences and humanities, respectively. More students commenced on structured studies after the reform than before the reform.

The proportion of female students follows the same pattern as found in chapter six. There is a greater chance that students who are below the age of 21 are female, while the opposite is true for students who are 21 years old or older. Within the humanities and the social sciences, female students amount to almost two thirds of the students, while they amount to 37 percent within the natural sciences. Female students made up a greater share of the student body before the Quality Reform than after.

When it comes to the average age of students it is lower the higher one's social class origin is. Male students have a higher average age than female students. And the average age is more or less the same within the three educational fields and before and after the Quality Reform.

## **7.2. Departure rates before and after the Quality Reform**

In the same manner as in chapter six, the regression table for departure after one semester for the educational field sample is found in the appendix, more specifically in table A7.1. We see that the variable representing the Quality Reform does not turn statistically significant until model five, i.e. students who enrolled after the Quality Reform have higher grades than those who enrolled before the reform. This is in line with the findings in chapter six. In reality, there is no difference in departure after one semester, but students were more prone to leave higher education after the reform, when grades from upper secondary school are held constant. In regards to the educational fields of the social and natural sciences, they both have lower risk

**Table 7.2 Departure after three semesters for the educational field sample**

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	coef	se	coef	se	coef	se	coef	Se	coef	se
<i>Social class (constant: Skilled and partly skilled workers)</i>										
Upper class, culture	-0.531***	0.123	-0.524***	0.123	-0.424***	0.124	-0.414***	0.125	-0.215	0.149
Upper class, middle	-0.549***	0.093	-0.548***	0.093	-0.440***	0.094	-0.349***	0.094	-0.157	0.107
Upper class, economy	-0.761***	0.104	-0.760***	0.104	-0.648***	0.104	-0.535***	0.105	-0.414***	0.120
Upper middle class, culture	-0.557***	0.084	-0.553***	0.084	-0.476***	0.084	-0.470***	0.085	-0.229*	0.095
Upper middle class, middle	-0.454***	0.070	-0.453***	0.070	-0.375***	0.071	-0.316***	0.071	-0.175*	0.080
Upper middle class, economy	-0.550***	0.081	-0.550***	0.081	-0.457***	0.082	-0.387***	0.083	-0.216*	0.093
Lower middle class, culture	-0.246*	0.104	-0.245*	0.104	-0.179	0.105	-0.174	0.105	-0.120	0.123
Lower middle class, middle	-0.178*	0.083	-0.180*	0.083	-0.148	0.084	-0.143	0.084	-0.107	0.095
Lower middle class, economy	-0.223**	0.074	-0.224**	0.074	-0.179*	0.075	-0.160*	0.075	-0.049	0.085
Skilled workers	0.028	0.086	0.031	0.086	0.012	0.087	0.006	0.087	-0.021	0.099
Social welfare	0.010	0.078	0.019	0.078	-0.049	0.079	-0.018	0.080	-0.059	0.091
<i>The Quality Reform (constant: before the reform)</i>										
			0.246***	0.036	0.208***	0.036	0.305***	0.080	0.339***	0.089
<i>Gender (constant: female students)</i>										
					0.148***	0.036	-0.048	0.037	0.089*	0.043
<i>Age (the constant is 20)</i>										
Age					0.261***	0.020	0.216***	0.020	0.076**	0.024
Age <sup>2</sup>					0.083***	0.016	0.074***	0.016	0.056**	0.018
Age <sup>3</sup>					-0.018***	0.003	-0.015***	0.003	-0.008*	0.004
<i>Structured studies (constant: not structured studies)</i>										
							-1.541***	0.102	-1.196***	0.112
<i>Educational fields (constant: humanities)</i>										
Social sciences							-0.233***	0.050	-0.335***	0.059
Natural sciences							-0.302***	0.065	-0.356***	0.077
Social sciences*Quality Reform							-0.075	0.082	0.016	0.092
Natural sciences*Quality Reform							-0.137	0.105	-0.115	0.118
<i>Institutions (Constant: Univ. Of Oslo)</i>										
University of Tromsø							-0.238*	0.103	-0.432***	0.130
NTNU							0.144*	0.058	0.006	0.066
University of Bergen							0.256***	0.053	0.086	0.063
Univ. of Troms*Quality Reform							0.246	0.162	0.266	0.188
NTNU*Quality Reform							0.093	0.092	0.002	0.102
Univ. of Bergen*Quality Reform							-0.227*	0.093	-0.203	0.103
<i>Grades</i>										
									-0.551***	0.022
<i>Constant</i>	-2.150***	0.058	-2.235***	0.059	-2.477***	0.066	-2.194***	0.083	-2.469***	0.096
Probability of departure for constant	0.104		0.097		0.077		0.100		0.078	
Number of observations	47 699		47 699		47 699		47 699		41 385	
aic	25 817.585		25 773.276		25 286.292		24 702.561		19 367.755	
bic	25 922.857		25 887.321		25 435.427		24 948.195		19 618.044	

note: \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05

note: The constant is a 20 year old female student originating from the skilled and partly skilled working class, who enrolled before the Quality Reform within the educational field of the humanities at the University of Oslo, who did not enroll in structured studies, and with mean grades from upper secondary school.

of departure than the humanities, but neither of the two educational fields have experienced altered departure rates after the reform compared to the reference group. On the overall, these are not encouraging findings for the initiators of the Quality Reform, considering the goals of the reform. Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind that a great deal of the students in the

educational field sample had completed the preparatory course before they embarked on their studies within humanities, social sciences and natural sciences. The point being that they already have educational experience from university, something those who enrolled after the reform do not have. Further on, those students who completed the preparatory course for then to leave higher education for good, or embark on a study within another tertiary institution than university, are excluded from the sample.

The main picture remains much the same as we turn to departure after three semesters in table 7.2, although the departure rates after the Quality Reform are statistical significant higher after the reform already in model two. As we control for structured studies, educational fields and institutions in model four, the Quality Reform remains statistical significant. Further on, we see that the interaction variable between the University of Bergen and the Quality Reform is statistical significant. Indicating that departure at this institution had experienced a lower increase in departure rates, compared to the three remaining institutions. This changes as we control for grades in model five; none of the interaction variables between institutions and the Quality Reform remain statistical significant. Additionally, the Quality Reform variable slightly increases as we control for grades. As a result of these findings, we may conclude that hypothesis one, which asserts that the change in total departure rates remains the same after the Quality Reform is confirmed for departure after one semester, but not for departure after three semesters.

When it comes to the second hypothesis, stating that differences in departure rates between social classes remain the same before and after the Quality Reform, I followed the same procedure as in chapter six; introducing an interaction variable between social class and the Quality Reform after one and three semesters. Unlike the samples in chapter six, no interaction variables were statistical significant. Hence, hypothesis two is confirmed.

### **7.3 Social class and cultural capital's impact on departure**

Hypothesis three, four and five are to be scrutinized in this section. The former of these hypotheses holds that there are social class differences in departure. Table A7.1 shows departure after one semester. Interestingly, there are so to speak no social class differences after one semester. It is only the three fractions of the upper middle class that have statistical significant coefficients. However, these social class differences evaporate in model three

where variables for age and gender are introduced. Most of the social class variables are furthered weakened as the grade variable in model five is introduced. However, skilled workers remain one exception. They have a greater risk of departure despite the fact that we control for grades from upper secondary school.

