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Widening the Participation Gap: The effect of educational track on political engagement among adolescents in England

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Central question and rationale

Key question:

Does tracking in upper secondary increase inequalities of political participation?

Rationale:

Tracking: good for the economy but bad for social cohesion and democracy?

Tracking and political participation

Tracking: the allocation of students into academic and vocational tracks on the basis (usually) of ability

Why would tracking enhance the participation gap?

Proposed mechanisms:

- differences in the curriculum
- differences in peer socialization

Why focus on upper secondary and why on England?

Upper secondary:

- political dispositions are formed in late adolescence

England:

- Status gap between the vocational and academic track;
- Large difference in the curriculum

Hypothesis

Tracking in upper secondary enhances the political engagement of students in the academic track and depresses that of students in the vocational track

Two studies using longitudinal data

- Study 1:
 - uses Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE), Waves 1 to 7 (ages 14-20)
 - analytic sample after imputation: 13,539
 - attrition rate Waves 1-7: 38%

- Study 2:
 - uses Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study (CELS), Waves 1 to 5 (ages 11-20)
 - analytic sample: 734
 - attrition rate Waves 1-5: 95.8%

Why longitudinal data? To address selection effects

Study 1 (LSYPE Study; with Mostafa and Hoskins)

- Conceptualises tracking as a combination of qualification and school environment;
- Assesses its effect on voting

Educational track:

1. Qualification:

- A levels: academic track
- NVQ, Btech: vocational track

2. Type of school:

- Sixth Form, independent schools: academic track
(‘prestigious’)
- Further education college: vocational track
(‘less prestigious’)

But qualification and type of school do not coincide!

Variables of interest

Outcome: Reported voting (Wave 7 – age 20)

(“Did you manage to vote in the general election of May 6th 2010”? [yes; no])

Key independent variable: Educational track (Wave 5 – age 18)

Six values:

1. Less prestigious schools & other qualifications (ref cat)
2. Less prestigious schools & A levels
3. Prestigious schools & other qualifications
4. Prestigious schools & A levels
5. Not in school & no or other qualifications
6. Not in school & A levels

Control variables

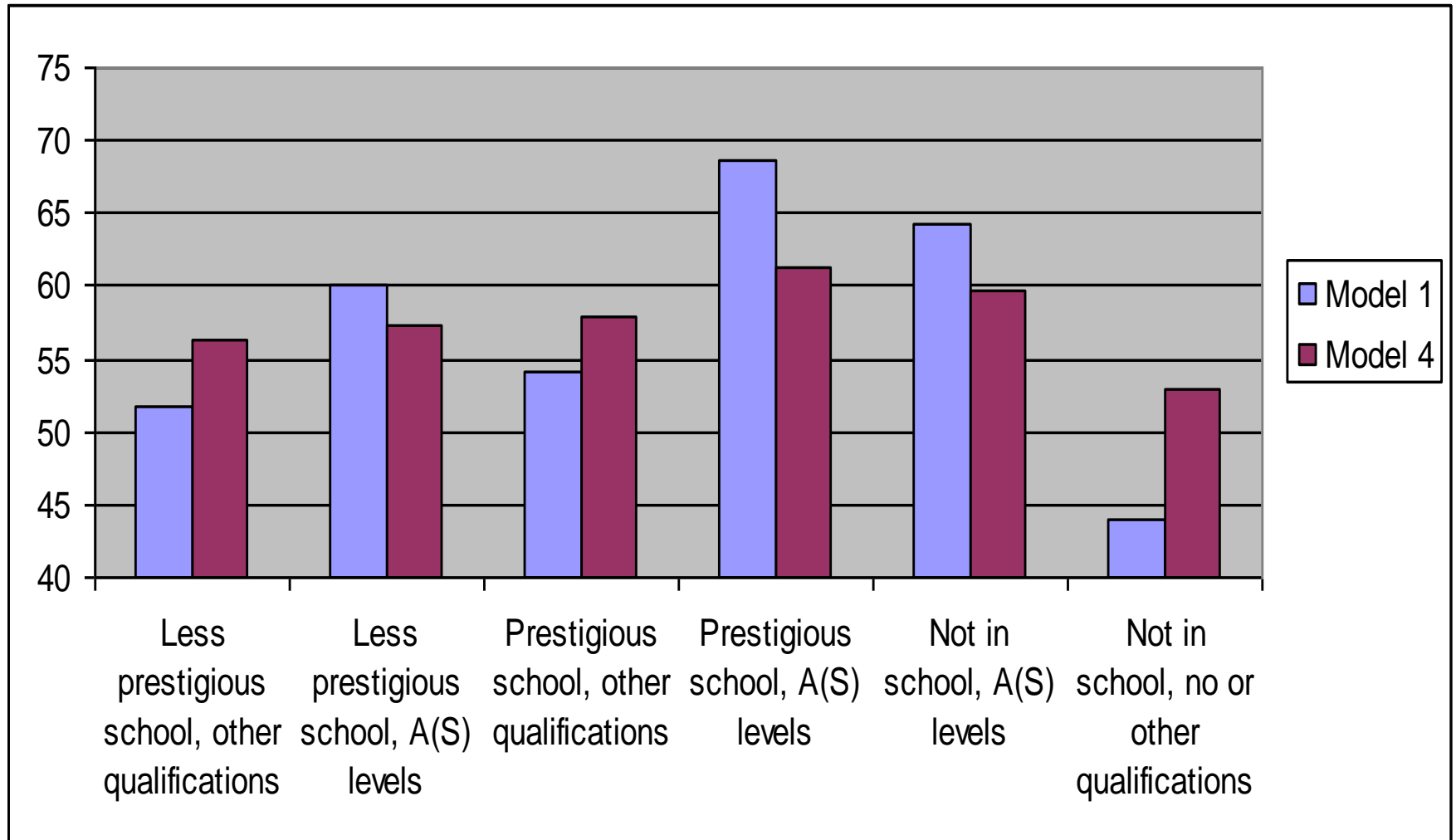
- Individual background (Waves 1 and 2):
 - gender,
 - ethnic identity
 - education level main parent
 - occupational status main parent
- Other pre-track influences (Waves 2 and 3):
 - GCSE score
 - reading enjoyment
 - History
 - Geography
 - Citizenship
- Post-track influences (Wave 7):
 - Main activity at age 20 (in education, work or training)

