

Durham
University

School type and fair access to Russell Group universities

Vikki Boliver

School of Applied Social Sciences
Durham University

ESRC Fellowship Think Tank event
Edinburgh University
8th October 2013

Background to the study

- “the odds of a child at a state secondary school who is eligible for free school meals (FSM) in Year 11 being admitted to Oxbridge by the age of 19 are almost 2,000 to 1 against. **By contrast, the odds of a privately educated child being admitted to Oxbridge are 20 to 1**” (Milburn 2012 p.21)
- “If all of the 20 Russell Group universities in England achieved their Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) Widening Participation benchmarks, they **would have recruited an additional 3,662 students from state schools** (Milburn 2013 p.16)

Research questions

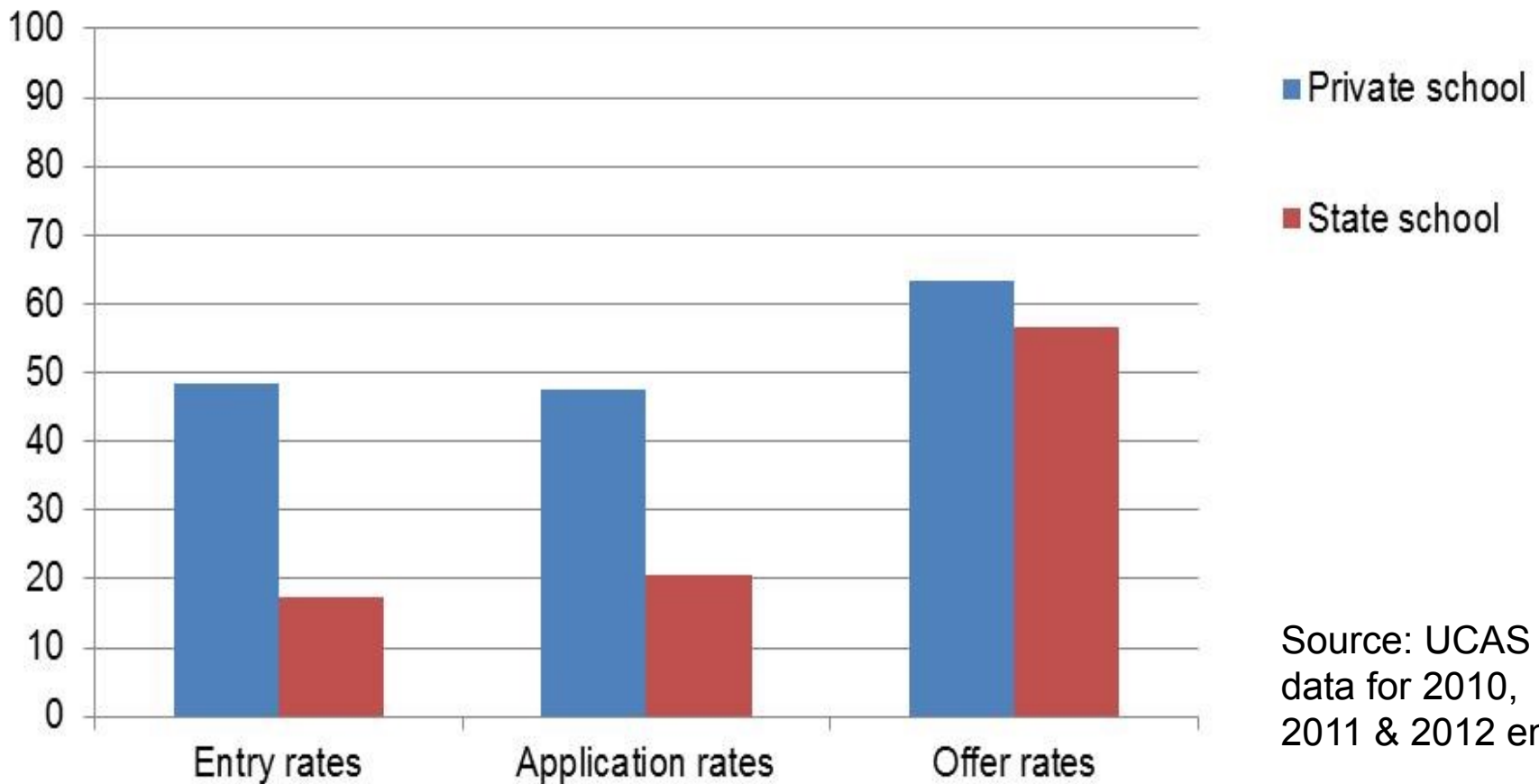
- Are state school pupils under-represented at Russell Group universities **because they are less likely to apply or because they are less likely to be admitted**, or both?
- Can we account for different propensities to apply and be admitted to Russell Group universities by controlling statistically for **'merit' as indicated by prior attainment**?
- How has fair access to Russell Group universities been **affected by tuition fees** introduced in England in 1998, increased to £3000 in 2006, and increased again to £9000 in 2012?

