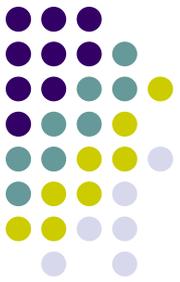# Recent trends in access to more prestigious UK universities*
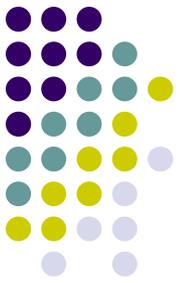
Vikki Boliver

Fair Admissions conference

University of Manchester

7th-8th July 2011
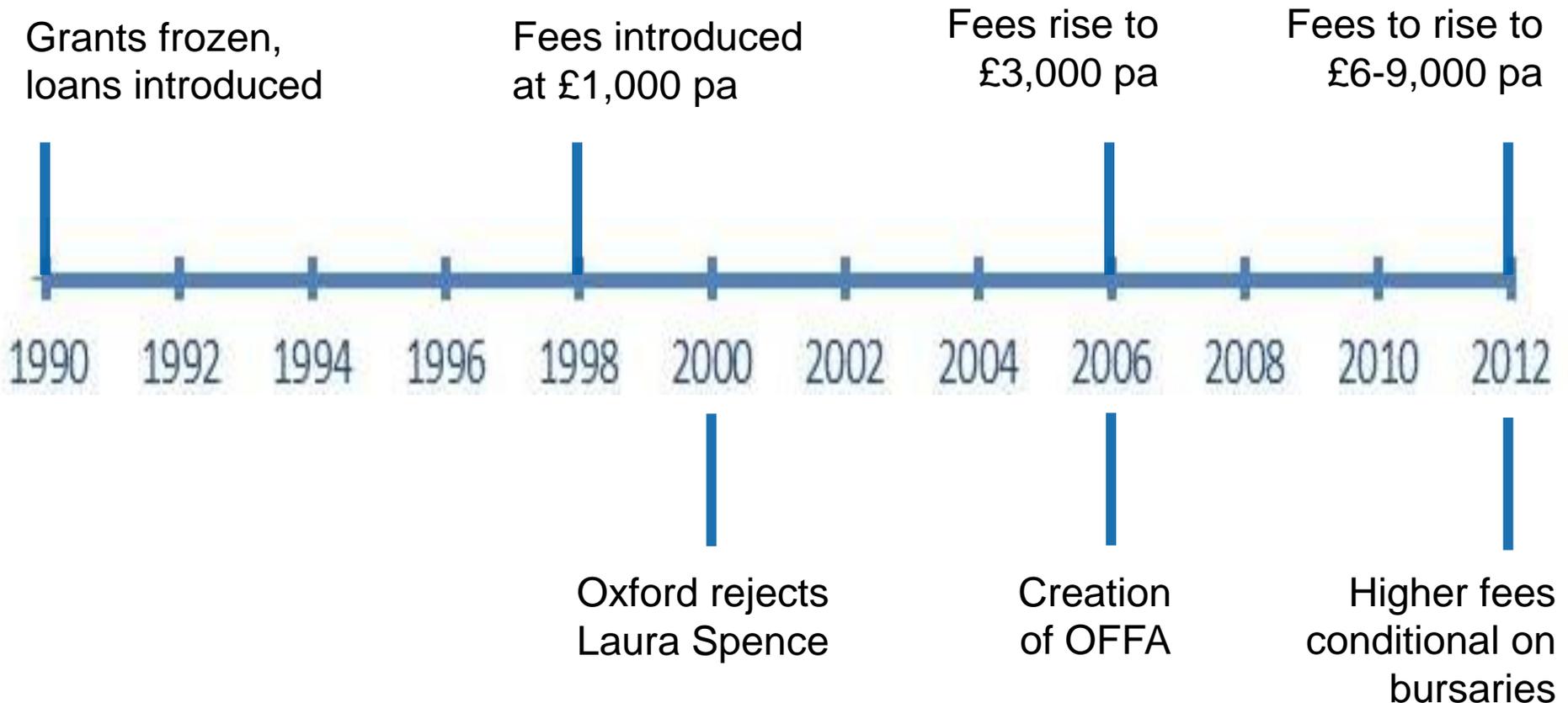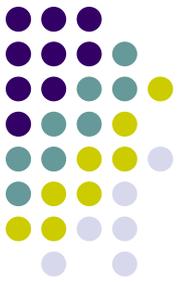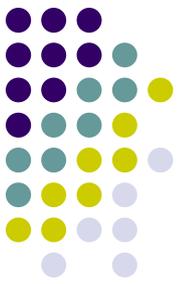
Background to the study

- Major changes to the UK HE sector (mass participation, privatization, marketization) make it Increasingly important to ask not just whether people go to university, but also to **which university** they go

- Access to more prestigious universities matters because of variability of **returns to HE** (including access to positions of power)

- This study explores social class, school type and ethnic inequalities of access to **Russell Group** (and other Old) universities

  - Role of **application choices** made by prospective students?
  - Role of **admissions decisions** made by universities?
  - Role of **social group differences in prior attainment**?
  - Impact of the **introduction and increase of fees** in 1998 & 2006?

