

OU Capstone

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Introduction

- ❖ Client: Open University, UK (distance learning)
- ❖ Problem: 30% students withdraw from the course
- ❖ Approach:
 - ❖ exploratory analysis: most important factors
 - ❖ in depth analysis into these
 - ❖ in addition, brief insight into scores, VLE engagement and if they influence the decision
- ❖ Predict whether student will withdraw or not

Background

- ❖ Kennedy and Powell (1976): insecure, educational history of failure, not prepared to take the course
- ❖ Simpson (2006): Reviews ways to predict student success and significance of statistical methods like Logistic regression
- ❖ Wolff and Zdrahal (2012): uses machine learning to forecast if student is at risk of failing based on VLE engagement

Data

- ❖ Data is from website:

https://analyse.kmi.open.ac.uk/open_dataset

7 files in all providing information about:

- ❖ Student demographics
- ❖ Module/course information including assessment scores and VLE engagement
- ❖ student activities like unregistration, scores and number of clicks on VLE
- ❖ Most important target file: studentInfo.csv related to demographics

Student - activities

studentRegistration
code_module VARCHAR(45)
code_presentation VARCHAR(45)
id_student INT
date_registration INT
date_unregistration INT

studentAssessment
id_student INT
id_assessment INT
date_submitted INT
is_banked TINYINT
score FLOAT

studentVle
id_site INT
id_student INT
code_module VARCHAR(45)
code_presentation VARCHAR(45)
date INT
sum_click INT

Student - demographics

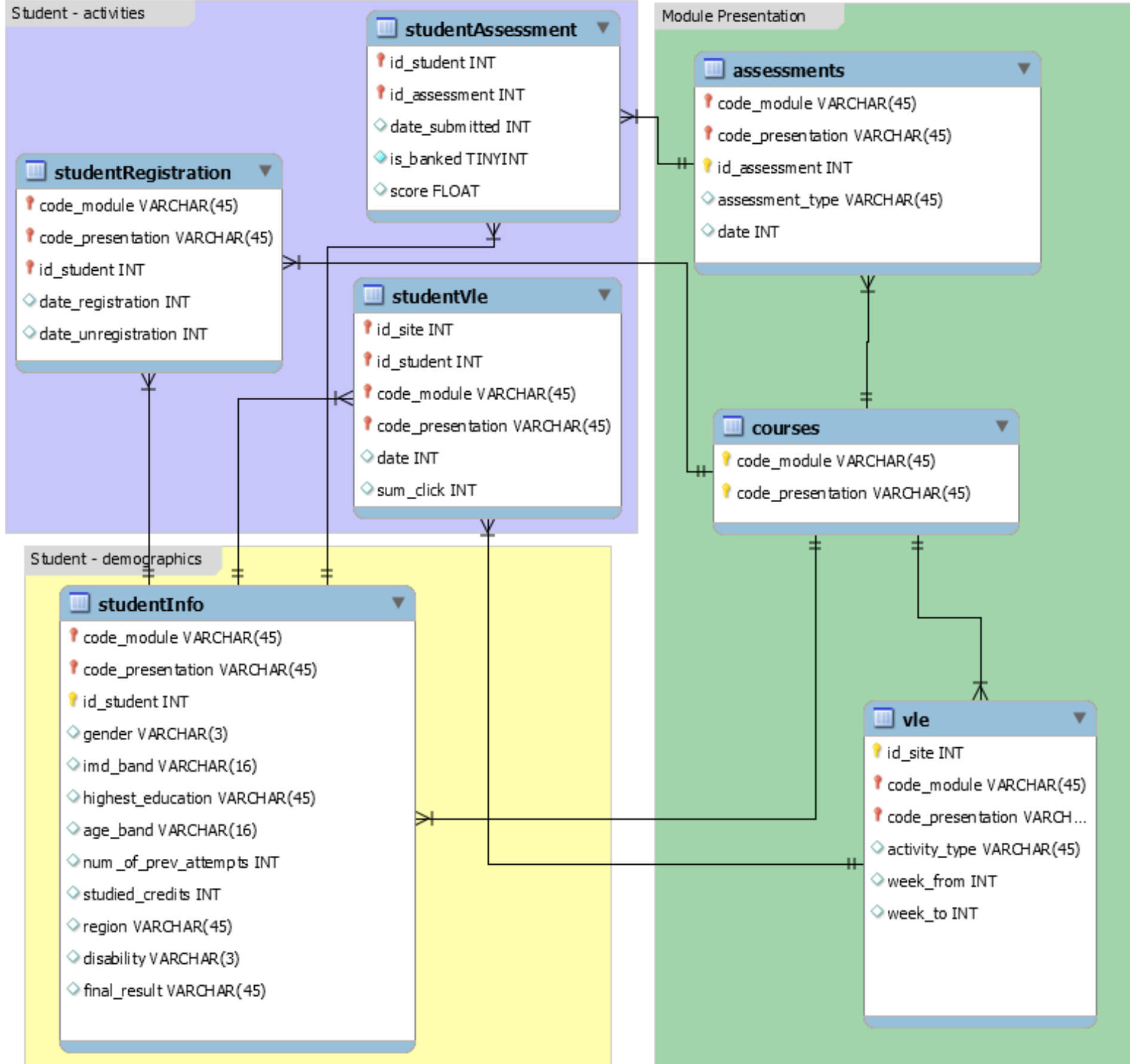
studentInfo
code_module VARCHAR(45)
code_presentation VARCHAR(45)
id_student INT
gender VARCHAR(3)
imd_band VARCHAR(16)
highest_education VARCHAR(45)
age_band VARCHAR(16)
num_of_prev_attempts INT
studied_credits INT
region VARCHAR(45)
disability VARCHAR(3)
final_result VARCHAR(45)

Module Presentation

assessments
code_module VARCHAR(45)
code_presentation VARCHAR(45)
id_assessment INT
assessment_type VARCHAR(45)
date INT

courses
code_module VARCHAR(45)
code_presentation VARCHAR(45)

vle
id_site INT
code_module VARCHAR(45)
code_presentation VARCH...
activity_type VARCHAR(45)
week_from INT
week_to INT

