

Social class inequalities in education and the life course

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Structure

- Introduction to the British Birth Cohort Studies
- Insights from important studies using the cohorts
- Examples from my own research:
 - Parenting and inequalities in the early years
 - Reading and learning development in adolescence
 - Access to elite Higher Education
 - Access to elite occupations and top incomes in mid-life

British Birth Cohort Studies

National Survey of Health and Development (NSHD)

Began in 1946

National Child Development Study (NCDS)

Began in 1958

1970 British Cohort Study (BCS70)

Began in 1970

Millennium Cohort Study (MCS)

Began in 2000

**CLS
based**

Value of the cohort studies

“Studying ourselves is something the British do exceptionally well. Social scientists, geneticists, psychologists, demographers, medical researchers and epidemiologists flock here from all over the world, seeking answers to fundamental questions from our unique series of birth cohort studies. No one else has anything like them.”
(Polly Toynbee, Guardian)

BCS70

Data collected on births and families of just over 17,000 babies born in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland in one week in 1970.

Medical and social data.

Sources of information

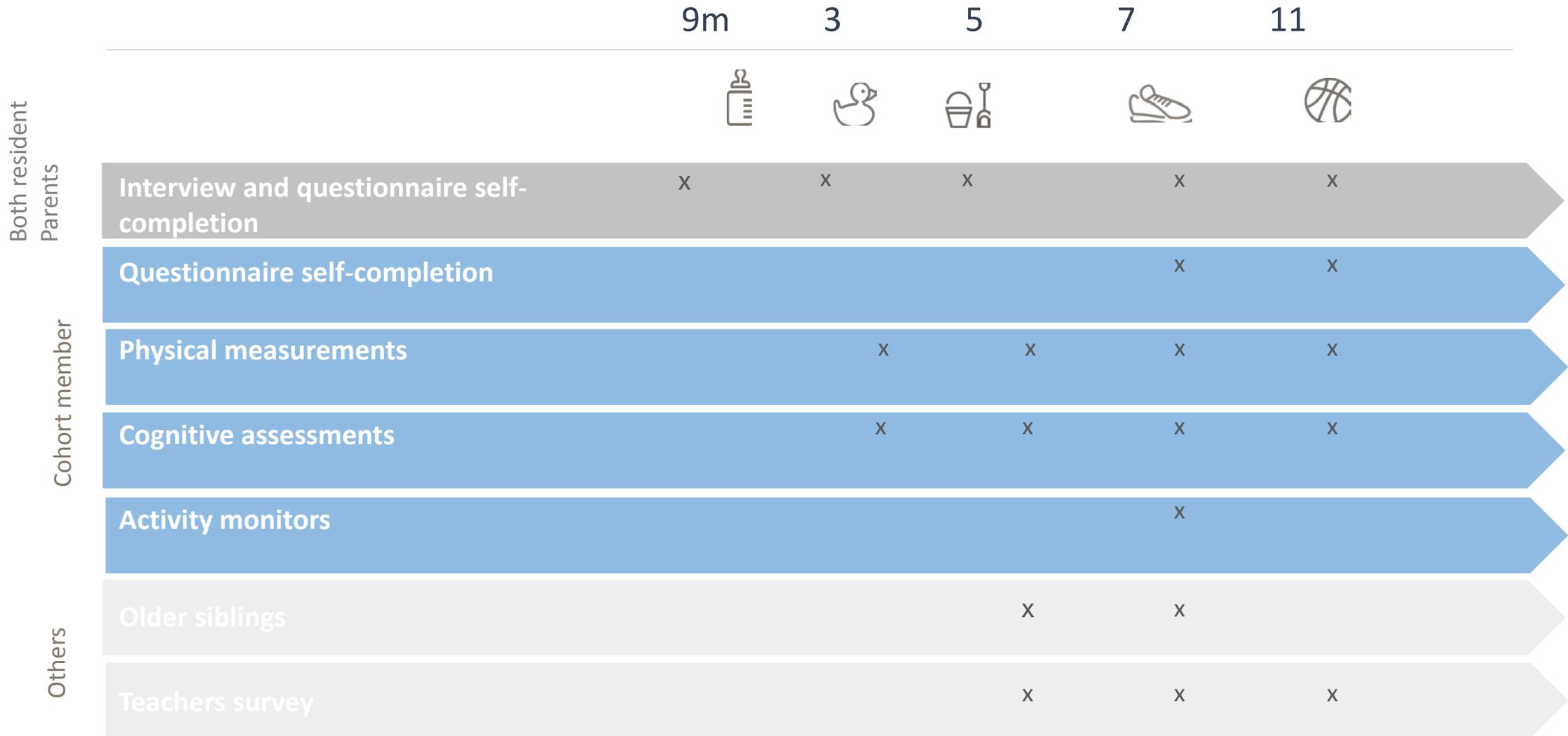
	1970	1975	1980	1986	1996	2000	2004	2008	2012	2016
	Birth	5	10	16	26	29/30	34	38	42	46
 Respondents	Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent						
		School	School	School						
				Cohort member	Cohort member	Cohort member	Cohort member	Cohort member	Cohort member	Cohort member
							Children (1 in 2)			
 Instruments	Medical	Tests Medical	Tests Medical	Tests Medical					Tests	Tests Medical

UK Millennium Cohort Study (MCS)

- Longitudinal birth cohort study of ~19,000 children born in ~400 areas of UK at turn of the millennium
- Gap of 30 years since last cohort
- Oversamples for:
 - - Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland
 - - Areas with high child poverty
 - - In England, areas with higher ethnic minority populations
- Births over ~ 12 month period

- Funded by Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and UK government departments

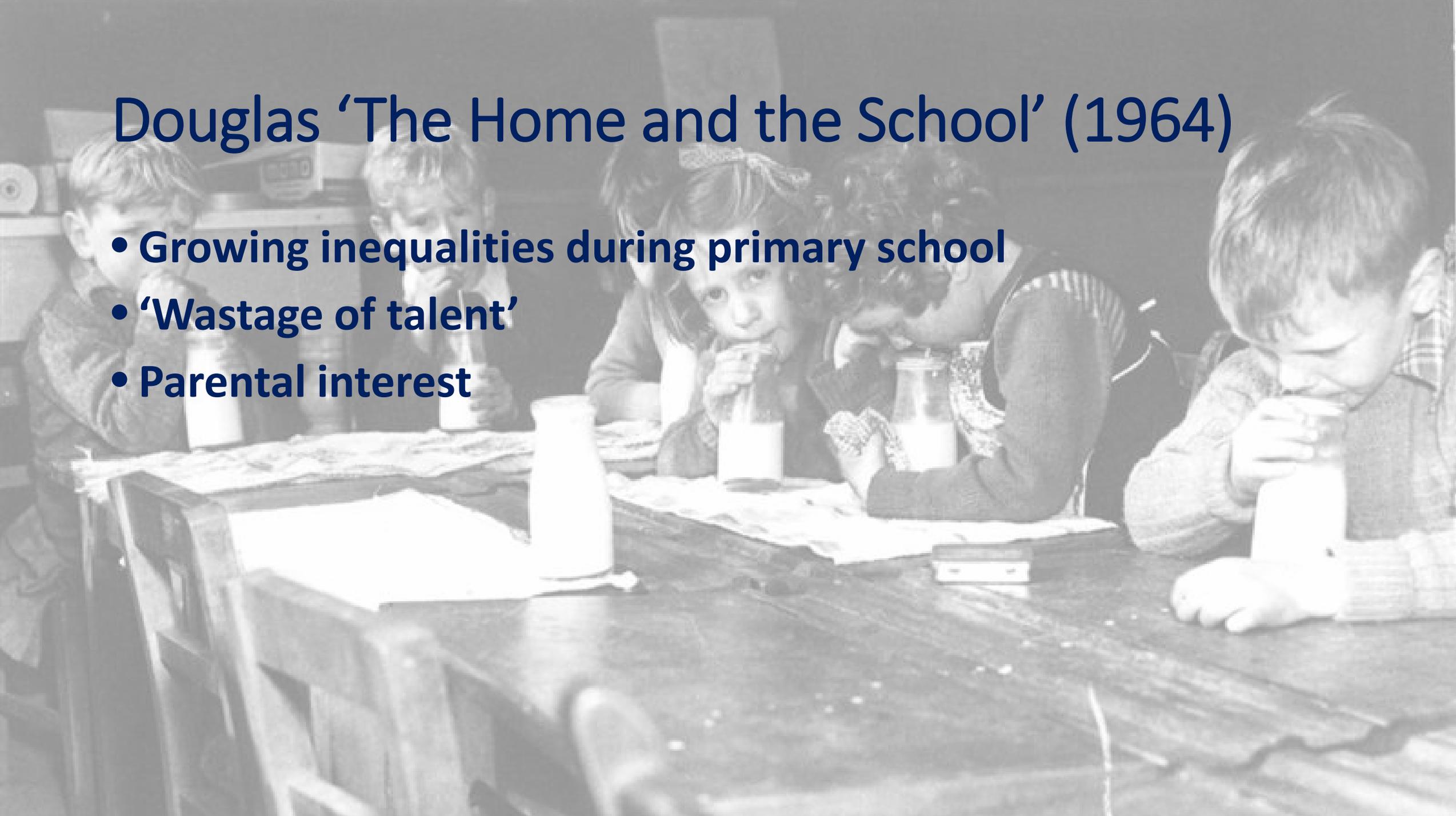
MCS



Insights on education and social
mobility

Douglas 'The Home and the School' (1964)

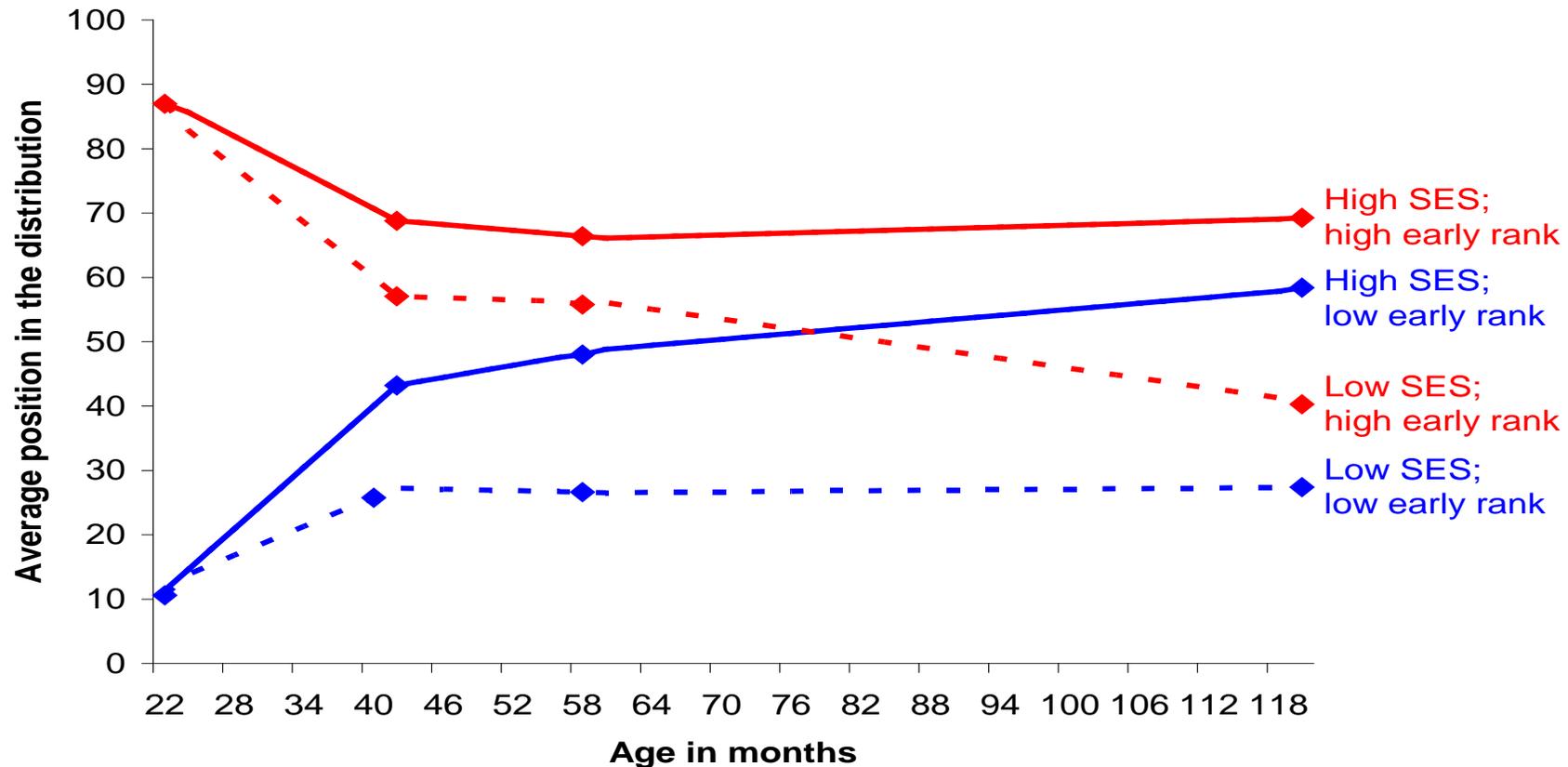
- **Growing inequalities during primary school**
- **'Wastage of talent'**
- **Parental interest**



