



Institute for
Fiscal Studies

The role of education and skills in driving social mobility

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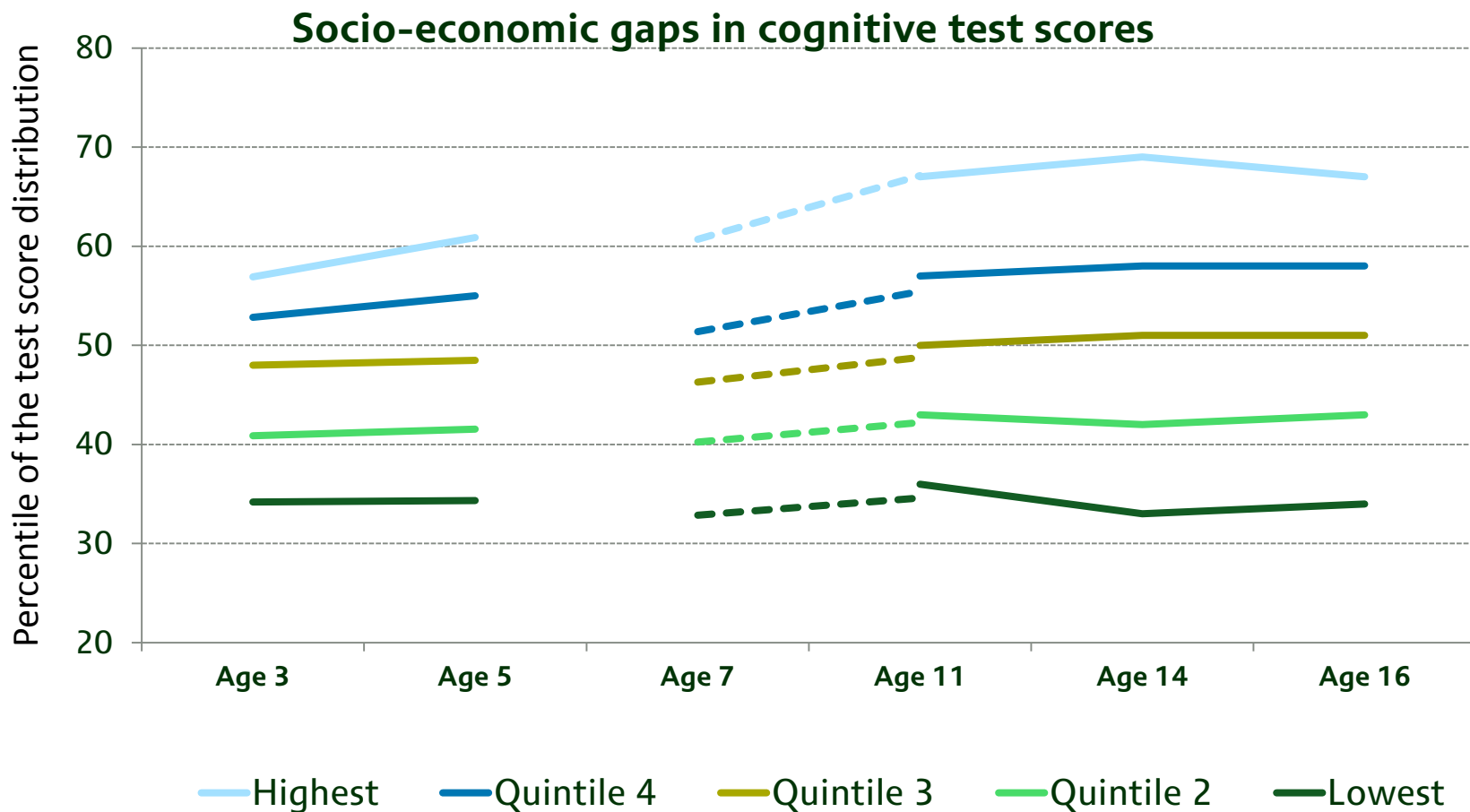
Social mobility and the role of education

- Social mobility: link between SES of parents and children
- Role of education as a transmission mechanism:
 - Children's educational attainment is strongly related to parents' SES
 - There are large wage returns to educational attainment
- Focus on the first today:
 - Evidence on the link between educational attainment and family background in the UK, including over time and relative to other nations
 - What drives these relationships? What types of policies are likely to be effective at reducing SES gaps in educational attainment?

