



Reaching potential?

Advancing Social Mobility in 2022-23

Key Findings from the UK Social Mobility Awards 2023

FULL REPORT

UK
SOCIAL
MOBILITY
AWARDS

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About this report

In this report, we explore 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.

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Last but certainly not least, thanks to all the entrants for their participation in the awards, and for their ongoing work to advance social mobility in the UK.

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Foreword

Never a day seems to go by without some pundit or politician making the confident assertion that what this country needs is economic growth.

Sadly, it is less common to hear any articulation of how this lofty ambition might be attained!

Happily, inspiration can be found in the world of sport where it is obvious to every fan of, for example, football, cricket, or rugby that what their team needs is more goals, runs, or tries.

Everyone with an interest in sport is focused on finding ways to get their team to do what it takes to win more. While the idea of winning is unlikely to have escaped the analyses of our nation's leaders and policymakers, they often struggle to apply it.

Again, there is no need to look no further than the sports field to find the answer – hire the best talent and make them playing members of your team.

Yet, sadly, it is still the case in our country that managers are more likely to recruit in their own image than to broaden their team's skills.

Irrelevant questions – such as which school and university did you attend, and what degree did you get – are not to be found in any soccer scout's vocabulary!

Nor do they have a place in the recruitment policies of the UK's wealth-generating industries.

It is totally obvious that victory on the field or in the market belongs to entities that create winning teams by recruiting, retaining, and developing loyal talent.

Moreover, that talent has to bring the widest range of social, cultural, and economic lived experiences to the task.

Why? Because any organisation that doesn't understand the motivations of its customers, employees, supply chains, recruitment pools, and the communities in which it operates is at a commercial disadvantage to those that do.

To my surprise, the idea that diversity is a driver of competitive advantage is still novel to so many businesses. Unfortunately for them, but fortunately for our national competitive advantage (and subsequent economic growth), this year's SOMOs show that the UK has many enlightened organisations which have not only understood that vast pools of untapped talent exist within the UK, but they have found ways to tap into it to their benefit.

I commend this research report to every leader determined to play their part in our economic renaissance.



What did employers do to advance social mobility in 2023?

In 2023, private and public sector organisations employing almost 1 million people entered the SOMOs. This infographic presents the percentage of SOMO entrants who reported activities across each stage of the social mobility journey in 2022-23.

Taking the lead

Employers collaborated within and across sectors to **advocate** for social mobility in 2022-23. Sector-based initiatives such as Access Accountancy, PRIME, and Progress Together demonstrated it is not only possible but vital to work in partnership to advance social mobility. Meanwhile, increasing employer participation in nationwide initiatives such as Social Mobility Day and Class Pay Gap Day demonstrated growing commitments to improve awareness and action on social mobility.

Advocacy 47%

Progression 31%

Retention 35%

Recruitment 52%

Outreach 87%

Strategy & Leadership 47%

Data 35%

Doing the work

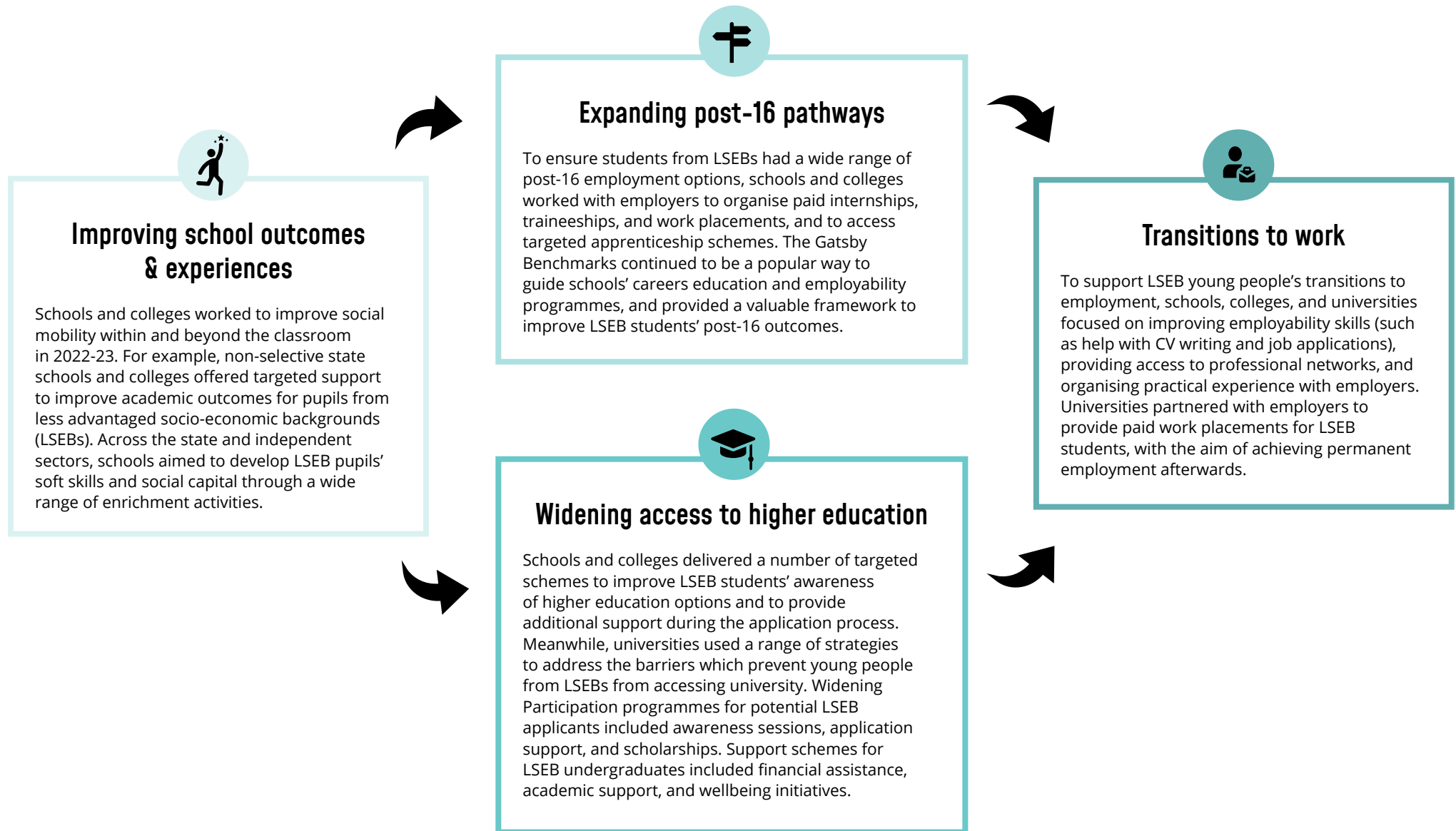
The vast majority of employers reported social mobility-related **outreach** work in 2022-23. These activities allowed employers to engage, inform, and equip young people from LSEBs with the knowledge and skills to pursue a broad range of careers. However, employers were less likely to report activities to recruit and retain LSEB individuals. Important **recruitment** activities included a wider range of pathways to employment, targeted recruitment programmes, and more inclusive hiring practices. In examples of best practice, employers sought to **retain** LSEB employees by ensuring financial security, creating inclusive workplaces, and by implementing targeted **progression** initiatives.

Building the foundations

In examples of best practice, employers used employee socio-economic background (SEB) **data** as the foundation for their social mobility work in 2022-23. SEB data allowed employers to understand the socio-economic profile of their workforce and to identify areas where employees from less advantaged socio-economic backgrounds (LSEBs) were under-represented. Social mobility **strategies** – often incorporated into existing DEI, ESG, or CSR commitments – acted as an important accountability mechanism by outlining planned actions, timeframes, and targets. Effective **leadership** was essential to ensure social mobility was taken seriously by organisations, and there were strong examples of both ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ leadership from LSEB individuals across sectors.

What did **educators** do to advance social mobility in 2023?

This infographic presents a summary of the key social mobility activities done by schools, colleges, and universities who entered the SOMOs in 2023.





Executive summary

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.



Full report

Introduction



The UK Social Mobility Awards

The UK Social Mobility Awards (SOMOs) is a nationwide initiative which has recognised and celebrated UK employers and educators working to advance social mobility since 2017. The SOMOs are organised by Making The Leap, a grassroots societal change charity. For the past 30 years, Making The Leap has worked with schools, young adults, charities, and employers to advance social mobility and race equity in the UK.

What is social mobility?

Social mobility is typically defined as creating opportunities for individuals from less advantaged socio-economic backgrounds (LSEBs) to become more economically successful.³ At Making The Leap, our aim is to make social mobility a reality in the UK, which would mean **everyone has access to:**

- **A good standard of living, no matter what your occupation or background.** This means that, no matter what your job, class, race, gender, or other characteristics, you have (at the very least) the ability to feed yourself and your family, access to decent housing, and financial security.
- **Equality of opportunity, no matter what your parents' occupation or background.** This means that, no matter what your parents' job, class, race, gender, or other characteristics, you have fair access to any education, employment, and training (EET) opportunities you wish to pursue. Linking back to our first goal, regardless of the EET pathways you choose, you will have access to a good standard of living.

³ Social Mobility Commission (2021) Socio-economic diversity and inclusion. Employers' toolkit: Cross Industry Edition. London: Social Mobility Commission.

Social mobility in the UK

Recent evidence indicates that there is still a long way to go before our vision of social mobility is realised in the UK. Children from low-income households are less likely to experience social mobility than their counterparts 40 years ago, with LSEB individuals who are racially minoritised and LSEB individuals who grow up in the North of England among the least 'socially mobile' groups.⁴ Housing mobility and wealth mobility⁵ have worsened over the past 30 years, while there continues to be a strong link between growing up in a low-income household and being in a low-income occupation.⁶

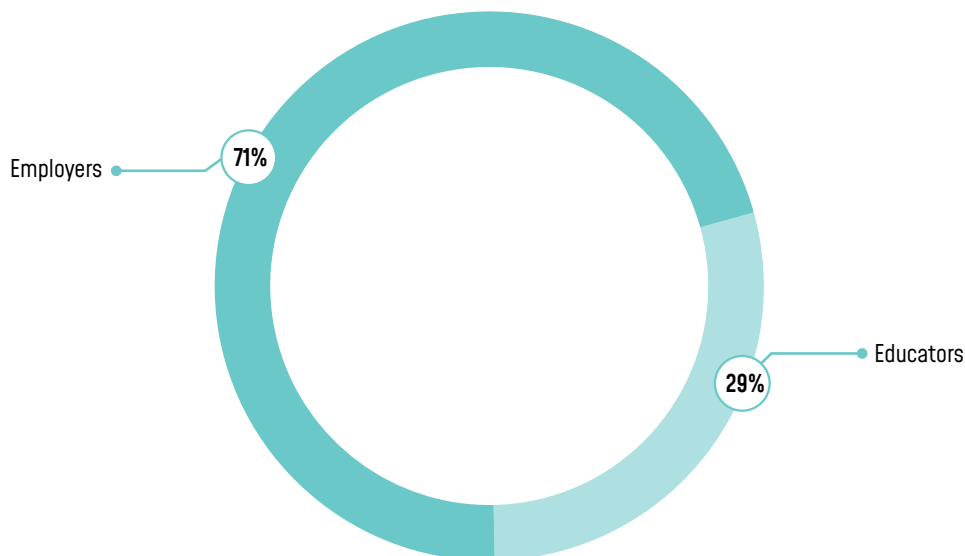
However, there are reasons to be hopeful. Across sectors, organisations are increasingly demonstrating commitments and action to improving social mobility. In 2022-23, an increasing number of organisations published socio-economic pay gap reports – including professional service firms KPMG and PwC, law firms Freshfields and Clifford Chance, publishers Penguin Random House, and educational charity Teach First. Meanwhile, in the retail industry, 59% of UK retailers included social mobility in their diversity and inclusion (D&I) strategies in 2022 (up from 20% in 2021).⁷ And participation from employers and educators in nationwide social mobility initiatives such as Social Mobility Day, the Social Mobility Employer Index, and the UK Social Mobility Awards continues to be strong.

In this report, we examine the work done by employers and educators to advance social mobility in 2022-23, based on their entries to the 2023 SOMOs. 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.

Who entered the SOMOs in 2023?

Over 70% of SOMO 2023 entrants were employers, with educational institutions representing just under 30% (see Figure 1). As in previous years, we of course recognise that schools, colleges and universities are also major employers - however, their SOMO 2023 entries focused on their work to improve social mobility through education. We therefore describe these organisations as 'educators', rather than as employers.

Figure 1: SOMO 2023 entrants - employers and educators



⁴ van der Erve, L., Krutikova, S., Macmillan, L., & Sturrock, D. (2023) Intergenerational mobility in the UK. London: Institute for Fiscal Studies.

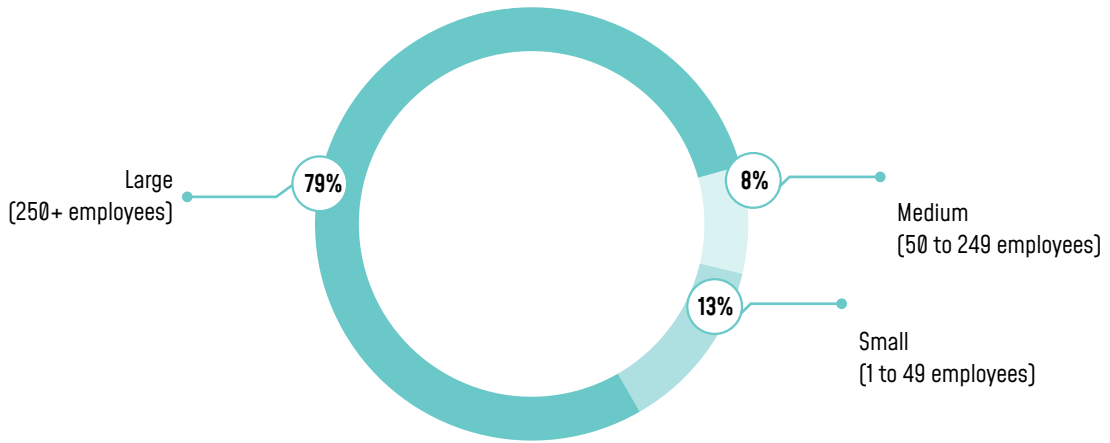
⁵ The link between parents' home ownership / wealth and their children's home ownership / wealth, respectively.

⁶ Social Mobility Commission (2023) The State of the Nation: People and Places. London: Social Mobility Commission.

⁷ British Retail Consortium & The MBS Group (2022) Tracking progress on diversity and inclusion in UK retail. London: The MBS Group.