Data and methods

- Individual-level data supplied by the **Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS)**
- Paper published in the June issue of the *British Journal of Sociology* focuses on the period **1996-2006**; this presentation updates the analysis to include the period **2010-2012**
- Focus is on England-domiciled applicants with A-levels
- Binary logistic regression models used to **compare the odds of application and admission to Russell Group universities** for applicants from different school backgrounds

School background inequalities

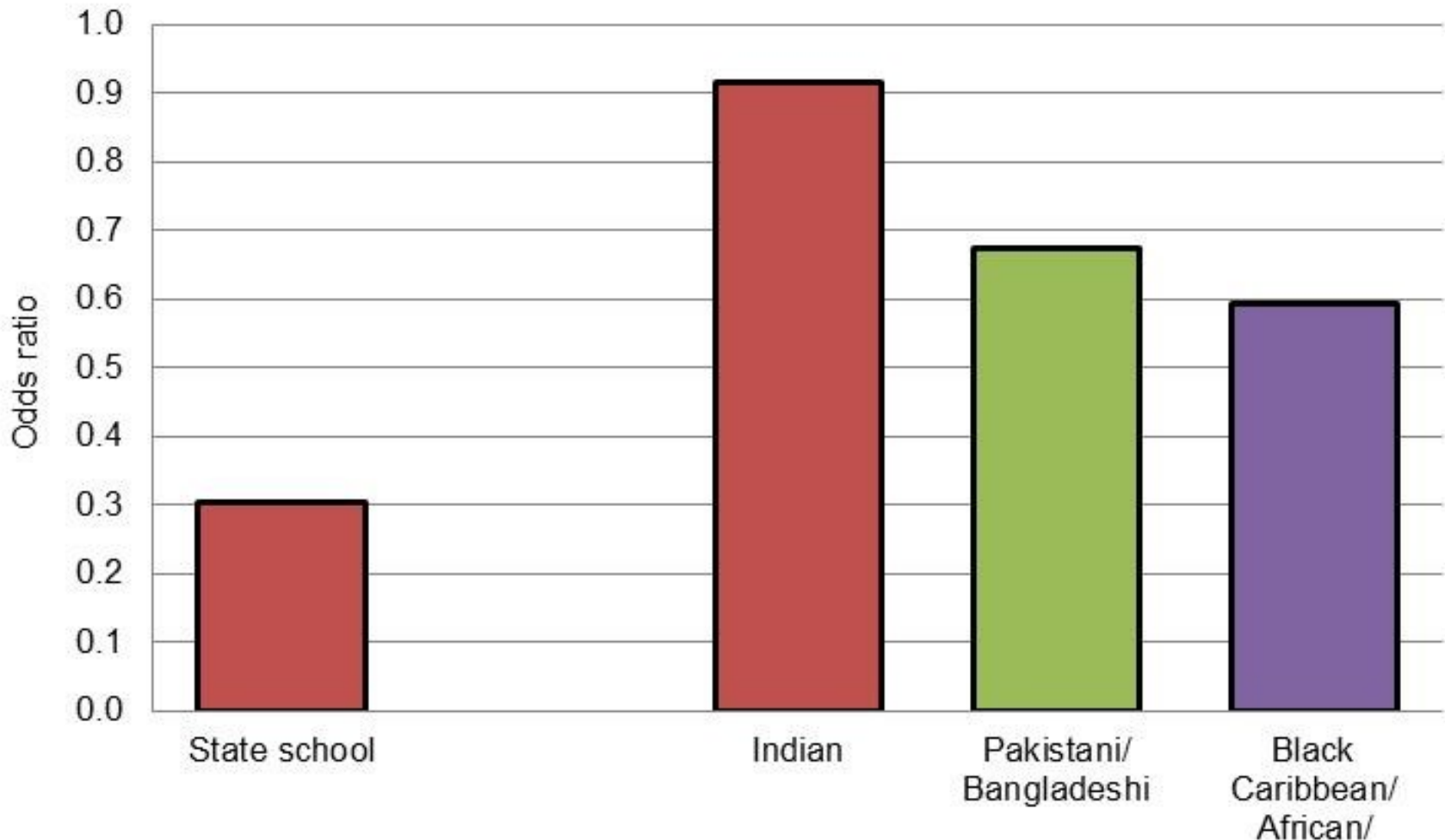
Entry, application and offer rates for Russell Group universities