Summary

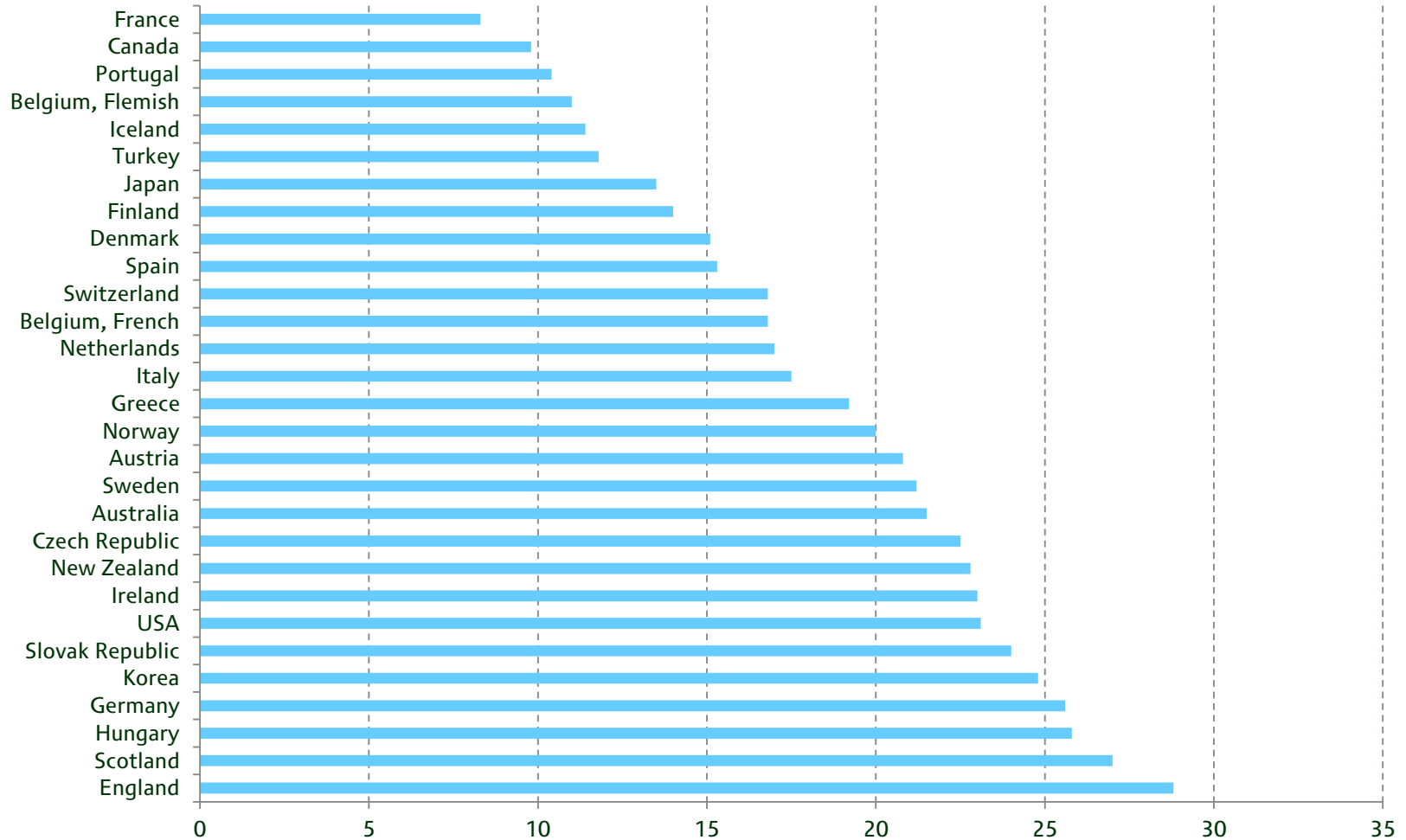
- Strong relationship between children’s educational attainment and family background in England
 - Differences emerge early and widen as children get older
 - Stronger than elsewhere and strengthening over time (until recently)
- There has been some success at encouraging children from lower SES backgrounds to reach “expected” levels of achievement
 - But children from higher SES backgrounds continue to improve too, highlighting difficulty of targeting relative measure of social mobility
- Large SES gaps persist in HE participation
 - But mainly driven by differences in attainment at 16 and 18, so earlier intervention is key to widening participation
 - Most ethnic minority groups are more likely to go to HE than White British students, although less likely to attend high status institutions
- Some thoughts on which policies are most likely to improve education/skills amongst those from the lowest SES backgrounds

Differences emerge early and widen over time



Source: Goodman & Gregg (2010), Poorer children's educational attainment: how important are attitudes and behaviours?, Report to the JRF, available at: <http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/educational-attainment-poor-children>

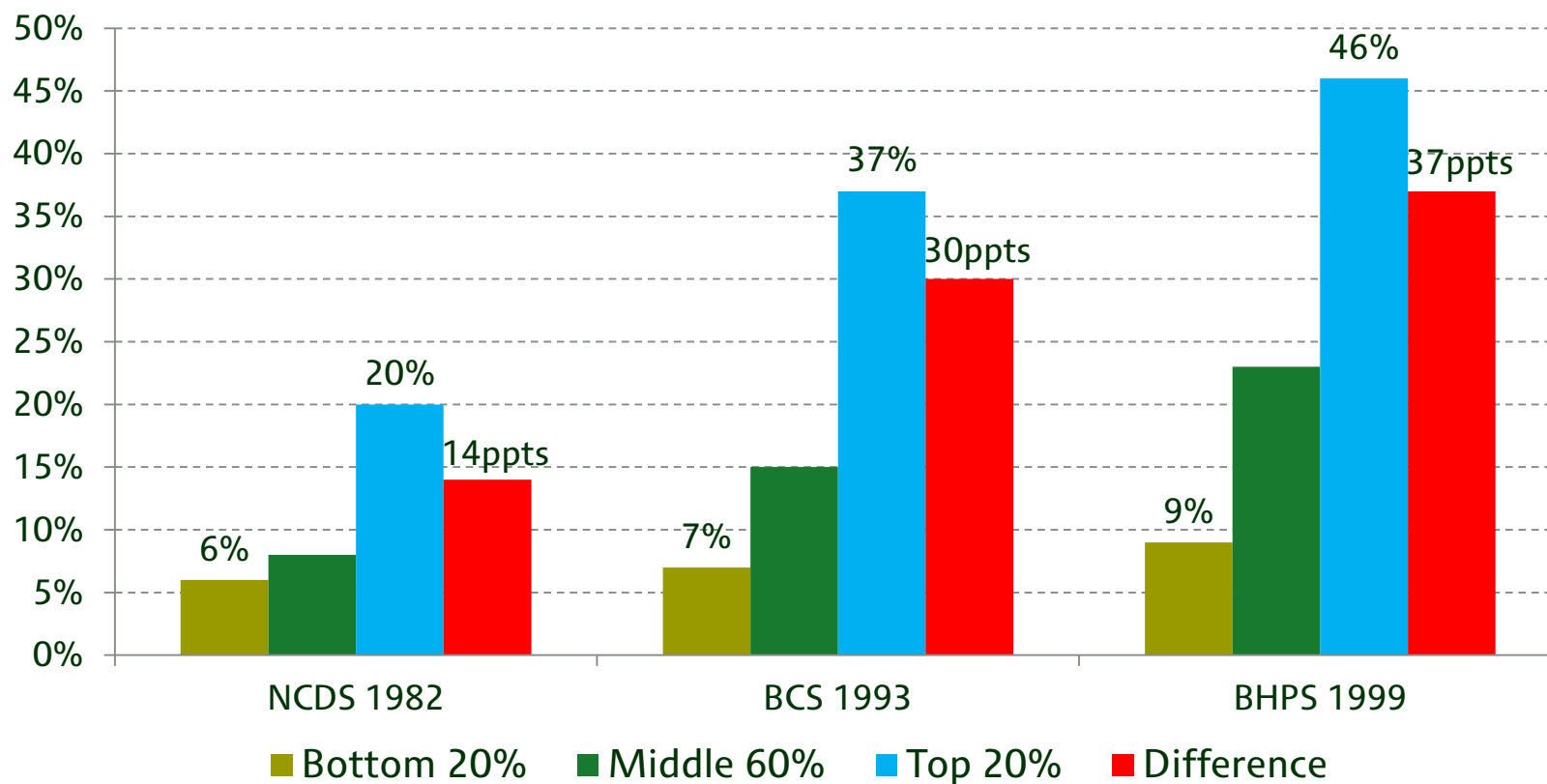
Stronger relationship between SES and educational attainment in England than elsewhere