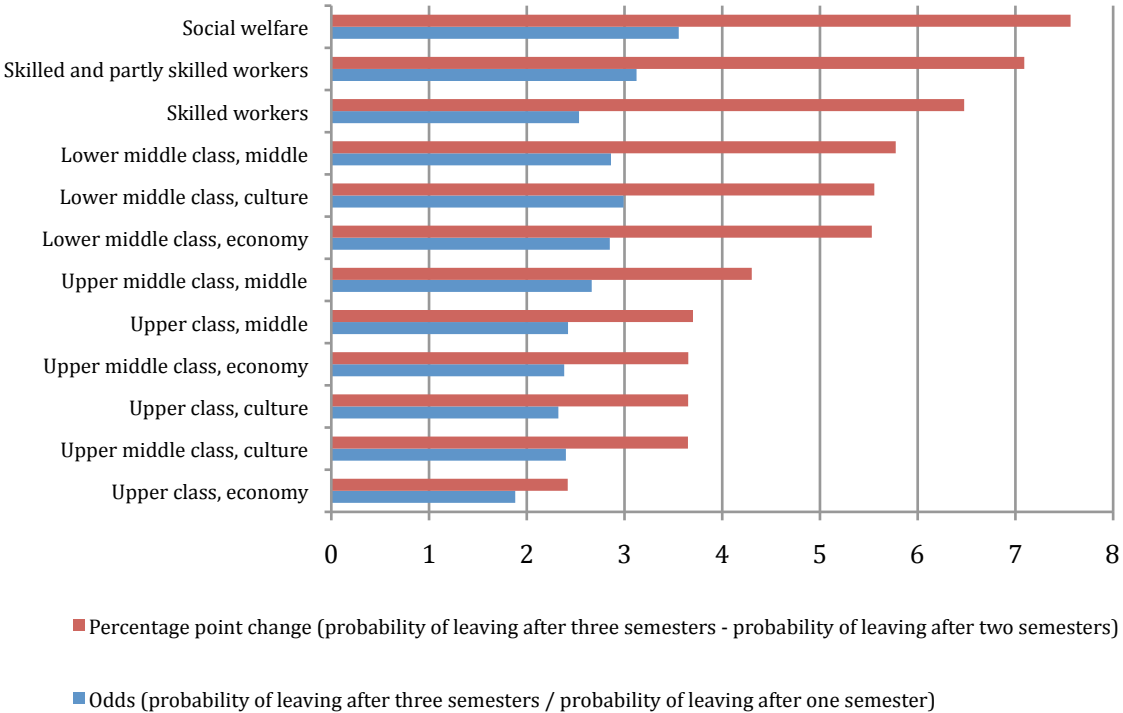
When it comes to departure after three semesters, social class differences have, in the same manner as for the two samples in chapter six, escalated. All social class coefficients are now, with the exception of skilled workers and social welfare, statistical significant negative to the reference group, i.e. they have lower risk of departure. Most of the fractions within the upper middle class and upper class have more or less the same risk of departure, with the economic fraction of the upper class and middle fraction of the upper middle class as exception. All the fractions within the lower middle class have more or less the same risk of departure. Two of these fractions become statistical insignificant in model three, as age and gender are introduced as independent variables. On the whole, most social class coefficients are reduced as these variables are introduced. As grades are introduced in model five, most social class differences turn statistical insignificant. Those that remain statistical significant, i.e. the economic fraction of the upper class together with all the fractions of the upper middle class, are weakened.

Departure rates are low after one semester. The reference group has a risk of 3,3 percent for departure before controlling for any variables. As all control variables are introduced, the risk is decreased to 2,7 percent. Although the risk of departure generally remains low for all groups, and that the social class coefficients remain weak, social class differences are found in regards to departure after one semester. Hypothesis three is therefore confirmed for departure after one semester. Regarding departure after three semesters, the reference group varies between having twice the risk of departure (economic fraction of the upper class) and fifty percent greater risk of departure (middle fraction of upper middle class) compared to the fractions within the upper class and upper middle class, with no control for any variables. The difference between the reference group and the fractions of the lower middle classes is weak. Despite the fact that the differences between the groups may be substantial, one may dispute whether 10,4 percent risk of departure (reference group in model one after three semesters) is a big or small number. Nevertheless, social class differences are found after one and three semesters and hypothesis three is therefore confirmed.

When it comes to the question of cultural capital’s influence on departure, we do not find any support for it in regards to departure after one semester or departure after three semesters. After one semester, the cultural fraction of the upper class and lower middle class remain statistically insignificant. Within the upper middle class the coefficient of the cultural fraction remain almost indistinguishable from the remaining two fractions. Considering departure after three semesters, cultural capital does not seem to contribute more in any way compared to the other fractions within the social classes. As a result of these findings, hypothesis four, asserting that the greater the proportion of cultural capital a student possesses, the smaller the risk of departure is, is turned down for both departure after one and three semesters.

The last hypothesis to be examined in this section goes as follows; social class differences in departure remain the same after one semester and after three semesters. We already know the answer to this question as the previous paragraphs have shown that social class differences were so to speak non-existing after one semester, while they intensified after three semesters.

**Figure 7.1** Percentage point change and odds of leaving after three semesters compared to one (calculations based on model 1 in table A7.1 and 7.2).



In figure 7.1 we see how social class differences develop from one to three semesters for the respective social classes. The figure is arranged according to descending percentage point change in the risk of leaving higher education from one to three semesters. Additionally, the odds of leaving after three semesters are included.

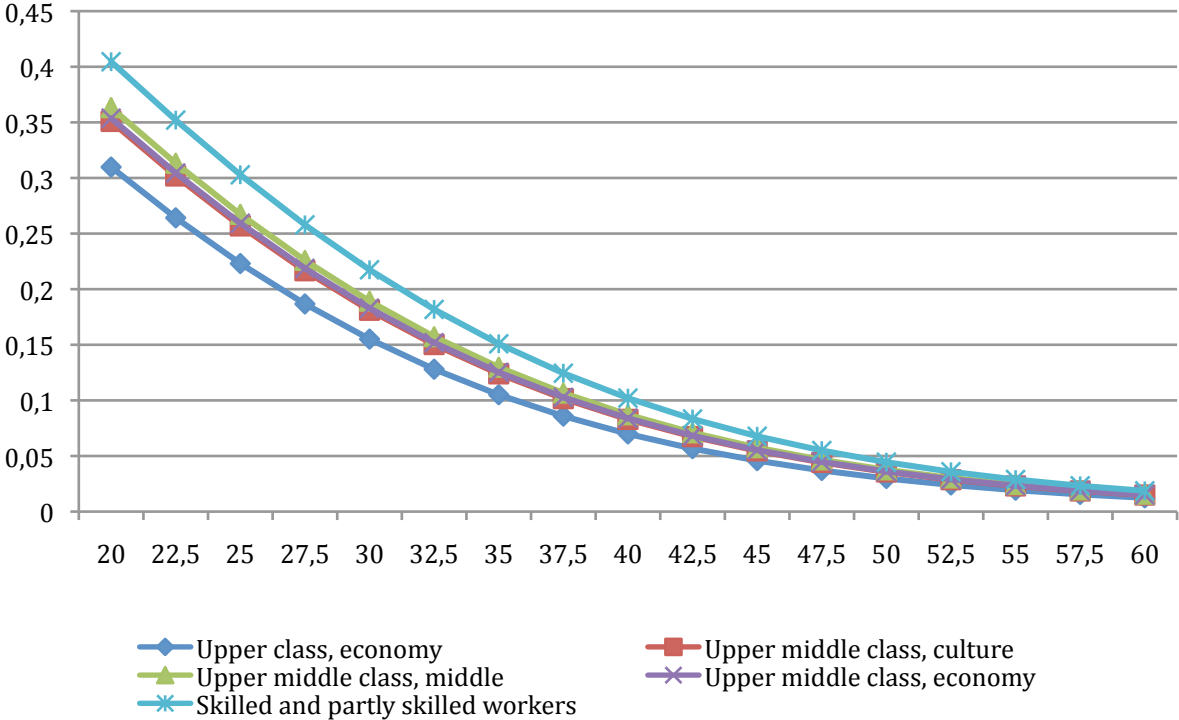
The figure shows that the three lowest social classes have the greatest increase in the risk of departure, as they are the only groups exceeding six percentage points change. They are followed by the three fractions within the lower middle class, which have an increase of approximately 5,5 percentage points each. From thereon, the rest of the social classes experience an increase between 3,5 to 4,5 percentage points. The exception is the economic fraction of the upper class, which has an increase below 2,5 percentage points. In regards to odds, most groups are somewhere between two and three times more likely to depart after three semesters compared to one. The exception is skilled and partly skilled workers, social welfare, and the economic fraction of the upper class. The two former are more than three times as likely to depart after three semesters, while the latter groups is less than two times as likely to depart after three semesters compared to one. To encapsulate, hypothesis five is confirmed.