Funding and access timeline

Grants frozen, loans introduced

Fees introduced at £1,000 pa

Fees rise to £3,000 pa

Fees to rise to £6-9,000 pa

1990 1992 1994 1996 1998 2000 2002 2004 2006 2008 2010 2012

Oxford rejects Laura Spence

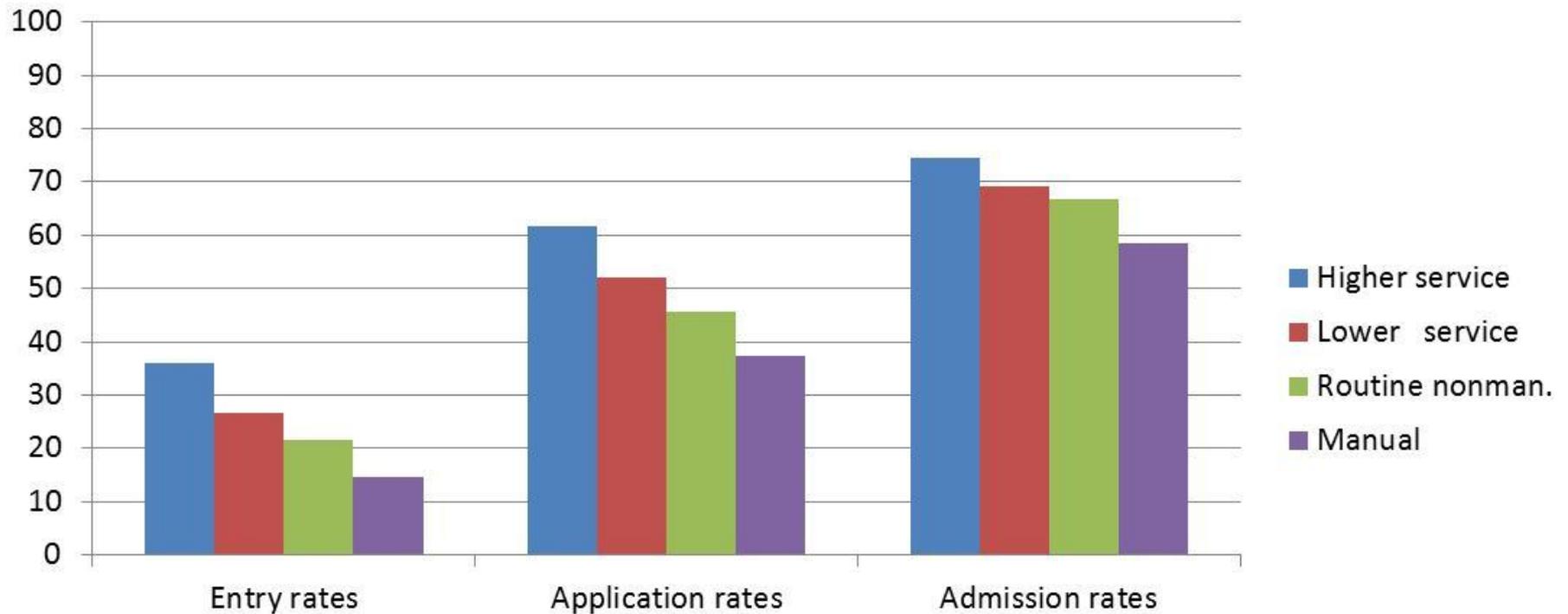Creation of OFFA

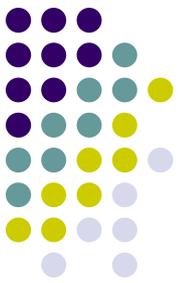Higher fees conditional on bursaries

Data and methods

- Individual-level data from the **Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS)** for the period 1996-2006

  - Random sample of 10% of applicants in each even year

  - N = 59,551 applicants making 273,873 applications

- To accommodate fact that applicants make multiple applications, data modelled using **random effects binary logistic regression**

- Two dependent variables: application and admission to Russell Group universities

  Model 1: Social class, school type and ethnicity as predictors

  Model 2: Controls for entry qualifications and A-level grades

  Model 3: Focus in on those with above-average A-levels

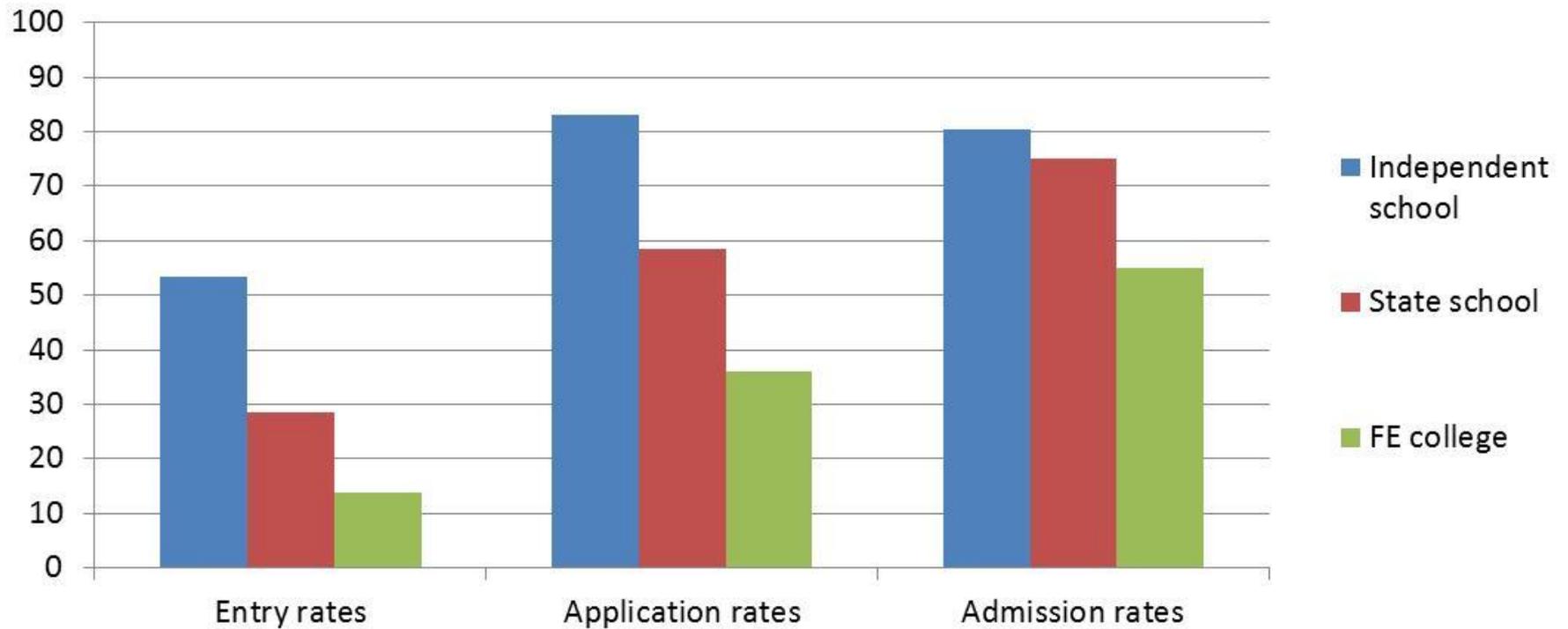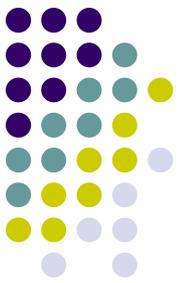 **Model 4:** Explore trends over time between 1996 and 2006

