

Social Inequalities of Access to Top Tier Universities in the UK

Vikki Boliver

British Academy Postdoctoral Research Fellow
Sociology Department, University of Oxford

Contact: vikki.boliver@sociology.ox.ac.uk

Social Inequalities of Access to Top Tier Universities in the UK

Outline

1. Differentiation and hierarchy among UK universities
 2. The class and ethnic composition of top tier universities
 3. Understanding inequalities of access to top tier universities
 - The role of applicants' choices
 - The role of admissions decisions
- } The mediating influence of prior qualifications

Differentiation and hierarchy among UK Universities

Table 1. Differentiation of HEI types by academic standing

	Russell Group	other Old	New	All
% Pre-clearing entrants	94.8	87.3	84.1	13.3
% A level entrants	83.3	77.5	58.0	67.7
Average A level points	25.6	20.7	13.9	17.7
Teaching score	82.6	78.8	73.3	76.2
% Teaching “excellent”	68.0	49.0	26.2	39.4
RAE grading	4.7	4.1	3.2	3.7
% Postgraduates	30.9	27.6	18.3	23.0

Differentiation and hierarchy among UK Universities

Table 2. Differentiation of HEI types by economic resources

	Russell Group	other Old	New	All
Research Income (£s) Per undergraduate	3610	1233	232	1008
Endowment income (£s) Per undergraduate	605	192	66	180
Academic services (£s) Per undergraduate	810	494	383	476
Ratio of students to staff	10.2	13.3	19.9	16.5

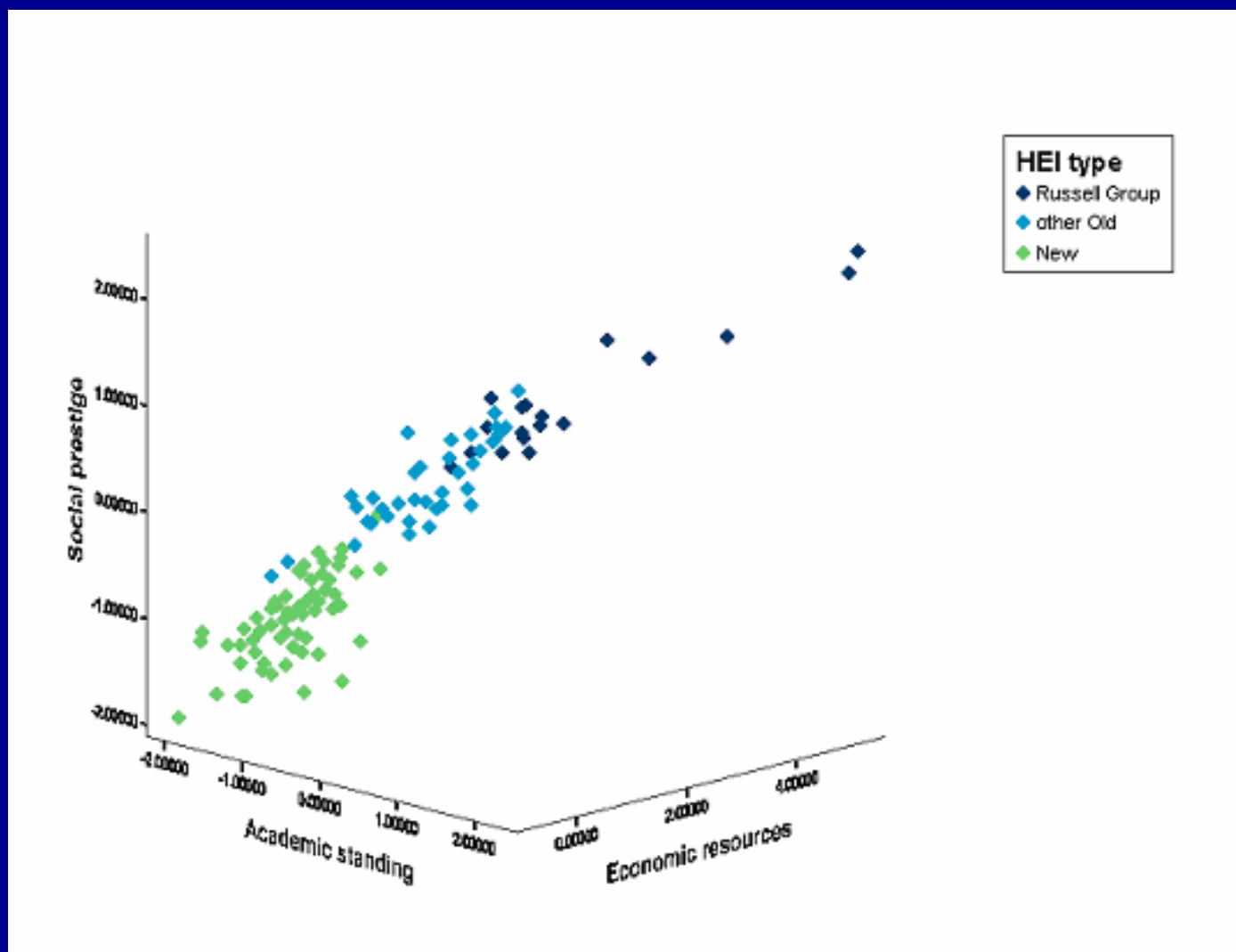
Differentiation and hierarchy among UK Universities