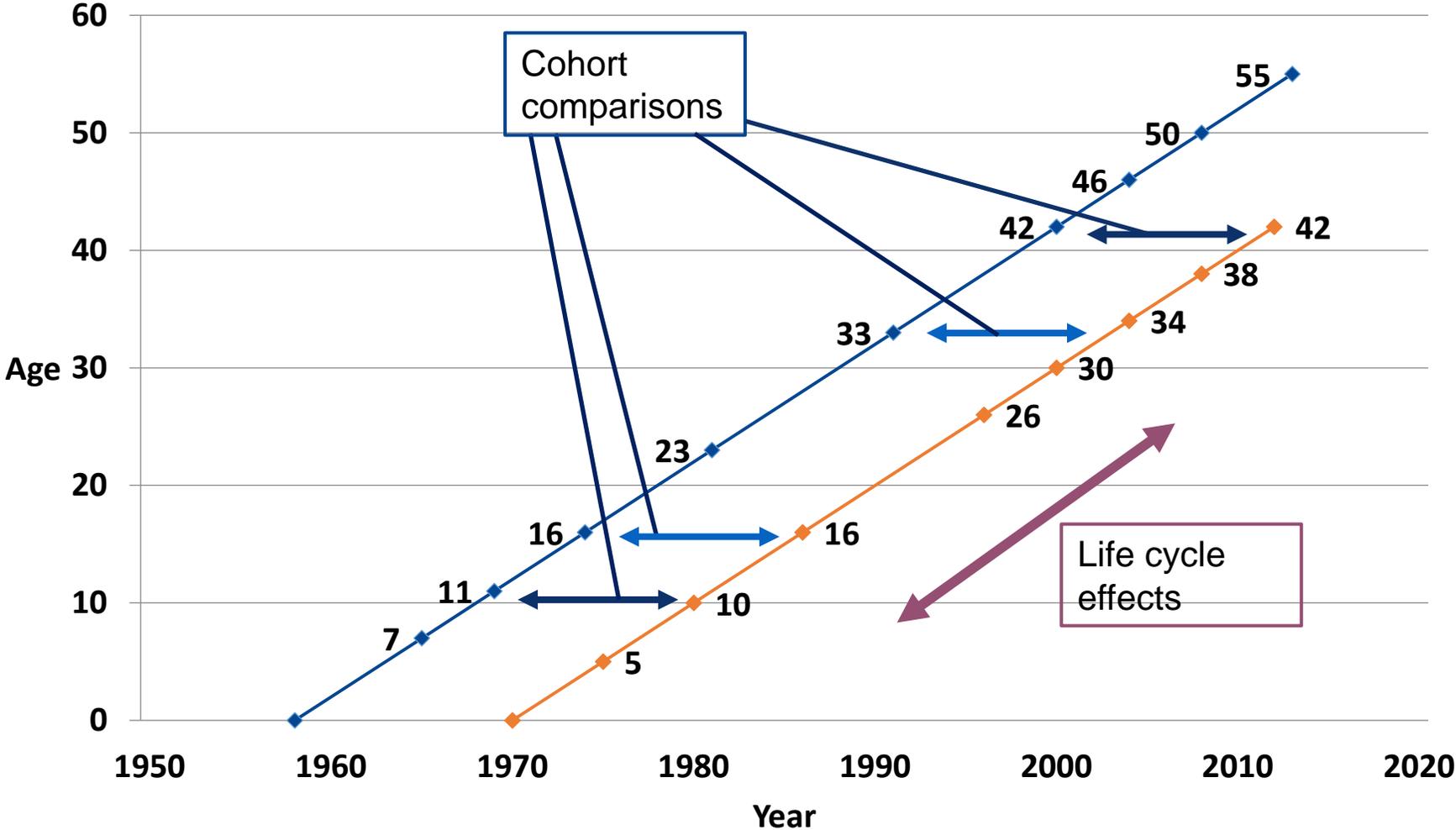
Early unequal trajectories in cognition

Feinstein, L. (2003). Inequality in the early cognitive development of British children in the 1970 cohort. *Economica*, 70 (277), 73-97.

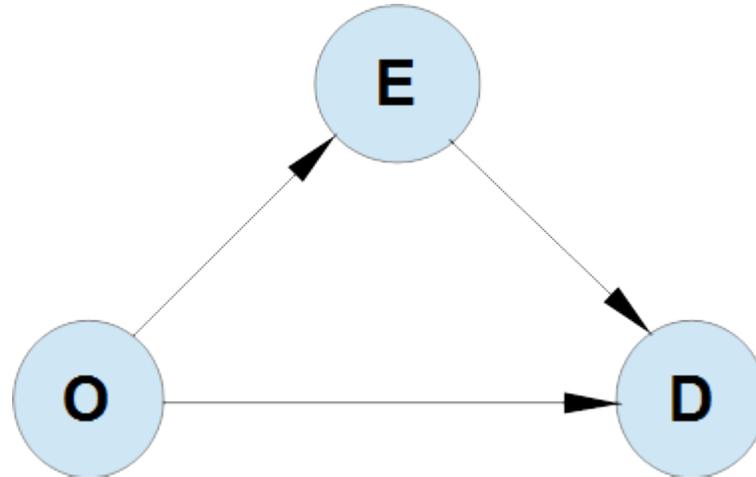
Included in the Every Child Matters Green Paper in (2003), (Field 2010) and (Marmot 2010) reviews of poverty and life chances.



Cross cohort comparisons



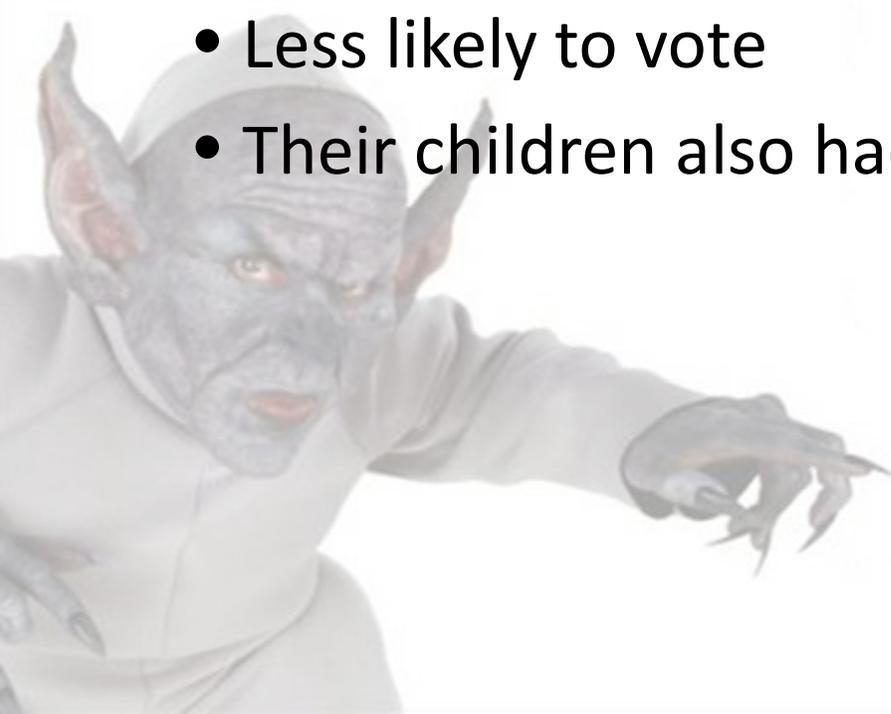
Social mobility



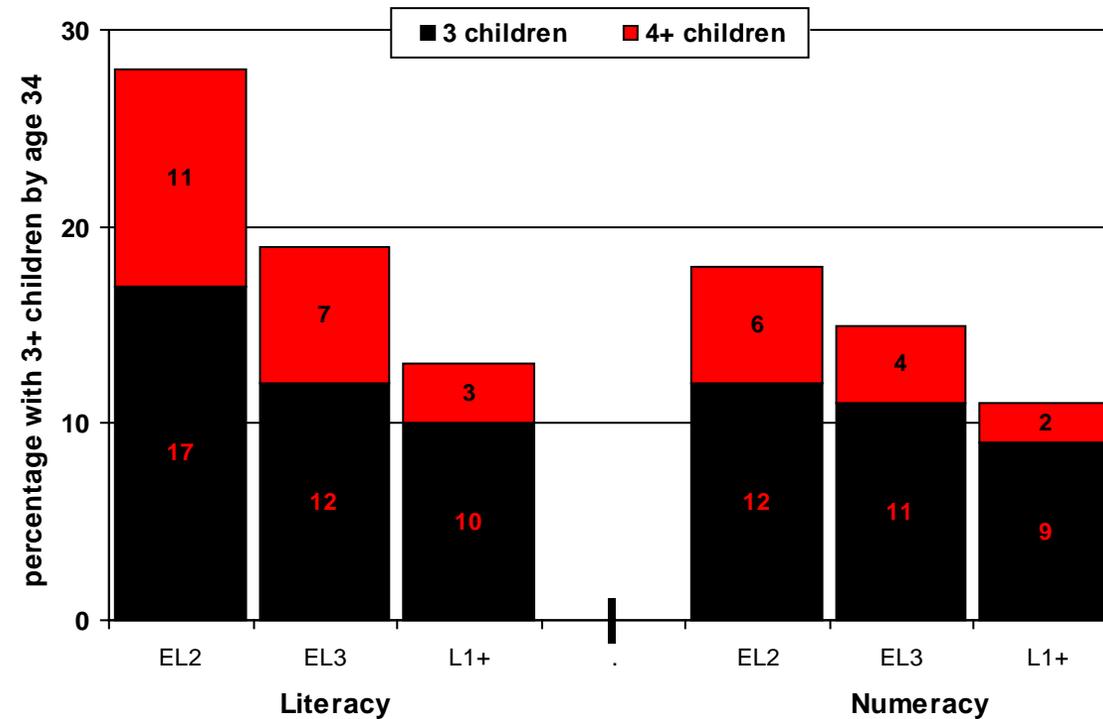
- Blanden, J., Goodman, A., Gregg, P., & Machin, S. (2004). Changes in intergenerational mobility in Britain. *Generational income mobility in North America and Europe*, 122-46.
- Goldthorpe, J. H., & Jackson, M. (2007). Intergenerational class mobility in contemporary Britain: political concerns and empirical findings. *The British journal of sociology*, 58(4), 525-546.
- Boliver, V., & Swift, A. (2011). Do comprehensive schools reduce social mobility? 1. *The British journal of sociology*, 62(1), 89-110.

Adult Literacy and Numeracy (Bynner and Parsons)

- Does numeracy matter more? (2005)
- New light on literacy and numeracy (2006)
- Poor basic skills linked to unemployment and depression
- Less likely to vote
- Their children also had relatively poor skills

