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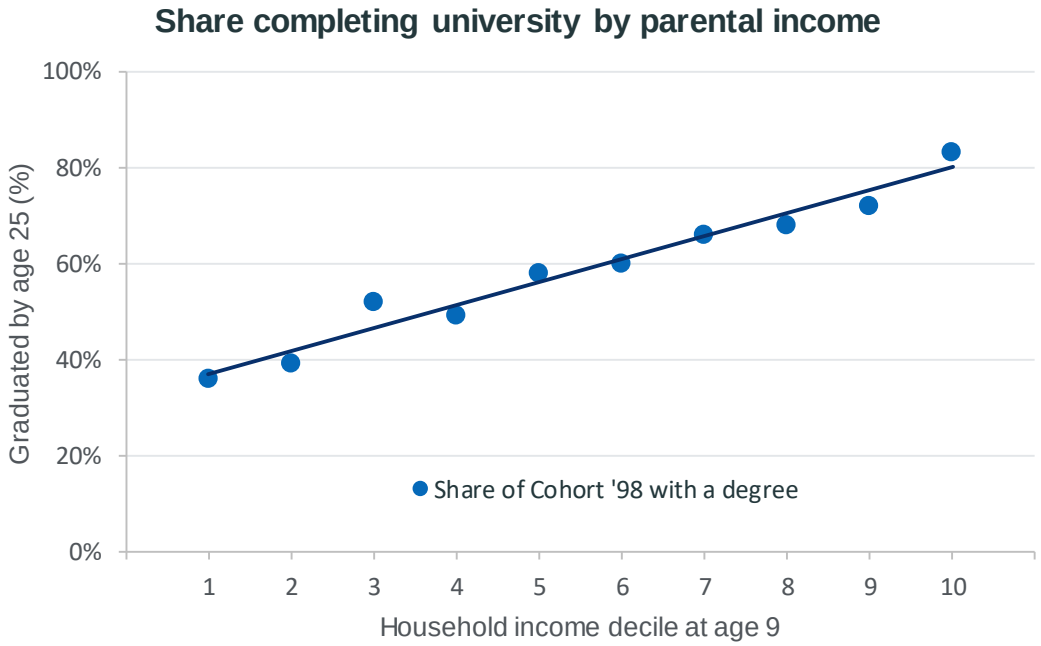
Socioeconomic gradients in educational attainment: evidence from Ireland

Libor Melioris

with Barra Roantree, Tara Mitchell and Martina Zanella
Trinity College Dublin
Growing Up in Ireland Annual Conference, 5 November 2026

This presentation contains authors' analysis of data from Growing Up in Ireland (GUI), which is funded by the Government of Ireland. GUI is managed as a partnership between the Department of Children, Disability and Equality (DCDE) and the Central Statistics Office (CSO). The CSO are responsible for the survey element of GUI. Results in this report are based on analyses of data from Research Microdata Files provided by the CSO. Neither the CSO nor DCDE take any responsibility for the views expressed or the outputs generated from these analyses.

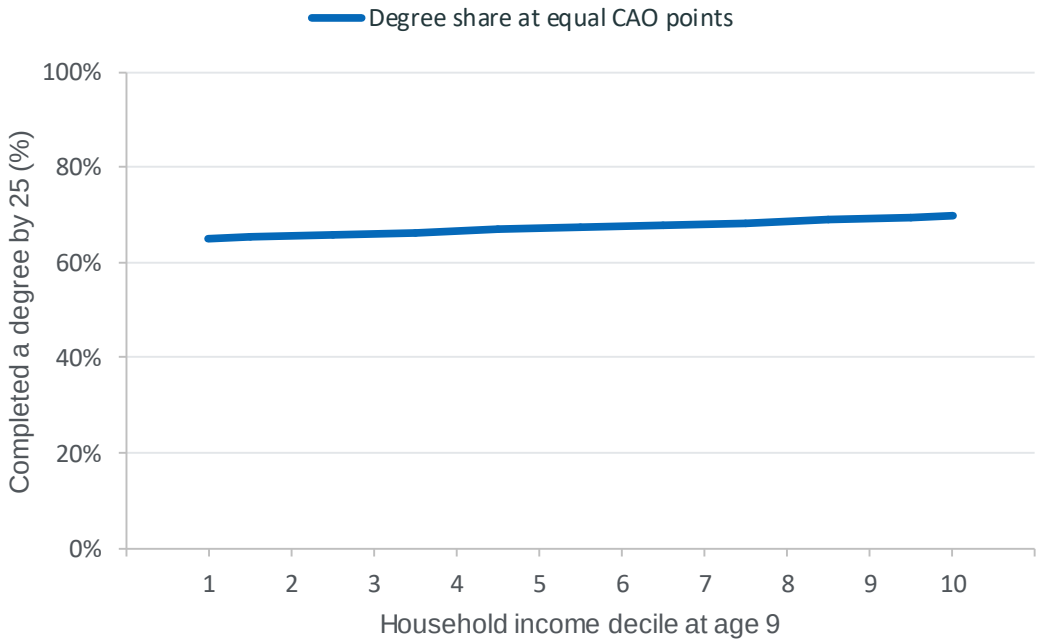
Sharp income gradient in university degrees by age 25



- **36%** in the lowest decile vs **83%** in the highest have a degree by 25
- Graduates from the richest fifth are about half as likely to study health and medicine …
- … and nearly four times as likely to attend TCD or UCD as those from the poorest fifth

Source: Growing Up in Ireland, Cohort '98 (ages 9 to 25), weighted. Income = equivalised household income decile at age 9.