#### **7.4 Grades' impact on departure**

The last section of this chapter concerns grades from upper secondary school's influence on departure, more specifically the hypothesis to be tested states that social class differences in departure are to a large degree a result of different grade attainment among social classes. Because social class differences were so to speak non-existing after one semester without the control for any variables, I do not consider it relevant for hypothesis six.

However, social class differences were current in regards to departure after three semesters. As a result of introducing age and gender as control variables in model three in table 7.2, we see that all social class coefficients are slightly reduced. As grades are introduced in model five, there are only four of the social class coefficients that remain statistical significant. These are displayed in figure 7.2 together with grades from upper secondary school and the probability of departure. The figure displays the same findings as figure 6.2: There is a close relation between departure from higher education and grades, and the difference in the risk of departure between the social classes is greater the lower the grades are.

**Figure 7.2 Social class and grades from upper secondary school's impact on the probability departure.**



Note: Calculations are based on model five in table 7.2. Only the statistical significant variables are presented.

Due to the fact three of the statistical significant variables in model four in table 7.2 became statistical insignificant after controlling for grade, we may conclude that grades from upper secondary school explains a lot of the social class differences in regards to the risk of departure. In addition, those variables that remain statistical significant in model 5, where also sharply reduced as a result of controlling for grades. In sum, these findings entail that hypothesis six is confirmed.



## 8 Discussion and conclusion

In chapter six and seven I tested six hypotheses. The aim of the following chapter is first and foremost to discuss the findings of the two preceding chapters in light of theory and previous research. The chapter consists of two sections. The former concerns the Quality Reform, while the latter focuses on social class, cultural capital and primary and secondary effects of stratification.

Figure 8.1 gives an overview of the hypotheses that was tested in the two preceding chapters and whether they were confirmed or not. Although there were some differences in regards to what degree the different hypotheses were upheld or rejected, the reader should notice that the conclusions to a great extent accord across the samples.

**Figure 8.1 Confirmed and disconfirmed hypotheses**

Hypotheses	Departure after one semester			Departure after three semesters		
	Inclusive	Exclusive	Edu. field	Inclusive	Exclusive	Edu. field
H1: The change in total departure rates remains the same after the Quality Reform.	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗
H2: Differences in departure rates between social classes remain the same before and after the Quality Reform.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
H3: There are social class differences in departure.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
H4: The greater the proportion of cultural capital a student possesses, the smaller the risk of departure is.	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
H5: Social class differences in departure remain the same after one semester and after three semesters.	Confirmed for all three samples					
H6: Social class differences in departure are to a large degree a result of different grade attainment among social classes.	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓

### **8.1 Main findings of the analysis of the Quality Reform**

As figure 8.1 shows, the findings following the investigation of hypotheses one entail that the risk of departure changed following the Quality Reform, the exceptions are the exclusive and the educational field sample after one semester.

The goal with the educational field sample was to test whether departure from higher education differed at a lower level than at a highly aggregated level. The main impression of the results is that it does not differ very much from the exclusive sample, neither in regards to overall departure rates or when it comes to the risk of departure between social classes. Further on the analysis showed that none of the educational fields deviated from the reference group when it comes to departure before and after the Quality Reform. This is congruent with the findings of Næss (2003).

The exclusive sample was constructed with the aim of comparing students before and after the reform that had enrolled in an educational field. I suspected that many of the students that enrolled in the preparatory course before the reform had few or no plans for their educational career post preparatory course. The analysis of this sample showed no difference after one semester and increased risk of departure following the Quality Reform after three semesters. First of all, this entails that the Quality Reform is doing worse in holding on to its students on a long term than on a short term. Secondly, the finding indicates that the Quality Reform had an opposite effect than what their intention was: As we compare students who have chosen their educational path, students after the reform are more prone to leave higher education. This said, many of the students in the exclusive sample already had educational experience (the preparatory course). This experience might have made them convinced that they really wanted to opt for a degree. Students after the reform did not have any experience from higher education. Further on, those students that completed the preparatory course for then to leave higher education or enroll within another institution than university, are erased from this sample. Hence, the departure rate before the reform is probably artificial low.

This suspicion is confirmed when we apply the inclusive sample as departure rates after the Quality reform has (model 2, table 6.2 and A6.1) decreased. The findings in this sample point in the same direction as the exclusive sample, namely that the reform has greater impact on a

short term than long term departure, as the coefficient for the Quality Reform is substantially weaker for departure after three semesters than after one semester. In fact, the coefficient for departure after three semesters is barely statistical significant. With the inclusive sample as the starting point, I will in the following try to suggest why the impact of the changes following the Quality Reform on an aggregated level was quite marginal. Afterwards I try to explain why departure rates had decreased at the University of Oslo.

It is important to keep in mind the organization of the regression tables. All the results of departure among institutions in model four are controlled for social class, gender, age and structured studies. Nevertheless, binary correlations between institutions and departure points in the same direction.

### **8.1.1 Why the small impact, Quality Reform?**

In chapter two, I pointed out three changes following the Quality Reform that I believe to be important in regards to overall departure rates and social class differences in departure before and after the reform. These were: Changes in the study structure, further evaluation on the way, and changes in the financing system. When marginal change is the result of the Quality Reform, we may for obvious reasons suggest that these changes have no effect on students' departure from higher education, i.e. students leave higher education for other reasons than what the initiators of the Quality Reform believe. Such an assumption may gain some support from the fact that Hovdhaugen and Aamodt (2006) found that study stability (i.e. students' liability to stay within the same educational institution or educational field as they commenced their studies within) has increased after the reform. They argue that the source to increased study stability within the universities may be related to the fact "... that the new degrees and methods of teaching are organised in such a way that student groups or classes go around with each other and enjoy many shared activities"<sup>38</sup> (Hovdhaugen and Aamodt, 2006:61). In other words, we could imagine that the changes are working on other forms of departure, e.g. transfer to other educational institutions or studies, but not when it comes to leaving higher education. Hovdhaugen's et al. (2008) pursuit after a cure for departure conclude in the following way: "Despite the fact that there are different reasons as to why students quit or change their place of study, the institutions' ability to influence departure is

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<sup>38</sup> ... at de nye studieprogrammene og de nye undervisningsmetodene er organisert slik at studentgrupper eller kull følger hverandre og har mange felles aktiviteter.

comparatively little for both groups <sup>39</sup> (Hovdhaugen et al., 2008:49). If the overall departure rates did not respond to the changes introduced in the wake of the Quality Reform, the chance is that they neither had any effect on social class differences in departure before and after the reform. Even though I did not find substantial evidence for altered social class differences after the reform, Hovdhaugen and Aamodt (2006) found increasing social background differences in departure from higher education after the reform as students whose parents had some kind of higher education profited with lower departure rates compared to students with lower social background.

On the other hand, we could imagine that e.g. further evaluation on the way and changes in the financing structure do affect both overall departure and social class differences in departure from higher education, but the Quality Reform has not been radical enough, i.e. it has not provided enough further evaluation on the way, the study structure is not structured enough, or the changes in the financing system are not sufficient so that failing an exam appear costly enough, or the other way around: the benefit of passing an exams is not high enough (to be clear, the argument refers to the change in the finance system that made grants from the NSELF dependent on academic progression).