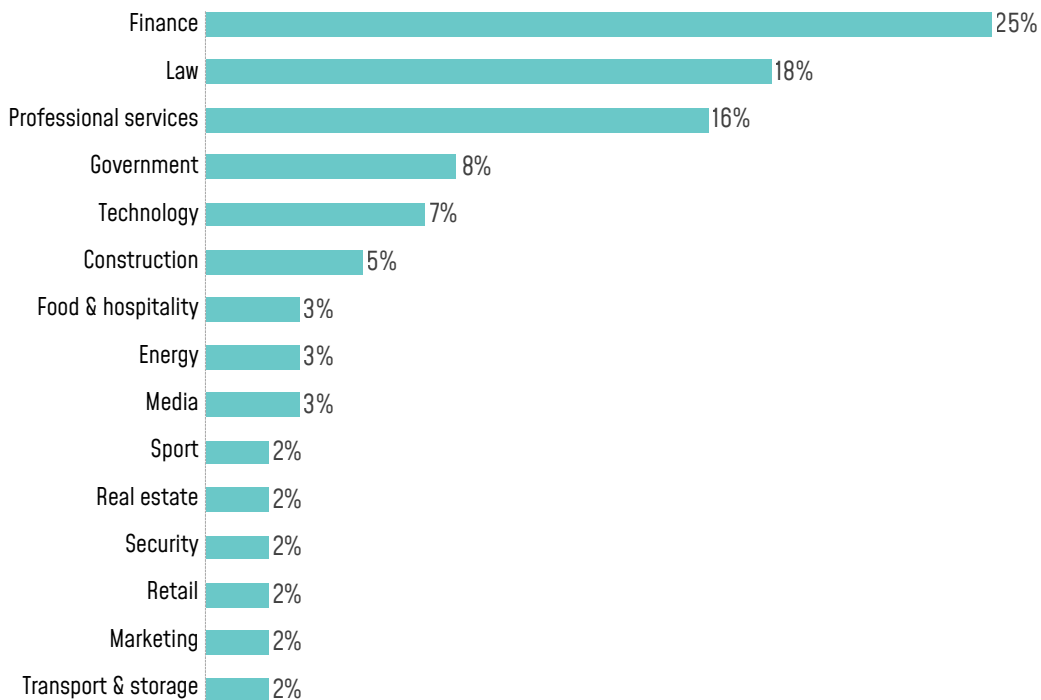
In total, employers who entered the SOMOs in 2023 employed close to 1 million people across the UK. Just under 80% of employers were large organisations, employing over 250 people, with much lower proportions of medium and small organisations 8% and 13% respectively – see Figure 2). Among large organisations, 40% employed between 1,001 and 5,000 employees, with a further 40% employing over 10,000 employees.

Figure 2: SOMO 2023 entrants - employers by size



Employers from 15 employment sectors entered the SOMOs in 2023 (see Figure 3). As in previous years, finance (25%), law (18%) and professional services (16%) were the most represented sectors among SOMO entrants, which is an ongoing reflection of aims to address the under-representation of LSEB individuals in these sectors.

Figure 3: SOMO 2023 employers by sector



Among educators, just under half of SOMO 2023 entries came from universities (48%), with 40% from schools and colleges and 12% from other types of educational organisation (see Figure 4). The lower proportion of entries from schools and colleges in 2023 compared to 2022 (60%) may reflect the ongoing challenges faced by these institutions in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, during the cost-of-living crisis, and due to industrial action in 2022-23.

Figure 4: SOMO 2023 educators by institution type

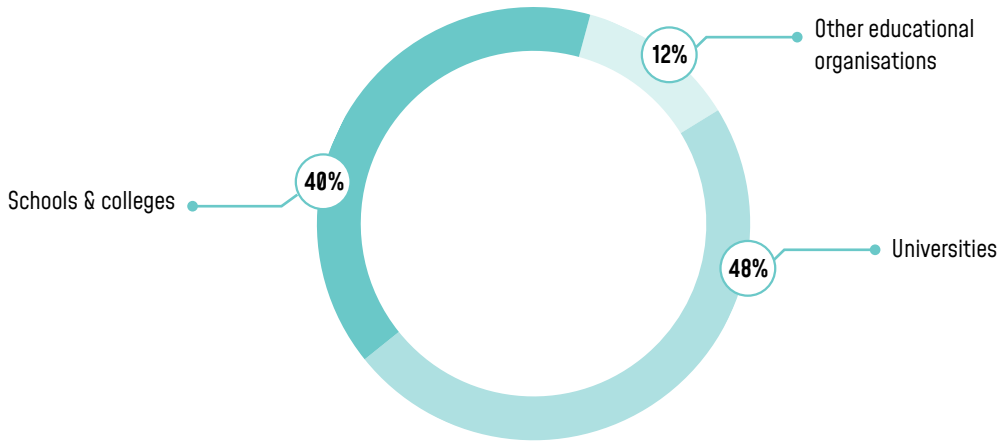
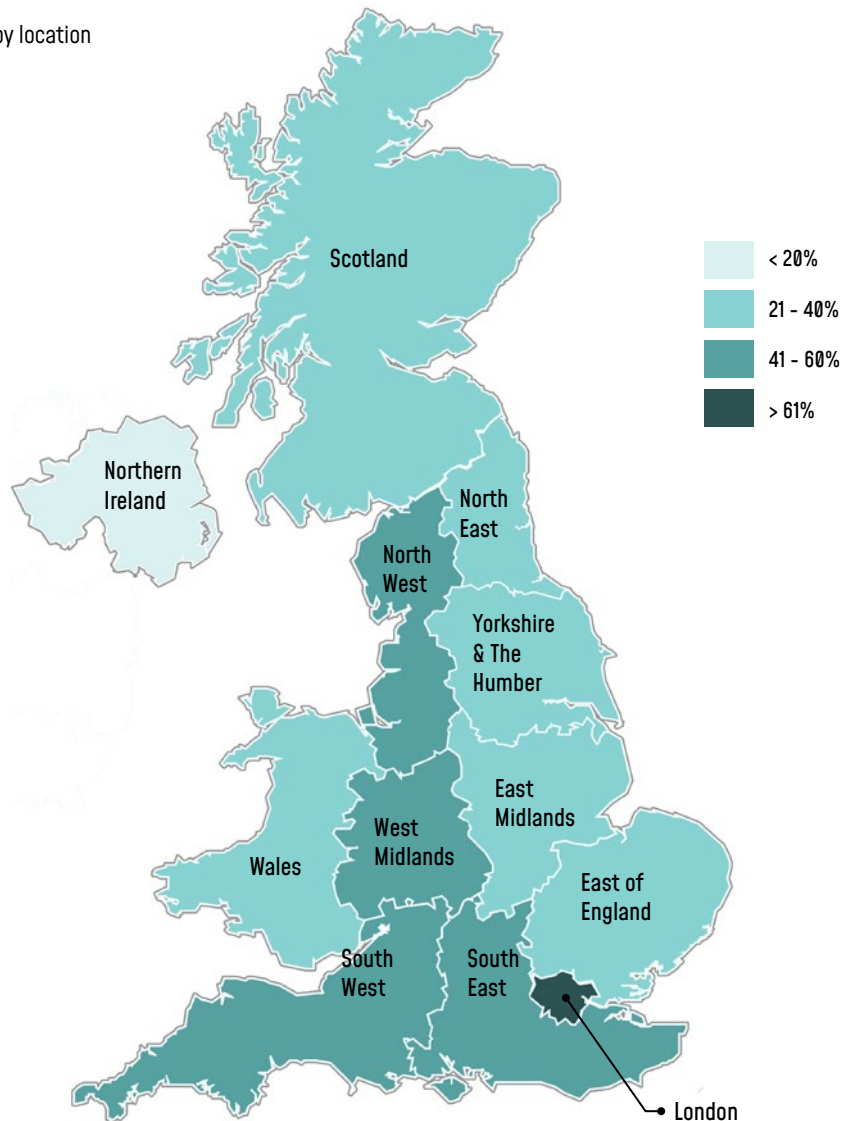


Figure 5: SOMO 2023 activities by location



All SOMO 2023 entrants were asked to report the location of their social mobility activities over the past year (see Figure 5). Entrants were most likely to report social mobility activities in London (72%), followed by South East England (47%). Consistent with 2022, this ongoing focus on London is likely to reflect the location of some of the UK's most deprived areas in and around the capital,⁸ and the locations of entrants' head offices. A lower proportion of entrants reported activities in the North East and Yorkshire and The Humber compared to 2022, but other regions with a high concentration of social mobility cold spots such as the North West (46%) and West Midlands (46%) continued to be well-served by entrants' social mobility work.

Navigating this report

This report presents key findings from all eligible entries to the 2023 SOMOs, which describe social mobility activities undertaken from January 2022 to March 2023. Based on thematic analysis of entries, we explore *what* employers and educators did to advance social mobility, as well as *how* they did it – the challenges overcome, and the enabling factors that supported effective social mobility work.

The first three report chapters focus on what **employers** did to advance social mobility in 2022-23, while the fourth chapter focuses on **educators'** social mobility activities over the same period. The chapters can be read chronologically, or can be used as standalone reference chapters to inform specific stages of social mobility work.

1 Building the foundations

How employers collected and used SEB **data**, how they developed social mobility **strategy**, and the role of **leadership** and governance in effective social mobility work.

2 Doing the work

Employers' **outreach** and **recruitment** activities to increase socio-economic diversity, their work to support **retention** and improve socio-economic inclusion, and activities to support equitable **progression** opportunities for those from less advantaged SEBs.

3 Taking the lead

The **advocacy** work done by employers to promote awareness, understanding and action on social mobility.

4 Bridging the gap

Activities by **schools**, **colleges** and **universities** to improve outcomes and experiences of schooling, to expand post-16 pathways, to widen access to higher education, and to facilitate transitions to employment.

⁸ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2019) *The English Indices of Deprivation 2019: Statistical Release*. London: Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.



1

Building the foundations

Data, strategy and leadership

imi Data



Overview

Employee socio-economic background (SEB) data formed an essential foundation for employers' social mobility activities, with some employers adding SEB questions to their internal diversity surveys and HR systems for the first time in 2022-23. Across sectors, the Social Mobility Commission's Employer Toolkit continued to be a valued resource by providing clear guidance on questions to ask to measure SEB and how to analyse employee SEB data.

Employers used quantitative SEB data to understand the socio-economic profile of their workforce and to identify areas of LSEB under-representation. Qualitative data, collected via interviews and focus groups, were used to understand LSEB employees' views and experiences. In examples of best practice, employers publicly reported their social mobility data (including socio-economic pay gaps), and published commitments to address pay gaps, improve LSEB representation, and address barriers faced by LSEB employees.

Collecting data

Employers collected two main types of social mobility-related data in 2022-23: employee SEB data to develop and support internal social mobility programmes, and wider socio-economic data on local communities to support their outreach work.

Internally, employers collected data across the employee journey. This included collecting SEB data from candidates during recruitment, and continuing to collect SEB data to understand trends in retention and progression. In 2022-23, employers including **bp**, **Compass Group**, and **Nationwide Building Society** collected employee SEB data for the first time. Where permitted, bp piloted a self-identification survey in their UK HR system (which included the four recommended Social Mobility Commission SEB questions), and also used their annual staff survey to ask if individuals were the first in their family to attend university. Compass Group started with a smaller targeted group of 2,000 employees for their SEB survey, recognising the challenges around communicating the need for the data. While Nationwide initially experienced low response rates to new SEB questions, the building society improved responses through internal communications explaining why the questions were important.

Improving response rates to SEB questions was also a focus for employers that had been collecting data for several years including **AMS, BlackRock, Department for Work and Pensions, Grant Thornton UK LLP** and **PwC**. BlackRock improved the self-identification rate of LSEB employees by 25% in 2022-23, with a specific 6-week Count Me In campaign that encouraged employees to answer social mobility questions. Department for Work and Pensions used internal communications to increase declaration to 76% overall, and 89% for some grades. Grant Thornton reduced their 'prefer not to answer' rate for SEB questions in 2022-23. The firm attributed improved response rates to employees' increased understanding of why the questions were asked and how data would be used, including helping to inform targeted action and support for LSEB employees.

Employers used a range of external data sources to support their outreach work. For example, **Balfour Beatty VINCI Systra Joint Venture** developed a bespoke data aggregation tool that combined multiple datasets into an interactive system which they used to understand the SEB characteristics of local areas and communities. In turn, this supported the development and targeting of the company's outreach work. Employers also partnered with external organisations on their outreach-related data collection activities. **England Boxing** partnered with Upshot, a digital platform and insight-gathering tool, to collect data and measure the impact of their community-based work. Meanwhile, **KPMG** worked with the Bridge Group to use a unique algorithm to target the schools that were in most need of support, and **NatWest Group** conducted research with Purpose Union to identify opportunities to support young people.

From data to action

Following data collection, employers used employee SEB data to develop and improve their internal policies and targeted programmes. Some employers also published their data externally, in order to increase awareness and understanding of the barriers faced by LSEB individuals. **Department for Work and Pensions** conducted extensive internal research, including surveys and focus groups, to develop its Leaders Like You programme. The programme aimed to support a strong and diverse talent pipeline, and help individuals achieve their potential, and Department for Work and Pensions' evaluation team used their data to evaluate the programme's impact and the return on investment for the department.

In December 2022, **KPMG** published its Mind the Gap research report. Based on longitudinal research examining the careers of 16,500 people over a five-year period, the study revealed that SEB had the biggest effect on progression, compared to other characteristics such as gender and ethnicity. The findings led to KPMG accelerating and updating its Social Mobility Action Plan, with a specific focus on retention, progression, outreach and advocacy. **Norton Rose Fulbright LLP** reported on social mobility in their annual pay gap report for the first time in 2022-23, and used the data to define a set of social mobility priorities and aims to ensure LSEB employees have the same access to career opportunities as the rest of their cohort. **Phoenix Group** increased reporting of their data, including social mobility data in the board's annual report. These data were also reported to the Social Mobility Foundation and Progress Together, and the company committed to publicly reporting their class pay gap in 2024.

Employers that collected data for their outreach work used this to develop targeted programmes of support. In response to research indicating that those from low-earning families aged 18-24 were twice as likely to be out of education and employment than their wealthier peers, **NatWest** designed a social-mobility focused youth employability programme, CareerSense, to bridge the employability gap by preparing young people for the world of work. **Capgemini's** research into the impact of limited access to technology,

What were the enablers and barriers to collecting and using SEB data?

Enablers

Raising employee awareness

To increase response rates and employee engagement, employers communicated the need for collecting SEB data and explained how it would be used. Some employers also used specific self-identification days or weeks to focus attention and participation in data collection.