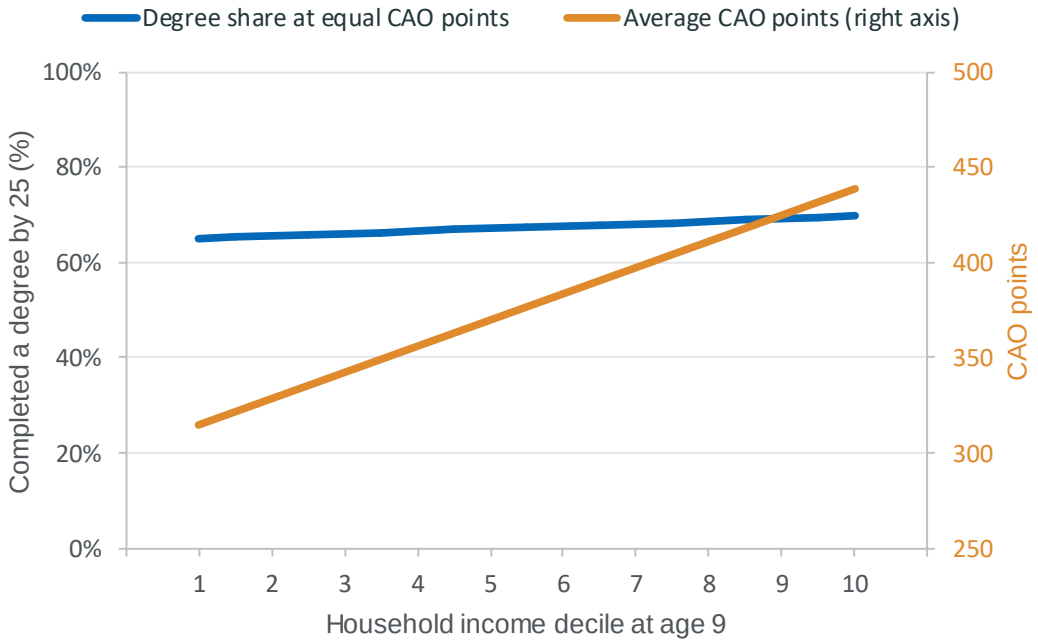
At equal CAO points income matters little



- Among students with the same CAO points, degree completion differs by only **4 percentage points** across the income distribution

Source: Growing Up in Ireland, Cohort '98 (ages 9 to 25), weighted. Degree share from a logit of degree by 25 on income perce ntile and CAO points (students with CAO points, N = 2,423). CAO line is a linear fit through average CAO points by income decile, Leaving Cert sitters only.

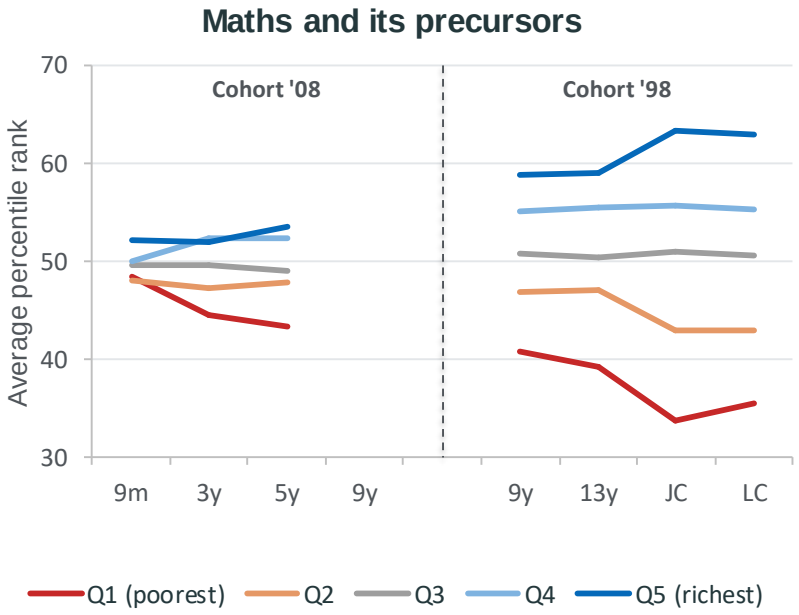
At equal CAO points income matters little, but CAO points rise steeply with income

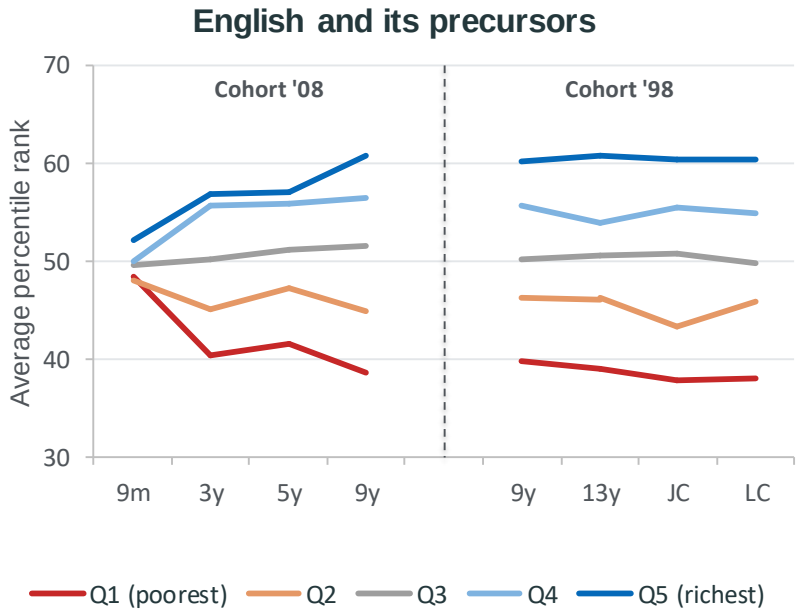


- Among students with the same CAO points, degree completion differs by only **4 percentage points** across the income distribution
- CAO points differ by **146 points** between the poorest and the richest tenth
- Points are the entry gate to higher education
- 14% of the poorest tenth never sit the LC, vs 1% of the richest (not included in this calculation)

Source: Growing Up in Ireland, Cohort '98 (ages 9 to 25), weighted. Degree share from a logit of degree by 25 on income percentile and CAO points (students with CAO points, N = 2,423). CAO line is a linear fit through average CAO points by income decile, Leaving Cert sitters only.

