THE SUTTON TRUST

# Annual Review

2024/2025



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# 2024/25 in numbers

Over

**29,500**

applications for our guided programmes

**14,590**

young people took part in our programmes

**3,957** on guided programmes

**10,633** through Sutton Trust Online

**1,000+** work experience placements facilitated

**11** pieces of research released

**10** policy wins during 2024/25

**4,730**

alumni engaged with programmes, events, and our Sutton Trust Alumni platform

**19,320**

young people supported across our programme work

**£7m**

raised to support our work

**Social Mobility Alliance**

launched

Evidence given at

**14**

consultations and inquiries

**4,007**

media mentions – 25% increase on 2023/24

**976**

teachers engaged with our Teacher Champions offer

Over

**40,000**

contactable alumni in our alumni network

# Welcome from the Chairperson



This report reflects on a year in which the Sutton Trust delivered substantial impact at a time when the challenge of social mobility in the UK remains acute.

Too many young people continue to see their life chances shaped by family background and geography, with persistent inequalities in education, access to high-status professions, and economic opportunity holding back individuals and the country as a whole. Against this backdrop, the work of the Sutton Trust over the past year has been both important and influential.

The year also saw the launch of our **ambitious five-year strategy to accelerate social mobility** and help drive inclusive economic growth across the UK. At its heart are commitments to grow Sutton Trust programmes to support 20,000 young people each year, to challenge government to deliver substantive and sustained reform, to drive practice change across schools, universities, and employers, and to empower the alumni community to become a catalyst for change.

The strategy reflects the organisation's distinctive combination of **delivery, evidence, and advocacy**, and its focus on impact, rigour, and financial sustainability. There were also a number of important changes to the Trustee Board during the year. Most significantly, Sir Peter Lampl, the founder of the Sutton Trust, stepped back after nearly three decades of extraordinary service. His vision and leadership created the Trust and shaped it into a **nationally influential organisation**, transforming life chances for tens of thousands of young people and fundamentally reshaping the social mobility debate in the UK. I would also like to thank Oliver Quick and the Rt Hon Lord Brady of Altrincham for their contributions as trustees during their time serving.

Meanwhile, we were delighted to welcome Jardelle Johnson to the Board; as a Sutton Trust alum, her appointment is a powerful reflection of the Trust's long-term impact and the growing role of alumni in its work.

I would like to thank the Trust's staff for their professionalism and commitment throughout the year, and my fellow trustees for their stewardship and challenge. I am also grateful to the Trust's donors, partners, and supporters, whose generosity makes this work possible.

Taken together, the achievements set out in this report demonstrate the Sutton Trust's effectiveness in **delivering change** for young people, and its credibility as a **contributor to the national debate** on opportunity.



**Ian Walsh**
Chairperson

# Chief Executive update

I am immensely proud of what our Sutton Trust team, partners, and supporters have achieved together over the past year for the young people we serve.



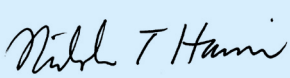
This year, we had the privilege of working with a **record 14,000+ talented young people** from across the UK through our university, apprenticeship, and career access programmes. Meeting students on our programmes remains one of the most inspiring parts of my role. Their ambition, resilience, and optimism are a powerful reminder of the extraordinary potential that exists in every part of the country when opportunity is unlocked.

Our impact does not end when a programme finishes. We now support a **thriving alumni community** of over 40,000, many of whom are actively championing social mobility in their own lives and workplaces. Through volunteering, mentoring, advocacy, and generous giving, our alumni play an increasingly central role in our mission, and their commitment is a testament to the lasting power of our work.

Alongside our programme delivery, the Trust has continued to play a leading role in **shaping the national conversation on opportunity**. Our research was referenced in the media more than 4,000 times this year, shining a light on persistent barriers to opportunity in schools, higher education, and the workplace. Flagship reports such as The Opportunity Index, which exposes stark regional differences in access to opportunity, and Elitist Britain, which examines the educational backgrounds of the UK's leading figures, have helped to underline how background continues to shape life chances.

We have seen encouraging progress in a number of **key policy areas**, including the roll-out of family hubs, the expansion of free school meals, the re-introduction of student maintenance support for some subjects, and new commitments to widen access to careers in medicine. Yet while progress matters, there is still much more to do. We continue to push for ambitious and sustained action from government on the persistent issues that hold too many young people back.

As an independent charity, none of this work would be possible without the generosity and commitment of our donors, university partners, employers, trustees, and supporters. **Together, we are working to break the link between background and opportunity.** There is still a long road ahead, but the progress captured in this report shows what is possible when talent is matched with support, evidence, and ambition. Thank you for your support, and I look forward to continuing this work with you in the year ahead.



**Nick Harrison**
Chief Executive

# Message from the Alumni Leadership Board



We are delighted to be this year's Sutton Trust **Alumni Leadership Board** Co-Chairs, representing the 40,000+ strong alumni community and helping to ensure that the voice of young people is at the heart of the Trust's work.

As former participants of the Sutton Trust's programmes we know **first-hand the impact of the Trust's support**. We both grew up ambitious and knowing the type of career we wanted, but without family connections, experience, or direction that we would later realise are crucial in turning those ambitions into a realistic pathway. The Sutton Trust gave us **access to the knowledge and experience** we needed – support with university applications, opportunities for work experience, and connections which continue to be extremely valuable years after completing the programme.

Looking back, it is difficult to imagine **achieving the careers we had always hoped for** without being able to trace it back to the programme and the continued support the Sutton Trust provides to its alumni. Joining the **Alumni Leadership Board** felt like a natural way for us to give back, to support those on a similar journey and help pass the ladder down to the next generation. We're excited to be joining in a **record-breaking year for the Sutton Trust** and playing a part in shaping the Trust's work, at the same time as we embark on our own careers in the sectors we dreamed of.

We both know many young people in similar positions who may not be aware of all the options open to them or have the connections needed to get a foot in the door. It's **inspiring to see what young people achieve during and after a Sutton Trust programme**, and a real privilege to watch them grow, develop, and reach their goals as alumni. The work of the Sutton Trust is more important than ever in making sure young people's talent and ambition are not held back by a lack of opportunity.

Thank you for being a part of the Sutton Trust journey and giving this opportunity to young people like us.

**Ridhka Kakkar and Warrick Scaife**
Alumni Leadership Board Co-chairs 2025/26

## Alumni Leadership Board 2024/25

Thank you to our all our ALB 2024/25 members for their time and energy championing social mobility and supporting The Sutton Trust.

- **Co-Chair:** Emily Gissing, UK Summer Schools 2013/14
- **Co-Chair:** Mary Osofisan, Pathways to Law 2012/13
- **Co-Chair:** Jack Winterton, US Programme 2012/13
- Noshim Ahmed, Pathways to Banking & Finance 2017/18
- Ibrahim Butt, US Programme 2014/15
- Mitesh Chotai, UK Summer Schools 2005/06
- Fiorella Gallardo Sarti, Pathways to Law 2017/18
- Sam Harkness, UK Summer Schools 2013/14
- Ridhka Kakkar, Sutton Trust Online 2020/21
- Neil McCallum, UK Summer Schools 2010/11
- Maisie Outhart, UK Summer Schools 2018/19
- Saleha Patel, UK Summer Schools 2006/07
- Chloe Pomfret, UK Summer Schools 2020/21
- Thonmoy Rahman, Sutton Trust Online 2019/20
- Warrick Scaife, Pathways to Banking & Finance 2019/20
- Emmanuel Solomon, Pathways to Law 2018/19
- Bethany Spain, UK Summer Schools 2017/18

# 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 14,000 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.**

## About social mobility

**Improving social mobility in the UK will benefit all of us.** It's about making sure everyone has opportunities to get on in life, regardless of their background. But social mobility is poor in the UK compared to other developed nations.

Everyone deserves a **fair chance to succeed**, but young people from low-income backgrounds have fewer opportunities in education and employment, and the impact of poverty limits access to the opportunities that do exist.