Harnessing technology

Bespoke data collection platforms made it easier for employees to answer SEB questions, and for employers to analyse the responses. Providing a user-friendly interface, alongside clear messaging about the purpose and use of SEB data, helped to increase employee response rates.

Barriers

Knowing what to ask

As there are multiple dimensions to SEB and social mobility, employers did not always know how best to define and collect data on SEB. The range of different questions used also created barriers to comparing social mobility trends across organisations and sectors. The Social Mobility Commission's four questions to measure SEB were an increasingly popular solution to this challenge.

Reluctance to disclose SEB

Employers across sectors reported that their employees could be reluctant to answer SEB questions, in part due to a lack of familiarity with these questions and fears of discrimination. As mentioned above, providing clarity about the intended use of SEB data helped to address these employee concerns.

Digital Divide, found refugees as a potential high-impact group. This led to their partnership with CodeYourFuture, in order to support refugees and minority groups in the technology sector. Lastly, **Landsec** partnered with the Social Mobility Foundation, Making the Leap, and The Sutton Trust to understand the barriers faced by LSEB individuals to working in the real estate sector and as a result, developed four new programmes centred on industry action and community support.

Strategy and leadership



Overview

Employers used social mobility strategies to affirm their commitments to the cause, and to establish goals and timeframes for their social mobility work. Strategic approaches included standalone social mobility strategies, or embedding social mobility as a key 'pillar' or element of existing commitments to DEI, ESG, and/or CSR.

Effective leadership and governance were essential to ensure social mobility was taken seriously by organisations. Examples of best practice included senior leadership, accountability mechanisms, and employee involvement through staff networks or resource groups to lead and govern social mobility work. In combination, these factors ensured that there was sufficient budget and resources for social mobility work, that social mobility was treated as an organisational priority, and that social mobility activities were informed by the experiences and priorities of LSEB employees.

Adopting a strategic approach to social mobility

Most employers embedded their social mobility strategies in existing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) strategies in 2022-23. Employers adopting this approach included **BlackRock**, **Department for Work and Pensions**, **EY**, **Phoenix Group**, and **Sharpe Pritchard LLP**. At BlackRock, placing social mobility work within its DEI strategy meant access to a budget to fund internal and external social mobility events. EY also placed social mobility within its DEI strategy, with an emphasis on intersectionality between characteristics such as SEB, race, and gender. EY also allocated a budget for social mobility work, ringfencing £20,000 for activities in 2022-23. For Phoenix Group, the development of the organisation's first social mobility strategy led to DEI being adopted as a group-level KPI for the first time.

Another approach was to include social mobility strategies within ESG or CSR approaches. For example, **Greene King** added a social mobility strategy driver to its ESG policy, with the aim of making social mobility part of business as usual across the organisation. **Pinsent Masons** embedded social mobility within its CSR team, and this allowed them to ringfence funding for their social mobility activities.

Across sectors, employers launched social mobility strategies aimed at improving social mobility for specific groups within the organisation or the local community. Several employers launched early career social mobility strategies.

For example, **bp** launched its Social Mobility Framework for Action, which set out the organisation's social mobility ambitions, including to more than double the number of apprentices globally to up to 2,000 by 2030 and expanding professional work experience placements to up to 500 by 2024. Progression strategies included **Department for Work and Pensions'** Leaders Like You programme and **Capita's** Employee Directors programme, both of which intended to support LSEB employees to reach their potential within the organisation.

Outreach strategies included **Balfour Beatty's** Skills, Employment and Education (SEE) Strategy which was developed on the HS2 Old Oak Common (OOC) Station project and radically shifted the organisation's outreach approach. **HMRC's** Building Our Future and Locations' Strategy aimed to enhance relationships with local communities, building links that helped to grow the department's regional outreach programmes.

More widely, employers' CSR programmes were vital in the delivery of outreach work (discussed further in Chapter 2), by providing employees with paid volunteering time on which most organisations' programmes were built. Examples include **AMS, Capgemini, Capital One, EY, KPMG, and PA Consulting**. At KPMG, all employees were given a minimum of six days for volunteering and in 2022, 41% of KPMG staff volunteered a total of 76,780 hours to improve social mobility.

Establishing leadership and governance

Across sectors, the three key pillars of social mobility leadership and governance were senior sponsorship, accountability, and social mobility staff networks.

Senior sponsorship of social mobility strategies was essential to ensure that social mobility work was embedded within organisations, and received the resourcing and attention it needed to succeed. The importance of senior sponsorship was evident across private sector employers, including **Aon, AMS, BlackRock, Capita, Compass Group, DLA Piper UK LLP, EY, KPMG, Landsec, PwC, and Sharpe Pritchard LLP**. At these companies, senior social mobility sponsors had significant input and input at the Executive Committee (ExCo) level, including CEOs, Managing Directors, Chief Operating Officers and Chief People Directors. In the public sector, **Department for Work and Pensions, Government Commercial Organisation, Government Digital Service and Home Office** also highlighted the importance of senior Civil Service sponsorship of social mobility work and to create environments in which LSEB individuals could meet their potential. These leaders either had direct involvement in the development of social mobility strategies, or acted as social mobility advocates to ensure the work gained visibility and status. In organisations with LSEB senior leaders, these individuals often took the lead on social mobility by steering strategy development, securing buy-in at board level, and engaging employees across the organisation, including by sharing their own experiences.

Across sectors, senior leaders who were themselves from LSEBs and/or other minoritised groups acted as inspirational and authentic social mobility champions. Examples in 2022-23 included **Kerry Dryburgh** at **bp**, **David Ampaw** at **DLA Piper**, **Christopher Woolard CBE** at **EY**, **Rakesh Thakrar** at **Phoenix Group**, **Barry Murphy** at **PwC**, and **Jo Whight** at **Nationwide**.

Among private sector employers, senior leaders set specific targets against which they (and/or other senior leaders) would be measured and held accountable for social mobility progress. For example, **Phoenix Group** adopted social mobility targets as a group level KPI, and **dentsu** set a target of hiring 25% of early careers employees from LSEBs. In outreach work, in 2022-23 **Atkins** committed to (and exceeded) a target of placing 44 STEM Governors on under-represented school boards in England and Wales to promote social mobility. **Balfour Beatty** committed to (and also exceeded) their target for new apprenticeships, local/workless employment, work placements, education facility engagement, and professional accreditations. Lastly, **Landsec**

What were the enablers and barriers to effective strategy and leadership?

Enablers

Senior buy-in

Strong Executive Committee (ExCo) involvement ensured that employers' social mobility work received the resources, visibility, and status required to be impactful. Particularly powerful examples included senior sponsors who were from LSEBs themselves, and were willing to share their stories more widely. This helped to increase understanding and engage early career LSEB employees in social mobility-related activities.

Targets and funding

By setting targets and commitments at board and/or senior leadership level, employers were able to ringfence staff time and budgets for ambitious social mobility programmes. This approach was particularly valuable to ensure social mobility work was prioritised within busy schedules.

Barriers

Understanding and engagement

Some employers working on their first social mobility strategy or programme experienced low levels of engagement due to a lack of understanding or awareness of social mobility-related issues. This was a particular challenge in global organisations with significant differences in definitions of social mobility across country offices. Senior sponsorship and engagement from UK leaders were key to overcome this barrier.

Competing priorities

As SEB is not a protected characteristic under the UK Equality Act 2010, some employers found that social mobility could be perceived as a lower priority compared to characteristics such as disability, gender, race, or sexual orientation. Incorporating an intersectional approach to DEI which included SEB was essential to overcome assumptions that different forms of disadvantage were in 'competition' with each other.

committed to a £20m fund, to be invested over 10 years, to improve social mobility and support 30,000 people from LSEBs into work by 2030.

Once strategies and targets were set, much of the day-to-day social mobility work was handled by social mobility teams, networks, councils, committees and individual champions. In some organisations, including **BlackRock, dentsu, EY, Pemberton Asset Management, Phoenix Group, and PwC**, this work was led by individuals or teams employed to meet the organisation's social mobility and/or wider DEI targets. dentsu hired a GenZ and Culture advisor who was tasked with attracting, developing, and retaining GenZ talent, particularly LSEB individuals. PwC employed six members of staff to work solely on social mobility, five within their Community Engagement team and one within the Inclusion team.

In most cases, employers relied on employee volunteers to lead or support social mobility work. These volunteer-based employee groups were encouraged to join social mobility groups by senior leaders or social mobility champions. These groups or networks were central to employers' socio-economic diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts across the private and public sectors, at **BlackRock, Department for Work and Pensions, Government Commercial Organisation, Linklaters LLP** and **Nationwide Building Society**. At **AMS, Ashurst LLP, and Pinsent Masons**, employee-led groups were instrumental in outreach work by designing programmes, developing external relationships and using paid volunteering time to deliver support. Colleagues at **Bexley Beaumont** also participated in volunteering activities to support less advantaged groups.

Grant Thornton adopted a wide-ranging approach to social mobility leadership and governance. While employee volunteers and networks played an important role in engagement activities and providing support and feedback, the firm's social mobility action plan continued to be owned and invested in centrally with secondees and full-time employees. Activities related to social mobility including data analysis, policy changes, and updates to systems and processes continued to be owned and led by the firm's senior leaders and Inclusion and Diversity team.

Individual social mobility champions from LSEBs spearheaded the social mobility work across sectors. In addition to their day jobs, these individuals worked to improve social mobility within their organisations, sectors, and local communities, with some starting this work in the first weeks or months of their career. Examples of LSEB social mobility champions included **Alice Kinder** at **Bexley Beaumont**, **Callum Wilkinson** at **BlackRock**, **Omar Mentesh** at **Capita**, **Anna Holloway** at **Government Digital Service**, and **Sophie Jamieson** at **Lewis Silkin**. These individuals stepped forward early on in their careers to help remove barriers for others from LSEBs by developing outreach activities, mentoring, and recruitment programmes. Some also encouraged their colleagues to share their LSEB via workplace surveys, which helped to improve the quality of their companies' SEB data, and also supported inclusion and belonging activities within the workplace.



2

Doing the work

Outreach, recruitment, retention & progression



Overview

Across the private and public sectors, employers delivered a range of activities to engage, inform, and equip young people from LSEBs with the knowledge and skills they required to pursue careers in which people from LSEBs are under-represented. These included one-off events and ongoing programmes to improve awareness about a range of career pathways; to develop employability skills such as CV writing and job interviews; and to provide insights into work environments. Employers also inspired and supported young people from LSEBs through targeted mentoring and coaching programmes – typically delivered by employees who volunteered their time – and worked with local schools, colleges, and groups to support community-level change.

Raising awareness about career pathways

Employers across all sectors worked with schools, colleges, and universities to promote career pathways in areas including law, finance, and STEM to people from LSEBs. Law firms including **Hill Dickinson LLP**, **Lewis Silkin**, and **Sharpe Pritchard LLP** all delivered multi-dimensional awareness raising programmes to promote careers in law. In some cases, these programmes were led by individual lawyers who spearheaded their firm's work in encouraging and supporting LSEB students to see law as an option within their reach. In her capacity as Chair of the Birmingham Law Society Social Mobility Sub Committee, **Alice Kinder** of Bexley Beaumont led of the Law Society's annual Raising Aspirations in Law Event.

Targeted at aspiring lawyers in the Birmingham area, the event aimed to increase awareness of available career options in the legal profession, and to provide students with the chance to build their professional networks. Hill Dickinson setup the Hill Dickinson School Outreach Programme which connected the firm with schools in deprived areas to provide guidance on different pathways into law. At one Liverpool school, the firm facilitated a 'moot' – a debate in front of a judge – for students to gain some practical experience and to aid development and understanding of law. Lewis Silkin embraced the benefits of video conferencing to broaden their reach, developing the firm's Cold Spot Outreach Programme which saw them deliver webinars on legal careers, dispelling myths and helping students feel a legal career is within their reach. The programme, led by Sophie Jamieson, has delivered 32 webinars across 17 local authorities – reaching 1,800 students over the past year. Sharpe Pritchard LLP partnered with AllAboutGroup to hold careers events specifically for LSEB candidates, which aimed to empower aspiring young professionals, supporting them on their career path.

Employers working in the finance sector, including **BlackRock, Pemberton Asset Management**, and **Phoenix Group** forged links with local schools to inform, educate and inspire students. BlackRock encouraged staff to return to their own schools and colleges to discuss their background and career journey into the finance sector. Their Financial Inclusion Team Network delivered in-depth sessions at a London school covering personal finance, financial markets, careers in the finance sector, sustainable investing, and the new economy. Pemberton Asset Management organised an insight day at a London school to provide students with an insight into working life in the financial services sector and encouraged staff to share their own career choices and experiences. Phoenix Group offered financial services careers advice to teachers, students, and parents in several schools.

In the public sector, **Government Commercial Organisation** and **Home Office** both delivered extensive outreach programmes to raise awareness of careers in the Civil Service. Government Commercial Organisation delivered its first Schools Outreach Programme, bringing together 100 volunteers with over 200 young people from 14 schools across five levelling-up priority regions. The programme aimed to provide meaningful, practical experiences for LSEB students as well as an opportunity to network, engage with volunteers and learn about routes into the Civil Service. Surveys were conducted before and after the sessions to measure impact, from a baseline of not knowing what the civil service was, 72% said they would now like to work for GCF, highlighting how the programme changed their understanding of government and the impact it has on society. Home Office delivered its Elevate Insight Programme to provide university students from state-educated backgrounds the opportunity to learn about the range of different careers and professions available in the Civil Service, through the lens of the Home Office.

Employers in the professional services sector, including **PwC** and **Atkins/SNC** delivered diverse support to schools in social mobility cold spots. PwC delivered a wide range of community programmes across the UK, reaching 40,000 students living in social mobility cold spots, with a specific focus on children in rural areas who have few opportunities to learn about career pathways. PwC also delivered several targeted outreach programmes to promote career pathways for primary schools, SEND children, Refugees, and young people with care experience. Atkins' Governors for Schools programme has seen the company's staff step into newly created Governor positions in primary and secondary schools across England to help promote Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) subjects and raise the profile of engineering as a career path. The company have recruited 60 governors so far who will share their skills, improve governance, and champion STEM to equip young people with skills and qualifications.

In the technology sector, **Capgemini** and **Sapphire Systems** promoted careers in STEM through a range of events and programmes. In partnership with CodeYourFuture, Capgemini delivered numerous events to promote careers in technology, including targeted programmes for women and refugees. Sapphire Systems' Brighter Future Initiative held a series of workshops targeting a local state primary school and secondary school in Southwark, a borough with high levels of deprivation. Some of the classes that visited Sapphire's offices at the Shard spoke English as a second language.