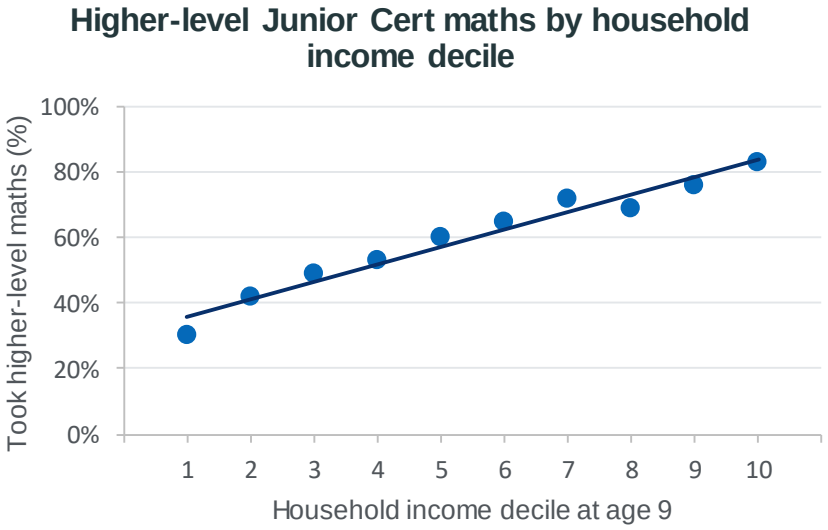
Income gaps in test scores appear early and keep widening in maths

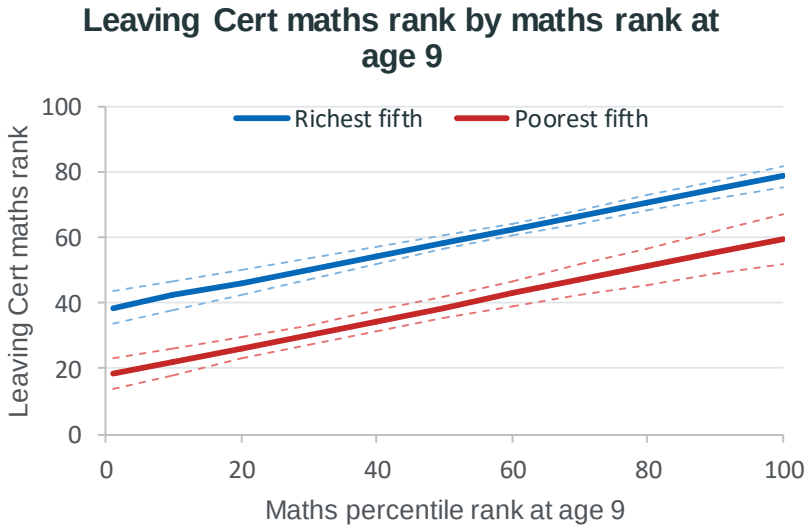




9m ASQ, 3 and 5 BAS, 9 and 13 Drumcondra, JC and LC exam grades. Cohort '08 has no maths test at 9. Cohort '08 from an earlie r CSO export. Cohort '98 weighted, LC including non-sitters at the bottom.

Poorer children take less higher-level maths and fall behind, even with the same maths at 9

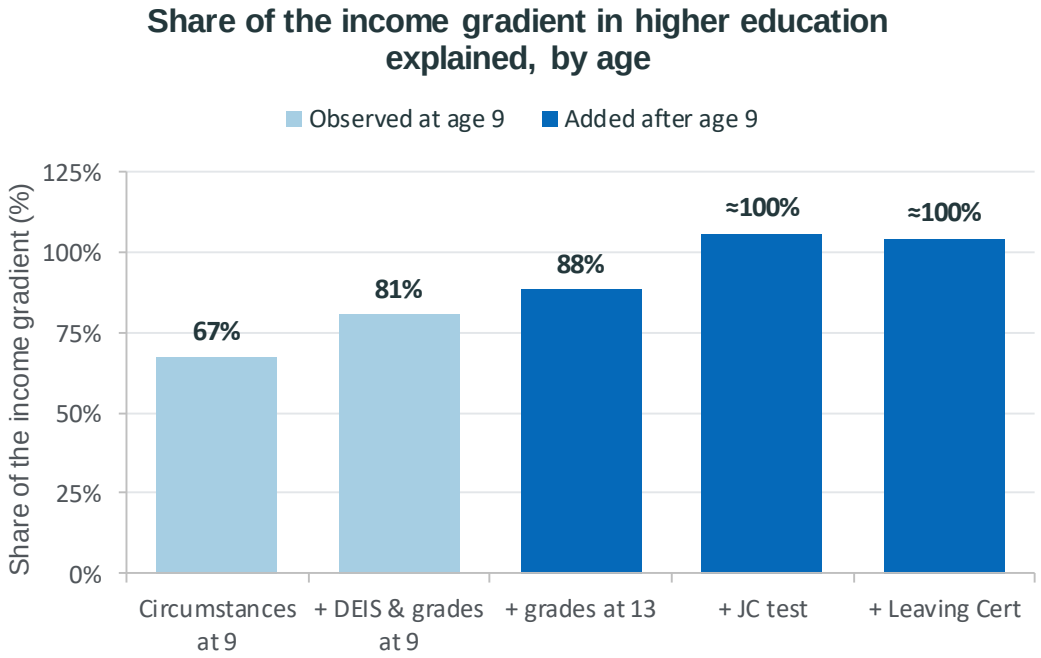




- **30%** of the poorest tenth take higher-level Junior Cert maths, compared with **83%** of the richest
- Children with the same maths rank at 9 end the Leaving Cert about **20 rank points** apart, depending on family income

Source: Growing Up in Ireland, Cohort '98 (ages 9 to 25), weighted. Income = equivalised household income decile at age 9. Right panel shows linear predictions, dashed lines are 95% confidence intervals.