Voted in 2010 elections

Educational track	Yes (%)	N
Prestigious schools, A levels	68.6	5004
Not in school, A levels	64.3	1238
Less prestigious schools, A levels	60.0	1896
Prestigious schools, other qualifications	54.1	316
Less prestigious schools, other qualifications	51.7	3424
Not in school, no or other qualifications	44.0	1277
Total	56.8	13,168

Dependent variable: Voted in 2010 elections	Model 1 without any controls (odds ratios)	Model 4 all controls included (odds ratios)
Educational track (age 18)		
Less prestigious schools, other quals (ref cat)		
Less prestigious schools, A(S) levels	1.25***	1.04
Prestigious schools, other qualifications	1.07	1.06
Prestigious schools, A(S) levels	1.66***	1.23***
Not in school, no or other qualifications	0.82**	0.87
Not in school, A(S) levels	1.43***	1.15

Predicted probabilities of having voted in the 2010 elections (%)



Conclusions LSYPE study

- Tracking indeed seems to widen the participation gap in the predicted fashion;
- This effect appears to be lasting;
- Both qualification and type of school are important

Limitations:

- The two causal mechanisms, school and peer socialization could not fully be assessed;
- LSYPE does not include prior measurements of the outcome

Study 2 (CELS study; with Hoskins)

- Conceptualises tracking as a combination of type (academic/vocational) and level (1,2 or 3) of education;
- Examines the effect of tracking on voting and participating in protest activities

