

# The role of institutional factors for widening participation in higher education

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# The Education and Social Stratification research

Three main research themes:

1. Analysing inequalities in access to, participation and attainment in tertiary education
2. Exploring the relationship between educational achievement, employment opportunities and social mobility
3. Identifying the relationship between education, civic values and civic participation

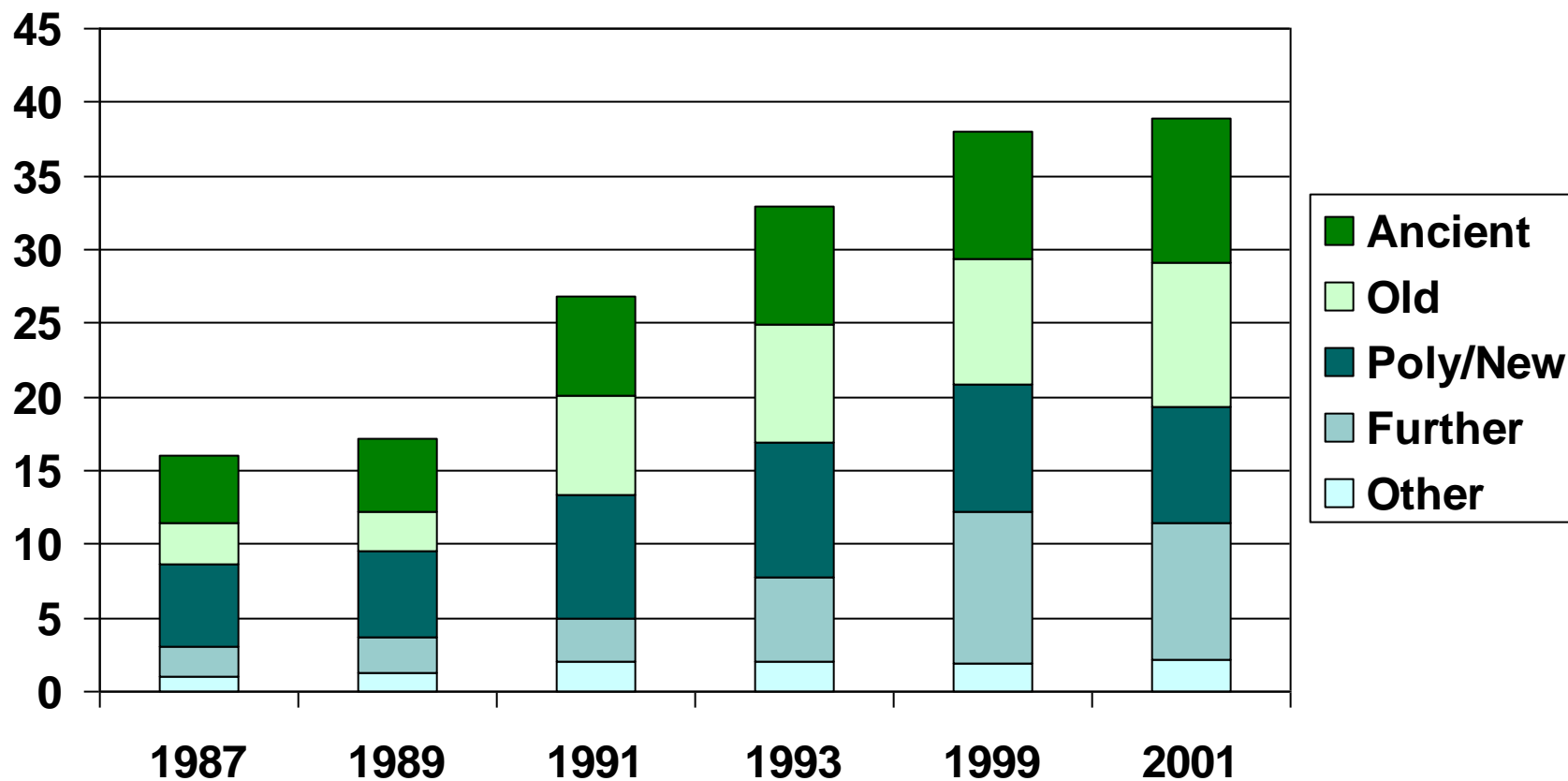
Currently six research projects (e.g. curriculum choices, HE retention, education systems and labour market pathways)

*<http://www.aqmen.ac.uk/research/education>*

# HE expansion and widening access in Scotland

- HE expansion has led to more inclusion but little changes in terms of social inequalities
- Why?
  - All social groups benefited from the expansion
  - Institutional differentiation within the HE sector
  - School curricula and attainment

# Uneven expansion of the HE sector



Source: Iannelli, C., Gamoran, A. and Paterson, L. (2011) 'Expansion through Diversion in Scottish Higher Education, 1987-2001', *Oxford Review of Education*, 37(6): 717-741

# Expansion through diversion

- In Scotland the most prominent sectors of HE expansion for children from more disadvantaged social classes were the new universities and the FE colleges
- Instead, the growth in HE entry of children of professional and intermediate classes occurred mainly in the ancient and old universities
- For those students who lack the necessary qualification for university entry, FE colleges represent the only opportunity to access HE since entry requirements for sub-degree courses are lower
  - » But this is only part of the story.....

