

Leadership of the Year | PwC UK



About PwC UK

PwC’s purpose is to build trust in society and solve important problems. PwC is a network of firms in 155 countries with over 284,000 people who are committed to delivering quality in assurance, advisory and tax services.

As a major employer, PwC believes they can play a positive role in increasing social mobility through their recruitment, development and progression, community and advocacy activities. PwC aims to lead by example as an employer and be recognised as an inclusive organisation where people from all backgrounds are able to work, develop and succeed. It also aims to use its skills and resources to enable people from less advantaged backgrounds across the UK to make the most of their potential, whether at PwC or elsewhere.

What were PwC UK’s winning activities in 2020-21?

PwC UK won the Leadership of the Year award in recognition of their position as one of the leading employers taking action to improve social mobility. In 2020-21, the firm led the way by publishing their socio-economic pay gap and by advocating to wider audiences. This included sessions with the Social Mobility Commission and the Lord Mayor’s Appeal to promote greater awareness and more action among employers.

The firm was able to offer support and advice to other employers based on its ongoing, holistic approach to promoting social mobility. In addition to the activities described above, PwC UK worked with other professional services firms and the ICAEW to found and support Rise, a skills development programme aiming to raise the aspirations of young people from less advantaged SEBs.

What are PwC UK’s key enabling factors to advance social mobility?

Data collection and analysis

PwC UK’s targeted social mobility work is informed by robust employee SEB data, using the questions recommended by the Social Mobility Commission. In 2021, PwC UK analysed and published its SEB data by grade, and also reported its socio-economic pay gap, leading the way as one of the first employers to do this in the UK.

“We want to support others to come along on the social mobility journey with us. Collaboration is key – we’re all working towards the same goal.”

Dedicated resource and internal collaboration

PwC UK has a dedicated Social Mobility Team which sits within its Inclusion, Community and Wellbeing Team. The Social Mobility Team collaborates with many other teams across PwC to deliver targeted work to reach, recruit, develop and progress people from less advantaged SEBs. Additionally, the team works with PwC UK's staff-led Social Mobility Network (which reached 2,800 members in 2021) to promote social mobility stories, raise awareness and celebrate role models from less advantaged SEBs.

Leadership and transparency

Diversity, inclusion and social mobility are high priorities for PwC UK's senior leadership. As noted by PwC UK's Chairman and Senior Partner Kevin Ellis, "the prospect of challenging conversations and headlines should not stop business leaders being honest about their actions and how they're measuring both improvement and setbacks" ([City AM 2021](#)). This top-down commitment to transparency is reflected in PwC UK's voluntary ethnicity and socio-economic pay gap reporting, alongside mandatory gender pay gap reporting.

What challenges has PwC UK faced on social mobility?

PwC UK now has response rates of around 80 per cent to its workforce SEB survey. However, a few years ago response rates were at 25 per cent, and the firm took several actions to improve this. To lend executive sponsorship and credibility, the survey was sent out to all staff by PwC UK's Chief People Officer. To promote visibility, the survey was included in all regular social mobility-related communications on internal news channels. To embed the survey into regular firm-wide data collection, SEB questions were incorporated into mandatory compliance returns for all staff (with a 'prefer not to say' option retained). Lastly, the Social Mobility Team worked hard to ensure employees understood that the data were being collected to make PwC UK a fairer place to work.

How does PwC UK measure social mobility success?

PwC UK measures success based on the number of individuals from less advantaged SEBs reached through community engagement activities and recruited onto work experience and permanent programmes. The firm also measures success in terms of the quality of experiences and level of engagement among those participating in outreach programmes and among its employees.

What next for PwC UK on social mobility?

PwC UK plans to grow its community engagement work, for example by expanding the number of students from less advantaged groups who access the firm's paid work experience programme which is ring-fenced for Year 12 (or equivalent) students from less advantaged SEBs. They plan to continue using data to ensure people from less advantaged SEBs can develop and progress at the firm. PwC UK is also conducting a detailed predictive analytics exercise to set recruitment and workforce targets for socio-economic background.

With thanks to Hollie Compton (Social Mobility Lead, PwC UK), who was interviewed for this case study.

“Social mobility is really high on our board's agenda and our chairman's agenda, which is key. You can't drive forward change unless you've got supportive leadership.”