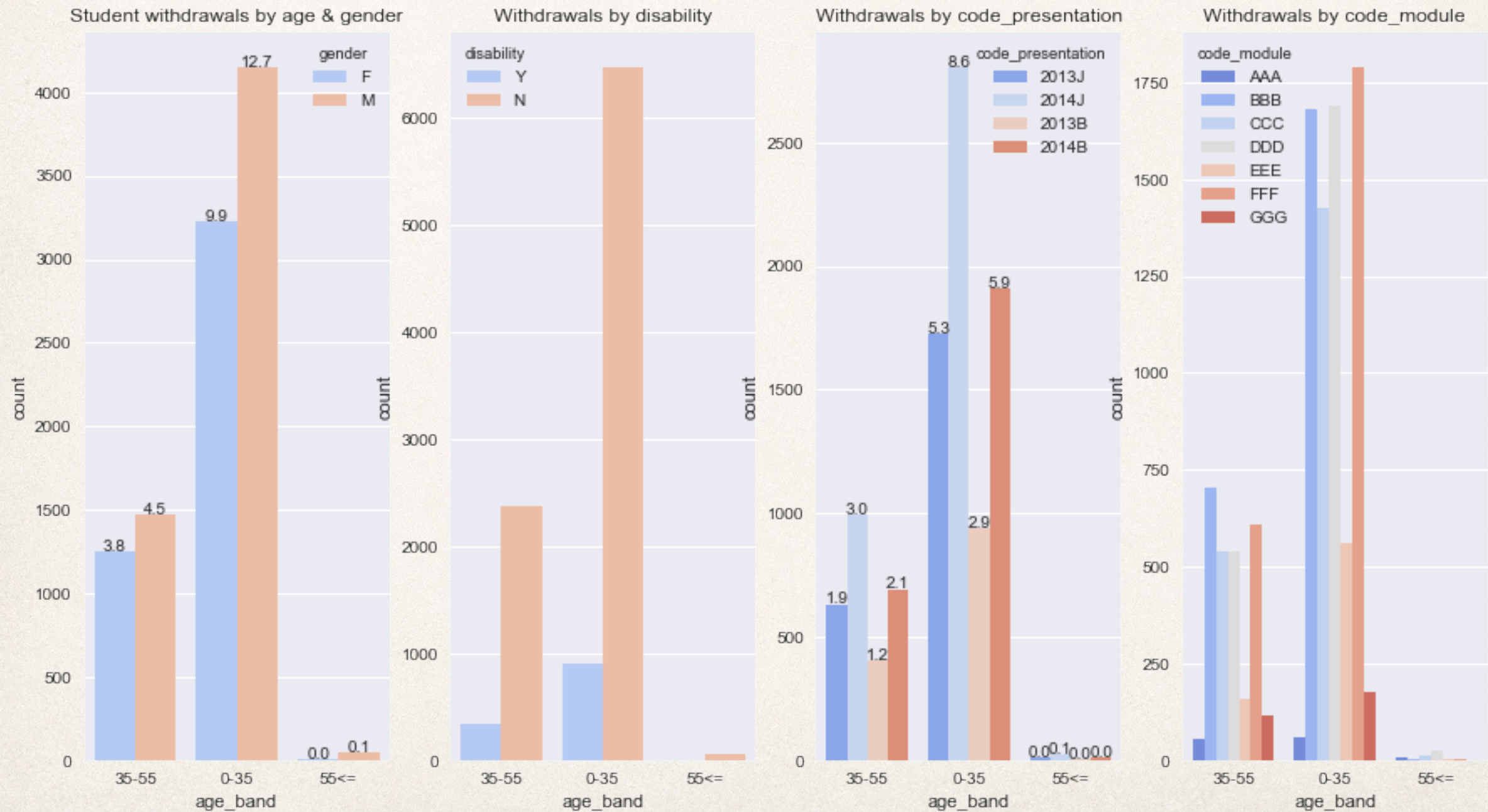


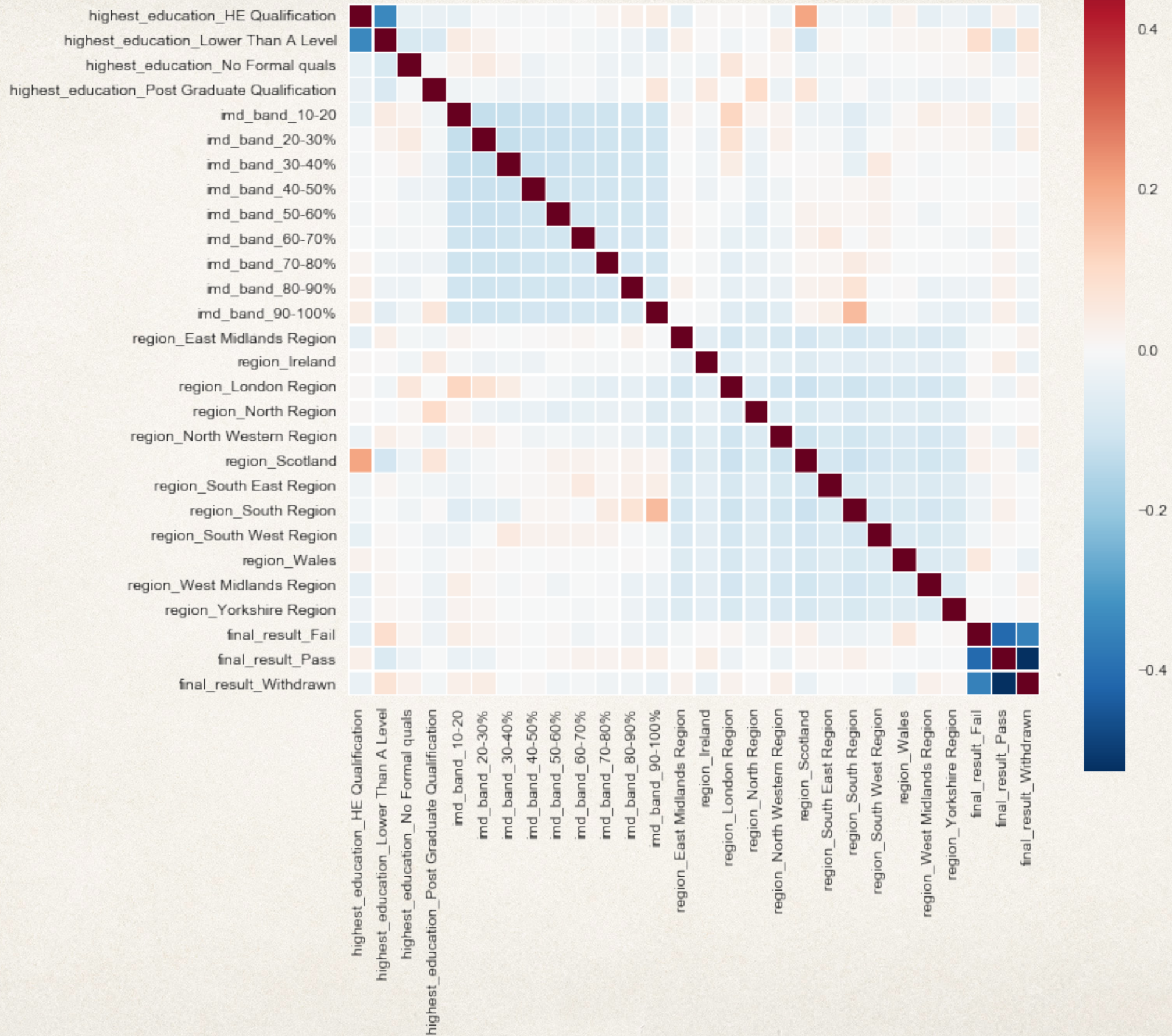
❖ Exploratory data analysis based only on demographics

