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From Bowlby to Balls: Changes in the compatibility of motherhood and employment

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The Changing Face of Britain

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Paid work by mothers: a revolution in practice and perception over 60 years



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In the 1950s mothers generally stayed at home with their children. This practice was endorsed by **John Bowlby's Attachment Theory** - that mothers should prioritize bonding with their infants, not to mention a climate of opinion that mother's place was in the home, while fathers were breadwinners

In the 2000s government policy and much public opinion has swung in favour of the much increased employment participation of mothers, has also acknowledged a greater non-maternal role for ensuring the welfare of children in the early years, and begun to support the role of fathers in the unpaid sphere.

Although **Ed Balls** does not have a successor as Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, **the new government** will be facing this secular change.

Overview



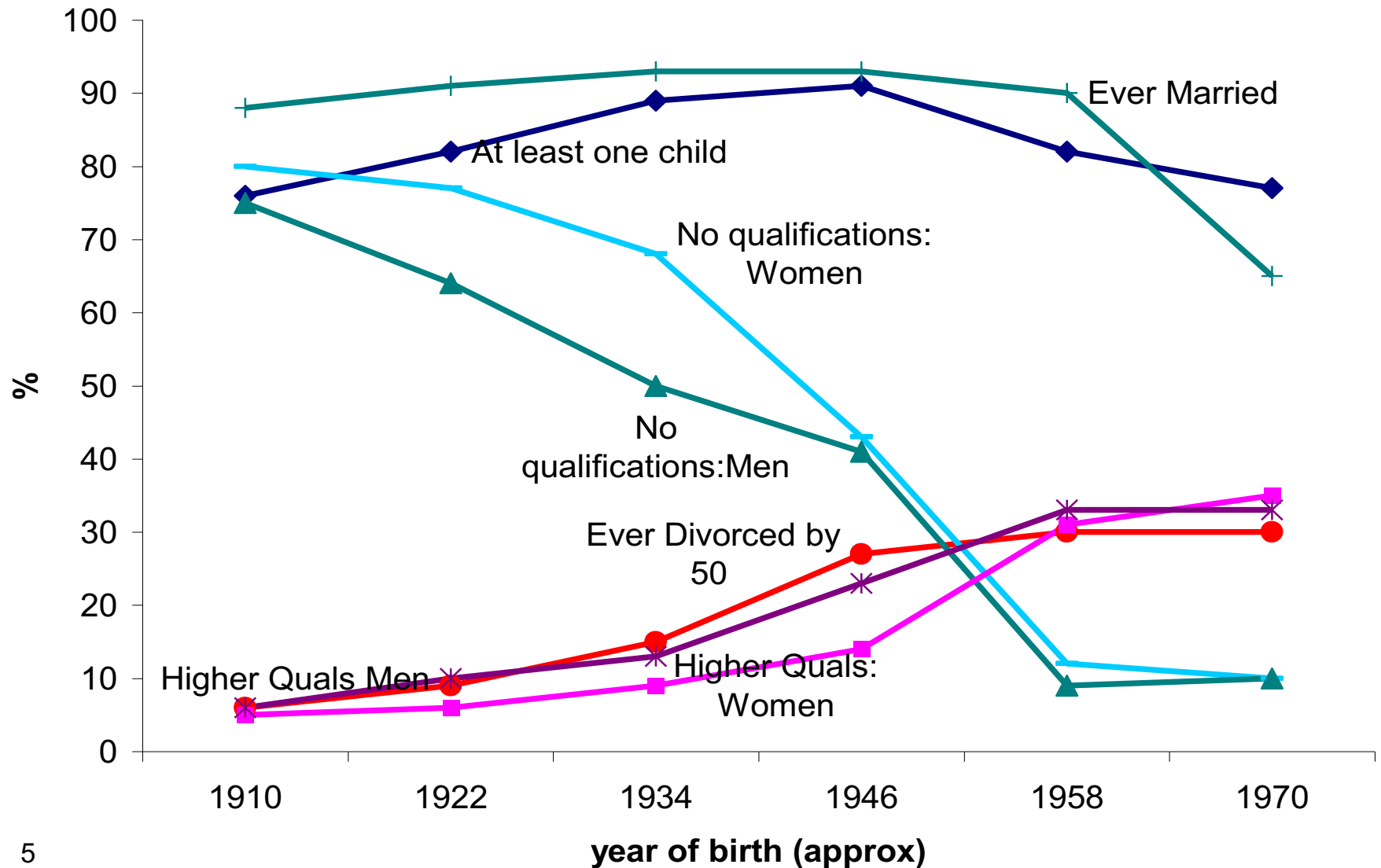
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1. The rise of the working mother

