

Ungifted, Untalented and Not Even Special: socio-spatial unevenness in selective educational labelling and the implications for “widening participation”

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INTRODUCTION

We examine various factors relating to educational labelling, either as "gifted and talented" or as "special educational need". The analysis is from the National Pupil Database, drawn from the Annual School Census, all Year 10 and Year 11 pupils. January 2008.

Schools have been asked to identify pupils as "Gifted and talented" (G&T), and this indicator is reported in the Spring Census and appears in the National Pupil Database.

We present our findings in the form of descriptive statistics and maps.

NUMBERS OF CHILDREN RECEIVING CLASSIFICATION

At the time of the 2008 Spring Census there were 589,529 Year 10 and 598,611 pupils in state maintained schools in England.

In 2008 88,192 Year 10s and 90,547 Year 11s had the G&T indicator attached. The rest were coded 0 except for cases where the indicator was missing (2% in each year group).

Table 1: Gifted and talented numbers

Category	Year 10	Year 11
Gifted and (or) talented	88,192 (15.2%)	90,547 (15.4%)
Not gifted or talented	491,171	497,664
Total known	579,363	588,211

Of these G&T pupils, some were presumably thought to be gifted, some talented and presumably some were both - but these distinctions are not recorded in the National Pupil Database.

In the same year, many pupils were recorded as having a Special Educational Need.

Table 2: Special Educational Need numbers

Category	Year 10	Year 11
SEN: School Action	70,941 (12.0%)	70,876 (11.8%)
SEN: School Action Plus	36,069 (6.1%)	35,260 (5.9%)
SEN: Statement	23,527 (4.0%)	23,456 (3.9%)
Total SEN	130,537 (22.1%)	129,592 (21.6%)
No SEN	458,989 (77.9%)	469,017 (78.4%)
Total	589,529	598,611

Here there are only 5 missing cases.

It is possible to be classified as both G&T and SEN. About 7 per cent of G&T children were recorded as having SEN, mainly School Action. And among the School Action children 6 per cent were G&T, among the School Action Plus 4 per cent, while among those with statements of SEN, 3 per cent were G&T.

However, the majority of children (65 per cent) are neither. They are therefore Ungifted and Untalented and Not Even Special (UUNES). Of course this label is not applied explicitly but children, even average children, are not stupid most of the time. They realise that those not Gifted are Ungifted, those not Talented are Untalented and those not Special are Not Special.

RELATIONSHIP WITH DEPRIVATION

Cartogram 1 (appended) shows the pattern of Income Deprivation Affecting Children (an index compiled by government). This cartogram shows each local area (Mid-Level Super Output Area) proportionally to the number of residents in the area. Therefore the shape of England is distorted, but the pattern is clearer, as it is not dominated by large area, small population rural districts. As can be seen, income deprivation is high in inner cities: inner London, the West Midlands, northern cities etc.

Schools are under pressure to identify 10% of their pupils as G&T. The assumption is therefore that Providence has showered its gifts and talents evenly across England to 10% of the population, quite independently of the differences in health, housing, parents' education and occupations and other social variables that are known to contribute to uneven outcomes in education. In fact, the percentages of G&T are changing from year to year as schools respond to the pressure. If in 2008 schools had all acted just as they were told to then there would be no difference in the index of deprivation of the G&T and the UUNES pupils.

Table 3: Income deprivation, SEN and G&T

Category	N	Mean Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI)
G&T	178,274	0.1863
SEN School Action	141,119	0.2821
SEN School Action Plus	70,911	0.2956
Statement of SEN	46,674	0.2686
UUNES	758,146	0.2148
England average	1,183,409	0.2251

These relationships are statistically significant (ANOVA tables, F significant at .000). Therefore G&T pupils are from less deprived areas (0.4 index points less). SEN pupils are from more deprived areas (0.05 to 0.07 more). The effect is lower for those with statements, next comes School Action (where the school defines and says it can provide the support) and then School Action Plus (where the school defines and external support is available). The UUNES, an in-between residual group, are from slightly less deprived areas than average.

Our three further cartograms show the geographical patterns. SEN follows income deprivation, G&T has, in general, an opposite relationship. The exception is some city centres, which have both high levels of SEN and high levels of G&T. UUNES is the residual category. Because it excludes the SEN, who are more numerous than the G&T, it tends to follow the G&T pattern.