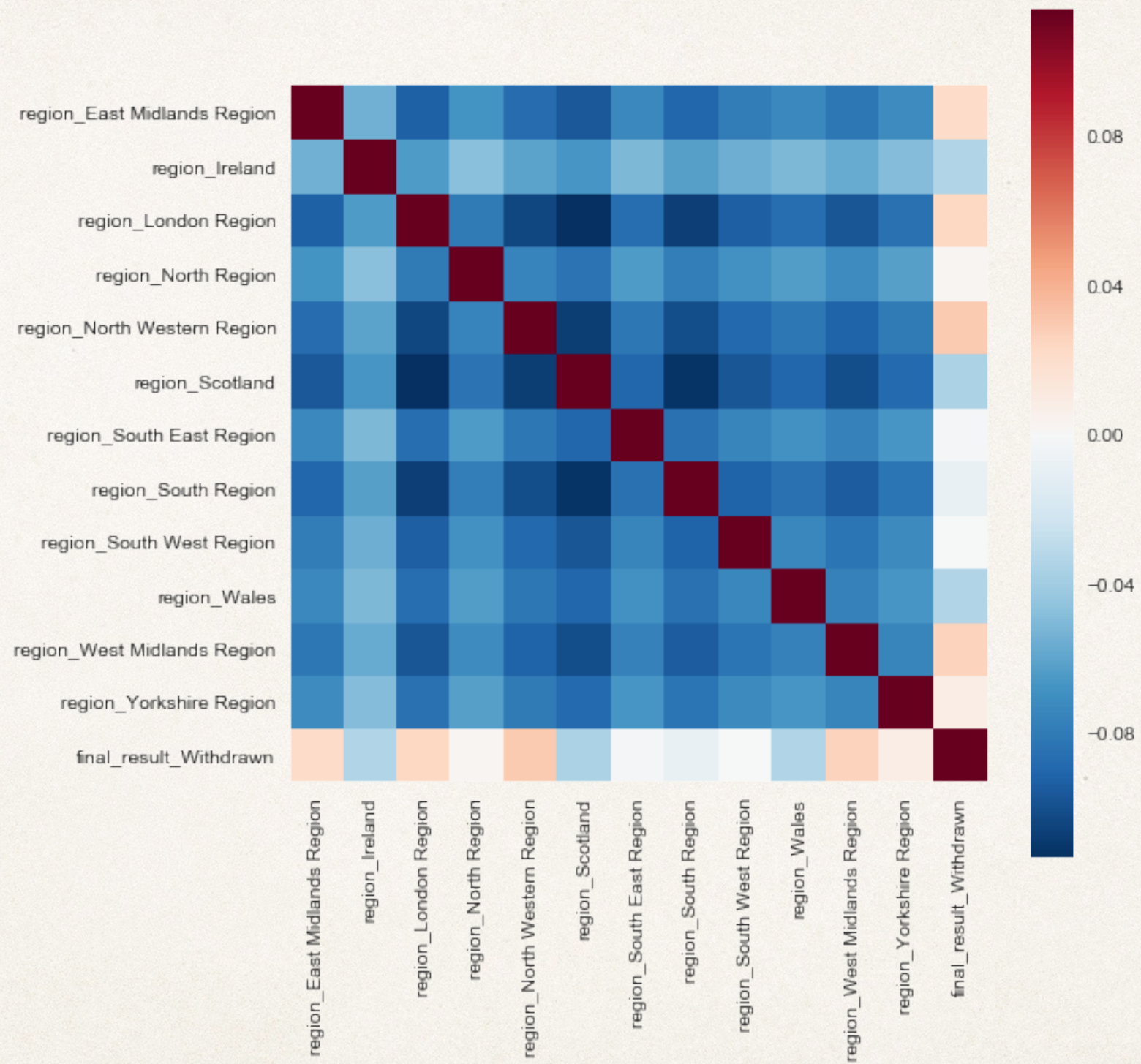
To gain an insight into the possible reasons the students withdraw, the aim is to find correlation between students who withdraw and:

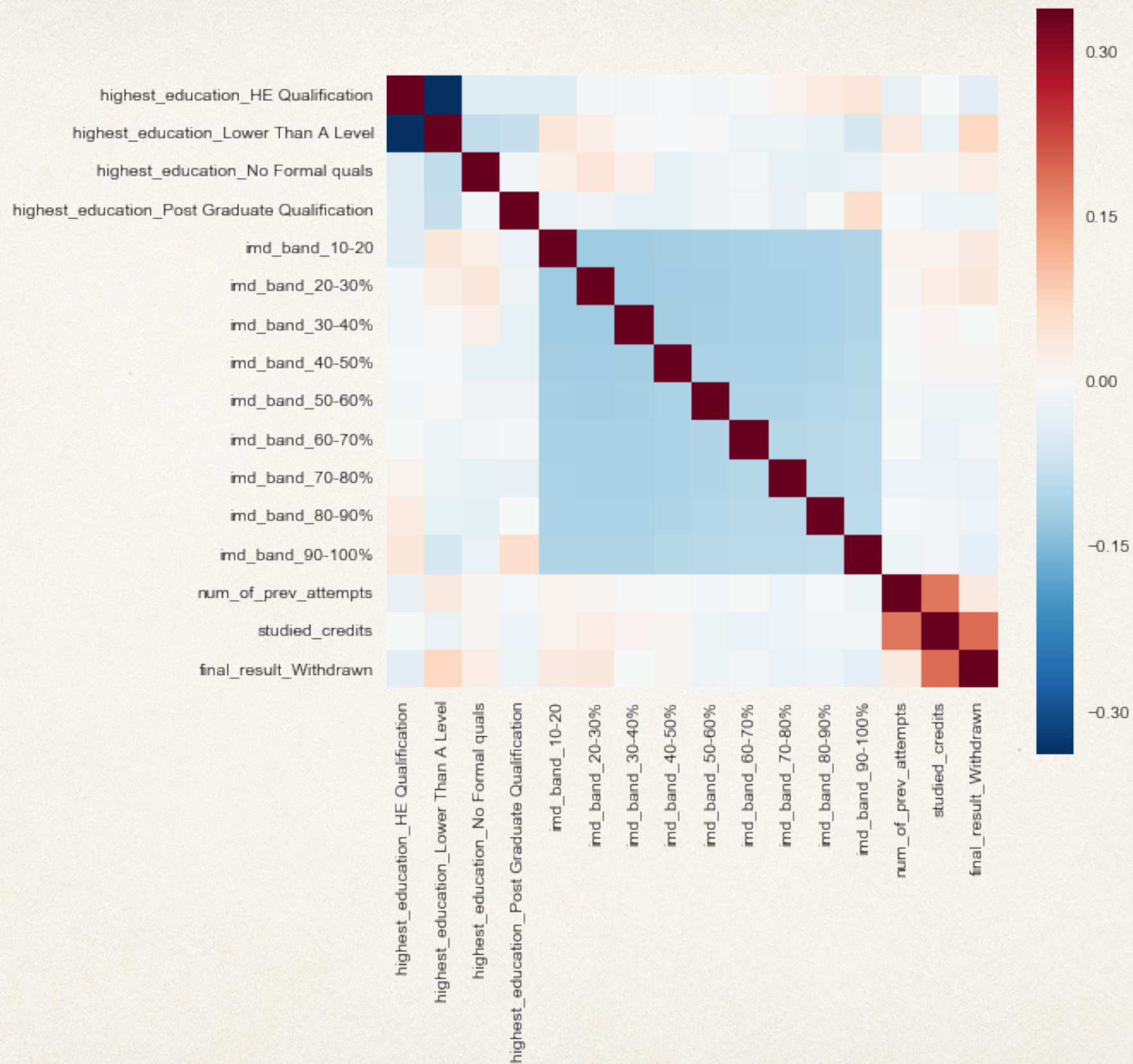
- * region
- * imd_score
- * highest education
- * previous attempts
- * number of credits