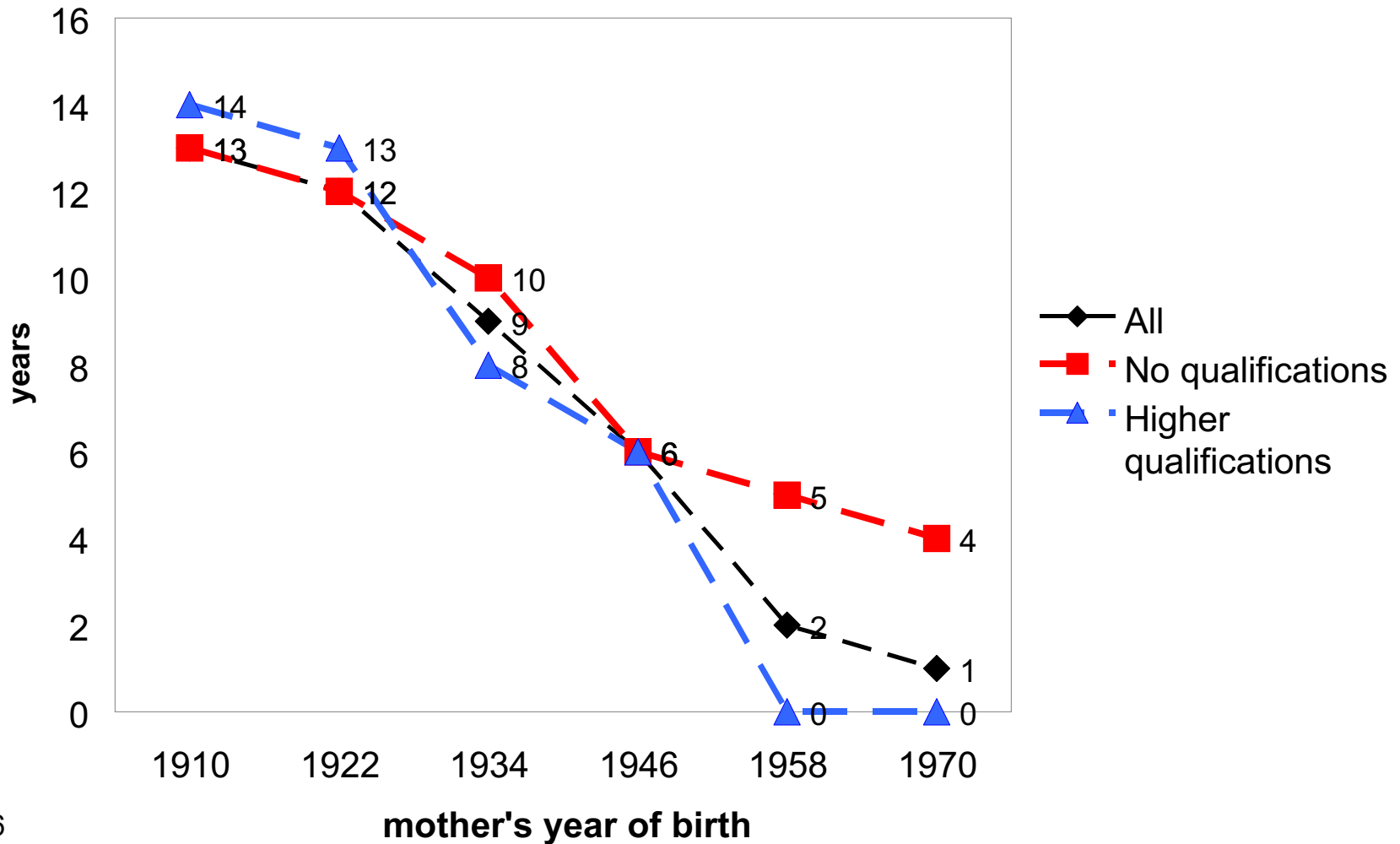
We start by taking a long perspective over cohorts (generations0 born in the 20th Century