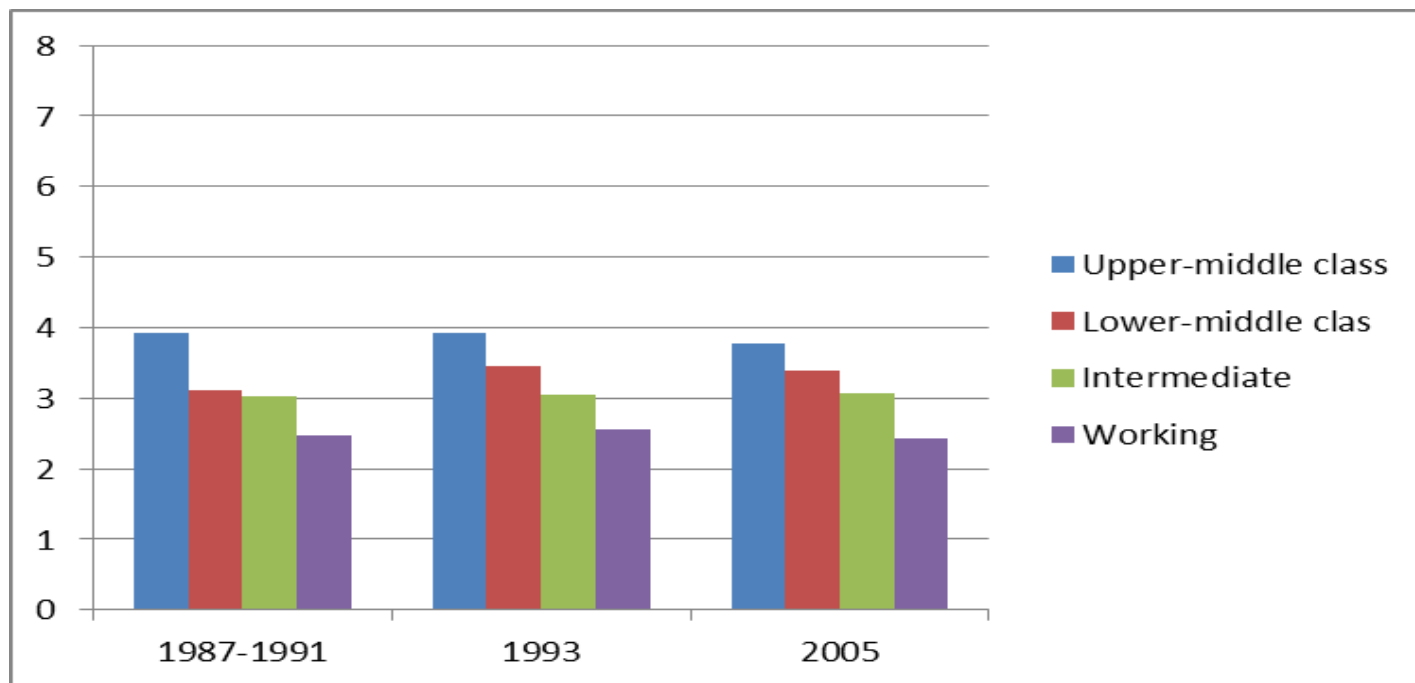
# Secondary school subject choices and HE entry

(Iannelli, C., Smyth, E. and Klein, M., 2016)

- Flexible choice of type and number of school subjects in Scotland (and more generally in the UK) has provided another avenue for social inequalities to emerge
- Eight academic subjects (among them English, maths, languages and sciences) identified as ‘facilitating’ entry to the Russell Group universities (*Russell Group Dossier, 2011*)
- Less socially advantaged students are less likely to study ‘facilitating’ subjects in their final secondary school exams. This ultimately perpetuates social inequalities in pupils’ chances of entering ancient and old universities.

