



# Higher Education and Social Mobility in Scotland

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# Outline

- What do we know about social mobility?
- The role of HE in social mobility
- Differentiation in HE: inclusion or diversion?
- School subjects, HE and occupational destinations
- Social inequalities in labour market outcomes
- Education policy and social mobility

# What do we know about social mobility?

- One measure of (in)equality is a society's level of social mobility
- Evidence from international research shows:
  - In absolute terms: In many countries there has been a lot of mobility mostly due to changes in the labour market structure and Scotland is not an exception
  - In relative terms: some societies are more equal than others and a few countries have experienced an increase in social fluidity (e.g. France and the Netherlands). In the last fifty years in Scotland social fluidity has remained constant

# The role of HE in social mobility

- In many countries, including Scotland, education mediates part but not all origin-destination (OD) association
- In some countries (e.g. USA, France and Scotland) the OD association has been found weaker at higher levels of education
- Can continuing to expand the HE system lead to higher social mobility?

# The role of HE in social mobility

- Two reasons for doubting the efficacy of HE expansion:
  - Differentiation within the HE system may perpetuate class differences in education and the labour market outcomes
  - The labour market does not operate only on meritocratic basis and the signalling power of degree qualifications may tend to reduce with the expansion

# Expansion and Stratification in Higher Education

- What does expansion imply for inequality?
  - Inclusion: more opportunities for persons from disadvantaged backgrounds
  - Or diversion: elite positions are preserved for people from more advantaged social classes

# Findings for Scotland

- Expansion has favoured the disadvantaged
- However, most of the expansion favouring the disadvantaged has occurred in the lower status institutions
- Inequalities across the extremes of the socioeconomic distribution are staggering

# HE expansion and differentiation in Scotland

(Iannelli, Gamoran and Paterson, 2011a)

Parent SES/Year	Ancient	Old	Poly/New	FE	None
Prof & hi ed	36.8	12.2	37.5	3.5	10.0
1987/89/91					
1993	36.7	21.0	32.1	5.1	5.1
1999/01	36.6	25.0	20.9	6.6	11.0
Intermed & mid ed					
1987/89/91	0.2	0.4	8.0	4.8	86.6
1993	0.2	0.6	8.9	12.9	77.4
1999/01	1.5	4.1	7.7	14.7	72.0
Working & low ed					
1987/89/91	0.03	0.05	2.5	2.2	95.3
1993	0.04	0.2	4.6	6.3	88.9
1999/01	0.5	1.0	5.9	13.3	79.3

Source: Scottish School Leavers Surveys

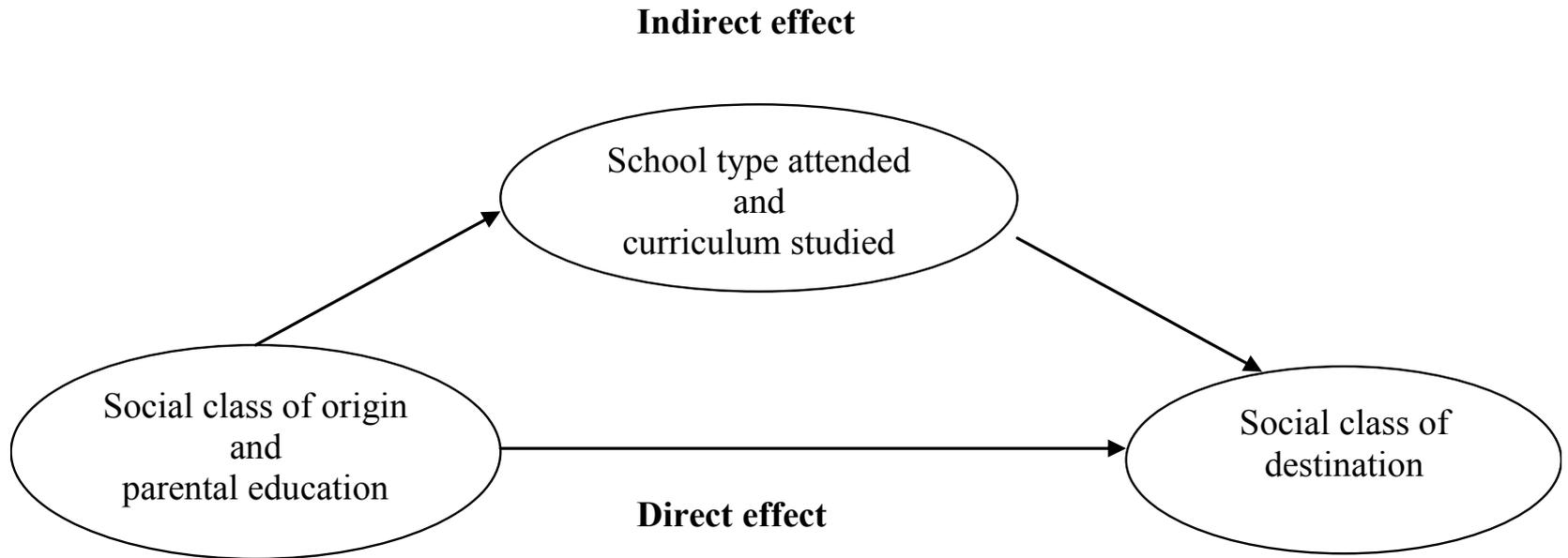
# HE expansion and differentiation in Scotland (Iannelli, Paterson and Gamoran, 2011b)

