

Exploring Ear'oles Education: An investigation of the school-level educational outcomes of 'working class' pupils in contemporary Scotland

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Introduction

In his book *Learning to Labour*, Willis (1977) identified two sub-groups of boys from working class backgrounds. *The Lads* were working class boys who had rejected culture of school. The *Ear'oles* were from a similar class background to 'lads' but in contrast, had chosen not to rejected culture of school. Differences between 'ordinary' working class youths have largely been ignored despite four decades of comprehensive education in England & Wales (Brisard & Menter, 2008) and Scotland (Murphy 2015). There has been a recent resurgence in interest in 'ordinary' working class pupils (Roberts 2013). This research has two questions:

- Can we identify differences in attainment among 'ordinary' working class pupils?
- Can we identify 'lads' and 'Ear'oles' using occupational data?

Background

The educational attainment of 'ordinary' young people has been investigated using the British Household Panel Survey (Connelly, Murray & Gayle (2013) and the Youth Cohort Study (Gayle, Murray and Connelly (2016). Both studies observed persistent inequality over time despite different qualifications and measures of socio-economic background.

Standard Grades were most widely taken qualifications in year S4 at end of compulsory schooling in Scotland (Brisard & Menter, 2008). Standard grade attainment is a strong predictor of later attainment (Tinklin 2003). Positional advantage in educational attainment by middle class parents was also observed in Scotland between 1977-2005 using data from the Scottish School Leavers Survey (Croxford 2015). There has been a reduction in inequalities in educational attainment at the compulsory stage but increased inequalities at the end of post-compulsory education for pupils from managerial/professional backgrounds. The complexity of school subject-level qualifications has been investigated using latent class analysis (Playford and Gayle 2016; Playford et al. Forthcoming).

Data

The SLS is a 5.3% representative sample of the Scottish population which links Census records to other administrative data resources including Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) attainment data (Boyle et al. 2009; Raab (2013). This study used parental information from the 2001 Census in conjunction with linked standard grade attainment data from 2007-2011.

Discussion

Pupils with parents in the routine and manual occupations (classified as NS-SEC 5-7) perform poorly in school-level qualifications in contemporary Scotland. A small proportion of pupils with parents in routine and manual occupations do perform well however. The existence of this minority group of pupils is promising. The differences in attainment between parental occupations within routine and manual classes may represent differences in the educational pre-requisites of these occupations.

The extent to which these pupils mirror the 'ear'oles' in Willis' original study cannot be assessed with administrative data but the category has been useful as (to use a term borrowed from Tony Giddens) a 'sensitising device'. Administrative data contribute little to the understanding of individual pupil's attitudes and group cultures within schools.

