HIGHER EDUCATION FUNDING COUNCIL FOR ENGLAND

Using POLAR to inform the debate on access and retention

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Retention, Progression and Success in HE conference

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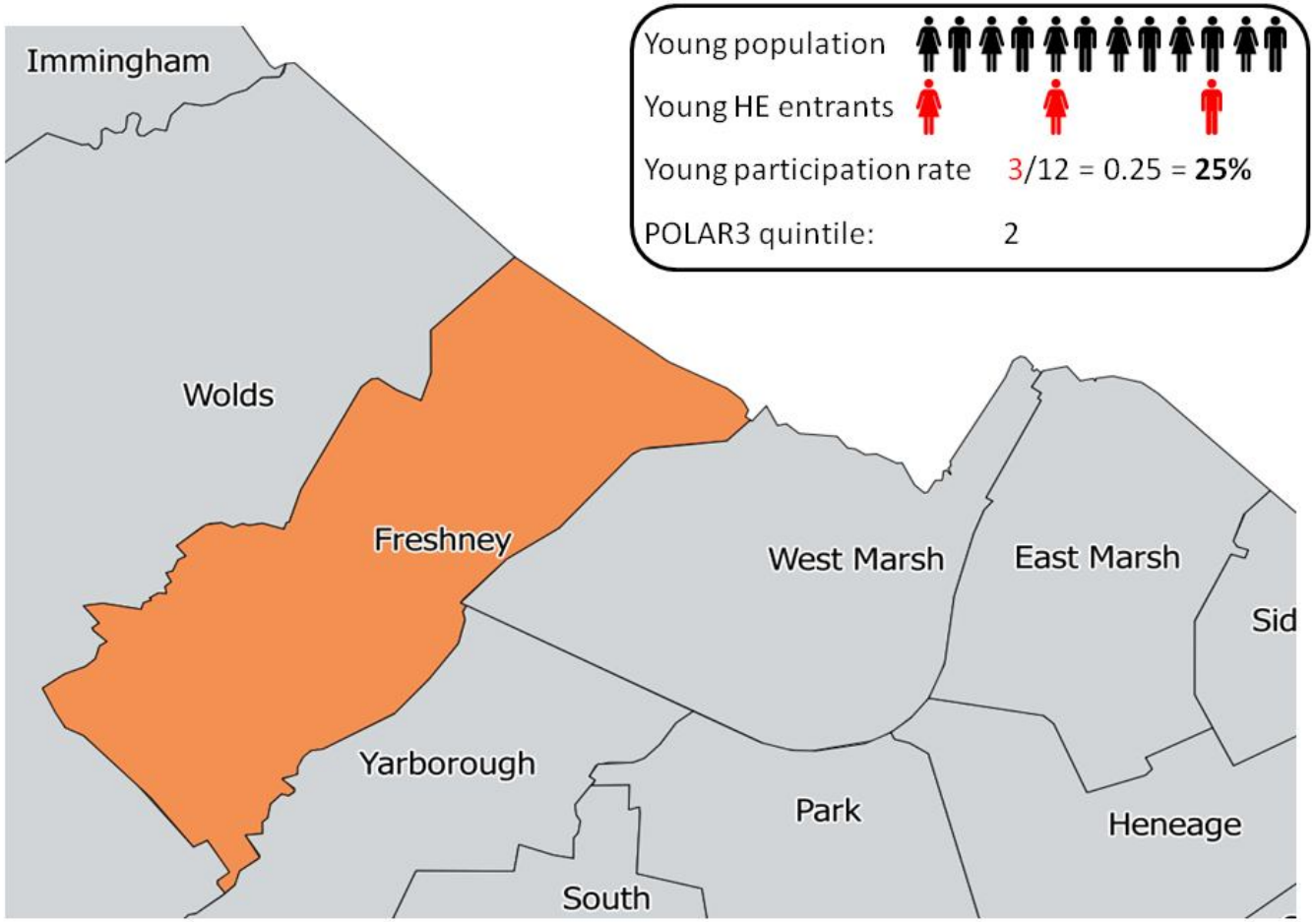
Outline of presentation

- Introduction to POLAR
- Most recent findings from POLAR
- Retention, completion and destination by POLAR groups

Introduction to POLAR

- POLAR is a classification of small areas according to **rates** of young participation in higher education.
- Assigns wards into one of five groups or ‘quintiles’.
- Quintile 1 contains areas with the lowest participation rates. Quintile 5 contains areas with the highest.
- First created in 2005, updated in 2007 (POLAR2).
- Updated again in 2012 to take account of the most recent HE entrant and population data.
- Forms part of HEFCE’s wider research programme into young participation.

Young participation rate for an area



POLAR is very well established

POLAR is used in the following ways

- To distribute HEFCE's widening participation allocation to institutions.
- To measure widening participation performance.
- To target outreach activities.
- To aid in admissions via contextual data.