Cohort differences in family and education



Mothers' employment gap by cohort

Years between first birth and next job at the median

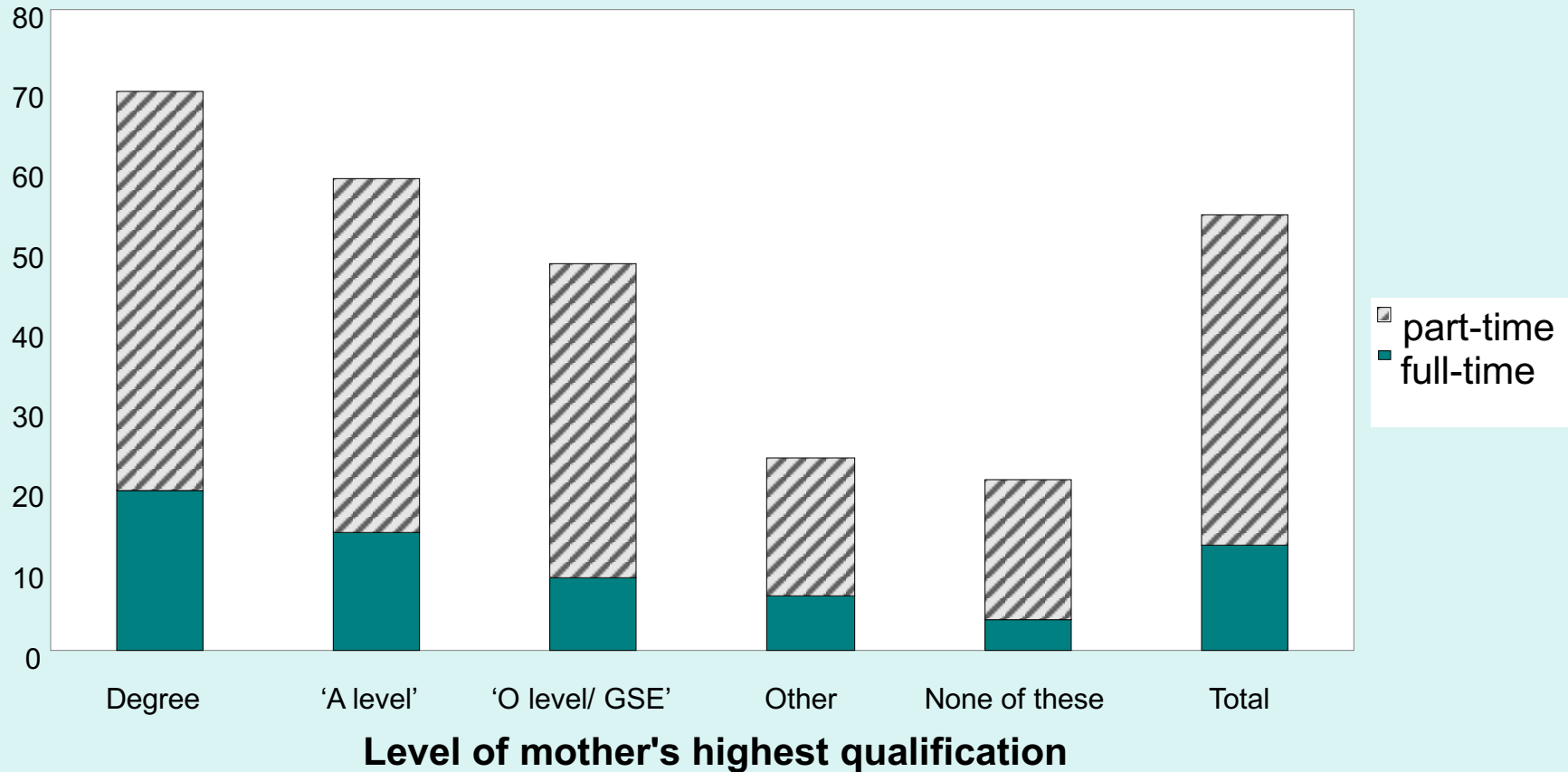


Employment of Mothers with a child aged 3, 2004



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Source Millennium Cohort Study, mainly 2004





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2. Motherhood, lifetime earnings and gender equity

Lifetime Earnings



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Simulations of lifetime earnings, partly projected, up to retirement age cohorts entering the labour market in post-war Britain