Table 3. Differentiation of HEI types by social prestige

	Russell Group	other Old	New	All
Sunday Times score 2001	779	637	390	525
Sunday Times score 2002	799	669	403	543
Sunday Times score 2003	794	672	423	555

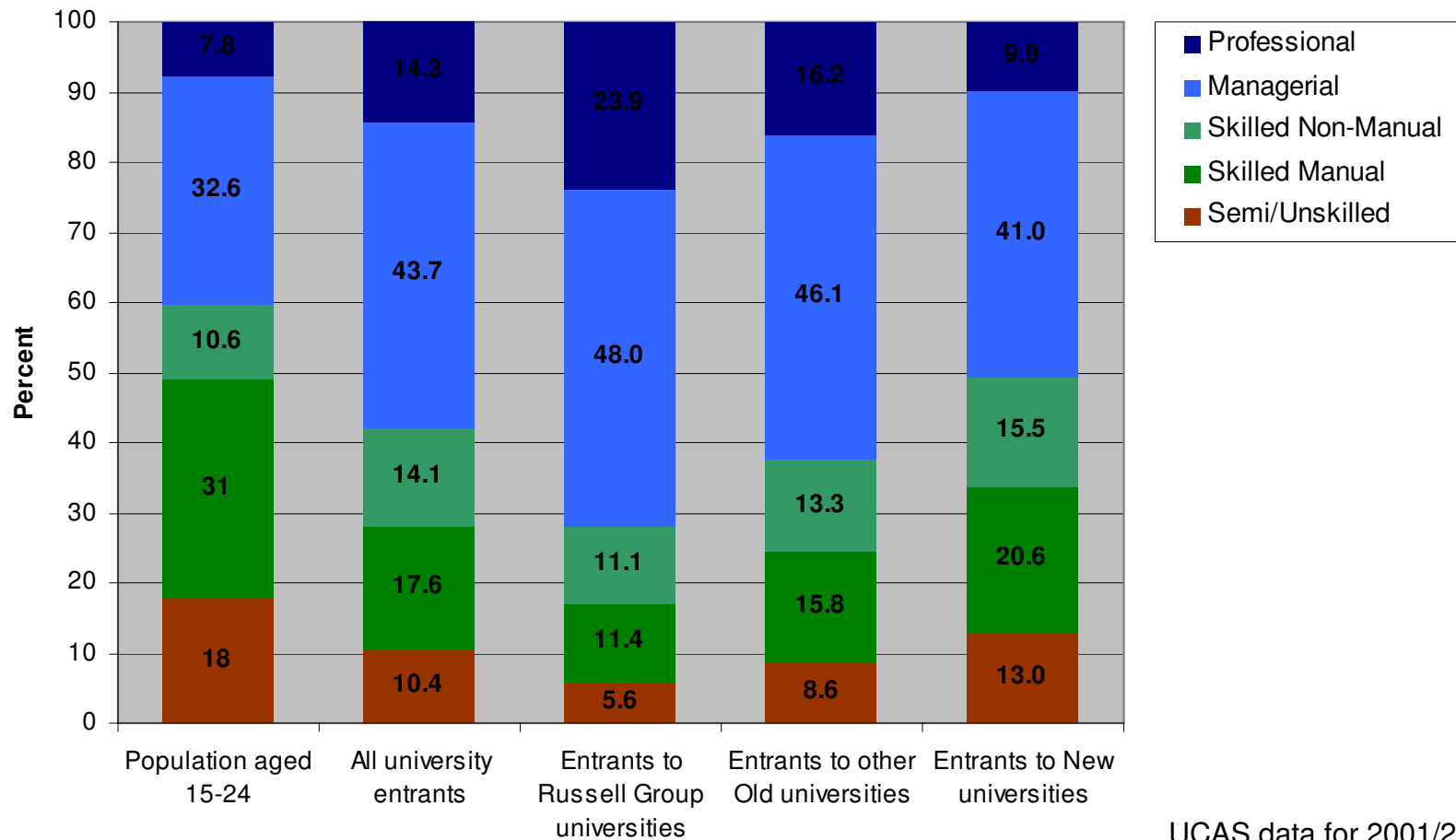
Composite scores based on: teaching quality (2.5 times weighting); research quality (2 weighting); average A-level/Highers points of entrants (2.5 times weighting); percentage of graduates in employment; percentage of firsts/2:1s awarded; student/staff ratio, and percentage drop-out rate.

