

UK SOCIAL MOBILITY AWARDS

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LEADING THE WAY

Winners' Case Studies – UK Social Mobility Awards 2025



Organised by **Making the Leap.**

About the report

In this report, we celebrate best practice to advance social mobility in 2024-25, focusing on the employers and educators who won UK Social Mobility Awards (SOMOs) in 2025. Across 14 award categories, we explore what winners did to advance social mobility in 2024-25, key enabling factors, challenges overcome, and their future plans for social mobility. Together, the case studies offer inspiring, practical examples of how to improve socio-economic diversity, equity and inclusion from the classroom to the workplace.

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 social mobility charity which was founded in 1993 and works with schools, young adults, and employers to advance social mobility and race equity in the UK.

To learn more about the UK Social Mobility Awards, please visit: www.somo.uk.

About the authors

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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank our partners for the 2025 UK Social Mobility Awards for their generous support: our Headline Partner National Grid, and our category champions Barclays, BNP Paribas, bp, Hedley May, Lloyds Banking Group, PwC, and Sky. Thanks to our independent judging panel, chaired by Sir Kenneth Olisa, for their valuable time and input to the awards. Last but not least, thanks to all our 2025 SOMO winners for their time and participation in our case study research, and for their outstanding work to promote socio-economic diversity, equity and inclusion in 2024-25.

Recommended citation

Christensen, K. & Iyer, P. (2026). *Leading the way: Winners' Case Studies from the UK Social Mobility Awards 2025*. London: Making The Leap.

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Introduction

Background

Since 2017, the UK Social Mobility Awards (SOMOs) has recognised and celebrated organisations working to advance social mobility across the UK. Organised by social mobility charity Making The Leap, every year we highlight the work of our winning organisations and individuals, to inspire and inform others to take action on social mobility.

At its core, social mobility is about removing the barriers that prevent people from less advantaged socio-economic backgrounds (LSEBs) from fulfilling their potential. At Making The Leap, our work with young people and employers aims to make social mobility a reality by ensuring that people from LSEBs have fair access to:

- High-quality education, employment and training (EET)
- Opportunities to develop the skills, confidence, and networks they need to succeed
- Work that provides financial security, job stability, and career progression.

UK Social Mobility Awards 2025

Over 100 organisations entered the SOMOs in 2025 – the highest level of participation in the Awards since 2017. These organisations represent over 20 sectors, and collectively employ close to 1 million people. As in previous years, the most common sectors are those in which LSEB individuals have been historically underrepresented: professional services, technology, law, and finance.

In this report, we focus on the SOMO 2025 winners. In each of our 14 categories, we explore what winners did to advance social mobility, key enabling factors for their work, the challenges they overcame, and their plans for social mobility in 2026 and beyond. Each case study provides valuable insights into how organisations and individuals can improve socio-economic diversity, equity, and inclusion. Before the case studies, we present our 2025 winners' top tips on best practice to advance social mobility.

Research methods

The authors conducted qualitative interviews with representatives from all organisations and individuals who won SOMOs in 2025. Case studies were written by the authors, with reference to interview transcripts and winners' SOMO 2025 entries, and were reviewed and approved by winners prior to publication. The report was proofread in two stages: by the authors, and using an artificial intelligence (AI) tool.

Winners' Tips

Looking for inspiration to get started on your own social mobility journey, or wondering how to keep going? Here are some top tips from our SOMO 2025 winners...



Make a strong business case: While there is a clear moral case for advancing social mobility, making a strong business case may be a more effective way to get your company on board. These are the key points shared by our winners:

- Supporting social mobility allows you to diversify your teams.
- Diversity of thought and a broader range of perspectives allow you to more creatively and effectively meet your clients' needs.
- Overall, more diverse teams lead to better decisions, greater impact, and a competitive advantage.



Identify your priorities: To create sustainable change for social mobility within your business, start by identifying your priorities. You don't need a perfect plan to get started. Identify a key barrier and set an achievable goal to address it, even if this means starting small. Your first activity, initiative or programme is unlikely to solve all your social mobility challenges. But think of it as a snowball effect – once you've started, you can build momentum and push for further change.



Collaborate and build networks: You don't need to go it alone on your social mobility journey. Partner with local authorities or charities to understand key areas of socio-economic disadvantage, or collaborate with other employers to understand how they are tackling social mobility. Building these networks will help you to deliver targeted, impactful and meaningful work.