RELATIONSHIP WITH GENDER

Table 4: Gender, SEN and G&T

Category	Percentage male
G&T	47.6
SEN School Action	59.3
SEN School Action Plus	63.3
Statement of SEN	72.6
UUNES	48.0
England average	51.0

The balance of the sexes in the general population is different in different age groups. More boys are born than girls and in teenage and young adult populations there continues to be slightly more males. Much later in the lifecourse, the balance shifts the other way.

Here we find the expected slightly larger number of boys than girls in the total maintained school population. G&T pupils are more likely to be girls, while SEN affects boys much more than girls, with the proportion of boys being higher the greater the level of intervention. SEN pupils with statements are nearly three quarters boys. Since the SEN pupils are discounted, the UUNES group end up with a similar balance to the G&T, with slightly more girls.

RELATIONSHIP WITH ETHNICITY

G&T, SEN and G&T and UUNES can be examined by ethnicity.

Table 5: Ethnicity, SEN and G&T

Ethnic group	G&T	SEN statement	All SEN	UUNES
African	10.7%	6.8%	25.5%	65%
Any Other Asian Background	12.7%	4.1%	17.9%	71%
Any Other Black Background	12.0%	9.0%	29.0%	61%
Any Other Ethnic Group	11.8%	6.1%	24.0%	65%
Any Other Mixed Background	18.3%	6.4%	22.0%	62%
Any Other White Background	13.6%	6.4%	22.9%	65%
Bangladeshi	13.9%	5.5%	24.9%	63%
Caribbean	12.5%	10.8%	33.1%	57%
Chinese	27.6%	3.7%	14.9%	60%
Gypsy / Romany	4.3%	19.8%	54.5%	43%
Indian	16.9%	2.6%	14.4%	70%
Irish	16.5%	6.4%	21.6%	63%
Pakistani	9.4%	5.2%	26.8%	65%
Traveller Of Irish Heritage	3.6%	20.6%	57.8%	39%
White and Asian	21.0%	4.6%	18.0%	62%
White and Black African	16.7%	7.2%	24.5%	61%
White and Black Caribbean	14.9%	9.1%	29.2%	58%
White British	15.7%	6.0%	21.4%	64%

The most striking relationship is between Traveller and Gypsy communities and SEN. The majority of children in the Gypsy/Romany and Traveller of Irish Heritage categories are also classed as having SEN.

Otherwise rates of SEN are above average among Caribbean, Mixed White/Caribbean, Other Black background, Pakistani, African, Bangladeshi, Mixed White/African and Other ethnic groups. They are lowest among Chinese and Indian children.

G&T has the highest rates among Chinese children and high rates also among Mixed ethnic groups, including the Mixed White and Black African, where the rate of SEN was also high.

AGE

In the table below we present the average ages, within the academic year, of children in the categories under consideration. Age is defined as the months part of the age, i.e. it is zero for a child born in August (14 years and 0 months or 15 years and 0 months), 1 for a child born in September, etc.

Table 6: Age in months, gender, SEN and G&T

Group	Average age, months part, at start of school year
All children	5.45
Girls	5.46
Boys	5.44
Gifted and talented girls	5.83
Gifted and talented boys	5.88
Special needs School Action girls	5.19
Special needs School Action boys	5.19
Special Needs School Action Plus girls	5.35
Special Needs School Action Plus boys	5.24
Special Needs Statement girls	5.22
Special Needs Statement boys	5.16
Ungifted and Untalented girls	5.43
Ungifted and Untalented boys	5.45

Gifted and Talented pupils are older on average. This effect is statistically significant (ANOVA, at 0.000). Gifted and Talented boys are somewhat older than girls. Special needs pupils, on the other hand, are younger than average, and again this is significant. It is true for all groups of special needs pupils, but especially so for those on School Action or having a statement. Girls with special needs are older than boys in the same category, or the same age as them.

The Ungifted and Untalented girls are on average slightly younger than other girls while the boys are slightly older than other boys.

DISCUSSION

Education in the 2000s likes to see itself as more inclusive than it was in the 1970s when Bernard Coard worked out *How the West Indian Child is Made Educationally Subnormal in the British School System*. The Warnock Report marked a genuine step forward, replacing the ESN (educationally subnormal) with its anagram SEN. Children were no longer regarded as “ineducable”. Disabilities (no longer “handicaps”) might be either physical or mental; they were still assumed to arise from the individual child, but they were “needs” that the schooling system should and could respond to. Although stigma reattached itself to the label of “special need”, “special” is still a much nicer label than the early 20th century categories of “idiot”, “imbecile” or “moron”. It was readily applied to children who in the 1960s would have been “remedial”. Such large proportions of children were being identified as SEN that the “statementing” system buckled under the strain. The “School Action” and “School Action Plus” categories allowed it to be bypassed. Now there are variety of ways in which children can be labelled and taught “specially” (i.e. separately, in a separate space in the class, in a special unit, or in a special schools).