Social class

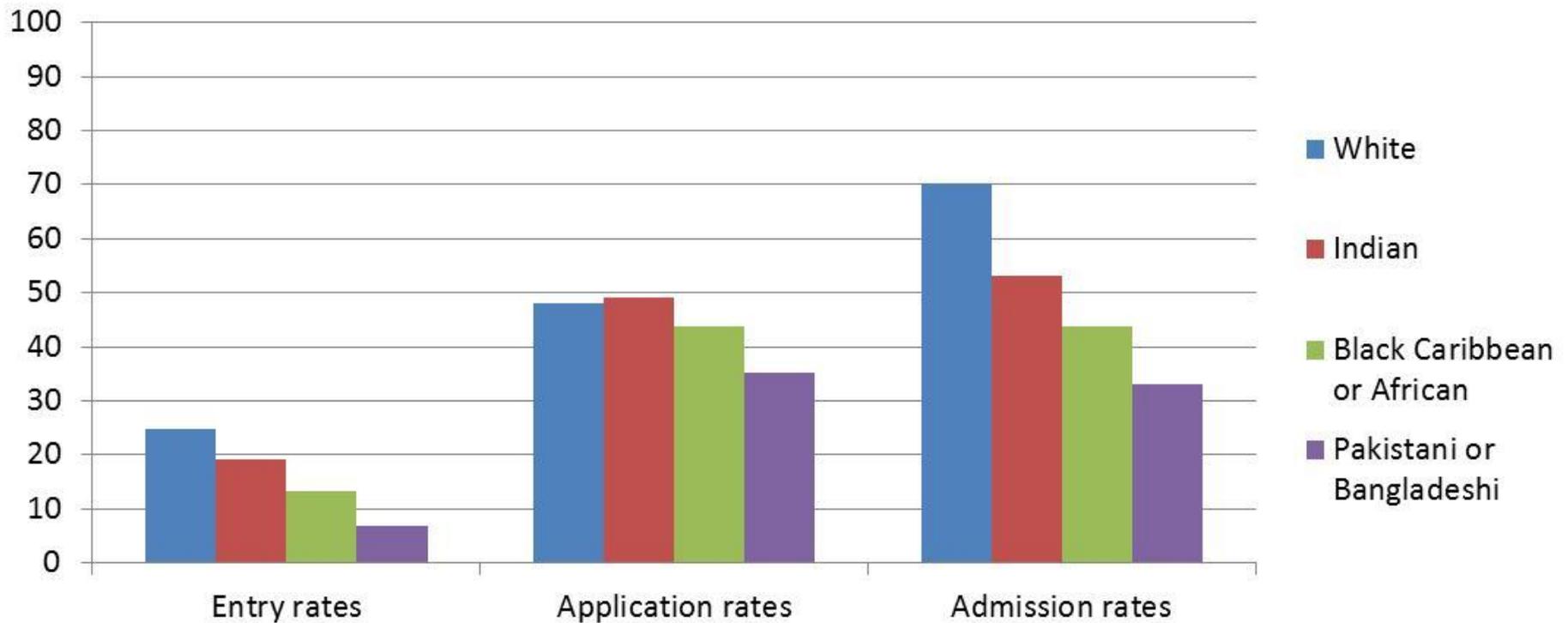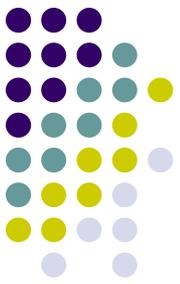## Rates of entry, application and admission to RG universities

School type

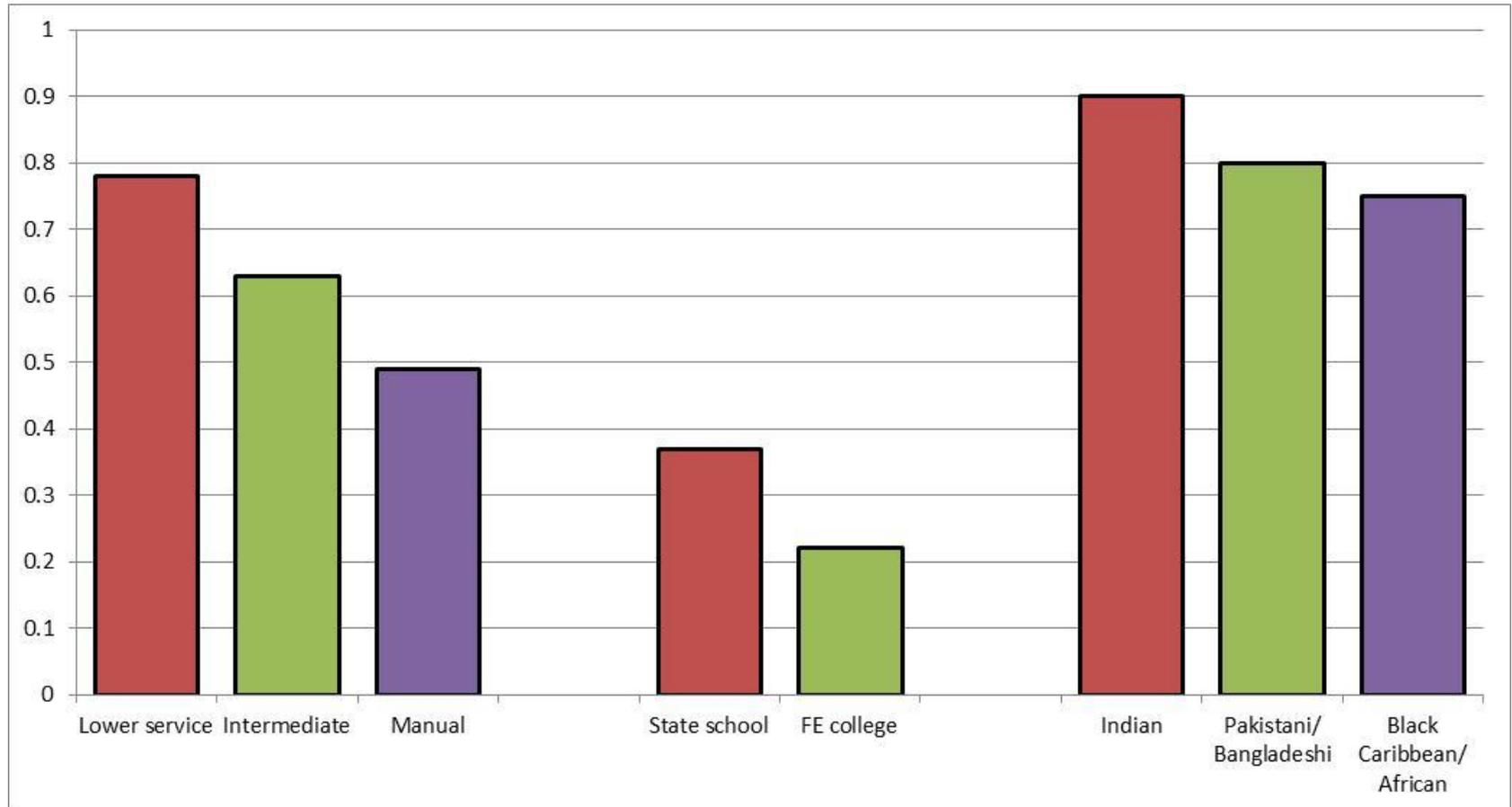**Rates of entry, application and admission to RG universities**
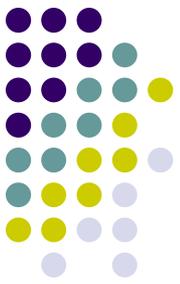
Ethnic group