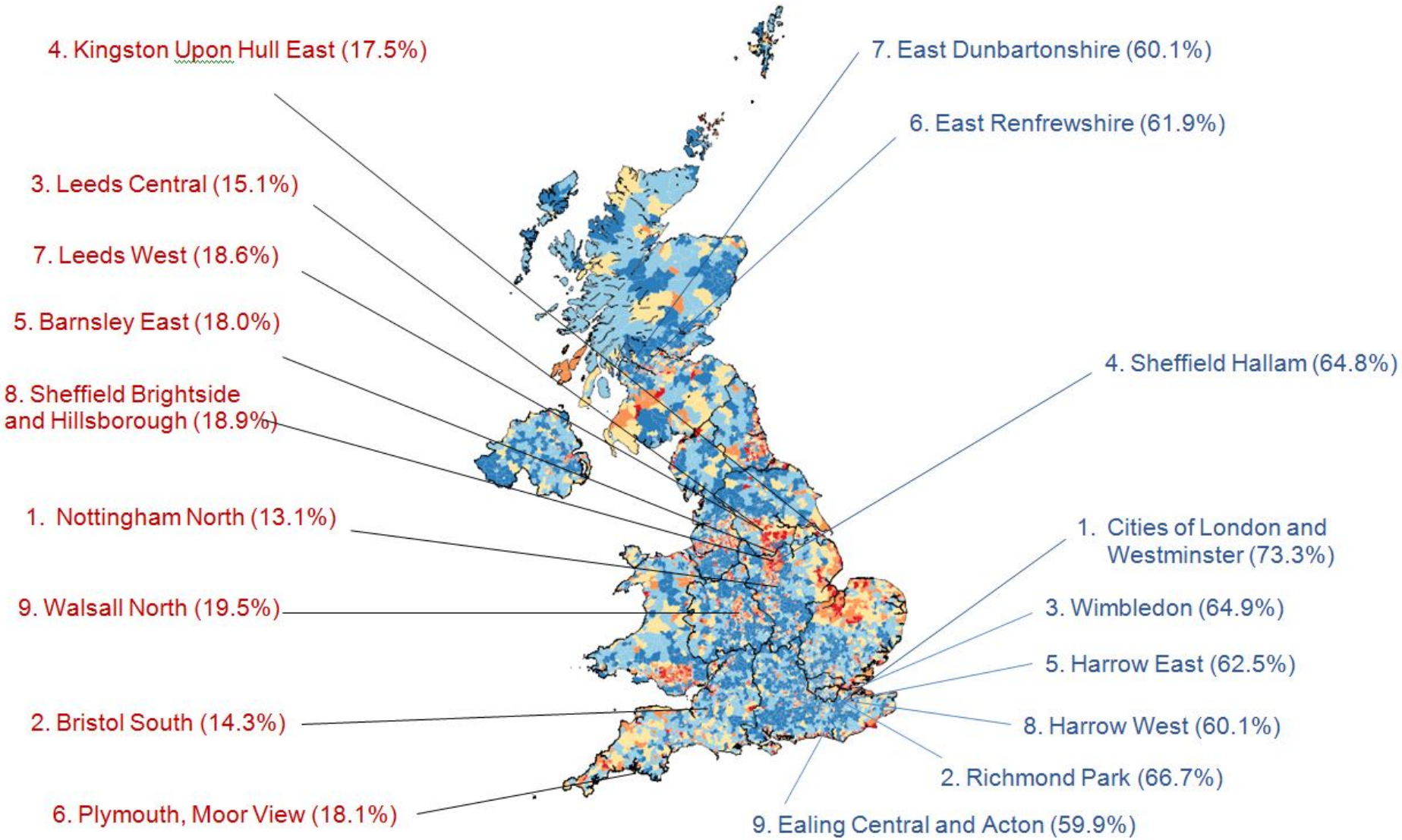
POLAR3 – what is different

- Made use of the most up to date data; cohorts aged 18 between 2005 and 2009.
- More information has been published than for previous versions. Examples include
  - Small are participation rates and associated entrant and population estimates
  - Maps at different geographies
- Available from www.hefce.ac.uk/polar

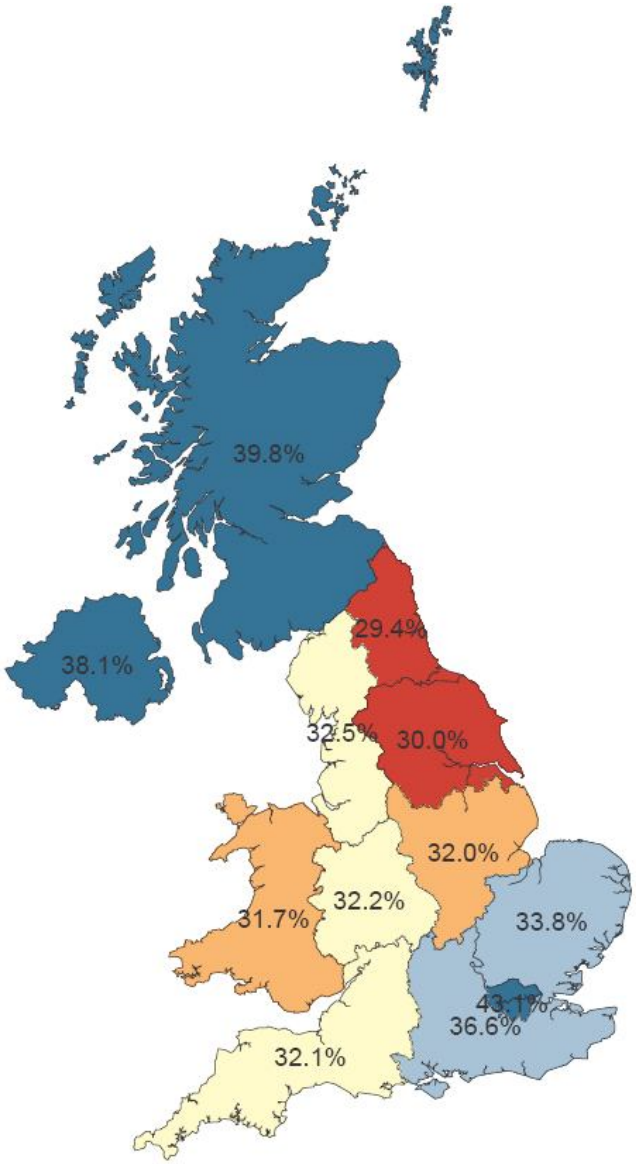
What the POLAR classification shows

- Substantial geographical variation in young participation rates across the UK.
- Increase in young participation rate since the POLAR2 period (2000 to 2004 cohorts).
- Greater equality in average participation rates across quintiles.
- Differential changes in participation rates across the UK.