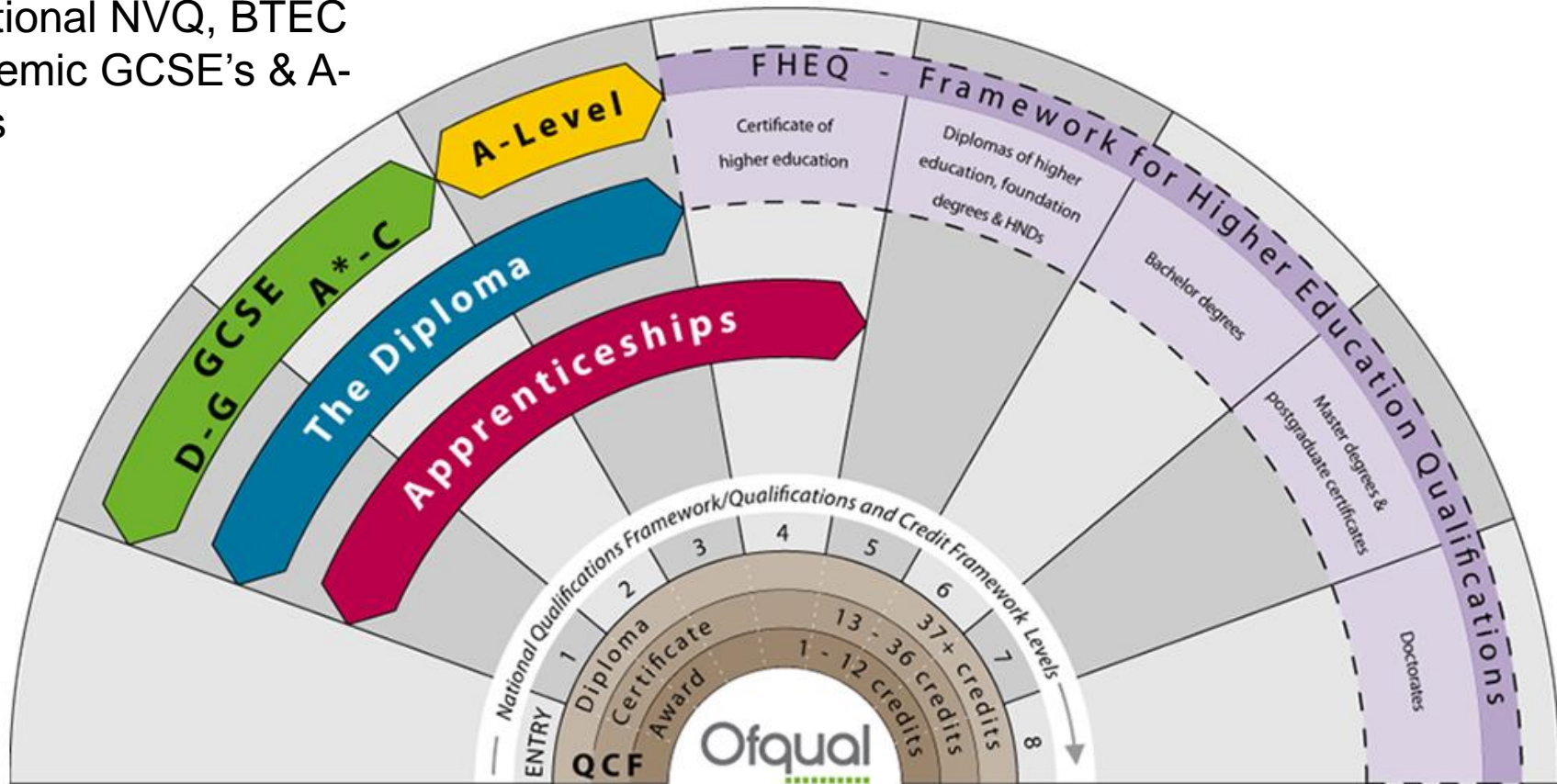
Theories:

- Type: differences in the curriculum and pedagogy;
- Level: education enhances “verbal cognitive proficiency” (Nie et al 1996);
- Proxy: tracking proxies for early socialization effects

National qualifications framework

Education pathways

Vocational NVQ, BTEC
Academic GCSE's & A-
levels



Dependent variables (Wave 5: ages 19-20)

- Voting in 2010 election (1=yes; 0=no)
- Protest
 - “Taken part in a public demonstration”
 - “Signed a petition or email/online petition”
 - “Got together with other young people to campaign about an issue”
 - “Joined a facebook group about a political or social issue”
 - (1=one or more of these activities; 0=none of these activities)

Key independent variable (Wave 5)

Tracking ('Educational pathway'):

- Level 1 academic and vocational
- Level 2 academic (GCSE grades A-C)
- Level 2 vocational (GNVQs and BTEC)
- Level 3 academic (A levels)
- Level 3 vocational (NVQ and BTEC)
- Other (including foreign qualifications)

Controls

Wave 2 (age 13-14)

- Books in home
- Intentions to vote or protest (prior measures of the dependent variables)
- Amount of citizenship education received

Wave 5 (age 19-20)