Source: UCAS data for 2010, 2011 & 2012 entry

Application to a Russell Group university

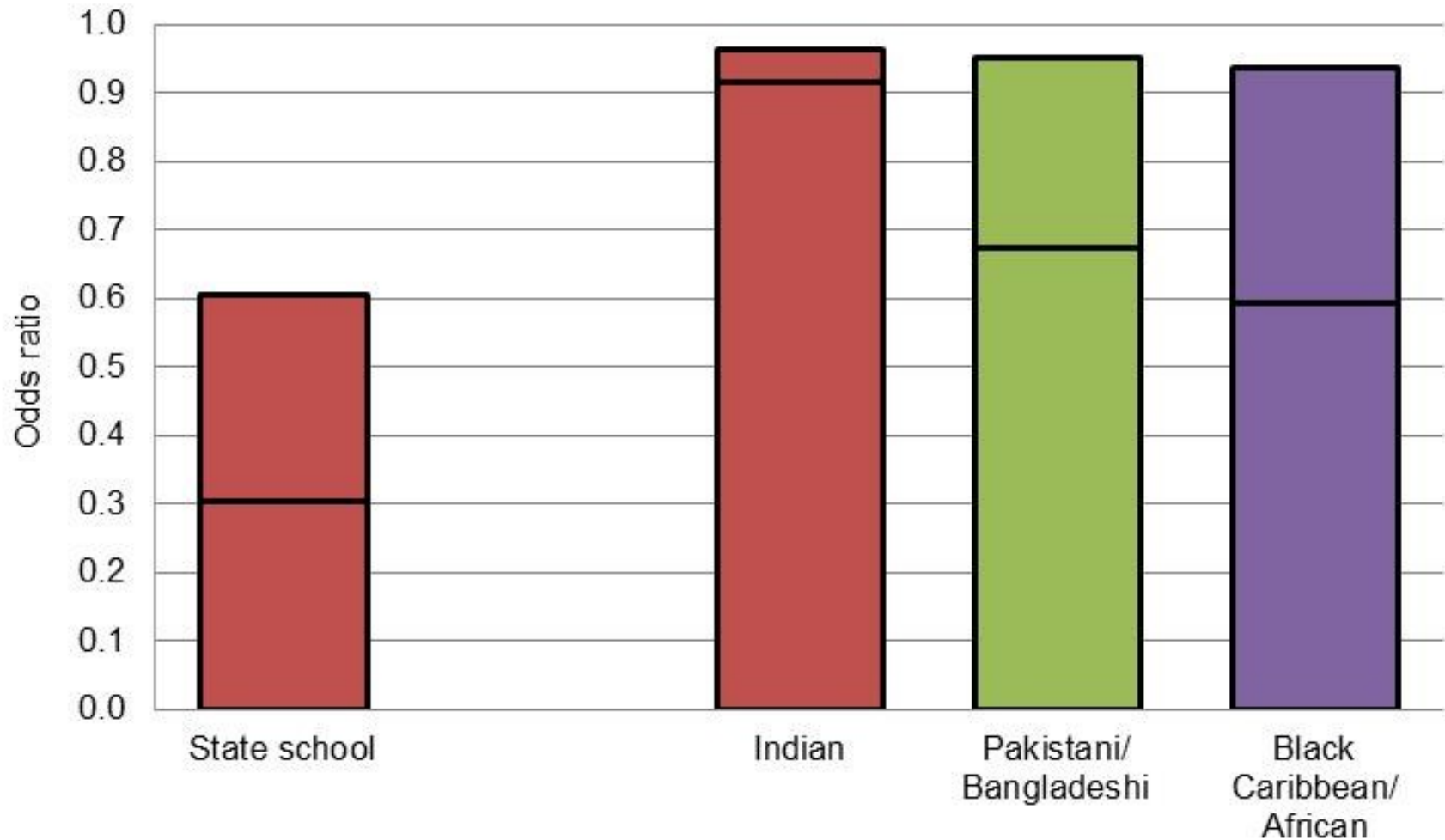
Model 1. Controls for applicant characteristics and HE subject area