Participation by constituency



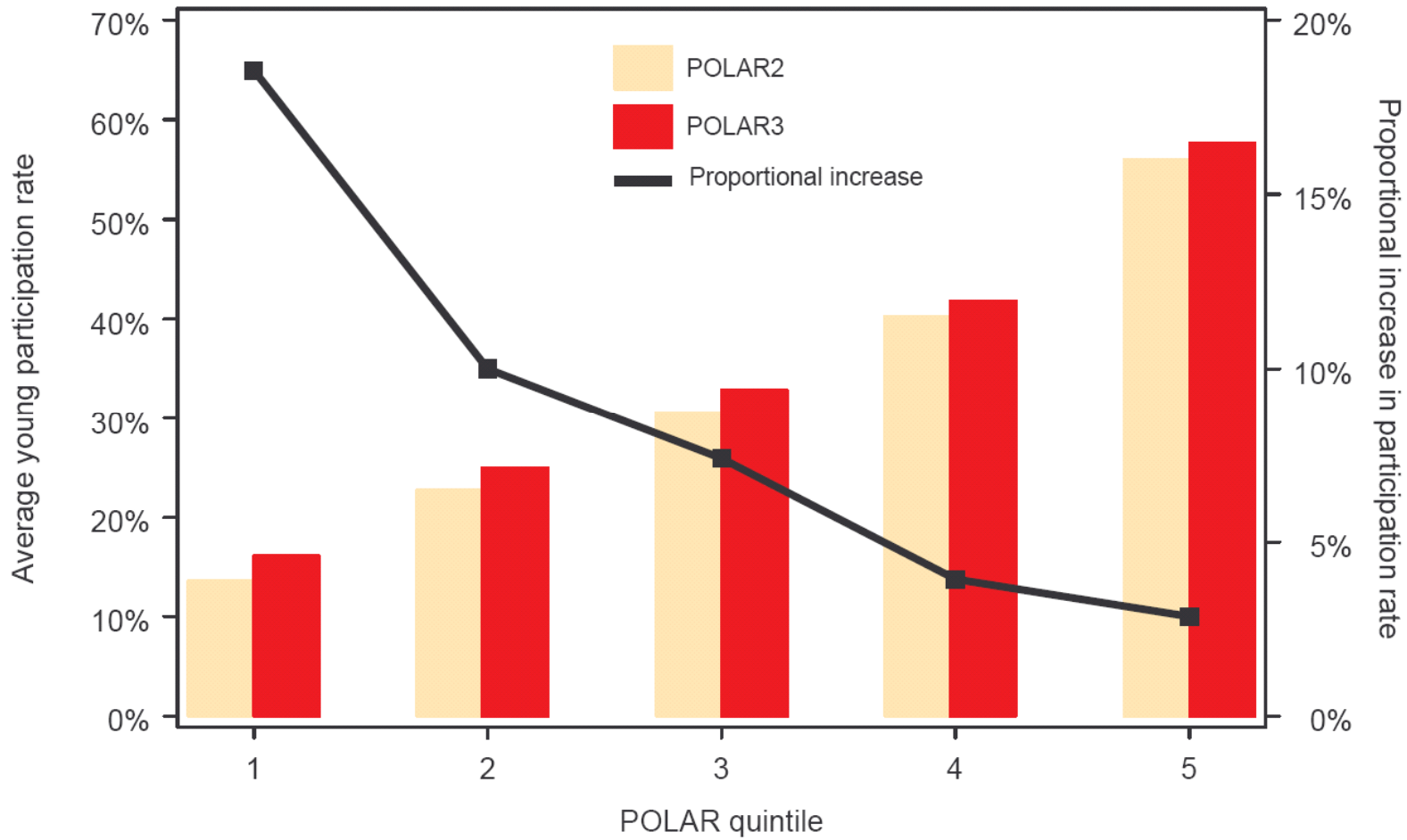
Participation by region



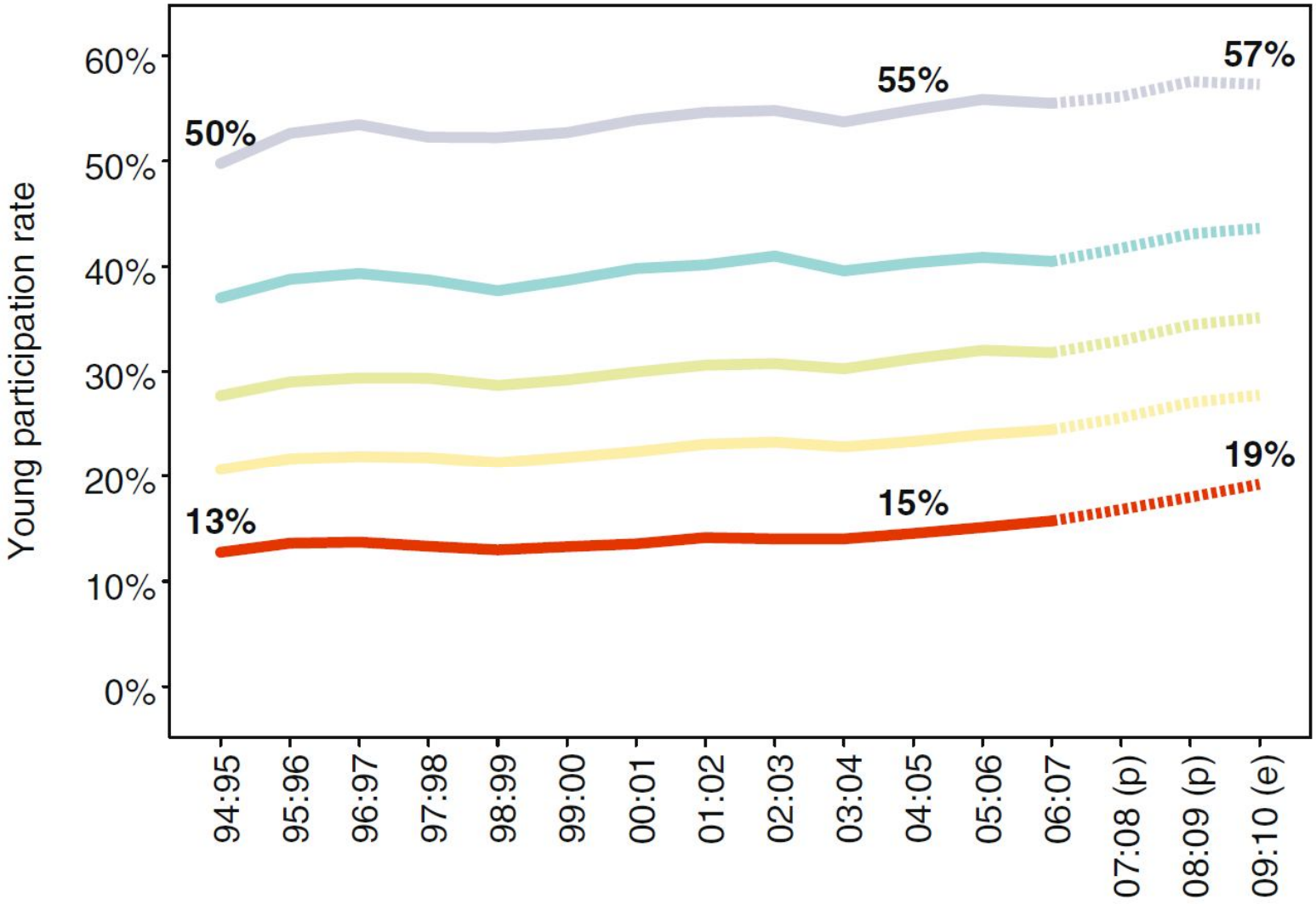
Overall, an increase in participation

- Participation during the POLAR3 period was 34.7 per