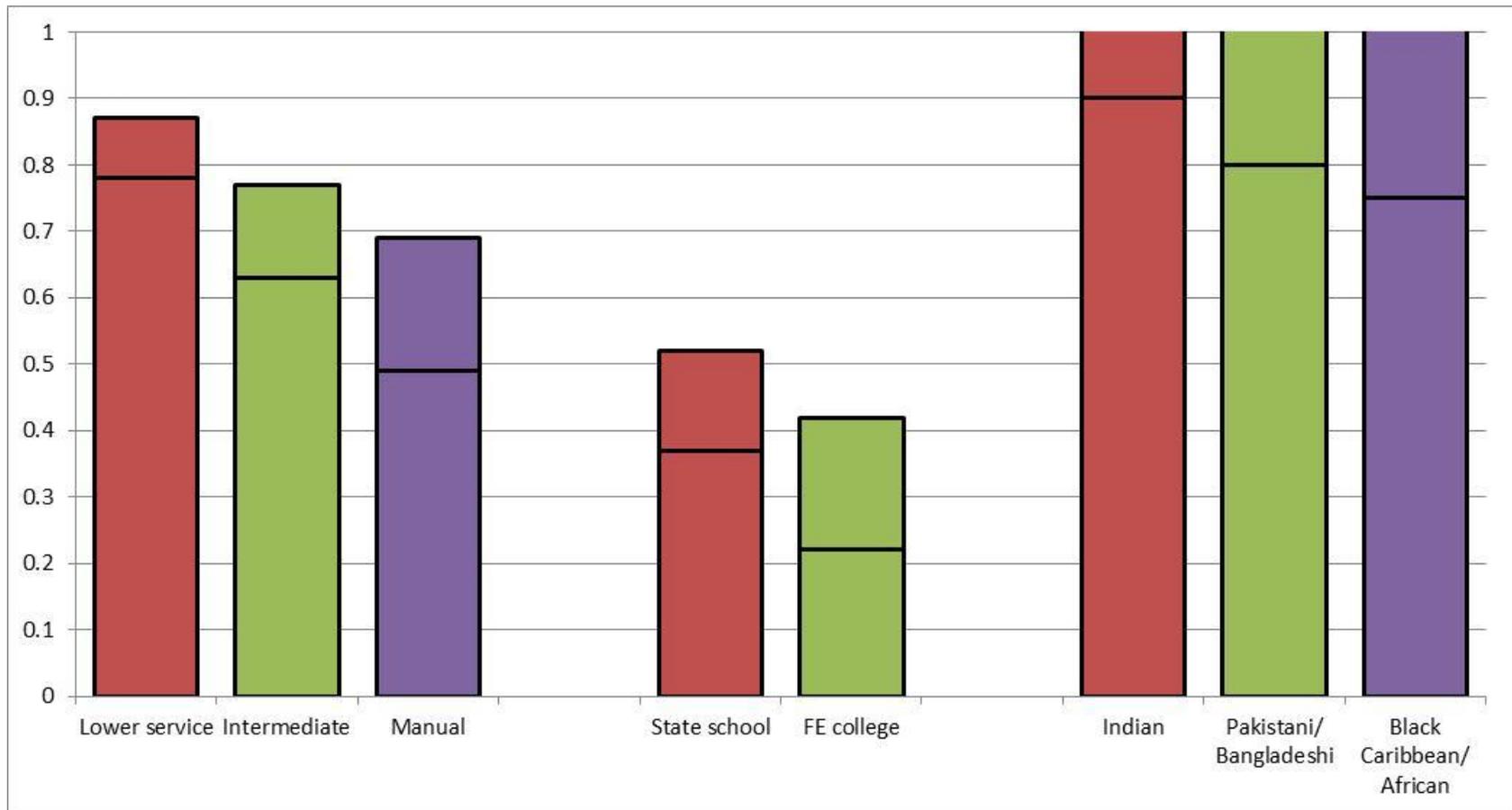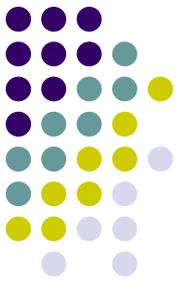## Rates of entry, application and admission to RG universities