Source: Hanushek & Woessmann (2011), *The Economics of International Differences in Educational Achievement*, in Hanushek, Machin & Woessmann (eds), *Handbooks in Economics*, Vol. 3, pp. 89-200, North-Holland, Netherlands.

Some evidence that this relationship has strengthened over time . . .

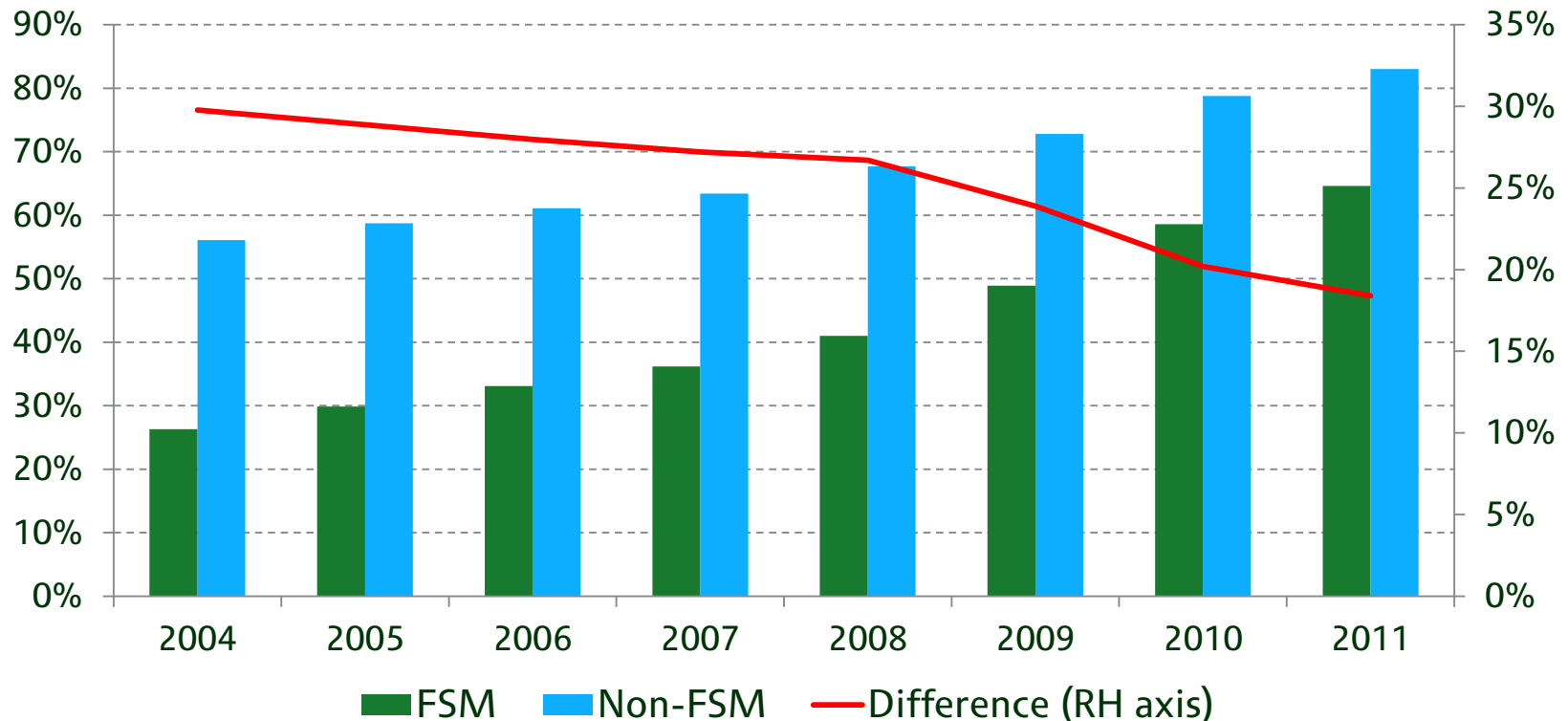
Degree acquisition by age 23 by parental income



Source: Blanden & Machin (2004), Educational inequality and the expansion of UK higher education, Scottish Journal of Political Economy, Special Issue on the Economics of Education, Vol. 51, pp. 230-249.