cent, an increase of two percentage points compared to participation during the POLAR2 period.

Greater equality across quintiles



Trend in participation by POLAR



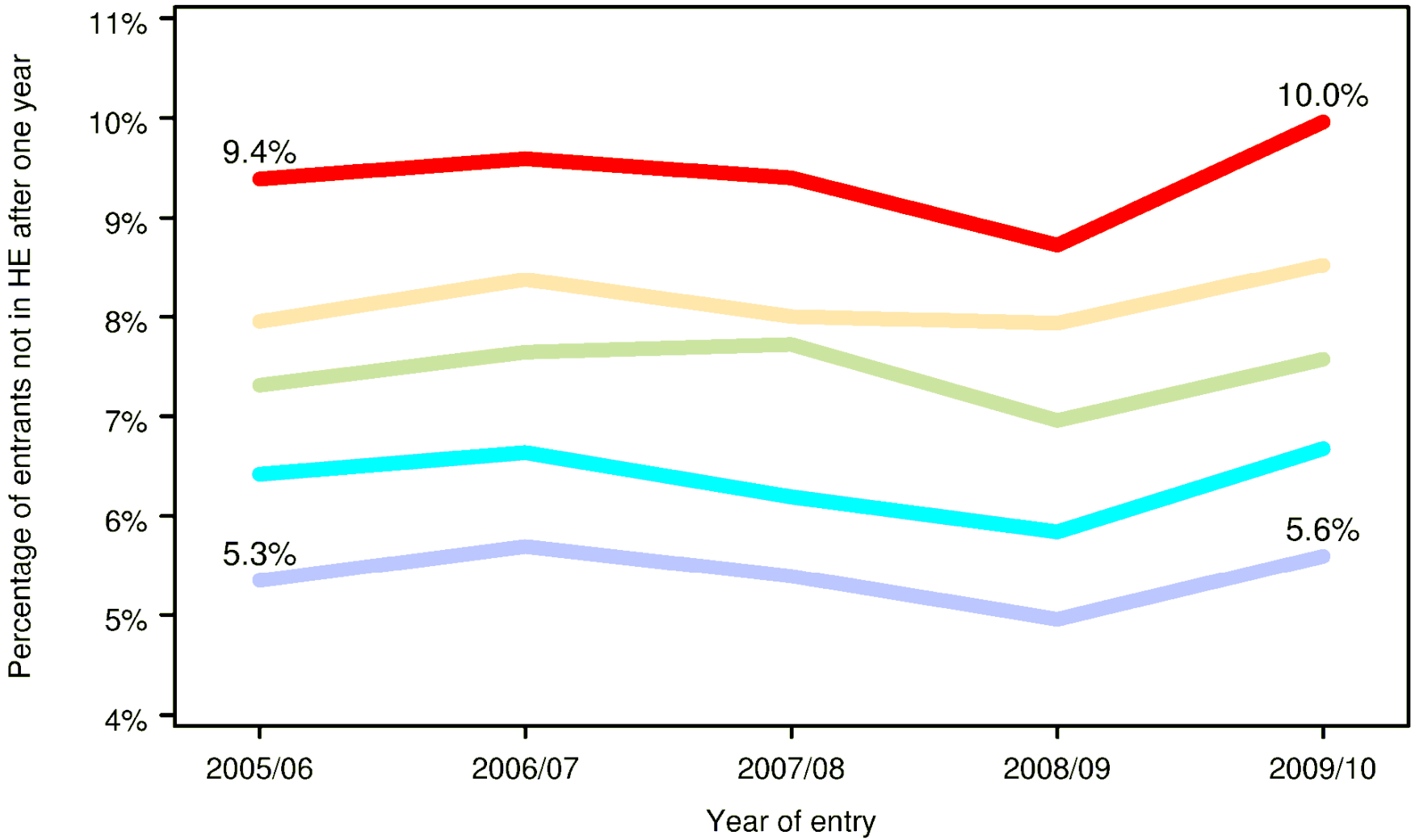
What next after entry to HE?

