

# Geographies of Higher Education

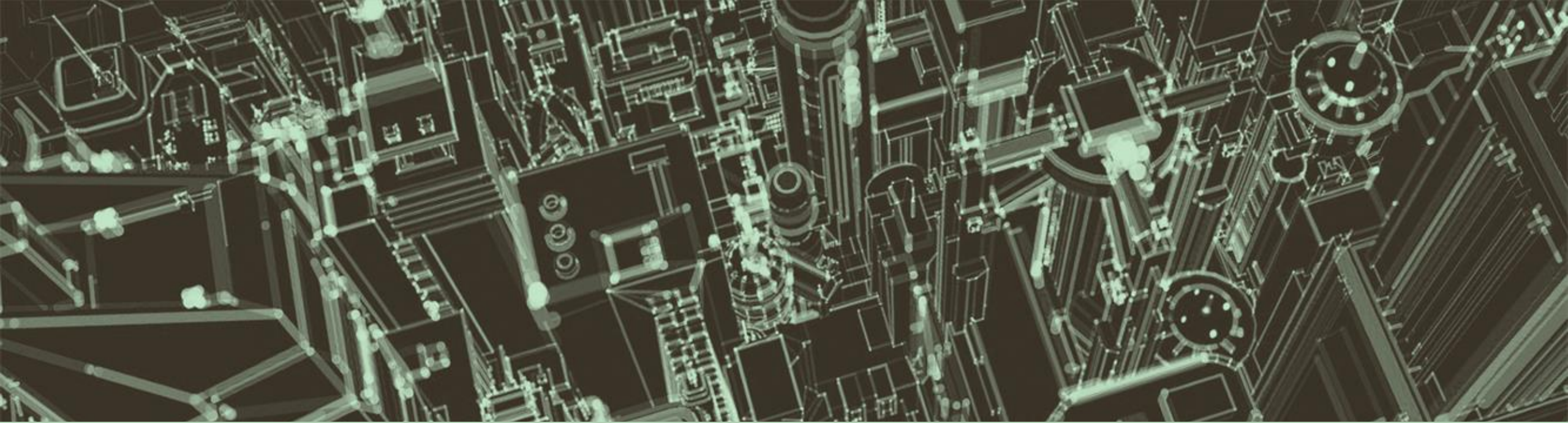
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# What do we mean by geographies of higher education?

- Geographic *inequality*
- Geographic *borders and boundaries*
- Geographic *mobilities*



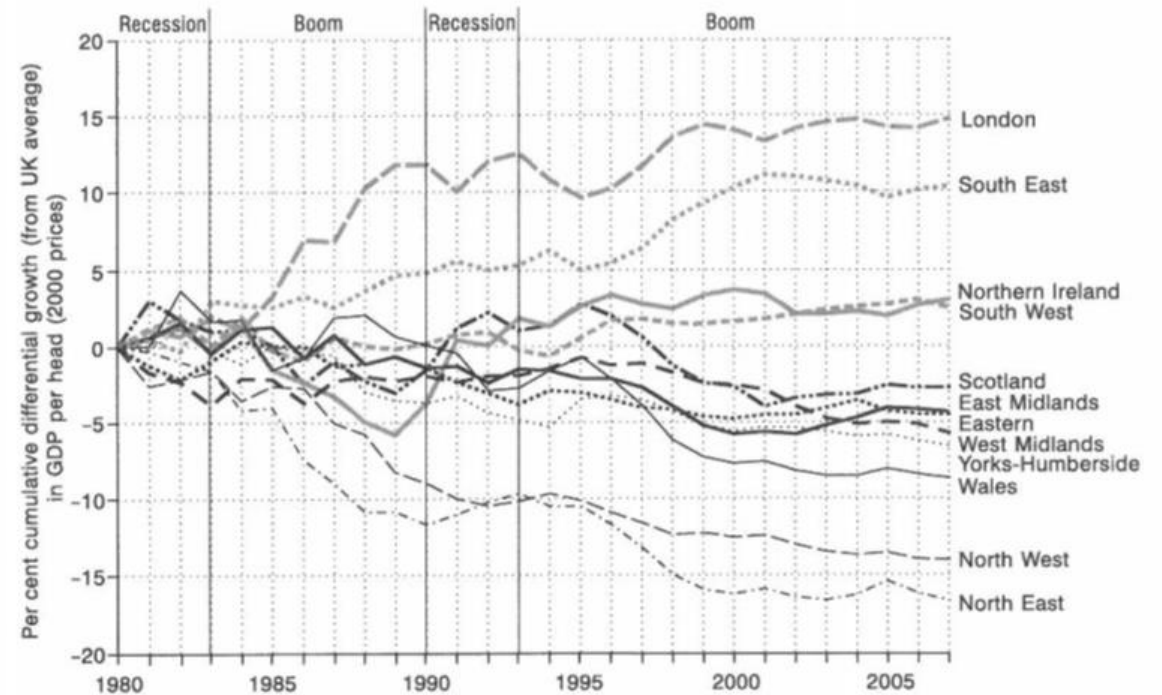


# Geographic inequality



# UK: the most economically divided nation in Europe

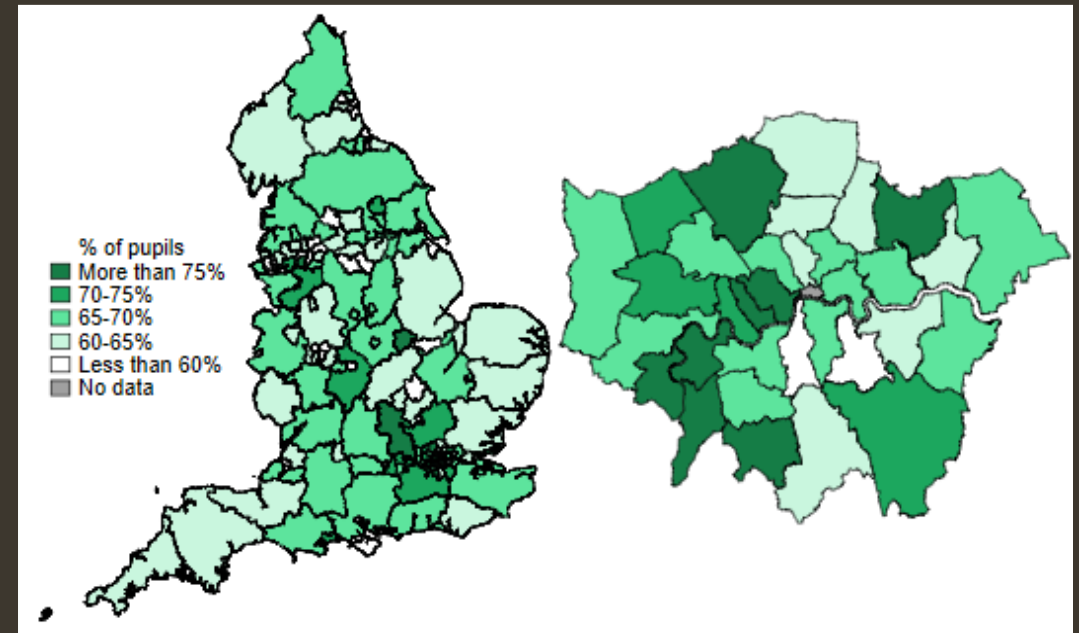
- Economic catastrophe of deindustrialization has never been fully healed.
- Plethora of place-based policy, including education (most recently levelling up).
- But regional development programmes have never been at the scale of other European nations (especially countries like Germany) with lower rates of geographic inequality.



**Figure 3.1** Growing apart: regional cumulative differential growth in GDP per capita, 1980–2007. Cumulative differential growth measured as cumulative annual difference between regional and national percentage change in GDP per capita. GDP measure is work-place based. (Cambridge Econometrics, <http://www.camecon.com>)

# Economic inequalities across space translate into poorer educational outcomes and unequal HE participation

- Biggest predictor of low attainment relates to social background, not geography.
- ...But poverty is not equally distributed across the UK - geography is not directly linked to attainment, but mediated by background.
- Despite this, London has had incredible success and lower rates of inequality than other parts of UK. Poorer groups in London do better than other parts of UK.





# Translating into stark geographic inequalities in higher education entry...

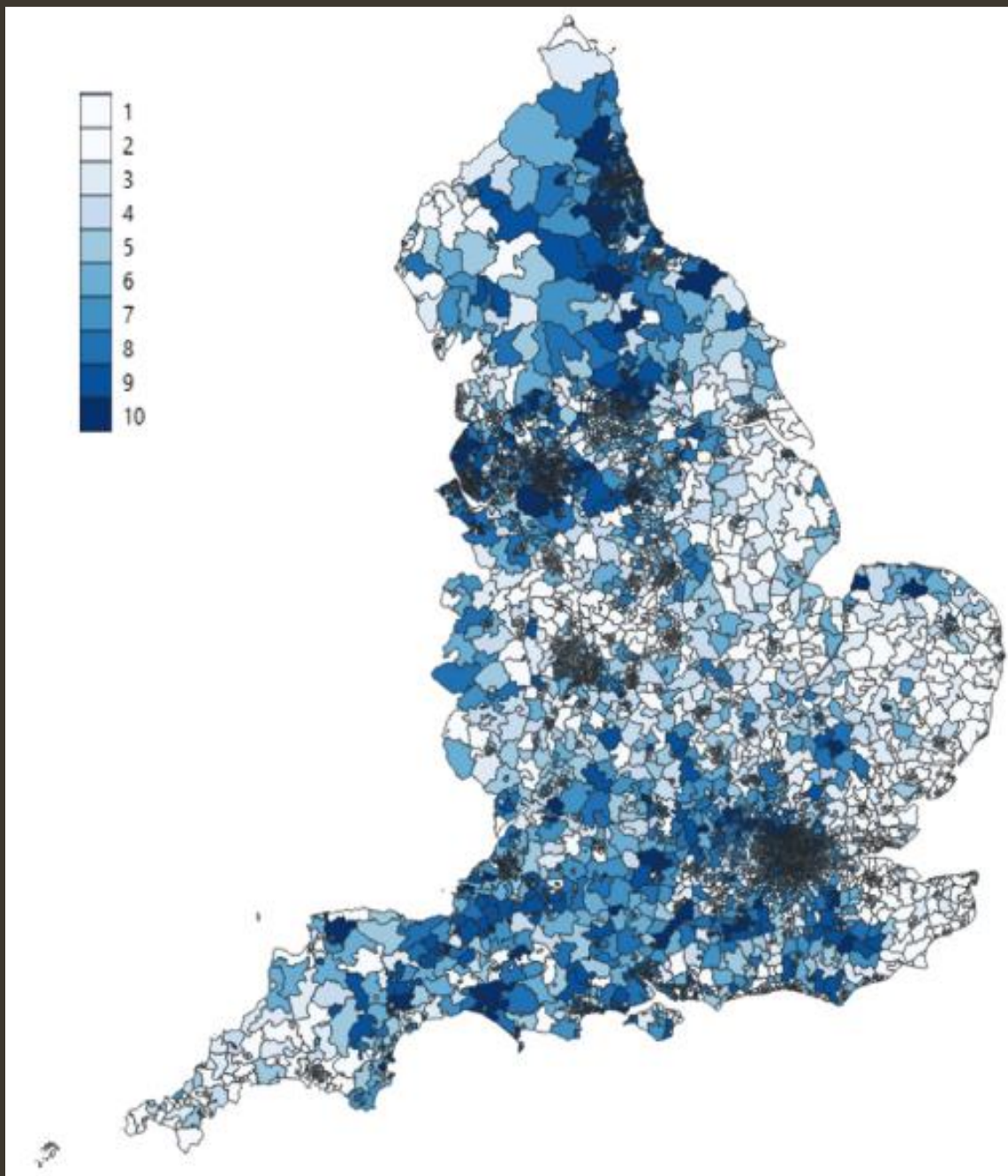
Table A1. Top 20 MSOAs for elite HE progression