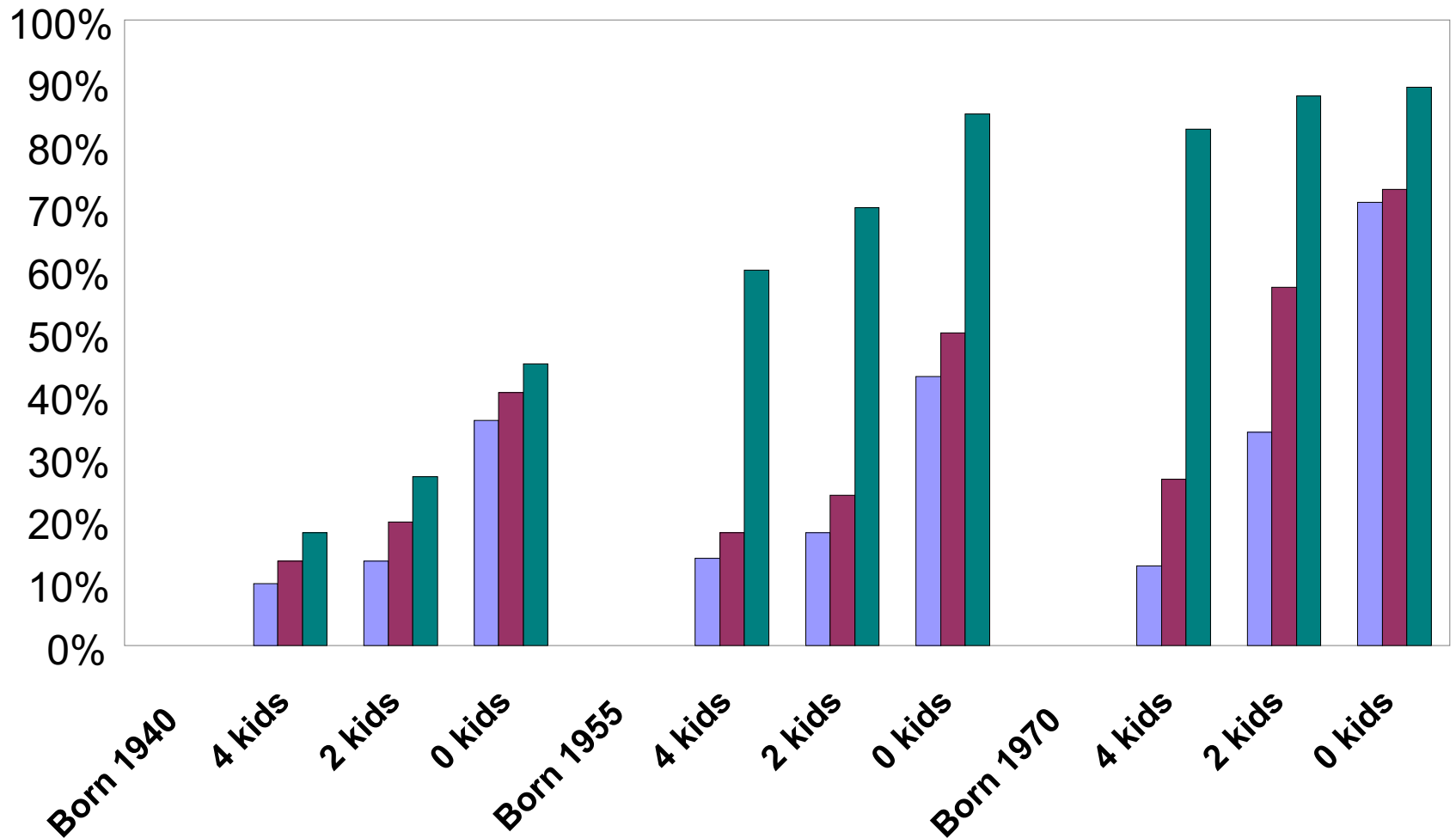
Averaged over 3 levels of education and three family sizes

Women to have interruptions and part-time work for children, and to be paid less on that account, and for a pure gender penalty

