



# SOCIAL MOBILITY IN THE WORKPLACE

An employer's guide





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### About the Sutton Trust

The Sutton Trust is a foundation which improves social mobility in the UK through evidence-based programmes, research and policy advocacy.

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# CONTENTS

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<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Foreword</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>5 steps to improving social mobility in your workforce</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>1 <u>Measuring socio-economic diversity</u></b>	<b>8</b>
<b>2 <u>Build a talent pipeline</u></b>	<b>16</b>
<b>3 <u>Improve recruitment practices</u></b>	<b>21</b>
<b>4 <u>Keep and nurture talent</u></b>	<b>27</b>
<b>5 <u>Looking outside of your workplace</u></b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Coronavirus and social mobility in the workplace</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Next steps</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Appendix A: Other organisations working with young people</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Appendix B: Defining parental occupational group</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Appendix C: Four part question for parental occupation</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>42</b>

# FOREWORD

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2020 has been a year of upheaval, with huge impacts caused by the coronavirus pandemic on every part of society, on people young and old, and reaching across all sectors in the economy. Educators and employers alike have faced unprecedented challenges. But some things remain constant. One of the key elements of the crisis has been in its widening of existing gaps, and magnification of existing differences.

While some may have thought a health pandemic would distract from wider issues of fairness in education and our economy, it has in fact underlined their importance. Unequal opportunities have become more salient than ever, whether by gender, race, geography, disability or social background, and we all have a role to play.

Embracing social mobility should be a positive thing for employers to do. It is not about penalising those who have had advantages, or giving an unfair leg up in life; it's about ensuring that we make best use of the talents and aspirations of every single person, regardless of their background.

Getting the best people into the workplace, and supporting them to thrive, makes sound business sense. By tapping into the potential that exists in all corners of our society and our country, organisations will have a competitive edge and benefit from diverse viewpoints. Wasted talent has an economic as well as a social cost.

But it can seem a bit overwhelming knowing where to start to act on social mobility. This guidance tries to break down the issue into actionable chunks and to suggest constructive things employers can implement, adapting as appropriate for their scale and context.

There are some great resources out there already, particularly the Social Mobility Commission's Toolkit. Our guidance complements these existing resources and tries to answer some of the outstanding questions that employers have asked us, as well as looking at some new areas and others in greater detail.

We don't have all the answers, and the social mobility agenda is relatively young; over time this guidance will inevitably develop. We are working with the Social Mobility Commission to explore a shared approach to presenting insights from our organisations, and making such advice as clear and accessible to employers as possible. We are also keen to hear from employers on any issues they face which are not currently addressed.

*"By tapping into the potential that exists in all corners of our society and our country, organisations will have a competitive edge and benefit from diverse viewpoints"*

In the meantime, we hope you find this guide useful and that you start to reap the benefits of using it.

**James Turner**  
Chief Executive  
The Sutton Trust



# INTRODUCTION

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Over the last few decades, there has been a welcome focus on improving diversity in the professional workforce, particularly since the establishment of the Equality Act in 2010. Many employers and industries have worked to try to remove barriers, including by gender, ethnicity and sexuality.

But despite this progress, some parts of the diversity equation outside the official 'protected characteristics' have had less attention, including socio-economic diversity; whether employees' family backgrounds reflect a range of income and education levels.<sup>1</sup>

We know that the social and economic position that someone grew up in can have a major impact on their entry and progression into the workforce, but many organisations do not monitor the socio-economic diversity of their workforce or have a plan in place on how to improve accessibility and progression.

**5x** People in Britain's top jobs are five more likely to have attended a private school than the general population.<sup>2</sup>

There is a strong business case for taking action. When factors unrelated to merit hold influence on hiring decisions, employers risk not choosing the best person for the role. It can be easy to unconsciously recruit people that are similar to existing employees, but this means potentially missing out on an untapped pool of talent, with a great deal to offer organisations.

Diversity of background can often bring new ways of thinking and can impact positively on innovation and change.

Companies who do look for this talent have the chance for a real economic advantage, taking on employees with a large amount to offer who other companies may miss. Acting on this issue is not about penalising those from better-off backgrounds, but about recognising barriers, spotting potential and ensuring the best talent, regardless of background, thrives.

**70%** of internships are unpaid – locking out young people who cannot afford to work for free.<sup>3</sup>

Research looking at the legal profession, for example, found that trainees from state schools, or who were the first in their family to go to university, were more likely than their peers to have high performance reviews. However, despite this they were also less likely to progress in their early career, with many lost from the profession.<sup>4</sup>

Without greater attention, not just on outreach and hiring, but also through to progression and retention, organisations are losing out on talent. And importantly, diversity issues do not exist in isolation; an organisation cannot tackle one without also acting on others.

Someone's socio-economic background will also interact with other parts of their identity, with social class often

inflicting a double disadvantage in combination with other characteristics such as gender, ethnicity or disability.

For example, in the top professions the gender pay gap is around £10,000 year, and the socio-economic pay gap is £6,400. However, the pay gap in these professions between the most privileged men and the least privileged women is £18,900, over £2,000 more than the two gaps simply added together.<sup>5</sup>

None of this is inevitable. Many organisations are already championing social mobility in the workplace and tapping into the potential present in all corners of society as a result.

**2%** If social mobility in the UK increased to the average level in Western Europe, GDP could be roughly 2% higher.<sup>6</sup>

This guide is aimed at employers looking for detailed advice to improve social mobility in the workplace, aimed both at those taking their first steps to improve socio-economic diversity in their workforce, as well as giving tips and guidance for those who are already further into the process.

**16%** Workers in the top professions from upper middle-class backgrounds are estimated to earn 16% more than those from working class backgrounds, even in the same type of jobs.<sup>7</sup>

It covers a wide range of issues, from how to measure the socio-economic make-up of your workforce, through to contextual recruitment and best practice advice on routes into the workplace, including internships and apprenticeships.

When using this guide, we suggest employers make use of other resources alongside it which are referenced throughout, for example the Social Mobility Commission's recent [\*\*Employer's Toolkit\*\*](#), which provides a useful overview for employers and is a good companion to the guidance included here.



# 5 STEPS TO IMPROVING SOCIAL MOBILITY IN YOUR WORKFORCE

## 1 Measuring socio-economic diversity

**By measuring the socio-economic background of your workforce, you will be able to:**

- ✓ See any gaps in applications, hires, progression or retention
- ✓ Target initiatives to improve diversity
- ✓ Track progress over time.

**We recommend you ask questions on the following (in order of priority):**

- ✓ Parental occupation
- ✓ School type attended
- ✓ Free school meal eligibility
- ✓ Parental education.

## 2 Build a talent pipeline

**Create diverse routes into your workplace by:**

- ✓ Paying and openly advertising internships and work experience placements
- ✓ Making use of apprenticeships to open up new routes into the workplace.

## 3 Improve recruitment practices

**To make sure you are finding top talent, regardless of background:**

- ✓ Where possible, put in place contextual recruitment practices
- ✓ Ensure recruitment practices are open and transparent
- ✓ Have honest conversations about talent.

## 4 Keep and nurture talent

**To give all your employees, regardless of background, equal opportunity to succeed within your organisation:**

- ✓ Monitor class pay gaps
- ✓ Ensure promotion and work allocation processes are fair
- ✓ Create an inclusive, welcoming culture that celebrates diversity and different viewpoints.

## 5 Looking outside of your workplace

Working with young people in schools, universities and further education colleges can help to broaden their horizons and open up opportunities.

**To make the largest impact:**

- ✓ Where possible, go through an organisation already working with young people – they can ensure students have sustained engagement with employers and target support where it is most needed
- ✓ Look beyond your local area
- ✓ When working with schools, take your lead from teachers – they know their pupils best
- ✓ Consider widening the range of universities you recruit from
- ✓ Think about financial barriers – for example the cost of attending an industry insight day.

## 1

# MEASURING SOCIO-ECONOMIC DIVERSITY

Monitoring the socio-economic diversity of your workforce can help you to:

- ✓ See any gaps in applications, hires, progression or retention
- ✓ Target initiatives to improve diversity
- ✓ Track progress over time.

This section explains how to measure the socio-economic background of your workforce, including:

- ✓ Parental occupation
- ✓ School type attended
- ✓ Free school meal eligibility
- ✓ Parental education.





## 1

# MEASURING SOCIO-ECONOMIC DIVERSITY

## Why measure socio-economic diversity?

One of the first steps to improving socio-economic diversity in your organisation is to find out more about the background of your workforce.

Doing so can help an organisation to identify any gaps in access or progression, which in turn can help to target any initiatives aiming to improve diversity.

For example, if your organisation has access gaps which open up at the recruitment stage, you may choose to focus efforts on your recruitment process, and the stages within it which might be causing barriers.

Alternatively, if you are already recruiting people from a wide range of backgrounds, but employees from lower socio-economic backgrounds are less likely to stay on or to progress, you may decide to focus on retention and progression within your firm.

Recording data on socio-economic background can also help your organisation to evaluate whether progress is being made over time.

## How to measure

Measuring the socio-economic diversity of your workforce can seem more complicated than measuring other diversity characteristics, but the process is very straightforward with the right information at hand. This section will take you through the process step-by-step, including:

- How to explain why you are asking these questions to staff

- Which questions to ask, and why
- How to benchmark the data, where available against the UK workforce, undergraduates and the graduate population overall.