Making the most of talent, wherever it comes from, is critical both for fairness and for economic prosperity. Social mobility **drives productivity** by increasing levels of education and skills, and ensuring jobs are filled by those with **the greatest potential** to do them well. Breaking down barriers in an inclusive way means everyone can play a part in – and benefit from – economic growth.

Change is possible and should be a priority to deliver a **fairer, more productive and more prosperous society**.

# Our Programmes

Each year there are **c.50,000 young people in the UK** who are from disadvantaged backgrounds and with the academic potential to access highly competitive universities and professional careers.

Our programmes are designed to support these talented young people from low socio-economic backgrounds to **make informed choices** about their future, **maximise their talents**, and **realise their aspirations**.

In the academic 2024/25, we received a **record number of applications** for our programmes, and were therefore able to support the highest ever number of beneficiaries.

**Over 29,000** applications to our guided programmes

**14,590 young people** supported across our full suite of programmes



Our **delivery model** brings together Sutton Trust expertise, leading universities, and employer partners to create an ecosystem that tackles the barriers faced by talented young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds. We work with **over 2,000 schools**, **19 leading universities**, **130+ national employers** and **200+ industry volunteers** each year. Our national convening power and do-tank model, along with our commitment to rigorous research and evaluation, means our programmes are **uniquely positioned to transform the lives** of thousands of young people each year.

Our suite of programmes includes **five guided programmes**, **two bursary programmes**, and our **award-winning online platform** Sutton Trust Online. Our programmes are all designed to meet our overarching Theory of Change, **building skills, knowledge and confidence** in young people to make informed decisions and successfully apply and transition to higher education and highly competitive careers.

To best meet the respective needs of access to higher education and the workplace, our programmes are split into two pillars – **University Access**, and **Employability**.

## University Access

Research has shown that **access to higher education increases social mobility**, especially leading universities. If you are a free school meal eligible pupil you are four times more likely to become socially mobile if you attend university (Universities and Social Mobility, 2021). If you attend one of the most selective Russell Group institutions, you are ten times more likely to become socially mobile than peers without a degree.

Our university access programmes focus on supporting talented young people from low socio-economic backgrounds to successfully apply and transition to leading higher education institutions. Our **UK Summer Schools, Sutton Trust Online**, and the **Sutton Trust Fulbright US Programme** increase our students' sense of belonging at these competitive institutions in the UK and US, and build their skills and knowledge so they can make informed choices about their future.

# Employability

Poor social mobility results in wasted talent. It causes **weaker productivity** and **lower economic growth**, because it undermines the best allocation of talent and amplifies shortages of skilled workers, through stifling the progress of many high-potential young people. Previous research by the Sutton Trust found that increasing UK social mobility to the European average would result in between **2-9% GDP growth** – at the mid-point this is a c.£100bn opportunity for the UK.

Companies and individuals also benefit from improving the socio-economic diversity of the workforce. Finding the **hidden stars in talent pipelines** benefits employers, with the Social Mobility Commission reporting that in professional service firms' trainees from lower socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to achieve the highest performance.

Our **Pathways to the Professions** programme focuses on these professional sectors where improving social mobility will improve performance of the sector and provide life-changing opportunities for individuals. Alongside Pathways, we also run **Access Apprenticeships** to encourage talented young people to consider degree apprenticeships, and Careers Plus for our programme alumni who want to explore a specific professional sector. We also offer two **bursary programmes** for our alumni, to support them accessing opportunities and building skills during undergraduate study.



# Programme Eligibility

In every cohort, we apply five needs-based and one talent-based eligibility criteria, to ensure our programmes are reaching the young people who will benefit most.

Our criteria:

**Free School Meals** eligibility

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

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

Attend a **low performing school**

**Care-experienced**

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, with **65%** of our 2024/25 guided programmes cohorts eligible for Free School Meals, compared to **25.7% of pupils in England**, and **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 of England and the West Midlands. **90%** of our students live in neighbourhoods that are recognised as those of socio-economic deprivation, using tools such as Acorn from CACI Ltd and the Indices of Multiple Deprivation for England and Scotland.

Despite facing challenges, young people on our programmes are **talented, ambitious, and driven**. They have **high potential to excel** in university or degree apprenticeships and their careers, and we know from our alumni that taking part in our programmes is a formative part of their development.

We do not select our cohorts by gender or ethnicity, however examination of the demographics of our cohorts demonstrates that **low socio-economic background intersects with wider diversity**. In our 2024/25 cohort, **64%** identified as female compared to 55% of students offered university places in 2024, and **67%** of our students identified as ethnically from the global majority compared to 34% of students offered university places in 2024.

In 2024/25 we received **over 29,000 applications** for the c.3,800 places on our guided programmes, more than seven applications per place. Application numbers **increased 26%** compared to 2023/24, showing the continued and growing demand and critical need for our programmes to support young people facing disadvantage and help them unlock their considerable talents.

# Programme Impact and Evaluation

**Robust evaluation** of the impact of our programmes is crucial for the Trust, and we employ **mixed-methods evaluation** of our programmes to track short, medium, and long-term outcomes.

During 2024/25 we started to build our **internal impact evaluation function** with a new role, to complement our existing approach of externally commissioned evaluations. This enables us to develop **in-house regular tracking and analytics** capability, and **strategically commission external evaluators** for in-depth work and to leverage external expertise. Bolstering the existing expertise within our programme delivery leadership team with dedicated impact evaluation resource improves the timeliness and quality of our evaluation work, including reflecting the findings in our practice.

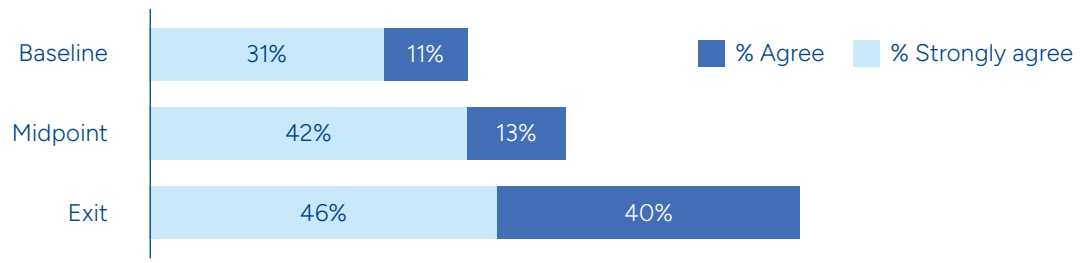
During 2024/25 we have focused on analysis of the short and medium term outcomes data, as well as further building relationships with the **Higher Education Access Tracker** and **UCAS Outreach Evaluator** to try and improve data provision from these organisations as there have been significant delays in recent years. Delayed data on graduate destinations and university applications from both organisations is due during 2025/26 and we are planning for robust analysis to complement the evaluation already undertaken on short and medium term outcomes for the relevant previous programme cohorts.

## 2024/25 highlights

Short and medium term outcomes from our Theories of Change are tracked with surveys **aligned with validated sector standards**, such as the Access and Success Questionnaire from TASO (Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education).

We undertake baseline, midpoint and exit surveys that allow us to monitor changes across the programme and understand how our students **skills, knowledge and confidence** is growing in line with our key Theory of Change outcomes.