Careers in STEM were also championed by employers in the construction industry. **Balfour Beatty VINCI Systra Joint Venture** developed a bespoke tool to identify the most disadvantaged, underrepresented and in-need secondary schools in nearby Local Authorities. The company raised awareness of STEM careers in Construction using online games and a mathematics platform, to inspire young people and help them understand their potential. The SPARX mathematics system has racked up 15 million mathematics answered questions and over 300,000 hours of learning by 14,000 students - 55% of whom are female. **Wates Property Services** worked with schools in London to engage in activities related to STEM and the company committed to engage 25,000 young people about careers in construction and the built environment by 2025.

What were the enablers and barriers to outreach activities?

Enablers

Leading by example

When senior staff were involved in outreach work – by participating themselves, and/or by acting as vocal sponsors for programmes – this helped to increase wider staff engagement, and to reduce internal barriers to participation such as workload issues.

Ringfencing volunteering time

Across sectors, employers' outreach programmes were delivered by internal volunteers. Employers broadened the reach and effectiveness of their outreach work by providing staff with paid volunteering time (in some cases, up to six days per year).

Working in partnership

Employers developed links with a wide range of organisations – including local and national charities focused on social mobility, refugees and asylum seekers, prison leavers, and care-experienced young people – to deliver their outreach programmes. This allowed employers to reach specific groups from LSEBs, ensured that programmes were tailored and delivered based on partner organisations' expertise, and helped to maximise the impact of employers' programmes.

Addressing barriers to participation

To ensure outreach programmes were accessible for people from LSEBs, employers provided technical equipment, designed hybrid experiences, paid travel and food expenses, and/or offered paid work experience and internships. This reduced the likelihood of excluding people from LSEBs due to location and/or costs of participation.

Across other sectors, including energy, real estate and media, employers delivered awareness raising programmes. **bp** committed to reaching 5,000 students over five years through programmes like AFS changemakers, which gives young people the opportunity to broaden their understanding of STEM, with a focus on sustainability. **Landsec** commenced 3-year partnerships with 25 employability charities across 18 UK locations to raise awareness of real estate opportunities for young people and provide training and pathways into real estate jobs for working age people. **Rhotic Media** delivered outreach programmes at multiple schools across Liverpool, Bath, and Essex, giving students an introduction to the media industry and what it has to offer.

Developing employability skills

Employers across sectors including professional services, finance, government, technology, and real estate ran programmes to improve employability skills such as CV writing and interviewing. In addition to supporting these core skills, employers ran a wide range of programmes on tech skills, entrepreneurship, and tackling imposter syndrome.

Professional services firms such as **KPMG**, **PA Consulting** and **PwC** provided programmes and sessions to support specific groups on employability and wider skills. KPMG offered sessions on teamwork, resilience, creativity and problem solving to help young people from LSEBs to develop the adaptability and resilience to move into and between jobs. PA Consulting provided STEM learning opportunities and training for in-demand technical skills for 12 to 25-year-olds across the UK. This included developing STEM educational resources for teachers nationally in partnership with The Economist Educational Foundation, delivering coding clubs with The Raspberry Pi Foundation in Manchester and Belfast, and delivering introductory coding courses to women through their Women in Tech network. PwC's programmes supported schools in social mobility cold spots or above average Free School Meal (FSM) provision to improve student's confidence. The firm also worked with partners including Refugee Council, Welsh Refugee Council, Reuaid, and Barnardo's to deliver a wide range of targeted development programmes to support refugees and care experienced young people to develop skills, including personal branding and communication skills.

Firms in the finance sector including **BlackRock**, **CMC Markets**, **M&G plc**, **NatWest Group** and **The Aldermore Group** delivered a range of employability skills programmes. M&G's The Bridge programme provided bespoke training and coaching for school leavers to support them with apprenticeship assessment centres. The NatWest CareerSense Skills Exploration Workshop for 13-18-year-olds showcased transferable workplace skills, through mini activities based on real tasks from the world of work and supported by bank volunteers. The bank's entrepreneurial Dream Bigger workshop introduced entrepreneurship as a potential career pathway and covered topics like growth mindset and pitching. The Aldermore Group's Aspire platform supported Year 10 and 11 students across 205 schools within Greater Manchester and Cardiff regions with topics such as entrepreneurship, business, economics, and financial planning.

Within the public sector, **Department for Work and Pensions** and **Home Office** delivered programmes for young people (identified as being at risk of becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training) and those who were state-educated, respectively) to develop soft skills, increase confidence, and tackle imposter syndrome. **The Government Digital Service** piloted a programme set up by **Anna Holloway**, to improve tech skills within the community focussing on LSEB areas.

Employers across the private and public sectors including **PwC**, **Capgemini** and **Government Digital Service** worked with CodeYourFuture to support refugees and others from LSEBs to develop vocational tech skills. Capgemini supported 12 software development courses for 460 students. The course had a 76% graduation rate, and 71% of those graduates went on to employment or further education within six months (including 82 Capgemini hires). **Decipher Cyber** also delivered tech skills programmes for young people from LSEBs in London. They ran workshops

What were the enablers and barriers to outreach activities?

Barriers

Engaging schools

Employers faced challenges delivering outreach activities in schools due to staff shortages, workload, and industrial action in 2022-23. To overcome these challenges, employers often worked with partner organisations (to benefit from existing relationships with schools), and worked flexibly to respond to the needs of partner schools. Many outreach programmes were rescheduled in 2022-23 to work around industrial action, and employers needed to be sensitive and responsive to these situations.

Limited time and money

Effective outreach programmes required a significant time commitment from employees. This often presented a challenge for employers and individual staff members, particularly when juggling delivery with existing work commitments. There were further challenges when employers were unable to secure budgets for their outreach work. Employers overcame these challenges through proactive support for outreach programmes across organisations, ringfenced volunteering time and (where possible) budget for delivery, flexibility with workloads, and engaging external partner organisations.

Navigating safeguarding requirements

Ensuring that safeguarding requirements were met was a particular challenge for employers who delivered outreach programmes with more vulnerable groups, such as care leavers. External partners provided important support to ensure safeguarding requirements were met, while there were also employers who gave internal staff members the time, support, and budget to become trained safeguarding leads.

and training sessions over weekends and school holidays to ensure accessibility for the participants, and focussed on equipping them with the essential knowledge and skills to thrive in the security and start-up space. The company also ran sessions covering time management, sales, digital marketing, and fundraising. In separate work focusing on employability skills, **bp** partnered with refugee service organisations to support 39 migrants and refugees on topics ranging from CV writing, interviewing skills, and career options in the energy industry.

Greene King's Releasing Potential Programme for ex-offenders expanded in 2022-23 to include a partnership with Only a Pavement Away, which provided post-release wraparound support (including employability sessions) for prison leavers across England, Scotland and Wales. **bp** also delivered a targeted employability programme called Refugee Open House, which supported 39 displaced individuals on topics ranging from CV writing, interviewing skills, and career options in the energy industry.

Circl provided training to young people from LSEBs on how to become coaches, which exposed young people to individuals from a range of different backgrounds while equipping them with new skills and a coaching certification. Circl's reverse mentoring approach involved 19-year-olds acting as coaches to CEOs, which enabled mutual support to achieve their goals and (for young people) an opportunity to increase their confidence and broaden their perspectives about future careers.

Exposure to work environments

Employers provided people from LSEBs with virtual and in-person exposure to work environments in 2022-23, including insight days, work experience placements, and internships. As part of their focus on social mobility, some employers provided paid work experience or internships for the first time, and others covered costs including travel and lunch to reduce the barriers faced by young people from LSEBs. This was particularly beneficial for young people who lived outside the cities in which employers were based.

Work experience placements were the most common way that employers exposed young people to workplace environments. In-person placements were offered by **BlackRock, bp, EY, Goldman Sachs, Greene King, Phoenix Group, Pinsent Masons, Sharpe Pritchard LLP, and Wates Property Services**. Placements varied in length from a few days to several weeks, and some targeted specific groups including care leavers, young people who were NEET, and older people experiencing long-term unemployment. Many employers ensured that placements were as useful as possible by providing mentors, exposure to real work, and access to senior leaders.

To reduce the workplace barriers facing people from LSEBs, employers offered paid and/or hybrid work experience placements in 2022-23. Paid, in-person placements were run by **Ashurst LLP, bp, Landsec, NatWest** and **PA Consulting**. Meanwhile, **Aon's** hybrid scheme offered a one-week structured programme for Year 12 LSEB students. The company aimed for around 70% of students to take part on a hybrid basis and the other 30% with an online-only experience so they would not be excluded due to location.

CMS and **PwC** both offered paid, hybrid work experience programmes to LSEB students. The CMS Connect programme was designed in partnership with PRIME, and offered 56 Year 12 LSEB students a week of paid, hybrid work experience. Participating students were paid £275 for the week (above the national living wage for this age group) and included pro rata holiday pay for their time. Meanwhile, PwC offered one-week hybrid work experience placements to 245 students (who were from high-than-average FSM areas and/or social mobility cold spots) across 12 PwC offices. Students' lunch and travel costs were covered, and students were provided with equipment including a PwC laptop for the week. Students were gifted a laptop at the end of the programme to support their further studies.

PA Consulting ran a week-long residential work experience programme for 30 students aged 16-18, in partnership with The Social Mobility Foundation and Career Ready. Students worked in small teams, mentored by PA experts, to address a client problem connected to one of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. Several employers including **CMS, EY, and NatWest Group** offered post-work placement support, such as follow-on mentoring and support with university or work applications. NatWest enrolled 72 young people (aged 16 to 24) onto their CareerSense Find Your Path programme. Co-created with youth partners and focusing on young people who were not in education, employment, or training, this programme delivered a range of skills-focused workshops, mentoring with a bank mentor, and a paid four-week placement with the bank at the end of their programme. In addition to paid work placements, NatWest also worked with a range of social mobility partners such as The Sutton Trust, Social Mobility Foundation, and Career Ready to offer experiences including insight days, and mentoring to help young people develop the skills and confidence they need for the world of work.

Employers also opened their doors to young people from LSEBs for insight days, which aimed to provide a taster of working life and practical sessions to develop skills, knowledge, and confidence to pursue a career in a range of sectors. Insight days were offered by employers including **Capgemini**, **Hill Dickinson LLP**, **KPMG**, and **The Aldermore Group**. At Hill Dickinson, the cost of food and travel was subsidised to enable as many students as possible to attend their one-day event.

Many employers worked in partnership with external organisations to design their internship programmes and to recruit eligible children and young people. **Hill Dickinson LLP**, **Pemberton Asset Management**, **Phoenix Group**, **PwC**, and **Rhotic Media** worked in partnership with the **10,000 Black Interns** initiative to offer paid internships. PwC offered internships to 61 students, 25% of whom were from LSEBs. **Barrington Hibbert Associates** used their relationships with city firms to challenge their assumptions about who they should be offering these internships to, encouraging them to look outside the Russell Group for candidates. Phoenix Group worked in partnership with the Social Mobility Foundation to provide three paid internships, while Pemberton Asset Management worked with Dartmouth and UpReach to recruit LSEB university students for internships and externships, and **CMC Markets** worked with Making the Leap to offer a new internship programme.

Inspiring and supporting young people

Coaching and mentoring programmes were often provided by employers as part of a wider outreach initiatives – for example, during or after a work experience placements or skills development sessions. **Capgemini**, **CMS**, **EY**, **Home Office**, and **NatWest Group** all offered mentoring or coaching support to young people as part of their wider outreach schemes. Across these schemes, students were matched with a mentor or coach for a fixed period to support during their placement or course, and then to help young people with their next steps such as a return to education or applying for employment.

Standalone mentoring programmes were common the legal and professional services sectors. Law firms **Ashurst LLP**, **Lewis Silkin**, and **Pinsent Masons** delivered mentoring programmes to Year 12 students from schools in social mobility cold spots. Lewis Silkin expanded their 2022-23 mentoring programme beyond London to include students across Norwich, Corby, Kent, and Blackburn. Among professional services firms, **AMS** and **PA Consulting** worked with external partners to deliver their mentoring programmes. AMS worked with the Prince's Trust and the Stephen Lawrence Scholarship to coach 130 work-ready young people from LSEBs across the UK and Ireland. Meanwhile, **PA Consulting** worked with Generation Success to deliver a targeted programme to support Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic young people from LSEBs.

In other sectors, **BlackRock's** Urban Synergy programme supported students reach their potential through mentoring and role modelling sessions, while **Ablaze** facilitated mentors from business for young people in Bristol, BANES, North Somerset, South Gloucestershire, and Wiltshire. **SecuriGroup Ltd** delivered their MCR Pathways scheme, which provided one-to-one career guidance to care-experienced young people.

There were examples of individual employees who took the initiative to establish links with local schools and partner organisations, offering their time and skills to mentor young people from LSEBs. This included **Alice Kinder** at **Bexley Beaumont**, who mentored and guided first-generation university students, providing them skills and confidence to overcome challenges and realise their full potential. At **The Clancy Group**, **Hannah Leggatt** acted as a mentor through programmes with the Social Mobility Foundation, the Sustainability Forum, and The Girls Network.

Supporting community-level change

In 2022-23, employers supported community-level change by delivering education, work, financial and nutrition support and by tackling digital exclusion. Many employers, including **Ablaze**, **Capital One**, **Hill Dickinson LLP**, **HMRC**, and **KPMG** delivered numeracy and literacy support to schools in their local communities. Capital One supported a cluster of primary schools in Nottingham to help parents and carers become actively involved, build positive attitudes, and get engaged in children's learning. KPMG delivered a wide range of numeracy and literacy support and through the Marcus Rashford Book Club donated 75,000 books to schools in social mobility cold spots and areas of deprivation, linked to National Literacy Trust Hubs. **Programme and Project Partners at Sellafield** partnered with Chapter One, an online literacy programme, to provide 480 hours of classroom reading support to 105 young children in 11 classes across West Cumbrian schools in some of the county's most deprived areas. The adult-child pairs used a secure digital reading platform for their weekly sessions, to make it easier for volunteers to take part. In one example of impact, 28 volunteers from Programme and Project Partners at Sellafield read with children at Northside Primary School, providing 78 hours of classroom reading support. The school reported an increase in phonics pass results from 25% in the previous academic year to 75% in 2022-23. Following the success of the programme, Programme and Project Partners at Sellafield will be working with 300 volunteers in the 2023-24 academic year.

Other examples of school-based community support include **M&G plc's** Place-based Skills for Life in Middlesbrough programme, which tackled local challenges of low educational outcomes, aspirations and school attendance in school. **DP World London Gateway** partnered with STEM Learning, providing improved access to STEM for young people in South Essex, including areas of especially high deprivation.