### Staff explainer:

Why are you asking these questions?

Below is a quick explainer you may wish to include with these questions when putting any surveys out to your staff. Please feel free to use or edit this wording –  
*Our organisation is committed to ensuring everyone has the opportunity to succeed, regardless of their background. Research shows that someone's socio-economic background (the social and economic circumstances a person grew up in, including the social class and financial resources of their family, and the type of school they attended) can sometimes disadvantage them in the workplace. We want to understand more about this issue in our workforce, so that we can remove any barriers, open up opportunities within our organisation and ensure we are making full use of the talent available.*

## The questions

Someone's socio-economic background is made up of several different factors, and can be more complex to capture than other characteristics. That's why we recommend asking, if possible, four different questions when looking at social mobility. This set of questions has been developed and endorsed

by the Social Mobility Commission and a range of social mobility organisations across the sector, including the Sutton Trust.<sup>8</sup>

We recommend analysing these questions separately, not in combination.

To keep data consistent between organisations and across sectors, we would advise that wherever possible you ask the questions exactly as they are written here.

If you are unable to ask all four questions, they are included here in order of our recommended priority. If you can only ask one, we strongly recommend you ask

the question on parental occupation.

Benchmarking data is provided where available to help you assess how representative your workforce is compared to the general population, or where available, compared to the working age or graduate populations. Having this knowledge can help you to address any disparities in access, for example if you are currently over-recruiting from private school alumni, knowing that can help you to target changes to your outreach work and recruitment processes to bring in a more diverse range of talent.

## Question 1

### Parental occupation

What was the occupation of your main household earner when you were about aged 14?

- a. Modern professional & traditional professional occupations  
such as: teacher, nurse, physiotherapist, social worker, musician, police officer (sergeant or above), software designer, accountant, solicitor, medical practitioner, scientist, civil / mechanical engineer.
- b. Senior, middle or junior managers or administrators  
such as: finance manager, chief executive, large business owner, office manager, retail manager, bank manager, restaurant manager, warehouse manager.
- c. Clerical and intermediate occupations  
such as: secretary, personal assistant, call centre agent, clerical worker, nursery nurse.
- d. Technical and craft occupations  
such as: motor mechanic, plumber, printer, electrician, gardener, train driver.
- e. Routine, semi-routine manual and service occupations  
such as: postal worker, machine operative, security guard, caretaker, farm worker, catering assistant, sales assistant, HGV driver, cleaner, porter, packer, labourer, waiter/waitress, bar staff.
- f. Long-term unemployed  
claimed Jobseeker's Allowance or earlier unemployment benefit for more than a year.
- g. Small business owners  
who employed less than 25 people  
such as: corner shop owners, small plumbing companies, retail shop owner, single restaurant or cafe owner, taxi owner, garage owner
- h. Other  
such as: retired, this question does not apply to me, I don't know
- i. I prefer not to say

## Why ask this question?

Parental occupation is a common measure used to look at socio-economic background and extensive research has found that it is closely related to an individual's future occupation,<sup>9</sup> a sign of the UK's current low levels of social mobility.

Research has also found that even if someone from a working class background does progress to a professional or managerial role, they are less likely to earn as highly as those whose parents themselves also worked in this type of profession.<sup>10</sup> This 'class pay gap', comparing people in the top professions doing the same jobs, is estimated to be £6,400 a year.<sup>11</sup>

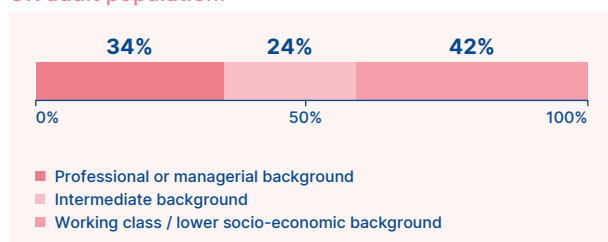
## How to analyse this question

This question will allow you to classify employees into one of three socio-economic groups by parental occupation. How to group responses is outlined in [Appendix B](#).

## Benchmarking data

When split into these three groups, 34% of the UK adult population are from professional or managerial backgrounds, 24% from intermediate backgrounds, and 42% from working class/lower socio-economic backgrounds.<sup>12</sup> The [Social Mobility Commission](#) also provide industry specific benchmarks for this measure.

UK adult population:



## Other versions of this question

A more detailed version of this question, with four parts, which also asks whether someone's parent was self-employed and if they supervised employees, was previously recommended. Asking these additional questions makes the final classification slightly more accurate, but can be more complicated to ask and to analyse. However, if you would like to ask all four parts, we have included how to do so in [Appendix C](#). If your organisation already uses the four part version of this question, we would recommend you continue to do so, although you may wish to use this one part version for some purposes where less space is available, for example in supplementary staff surveys. More information on this change can be found [here](#).

## Question 2

Which type of school did you attend for the most time between the ages of 11 and 16?

- A state-run or state-funded school
- Independent or fee-paying school
- Independent or fee-paying school, where I received a means tested bursary covering 90% or more of the total cost of attending throughout my time there
- Attended school outside the UK
- I don't know
- Prefer not to say

### Why ask this question?

Independent school attendance is an indirect measure commonly used to measure socio-economic background. While not true universally, the majority of those who attended an independent school will have done so because their parents were able to afford to pay for fees, with currently just 1% of the students attending private schools having all their fees covered, and just 4% receiving scholarships or bursaries which covered more than half of their fees.<sup>13</sup> Since the 1990s, just over three-quarters of students at private schools have come from professional and managerial backgrounds.<sup>14</sup> It is also a straightforward question for individuals to answer, as the majority will know the type of school they attended.

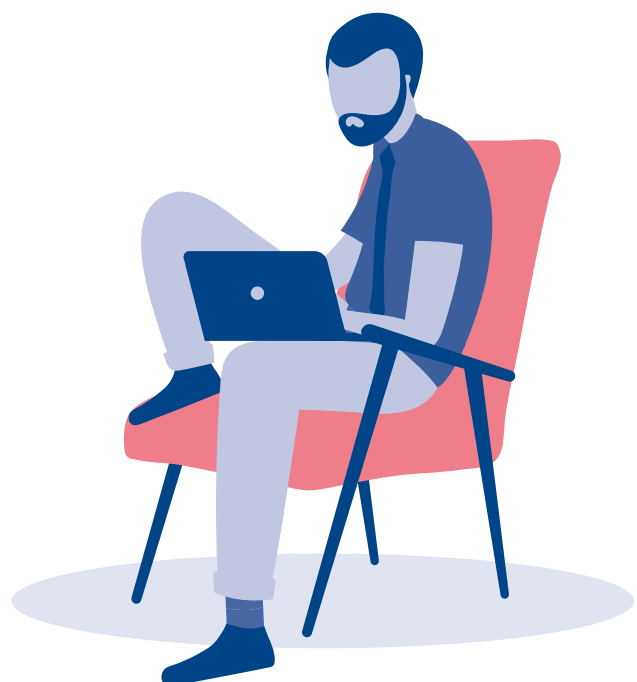
## Benchmarking data

### General population

There are no figures for overall school type attendance in the general population in the UK. We can however give a good estimate, as we do know that private school attendance has stayed stable throughout the period in which the current workforce attended school, at around 7% since the 1960s.<sup>15</sup>

### Graduates

Between 2015-16 and 2017-18 around 90% of UK domiciled undergraduate students have come from state schools (either comprehensive or grammar), broadly similar to the school population. However, this differs substantially between different types of institution.<sup>16</sup> At Oxford, this figure was just 56% of those admitted in 2015, rising gradually to 62% in 2019.<sup>17</sup> And similarly, at Cambridge this figure was 62% in 2015, going up to 69% in 2019.<sup>18</sup> Looking at the Russell Group as a whole, 78% of students who started in 2015 attended a state school, with a similar proportion, 79%, doing so in 2018.<sup>19</sup>



## Question 3

### Free school meals

If you finished school after 1980, were you eligible for free school meals at any point during your school years?

Free school meals are a statutory benefit available to school-aged children from families who receive other qualifying benefits and who have been through the relevant registration process. It does not include those who receive meals at school through other means (e.g. boarding school).

- Yes
- No
- Not applicable (finished school before 1980 or went to school overseas)
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

### Why ask this question?

Receipt of free school meals (FSM) is another common indirect measure of disadvantage, with children eligible if their parents receive certain types of state benefits. FSM eligibility is both closely related to low incomes and poverty,<sup>20</sup> to disadvantage in education,<sup>21</sup> and to workplace outcomes.<sup>22</sup> While attendance at a private school can be a good indicator of high incomes, free school meal eligibility is a good indicator of those on low incomes.

A pilot asking these questions to a set of employees found few people have problems answering this question,<sup>23</sup> which gives a simple measure as it is divided into two clear categories.

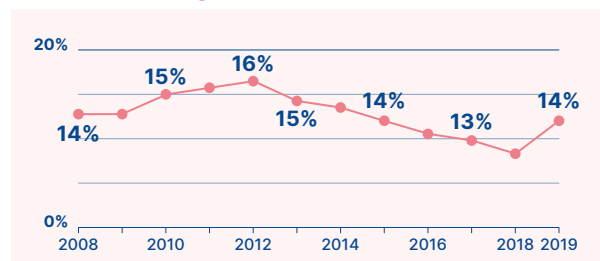
As free school meals have only been available since 1980, this question can only be used for employees who started school after this date.

