

# Annual Review

2023/2024



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# 2023/24 highlights

**15,500+**

individuals supported,  
including young people,  
alumni, and teachers

**2X**

as many of our students  
accept offers from high tariff  
universities compared to the  
UCAS comparator group

**11,900**

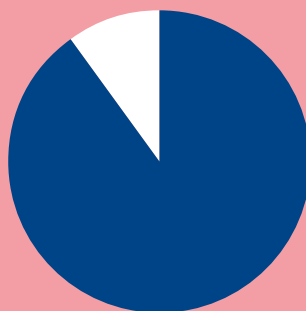
young people aged  
16-18 taking part in  
our programmes

Launched our policy  
manifesto –

**Fair  
Opportunity  
For All**

**15**

pieces of policy  
focused research  
published



**90%**

of our programme  
participants apply for  
university in their first  
eligible year

**31**

General Election policy  
commitments made by  
main UK political parties  
reflecting Sutton Trust  
recommendations

**2,600**

alumni supported  
through programmes,  
bursaries, events and  
opportunities



# Welcome from the Chairperson



I write this a few months into my tenure as Chairperson of the Sutton Trust. It has been an honour to take on the role at such a prestigious organisation.

First, I want to formally recognise the huge role Sir Peter Lampl has played over the past 27 years as Executive Chair: founding The Sutton Trust, transforming the lives of tens of thousands of talented students, re-imagining research on this topic, incubating and chairing the EEF, and building national consensus around the social mobility imperative. A remarkable contribution to the UK's prosperity and fairness. Thankfully, Sir Peter has agreed to continue as a Trustee, so we will continue to benefit from his experience and insight.

I would also like to thank our longstanding Trustees Tim Bunting, Sir Peter Gershon, Lady Susan Lampl and Dame Louise Richardson who have stepped down in the last year, as well as welcoming Fiona Forbes, Erica Wax, Martin Sullivan, Stephen Julius and the Rt Hon. the Lord Brady of Altrincham to the board.

I've spent much of my time so far meeting supporters and other stakeholders. I appreciate the time many of you have taken. It has been a pleasure to hear your passion for the cause, warmth for the Trust, ambition for the future and willingness to support.

Indeed, the need for our work has never been greater. The UK remains one of the most challenging countries in the developed world for social mobility. If anything, the outlook for young people from low-income families has worsened through the pandemic and cost of living crisis.

That said, I am energised by the difference we can make at the Sutton Trust, and I'm excited to be taking the organisation forward into its next chapter. Moreover, I look forward to working collaboratively with Government, business and the education sector to take our agenda forward. Social mobility is recognised by an increasing number of stakeholders as one of the most pressing problems holding our country back, both socially and economically – and the coming years represent a crucial moment to make a difference.

Let me end by thanking all our donors, supporters and partners. We could not do our work without you, and I hope we can count on your support in the years to come.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ian Walsh'.

**Ian Walsh**  
Chairperson

# CEO Update

The last year has been another busy and successful period for the Sutton Trust, and I'm proud of what the team has delivered for the young people we support, and on our agenda more broadly.

Our programmes empower talented young people to access great universities and careers, and I'm delighted that we were able to support 12,000 young people from across the UK last year – a record for the Trust. Meeting students on our programmes is inspiring. I'm always struck by the energy and optimism they bring, and it is truly a privilege to help them maximise the opportunities they can access.

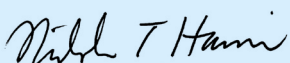
Indeed, our growing and engaged alumni community of over 35,000 is testament to the power of our programming, and it has been fantastic to engage with alumni on our work, many of whom still volunteer for the trust, and many of whom are also initiating social mobility initiatives in their own lives and workplaces.

We've had a change of government this year of course, and this has energised our research and advocacy work. We published our social mobility manifesto – Fair Opportunity For All – during the snap election campaign. It was very well received and now forms our advocacy template for the next few years. Since the election, we have been engaging with the new government, particularly around their Opportunity Mission, as well as getting to know the new Shadow Team.

Our work to change the system is not only focused on government, and we have also initiated projects with both the tech and screen industries which aim to choreograph groups of leading companies to initiate change in their sectors.