Controls for: sex, age, LPN status, HE subject area, application year

Application to a Russell Group university

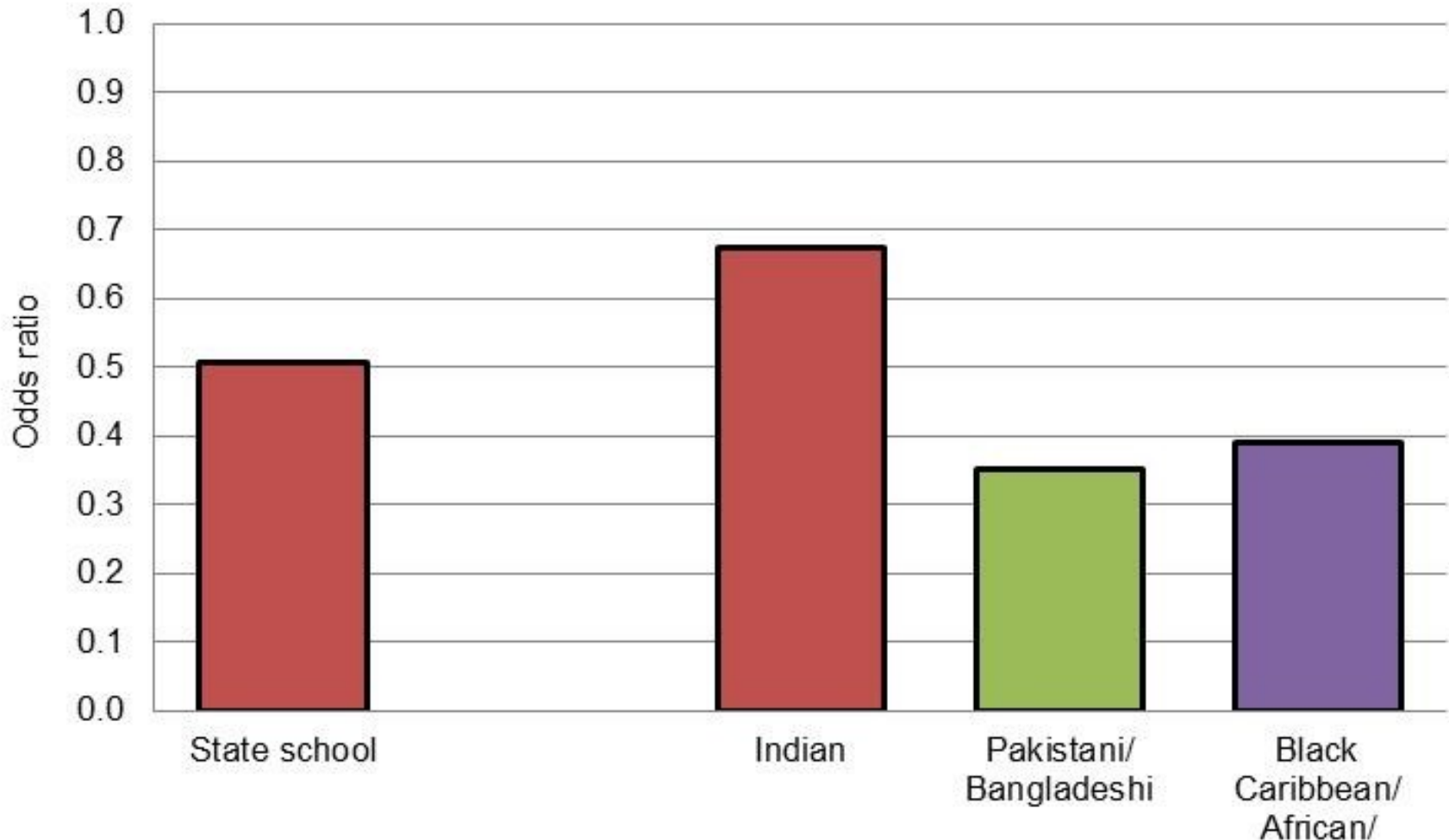
Model 2. Further controls for A-level grades & 'facilitating subjects'*