By the Junior Cert, the income gap is fully reflected in school results



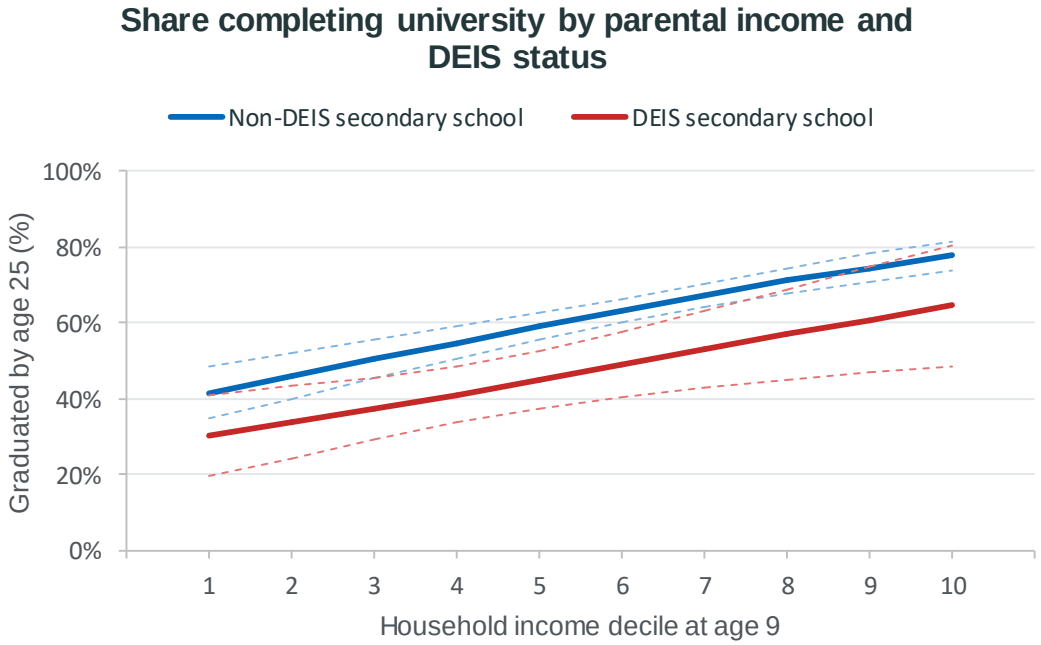
- What we observe at 9 already accounts for **four-fifths** of the income gradient
- Grades at 13 and Junior Cert results account for the rest, and the income gradient falls to about zero
- The Leaving Cert adds nothing further

Source: Growing Up in Ireland, Cohort '98 (ages 9 to 25), weighted. Income = equivalised household income decile at age 9.

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However, not just individual circumstances that matter

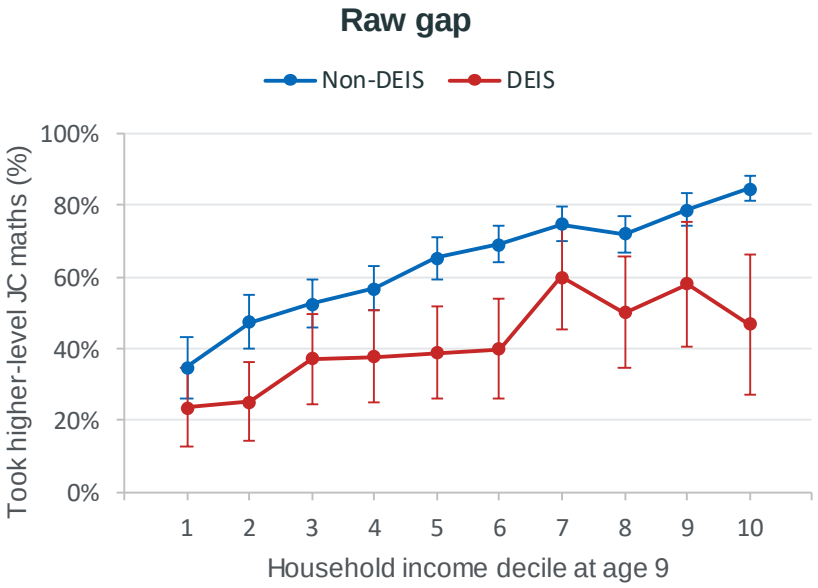
At similar family income, fewer pupils from DEIS schools complete a degree

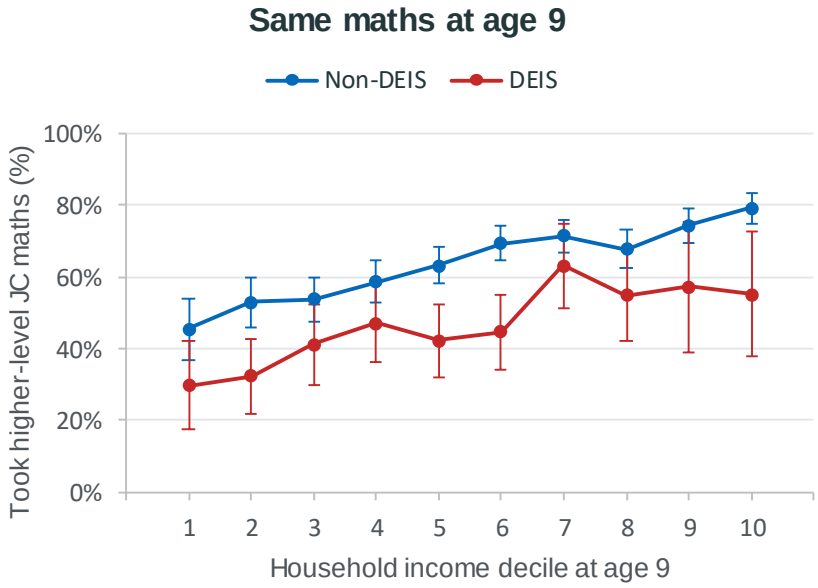


- DEIS pupils are about **13 percentage points** less likely to have a degree by 25 than non-DEIS pupils with the same family income
- The gap is almost constant across income deciles

Source: Growing Up in Ireland, Cohort '98 (ages 9 to 25), weighted. Income = equivalised household income decile at age 9. Logit predicted margins, dashed lines are 95% confidence intervals.

