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**SUTTON TRUST  
NEWS RELEASE**

**WAGE GAP TOO LARGE - SAY THREE OUT OF FOUR  
BRITAINS**

Nearly three out of four people (74%) think that income differences in Britain are too large and seven in ten (69%) believe that parents' income plays too big a part in determining children's life chances, according to the first survey of attitudes to inequality and social mobility commissioned by the Sutton Trust.

The results from the Ipsos MORI survey of over 2,000 adults are consistent with academic research which has shown that background plays a bigger role in determining educational outcomes in Britain than in many other countries and that levels of social mobility are relatively low. Recent research from the Institute of Fiscal Studies meanwhile has suggested that income inequality is at its highest level since the 1960s (note 1).

The other findings of the survey paint a mixed picture of attitudes to inequality and mobility:

- 69% of respondents who answered the question believed that they had experienced static or downward mobility, with the household they are in today being relatively worse off - or no better off - than the household they grew up in as a child.
- Only 10% of those who answered the question and said they grew up in households in the bottom quartile of income reported being in the top quartile in adulthood (note 2).
- Despite this, just 31% of respondents thought that social mobility in Britain is too low, and one half thought it is "about right".
- And, surprisingly, more than half (54%) agreed that people in Britain have equal opportunities to get ahead.

Dr Lee Elliot Major, Director of Research at the Sutton Trust, said: "Opportunities in this country remain heavily determined by parental background. A wide range of research places Britain at or near the bottom of the league table of mobility, particularly in terms of the link between children's educational achievement and parental income.

These findings suggest unease among the public about life opportunities in modern Britain, but that perceptions of mobility and inequality are mixed. The public appear to recognise some of the inequalities in our society, but on the face of it half do not think

that Britain is particularly socially immobile. If we are to promote real change, a first step is to recognise that we have a problem and create a consensus on the need for reform.

The Sutton Trust has recently brought together a range of academics, educationalists and policymakers to discuss how to promote mobility through education and to begin to build a way forward. In the Autumn we will propose a number of practical ways forward which we hope will make a real difference to people's future opportunities."

### **Notes to editors**

The research is attached and is available at [www.suttontrust.com](http://www.suttontrust.com). The research was produced by Ipsos MORI and is based on interviews with 2,060 adults between 15 and 20 May 2008.

#### Note 1

An analysis published by The Institute of Fiscal Studies earlier this month suggested that income inequality increased in 2006/07 compared with the previous year and remains at its highest level since it was consistently measured in 1961.<sup>1</sup>

A 2006 comparative study<sup>2</sup> looked at the association between 13 year olds' test scores and 'books at home' (a proxy for parental background). It placed the UK bottom of the rankings of 54 countries, with the closest relationship between test scores and parental background. Another recent study<sup>3</sup> of 7 OECD countries finds that UK adults aged between 30 and 39 have the strongest association between their test scores and their father's education. Research commissioned by the Trust in 2007 has suggested that levels of education mobility for the current generation are as low as those born in the 1970s.<sup>4</sup>

#### Note 2

Evidence from the 1970 British Cohort Study (adults now aged 38) shows that 16% of those in the bottom 25% of income in childhood made it to the top 25% of income in adulthood. 37% of the poorest stayed in the bottom bracket<sup>5</sup>.

**The Sutton Trust** is a charity founded in 1997 by Sir Peter Lampl with the aim of providing educational opportunities for young people from non-privileged backgrounds and improving social mobility. It funds a wide range of research and projects covering parenting and early years, schools, universities and access to the professions.

**For Further information from Tim Devlin, Press Officer, The Sutton Trust, on 07939 544 487**

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<sup>1</sup> [www.ifs.org.uk/pr/hbai\\_pr1.pdf](http://www.ifs.org.uk/pr/hbai_pr1.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> How Equal Are Educational Opportunities? Family Background and Student Achievement in Europe and the United States, L Woessmann (2004)

<sup>3</sup> Changes in Intergenerational Income Mobility in Britain, in M. Corak (ed.) Esping-Anderson (2005)

<sup>4</sup> Recent Changes in Intergenerational Mobility in Britain, J Blanden, S Machin, (2007)

<sup>5</sup> Intergenerational Mobility in Europe and North America, J Blanden, P Gregg, S Machin (2005)