## Benchmarking data

### General population

The definition and criteria for eligibility to FSM has changed slightly over time, but rates have remained relatively consistent. The proportion of secondary school students eligible for FSM has been quite stable for the last decade, at between 13% and 16% of students in state funded secondary schools in England.<sup>24</sup>

Proportion of state funded secondary school students receiving free school meals:

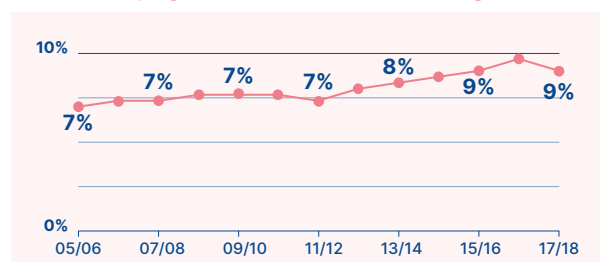


### Graduates

Young people eligible for FSM make up a small proportion of those who go onto higher education. Looking at the destinations of young people by age 19, in 2017/18 just 9% of those who went onto higher education were eligible for free school meals. This has increased gradually over time from 7% in 2005/06.<sup>25</sup>

The proportion of young people going to highly selective universities who were eligible for FSM is even lower, making up 5% of young people go to these institutions by age 19, an increase from 3% in 2008/09.<sup>26</sup>

Proportion of young people who have gone onto higher education by age 19, who were also FSM eligible:



## Question 4

### Parental education

If you have a graduate scheme, ask this additional question (relevant to graduate hires only):

Did either of your parents attend university and gain a degree (e.g. BA/BSc or equivalent) by the time you were 18?

- No, neither of my parents attended university Independent or fee-paying school
- Yes, one or both of my parents attended university
- Do not know/not sure
- Prefer not to say

### Why ask this question?

How educated someone's parents are has been found, on average, to be associated to an individual's future occupation. Parents who have been to university themselves are also more likely to be able to guide their own children through the process, which plays a role in ongoing differences in rates of attending university across socio-economic groups.<sup>27</sup> This is also an easy question for most employees to be able to answer, with high response rates in a pilot of questions on socio-economic diversity.<sup>28</sup>

### Benchmarking data

Around two thirds (67%) of recent graduates (based on a study of people born in 1989/1990) were the first in their family to attend university (defined as neither of their parents having gained a degree). However, this figure differs substantially between different types of institution, falling to 50% for those who attend a Russell Group university and just 32% for those who attend Oxbridge.<sup>29</sup>



## Can I ask these questions to staff brought up outside of the UK?

Questions on parental occupation and education are applicable to staff brought up overseas. However, benchmarking data included here is based on the UK population, so if your organisation has a higher proportion of people born overseas than the UK workforce overall (17%),<sup>30</sup> you should keep this in mind when interpreting your data.

Questions on school type and whether someone was eligible for free school meals focus on staff brought up in the UK only, but both questions include an option for anyone who attended school outside of the UK to select.

## Driving up response rates

The Social Mobility Commission's [Employer's Toolkit](#) includes some useful tips on how to drive up response rates to these questions, including case studies from firms who have implemented them successfully. The SMC advise firms should aim for overall response rates of at least 70%.

## Collecting data in a small organisation

We would encourage organisations of all sizes to monitor socio-economic diversity if possible, but smaller organisations should be more cautious in the interpretation of their findings and comparison to benchmarking data. Smaller differences between your workforce and benchmarking data may be due to random variation, but any larger differences (for example if a group is twice as well represented as would be expected) can still be informative and help to direct action.

## Sharing data across the sector

We would encourage organisations to work together with regulators to collect data on socio-economic diversity from across their own sectors. Making this information easily accessible to organisations working across a specific area can help them to see how they are performing compared to their industry as a whole, as well as helping regulators to identify examples of good practice to share more widely. You may also want to work with the [Bridge Group](#) to understand this data in more detail, as they have expertise across a range of sectors. The Social Mobility Commission are currently working on producing benchmarks for different sectors.<sup>31</sup>

If you work for a sector regulator interested in putting together data across your sector, we are happy to help. Please [get in touch with us](#).



## 2

# BUILDING TALENT PIPELINES

.....

**To build a diverse talent pipeline into your organisation:**

- ✓ Pay and openly advertise internships and work experience placements
  - ✓ Make use of apprenticeships to open up new routes into the workplace.
- .....





## 2

## BUILDING TALENT PIPELINES

Looking at your organisation's pipelines and recruitment practices is a vital part of addressing socio-economic diversity in the workplace.

From how opportunities to work for your organisation are advertised, through to how you are assessing talent and potential, the next section will give suggestions on various aspects of the recruitment process, with a focus on entry level positions.

Employers play an important role in several pathways from education into the world of work, such as internships, work experience placements and apprenticeships.<sup>32</sup> Below we have some top tips for ensuring these routes are open to people from all backgrounds.

### Internships

With many roles now requiring previous experience, and many interns going on to be employed by the organisation they interned at, internships and work experience placements act as an important pipeline into the workforce.

However, too many of these opportunities are currently unpaid and unadvertised. This prevents many talented young people who are unable to work unpaid or who do not have connections from finding placements that might benefit both them and the employer.

- The Sutton Trust have calculated that it costs an unpaid intern a minimum of £1,100 a month to live in London, or £1,019 excluding transport.<sup>33</sup>
- Sutton Trust research has found that over a quarter (27%) of graduates have completed at least one unpaid internship,

and that middle-class graduates are more likely to be funded by parents, have savings and use personal connections to obtain internships.<sup>34</sup>

- Many people doing unpaid internships in London are only able to do so because they have family and friends living in the capital who they can stay with for free, which many young people, especially those from outside of the South East, do not.

#### What does the law say?

There are no specific laws relating to internships in the UK, but they are covered by general employment law.

An intern is entitled to the national minimum wage (NMW)<sup>35</sup> if they are classified as a 'worker' under that legislation, which is likely to be the case for most internships. According to government advice, someone is classed as a worker if:

- They have a contract (written or unwritten) or other arrangement to do work or services personally for a reward.
- Their reward is for money or a benefit in kind, for example the promise of a contract or future work.
- They only have a limited right to send someone else to do the work.
- They have to turn up for work even if they don't want to.

- Their employer has to have work for them to do as long as the contract or arrangement lasts.
- They aren't doing the work as part of their own limited company in an arrangement where the 'employer' is actually a customer or client.

There are some limited exceptions to this, including students doing a work placement as part of a university course.

These laws apply no matter how an employer terms someone's role, including whether it is referred to and advertised as an internship, work experience placement or voluntary role. If the person in that role meets the criteria above, they are a worker and are entitled to be paid at least the national minimum wage.<sup>36</sup>

Sutton Trust research has found that many employers do not have a good understanding of the law as it applies to unpaid internships.

For example, we found that half of employers thought that an internship with a flexible three-day week, with tasks assigned and a £100 allowance would be legal, and a further third were unsure about its legality.

But in this scenario, the intern would likely be entitled to the national minimum wage, for two reasons:

- They are being required to carry out work for their employer (regardless of whether they can do so flexibly)
- They are being given a reward for their work, in the form of an allowance.

However, even for the small number of placements which do not qualify for the minimum wage (for example those carrying out work shadowing), it is still recommended that employers provide interns with pay, a stipend, or expenses, to ensure money is not a barrier to participation. If the experience is giving young people insight into your industry that is likely to help them in future (for example in job applications) but is only

accessible to those who can afford to take part, this is likely to narrow opportunities.

### How can organisations make internships accessible?

#### **Internships should be paid, ideally at the Living Wage Foundation's Living Wage.**

If an internship or placement is not paid, it will not be fully accessible to all talented young people, regardless of their socio-economic background. While the majority of interns are legally entitled to at least the National Minimum Wage, we recommend that wherever possible, employers should pay the Living Wage, which has been calculated to ensure that pay meets the cost of living.

#### **All internships should be advertised, and that where possible, employers work with university career services, schools and colleges to advertise opportunities.**

Sutton Trust research has found that the most common route by which young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds in particular find internships is through an educational institution, with 40% of those who completed an internship finding their placement through this route.<sup>37</sup> Processes should be put in place to prevent employees giving out placements through personal contacts, for example to the children of friends or family. When working with universities, target a wide range of institutions.

### Apprenticeships

Opening up a more diverse range of routes into the workplace is another way organisations can improve diversity.

Apprenticeships give young people entering the workforce the opportunity to earn while they learn, with apprentices developing skills directly relevant to the workplace.

For many young people, they are an increasingly attractive alternative to university.

However, there is not enough awareness among teachers, parents and young people about this route into the workplace, and while growing fast, there are still many fewer high level apprenticeships available compared to university routes.

Companies opening up apprenticeships and increasing awareness around this route have huge potential to improve social mobility.

While much of the previous advice on recruitment will also apply to apprenticeships, this section looks specifically at advice related to apprentices.

### Getting started with apprenticeships

If your organisation doesn't currently offer apprenticeships, there is lots of help and advice available to get you started.