A third way of interpreting the Quality Reform's ostensible lack of impact on departure from higher education is that some of the changes actually made a contribution to reduce departure, while other alterations increased departure. Taken together, these changes might neutralize departure rates so that they remain the same before and after the reform. Thus, the reform may have altered departure rates, but they are concealed. Such an effect could also be present within each of the changes, as well. For instance, the changes in the finance structure entailed increased support from the NSELF, with the aim of enabling them to study more and spend less time on part-time jobs. In addition, students were allowed to earn more alongside their studies before their grants from the NSELF were reduced. Opheim (Aamodt et al., 2006) suggests that this arrangement may be conflicting. Her analysis show that only seven percent of the students work less alongside their studies after the Quality Reform, and she offers the following explanation: "This may be connected with the fact that the changes in financial support also entailed a considerable increase of the income threshold before the proportion of grants are reduced. This may have functioned as an opposite incentive, and may have

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<sup>39</sup> Men til tross for at det er forskjellige grunner til at studenter slutter helt eller skifter lærested, er lærestedenes handlingsrom i forhold til å påvirke frafall forholdsvis lite for begge grupper.

contributed to increase the extent of work alongside the studies”<sup>40</sup> (Aamodt et al., 2006:68). In regards to social class differences, we could imagine that a similar pattern is current. For instance, some of the changes following the Quality Reform may have had a levelling effect on departure rates between students from different social origins, some no effect, while other changes contributed to increase departure rates between different social origins. Accordingly, the reform may have led to great changes, but we are not able to discern the different effects. Since we do not have variables for each of these changes, we cannot be sure whether or which effect they had.

In regards to social class differences, I have used contingency (not presented here) tables to display mean grades, mean age and proportion of female students within social classes before and after the reform. These tables show that on the overall there is so to speak no difference before and after the reform between the social classes in regards to these characteristics (i.e. most of the groups in the class schema have slightly better grades after the reform).

Consequently, it is tempting to conclude that departure rates between social classes in the end depends on changes in the recruitment of students within the different classes, i.e. that it is the traits and characteristics of students that remain the key factors, and not so much the learning environment or similar elements, when it comes to who stay and who leave higher education. Hence, with the available data, I regard this as the most promising explanation as to why social class differences remain the same after the reform. In reality, the fact that the Quality Reform has not altered social class differences should not come as a big surprise. One of the main conclusions of one of the most thoroughly studies on educational opportunity concludes in the following way: “Finally, the impact of educational reforms on changes in educational stratification seems to be negligible. Nowhere have they reduced inequalities of educational opportunity between socioeconomic strata (Blossfeld and Shavit, 1993:21).”

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<sup>40</sup> Dette kan ha en sammenheng med at endringene i studiestøtten også innebar en vesentlig økning av inntektsgrensen (fribeløpet) før stipendandelen blir redusert. Denne økningen kan ha virket som et motsatt insentiv, og kan ha bidratt til å øke omfanget av arbeid ved siden av studiene.

### 8.1.2 The curious case of the University of Oslo

Even though the operationalisation of the dependent variable and the sample differ from that of Hovdhaugen and Aamodt (2006)<sup>41</sup>, the finding that overall departure rates are stable before and after the reform coincide with their conclusion:

The main impression of the study pattern from the first to the second year of study is nevertheless that the Quality Reform has had a limited effect in regards to the students who commenced their studies. The proportion of new students at the universities that find themselves outside higher education one year after they enrolled remains the same at approximately 20 percent before and after the reform<sup>42</sup> (Hovdhaugen and Aamodt, 2006:62).

Despite the fact that Hovdhaugen and Aamodt (2006) did not find that overall departure rates changed on an aggregate level (the total departure rate for the four universities) after the reform, they found that in addition to increased study stability, the University of Oslo had experienced five percentage points lower departure rates subsequent to the reform, while the three remaining universities had experienced interchangeable (University of Tromsø) and slightly increased (NTNU and University of Bergen) departure rates subsequent to the Quality Reform. My analysis of the inclusive sample (model four, table 6.2) point in the same direction as the University of Oslo was the only institution that had experienced reduction in overall departure rates three semesters following the reform. However, I found nearly interchangeable rates at the University of Bergen, and a slight increase at NTNU and the University of Tromsø. Hovdhaugen and Aamodt (2006) attribute the reduced departure rates at the University of Oslo to a “scare effect”, i.e. that students who were looking for a loose and uncommitted student life refrain from applying after the Quality Reform because the university can no longer offer them this type of life:

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<sup>41</sup> Most importantly, my samples are confined to students below the age of 26 (no age limit in theirs sample), and my dependent variable require that students are out of higher education two subsequent semesters prior to be defined as departed from higher education (no quarantine in their sample). In addition I measure whether students are within higher education one and three semesters after initial enrolment, while Hovdhaugen and Aamodt measures it one year (two semesters) after initial enrolment. Lastly, my sample covers the period from 1998 to 2005, while theirs analyses are based on two samples from 1998 and 2003.

<sup>42</sup> Det samlede inntrykket av studiemønsteret fra første til andre studieår, er likevel at kvalitetsreformen har hatt begrenset effekt i forhold til de studentene som begynte studiene. Andelen nye studenter ved universitetene som er helt utenfor høyere utdanning ett år etter at de begynte er uforandret på ca. 20 prosent før og etter reformen.

In our opinion the strong effects of lower dropout we see at the University of Oslo is primarily related with the elimination of this group of very loosely connected students, who merely were signed up for the preparatory course and with unclear or no plans of further studies. In many ways these were not actually new students (Hovdhaugen and Aamodt, 2006:60)<sup>43</sup>.

In short, they point to the removal of the preparatory course as the source to lower departure rates at the University of Oslo. However, we are not given any particular reasons as to why the same effect is not present at the three other universities. Nevertheless, the argument that the Quality Reform may have attracted a new group of students is interesting.

One important aspect of the analyses of the inclusive and exclusive sample is the effect of introducing grades in model five. We see that in regards to departure after one semester for the inclusive sample the Quality Reform variable turns statistical insignificant, while for the exclusive sample it goes from being statistical insignificant to strong and positive. However, the implication is the same for both samples: The risk of departure after the Quality Reform increases from model four to model five. We find the exactly same tendency when we move further to departure after three semesters for the same samples. The substantial interpretation of this is that students who enrolled after the reform have higher grades than students that enrolled before the reform, and that this lead to lower risk of departure than they otherwise would have, had they had the same grades as those who enrolled before the reform.

A possible explanation for the finding is the introduction of grade assessment following the Quality Reform. As a consequence of the Quality Reform, all applicants are being assessed on the background of their grades from upper secondary school and have to compete over the slots at universities. On the contrary to before the reform, there are no open courses at university. The results seem to indicate that competition over the slots has increased average grades from upper secondary school among students after the reform and that this has resulted in more severe selection, causing departure rates to decrease. In any event, we are just as far when it comes to the remaining three universities. The interaction variable between the

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<sup>43</sup> Vi mener at de sterkeste utslagene i retning lavere frafall som vi ser ved Universitetet i Oslo primært henger sammen med elimineringen av denne gruppen svært løst tilknyttede studenter, som bare var oppmeldt til forberedende og med uklare eller ingen planer om videre studier. På mange måter var ikke dette reelle nye studenter.

Quality Reform and NTNU (however, departure rates remain higher after than before the reform) reduces as we move from model four to five, but the same coefficient for the University of Bergen and Tromsø remain the same for the inclusive sample after three semesters.