*Biology, Chemistry, Eng. Lit., Geography, History, Languages, Maths, Physics

Offer from a Russell Group university

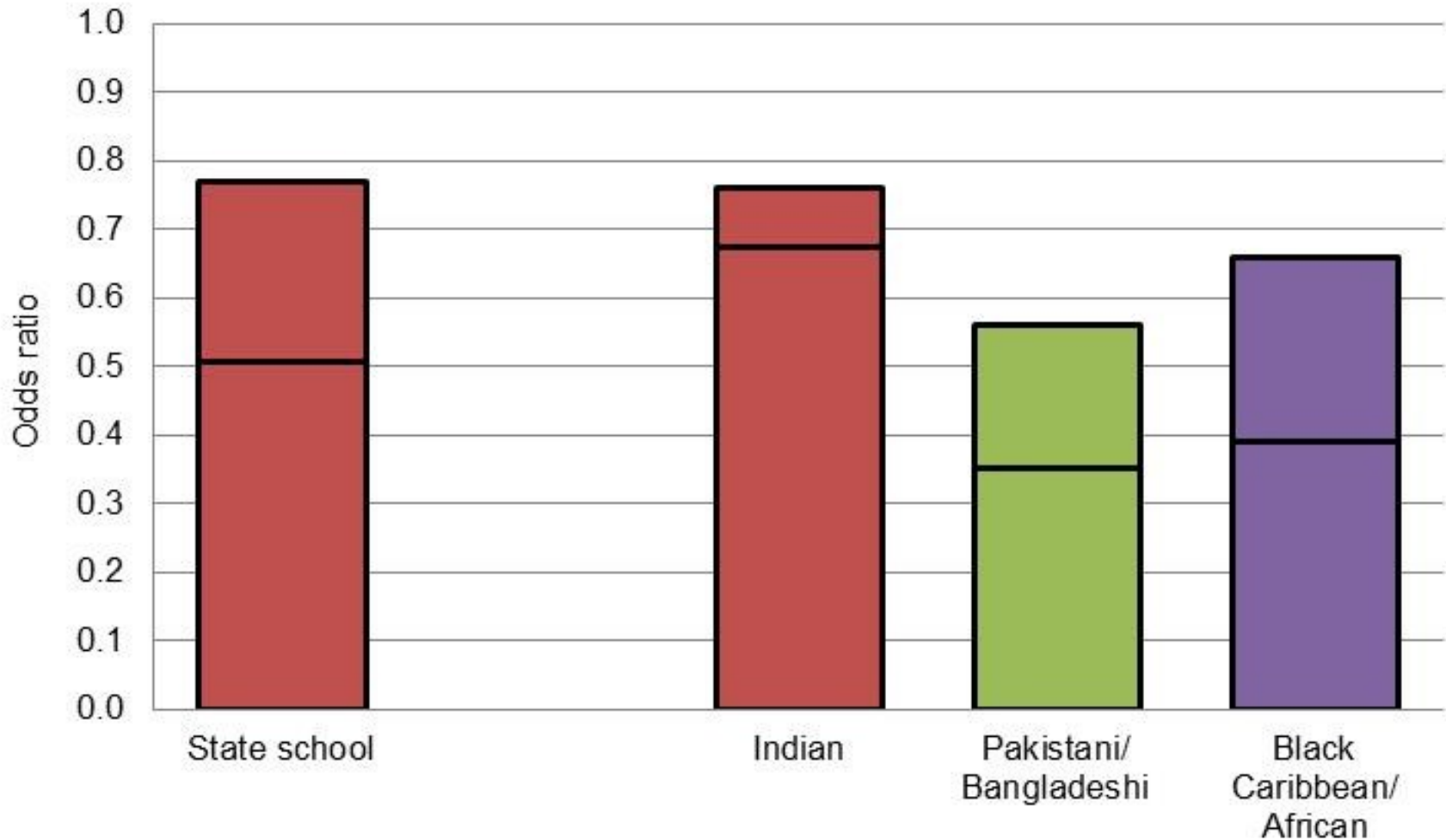
Model 1. Controls for applicant characteristics and HE subject area



Controls for: sex, age, LPN status, HE subject area, application year

Offer from a Russell Group university

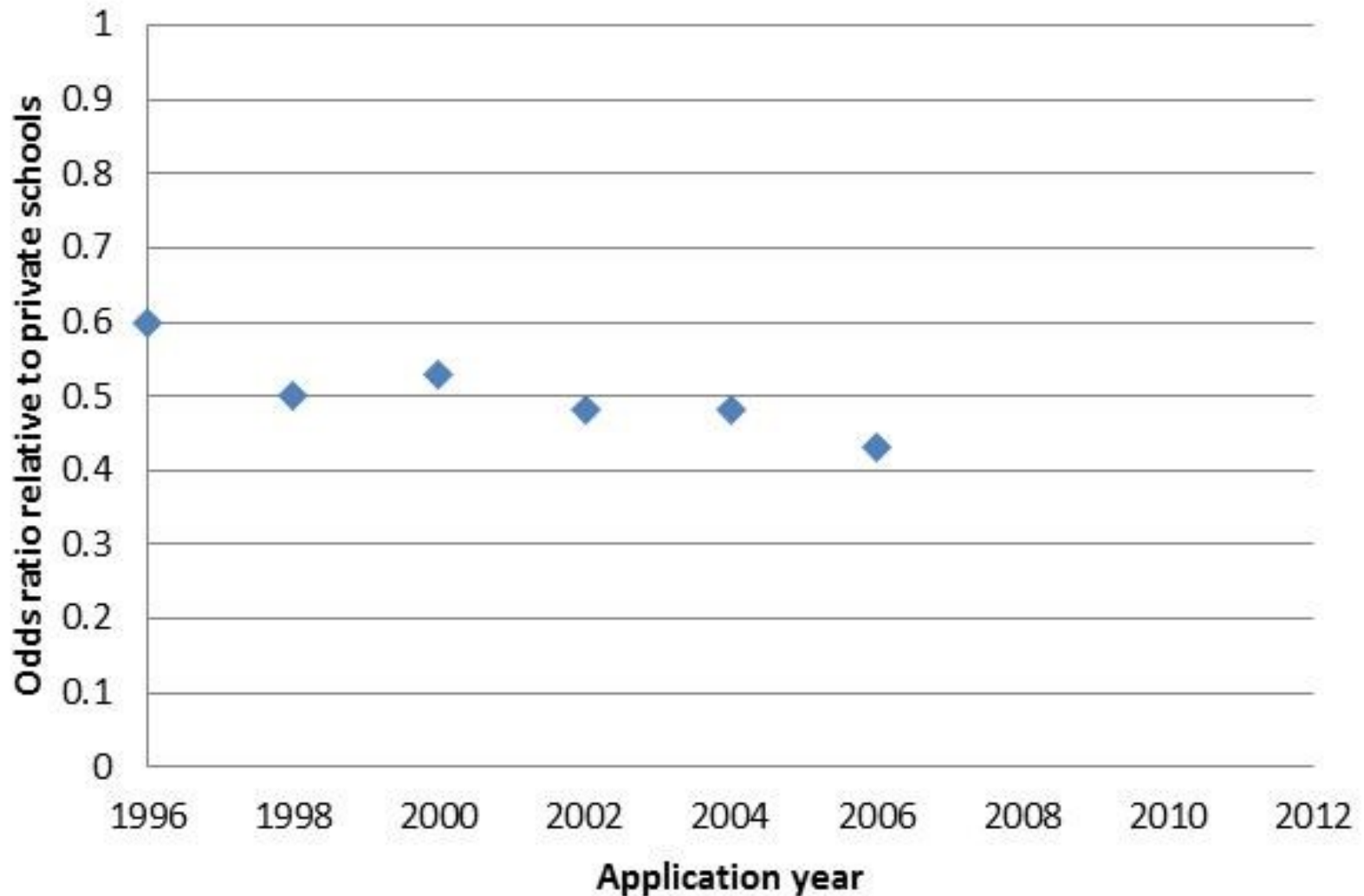
Model 2. Further controls for A-level grades & 'facilitating subjects'*