Overview of student data

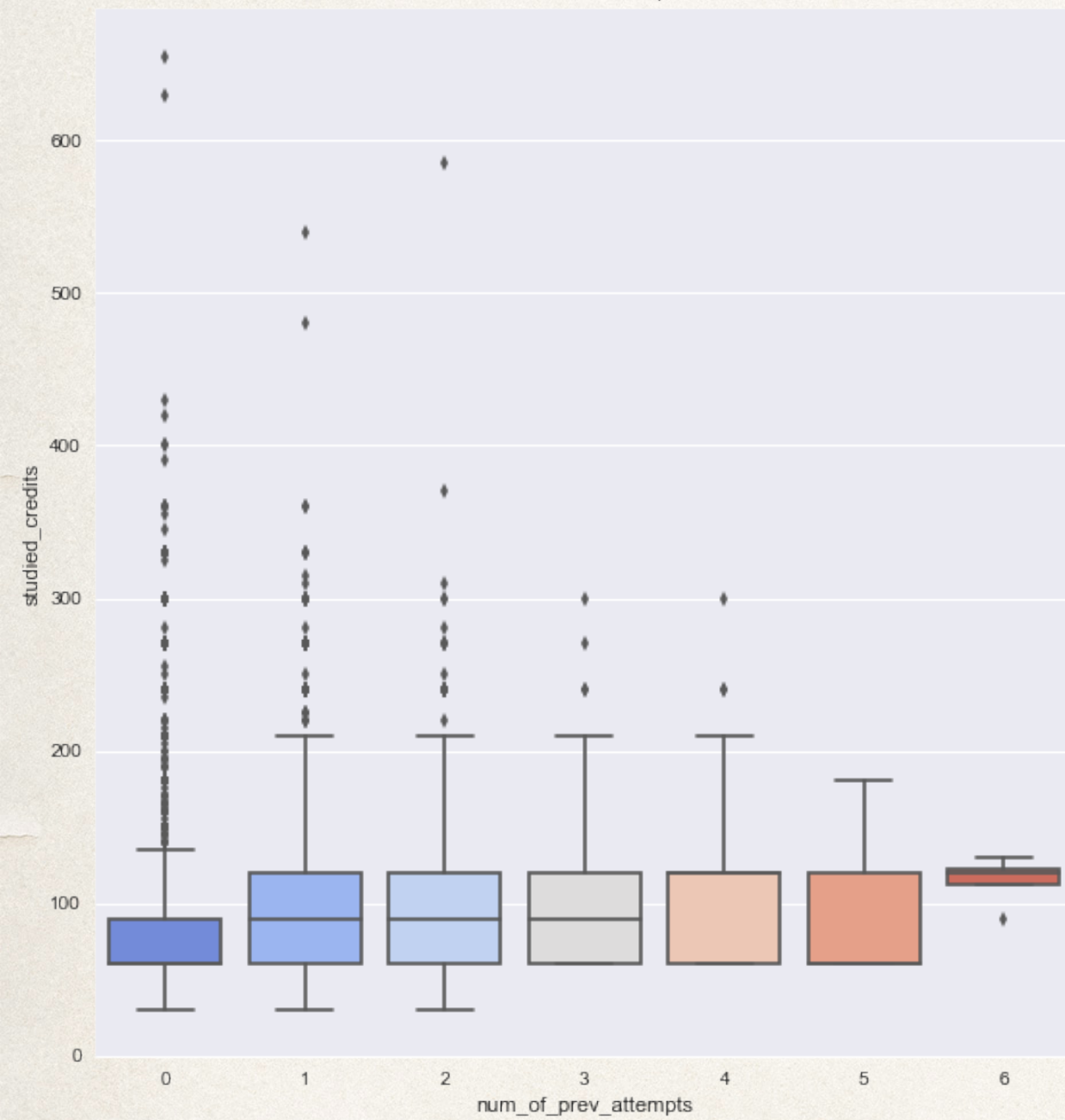




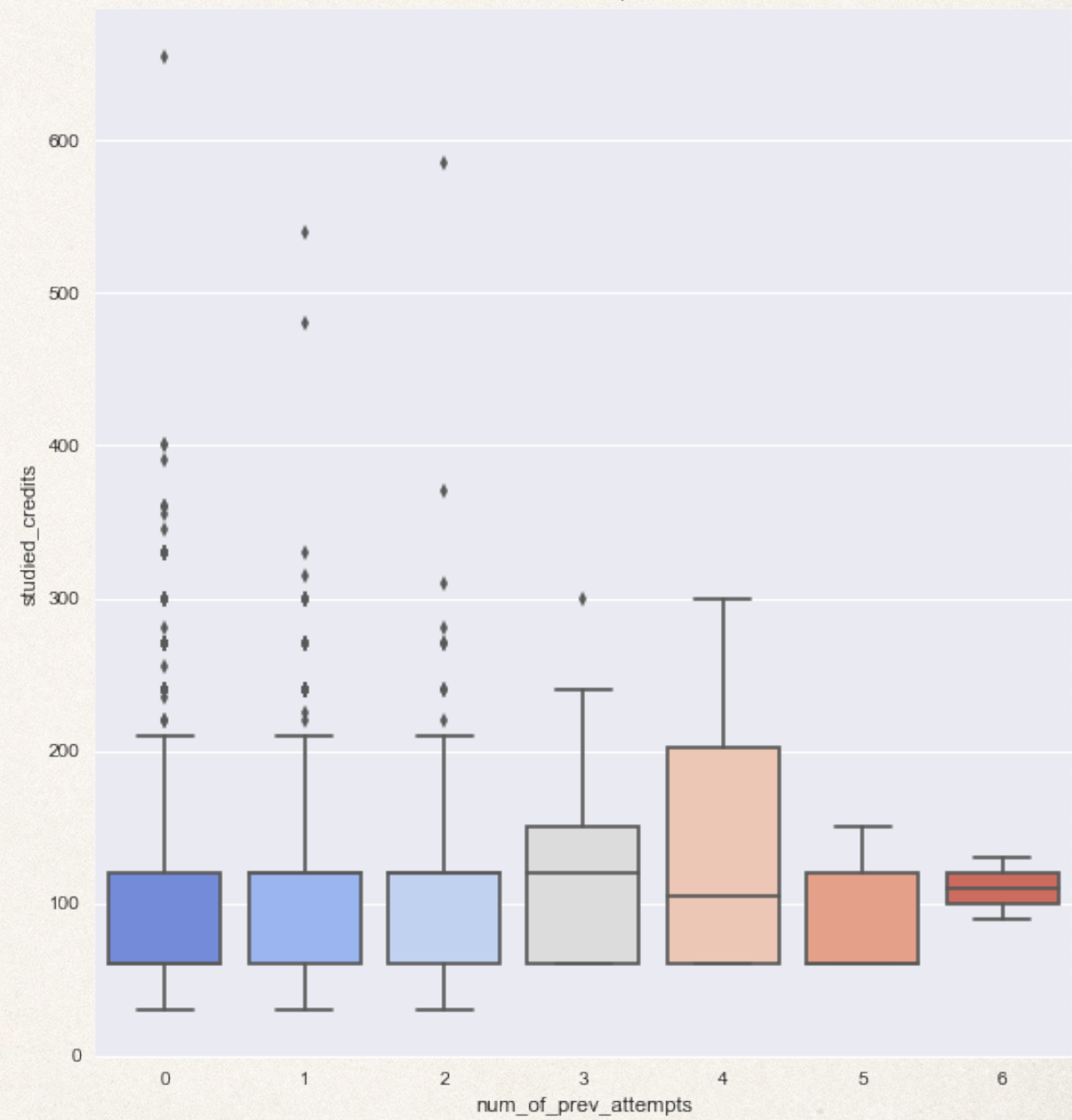


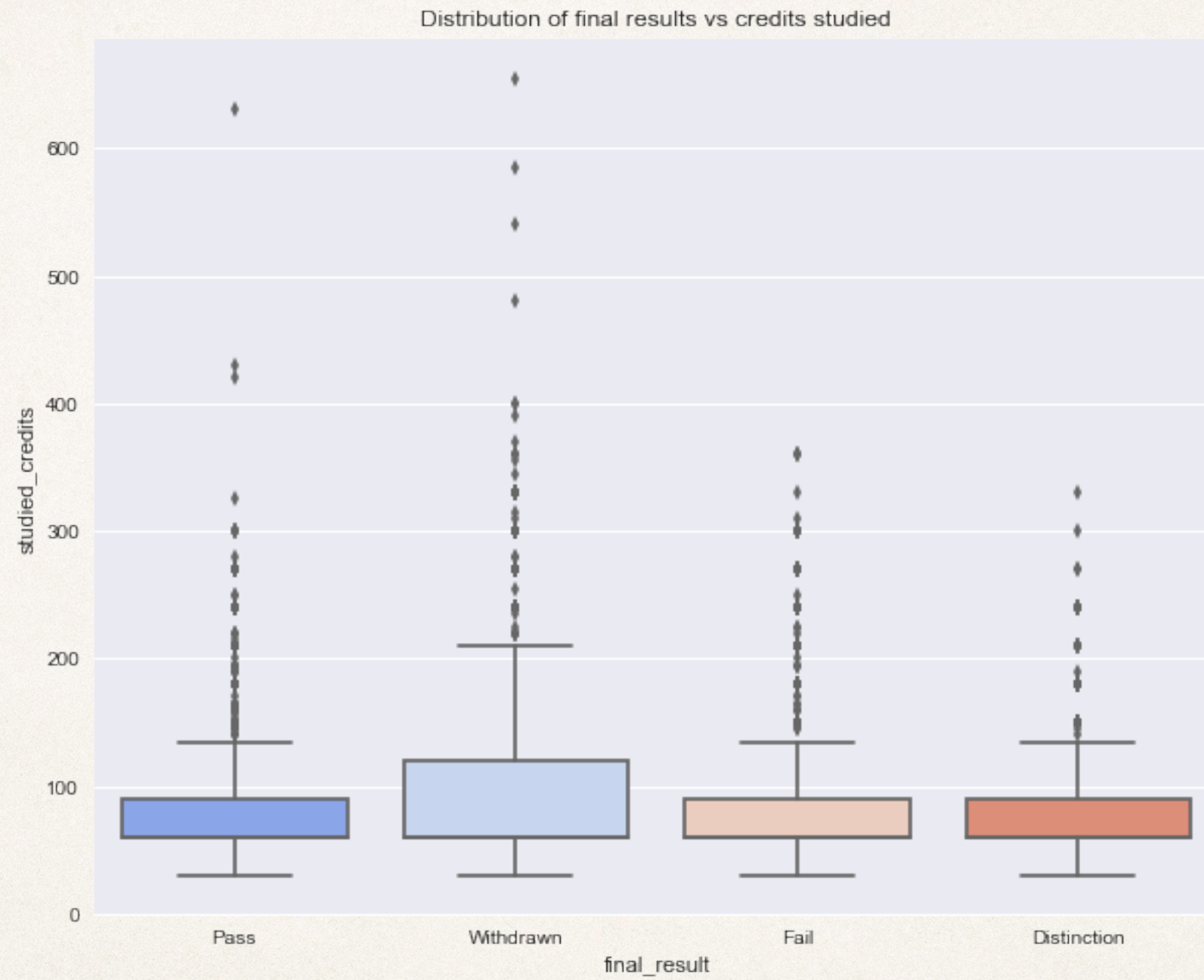


Distribution of number of attempts vs credits: All



Distribution of number of attempts vs credits: Withdraw





Initial findings

- ❖ region: positive correlation from East and West Midlands, London and North-West
- ❖ imd_score: more withdrawals from those in 0-30%
- ❖ highest education: Lower than A level or No Formal Quals has an impact
- ❖ previous attempts: More the number of attempts, especially more than 3, has a positive correlation
- ❖ studied credits: only students who withdraw have upper quartile credits more than 100

