



Institute for
Fiscal Studies

Some key facts on the link between family background and educational attainment

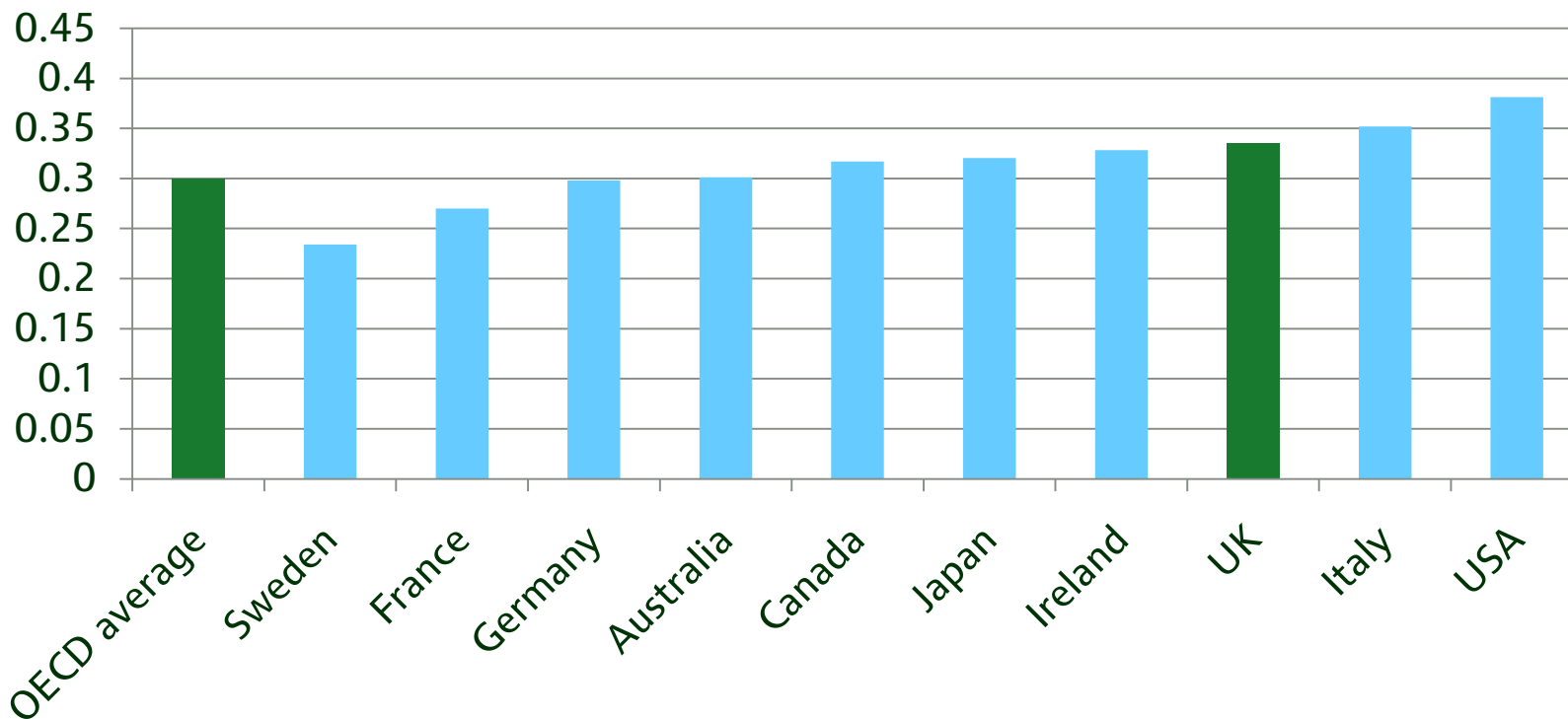
Claire Crawford and Paul Johnson

Summary

- Strong relationship between children’s educational attainment and family background in the UK
- Differences emerge early and widen over time
- There has been some success at encouraging children from lower SES backgrounds to reach “expected” levels of achievement
 - But children from higher SES backgrounds continue to improve too, highlighting difficulty of targeting relative measure of social mobility
- Large SES gaps persist in higher education participation
 - But mainly driven by differences in attainment at 16 and 18, so earlier intervention is key to widening participation
- Which types of policies are most likely to improve education/skills amongst those from the lowest SES backgrounds?