### I know what studying at university would be like

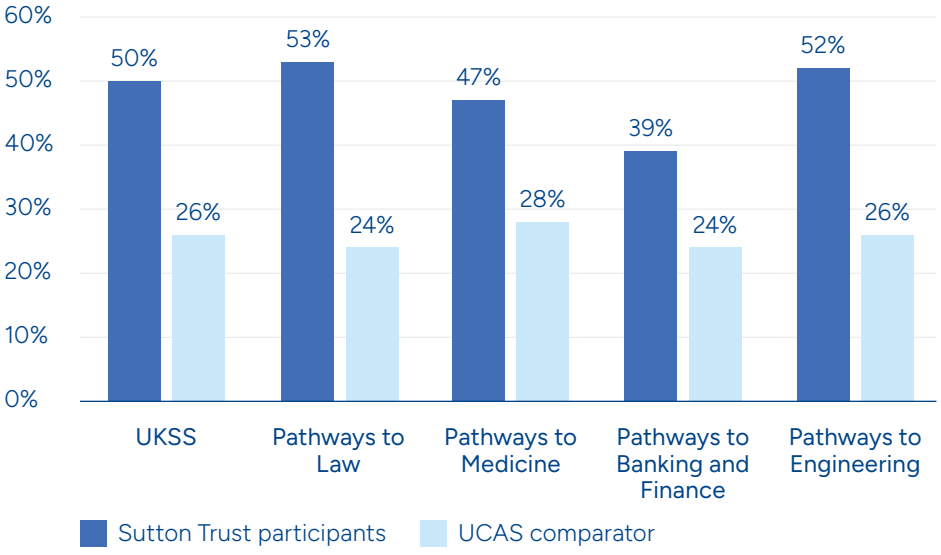


Headlines from our 2024/25 analysis include:

- **90%** of students intend to apply to a competitive university after attending our UK Summer Schools, and the same percentage said attending the programme left them feeling more motivated for their final year of school.
- **93%** of Pathways to the Professions students intend to apply to university or for a degree apprenticeship after taking part in the programme, and **94%** felt more motivated to achieve their career goals after taking part in their work experience placement as part of the programme.
- Students overwhelmingly positively rate their experience of our guided programmes – **97%** of students on Pathways to the Professions and **94%** of UK Summer Schools students said they enjoyed their time on the programme.

Although there have been delays in receiving UCAS Outreach Evaluator and HEAT data in recent years, we have still been able to analyse the most recently available UCAS data, which shows that Sutton Trust participants are significantly more likely to accept a place at a high-tariff university compared to students of a similar background.

## Percentage accepting a place at a high-tariff university, 2024



# External Evaluations

We also commission industry experts to conduct objective, critical evaluations of our programmes. These deep dive evaluations play a fundamental role in programme design, helping us to continuously improve the student experience on our programmes.

During 2024/25 we also commissioned external evaluations from industry experts for a number of programmes that were at key points in their pilot and delivery cycles.

Both our alumni **Bursary programmes** completed three cohorts of delivery during 2024/25, and in line with our three-year pilot approach we commissioned external evaluations of both programmes to understand their impact. We also received the evaluation of the first five years of delivery of **Sutton Trust Online** (STO), and findings from all three evaluations fed into continued improvement of the programmes, as well as renewal of partnerships with key funders.

Headlines from these evaluations include:

- Students using **STO** were **1.7x more likely to secure a place at a high-tariff university** than a control group of peers with similar grades and backgrounds.
- The more students **engaged** with STO, the **more likely** they were to **apply and secure** a place at competitive universities – **53%** of students who were highly engaged with STO were accepted to a high-tariff university, compared to 28% of the control group.
- **98%** of **Careers Skills Bursary** recipients felt they understood what a job in FinTech entails by the end of the programme, up from 40% at the start of programme, and **100%** of the recipients felt confident writing CVs and applying for jobs.
- The **Opportunity Bursary** was overwhelmingly successful at supporting alumni to fund activities, internships, qualifications, courses and experiences that improved their skills and employment opportunities, and students became significantly more confident in their ability to perform well in job interviews.



## University Access:

# UK Summer Schools

In 2024/25 we gave **2,343 talented students** aged 16-17 the chance to experience what student life is really like at leading universities across the UK through our UK Summer Schools.

We deliver our summer schools in partnership with **12 leading universities across the UK** – Imperial College London, University College London, Durham University, Cardiff University, Royal Veterinary College, and the Universities of St Andrews, Cambridge, Sheffield, Nottingham, Warwick, Edinburgh, and Glasgow.

In 2024/25 we offered **196 different combinations of subjects** that ranged from STEM essentials – such as engineering, mathematics, biosciences, medicine, and computer science – through to arts and humanities courses, and social science staples like politics and sustainable development. The most popular courses focused on **economics**, **law**, **medicine**, and **engineering** – all subjects that we know can lead to increased social mobility for individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

As part of their **week-long immersive residential** at the universities, students explored academic disciplines, engaging in university-level lectures, research projects, and interactive tutorials by leading university faculty members. They also received **expert guidance** to support university applications, including personal statements. The residential delivery model fosters a **strong sense of belonging** through campus tours, student ambassador engagement and structured social activities which help students integrate in university life.

**19,575**
**applications in 2024/25**

**12**
**University partners**

**2,343**
**participants in 2024/25**

**73%**
were the **first in their family** to attend university

**69%**
have been eligible for **Free School Meals**

**93%**
come from **disadvantaged neighbourhoods**

**58%**
come from a **low performing school**



**"This has been a wonderful experience that I will be sure to remember forever. This programme has given me a space where I can enhance many of my skills including teamwork and communication. It has deepened my passion for medicine and increased my resilience to get where I want to be. I think this experience also allowed me to learn a lot about myself and how I handle different situations. I am so grateful for this opportunity and have found myself reminiscing since the train ride back home."**

UKSS Medicine participant at Cardiff University, 2024/25

## Programme impact and evaluation

Our 2024/25 UK Summer School evaluation showed that we are meeting our Theory of Change outcomes, with participants leaving the programme feeling far **more confident** in their knowledge of university life, **ready to apply** to university, and with an increased **sense of belonging** at selective universities.

**Highlights include:**

- **94%** of students said they learnt a lot by attending the programme, and the same percentage enjoyed the experience.
- **90%** of students intend to apply to a competitive university after attending the summer school, and the same percentage said attending the UK Summer School left them feeling more motivated for their final year of school.

### Gaining confidence making informed decisions, and applying and transitioning to selective universities

- **86%** of students said they know what studying at university would be like after completing the programme, more than double the 42% at the start of the programme.
- **89%** of students left the programme with a clear idea of which university they will apply to, with those strongly agreeing increasing from 44% at the start to 62% at the end of the programme.

### Developing skills to access and succeed in university and beyond

- **79%** of students left the programme knowing what universities look for in a personal statement, compared to 39% at the start of the programme.
- **68%** felt confident about applying to a highly selective university, compared to 55% at the start of the programme.

### Increasing sense of belonging at highly selective universities

- **88%** of students agreed that 'university is for people like me' at the end of their programme.
- **88%** of students finished the programme feeling they will fit in academically at university, and 81% felt they will fit in socially.

This year we also conducted a pilot of enhanced **Sutton Trust Online (STO) wraparound activity**, working with five of our partner universities to more systematically embed the year-round offer of STO as a complement to the UK Summer School residential experience. We know from our STO and UK Summer School evaluations that students who engage more with STO feel more confident and build more skills, and progress to selective universities at a higher rate than peers who do not engage. More information on STO is found on pages 18-19 of this report.

## University Access:

# Sutton Trust Fulbright US Programme

Since its launch in 2012, the Sutton Trust Fulbright US Programme has supported **over 1,900 talented students** from low socio-economic backgrounds to **explore and access world-leading US universities**. To date, 707 alumni have enrolled at US institutions, unlocking over $200 million in financial aid.

In 2024/25, **132 students** took part in the programme following a rigorous application process. During the programme, students benefit from intensive residentials, expert-led virtual sessions, personalised mentoring and feedback, dedicated financial aid guidance, and an alumni network that continues to grow in strength and reach.

The result is not only impressive university destinations, but also students who are more confident, ambitious, and resilient – better prepared to make informed decisions about their futures, whether in the US or the UK.

Highlights of programme activity in 2024/25 included:

- a **three-day UK residential** at University of Nottingham, launching the programme with workshops on the differences between UK and US universities, how to research US universities, admissions processes financial aid, and hearing from programme alumni.
- the **preparation phase**, utilising Fulbright's innovative **Launchpad** online course, and including support for parents and carers as well as myth-busting, practicing for the Common App essay, and a two-day virtual residential.
- intensive support for the SAT, the **US university admissions exam**, including 30 hours of live sessions, four mock exams, and weekly reflective practice.
- the **US residential trip** in July 2025, visiting MIT, Princeton, Brown and Harvard universities to explore campus life, attend a private university fair with over 25 university admissions officers, and take part in cultural activities – including attending a WNBA game.