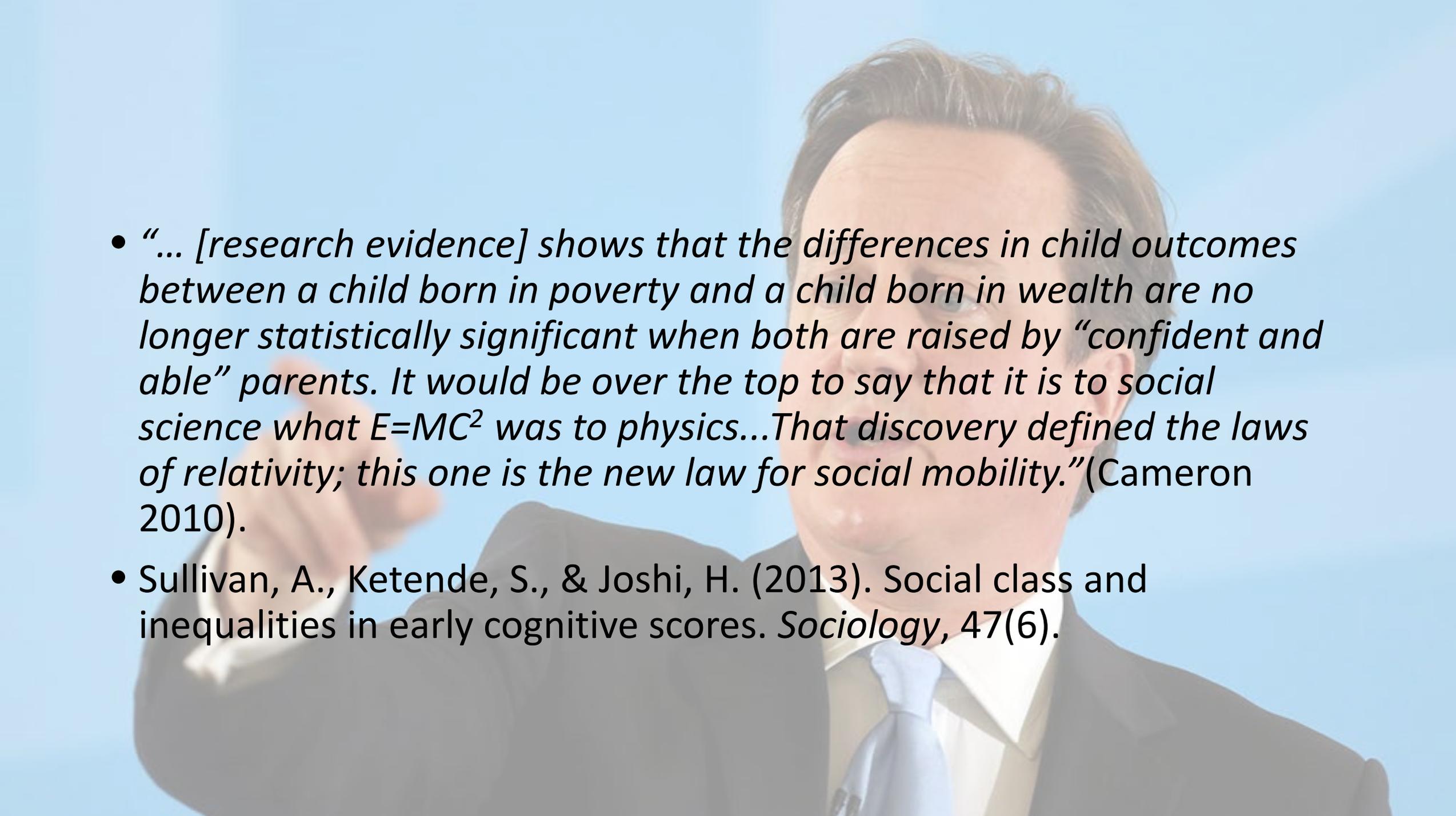


Women's literacy and numeracy against number of children

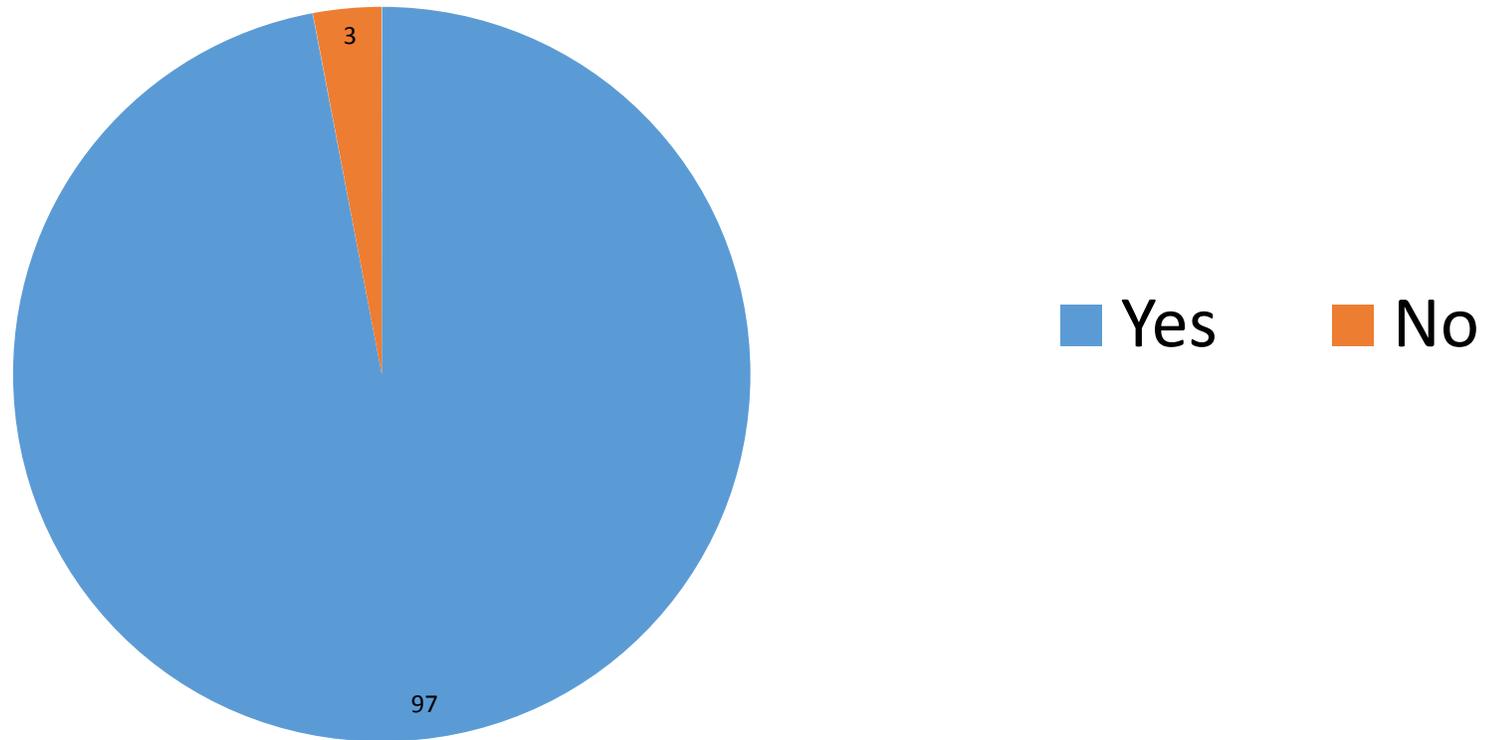


Explaining social class inequalities

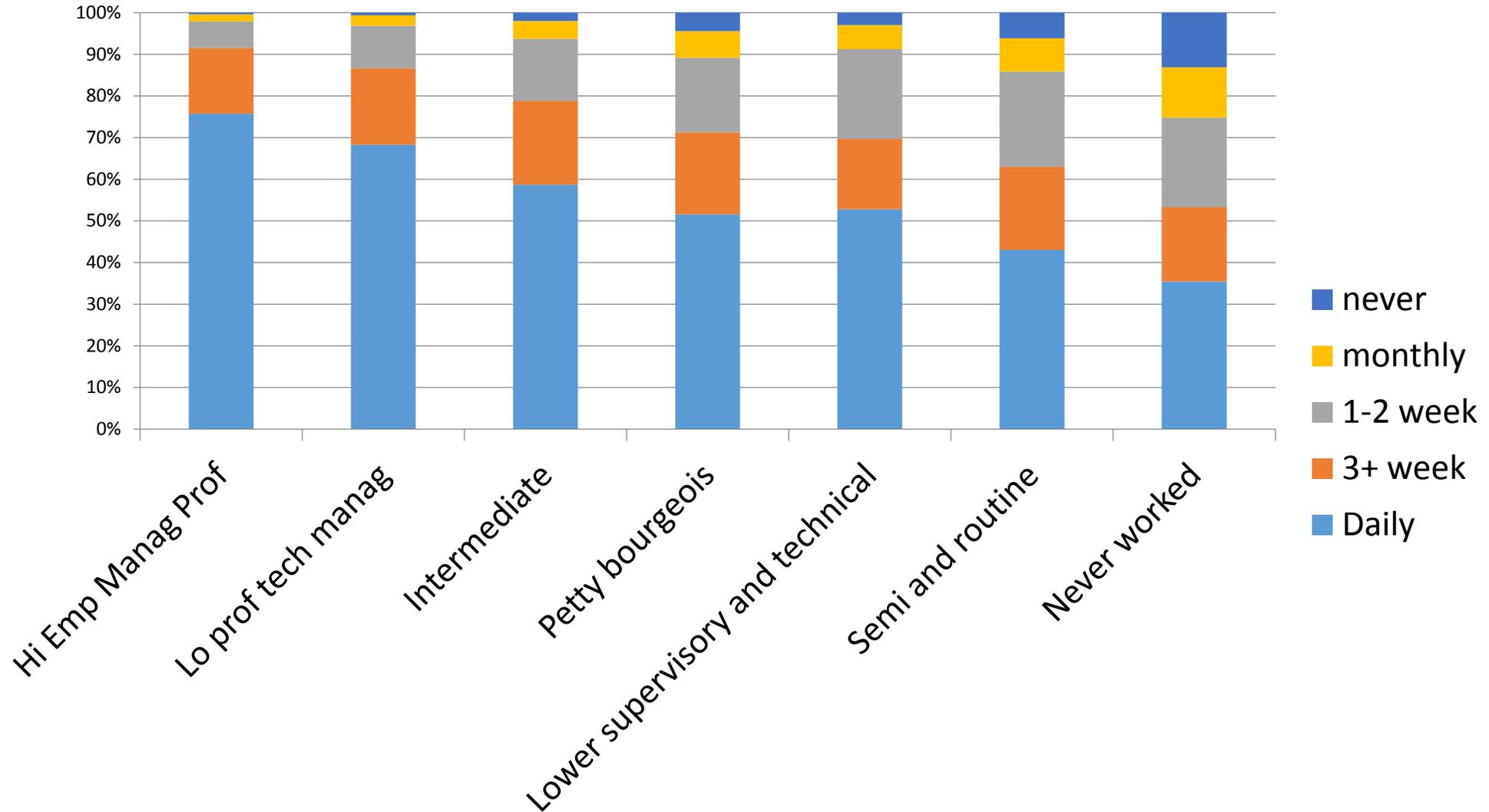
Evidence from MCS and BCS70

- 
- *“... [research evidence] shows that the differences in child outcomes between a child born in poverty and a child born in wealth are no longer statistically significant when both are raised by “confident and able” parents. It would be over the top to say that it is to social science what $E=MC^2$ was to physics...That discovery defined the laws of relativity; this one is the new law for social mobility.”(Cameron 2010).*
 - Sullivan, A., Ketende, S., & Joshi, H. (2013). Social class and inequalities in early cognitive scores. *Sociology*, 47(6).

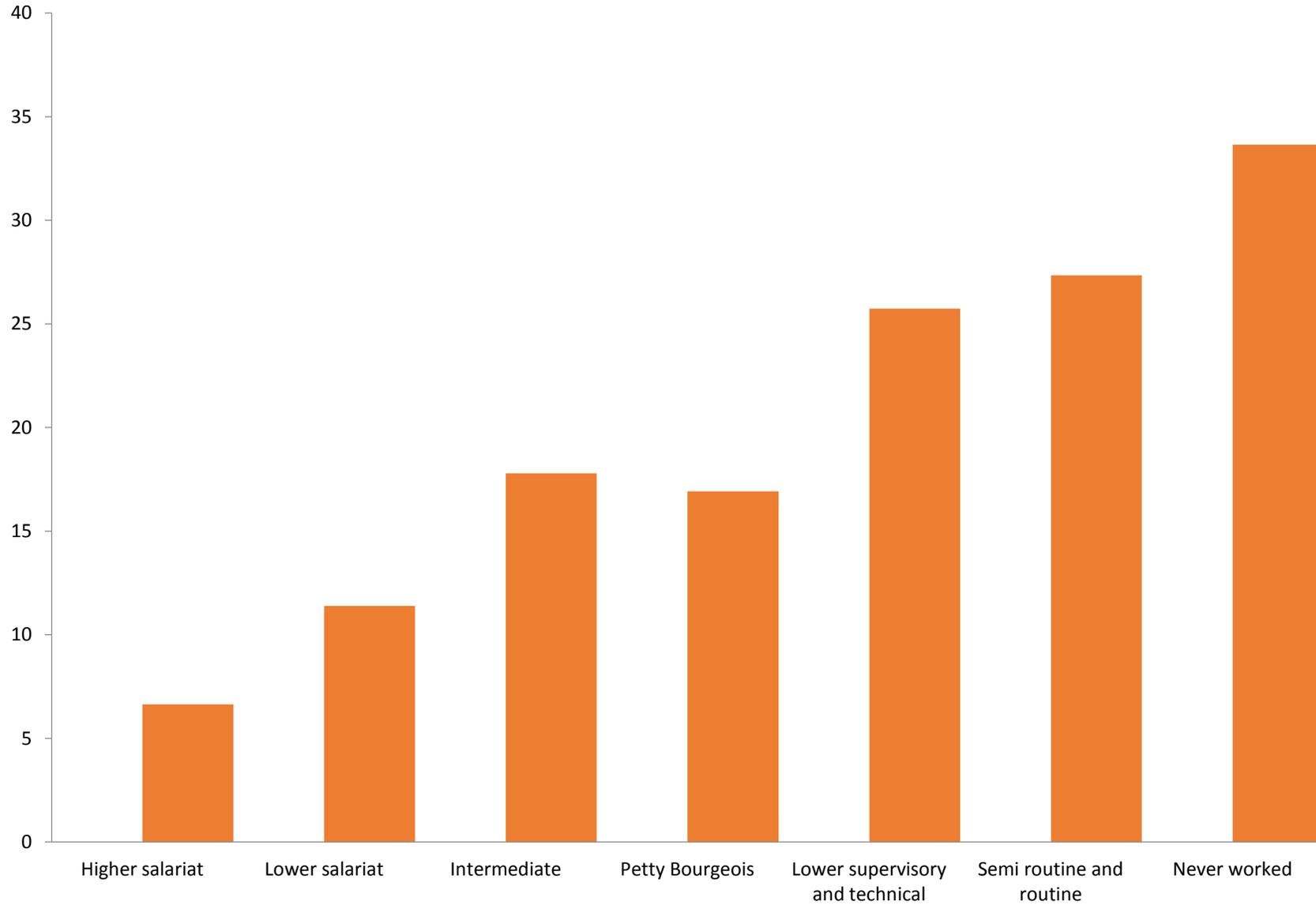
Poverty of Aspirations?: Do you want your child to go to university? (MCS age 7)