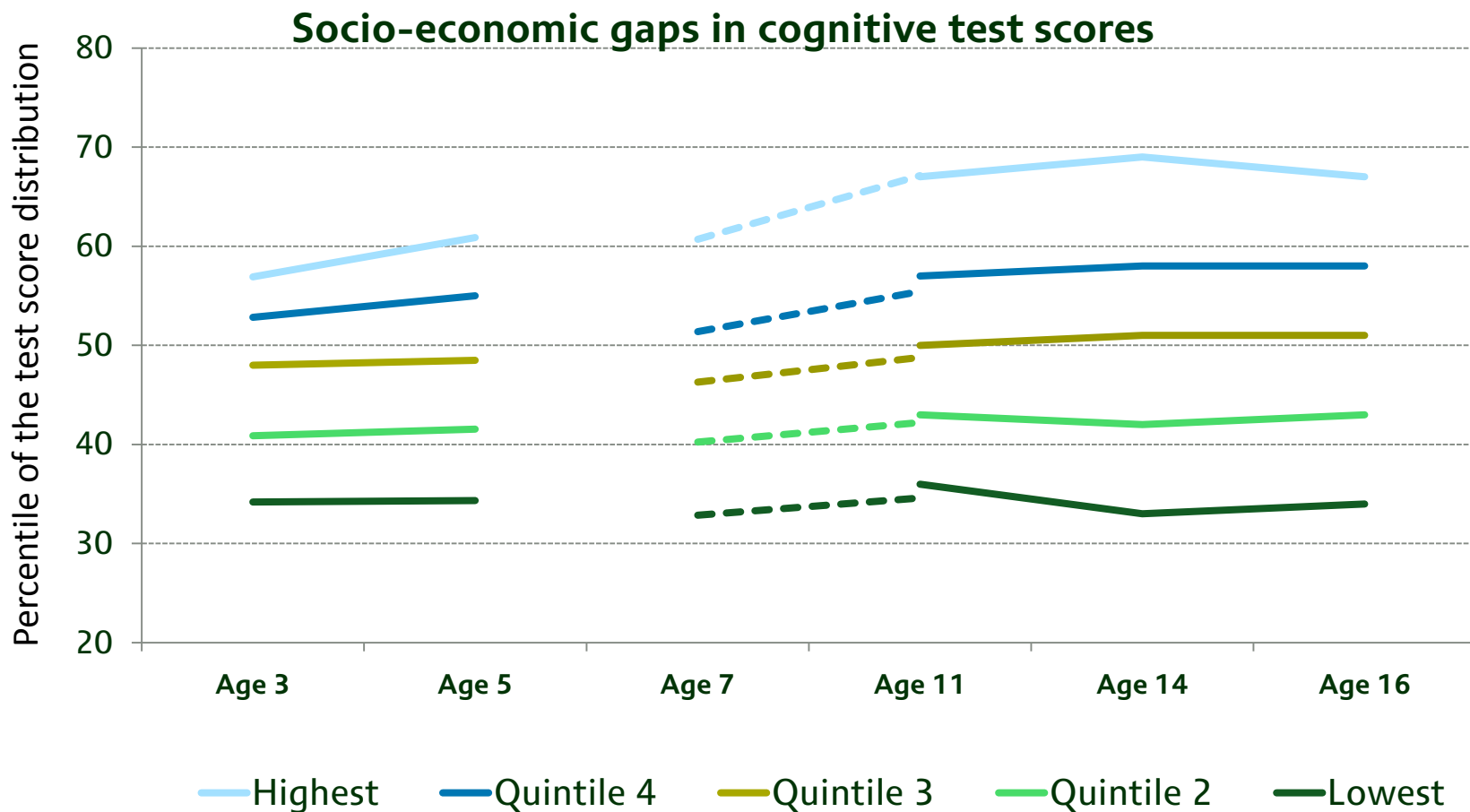
Strong relationship between educational attainment and family background may be related to the fact that income inequality is higher in UK than most other OECD countries

**Income inequality in selected OECD countries in mid 2000s,
as measured by Gini coefficient**



Source: OECD (2008), Growing Unequal? Income distribution and poverty in OECD countries, available at: http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/growing-unequal_9789264044197-en