As we enter a new strategy period, I'm looking forward to further growing the impact of the Trust, whether that is growing our programme support, advocating for and delivering bigger policy wins, turbo-charging our alumni community, or working to choreograph change within business sectors. Our mission is to break the link between background and opportunity, and there is still much to do to achieve this.

Let me finish by also thanking all our partners, supporters, and generous donors – and also extending a special thank you to Sir Peter Lampl for all his achievements with the Trust. I'd also like to welcome Ian Walsh as our new Chairperson, and I look forward to working with him and the rest of the Trustees to deliver our agenda.



**Nick Harrison**

Chief Executive Officer



# About The Sutton Trust

The Sutton Trust is the UK's leading social mobility charity. We believe every young person should have a fair chance in life, regardless of their family's income, the school they go to or where they grow up. But today in this country, the opportunity to succeed is heavily shaped by socio-economic background. Our mission is to change this. Our programmes empower young people to access life-changing opportunities, and our research influences national change to deliver a fairer future.

Each year, together with our university and employer partners, we support **over 10,000 young people** to reach their potential through our **university, apprenticeship and career access programmes**. And our support doesn't stop there. We engage our **thriving alumni community** to help them to succeed in their professions and to act as advocates for social mobility.

Our **rigorous and extensive research** shines a light on barriers to opportunity from the early years to the workplace, and we strive to **influence national policy change** with evidence-based solutions to tackle educational and workplace inequality. Using insights from our programmes and research, we also test and scale new ideas in education and employment practice.

As an **independent charity**, our work is entirely reliant on the generous support of our community of donors. The need to **support our work to tackle the UK's low social mobility** has never been greater.



# Programmes

Each year we support thousands of high-attaining young people from low socio-economic backgrounds to make informed choices about their future, maximise their talents, and realise their aspirations.

In academic year 23/24 we supported record numbers of beneficiaries, with highlights including:

**23,000+ applications** to our programmes.

**15,500+ individuals** supported – including c.11,900 young people (pre-18), c.2,600 alumni and 1,000 teachers.

Working with **20 university partners** and **over 120 employers** to support students participating in **over 1,000 work experience placements** and engaging with **over 200 industry volunteers**.



## Programme Eligibility

In every cohort, we apply **five socio-economic and one academic attainment eligibility criteria** to ensure we are reaching the young people that will benefit most:

**Free School Meals** eligibility

**First generation** of their family to attend university

Live in a **neighbourhood of socio-economic deprivation**

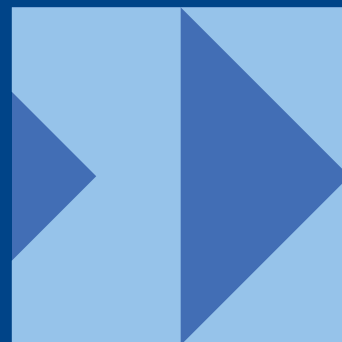
Attend a **Sutton Trust target school** (defined as a school or college with a below-average A-level or Higher point score and/or a low rate of progression to higher education)

Been in **local authority care**

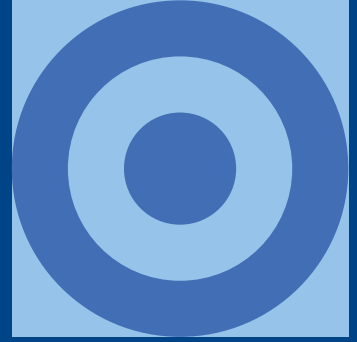
Predicted to attain at least five GCSEs grade 9-6 (equivalent to A\* to B), or at least five A or B grades at National 5 in Scotland.

The students we support have often grown up in areas with **high rates of poverty and economic deprivation**; nearly half have been eligible for free school meals. They attend state-funded schools and **more than 75% are the first in their family to attend university**. Our programmes are open to students from across the UK, encouraging applications from regional social mobility cold spots such as those in the North-East, North-West, and the West Midlands.

Despite the challenges they have faced, young people on our programmes are **often outstanding students with high potential** to excel in university and their careers, and our cohorts reflect **greater ethnic and gender diversity** than found in comparative courses at Russell Group institutions. In 2023/24 we received **more than five applications for each place** on our programmes, demonstrating the critical need for our programmes to support disadvantaged young people and help them unlock their considerable talents.







## Programme Impact

As a result of taking part in our programmes, students will **increase their confidence, develop skills for the future and make an informed choice** about next steps.