MSOA	Ranking	Non-elite HE progression (%)	Elite HE progression (%)
Kensington and Chelsea 011	1	20.9	79.1
Kensington and Chelsea 006	2	21.5	78.5
Merton 002	3	21.8	78.2
Oxford 003	4	22.0	78.0
Hammersmith and Fulham 024	5	22.7	77.3
Kensington and Chelsea 007	6	23.5	76.5
Barnet 033	7	24.6	75.4
Ealing 034	8	24.8	75.2
Merton 004	9	25.4	74.6
Wandsworth 015	10	26.0	74.0
Richmond upon Thames 008	11	26.4	73.6
Wandsworth 017	12	26.4	73.6
Cambridge 007	13	26.9	73.1
Westminster 019	14	27.1	72.9
Bristol 015	15	27.2	72.8
Camden 002	16	27.3	72.7
Hounslow 001	17	27.3	72.7
Kensington and Chelsea 020	18	27.3	72.7
Wandsworth 011	19	27.3	72.7
Southwark 031	20	27.6	72.4

Table A2. Bottom 20 MSOAs for elite HE progression

MSOA	Ranking	Non-elite HE progression (%)	Elite HE progression (%)
Basildon 019	6772	96.6	3.4
Middlesbrough 003	6773	97.0	3.0
Basildon 015	6774	97.1	2.9
Northampton 017	6775	97.1	2.9
Tamworth 007	6776	97.1	2.9
Walsall 018	6777	97.1	2.9
Great Yarmouth 007	6778	97.3	2.7
Kingston upon Hull 004	6779	97.3	2.7
Portsmouth 002	6780	97.4	2.6
Solihull 006	6781	97.4	2.6
Ipswich 016	6782	97.6	2.4
Leicester 017	6783	97.6	2.4
Leicester 035	6784	97.6	2.4
Kingston upon Hull 003	6785	97.9	2.1
Kingston upon Hull 021	6786	97.9	2.1
Shepway 013	6787	98.0	2.0
Sandwell 014	6788	98.2	1.8
Stoke-on-Trent 016	6789	98.2	1.8
Plymouth 006	6790	100.0	0.0
Wolverhampton 007	6791	100.0	0.0

Davies, J., Donnelly, M., & Sandoval-Hernandez, A. (2021). Geographies of elite higher education participation: An urban 'escalator' effect. *British Educational Research Journal*, 47(4), 1079-1101.



*An urban escalator  
effect in elite  
university  
progression?*

Even after holding  
constant all known factors  
that account for  
participation (social,  
ethnic, gender and  
attainment differences)  
patterns of elite HE entry  
vary



# London: a microcosm of the *urban escalator* effect

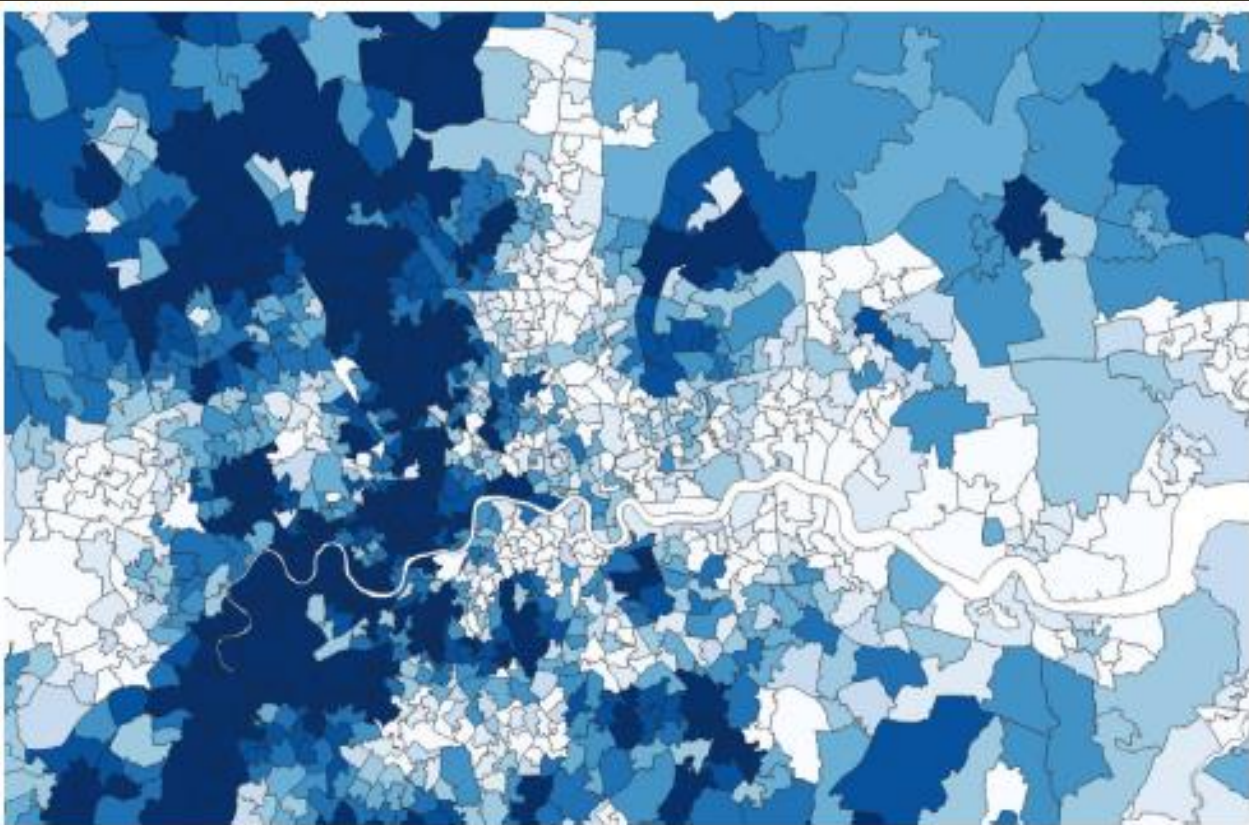


Figure 3. Null model map, zoomed in on London area. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]



Figure 4. Final fixed-effects model map, zoomed in on London area. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]



# UEA as a 'beacon of hope' – little other provision

And do you think do you think erm, are there any kind of like third-sector organisations that do like widening participation activities in the area or?

Not really, no. that's, it's, it's all down to (...) us. Or me. To get them in, to get the UEA in for example, like 'let's go, let's go do this' apart from that there's nothing. Because if I didn't do anything they wouldn't do anything. They would literally come here, study, go. Those, there's nothing, outside, I've, I umm, created this mentoring scheme with the UEA this year to get students from the UEA to mentor them through the, umm, thing. Which has been great. And they've gone to different universities and some of them had PhDs and stuff. It's brilliant and it just worked brilliantly. Because I thought you are gonna ask questions, how did you get there and (...) that's as close as it comes. Because they apply for these university summer schools, which have a wide participation and we hit the criteria. But then you find that those, if I suggest to them, those that want to can't because of the income from the parents. Erm, and then those that the parents would be eligible don't want to do it

John, HE Coordinator, 'Great Mundestoft Sixth Form College', East Anglia.

Joanne Davies & Michael Donnelly (2023) Spatial division of opportunity: local economic context, elite trajectories, and the widening participation industry, Social & Cultural Geography, DOI: [10.1080/14649365.2023.2203119](https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2023.2203119)

# Struggling in peripheral regions

**So what do you mean by practically it's difficult, you mean it's difficult to sort of, to, how do you mean it's practically difficult to actually do that?**

Well, I couldn't get any institution to take 30 kids for a day. Um, the bus was gonna cost a fortune, going to York, so then I'm asking the kids to pay for it, in an economically deprived area to start with. Um, and then you, we need to think about what, what would be the value of bussing them there and then having a quick whistle stop tour and then being back as well. So it, I, I like honestly think it would be so good for them to have like an overnight stay somewhere um [pause] and especially at this time of year when everything's a bit more relaxed and, if they, if it could be funded half and half by the school and the institution I think that link would be much better.

Head of sixth form, state school, North East



# Schools can't afford transport to university open days

- Representative of UCLAN invited the school to come for the open day. When Head of sixth form said they couldn't afford it, she said would they pay for a bus. University of Liverpool don't offer that kind of funding for their students to come on the open day.

Interview head of sixth, 'Bootlefield School', Liverpool.