However, children from Caribbean and Mixed White/Caribbean backgrounds are still more likely to be classified as having SEN. SEN labels are also much more commonly attached to boys than to girls (and of course to Caribbean and Mixed White/Caribbean boys), to the younger children in each year group, and to children from deprived areas.

At the same time schools are under pressure to identify at least 10% of their pupils as G&T. Apparently, Providence has scattered gifts and talents upon England’s maternity wards to the same

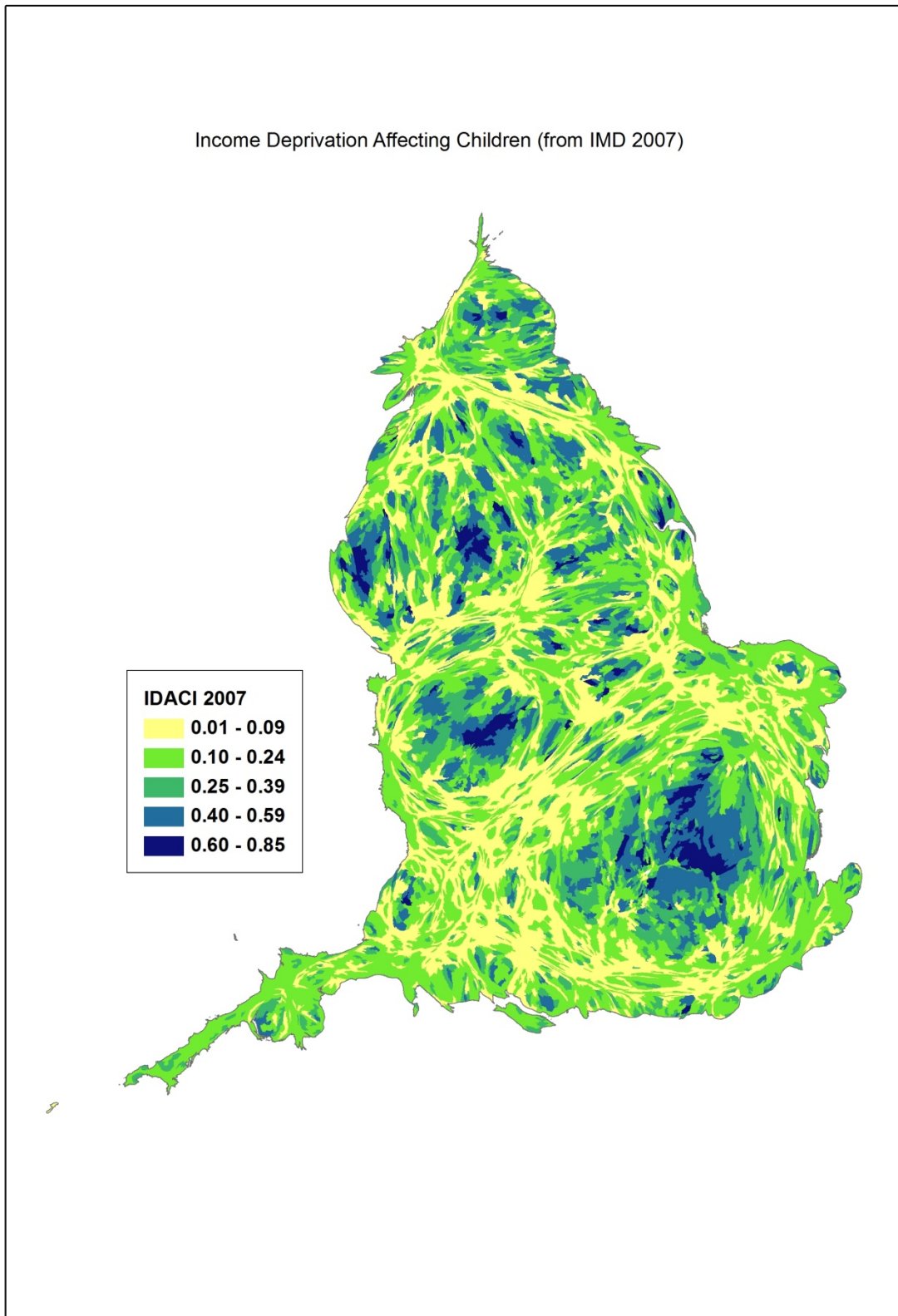
number of favoured few everywhere, irrespective of health, housing, parents' education and occupations or other factors that affect educational outcomes. In fact, the percentages of G&T are changing from year to year as schools respond to the pressure. If in 2008 all schools had followed instructions there would be no difference in the average index of deprivation of the G&T compared to other pupils. One minor factor in the low income deprivation of the G&T is that some grammar schools identified 100% of their pupils as G&T. Perhaps sometimes Providence is especially undiscerning.