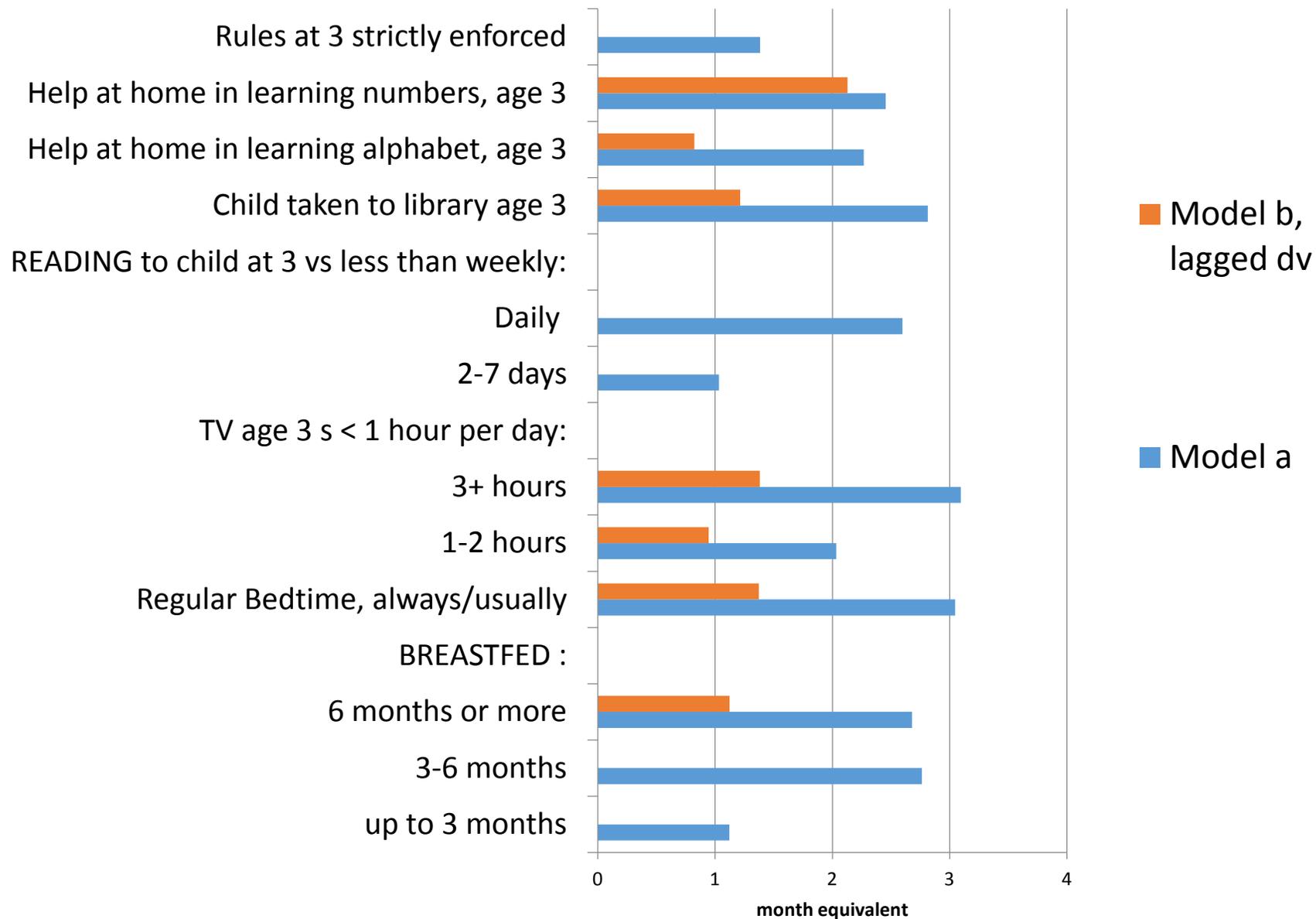
Reading to children at age 3 by class



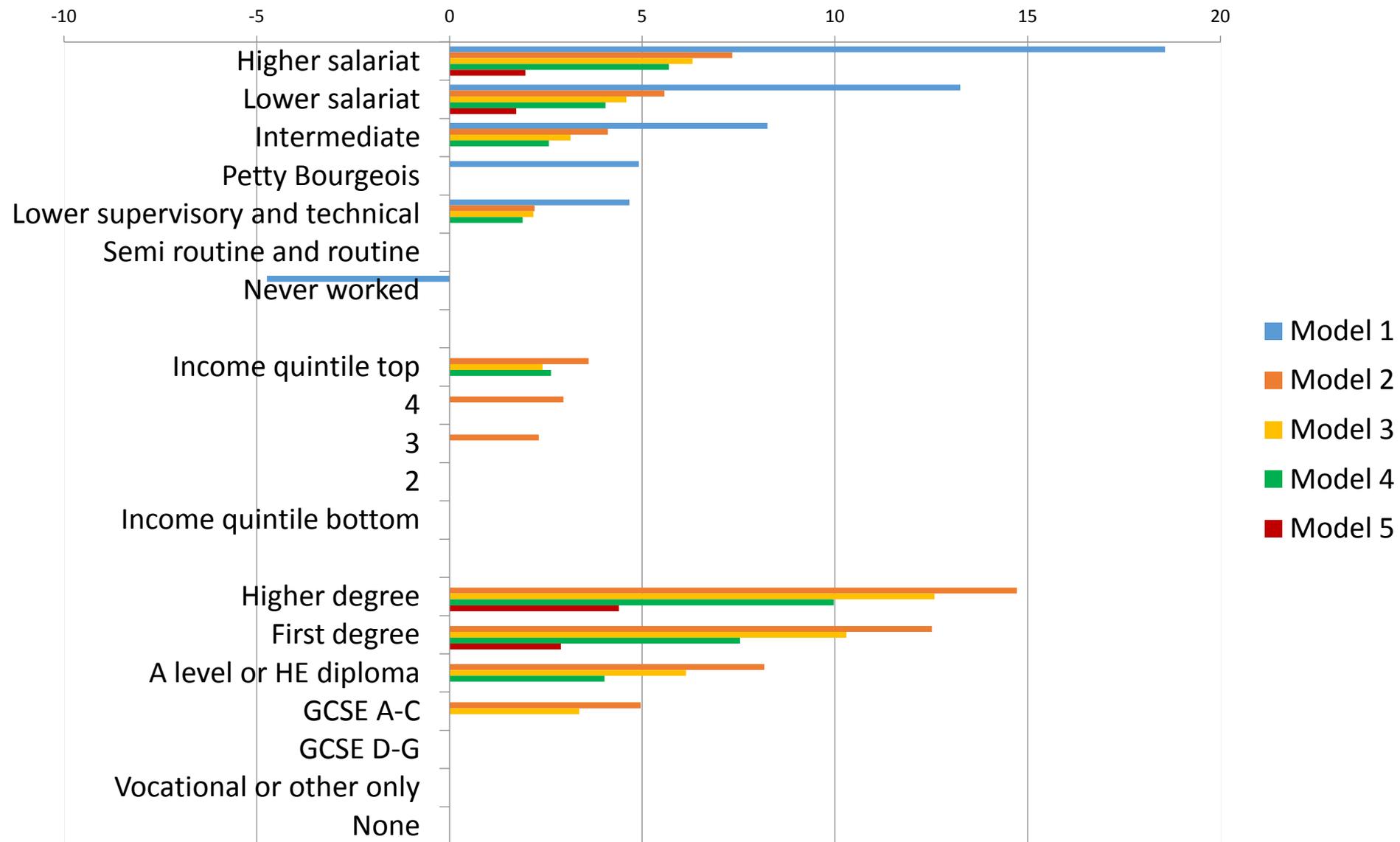
% 3+ hours TV daily



Parenting and cognition at age seven



Progress in months, cognitive scores age 7



Conclusions

- 'What parents do' matters, but parents' education is most important.
- We cannot ignore resources, both economic and cultural.

Reading for pleasure and adolescent cognitive progress

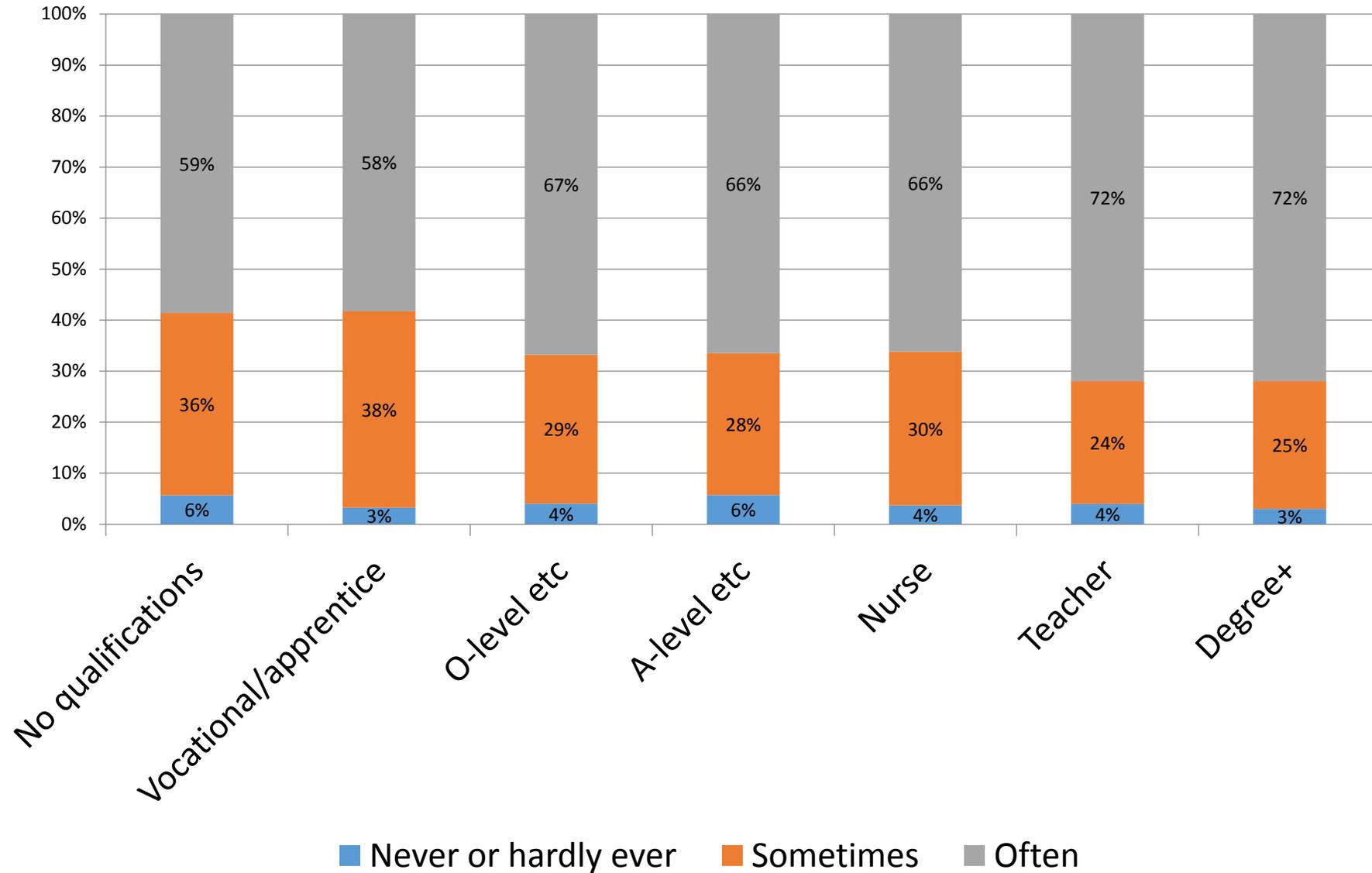
- To what extent does reading influence learning up to age 16?
- And beyond?

Sullivan, A. and Brown, M. 2015 (forthcoming 2015) *Reading for pleasure and attainment in vocabulary and mathematics*. British Educational Research Journal.