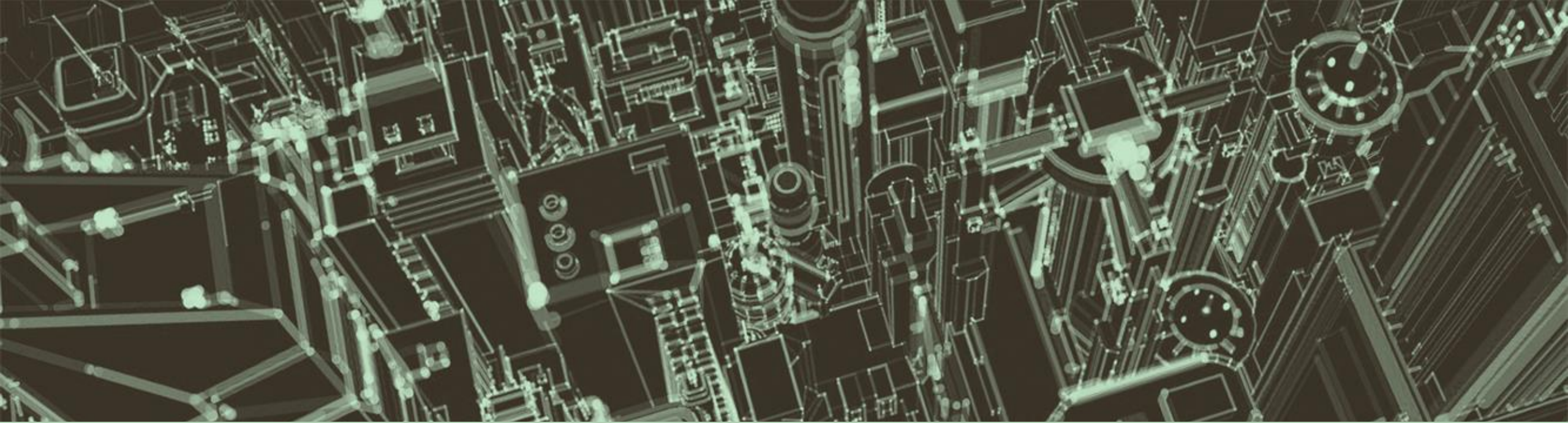
# Overwhelmed and inundated in others...

- ‘I have people banging on my door asking to come in.’

Conversation with Head of Sixth Form, ‘Tower Chapel School’, East London.

- Schools in London overwhelmed by the number of universities and city firms wanting to visit – Deloitte, KPMG, Into University centre nearby
- Deep contradictions here which underline tensions in how WP and outreach works in relation to geographies of social and economic inequality.





# Geographic mobility



- Overall: 47% regionally mobile; 53% regionally immobile
- Higher **socio-economic groups** more regionally mobile – 62% for highest NS-SEC group falling gradually to just 28.2% for students from unemployed families.
- 51% of students with **degree educated parents** mobile, compared to 36% of students whose parents are not
- 75% **private** educated students mobile, 45% **state** educated are mobile
- Most **ethnic groups** equally likely to be regionally mobile/immobile, except for Pakistani (80% immobile) and Bangladeshi (70% immobile)
- University and course choices: greater regional mobility for **specialist courses** and **higher tariff universities**

Donnelly, M. and Gamsu, S. (2018) Regional structures of feeling? A spatially and socially differentiated analysis of UK student im/mobility, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, DOI:

[10.1080/01425692.2018.1426442](https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2018.1426442)



% within region of origin		Origin												
		North East	North West	Yorkshire and The Humber	East Midlands	West Midlands	East of England	London	South East	South West	Wales	Scotland	Northern Ireland	Total
Destination	North East	65.70%	3.90%	8.90%	3.40%	1.20%	2.50%	1.40%	2.20%	1.50%	0.80%	0.70%	3.10%	4.90%
	North West	6.90%	62.50%	12.60%	7.60%	8.90%	4.00%	3.10%	3.40%	3.50%	10.50%	0.80%	9.20%	12.00%
	Yorkshire and The Humber	12.80%	13.80%	54.70%	16.60%	5.80%	7.20%	3.20%	4.30%	3.20%	2.50%	0.40%	1.40%	9.80%
	East Midlands	2.50%	3.50%	8.10%	42.60%	11.00%	12.50%	5.50%	6.50%	3.10%	2.30%	0.20%	1.00%	8.10%
	West Midlands	1.50%	3.80%	3.20%	9.10%	51.50%	6.10%	4.90%	5.50%	5.70%	3.70%	0.40%	1.00%	8.80%
	East of England	1.00%	0.90%	1.40%	3.80%	1.50%	28.60%	8.70%	4.90%	2.00%	1.00%	0.30%	1.00%	5.50%
	London	3.30%	3.40%	3.90%	5.30%	4.40%	14.40%	50.30%	16.20%	8.20%	3.80%	0.90%	1.90%	14.30%
	South East	1.60%	2.20%	2.30%	4.80%	4.40%	14.70%	14.80%	37.80%	14.40%	4.60%	0.50%	1.80%	11.40%
	South West	1.10%	1.80%	1.80%	3.80%	5.90%	6.60%	5.30%	13.90%	48.20%	10.00%	0.40%	1.60%	8.60%
	Wales	0.70%	2.40%	1.20%	1.90%	4.50%	2.10%	1.30%	3.70%	8.90%	60.10%	0.20%	1.10%	5.30%
	Scotland	2.90%	1.60%	1.60%	1.00%	0.60%	1.30%	1.10%	1.30%	1.20%	0.60%	95.10%	6.70%	8.60%
	Northern Ireland	0.10%	0.10%	0.10%	0.10%	0.30%	0.10%	0.60%	0.10%	0.10%	0.00%	0.00%	70.20%	2.60%
	Total	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

<b>Parental education (base: degree educated)</b>		
Parent without degree	<b>0.804</b>	<b>0.746</b>
Don't know	<b>0.786</b>	<b>0.75</b>
Not known	<b>0.722</b>	<b>0.712</b>
<b>Education sector (base: private)</b>		
State educated	<b>0.438</b>	<b>0.519</b>
Unknown	<b>0.379</b>	<b>0.512</b>
<b>NS-SEC Category</b>		
2. Lower managerial and professional occupations	<b>0.84</b>	<b>0.861</b>
3. Intermediate occupations	<b>0.718</b>	<b>0.746</b>
4. Small employers and own account workers	<b>0.708</b>	<b>0.74</b>
5. Lower supervisory and technical occupations	<b>0.704</b>	<b>0.731</b>
6. Semi-routine occupations	<b>0.582</b>	<b>0.62</b>
7. Routine occupations	<b>0.565</b>	<b>0.604</b>
8. Never worked and long term unemployed	<b>0.386</b>	<b>0.462</b>
Not classified	<b>0.56</b>	<b>0.584</b>



Table 7: Binary logistic regression results as 'odds ratios' for probability of moving out of 'home' region

	Model 2	Model 3
<b>Gender (base: Male)</b>		
Female	<b>0.861</b>	<b>0.88</b>
Other	0.867	1.121
<b>Ethnicity (base: White)</b>		
Black/Black British - Caribbean	<b>1.115</b>	<b>0.903</b>
Black/Black British – African	<b>1.416</b>	<b>1.143</b>
Other Black background	<b>1.123</b>	0.918
Asian/Asian British – Indian	<b>1.133</b>	<b>0.859</b>
Asian/Asian British – Pakistani	<b>0.547</b>	<b>0.494</b>
Asian/Asian British - Bangladeshi	<b>0.396</b>	<b>0.312</b>
Chinese	<b>1.363</b>	<b>1.194</b>
Other Asian background	<b>1.062</b>	<b>0.839</b>
Other (including mixed)	<b>1.094</b>	<b>0.892</b>
Ethnicity not known	<b>0.83</b>	<b>0.745</b>



Bangladeshi and Pakistani-background students consistently less mobile

Matters for equality of opportunity and access to graduate jobs

<b>University selectiveness (base group 1)</b>			
Percentile 2		<b>0.912</b>	<b>1.376</b>
Percentile 3		<b>2.107</b>	<b>2.361</b>
Percentile 4		<b>1.059</b>	<b>3.287</b>
Percentile 5		<b>2.555</b>	<b>3.267</b>
<b>Choice of degree subject (base: Medicine &amp; dentistry)</b>			
Subjects allied to medicine		<b>0.496</b>	<b>0.474</b>
Biological sciences		<b>0.842</b>	<b>0.753</b>
Veterinary science		<b>1.96</b>	<b>1.782</b>
Agriculture & related subjects		<b>1.398</b>	<b>1.196</b>
Physical sciences		<b>1.09</b>	0.988
Mathematical sciences		1.014	<b>0.821</b>
Computer science		0.538	<b>0.529</b>
Engineering & technology		<b>0.769</b>	<b>0.812</b>
Architecture, building & planning		<b>0.691</b>	<b>0.71</b>
Social studies		<b>0.809</b>	<b>0.701</b>
Law		<b>0.74</b>	<b>0.707</b>
Business & administrative studies		<b>0.814</b>	<b>0.804</b>
Mass communications & documentation		1.034	0.967
Languages		<b>1.142</b>	0.945
Historical & philosophical studies		<b>1.108</b>	<b>0.922</b>
Creative arts & design		<b>1.122</b>	0.993
Education		<b>0.474</b>	<b>0.437</b>
Combined		<b>1.387</b>	0.912

# Combining region into a regression model...

<b>Geographic origin (base: North East)</b>			
North West			1.128
Yorkshire and the Humber			1.738
East Midlands			2.933
West Midlands			2.344
East of England			5.217
London			2.103
South East			2.767
South West			2.027
Wales			1.559
Scotland			0.054
Northern Ireland			0.921

Regional differences similar when included in a model with student background, institution selectivity, course choice etc. Holding all these constant the likelihood a student will leave their home region is similar to the figures seen in the matrix.