Analysis of UCAS applications and offers for those completing A-Levels or equivalent in 2023 show:

- **Nine in ten students (90%) apply to university for study immediately after A-Levels** (or equivalent in other UK nations), with between 74-80% of the total cohort accepting a place.
- **Almost all programme participants who apply to university choose to apply to at least one high tariff university** (typically around four in five, 80%, of the total cohort) and between 40%-48% accept a place.
- In general **twice as many participants** accepted a place at a high tariff university compared to a demographically matched comparator group.
- Engagement in **Sutton Trust Online (STO)** also has a **positive impact for students on other programmes**. For example, UK Summer School participants who engaged with STO were significantly more likely to accept an offer at a high tariff university than those who did not activate their account (56% vs 34%).

Previous longitudinal analysis of data from the Higher Education Access Tracker has shown:

- **88%** of 2018 UK Summer School participants achieved a **First or 2:1 for their degree**, compared with 79% of qualifiers across the sector as a whole.
- **96%** of UK Summer School participants starting university in 2021/21 **continued their studies** after their first year.
- **80%** of 2020 graduates in employment who took part in our UK Summer Schools were **in high skill level occupations** (managerial, professional, and associate professional), compared to 70% of all 2020 graduates in employment.

# UK Summer Schools

Each year we give **over 2,000 talented students** aged 16-17 the chance to experience what student life is really like at leading universities across the UK. With our **12 university partners**, students explore academic life in **over 40 subject areas** by attending lectures, workshops, seminars, and hands-on sessions, and take part in social activities that introduce them to the local area and university culture. They are also supported to **develop their skills for applying to university**, including navigating student finance and living independently.

In 2023/24, the Trust received **15,655 applications** for UK Summer School places and **offered 2,651 places**. This is equivalent to 5.9 applications per place. 2023/24 was an exceptional year and we were able to increase places available, but to ensure organisational sustainability moving forward we will think strategically about how we can apply resources, including access to Sutton Trust Online, to best support talented young people to unlock their potential.

Evaluation for our 2022/23 cohort showed:

- **88%** of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the summer school had helped them **make more informed decisions** about their post-school options.
- At the end of the summer school, **90%** of respondents felt **confident about applying** to university, up from 68% at baseline. There was also a 37-percentage point increase in respondents' feeling confident about making a university application for their summer school.
- **84%** of respondents agreed that the summer school had given them **the skills needed to navigate the higher education system**.
- Attending the summer school made participants feel substantially more **comfortable about the transition to university and fitting in socially**. Student ambassadors had a highly positive role in this process.
- Attending the summer school also **positively changed students' perceptions** of universities as accessible and inclusive places.
- **93% of participants enjoyed taking part.**

## 70%

were the **first in their family** to attend university

## 54%

have been eligible for **Free School Meals**

## 89%

come from **disadvantaged neighbourhoods**

## 75%

come from a **Sutton Trust target school**



**“Taking part in the programme has impacted me hugely; I know I can live away from home, knowing I am safe and comfortable with the university. Before attending this programme, I was unsure of applying to university and the course I was interested in doing but after attending, gaining experience, and learning about new opportunities, I am excited.”**

**UK Summer School participant, 2024**





# US Programme

Together with our partner the Fulbright Commission, we supported **150 students** to take part in this programme in 2023/24. This included a week-long trip to the States, where students get a **taste of US higher education and culture at leading institutions** such as Yale, MIT, and Princeton, and a UK-based residential to **experience UK universities** and receive **comprehensive US admissions advice** from experts, including understanding financial aid at American universities.

The impact of the US Programme is profound and can leverage **huge financial returns for participants**, as they leave their university experience free of the significant debt that their peers in the UK system are saddled with. Since its inception, **653 US Programme participants have enrolled** with some of the most prestigious universities in the world including **47 at Princeton, 31 at Harvard** and **29 at Yale**. Our students have accessed **over \$170m in financial aid** and importantly, **80% of participants return to the UK** after graduating, bringing their knowledge, skills, and talent back with them.

**44 students** from Cohort 12 (starting the programme in 2022/23) have **secured places at US colleges this year** – an acceptance rate of 48%. Students have been awarded places across 28 institutions including four at both **Harvard** and **Emory** and three at **Princeton**, three at **Northwestern** and three at **Dartmouth**. The 44 students have been awarded at total of **\$14.8m in financial aid** across their 4 years of study.