Recent work on retention, completion and graduate destinations shows that HE entrants from more disadvantaged POLAR quintiles are ...

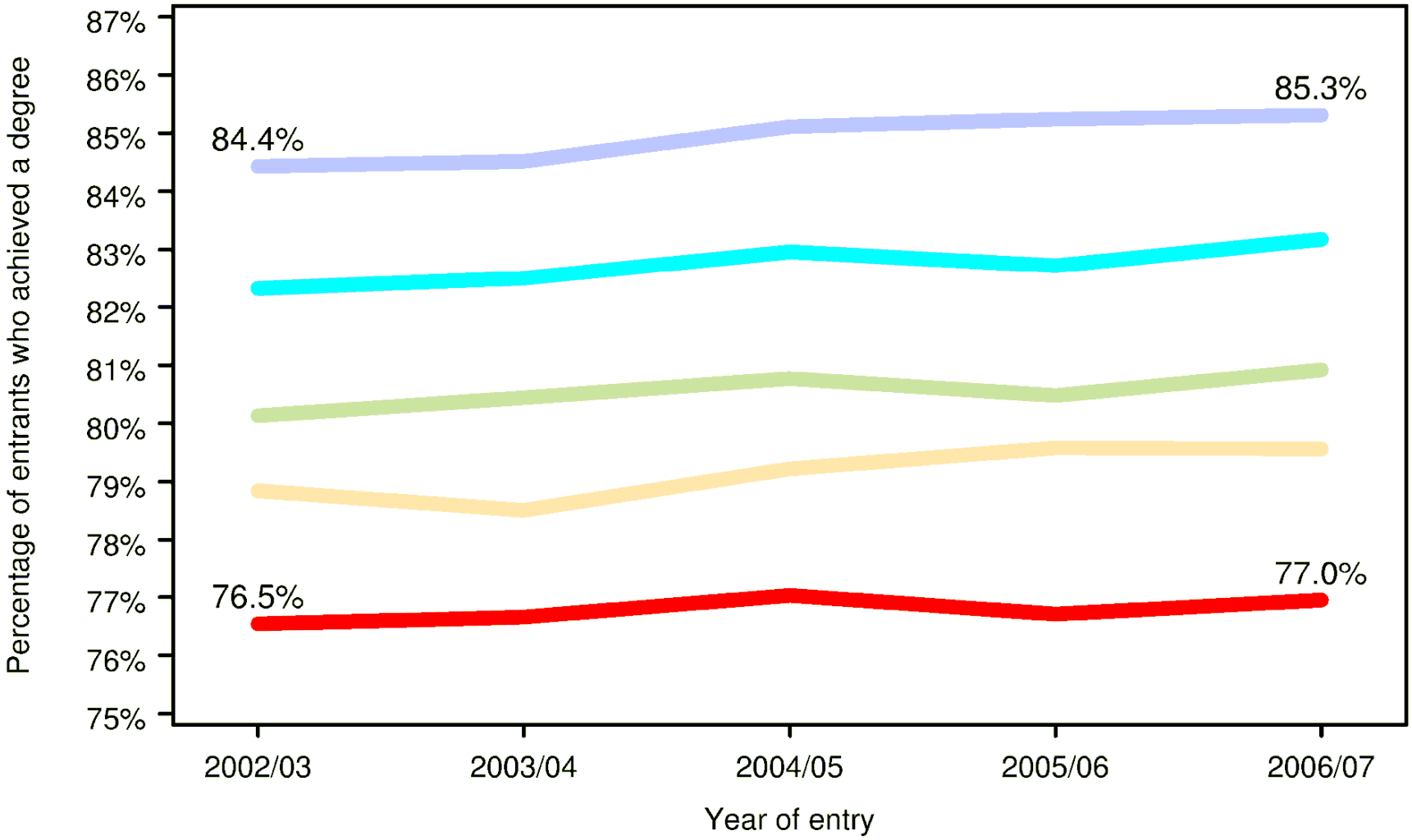
- less likely to still be in HE one year later
- less likely to attain a degree
- less likely to be in employment or further study

compared to entrants from more advantaged quintiles.