*Biology, Chemistry, Eng. Lit., Geography, History, Languages, Maths, Physics

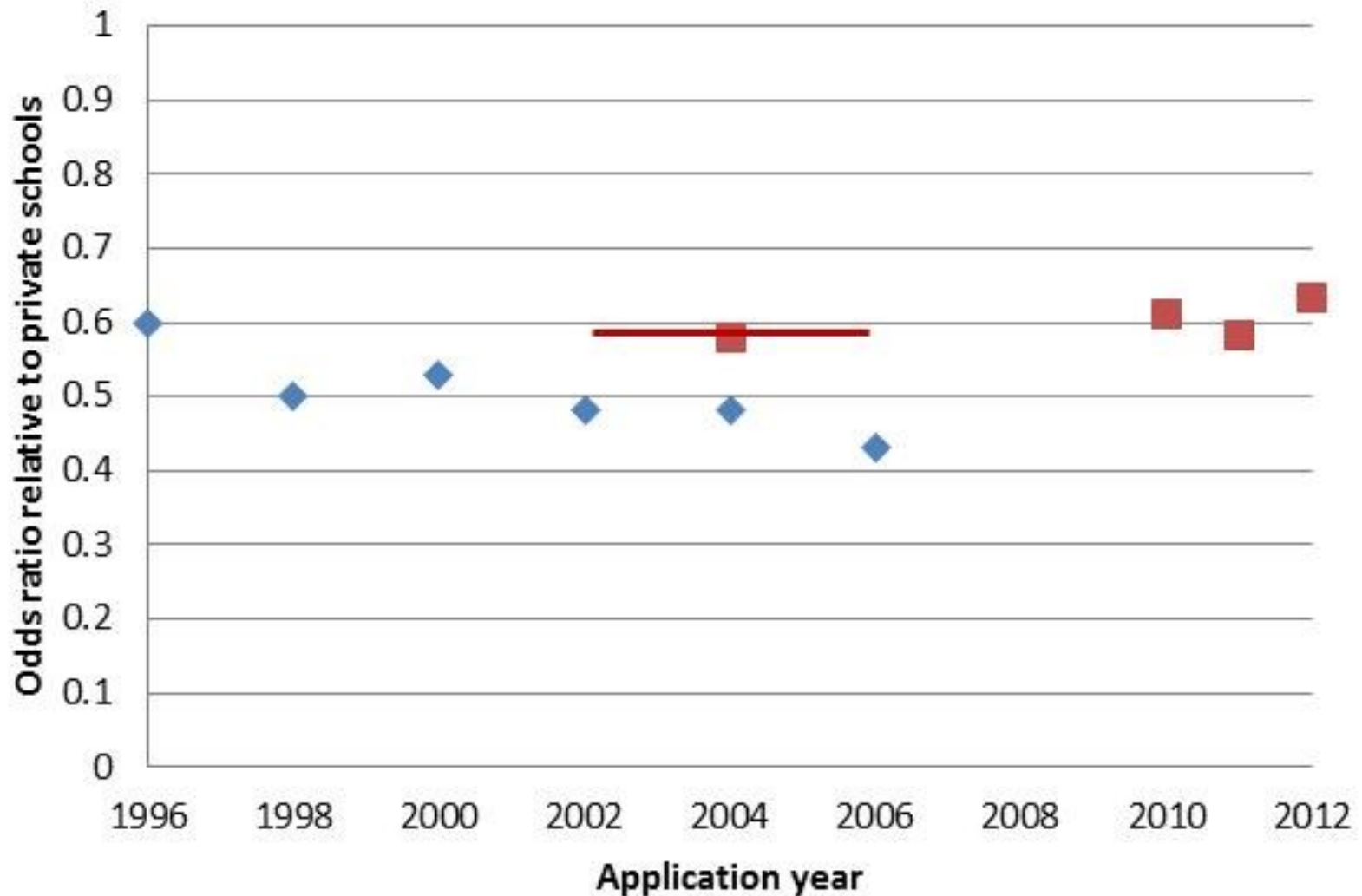
Change over time?