Multivariate models: application

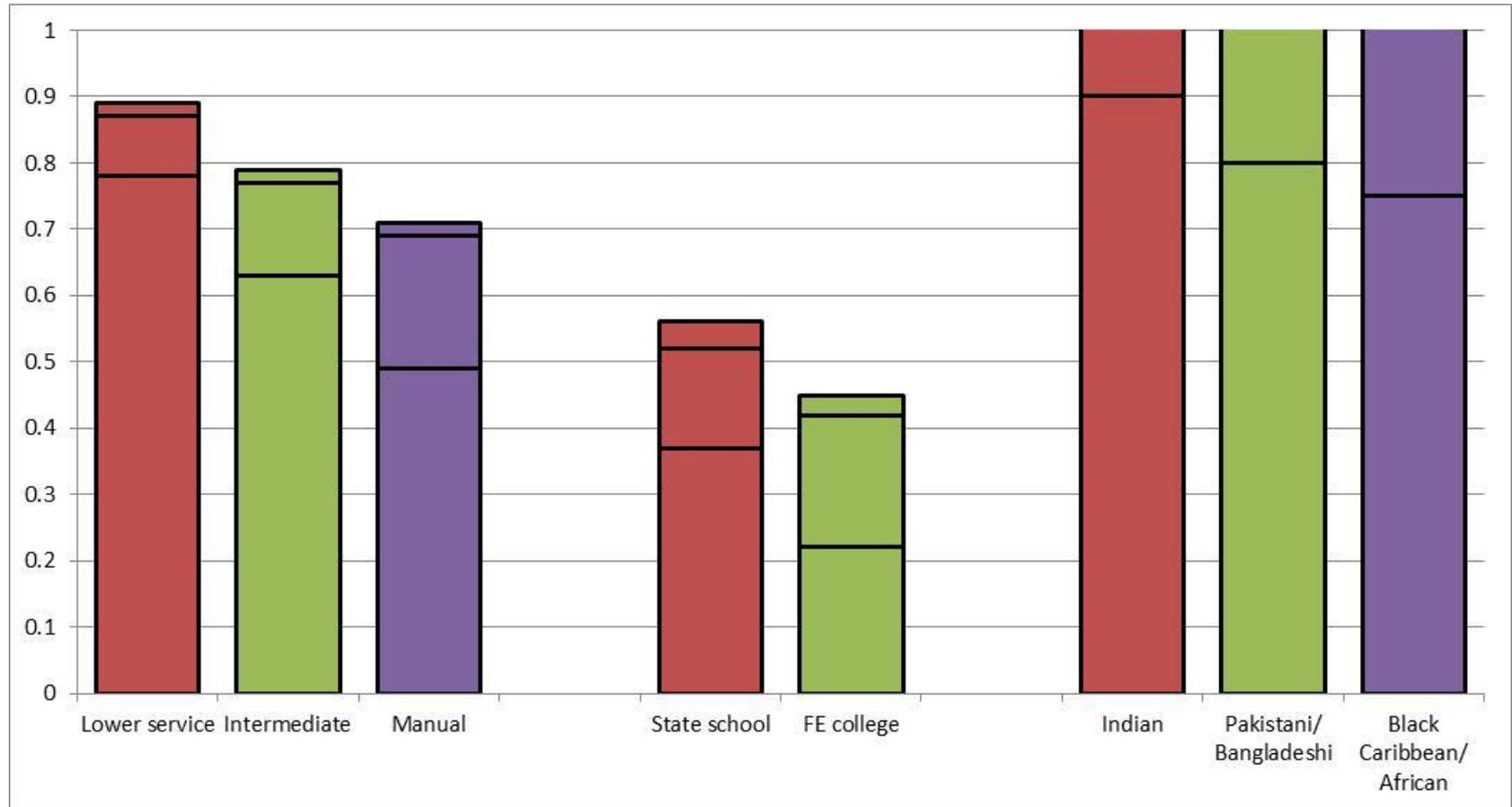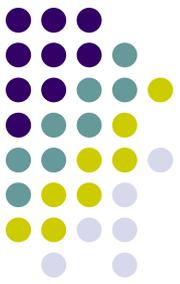## Model 1 Social background variables

Multivariate models: application

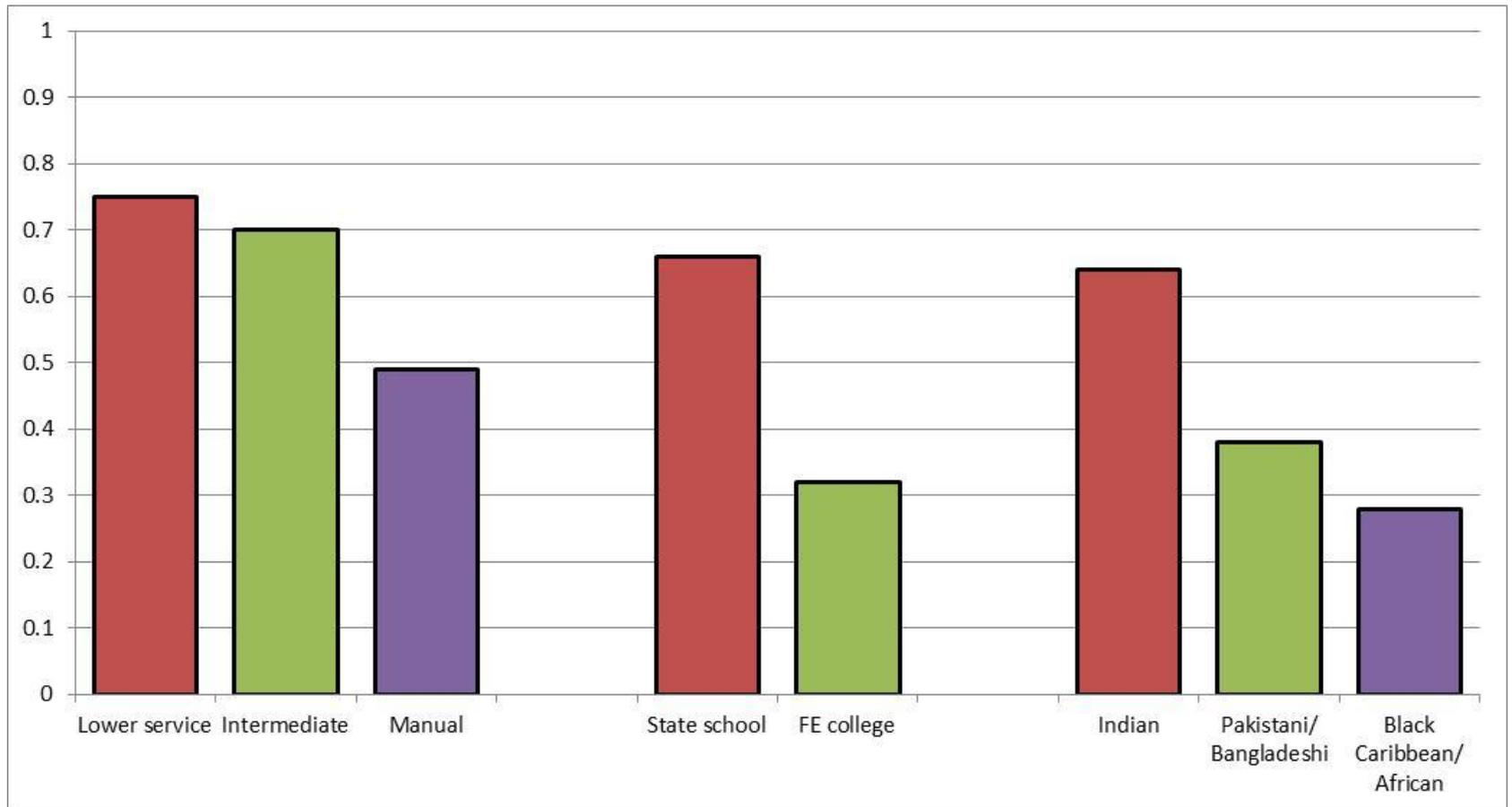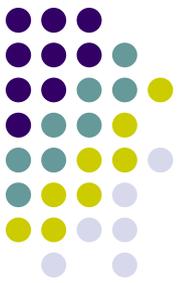**Model 2 Addition of controls for prior attainment**