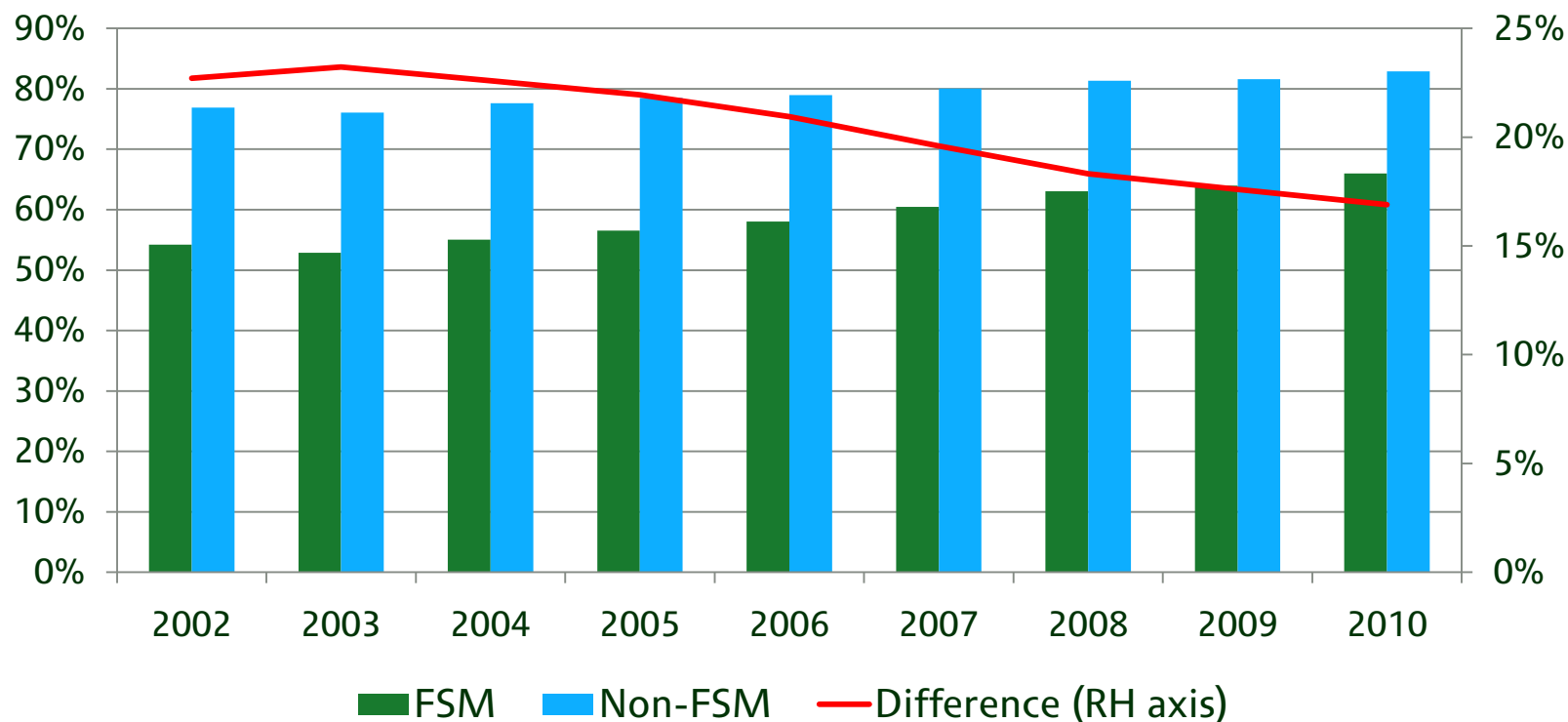
Differences emerge early and widen over time



Source: Goodman & Gregg (2010), Poorer children's educational attainment: how important are attitudes and behaviours?, Report to the JRF, available at: <http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/educational-attainment-poor-children>