The status hierarchy of UK HEIs



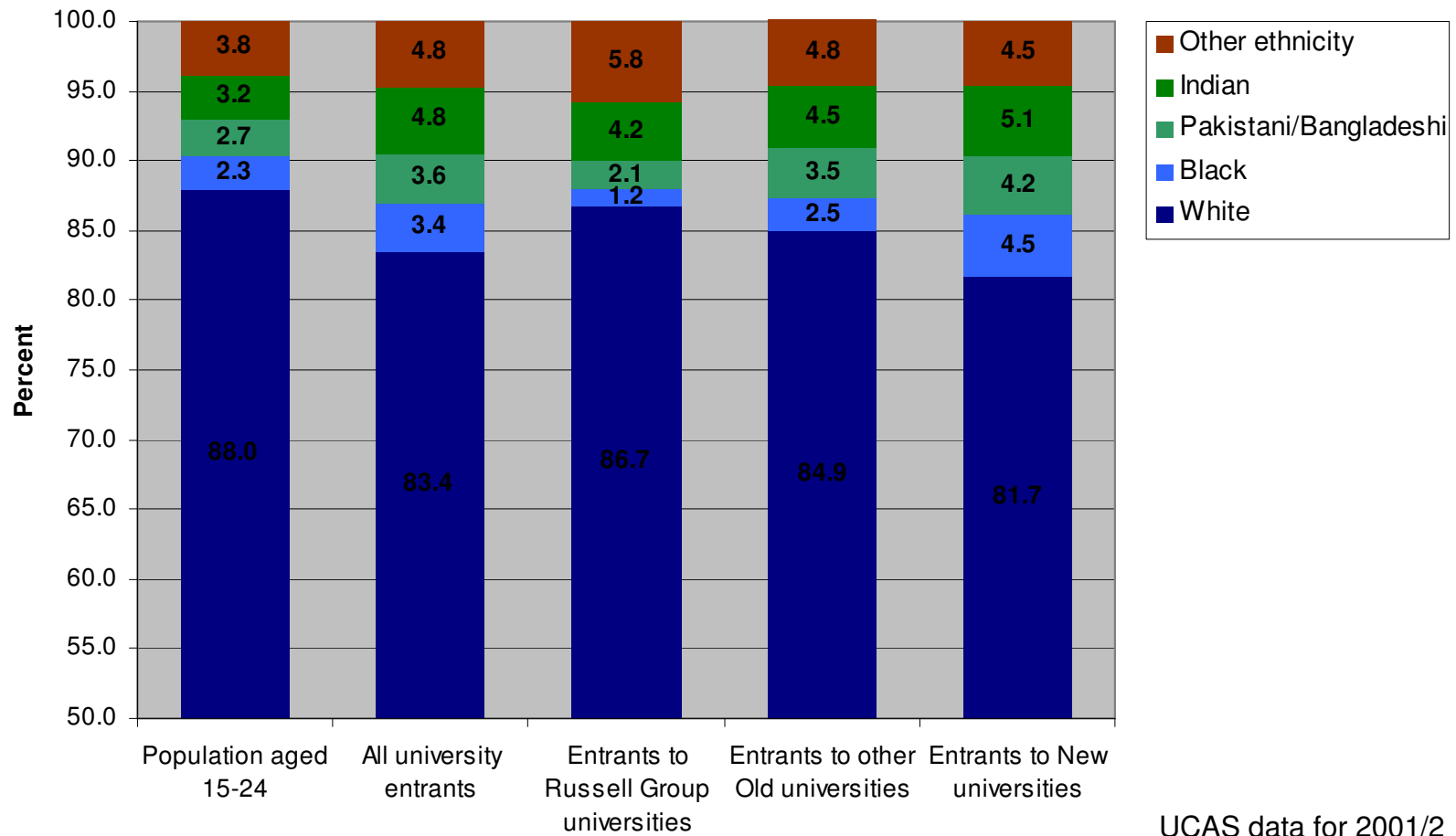
Social class composition of UK universities

Fig. 1. Class origins of entrants to full-time higher education in 2001



Ethnic origin composition of UK universities

Ethnic origins of entrants to full-time higher education in 2001



The role of applicants' choices

Table 1. Applications to Russell Group, Other Old and New universities (odds ratios)

