

**Institutional stratification,  
concentration of funding and fair  
access to doctoral study:  
the case of the United Kingdom**

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# Outline

- Massification and (in)equality in access to HE
- The rise – and neglect – of postgraduate study
- Institutional stratification, funding concentration and access to doctoral study

# Educational expansion and inequality

- Credential inflation
- Maximally-maintained inequality
- Effectively-maintained inequality
- Examples: Shavit *et al* (2007); Bolliver (2011); appearance of league tables

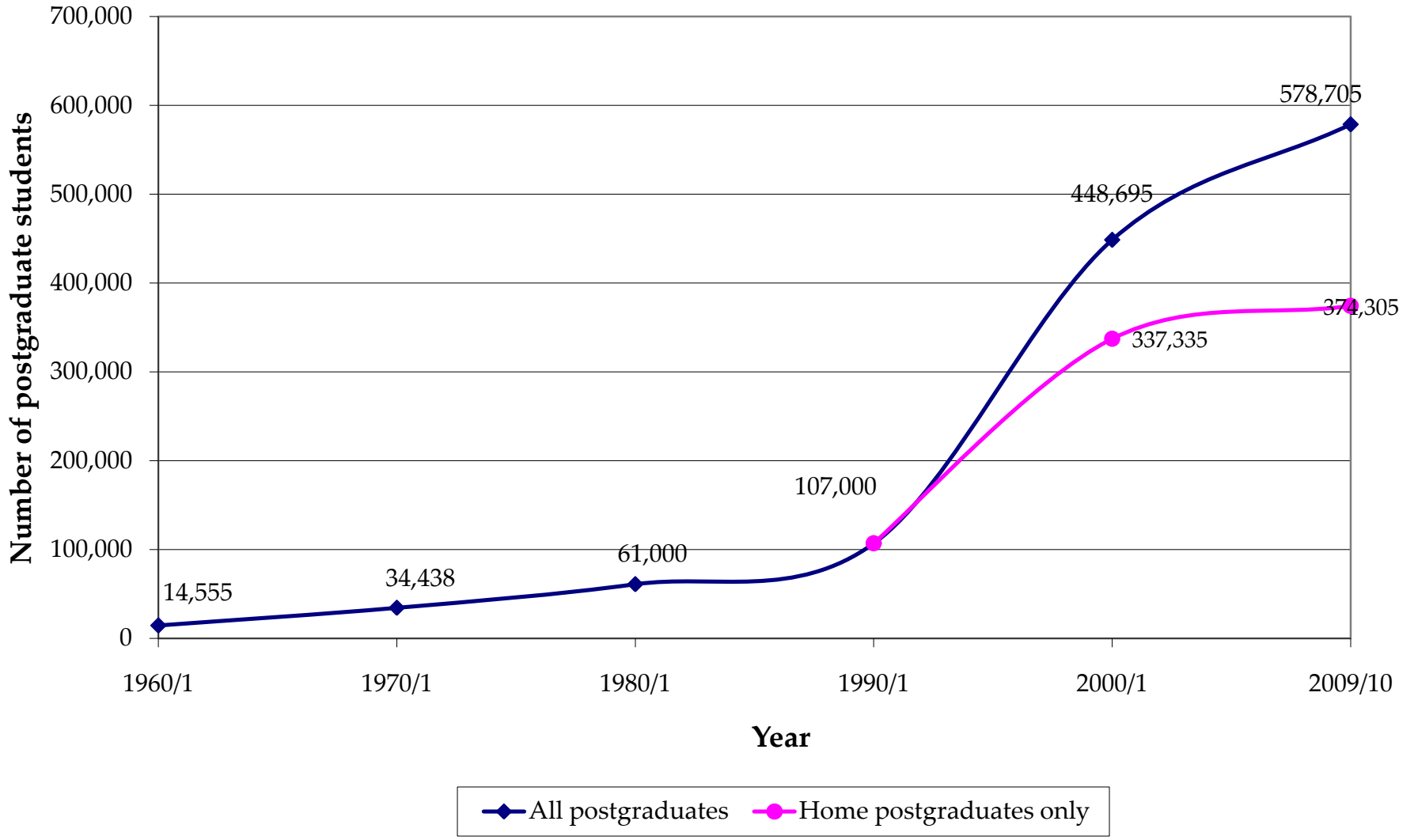
# Expectation?