More FSM pupils are reaching the expected level (Level 4) at age 11

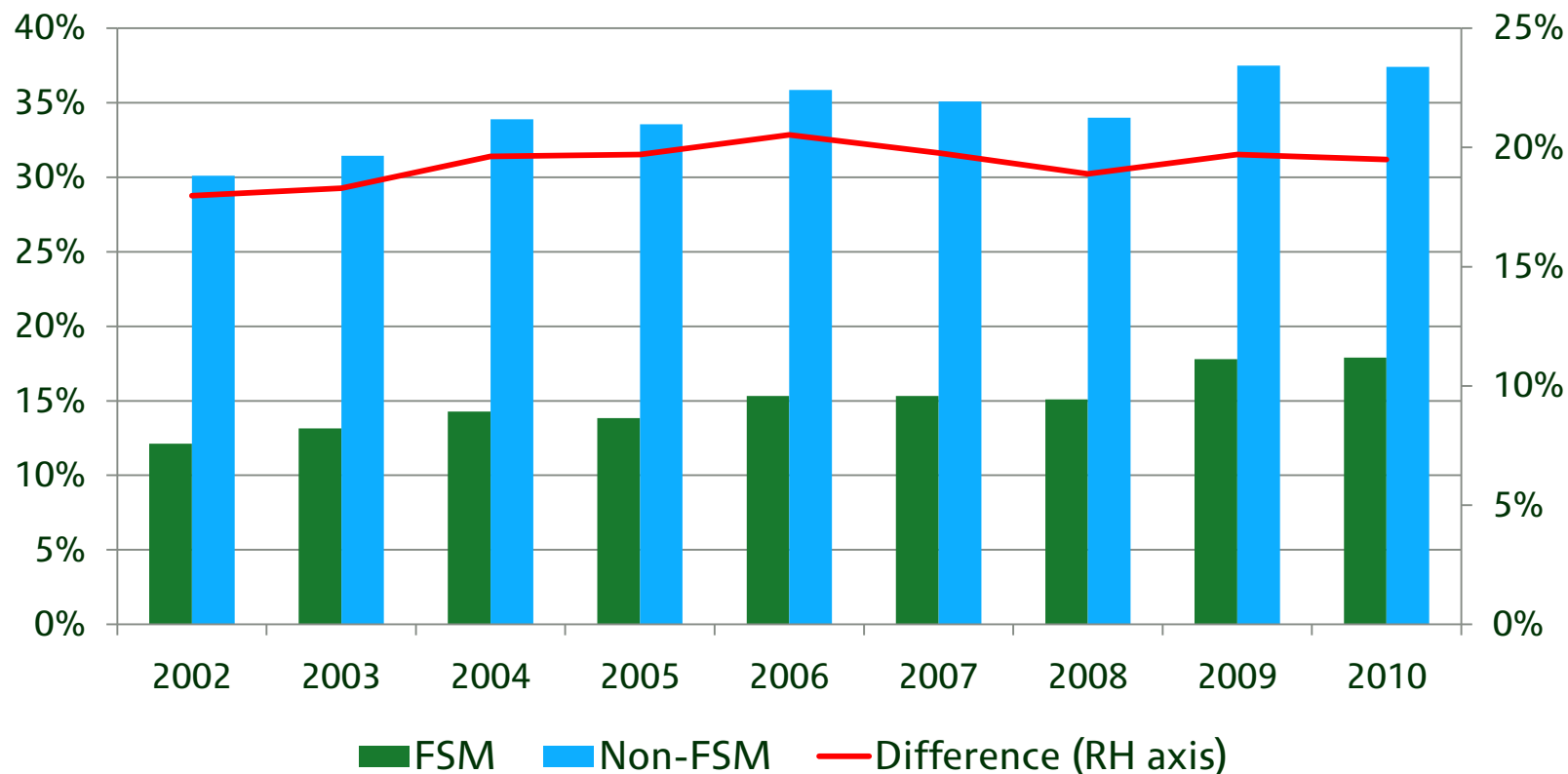
% of pupils reaching the expected level or above in Key Stage 2 maths tests



2006-2010 figures based on SFR 35/2010: Key Stage 2 Attainment by Pupil Characteristics in England in 2009-10, Department for Education, available at: <http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000972/index.shtml>.
2002-2005 figures based on authors' calculations using Key Stage 2 and PLASC data.

