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Analysing inequalities within the LSE student body: bringing social class into the mix

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ABSTRACT

We report the results of a study of LSE home undergraduate students which addresses the significance of social class background in shaping a range of student outcomes. We explore how class background and other sociodemographic variables affect *access* (who gets in), *study choice* (who studies what), *attainment* (how students perform in summative assessment), and *satisfaction* (how students rate their programme). We show that parental class background plays a major role across all these dimensions and is a major force shaping LSE undergraduate student outcomes. This is evident from observing raw bivariate associations and remains true when we report linear regression models controlling for numerous other socio-demographic and institutional factors. We also demonstrate powerful intersectional associations, especially with race, and also with declared disability status. Our results underscore the need to take social class seriously in the analysis of the undergraduate experience, both in analytical and in policy terms.

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0: Introduction

In recent years there have been increasing concerns to measure, and seek to alleviate, structural inequalities within the British higher education system. Much of the focus has addressed the protected characteristics deriving from the 2010 Equalities Act, notably with respect to race and gender inequalities. A considerable investment has been placed on racial inequalities, which have led to initiatives such as those linked to the Race Equality Charter (Ali 2021; Arday and Mizra 2018; Bhopal and Henderson 2021; Bhopal and Pitkin 2020). In Suki Ali's words,

'In the past five years, UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have been under increasing public scrutiny for failing to address racial inequalities across the sector. Under the new Higher Education and Research Act (2017) universities are required to review all aspects of the educational experience and delivery, including teaching, and will report to the recently formed Office for Students' (Ali, 2021, p. 924).

While recent regulatory focus has widened to include socio-economic indicators such as students' households Index of Multiple Deprivation scores, or eligibility Free School Meals, these initiatives have not yet been linked to a deeper sociological recognition of the significance of class, as has been established in academic studies (e.g. Reay et al 2005; 2017), which also involve powerful intersectional dynamics which can also intensify racial inequalities (e.g. Bhopal and Myers 2023).

In this paper we rectify this neglect by reporting a comprehensive analysis of student data from the London School of Economics. This allows us to demonstrate the systematic ways in which class has a manifest impact on student experience and attainment. We link administrative data on UK-domiciled student's parental class background, with perception of their experiences, on their educational success, all set in the context of their disciplines of study. Our analysis is based on painstaking data linkage across several administrative data sets and is probably the most detailed quantitative analysis of how class affects student experiences within any UK university.

Specifically, we extend the analysis of how class background and other sociodemographic variables affect *access* (who gets in), to also include original analyses of *study choice* (who studies what), *attainment* (how students perform in summative assessment), and *satisfaction* (how students rate their programme). We will show that parental class background plays a major role across all the dimensions that we study and is a major force shaping LSE student life. This is not only evident from observing raw bivariate associations but remains true when we report linear regression models controlling for numerous other socio-demographic and institutional factors. We also demonstrate powerful intersectional associations with race, in which working class Black British students are clearly the most disadvantaged students in our analysis.

Methodologically, our analysis is underpinned by an unusually robust measurement of class in which we use both the official National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC) and a model derived from Bourdieusian perspectives, the Oslo Registration Data Classification (ORDC). This allows us to differentiate class position horizontally (distinguishing between individuals with greater amounts of economic and cultural capital) as well as vertically (between higher and lower classes). Intriguingly, we show that these two perspectives highlight differing aspects of class inequality, with NS-SEC better predicting academic satisfaction, and ORDC better predicting student grades.

Overall, our paper clearly establishes the vital need to recognise the significance of social class as a fundamental stratifying feature of student experience and attainment at the LSE and we hope it will

be a spur to further research, at the LSE and across UK and global higher education. We also hope that our findings will encourage policy makers, at the LSE and beyond, to consider how to address the class inequalities within higher education that we expose.

The first section briefly discusses the social science literature to explore how social class has been analysed in studies of higher education. We point to the strange paradox that although education has long been central to studies of social mobility, and although there is a powerful tradition of qualitative research attesting to the scarring effects of social class amongst university students, this has not yet been buttressed by quantitative analysis of the intra-university processes by which class may manifest itself.

In the second section, we contextualise the LSE within the UK HEI sector and explain our data linkage strategies, leading onto the third section where we show how two differing measures of class suggest somewhat different interpretations of the LSE student body. In the fourth section, using multiple correspondence analysis, we lay out the powerful ways in which the LSE's departmental and disciplinary divides are powerfully structured by class and race divides. This is important for showing how disciplinary hierarchies overlap with social divides, in a way which might be mutually reinforcing.

Having provided this socio-disciplinary anatomy of the LSE, the sixth and final part of our paper shows that tangible student outcomes, in terms of average grade awarded, and in terms of academic satisfaction, are also strongly affected by social class background. We reflect on policy as well as analytical implications, including an exploration of how Departmental processes may be significant.

1: The curious neglect of social class within HE policy

Given the prominence of social class in sociological analysis, very much including in the sociology of education, the relative lack of policy attention to the impact of class within UK HEI is on the face of it, puzzling. To be sure, since class is not a protected characteristic under the 2010 Equality Act, there is less policy imperative to address its significance directly¹. Admittedly, there has been a modest move in policy circles to recognize socio-economic disadvantage. The Access and Participation Plan regime, overseen by the English higher education regulator the Office for Students (OfS), has recently drawn attention to the role of socio-economic background in shaping student access, experiences and outcomes in Higher Education. Yet analysis and institutional responses have been based on crude concepts and measures of social class. Some highly selective university providers, including Oxford, Cambridge and LSE, have agreed with the OfS to increase the representation of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, based on analysis highlighting their relative underrepresentation. However, to date, these targets only use broad measures such as whether students come from households which score poorly on the English Indices of Multiple Deprivation or students' eligibility for Free School meals. There has also been no sustained attempt to measure the systematic effects of social class and the mechanisms underpinning it, which is at odds with recent regulatory emphasis to ensure more holistic approaches to access and participation (cf. Office for Students, 2023).

This neglect is at odds with the vast social science literature attesting to the impact of class within educational settings, including universities. Dominant traditions of quantitative class analysis in the UK have, however, failed to develop the right kind of analytical frame and empirical research agenda for these purposes. Although quantitative class analysis is flourishing within sociology, it has so far not sufficiently informed analyses of educational pathways, experiences and trajectories *within* higher education. This is a deficiency that our paper seeks to redress.

¹ Hence the calls, in academia and beyond, for introducing class in the legislation (Benn 2020; Van Bueren 2021)

It is not the aim of this paper to review the extensive literature on the role that education, and more specifically higher education, plays within broader social mobility processes. We confine ourselves to drawing attention to the mismatch between quantitative studies (which largely neglect class-based stratification within HEIs) and qualitative studies (for which this is a major research theme). This allows us to establish the vital need for qualitative insights to feed into more exact forms of quantification, of the kind we conduct here.

In general, the sophisticated quantitative analysis of the relationship between educational attainment and social mobility largely treats higher education as an ‘empty vessel’ within the ‘OED (origins-education-destination) triangle’ (Bukodi and Goldthorpe 2022; 278f, see also Bukodi and Goldthorpe 2023; Bukodi et al 2016; Breen and Muller 2020; Shavit et al 2007 amongst many others). Against a background of the massive expansion of HE, this literature has documented how universities and courses remain stratified in both recruitment and outcome. On the side of recruitment (the ‘O-E’ part of the OED triangle), there has been growing interest in how class affects access to ‘elite’ universities such as Oxford and Cambridge University (Oog et al 2009; Zimdars 2010; Boliver 2013).

On the side of outcomes (the ‘E-D’ part of the OED triangle), there is a growing interest in how university attendance affects graduate destinations, though most of this research, driven by government ‘employability’ agendas, focuses on the effect on graduate incomes rather than occupational class position itself. A partial exception is the emerging interest in how far university attendance mediates entry to the British elite (e.g. Wakeling and Savage 2015; Reeves et al 2017).

What is missing in this literature is a study of stratifying processes unfolding within universities themselves. Holding constant university and course attended, higher education attendance is treated as some kind of monolithic experience which mediates – to a greater or lesser extent – social origins and destinations. However, the precise mechanisms operating within universities to crystallize or dilute the role of class, and the extent to which class stratification operates within HEI itself, has not been the subject of critical attention using representative quantitative data.

By contrast, there is now an extensive qualitative literature which fully draws out how class is a deeply powerful force in UK HEI settings. This testifies to the scarring effects of class, whereby those from working class backgrounds feel stigmatised, denigrated or marginalised within university settings (see variously Anderson and William 2001; Finnegan and Merril 2017; Mahony and Zmroczek 2005; Reay et al 2009; 2017; Bhopal and Myers 2023). This literature often takes its point of departure from the 1960s theme of the ‘upwardly mobile working-class child’, in which the success of such children in going to university was the subject of attention. Diane Reay (2017: 103) returns to Brian Jackson and Marsden’s influential study *Education and the Working Class* which first promoted the idea that working class ‘scholarship’ boys ‘appeared like Icarus to fly too high... “there is something infinitely pathetic in these former working-class children who lost their roots young”’. More recently Bathmaker et al (2013, 2016), in their comparative study of students at the University of Bristol and the University of West of England, draw out how middle-class students are more likely to have a ‘feel for the game’, being more likely to be confident to develop their social capital and networks.

There are therefore strong reasons, derived from qualitative case studies, to recognise the role of social class in structuring HEI experience and attainment. Our paper will use representative quantitative data from within the LSE to address this lacuna.

2: Data and Methods

2a: Contextualising the LSE within the UK HEI infrastructure

We start by positioning our case study site, the London School of Economics. The LSE is peculiar in being the only UK university, and one of the relatively few in the world, which specialises in social science. It also has an unusual history, also being one of the very few universities to be founded by avowed socialists (Dahrendorf 1995). It is highly prestigious, especially internationally, and is normally in the top tier of global rankings. Nonetheless, its precise place is somewhat contested. In his influential account of the British 20th century ‘intellectual aristocracy’, Noel Annan (1990) saw it as equivalent in its intellectual standing to Oxford and Cambridge. More recently, however, Vikki Boliver’s (2015) analysis of the standing of UK universities, placed it within a large cluster including other Russell Group universities and 17 other ‘old’ universities – but not alongside Oxford and Cambridge which were in a superior group of their own. In contrast, Gamsu and Donnelly’s (2021) list, derived from a social network analysis unravels ‘a distinctive geography of recruitment and movement of students from elite state and private schools to a highly select group of universities’, including LSE as well as 21 other – mostly Russell Group – universities, which include Oxford and Cambridge.

Analyses which focus more on the socio-economic destinations of students tend to place LSE towards the top of the UK HE hierarchy, indeed by some measures such as graduate earnings, towards the very top. Using highly granular (though not fully representative) data from the Great British Class Survey Wakeling and Savage (2015a, 2015b) see the LSE as part of an exclusive ‘Golden Triangle’ including Oxford, Cambridge, Kings College London, Imperial College, Bristol and UCL. Indeed, Wakeling and Savage (2015a: Table 3) calculate that the LSE is the second most powerful university after Oxford in raising subsequent household earnings and entry prospects into NS-SEC1 (the higher professional and managerial class), even controlling for subject mix and student profiles. There are therefore good grounds to claim that the LSE case study is of interest as it represents a major ‘elite’ institution – albeit one oriented towards the social sciences. This therefore makes our case study highly relevant for the now flourishing field of elite education studies (e.g. Van Zanten et al 2015).