Mapping *unexpectedly mobile* students:  
Low-SES ethnic minority students pursuing HE  
outside of their 'home' region

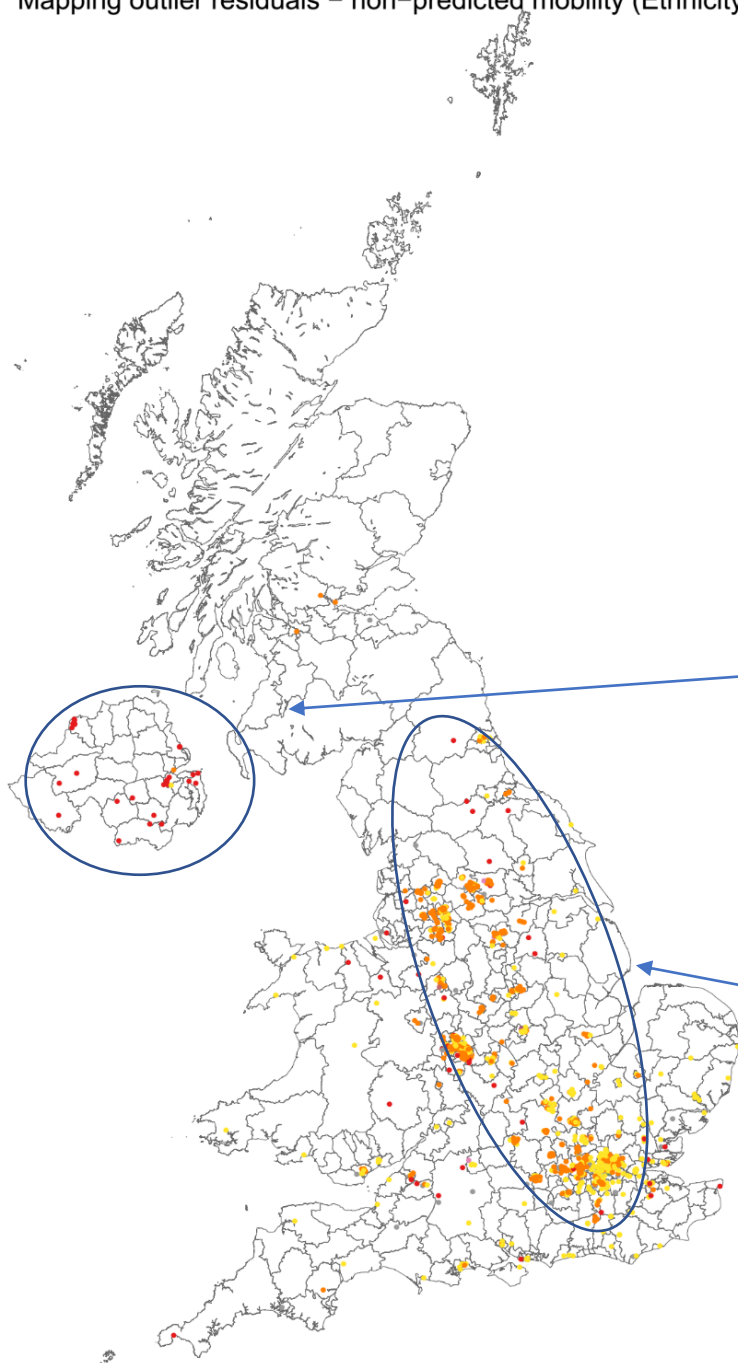
### Ethnicity

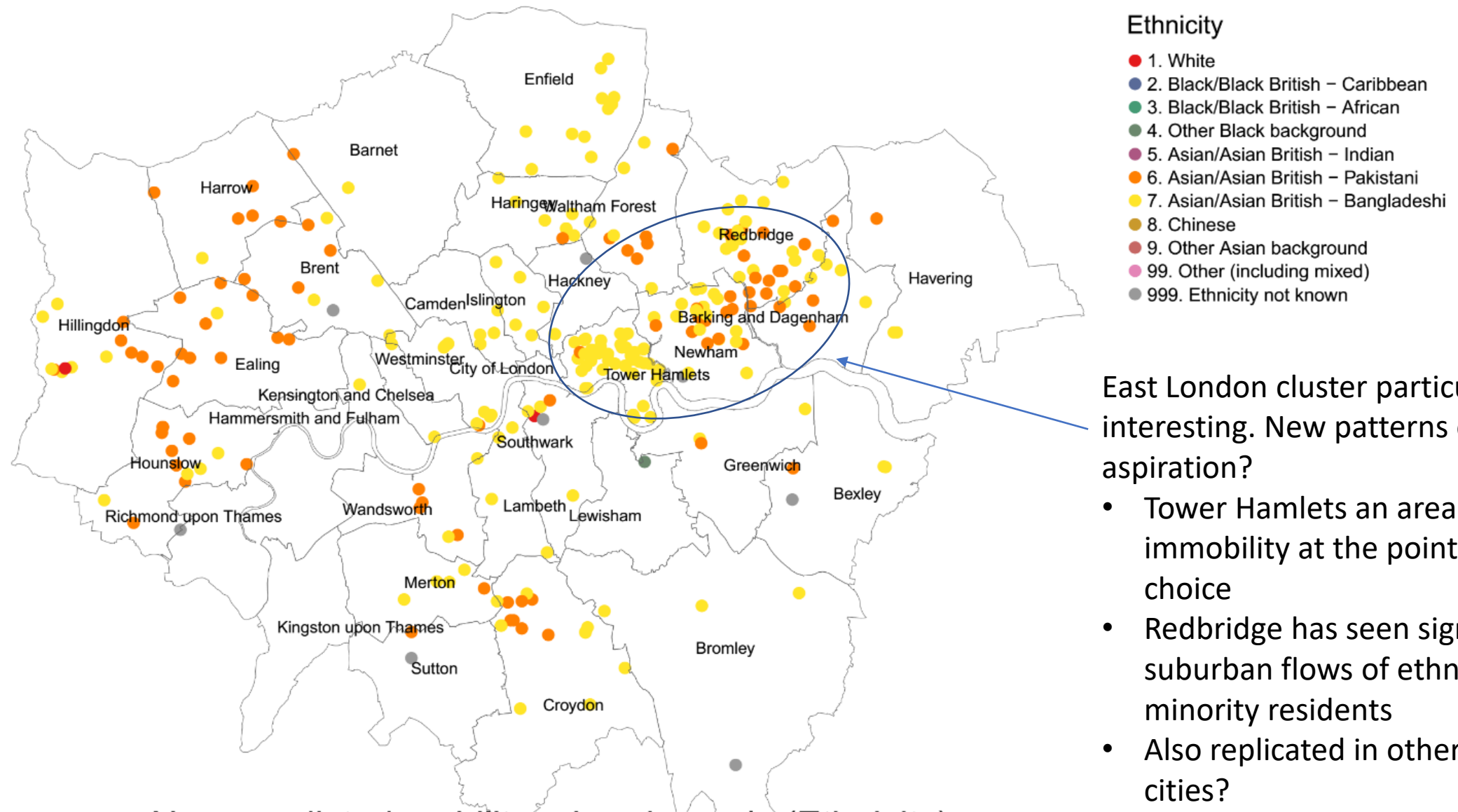
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- 4. Other Black background
- 5. Asian/Asian British – Indian
- 6. Asian/Asian British – Pakistani
- 7. Asian/Asian British – Bangladeshi
- 8. Chinese
- 9. Other Asian background
- 99. Other (including mixed)
- 999. Ethnicity not known

- 1345 cases: 2 to 4 standard deviations higher than the mean residual value (i.e. residuals varying between 1.96 and 3.91)
- Majority are female (58%) and studying in lower tariff universities
- Majority in London (21%), South East (16%), and East of England (13%)...
- Broad range of socio-economic backgrounds.

Exception to this ethnic breakdown is in Northern Ireland where a small number of students are also regionally mobile *contra* expectations.

British-Bangladeshi (44%) and British-Pakistani (46%) students buck the general trend and they are overwhelmingly concentrated in English cities...





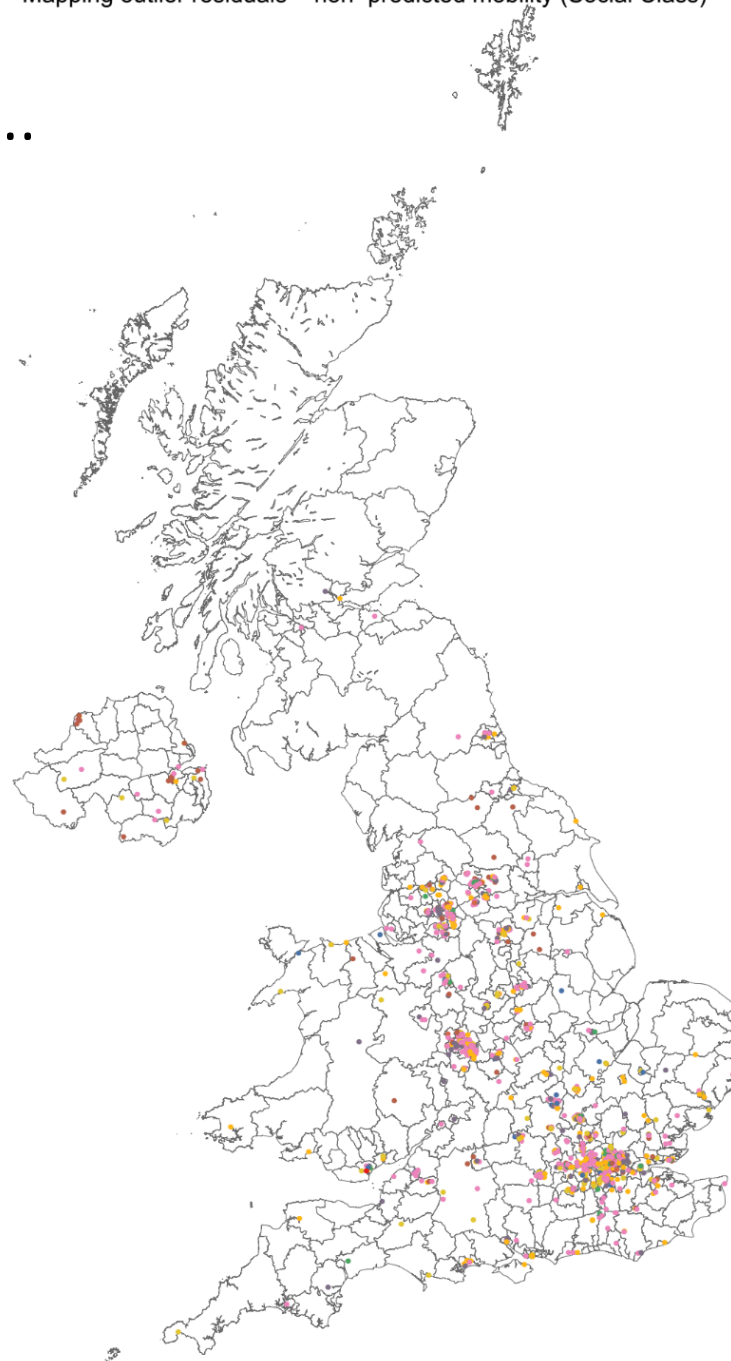
Non-predicted mobility – London only (Ethnicity)