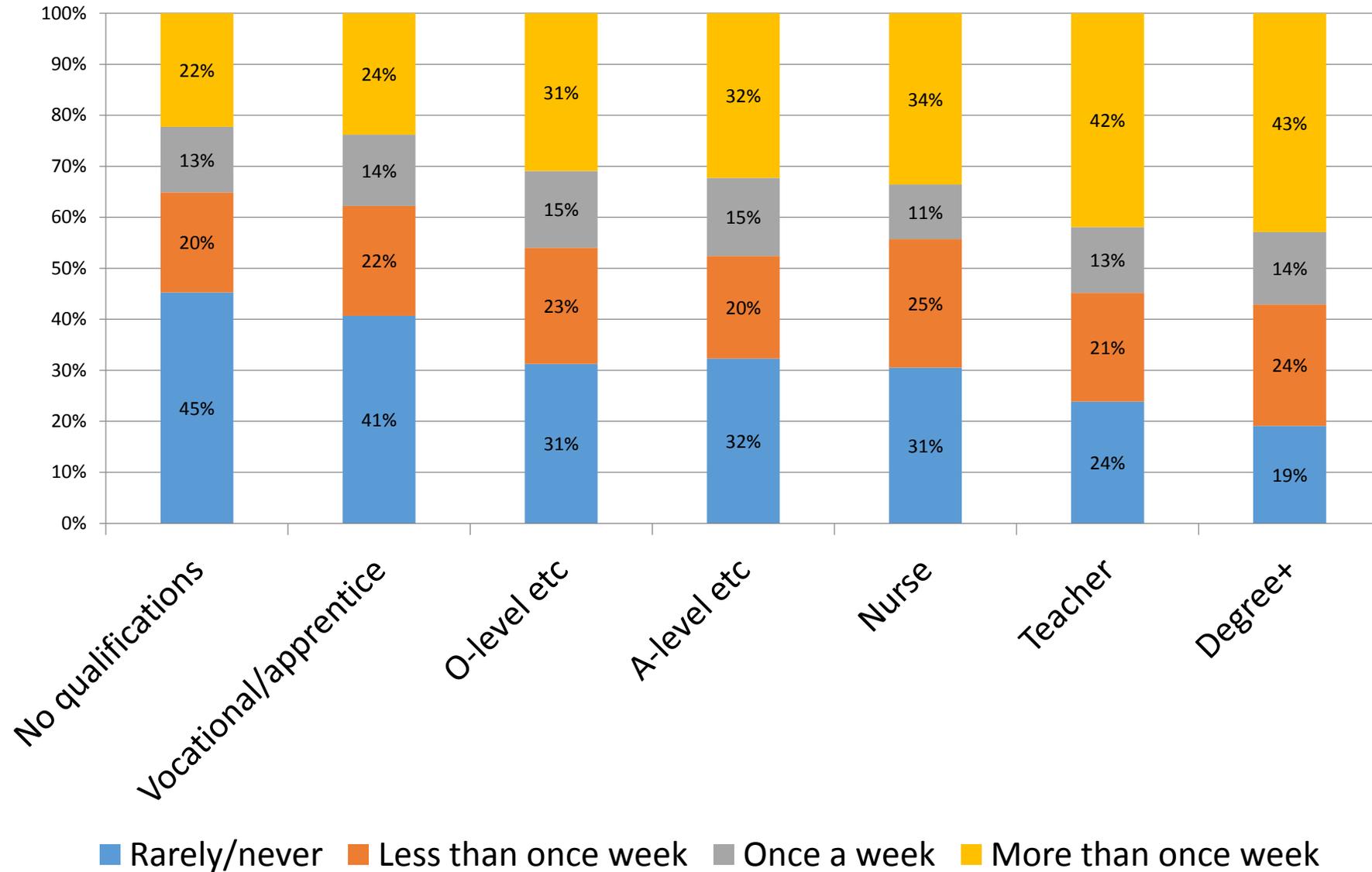
Sullivan, A. and Brown, M. 2015. Vocabulary from adolescence to middle age. *Longitudinal and Life Course Studies*.6(2) 173-189.



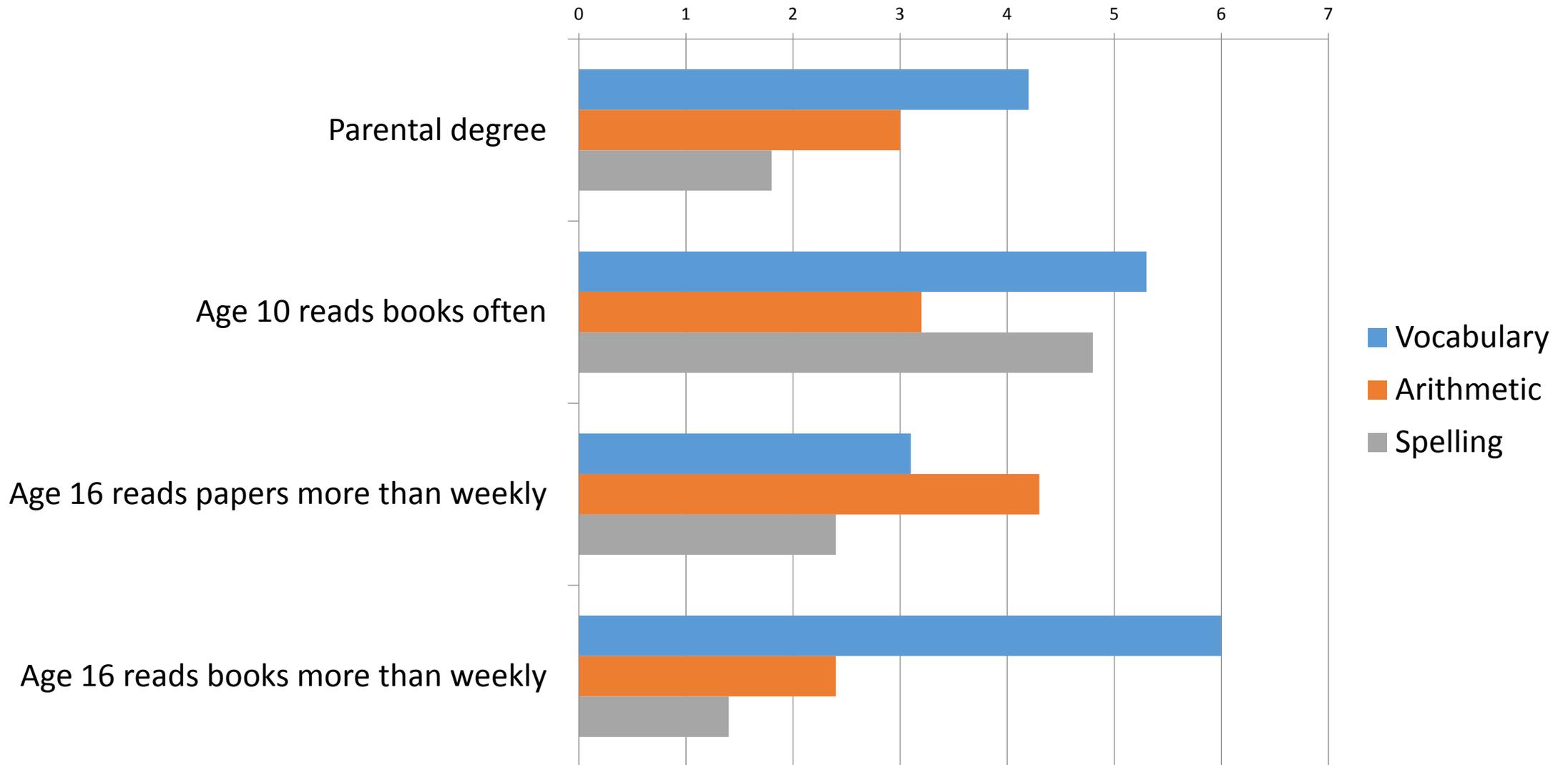
Child reads books - Maternal report - Age 10 by highest parental qualification



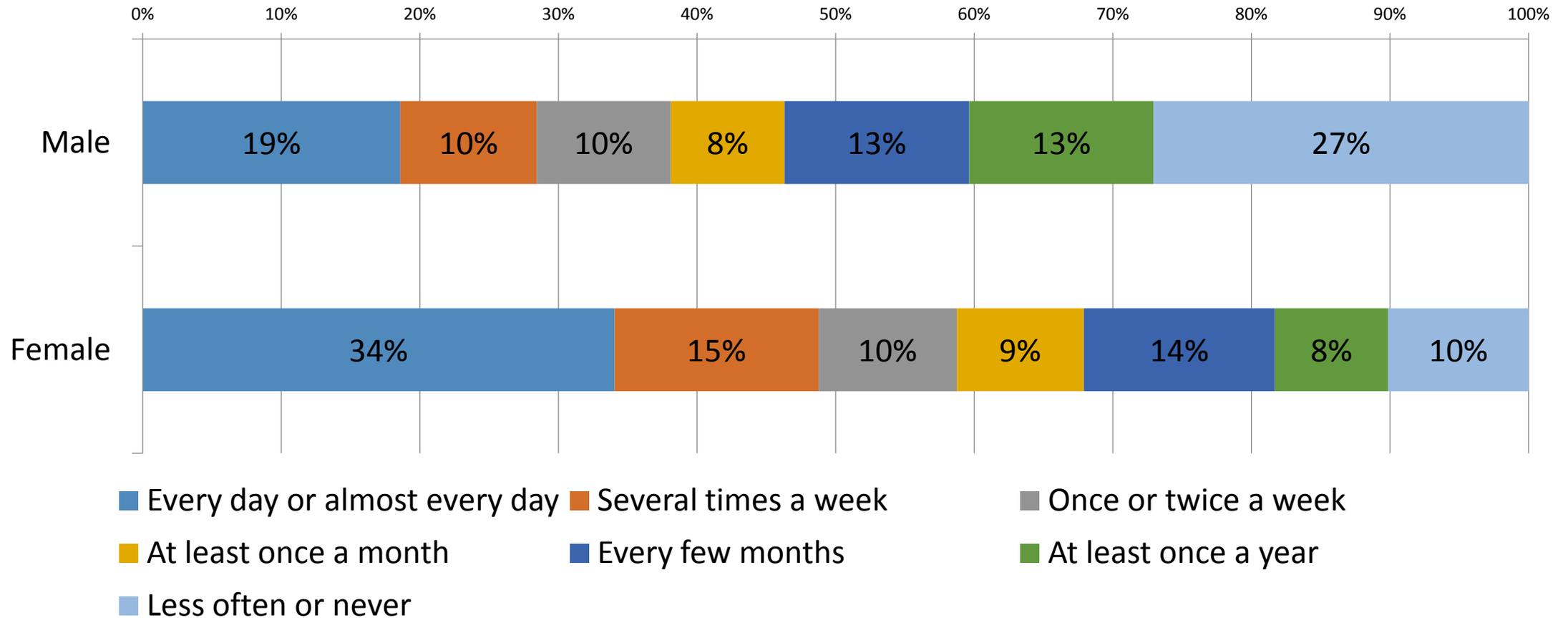
Child reads books- Self-report - Age 16 by highest parental qualification