Beyond schools, financial literacy and wellbeing support was delivered to adults by **Copy & TV** and **Snoop**. Copy & TV's ran She's Worth It, a free financial wellbeing workshop designed to change women's conversations around money. The workshops were designed to inform practitioners working with vulnerable women about the importance of building financial wellbeing when assessing safety, and delivered in women's domestic abuse refuges.

Currys, Government Digital Service, and **Sky** tackled digital exclusion by providing access to skills, technology, and training. Curry's Tech4Families initiative worked with families with children aged four to 16 who didn't have access to a device suitable for learning, and provided them with the technology they needed to meet their potential. Combining a focus on children and young adults' mental wellbeing and learning outcomes, **The VR Hive** developed a platform to provide personalised learning support, mental health tools to manage anxiety, and to promote social learning. The programme employed Virtual Reality (VR) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) to create an interactive experience for learners ranging from school children to college and university students, with a focus on those in less advantaged areas of England, Scotland, and Wales.

More widely, **Compass Group** delivered community support with nutrition through their Healthy Nutrition programme which delivered nutrition workshops to more than 80,000 children across the country. Finally, **England Boxing** apprentices delivered physical activity programs at two weekly community outreach sessions, which were targeted at inactive and underrepresented groups.

Recruitment



Overview

To address the lack of socio-economic diversity across sectors, employers sought to expand routes into their organisations and to transform their hiring practices. Social mobility apprenticeships were targeted to specific groups including school leavers and university graduates from LSEBs, while employers demonstrated commitments to financial security and job stability by paying full-time salaries, covering expenses, and linking apprenticeships to permanent employment opportunities.

Further routes into employment included paid internships for those from social mobility cold spots, targeted employment programmes for groups facing specific socio-economic disadvantage including disabled people, military communities, people experiencing long-term unemployment, prison leavers, and refugees and asylum seekers.

Employers worked to create more inclusive hiring practices by changing or removing required qualifications and experience from job adverts, addressing bias within their systems, and providing additional support for candidates from LSEBs to help them shine during application processes.

Social mobility apprenticeships

Employers offered social mobility apprenticeships across sectors including construction, energy, finance, food services, hospitality, law, media, professional services, security, and sport. **BlackRock** launched its first Apprenticeship Programme in 2023, while **bp** nearly quadrupled its intake of UK office-based, school-leaver apprentices from 2022 to 2023.

Compass Group continued to expand its apprenticeship offer, with over 600 people on more than 60 different types of apprenticeships in 2022-23.

Employers targeted recruitment of LSEB apprentices in several ways. **Aon** and **Hill Dickinson LLP** used their outreach programmes to develop a pipeline for potential candidates. **BlackRock** focused their recruitment campaign on schools with an above average number of LSEB students. **EY** and **NatWest Group** worked in partnership with organisations including Doceo, UpReach and Leadership Through Sport & Business to target LSEB candidates.

Providing support to people from LSEBs at the recruitment stage helped to encourage applications and ensure they were as strong as possible. **Aon** and **BlackRock** both built application support into their schemes to ensure that candidates could show their potential. **EY** worked with RARE to develop an inclusive approach to recruiting apprentices by awarding extra points to applications from students from LSEBs.

Among law firms and media companies, there were examples of employers working to challenge perceptions of apprenticeships, with the aim of normalising these alternative routes into the sectors. **Ben Morton** led the way to **DLA Piper UK LLP** becoming one of the first legal firms to introduce solicitor apprenticeships as an alternative route into the legal profession. Meanwhile, **Rhotic Media** established their apprenticeships as a route into journalism.

Employers including **BlackRock**, **EY**, **DLA Piper UK LLP** and **Sharpe Pritchard LLP** provided structured progression routes from apprenticeships to full-time employment to ensure apprentices could continue their careers. **Rhotic Media** offered its apprentices a full-time salary and related benefits from day one, in addition to covering apprentices' education costs and allocating them a weekly study day.

Alternative pathways to employment

The main alternative employment pathway provided by employers was through their internship programmes. Moreover, many employers offered progression routes from internship to full time employment. This was particularly common in law firms; **Hill Dickinson LLP** and **Sharpe Pritchard LLP** offered full-time training contracts to interns recruited through 10,000 Black Interns.

Outreach programmes were also used to identify and engage potential hires. **KPMG** gave every student who took part in their Social Mobility Talent Insight Programme the opportunity to take part in the firm's graduate assessment at the end of their placement, and committed to offering a graduate role to every student who passed the assessment. Similarly, in the construction sector, **Wates Property Services** provided structured progression for students who took part in their work experience programmes. In the media sector, **dentsu** used its outreach programme The Code to establish a direct link between 12 schools in social mobility cold spots and its talent pipeline.

Graduates from LSEBs were also offered full time jobs or training contracts. Employers did this by engaging with universities in social mobility cold spots, or by working with partner organisations to identify individual LSEB students. **Pemberton Asset Management** and **PwC** worked with UpReach to recruit LSEB graduates, while PwC also established a pathway programme for students at Aston University. **NatWest Group** worked in partnership with John Smith Group to promote their graduate opportunities to recipients of bursaries.

Law firms **Macfarlanes**, **Norton Rose Fulbright LLP**, and **Slaughter and May** used their own bursaries and scholarship schemes as a pipeline for talent. Some recipients of Norton Rose Fulbright's inaugural bursary went on to receive training contracts at the firm in 2022-23. Additionally, Slaughter and May offered training contracts to three students on its Scholarship Scheme.

Targeted employment programmes

Beyond their work with school leavers and graduates, employers across sectors offered programmes that targeted specific LSEB groups. **SecuriGroup Ltd** supported people experiencing long-term unemployment back into work, working in partnerships with PeoplePlus UK, PeoplePlus Scotland, Back to Work, and Remploy. Executives from **Phoenix Group** attended local job centres in person to encourage candidates to apply for their roles and worked with Connectr and Restless to advertise their roles to over 50s.

What were the enablers and barriers to recruitment activities?

Enablers

Working in partnership

Partner organisations helped employers to develop new recruitment policies, processes, training, and to target people from LSEBs during recruitment. These partnerships allowed larger employers to implement consistently inclusive approaches to hiring, and employers of all sizes to run targeted employment programmes.

Inclusive hiring campaigns

It was not sufficient to simply introduce targeted employment programmes; people from LSEBs needed to know they existed and how to apply. In examples of best practice, employers developed specific campaigns to advertise their targeted recruitment initiatives, often with guidance and input from their partner organisations.

Barriers

Changing existing processes

For large employers, there were challenges related to time, money, and internal support when seeking to change longstanding recruitment processes. Internal social mobility advocates overcame these barriers through senior sponsorship for change, and using evidence of the benefits of inclusive recruitment to make their case.

Overcoming bias

In sectors with a traditional focus on recruiting Russell Group university graduates, there was some resistance to practices such as changing entry requirements and targeted recruitment for school leavers and/or non-Russell Group universities. Senior sponsorship, along with making the moral case and the business case for social mobility, were all important factors in overcoming these barriers.

Several employment programmes targeted ex-offenders. **Capita** worked with Project ReMake to create internship opportunities for ex-offenders with the aim of providing an ongoing or permanent role afterwards. **Greene King's** Releasing Potential Programme focused on offering jobs to prison leavers and ex-offenders and, with 183 ex-offenders recruited across the UK in 2022-23.

Compass Group worked with West Lea Partnership and Ambitious about Autism to provide internships to young people with learning difficulties and/or neurodivergent young people, which led to 11 young people progressing to full-time employment with the company. The **Mitie Foundation's** Ready2Work Enable programme aimed to improve employment outcomes for individuals with learning difficulties and disabilities through work experience, and also provided an opportunity to apply for a job with the organisation at the end of their programme.

AMS and **Capgemini** supported refugees to work. AMS developed a Careers Centre for Ukrainian refugees and supported service users into employment through the centre. Capgemini, through their partnership with CodeYourFuture, hired refugees who graduated from their Software Development Course as software developers.

Inclusive hiring practices

Employers worked towards more inclusive hiring practices by changing the required qualifications and experiences for their roles, tackling bias in their systems, and supporting people from LSEBs to succeed with their applications.

Several employers reduced or removed the qualifications needed to apply for some of their roles. For example, both **Phoenix Group** and **PwC** removed their 2:1 degree requirement to reduce barriers for LSEB graduates. PwC also launched a new Tax Compliance Academy which has no academic qualification requirements.

Support was also offered to people from LSEBs during the application and assessment stages to give them the best possible chance of success. For example, **NatWest Group** offered a 3-week bespoke bootcamp to prepare candidates with employability skills, and help prepare for the assessment process and interview. **Barrington Hibbert Associates** funded the creation of 150 tailor-made suits, skirts, dresses, ties, and scarfs for LSEB students to ensure they were able to put their best foot forward for interviews for internships and full-time positions.

At assessment stage, some employers used technology to reduce bias against applicants from LSEBs. **Hill Dickinson LLP** and **EY** worked with RARE to develop more inclusive recruitment processes. EY used RARE training for their recruiters and hiring managers, while Hill Dickinson used RARE's recruitment system to ensure they gave equal opportunities to all applicants. **Clu** developed an AI-powered Inclusive Recruitment Platform to help employers to build inclusive teams by using algorithms match job opportunities to job seekers with the right skills.

Employers also worked to reduce barriers at other stages of the assessment process. **NatWest** replaced their competency tests with a video assessment, to allow candidates to showcase their passion and potential rather than focusing on test scores and qualifications. **Pemberton Asset Management** tried to reduce bias at interview stage by ensuring that each candidate was met separately by two different employees before shortlists were made by the recruitment panel. the benefits of video conferencing to broaden their reach, developing the firm's Cold Spot Outreach Programme which saw them deliver webinars on legal careers, dispelling myths and helping students feel a legal career is within their reach. The programme, led by Sophie Jamieson, has delivered 32 webinars across 17 local authorities – reaching 1,800 students over the past year Sharpe Pritchard LLP partnered with AllAboutGroup to hold careers events specifically for LSEB candidates, which aimed to empower aspiring young professionals, supporting them on their career path.

Retention



Overview

Employers adopted a range of strategies to retain LSEB employees in 2022-23. In light of the ongoing cost-of-living crisis and energy crisis, organisations prioritised employees' financial wellbeing by paying the Real Living Wage, providing one-off payments to help with living costs, and offering support with financial guidance and advice.

Creating inclusive cultures and fostering a sense of belonging among LSEB employees was another important focus across the private and public sectors. 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. Employers also delivered targeted initiatives including mentoring, reverse mentoring, and one-off sessions on topics such as imposter syndrome to support LSEB employees with the specific challenges they faced in the workplace.

Providing financial security

In light of the financial challenges facing LSEB employees during the cost-of-living crisis and energy crisis in 2022-23, employers adopted a range of strategies to improve employees' financial security and job stability. These included one-off payments to support employees with rising living costs, and enabling employees to work flexibly.

Compass Group and **KPMG** highlighted their commitment to good-quality employment as Real Living Wage employers. Compass Group also worked with their clients to promote the Real Living Wage, which led to 20,000 employees across 330 organisations being paid the Real Living Wage in 2021-23. Other employers such as **Greene King** and **NatWest Group** reviewed their pay and benefit structures during the cost-of-living crisis, with NatWest paying all employees a £1,000 bonus to deal with rising living costs.

Financial wellbeing guidance and advice was provided by **NatWest** and **Phoenix Group** to support employees with decision-making and planning. Phoenix Group offered all employees a 'mid-life MOT', a digital self-assessment covering work, wealth, and wellbeing, with a tailored report of tips and recommended actions. The firm also ran targeted workshops to offer advice to employees with fewer than 10 years to retirement. Phoenix Group also encouraged their teams to work from home and to work flexibly whenever they needed to, in order to create an inclusive working environment for people living across geographical locations and with a range of personal challenges and responsibilities outside work.

Inclusion and belonging in the workplace

In 2022-23, employers promoted inclusion and belonging through a range of social mobility-focused internal programmes, events, and groups, and by working to identify existing barriers that needed to be overcome. Employers working to implement or improve inclusive approaches to recruitment understood that the challenges and biases faced by people from LSEBs often persisted beyond a job offer.

A common approach to improving socio-economic inclusion was to deliver mentoring and reverse mentoring programmes. Employers including **bp**, **Capgemini**, **CMC Markets**, and **Department for Work and Pensions** offered internal mentoring programmes for LSEB employees in 2022-23. Where employers had outreach-to-recruitment programmes, these often included a mentoring element to support LSEB individuals from outreach to employment. For example, at Capgemini, mentors were assigned to LSEB students from the point they joined the CodeYourFuture course, throughout recruitment, and into the person's employment (whether this was at Capgemini or another employer).

Employers across sectors also continued to deliver reverse mentoring programmes in 2022-23, which saw senior leaders paired with junior LSEB employees to facilitate mutual learning, support, and development. These reverse mentoring relationships helped senior leaders to understand the strengths that people from LSEBs brought to the organisation, and to understand the challenges they faced with 'getting in and getting on' at work. Reverse mentoring programmes were provided by employers across a range of sectors, including **BlackRock**, **Compass Group**, **DLA Piper LLP** and **Greene King**. At BlackRock, **Callum Wilkinson** spearheaded the organisation's social mobility mentoring and reverse mentoring programmes. In 2022-23, he created 168 social mobility mentorship relationships, and in May 2023, he launched the company's reverse mentoring programme.

Employers also recognised the importance of LSEB employees being able to connect with and support each other in the workplace. Social mobility networks and employee resource groups (ERGs) gave LSEB employees time and space to discuss their experiences, create a community, and encourage allyship from more advantaged SEB colleagues. As discussed in Chapter 1, these networks and groups were also a vital resource through which employers' social mobility programmes and advocacy activities were delivered.

A crucial element of promoting inclusion and belonging was to listen to the challenges faced by LSEB employees, and to understand where further changes, support, or training may be needed. **Department for Work and Pensions'** Social Mobility Network held regular listening circles to hear directly from employees to understand barriers, areas of success, and themes for future focus. **dentsu** hired a new member of staff and created a new resource group to focus on attracting, developing, and retaining Generation Z talent, particularly individuals from LSEBs.

Government Commercial Organisation delivered an imposter syndrome workshop for its LSEB employees, in response to discussions and concerns shared within the group. Similarly, following feedback that corporate environments can be a challenging adjustment for LSEB employees, **Linklaters LLP** worked with their social mobility network to develop a training session called 'Demystifying the office' which is based on the lived experiences of junior members and aims to answer questions incoming trainees might feel uncomfortable asking.