Men assumed to work continuous full-time

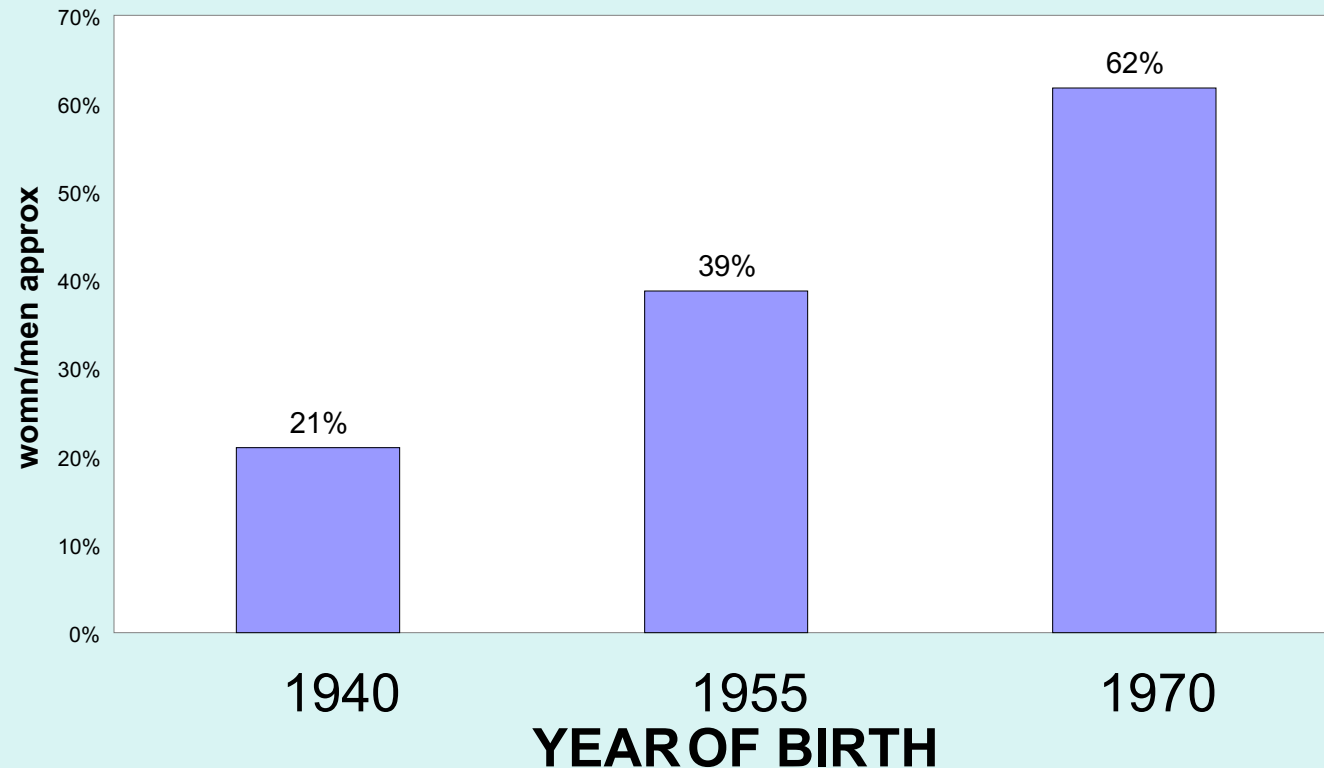
Simulated relative lifetime earnings by cohort, children and education

■ No Quals ■ Mid quals ■ High quals



Gender gap in life time earnings

**Lifetime earnings: ratio of women to men
by year of birth**



3. Is gender equity a threat to fertility?

It used to be thought that establishing equal opportunities for women in education and employment would lower childbearing through raising the opportunity cost of motherhood.

The opening of career opportunities is likely to have helped drive the postponement of motherhood from the 1970s onwards, but it may not have reduced the fertility rate much as these women as women became ‘working mothers’.

Internationally, across Europe the fertility rates started to be positively correlated with female employment rates (cf Scandinavia vs Mediterrean countries) , and some demographers now argue that gender equity and access of parents to the labour market is a condition of reviving low fertility, rather than a threat to it. (ter McDonald, PDR 2000)

4. Complementary care

Various institutions are modifying the opportunity costs of motherhoods in Britain.

Child care services increasingly acceptable and affordable having been more or less invisible until the 1990s.