# These students are also from very diverse socio-economic backgrounds...

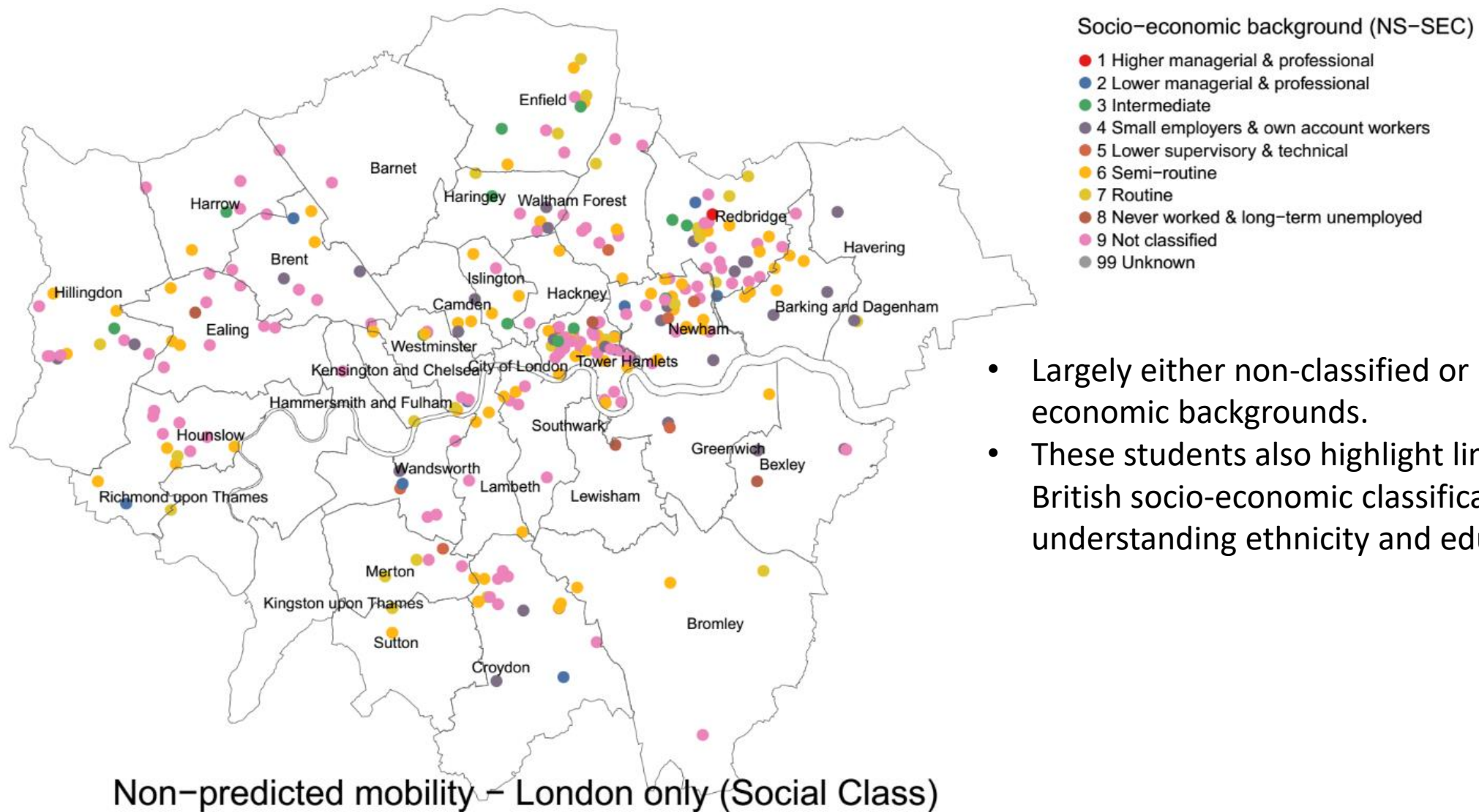
- Largely from lower socio-economic or unclassified socio-economic backgrounds
- Concentration in cities suggest a particular effect of ethnicity and the success of schools in raising attainment amongst deprived students over the past decade?
- Does this also speak to the success of widening participation programmes in broadening students' horizons of choice?

Mapping outlier residuals – non-predicted mobility (Social Class)



## Parental NS-SEC

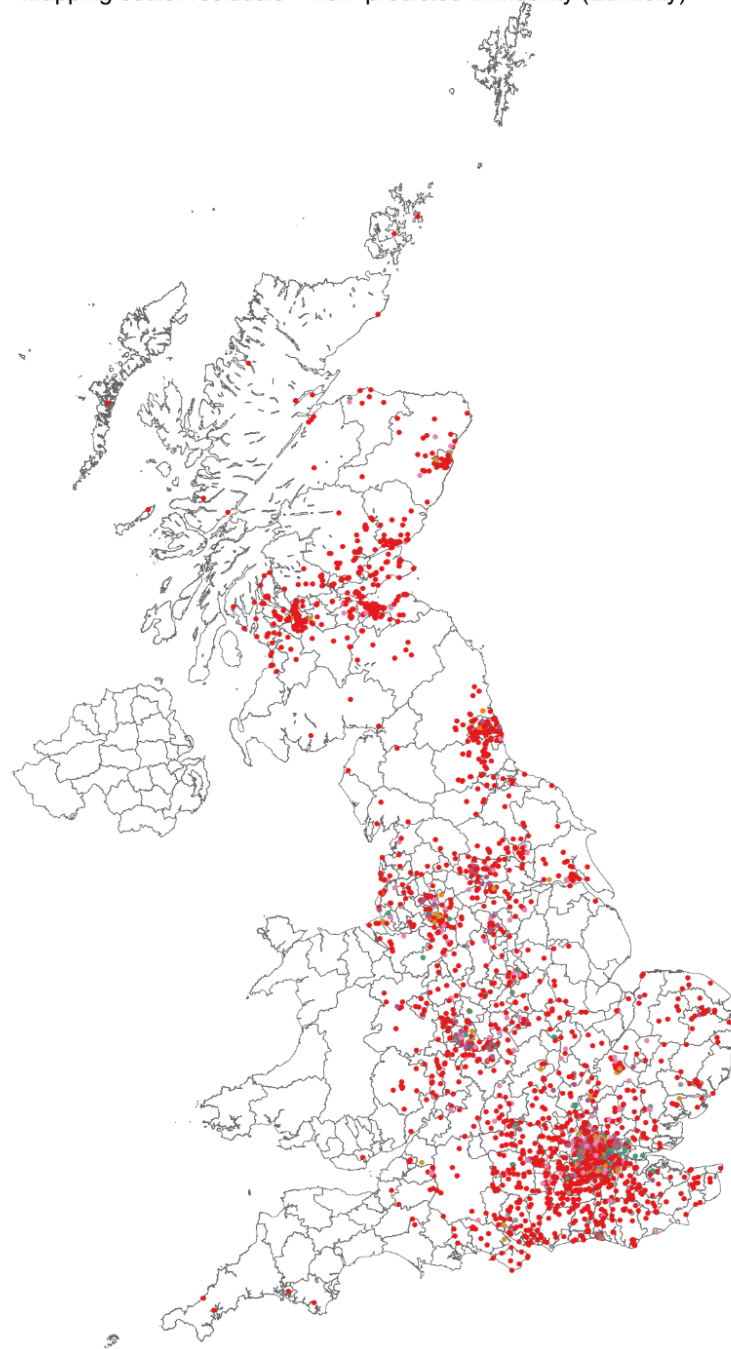
- 1 Higher managerial & professional
- 2 Lower managerial & professional
- 3 Intermediate
- 4 Small employers & own account workers
- 5 Lower supervisory & technical
- 6 Semi-routine
- 7 Routine
- 8 Never worked & long-term unemployed
- 9 Not classified
- 99 Unknown



- Largely either non-classified or lower socio-economic backgrounds.
- These students also highlight limits of British socio-economic classification in understanding ethnicity and education

Mapping *unexpectedly immobile* students:  
Middle-class (largely white) students staying  
regionally local to study