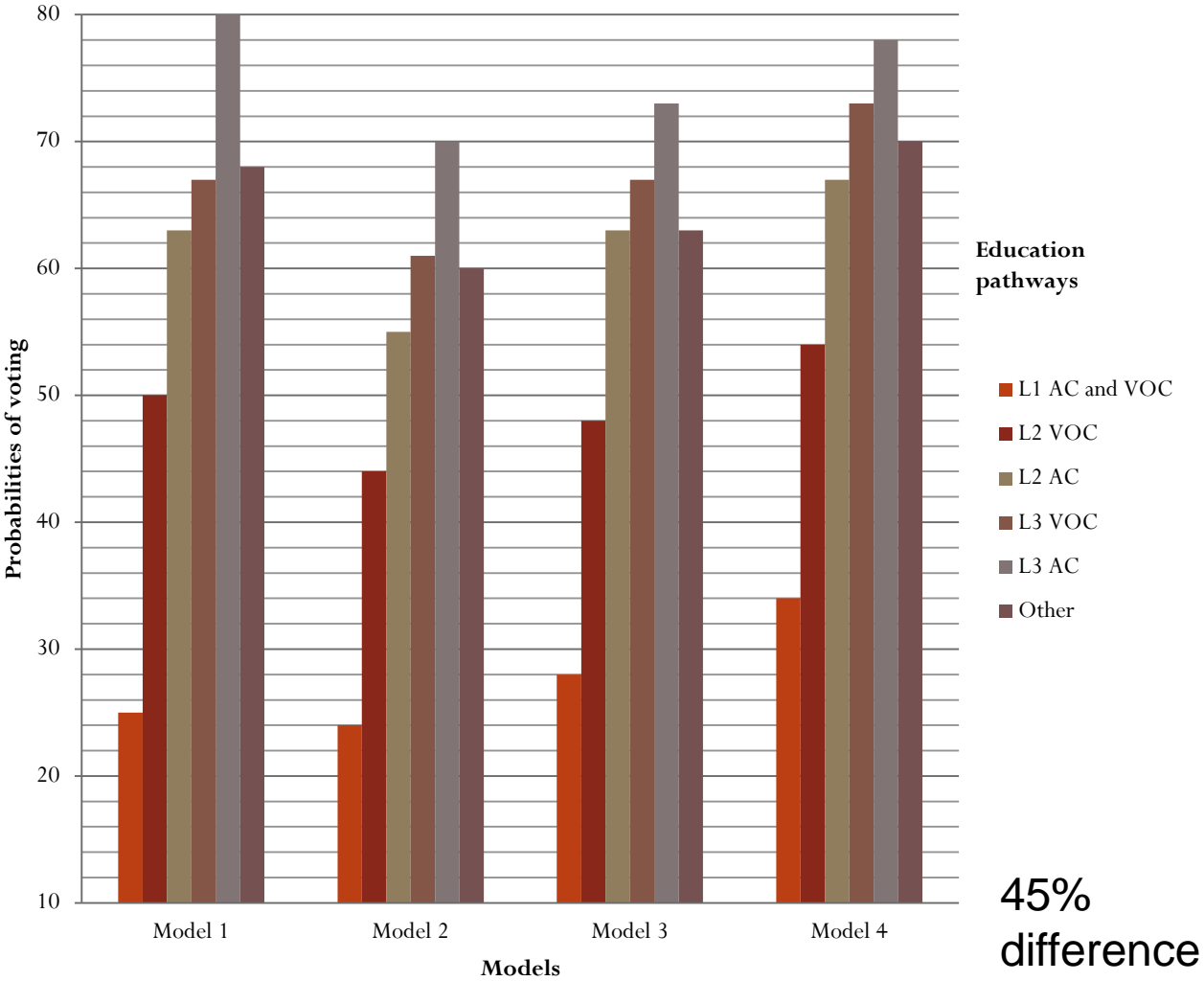
- Education of mother and father
- Ethnicity
- Gender
- Current activity (university, work, unemployed, etc)

Voting

Reference Category level 3 academic

Vote	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
L1 AC and VOC	0.084***	0.135***	0.149***	0.146***
L2 VOC	0.245***	0.332**	0.348**	0.321**
L2 AC	0.408**	0.508	0.652	0.573
L3 VOC	0.500*	0.659	0.751	0.768
Other	0.526**	0.612*	0.638	0.650
Nagelkerke R ²	0.123	0.226	0.306	0.333

Voting by educational pathway for the 4 models (probabilities)