2b: Using LSE administrative data

Our study deploys two linked datasets, assembled in collaboration with LSE’s Planning Division, LSE’s Teaching Quality Assurance and Review Office (TQARO) and LSE’s Academic Registrar’s Division. The first is an excerpt of LSE’s student registry, an administrative dataset containing socio-demographic characteristics collected from all undergraduate (UG) students enrolled at the institution in the academic years 2019/20 to 2021/22. This data includes students’ programme of study, gender, ethnicity and disability declaration status. In collaboration with the mentioned administrative units, we were for the first time able to additionally include students’ self-declared parental occupation in this data; this information was recoded into the NS-SEC and ORDC standards (see section 3 for details). This information originates in UCAS’ standardised admission form, which requires all UK domiciled students to declare parental occupational history for monitoring purposes. UCAS collects this data using autocompletion of job titles consistent with the four-digit SOC 2010 standard. Although this data forms part of the routine monitoring data reported to the Higher Education Statistics Agency, we note that UCAS’ question prompt is unusual in two ways when compared for example to the way the Labour Force Survey collects this data: it asks applicants to declare only the occupation of highest earning

parent, step-parent or guardian; and it asks applicants to state the most recent occupation of the main-income earner, in cases where they are unemployed or retired².

We restrict our analysis here to the students enrolled at LSE on a BA, BSc or LLB undergraduate programme in 2021/22 (the most recent year of data availability) and, at the point of application, domiciled in England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland ($n = 2,776^3$). We do this to ensure that data has been consistently collected through UCAS applications which, as noted above, only collects parental occupation data from UK undergraduate applicants, as well as to address potential conceptual concerns about the role of social class in an international context. We note that many non-UK domiciled undergraduates are therefore excluded, as well as all graduate students, with our sample representing 21.2% of the overall LSE student population in 2021/22.

The second dataset contains student-level survey responses from LSE's *Programme Survey*, an annual survey of 1st and 2nd-year students enrolled at LSE, containing 27 core questions on student experience and satisfaction, with answers collected in 5-point Likert scales. This survey mirrors the UK's National Student Survey (NSS) in timing, format and questions asked. However, unlike the NSS, which is administered by IPSOS Mori to students in the last year of their degree, the Programme Survey is administered by TQARO, inviting students in year 1 and 2 of their degrees to participate. The internal nature allows the data to be joined up with administrative population data mentioned above via students' unique student ID. To ensure consistency with the above population data, we also restrict our analysis here to a sub-set of students domiciled in the UK and enrolled at LSE for an undergraduate programme. This subset contains 532 completed survey responses from 1st and 2nd-year students, representing a 26.9% response rate (1st and 2nd-year students form a total of $n=1978$). We recognise this is a small number of cases and our analysis of this survey is therefore to be treated as exploratory. Nonetheless, given the importance of the NSS in institutional decision making and university performance assessment in both League Tables and more recently the Teaching Excellence Framework assessment by the Office for Students, these results are still of interest.

Finally, owing to further data linking work, we can explore the association of grades and socio-demographic characteristics for students who responded to the Programme Survey. The grade marker available to us is the weighted average of grades a student has achieved across all for credit modules they have passed in that year. This is a rather unusual step which allows us to consider how student profile can affect outcomes.

3: Operationalising social class.

A major difficulty in assessing the significance of social class lies in the bitterly contested ways in which class has been operationalised in social research (Barone et al 2022). In Britain, since the 1990s, this has pitted sociologists who operationalise class through a theory of employment relations (notably those led by influential Oxford sociologist John Goldthorpe) against those who derive a theory of class from the operations of 'capitals, assets and resources' (see Savage et al 2005). This is not merely a measurement validation issue since these two perspectives are embedded in very different theoretical

² Cf Higher Education Statistics agency definition of the data: "The student should be asked for parental occupation or, if 21 or over, for their own occupation. For example, "If you are under 21, please give the occupation of your parent, step-parent or guardian who earns the most. If they are retired or unemployed, give their most recent occupation. If you are 21 or over, please give your own occupation."

³ There were 2,938 Non-UK domiciled students in 2021/22, therefore UK-domiciled students formed 48.6% of undergraduate LSE students.

frameworks, the former drawing on rational action frameworks (see Goldthorpe 2007) and the later on versions of Pierre Bourdieu’s sociology of capitals, habitus and fields.

We do not weigh in directly into this contentious argument, except to note that the two approaches have different implications for measuring the classed nature of the LSE student body (Connelly et al 2016). Goldthorpe’s class schema differentiates classes according to their employment situation, firstly distinguishing those employed from those who are employers, or self-employed. For the majority who are employees, it then distinguishes between those employed on ‘labour contracts’ rather than those in ‘service relationships’. The rationale for this separation is that,

‘Managers are engaged to exercise delegated authority, and professionals to exercise specialised knowledge and expertise, on behalf of their employers; it is therefore of advantage to employers if these employees are motivated to act consistently in the interests of the employing organisation and to adapt and develop their abilities and skills over time in its particular context. Thus, what is in these circumstances appropriate is a contract that goes beyond simply a recurrent ‘money for effort’ bargain and implies an exchange between employer and employee of a relatively diffuse and long-term kind.’ (Bukodi and Goldthorpe 2018).

Appendix 1 provides a detailed description of the NS-SEC schema, including the representative occupations to be found within each class. Because this approach has been formally adopted in UK statistics, it is therefore readily available from HESA data and reveals the following class distribution of LSE UK domiciled undergraduate students. Table 1 reports the NS-SEC class origins of LSE students using this metric.

Table 1: NS-SEC class origins of LSE undergraduate students

Category	n	%	Val %
1 Higher managerial, administrative and professional occupations	962	34.7%	39.6%
2 Lower managerial, administrative and professional occupations	628	22.6%	25.9%
3 Intermediate occupations	262	9.4%	10.8%
4 Small employers and own account workers	197	7.1%	8.1%
5 Lower supervisory and technical occupations	76	2.7%	3.1%
6 Semi-routine occupations	187	6.7%	7.7%
7 Routine occupations	115	4.1%	4.7%
Missing	349	12.6%	
Total	2776	100.0%	100.0%

Table 1 shows that applying the NS-SEC reveals a hugely privileged student body. Omitting students with missing data, nearly two-thirds of the LSE home UG student body come from the professional/managerial service class, and nearly 40% are from the upper wing of that class. By contrast, only 11% of students are from the ‘working class’ NS-SEC 6 and 7. Seen in these terms, this home UG part of the LSE is a very upper and middle class institution. Working class students are very much a minority.

The competing perspective, which more often informs qualitative studies, as well as influential accounts of cultural divides (e.g. Bennett et al 2009) is inspired by Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of economic and cultural capital. Here class is not derived purely from employment relations, but rather from different stocks of economic, cultural and social capital (Bourdieu 1986). This approach is frequently seen as more subtle in recognising the interplay and divisions within the middle and upper classes, for instance differentiating between more liberal professionals against more conservative industrialists (e.g. Savage et al 1992; Bennett et al 2009; Savage et al 2015). This horizontal divide has been seen as increasingly significant in shaping political and lifestyle orientations amongst the middle

classes, for instance through Piketty’s (2020) emphasis (also endorsed by much political science) on the political cleavages between the ‘Brahmin left’ and ‘Merchant right’.

This multi-dimensional approach is harder to operationalise than the NS-SEC. Ideally, it depends on a battery of questions on academic credentials, cultural preferences and practices, as well as different components of economic capital. Given that we cannot access such a wide palate of questions from HESA data, we have adopted an approach championed by Norwegian sociologists which recodes occupations horizontally as well as vertically to allow a separation between occupations which typically demand higher qualification levels against those which command the highest pay. As Anderson and Hansen (2011: 611) put it:

‘The basic idea behind the ORDC scheme is that classes can be distinguished both vertically, according to the amount of capital, and horizontally, according to the composition of capital. The data on occupation are provided by information given by employers about their employees to the authorities, among other things on earnings, working hours, and occupation’

Applying the ORDC scheme to LSE data required extensive work because of differing coding standards. The ORDC scheme classifies occupation codes based on the international ISCO-88 format, whereas the LSE data is collected using the British SOC-2010 standard. Applying the scheme therefore required us to build two crosswalks (SOC-2010 to ISCO-08, and ISCO-08 to ISCO-88). This also required us to resolve a small number of ambiguous cases where a single SOC-2010 code corresponded to different ISCO and therefore ORDC classifications (see annex 2). Applying this class schema provides a rather different interpretation of the LSE home UG student body than that offered by the NS-SEC.

The more nuanced and refined ORDC measures suggests that the LSE is more of an upper- and middle class, rather than upper class institution. Only 22% of students fall into the most privileged ‘upper class’ categories, compared to 40% who fall into the upper middle classes. The ORDC classification also suggests a rather more significant working-class presence at LSE, with nearly a quarter of students coming from such backgrounds.

Table 2: LSE undergraduate students by ORDC derived class

Category	n	%	Val %
Primary-sector employees	6	0.2%	0.2%
Unskilled working class	370	13.3%	15.2%
Skilled working class	211	7.6%	8.7%
Lower-middle class: culture	48	1.7%	2.0%
Lower-middle class: balanced	197	7.1%	8.1%
Lower-middle class: economic	93	3.4%	3.8%
Upper-middle class: culture	78	2.8%	3.2%
Upper-middle class: balanced	384	13.8%	15.8%
Upper-middle class: economic	508	18.3%	20.9%
Upper class: culture	102	3.7%	4.2%
Upper class: balanced	332	12.0%	13.7%
Upper class: economic	98	3.5%	4.0%
Missing	349	12.6%	
Total	2776	100.0%	100.0%

A nuance of the ORDC is its capacity to distinguish upper and middle classes with relatively high amounts of cultural or economic capital. LSE data suggests the weakness of the more ‘cultural’ upper middle and lower middle classes (i.e. occupations such as teachers, journalists, musicians and actors), and the much heavier weighting towards the ‘economic’ wing (such as financial brokers, upper level managers, the self-employed, rentiers).

Figure 1 benchmarks the ORDC class of home UG LSE students against estimates of the UK adult population drawn from a recoding of the Labour Force Survey. This suggests that the LSE is not as highly weighted towards the upper and middle classes as might be expected. The greatest differential is the additional 9% of students who come from ‘upper class – balanced’ (such as judges and doctors) who typically occupy positions of institutional and professional power. There is less over-representation of students from ‘upper middle class’ families, apart from those on the economic wing, such as middle managers, financial brokers, and the self-employed. The largest under-representation comes from the lower middle class (balanced) and skilled and unskilled working class⁴.

Figure 1: Class differentials comparing LSE students against the UK population.