	Russell Group university			Other Old university			New (post-1992) university		
Class origin (Professional)									
Managerial	.556	.617	.711	.727	.808	.899	1.999	1.839	1.613
Skilled non-manual	.393	.486	.614	.554	.683	.807	2.885	2.420	1.904
Skilled manual	.340	.429	.582	.527	.659	.808	4.109	3.342	2.435
Semi/Unskilled manual	.299	.407	.568	.456	.613	.762	4.574	3.499	2.428
Not known	.266	.400	.553	.413	.607	.752	3.772	2.665	1.793
Ethnic origin (White)									
Black Caribbean	.419	.608	.790	.666	.929	1.067	3.528	2.553	1.790
Black African/Other	.860	1.250	1.528	1.128	1.578	1.744	1.942	1.578	1.217
Pakistani	1.132	1.435	1.756	1.519	1.869	2.094	1.357	1.133	.888
Bangladeshi	1.000	1.175	1.493	1.456	1.702	1.958	1.556	1.391	1.082
Indian	1.233	1.332	1.542	1.457	1.568	1.713	.864	.815	.685
Chinese	1.778	1.812	1.820	1.599	1.603	1.597	.545	.538	.555
Mixed	1.083	1.100	1.105	1.069	1.086	1.091	.808	.807	.783
Other	1.229	1.415	1.660	1.448	1.673	1.840	.854	.809	.674
Not known	.616	.780	.902	.695	.862	.933	1.469	1.229	.999
Qualification (A-level)									
Degree		.979	1.296		.595	.599		.493	.284
Foundation degree/credits		.166	.219		.179	.178		4.341	2.492
Access course		.331	.411		.408	.393		2.231	1.380
Vocational FE		.185	.239		.279	.275		9.771	5.641
Not known		.361	.428		.373	.370		1.671	1.123
A-level points centred			1.190			1.110			.820
A-level points ctd & squared			1.007			.998			.996
Constant	1.821	2.199	1.284	1.981	2.331	1.956	1.326	1.154	2.662

The role of admissions decisions

Table 2. Offers of admission to Russell Group, Other Old and New universities (odds ratios)

	Russell Group university			Other Old university			New (post-1992) university		
Class origin (Professional)									
Managerial	.675	.736	.830	.816	.904	1.001	.944	1.011	1.001
Skilled non-manual	.498	.602	.736	.608	.756	.880	.871	1.023	1.059
Skilled manual	.439	.533	.709	.639	.791	.974	.982	1.076	1.130
Semi/Unskilled manual	.385	.511	.679	.537	.730	.886	.785	.933	.971
Not known	.332	.496	.663	.414	.647	.791	.627	.796	.819
Ethnic origin (White)									
Black Caribbean	.254	.338	.419	.287	.410	.480	.676	.820	.819
Black African/Other	.232	.318	.379	.285	.407	.443	.568	.788	.719
Pakistani	.370	.391	.465	.504	.611	.647	1.495	1.543	1.413
Bangladeshi	.431	.422	.503	.489	.549	.593	1.327	1.406	1.495
Indian	.528	.501	.518	.580	.596	.619	1.618	1.622	1.462
Chinese	1.132	1.096	1.044	1.126	1.139	1.121	1.197	1.205	.960
Mixed	.897	.875	.851	.825	.867	.899	.867	.931	1.035
Other	.491	.544	.594	.545	.661	.699	.931	1.127	1.099
Not known	.500	.630	.682	.527	.676	.725	.667	.837	.799
Qualification (A-level)									
Degree		.248	.345		.146	.834		.161	.123
Foundation degree/credits		.202	.283		.215	.218		.344	.293
Access course		.326	.431		.287	.291		.426	.379
Vocational FE		.130	.178		.243	.238		.647	.544
Not known		.266	.361		.292	.283		.278	.210
A-level points centred			1.145			1.111			1.010
A-level points ctd & squared			1.001			.998			.995
Constant	5.256	6.083	3.721	7.169	8.522	7.870	14.013	16.877	28.617

Summary and Conclusions

- Substantial **differentiation and hierarchy** among UK HEIs along dimensions of academic standing, economic resources and social prestige
- Sizeable **under-representation** of non-traditional students in top tier HEIs
 - ...due in part to **lower odds of application** to top tier universities on the part of lower social class and black candidates...
 - ...but also to **lower odds of admission** to top tier universities, especially for black and Asian candidates...
- Substantial mediating role of **prior qualifications** as major determinants of the odds of both application and admission to top tier universities
- Given recent evidence of **independent effects of HEI tier on HE participation outcomes**, stratified nature of UK HEIs cannot be ignored