But they are not closing the gap at Level 5

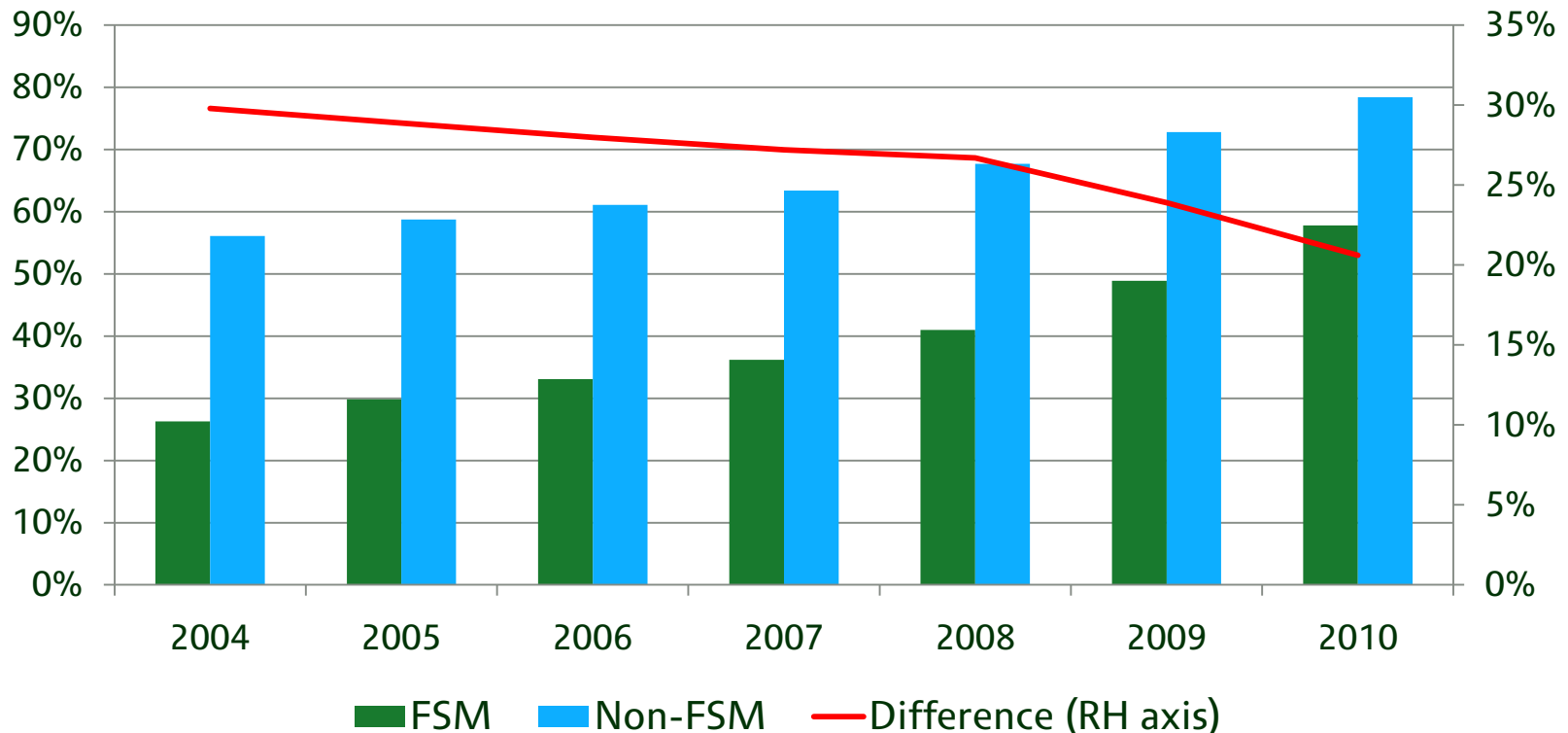
% of pupils achieving Level 5 in Key Stage 2 maths tests