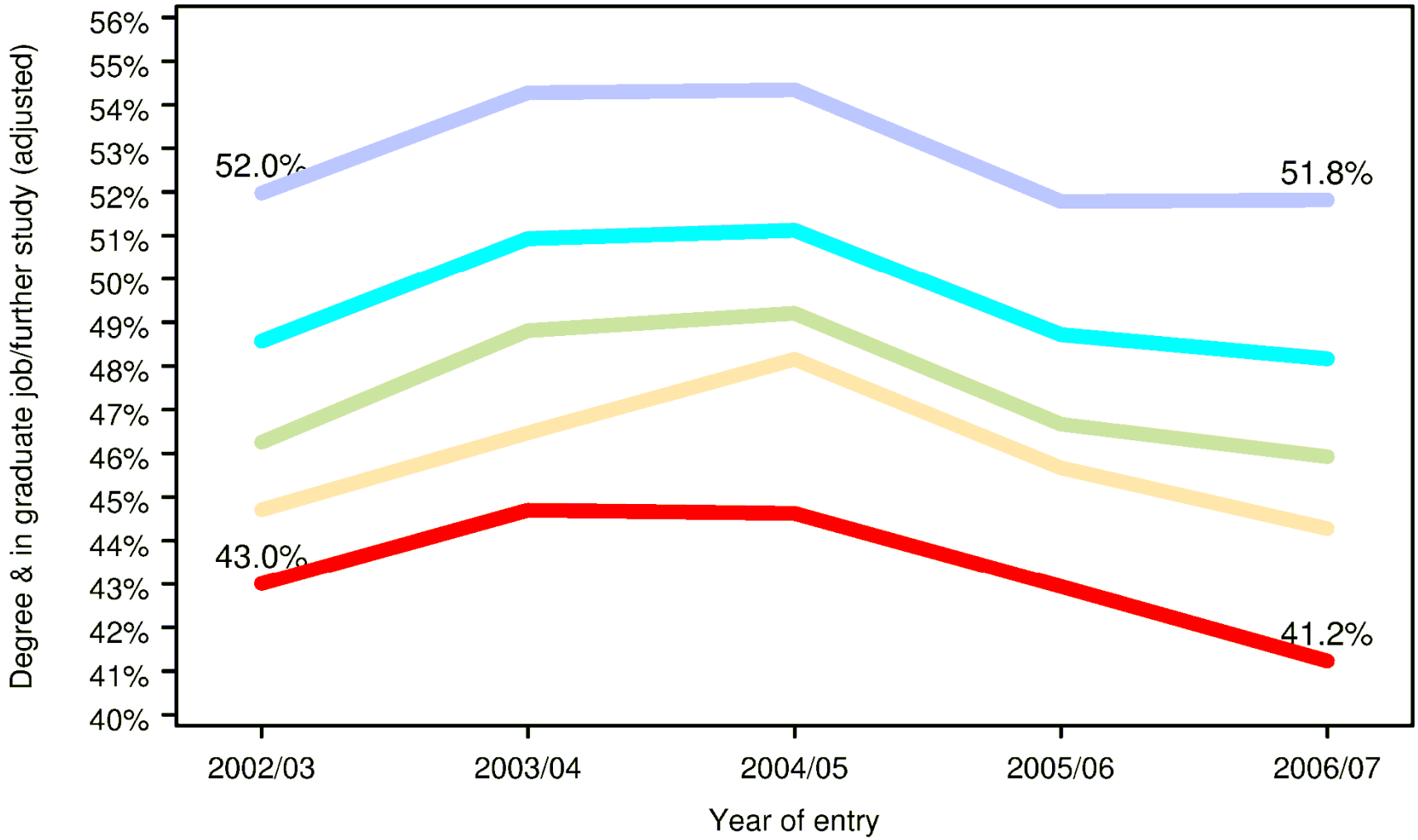
Disadvantaged less likely to continue...