Some employers responded to feedback from employees facing multiple types of barriers to staying and thriving in work. **SecuriGroup Ltd** restructured their training courses to make them more accessible for employees with learning disabilities such as dyslexia, and in line with their Disability Confident Employer accreditation, they worked continuously to improve this content.

Some employers noted that creating and sustaining work communities in the world of hybrid working was challenging. To overcome this, employers engaged with colleagues through online events and resources. **Government Commercial Organisation** created

What were the enablers and barriers to retention activities?

Enablers

Using senior leaders as role models

When senior leaders talked about social mobility issues, and/or shared their own social mobility journeys, this helped to increase visibility, interest, and understanding of social mobility. Moreover, it supported an increased sense of belonging for LSEBs employees in more junior roles.

Centring lived experiences

Activities to foster a sense of belonging and improve retention among LSEB employees were most effective when these were led by LSEB employees themselves. This allowed events, resources, and communications to gain authenticity from lived experiences, and therefore resonate more effectively with LSEB employees.

Understanding intersectionality

The most effective internal social mobility activities did not focus exclusively on LSEB. Instead, employee events that highlighted the intersections between socio-economic background and other characteristics such as gender, sexual orientation, or race supported more holistic understandings and engagement with diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives.

an online forum for discussion, and also set up a page with links to relevant external articles. **EY** set up a community and sub-site for their LSEB employees, which encouraged peer support and learning, and provided a dedicated wellbeing space. In response to the increase in hybrid working and staff living further away from central offices, **AMS** increased their online interactive content, and also set up four regional collaborative communities for colleagues to connect and collaborate in-person.

Promoting awareness and understanding

Employers promoted awareness and understanding of social mobility by encouraging LSEB employees to share their personal stories, running presentations and discussions on social mobility issues and delivering formal training employees. Organisations including **AMS**, **bp**, **BlackRock**, **Department for Work and Pensions**, **Government Commercial Organisation**, **Grant Thornton UK LLP**, **Linklaters LLP** and **Nationwide** encouraged their LSEB employees to share their personal stories and social mobility journeys with colleagues at in-person or virtual events. Personal storytelling was a powerful way of explaining the multiple barriers faced by those from LSEBs, and the impact of these barriers on their lives and careers. Many employers encouraged their senior leaders from LSEBs to share their stories, to increase visibility of social mobility issues, tackle assumptions about the potential of people from LSEBs, and inspire their LSEB colleagues. **BlackRock** and **Nationwide** also highlighted the importance of intersectionality across the social mobility events, and ensured that employees from diverse LSEB backgrounds were given space to share their experiences. **Linklaters LLP** ran social mobility sessions for senior employees to discuss their social mobility journey, sometimes sharing uncomfortable experiences and giving practical tips on how they overcame challenges.

Stories were shared in a range of formats. Employers including **Government Commercial Organisation** and **Grant Thornton** shared social mobility stories through regular sessions, either formally, as panel events, or more informally as tea break sessions. Other employers, including **AMS** and **Department for Work and Pensions**, organised their sessions during Social Mobility Day in June 2023 (or a Social Mobility Week organised around the day). **Linklaters** used video to share their employees' journeys in their SoMo Stories series, which aimed to highlight the biases faced by LSEB employees and to normalise discussion of social mobility issues within the firm.

In addition to sharing stories, employers ran sessions on a range of social mobility issues including classism, accent bias, imposter syndrome, and confidence. These sessions aimed to support LSEB employees with these barriers, and to raise awareness and understanding among non-LSEB employees of these issues. **Government Commercial Organisation** ran a workshop attended by 200 employees, examining the challenges faced by individuals with regional accents and promoting a more inclusive culture within the department. **Phoenix Group** ran "meet the expert" sessions with representatives from the Social Mobility Foundation and Progress Together, which aimed to foster open discussions and reduce unconscious bias within the organisation.

Formal training was used by employers to ensure that employees were aware of unconscious biases and how to overcome them. This year, **KPMG** launched mandatory social mobility training, including an immersive section in which colleagues could see the world through different lenses. **EY** developed a range of toolkits and resources on social mobility issues, including an accent bias toolkit to support employees to recognise the unhelpful inferences they may make about colleagues based on accents. **Barrington Hibbert Associates** offered coaching and advisory services to firms in the City of London to ensure they could create cultures to foster belonging, especially for underrepresented groups such as LSEB employees.

What were the enablers and barriers to retention activities?

Barriers

Breaking taboos

While many employers felt that personal stories were the most powerful tool they had to promote social mobility, LSEB employees were not always comfortable sharing information about their background, experiences, or the biases they had faced. Employers overcame this barrier by encouraging senior LSEB staff to challenge these taboos and normalise social mobility conversations by sharing their own stories.

Hybrid working

Although hybrid working brought benefits to many LSEB employees, it also made it more difficult to foster a sense of community and belonging for employee groups and networks. This increased the risk of employees feeling isolated or out of place in their organisation. Employers overcame this barrier to engagement by hosting regular, interactive online events, alongside smaller, local in-person meet-ups for employees.

Progression



Overview

As in previous years, activities to improve social mobility by supporting career progression for LSEB employees were not commonly reported by employers in 2022-23. However, there were examples of best practice across sectors. Examples included collecting SEB data across the employee journey, to understand and address progression barriers faced by LSEB employees; setting targets to address LSEB under-representation at senior levels; ensuring progression pathways and processes were transparently defined and communicated to all employees; and providing targeted training and development to help LSEB employees develop skills and put themselves forward for progression opportunities they might not otherwise consider.

Targets and accountability to address the 'class ceiling'

The first step in taking positive action to support the promotion of LSEB employees was ensuring there was reliable data on how these employees were currently progressing, understanding if the organisation had a class ceiling and if so, where it was. **KPMG's** research report *Mind the Gap* deepened the firm's understanding of social inequalities in the workplace and used these insights to better target progression interventions through a refreshed Social Mobility Action Plan. **EY** made all business leaders accountable for a scorecard of metrics to improve representation at senior levels, as well as work allocation. Performance against these metrics was reviewed quarterly using a dashboard, and this information influences decisions about the talent pipeline and progression into top roles.

After identifying that LSEB individuals were underrepresented at senior levels within the organisation, **Capita** introduced Employee Directors to the board in order to give them a voice at the most senior level, and to provide them with the skills needed to succeed. The current LSEB employee board member was selected with the support of an external firm of organisational psychologists, who assessed 200 employee applications using a process focusing on behaviour and potential rather than experience and qualifications.

Transparent progression pathways

Another strategy to support LSEB employees' progress was to provide clarity on available routes for progression, and how to work towards promotion. **Compass Group's** Career Pathways covered all frontline delivery roles through to senior leadership, and clearly defined the training and experience needed for all roles. Discussions around progression began during the onboarding process, to place a clear emphasis on progression as part of each employee's professional development journey. In the public sector, **Department for Work and Pensions** and **Government Commercial Organisation** worked to demystify progression routes within their organisations. For example, Department for Work and Pensions provided enhanced guidance on the department's recruitment processes, and ran sessions with experienced application sifters and interviewers who shared insights on how to excel during the promotion process.

Training and development for LSEB employees

Training and development activities targeted at supporting progression of LSEB employees included mentoring programmes, targeted development programmes, and training sessions. In particular, mentoring was seen as a crucial element in growing LSEB representation at senior levels within many organisations. **AMS, BlackRock, bp, Compass Group, Department for Work and Pensions, KPMG** and **Phoenix Group** provided targeted mentoring or coaching programmes to support the progression of LSEB employees. Phoenix Group's coaching programme supported employees transitioning into full-time employment after apprenticeships, graduate programmes, or work experience within the organisation. Once they started a full-time role, employees became part of the Join and Thrive Programme, and were assigned a mentor to support their progression. Compass Group's internal mentoring programme had more than 100 people sign up to mentor their colleagues and support their progression.

Development programmes focussed on the progression of LSEB employees were run by **Capita, Department for Work and Pensions, KPMG** and **Wates Property Services**. Department for Work and Pensions' Leaders Like You Programme targeted specific groups, including LSEB employees, to develop future senior leaders within the department to progress. In 2022, Department for Work and Pensions researched and designed a programme for 96 successful programme applicants who were selected through a rigorous process with the support of external partners. Wates Property Services' Progression Programme focussed on ensuring that LSEB employees could benefit from a programme of continuous development. This included ensuring that entry into their Business Management Trainee pathway was open to all employees.

Department for Work and Pensions and **Linklaters LLP** also delivered targeted training to support LSEB employees' progression. Department for Work and Pensions' Summer School ran events designed to support personal development, build leadership capability and confidence, and develop collaborative working skills. In response to feedback that LSEB employees felt they lacked the soft skills that would help them to progress, Linklaters ran a series of training sessions on topics including networking, imposter syndrome, and the partnership election process. The firm also started work on a new training programme to focus on improving skills which LSEB employees were less likely to have developed compared to their more advantaged colleagues, such as public speaking, utilising feedback, and building a business case.

What were the enablers and barriers to progression activities?

Enablers

Finding the class ceiling

When it came to progression, qualitative and quantitative data were key to help employers understand LSEB employees' experiences and outcomes, and so to design effective interventions to overcome the barriers they faced.

Senior leadership buy-in

Authentic and consistent support of senior leadership was essential to supporting LSEB employees' progression. Senior leaders ensured that relevant policies and processes were in place, while also inspiring and helping LSEB employees with their career progression through formal and informal support.

Barriers

Identifying LSEB employees

As discussed in the Data chapter, employers faced challenges when trying to accurately and consistently identify LSEB employees. This included deciding which questions to use to measure SEB, and encouraging employees to answer questions. This challenge was overcome through consistent communications about why SEB data were being collected, and how they would be used.

Imposter syndrome

Some employers found that LSEB employees screened themselves out of progression processes, due to issues such as a lack of confidence and imposter syndrome. While this presented a barrier to LSEB employees' progression, improving confidence and addressing imposter syndrome were also key focus areas of targeted social mobility progression programmes.



3 Taking the lead

Advocacy

Advocacy



Overview

To improve awareness and action on social mobility, employers collaborated within and across sectors in 2022-23. From existing sector-based initiatives (such as Progress Together, Access Accountancy, PRIME) to new schemes such as the Legal Apprenticeship Pledge, employers demonstrated that it is not only possible but vital to work in partnership to advance social mobility through employment. Specific advocacy work included internal and external activities to promote Social Mobility Day and Class Pay Gap Day, events and conferences to highlight key issues and recommended actions to improve social mobility, and working with the government to support specific social mobility initiatives.

Promoting social mobility among peers

Employers took part in a range of sector-based social mobility initiatives in 2022-23. In the financial and professional services sectors, **Aon, Barrington Hibbert Associates, BlackRock, EY, KPMG, Nationwide Building Society and Phoenix Group** and **PwC** all worked with Progress Together to improve social mobility in the financial services sector. EY seconded an employee to work with Progress Together for a year to support the organisation's mission to create a UK financial services sector in which everyone can achieve their full potential. Aon shared experiences of their Work Insight Programme with Progress Together members to encourage other firms to think differently about how they could support LSEB students.

In the professional services sector, **EY, KPMG,** and **PwC** continued their support for Access Accountancy, to improve socio-economic diversity in the accountancy profession. The three firms also continued their support for Rise, to increase social mobility through workshops in schools and downloadable resources to support young people develop relevant skills for the workplace.

In the legal sector, **CMS, DLA Piper UK LLP, Norton Rose Fulbright LLP,** and **Sharpe Pritchard LLP** participated in PRIME, an alliance of law firms working to improve access to the legal profession for LSEB individuals. CMS worked with PRIME to develop CMS Connect, a paid programme of sustained support open to Year 12 LSEB students. In 2022, Norton Rose Fulbright launched the legal apprenticeship pledge, the first of its kind in the UK. As of June 2023, the pledge had been signed by 26 law firms, including CMS and **Linklaters LLP**. These three firms, along with DLA Piper and **Pinsent Masons** also supported City Century, a new solicitor apprenticeship initiative led by the City of London Law Society.

Influencing wider audiences

Employers described a wide range of activities to improve social mobility beyond their own sectors, including signing social mobility pledges, hosting social mobility events, taking part in social mobility campaigns, and working to influence government policy. In the professional services sector, **AMS** and **Capita** were active participants in the Ban the Box campaign with Business In The Community (BITC). AMS committed to giving people with criminal records a fair chance to work by removing the 'convictions' tick-box from their applications processes, and Capita worked to encourage other employers to sign the pledge. At **PwC**, **Barry Murphy**, a co-founder of the Employers Social Mobility Alliance (ESMA), continued his work to bring organisations in the social mobility community together to create meaningful, large-scale change through outcome-focused collaboration. The Alliance developed an extensive reach by reviewing the work of over 500 organisations focusing on social mobility.

In the legal sector, **Bexley Beaumont** and **Linklaters LLP** supported social mobility-focused events for external stakeholders to raise awareness and encourage positive action. **Alice Kinder** at Bexley Beaumont organised the first Birmingham Law Society Social Mobility Conference, sponsored by Squire Patton Boggs, which included sessions from legal professionals and other stakeholders. The aim of the event was to promote the work of social mobility organisations, including Leadership through Sport and Business, the Ahead Partnership and Inspiration for All, and allowed them to build relationships with local employers to deliver their programmes on a larger scale. Linklaters delivered their 'Let's talk about Social Mobility' presentation to the firm's clients, which aimed to raise awareness of barriers to LSEB individuals working professional services. The session received highly positive feedback, with some attendees saying it had prompted them to think about social mobility for the first time.

Employers across sectors published articles and social media content on social mobility to increase awareness and understanding among employers and the wider public. **AMS** published a range of articles and insight pieces relating to social mobility, to provide a clear message and focus for the firm's clients. Their work on Santander's Graduate Scheme intake in 2022 gained national media coverage due to their work to reduce barriers for LSEB people, including Santander's commitment to removing their requirement for a 2.1 degree. **PwC** featured in publications and webinars as experts in social mobility, including their work for the World Economic Forum and UN Compact. In the legal sector, **David Ampaw** at **DLA Piper UK LLP** collaborated with the Legal 500 to deliver a podcast on Social Mobility and the Law.

Employers observed Social Mobility Day through a range of activities. **Rhotic Media** filmed a set of professionally produced videos outlining the organisation's social mobility employment practices with the purpose of inspiring and influencing the media sector to consider how they can improve social mobility. **Bexley Beaumont** organised a free social mobility webinar for business owners and HR professionals to educate employers of all sizes on how to diversify their workforce and give everyone an opportunity to succeed without needing a large DEI team or a significant budget. Elsewhere, PwC conducted research into skills gaps and social mobility cold spots in support of Class Pay Gap Day and the Flexible Futures Campaign.