When it comes to the remaining strength of the Quality Reform variable in model five, table 6.2, may very well be a result of an elimination of loosely connected students. A possible reason for why these ostensibly are eliminated at the University of Oslo and not at the other three institutions may be because this institution recruits a greater proportion of their students from nearby area (e.g. Oslo and Akershus) than the three remaining institutions. As a result, a greater proportion of students have the possibility to be loosely committed to the institution. As the costs of applying and remain enrolled increased in the wake of the reform, they decided that it was not worth it anymore and did not apply. I do not believe that the same mechanism, at least not to the same extent, is current at the three remaining institutions as a greater share of the students at these universities have moved from their hometown to go study at them.

## **8.2 Main findings of the analyses of social class differences**

Statistical significant social class differences were found for all samples after one and three semesters. However, the differences were minimal after one semester and evaporated quickly as the age was introduced as control variable. In regards to the analyses of departure after three semesters, social class differences had increased, and the main picture is that there is a relation between the risk of departure and social class. As we ascend the social hierarchy, the risk of departure becomes smaller, i.e. at a general level the fractions of the lower middle class have less risk of departure than the three social classes at the bottom, the upper middle class has less risk of departure than the lower middle class, and finally, the upper class has less risk of departure than the upper middle class. In other words, there is a relation between social class and departure.

Notwithstanding that e.g. the fractions of the upper class have much less risk of departure than the reference group, the difference in the risk of departure between e.g. the fractions of the upper class and upper middle class, or the lower middle class and the skilled workers, manifest itself as subtle gradations and sometimes they even overlap. If we add to the picture



that the greatest departure rate found for any group (skilled and partly skilled workers) is 15,5 percent in model four, table 6.2, and the lowest departure rate in the same model is 8,7 percent (economic fraction of upper class), we know that the ten remaining groups disperse themselves over 6,8 ( $15,5 - 8,7 = 6,8$ ) percentage points. As a result, none of the social classes are clearly set apart with substantially lower or higher risk of departure than adjacent groups, hence it is hard to come up with any good explanation for why one fraction has somewhere between one or two percentage points lower risk of departure than another.

One may of course argue whether the differences found between the social classes are small or big. In the following section, I highlight three reasons for why we should not underestimate the differences found.

### **8.2.1 Repressed or forthcoming inequalities in the educational run?**

Despite the fact that the differences between many of the groups in the class schema are small, and that the preponderance of the social class that comes worst out of it, i.e. has greatest risk of departure, remains within higher education after three semesters, there are mainly three reasons as to why we should be careful to state that social class differences found are trivial.

First of all, in chapter four I outlined two hypotheses that offer different explanations of the same finding: That students from different social origins become more and more homogenous in regards to motivation and abilities the further up in the educational system they arrive, hence grade attainment and the risk of leaving becomes less pronounced between students from different social origins than at previous stages. This thesis has not focused on the degree of selection to universities, but as demonstrated in chapter four, previous research suggests that it is quite extensive. Furthermore, Bourdieu argues “Thus, previous performances being equal, pupils of working-class origin are more likely to ‘eliminate themselves’ by declining to enter it than to eliminate themselves once they have entered, and a fortiori more likely not to enter than to be eliminated from it by the explicit sanction of examination failure” (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977:153). Hence, that there are social class differences in departure in spite of extensive selection throughout the educational run before one reaches higher education might be rendered as quite striking.

Secondly, social class differences are likely to reinforce throughout the educational run. The differences between the social classes are most likely to be highly contingent on the definition of departure that is employed, and at what point it is measured. In this regard, my definition of departure entails that students have to stay outside higher education for at least two semesters before they are regarded as having left. Further on, one and three semesters is still early in the educational run and we might have seen greater differences between the groups had departure been measured at a later stage. Recent statistics from Statistics Norway confirm such an assumption. Out of the students who commenced their studies in 1997, the statistics show that 47,4 percent of the students whose parents' highest educational level was basic education had not obtained a degree ten years later, while 31,5 percent of students whose parents had long higher education (four years or more) found themselves in the same situation (Statistics Norway, 2009). Hence, social class differences in departure escalate throughout the educational run. This is also confirmed with my findings in regards to the fifth hypothesis as social class differences were sharply enhanced from one to three semesters.

Thirdly, even though the bulk of students originating from one of the working classes remain within higher education after three semesters, and that the difference compared to some of the groups higher up in the hierarchy is not alarming, it is important to emphasize that the cause and reasons students provide for leaving higher education may be connected to disparate mechanisms. Accordingly, it is quite different to leave the educational system because one feels awkward and alienated, and thereby decides that it is "not for the likes of me", or whether one is having a break for a year to undertake a commission for an organization or to live life as a backpacker. With the available data it is not possible to observe why students decide to leave, but other studies have asked students why they have left. Hovdhaugen et al. (2008:31) did so, and concluded that:

Approximately half of the students interpret their experience of quitting as something positive, through the following statement: 'It was a result of that I had found something exciting to do, I found out what I really wanted and a process where I matured as a human being'. The other half on the contrary understand leaving as a difficult decision and about one out of three regretted afterwards or looks at it as a defeat.<sup>44</sup>

However, the study is mute in regards as to how these reasons for leaving are related to students' social origin.

### **8.2.2 Why not greater differences?**

Despite the fact that we should be careful asserting that the social class differences found are not considerable, it is possible to reflect on why they not are greater. Naturally, there might be many reasons as to why we do not see greater differences between most of the social classes. One explanation might be that habituses from lower classes is more adaptable to new social arenas than what the theory presupposes, i.e. that the relationship between primary and secondary socialization is more skewed in favour of secondary socialization than what the theory put to ground. As a result, in spite of that students from the lower strata encounter a new and unfamiliar environment as they enter university, most of them are able to adapt quite fast to it.

Another argument is that Norway is one of the more egalitarian countries, and that equity in education is and has been a central policy goal since the post-war era (e.g. Opheim, 2008). This may have resulted in universities that are less elitist than those in the analyses of Bourdieu (Danielsen, 1998). A related aspect to this is Boudon's criticism of Bourdieu's alleged unwillingness to realise that recruitment to universities have changed throughout the post-war era as he asserts that "It is no longer the students from the upper class that dominate in numbers" (Hansen, 1986a:72), consequently one may argue that the culture within the university has changed as a result of this. A third argument may be that the social room in Norway is "smaller" or more egalitarian than that of the French society, i.e. the social class

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<sup>44</sup> Omtrent halvparten av studentene fortolker sin opplevelse av å slutte som noe positivt, gjennom følgende utsagn: 'Det var et uttrykk for at jeg fant noe mer spennende å gjøre, jeg fan tut hva jeg egentlig ønsket og en prosess der jeg modnet som menneske'. Den andre halvparten derimot ser på det å slutte som en vanskelig beslutning og rundt en av tre angret i ettertid eller ser på det som et nederlag.

differences are less pronounced. Consequently, we could expect that the habitus of the different social classes are more alike than what the case is in other countries (Hansen, 1986b:23). The egalitarian argument is also valid for social position theory, as it asserts that economy is an important resource for educational choices and to remain within education.

Goldthorpe asserts that in addition to economy, information constitute an important resources for educational choices. In relation to departure, the idea must be that students who have access to information about higher education through their parents, will have greater probability of making the right educational choice and as a consequence less risk of departure. A reason for why the social class differences are compact after one and three semesters may then be a result of that many individuals in Norway has higher education of some kind. According to the class schema, it seems like all fractions above skilled workers, skilled and partly skilled workers and social welfare, have some kind of higher education. Further on, the results of departure after three semesters in model one of all three samples, show that all the fractions of the three upper classes have statistical significant lower risk of departure than the three social classes at the bottom of the schema. This may support the idea that information concerning higher education account for some of the variation. On the other hand, Opheim investigated whether information about the new finance system differed according to students' social background<sup>45</sup>, and found at that it did not (Aamodt et al. 2006:67). Although the finance system amounts to small part of the information about higher education, the finding might implicate that informational gap is small and that students from different social classes manage to receive sufficient information about higher education.