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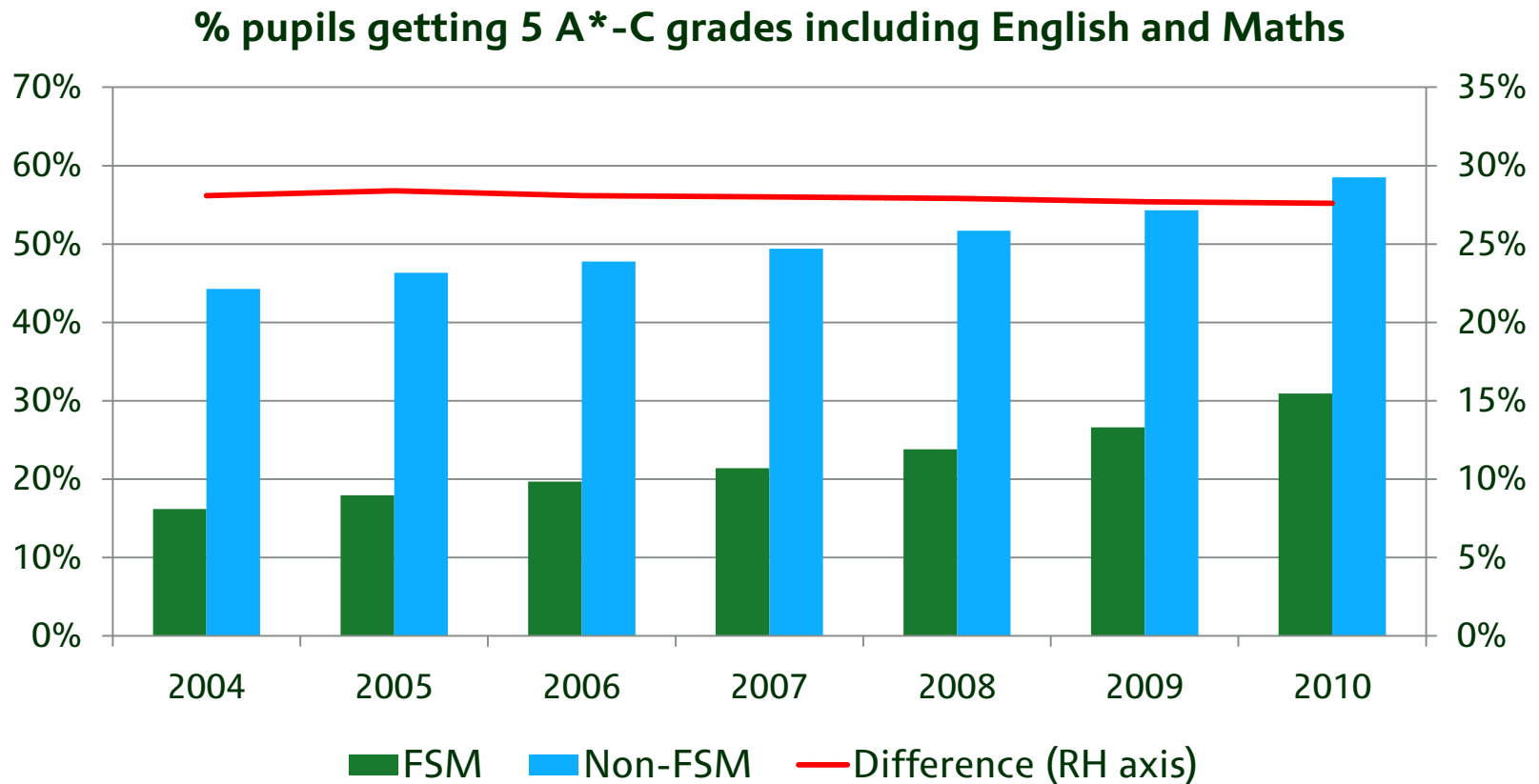
And while GCSE equivalents seem to have helped FSM pupils to close the gap . . .

% pupils getting 5 A*-C grades in GCSEs and equivalents



2006-2010 figures based on SFR 37/2010: GCSE and Equivalent Attainment by Pupil Characteristics in England, Department for Education, available at: <http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000977/sfr37-2010.pdf>. 2004-2005 figures based on authors' calculations using Key Stage 4 and PLASC data.

