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Testing the spill-over hypothesis : meritocracy in enrolment in postgraduate education

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**Abstract**

This study contributes to the literature on educational transitions, specifically whether an equalising of opportunities at early educational transitions translates into more equal participation patterns at later stages (Spill-over versus maximally maintained inequality hypotheses). The case study approach used in this paper compares the enrolment profile of postgraduate students at a prestigious, research-led British university with the profile of the postgraduates? undergraduate degree-awarding institution. The database for this research consists of government statistics and two purposefully administered surveys, one of undergraduate students (n = 709) and one of postgraduate students (n = 502). The study finds that the intake of new postgraduates is largely drawn from the most prestigious universities thus suggesting that graduates from lower tier institutions do not self-select themselves for further study at Oxford. The results lend support to the meritocracy hypothesis regarding the attainment levels of new postgraduate students and their propensity to gain government funding. There are, however, some discrepancies in transition patterns that advantage the already privileged.

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This lends support to the maximally maintained inequality hypothesis and suggests that there are social justice concerns in postgraduate education. (HRK / Abstract übernommen) Zimdars, Anna K.,

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