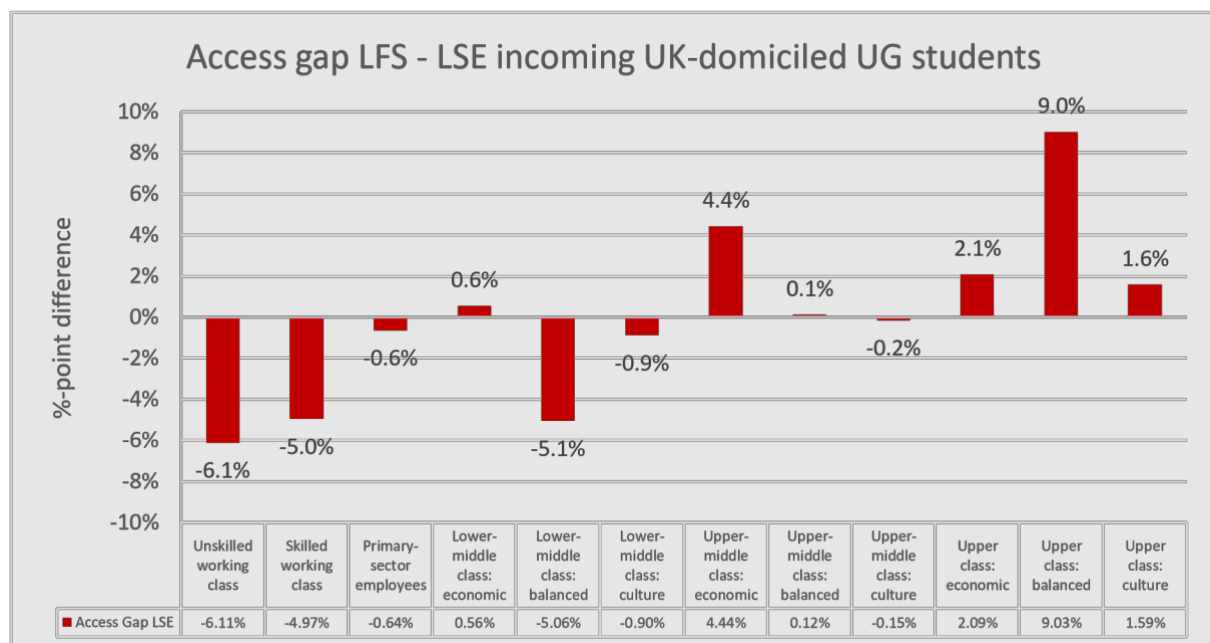


Figure 1: %-point difference between ORDC coded UK Labour Force Sample (Q3 2020) and 1st-year, UK domiciled, LSE undergraduate students in academic years 2019/20-2021/22. N/as were excluded in both samples. Note: a negative gap suggests underrepresentation of a given socio-economic strata, a positive gap overrepresentation.

We value that the ORDC offers a more refined approach which has more capacity to reveal variation amongst the more privileged upper and middle classes, compared to the broad-brush NS-SEC ‘service class’ classifications. We will discuss in later sections which model gives us better handle on measuring student experience and attainment.

To complete our contextual discussion, Table 3 indicates the ethnic, gender, and geographical backgrounds of the LSE home UG student body. This will allow us to later on pull out possible intersections with class.

⁴ This comparison will be approximate given that our estimates of the LFS is from the entire adult sample, and does not select those who are most likely to be of the parental age to have children attending university.

Table 3a: Ethnicity

Category	n	%	Val %
Asian	1011	36.4%	37.0%
Black	241	8.7%	8.8%
Chinese	121	4.4%	4.4%
Mixed	223	8.0%	8.2%
Other	95	3.4%	3.5%
White	1039	37.4%	38.1%
Missing	46	1.7%	
Total	2776	100.0%	100.0%

Table 3b: Gender

Category	n	%	Val %
Man	1456	52.4%	52.4%
Woman	1318	47.5%	47.5%
Other	2	0.1%	0.1%
Total	2776	100.0%	100.0%

Table 3c: UK region

Category	n	%	Val %
East Midlands	92	3.3%	3.3%
East of England	265	9.5%	9.6%
London	1379	49.7%	49.7%
North East	27	1.0%	1.0%
North West	146	5.3%	5.3%
Northern Ireland	16	0.6%	0.6%
Scotland	39	1.4%	1.4%
South East	401	14.4%	14.5%
South West	138	5.0%	5.0%
Wales	72	2.6%	2.6%
West Midlands	122	4.4%	4.4%
Yorkshire and The Humber	77	2.8%	2.8%
Missing	2	0.1%	
Total	2776	100.0%	100.0%

Table 3a reveals that although White British students form the single biggest ethnic group, the home UG student body is predominantly non-White British with nearly as many British Asian students. (Unfortunately, available data does not distinguish between different Asian British ethnicities apart from Chinese). Black British students, just less than 9% of the LSE body, are slightly overrepresented relative to the overall British population of 18-to-24-year-olds according to the 2021 Census, though they are likely underrepresented given the geographical skew of LSE students towards the London population, which is more racially diverse (see Table 3c).

Table 3b indicates a slight gender bias towards male students. Figure 3c is highly revealing in demonstrating the strong London and Home Counties backgrounds of UK-domiciled LSE students. Half of the entire home UG student body come from London, a proportion which rises to 74% of students when the South-East and East of England is included. Students from old industrial areas of the north of England, Scotland, Wales and the Midlands are clearly very much in a minority at LSE.

These descriptive statistics offer an invaluable starting point for our study. Certainly, if the ORDC class schema is used, and when it is placed alongside data on ethnicity and geography, the LSE student body seems a long way from being a quintessentially White British elite university (on the stereotypical Oxbridge, Durham, Bristol model). Instead, it appears more oriented towards the metropolitan middle and upper middle classes, with a significant degree of ethnic diversity, especially with respect to Asian British representation. There would appear to be a more subtle and complex set of class dynamics in play. We now turn to see how these play out in affecting student profiles at the LSE.

4: A socio-disciplinary anatomy of the LSE

Our next step considers how social class is embedded within the disciplinary organisation of the LSE, and how it relates to other socio-demographic factors amongst the student body. We conduct this anatomy through a multiple correspondence analysis, which allows us to unravel, and visualise, the clustering of socio-demographic variables that may affect student experience. Our strategy here is to firstly treat these socio-demographic variables as active for constructing the MCA. We will then project as supplementary variables the Departments that students are enrolled, so that we can identify the extent to which Departments cater for distinctive kinds of students. The results are very revealing.

We conduct the data analysis on all LSE undergraduate students domiciled in the UK for the academic year 2021/22 ($n=2,776$). We use 7 active variables, all of which might potentially shape student attainment and experience. These are (i) students home address, coded by their quintile location by the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), a measure of how deprived or advantaged the previous residence of students was; (ii) whether students had LSE undergraduate bursary; (iii) declared disability status; (iv) declared ethnicity; (v) declared gender; (vi) citizenship (UK or not); and finally (vii) ORDC class origins (as derived from declared occupation of main parental earner). We thus have 7 active variables, formed of 27 active modalities (and 5 passive modalities).

In this MCA analysis we only use the ORDC class schema. Although this is explicable insofar as the ORDC is more consistent with the Bourdieusian social space approach underpinning MCA, this is also warranted by the skew in NS-SEC categories discussed above where NS-SEC class 1 dominates so much. We would need to have recoded Class 7 with Class 6 in order to meet the minimum 5% threshold that modalities need for MCA, and the very large class 1 would also have limited the variance we could have expected to find. Our recoding of ORDC categories to also overcome the threshold problem is less dramatic. We (a) recoded upper and upper middle cultural groups into one group; (b) similarly recoded upper and upper middle economic groups; (c) recoded lower middle cultural and balanced wings; and (d) unskilled working class and primary sector employees. We also recoded Chinese British along with Asian British as well as Mixed and Other ethnic group to reach the 5% threshold size.

We need 17 axes to reach 100% of the cumulated modified rates. Table 4 reports the variance of the axes. As is common with MCA, there is a strong first dimension, explaining 63% of the adjusted total variance, but there is also a strong 2nd dimension. Checking the 'cloud of individuals' (see Figure A3 in the Appendix) confirms that there is a good separation between individual respondents and hence no evidence of a Gutmann effect indicating that specific modalities are duplicating each other, hence distorting the space. We can therefore be confident that the MCA provides a powerful way of interpreting the relationship between socio-demographic variables.

Table 4: Axes of MCA

Dimension	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.	14.	15.	16.	17.
Eigenvalue	0.29	0.18	0.17	0.16	0.16	0.15	0.15	0.15	0.14	0.14	0.14	0.14	0.14	0.13	0.13	0.12	0.12
Variance %	9.9	6.2	5.8	5.5	5.4	5.3	5.1	5.1	5.0	4.9	4.9	4.8	4.7	4.6	4.4	4.1	4.0
Adjusted variance %	63.3	8.8	5.6	4.0	3.5	2.9	2.2	2.2	1.8	1.4	1.3	1.2	0.8	0.6	0.4	0.0	0.0
Cum. adjusted variance %	63.3	72.1	77.7	81.7	85.2	88.1	90.3	92.5	94.3	95.7	97.0	98.2	99.0	99.6	100.0	100.0	100.0

Interpreting the axes allows us to identify which of the modalities are the most discriminating. The first axis is especially powerful and therefore commands particular attention. There is a strong intersecting class, racial and geographical divide amongst home UG LSE students. On the one side lie students who receive bursaries, who come from unskilled working-class backgrounds, whose home is in the most deprived areas of the UK and are Black British. On the other side of axis 1 are White British students who do not have bursaries and live in the most prosperous parts of the UK. The intersection between class, race and geography is therefore very apparent.

Table 5: Contributions to axis 1

Dimension 1(+)		
Modality	Contribution	Coordinate
Undergraduate bursary: Yes	17.7	1.01
Class origins: Unskilled working class	16.3	1.55
IMD: 1	10.7	1.25
Ethnicity: Black	8.4	1.39
IMD: 2	5.0	0.74
Dimension 1(-)		
Modality	Contribution	Coordinate
Undergraduate bursary: No	10.2	-0.58
IMD: 5	7.6	-0.76
Ethnicity: White	4.8	-0.51

The second axis is much less powerful, though still important. Table 6 shows that this second axis opposes a different kind of class and racial divide, this time also associated with gender and disability declaration. On one side are White (or to some extent from a mixed or "other" ethnicity) Non-British women from the cultural fractions of the upper and upper-middle class, with mental health or cognitive/learning disabilities to, *on the other hand*, Asian British or Chinese British men with no declared disabilities. The contribution of the Asian British & Chinese British to this 2nd axis is very strong, suggesting that this cleavage between this group and the others is of prime significance.