From our 2024/25 cohort, **80 students** have chosen to proceed to Part 2 of the programme to make **applications to US universities** with intensive support from The Sutton Trust and Fulbright. The students who have chosen not to apply to US universities have been given access to **Sutton Trust Online** to support exploring their options in the UK.

**69%**

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

**62%**

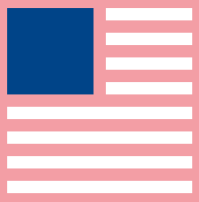
have been eligible for **Free School Meals**

**90%**

come from **disadvantaged neighbourhoods**

**37%**

come from a **low performing school**



**"I am so proud of myself and my cohort – we've all grown so much together as people. We've learnt so much on the [Sutton Trust] programme, made friends for a lifetime, developed new skills, and I am so excited to study in the US and to start this new chapter."**

US programme participant, US Embassy Fulbright Summer Celebration Event, 17 July

**1,857**

**applications in 2024/25 in Part 1**

**132**

**participants in 2024/25**

During 2024/25, students from our 2023/24 cohort took part in Part 2 of the programme, applying to US universities. From this cohort of 150 students who completed Part 1:

- **109 students** submitted one or more applications to US institutions, and
- **54 students** enrolled at **33 US universities**, securing **$19.5million in financial aid** over their four years of study.

Activities during Part 2 included attending **Europe's largest US college fair**, hosted by Fulbright for more than 48 years and with over 120 US universities represented, **mentoring** for their applications, support to apply in both the Early Decision Round and Regular Round, support to **interpret financial aid packages**, and how to move forward from a declined application. For the 54 students who successfully enrolled, they also received support with the **US visa process**, took part in a pre-departure event in the UK, and attended a **reception at the US Embassy** to celebrate cultural and educational exchange and mobility between the US and the UK.

## Programme impact and evaluation

Our evaluation of ten years of the Sutton Trust Fulbright US Programme showed that we are meeting our Theory of Change, with participants making informed decisions about studying in the US, applying to and attending US and UK institutions, and being supported to access transformative financial aid to study in the US.

Highlights include:

- **55%** of programme participants applying to US colleges, with **67%** of these then enrolling to study in the US, and collectively accessing **over $200m** in financial aid.
- Students who did not apply to US colleges after the programme said preferring to apply and study in the UK was a key reason, and **63%** of all participants went on to study in the UK.
- **88%** of students said the programme improved their understanding of US culture, politics, and society.
- **90%** of students said the programme had an influence on their broader outlook and ambitions.
- The majority of students who studied in the US **returned to the UK** after their studies, with only **17%** remaining in the US. Students returning brought back to the UK the skills, knowledge, and experience they built in the US improving social mobility in the UK.

## University Access:

# Sutton Trust Online

**Sutton Trust Online** (STO) was launched in 2020, with support from Bloomberg Philanthropies, as an innovative platform to **expand our reach** and offer a **digital solution** for talented young people from low socio-economic backgrounds who struggle to access our guided programmes or miss out on securing a place.

Since launch, STO has supported **over 57,000 young people** to access digital advice, information, and support. Demand for our programmes remains high, receiving more than seven applications for each guided programme place in 2024/25. With this scale of demand, the need to continue to offer and develop STO is critical. **Over 18,000** of the students who applied to our programmes and met the criteria to be offered STO were invited to activate their accounts, with **74%** doing so.

Activation rates are improving each year, showing appetite from students for the **unique ecosystem** that STO offers, and that despite perceptions of digital fatigue, platforms that **understand and adapt with their audience** can still succeed in creating impact.

Since the 2024/25 cohort launch event in April 2025, **over 40 events** have been delivered – averaging two per week – with **over 5,500 students** attending at least one live event. These included university taster and information sessions, webinars on producing impactful personal statements and university applications, and inclusion-focused sessions for students of colour and care-experienced young people.

STO is structured around four phases – **Explore, Apply, Prepare, and Succeed** – to support our theory of change and help our talented students to apply and transition to their next stage of education.

**19,172**
**account invitations**

**14,156**
**active accounts**

**10,653**
**STO-only accounts**

*Note:* 'STO-only' refers to STO students who were not also on another Sutton Trust guided programme.

**65%**
were the **first in their family** to attend university

**37%**
have been eligible for **Free School Meals**

**83%**
come from **disadvantaged neighbourhoods**

**62%**
come from a **low performing school**



**"STO was a lifeline for me; it gave me much needed advice, and, most importantly, it gave me confidence."**

**"Sutton Trust Online convinced me that I can, in fact, apply to other universities that were highly ranked and gave me the tools to help me succeed."**

**"It is an amazing, inclusive tool for prospective students to use, whichever direction they want to go in. It was curated so beautifully that it helped educate me in different directions I could go in."**

STO users, evaluation focus groups

We have integrated content from our university partners and key information sources, including UCAS, Skills Builder, the OSCAR personal statement builder from Causeway Education, and Aspiring Medics, an AI-enhanced tool providing interview support for applications to study medicine.

Recent **platform content updates** include tech work to further incorporate STO Chat alumni profiles, increasing alumni presence and student engagement, and adding an **additional 25 alumni mentors** to the platform from high-interest or previously unrepresented subjects and courses.

STO now **supports 20 subjects**, including STEM, arts, humanities, and social sciences, and an apprenticeships pathway, supporting informed choice for our students.

## Programme impact and evaluation

In 2024/25, we received the results of our external evaluation of cohorts 1-5 of STO from The Brilliant Club.

Evaluation highlights include:

- Students using STO were **1.7x more likely to secure a place at a high-tariff university** than a control group of peers with similar grades and backgrounds.
- **86%** of STO students applied to **Russell Group** universities, and **44%** went on to study there – compared to 51% and 26% of the control group.
- **87%** applied to **high UCAS tariff** universities, and **48%** went on to study there – compared to 50% and 27% of the control group.
- **27%** applied to **Oxbridge**, with **5%** securing places – compared to 3% and 1% of the control group.
- The more students **engaged** with STO, the **more likely** they were to **apply and secure** a place at competitive universities – **53%** of students who were highly engaged with STO were accepted to a high-tariff university, compared to 28% of the control group.

## University Access:

# Case studies



## Alecia Whitworth

### UK Summer Schools, 2024/25

Alecia attended the Modern Languages and Cultures Summer School at Durham University in 2024. She is now studying Languages at Durham and remains passionate about learning and educational access.

**Tell us a bit about your background**
I am from Sheffield and have lived there for most of my life. I attended a state primary school and successfully appealed to get into a good school on the other side of town. I have always lived with my Mum, her partner and my step sister, and had no support from my Dad. I am very passionate about my learning, and I'm very thankful that the Sutton Trust programme finally allowed me to be around students that share the same mind set, no matter our backgrounds, here at Durham.

**How did you hear about the Sutton Trust and what led you to apply?**
An email was sent to everyone by the head of sixth form, and I remember sitting and filling the application in at my desk. I was very excited to have the opportunity I never thought I would.

**What do you remember about your time on your Sutton Trust programme?**
I was very anxious for the programme. I vividly remember saying to one of the Durham students volunteering at the Summer School that I felt like I wasn't good enough at French to be there. Quickly, through the talks over the course of the Summer School, I realised that I in fact was. I am still very good friends with one of the girls I met on the programme and we still talk everyday. We both met our required grades and now attend Durham University! It's almost a home comfort when you walk through the streets and wave at people you recognise from the Sutton Trust programme.

**How did your programme impact you?**
Before attending the Summer School, I had decided I was just attending the week for the experience, as it felt impossible that I could one day study here. By the end of the week, my heart was set on attending Durham. Throughout the whole experience I felt welcomed and accepted.