Employers also worked to support and encourage government action to improve social mobility. **Greene King** continued to work with the UK Government to support prisoners and ex-offenders. In 2022-23, they petitioned the Government to allow serving prisoners to complete apprenticeships, and became one of two employers taking part in a prison apprenticeship pilot. The company worked with Minister and Shadow Minister steering groups to help shape prison leaver policy, and also worked with the Scottish Prison Service to create a pathway to employment for ex-offenders leaving custody.

What were the enablers and barriers to advocacy activities?

Enablers

Working in partnership

Building strong relationships with social mobility-focused organisations in the private, public, and third sectors were an important way that employers shared knowledge and resources. In turn, this maximised the impact of their social mobility activities.

Protected time for social mobility advocacy

Employees typically carried out social mobility advocacy activities in addition to their existing roles. In examples of best practice, employers supported individuals and groups through paid volunteering time and/or protected time within their existing workloads. This allowed employees to undertake wide-ranging and impactful advocacy work, and reflected employers' commitment to social mobility as part of – and not an 'add-on' to – full-time roles.

Barriers

Awareness and attitudes of employers

As social mobility continued to be a less familiar area within and across sectors in 2022-23, there were employers who struggled to engage their audiences on the importance of socio-economic diversity, equity, and inclusion. To overcome this, employers developed accessible content, focused on the business case for advancing social mobility, and worked with their peers to build a stronger voice around the issue.



4

Bridging the gap

Schools, colleges and universities

Schools and colleges



Overview

Within and beyond the classroom, schools and colleges continued to play a crucial role in supporting social mobility for children and young people from LSEBs in 2022-23. Among non-selective state schools and colleges serving less advantaged students, activities included targeted interventions to improve academic outcomes; working with external partners to deliver a range of enrichment activities to develop soft skills; creating more inclusive school cultures; and supporting multiple pathways to further education, higher education, and employment. Independent schools partnered with local state schools to give LSEB students access to their facilities, and aimed to widen access to private education through bursaries, scholarships, and free places.

Improving academic outcomes

Non-selective state schools and colleges serving less advantaged students used a variety of interventions to improve academic outcomes in 2022-23. For example, **Chelsea Academy** targeted students who need extra support through Maths and English tutoring. For students identified as most at risk of not passing these subjects at GCSE, the school organised a weekend residential trip which included intensive revision sessions. Chelsea Academy also partnered with Voice 21 on its Oracy Programme to help embed language skills into the curriculum. For 348 students with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), **Bridgewater & Taunton College** offered Foundation Learning, an alternative for those who struggle with classroom-based learning. To increase learners' confidence and engagement in learning, the college offered a land-based studies campus, a tutor and a keyworker for each student, and small teaching groups.

Queen Katharine Academy used their team of specialist teachers to work with students with additional needs, delivering one-to-one academic tutoring, study skills workshops, and revision classes. **Leicester College** engaged a team of 13 mentors to work with students identified as needing extra support to successfully achieve their courses, with one mentor specifically targeting the most vulnerable students. The library team played a crucial role in helping students to improve their literacy. The Reading Challenge was designed to support English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) students and 14 students benefitted from this.

Non-profit organisations helped schools and colleges to improve their academic outcomes. **Skywards Kids Limited** worked towards providing fairer access to grammar schools, including a programme of private tutoring for 11 Plus preparation for low-income families. The organisation partnered with **Pate's Grammar School** and developed Shaping Futures, which provided 11 Plus courses free of charge to those on Pupil Premium. Together, Skywards Kids Limited and Pate's Grammar School helped over 100 primary school students in 2022-23, through activities including bi-weekly additional STEM, Cookery, Geography, Yoga, KS2 English and Maths, and an 11 Plus familiarisation programme.

Providing enrichment activities

In 2022-23, non-selective state schools serving less advantaged pupils adopted a range of strategies to make enrichment activities more easily accessible and financially viable. **Tile Cross Academy** partnered with the UK Sailing Academy (UKSA) to provide seven fully-funded residentials to the Sea Change Programme, where young people experienced water-based activities and learned about training and careers in the maritime sector. The school also continued their partnership with the charity Snow Camp, which uses snow sports to drive social mobility. In 2022-23, two Looked After Children completed the programme and gained their Snow Sport England instructor foundation qualifications after a residential. These pupils' costs were funded by cadet force charities.

In further examples of schools collaborating with external organisations to deliver enrichment activities, **Waterhead Academy** became one of the first schools in the UK to become an NHS-St John Ambulance Cadet Unit. Through this partnership, students learned emergency first aid skills, trained other students, and participated in a range of community programmes such as volunteering at retirement homes and gaining insights into the medical profession. **Tile Cross Academy** was part of the Combined Cadet Force at Solihull School, their local independent school. Staff from Tile Cross Academy led a joint corps of drums music project and an expedition to attend a cadet leadership camp in the USA. Reported benefits for students included improved attendance and educational outcomes, better mental and physical wellbeing, and reduced vulnerability.

At **Queen Katharine Academy**, students were given a chance to develop their leadership, communication and independent learning skills through activities such as student council and debating society. **Bridgewater & Taunton College** delivered a range of projects for students, such as volunteering with West Somerset Railway and the Conquest Riding Centre. Some students ran their own craft and donation shop, raising £1,000 in two weeks for charity. The college also partnered with [Game Changers](#), a social enterprise offering internet safety and supporting children and young people with SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) back into the community after lockdown.

Non-selective state schools offered residentials as an opportunity for students to immerse themselves in enrichment activities, and to re-engage those who have become at risk of falling behind or out of the schooling system completely. **Tile Cross Academy** ran two week-long residential visits to Youth Hostel Association hostels, made possible by grant funding which reduced the parental contribution to a maximum of £30 per pupil. **Chelsea Academy** organised trips to Jamie's Farm, which combined farming and therapy for the least advantaged students. In addition, Place2Be was offered full-time at the school, providing mental health care to help students become more resilient and to reach them before a crisis point.

Among independent schools that entered the SOMOs in 2022-23, **Christ's Hospital** (a school with a high percentage of students receiving very low cost or free boarding places) provided a series of Rap Therapy Sessions as part of their Inclusion Working Group. The sessions engaged students with lyric writing and rap music to improve communication, influence positive ways of expression, and improve mental health.

What were the enablers and barriers for schools and colleges?

Enablers

Strong stakeholder partnerships

Partnerships were essential to schools' and colleges' social mobility activities. Examples included working with other educational institutions, local councils, charities, and/or employers. Successful partnerships were built on a mutual understanding of social mobility, reliability, and shared values.

Delivering accessible activities

Schools and colleges adopted a range of strategies to ensure social mobility activities were as accessible as possible for less advantaged students. In one example, a school adapted events for care-experienced students by engaging familiar staff members and by scheduling events in the early evening. This helped students feel more at ease, and ensured school spaces were quieter and less overwhelming.

Dedication and care from staff

School and college staff played a key role in delivering effective social mobility activities. Staff members were described as dedicating time to work with the least engaged students, having a positive mindsets, and going above and beyond their job descriptions to deliver programmes with enthusiasm and commitment.

Creating inclusive school cultures

Schools serving less advantaged populations worked to improve accessibility for children and young people facing socio-economic disadvantages, particularly in light of the additional learning barriers they faced. Bespoke sessions for care-experienced young people and unaccompanied asylum seekers were created at **Leicester College**. These sessions focused on citizenship, British values, college values, and bespoke support in the college and local community. Sessions were delivered by a qualified Youth Worker from the college's Student Enrichment Team and were timed around students' course commitments to ensure their studies were not negatively impacted.

Queen Katharine Academy adapted their curriculum to improve accessibility for learners facing specific barriers, such as learning or emotional challenges. The school set up a series of pathways which allowed a highly customisable experience, allowing students to access level 2 and 3 vocational and academic courses. Schools also took steps to create inclusive cultures and environments in which students from all backgrounds could thrive. **Chelsea Academy** received a Bronze Award from Educate & Celebrate for completing their Pride Project to improve inclusion for LGBT+ students. This included staff training, a full review of policies such as uniforms, a visible Code of Conduct based on the Equality Act 2010 throughout the school, and the creation of an Active Youth Network to advocate for change. The school also ran a Peer Mentoring programme with Oppidan Education, where Year 10 and Year 12 students were taught to mentor Year 7 students in an effort to build a strong sense of belonging in the school community.

Among independent schools, **Christ's Hospital** worked with Inclusion Labs to create an Inclusion Working Group, chaired by the school's newly-appointed full-time EDI Lead, through which students were empowered to shape their school's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policies and activities. The school worked closely with Academic Department Champions to ensure students' voices were represented in the curriculum, and helped to increase understanding of a wide range of cultures, faiths, gender identities, and sexualities. This led to the formation of student groups including the African Caribbean Society, Anti-Sexism Group, and Neurodivergent Society. Among Upper Sixth students in 2023, 89% said their experience instilled a desire to challenge injustice, and 97% said it helped them to integrate with people from different backgrounds.

Pathways to FE, HE, and employment

Looking forwards to the world of work, non-selective state schools worked to increase opportunities for students from LSEBs to enter further education (FE) and higher education (HE), to support social mobility through high-quality employment opportunities. **Bridgewater & Taunton College**, which is in one of the areas of the lowest social mobility in the UK, offered a holistic and bespoke approach to improve students' employability. This included supported internships and traineeships with employers such as Hinkley Point C (HPC), with the aim of creating placement opportunities linked to real job offers for learners with SEND. The 13 weeks of training included five weeks of classroom preparation, eight weeks at HCP in a role matched to their skillset, and specific skill development such as travel training to promote independent travel to and from work. The college additionally offered Moving Up – a Careers Fair for students with SEND – and BTC Takeover, where students learned practical skills such as farm work and catering with local small-medium sized enterprises.

A number of non-selective state schools used the Gatsby Benchmarks to measure their careers provision in 2022-23. For example, **Waterhead Academy** achieved all eight benchmarks, partly by establishing a wide-ranging portfolio of local and national partnerships with employers including DHL, St John's Ambulance, BBC, and universities such as Oxford and Cambridge. Through visits, seminars, and work experience placements, these partnerships demonstrated to students that everyone can follow the very best career and education pathways, regardless of their home postcodes.

What were the enablers and barriers for schools and colleges?

Barriers

Limited resources

For state schools serving LSEB students, securing financial resources was an ongoing difficulty in 2022-23. As schools were often unable to appoint staff for dedicated roles within their budgets, existing staff were required to take on additional responsibilities. Time continued to be another limiting factor for social mobility activities, as schools and colleges had to find a balance between these initiatives and formal classroom-based learning.

Low engagement

LSEB students who could benefit from social mobility activities continued to face barriers to school engagement in 2022-23. Issues included a distrust of institutions based on past negative experiences, and decreased social interaction and/or increased anxiety following the Covid-19 pandemic. Schools adopted a range of strategies to overcome these challenges. To improve engagement, some schools focused on involving parents from an early stage, with targeted meetings and accessible communications to emphasise the benefits of social mobility-related activities and programmes. To support students experiencing anxiety and mental health issues, schools and colleges offered increased flexibility with targeted courses and enrichment activities, and had dedicated pastoral staff on hand to provide additional support, where needed.

Supporting students with their post-16 options even after students had left school was another way schools and colleges supported future pathways. **Chelsea Academy** offered The Access Project for their Pupil Premium students, giving 20 students in Years 10-13 additional academic tutoring, along with a mentor to help with university applications. Once at university, The Access Project offered an additional year of support to help with the transition to higher education. The school also addressed the cultural capital gap for students from LSEBs by offering several university visits. This initiative recognized that many students had never been outside London, and would be the first generation in their family to attend university.

Support and development for school staff

Schools supported and developed their staff to help improve young people's social mobility outcomes in 2022-23. **Queen Katharine Academy** ensured social mobility and their mission was a key emphasis for staff CPD (continued professional development) accreditation. In Trust-level speeches, the school's Director of Sixth Form explained and emphasised the importance of social mobility to further spread awareness beyond the school itself. More bespoke training included sessions run by FLAIR for staff at **Christ's Hospital**, set up by the school's student Afro-Caribbean Education Network. **Leicester College** gained their Carers Federation Accreditation, in recognition of staff training to understand the education-related challenges faced by (and support available for) young adult carers. This meant issues could be identified earlier, solutions provided, and success monitored.

Partnerships and community support

Schools and colleges created external partnerships to further enhance social mobility within their communities in 2022-23. **Leicester College** worked with Leicester City Council and Leicestershire Virtual Schools to organise discrete events for care-experienced students in Year 11 from the local area. Students attended two evening events, which were held at the college campus and included a presentation, campus tour, and experience in the social space with the Student Enrichment Team. **Wellington College** ran their Wellington Refugee Programme, a weekly session run by teachers and pupils to supplement the education and experiences of children from local refugee and asylum-seeking families. Sessions comprised of academic tutoring, information on the UK education and careers systems, and social interaction. A unique feature of the Refugee Partnership was the inclusion of siblings and parents in many of the sessions, helping to build a sense of community and provide reassurance. **Chelsea Academy** worked to build a strong sense of community beyond the school by collaborating with individuals, businesses, and churches in their local area to deliver activities such as a weekly lecture series and mock interviews. These activities aimed to bring social mobility to the forefront of conversation in a wider cultural space.

Selective state and independent schools partnered with local non-selective state schools to increase reach and share resources. **Pate's Grammar School** continued their Shaping Futures Programme to improve awareness of opportunities for primary pupils and to help them reach their full potential. The school provided over 100 Pupil Premium students with mentors from secondary schools, and enrichment activities such as summer camps and cookery classes. Neighbouring independent schools **Hampton School** and **LEH** partnered with the Reach Foundation to found Feltham College Sixth Form, in an area where only 20% of young people move on to higher education, less than half the national average. Hampton and LEH staff provided 28 periods of teaching each week in a variety of subjects to help reduce barriers and expand horizons for Feltham College students. Hampton School also ran a Community Partnership Programme; in 2022-23, around 1,000 local state school children participated in a range of enrichment activities, such as sports, music, drama and academic opportunities.

Widening access to independent schools

A number of non-selective state schools partnered with independent schools as a way to improve LSEB pupils' access to these schools. **Tile Cross Academy** continued to participate in Birmingham Schools Springboard Partnership, which placed students in independent boarding schools. Alumni, otherwise known as 'Springboarders', presented their experiences of applying to Oxford and medical schools to Year 10 pupils in an assembly. The school also continued a longstanding partnership with the independent Solihull School, through which five former pupils were awarded 1100 bursaries to attend their sixth form in 2022-23.