Employers with a pay bill over £3 million a year will pay the apprenticeship levy. They can then receive levy funds to spend on apprenticeship training.

Smaller employers not paying the levy can also access funding to help them pay for apprenticeship training, either through government or by a levy-paying employer transferring up to 25% of their annual funds.

You can find out more about the levy [here](#).

#### The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education

The IfATE have a large amount of information available to help employers getting started with apprenticeships.

Many apprenticeship standards already exist in a wide range of fields, for example in finance and accounting, construction, health and science, transport and logistics, hair and beauty and engineering and manufacturing. Getting started with an existing standard is relatively straightforward. Setting up your own can be more challenging, but information is available to help you get started.

### Opening up apprenticeships to young people from all backgrounds

Companies can think that by offering more diverse routes into their workplace like apprenticeships, they have already done the hard work needed to increase socio-economic diversity.

While offering apprenticeships is an important step, it's also important to know who is taking them up. Sutton Trust research has shown that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are still less likely to undertake a high level apprenticeship than their more advantaged peers. The best higher and degree level apprenticeships are socially selective, with twice as many degree level apprentices from the wealthiest backgrounds as the least well off.<sup>38</sup>

So, how can an organisation improve diversity among apprentices?

- **Monitor the socio-economic background of your apprentices.**

Just as with the rest of your workforce, it's important to know who is taking up your apprenticeships (see previous section: measuring socio-economic diversity).

- **Look at how you're marketing apprenticeship opportunities.**

Advertise your apprenticeships via a government website to make sure they reach as many young people as possible, links for the UK nations are included below:

[England](#)

[Scotland](#)

[Wales](#)

[Northern Ireland](#)

You can also use a talent matching company such as [Whitehat](#), who help to match apprenticeship candidates to vacancies.

- **Talk about apprenticeship routes in schools.** Young people can't be what they can't see. By going into schools, you can help to educate young people about apprenticeships (see engaging in schools section, [page 31](#)).
- **If you can, pay apprentices the Living Wage or the London Living Wage.** One of the major attractions of apprenticeships is that apprentices can earn while they learn. By paying apprentices a wage relative to the cost of living, you can help to ensure all young people can afford to take them up.
- **Make sure all your apprenticeships are of a high quality.** So that both the apprentice and your company really gain from the process. Guidance on what makes a high quality apprenticeship is available from the [Institute of Apprenticeships and Technical Education](#).

**For more advice on how to recruit and support apprentices from lower socio-economic backgrounds, please see the [Social Mobility Commission's recent guide](#).**



## 3

# RECRUITMENT

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## To find top talent, regardless of background:

- ✓ Where possible, put in place contextual recruitment practices
  - ✓ Ensure recruitment is open and transparent
  - ✓ Have honest conversations about talent.
- 



## 3

# RECRUITMENT

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When it comes to recruiting staff, there are several steps organisations can take to ensure they are attracting and recruiting top talent, regardless of background. This section looks in detail at contextual recruitment, how to break down barriers for candidates, and ways to tackle any potential biases in the recruitment process.

## Contextual recruitment

Contextual recruitment covers any recruitment practices in which you take the context in which an applicant's previous academic attainment or experience has been achieved into account during the recruitment process.

For example, if your firm uses A-level results to screen out candidates during your recruitment process, a contextual recruitment approach may introduce lower grades requirements for applicants from disadvantaged backgrounds to take into account that their grades may not fully reflect their talent and ability, given the barriers they may have faced.

We recommend that where possible, employers consider contextualising their recruitment practices. This can include both how you assess a candidate's academic record, and also how you assess any previous work experience. Contextual recruitment helps employers to gain access to talented people who they may otherwise have missed.

- Gaining three As from a deprived school is likely to have been more difficult than gaining three As from an academically selective school serving a wealthy area. Contextual recruitment practices reflect how the same level of attainment

can signal different levels of talent, dependent on the circumstances in which the grades were achieved.

- Many young people will be unable to afford to work for free, or lack the networks needed to secure work placements. So while some candidates may have multiple unpaid work placements in impressive organisations, these experiences are out of reach for many other talented candidates.

Blind recruitment is another way of potentially improving recruitment practices, but has some down sides. While making recruitment practices blind may help to avoid unconscious biases in hiring in early recruitment stages, it cannot be used in the entire process if job interviews are a part of the recruitment round. Blind recruitment can also prevent organisations from taking contextual information into account.

## Contextual recruitment tools

Automated tools are available which can help you to contextualise the achievements of candidates in a systematic way.

These tools will be the most useful for organisations recruiting large numbers of applicants at once, for example when recruiting to graduate schemes.

Smaller organisations have however also used these systems successfully to contextualise the achievements of only a few candidates.

## There are two main contextual admissions tools currently available:

### Rare Contextual Recruitment System

Rare contextualises applications to over 100 top employers, including consultancy and accounting organisations, law firms and major banks – with companies they have worked with taking on more diverse hires as a result. For example, 28% of legal trainees in Rare client law firms now come from disadvantaged backgrounds, up from below 20% prior to the introduction of Rare's system.

Rare's contextual recruitment system includes information on a range of factors including the quality of someone's secondary school, if they were eligible for free school meals, whether they worked part time alongside their studies, if they were the first in their family to go to university, and if a candidate had other personal challenges such as spending time in care or being a refugee.

Using that range of factors, candidates are given flags to help reflect their socio-economic background, and their A-level or university results are put into context to reflect the challenges they have faced to achieve those results.

Rare's system can be purchased by employers, and the organisation can work with employers to integrate it as a part of their overall recruitment system.

Alongside their contextual recruitment tool, Rare also provide a host of other support for employers looking to improve diversity at their firm. For more information on Rare, organisations can get in touch with them [here](#).

### REALrating – upReach

upReach offer a contextual recruitment system, which provides both a single "net indicator of disadvantage" score, and contextualised A-level grades that reflect the background of candidates. Their system has been developed based on a body of research looking at disadvantage and its impact on attainment.

REALrating includes information on a range of 14 factors, including the school a candidate attended, whether they qualified for free school meals, if they were the first in their family to attend university, where they lived (including the deprivation rate in their local area), and whether they had previously spent time in care.

Using this range of factors, REALrating gives each candidate a score to reflect the level of disadvantage they have experienced between 0 and 24 (equivalent to UCAS points, where 8 points equals one A Level grade). Their A-level grades are then correspondingly adjusted to take account of their circumstances.

upReach partner with over 40 leading employers in the legal, financial, consultancy and other sectors, using REALrating to contextualise grades of applicants. upReach offer both free and paid-for versions of their contextual recruitment tool. Their free version gives employers a report detailing the contextualised grades of candidates at the end of the application process. They offer a range of paid-for options, which include live dashboards and updates on applications. They also work with employers to integrate REALrating as part of their overall recruitment system.

Alongside their REALrating system, upReach also offer a range of other support for employers on recruitment and Corporate Social Responsibility. For more information on upReach, organisations can get in touch with them [here](#).



## Quick comparison

	Rare contextual recruitment system	upReach REALrating
<b>Previous grades contextualised</b>		
School grades (GCSE equivalent)	Yes	No
School grades (A-Level equivalent)	Yes	Yes
University grades	Yes	No
<b>Contextual factors considered</b>		
Secondary school attended	Yes	Yes
Receipt of free school meals	Yes	Yes
First in family at university	Yes	Yes
Worked alongside studies	Yes	No
<b>Versions available</b>		
Free (not integrated)	No	Yes
Paid-for (integrated into existing recruitment systems)	Yes	Yes

## Going it alone

Where possible you may want to use an already established tool for contextual recruitment, because these tools are based on robust research and the organisations who offer them have the expertise to give you tailored help and support while adapting the process to your organisation.

However, if you would like to develop your own contextual recruitment approach, The Law Society provide a comprehensive guide on how to do so [here](#).

## Contextualising work experience

**Young people from less advantaged backgrounds will likely have found it more difficult to gain relevant work experience** – for example because they don't have access to the networks needed to gain a place, because they couldn't afford to work unpaid, or didn't have time to do a placement due to paid work.

**Consider carefully whether previous experience is needed for the role, especially one at entry level.** If you can train someone

on the job, or the experience isn't directly relevant to the role, you may want to put less emphasis on work experience.

**Ensure all candidates have a chance to bring out the skills they have gained through less traditional routes.** For example, a candidate may have developed teamwork skills through a job in a bar, or the ability to prioritise against competing deadlines while caring for a relative alongside their school or university work. Make sure your application process explains that candidates can and are encouraged to draw on this wider experience, and that interviewers know to take this into account during the recruitment process.

**Consider the impact paid work may have had on a student's performance at university.** Working while at university has been linked to lower final grades, with students working the average number of hours a week a third less likely to get a good degree than an identical student who was not working. The more hours worked, the greater the negative impact.<sup>39</sup> While taking into account skills learnt through paid work,



it's also important to consider the impact working alongside university may have had on a student's academic attainment.

### Breaking down barriers for applications

#### **Look at financial barriers for applicants.**

If you don't already, consider paying travel expenses for interviewees to ensure they can afford to attend. Think about other hidden barriers, for example whether someone who is an unpaid carer may not be able to afford the care costs to attend their interview.