Of course, I still battle with feelings of 'imposter syndrome' at my current university, and even feelings of inadequacy due to the vast amount of private school students. However, reminding myself of the programme always reassures me that these feelings are not true, and that we all deserve our place here.

# Georgia Lawton-Bond



## Sutton Trust Online, 2023-25

Georgia participated in our Sutton Trust Online programme in 2024, which taught her everything she needed to know about university life and applications. This support helped her secure a place at the University of Bath, where she now thoroughly enjoys studying Sociology.

**Tell us a bit about your background**
I was born in Wolverhampton and grew up in Telford. I am the first in my immediate family to attend university. No one really understood the application process so applying to university was very daunting for me as I had to research and explain everything to my mom, dad and step mom who were very confused about the whole process.

**How did you hear about the Sutton Trust and what led you to apply?**
I heard about the Sutton Trust through my schools career team and I applied as I wanted to take advantage of the opportunities the Sutton Trust were offering. Their knowledge and understanding of how universities work really drew me in as I didn't know that much in the early stages of applying to university.

**What do you remember about your time on your Sutton Trust programme?**
My time on the Sutton Trust Online programme was amazing! It was incredibly useful to me to learn about the application process, chat with current students and learn about different skills all in one space, and I could complete it at a time of my own convenience.

The STO chat was particularly useful for me to use as I could ask current students about anything and everything about student life. The advisors were so lovely and helpful especially when I was asking about student accommodation as I did not fully understand the different types each university had and had some worries about sharing facilities.

**What would you say to a student who is unsure about applying to a Sutton Trust programme?**
To the students who are considering applying to Sutton Trust Online, please apply! The programme has been a huge help for me when going through the application process to get into university. It is super convenient, you can do it in your own time and there is a vast amount of sources for you to use.

## Employability:

# Pathways to the Professions

In 2024/25, our Pathways to the Professions programme supported **1,122 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.

Our Pathways programmes run for 18 months and focus on a **specific profession or industry**, including: law, engineering, medicine, and banking & finance. Delivery in 2024/25 was in collaboration with **over 120 employer partners** and **12 leading universities across the UK** – Imperial College London, London School of Economics, Queen Mary University of London, Cardiff University, and the Universities of Leeds, Liverpool, Newcastle, Manchester, Leicester, Nottingham, Warwick, and Exeter.

Across the programme, activities for our students included university-led conferences, skills sessions, admissions support, insight days, and work experience placements. Our **unique model** of working with **both university and employer partners** provides Pathways students with exposure to and experience in both academic and workplace settings that they would otherwise struggle to access and envision themselves thriving in.

Activity highlights across the different sectors this year included:

- facilitating **943 work experience placements** across all sectors, including with leading employers like Siemens, Ramboll, Boeing, Deutsche Bank, Mishcon de Reya, Eversheds Sutherland, DLA Piper, and the Bank of England.

### Banking & Finance

- **Launch events** in London and Birmingham held together with Access Apprenticeships Banking & Finance students, hosted by founding partner Deutsche Bank and featuring panel events, chances to speak to current apprentices and staff, and a networking session with a range of leading employers in the sector.
- Exploring different aspects of banking and finance, including '**Discover Economics**' taster days, industry spotlights on investment banking and FinTech, virtual coaching days with PwC, and visiting university fairs.

**76%**

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

**57%**

have been eligible for **Free School Meals**

**90%**

come from **disadvantaged neighbourhoods**

**63%**

come from a **low performing school**



**"My experience at the Pathways to Engineering Conference was very useful in terms of gaining insight into engineering itself and networking, but it was also an unforgettable social experience where I made many friends from all over the country."**

**Pathways to Engineering participant, 2024/25**

## Engineering

- Exploring the range of different types of engineering and the **career pathways** they lead to, including chemical, mechanical, automotive, civil, environmental, electrical, aerospace, architectural and systems engineering.
- Introducing engineering pathway students to the '**Formula Student**' society who shared their experience at university studying different types of engineering, and the opportunity to drive a simulation car.
- Mercedes-AMG PETRONAS Formula One™ Team hosting an **insight day** at their HQ in Brackley, including hearing from Trackside Engineering Director Andrew Shovlin.

## Medicine & Veterinary Medicine

- Workshops and advice on studying for and sitting the UCAT, the UK **admissions test for medicine**, which more affluent peers will often have tutors and additional study to help them prepare for.
- Q&As with clinicians, sharing their experience of and **advice for studying medicine**, managing placements alongside study and student life, and moving into the workplace.
- **Guest lectures** to introduce the options for medical study, what studying and practicing medicine is like, admissions interview skills, patient care, diagnostics skills, and becoming a doctor.

## Consulting

- Co-delivery with four **leading consultancy firms** – BCG, Bain & Co, McKinsey & Company, and Oliver Wyman – opened up the world of consultancy for 155 students from the 2024/25 Pathways cohort.
- **Industry panels** and **insight days** to demystify the day-to-day life of consultants, including workshops on public speaking, problem solving, communications styles, economics, finance, and business.

# Pathways to the Professions

**7,289**

**applications in 2024/25**

**12**

**University partners**

**1,122**

**participants in 2024/25**

## Law

- **'Rules in the Park'** interactive session with Queen Mary Legal Advice Centre, including role play, debate and discussion on how laws are drafted and how and why laws are made.
- **'Learn with the Lords'** session with visiting speaker Baroness Garden, current Deputy Speaker of the House of Lords and passionate about issues related to education, women's rights, and social issues.
- **Mooting competitions**, introducing students to a crucial aspect of legal study and practice, where they can develop and hone their debating skills and learn how to structure a legal argument.
- Visits to the Royal Courts of Justice, Inner Temple, magistrates courts, and guest lectures across the **wide variety of subjects within law** – including criminal law and criminology, family law, intellectual property, youth justice, policing, and sentencing.
- Workshops and advice on studying for and sitting the LNAT, the **UK admissions test for law**, which more affluent peers will often have tutors and additional study to help them prepare for.



## Programme impact and evaluation

Our 2024/25 evaluations for Pathways to the Professions showed that we are meeting our Theory of Change outcomes, with participants leaving the programme feeling far more confident about taking steps to access a career in their chosen sector, more knowledgeable about their chosen sector, and with an increased sense of belonging in higher education (HE) and their chosen sector.

**Highlights include:**

- **93%** of Pathways students intend to apply to university or for a degree apprenticeship after taking part in the programme.
- **94%** of Pathways students felt more motivated to achieve their career goals after taking part in their work experience placement as part of the programme.

### Gaining confidence making informed decisions, and progressing to highly competitive careers and highly selective HE

- **72%** of Pathways to Law and Pathways to Banking & Finance students finished the programme feeling confident they will get the job they want, compared to 56% (Law) and 60% (B&F) at the start of the programme.
- **69%** of Pathways to Engineering students finished the programme feeling confident they will get the job they want, compared to 55% at the start of the programme.

### Developing skills and knowledge to access highly competitive careers and highly selective HE

- A significant majority of Pathways students said taking part in the programme had given them sector skills – across the sector strands this was **89%** in Law, **87%** in Banking & Finance, **82%** in Medicine, **81%** in Engineering, and **79%** in Consulting.
- **91%** of Pathways students said taking part in their work experience placement had improved their ability to communicate, and **82%** said it had improved their ability to work in a team.

### Increasing sense of belonging in highly competitive careers and highly selective HE

- Most Pathways students finished their 2024/25 programme activity agreeing that 'University is for people like me' – across the sector strands this was **72%** in Banking & Finance, **71%** in Law, **68%** in Engineering, and in Medicine lower but still increased from the start of the programme at **59%**.
- Most Pathways students intend to pursue a career in their chosen sector after the programme – across the sector strands this was **85%** in Medicine, **84%** in Law, **83%** in Banking & Finance, **78%** in Engineering, and **67%** in Consulting.

## Employability:

# Access Apprenticeships

Our **Access Apprenticeships** programme supports students to gain knowledge and access **high-quality apprenticeships**. Previously our Apprenticeships Summer School, in 2023/24 we re-launched with a longer delivery model that is parallel to our Pathways delivery. It offers students aged 16-17 a year-long comprehensive programme of tailored support with a focus on accessing **higher and degree level apprenticeships**.