In-depth analysis

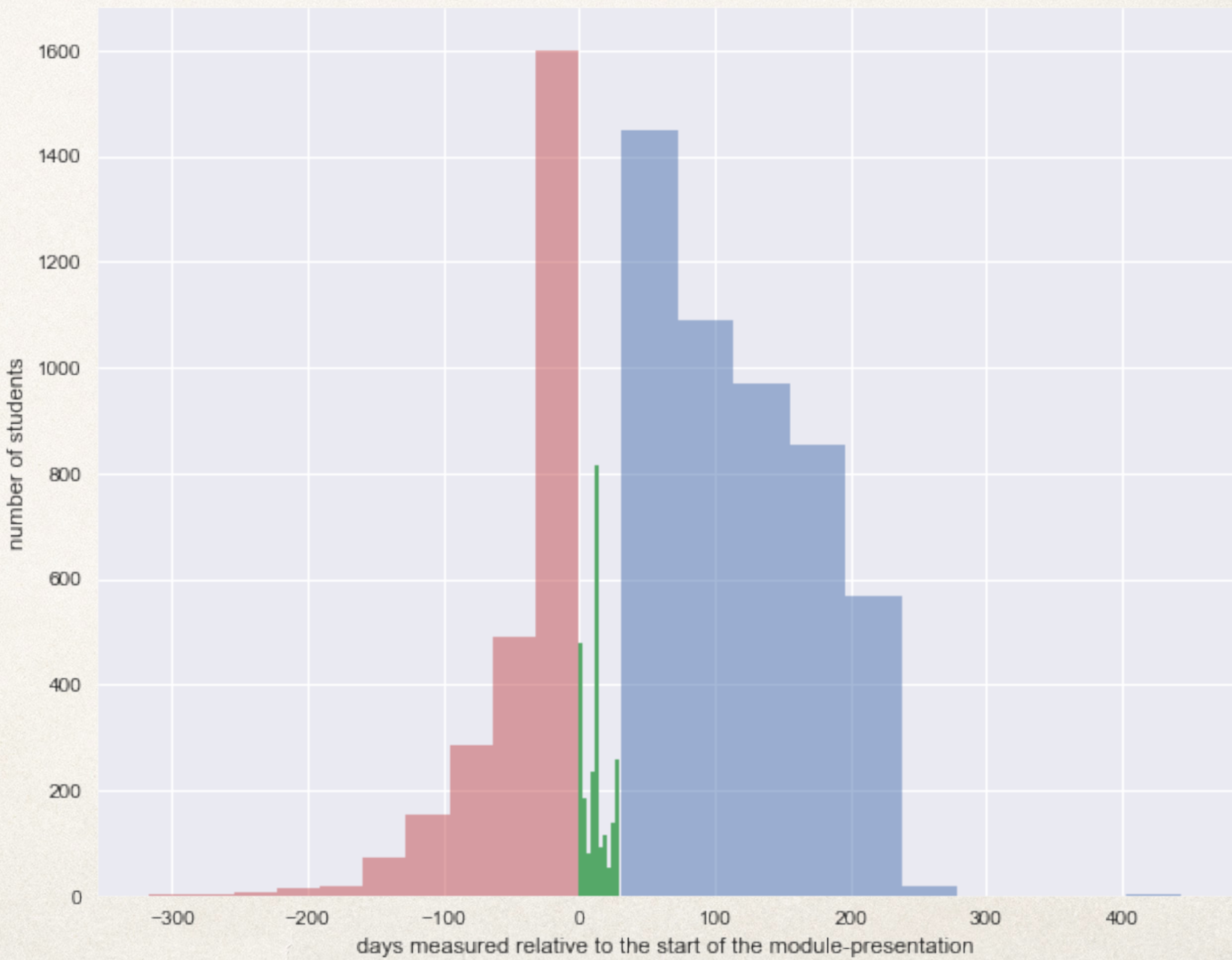
The next data story is done in 5 parts-correlation between student withdrawal and:

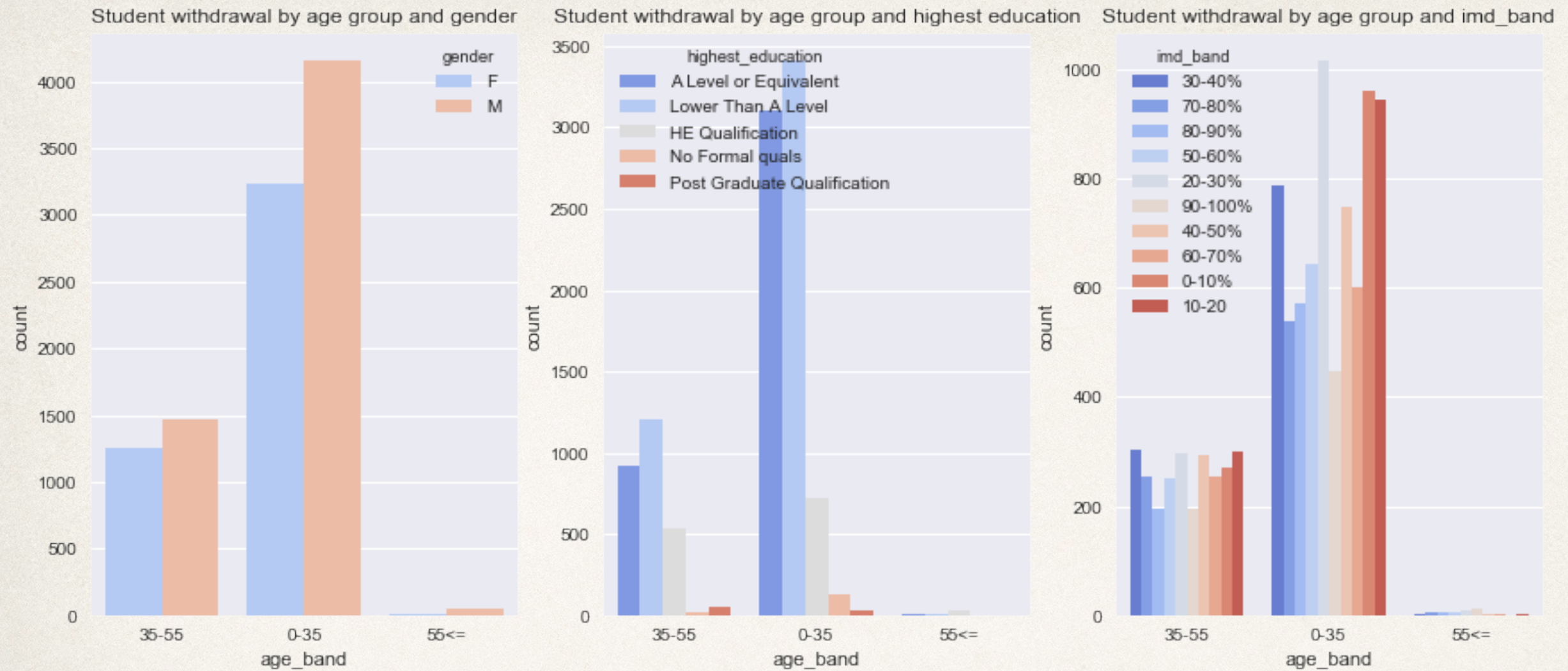
- * date of withdrawal
- * students who are disadvantaged due to their background
- * scores and student withdrawal
- * VLE engagement and student withdrawal
- * disabled students analysis

Data is taken from column `date_unregistration` from `studentRegistration.csv`:
date of student unregistration from the module presentation (this is the number of days measured relative to the start of the module-presentation)

negative number implies students withdrew before the start of module
positive number of say 35 that the student withdrew on the 35th day after the course started.

number of students who withdraw	10033	
number of students who withdrew before the start of module presentation	2643	26% of students withdrew before the start of the course, majority just before
number of students who withdrew in the first 30 days after the start of the module presentation	2446	25% withdraw in the first month
mean module presentation length (days)	255.55	





As we have observed before:

- More students who withdraw have A Level or Lower Quals
- They are more likely to be in 0-30% imd_band

We define these as disadvantaged students or those most at risk.