State school applications to Russell Group universities



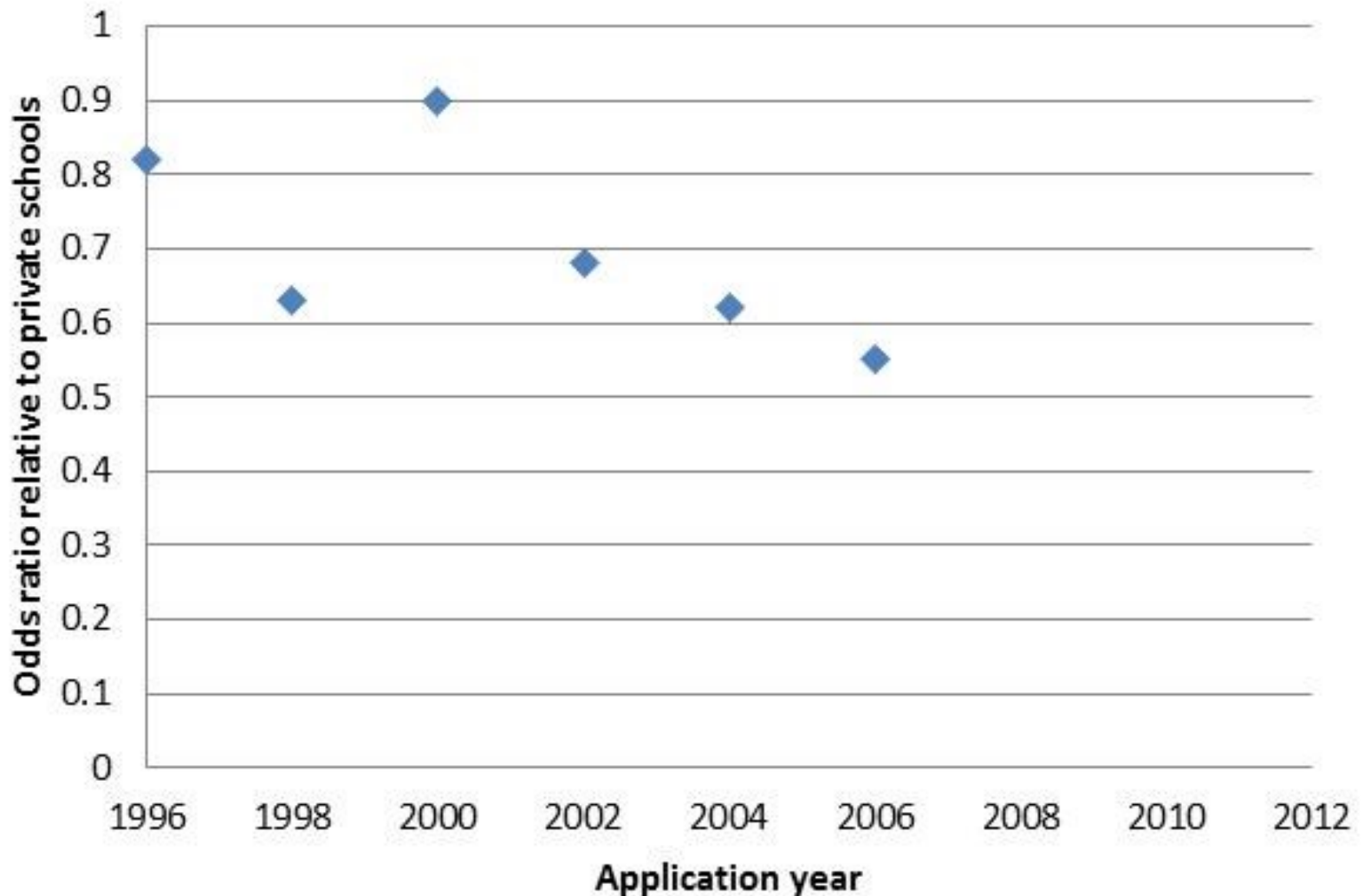
Change over time?