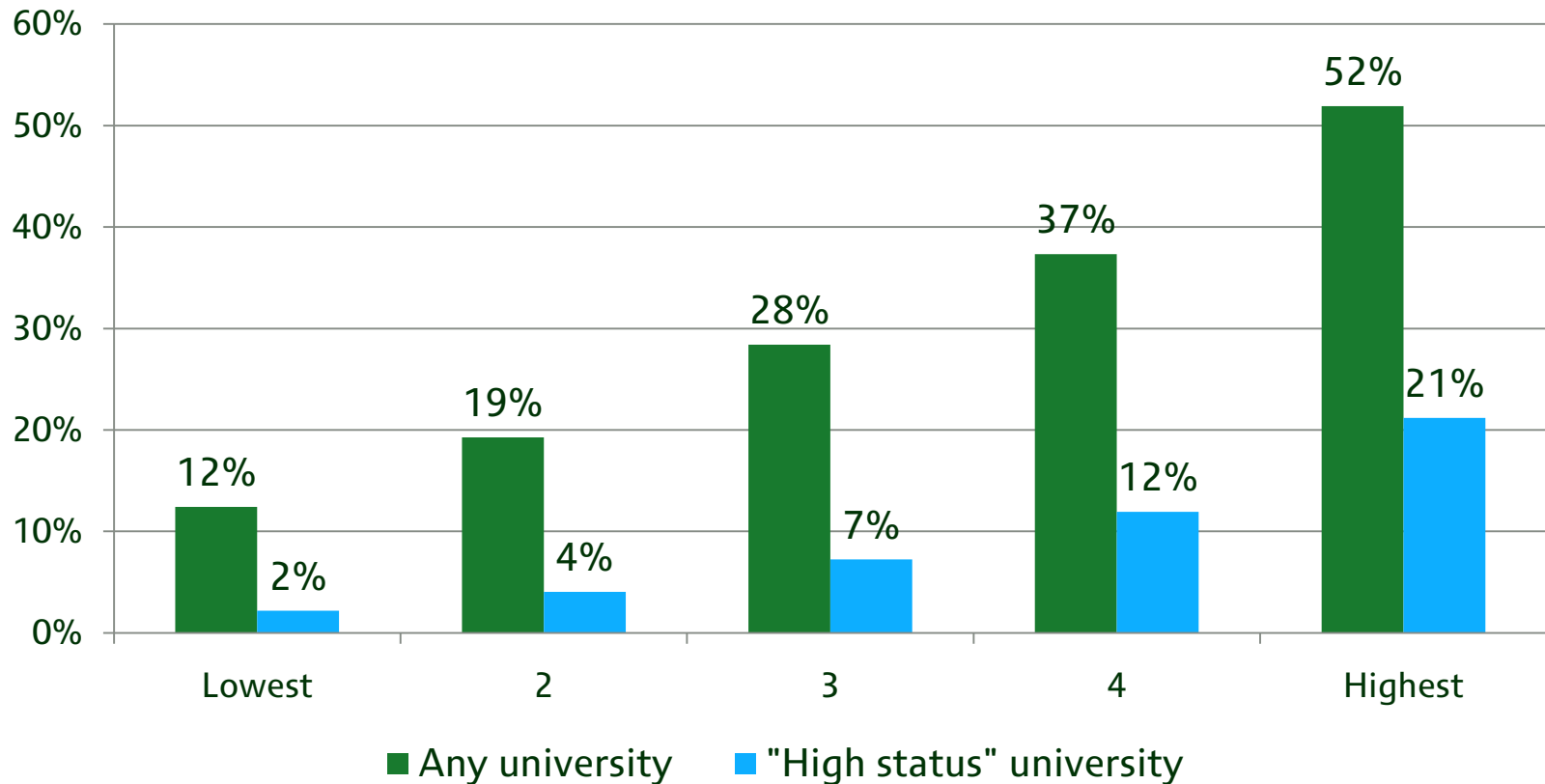
The gap has not closed when measuring GCSEs including English and Maths



2006-2010 figures based on SFR 37/2010: GCSE and Equivalent Attainment by Pupil Characteristics in England, Department for Education, available at: <http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000977/sfr37-2010.pdf>. 2004-2005 figures based on authors' calculations using Key Stage 4 and PLASC data.