Evaluation for our 2022/23 cohort showed:

- After the programme, **97% are planning to attend university** in the US or UK, with most students intending to apply to US universities also intending to apply for a place at a UK university.
- **89%** of participants felt they had the support needed to make their application to a US university.
- **95%** of participants felt prepared for the crucial US admissions tests at the end of the programme, compared to only 15% at the start.
- **93%** of participants knew what US universities look for at the end of the programme, compared to 33% at the start.

## 67%

were the **first in their family** to attend university

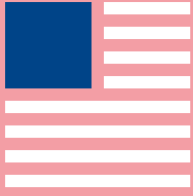
## 47%

have been eligible for **Free School Meals**

## 78%

come from **disadvantaged neighbourhoods**





**“More than just an academic endeavour, the programme fosters enduring friendships with like- minded individuals. This experience has been so instrumental in my confidence growth during Year 12, greatly contributing to my overall development and achievements”**

**US Programme participant accepted to Dartmouth University.**





# Sutton Trust Online

Sutton Trust Online, supported by Bloomberg, launched in 2020 to meet the challenges of the pandemic, supporting our swift pivot to virtual delivery during a time of acute need. Sutton Trust Online is **now embedded in the way we deliver our programmes**, with all participants having access to the virtual platform that covers four phases of content:

- **Explore:** supports students in their exploration of post-18 options, whether that be university, apprenticeships, or careers.
- **Apply:** supports students in creating a competitive and powerful university and/or apprenticeship application.
- **Prepare:** supports students in their preparation for university or an apprenticeship.
- **Succeed:** supports students in transitioning to studying and living in a post-18 environment.

Alongside students participating in our university-access and workplace-access programmes, since its creation Sutton Trust Online has also been offered to students who applied for these programmes but were not successful in securing a place, as long as they met our programme eligibility criteria.

In 2023/24 we also opened direct applications for Sutton Trust Online for the first time, growing our offering to ensure that we can reach more talented young people. We received **782 direct applications**, of which 558 met our eligibility criteria and accepted a place. We are pleased with this for our pilot year of offering this and look forward to further developing our marketing and offer in this space.

As a result of direct applications and growth in applications to our other programmes, we reached a total of **11,400 Year 12 students** who activated an account on the platform, a c.2,000 increase compared to the previous year. In total over **43,000 students** have now received support **since STO launched**.

# 782

**direct applications**  
via the Sutton Trust  
Online platform

# 11,400

**Year 12 students**  
activated an account  
on the Sutton Trust  
Online platform

# 43,000

students have **received**  
**support** since the launch  
of Sutton Trust Online



**“What I liked most about STO is how it provided me with a wealth of resources and clear, detailed information about my future options and pathways. The guidance and tools boosted my confidence in making informed decisions regarding my education and career”**

STO participant from the external evaluation

This year we’ve worked hard to improve engagement with the platform and its resources. As a result:

- **23,986 messages** have been sent on **Sutton Trust Online Chat** in 2023-24, connecting students and alumni.
- **Over 6,500 students** have watched our Sutton Trust Online onboarding webinar, with over 2,600 attending live and high levels of engagement – with hundreds of questions asked via the chat box functionality and several Sutton Trust staff on hand to ensure prompt answers.
- We have made recordings available for **over 130 webinars** for Sutton Trust Online users to access. Topics include student experience at specific universities, taster lectures for subjects, university funding, apprenticeships Q&As, making the most of open days, choosing a course, and student experience for diverse demographics of students.
- **4,280** students have used OSCAR, the **personal statement builder**

In 2023/24, we conducted an **external evaluation of the programme**. This focused both on the university outcomes for users as well as evaluation of their experience of the platform and recommendations for improvements using the evaluators expert digital team.

Students engaging with Sutton Trust Online are **significantly more likely to apply to and gain acceptance at competitive institutions**. Critically, **the level of engagement with Sutton Trust Online correlates with success**. Students who engage deeply with the platform are statistically more likely to receive offers and acceptances than their less-engaged peers. This tells us that Sutton Trust Online isn’t just helping students apply to these universities – it’s **equipping them with the skills and knowledge to succeed in the highly competitive application process**.