**Consider which qualifications are required for the job.** Only include qualifications which are necessary to perform the advertised role.<sup>40</sup>

#### **Be clear about interview expectations.**

Giving clear guidance to interviewees, for example on what to wear and the level of formality expected, can help applicants from under-represented backgrounds who may not have access to advice on the appropriate way to dress, or the style of communication expected during an interview.

**Openly advertise positions.** If a candidate doesn't know about a position, they cannot apply for it, and your organisations risks missing out on talent it may not otherwise spot. Wherever possible, and especially in entry level positions and where you are recruiting externally rather than promoting someone internally, roles should be openly advertised. Clear information about the recruitment process and required skills and knowledge should be made available to both candidates and interviewers.

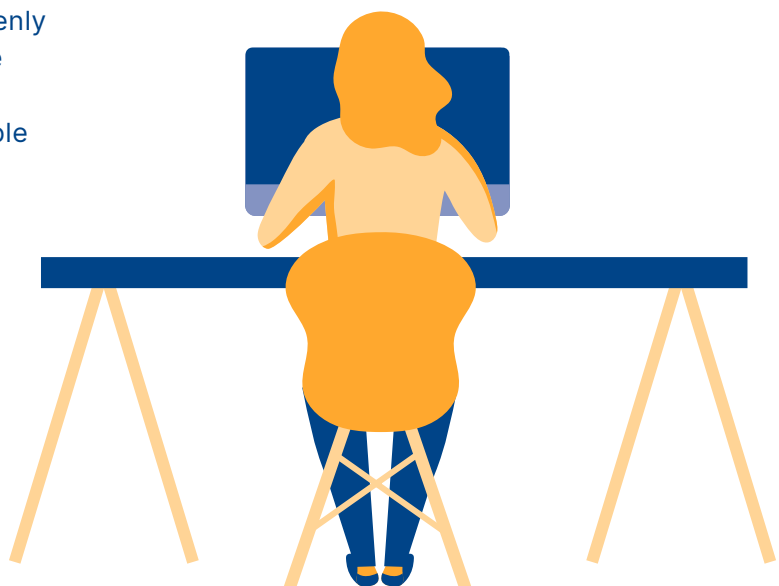
### Challenging biases in recruitment

It is important that in any selection and interview process that candidates have the opportunity to demonstrate their suitability for the role and recruitment decisions are not clouded by preconceptions. Research suggests that biases, both conscious and unconscious, can impact the recruitment of people from lower socio-economic backgrounds in the workplace.

Unconscious biases specifically are both common and deep rooted, even in the most well-meaning employees.

These biases can mean people prefer others similar to themselves and can also impact how people evaluate talent.

Some may for, example, use proxies they associate with employees they have previously known to be high performing (for example, having a certain accent or coming across very confidently) when assessing talent, which may obscure direct assessment of the skills of a candidate.



**Below are some tips on what you can do to reduce the impact of these biases in the workplace:**

**Have honest conversations about talent.**

What skills are you assessing in your candidates? Can you be sure the way you are assessing for those skills works? Are those skills needed to perform well in the job you're recruiting for, for example do you know they are linked to performance and quality of output in the role?

**Help staff to identify and tackle their biases.** Addressing and changing unconscious bias is challenging, but acknowledging the issue can be a first step. For firms in the legal and financial sectors, Rare Recruitment offer sector specific unconscious bias training (with more versions in the pipeline). You can find out more about their training [here](#).

**Consider the make-up of your interview panels.** Having interviewers from a wider range of socio-economic and other backgrounds is likely to bring useful perspectives to an interview process and reduce possible biases.

**What next?**

The Social Mobility Commission's [Employer Toolkit](#) includes additional help and support on how best to advertise roles and put in place recruitment practices to promote socio-economic diversity.



## 4

# KEEPING AND NURTURING TALENT

**To give all your employees, regardless of background, equal opportunity to succeed within your organisation:**

- ✓ Monitor class pay gaps
- ✓ Ensure promotion and work allocation processes are fair
- ✓ Create an inclusive, welcoming culture that celebrates diversity and different viewpoints
- ✓ Many companies have made progress in recruiting employees from a wider range of socio-economic backgrounds. However, to make the most of those employees' talent, it is vital to also look at their retention and progression within the organisation.



## 4

# KEEPING AND NURTURING TALENT

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## The problem

- Research in the legal sector has found that while trainees from lower socio-economic backgrounds are likely to be the highest performers in their firms, they are less likely to progress in their early career and are more likely to leave the organisation all together.<sup>41</sup>
- There is a substantial class pay gap in the professions, with employees from working class backgrounds earning on average £6,400 less per year than their colleagues from privileged families.
- Access and pay also intersect with other issues, such as gender, ethnicity and disability. For example, the class pay gap is even bigger for women from working class backgrounds, with their pay gap on average £2,000 larger than would be expected simply by adding the gender and class pay gaps together.
- Black British people working in the professions from working class backgrounds earn on average £11,000 less than their White colleagues from privileged backgrounds (a difference £5,300 a year larger than the overall class pay gap).<sup>42</sup>
- People with disabilities from lower socio-economic backgrounds are about three times less likely to be in a job in the professions compared to non-disabled people from privileged backgrounds.<sup>43</sup>

## Take action

### Monitor the socio-economic backgrounds of your workforce as a whole.

- This should include breakdowns by seniority (if the size of your organisation allows it), as this is an important way to track not just that talent from lower socio-economic backgrounds is accessing your firm, but also that these employees are staying on and able to progress. This data can also allow you to identify any class pay gaps in your organisation.

### Ensuring promotion and work allocation processes are fair.

- Research has found that informal networks can impact on progression.<sup>44</sup> In some sectors, informal sponsorship is still common, a practice whereby senior employees fast-track the career opportunities of people to whom they effectively act as mentors (for example through accelerating their promotion opportunities or allocating them the best work). However, there is a risk that people tend to informally sponsor people from similar backgrounds to themselves, potentially exacerbating existing inequalities.<sup>45</sup>
- By putting in place a more formalised system for promotions and ensuring the allocation of work is fair, firms can help to reduce these practices and make progression fairer. Firms should build in clear and firm distinctions about what skills are needed to progress.

- As with recruitment, this also means having open conversations about talent and merit in your profession and making sure that your promotion processes are fairly assessing these qualities.
- A formalised mentoring system open to all employees, where less experienced staff are mentored by people who are more senior, can also help.
- Firms should also ensure training opportunities are equally available to all staff.
- The Social Mobility Commission's [Employer Toolkit](#) includes helpful advice on how to foster an environment in which staff can engage in discussions on socio-economic diversity, for example through events or forums. It also includes tips on how to ensure the culture and leadership in your organisation create a shared vision to support socio-economic diversity, embedded at every level.
- While some form of adaptation is part of any job for employees of any background, this process of attempting to 'fit' can negatively impact on employees, resulting in lower engagement in work, which in turn may impact on progression. There is also evidence that people from lower socio-economic backgrounds face micro-aggressions at work, small comments which cumulatively can have substantial impacts on staff wellbeing, which are likely to contribute to this feeling of a lack of fit.
- Senior staff should foster a welcoming culture, where all employees feel comfortable and valued. This should include encouraging staff from lower socio-economic backgrounds to tell senior management about any behaviour which has made them feel uncomfortable at work, which senior staff should act upon.<sup>46</sup>

### Build an inclusive culture in the workplace.

- Research has found that employees from lower socio-economic backgrounds can sometimes feel they need to change themselves to fit into professional workplaces, for example by changing their accents, or avoiding certain conversation topics while pretending to be interested in others.

For more advice on building an inclusive culture to promote socio-economic diversity, see the Social Mobility Commission's [Employer's Toolkit](#).



## 5

# LOOKING OUTSIDE OF YOUR WORKPLACE

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**Working with young people in schools, universities and further education colleges can help to broaden their horizons and open up opportunities. To make the largest impact:**

- ✓ Where possible, go through an organisation already working with young people – they can ensure students have sustained engagement with employers and target support where it is most needed
  - ✓ Look beyond your local area, it may already be well served, while other areas may be under-served and could benefit more
  - ✓ When working with schools, take your lead from teachers – they know their pupils best
  - ✓ Consider widening the range of universities from you recruit from
  - ✓ Think about financial barriers – for example the cost of attending an industry insight day.
- 



## 5

# LOOKING OUTSIDE OF YOUR WORKPLACE

## Working with school aged students

Young people rarely become what they can't see. Many better-off students will have had exposure to people working in professional roles through their families and wider networks, and therefore will have absorbed an understanding of such roles in informal ways. However, for students from less advantaged backgrounds, they may not even be aware that many roles exist, let alone the path to those roles.

Working in schools is a great way for employers to bring this knowledge and experience to students, but it requires sustained engagement over a long period of time.

It is also important to recognise that, depending on the age of the students involved and the entry points to your organisation, these projects may not feed directly into your own company's talent pipeline, but help to effect longer term change in your sector or wider community.

Taking part can make a big difference. Research has shown that young people who have regular contact with employers while at school are less likely to become NEETs (not in education, employment or training).<sup>47</sup>

Organisations can work together to ensure better outcomes for young people, as well as a healthy pipeline of talent from across society for all businesses.

## How to get involved

- The best way to get involved with school age students is likely to be through an organisation which is

already working with these students.

- These organisations will know where help is needed, which can prevent schools from being bombarded by offers.
- They can also ensure schools have sustained engagement with employers, even if your own organisation can only give limited time.
- Importantly, these organisations know how to engage with teachers, are familiar with the needs of students and have tried and tested interventions.