Results: Progress as percentage points



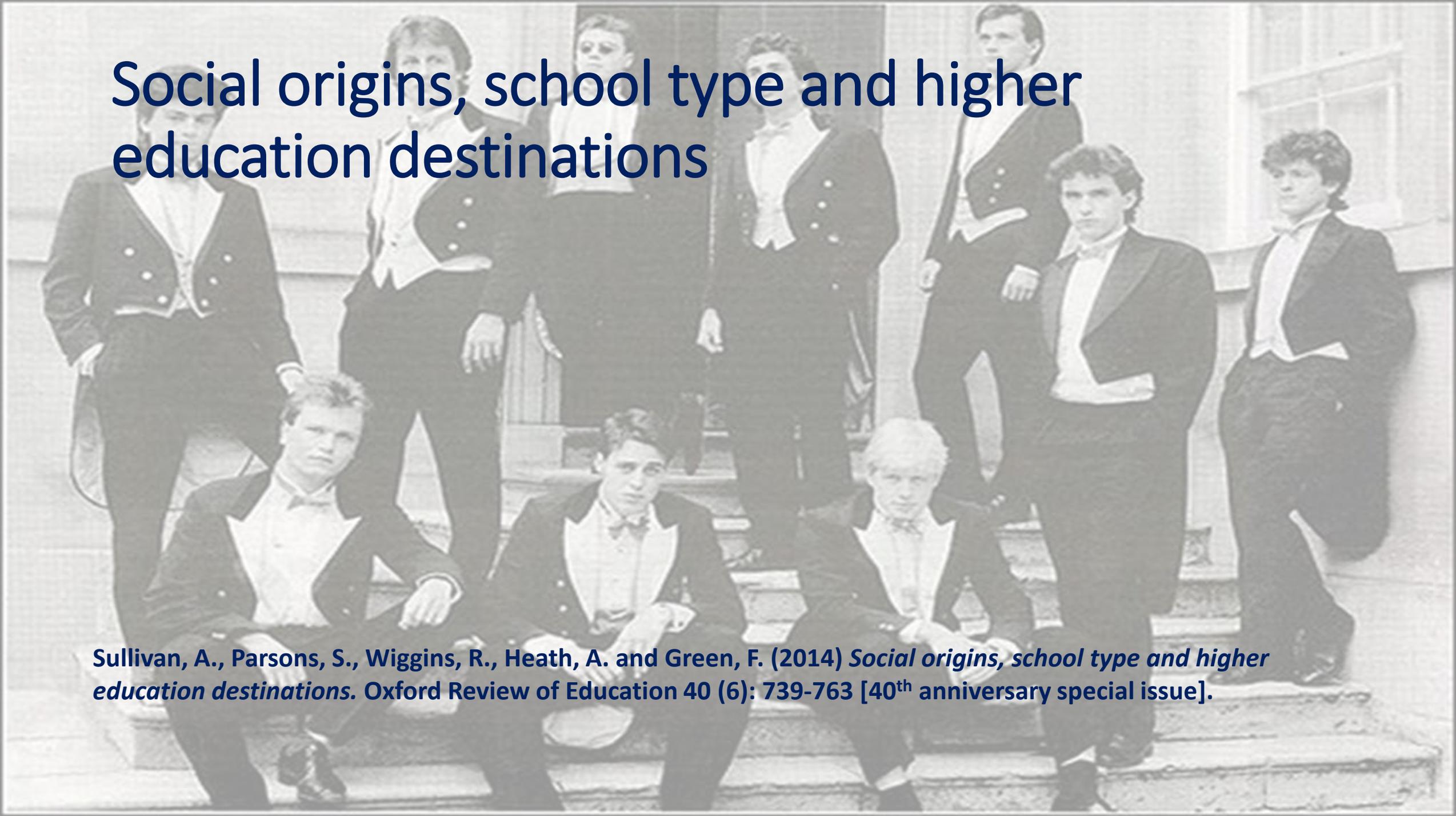
Frequency of reading books at 42 by sex



Conclusions

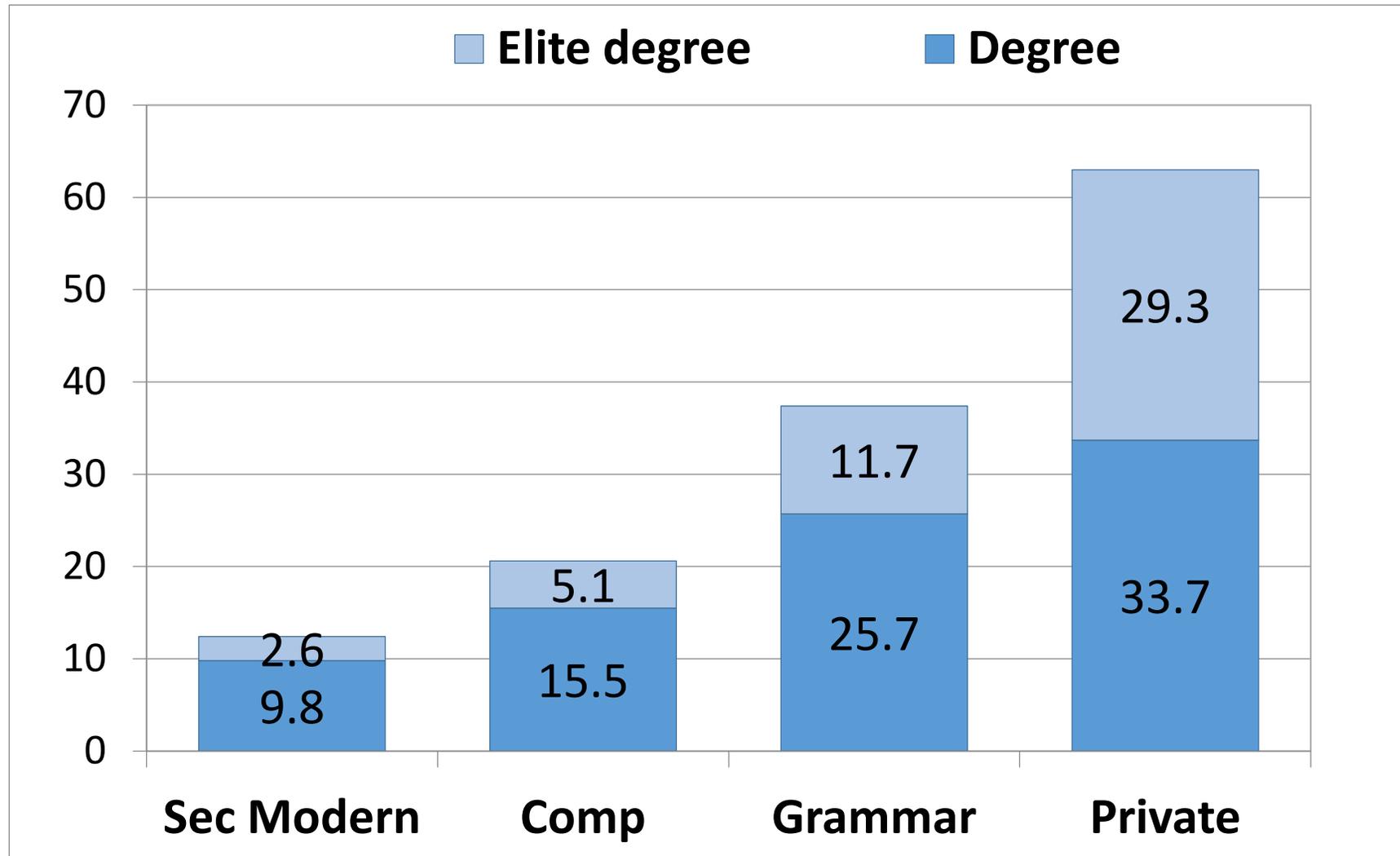
- Childhood reading is vitally important
- However, it only explains a very modest portion of the parental education and social class differences

Social origins, school type and higher education destinations



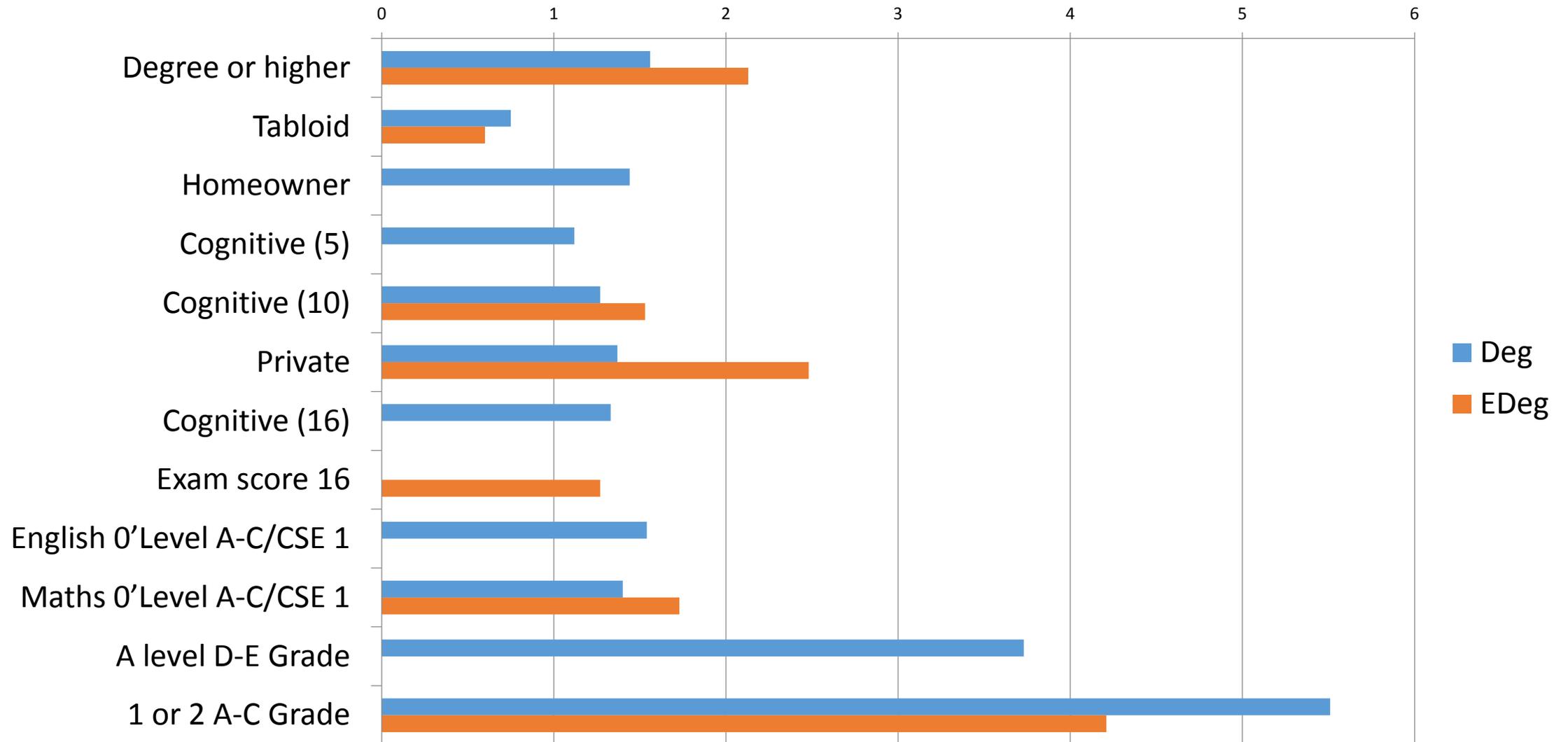
Sullivan, A., Parsons, S., Wiggins, R., Heath, A. and Green, F. (2014) *Social origins, school type and higher education destinations*. *Oxford Review of Education* 40 (6): 739-763 [40th anniversary special issue].

% Degree by school type



Note: OR for 3+ A-C A levels too large to show.

Who gets a (posh) degree?



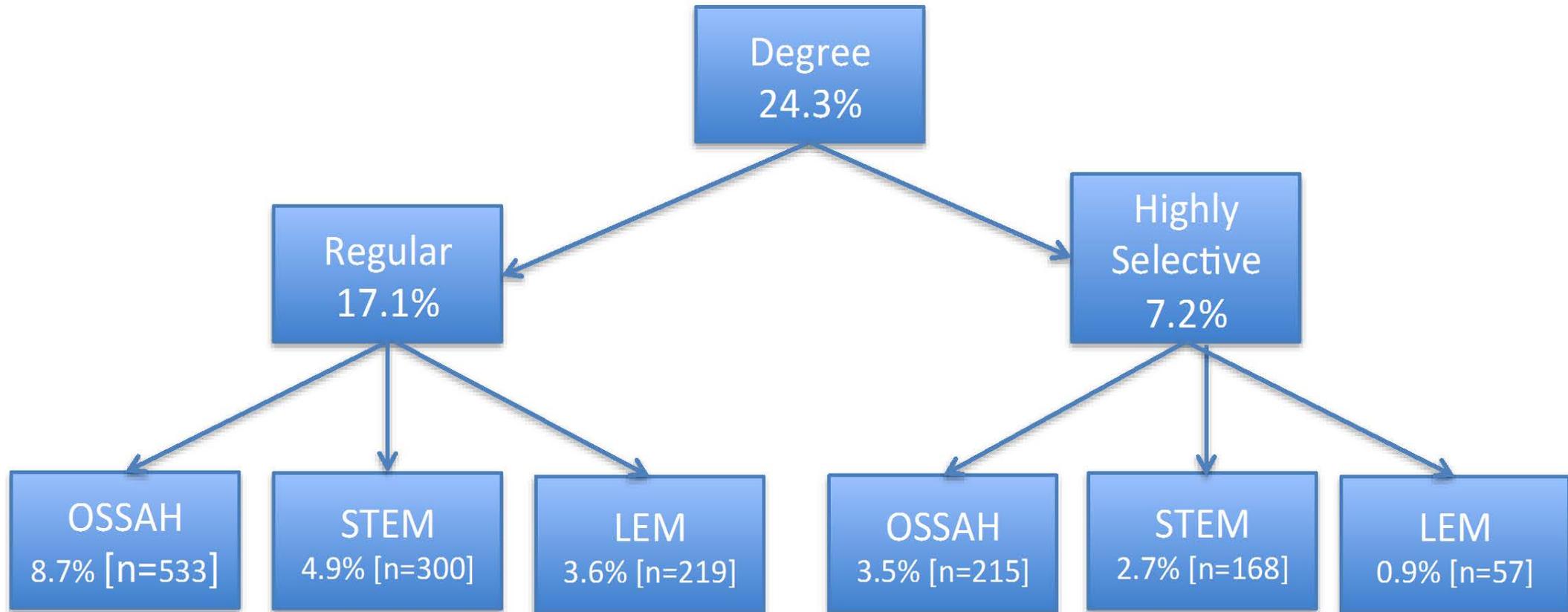
Conclusions

- Private schools and parental education influence university entrance above and beyond their influence on school qualifications