# Pathways to the Professions

Each year our Pathways to the Professions programmes support **over 1,000 talented students** aged 16-18 to **understand more about specific subjects and career sectors**, levelling the playing field with their more socio-economically advantaged peers when it comes to accessing networks, information, and critical work experience placements.

Pathways programmes run for 18 months and focus on a specific profession or industry, such as law, engineering, medicine, consulting, or banking & finance. Delivery is in collaboration with **12 leading universities and over 100 employer partners**, and includes university-led conferences, skills sessions, admissions support, and work placements.

We support students **across the country**, with university partners including Exeter, LSE, Nottingham, Warwick, Manchester, Newcastle, and Cardiff. We also offer online-only options for Banking & Finance and Law programme streams, and our Pathways to Consulting programme is entirely online with four leading consultancy firms.

In 2023/24, the Trust received **6,234 applications** for our Pathways programmes and **offered 1,552 places**. This is equivalent to 4 applications for each place, demonstrating the critical need for this programme.

## 75%

were the **first in their family** to attend university

## 46%

have been eligible for **Free School Meals**

## 90%

come from **disadvantaged neighbourhoods**

## 62%

come from a **Sutton Trust target school**







**“The programme exposed me to the entire spectrum of careers in the banking and finance sector, through networking events, information sessions, and work experience at notable industry names. Most importantly, however, the programme gave me courage and belief. It allowed me to envision myself in a high-flying finance career, something that seemed all too distant from what I was exposed to growing up. Visibility is super important!”**

Pathways to Banking & Finance participant, 2023/24

#### **Programmatic highlights in 2023/24 included:**

- Supporting over **400 work experience placements** across all of our industry sectors over the Easter break and May half-term.
- Our **Pathways to Banking & Finance** and **Pathways to Law** conferences supported 341 students and included excellent employer-led sessions from organisations such as Citi, DLA Piper, Irwin Mitchell, PwC UK and Orbis Investment.
- **75%** of attendees felt the conferences had helped them make an informed choice about whether to enter the sector, and over **70%** agreed they had developed key employability skills.
- Our **Pathways to Engineering** conference engaged 83 students from Cardiff, Liverpool and Warwick university programmes, and we partnered with Mercedes for 45 students to attend a careers day at their offices.
- For **Pathways to Medicine**, we hosted 120 students for an online week of work experience with our partner universities – Imperial, Nottingham, Newcastle & Hull York Medical School.

#### **Evaluation for our 2022-24 cohort showed:**

- **Confidence in applying to university increased**, especially in writing personal statements, rising from 52% at baseline to 85% at midpoint.
- At exit, **84%** agreed or strongly agreed that Pathways had given them the **skills needed to navigate the university system**.
- **81%** said that their **perceptions of the sector had positively changed**, with **81%** also agreeing or agreeing strongly that attending the Pathways programme has given them the **skills to navigate their chosen sector**.

# Access Apprenticeships

Initially trialled as a short intensive summer school, we've learnt from our pilot delivery and have adapted the model to better suit young people's needs. Despite positive outcomes from the initial summer school pilot, specifically in increasing students' knowledge and interest in apprenticeships, only 36% were confident about actually applying to an apprenticeship, with many expressing a need for additional support in their application journey.

Informed by this learning, our new **Access Apprenticeships** programme, launched in early 2024, supports students in accessing high-quality apprenticeships. Taking place over a year, the programme is providing 146 students aged 16-17 with opportunities to **network with professionals** in the industry, **attend information sessions** on apprenticeship programmes, and **receive guidance with the application process** itself.

Every student has chosen a sector strand which interests them from **Banking & Finance, Law, and Engineering**. They then take part in a range of core activities to get a **unique insight into what apprenticeships and a career in that sector** is really like. Activities include work experience, sector insight days, skills sessions, mock assessment centres, and workshops, with in-person and online interaction and opportunities to meet current apprentices within the company.

Students are now receiving **dedicated application mentoring** to support applications to higher and degree apprenticeships, and we look forward to receiving evaluation data and metrics next year.



# Alumni and Post-18 Programming

We recognise that our alumni are a powerful force for change; there are now over 60,000 Sutton Trust alumni at university and in the workplace, of which around 36,000 are in contact with us.