Table 6: Contributions to Axis 2

Dimension 2(+)		
Modality	Contribution	Coordinate
Class origins: Upper/Upper-middle class: culture	10.5	1.43
Disability: Cognitive/Learning difficulties	9.0	1.30
Gender: Woman	8.1	0.46
Ethnicity: White	8.0	0.52
Disability: Mental health condition	7.0	1.02
Citizenship: Non-UK	4.9	0.75
Ethnicity: Mixed/Other	3.9	0.65
Dimension 2(-)		
Modality	Contribution	Coordinate
Ethnicity: Asian/Chinese	21.1	-0.81

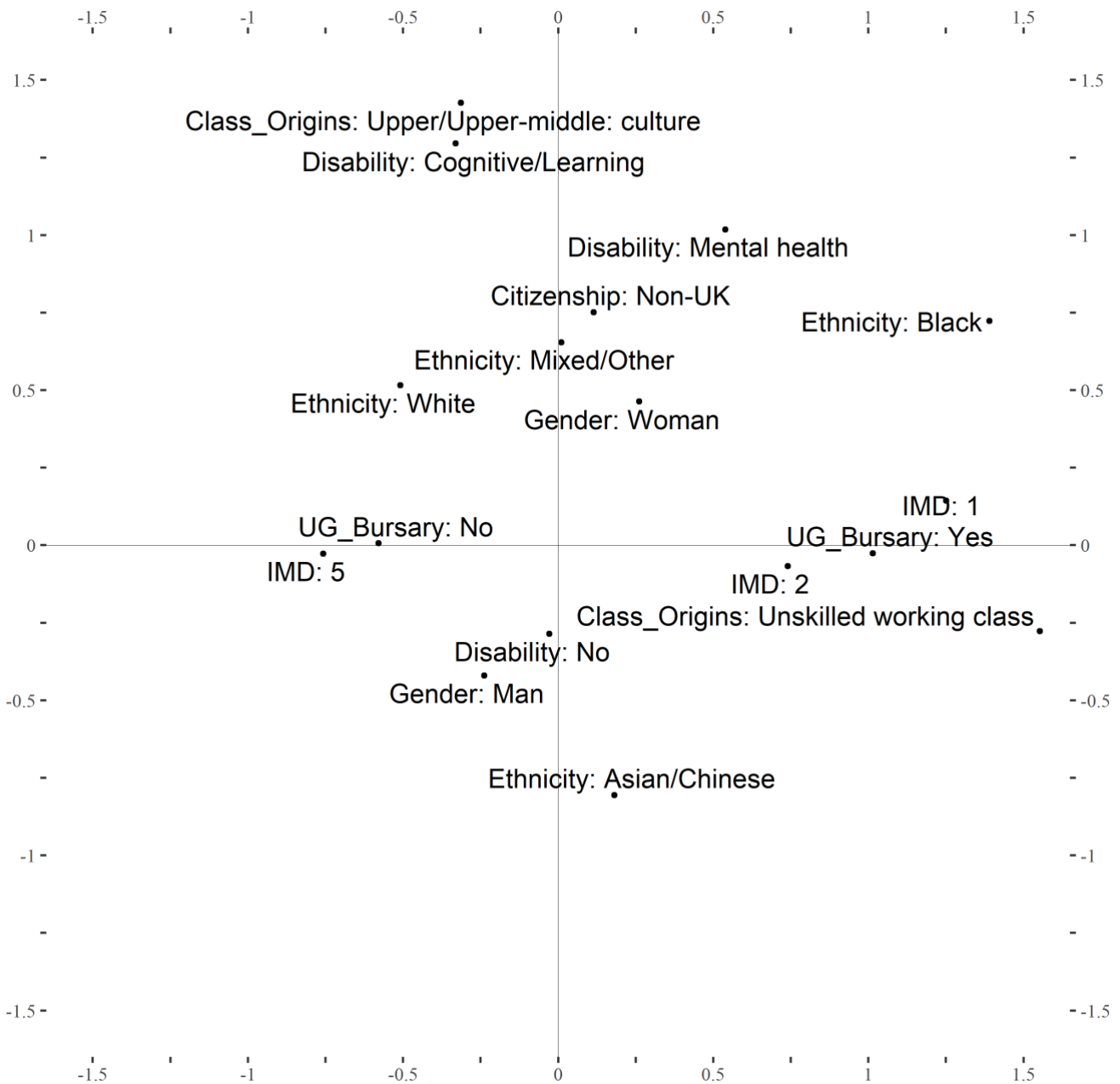
Gender: Man	7.4	-0.42
Disability: No	5.1	-0.29

It is important to draw out the implications of this analysis. MCA operates inductively in assessing clustering and partitions between its active variables, and there is no assumption that class will be of prime importance. Yet, class turns out to be crucial, given that is strongly represented on the 1st axis, working alongside geographical location and racial divides. With respect to ethnic divides, it is noteworthy that whereas axis 1 distinguishes between White British and Black British students, axis 2 distinguishes between White non-British and Asian British students, in a way which would be obscured by using the contentious ‘BME’ label. Axis 1 distinguishes working-class Black British students from middle-class White British students. However, the distinction between White non-British and Asian British students which operates on the 2nd axis is not associated with class but is associated with gender and disability status (contrasting White non-British women students with declared disabilities with Asian British men without declared disabilities).

Figure 2 draws together these two axes, revealing the social space of home LSE students are differentiated. The economic divide along the horizontal first axis is very clear, with receipt of undergraduate bursary and geographical location crisply dividing students on the left - right axis. As we have seen above, the racial divide is organised on two separate axes.

It is also revealing that the declaration of disability is associated with more privileged upper middle class students. On the face of it, this pattern may be surprising as disability identification in children and teenagers is strongly associated to family disadvantage (Chatzitheochari et al 2022; Parsons and Platt 2013; Spencer et al 2015). However, existing scholarship/intersectional disability studies suggest two simple explanations. First, the willingness to disclose a disability may be structured along class and racial lines, as pupils from privileged backgrounds are less exposed to discrimination in primary and secondary school settings (Chatzitheochari & Butler-Rees 2022) and they learn to leverage diagnoses to their advantage early on (Hale 2015; Holmqvist 2020). Second, and most importantly, the educational survival rates of young disabled students vary by class: among disabled students, those from lower class origins display worse academic outcomes – they are more likely to be eliminated before the university threshold (Chatzitheochari & Platt 2019; Velthuis & Chatzitheochari 2021). While privileged families can mitigate the consequences, these compensations strategies are not available for others.

Figure 2: The social space of British LSE students

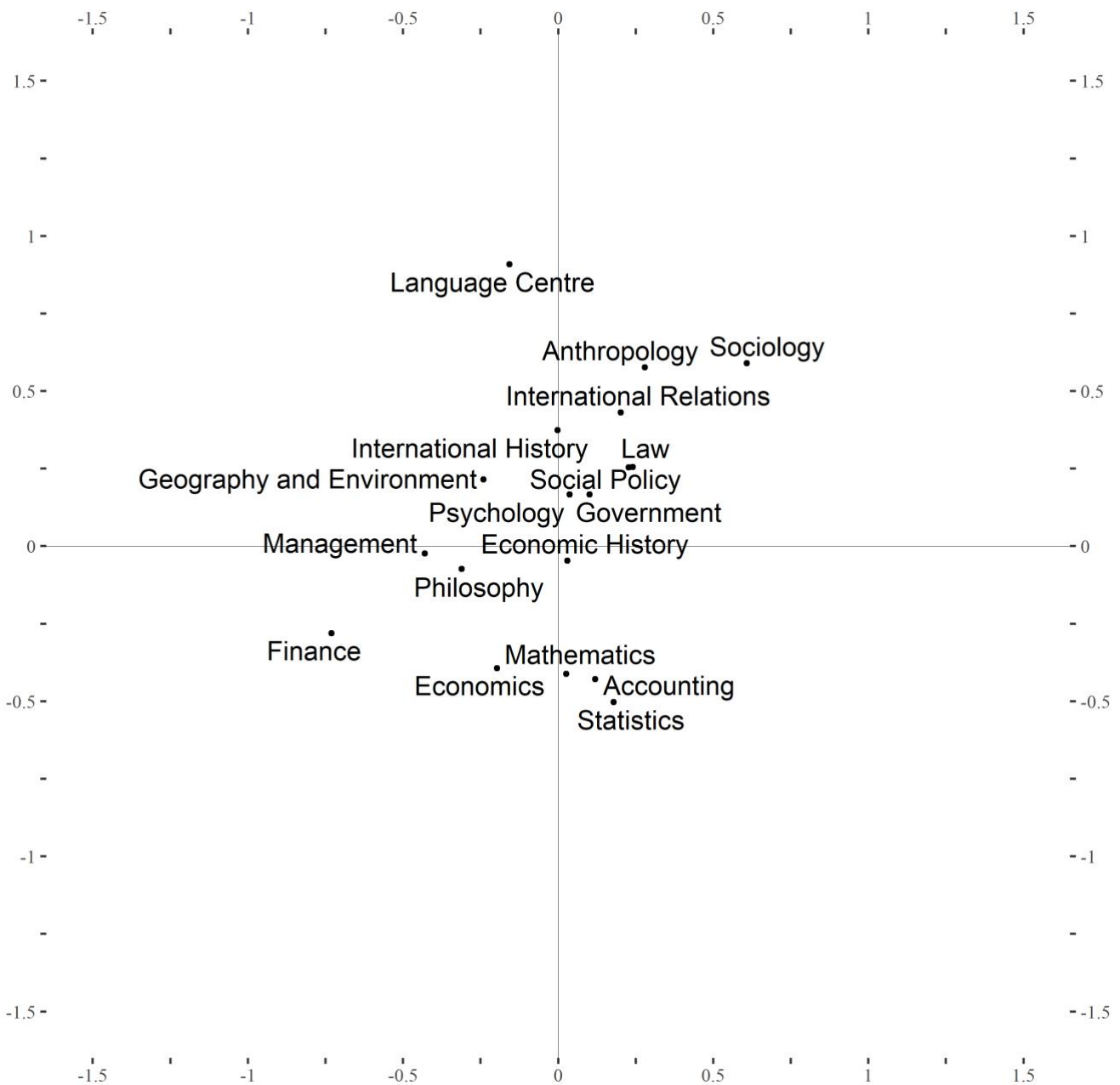


We can now take stock of the implications of the MCA for recognising class inequalities amongst the LSE student body. As we have already intimated in Section 3, the LSE is not a university where elite students utterly dominate. If this was the case, the first axis would be organised along non-class lines separating differing kinds of elite profiles. Rather, the LSE student body is internally differentiated on class lines, with significant numbers of working class and Black British students. This reinforces our earlier argument that it is necessary to treat HEIs not as ‘empty vessels’ but as internally differentiated – and potentially contested – institutions.

We can push this point further by exploring how far the oppositions delineated in Figure 2 map onto the institutional infrastructure of the LSE itself by projecting the Departments in which students’ study. Figure 3 does, indeed, reveal how disciplinary divides are aligned with the socio-demographic divides we have uncovered, though they are more associated with the second rather than the first axis. On the first axis, and associated unskilled working-class Black British students, the Department of Sociology is

especially clearly placed, leaning on the very right. In contrast, on the side of more affluent White British students, the Department of Finance is on the very left.

Figure 3: Superimposing Departments onto the social space of LSE students



It is revealing to note that this cleavage does not map onto a separation between quantitative (=privileged students) in opposition to qualitative and more humanities oriented departments (= less privileged students). In fact, the 'pure' quantitative disciplines of statistics, accounting, economic history and mathematics are also located on the right-hand side of axis 1 alongside sociology and others. Rather, those Departments associated with privileged students seem more clearly oriented towards an applied quantitative focus in management and finance geared to future careers in the corporate sector.

Departments are more strongly differentiated on the second axis. If we look at *axis 2* (vertical) on Figure 3, we see, on the top, where White non-British women from the cultural fractions of the upper classes with reported disabilities are located, departments such as the language centre, sociology, anthropology, international relations or international history. And on the bottom (oriented towards Asian British/Chinese British men with no reported disability), departments such as statistics, accounting, mathematics, economics or finance are much stronger. Here, the quantitative versus qualitative distinction appears more significant, with Asian British/Chinese men being more commonly represented in the former. This confirms the international literature on gender segregation in higher education: women are more likely to be found in fields perceived as humanistic (rather than scientific) and/or care-oriented (rather than technical) (e.g. Barone 2011).

The general implication is that the disciplines that home UG students' study at LSE are not just an academic, but also a social marker. Although we can only draw on anecdotal evidence here, there is good reason to believe that this separation closely maps onto how students (and academics) themselves perceive the LSE.

