



# Widening Participation in Higher Education: A Quantitative Analysis

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# Background and Motivation

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- ❖ **Expansion of HE**
  - ♦ 43% of 17-30 year olds participate in higher education
- ❖ **Widening participation still cause for concern**
  - ♦ gap in the HE participation rate between richer and poorer students actually widened in the mid and late 1990s

# Background and Motivation

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- ❖ **Concerns about who is accessing HE increased following the introduction of tuition fees**
  - ❖ another barrier to HE participation by poorer students (Callender, 2003)
- ❖ **Introduction of fees in 1998 not associated with any sustained overall fall in the number of students nor the 2004 Higher Education Act with higher/variable fees**
- ❖ **Recent policy developments may, however, affect future participation.**

# Inequality in the UK

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- ❖ **Socio-economic gaps emerge early and remain entrenched**
- ❖ **UK has higher than average socio-economic education gap**
- ❖ **Gap has reduced this decade though still large at HE level**

Blanden, Gregg and Machin, 2005; Blanden and Machin, 2008, Chowdry et al. 2008, Feinstein, 2003; George et al. 2007; Goodman and Gregg, 2009.

# Research Questions

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- ❖ **How does the likelihood of HE participation vary by socio-economic background?**
- ❖ **How much of this is explained by prior achievement?**
- ❖ **When do differences by socio-economic background emerge?**
- ❖ **How does the type of HE participation vary across socio-economic groups?**

# Data

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- ❖ **We linked administrative data to generate a longitudinal record of each child's schooling from age 5 onwards**
  - ♦ National Pupil Database / Annual School Census
  - ♦ Individual Learner Record
  - ♦ Higher Education Statistics Agency

# Data

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- ❖ **Linked individual-level school administrative records, FE records and HE data**
- ❖ **Data on participants AND non-participants**
- ❖ **Data for two cohorts:**
  - ◆ In Year 11 in 2001 / 02 and Year 11 in 2002 / 03
  - ◆ Potential age 18 HE entry in 2004 / 05 / 06 or age 19 HE entry in 2005 / 06 / 07

# Data

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- ❖ **Socio-economic background**

- ◆ Free school meals

- ◆ Neighbourhood based measures

- ◆ Combined to create a “deprivation index” (split into 5 equally sized groups)

- ❖ **Ethnicity**

- ❖ **Measures of prior attainment i.e. all Key Stage results through to KS5**



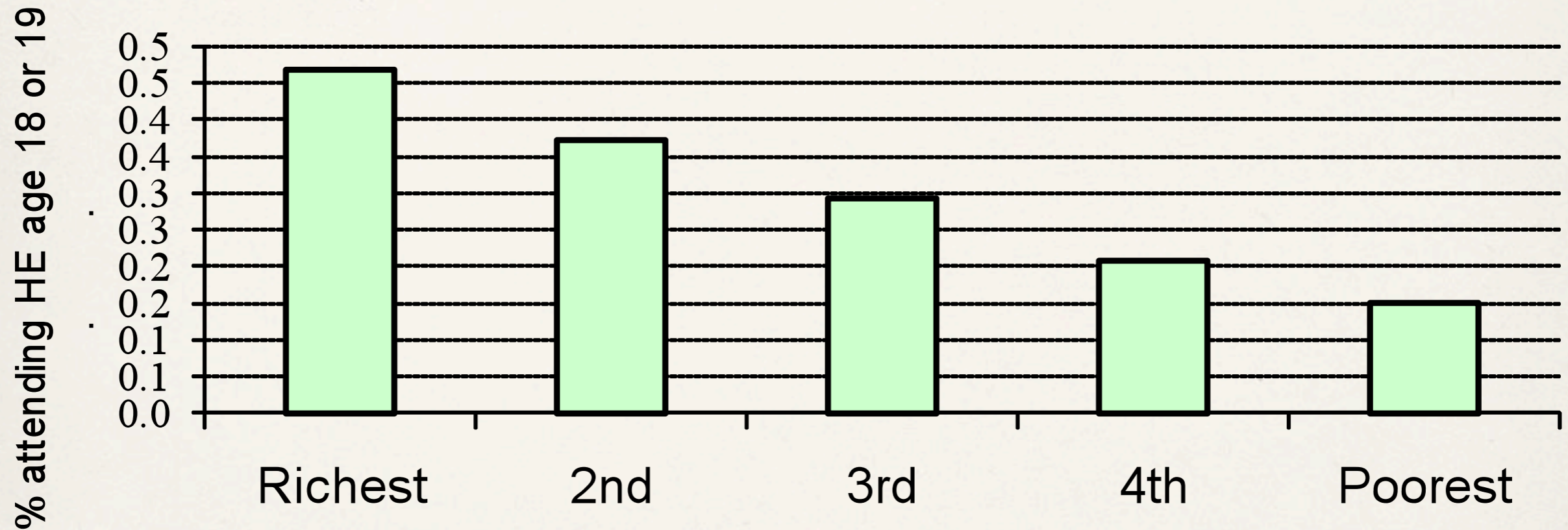
# Results - what do they tell us?