Multivariate models: application
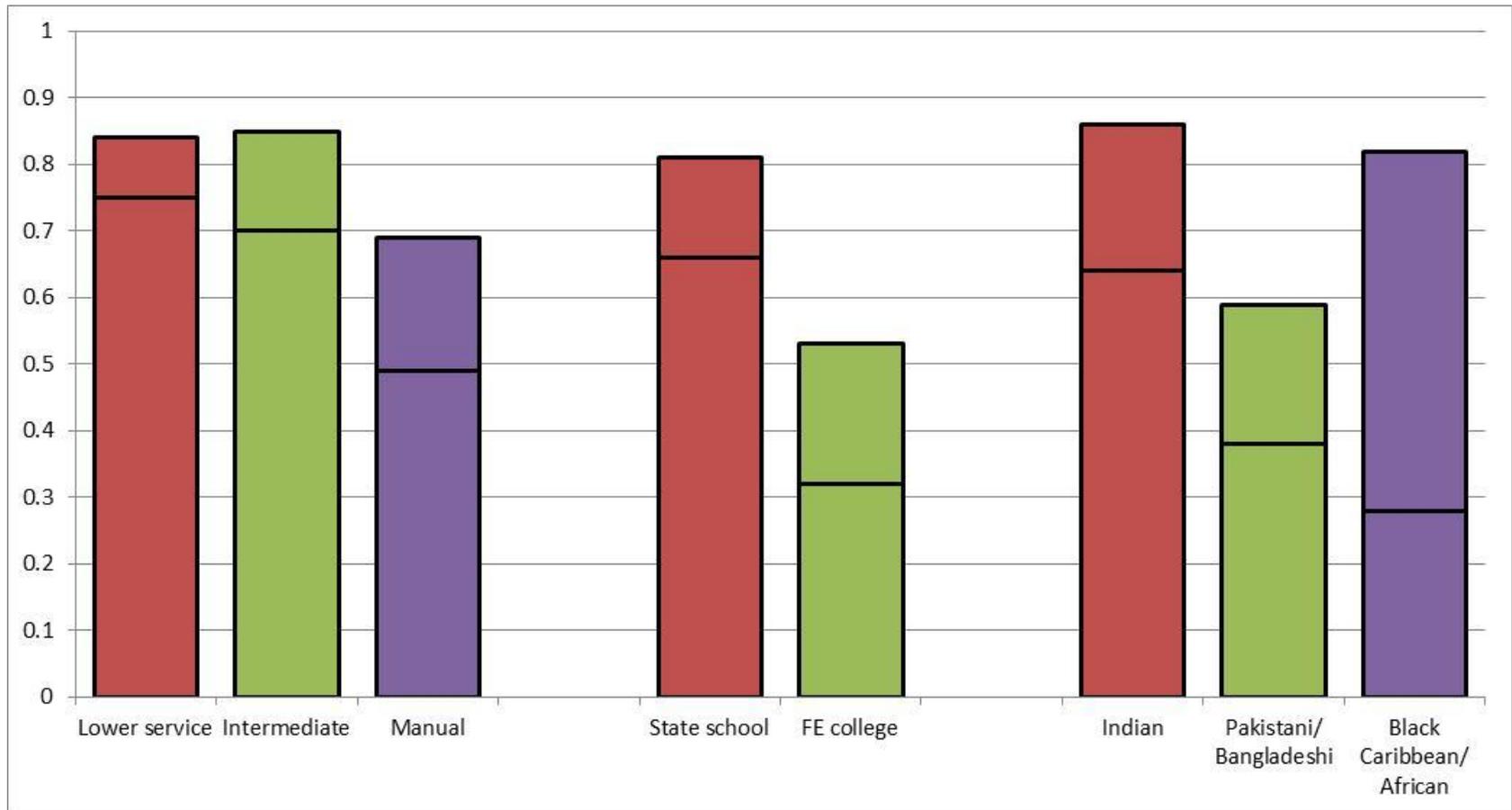
Model 3 Focus on those with above-average A-level grades
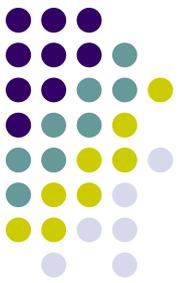
Multivariate models: admission