These findings lead to an important conclusion. The LSE is not a homogeneous 'elite' institution. It is internally differentiated along class, ethnic and gender lines, with different Departments catering to some extent as institutional 'homes' to similar kinds of students. This may allow these Departments to potentially act as shelters which buffer students against more alien, unfamiliar, and hostile aspects of the institution. To give an obvious example, the values and curriculum of the Sociology Department (or sociology as a discipline) can be seen to be aligned with the working class, Black British and Muslim students who tend to be concentrated amongst its ranks (Grauerholz & Gibson 2006; Persell and colleagues 2007; Persell 2010; Wagenaar 2004). By contrast, the values of management and finance Departments could well be allied to the economic and corporate orientations of its students, which itself might be affiliated to the upper-class backgrounds from which they come. Disciplinary and departmental identities therefore might act to reinforce socio-demographic identities.

5: Class inequalities in entry, academic satisfaction and student profiles at LSE

Having established how class is represented within the internal socio-disciplinary anatomy of the LSE, let us now turn to the more analytical goal of considering how far class has an impact on measurable student outcomes. Here, we re-introduce the contrast between NS-SEC and ORDC class schemas.

We have two main outcomes in our data (a) average grade, and (b) student satisfaction scores. It follows from our discussion above that alongside presenting the raw correlations between class and these outcomes, we need to conduct multivariate analysis to establish how far the effects of class can be separated from other effects, notably the Departments in which students are based. We therefore present our findings in two stages, firstly descriptively, and then using a linear regression model in which we can consider the significance of class compared to race, gender, and Department of study.

5.1: Student performance

Table 7a makes it immediately apparent that there is some arresting variation between ORDC classes in terms of the average mark of students from different class backgrounds. The highest average mark, 65.46 for the upper class (economic) is 3 points higher than the lowest class mark, 62.39 for the unskilled working class. However, there is also considerable variance within the upper and upper middle classes, and some of the cell sizes are smaller than others. Nonetheless, some kind of class differential does appear to be evident.

Table 7a: ORDC x Average mark (survey sample)

ORDC class background	Mean	SD	n	%
Upper class: economic	65.46	6.23	92	3.5%
Upper class: balanced	64.59	7.39	315	12.0%
Upper class: culture	65.36	5.84	94	3.6%
Upper-middle class: economic	63.39	6.11	483	18.4%
Upper-middle class: balanced	63.53	7.05	366	13.9%
Upper-middle class: culture	64.35	6.45	75	2.9%
Lower-middle class: economic	64.14	7.20	86	3.3%
Lower-middle class: balanced	63.84	6.08	186	7.1%
Lower-middle class: culture	64.46	7.74	44	1.7%
Skilled working class	62.72	6.80	196	7.5%
Unskilled working class	62.39	6.49	349	13.3%
Primary-sector employees	66.03	2.58	6	0.2%
Missing	63.15	7.35	333	12.7%
Total	63.59	6.77	2625	100.0%

Note: Average Mark is missing for 151 students.

Table 7b shows that using the NS-SEC reveals rather less class differentiation, probably because of its less detailed breakdown of upper and middle classes. Even so, we find almost linear decrease of average mark from class 1 to class 7. It seems to be the semi-routine occupations who have the lowest marks, while routine occupations fare slightly higher than lower supervisory and technical occupations.

Table 7b: NS-SEC x Average mark (survey sample)

NS-SEC class background	Mean	SD	n	%
1 Higher managerial, administrative and professional occupations	64.44	6.71	914	34.8%
2 Lower managerial, administrative and professional occupations	63.50	6.74	599	22.8%
3 Intermediate occupations	63.38	6.25	245	9.3%
4 Small employers and own account workers	62.98	6.86	185	7.0%
5 Lower supervisory and technical occupations	62.47	6.41	72	2.7%
6 Semi-routine occupations	62.26	6.40	170	6.5%
7 Routine occupations	62.65	6.71	107	4.1%
Missing	63.15	7.35	333	12.7%
Total	64.24	7.12	2625	100.0%

Note: Average Mark is missing for 151 students.

Clearly these descriptive findings need to be treated carefully. They may reflect that there are different marking cultures between Departments, rather than the effects of class itself. To address this issue, we therefore conducted linear regression models on the average mark in which class, race, gender, disability status and Department of study were all treated as independent variables.

Table 8a: Linear models on average mark with ORDC class as independent variable

	Model 1			Model 2		
(Intercept)	66.17	-0.71	***	66.94	-1.03	***
Gender: Woman	0.55	-0.28		-0.18	-0.29	
Ethnicity: Asian	-1.97	-0.33	***	-1.34	-0.32	***
Ethnicity: Black	-3.32	-0.54	***	-3.14	-0.52	***
Ethnicity: Chinese	-0.52	-0.70		0.53	-0.68	
Ethnicity: Mixed	-1.29	-0.54	*	-1.25	-0.52	*
Ethnicity: Other	-2.01	-0.81	*	-1.90	-0.78	*
ORDC Class Origins: Unskilled working class	-2.18	-0.78	**	-1.79	-0.76	*
ORDC Class Origins: Skilled working class	-2.53	-0.84	**	-1.77	-0.81	*
ORDC Class Origins: Lower-middle class: culture	-0.82	-1.20		-0.60	-1.16	
ORDC Class Origins: Lower-middle class: balanced	-1.13	-0.84		-0.80	-0.81	
ORDC Class Origins: Lower-middle class: economic	-1.32	-0.99		-0.86	-0.96	
ORDC Class Origins: Upper-middle class: culture	-1.08	-1.03		-0.73	-0.99	
ORDC Class Origins: Upper-middle class: balanced	-1.70	-0.77	*	-1.25	-0.75	
ORDC Class Origins: Upper-middle class: economic	-2.02	-0.75	**	-1.72	-0.72	*
ORDC Class Origins: Upper class: culture	-0.45	-0.97		-0.21	-0.94	
ORDC Class Origins: Upper class: balanced	-0.33	-0.78		-0.16	-0.75	
Disability: Cognitive/learning difficulties	-0.66	-0.58		-0.82	-0.56	
Disability: Mental health condition	-0.15	-0.52		-0.73	-0.50	
Disability: Other or multiple impairments	-0.01	-0.70		-0.18	-0.67	
Disability: Sensory or physical impairments	-0.84	-0.95		-0.58	-0.91	
Disability: Social/communication impairment+	-1.75	-3.29		-1.68	-3.18	
Department: Accounting				-2.86	-0.96	**
Department: Anthropology				0.03	-0.99	
Department: Economic History				0.17	-0.97	
Department: Economics				-0.22	-0.85	
Department: Finance				-2.51	-1.20	*
Department: Geography and Environment				0.55	-0.93	
Department: Government				0.22	-0.85	
Department: International History				0.33	-0.93	
Department: International Relations				0.45	-1.08	
Department: Language Centre				0.56	-1.41	
Department: Law				-1.08	-0.86	
Department: Management				-3.61	-0.98	***
Department: Mathematics				-4.72	-0.90	***
Department: Philosophy				1.15	-0.93	
Department: Psychology				1.94	-1.28	
Department: Social Policy				-0.11	-1.06	
Department: Statistics				-5.66	-0.96	***
R ²	0.04			0.13		
Adj. R ²	0.03			0.11		
Num. obs.	2255.00			2255.00		

Notes: Reference categories: Gender: Man; Ethnicity: White; Class: Upper class: economic; Disability: None; Department: Sociology. (+ = less than 10 cases in these categories)

In Table 8 the first panel shows the correlations between average mark with the socio-demographic variables, and the 2nd panel includes controls for Departments, so that the direct effects of class, gender, race and disability status are more clearly revealed. The results demonstrate several statistically significant associations. Care should be taken, however, in assuming that marks are mostly driven by individual characteristics, as other socio-demographic variables not measured here may play a role, as well as prior attainment at A-level (or equivalent), which is known to be a significant predictor of performance (Mountford-Zimdars, 2015).

In any event, it is clear there are significant race and class effects which affect students grades. Compared to White British students, Asian British, Mixed, “Other” (as in “other ethnicity”) and especially Black British students have a lower average mark, which remains true when allowance is made, in Panel 2, for the Departments in which students are located. Class also has an impact: compared to upper class students stemming from the economic fractions of the social space, those from the skilled and unskilled working class, and (more surprisingly) from the economic fraction of the

upper middle class do worse. Gender, and declared disabilities have no effect. Table 6 also demonstrates, as we anticipate, significant Departmental effects. Students in Statistics (especially), Mathematics, Management, Accounting and Finance tend to get lower marks than Sociology students (controlling, of course for all the socio-demographic variables listed in this model).

Table 8b: Linear models on average mark with NS-SEC class as independent variable

	Model 1			Model 2		
(Intercept)	65.37	-0.31	***	66.53	-0.83	***
Gender: Woman	0.50	-0.28		-0.24	-0.29	
Ethnicity: Asian	-1.99	-0.32	***	-1.36	-0.32	***
Ethnicity: Black	-3.22	-0.54	***	-3.03	-0.52	***
Ethnicity: Chinese	-0.49	-0.70		0.57	-0.68	
Ethnicity: Mixed	-1.30	-0.54	*	-1.26	-0.52	*
Ethnicity: Other	-1.83	-0.81	*	-1.77	-0.78	*
NS SEC Class Origins: 2 Lower manag./admin./prof. occupations	-1.04	-0.35	**	-0.92	-0.34	**
NS SEC Class Origins: 3 Intermediate occupations	-0.79	-0.48		-0.69	-0.46	
NS SEC Class Origins: 4 Small employers and own account workers	-1.15	-0.54	*	-0.85	-0.52	
NS SEC Class Origins: 5 Lower supervisory and technical occupations	-1.88	-0.82	*	-1.35	-0.79	
NS SEC Class Origins: 6 Semi-routine occupations	-1.70	-0.56	**	-1.62	-0.54	**
NS SEC Class Origins: 7 Routine occupations	-1.25	-0.68		-1.28	-0.66	
Disability: Cognitive/learning difficulties	-0.59	-0.58		-0.77	-0.56	
Disability: Mental health condition	-0.12	-0.52		-0.68	-0.50	
Disability: Other or multiple impairments	0.00	-0.70		-0.16	-0.67	
Disability: Sensory or physical impairments	-0.88	-0.95		-0.60	-0.91	
Disability: Social/communication impairment+	-2.19	-3.30		-2.03	-3.18	
Department: Accounting				-3.07	-0.96	**
Department: Anthropology				-0.05	-0.99	
Department: Economic History				0.16	-0.97	
Department: Economics				-0.35	-0.85	
Department: Finance				-2.67	-1.20	*
Department: Geography and Environment				0.36	-0.93	
Department: Government				0.11	-0.86	
Department: International History				0.25	-0.93	
Department: International Relations				0.30	-1.08	
Department: Language Centre				0.47	-1.41	
Department: Law				-1.16	-0.86	
Department: Management				-3.84	-0.98	***
Department: Mathematics				-4.80	-0.90	***
Department: Philosophy				1.00	-0.93	
Department: Psychology				1.84	-1.28	
Department: Social Policy				-0.29	-1.06	
Department: Statistics				-5.86	-0.96	***
R ²	0.04			0.13		
Adj. R ²	0.03			0.11		
Num. obs.	2255.00			2255.00		

Notes: Reference categories: Gender: Man; Ethnicity: White; Class: Upper class: economic; Disability: None; Department: Sociology. (+ = less than 10 cases in these categories)

Table 8b provides the equivalent analysis using NS-SEC class. It is similar in many respects, also revealing the strength of ethnicity in affecting average mark, and with similar Departmental effects. It also reveals that when controlled for the Department, lower managers, administrators and professionals, as well as individuals stemming from semi-routine occupations, get lower marks than Class 1.