Higher-level maths uptake lower in DEIS schools, even conditional on income/grades





- At the same income, the DEIS gap is about 22 points raw and about 17 points with the same maths at 9

Source: Growing Up in Ireland, Cohort '98 (ages 9 to 25), weighted. Income = equivalised household income decile at age 9. Logit predicted margins with 95% confidence intervals.

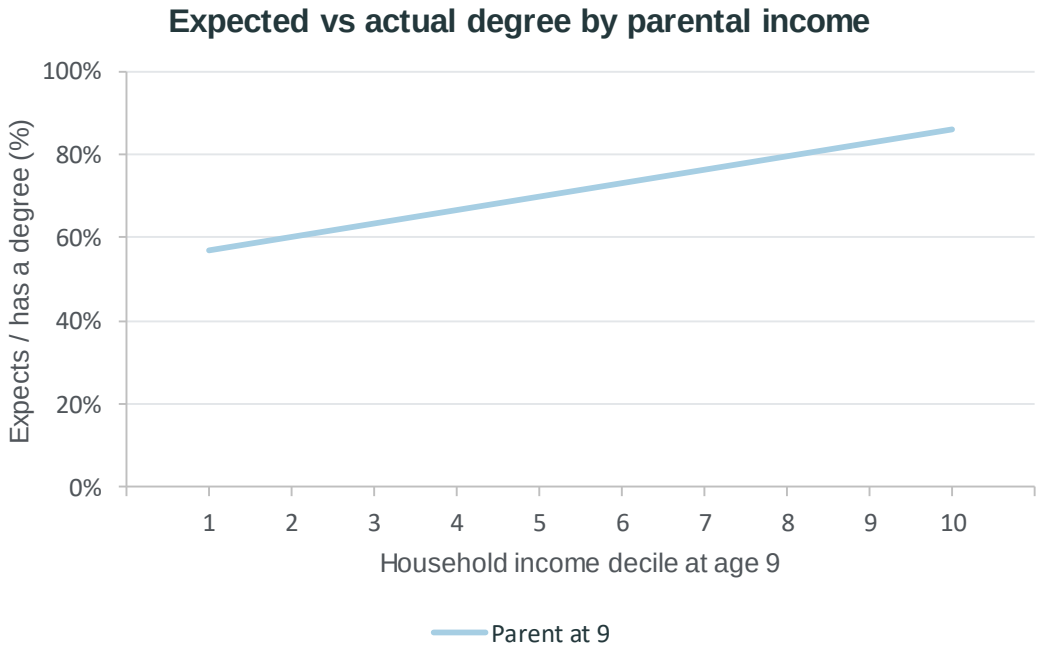


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Expectations

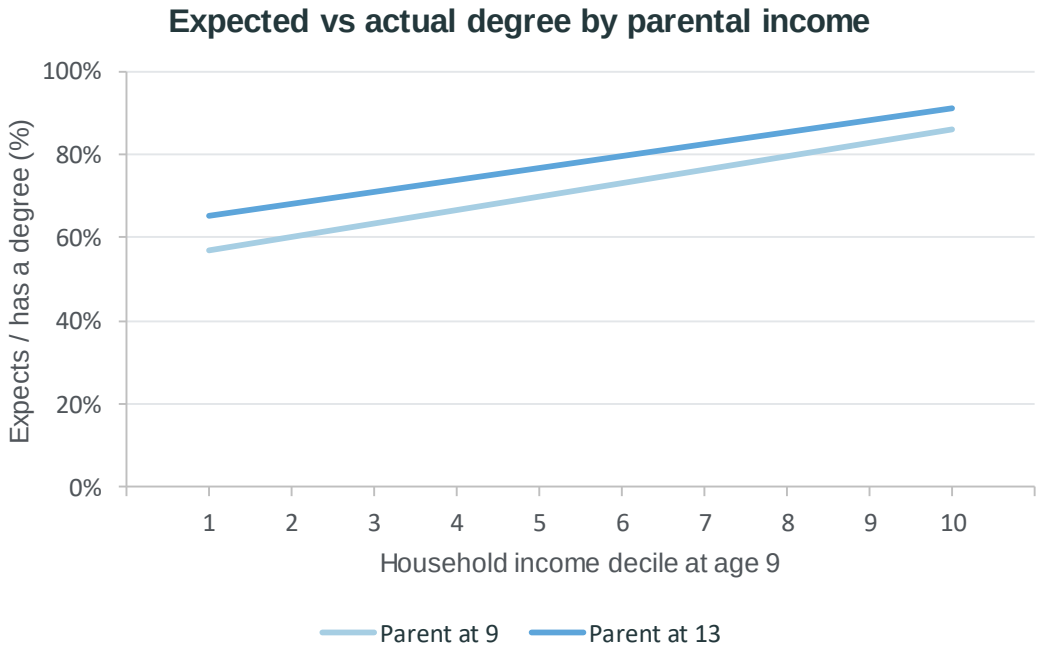
Also evidence that own- and parental-expectations important

