

# Educational mobility: Students from working class background half as likely to attend top universities

August 22 2019, by Tony Trueman

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Students from a working class background are around half as likely to move to a 'golden triangle' university to study for a masters' degree than those with wealthier parents, even if they match them academically.

In the first study of its kind, researchers analyzed data on 35,000 students living in the UK who went on to do a master's after their first degree, and found that most stayed at the same university to continue their studies.

Of the students who moved universities, 24 percent of those with parents from the higher professions went to 'golden triangle' universities—Oxford, Cambridge and some London colleges—compared with 11 percent of those whose parents did routine occupations.

When considering those students who got a first for their bachelor's degree, the gap remained—36 percent of those from the higher background went to golden triangle universities, compared with 20 percent of those whose parents did routine jobs.

The researchers, José Luis Mateos-González and Professor Paul Wakeling, of the University of York, said that difficulty in finding funding may have deterred poorer students.

Mr Mateos told the the European Sociological Association conference in Manchester, 22 August 2019, that "There is less mobility than we might expect, and those from advantaged backgrounds are much more likely to move institutions and to enroll in a master's course in a golden triangle institution.

"Institutional immobility varies significantly based on the socio-economic background of graduates. Among those graduates that were institutionally mobile, the odds of enrolling in a golden triangle university vary greatly by socioeconomic classification.

"This was the case even after we examined students applying from the same type of university with first class degrees—it appears that pathways

to elite institutions are closed off at entry to [higher education](#).

"The reason why students from a working [class background](#) may be deterred from studying at a golden triangle university is probably funding. Those students enrolling in a master's degree in 2017/18 had access to a government-backed loan capped at £10,280. In most cases, this amount hardly covers master's fees in leading universities, which tend to have higher than average fees.

"This, together with the high maintenance costs in cities such as London, Cambridge or Oxford, may stop poorer students from pursuing a master's degree in a golden triangle university."

Mr Mateos said they carried out the study because progression to master's degree had been largely unnoticed in debates about widening participation.

The researchers analyzed data from UK's Higher Education Statistics Agency and the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education survey containing information from all students that in 2016/17 graduated from their first-degrees, 350,000, of whom 35,000 went on to master's degrees.

The 'golden triangle' is the universities of Oxford and Cambridge and some London institutions: Imperial College, King's College, University College London and the London School of Economics.

The researchers used the National Statistics Socio-Economic classification for parent's [occupation](#), which has seven groupings: higher managerial and professional; lower managerial and professional; intermediate occupations; small employers and own account workers; lower supervisory and technical occupations; semi-routine occupations; routine occupations.

Provided by European Sociological Association

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