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- ❖ **Likelihood of HE participation varies massively by socio-economic background**
- ❖ **However much of this gap can be explained by prior achievement**

# Access by the poor to Uni is limited

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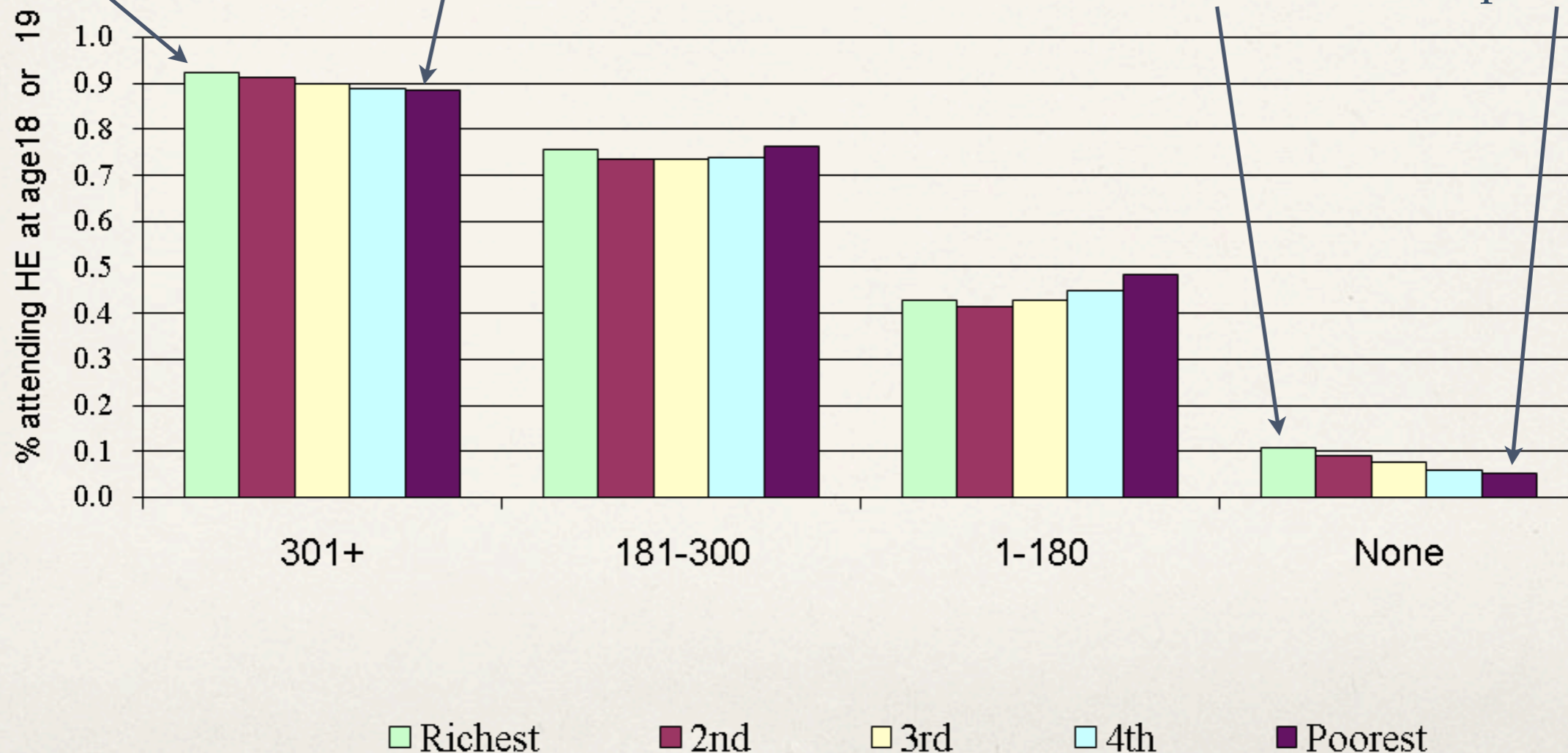
# Equal chance of going to uni IF poor and rich get the same grades