- Growth in first-cycle HE participation leads to:
  - Increase in inequalities at *next* level
  - Increase in institutional stratification *within* level
- Aside: cynical or pessimistic view might be that widening participation initiatives are essentially futile, even if successful on their own terms...

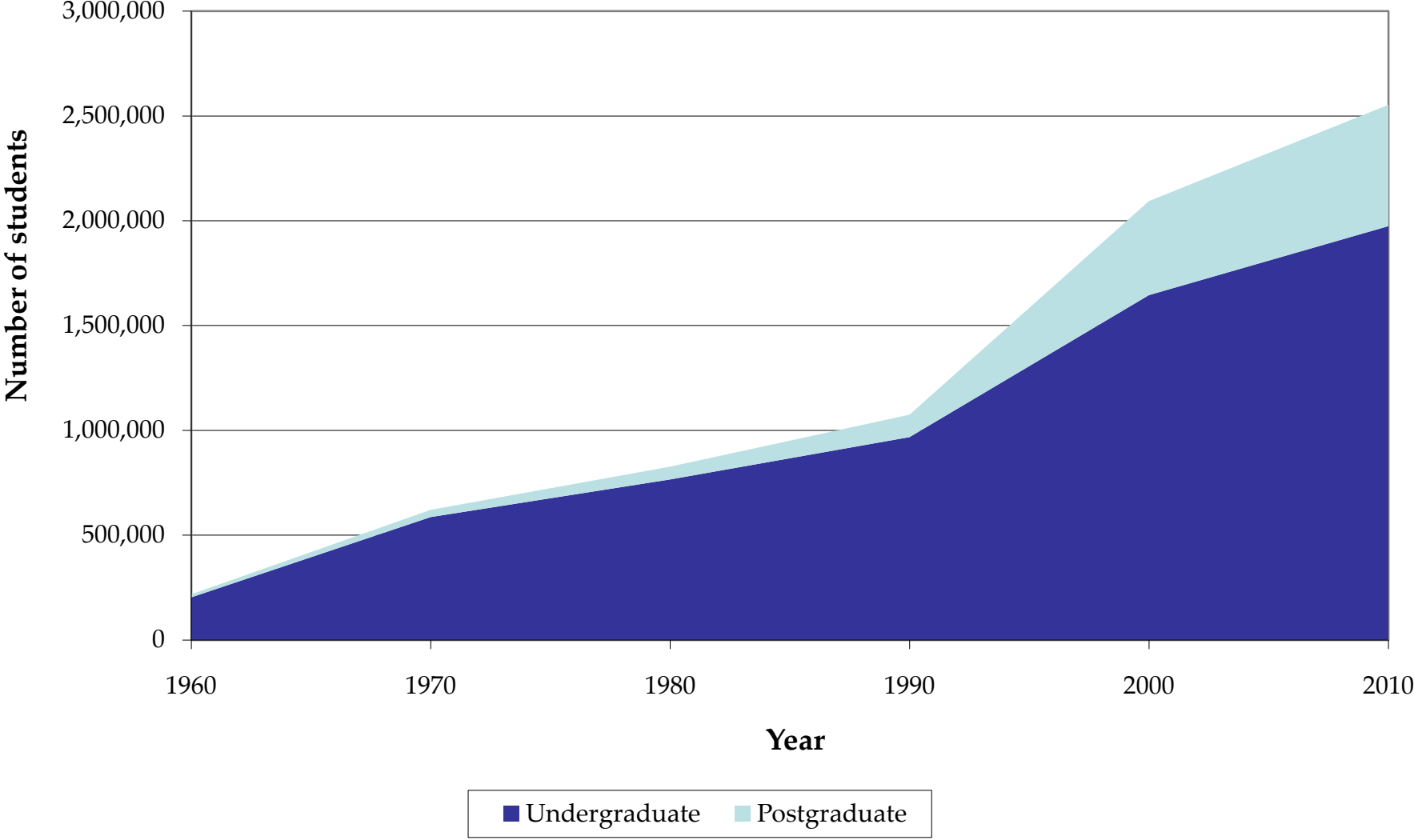
# Growth in postgraduate study

- USA: 63% (1976 – 2006)
- Australia: ~300% (1988 – 2007)
- UK: >400% (1990 – 2006)
- PhDs grew everywhere (e.g. France, 67% 1985 – 2007)
- KEY POINT: 2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> cycle growth rate typically higher than 1<sup>st</sup> cycle

# UK Postgraduate Student Numbers, 1960/1 - 2009/10



# UK Student Numbers by Level, 1960 - 2010



# Masters or Doctors?

- Growth has tended to be at masters level
- House (2010) and Artess *et al* (2008) report virtual stasis in UK doctoral entrants
- Consistent with maximally-maintained inequality/credential inflation?
- Natural limits to PhD growth (one-to-one tuition)

# Is this a fair admissions issue?

- Very little prior consideration of access to PG
- Alan Milburn's *Fair Access to the Professions* and social mobility concerns
- Perkin's "key profession"
- Widening the talent pool (and the consequences for knowledge)
- Fear that increased fees (£3k, £9k!) will deter potential postgraduates (see White Paper)

# Institutional locations: top 10s

<b>PGR progression rate 2009/10 (from House 2010)</b>	<b>NS-SEC 1 – 3 undergrads</b>	<b>PhD new entrants 2009/10</b>
Imperial	Cambridge	Cambridge
Cambridge	Oxford	UCL
Oxford	Durham	Manchester
Bath	St. Andrews	Oxford
UCL	Bristol	Nottingham
York	Exeter	Edinburgh
Strathclyde	Edinburgh	Birmingham
St. Andrews	Bath	Imperial
Durham	Nottingham	Leeds
Bristol	UCL	KCL
	Imperial	Bristol