Out of 32593 enrolled students, 17127 or 52.5% deemed at risk as they have both educational as well as imd_band disadvantage

Among these 17127 students, 6006 withdrew or 35%.

Out of 10033 students who withdrew overall, 59% are in the disadvantaged category.
Number of previous attempts is much more for disadvantaged students (after 3)

To predict the probability that a student will withdraw,
we will use the above information.

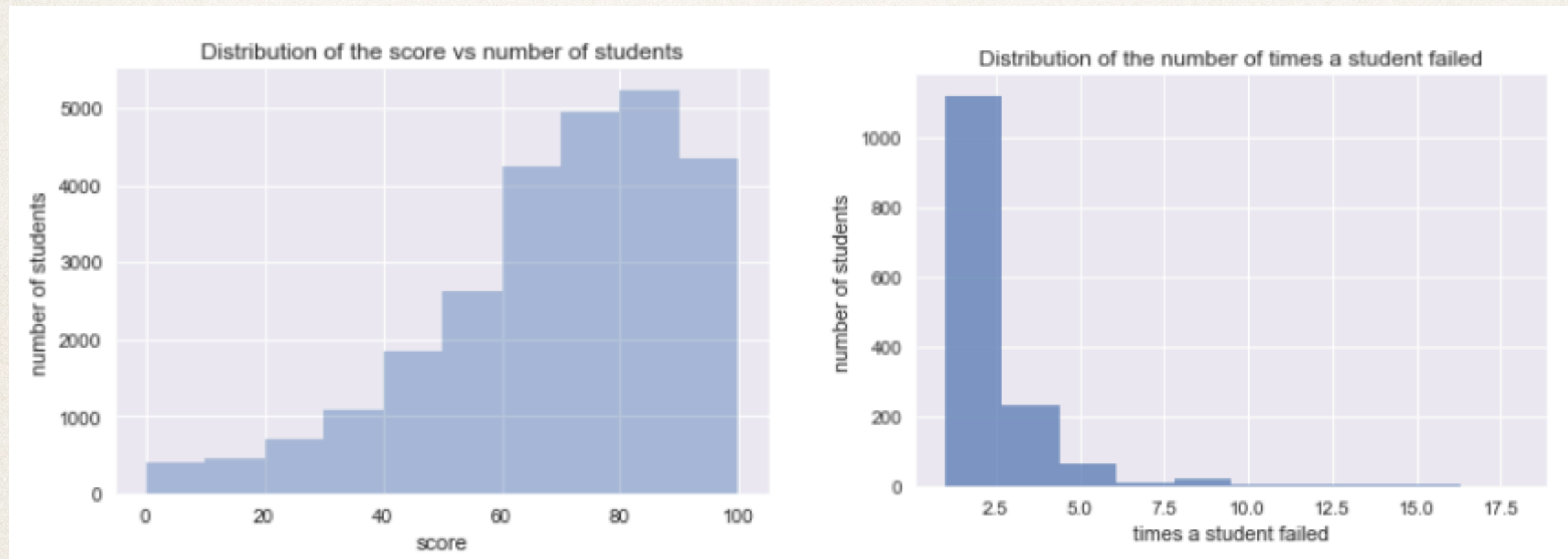
Number of students from A level or lower Quals: 13505		
Withdrawn	4769	47.5% of all withdrawals
Pass	4472	
Fail	3521	
Distinction	743	
Number of students from lower imd_band(0-30%): 6965		
Withdrawn	2552	25% of all withdrawals
Pass	2222	
Fail	1760	
Distinction	431	

Number of students deemed at risk as they have educational or imd_band disadvantage:		
Withdrawn	6006	60% of all withdrawals
Pass	5774	
Fail	4299	
Distinction	1048	

```
previous attempts: disadvantaged students
0      14721
1      1867
2       406
3        94
4        26
5         10
6          3
Name: num_of_prev_attempts, dtype: int64
-----
previous attempts: all students
0      28421
1      3299
2       675
3       142
4        39
5         13
6          4
Name: num_of_prev_attempts, dtype: int64
```


Many attempts in the same module can either mean :

- Student failed multiple times: we can see from the graphs that it is not the case. Not many students have failed more than thrice and even then, most students who withdrew did not fail.
- Student took the course but did not complete assessments: only 12.5% of the scores belong to students who withdrew. So this is true. Only 4854 students or about half have a score.



The only VLE engagement data provided is the `sum_clicks`, total number of clicks by a student.