25% of  
richest get  
top A levels

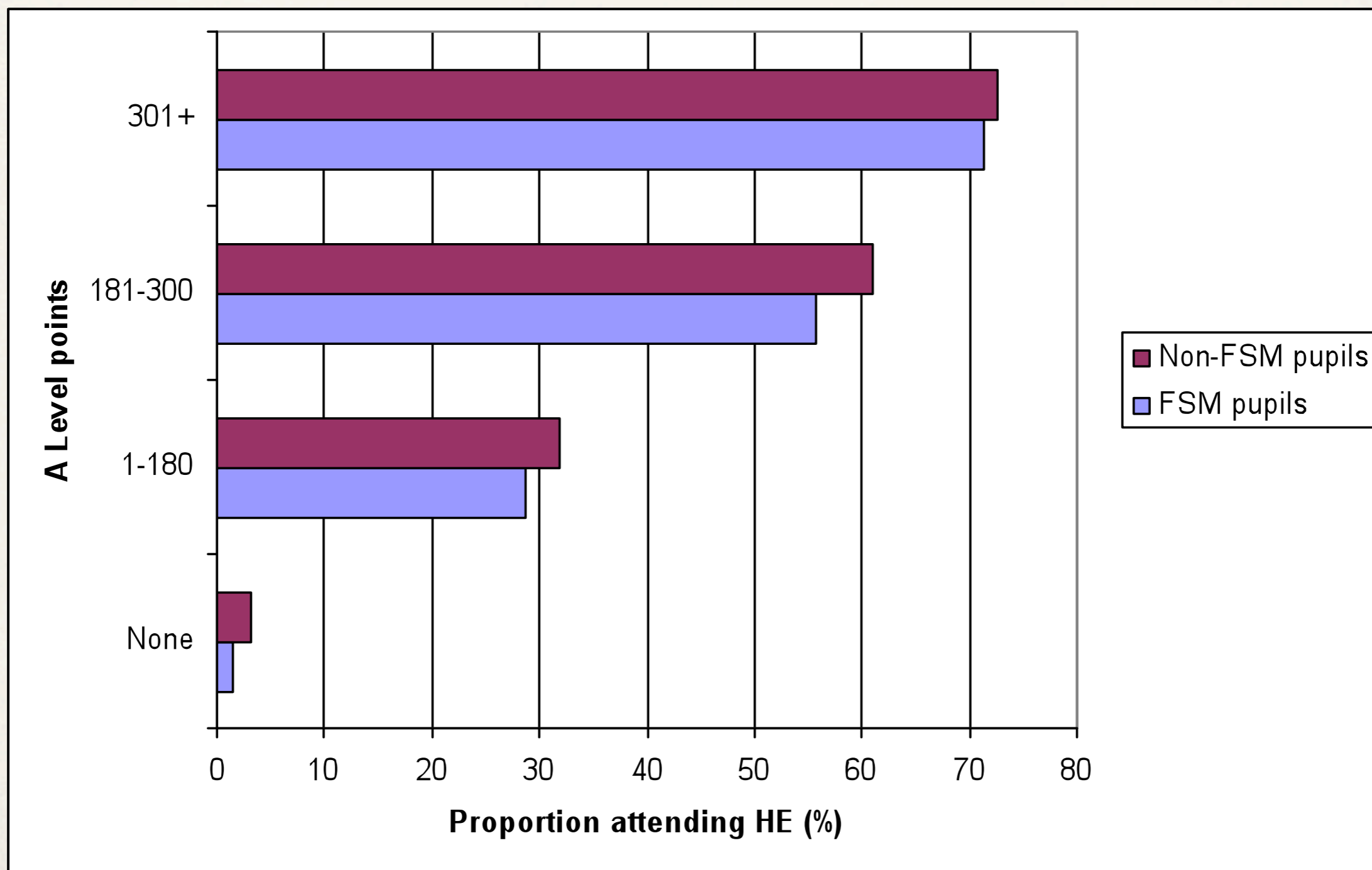
3% of  
poorest get  
top A levels

45% of  
richest

84% of  
poorest



# Allowing for prior achievement



# Type of Participation

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- ❖ **Also consider type of HE participation, because:**
  - ♦ Students at less prestigious institutions more likely to drop out and/or achieve lower degree classification
  - ♦ Graduates from more prestigious institutions earn higher returns in the labour market

# Type of Participation

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- ❖ **Define “high status” university as:**
  - ♦ Russell Group university (20 in total)
  - ♦ Any UK university with an average 2001 RAE score greater than lowest found amongst Russell Group
    - \* *Adds Bath, Durham, Lancaster, York, etc (21 in total)*