Source: HESA

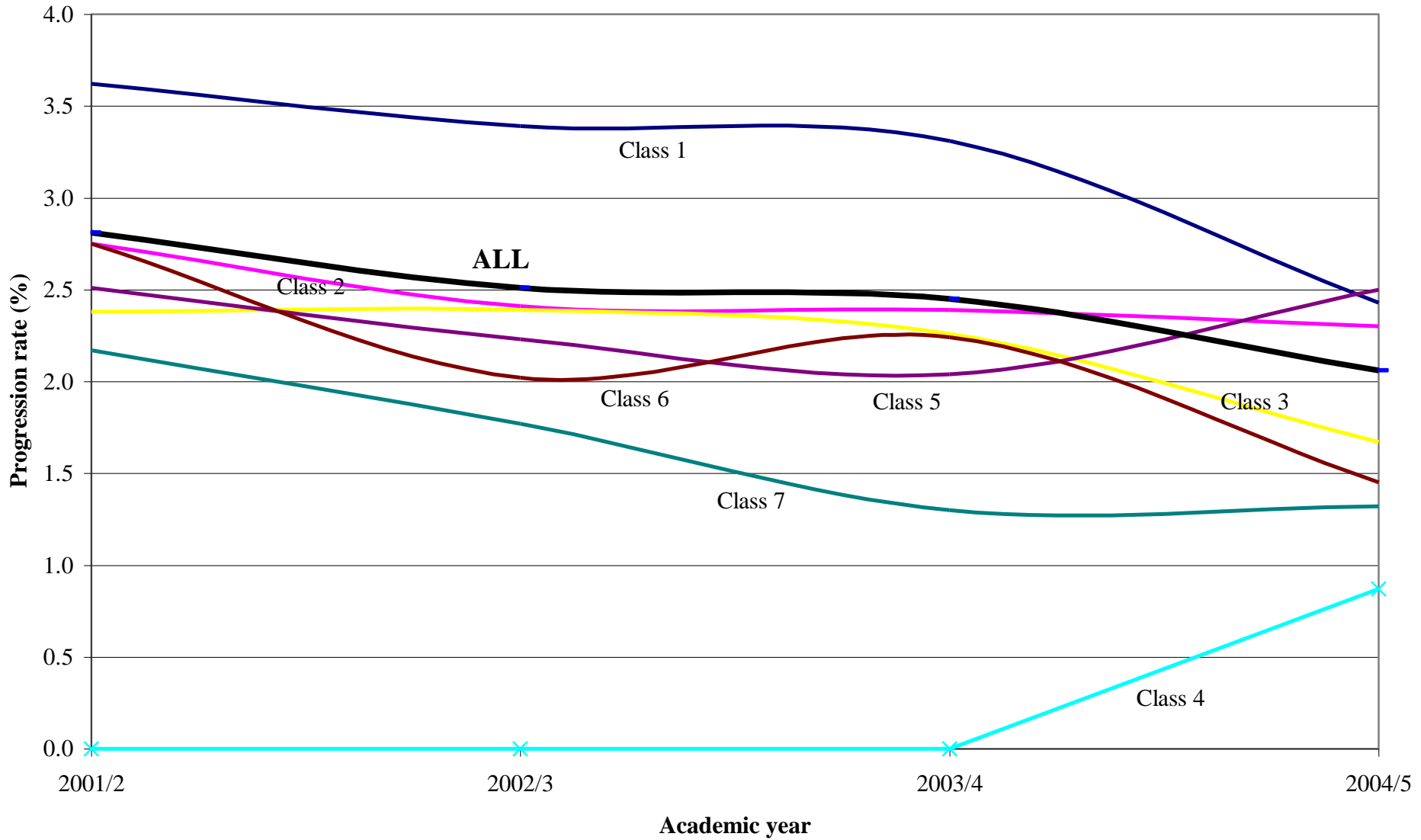
# Concentration of funding

- By HEFCE
  - Selective funding of research and research degrees
- By research councils
  - Doctoral training centres
- Polarisation through the RAE etc

# But is it *fair*?

- Differentiation of mission and 'the national interest' vs. institutional stratification
- Meritocracy?
- Institution as proxy for capability/desire?
- Talent search or 'people like us'?

# Rate of progression of first-degree graduates to research degree study, 2001/2 – 2004/5



# Social class or something else?

- Multilevel model
- Most of the social class differences are accounted for by:
  - Degree-level attainment (classification of degree)
  - Subject of study for first degree
  - **Institution attended for first degree**
- Hints that more pronounced for PhD ‘returners’

# Other studies

- Zimdars' (2007) study of postgraduates at Oxford
  - Underrepresentation of graduates from less prestigious universities
  - Almost half from Oxbridge; further 25% from Russell Group
  - 2% from post-1992 sector
- Wakeling and Kyriacou (2010) – synthesis
  - Little *direct* effect of social class on entry to PGR
  - BUT patterns of institutional mobility?

# Consequences

- Selection at 18?
  - Institutional habitus and ‘well worn paths’
  - A new tripartitism?
  - Reinforced by new English funding regime?
- Geography
  - Norwich, Stoke, Leicester, Derby, Northampton, Carlisle, Rhyl, Highlands etc
- Comparisons with the US?
  - Sponsored vs. contest mobility

# Conclusion

- Exogenous and endogenous pressures for institutional stratification:
  - Mission differentiation/institutional status
  - Effectively maintained inequality
- Consequence for UK: narrow social basis of recruitment to doctoral study
- Open question: international trend?

An aerial photograph of a university campus. In the foreground, there is a large, white, tent-like structure with a central peak, situated on a grassy area. To the right, a modern, multi-story building with a grid of windows is visible. The campus is surrounded by lush green trees and a river flows through the middle ground. The background shows a residential area with houses and more greenery under a clear sky.

**Thank you**

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