# Facilitating subjects and social class inequalities in Scotland

Class of origin differences in the average number of “facilitating” subjects sat in upper secondary education (English, languages, maths, history, physics, chemistry, biology and geography), Scotland

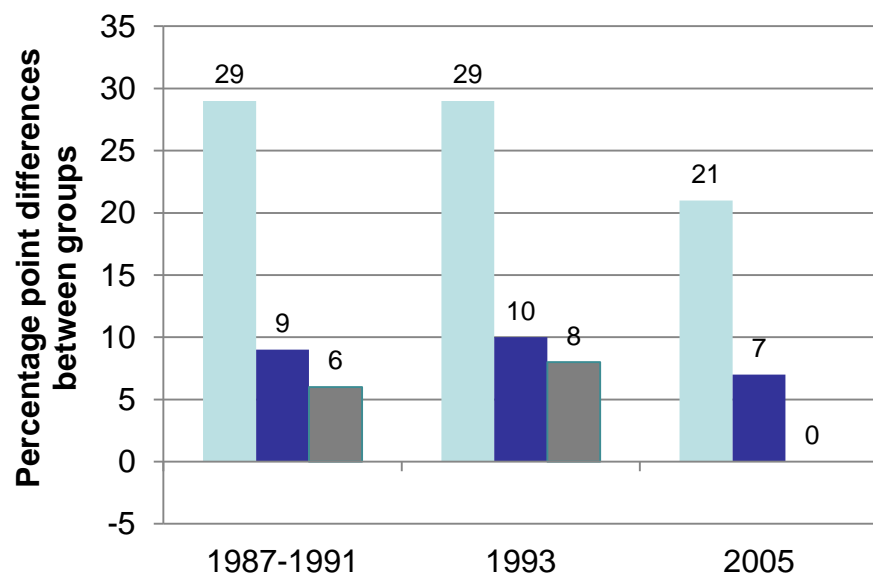


Source: Scottish School Leavers Survey

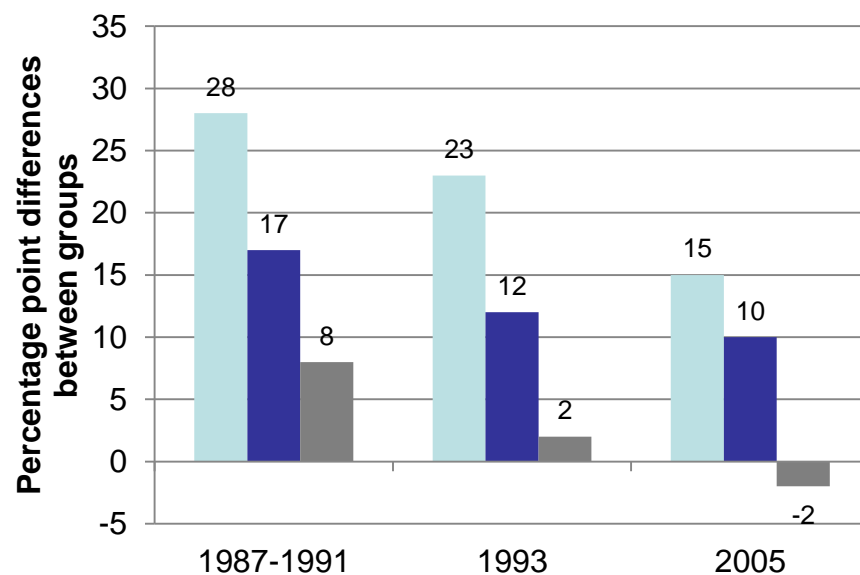
# Comparing Scotland and Ireland

Percentage point difference in the probability of HE entry between students from upper-middle and working class background, Scotland and Ireland

## Scotland



## Ireland



- Gross social gap
- Social gap net of subject choices
- Social gap net of subject choices and performance

Source: Scottish and Irish School Leavers Surveys



- **In summary**
  - Selection of school subjects within the Scottish secondary system is socially patterned
  - Subject choices in S3/S4 strong predictor of subject choices in S5/S6 (i.e. they explain social origin differences of later subject choices)
- **Policy implications**
  - Widening progression to HE relies therefore on educational guidance from an early stage
  - Allowing people to drop academic subjects too early has long-term implications for pathways open to young people
  - Since the introduction of the CfE there has been a reduction in the number of subjects taken in S4 (most likely by pupils with lower academic performance)

# Limitations of current policies - some thoughts

- Targeted policies based on area-level indicators (e.g. the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation, SIMD) fail to capture people in socio-economic disadvantage who do not live in particularly deprived areas
- The unintended consequences of the implementation of the CfE (e.g. narrowing of the curriculum, cross-curricula learning vs subject-based learning, skills vs knowledge) need to be carefully monitored
- Articulation route from FE to university has its challenges in terms of accreditation of prior learning and HE retention
- The cap on student numbers imposed to universities is limiting the potential for further promoting widening access
- Current policies on widening access have mainly targeted young people and this may have a negative impact on other students, in particular the adult learners (their HE participation has dropped in recent years)