Students choose the sector strand of the programme in which they have a key interest from **law**, **banking and finance**, or **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.

Our 2024/25 cohort consisted of 153 students, with **71** on the **banking and finance** strand, **48** on **law**, and **32** focused on **engineering**. We adjusted the location of the **engineering** strand from Birmingham to Manchester, due to the availability of employer partners and a review of student demand, and we've seen application numbers increase by 57%.

This year we aligned the application dates for **Access Apprenticeships** with **Pathways to the Professions**, across September to November of Year 12. This enables students interested in law, finance and engineering the opportunity to select the programme approach that is right for them – either the university or apprenticeship route.



**89%**

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

**73%**

have been eligible for **Free School Meals**

**97%**

come from **disadvantaged neighbourhoods**

**69%**

come from a **low performing school**



**"During the work experience we did mock interviews, and it was the best thing... I could apply all the skills that I learned there into any job and it just gave me more confidence, and especially moving on to the next stage of adulthood, leaving school and applying for jobs, really putting myself out there. It gave me such a confidence boost."**

**Access Apprenticeships participant, 2024/25**

By delivering the majority of the programme activity in Year 12, it allows students **more time to explore their options**, enabling them to make an informed choice by the time they need to apply for apprenticeships in the autumn of Year 13.

During the programme students take part in a range of activities – launch events, insight days, work experience placements, workshops, and online sessions to introduce them to their chosen sector, how apprenticeships work, how to apply, what employers are looking for, and what careers could be available to them.

Activity highlights during 2024/25 included:

- **All sector strands:** Speakers Trust hosting a **public speaking workshop** designed to build students' confidence ahead of work experience placements, application support webinars, in-person assessment centre events, and dedicated apprenticeships information and advice on Sutton Trust Online.
- **Engineering:** students attended an **insight day** at Mercedes-AMG PETRONAS Formula One™ Team HQ, alongside Pathways participants, visited National Gas for information sessions and **apprenticeship applications advice**, and took part in **work experience placements** with organisations like Siemens, MBDA, and Arm.
- **Banking & Finance:** students took part in an **investment management workshop** with Citi, including interactive exercises and a Q&A session, and Orbis Management Investments hosted an **introduction to financial technology**, to broaden students' awareness and knowledge of the FinTech sector. **Work experience placements** were offered with a range of leading employers, including Lloyds Banking Group, BNY, and First Sentier.
- **Law:** students attended sessions on the **varied career paths within law**, including commercial law with Norton Rose Fulbright, intellectual property with Venner Shipley, and **work experience placements** with leading firms like Eversheds Sutherland, Hogan Lovells, DLA Piper, and Mishcon de Reya.

**836**

**applications in 2024/25**

**153**

**participants in 2024/25**

## Programme impact and evaluation

2024/25 was the second year of delivery for Access Apprenticeships in its new format, aligned with Pathways to the Professions. Evaluation of the programme in the summer school format showed that although **students' awareness of apprenticeships as a career pathway increased** during the programme, they still felt unsure about how best to approach the application process, with only 36% of students feeling confident about applying for an apprenticeship at the end of the residential.

In response to the evaluation findings, we changed the programme delivery to its new format, which we are approaching as we do all our pilot delivery – **monitoring and evaluating** over the three years of delivery to allow for us to assess outputs and outcomes against our Theory of Change, and understand alumni progression to apprenticeships, higher education, and careers. During 2024/25 we commissioned The Brilliant Club to undertake an **interim evaluation** of the new delivery model, due at the end of the 2025 calendar year.

Highlights from surveys of recent participants and our external evaluation focus groups include:

- **74%** of students felt confident they knew when and where to find apprenticeship opportunities after the programme, up from 28% at the start.
- **80%** of students agreed that as a result of the programme they felt confident balancing academic study with work.
- **50%** of students from the focus groups were intending on pursuing an apprenticeship, immediately or after a gap year, and **41%** were applying to university immediately or after a gap year.
- Students gained a clearer understanding of apprenticeship structures, sector expectations, and the competitive nature of applications – for some this **reinforced their interest** and **boosted their confidence** and preparedness to apply, and for others this led to their informed decision that apprenticeships are not the right fit for them, prompting them to consider university or alternative routes instead.



## Employability:

# Careers Plus

We recognise that **access to university is not the end of barriers for our alumni**, so we also offer a career readiness post-18 programme, designed to provide additional support during their time as an undergraduate and help break down barriers to entering a competitive career.

**Careers Plus** 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.

Delivered between April and October, **Careers Plus: Law** began in 2013/14, and in 2024/25 we expanded our offer to also run **Careers Plus: Consulting** and **Careers Plus: Tech & Digital**. Across the three sectors we supported 149 undergraduate alumni of our programmes to explore their chosen sector, with **63** opting for Tech & Digital, **48** for Law, and **38** for Consulting.

Activity highlights during 2024/25 included:

- **Law:** exploring what life is like as a lawyer with leading firms such as Mishcon de Reya and Hogan Lovells, including different career paths, Q&A panels with early careers professionals, shadowing associates, and looking at AI in law firms, with a project discussing the benefits and risks.
- **Consulting:** leading consulting firms BCG, Bain & Co, and McKinsey masterclasses and workshops to help students understand what is involved in a career as a consultant, including topics like commercial awareness, how to succeed at assessment centres, and analysis of case studies to make professional suggestions.
- **Tech & Digital:** insight days with leading employers, including Stripe, Samsung, Citadel | Citadel Securities, and Cisco. Activities included 'Careers in Tech' panel discussion covering a range of tech roles, how tech projects work session with Q&A at Cisco, practice assessment centre with Samsung, and careers talk with the founder of Lux Rewards who worked at IBM before forming his own tech start-up.

**78%**

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

**93%**

have been eligible for **Free School Meals**

**90%**

come from **disadvantaged neighbourhoods**

**37%**

come from a **low performing school**

**“I think my favourite insight day was probably with Citadel. I’ve never been in that kind of environment before, and I know it’s such a top firm, and we were able to do CV reviews as well, from employees, which was really cool.”**

**Careers Plus: Tech & Digital participant, 2024/25**

**560**

**applications in 2024/25**

**149**

**participants in 2024/25**

## Programme impact and evaluation

**Careers Plus: Consulting** and **Careers Plus: Tech & Digital** are both in the first year of pilot delivery, and we will continue to monitor and evaluate the programme over our three-year pilot timeframe, assessing the programme against our Theory of Change and understanding alumni progression through finishing higher education and into careers.

Programme delivery for Careers Plus runs on an **April-October schedule** to best suit the availability of undergraduates to take part in programme activities, so at the time of writing we have gathered end of programme survey results but not fully evaluated the 2024/25 delivery. During 2024/25 we also commissioned an interim evaluation from The Brilliant Club for Careers Plus: Tech & Digital, due in early 2026.

Key highlights from our end-point surveys from 2024/25 include:

- **100%** of Careers Plus: Consulting students felt confident pursing a career in the sector after the programme.
- **67%** of Careers Plus: Tech & Digital students taking part in evaluation focus groups felt sure after the programme that they want to go into the tech sector, with the remaining 33% still open to tech but exploring their options.
- **100%** of Careers Plus: Law students would recommend the programme to their fellow alumni.

## Employability:

# Case studies



## Ricardo Serrao

### Pathways to Banking & Finance, 2023-25

Ricardo took part on the Pathways to Banking and Finance programme in 2023 and is now an Investment Banking Apprentice with Deutsche Bank.

**Tell us a bit about your background and where you come from**
My name is Ricardo and I come from a working-class background in the outskirts of West London. I am originally from Portugal, but I was born here. I attended two non-selective state schools and then found the Sutton Trust, which pulled me towards a career in finance.