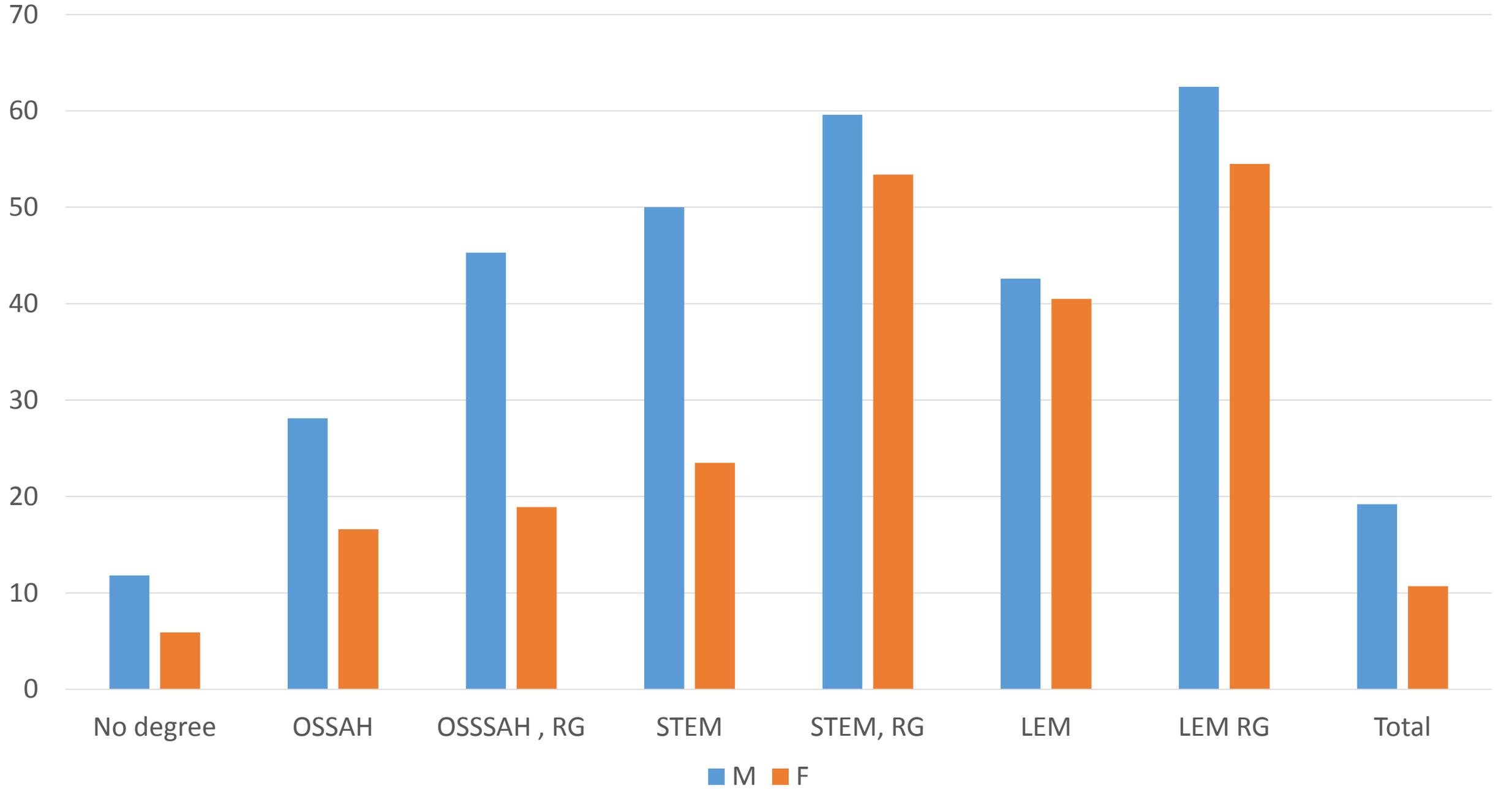
Elite education and elite formation

Sullivan, A., Parsons, S. Green, F. and Wiggins, R. (in preparation)

Types of degree



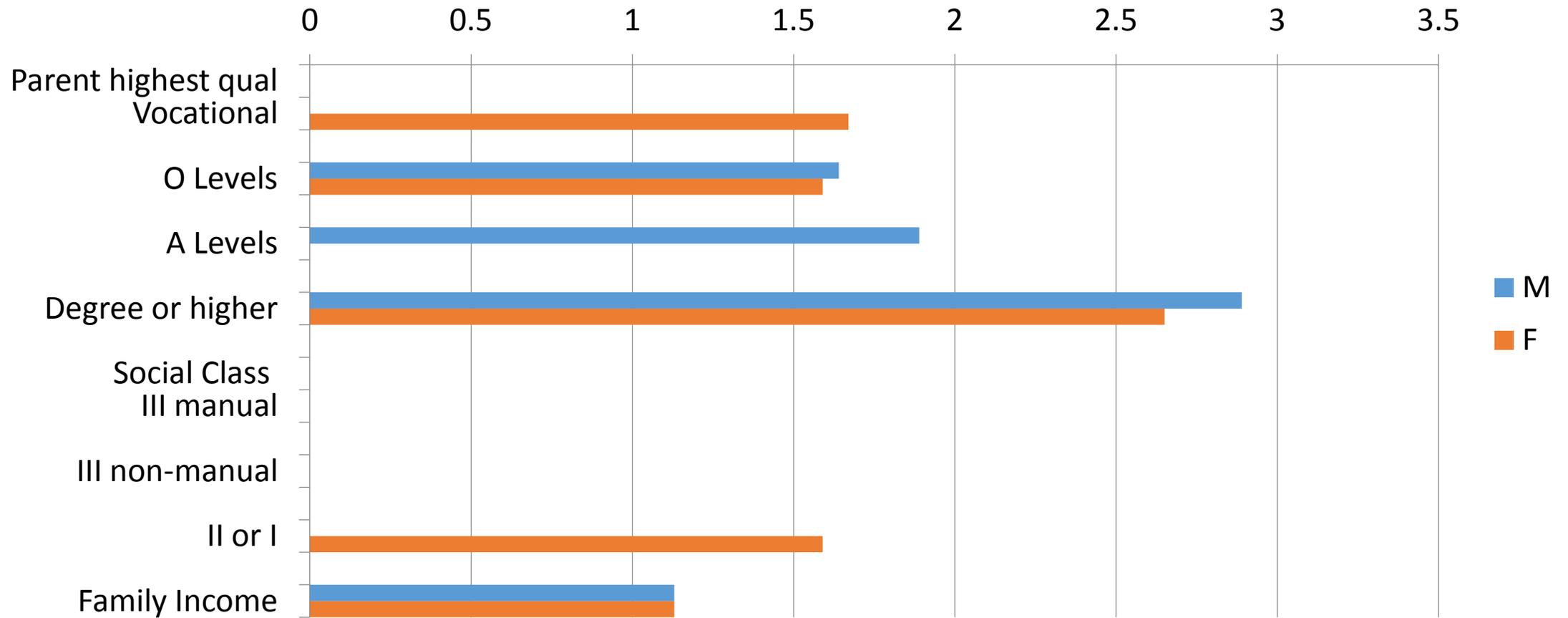
% Class 1 by degree



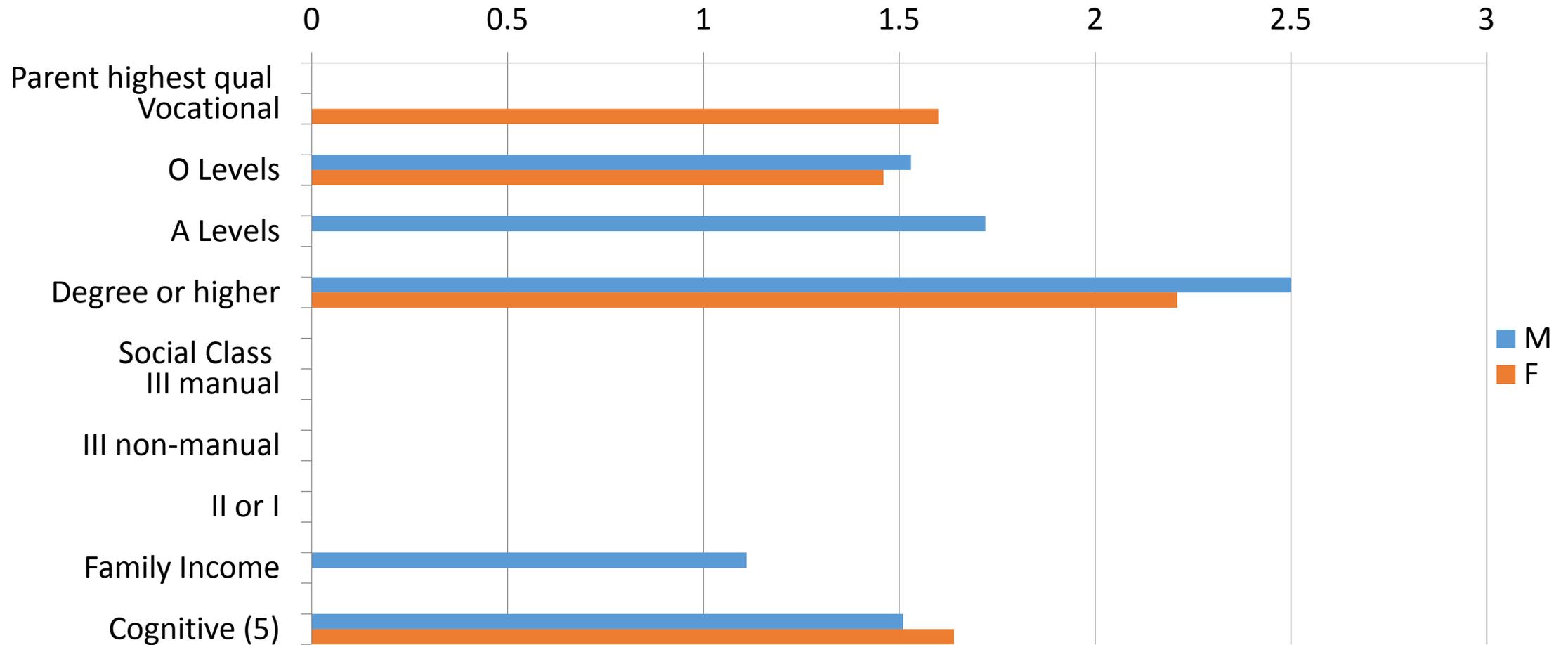
Models of class/income at 42

1. birth characteristics: income, social class, parental education
2. + cognition age 5
3. + cognition age 10
4. + secondary school type
5. + school qualifications
6. + degree: Russell group/not; STEM, LEM and OSSAH