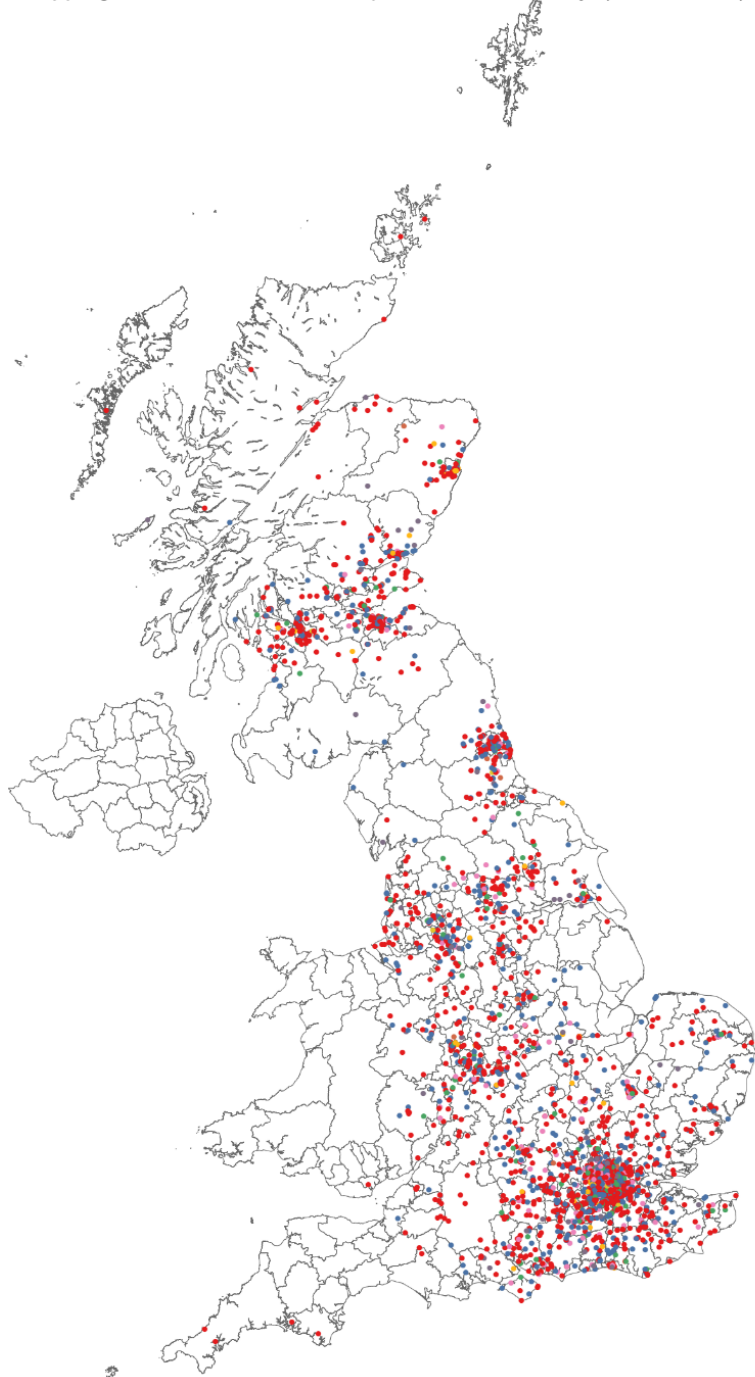




## Ethnicity

- 1. White
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- 5. Asian/Asian British – Indian
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- 8. Chinese
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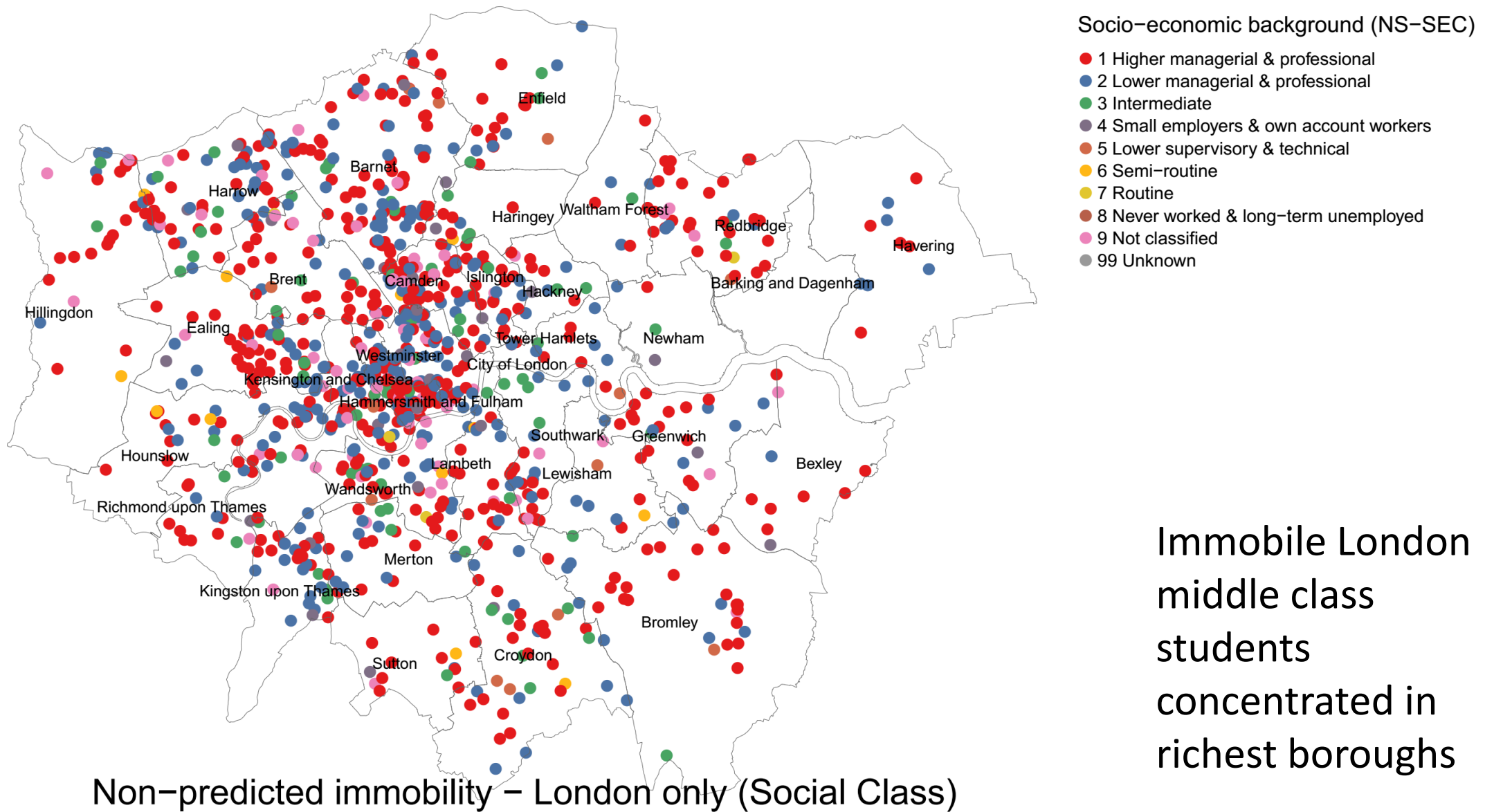
- 2681 cases that are -2 to -5 standard deviations from the mean residual value (i.e. residuals varying between -1.96 and -4.90, -4.22 is actually the lowest value)
- 73% White, 8% Indian



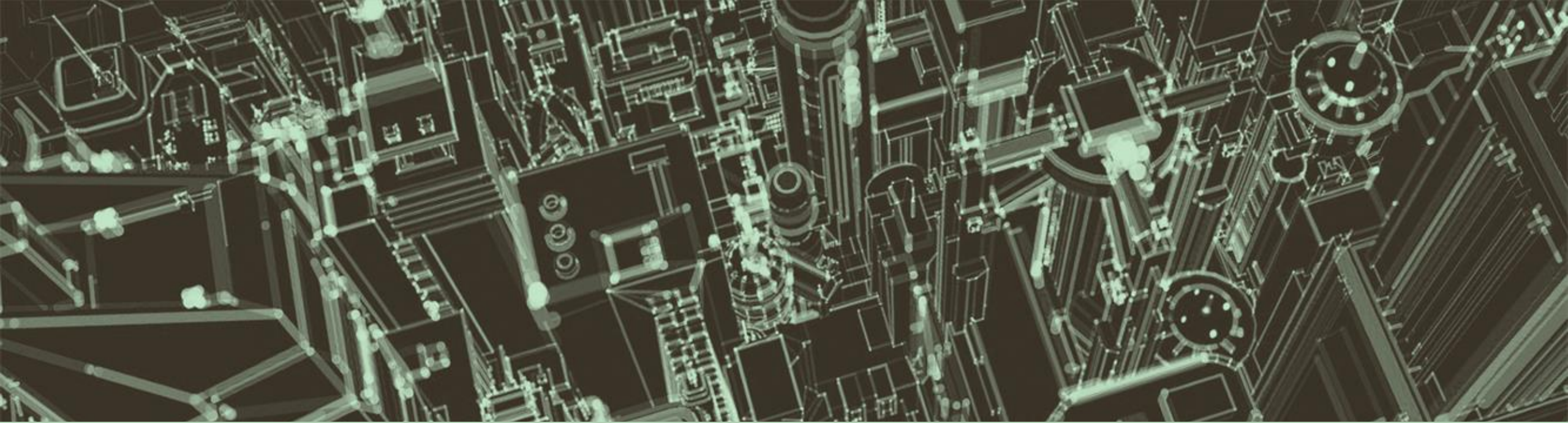
### Socio-economic background (NS-SEC)

- 1 Higher managerial & professional
- 2 Lower managerial & professional
- 3 Intermediate
- 4 Small employers & own account workers
- 5 Lower supervisory & technical
- 6 Semi-routine
- 7 Routine
- 8 Never worked & long-term unemployed
- 9 Not classified
- 99 Unknown

- This is not about accommodation costs, most of these students are still living in student halls (71%) or rented accommodation – only 13% live with parents.
- These students are overwhelmingly white British from professional and managerial families (68% in NS-SEC 1/2)
- Majority have degree educated parents (80%) and went to private school (94%)
- London middle class staying close to elite networks, Scottish students benefiting from free tuition fees?
- But what explains North East and pockets of north? Localised middle class identities?







Geographic borders and  
boundaries: *spatial structures of  
class, race and nationhood*



# Institutional *and* place-based stratification: Wales not on the 'elite circuit' of universities/places

Durham is a nicer place than Swansea. And so because uh, those universities were in cities where I had deemed with my experience to be like nicer cities there, and because I knew people people there, and I felt like the fact that also their courses were rated higher meant that I'd prefer – I'd prefer to go to those universities kind of outright.

**What do you mean that Durham and Edinburgh are nicer places?**

Uh, just kinda I've kinda, I've seen them [...]. And I've kind of like, I've only spent a couple days, I've only spent one or two days visiting Cardiff and I just like, I just I liked, almost the feel of the cities. Like, Edinburgh felt a lot cleaner? I don't know if that's the right word to say it, and also it's a lot closer to London, I think, than like Swansea, so I kind of, kind of felt more at home there. I just prefer the feel of that.

**In what ways is it a lot closer to London or?**

Well because a lot of students from London, um go to Edinburgh, and it's almost like, been described as this like, middle class, um, city, very similar- in a very similar way to London. And so, I just felt like there were a lot of like, a lot of similar amenities sort of.

**Yeah. Oh so you mean a lot closer in terms of like-**

Yeah, like- similar. Probably. It's obviously not closer in vicinity.

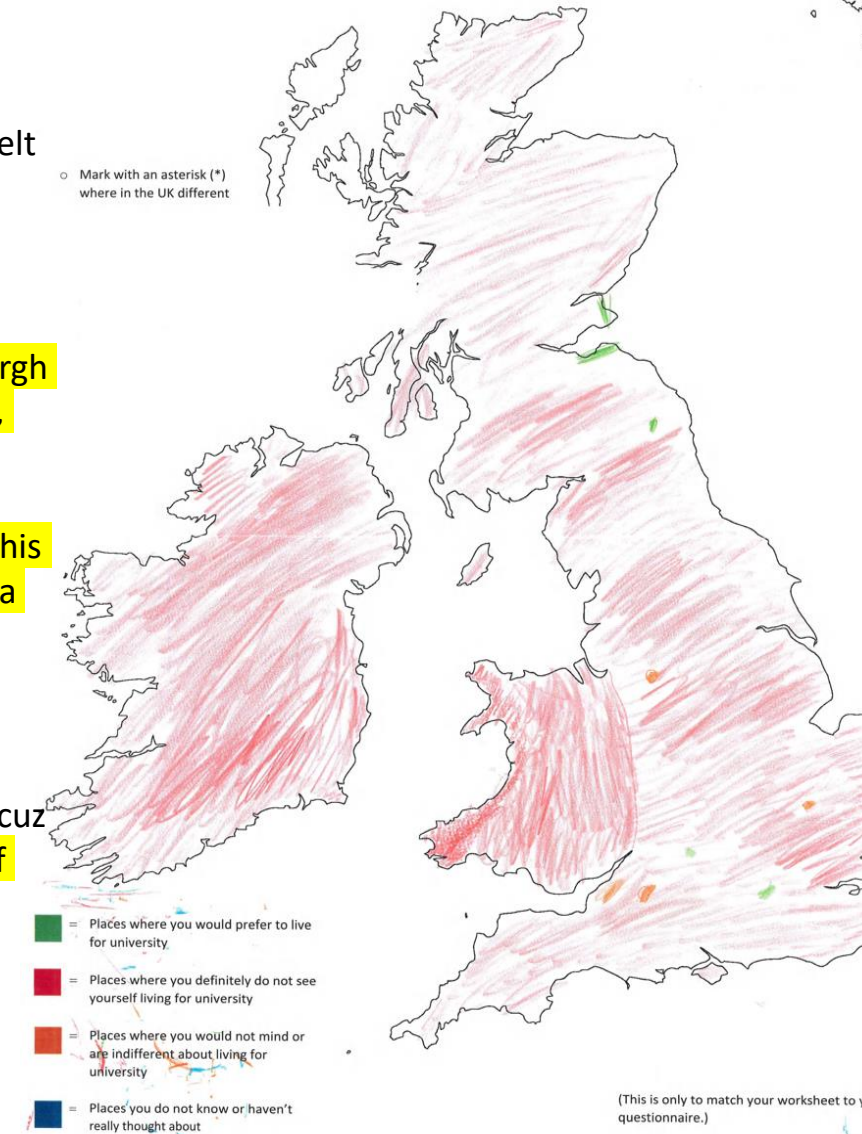
**Yeah yeah. Similar in terms of the amenities that are there and –**

Yeah, and like uh, just kind of, almost the kind of look of it as well. It almost seemed a bit similar. [...] just cuz like Edinburgh's like where all the parliament buildings are in Scotland so like kind of similar in that way, if you understand what I'm saying? [...] and it just seems like a centre, to be honest.