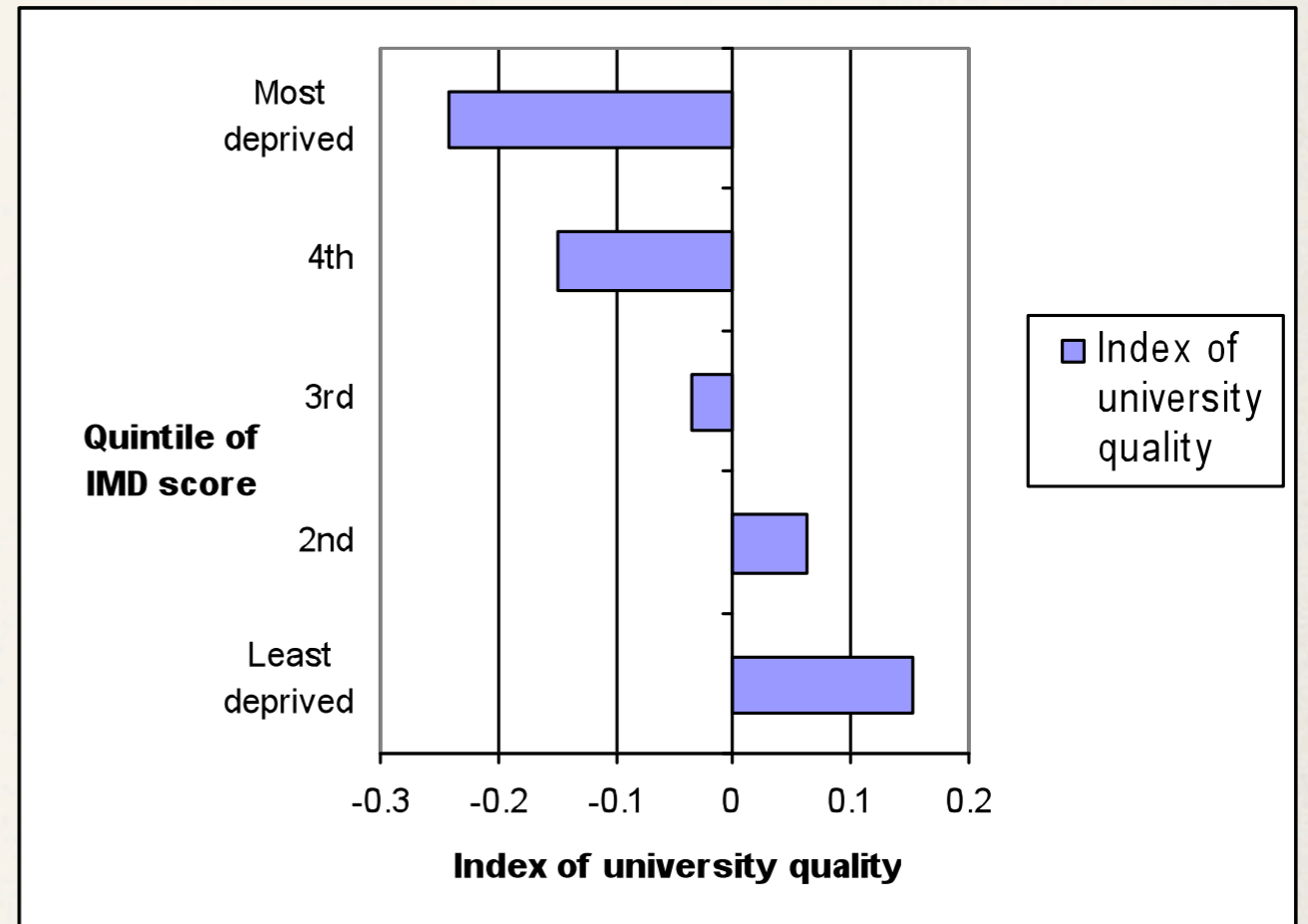