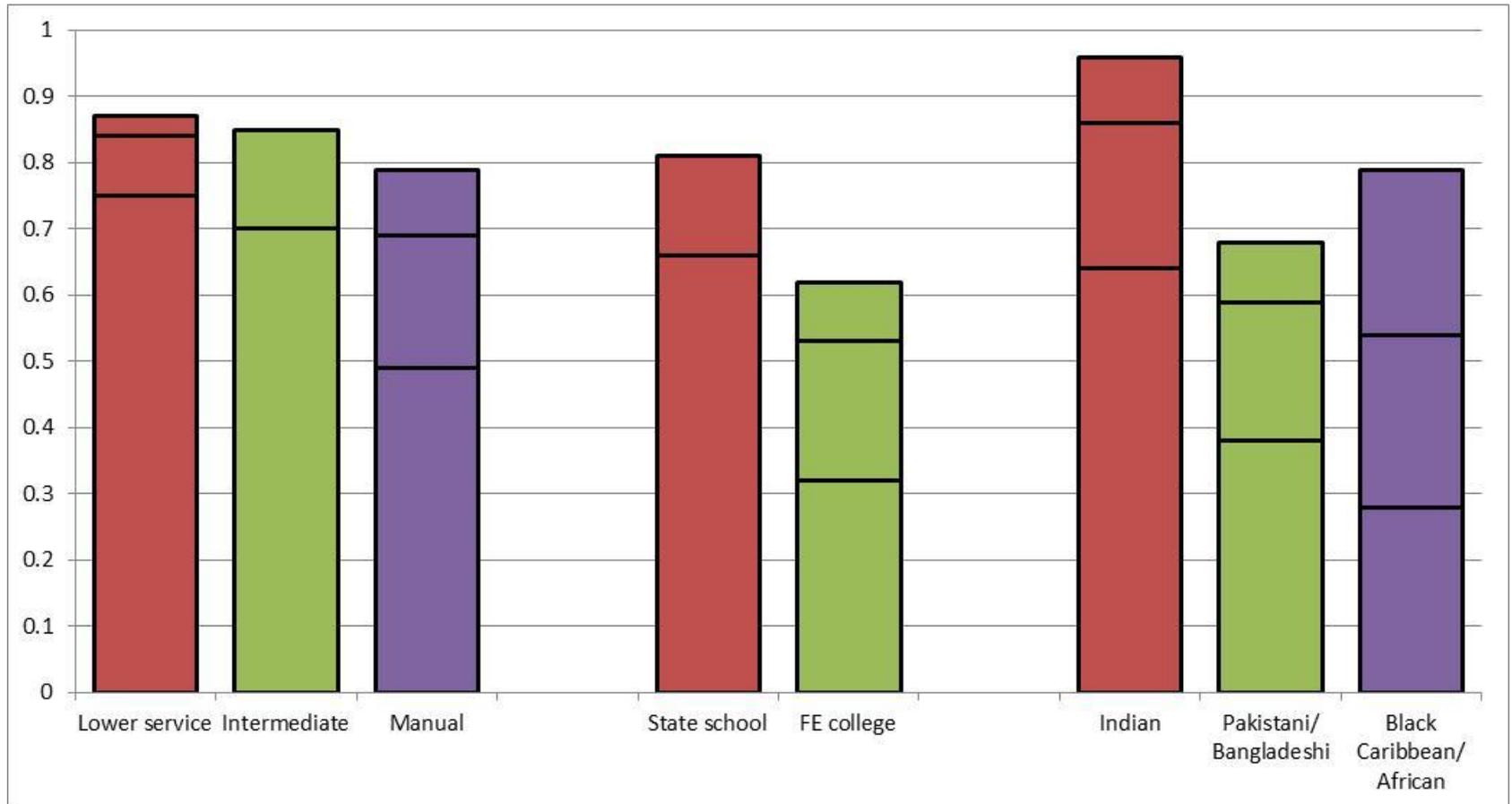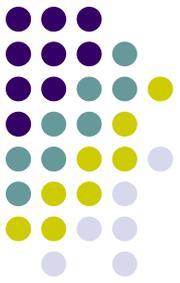## Model 1 Social background variables

Multivariate models: admission

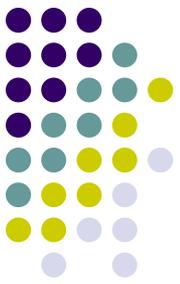**Model 2 Addition of controls for prior attainment**

Multivariate models: admission

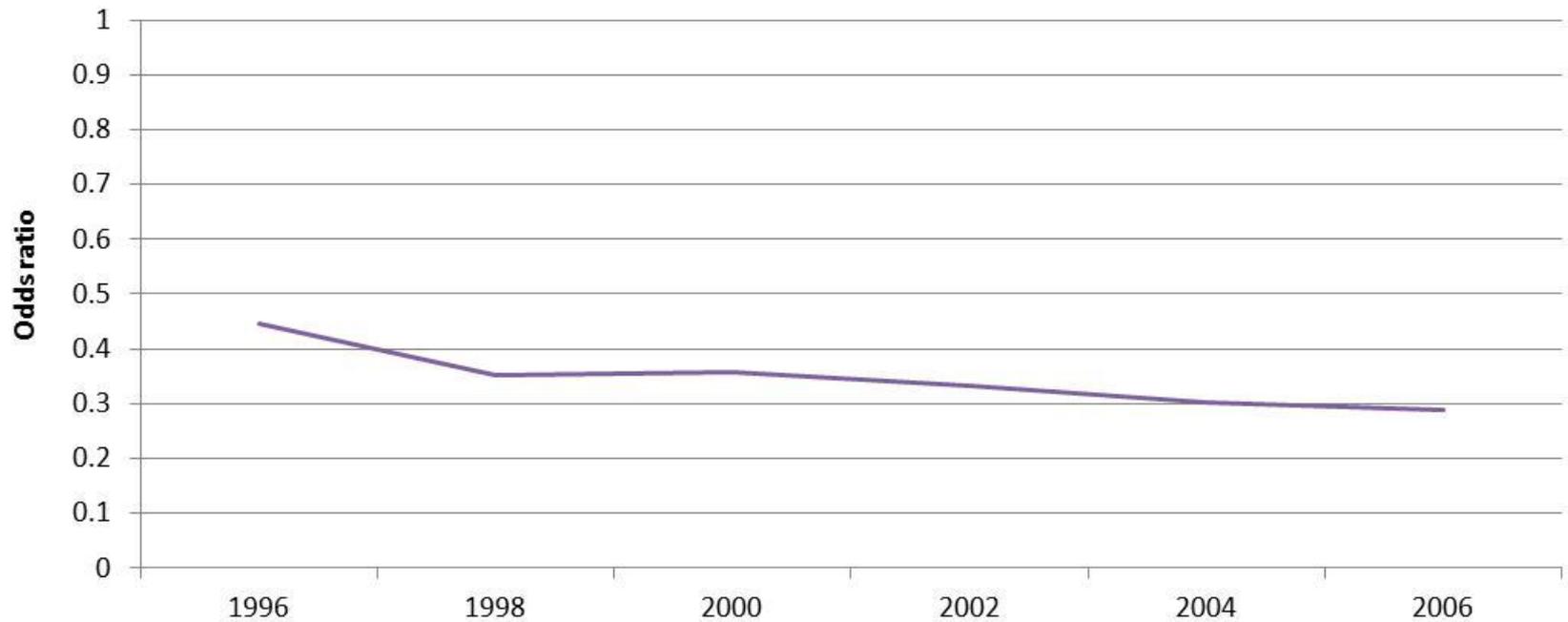**Model 3 Focus on those with above-average A-level grades**
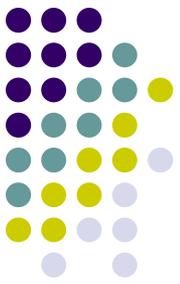
Trends over time: application