**Right. What do you mean a centre?**

Well because it's like, where the parliament is and its, um, yeah that's basically what I meant yeah.

*Samuel, white British, NS-SEC 1, St. Alexanders Boys' School, (Independent school, London)*





# A dominant south and dominated north?

I prefer it up north, [I] just feel closer to home, if I do need to go home, I can, and people sound like me a bit, they have got some of the same views, and I can get on with them more, kind of the same, bit of banter, compared to people from Devon or Cornwall say... umm but yeah there is-

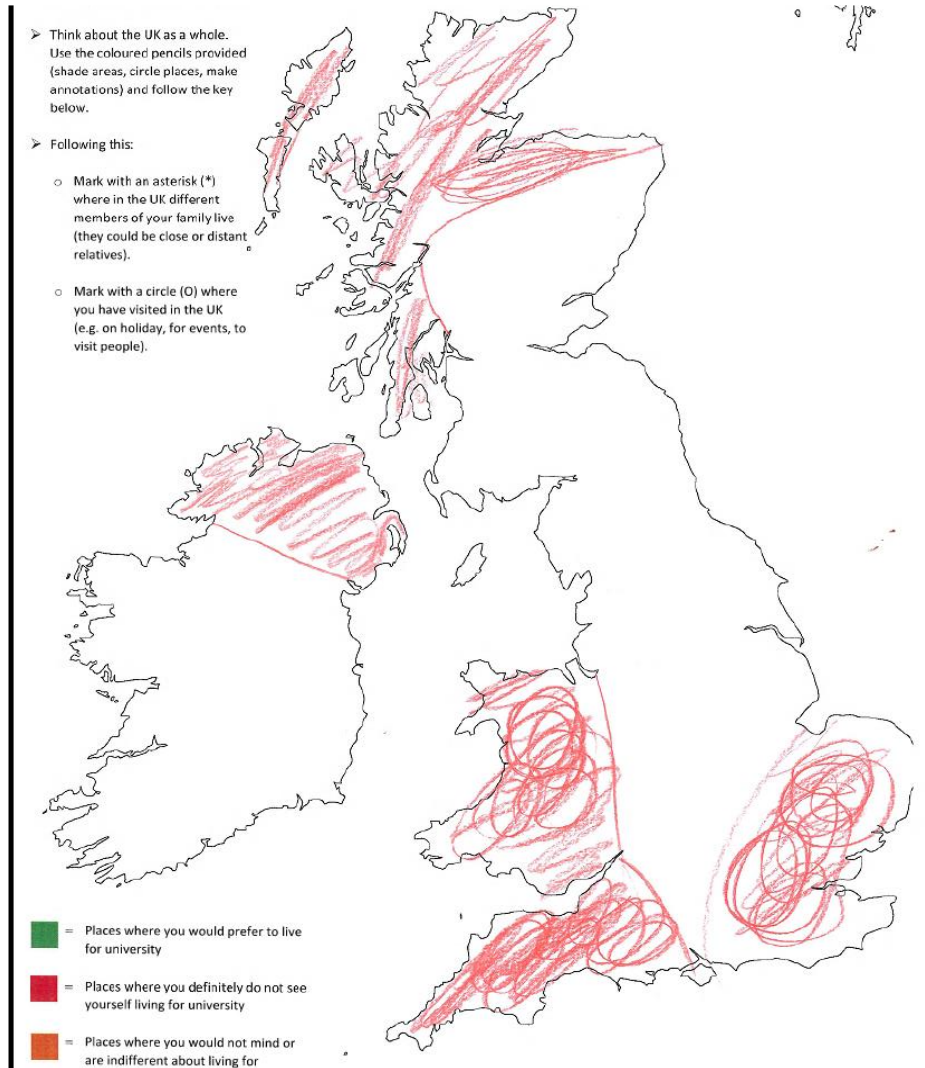
**What do you mean they sound like you? You mean your accent?**

Yeah almost, like we went down to-, sometimes schools would come up from London and I don't have the-, even here I don't have the best accent. I can make it more middle class when speaking to a teacher, [when] I am asking for something and help, or explaining my point of view, because I am more middle class, but especially when the schools from down south come up you can see the difference in the accent-

**What can you see, what do you mean?**

Just- even the posher more middle classed people from around here, just see them, [it is] like they have just come from the mines, even the one's that their parents are doctors and stuff- when speaking to people rally refined, their southern accents just sound like really northern, you don't hear it normally because you are so used to hearing it, but you can pick it up subtly, but then again when people from Liverpool come over then we mock them for their [accent] so it's fine, we are not the bottom of the pile.

*Dan, white British, no family experience of HE, Brasenose School (independent school, Greater Manchester)*



# Spatial structures of ethnicity: 'diversity' and 'whiteness' of places

Z: Like I've not really been around England. I've not even been to London. But I just feel like, because London's so, I dunno, diverse, and like multicultural, I dunno. It has quite a lot of different aspects to it. I feel like I'd like- I dunno, I don't want something too bland. Like I like places that have got, like, different colours about them. Like different people, different cultures. I dunno, stuff like that.

.....

I: What happens when, like, you imagine going to places that are in these blue areas? You said you don't feel like people would-

Z: I'd just feel really uncomfortable in an area that- 'cos I don't know much about these areas either.

I: No.

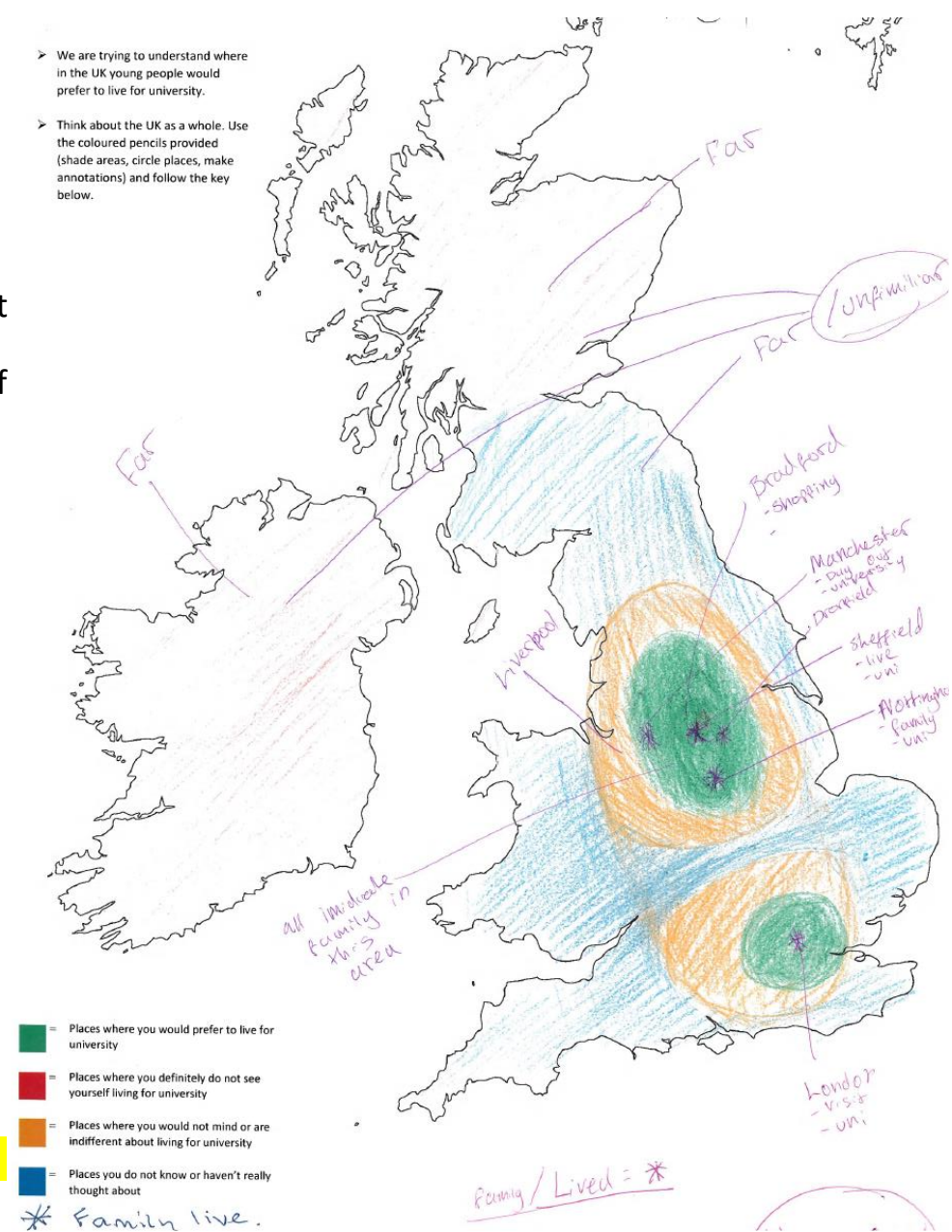
Z: I feel like, I dunno, it would be uncomfortable for me because I'm like, I dunno... I just wouldn't feel that comfortable, you know with like – it'd be hard for me to get used to it.

I: Yeah. Why, so like, can you say what's in your mind then when you're thinking of that? What's...?