Our **Sutton Trust Alumni platform** (STA) offers exclusive access to job opportunities from companies dedicated to improving social mobility, webinars, and resources. Our **alumni e-newsletter** connects our thousands of alumni with opportunities and keeps them in touch with our work.

Alumni are also a vital part of both our programming and the Trust's wider work, with alumni giving over 1,200 hours of their time, providing in-kind support such as employer spaces to host events, and introductions to employers and contacts who then work in partnership with us. Alumni volunteer in several ways, including speaking in webinars and in person events, acting as mentors, and supporting our fundraising efforts.

We are also proud to have a thriving and diverse **Alumni Leadership Board** who often act as spokespeople with the media, provide feedback on programme improvements and develop ways for the Trust to support its alumni body after students complete their programme.

## Careers Plus Programmes

Because we recognise that **access to university is not the end of the barriers for our alumni**, we also offer a career readiness post-18 programme, designed to provide additional support during their time as an undergraduate. The **Careers Plus programme** is designed to help level the playing field and give high-attaining young people the opportunity to further develop their employability skills, gain critical work experience, and access mentoring with some of the UK's leading employers in selected professional sectors.

In 2023/24, 55 alumni participated in our **Careers Plus: Law** programme with work experience opportunities, a variety of skills-based sessions, and mentoring opportunities from employers. Following the programme **89%** of students surveyed agreed that the work experience made them **more likely to enter the profession**, and **100% would recommend the programme** to their fellow alumni.

For 2024-25, we will continue to run **Careers Plus: Law** and will be expanding our delivery to run two additional programmes – **Careers Plus: Consulting** and **Careers Plus: Tech**. We are excited to be bringing these two new programmes to life, working with existing delivery partners from Pathways to Consulting to support our expansion into post-18 programmes in consulting, and exploring new partnerships to deliver our tech programme.

## Bursaries

We have now also completed year three of both the **Careers Skills Bursary**, supported by Bloomberg LP, and the **Opportunity Bursary**, supported by JPMorganChase. The bursary programmes include both financial support to students as well as mentoring and, for the Careers Skills Bursary, a week-long work experience at Bloomberg LP in London. In 2023/24, we awarded a total of 72 bursaries.

# Ibrahim

## US Programme, 2015 and current

### Sutton Trust Alumni Leadership Board member



My parents immigrated to the UK from Pakistan in the 1980s and settled in Blackburn. My father is a mechanic and my mother a housewife (raising eight kids was as much of a job as anything else!)

Neither of them graduated high school or even primary school, and they came here with a basic level of English. I think that's why they really pushed the value of education to us.

In the UK, inequality is everywhere, and opportunity is very centralised to the major cities. Growing up in a post-industrial town in the Northwest of England, there wasn't much opportunity. If you did want to go anywhere, it would be Manchester, and you'd be lucky to get a train that would get you there on time. **The Sutton Trust showed me the opportunities out there, and that I could access them.**

I remember seeing the financial breakdown of what it costs to attend US universities – those terrifying numbers – and the emotional tax was something I was thinking about. **As a low-income student, you aren't told that you can reach for the stars, or that your world view can expand.** I hadn't been on a flight for 15 years before I moved to the US so that entire process was daunting.

I'd never been to America before, so **the US Programme symbolised adventure and opportunity to me.** That was why I applied – I wanted to broaden my horizons and see what I could achieve. My mind was always bigger than Blackburn, my Mum always said, I wanted something more than Blackburn could offer me.

The opportunity that the Sutton Trust afforded us was not just helping us apply to US universities but taking us to see and experience them for a week. It enabled me to explore American culture.

Coming to London with my cohort before the US visit was also the first time I'd been to the capital. I'd never met people from London, Scotland, or Northern Ireland before; **there aren't many organisations that can bring low-income first-generation students from across the country together like the Sutton Trust can.** My cohort became like family, because no one else had shared those experiences.

One of the best skills I learnt on the programme was resilience. I learnt that one's journey is rarely just a straight line – you make mistakes, you fail, but that's how you grow. So often young people aren't taught how to be resilient, or how to accept failures and move on.



The support I received with the personal essays for the admissions process also helped me to understand what my story was and how to tell it. **It's these same skills that now help me in the working world in interviews, for example.** Now, when I'm selling myself, I can say this is who I am, this is my story, this is the value I bring.