This geographical unevenness in educational labelling has implications for educational planning. It occurs in the context of local labour markets that are currently under significant strain, combined with competitive local education markets. School improvement and widening participation strategies are implemented at local level, but in very different contexts.

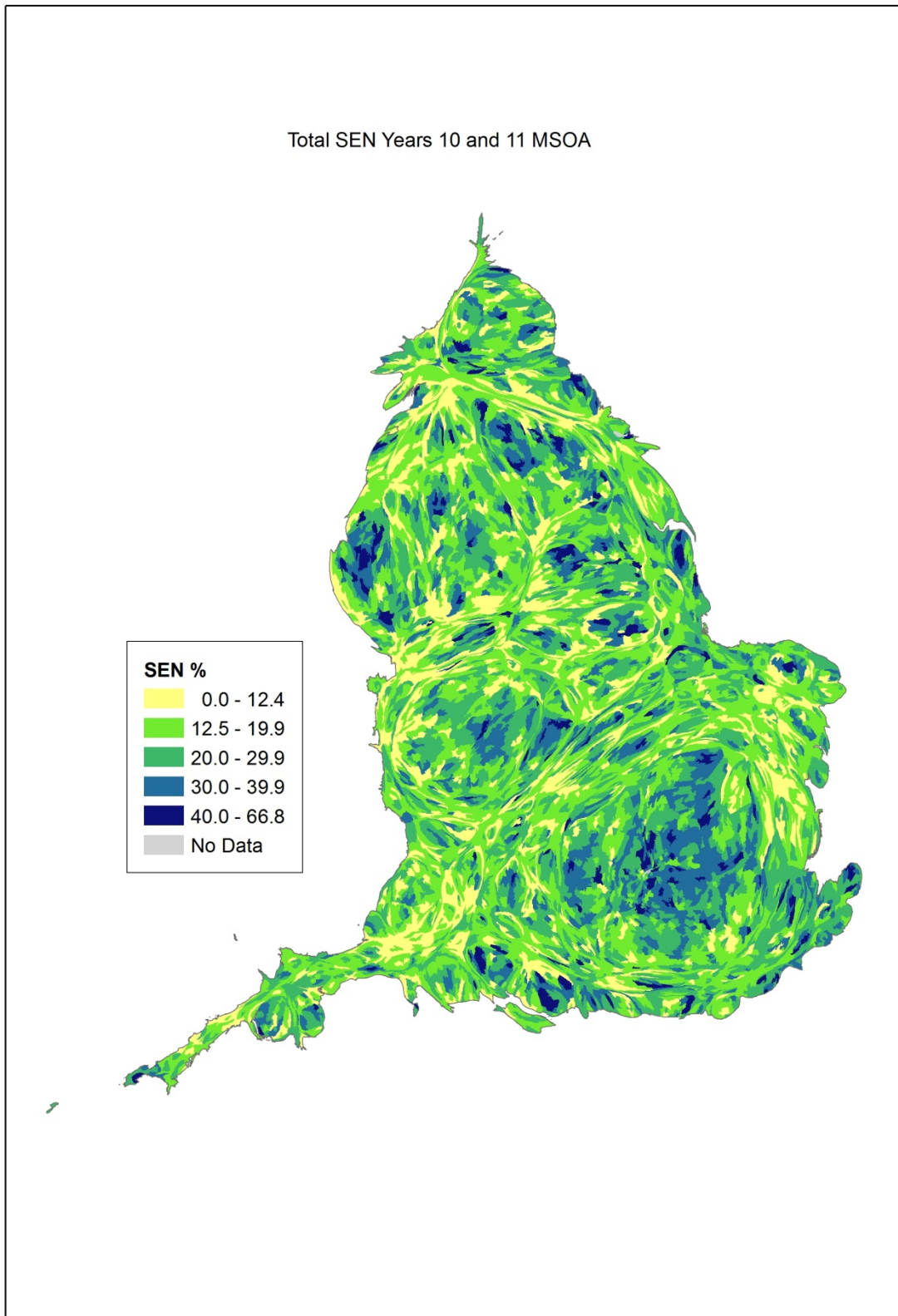
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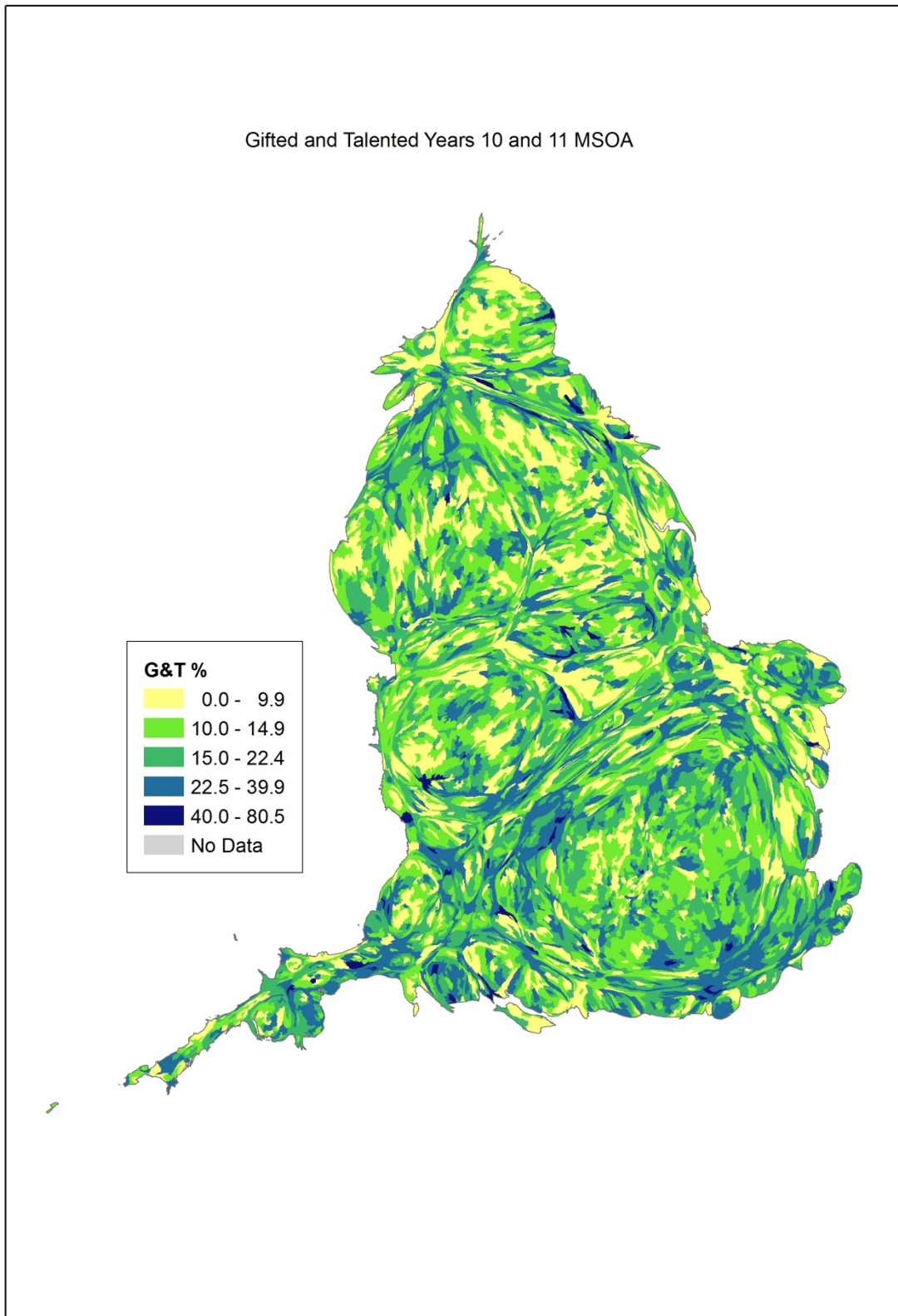
Cartogram 1: Income deprivation



Cartogram 2: SEN



Cartogram 3: G&T



Cartogram 4: UUNES

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