... at least until recently: gap in terms of % getting 5 A*-C grades in GCSEs and equivalents has fallen

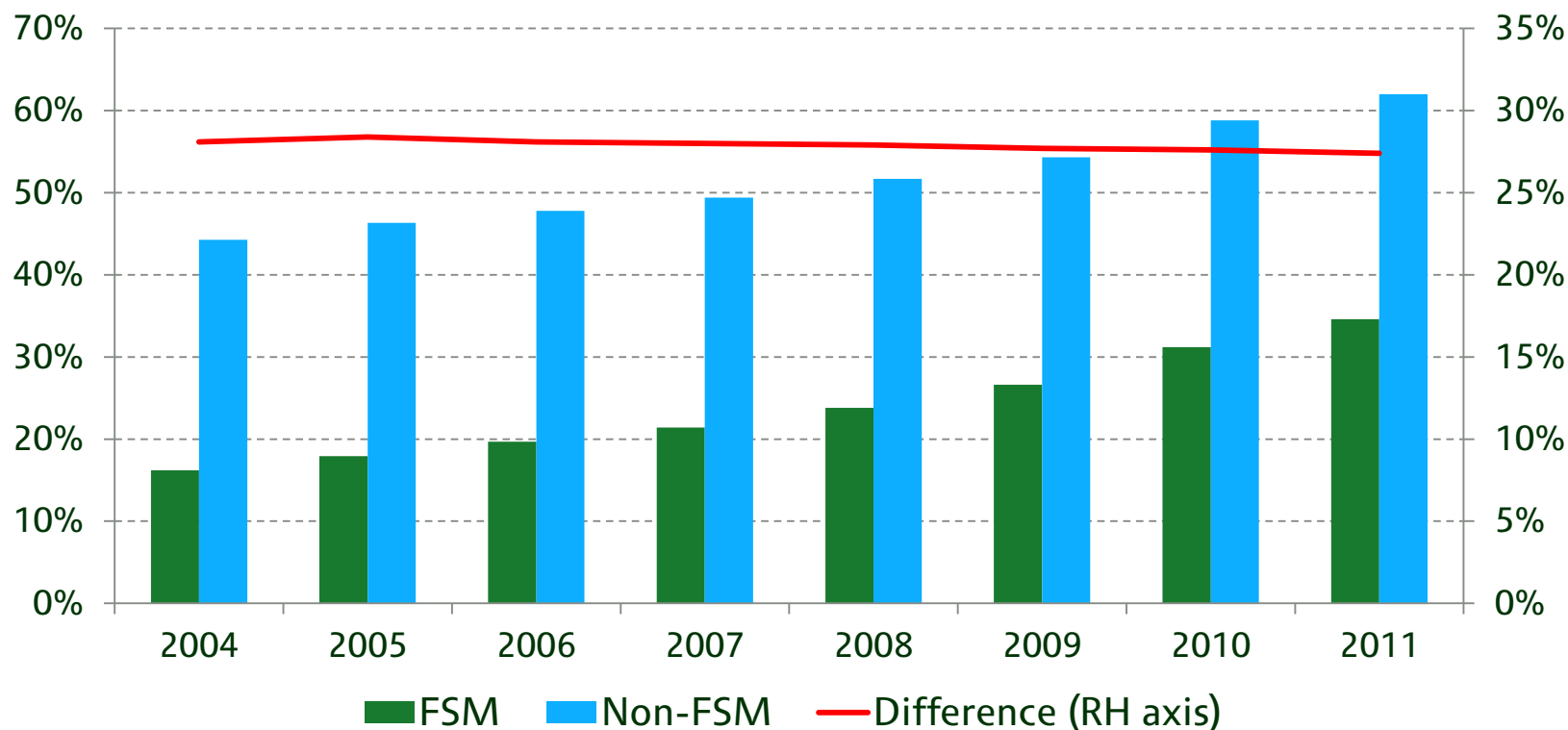
% pupils getting 5 A*-C grades in GCSEs and equivalents



2010-2011 figures based on SFR 03/2012: GCSE and Equivalent Attainment by Pupil Characteristics in England.
2006-2009 figures based on SFR 37/2010: GCSE and Equivalent Attainment by Pupil Characteristics in England.
2004-2005 figures based on authors' calculations using Key Stage 4 and PLASC data.