I successfully applied to study Political Sciences at Duke University, North Carolina. One thing that was amazing about studying in the US is they really **turn you into a well-rounded individual** – you grow as a student and as a leader. The ability to get involved in so many extra-curricular activities was perfect for this. I led Duke LIFE, the university's club for first generation and low-income students, where we organised activities and conferences to raise awareness for the needs of these students on campus. I also was elected to serve on the Duke University Board of Trustees, where I got to guide the long-term strategic actions of the university.

After my degree, I knew I wanted to **return to the UK and contribute to the country I was born in.** Even though US politics is fascinating, my mind was always on what's going on in Britain, thinking about how I can develop and change the country I'm a citizen of.

When I came back to the UK, I started out in management consultancy, but I always knew I'd go to work in politics. After that, I worked for the Mayor of Newham in East London, one of the most deprived boroughs in London, working on housing and crime issues. Now I work for a startup that is developing AI for public good. There's this massive role for technology and generative AI in improving public services, and I'm keen to make these changes.

**The Sutton Trust really is one of the best networks I have,** both across my professional and personal life. Once you say you're a Sutton Trust alumnus, you share a bond of what you've been through, and we all try to help each other. A key part of my Sutton Trust experience was realising I'm part of something bigger than myself – I'm a part of a social mobility movement.

It's why I now sit on the Sutton Trust Alumni Leadership Board and I'm so proud of the work we're doing with the alumni network. We have thousands of alumni that want to be engaged and have a desire to give back to the organisation that has helped them. **I don't think anyone would be talking about social mobility so much now if it wasn't for the Sutton Trust.**



# Research and Policy

Our programmes help thousands of young people fulfil their potential, but to see a true **step change in social mobility** in this country, more **fundamental changes** are needed in policymaking and wider society.

Our agenda-setting research identifies the root causes of low social mobility and promotes **effective solutions** through **evidence-led policy change**, from the early years, through to schools, apprenticeships, university and into employment. Since 1997 we have published **over 290 evidence-rich reports**, many of which have gone on to influence national policy.

Over the course of 2023/24 we have published 15 pieces of research, across each of our key research pillars. Both our research reports as well as our reactive analysis (such as around the General Election or the Paris Olympics) have continued to cement our position as a 'go-to' source of evidence and insight on social mobility and education.

## Major publication highlights this year have included:

### **Parliamentary Privilege (July 2024)**

- Since 2010, we have been looking at the educational backgrounds of the 650 Members of Parliament elected to the House of Commons. Following the 2024 General Election, **our detailed analysis of the new crop of MPs finds a considerable change in their school and university backgrounds** compared to those who were elected in 2019.
- It shows a historic sea change, with a record proportion of MPs educated at state comprehensive schools (63%), and moving our elected representatives closer to reflecting the British populace, especially compared to 54% of MPs elected in 2019. However, the majority of the House of Commons continue to attend a narrow range of universities, with 55% attending Oxbridge or Russell Group institutions.

### **Social Mobility and Opportunity (May 2024)**

- This research examined the **British public's views on equality of opportunity and social mobility** – looking at voters views on policies looking to level the playing field, and potential investments to equalise opportunities.
- National polling, completed with *More in Common*, looked at public attitudes to social mobility across the political spectrum. The results show **the public perceives British society as both unequal and unfair**, with clear social inequalities identified, particularly in relation to jobs and education, but also **strong public support for the idea that all young people should have equal opportunities regardless of background**.

### **School Admissions: Selective Comprehensives (January 2024)**

- This series of reports took a deep look at school admissions, uncovering evidence **that England's top comprehensive schools are, in practice, often highly socially selective**. The top 500 show a considerable gap between the rates of Free School Meal eligibility in the local area they draw their students from and the FSM rates of their actual intakes. This means that **even if disadvantaged pupils have a top school in their local area, they are less likely to get into one**.
- The data is available in an interactive dashboard, offering rich insights into the socio-economic makeup of individual school intakes across England, finding that 1 in 5 pupils in England would need to move school to achieve parity.