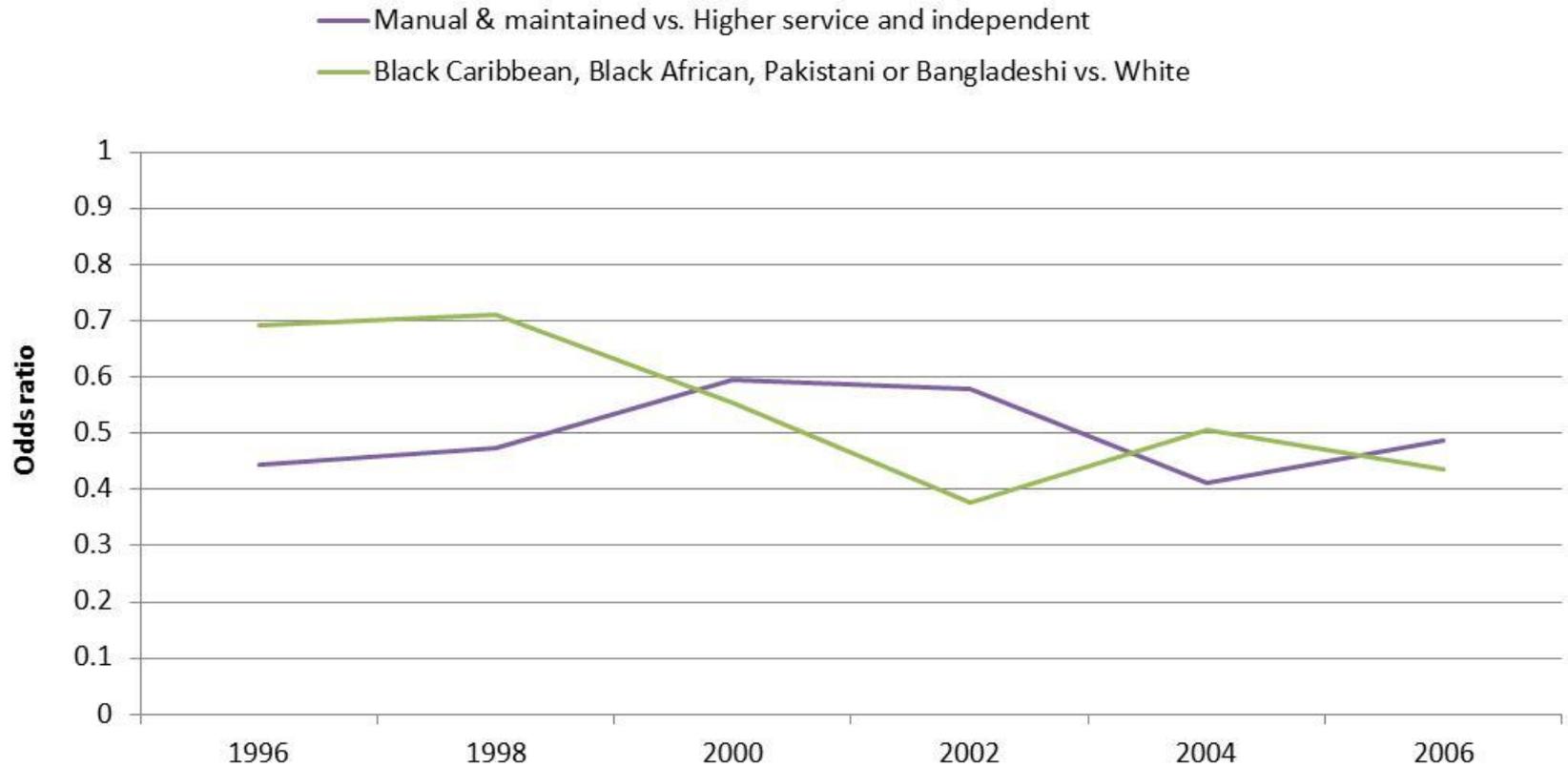Trends in the comparative odds of application to Russell Group universities

— Manual & maintained vs. Higher service and independent
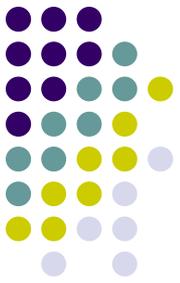
Trends over time: admission

Trends in the comparative odds of admission to Russell Group universities

— Manual & maintained vs. Higher service and independent
— Black Caribbean, Black African, Pakistani or Bangladeshi vs. White

Summary

- Students from lower social class origins, maintained sector schools, and black and Asian ethnic backgrounds **less likely to apply and less likely to be admitted** to more prestigious universities

- Unequal propensities to apply and be admitted to more prestigious universities **only partly accounted for by prior attainment**

- Patterns of access to more prestigious universities have been largely **stable over time**

- Next step is to explore the impact of the fees increase in 2012

For a copy of these slides or the draft paper, email me at
v.boliver@bathspa.ac.uk