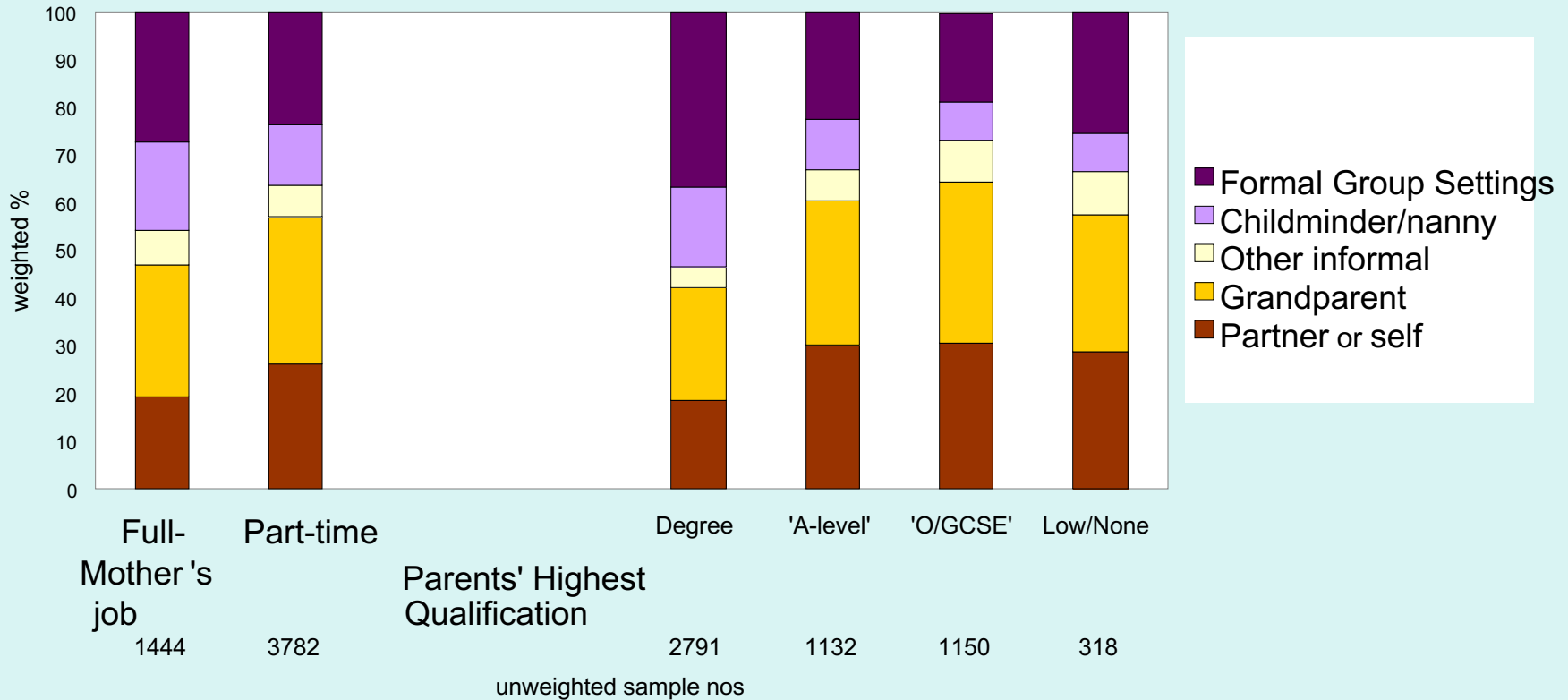
Fathers' participation as hands-on parents has even been recognised in statutory paternity leave, though of much shorter duration than maternity leave, and interchangeable parental leave has also been introduced since 2000.

Traditional divisions of labour in the home are more diverse than they were in the 1950s.