State school applications to Russell Group universities



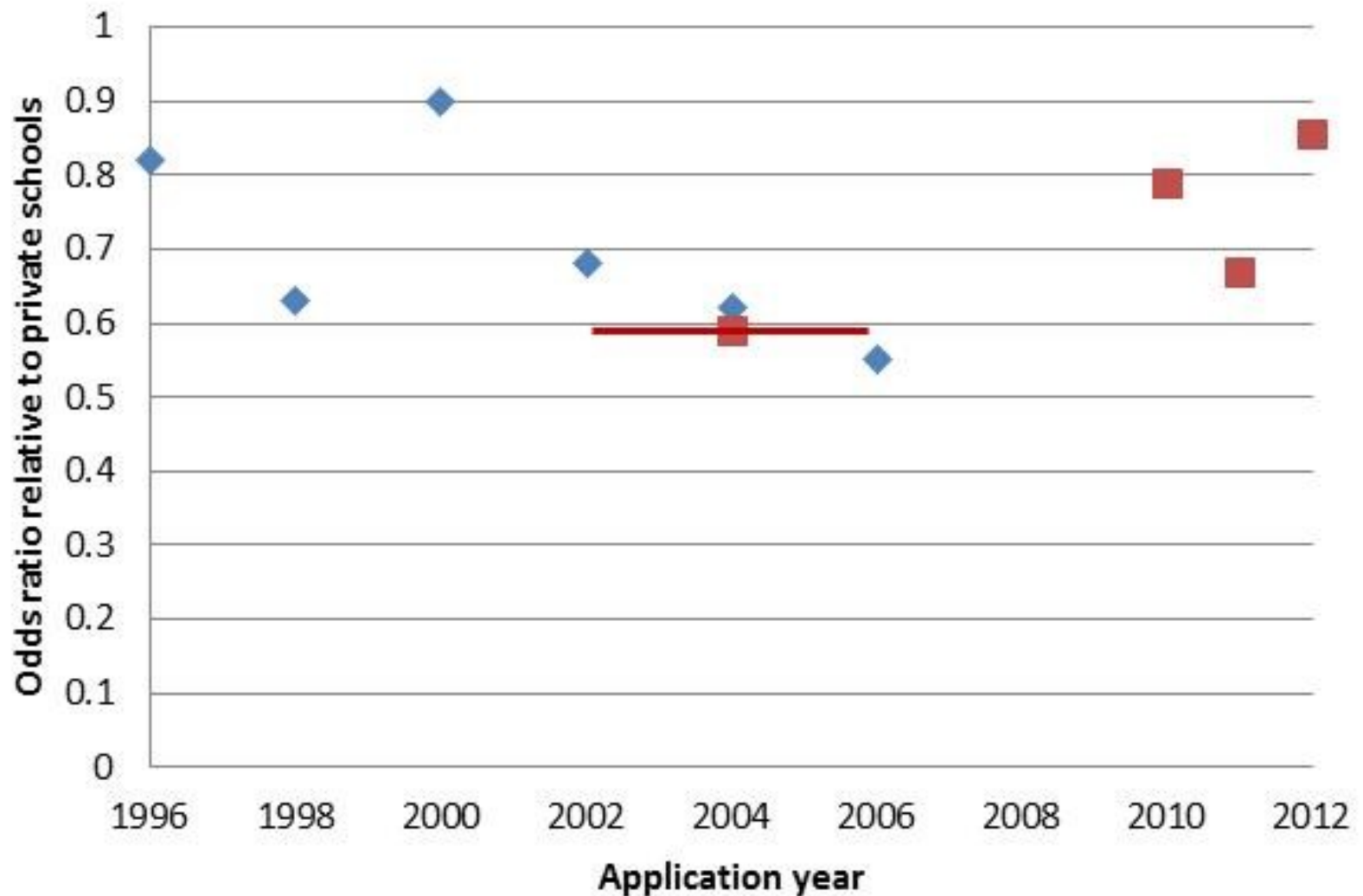
Change over time?

State school receipt offers from Russell Group universities



Change over time?

State school receipt offers from Russell Group universities



Conclusions

- **State school students** under-represented at Russell Group universities **mainly because they are less likely to apply but also because they are less likely to be admitted** than comparably qualified private school applicants
- If prestigious universities are going to be an engine for social mobility, **fair access policies must address disparities in the chances of admission** as well as application
- Clear need for **further research to find out why disparities in admission chances occur** – could be due to differences in predicted (as opposed to actual) A-level grades, which would raise again the question of whether we should move to a post-qualifications application system