**What was the highlight of your Sutton Trust programme?**
The highlight of my programme was definitely the summer work experience. I felt I had gained many hard and soft skills from this, and having a relevant and prestigious work experience at such a young age made me much more employable. I also met some great people on the programme, which allowed me to expand my network with aspiring finance professionals.

**What skills did you gain from taking part in the programme?**
The work experience touched upon some skills like financial modelling and commercial awareness, which help in my day-to-day career. Also, throughout the programme, my communication, leadership and teamwork skills all improved, which I was able to demonstrate in interviews/assessment centres.

**What are you doing now and what are your plans for the future?**
I am now a degree apprentice on the Deutsche Bank Investment Banking programme, and my plan for the future is to really get as much as I can from this programme and hopefully progress into a full-time position within the bank. I would also like to complete my CFA qualification and bachelor's degree, which are a part of the programme, and gain a broad skill set across many different divisions.

**Please tell us how taking part in your Sutton Trust programme has impacted you?**
It made me much more employable to get on this programme, provided me with training on the application process and allowed me to gain an insight into the world of work at such a young age.

**What would you tell someone who was unsure about applying for a Sutton Trust programme?**
I would say apply anyway! Even if you find out finance isn't for you, the people you meet and skills you gain along the way are really valuable and will help your professional development.

# Tamara Delaric-Honutse



## Pathways to Law, 2023-25

Tamara is a Pathways to Law alum, currently taking a gap year before university. Tamara's time on the Pathways programme helped her become more confident and passionate about law.

**Tell us a bit about your background**

My parents came from Ghana around 25-ish years ago, my dad always likes to tell the story of how he came with only £20 which is inspiring to me! For most of my life my family has always lived in lower income areas and I attended a state funded school. In primary school my sister and I would have been eligible for free school meals but my parents didn't want us to face any sort of discrimination for getting them so they worked incredibly hard to make sure we had food to take to school. I spent a large part of my secondary school years trying to become better in regard to my education.

**What do you remember about your time on your Sutton Trust programme?**

It was honestly really good, whenever people ask me about ways to get into their subject I always recommend looking at the Sutton Trust website. I made friends with a few girls from the time I had a placement at the Government Legal Department and I still speak to them in our group chat from time to time which is always lovely! I always remember how nice everyone was when we did the placements, the hosts and the students were always really nice which made the experience seamless!

**Did you know what you wanted to do for a career before university? Did your Sutton Trust programme help shape that decision?**

I always had an idea that I wanted to do law, however the programme elevated my love for law and further solidified the confidence that law was the career I wanted to pursue.

**What is your current role?**

I work part-time as a customer assistant during my gap year, and I volunteer with the witness service where I support and familiarise witnesses in criminal trials with the court process. I do this at my local court and when I move for university I plan to continue doing the same in that city also! My volunteer role at court was suggested to me by a criminal barrister whom I networked with at an event organised by my college. After previous work experience I have had through the Sutton Trust, I knew having an insight into another aspect of law would be a helpful decision for me.

**Did you face any barriers in accessing your career – and how did you overcome these?**

As I live in an area of lower income, I've always lived with the idea that people would judge me based on my personal circumstances. However, though it took some time, I invested time into myself to not doubt myself just because of my personal situations like lack of finance or resources. In addition, being a black woman in today's society also made me feel like I was at a disadvantage, however I have a great support system around me that helped me build the confidence that I am not social stereotypes, I am simply just myself!

# Alumni

Our alumni are a **powerful force for change**; there are now **nearly 70,000 Sutton Trust alumni** at university and in the workplace, with **over 40,000 contactable** through our alumni network. We support and work with our alumni through a range of activities and initiatives, from programmes and bursaries for undergraduates, to Early Careers newsletters, a dedicated online platform, and opportunities to give back to the Sutton Trust and champion social mobility in their workplaces and society.

## Alumni Leadership Board

Our thriving and diverse Alumni Leadership Board (ALB) supports the Sutton Trust by sharing their views, opinions, and advice on a range of issues – from our programme development to research and advocacy, and how we can continue to grow our connection with the 40,000+ contactable alumni network. Our ALB are drawn from graduates of our programmes, to ensure their voice in programme development comes from lived experience, and they also **champion social mobility and the Sutton Trust** in their networks and workplaces.

## Newsletters

Our alumni engagement team have two regular newsletters that boast significant engagement – one for 'young alumni', reaching **c.26,000 alumni** who are in the first four years after their Sutton Trust programme, that focuses on early careers advice and opportunities, and one for **all our contactable alumni** that keeps them informed and up to date with our work and social mobility in the UK.

Both our newsletters have well **above average open and engagement rates** compared to industry benchmarks, a testament to how much our alumni community still feel connected to us.

We also share opportunities from our partners via **targeted emails**, helping companies committed to social mobility and our work to reach our **diverse network** of talented and passionate alumni, and supporting our partners efforts to diversify their talent pipeline.

**63%**

open rate for our young alumni newsletter

**57%**

open rate for our all-alumni network newsletter

**65%**

open rate for our targeted alumni emails

**28.5%**

average open rate in education sector

**26.6%**

average open rate for non-profits

## STA Platform

Our **Sutton Trust Alumni platform** (STA) offers webinars, resources, and exclusive access to job opportunities from companies dedicated to improving social mobility. Launched as **companion platform to Sutton Trust Online**, alumni from recent years have been invited to migrate their STO accounts over to STA when they finish our programmes and move into higher education, apprenticeships, or careers.



# Alumni Bursaries

Our alumni can also apply for **two transformational bursaries**, designed to support them to break down barriers during their undergraduate study and level the playing field with more affluent peers.

## Careers Skills Bursary

The **Career Skills Bursary**, supported by Bloomberg, comprises of a £3k bursary, FinTech insight week with Bloomberg in London, skills workshops, and mentoring from Bloomberg colleagues. **30 students** access this bursary programme each year, with 90 students taking part across three pilot years since 2021/22.

In 2024/25 our third cohort of Career Skills Bursary students finished their programme, and we celebrated three successful years of delivery with Bloomberg at a jointly hosted event. We commissioned an **external evaluation** of the pilot delivery of the Career Skills Bursary and renewed our partnership with Bloomberg to deliver another two years, with recruitment for the next cohort in early 2026.

Evaluation highlights included:

- **100%** of students felt confident writing CVs and applying for jobs at the end of the programme.
- **98%** of students understood what a job in FinTech entails by the end of the programme, up from 40% at the start.
- Students saw a significant improvement in **professional networking skills**, with self-reported confidence rising from c.3.7 out of 5 to c.4.3 out of 5 across the programme.



## Opportunity Bursary

The **Opportunity Bursary**, supported by JPMorganChase, offers undergraduate alumni a bursary of up to £5k for a project or opportunity that will help them progress in their chosen professional career. Alumni can also access mentoring, encouraging them to develop their career and soft skills.

In 2024/25 the Opportunity Bursary was awarded to **58 students**, who took part in a **wide range of activities** thanks to the financial support. Projects undertaken from the most recent cohort include participating in mentoring and volunteering programmes that fostered personal growth and professional development, obtaining qualifications that led to presenting at professional conferences, enabling skills-based volunteering that benefitted local community non-profits, and travelling overseas for internships and work experience placements.

We also commissioned an **external evaluation** of the Opportunity Bursary, which found that the bursary is truly transformative for students taking part, and across cohorts 1-4 we supported **209 students** to access over £800k of bursary funding.

Highlights from this evaluation include:

- Students reported high levels of **achieving the goals set at the start of the programme** – average 4.3-4.6 out of 5 – showing the bursary reliably enabled participation across sectors including law, medicine, finance, engineering, and the arts.
- Students **confidence** rose significantly, especially across interview performance (+0.7 gain on a 5-point scale), application readiness (+0.8), and opportunities to meet professionals (+1.0).
- Confidence in self-identified priority **employability skills** also rose significantly – by an average of 1.2 points on a 5-point scale.

# Research and Policy

Our programmes help thousands of young people each year to 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.