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<sup>45</sup> Social background was operationalised in the following way: no parents with higher education, one parent with higher education and two parents with higher education.

### 8.2.3 Why the small impact of cultural capital?

When it comes to the question of cultural capital, I discarded hypothesis four for all samples, which claimed that cultural capital constitutes an important ingredients for reducing the risk of departure. This expectation was not fulfilled for any of the samples. The greatest setback in regards to the assumption is that the group presumed to be richest in cultural capital, i.e. the cultural fraction of the upper class has greater risk of departure than the economic fraction in the same social class after three semesters. This is true for all samples. When we control for grades, the cultural fraction's coefficient is sharply weakened, while the impact on the economic fraction is much less. This said, in regards to departure after three semesters, the analyses for all three samples show that the cultural fractions of the upper middle class and the lower middle class generally have lower risk of departure than the other fractions within the same social classes. Nevertheless, the differences are small and the cultural fractions of the upper middle class and lower middle class have approximately the same risk of departing as the other fractions within these social classes. Consequently, it seems as though cultural capital have a minimal affect on the risk of departure after one and three semesters. There might be several reasons as to why we get this result. Perhaps cultural capital is not so important within the educational system of Norway?

Danielsen (1998) argues in this line of thought as he asserts that cultural capital has poorer institutional foundation in Norway than what Bourdieu presupposes in his analyses of the French society. He claims that "... the higher educational system in Norway is more or less like a Keynesian regulator on the labour market than an elitist knowledge cathedral"<sup>46</sup> (Danielsen 1998, 100), and that these institutions have been to small to create their own milieu consisting of distinctive values, rules, hierarchies, ways of interacting and language. If this is true, it may account for why we do not see any significant impact of cultural capital. However, there are arguments against my conclusion and Danielsen's supposition.

Bourdieu often referred to cultural capital as the legitimate culture. However, Lamont and Lareau (1988) find it unclear whether this refers to the cultural signals that are most valued (i.e. prestigious) or the ones that are respectable (i.e. good, but not prestigious). As the authors emphasize, this is an important distinction because a prestigious meaning would focus on the

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<sup>46</sup> "... det norske utdanningssystemet fungerer mer som en Keynesiansk regulator på arbeidsmarkedet enn som en elitistisk lærdomskatedral."

access to high status positions, while the respectable understanding would put its gist on excluding the lower classes from the middle. Considering this, it may very well be that tertiary educational institutions in Norway do not represent the typical type of universities described in Bourdieu's analyses, i.e. knowledge cathedrals, but instead constitute a culture that amounts to the respectable understanding of cultural capital and not the prestigious one. Hence, one might imagine that most students master the settings of the university, but not the ones from the lowest strata. This might entail that the difference in the composition of capital for the classes above the lowest strata do not matter that much, something which would explain why I for the most of it found small differences between the fractions of the three upper classes and sometimes results that go against the assumption of cultural capital's importance. Furthermore, the two working classes and the social welfare class have generally statistical significant higher risk of departure after three semesters than all the remaining social classes. If these differences continue to increase throughout the educational run, the respectable interpretation of cultural capital may prove to be valid.

Regardless of whether we stick to the prestigious or the respectable conception of cultural capital, there are other ways to explain why cultural capital may be little relevant for understanding departure from higher education. As shown in chapter four, Bourdieu's main concept for understanding action, habitus, does not preclude rational calculations. Swartz writes:

Suddenly the tacit and practical implementation of the effects of early socialization, so well captured by the concept of habitus, gives way to a more consciously rational class reconversion strategy that conveys the sense of a highly future-oriented perspective of class behavior" (Swartz, 2005:198).

In another section, he asserts that in "Situations of crisis or where the financial stakes are considerable may encourage highly conscious forms of strategizing" (Swartz 1997:113). I do not know whether Bourdieu regards the costs of studying at universities a considerable financial stake. But if he does, we might ask how important it is for understanding departure from universities. If it is highly important and thereby opens up for rational calculations, one could argue that economic considerations trumps cultural capital in importance when it comes to departure from higher education. If it is so, one could argue that reproduction theory shares two pivotal similarities with social position theory as the choice of leaving is based on rational calculations, and secondly that economy is the main resource that influences the choice.

A third argument is that economic and cultural capital's effect on departure must be investigated for particular educational fields. As outlined in chapter four, Bourdieu claims that the currency of cultural capital may vary according to where the educational field in question is positioned according to two antagonistic principles, and whether success in the field was perceived as dependent of talent or hard work. By investigating cultural capital's effect on a highly aggregated level, real differences between the educational fields may be masked. In chapter seven I attempted to take the analysis at a lower level by focusing on three educational fields. However, the social class differences remained more or less the same as for the aggregated analysis (exclusive sample). This said, one might argue that the analysis ideally should be brought down at even a lower level.

#### **8.2.4 Primary and secondary effects of stratification**

In the same manner as previous studies on departure from higher education, I found a strong correlation between grades and the risk of departure; the lower the grades are, the greater the risk of departure is. Common interpretations of the relation between grades and departure is that grades functions as a proxy for motivation and skills (Hovdhaugen and Aamodt, 2005:16) and that lower grades would increase the costs of completing a degree because it is likely that one has to spend more time working with one's studies (Hansen and Mastekaasa, 2005:119). As Helland (2004:157-175) has thoroughly demonstrated, grades are a complicated matter and constitute a complex interplay between of both genetic and cultural factors. I would therefore be careful with designating the substantial interpretation of grades to a few factors. Even though grades do have an important influence on departure and that students with high grades have much less risk of departure compared to students with lower grades, figure 6.2 and 7.2 shows that at even the lowest grade levels, a great proportion of the students remain within higher education.

Nevertheless, the gist of the matter of the analyses has been on the relation between social class differences, grades from upper secondary school and the risk of departure<sup>47</sup>. The analyses also showed that as a result of controlling for grades from upper secondary school, much of the social class differences evaporated (the exception is the economic fraction of the upper class in which I will soon return to). In regards departure after three semesters for all

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<sup>47</sup> Departure after one semester is not relevant in the following discussion due to the fact that social class differences dissolved before we controlled for grades.

samples, it was only the coefficients of the fractions within the upper middle class and upper class that remained statistically significant different from that of the reference group. In the inclusive sample, all the fractions of the upper class and upper middle class were statistically significant different from that of the reference group, while for the two remaining samples the middle and cultural fraction of the upper class did not have statistically significant lower risk of departure than the reference group. At a general level we may therefore conclude that grades from upper secondary school reduce or even eliminate the difference in the risk of departure between the social classes.

In social position theory, and especially in Boudon's version of it, it is the secondary effects of stratification and aspirations among social classes that are perceived as central for explaining social class differences, while Bourdieu emphasizes the primary effects of stratification. The fact that most of the social class differences evaporated as we controlled for grades, gives support to the assumption that primary effects are first and foremost the factor that determine whether students from different social classes leave higher education to a different degree. Accordingly, we could expect that students with lower grades from upper secondary school are leaving higher education because they are struggling to receive satisfactory grades at university or even pass their exams, and may have to spend more time with their studies to keep up with the progression. This could affect the opportunity to obtain a social life, and hold a part time job, which is at utmost important for the economic situation of many students. We may conclude that the main picture of the relation between grades, social class and departure supports the assumptions of reproduction theory.

Even though primary effects of stratification demonstrates a strong effect on the risk of departure and dissolve much of the differences in the risk of departure between most of the social classes, the economic fraction of the upper class remains little affected by the control for grades. They distinguish themselves with lower risk of departure compared to the other statistically significant fractions of the upper middle and upper class. This is true for all samples after three semesters. In regards to the exclusive and educational field sample, the coefficients of both the middle and cultural fraction of the upper class became statistically insignificant as we controlled for grades from upper secondary school, while the economic fraction remained fairly strong. This finding coincides more with social position theory.