5.2: Student satisfaction

We now turn to student experiences, where the Programme Survey is our main source. We acknowledge that the relatively small numbers of cases makes our analysis here less robust than the analysis of administrative data considered above. While this survey asks over 25 questions, we focus

our analysis on the last one, where students are invited to report the extent to which they agree with the statement “Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of the course” on 5-point scale (1 = Definitely disagree; 5 = Definitely agree).

We focus on this academic satisfaction scale for two reasons. First, unlike questions that probe specific dimensions of teaching and learning, the overall satisfaction scale makes no assumption as to what matters for students. Rather, it relies on “a subjective weighting of all aspects of the course experience considered to be relevant by each individual student” (Cheng and Marsh 2010: 697). Second, this satisfaction scale has often been used in constructing public league tables and therefore is the most widely cited metric. This overall satisfaction score, often reported as the percentage of students who mostly or definitely agree, features prominently in ranking and discussions of quality assurance. This makes understanding the influence of sociodemographic variables on this measure a crucial endeavour.

We need to acknowledge the limitations of this survey item. Three main critiques stand out in the literature. First, there is evidence that the way students interpret this question (and others in the survey) differs based on their engagement and learning goals (Bennet and Kane 2014). Second, based inter alia on the inertia of results over the years, some researchers have questioned the “discriminatory potential” of NSS measures (Lanagan and Harris 2019: 1086). Third, course satisfaction is not student happiness (Dean and Gibbs 2015). Student life involves multiple dimensions, not all related to teaching and learning (Jones 2019; Temple et al 2014). Students can simultaneously enjoy the academic side of their experience and adjust poorly to the social demands of university life (Crede and Niehooster 2012). Given this, and while this often happens in higher education talk, the overall satisfaction scale should not be treated as an omnibus measure of “the student experience” (Sabri 2012, 2013).

Table 9a provides descriptive data on the link between ORDC class background and academic satisfaction. Overall, 71.8% students give a positive response to the question ‘I am satisfied with the quality of the programme’. As Table 9a shows, this only varies marginally by class background, though there is a slight tendency for the unskilled working class (=66.4%) and skilled working class (=58.2%) to give lower scores. What is particularly striking is the more telling divergence amongst those giving the very positive (++) scores, which are probably the best measure of unambiguous satisfaction with their programmes, compared to those who give the more qualified (+) response. Although 72% of LSE students give a positive score, only 21% give a maximum strongly agree score.

This differentiation between moderate and stronger support has been seen as significant in other areas of research: Flemmen and Savage (2017) thus reflect that whereas NCDS data reveal very few Britons report openly racist views, a significant number give qualified, rather than full, support to questions in this area. This might overlap with Brundu-Gonzalez and Timan (2021) findings from open ended responses to NSS questions, where they distinguish between ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ distrust of the LSE. The former being the sense that LSE does not listen effectively to students, whereas ‘hard’ responses representing a sense that the LSE actively does not care about students. It is plausible that those with soft distrust may tick the ‘+’ box compared to those with hard distrust who might indicate some kind of negative response (-- or -).

Table 9a: Academic satisfaction by ORDC class

ORDC class background	--	-	=	+	++	Total
Primary-sector employees*	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.2%
Unskilled working class	3.3%	6.6%	24.6%	45.9%	19.7%	11.5%
Skilled working class	9.3%	11.6%	20.9%	44.2%	14.0%	8.1%
Lower-middle class: culture	0.0%	9.1%	18.2%	45.5%	27.3%	2.1%
Lower-middle class: balanced	5.0%	12.5%	12.5%	57.5%	12.5%	7.5%
Lower-middle class: economic	7.7%	0.0%	0.0%	76.9%	15.4%	2.4%

Upper-middle class: culture	4.3%	8.7%	8.7%	56.5%	21.7%	4.3%
Upper-middle class: balanced	2.3%	4.6%	18.4%	54.0%	20.7%	16.4%
Upper-middle class: economic	4.6%	10.2%	16.7%	47.2%	21.3%	20.3%
Upper class: culture	5.0%	5.0%	20.0%	45.0%	25.0%	3.8%
Upper class: balanced	2.0%	6.1%	16.3%	49.0%	26.5%	9.2%
Upper class: economic	6.2%	6.2%	18.8%	31.2%	37.5%	3.0%
Missing	6.7%	8.3%	10.0%	48.3%	26.7%	11.3%
Total	4.5%	7.9%	16.7%	49.4%	21.4%	100.0%

Notes: N = 532 respondents to the survey. The question was: "I am satisfied with the quality of the programme". (* = less than 10 cases in these categories)

It might here be revealing that the highly positive (++) score is given by only 14% of skilled working class, 19.4% of unskilled working class, 12.5% of lower middle class (balanced) and 15.4% of lower middle class (economic). By contrast 37.5% of the upper class (economic) wings give double thumbs up. The equivalent findings for the NS-SEC class schema are provided in Table 9b.

Table 9b: Academic satisfaction by NS-SEC class

NS-SEC class background	--	-	=	+	++	Total
1 Higher manag./admin./prof. occupations	3.2%	6.3%	16.3%	46.3%	27.9%	35.7%
2 Lower manag./admin./prof. occupations	3.1%	5.4%	14.6%	60.0%	16.9%	24.4%
3 Intermediate occupations	6.7%	15.6%	17.8%	53.3%	6.7%	8.5%
4 Small employers and own account workers	10.0%	12.5%	27.5%	35.0%	15.0%	7.5%
5 Lower supervisory/technical occupations	0.0%	0.0%	16.7%	50.0%	33.3%	2.3%
6 Semi-routine occupations	6.5%	12.9%	25.8%	38.7%	16.1%	5.8%
7 Routine occupations	4.2%	8.3%	16.7%	50.0%	20.8%	4.5%
Missing	6.7%	8.3%	10.0%	48.3%	26.7%	11.3%
Total	4.5%	7.9%	16.7%	49.4%	21.4%	100.0%

Notes: N = 532 respondents to the survey. The question was: "I am satisfied with the quality of the programme".

Table 9b is very revealing. We again see the distinctiveness of class 4, where only half of the students give a positive (+ or ++) response, much lower than the 71% of the LSE student body. This applies to a lesser degree for those from intermediate occupations (Class 3) with semi-routine occupations not far behind.

In interpreting Table 9a and 9b, we can note that although there are class differentials, there is far from being wholehearted evidence for the 'fish out of water' working class syndrome, as the class differentials are not as strong as we might anticipate, even when we distinguish '+' and '++' responses. This is rather surprising, and this may reflect that NSS questions are not ideal at picking up such effects, for example as dimensions of the survey might be interpreted differently by students based on their engagement with the course and expectations of teaching (Bennet & Kane, 2014)⁵. It is also intriguing that the lower middle classes (NS SEC 4), on the whole, seem the least satisfied with their course.

We can more formally measure the significance of class through a linear regression, once again controlling for any Departmental effects. Given the low number of cases, this analysis needs to be treated as preliminary and exploratory. In fact, the 2nd panel of Table 10 suggests that Departmental effects are not significant. Further, when we use ORDC class, there are very few statistically significant variables, namely those concerned with reported disabilities. On the face of it, this is a surprising finding. Even allowing for the limits of the NSS question, there is no strong evidence that working-class

⁵ Indeed, based on these and related criticisms, the NSS survey questions changed for the summer 2023 NSS survey.

students feel less academically satisfied than other students. The same is true for different ethnicities, and by gender.

Table 10a: Linear models on satisfaction with ORDC class as independent variable

	Model 1			Model 2		
(Intercept)	3.92	0.26	***	3.93	0.38	***
Gender: Woman	0.11	0.10		0.07	0.10	
Ethnicity: Asian	-0.20	0.11		-0.15	0.11	
Ethnicity: Black	0.21	0.22		0.24	0.22	
Ethnicity: Chinese	-0.25	0.20		-0.25	0.21	
Ethnicity: Mixed	-0.05	0.18		-0.08	0.18	
Ethnicity: Other+	0.25	0.52		0.38	0.53	
ORDC Class Origins: Unskilled working class	-0.15	0.29		-0.07	0.29	
ORDC Class Origins: Skilled working class	-0.41	0.30		-0.24	0.30	
ORDC Class Origins: Lower-middle class: culture	-0.05	0.40		-0.03	0.40	
ORDC Class Origins: Lower-middle class: balanced	-0.26	0.30		-0.15	0.30	
ORDC Class Origins: Lower-middle class: economic	0.05	0.38		0.03	0.38	
ORDC Class Origins: Upper-middle class: culture	-0.09	0.33		0.03	0.33	
ORDC Class Origins: Upper-middle class: balanced	0.01	0.28		0.10	0.28	
ORDC Class Origins: Upper-middle class: economic	-0.16	0.27		-0.16	0.27	
ORDC Class Origins: Upper class: culture	-0.09	0.35		0.03	0.35	
ORDC Class Origins: Upper class: balanced	0.07	0.29		0.12	0.29	
Disability: Cognitive/learning difficulties	-0.01	0.21		-0.11	0.21	
Disability: Mental health condition	-0.30	0.18		-0.36	0.18	*
Disability: Other or multiple impairments	-0.41	0.22		-0.46	0.22	*
Disability: Sensory or physical impairments	0.15	0.33		0.08	0.33	
Department: Accounting				-0.23	0.32	
Department: Anthropology				0.56	0.36	
Department: Economic History				-0.31	0.36	
Department: Economics				-0.01	0.30	
Department: Finance				0.08	0.33	
Department: Geography and Environment				-0.29	0.30	
Department: Government				-0.26	0.31	
Department: International History				-0.02	0.33	
Department: International Relations				0.12	0.36	
Department: Language Centre				0.40	0.39	
Department: Law				-0.06	0.30	
Department: Management				0.60	0.36	
Department: Mathematics				-0.39	0.31	
Department: Philosophy				0.14	0.38	
Department: Psychology+				0.24	0.47	
Department: Social Policy				-0.13	0.39	
Department: Statistics				-0.25	0.36	
R ²	0.05			0.11		
Adj. R ²	0.01			0.03		
Num. obs.	467.00			467.00		

Notes: Reference categories: Gender: Man; Ethnicity: White; Class: Upper class: economic; Disability: None; Department: Sociology. (+ = less than 10 cases in these categories)

By contrast, when class is measured by NS-SEC (Table 10b), class effects do appear. Compared to students from upper professional and managerial backgrounds, students from class 3 (intermediate), class 4 (self-employed), and class 6 (semi-routine) report lower satisfaction scores. Ethnicity and gender do appear as significant. The R squared statistic (7%) is low, but considerably higher than for Table 10a. Our suggestion is that the NS-SEC is effective in pulling out the distinctive features of the petit bourgeois self-employed, who (as can be seen from Table 9b) are distinctive in being more dissatisfied than other social classes. This may also reflect the increasing precarity of the self-employed – but this is purely a conjecture.