But not when focusing on GCSEs including English and Maths: equivalents are key

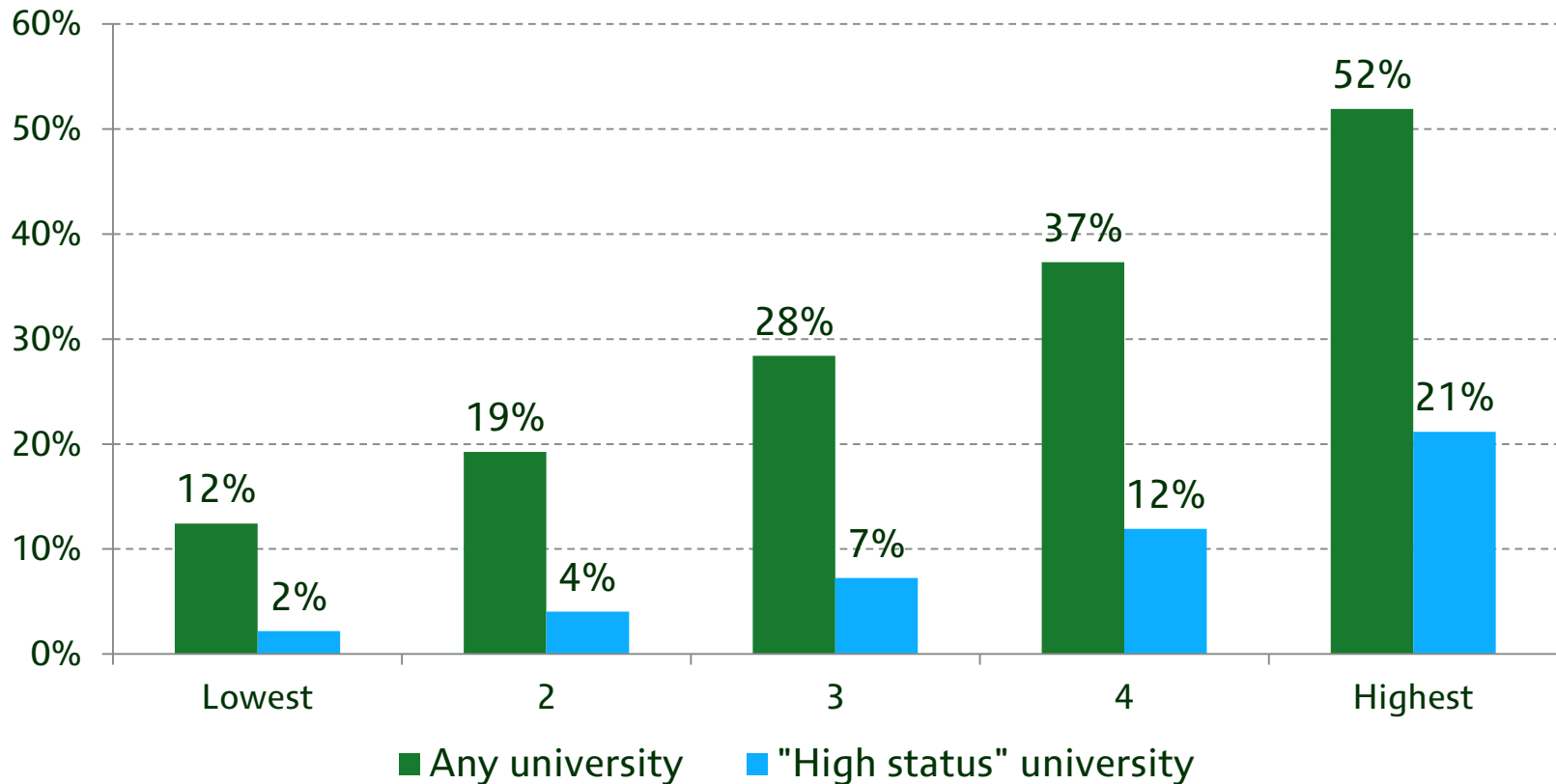
% pupils getting 5 A*-C grades including English and Maths



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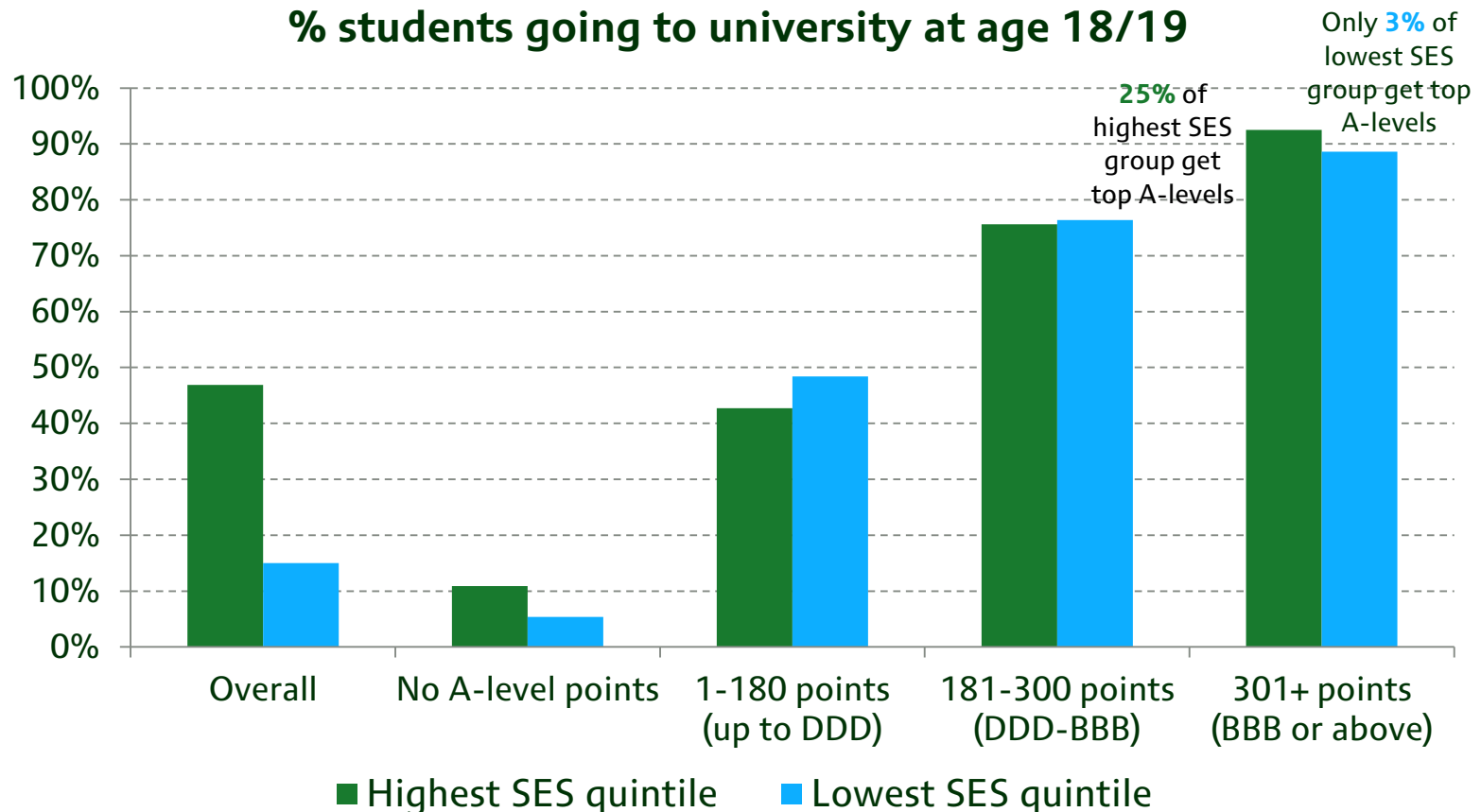
Sizeable SES gaps in HE participation remain, including by type of HE institution attended