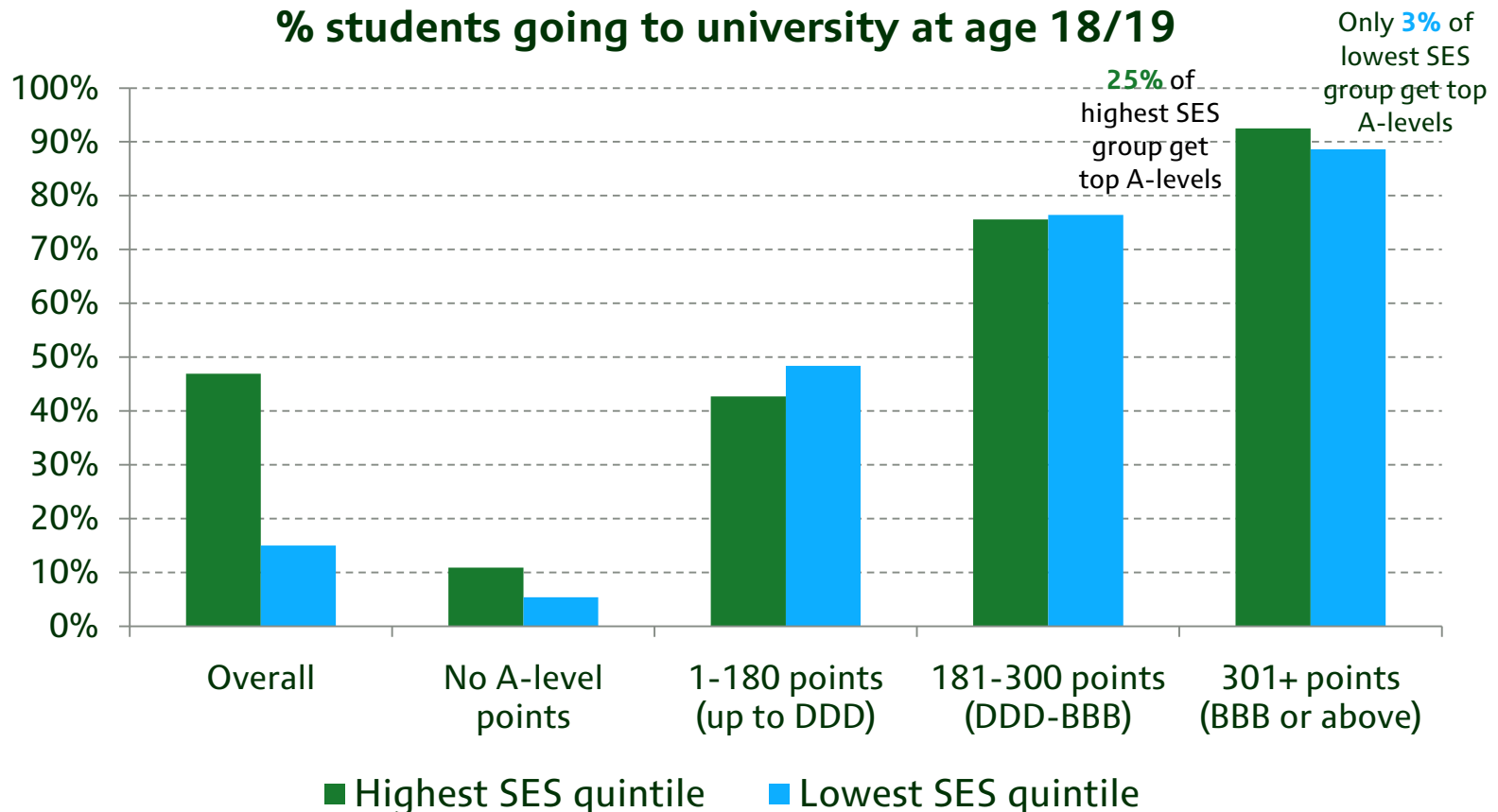
Family background also influences university participation, as well as the type of institution attended

% students going to university at age 18/19



Source: authors' calculations based on linked schools and universities administrative data for the cohorts eligible first eligible to start university in 2004-05 and 2005-06 (who sat their GCSEs in 2001-02 and 2002-03)

But these differences are almost entirely explained by differences in prior attainment



Source: based on work in Chowdry, Crawford, Dearden, Goodman & Vignoles (2010), Widening participation in higher education: analysis using linked administrative data, IFS Working Paper No. W10/04, available at: <http://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/4951>

Which types of policies are most likely to improve attainment/skills amongst the poorest?

- Early interventions have the potential to be more productive than later interventions
 - Strongest evidence is for high intensity interventions, e.g. Family-Nurse Partnership; mixed evidence on lower intensity interventions
 - But cannot just intervene once and then sit back; early interventions are most productive if followed up: consistency matters
- Basic skills (literacy/numeracy) are highly valued in the UK labour market, suggesting a shortage of such skills
 - Very difficult to improve in adulthood
 - Good evidence on (cost) effective literacy strategies, e.g.
 - The Literacy Hour: structured teaching methods affecting all children
 - Every Child a Reader: intensive 1:1 intervention for very lowest achievers
 - Improve outcomes in short run but uncertain how long benefits last

Which types of policies are most likely to improve attainment/skills amongst the poorest?

- Teachers matter:
 - Recruiting and retaining high quality teachers, and helping them to pass on their skills to other teachers is vital
 - But identifying who will become “good” teachers is difficult; degree class and experience are not good proxies; more evidence needed
 - Also important to remember that schools are only part of the story; parents/families have at least as great an influence on attainment
- Students need to be supported to make the right decisions
 - Choice of GCSE and A-level subjects and what to do at 16
- Later interventions may be better targeted at non-cognitive skills (e.g. leadership and time management) than cognitive skills
 - Though evidence remains weak; more is needed