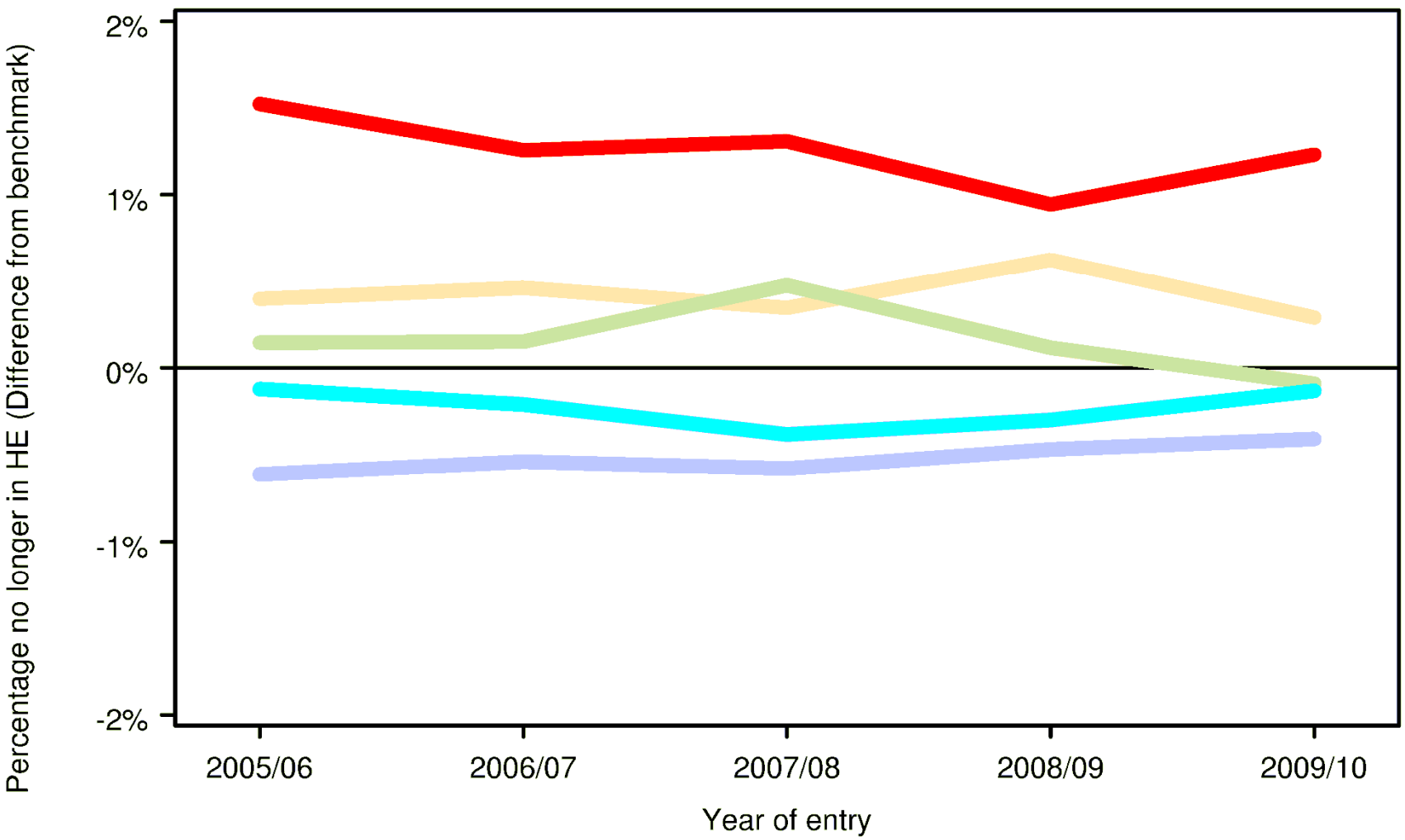
... and less likely to get a degree ...



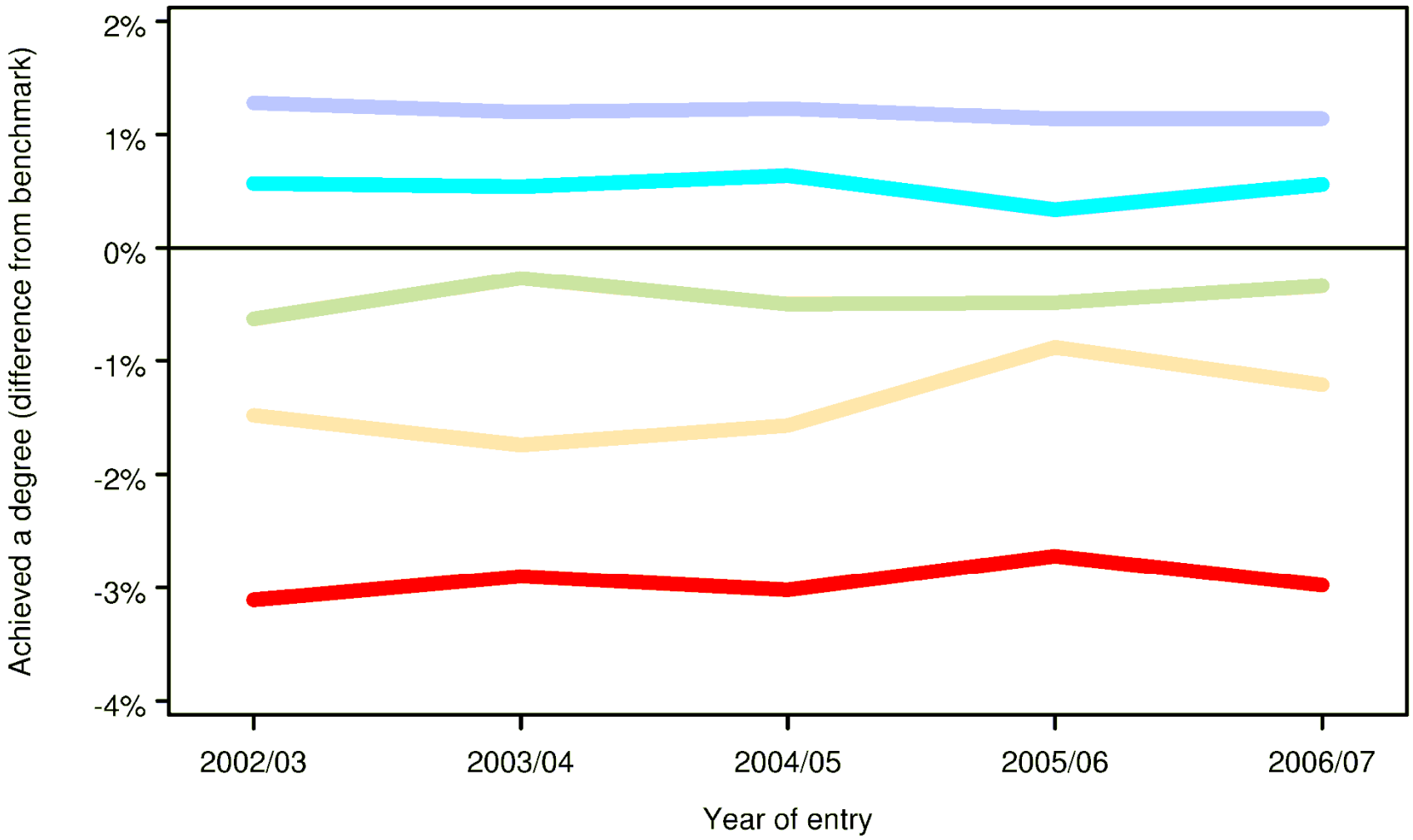
… and less likely to get a job afterwards