Z: I feel it's too, erm, it's not very diverse, I guess?

I: Yeah.

Z: People who live in like the outskirts, you know people that live in the Peak District areas, there's a lot of like, stereotypically, there's a lot of like old people and there's not that many people of colour. And so it feels a bit awkward. Especially, you know, when you go, when I like go on trips – because I do geography as well – so when we went to Castletown or somewhere like that and we were gonna go to Hornsea next week or something, I dunno, it just feels really weird because you'll see this like Punjabi girl doing her little geography work, so it's a bit like-



*Zaisha, NS-SEC 2, Asian British – Pakistani, parental experience of HE*



# “I don’t know if I can say this, but...”

But I've coloured umm Bristol in umm orange because, I don't know... I've been there but... I've been there but then I don't know. I liked it but it was more umm... I don't know how to say. I don't know, I liked it but I don't think I would go to university there for travel as well.

**You liked it but what? What was it about Bristol that...?**

The travelling and umm... I don't know, I don't know if I can say this but, like...

**No, say!**

I didn't feel like at home. Like...

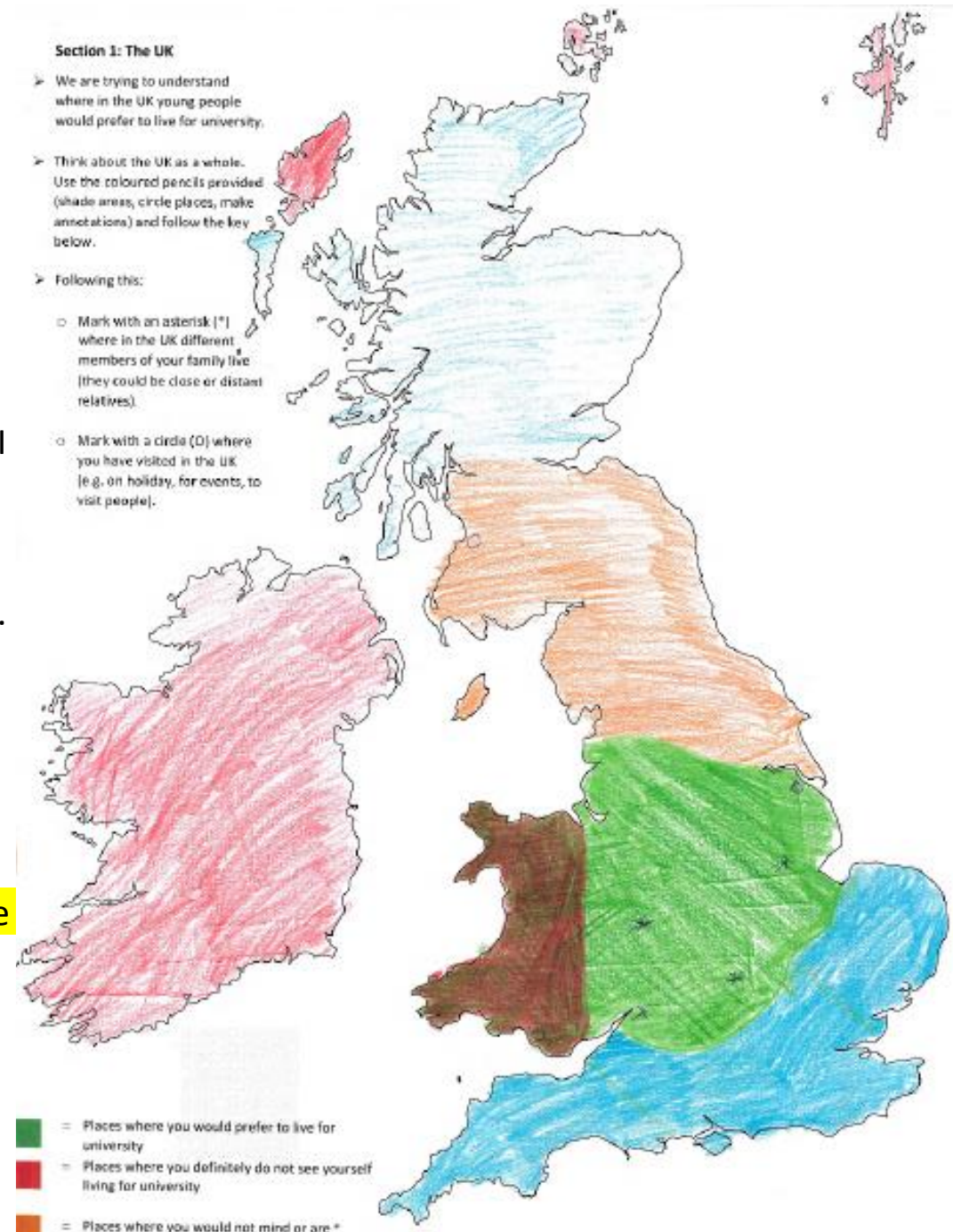
**No.**

Like, like there was not, 'cus I'm Muslim obviously, there was not much, majority of people there were not Muslim so I don't think I'd feel comfortable there.

**Yeah, yeah.**

Can I say that?

*Samila, other Black background, NS-SEC 4, no parental experience of HE*



Yeah. Yeah. Umm. Can you say a bit more about umm the thing about people looking at you? Can you say sort of...?

I felt like I was being judged. Like, constantly. Like...

Right.

Even like I think, umm, in the park, we went to the park, and I sat down and I think sat quite closely to an older lady and she looked at me and then she quickly got up and went. And I felt like, like, scarred. 'Cus I wasn't actually going to do anything to her, or, like...

Wow.

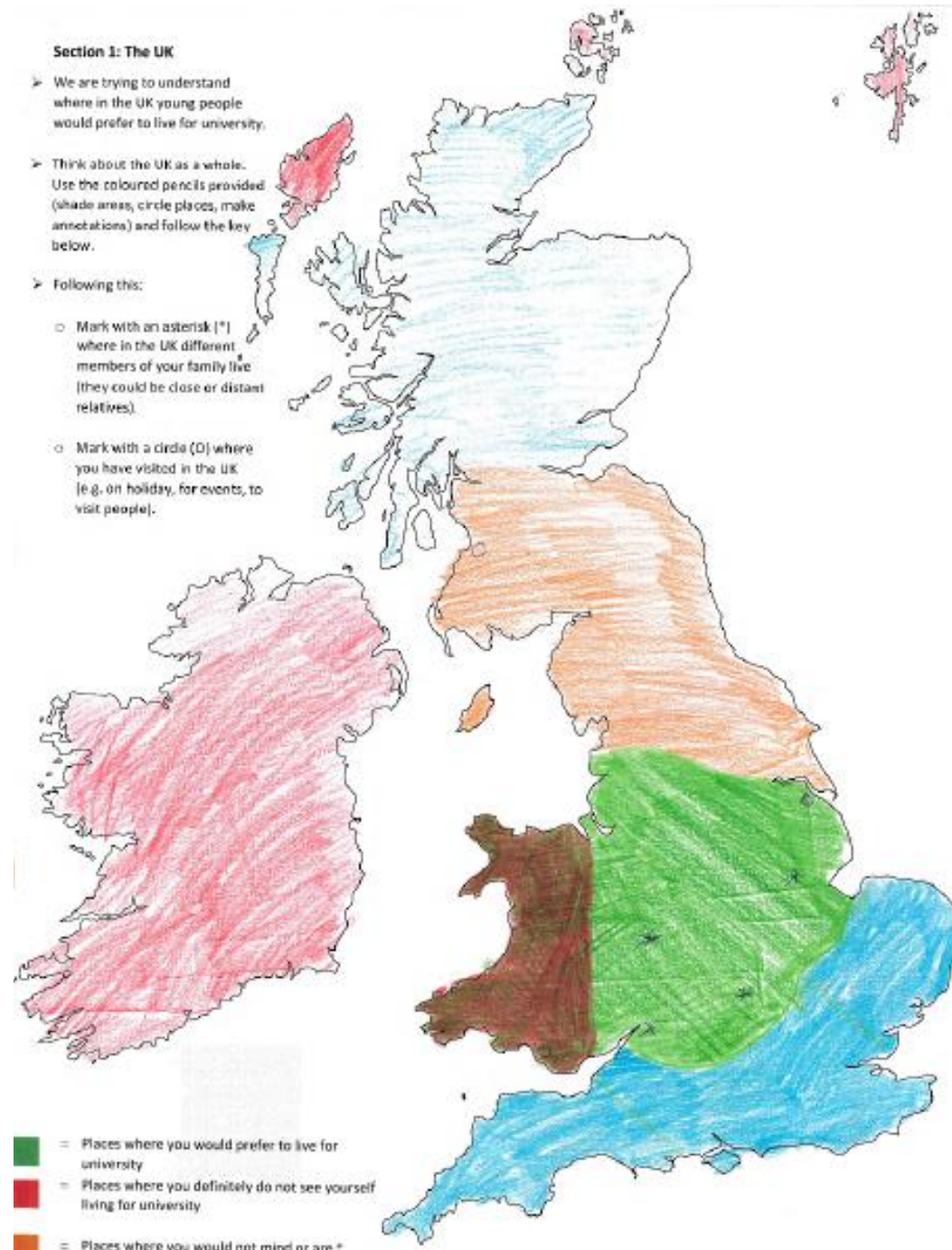
But she seemed like genuinely scared of me. Even though I hadn't done anything. And obviously because of my family and all of us, 'cus we're quite a big family as well, we just sat down and then umm... Yeah, she just got up and she walked like really fast away. And then when we went to, like, I think they've got like a tower where they do like shopping and that. We went in there and then we just got constant stares and I felt really uncomfortable.

Mmm.

I couldn't wait to get out.

It was a shame that we had to experience that. But we wouldn't, I'm speaking to my dad about it that, he said 'We wouldn't go back there again'. 'Cus we were obviously bothered by the experience.

*Samila, other Black background, NS-SEC 4, no parental experience of HE*



There are long roots to geographic inequalities in higher education, which can be traced back to the lasting legacy of deindustrialisation (seen most starkly in geographies of outreach)

Geographies of higher education map neatly on to the unequal social structuring of society: privileged groups choose **universities** *and* **places** to reproduce their advantage

Bold changes are needed at a structural level to begin to disrupt these processes of social reproduction, ultimately that is when we will start to see changes to geographic inequalities.

Immediate concerns: need to re-balance outreach and WP activities towards places with low resources and absence of cultural and economic wealth.

Need for long-term re-think of how WP works, particularly in relation to regional inequality – this can only happen if we radically re-orient the way higher education itself works.