- The choice of field of study is less stratified by social class
- Persons of lower social origins enter fields with greater labour market returns (occupational status and earnings) in lower-status institutional sectors
- Persons of lower social origins are less likely to enter more academically selective fields of study

# School subjects, HE and occupational destinations

- Selectivity in HE entry depends not only on prior educational achievement but also subject choice at secondary level
- Subject choices are crucial for gaining access to prestigious universities and for entering professional jobs

# School subjects, HE and occupational destinations (Iannelli, 2013)



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Percentages of direct and indirect effects of social class of origin and parental education on the chances of entering professional and managerial occupations (Class I-II)

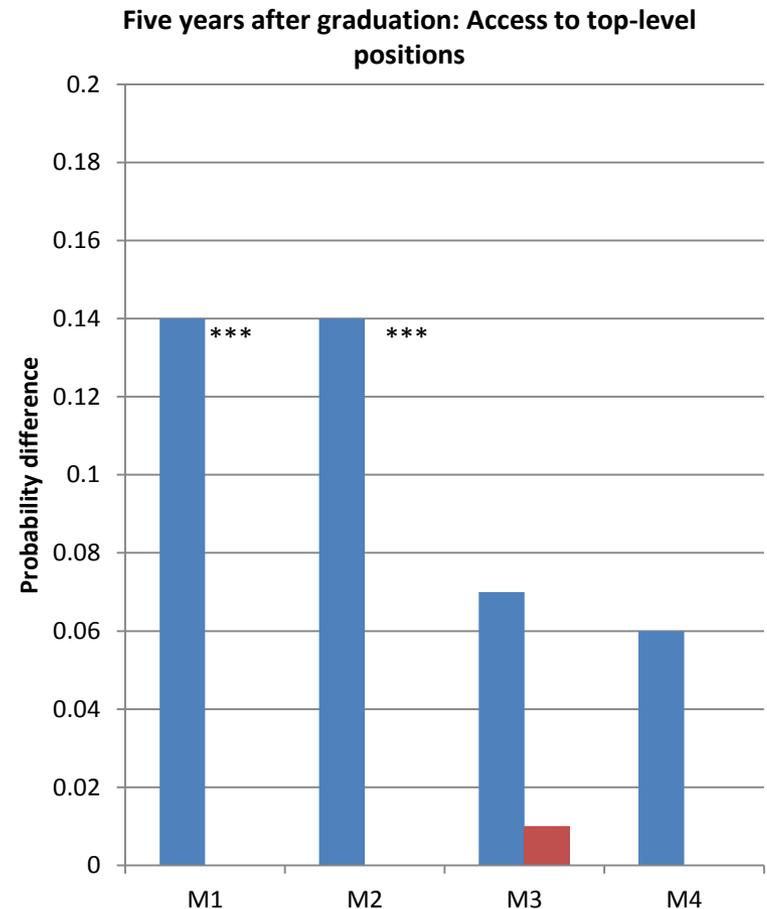
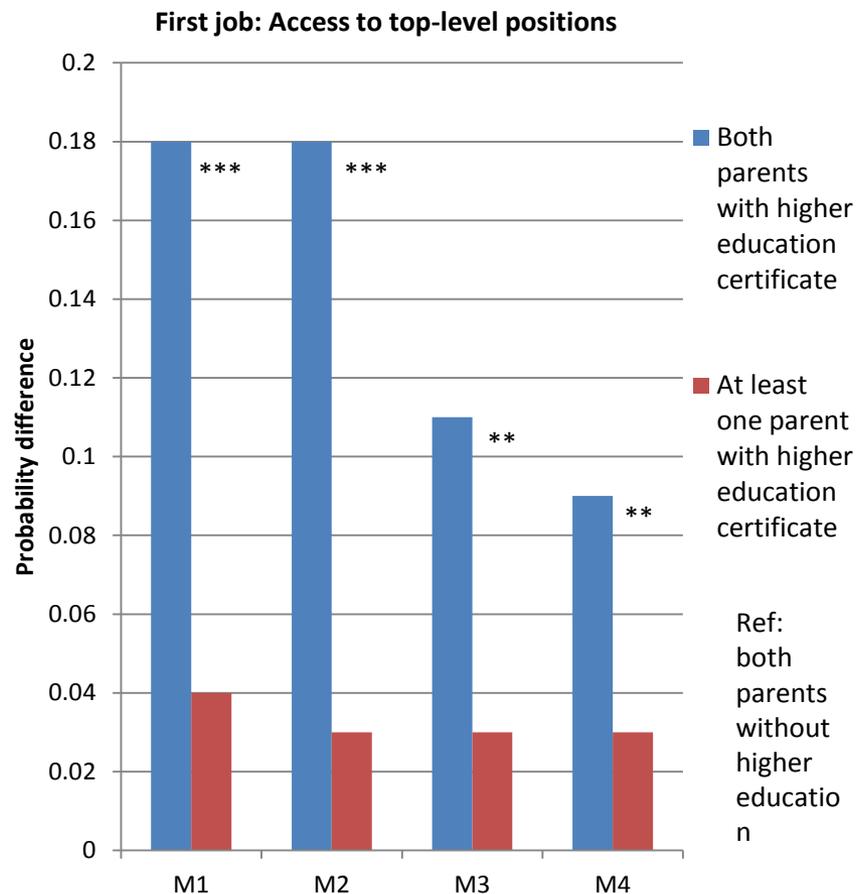
<i>Social class of origin</i> (ref. Class VI-VII)	Via school type	Via school curriculum	Via school type and curriculum
Class I-II			
Direct effect	92	77	75
Indirect effect	8*	23*	25*
<i>Parental education</i> (ref. left at 15 or younger)			
Left at 18 or later			
Direct effect	84	71	67
Indirect effect	16*	29*	33*

Source: 1958 National Child Development Study

# Social inequalities in labour market outcomes

- The effect of social class origin on individuals' labour market outcomes is still strong and only partly mediated by education
- Even though to a lesser extent than for low educated people, social origin also matters for HE graduates

# Parental education and graduates' chances of acquiring a professional occupation (Iannelli and Klein, 2013)



Source: REFLEX 2005 (UK data); all models control for gender, ethnic origin and age; M1= gross effect of parental education; M2= model 1 + attainment prior to higher education; M3= model 2 + field of study; M4 = model 3 + final grade and postgraduate enrolment.

# Education policy and social mobility

- Education policies have contributed relatively little to reducing social inequalities
- Education policy, on its own, cannot eradicate social inequalities, wider social reforms are needed
- After the referendum, is the Scottish Government going to have the power and the willingness to engage in wider social reforms leading to an equalisation of life conditions?

# References

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