Childcare: main arrangement for Working mothers with child aged 3

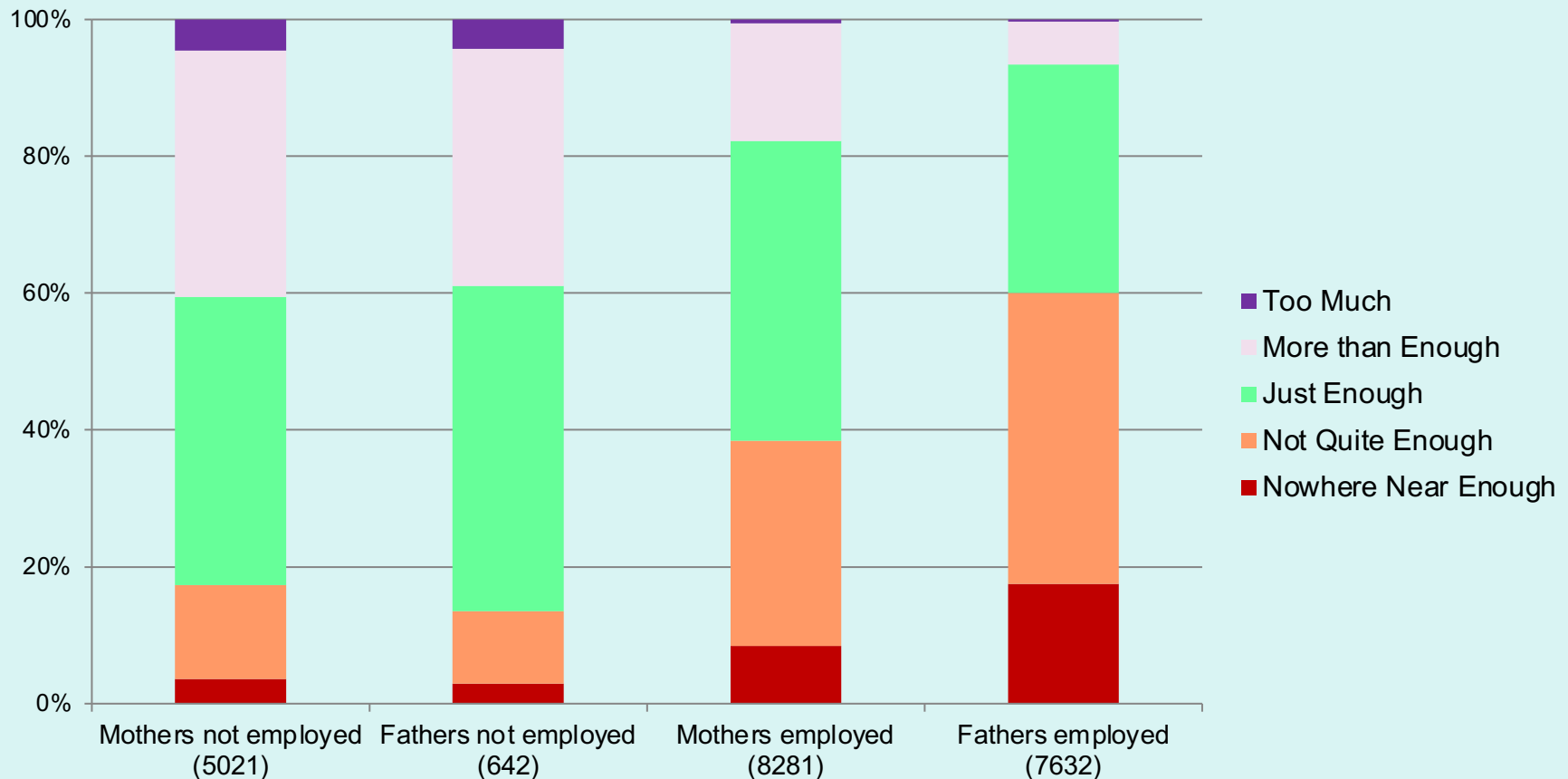


Main child care arrangement at age 3, MCS, by Mother's Job and Parental Qualifications



Dads short of time with child

Parents' views on time with child MCS at 7



5 Mothers' employment as a threat to child development?



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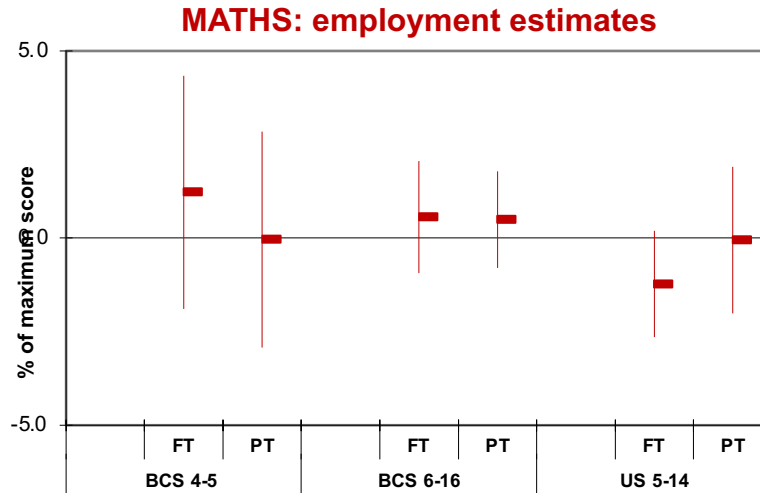
There is more passion and panic about this subject than will be convinced by statistical evidence.

