



Reaching potential?

Advancing Social Mobility in 2022-23

Key Findings from the UK Social Mobility Awards 2023

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

UK
SOCIAL
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AWARDS

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About the executive summary

This executive summary presents headline findings from *Reaching potential? Advancing social mobility in 2022-23*. The full report explores the work done by employers and educators to advance social mobility in 2022-23, as well as barriers overcome and key enablers to effective social mobility work. Based on analysis of entries to the UK Social Mobility Awards 2023, we examine social mobility activities from organisations employing almost 1 million people across sectors including finance, law, professional services, government, food, and hospitality. By providing in-depth insights into social mobility activities from the classroom to the workplace, the report offers evidence to inform and inspire wider action on social mobility in the UK.

About the UK Social Mobility Awards

The UK Social Mobility Awards (SOMOs) have recognised and celebrated UK employers and educators working to improve social mobility since 2017. The SOMOs are organised by Making The Leap, a London-based societal change charity which was founded in 1993 and works with schools, young adults, charities and employers to advance social mobility and race equity in the UK.

To learn more about the UK Social Mobility Awards, including the 2023 winners, please visit:

www.somo.uk.

About the authors

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Executive summary



The UK Social Mobility Awards

Recent evidence continues to show there is still a long way to go before social mobility is a reality in the UK.^{1,2} At the same time, awareness and engagement with social mobility continue to grow, with an increasing number of UK employers and educators committing and acting to advance social mobility. The UK Social Mobility Awards (SOMOs) is a nationwide initiative which exists to recognise and celebrate these employers and educators, and to inform and inspire wider action on social mobility. The SOMOs are organised by grassroots societal change charity Making The Leap, which works with schools, young adults, charities, and employers to advance social mobility and race equity in the UK.

Who entered the SOMOs in 2023?

Employers who entered the SOMOs in 2023 collectively employed close to 1 million people across 15 sectors in the UK. As in previous years, the most represented sectors were finance, law, and professional services, reflecting ongoing efforts to address the under-representation of LSEB individuals in these sectors. Among educators, just under half of entries came from universities, with two-fifths from schools and colleges. Entrants' social mobility activities were most likely to take place in London, South East England, and North West England.

Key findings from *Reaching potential? Advancing social mobility in 2022-23*

In our annual Key Findings Report, we examine what employers and educators did to advance social mobility in 2022-23, as well as how they did it – the barriers overcome, and the enabling factors that supported effective social mobility work. Findings are based on thematic analysis of all eligible entries to the 2023 SOMOs. In the full report, we take an in-depth look at the work done by employers to **build the foundations** for effective social mobility work (through data, strategy and leadership), to **do the work** across the employee journey (through outreach, recruitment, retention, and progression activities), and to **take the lead** with advocacy work to promote awareness and action on social mobility. We also explore the work done by schools, colleges, and universities to **bridge the gap** between education and employment, and improve outcomes for young people from LSEBs. Below, we present headline findings to highlight employers' activities to advance social mobility in 2022-23.

¹ van der Erve, L., Krutikova, S., Macmillan, L., & Sturrock, D. (2023) Intergenerational mobility in the UK. London: Institute for Fiscal Studies.

² Social Mobility Commission (2023) The State of the Nation: People and Places. London: Social Mobility Commission.

Key findings

Key Finding 1

Employers continued to focus on improving **socio-economic diversity** by reaching and recruiting people from less advantaged socio-economic backgrounds. (LSEBs).

Outreach work is a vital starting point for employers to improve social mobility, particularly in sectors where people from LSEBs are under-represented. The vast majority of our employers (87%) reported outreach activities in 2023. Across private and public sectors, employers worked to engage, inform, and equip young people from LSEBs with the knowledge and skills they required to pursue a broad range of careers. Activities included insight days, work experience, and school-based events to raise awareness about different career pathways; workshops and programmes to develop employability skills; and targeted mentoring and coaching to inspire and support young people from LSEBs with their future aspirations.

Importantly, outreach is just the first step towards improving socio-economic diversity in the workplace; the next stage is to actively recruit people from LSEBs. Just over half of our employers (52%) took action on recruitment in 2023, a notable reduction from 75% in 2022. Where employers did act to improve social mobility through recruitment, they did this by offering a wider range of pathways to employment such as social mobility apprenticeships, paid internships, and paid work placements for LSEB candidates. Employers also implemented targeted recruitment programmes for groups facing specific socio-economic disadvantages – including disabled people, military communities, prison leavers, and refugees and asylum seekers. In the finance, professional services, and legal sectors, employers took action to introduce more inclusive hiring practices – for example, by removing academic requirements for entry-level roles, offering targeted support during the recruitment process, and using technology and training to reduce bias in assessments and hiring decisions.

Key Finding 2

Across the private and public sectors, there was important work to improve **equity and inclusion for LSEB employees** – however, only a third of employers reported action in this area.

Once people from LSEBs have entered the workplace, inclusive cultures and equitable outcomes are essential to ensure they have access to an improved standard of living, and therefore experience social mobility. In 2023, just over a third of our employers (35%) took action focused on LSEB inclusion and retention, down from 53% of our employers in 2022. More encouragingly, employers were more likely to report progression initiatives in 2023 (31%) than in 2022 (23%). This was particularly true in the finance sector, which was no doubt driven by initiatives such as Progress Together. However, we hope to see more employer action on retention and progression in future years, to ensure socio-economic diversity is translated into meaningful social mobility outcomes for LSEB employees.

In examples of best practice in 2023, organisations in the finance, professional services, food, and hospitality sectors aimed to improve LSEB employees' financial security by paying the Real Living Wage as a minimum, providing one-off payments during the cost-of-living crisis, and offering advice and support on financial wellbeing. Employers across the private and public sectors also sought to create inclusive workplaces for LSEB employees. Staff-led social mobility networks and employee resource groups (ERGs) were an increasingly popular way to provide LSEB employees with a sense of community, and to encourage allyship and awareness from more advantaged colleagues. There were also public and private sector employers who led the way by addressing the progression gap faced by LSEB employees. Key actions included setting targets to address LSEB under-representation at senior levels; ensuring progression pathways and processes were transparently defined and communicated; and providing targeted training and development initiatives to support LSEB employees' career progression.

Key Finding 3

Best practice to advance social mobility was driven by high-quality **data**, clear **strategy**, passionate **leadership**, and an **intersectional approach** across the employee journey.

Employers who led the way to improve social mobility in 2023 shared a number of key enablers:

- Action on social mobility was informed by **data**, from quantitative socio-economic background data to qualitative data on LSEB employees' views and experiences. Across the public and private sectors, employers used these data to drive targeted action where it was most needed.
- These data informed social mobility **strategies**, which were often integrated into existing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), corporate social responsibility (CSR), or environment, social, and governance (ESG) commitments. Importantly, adopting a strategic approach to social mobility involved setting realistic goals, transparency, accountability, and ensuring that social mobility was established as a long-term organisational priority.
- Employers' social mobility work was driven by passionate **leadership**. In the best examples, this was both 'top down', with active sponsorship and ultimate responsibility at the most senior levels, and 'bottom up', with priorities and focus areas driven by employees who were often from LSEBs themselves.
- The most effective approaches to social mobility were **intersectional**. This meant that employers understood and were committed to addressing the multiple workplace barriers faced by LSEB individuals who also identified as disabled, female, LGBT+, racially minoritised, and/or as part of further marginalised groups.