Parents expect a lot, and the gap to outcomes is widest in poorer families



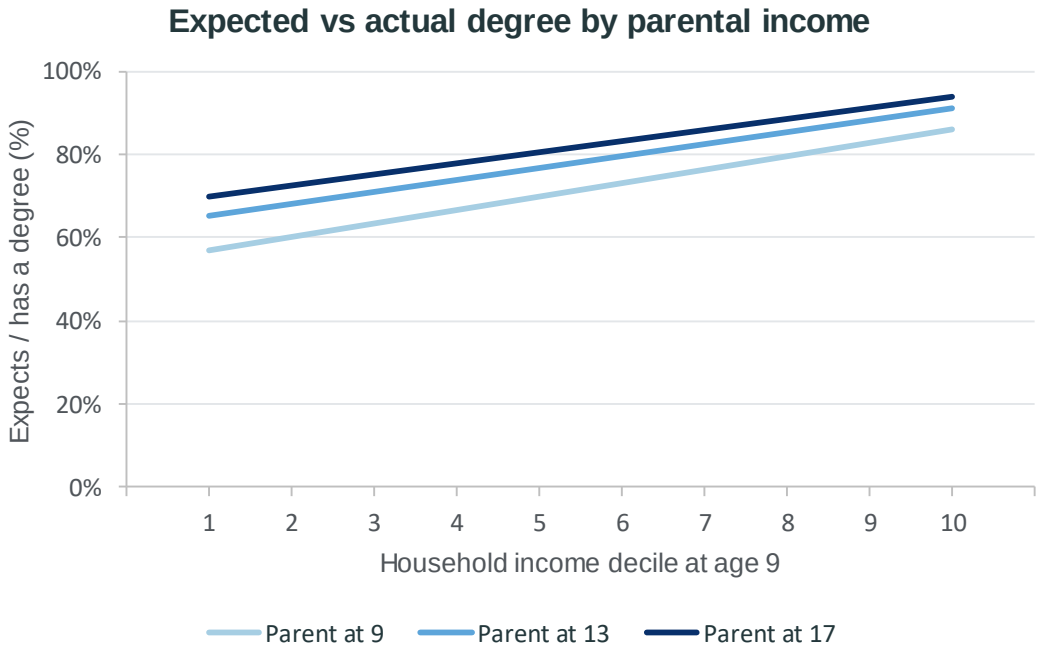
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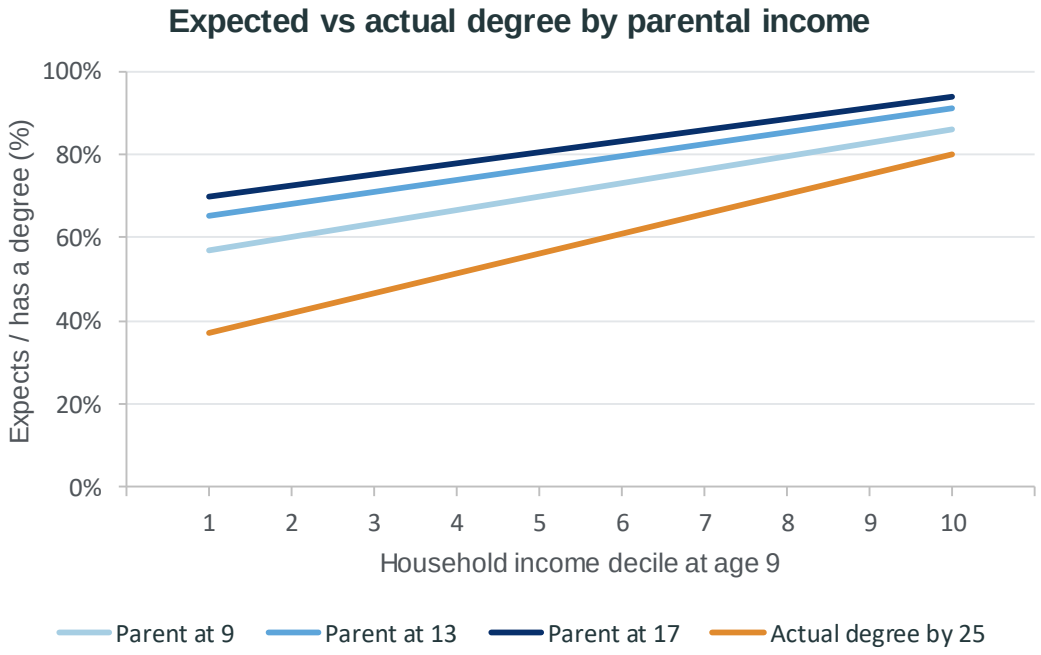
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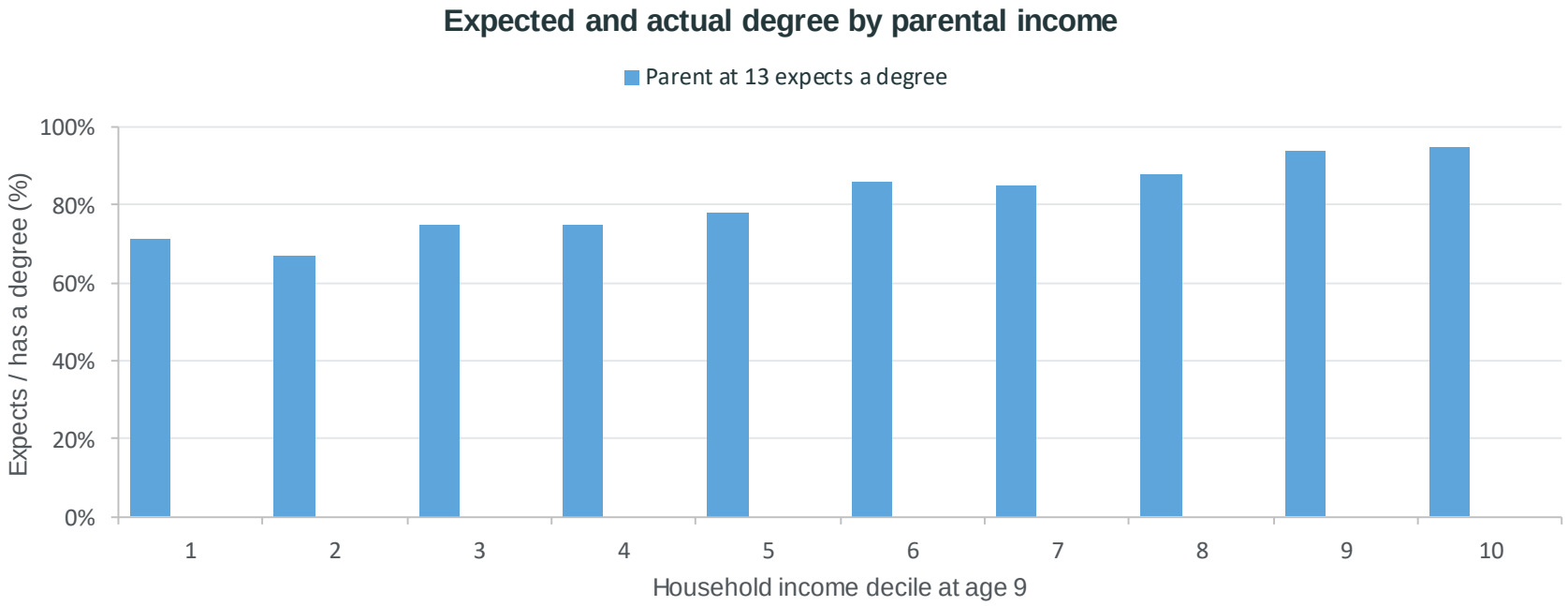
Expectation at 17 vs outcome