% students going to university at age 18/19



Source: authors' calculations based on linked schools and universities administrative data for the cohorts first eligible to start university in 2004-05 and 2005-06 (who sat their GCSEs in 2001-02 and 2002-03)

But these differences are almost entirely explained by differences in prior attainment

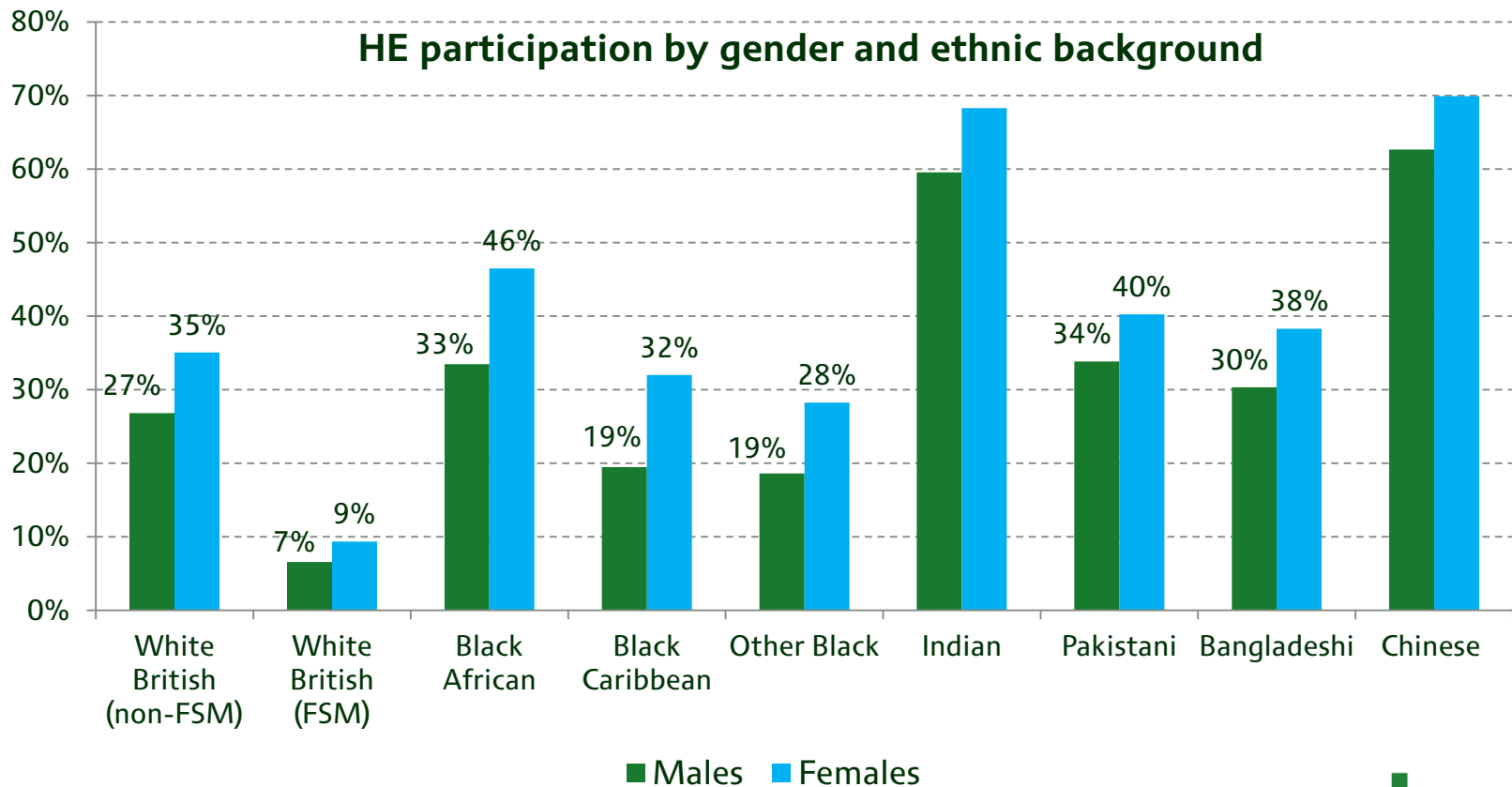


Source: based on work in Chowdry, Crawford, Dearden, Goodman & Vignoles (2010), Widening participation in higher education: analysis using linked administrative data, IFS Working Paper No. W10/04.