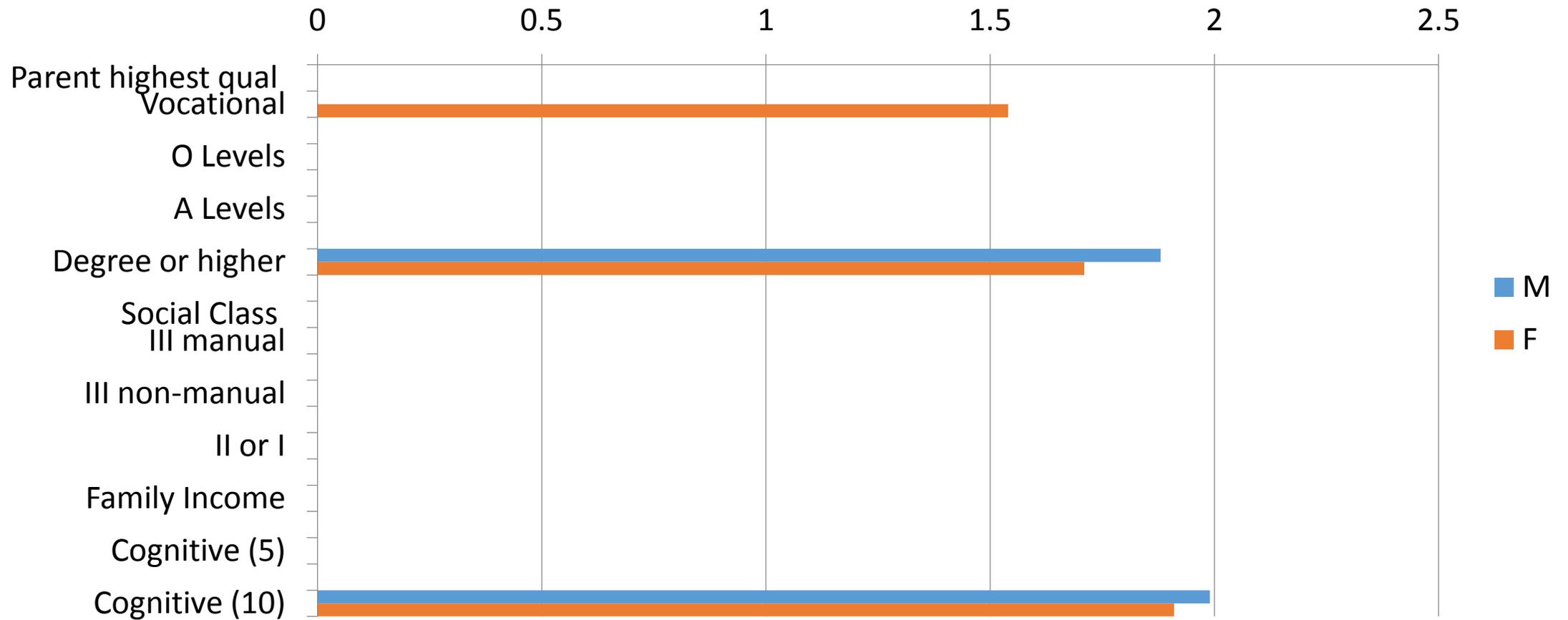
NS-SEC class 1 at 42: Model 1



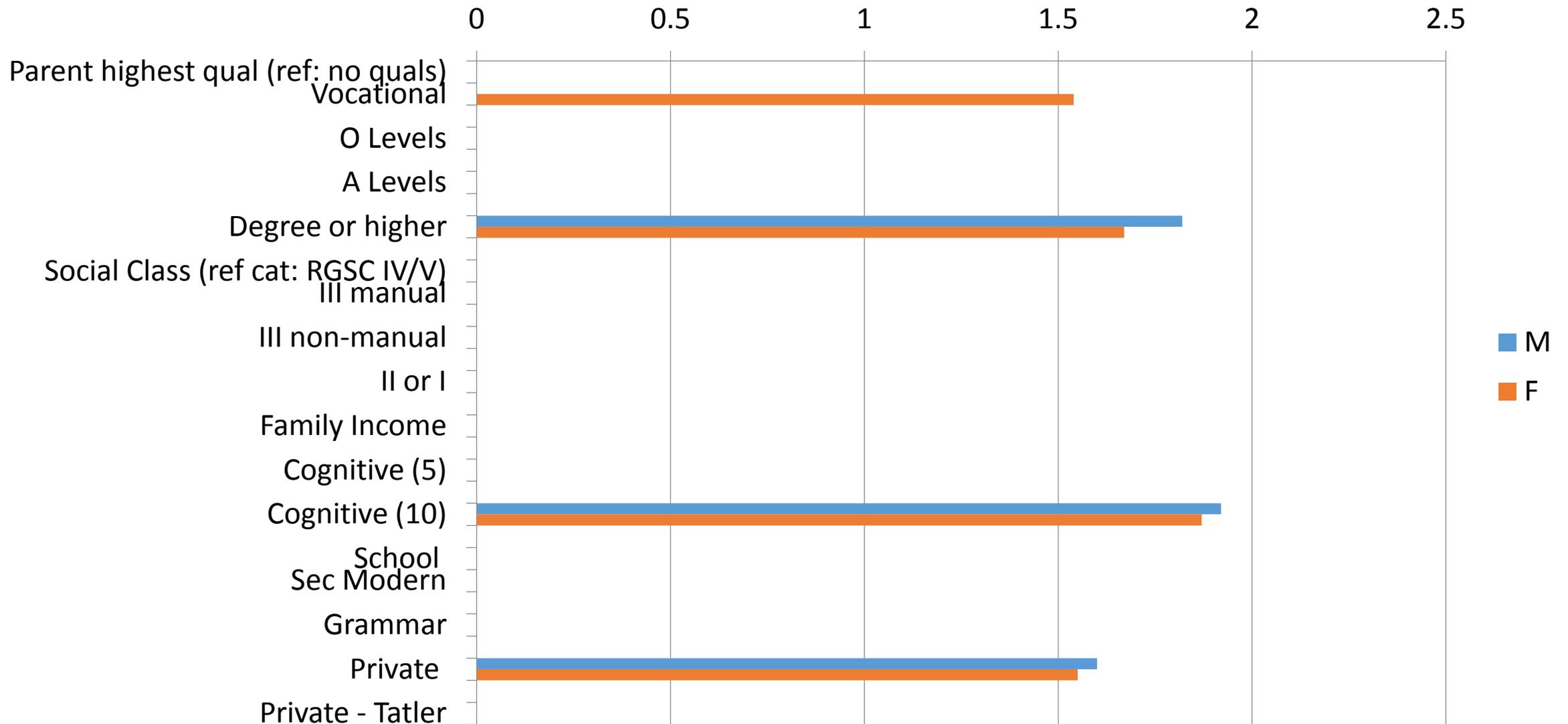
Model2: + cog age 5



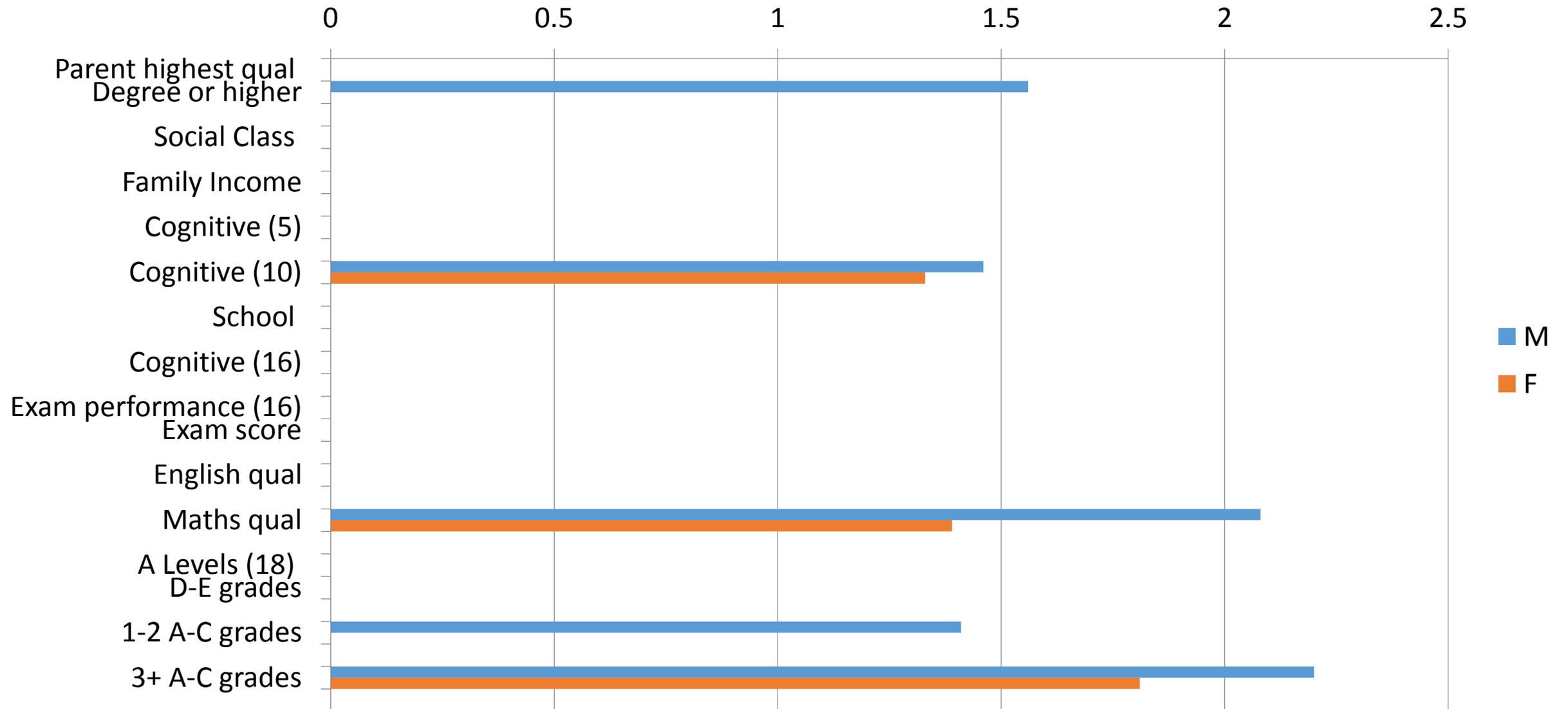
Model 3: + cog age 10



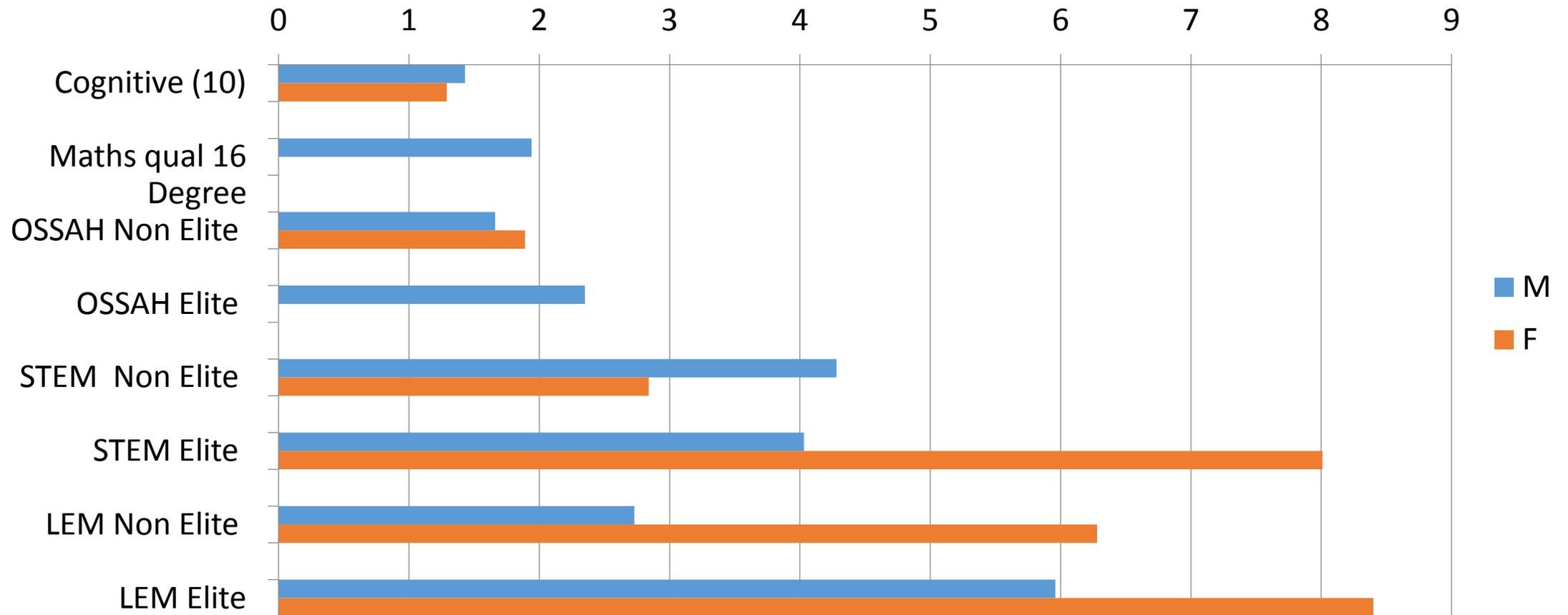
Model 4: + secondary school

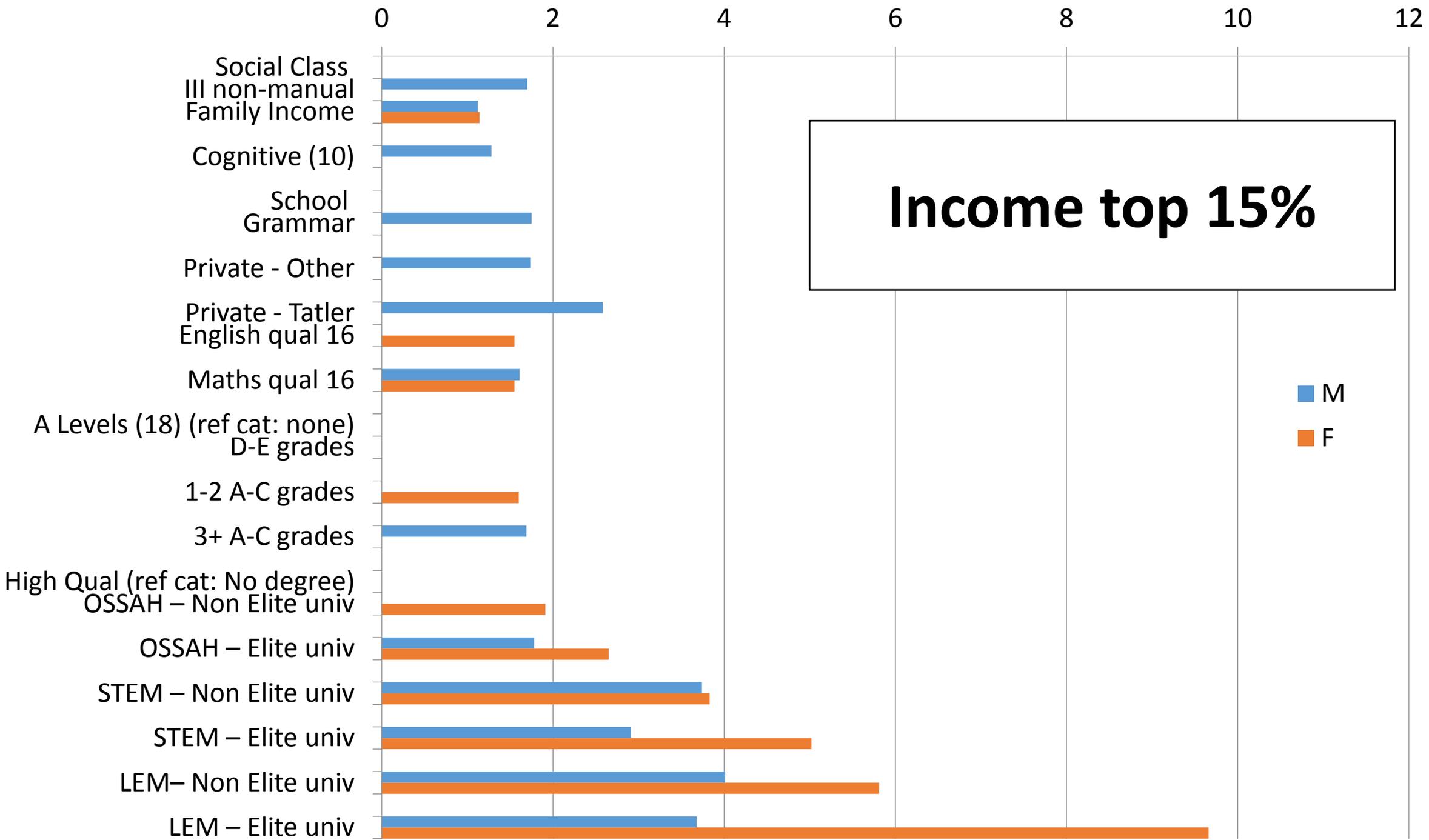


Model 5: + school qualifications



Model 6: + HE





Conclusions

- The link between social class origins and destinations is accounted for by a full specification of educational experience and attainment, but not quite for income.

Overall conclusions

- Educational inequalities cannot be ‘explained away’ as ‘what you do’.
- It is difficult to overstate the importance of books and reading.
- Private schools matter for university access and mid-life income
- The Origins-Destinations link is almost all via Education for this generation.
- Degree subject matters more than which university you attended.
- Vast scope for future work.

Thank you
Any questions?