### **Higher Education Maintenance Funding (December 2023)**

- Earlier in 2023, Sutton Trust research revealed the extent to which **students across the country were struggling to manage financially due to the cost-of-living crisis**, following a period of record high levels of inflation. Building on these findings, this analysis took a closer look at the financial support students receive through student finance. It found a **wide gap between the amount of maintenance support students receive, and the amount they need to spend on essentials**.
- Median loans both in London (£8,500) and the rest of England (£7,000) came nowhere near to covering median costs on essential spending (£17,287 and £11,400 respectively). This gap impacts students from low-socio economic backgrounds the most, who don't have the familial financial support that their more affluent peers are able to rely on.



### **COSMO Wave 2 Briefings – Post 18 Opportunities and Aspirations; Mental and Physical Health (November 2023)**

- COSMO is a **major national longitudinal cohort study** examining the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on educational inequality and social mobility. The study is a collaboration between the Sutton Trust, the UCL Centre for Education Policy and Equalising Opportunities, and the UCL Centre for Longitudinal Studies.
- A representative sample of young people in England who were in Year 11 in the 2020/2021 academic year were invited to take part in the survey, with the aim of following them as they progress through the final stages of education and into the labour market. A sample of more than 13,000 young people was recruited in Wave 1. All young people who took part in Wave 1 were invited to Wave 2 when they were in Year 13, and over 11,000 took part.
- The first two briefings on Wave 2 were published this year. The first examined the **long-term trend of worsening mental health and wellbeing** among young people, whilst the second examined the **post-18 opportunities and aspirations** of this cohort.

### **25 Years of University Access (October 2023)**

- Our major study of higher education trends over the past 25 years reveals **persistent access gaps for disadvantaged students**, particularly at the most selective universities.
- The report shows that while we have more young people accessing higher education than ever, there are **persistent access gaps for poorer students**, particularly at the most selective universities, and major regional disparities in applying to and attending university.

We also published three '**general election briefings**' centred around our three policy priorities ahead of the general election:

- **Reforming Student Maintenance** (March 2024) highlighted the increasingly insufficient financial support for students from less well-off backgrounds, and used economic modelling to propose an overhaul to student finance, increasing the amount of money in student pockets as well as bringing back maintenance grants.
- **Closing the Attainment Gap** (February 2024) highlighted that the disadvantage attainment gap at all stages of schooling is at decade long highs, and set out the basics of a national strategy to reduce that gap.
- **Inequality in Early Years Education** (January 2024), mapped out the state of play in Early Years policy, and set out a series of policies to give children a fair start in life, tackling access to early education, improving quality provision for those who need it most, and overhauling support for families through children's centres and family hubs.



# Public Affairs and Advocacy

A vital complement to our research work is our advocacy – **influencing government, political parties, educational institutions, employers, and other third sector organisations to make tangible changes to improve social mobility in the UK.**

Since 1997, we've worked with **every government and across all political parties** to make sure that social mobility stays at the top of the agenda. Prior to the 2024 General Election, our advocacy efforts focused on engagement across political parties to influence future policy. This centred around our manifesto, **Fair Opportunity For All**. It outlines our **policy roadmap that will enable the government to break the link between background and success and make the most of our country's talent**, by enacting each of our costed policy recommendations. This document will underpin our advocacy work over the coming parliamentary term.

This year also saw an expanded events programme. In September 2023 we hosted the launch event for the OECD's **"Education at a Glance" report**, chaired by Sir Peter Lampl, featuring Abel Schumann from the OECD, Secretary of State Gillian Keegan, and a panel of experts. We also held a **series of webinars** on our election priorities during the first half of the year, with a range of panellists across policy and practice, that were extremely well attended.

We have continued to receive **high profile national media coverage** for our work and have seen increased digital reach and parliamentary mentions over the course of the 2023/24 year, in line with a steady upward trend in the salience of social mobility in the parliamentary agenda.

Social mobility mentions in Hansard continue to grow: between September 2023 and August 2024 there were 102 references to social mobility. In comparison, 20 years earlier between September 2003 and September 2004 there were just 11 references, only one of which related to education and young people. This continued growth indicates how vital our research and policy work remains.



# Thank you to our supporters

As an independent charity, our work is entirely reliant on the generous support of our community of donors.

The need to support our work to tackle Britain's low social mobility has never been greater, and we are grateful for the continued support of the many businesses, trusts and foundations, and individuals we work with. Thank you to all our partners including those who wish to remain anonymous.

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