Decile at 9	Poorest	Richest
Parent at 17 expects	70%	94%
Actual degree	37%	80%
Shortfall (p.p.)	**33**	**14**

- Parents' expectations rise as their child grows older
- The difference between expectations and later outcomes is larger in poorer families

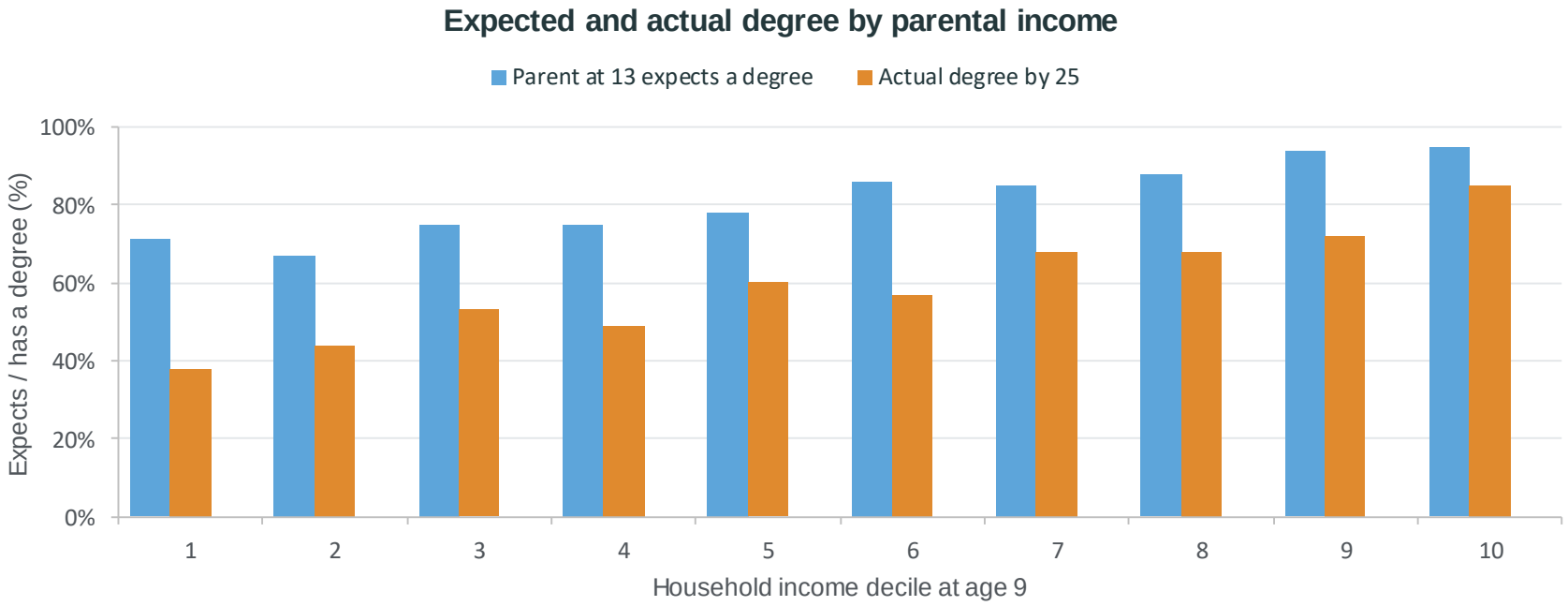
Source: Growing Up in Ireland, Cohort '98 (ages 9 to 25), weighted. Income = equivalised household income decile at age 9.

Children's expectations are more accurate than their parents'