For almost 20 years the Sutton Trust has run programmes to support low income young people to access the professions. The Sutton Trust Pathways programmes give secondary school students an insight into the professions, including law, banking & finance and medicine.<sup>48</sup>

All of our programmes are targeted at students from low and middle income backgrounds. Our employer partners support delivery of the programmes by providing work placements, and staff from our partner organisations are also given opportunities throughout the year to volunteer at pathways events.

But we are not alone. In [Appendix A](#) we have suggested several other organisations you could work with. This is by no means an exhaustive list and does not include many of the great organisations working locally within regions of the UK. Nonetheless, it should help to give you a starting point for getting involved in schools.

Know a great organisation we've missed?  
[Let us know.](#)

The Social Mobility Commission also have a directory of organisations working on outreach in schools you may find helpful, which can be found [here](#).

### Working directly with schools

The best way to work with schools is, in most cases, to do so alongside a partner organisation, but if this isn't possible, or if for other reasons you would prefer to work with a school directly, below are some recommendations to ensure these interventions are as effective as possible:

**When choosing a school to approach, look beyond schools in your immediate locality.** Many of the schools near to large business centres will already have more requests than they can accommodate, but schools further away from urban centres in rural or coastal areas may have had no offers at all. Even if it means signing up for fewer events and engagements, a sustained relationship with a school who currently has little contact with businesses has the potential to make a much larger impact than many visits in a school who can already access several other opportunities. We would recommend organisations target schools with high levels of free school meal eligibility (indicating high levels of disadvantage), with low attainment and/or with low progression to higher education. You can download detailed information on schools in England on the Department for Education [website](#).

**When approaching teachers, go into schools with an open mind** on what your business can offer them, and work together with teachers at the school to develop a programme. Be considerate of teachers' time demands, they may not be able to get back to you quickly on offers of help.

**Teachers will know the most about how to engage with their students;** take a lead from them and ask for any tips they have

on how to approach working with their students in a way they'll find engaging.

**Use the Gatsby Benchmarks**, a framework of eight guidelines which define the best careers provision in secondary schools. The benchmarks are part of the government's careers strategy. More information can be found [here](#).

### Working with university students

Many large graduate employers will already work with universities to reach students, but for any organisations who have not done so previously, reaching students through their university can be a great way to connect with students you would not otherwise have access to.

Below we have included some tips on how to get the most out of university engagement:

**Look at widening the range of universities you recruit from.** The Sutton Trust works with leading universities to diversify their intakes because these institutions offer great chances in life. We know, however, that talent also lies beyond these institutions, with high achieving students from disadvantaged backgrounds still less likely to attend high-status universities (including the Russell Group) than their better-off counterparts with similar grades. There are many reasons that talented students attend universities outside the most prestigious, including caring responsibilities, financial limitations and religious or family reasons. To access a larger pool of talented young people, where you are able to do so, look at recruiting at a broader range of institutions.

#### **Make the most of every engagement.**

If you're going to a campus for a graduate recruitment fair, could you also run a short workshop for students from disadvantaged backgrounds on interview preparation, for example on application writing or interview skills? Work together with university careers services and widening participation teams to set up opportunities for this group of students.



**Advertise any work experience opportunities openly, making use of university career services.** Our research has found that disadvantaged students are more likely to gain placements through their university, rather than through personal networks.<sup>49</sup> By advertising through a careers service, you can ensure opportunities at your organisation are more accessible.

We would also recommend organisations do not give any placements out to the family or friends of staff members.

**Think about financial barriers.** If you run industry insight days, consider covering travel costs and other expenses for students attending, to ensure money is not a barrier to attendance.



### Advertising opportunities to Sutton Trust alumni

The Sutton Trust run several programmes with less advantaged young people to widen access to leading universities and the professions. After taking part in any of our programmes, participants are invited to join our 4,000 strong (and growing) alumni community.

Our alumni are at various stages of their careers, with most either currently at university or in early career roles.

**Employers can advertise opportunities (such as vacancies, internships, and work placements) to our alumni through:**

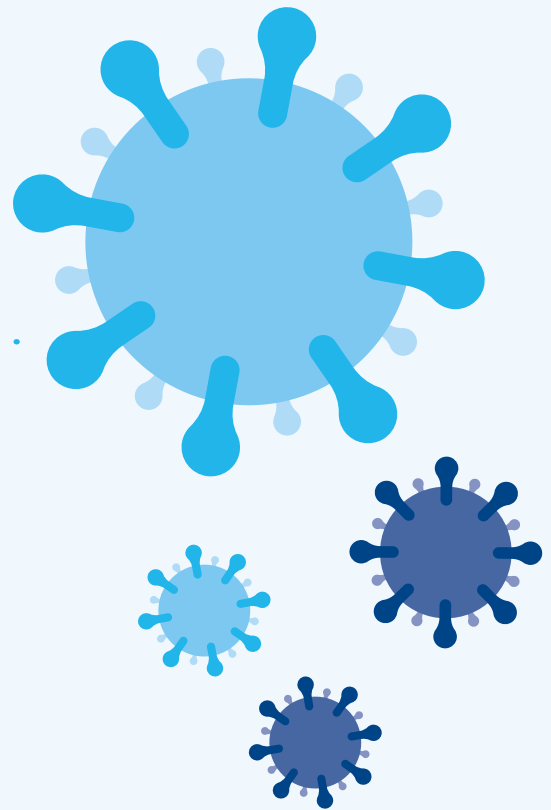
- Our alumni newsletter – sent out to our alumni each month
- Our online alumni platform – a site for Sutton Trust alumni to connect and share opportunities

Both our newsletter and online platform have high rates of engagement, so are great ways to reach a large number of highly motivated young people.

To advertise opportunities to our alumni through either our newsletter or online platform, you can join our employer mailing list. We'll then send you an email once a month, prompting you to send us any opportunities that may be of interest to our alumni.

Get in touch: [alumni@suttontrust.com](mailto:alumni@suttontrust.com)

# CORONAVIRUS AND SOCIAL MOBILITY IN THE WORKPLACE



Employers have a vital role in protecting and promoting social mobility during recovery from the coronavirus pandemic. The health crisis, and the associated economic shock, is likely to exacerbate existing inequalities and create more barriers for young people from less well-off backgrounds or those in financially precarious employment.<sup>50</sup>

**Taking these unequal impacts into account is crucial to ensure fairness as the economy recovers. As well as the other recommendations in this guide, in the short term, employers can:**

- ✓ Move work experience, internships, outreach and recruitment online where possible
- ✓ Ensure any opportunities and recruitment processes moved online are accessible
- ✓ When moving recruitment online, use it as a chance to widen the pool of young people reached
- ✓ Front-load learning for apprentices unable to work during lockdown.

**In the long term, employers should take into account:**

- ✓ Young people from poorer backgrounds have been less able to access remote learning during lockdown
- ✓ The impacts of time away from school will be long-lasting
- ✓ The system put in place to replace A-level and GCSE exams may disadvantage some students<sup>51</sup>
- ✓ Many students have had work experience, internships and opportunities to gain graduate jobs cancelled due to the pandemic.

# CORONAVIRUS AND SOCIAL MOBILITY IN THE WORKPLACE

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It is clear that the coronavirus pandemic is going to have a considerable economic impact.

This is a worrying time for social mobility. When opportunities are hard to come by, people from wealthier backgrounds are often better able to weather the storm, using resources and contacts to access the opportunities still available.

Recessions also have a considerable impact on young people's life chances, with those leaving education during a recession less likely to find a job, not just in the short term, but for more than 10 years after leaving full time education. Many face a permanent wage penalty throughout their careers.

In the coming months and years, employers will have a key role in ensuring that in a world with fewer opportunities, all remain equally accessible to all. Putting in place the other steps outlined in this guide can form a core part of that response. Alongside that, this section outlines some other coronavirus specific guidance for employers to aid social mobility.

## Short term – moving opportunities online

Many in-person work experience placements, as well as outreach work and recruitment, have either had to be cancelled or moved online due to the crisis.

We would encourage employers, wherever possible, to move these experiences online to ensure this group of young people can continue to access important work experience.

**Below are ways that organisations can best enable social mobility when moving opportunities online:**

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**Make sure online work experience placements are accessible.** Not all young people will have access to the equipment needed to take part online, and many will not have access to a suitable work space. Consider loaning or buying laptops, tablets and internet dongles for any young people unable to access content online. Some students may have access to the resources needed, but only for limited times during the day. Based on a survey of Sutton Trust programme students, we would recommend a maximum of 3 hours of live content per day, with tasks or other content accessible more flexibly. The longer materials are available online, the more accessible they will be for young people with limited internet access. As guidelines allow, you may also want to consider providing safe dedicated spaces students can use if they do not have an adequate workspace at home.

**Take the opportunity to widen your recruitment pool.** If you normally visit universities as part of a graduate recruitment milkround, the need to physically visit campuses may limit the number of institutions you can normally attend. Use moving experiences online as an opportunity to open these activities to young people at a wider range of institutions. Developing online alternatives could also help to widen access to these opportunities in future.

**Wherever possible, apprenticeships should be protected.** If apprentices are currently unable to carry out work (for example due to being unable to be on site or in the office), employers should consider front-loading their training as a way to make use of this time. Outreach work for apprenticeships should also be continued virtually where possible.