Table 10b: Linear models on satisfaction with NS-SEC class as independent variable

	Model 1		Model 2			
(Intercept)	3.94	0.10	***	4.06	0.28	***
Gender: Woman	0.12	0.09		0.08	0.10	
Ethnicity: Asian	-0.15	0.11		-0.10	0.11	
Ethnicity: Black	0.24	0.21		0.26	0.21	
Ethnicity: Chinese	-0.31	0.20		-0.30	0.21	
Ethnicity: Mixed	-0.03	0.18		-0.07	0.18	
Ethnicity: Other+	0.32	0.51		0.41	0.52	
NS SEC Class Origins: 2 Lower manag./admin./prof. occupations	-0.12	0.12		-0.08	0.12	
NS SEC Class Origins: 3 Intermediate occupations	-0.50	0.17	**	-0.42	0.17	*
NS SEC Class Origins: 4 Small employers and own account workers	-0.55	0.17	**	-0.47	0.18	**
NS SEC Class Origins: 5 Lower supervisory and technical occupations	0.32	0.31		0.53	0.31	
NS SEC Class Origins: 6 Semi-routine occupations	-0.48	0.20	*	-0.48	0.20	*
NS SEC Class Origins: 7 Routine occupations	-0.16	0.22		-0.10	0.22	
Disability: Cognitive/learning difficulties	0.03	0.20		-0.06	0.20	
Disability: Mental health condition	-0.28	0.17		-0.32	0.17	
Disability: Other or multiple impairments	-0.44	0.21	*	-0.48	0.22	*
Disability: Sensory or physical impairments	0.18	0.32		0.10	0.32	
Department: Accounting				-0.28	0.32	
Department: Anthropology				0.46	0.35	
Department: Economic History				-0.38	0.35	
Department: Economics				-0.07	0.29	
Department: Finance				-0.03	0.32	
Department: Geography and Environment				-0.36	0.30	
Department: Government				-0.33	0.30	
Department: International History				-0.08	0.32	
Department: International Relations				0.06	0.35	
Department: Language Centre				0.32	0.39	
Department: Law				-0.19	0.30	
Department: Management				0.48	0.35	
Department: Mathematics				-0.48	0.30	
Department: Philosophy				0.06	0.37	
Department: Psychology+				0.24	0.45	
Department: Social Policy				-0.19	0.39	
Department: Statistics				-0.32	0.35	
R ²	0.08			0.14		
Adj. R ²	0.04			0.07		
Num. obs.	467.00			467.00		

Notes: Reference categories: Gender: Man; Ethnicity: White; Class: Upper class: economic; Disability: None; Department: Sociology. (+ = less than 10 cases in these categories)

6: Conclusions

Our conclusions have both analytical and policy relevance. We should commence by noting the limitations of our study, which relies on administrative data, which is not always ideal for analytical purposes, for instance around the measurement of ethnicity. Likewise, as already pointed out above, we rely on a question on academic satisfaction which does not tap wider elements of the student experience. We also need to recognise that our analysis is based on a small sample size, and ideally will need to be buttressed by further analyses.

Nonetheless, even with these health warnings, our study has broken new ground by providing a rigorous analysis of how class affects student access, disciplinary specialism, experience, and performance. Of particular importance is our reflections on the relative strengths of the Bourdieu inspired ORDC, as well as the established NS-SEC class schema. Overall we are able to demonstrate some striking findings.

Our first concluding point is very stark. Class matters! It matters at least as much as race and gender which are the subject of much more policy intervention within HEI. Class matters not only in terms of access issues, where it is widely recognised that working-class students are less likely to enroll. It also

affects levels of academic satisfaction, and academic performance. These effects remain evident even when multivariate regression analysis controls for a range of variables, including disciplinary choice.

Our second point in some respects qualifies this first point. Class does not always operate along the predictable lines of pitting disadvantaged working class students against privileged middle- and upper-class students (though we still find such patterns in our data, especially in affecting average mark). On some of our measures, it is the lower middle class, and more particularly the self-employed petit bourgeoisie who appear worst off, certainly in terms of their lower levels of academic satisfaction. We are not able to explain these patterns from the data at our disposal here. One plausible explanation is the upper middle-class students have the confidence and resources to perform well, whilst lower working-class students may also be able to mobilise a sense of class identity (e.g. Crozier et al 2019), as well as potential resources such as bursaries, to mitigate their disadvantages. Working class students might also be more risk aware regarding HE – so for them, the (relative) absence of negative experience might be enough to meet or exceed expectations, hence give a positive score on the NSS (see Thomsen 2023). By contrast, those from more intermediate class positions who cannot benefit from parental resources, nor are able to mobilise countervailing identities, and may not feel that their Departments significantly recognise their needs, might feel more marginalised. This conjecture would benefit from additional, probably qualitative, research to explore further.

Here, we want to underscore the novelty of our analyses about satisfaction. Overall student satisfaction scores derived from the National Student Survey dominate national conversation about quality assurance in higher education. However, due to data access challenges, studies based on NSS data have mostly explored how satisfaction scores vary between universities, between subjects, or between study mode (e.g. Bell and Brooks 2018; Cheng and Marsh 2010). In contrast, with a few exceptions (Dean, Langan, and Probert 2010), the influence of student background has not been systematically documented. In fact, to the best of our knowledge, the association between overall satisfaction and class background has never been analysed before. Here, using survey data which virtually replicates the NSS, we establish for the first time a clear link between the overall satisfaction item and class background. This matters greatly in policy terms, since if our LSE findings can be generalised, the implication is that differences in NSS performance between HEIs may (at least partly) reflect the social origins of students rather than the degree of excellence of the HEIs themselves.

Thirdly, class needs to be placed in an intersectional perspective, as there is a close overlap with ethnic divides. Gender, by contrast, does not come over as a significant source of differentiation, either by itself or in association with class or ethnicity. There is a particularly strong association between Black British and working-class students – which does not extend to White British or Asian British students who are not especially likely to be from a disadvantaged class position. To this extent, our research highlights that while class and race can be distinguished on paper, they are likely connected in practice. Therefore, any policy efforts to reduce ethnoracial inequalities should also tackle class head on. It is also noteworthy that we are more likely to find disabled students among the privileged, which surely reflects the double disadvantage disabled students from lower class backgrounds face in secondary education.

Fourthly, we should note that although class influences student satisfaction and on academic performance, we should not over-state their importance. The r squared figure from our regression models based on socio-demographic variables is small. The vast majority of variance in student satisfaction is not explicable in these terms. To a certain degree, this is reassuring, though we also believe that more nuanced analysis, including qualitative studies which might capture social and cultural processes, are likely to throw up stronger associations.

Fifthly, on a more analytical note, our study shows that even a prestigious and powerful university such as the LSE cannot simply be seen as an ‘empty vehicle’ of elite reproduction. Although there are

disproportionate numbers of upper and upper middle-class students at the LSE, this disparity is not pronounced. There are also significant numbers of lower middle class and working-class students, who also have a significant presence at the LSE. This is further underscored by the existence of Departments – such as Sociology – forming distinct clusters within LSE, which may allow student and staff to build some sort of ‘institutional shelters’ to build collective identities, rather than be marginalised. We need to extend analytical research scope away from the narrow parameters of the ‘O-E-D’ triangle to unpack the internal mechanisms within the ‘E’ which also stratify and differentiate on class lines. Simply opening up university access to a wider class demographic through reforms to admissions policies alone will not wipe out the effects of class which manifest themselves within, as well as on the point of entry to, universities.

Our sixth point extrapolates from the close relationship between Departments and social class and ethnic profiles. Class matters not only in terms of student profiles, but also in being implicated in internal LSE disciplinary organisation, since differing Departments cater for students of varying classes. It is likely that disciplinary identities become bound up with class, as well as racial, divides. This factor may explain the relatively muted class effects on student satisfaction noted above. Working class Black British students may not feel as dissatisfied we may expect because they are disproportionately to be found in a department (such as Sociology) whose curriculum and values are tilted towards such students.

Finally, we can reflect on the relative value of using ORDC or NS-SEC class classifications. We have established the value of extending from NS-SEC to using the ORDC. This provides a much more granular picture of the upper and middle classes than does the NS-SEC and was helpful for explicating how certain upper and upper middle-class fractions are especially likely to obtain good marks. The NSSEC is better, however, in predicting student satisfaction where it helps predict lower scores amongst certain lower middle-class groups. We therefore endorse a pragmatic approach recognising how ORDC may be better at differentiating amongst the more privileged upper and middle classes, whereas NSSEC highlights the distinctiveness of the petit bourgeois and lower middle-class groups. More generally, by deploying different operationalisations of the same raw occupational data, and by showing how these yield diverging results, we confirm the interest of conducting sensitivity analyses when handling class socioeconomic classifications (Connelly *et al*, 2016).

Overall, we have demonstrated the vital need to take parental social class seriously as a structural force affecting numerous aspects of study within higher education, and one which also has powerful intersectional dynamics, especially with ethnicity. We look forward to developing this research in the future, and in extending the scope comparatively across UK and international HEI⁶.

⁶ Additional angles of inquiry which we will pursue in more refined analyses include a model specification for predicting satisfaction with attainment as an explanatory variable. We found two important things (1) attainment is not a predictor of satisfaction (2) class background remains statistically significant. Provisional analysis (not reported here) suggest that class and race effects vary between 1st and 2nd year students, for instance. We also hope to be able to link information on religious affiliation which would allow us to differentiate more effectively amongst Asian British students. We can also reflect further on the how geographical factors intersect with the race and class effects we have detected.

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APPENDIX 1: DETAILS OF NS-SEC AND BOURDIEU DERIVED CLASS SCHEMAS

Table A1: NS-SEC 7-class version and representative occupations

Class	Description	Representative occupations
Class 1	Higher managers and professionals	General managers in large companies and organisations, higher-grade civil servants and local government officials, architects, lawyers; medical practitioners, professional engineers, scientists, university teachers
Class 2	Lower managers and professionals	General managers in small companies and organisations, site managers, office managers, workshop managers, lower-grade civil servants and local government officers, librarians, nurses, physiotherapists, school teachers, social workers, surveyors
Class 3	Ancillary professional and administrative	Computer maintenance staff, draughtspersons, library assistants, nursery nurses, paramedical staff, cashiers, clerical workers, data processing operators, personal assistants, secretaries
Class 4	Small employers and own account workers	Garage proprietors, builders, café proprietors, craftsmen, market traders, publicans, shopkeepers
Class 5	Lower supervisory and technical occupations	Foremen, site and works supervisors, auto engineers, heating engineers, instrument technicians, laboratory technicians, printers, tool- and pattern-makers, TV and video engineers
Class 6	Semi-routine occupations	Care assistants, caretakers and housekeepers, chefs and cooks, chemical process workers, crane drivers, factory machinists, fitters, postal workers, receptionists, sales assistants, store controllers and despatchers, traffic wardens
Class 7	Routine occupations	Bus and van drivers, construction site and other labourers, craftsmen's mates, food process workers, counter and bar staff, house and office cleaners, kitchen assistants, packers and fillers, porters and attendants, refuse collectors, warehouse workers