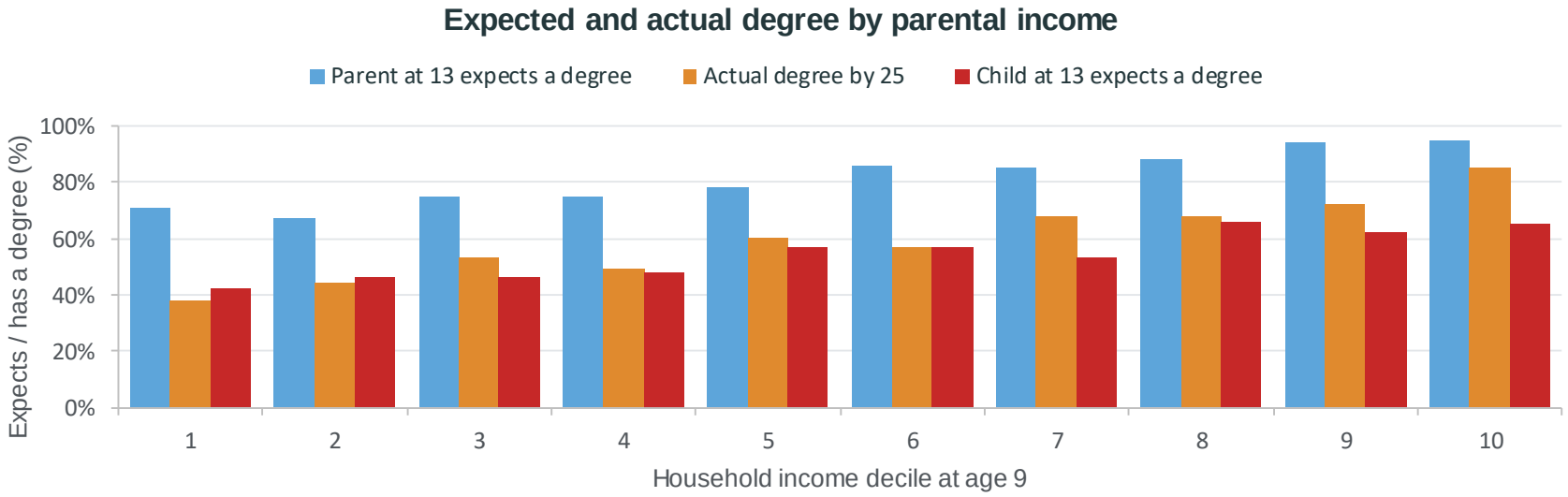
Source: Growing Up in Ireland, Cohort '98 (ages 9 to 25), weighted. Income = equivalised household income decile at age 9.

Children's expectations are more accurate than their parents



Source: Growing Up in Ireland, Cohort '98 (ages 9 to 25), weighted. Income = equivalised household income decile at age 9.

Children's expectations are more accurate than their parents



- In the lower 60% of the income distribution, children's expectations are close to the share who later complete a degree
- In richer families, children's expectations are below the share who later complete a degree

Source: Growing Up in Ireland, Cohort '98 (ages 9 to 25), weighted. Income = equivalised household income decile at age 9.

Next steps

- The next wave of Cohort '08 will show how income gaps in education have changed over a decade
- Cohort '08 Junior Cert results trace gaps back to early childhood, which Cohort '98 cannot
- Cohort '08 has a larger sample of children with non-Irish-born parents, allowing analysis by the origin of mother and father



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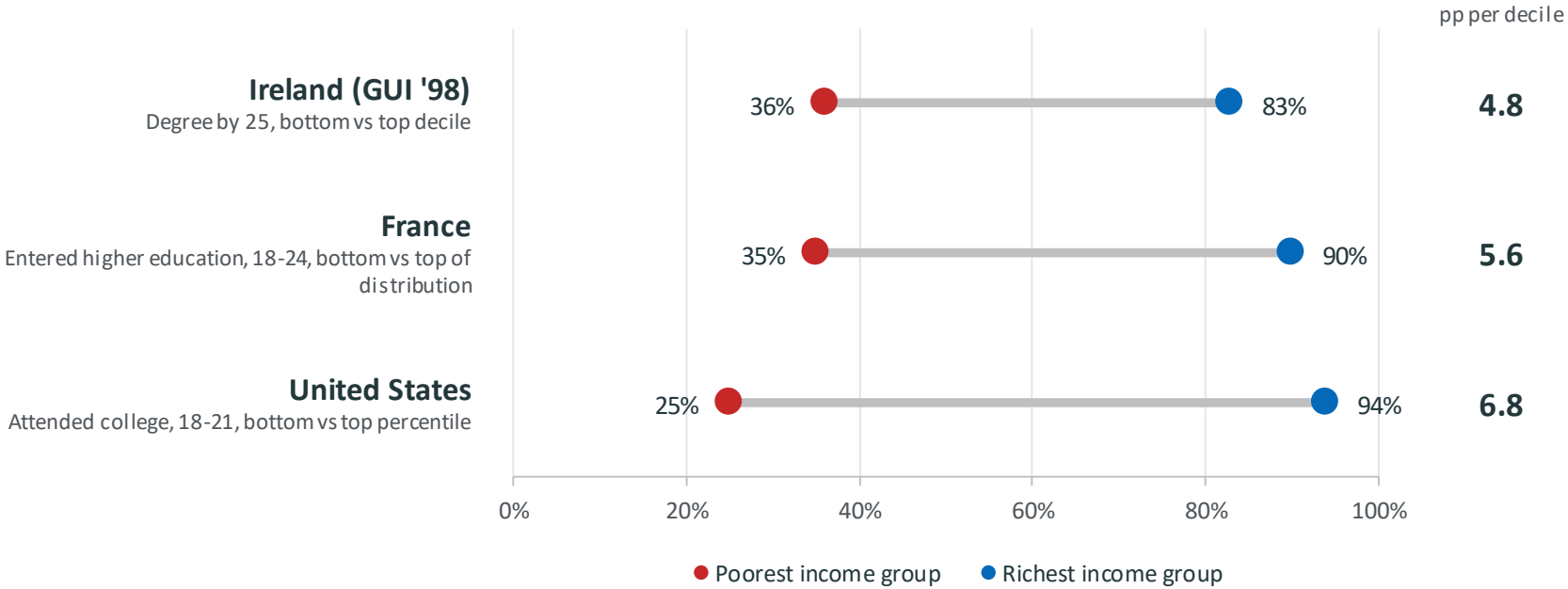
Thank you



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Additional slides

Income gradients in higher education in Ireland, France and the United States



Ireland: GUI Cohort '98, slide 2. France: Bonneau & Grobon (2022), WID WP 2022/01, ENRJ 2014. US: Chetty, Hendren, Kline & Sa ez (2014), QJE, Fig. IV A, slope 0.675, levels read from the figure. Outcomes and ages differ (completion in Ireland, entry in France and the US).