Independent schools gave targeted assistance to widen access to less advantaged students in 2022-23. **Hampton School** provided 110 pupils with either completely free or 80%+ funded places in 2022-23. The school worked with headteachers from local primary schools to identify children eligible for a free place who would benefit from improved social mobility,

with the aim of reaching families who may not have otherwise considered independent education for their child or who may have been unaware of the bursarial support on offer. **Wellington College** also offered free places; in 2022-23, its Prince Albert Foundation enabled 26 children from low-income, refugee and/or edge-of-care families to study at the college. Each financial award covered 110% of school fees, with the additional funding used for essentials such as uniforms, and enrichment activities such as trips and music lessons. To increase their reach, Wellington College continued to offer the Wheeler Programme. Pupils participating in this five-year programme continued to attend their state schools, while joining Wellington at least twice a term for additional academic and extracurricular activities, and for an annual one-week residential to build skills and experiences. **Christ's Hospital** continued to offer a high percentage of places free or at very low-cost to students from less advantaged backgrounds (76% in 2022-23). According to the college, the school's social mobility impact is evidenced by students going on to earn on average three times their parents' income.

Universities



Overview

Universities worked across the student journey to improve social mobility for young people from LSEBs. This started with work to inform LSEB students in low participation areas, schools, and colleges about possible pathways to higher education and to provide academic and application-related support. Once LSEB students had started their undergraduate courses, universities provided a range of financial, pastoral, and academic support schemes to reduce the risk of early dropout and ensure students had the best chance of success while at university. Both during and after their courses, LSEB students were offered careers advice and support, internships, and work placements through university-employer partnerships. Universities also acted to improve social mobility as employers – for example, through staff and student social mobility groups and networks – and in their local communities, with community-based research, partnerships, and low-cost or free services delivered by staff and students.

Improving access

Universities adopted a range of strategies to overcome access barriers facing young people from LSEBs in 2022-23. For example, the **University of Exeter** offered multiple access schemes, including Exeter Scholars, Realising Opportunities, and Pathways to Law, which provide pupils with the knowledge, skills, and confidence needed to progress into HE. The university delivered sessions to raise awareness and increase applications from less advantaged schools, and also targeted mature students through the Mature Access Pathway. These initiatives led to 45% of 2022-23 entrants from its local region coming from areas of the lowest HE participation in the UK. the **University of Warwick's** social mobility programme Warwick Scholars continued to support sixth-form students with bespoke academic support, including tutoring sessions and residential experiences, to support their transition to university.

The **University of Southampton** expanded its flagship widening participation programme Ignite Southampton in 2022-23. The programme offered a holistic approach for LSEB students with one-to-one support, financial assistance, and workshops, and doubled the number of available places to 60 incoming students in 2023. The university also responded to the crisis in Ukraine by fully funding seven displaced students places in 2022. The **University of Surrey** also expanded its existing Widening Participation and Outreach team, and launched a website and virtual learning environment to maximise the impact of face-to-face sessions. Future Quest, **UWE Bristol's** Widening Participation programme, aimed

to dispel misconceptions about 'aspiration raising' among LSEB students and instead focused on exposing young people to the notion of their future 'possible selves', giving them resources and tools to conceptualise their potential futures and motivation to make this a reality. In 2022-23, students who took part in Future Quest were 14% more likely to achieve a strong pass in GCSE Maths and English compared to the national average for less advantaged students. Additionally, UWE Bristol's FutureExplorer activity kits were delivered in schools by undergraduates, providing interactive, immersive experiences linked to HE subject study and research. **Lancaster University** increased access to information about HE through their Children and Young People's partnership. This involved delivering informal, innovative, and creative activities to pupils in Key Stage 3-4, in alternative education providers, and with youth and community groups.

Partnering with charities and other HE institutions helped universities to further widen HE access in less advantaged communities. In one example of this, the **University of Warwick** partnered with national charity IntoUniversity to deliver academic support, mentoring, and accessibility programmes through the Coventry IntoUniversity Centre. By 2022-23, the Centre had worked with more than 3,000 students over four years, with a progression rate to HE of 66% (compared to a 30% local average). The **University of Surrey** worked in partnership with the **Higher Education Outreach Network (HEON)** to deliver activities to support refugee and asylum-seeking young people to inspire participants to engage with HE and Further Education (FE), and to feel part of the UK education system. The overarching programme was made up of smaller projects and activities, which ranged from aspirational visits to local universities to information workshops delivered in a local FE College (Brooklands College). **University College London (UCL)** worked to improve access for under-represented groups in postgraduate research (PGR) through its partnership with In2research. Following mentoring, workshops, community-building away days, a paid eight-week research placement and support from alumni, 100% of participants felt the programme was valuable and 84% knew what skills they needed to complete a PhD, compared to 28% before the programme. In another example of a targeted access programme, **BPP Group's** Experience Project involved working in schools to connect young people from LSEBs with the legal profession. BPP learners were recruited as apprentice 'influencers', and visited schools to introduce the concept of a legal apprenticeship and share their career story. Co-delivered by BPP, law firms and BPP learners, young people participated in a day of legal workshops and a visit to a law firm.

Supporting students

Universities offered a number of support schemes for students in 2022-23 to reduce the risk of early dropout among LSEB students, and to address the range of challenges they faced compared to their more advantaged peers. The **University of Exeter** used its Enhanced Transition and Induction programme to provide information and peer support for groups who experienced the highest gaps in outcomes for retention and access. Meanwhile, the university's Transformative Education Framework aimed to embed inclusive practices within the curriculum, including having Race Equality and Inclusion academic leads to support students through their teaching methods. Further interventions included its Exeter Cares Scheme, which offered practical, financial, and wellbeing support throughout the student journey for mature, care-experienced and estranged students, asylum seekers and student carers. Similarly, **Lancaster University's** GROW Your Future programme, a community for widening participation students to improve employability, ran a range of activities aimed to reduced progression gaps and increase networks once in employment. The university also wanted to understand the challenges faced by LSEB students, and used reciprocal mentoring as a way for students to make recommendations about improving accessibility in learning and assessment practices. **Swansea University** partnered with TG Consulting and a number of other universities to deliver a seven-week RE:Action 24/7 programme, offering a mixture of talks from aspirational figures, workshops, and reflection sessions to promote a sense of belonging, increased confidence and access to opportunity for their LSEB students.

What were the enablers and barriers for universities?

Enablers

Evidence-based interventions

Universities drew on existing evidence to inform the design and delivery of their strategy adopted social mobility activities, to ensure time and resources were used as effectively as possible. Additionally, activities were monitored and evaluated to provide further evidence on 'what worked' to improve social mobility.

Alignment with strategic plans

Social mobility initiatives were more likely to be successful and sustainable when they were embedded within universities' wider strategic plans. This ensured buy-in and resources for social mobility work, and avoided interventions being seen as isolated or 'add-on' activities.

Barriers

Wider contextual factors

The ongoing effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, combined with the cost-of-living crisis, continued to present significant challenges for universities and their LSEB students. While universities increased available financial aid for students (ranging from bursaries and grants to food banks) and continued to deliver student wellbeing initiatives, they were unable to 'solve' these wider challenges themselves.

Trust and communication

LSEB students were sometimes less likely to engage with universities' social mobility initiatives due to lower levels of trust in educational institutions. To overcome this challenge, universities worked to improve communications and engagement with LSEB students to ensure their voices were heard and needs reflected in social mobility activities. Engaging partners and stakeholders with expertise in supporting vulnerable groups was one strategy adopted to deliver more inclusive and effective social mobility initiatives.

To address the additional financial barriers faced by LSEB students during the cost-of-living crisis and energy crisis in 2022-23, the **University of Southampton** made over £4.8 million available as financial support for over 3,800 students through bursaries, and an additional £1 million to their Student Support Fund. The university also provided heated spaces, along with free and low-cost food for students. The **University of Warwick** launched a new bursary for estranged students, providing £1,000 per year of study with an additional £750 for eligible students to support with vacation-related costs during the cost-of-living crisis.

Improving employability

Universities used several approaches to provide students with post-graduation careers and employability support. The **University of Southampton** offered a holistic coaching programme, MyGeneration, for students who were the first generation in their family to attend university. The programme offered students 12 months of intensive career support, application and interview help, goal setting and career planning. The **University of Warwick** partnered with social mobility charity upReach to benefit students from LSEBs with enhanced employment support. The **University of Exeter** partnered with a number of businesses to provide paid internship opportunities to those who met the Widening Participation criteria for their Access to Internships (A2I) scheme. Students were also offered a career consultant to help them take their first step onto the career ladder.

UWE Bristol offered Green Skills for Jobs and Entrepreneurship (GSKJE), a programme which provided training and business opportunities to racially minoritised young people – both students and non-student residents of the local area – with a focus on the skills, knowledge, insights, and industry contacts needed to pursue careers in the sustainability sector. 90 young people were supported in 2022-23, 46 of whom secured industry or research internships. 16 young people accessed business incubation support, and seven received grant funding for their businesses. The **Open University (OU)** also addressed the networks gap through their Access, Participation and Success Internships programme which aimed to reduce the progression gaps between LSEB students and the wider student population. They offered practical experience with employers, access to professional networks, help with CV writing, and confidence-building activities.

Improving socio-economic diversity and inclusion

Beyond supporting students' social mobility as higher education institutions, universities also focused on improving social mobility as employers in 2022-23. To better understand the social context of their staff community, the **University of Warwick** incorporated SEB questions into their annual employee survey, to better understand the socio-economic profile of its employees and to inform the institution's internal social mobility activities. Warwick students also played a vital role in advocacy and awareness raising around social mobility issues; for example, Warwick Students' Union (WSU) led a 'Let's Talk About Classism' campaign in 2022-23. At the **University of Southampton**, a Social Mobility Network for staff and students from LSEBs doubled in 2022-23, reaching over 170 members. The network promoted awareness of issues relating to social class, and launched a podcast covering topics including accent bias and cultural capital. The Network also launched a festival of social mobility on Social Mobility Awareness Day, which will be followed with an exhibition of working-class photography from their community in the next academic year. Likewise, **Lancaster University** continued their Widening Participation Forum, which brought together staff and students to share best practice and discuss matters in relation to social mobility. **BPP Group** supported law firms with their DEI initiatives with their Reverse Mentoring Scheme, through which students from under-represented groups mentored firm employees during a review of their DEI approach. This translated into numerous positive DEI-related actions, including: addressing unconscious barriers for prospective employees, a review of early careers recruitment, and the appointment of a Head of DEI.

Community research and engagement

Universities shared their resources through research, community, and school partnerships to increase social mobility in their local areas. The **University of Exeter** created the South West Social Mobility Commission to improve outcomes for local people based on research on socio-economic disadvantage in the region. Projects included a literacy tutoring programme involving undergraduate students working to support Year 8 students at local secondary schools, through which pupils showed a 100% improvement in post-tutoring test scores. Similarly, the **University of Southampton** worked with 5,000 learners on attainment raising projects such as literacy and numeracy support for primary pupils, and supported students studying Extended Project Qualifications (EPQs) in Years 12 and 13. The University of Warwick supported students to become social mobility advocates through their Social Mobility Student Research Hub, which was launched in 2022. The Hub provided funding for undergraduate and postgraduate students from underrepresented groups to carry out research projects on topics related to social mobility, diversity, and inclusion. 14 students engaged in the programme, supported by four postgraduates, and projects helped to influence positive changes in university practice and enhance its research culture. **London Metropolitan University** delivered a number of University Clinics in North

and East London in 2022-23, through which staff and students provided low-cost or free services and support to less advantaged communities. Services and support included legal advice, business skills for small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and injury and rehabilitation services to help those with physical needs to get back into the workplace. As part of the **University of Surrey** and the **Higher Education Outreach Network's** partnership aimed at supporting refugees and asylum seekers in their community, GCSE attainment was supported through revision workshops with subject specialists.

To further raise awareness of social mobility, **BPP Group** hosted its inaugural Social Mobility Conference in March 2023, which gave their social mobility partners the chance to host a panel discussion and share widening participation practices to the community. **Anglia Ruskin University (ARU)** directly helped its community at its new Peterborough campus, through activities to tackle skills deficits in the city and wider region, drive up local aspirations, and support local employers to boost the economy. **Nottingham Trent University** continued its Oak Tree Getting School Ready (OTGRS) programme, collaborating with local services and families to identify the root causes of school readiness issues and to develop activities to improve outcomes. Activities included the Warm Welcome Group (a parent-led peer support network), a parent-led stay-and-play for babies, literary support for reception and Year 1 students, building a sensory playground, and research into school readiness.



Conclusions

Conclusions



In this report, we have examined the work done by employers and educators to advance social mobility in 2022-23, based on evidence submitted to the UK Social Mobility Awards 2023. In this final chapter, we summarise key findings and areas for action to continue progress towards social mobility in the UK.

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.

Appendix

Submission process

The submissions process for the 2023 UK Social Mobility Awards opened in April 2023 and closed in June 2023. The awards were open to UK-based private and public sector employers, schools, colleges, and universities. Organisations were able to submit more than one entry to each individual category (for each person entered), but only one entry per organisation for each organisational category. Organisations were able to submit separate entries to as many relevant categories as they chose.

Social mobility-related activities conducted from 1 January 2022 to 31 March 2023 were eligible for consideration. Entrants were asked to provide a written submission via an online platform, which comprised: a 200-word executive summary, a 200-word description of the aims of their activities, a 600-word description of activity or activities, and 200 words each to describe any enabling factors, any challenges and how these were overcome, reach, and outcomes. Entrants were also asked to answer questions on their organisation's sector and size, the location of their social mobility activities in 2022-23, and beneficiary groups targeted by their activities.

Permissions

Before submitting their award entries, all entrants confirmed that they gave consent for content from their entries to be used by Making The Leap for research purposes. Additionally, all entrants named in this report were invited to review named references to their organisations in a draft version of the report in August – October 2023.

Analysis and reporting

Data from all eligible entries (n = 125) were analysed qualitatively using the Framework approach,⁹ which allowed analysis within and across cases and themes. Within- and cross-case analysis was conducted to identify trends by sector and by type of activity across the employee journey.

Entrants' responses to questions on sector, size, and activity location were analysed quantitatively to produce descriptive sample statistics. Beyond information provided by entrants, publicly available information on the number of employees per organisation was used to estimate aggregate figures on organisational size.

⁹ Gale, N.K., Heath, G., Cameron, E., Rashid, S. & Redwood, S. (2013) Using the framework method for the analysis of qualitative data in multi-disciplinary health research. *BMC Medical Research Methodology* 13 (177). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2288-13-117>.