As the leading UK social mobility 'do-tank', we pair our transformative programmes with our **agenda-setting research**, **practical policy recommendations**, and **advocacy engaging all political parties**. Our research and advocacy work 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 the workplace.

Since 1997 we have published over **300 evidence-rich reports**, many of which have gone on to influence national policy. In 2024/25 we published **11 pieces of thought-provoking research**, with the highlight being *The Opportunity Index*, our report on social mobility by constituency, released in May.



This was a significant and foundational piece of work, incorporating data from 10 million people over two decades. It is our **most viewed piece of research in over a decade**, and a piece which will continue to be referenced by us and many others in the months and years to come. We also placed related analysis in the Financial Times which highlighted imperative for the government to address opportunity, alongside widespread news coverage.

Our reports into the Creative Industries (*A Class Act*), Access to Medicine (*Unequal Treatment?*), and *Unpaid and Underpaid Internships* also garnered significant coverage, provoking vital thought and discussions on equality of access to these sectors and opportunities.

## 2024/25 Research Publications

### Artificial Advantage? (July 2025)

- State schools are falling behind in the new AI digital divide, with teachers in private schools more than twice as likely to have received formal training in AI, and inequalities also existing within the state school system.

### A World of Difference (June 2025)

- England's apprenticeship system is lagging behind international competitors, with dropout rates of c.40% and a similar percentage receiving less than their training entitlement. What lessons can we learn from other countries with similar economies but more successful apprenticeship systems?

### The Opportunity Index (May 2025)

- Using data on over 10 million young people across two decades, we took the most detailed look ever at the geography of opportunity and social mobility in England, and it is clear that where you grow up still determines your ability to get on in life.

### What is Social Mobility? (May 2025)

- Laying out a modern, relevant definition for social mobility today – including social mobility at all levels, and providing an entry point for those new to tackling social mobility.

### School Funding and Pupil Premium (April 2025)

- Polling revealed a big spike in schools using funding for disadvantaged pupils to plug budget holes, cutting staff, and cutting spending on extracurricular activities that support student skills and development.

### Unequal Treatment? (Feb 2025)

- Only a fraction of medical students are from working-class backgrounds despite efforts to widen access to the profession – only 5% of 2021 entrants were from the lowest socio-economic backgrounds.

### Unpaid and underpaid internships (Jan 2025)

- 61% of internships undertaken by recent graduates were unpaid or underpaid, creating a major barrier to social mobility and access to competitive professions for many young people from lower income backgrounds.

### A Class Act (Nov 2024)

- There are stark class inequalities in access to the creative industries, with younger adults from working-class backgrounds four-times less likely to work in the creative industries than their middle-class peers.

### Lessons Learnt? (Oct 2024)

- Reflecting on 20 years of school reform in England, with three major challenges facing the sector today – closing the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and better off peers; the decimation of post-16 education, and reduction in pastoral support for young people.

### Life Lessons (Sept 2024)

- Exploring the delivery of oracy and other life skills in schools today, and what educators would like to see develop further to improve life skills for students in more deprived areas.

### Social Selection on the map (Sept 2024)

- There is still socio-economic segregation in the comprehensive school system, with the attainment gap 27% higher in areas with the highest segregation.

# Communications and Advocacy

Our research outputs, and reactive comment generated a total of **4,007 media mentions** with several reports achieving widespread national media coverage. This is a **25% increase on the previous year** and includes 102 broadcast mentions and 274 mentions in our priority media outlets. We had **43 parliamentary mentions** – averaging more than one for every week parliament sits.

As well as publishing our evidence-rich research, we engage in **vital advocacy** to promote our findings and practical recommendations to key stakeholders. As a founding member of the **Social Mobility Alliance**, launched in June 2025, we believe in the power of bringing together the public, private, and third sectors to effect real change to social mobility in this country. Our **convening power** and **strong reputation** allows us to open doors and advocate for changes with all political parties, influence and partner with a wide range of businesses and employers, and work together with other charities and social enterprise organisations.





In 2024/25 we held numerous meetings with Ministers, MPs and officials. We gave evidence at **14 consultations and inquiries**, including the Covid Inquiry, the Curriculum and Assessment Review, and the Education Committee inquiry into Further Education and Skills; and we also re-started the parliamentary **All Party Parliamentary Group for Social Mobility**.

We ran a number of **high-profile events** across the year, including:

- Launch of the OECD Education report '*Education at a Glance*' in September, including a keynote speech from Secretary of State for Education Bridget Phillipson MP.
- **Party Conference events** at Labour and Conservative conferences.
- **Parliamentary Reception** in January with over 100 attendees. Speakers included Peter Swallow MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Education Laura Trott MP, Sarah Smith MP and previous co-chair of the alumni leadership board Mary Osofisan.
- Launch of the **Tech Future Taskforce** at Google London HQ in spring, including a fireside chat with then Secretary of State for Science and Technology Peter Kyle MP.
- Launch of our apprenticeship research '*A World of Difference*' at Deutsche Bank London offices in June, with a panel including Andrew Pakes MP, chair of the All Party Group on Apprenticeships and Sutton Trust alum Ridhka Kakkar.
- Well attended **webinars** on our *A Class Act* and *Unequal Treatment?* reports

Our research and advocacy work contributed to **significant policy progress** in a number of key areas this year. These included the rollout of family hubs; the increase in the Early Years Pupil Premium; the extension of free school meals; the access to medicine commitments; and the consultation on banning unpaid internships.

# Policy progress this year

## Early years

- **Family Hubs (July 2025):** Rollout of 1,000 new family hubs targeted at the most disadvantaged areas (a recommendation to open new children's centres was part of our 2024 manifesto).
- **Early Years Pupil Premium (Dec 2024):** 45% increase in the EYPP to £570 per year, alongside early years investment (increasing EYPP is a longstanding Sutton Trust policy priority).

## Schools

- **Free School Meals (June 2025):** FSM expanded to all on Universal Credit (a manifesto recommendation). It is estimated this will lift 100,000 children out of poverty.
- **School uniform limits (April 2025):** The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill introduced a clause limiting (expensive) branded items (an issue we highlighted in our previous *Selective Comprehensives* report).
- **Fair school admissions (Dec 2024):** The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill included a clause requiring local authorities and schools to co-operate on admissions (recommendation of our fair school admissions work).
- **Pupil premium priority (2024):** Brighton and Hove council cited the Sutton Trust extensively as their inspiration for introducing Pupil Premium priority in admissions at oversubscribed schools.

## University admissions

- **Access to medicine (July 2025):** The Sutton Trust's *Unequal Treatment?* report directly influenced the 10-year Health Plan for England which includes an explicit named commitment to work with us to expand access.

## Apprenticeships

- **Dropping GCSE Maths and English requirements for apprentices (Feb 2025):** One of our manifesto recommendations, to introduce alternative courses of study to avoid locking some young people out of apprenticeships.
- **Apprenticeship applications via UCAS (Oct 2024):** Our research recommended this change in application process to increase parity with university.

## Access to work

- **Banning unpaid internships (July 2025):** Department for Business and Trade (DBT) issued a call for evidence on how to protect younger workers from illegal unpaid internships. The official announcement included Sutton Trust evidence and a quote from our Chief Executive, Nick Harrison.

We are maintaining strong momentum into 2025/26, with the publication of *Elitist Britain* in September 2025, further policy wins, and a seat at the table in ongoing work with government on the Inquiry on White Working-Class Educational Outcomes, engagement on proposed reforms for Special Educational Needs, and a formal role in a group convened by the Minister for Higher Education and Skills, Baroness Smith, to make recommendations on University Access.

# Thank you to our supporters

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

As we embark on our ambitious 2030 strategy to expand and amplify our work, the need to support our mission to tackle Britain's low social mobility has never been greater. We are grateful for the continued support of the many businesses, trusts, foundations, and individuals we work with. To fulfil our ambitions we need to continue to grow our community of donors and have been delighted to welcome new supporters and renew significant partnerships this year.

Thank you to all our partners and supporters, including those who wish to remain anonymous.

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- Stephen Julius
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- Erica Wax
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