Notes: derived from Bukodi and Goldthorpe 2018: Figure 1.1

Figure A1: Graphical representations of the OsloRegister Data Class scheme

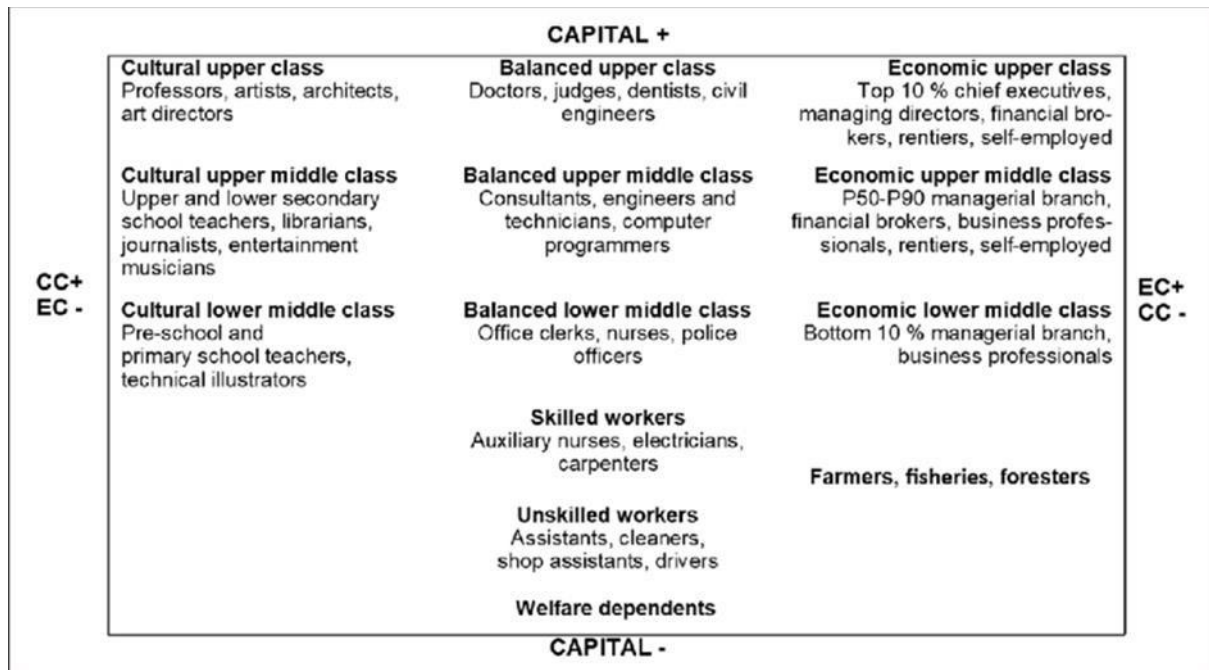


Figure A2: Cloud of individuals in MCA space

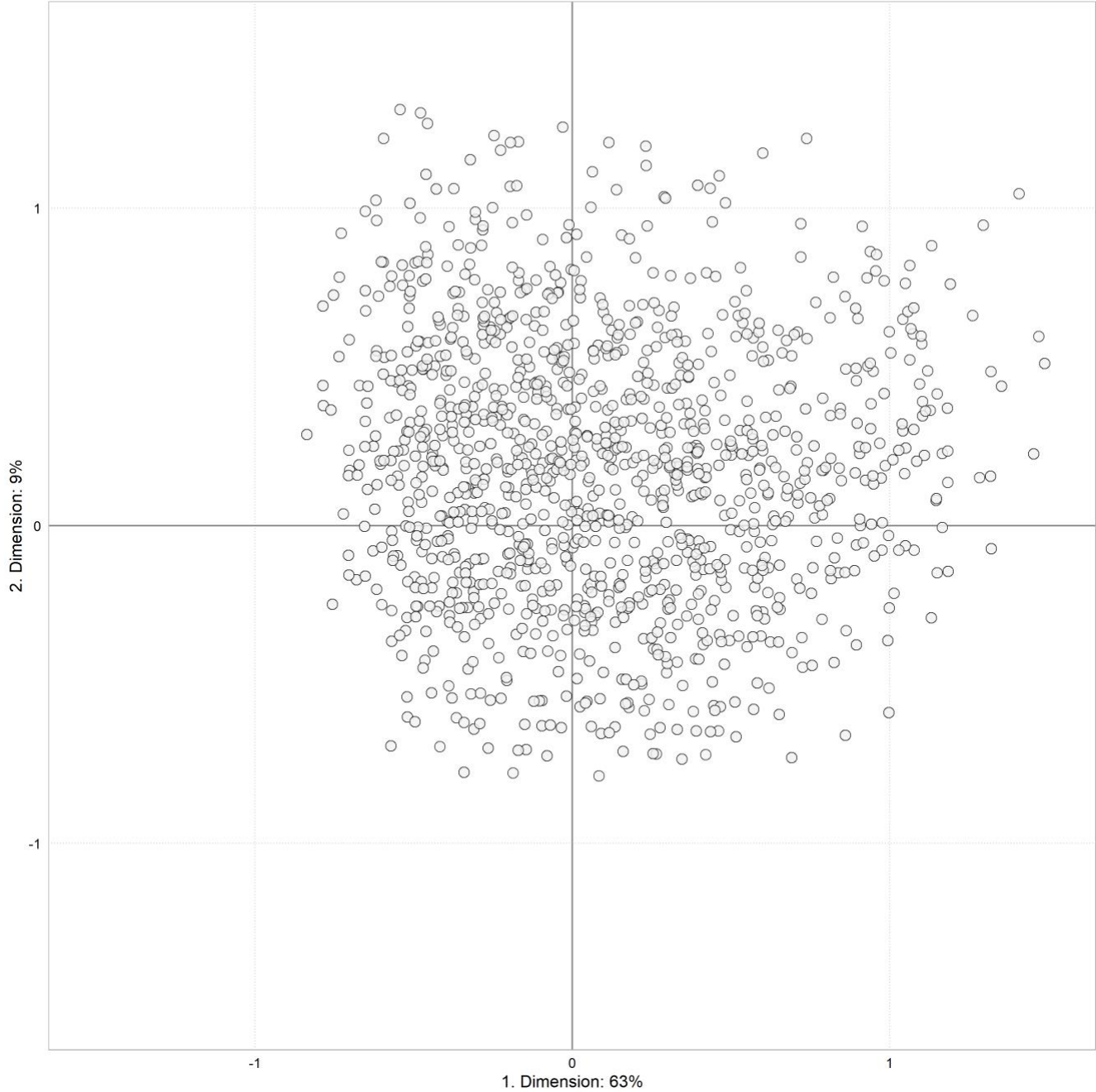


Table A2: Contributions of the variables and modalities to the first four axes

Variable	Modality	Axis 1	Axis 2	Axis 3	Axis 4	Freq
Citizenship	Non-UK	0.1	4.9	16.5	3.5	299
	UK	0.0	0.6	2.0	0.4	2477
	Total	0.1	5.5	18.5	3.9	2776
ORDC Class Origins	Unskilled working class	16.3	0.8	3.3	0.1	376
	Skilled working class	1.6	0.2	2.1	0.4	211
	Lower-middle class: balanced/culture	0.3	0.6	6.7	0.1	245
	Lower-middle class: economic	0.5	1.5	3.9	0.4	93
	Upper-middle class: balanced	1.3	0.5	0.3	0.5	384
	Upper/Upper-middle class: culture	0.3	10.5	1.5	5.2	180
	Upper class: balanced	3.1	1.9	0.7	31.4	332
	Upper/Upper-middle class: economic	3.1	0.0	0.3	3.3	606
	Total	26.5	16.0	18.8	41.4	2427
Disability	Cognitive/Learning	0.4	9.0	0.6	9.9	186
	Mental health	1.2	7.0	11.4	5.3	236
	Social/Sensory/Physical/Other	0.0	2.7	5.8	4.3	195
	No	0.0	5.1	2.6	1.1	2159
	Total	1.6	23.8	20.4	20.6	2776
Ethnicity	Asian/Chinese	0.7	21.1	0.6	0.3	1132
	Black	8.4	3.6	8.5	2.7	241
	Mixed/Other	0.0	3.9	1.8	7.8	318
	White	4.8	8.0	0.0	8.3	1039
	Total	13.9	36.6	10.9	19.1	2730
Gender	Man	1.5	7.4	1.5	1.0	1456
	Woman	1.6	8.1	1.7	1.1	1318
	Total	3.1	15.5	3.2	2.1	2774
IMD	1	10.7	0.2	11.5	0.0	380
	2	5.0	0.1	2.9	0.7	508
	3	0.1	1.2	10.2	3.4	534
	4	3.5	1.0	2.5	2.3	612
	5	7.6	0.0	0.1	5.4	740
	Total	26.9	2.5	27.2	11.8	2774
UG Bursary	No	10.2	0.0	0.4	0.3	1693
	Yes	17.7	0.0	0.6	0.5	956
	Total	27.9	0.0	1.0	0.8	2649

Notes: Modalities above the average contribution of 3.7 and variables above the average contribution of 14.3 are considered contributive to an axis.

APPENDIX 2: ORDC Crossroad & Resolving Duplicate Cases

To construct the SOC2010 to ORDC crossroad, two mapping schemes had to be built: from SOC2010 to ISCO08; and from ISCO08 to ISCO88, given that the original ORDC formatting applies to ISCO88. For the mapping from SOC to ISCO08, the Office for National Statistics' (ONS) "SOC 2010 to ISCO-08 Mapping" scheme was used⁷. For the translation from ISCO08 to ISCO88, the mapping scheme provided by "ISCOGEN", a common stata module for the recoding of ISCO codes, was used⁸.

While ISCOGEN has resolved duplicate mappings (i.e. cases where one ISCO-08 code responds to several possible ISCO-88 codes), the ONS Scheme does not. This resulted in 16 instances where one SOC2010 code could be mapped onto one or more ISCO08 codes. However, in 11 of these instances, the resulting multiple options did *not* change the resulting ORDC classification, as all available options were assigned the same ORDC classification. The remaining 5 instances were resolved manually by the research team (s. table A1).

SOC 2010	SOC2010 Unit Group Titles	ISCO08	ISCO08 Unit Group Titles	ISCO88	ISCO88 Unit Group	ORDC Classification
3417	Photographers, audio-visual and broadcasting equipment operators	3431	Photographers	3131	Photographers and image and sound recording equipment operators	Lower-middle class: culture
		3521	Broadcasting and audio-visual technicians	3130	Optical and electronic equipment	Lower-middle class: balanced
3537	Financial and accounting technicians	2411	Accountants	2411	Accountants	Upper-middle class: economic
		3313	Accounting associate professionals	3433	Bookkeepers	Skilled working class
5244	TV, video and audio engineers	2153	Telecommunications engineers	2144	Electronics and telecommunications engineers	Upper class: balanced
		7421	Electronics mechanics and servicers	7242	Electronics fitters	Skilled working class
5249	Electrical and electronic trades n.e.c.	2153	Telecommunications engineers	2144	Electronics and telecommunications engineers	Upper class: balanced
		7421	Electronics mechanics and servicers	7242	Electronics fitters	Skilled working class
7114	Pharmacy and other dispensing assistants	3213	Pharmaceutical technicians and assistants	3228	Pharmaceutical assistants	Lower-middle class: balanced
		5223	Shop sales assistants	5220	Shop salespersons and demonstrators	Unskilled working class

Table A1: Manually resolved multiple coding issues, with chosen ORDC classifications highlighted in bold and blue.

⁷Available online at:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/methodology/classificationsandstandards/standardoccupationalclassificationsoc/soc2020/classifyingthestandardoccupationalclassification2020soc2020totheinternationalstandardclassificationofoccupationsisco08>; accessed on 24.02.24

⁸ Ben Jann, 2019. "[ISCOGEN: Stata module to translate ISCO codes](#)," [Statistical Software Components](#). S458665, Boston College Department of Economics, revised 17 Nov 2020.