If we look back on the class schema in figure 5.2, we see that the economic fractions have a nearly built-in control for occupations, i.e. the occupations within the economic fractions remain largely the same (are held constant) while the income varies from below NOK 500 000, between NOK 500 000 and NOK 1 000000, and lastly above NOK 1 000000. In other words, the reason for why we see the low departure rates for the economic fraction of the upper class is somehow related to high income. A common postulate of the social position theory goes as follows:

... the chief concern of families in more advantaged class positions is that their children should obtain qualifications sufficient to preserve an intergenerational stability of class position or, at very least, to guard against decisive downward mobility... it may then be expected that the importance that is attached to qualifications adequate to maintain class stability, together with parents' capacity to absorb the costs involved, will lead children attempting to enter higher education even where their ability levels are such that, as regards the chances of a successful outcome, the investment is a rather high risk one (Goldthorpe, 1996:494).

If any of the social classes should be able to absorb the costs related to education, it would be the economic fraction of the upper class. Hence, it could explain their ability persist within higher education. Parents of the students within this social class may support their offspring with more money so that they do not have to work alongside their studies, and if they are not able to pass an exam, which after the Quality Reform would entail less grants from the NSELF, this may present less of a problem for them. But despite the fact that this fraction is the richest in regards to economic capital, it is not like the other fractions of the upper class have little of it. For instance, many of the occupations (e.g. physician) in the middle fraction of the upper class have a comfortable income, and although I cannot be completely sure, I do not believe that it is the extra income in itself that is the main explanation for why the economic fraction of the upper class has less risk of departure when controlled for grades than the middle fraction or any of the other two economic fractions. Further on, Hansen and Mastekaasa (2005) did not find any correlation between parents' income and risk of departure. We may therefore speculate whether it is other factors than high income per se that makes students of this fraction remain within higher education.

According to Boudon a possible explanation may be related to social norms among families who find themselves in advantaged class positions. The reason for why the economic fraction of the upper class remains in higher education more independent of their ability levels

compared to other social classes may be “a result of higher education becoming a social norm that children are induced to follow through family or peer-group pressure” (Goldthorpe, 1996:494). It might be that within this social class fraction there is a strong social norm of achieving a university degree, that there are extensive social costs related to leave or even having a break from university. Another interesting aspect of the economic fraction of the upper class is that educational qualifications are not enough to preserve intergenerational stability. Within the cultural and middle fraction of the upper class, for instance, the offspring have more or less secured intergenerational stability as long as they complete a degree approximate to that of their parents, and receive a position in the labor market based on this qualification. However, the situation is sort of different for students from the economic fraction, due to the fact that in addition to obtain the more or less same educational qualifications as their parents, they also need to get hold of highly scarce positions within the labor market that makes them eligible for high income. To obtain such positions we could expect that it becomes pivotal to enter the labor market as early as possible, as work experience in many cases is important for occupying prestigious positions with high income later in the career. Consequently, their risk of departure is lower.

### **8.3 Conclusion**

The aim of this thesis has been to investigate whether departure rates changed in the wake of the Quality Reform and how departure from higher education relates to social class.

The Quality Reform seems to have a negligible effect on overall departure rates and social class differences in departure from higher education. Nevertheless, the University of Oslo is an exception and my findings indicate that the selection of students may have intensified after the reform, causing the grade average to increase and departure to decrease. With the available data, it is difficult to say anything about the specific effect of the changes that the Quality Reform brought to higher education. This is something that should be investigated more closely, both in relation to overall departure and social class differences in departure.

In the introduction of this thesis I argued that theories should be tested more explicitly, an approach that I followed by applying the Bourdieu-inspired class schema. The analysis showed that students perceived rich in cultural capital did not have noticeable less risk of departure than students with less of this form of capital. In addition to the reasons I have

provided previously in this chapter as to why we see little impact of cultural capital, I question whether the class schema functions as an acceptable proxy for Bourdieu's notion of the conditions of existence as students' social class is designated at a late stage in their life. However, it is important to keep in mind that the class schema is in its making.

The analysis shows that there are social class differences in departure, and that the economic fraction of the upper class stands out with lower risk of departure before and after control for grades from upper secondary school. But on the overall, neither cultural nor economic capital stands out as the most important one. The findings do not give uniform support to reproduction theory nor social position theory. Some of the results support while other opposes the assumptions of both theories. This is may be a symptom of the complicated nature of departure from higher education. Further investigation of departure from higher education should pay more attention to why students leave and how this relates to social origin.

# Appendix

**Table A6.1 Departure after one semester for the inclusive sample**

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	coef	Se	coef	se	coef	se	coef	se	coef	se
<i>Social class (constant: Skilled and partly skilled workers)</i>										
Upper class, culture	-0.340*	0.147	-0.342*	0.147	-0.249	0.147	-0.227	0.148	0.064	0.181
Upper class, middle	-0.384***	0.111	-0.383***	0.111	-0.294**	0.111	-0.215	0.112	0.050	0.133
Upper class, economy	-0.285*	0.111	-0.285*	0.111	-0.198	0.112	-0.117	0.112	0.052	0.136
Upper middle class, culture	-0.278**	0.098	-0.280**	0.098	-0.215*	0.098	-0.189	0.098	0.053	0.119
Upper middle class, middle	-0.263**	0.084	-0.263**	0.084	-0.202*	0.084	-0.161	0.084	-0.031	0.103
Upper middle class, economy	-0.212*	0.093	-0.211*	0.093	-0.138	0.093	-0.094	0.094	0.023	0.115
Lower middle class, culture	-0.250	0.128	-0.250	0.128	-0.208	0.128	-0.200	0.129	-0.102	0.160
Lower middle class, middle	-0.105	0.099	-0.104	0.099	-0.080	0.100	-0.074	0.100	-0.058	0.123
Lower middle class, economy	-0.160	0.090	-0.160	0.090	-0.125	0.090	-0.109	0.090	-0.014	0.110
Skilled workers	0.185	0.101	0.183	0.101	0.177	0.101	0.167	0.101	0.196	0.124
Social welfare	-0.104	0.098	-0.111	0.098	-0.149	0.098	-0.142	0.099	-0.077	0.121
<i>The Quality Reform (constant: before the reform)</i>										
			-0.184***	0.042	-0.199***	0.042	-0.174*	0.072	0.035	0.090
<i>Gender (constant: female students)</i>										
					0.228***	0.042	0.134**	0.043	0.250***	0.053
<i>Age (constant: 20 years)</i>										
Age					0.216***	0.023	0.182***	0.023	0.033	0.030
Age <sup>2</sup>					0.030	0.019	0.029	0.019	0.048*	0.023
Age <sup>3</sup>					-0.010*	0.004	-0.009*	0.004	-0.010	0.005
<i>Structured studies (constant: not structured studies)</i>										
							-1.851***	0.132	-1.543***	0.150
<i>Institutions (constant: Univ. of Oslo)</i>										
University of Tromsø							0.024	0.094	-0.083	0.118
NTNU							-0.017	0.067	-0.060	0.077
University of Bergen							0.111	0.061	0.055	0.073
Univ. of Tromsø*Quality Reform							0.444**	0.143	0.241	0.192
NTNU*Quality Reform							0.122	0.108	0.168	0.131
Univ. of Bergen*Quality Reform							-0.188	0.112	-0.102	0.135
<i>Grades from upper secondary school</i>										
									-0.312***	0.027
<i>Constant</i>	-3.048***	0.070	-2.980***	0.072	-3.198***	0.080	-3.095***	0.087	-3.486***	0.109
Probability of departure for constant	0.045		0.048		0.039		0.043		0.030	
Number of observations	68 325		68 325		68 325		68 325		50 610	
aic	22 068.193		22 050.603		21 888.018		21 502.826		14 912.140	
bic	22 177.777		22 169.320		22 043.263		21 721.995		15 132.938	

note: \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05

note: The constant is a 20 year old female student originating from the skilled and partly skilled working class, who enrolled before the Quality Reform at the University of Oslo, who did not enroll in structured studies, and with mean grades from upper secondary school.