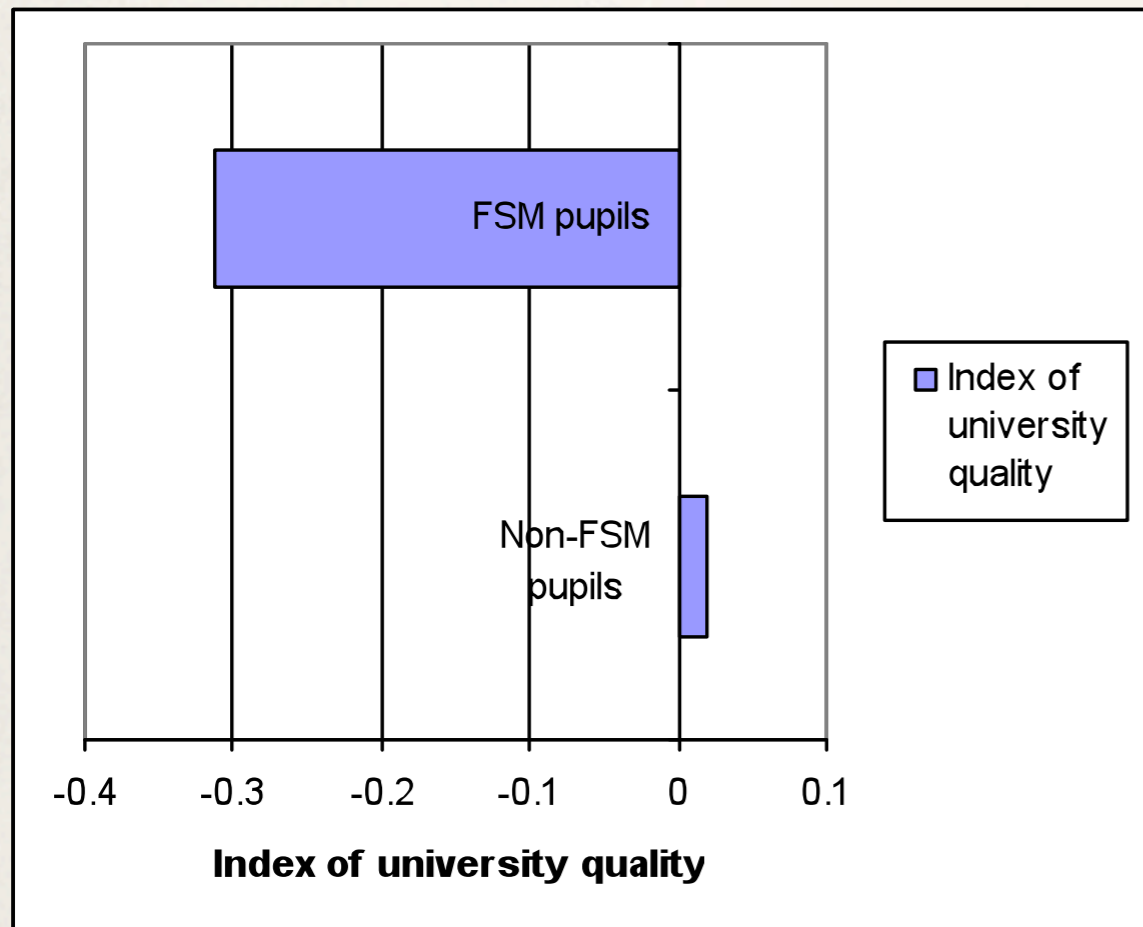
# Results