Such as it is, the estimates of mother's employment in a child's early years are mixed, minor and far from conclusive proof either of harm or no harm.

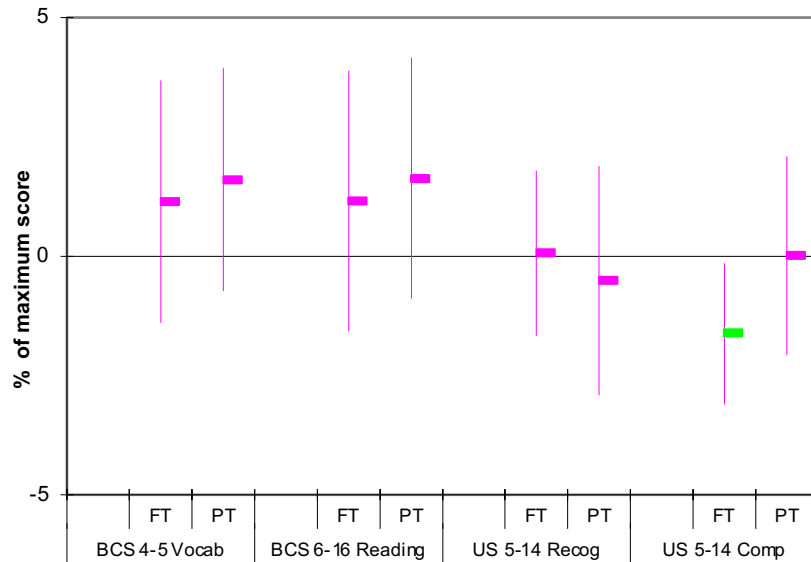
A selection of our estimates on British and US data follows. Our suggestion is that the workplace has become more friendly, and mothers are more able to make the compromises between caring and their careers than used to be the case.

Mothers employment seems not to be decisive, her economic resources, mental health and support network need to be considered.

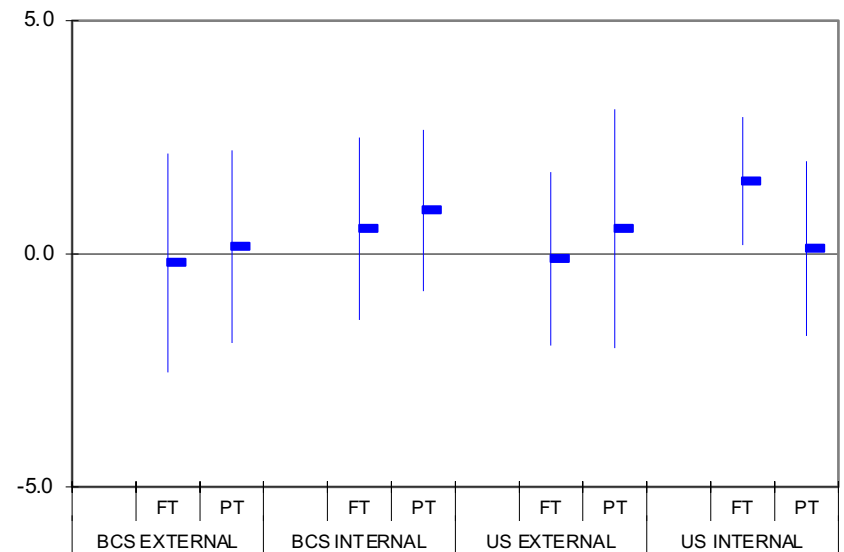
Estimated effects of employment at age 0 on child's Maths, Literacy, Behaviour at ages 4-16:



Vocabulary and Reading: employment estimates



Behavioural Adjustment: employment estimates



6. To sum up

Motherhood and paid work no longer incompatible.

Diversity rather than uniformity in modern parenthood.

Childrearing is no longer mother's monopoly.

Children are still more than the business of mothers, and women's business is more than their own children.



Policy for compatibility of parenthood and production in the new century

Although Every Child Matters is yesterday's slogan, the sentiment still holds, at least for their parents. It is also clear from research, as well as life, that every child is different. One size of private or public policy does not fit all.

Parental and productive roles can be compatible for both men and women under the new sets of expectations with which the 21st century has started. The challenge for policy makers now is to keep a range of options open, in terms of access to childcare, leave and flexible hours for parents, as well as support for those who choose or have to stay at home. Families need Flexibility



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