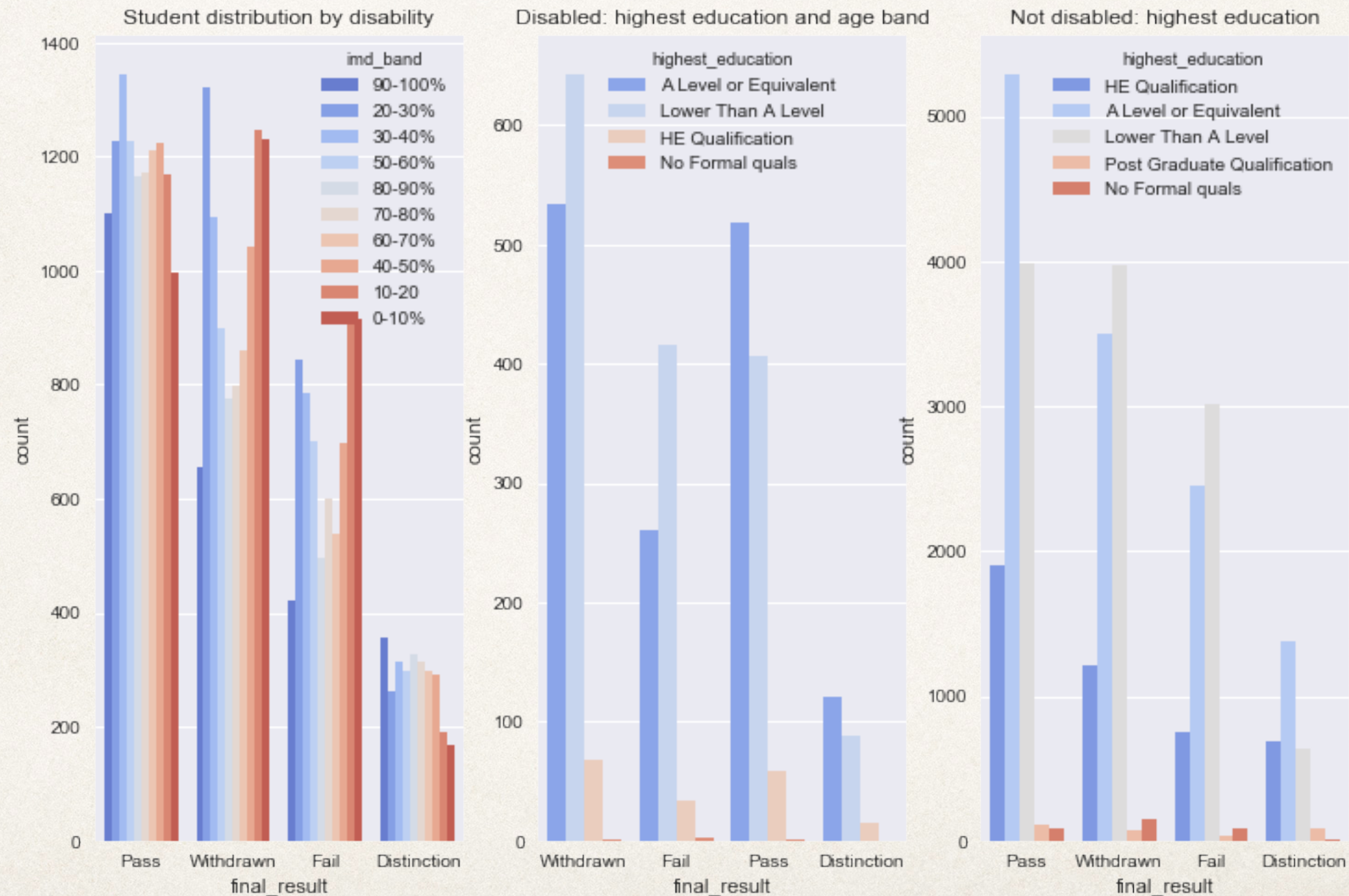
As we can see from the descriptive stats, the difference between all students vs the ones who withdrew is not vast.

We can be sure that more VLE engagement will have a positive impact on students experience.

The data for analysis in depth is missing in this dataset. But lack of VLE engagement does not appear to be a direct reason for withdrawal.

```
(1830536, 17)
Unique id: 6769
All Students
count      1.300658e+07
mean       3.706290e+00
std        8.962795e+00
min        1.000000e+00
25%        1.000000e+00
50%        2.000000e+00
75%        3.000000e+00
max        6.977000e+03
Name: sum_click, dtype: float64
-----
Students who withdraw
count      1.830536e+06
mean       3.485032e+00
std        8.405775e+00
min        1.000000e+00
25%        1.000000e+00
50%        2.000000e+00
75%        3.000000e+00
max        3.958000e+03
Name: sum_click, dtype: float64
```


The disadvantaged students with A level or Lower withdraw more than any other group. With more data, it is possible to look at student retention as a separate topic.



Prediction

The target of his study is to predict a binary response based on a set of explanatory discrete values. The best suited for this kind of classification is Binary Logistic Regression.

Our dependent variable or output is the probability of Withdrawal and the independent variables are the factors highlighted as “high-risk”.

The probability can be used to intervene to retain the student. 10-fold cross validation is used to verify the result.

```
Data Prep
Training
[False False False ..., False False False]
[[ 0.59533369  0.40466631]
 [ 0.63064243  0.36935757]
 [ 0.6568101   0.3431899  ]
 ...,
 [ 0.6568101   0.3431899  ]
 [ 0.74890457  0.25109543]
 [ 0.72557988  0.27442012]]
Predicting
accuracy score: 0.68830106354
roc score: 0.555510060549
Using 10-fold cross-validation
[ 0.68875256  0.68875256  0.68875256  0.68875256  0.68834356  0.68834356
 0.68903437  0.68903437  0.68890708  0.68890708]
mean score: 0.68875802442
Done
```

Training accuracy: 0.688757977418
Test accuracy: 0.686955454657

We can predict if a
student will withdraw
with up to 69% accuracy

Recommendations

- ❖ # 1: Proactive: Many students at risk withdraw even before the course starts or in the first month. This might mean the students are not sure they are ready for the course. So **registration should be combined with counseling**. This can include matching students with appropriate courses (data connecting withdrawal related to courses will be very useful), raising awareness about expected work loads and adding a personal touch to distance learning.
- ❖ # 2: Proactive: Since a majority of students who withdraw do not have A levels, a **summer or pre-course preparation** for “high risk” students could calm the nerves and also enable them to start on a positive note.
- ❖ # 3: Reactive: **Tutorials and peer-peer engagement** to motivate the students and make sure the next two recommendations are followed.
- ❖ # 4: Reactive: **Monitor VLE engagement**, especially in the first month and when it is low, try to understand reasons and offer solutions. This could also mean the course chosen is not interesting to the student.
- ❖ # 5: Reactive: **Monitor assessment scores** to evaluate student response to materials, their strengths and weakness, adapt assessment.
- ❖ # 6: Proactive: With more data related to about course and assessment, a **personalized course** can be offered to students “at risk”.

Limitations and Further Research

- ❖ The most important limitation was incompleteness of data. In particular, data related to assessment and VLE engagement.
- ❖ Secondly, as mentioned earlier, student demographic can only predict chances of withdrawal to some extent. The dataset is a very small subset and hence, the validity of the findings depends on the reliability of data.
- ❖ Further research can include:
 - Personalized courses
 - Profile by region
 - Tracking student progress
 - VLE engagement and its relation to scores

Conclusion

- ❖ Student retention in distance learning courses like the Open University, requires a different approach when compared to traditional university structure.
- ❖ While it is not possible to analyze in depth, it is possible to identify the group most “at risk” as well as the date when students are more likely to withdraw.
- ❖ The profile is based on highest education received before the start of course (Lower than A level has a higher incidence) and imd-band (lower the score, greater the risk).
- ❖ This information allowed us to apply Logistic Regression to predict with 69% accuracy the probability of a student withdrawing from the course and we could offer some recommendations.
- ❖ Further research can enable intervention to be more targeted to offer personalized solutions and increase student retention.

References

- ❖ Open University (2017) <http://www.open.ac.uk>
Kennedy D. and Powell R. (1976) Student progress and withdrawal in the Open
- ❖ University. Teaching at a Distance 7 (November), 61–75.
Simpson, O. (2006). Predicting student success in open and distance learning. Open
- ❖ Learning, 21(2), 125-138.
- ❖ Wolff , A. and Zdrahal, Z. (2012). Improving retention by identifying and supporting "at- risk" students. EDUCAUSE Review Online