**Table A6.2 Departure after one semester for the exclusive sample**

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	coef	se	coef	se	coef	se	coef	se	coef	se
<i>Social class (constant: Skilled and partly skilled workers)</i>										
Upper class, culture	-0.189	0.167	-0.191	0.167	-0.099	0.167	-0.052	0.168	0.149	0.204
Upper class, middle	-0.301*	0.131	-0.301*	0.131	-0.209	0.131	-0.094	0.132	0.121	0.154
Upper class, economy	-0.212	0.133	-0.212	0.133	-0.125	0.133	0.004	0.134	0.214	0.154
Upper middle class, culture	-0.319**	0.120	-0.320**	0.120	-0.252*	0.120	-0.212	0.120	0.022	0.141
Upper middle class, middle	-0.264**	0.102	-0.264**	0.102	-0.200*	0.102	-0.141	0.102	-0.004	0.122
Upper middle class, economy	-0.282*	0.115	-0.281*	0.115	-0.205	0.116	-0.128	0.116	-0.022	0.138
Lower middle class, culture	-0.204	0.154	-0.204	0.154	-0.160	0.154	-0.137	0.154	-0.103	0.189
Lower middle class, middle	-0.061	0.120	-0.060	0.120	-0.031	0.120	-0.017	0.121	0.001	0.145
Lower middle class, economy	-0.131	0.109	-0.131	0.109	-0.095	0.109	-0.065	0.109	0.034	0.130
Skilled workers	0.241*	0.122	0.240*	0.122	0.235	0.122	0.220	0.122	0.288*	0.144
Social welfare	-0.098	0.120	-0.099	0.120	-0.135	0.120	-0.103	0.121	-0.044	0.143
<i>The Quality Reform (constant: before the reform)</i>										
			-0.042	0.049	-0.060	0.049	0.036	0.093	0.365***	0.106
<i>Gender (constant: female students)</i>										
					0.260***	0.051	0.139**	0.052	0.249***	0.062
<i>Age (constant: 20 years)</i>										
Age					0.175***	0.028	0.132***	0.028	-0.003	0.035
Age <sup>2</sup>					0.054*	0.022	0.054*	0.022	0.050	0.027
Age <sup>3</sup>					-0.012*	0.005	-0.010*	0.005	-0.008	0.006
<i>Structured studies (constant: not structured studies)</i>										
							-1.246***	0.103	-0.986***	0.118
<i>Institutions (constant: Univ. of Oslo)</i>										
University of Tromsø							0.268*	0.124	0.236	0.143
NTNU							0.234**	0.086	0.111	0.097
University of Bergen							0.392***	0.080	0.313***	0.092
Univ. of Tromsø*Quality Reform							0.162	0.182	-0.305	0.231
NTNU*Quality Reform							0.063	0.127	0.012	0.147
Univ. of Bergen*Quality Reform							-0.343**	0.133	-0.379*	0.152
<i>Grades from upper secondary school</i>										
									-0.292***	0.032
<i>Constant</i>										
	-3.352***	0.085	-3.334***	0.088	-3.599***	0.098	-3.660***	0.112	-3.936***	0.134
Probability of departure for constant	0.034		0.034		0.027		0.025		0.019	
Number of observations	61 249		61 249		61 249		61 249		45 846	
aic	15 964.949		15 966.204		15 856.220		15 630.803		11 494.179	
bic	16 073.221		16 083.499		16 009.606		15 847.348		11 712.505	

note: \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05

note: The constant is a 20 year old female student originating from the skilled and partly skilled working class, who enrolled before the Quality Reform at the University of Oslo, who did not enroll in structured studies, and with mean grades from upper secondary school.

**Table A7.1 Departure after one semester for the educational field sample**

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	coef	se	coef	se	coef	se	coef	se	coef	se
<i>Social class (constant: Skilled and partly skilled workers)</i>										
Upper class, culture	-0.197	0.176	-0.198	0.176	-0.110	0.177	-0.097	0.177	0.048	0.216
Upper class, middle	-0.257	0.137	-0.257	0.137	-0.168	0.138	-0.077	0.138	0.121	0.160
Upper class, economy	-0.203	0.141	-0.203	0.141	-0.120	0.141	0.011	0.142	0.172	0.164
Upper middle class, culture	-0.256*	0.125	-0.256*	0.125	-0.190	0.125	-0.182	0.125	0.007	0.146
Upper middle class, middle	-0.264*	0.108	-0.264*	0.108	-0.202	0.108	-0.147	0.108	-0.028	0.128
Upper middle class, economy	-0.242*	0.121	-0.242*	0.121	-0.168	0.121	-0.092	0.122	-0.013	0.144
Lower middle class, culture	-0.185	0.162	-0.185	0.162	-0.137	0.162	-0.131	0.163	-0.171	0.201
Lower middle class, middle	-0.076	0.128	-0.076	0.128	-0.046	0.128	-0.035	0.128	-0.024	0.153
Lower middle class, economy	-0.114	0.115	-0.114	0.115	-0.080	0.116	-0.058	0.116	0.010	0.136
Skilled workers	0.243	0.129	0.242	0.129	0.234	0.129	0.227	0.129	0.262	0.152
Social welfare	-0.124	0.128	-0.126	0.128	-0.163	0.128	-0.134	0.129	-0.132	0.153
<i>The Quality Reform (constant: before the reform)</i>										
			-0.030	0.052	-0.046	0.052	-0.078	0.119	0.267*	0.135
<i>Gender (constant: female students)</i>										
					0.287***	0.054	0.158**	0.056	0.229***	0.067
<i>Age (the constant is 20)</i>										
Age					0.163***	0.029	0.120***	0.030	-0.023	0.037
Age <sup>2</sup>					0.071**	0.023	0.068**	0.023	0.068*	0.028
Age <sup>3</sup>					-0.014**	0.005	-0.013*	0.005	-0.011	0.007
<i>Structured studies (constant: not structured studies)</i>										
							-1.302***	0.132	-1.083***	0.153
<i>Educational fields (constant: humanities)</i>										
Social sciences							-0.354***	0.076	-0.511***	0.087
Natural sciences							-0.232*	0.096	-0.372***	0.112
Social sciences*Quality Reform							0.129	0.118	0.115	0.139
Natural sciences*Quality Reform							0.122	0.147	0.038	0.173
<i>Institutions (Constant: Univ. Of Oslo)</i>										
University of Tromsø							0.315*	0.137	0.333*	0.159
NTNU							0.206*	0.091	0.122	0.103
University of Bergen							0.401***	0.083	0.308**	0.096
Univ. of Troms*Quality Reform							0.208	0.204	-0.459	0.270
NTNU*Quality Reform							0.125	0.135	0.026	0.156
Univ. of Bergen*Quality Reform							-0.311*	0.139	-0.369*	0.159
<i>Grades</i>										
									-0.294***	0.034
<i>Constant</i>	-3.365***	0.091	-3.353***	0.093	-3.649***	0.103	-3.493***	0.128	-3.596***	0.151
Probability of departure for constant	0.033		0.034		0.025		0.029		0.027	
Number of observations	55 495		55 495		55 495		55 495		41 385	
aic	14 448.040		14 449.703		14 346.978		14 142.464		10 361.148	
bic	14 555.128		14 565.716		14 498.687		14 392.338		10 611.438	

note: \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05

note: The constant is a 20 year old female student originating from the skilled and partly skilled working class, who enrolled before the Quality Reform within the educational field of the humanities at the University of Oslo, who did not enroll in structured studies, and with mean grades from upper secondary school.

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