### Long term – assessing potential

The COVID-19 generation are facing significant disruption to both their education and their opportunities to gain vital work experience. The following should be taken into account during future rounds of recruitment, for example through a more ambitious use of contextual recruitment:

#### School

**Young people from poorer backgrounds have been less able to access remote learning during lockdown.** For example, students in private schools are twice as likely to have been taking part in online lessons every day while away from school, while many poorer students have not even had access to the equipment needed to learn remotely.<sup>52</sup>

**The impacts of time away from school will be both significant and long-lasting.** Analysis by the Education Endowment Foundation has estimated time away from school due to the pandemic is likely to reverse the progress made in the last decade to close the gap in attainment between the poorest students and their better-off peers.<sup>53</sup>

**The system put in place to replace A-level and GCSE exams may disadvantage some students.** The new system relies on teacher assessments, but research has found teachers often underpredict the abilities of some students, including those from poorer backgrounds.

#### University

**Many students have had work experience, internships and opportunities to gain graduate jobs cancelled due to the pandemic.**

Sutton Trust research has found almost a fifth of students (18%) have had an internship cancelled or postponed, 11% have had interviews cancelled, and 4% have had job offers withdrawn.<sup>54</sup>

**Some students will have struggled to work from home effectively during lockdown.** For example, we found that 26% of working-class students and 22% of middle-class students do not have access to an adequate study space, likely to make learning difficult.

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Further advice on coronavirus and social mobility in the workplace can be found in the [Social Mobility Commission's recent webinar](#).



# NEXT STEPS

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**This guide is designed as a starting point for organisations looking to improve their socio-economic diversity.**

**If after reading this guide you are looking to go further, we've included some links below to help you take your next steps:**

## Sutton Trust

There are opportunities for organisations interested in promoting social mobility to get involved in both our outreach work with young people, and our research work.

To get involved with outreach work, organisations can partner with the Trust to support our programmes for young people, or volunteer to support students and alumni across our programmes.

For our Research and Policy work, we are also always looking for examples of good practice in the workplace to highlight to others. If you have been successful at promoting socio-economic diversity and social mobility in your organisation and are happy to share your learnings with others, we want to hear from you.

To find out more about our corporate partnerships, volunteering opportunities or to get involved in our Research and Policy work, get in touch by [email](#).

More information on corporate partnerships is available on [our website](#).

## Social Mobility Commission

The Social Mobility Commission's employer toolkit includes information on measuring

socio-economic diversity, how to change the culture in your organisation, tips on outreach and progression and how to go about advocating for wider change. The Commission are also currently running a series of events and training sessions on different aspects of their toolkit and on different sectors.

## Bridge Group

The Bridge Group are a non-profit consultancy, who work closely with organisations to help them to improve social mobility in their workforce. The organisation brings together data, evidence and their expertise to design practical solutions for organisations to help them to improve socio-economic diversity in their workforce.

## Social Mobility Foundation

The Social Mobility Foundation run an index of employers which ranks organisations on the actions they are taking to improve social mobility. The index launched in 2017 and includes 172 employers across 18 sectors. The charity helps employers build an action plan for social mobility within their organisation, giving each a feedback report including areas where they perform well and where improvements can be made.

## Social Mobility Pledge

Chaired by former Education Secretary and Minister for Women and Equalities, Justine Greening. By taking the Social Mobility Pledge organisations can commit themselves to taking action to improve social mobility through outreach, access and recruitment.

# APPENDIX A

## Other organisations connecting employers with young people

### Through schools

#### Careers and Enterprise Company

The Careers and Enterprise Company is a government funded body who link schools and colleges to employers, to help the schools to deliver careers education.

Senior-level professionals can become Enterprise Advisors through the organisation, who work directly with a school or college's senior leadership team to develop their careers programme.

#### Career Ready

Career Ready work with young people in areas with low social mobility. Companies can partner with the charity to get their employees involved in a variety of activities in schools, from a year of one to one mentoring, to hour long masterclasses for young people and work experience placements.

#### Social Mobility Business Partnership

The Social Mobility Business Partnership helps to support students in year 12 from low income backgrounds to learn more about business. Students visit four different businesses over a week, with organisations running interactive games with students.

#### Speakers for Schools

Speakers for Schools organises talks with influential figures in state schools, as well as running a work experience programme, S4S:NextGen.

Through that programme they give advice to employers on how to set up their own work experience programmes, or how to broaden the reach of programmes they already run, giving advice on best practice, how to identify high-need students and access to their network of 1,800 state schools.

#### SEO London

SEO work with high achieving students in Years 11 to 13, offering them access to academic, professional and enrichment opportunities. This includes insight days and work experience placements in sponsor firms. Employers can become a sponsor, and employees can become mentors or volunteers.

### Working directly with young people

#### Social Mobility Foundation

The Foundation's Aspiring Professionals Programme aims to open up professions for those with the ability to join them in future, but without the means or networks to get there. The programme includes mentoring, skills sessions and career workshops.

#### upReach

upReach work with university students to help support them into the professions. By partnering with upReach, employers can take part in a host of activities including running insight days as well as providing mentors and professional work experience opportunities.

## Sector collaborations

### PRIME

Legal firms can offer work placements through the organisation PRIME. Firms sign up to a series of commitments about the quality of placements they will offer (for example ensuring placements are reaching those with the least opportunity, that they help to develop key skills and they prepare young people for the world of work). Firms taking part can then offer work experience placements through PRIME, so students, parents and teachers can find the placements through PRIME's 'experience finder tool'.

### Access Accountancy

Accountancy firms signing up to Access Accountancy are asked to commit to providing work experience placements to young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds, as well as collecting and monitoring socio-economic data of applicants and hires each year. Access Accountancy can then help firms to develop their work experience programmes, as well as giving help and support for firms to target and get in touch with schools to offer placements.

Know a great organisation we've missed?  
[Let us know](#)



# APPENDIX B

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Answers can be grouped into three categories as outlined below

Answer	Parental occupation group
Modern professional & traditional professional occupations	Higher managerial, administrative and professional occupations
Senior, middle or junior managers or administrators	Intermediate occupations
Clerical and intermediate occupations	Small employers and account holders
Technical and craft occupations	Lower supervisory and technical occupations
Routine, semi-routine manual and service occupations	Working class/lower socio-economic background
Long-term unemployed	Working class/lower socio-economic background
Small business owners	Intermediate background
Other	Exclude from analysis
I prefer not to say	Exclude from analysis



# APPENDIX C

## Defining parental occupational group (continued from page 11)

### Question 1

#### Parental occupation

**Part A:** Thinking back to when you were aged about 14, which best describes the sort of work the main/ highest income earner in your household did in their main job?

- a. Modern professional occupations  
Such as teacher/lecturer, nurse, physiotherapist, social worker, welfare officer, artist, musician, police officer (sergeant or above), software designer
- b. Clerical and intermediate occupations  
Such as secretary, personal assistant, clerical worker, office clerk, call centre agent, nursing auxiliary, nursery nurse
- c. Senior managers and administrators  
Usually responsible for planning, organising and co-ordinating work and for finance such as: finance manager, chief executive
- d. Technical and craft occupations  
Such as motor mechanic, fitter, inspector, plumber, printer, tool maker, electrician, gardener, train driver
- e. Semi-routine manual and service occupations  
Such as postal worker, machine operative, security guard, caretaker, farm worker, catering assistant, receptionist, sales assistant
- f. Routine manual and service occupations  
Such as HGV driver, van driver, cleaner, porter, packer, sewing machinist, messenger, labourer, waiter / waitress, bar staff
- g. Middle or junior managers  
Such as office manager, retail manager, bank manager, restaurant manager, warehouse manager, publican
- h. Traditional professional occupations  
Such as accountant, solicitor, medical practitioner, scientist, civil/mechanical engineer
- i. Long term unemployed  
Claimed Jobseeker's Allowance or earlier unemployment benefit for more than a year
- j. Retired
- k. Not applicable
- l. I don't know
- m. Prefer not to answer question on parental occupation (skip Part B-D)

Continued overleaf

## Question 1 *continued*

**Part B:** Thinking back to when you were aged about 14, did the main/highest income earner in your household work as an employee or self-employed?

- Employee
- Self-employed with employees
- Self-employed/freelancer without employees
- Not working
- I don't know
- Not applicable
- Prefer not to say

**Part C:** If the highest income earner in your household was employed when you were aged 14, how many people worked for their employer? If they were self-employed and employed other people, how many people did they employ?