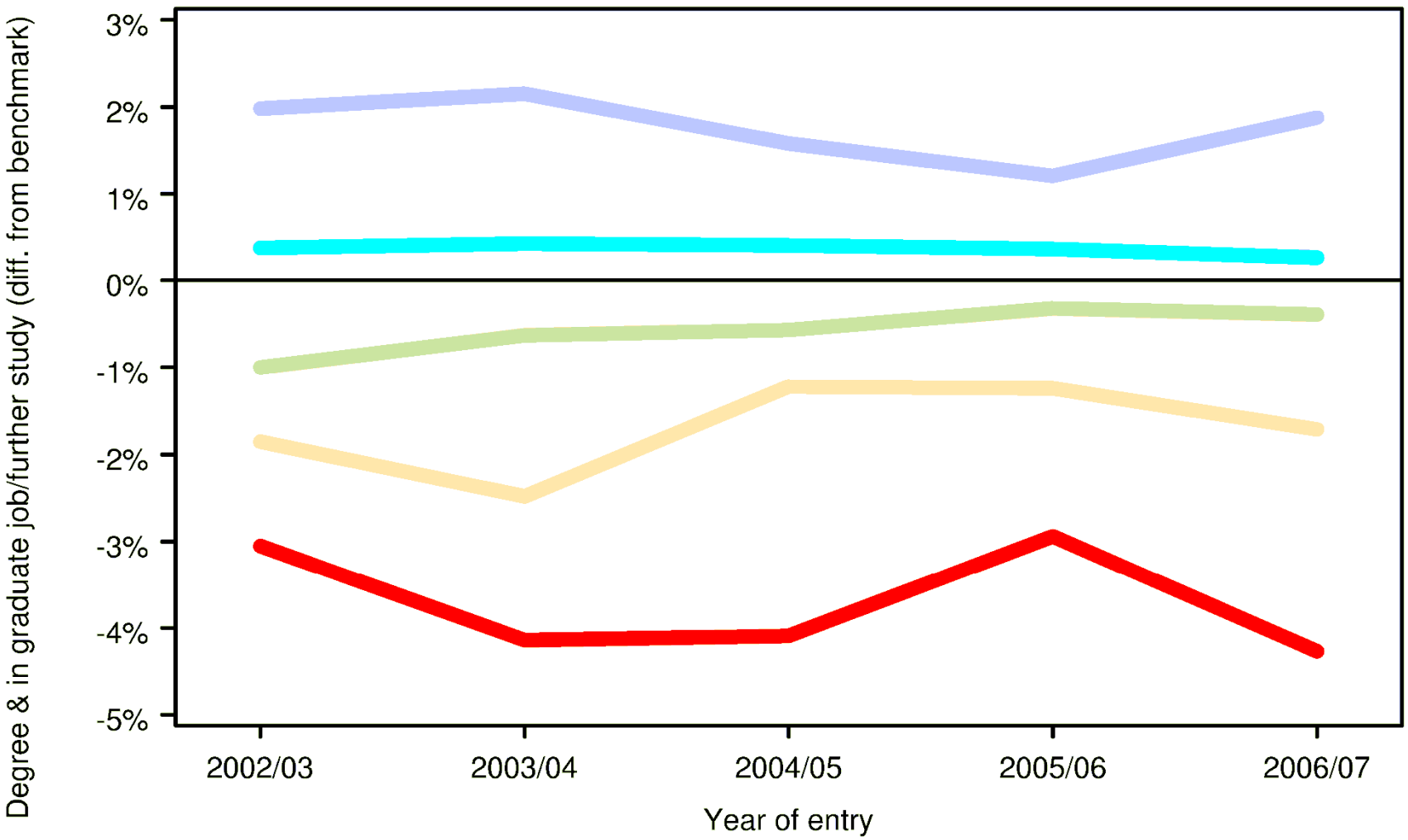
Retention: observed minus expected



Completion: observed minus expected



Destination: observed minus expected



Conclusions

- POLAR is an area-based classification which groups small areas according to their rates of young participation in higher education.
- Shows substantial geographical variation in the chances of HE participation among young people across the UK.
- Clear differences in retention, completion and graduate employment or further study rates across POLAR quintiles.
- Differences still exist even when certain confounding factors are accounted for.

Resources

Currently available from www.hefce.ac.uk/polar

- Postcode and ward to POLAR3 quintile lookup files
- Interactive ward level map
- Issues paper (HEFCE 2012/26)

Soon to be available

- Report giving further information about POLAR
- Report focusing on retention
- Report focusing on completion and destination

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Thank you for listening

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