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- ❖ **There is also inequality in the types of universities attended by different students**
- ❖ **Poorer students tend to enrol in less prestigious universities**
- ❖ **This has implications for the amount of human capital they acquire and hence their earnings**

# Strong gradient in university prestige by deprivation status

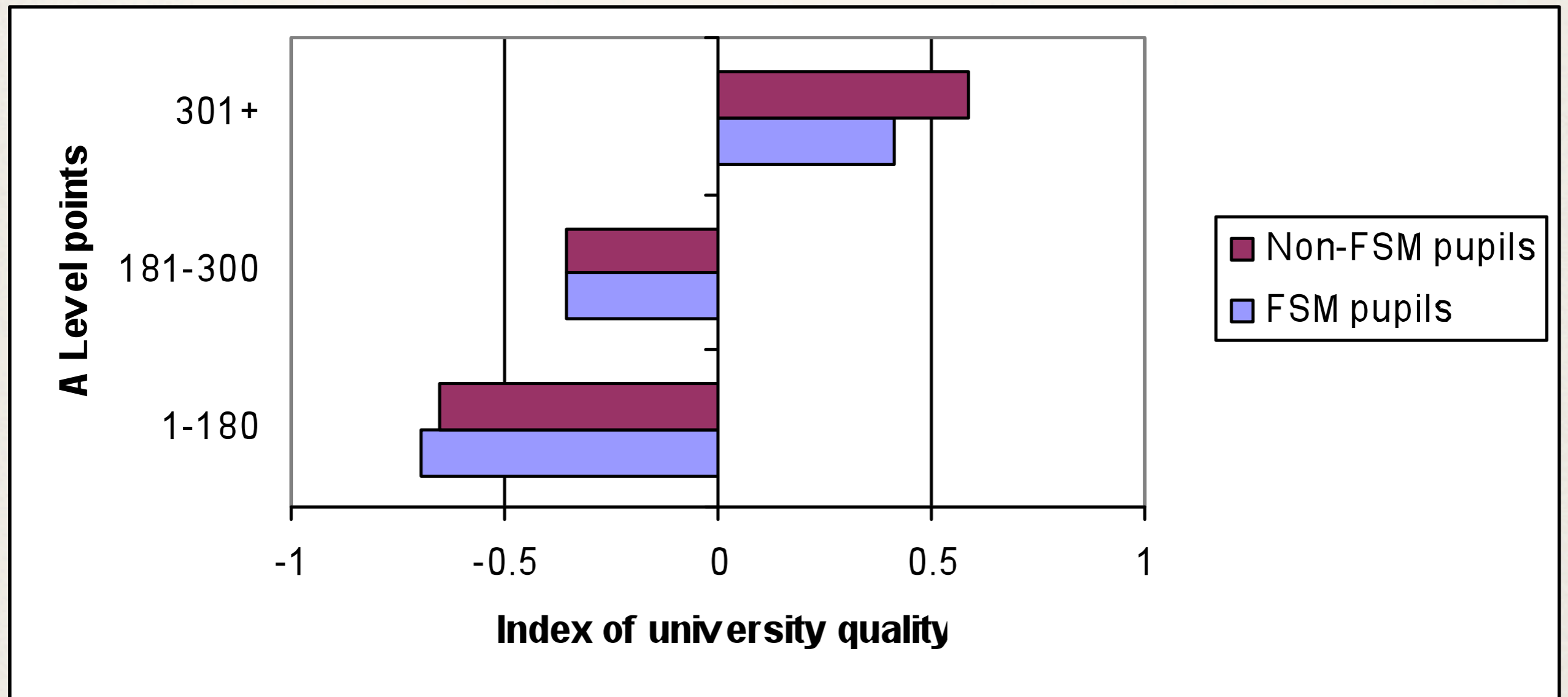
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# Differences in HE prestige within A Level scores

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# Conclusions

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- ❖ **Our results indicated that the key to low participation by poor students is not primarily barriers arising at the point of entry into HE (e.g. financial costs of study)**
- ❖ **Reducing inequality in higher education participation in the UK is largely about reducing inequalities earlier in the system**