- 1-24
- 25 or more
- I don't know
- Not applicable
- Prefer not to say

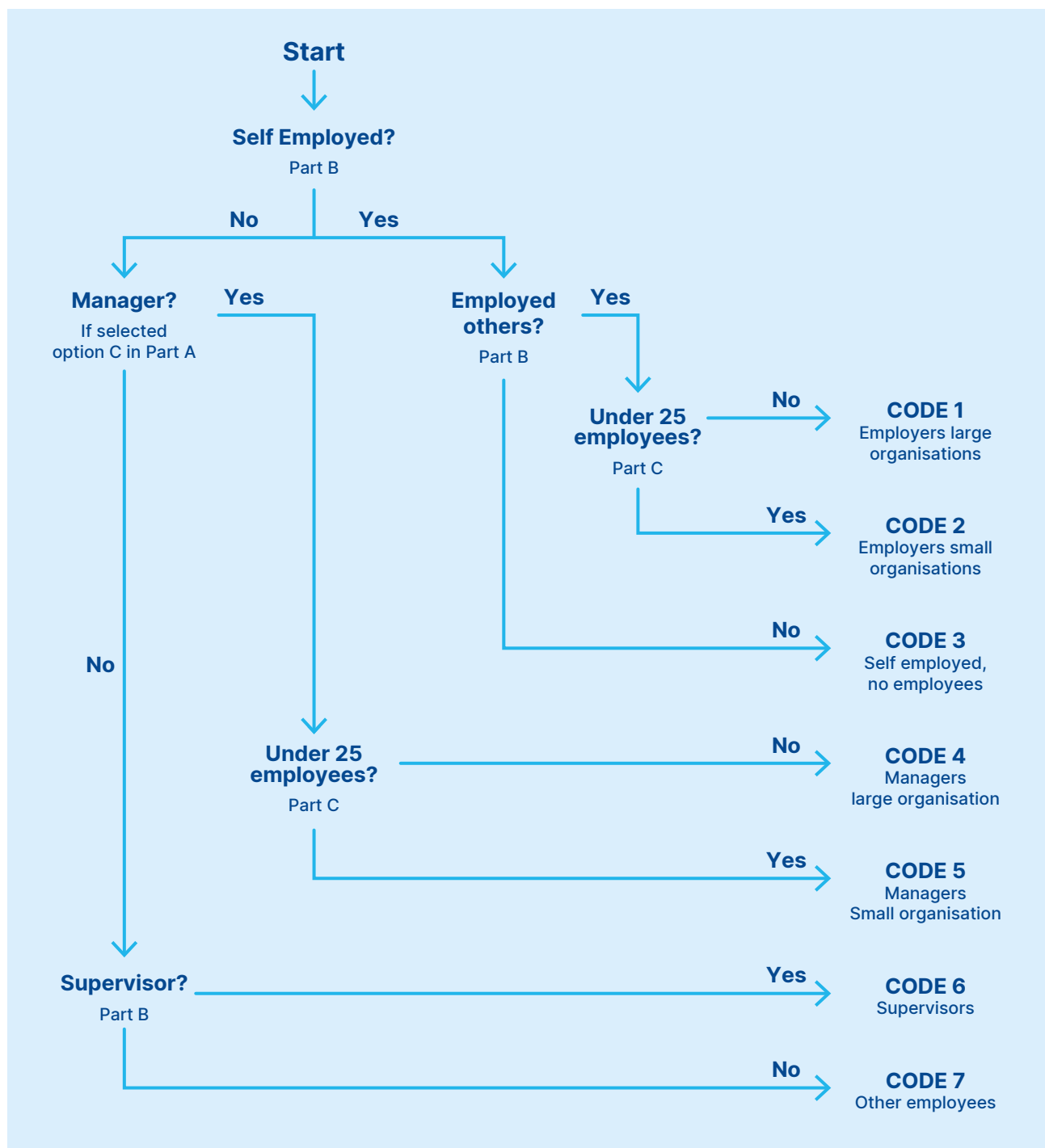
**Part D:** If the highest income earner in your household was employed when you were aged 14, did they supervise any other employees? A supervisor is responsible for overseeing the work of other employees on a day-to-day basis.

- Yes
- No
- I don't know
- Not applicable
- Prefer not to say

You can then use answers to these questions to code employers into one of three groups, as outlined on the following page.

## Defining parental occupational group (continued from page 11)

**Step 1:** Select an employment code from the below



**Step 2:** Using the code from Step 1 and their answer to Part A, determine group

Answer to Part A	Code from Step 1						
	CODE 1	CODE 2	CODE 3	CODE 4	CODE 5	CODE 6	CODE 7
1 Modern professional occupations	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
2 Clerical and intermediate occupations	1	3	3	1	1	1	2
3 Senior managers or administrators	1	3	3	1	1	1	1
4 Technical and craft operations	1	3	3	1	1	4	4
5 Semi-routine manual and service occupations	1	3	3	1	1	4	5
6 Routine manual and service occupations	1	3	3	1	1	4	5
7 Middle or junior managers	1	3	3	1	1	1	1
8 Traditional professional occupations	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

**Step 3:** Parental occupation groups

Group	
1	Higher managerial, administrative and professional occupations
2	Intermediate occupations
3	Small employers and account holders
4	Lower supervisory and technical occupations
5	Semi-routine and routine occupations

**These 5 groups can be further simplified into three broad groups, to allow for comparison to benchmarking data, as follows:**

- 1: Professional or managerial origins
- 2 and 3: Intermediate origins
- 4 and 5 + Long term unemployed (part A): Working class origin

# REFERENCES

- 1 You can find definitions for a range of useful terms, including socio-economic background and social mobility, in the Social Mobility Commission's Employer's toolkit, available [here](#).
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- 5 S. Friedman and D. Laurison. (2019) The Class Ceiling: Why it pays to be privileged. Great Britain: Policy Press.
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- 14 F. Green et al (2017) Who Chooses Private Schooling in Britain and Why? Centre for Learning and Life Chances in Knowledge Economies and Societies at LLAKES. Available [here](#).
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25. Widening Participation in Higher Education 2019. Department for Education. Available [here](#).
26. Ibid
27. R. Lampard (2017) Is Social Mobility an Echo of Educational Mobility? Parents' Educations and Occupations and Their Children's Occupational Attainment. Sociology, 12, p.44-66. Available [here](#), and M. Henderson (2020) Moving on up: 'first in family' university graduates in England. Oxford Review of Education. Available [here](#).
28. Annex A – Evaluation of measures of socio-economic background (2018) HM Cabinet Office. Available [here](#).
29. M. Henderson (2020) Moving on up: 'first in family' university graduates in England. Oxford Review of Education. Available [here](#).
30. M. Fernández-Reino and Dr.C. Rienzo (2019) Migrants in the UK Labour Market: An Overview. (2019) The Migration Observatory., University of Oxford. Available [here](#).
31. The Social Mobility Commission are currently putting together benchmarks for the retail sector, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), the creative sector, professional & financial services, and the public sector.
32. Note – This guide uses the term employer throughout for simplicity. For industries with a large amount of self-employment (for example the Bar), while this term may not be relevant, much of this advice will still apply to the individuals making decisions covered here, for example on outreach work, work experience opportunities and work allocation.

33. In Manchester, this figure is £885, or £827 if transport is not included.
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# SOCIAL MOBILITY IN THE WORKPLACE

An employer's guide





## Question 2

### Parental education

What is the highest level of qualification achieved by either of your parent(s) or guardians(s) by the time you were 18?

- At least one has a degree level qualification
- Qualifications below degree level
- No formal qualifications
- I don't know
- Not applicable
- Prefer not to say

### Why ask this question?

Parental education level is another commonly used measure of socio-economic background. How educated someone's parents are has been found, on average, to be associated to an individual's future occupation (although to a lesser extent than parental occupation, which is why we recommend prioritising that question if you are only able to ask one).<sup>12</sup> Parents who have been to university themselves are also more likely to be able to guide their own children through the process. This is also an easy question for most employees to be able to answer, with high response rates in a pilot of these questions.<sup>28</sup>

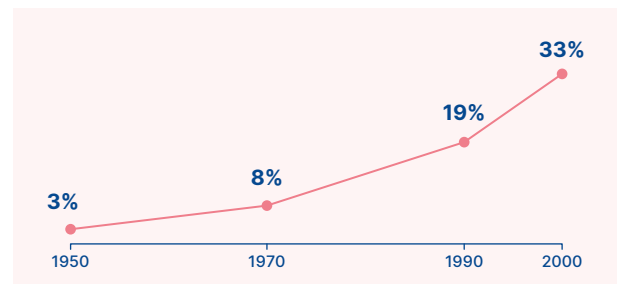
### Benchmarking data

#### General population

**How you interpret this data will depend on the age of your workforce, as the level of qualifications in the general population has changed over time:**

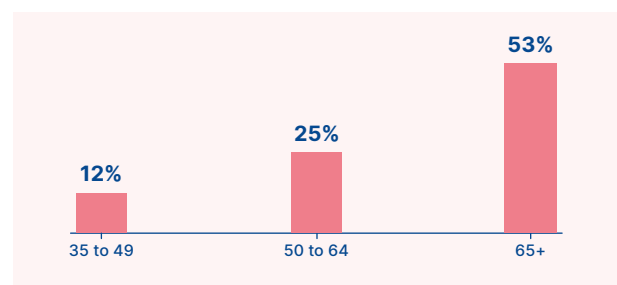
University attendance in the UK has changed significantly over time, with participation rates just 3% in 1950, rising to 8% in 1970, 19% in 1990 and 33% in 2000.

Participation rate in higher education:



The proportion of the population with no qualifications has also changed. Data from the 2011 census showed that 12% of 35-49-year olds, 25% of 50 to 64-year olds and 53% of those aged 65 and older have no formal qualifications.

Proportion of age group with no qualifications:  
– 2011 census



### Graduates

Looking at a sample of university graduates in England born in 1989/90, just under half grew up in a family where neither parent had a degree when they were 17.