What about amongst groups of concern?

(Poor White men, Black men and Pakistani & Bangladeshi women)

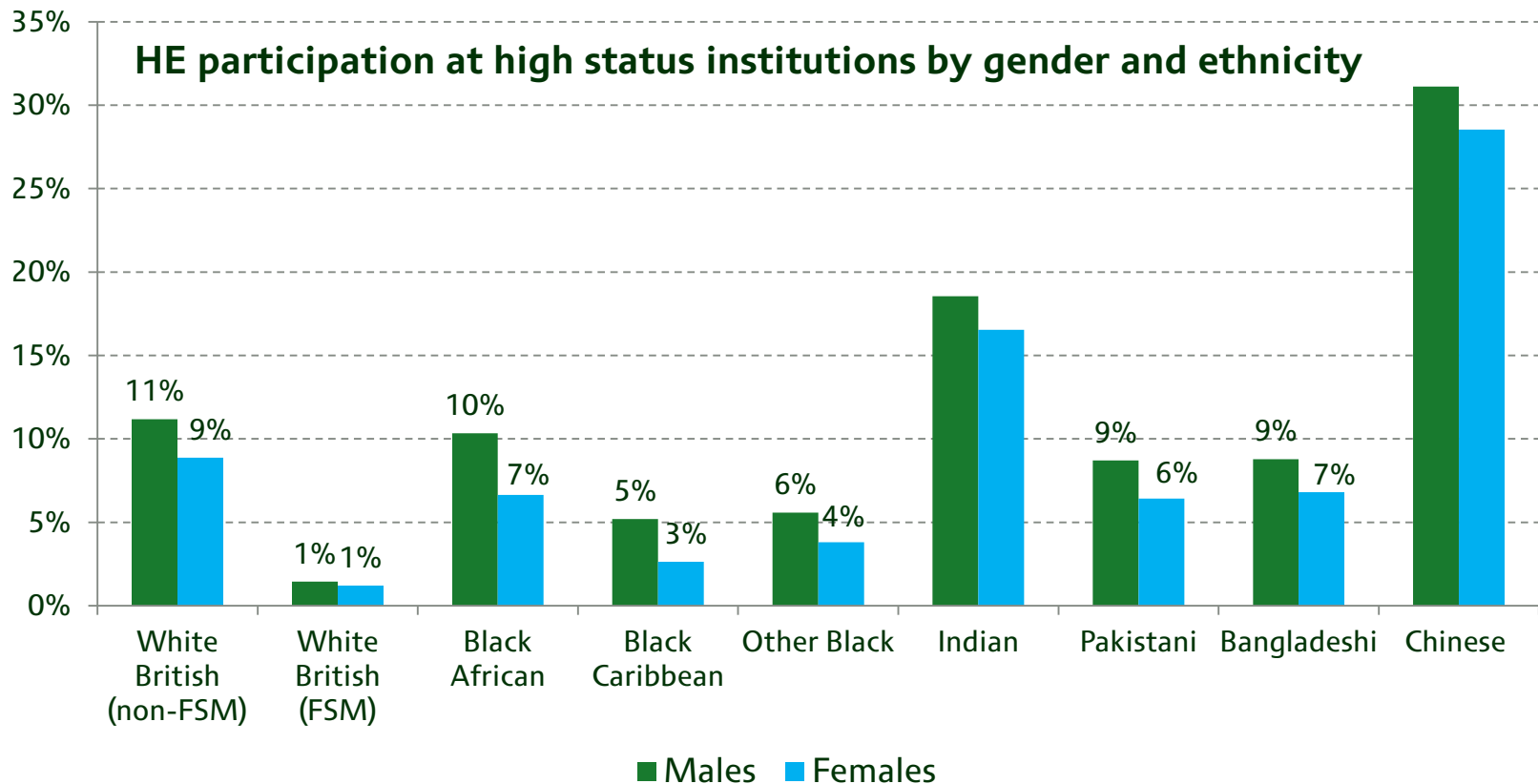
- Ethnic differences in cognitive skills are evident early (Dearden & Sibieta, 2010) but narrow throughout secondary school (Wilson, Burgess & Briggs, 2006)
- Most ethnic minority groups outperform whites in terms of HE participation . . .



What about amongst groups of concern?

(Poor White men, Black men and Pakistani & Bangladeshi women)

- But things are not so rosy in terms of HE participation at high status institutions (though most of the difference can be explained by differences in prior attainment)