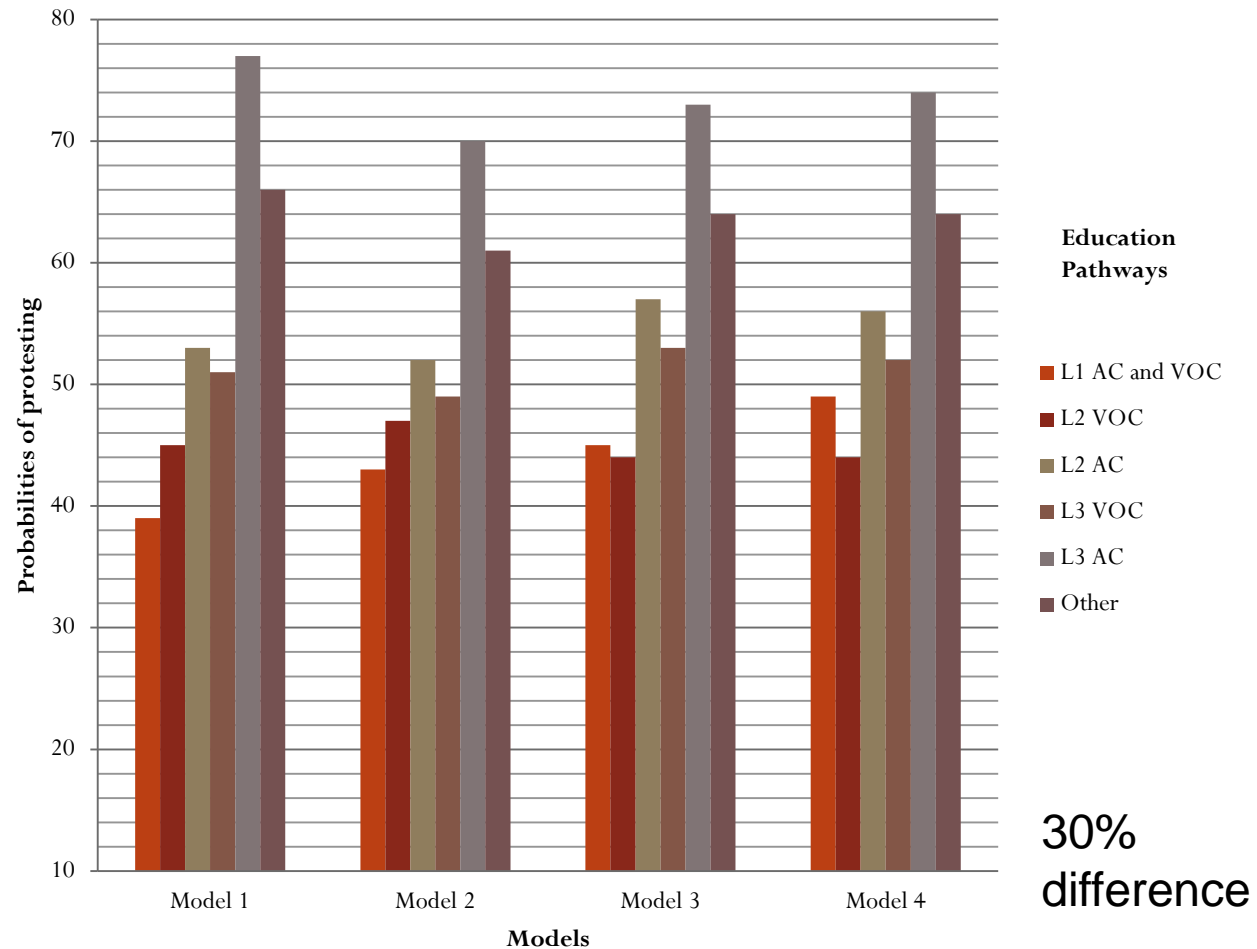


Protest

Reference Category level 3 academic

Protest	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
L1 AC and VOC	0.19***	0.32***	0.30***	0.33**
L2 VOC	0.24***	0.37**	0.29***	0.27***
L2 AC	0.33***	0.45*	0.49*	0.45*
L3 VOC	0.30***	0.41***	0.41**	0.38***
Other	0.57**	0.66*	0.65*	0.63*
Nagelkerke R ²	0.10	0.17	0.23	0.25

Protesting by education pathway for the 4 models (probabilities)



Conclusions CELS study

- Educational pathways (both type and level) have an effect on political participation
- Even when controlling for
 - Social background
 - Prior intentions towards political engagement'
 - University entrance
- Ergo: no support for early socialization theory

- Protesting is influenced by both type and level of education
- Voting is less affected by type of education and more by level of education

Wider relevance of the findings

Working class students are overrepresented in vocational tracks, in groups with lower levels of attainment and in less prestigious schools

Therefore, social class differences in political engagement will surely widen in late adolescence due to tracking

Policy implications

Possible measures to reduce the participation gap:

- Introduce general subjects in vocational education (citizenship education; social studies)
- Enhance the status of Level 3 VET

Yet, without more appreciation for blue collar work in general, educational measures may well be ineffective