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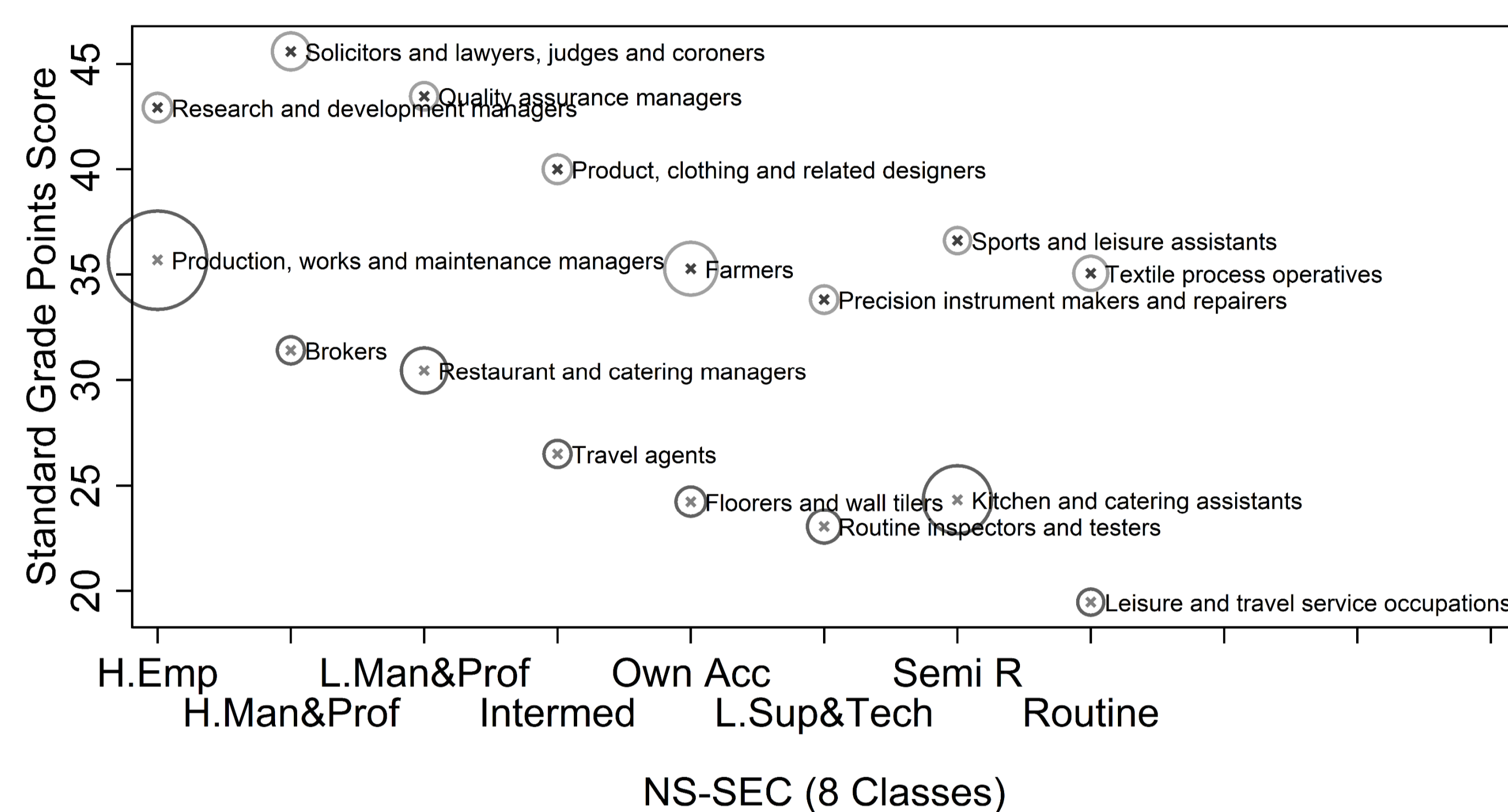
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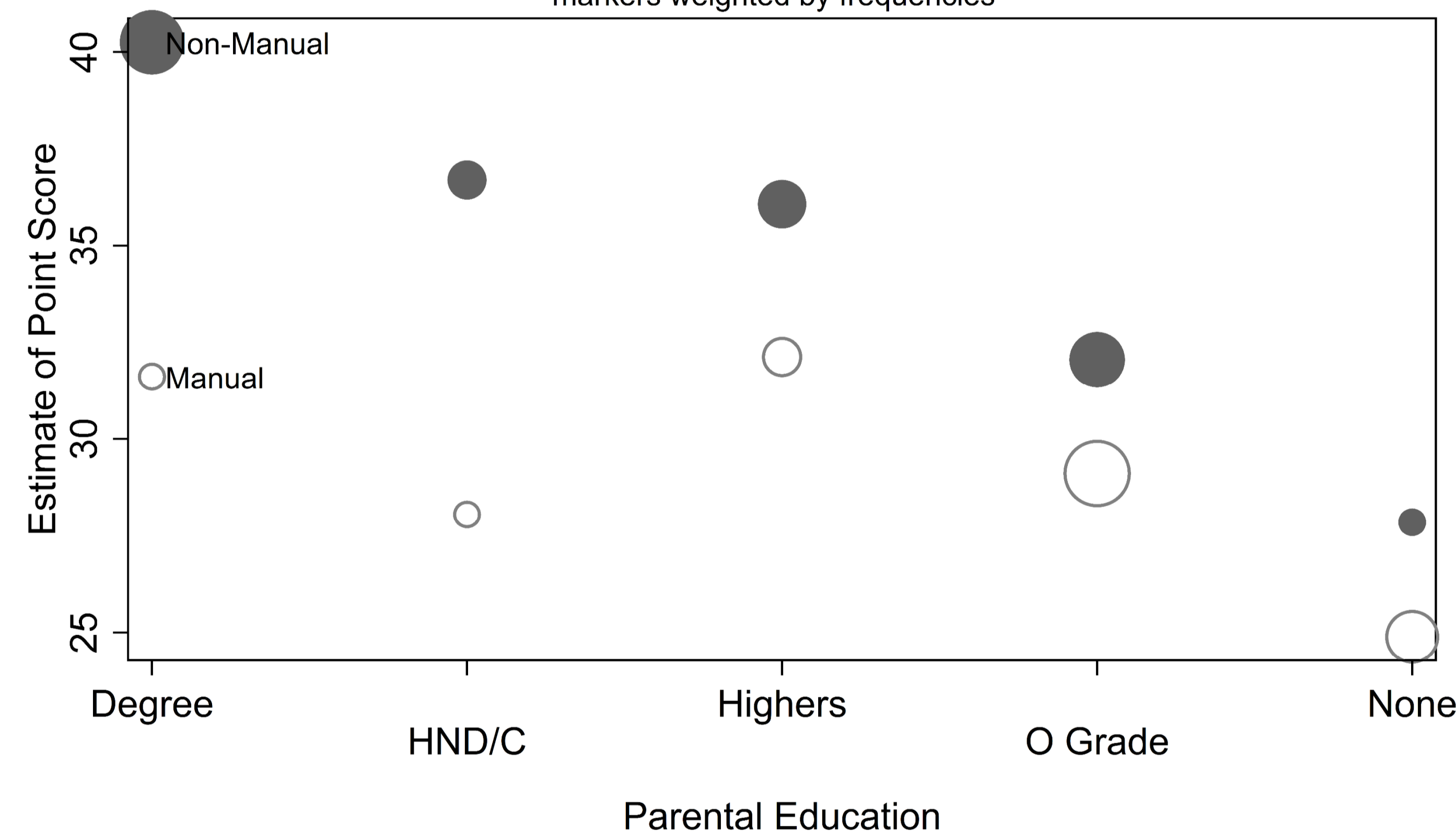
Results

Standard Grade Points Score, by Parental NS-SEC
Parental Occupation (SOC2000)
(Bubble = Occupation Size)



Source: SLS, n=8,425

Standard Grade Score
by Parental Education and Non Manual / Manual
markers weighted by frequencies



Source: SLS, n=8,425

Conclusions

After many decades of comprehensive education in Scotland a strong parental social class gradient is still observable. Pupils with parents in more advanced social class group have far better overall school educational outcomes. These overall patterns exist despite changes in the curriculum, qualifications and the organisation and management of schools. The performance of working class pupils at subject area level is a cause for concern because given the current structure and organisation of post-school education in Britain their choices will be severely constrained.

Overall, these results are important as they appeal to 'Getting it Right for Every Child' (GIRFEC), which is the national approach to improving the wellbeing of children and young people in Scotland, as well as the aims of the Curriculum for Excellence reforms (Kidner 2013), the strategy for developing Scotland's young workforce, and the UK Government's strengthened approach to tracking the life chances of Britain's most disadvantaged children.

When we examine outcomes within patterns of subjects we still observe that working class pupils have low levels of membership in more favourable educational groups. Future work will look further at differences in educational attainment by occupational classifications.

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