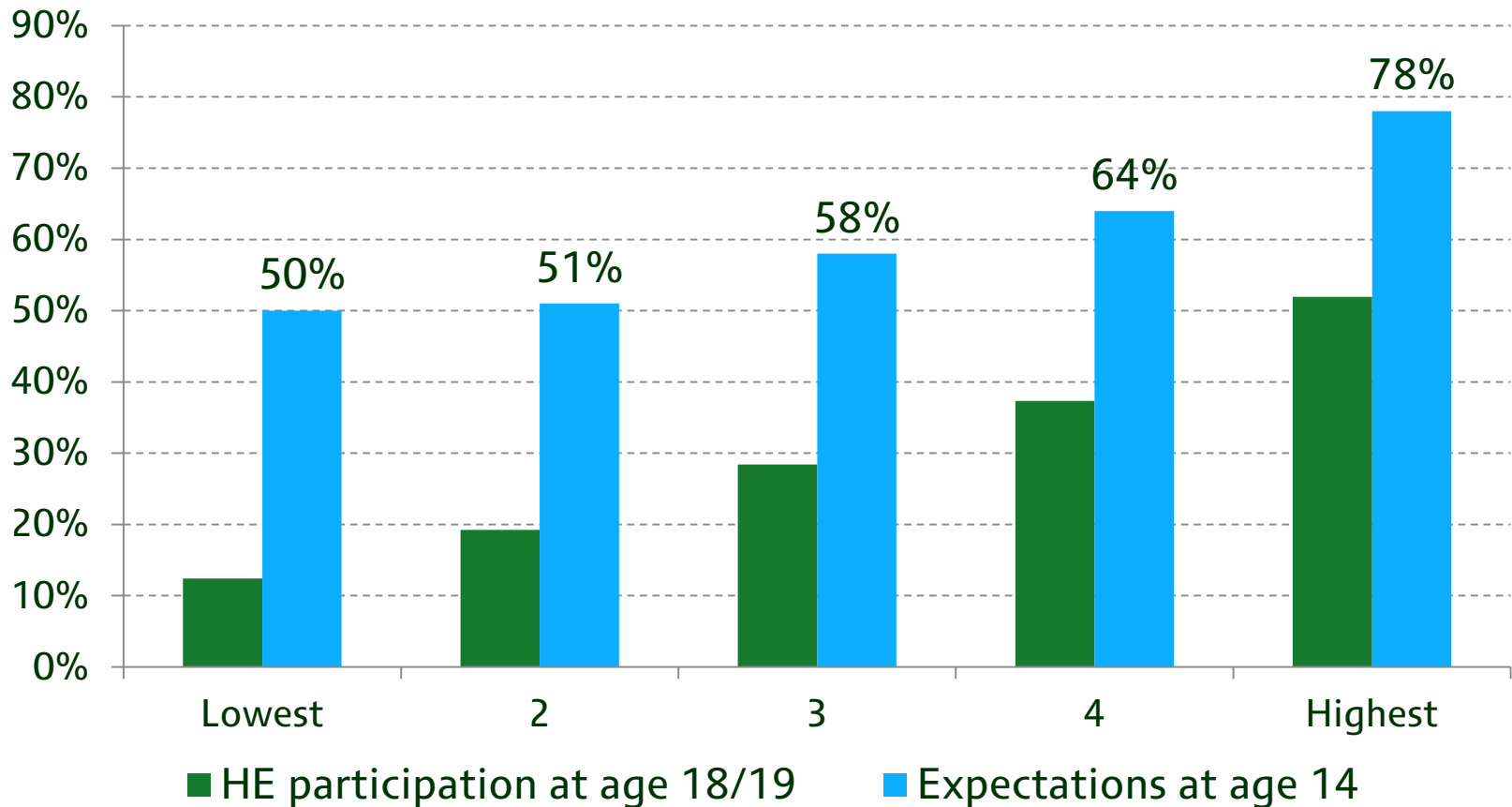


Source: authors' calculations based on linked schools and universities administrative data for the cohorts first eligible to start university in 2004-05 and 2005-06 (who sat their GCSEs in 2001-02 and 2002-03)

What drives the relationship between family background and educational attainment?

- Decompose the gaps in attainment between rich and poor pupils
- Factors will explain a large proportion of the gap if they:
 - Are highly correlated with socio-economic status
 - Have a large effect on attainment conditional on other characteristics
- Goodman & Gregg (2010) and accompanying studies find that these factors seem to play an important role in perpetuating SES gaps:
 - Early home learning environment
 - Expectations/aspirations for education
 - Locus of control (belief that own actions make a difference)
 - Behaviour
 - Material factors (e.g. access to internet/computer)
- Suggests potentially important role for policy assuming that these relationships are causal and that these factors are malleable

A note of caution: HE expectations amongst young people are high across the board



Source: Chowdry, Crawford & Goodman (2011), The role of attitudes and behaviours in explaining socio-economic differences in attainment at age 16, Longitudinal and Life Course Studies, Vol. 2, No. 1, pp. 59-76

Which types of policies are most likely to improve attainment/skills amongst the poorest?

- Early interventions have the potential to be more productive than later interventions
 - Strongest evidence is for high intensity interventions, e.g. Family-Nurse Partnership; mixed evidence on lower intensity interventions
 - But cannot just intervene once and then sit back; early interventions are most productive if followed up: consistency matters
- Basic skills (literacy/numeracy) are highly valued in the UK labour market, suggesting a shortage of such skills
 - Very difficult to improve in adulthood
 - Good evidence on (cost) effective literacy strategies, e.g.
 - The Literacy Hour: structured teaching methods affecting all children
 - Every Child a Reader: intensive 1:1 intervention for very lowest achievers
 - Improve outcomes in short run but uncertain how long benefits last

Which types of policies are most likely to improve attainment/skills amongst the poorest?

- Teachers matter:
 - Recruiting and retaining high quality teachers, and helping them to pass on their skills to other teachers is vital
 - But identifying who will become “good” teachers is difficult; degree class and experience are not good proxies; more evidence needed
 - Also important to remember that schools are only part of the story; parents/families have at least as great an influence on attainment
- Students need to be supported to make the right decisions
 - Choice of GCSE and A-level subjects and what to do at 16
- Later interventions may be better targeted non-cognitive skills (e.g. leadership and time management) than cognitive skills
 - Though evidence remains weak; more is needed

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