Work with data: To create targeted social mobility initiatives, you need to understand the needs of your LSEB employees. Collecting and analysing SEB data will allow you to pinpoint areas of need and to create an action plan. You can also use existing data to inform your work. For example, national statistics about education levels, unemployment and social mobility cold spots can provide a compelling case for community and outreach initiatives.

2025 Winners' Case Studies





Organisation of the Year | Mears Group

MEARS

About Mears Group

Mears Group is a leading provider of housing and care services across the UK, working in close partnership with central and local government to manage and maintain 450,000 homes. With over 5,500 employees, Mears Group is rooted in communities and committed to improving the life chances of individuals, particularly those from LSEBs.

What were Mears Group's winning activities in 2024-25?

Mears Group won Organisation of the Year for its commitment to removing structural barriers impacting social mobility, through a data-led, inclusive approach. From its recruitment processes to staff development and its workplace culture, in 2024-25 Mears Group used a strategic framework to address social mobility at each stage of the employee journey.

As part of its data-driven approach, Mears Group introduced anonymised SEB data collection. This allowed the company to track barriers at key stages of the employee journey, such as barriers in their hiring processes, and to start examining its class pay gap.

With apprenticeships at the core of its social mobility strategy, Mears Group recruited 128 apprentices in 2024-25, which included structured pathways for school leavers and adults who are re-training. Apprentices who started their careers at Mears Group received a £250 starter grant, were offered wellbeing support, and received role-specific equipment.

For existing staff, the company invested in accessible leadership programmes and an alternative training route, which offered formal qualifications with practical training. Mentorship was also a key part of Mears Group's social mobility strategy. This included skills-based mentors and a reverse mentoring initiative that enabled LSEB staff to share their perspectives with senior leadership.



"There is a strong business case for social mobility - it's just good business sense. The more diversity you have and the more inclusive you are as an employer, the better outcomes you will get."

What are the key enabling factors for Mears Group to advance social mobility?

Strong commitment from leadership is a key enabling factor for Mears Group. The company's action on social mobility has been sustained with the full support of its CEO, who has enabled the structural changes needed to support LSEB individuals and to make inclusion a priority. High levels of engagement and good communication have also enabled multiple teams across the organisation to successfully collaborate and deliver Mears Group's social mobility initiatives.

What challenges has Mears Group faced on social mobility?

Mears Group faced the challenge of building the momentum and creating the conditions for sustainable change for its social mobility initiatives, particularly at the early stages. To do this, it was essential to ensure buy-in and support for social mobility as part of Mears Group's values and culture, so that staff at all levels understood that social mobility was a day-to-day priority.

How does Mears Group define social mobility success?

For Mears Group, success means continuing its work to advance social mobility through its apprenticeship programmes. Internally, Mears Group views success as creating a workplace where everyone who wants to progress has the opportunity and support to do so. More broadly, the company also defines success as having a larger impact on social mobility, by encouraging other organisations to create more socio-economically inclusive work environments.

What next for Mears Group on social mobility?

Looking ahead, Mears Group aims to strengthen its early careers and career development strategies, to continue improving social mobility across the employee journey. Through the Mears Foundation, it will continue its support for wider social mobility initiatives that deliver meaningful impact. Lastly, Mears Group hopes to gain insights into the career development of its LSEB employees, which will allow it to measure the impact of its social mobility initiatives.

With thanks to Jo Fry (HR Director, Mears Group), who was interviewed for this case study.



Leadership of the Year | Coventry Building Society



About Coventry Building Society

Founded in 1884, Coventry Building Society is the second largest building society in the UK. Owned by its members, the building society provides products and services including banking, savings and mortgages. With a strong focus on social value, Coventry Building Society is passionate about the work it does and the communities it serves.

What were Coventry Building Society's winning activities in 2024-25?

Coventry Building Society won Leadership of the Year for its continued commitment to supporting individuals from LSEBs, through its Better Futures programme. In 2024-25, Coventry Building Society supported over 15,000 children and young people from LSEBs with targeted initiatives and hardship funding.

As part of Better Futures, the building society partnered with primary and secondary schools in Coventry's most disadvantaged communities to improve literacy and numeracy support and employability skills. To build practical and soft skills, sessions included maths in real life, employer expectations and workplace behaviours, CV writing, mock interviews, vision boards and presenting. The building society also provided paid internships for Year 12-13 students, and for Year 10 students and above, offered workplace visits, insight days, online work experience and arranged future career panels. To build cultural capital, Coventry Building Society funded enrichment experiences for students ranging from theatre trips and university open days to field trips abroad.

Through its hardship funding, Coventry Building Society provided uniforms, meals and trips for local young people. It partnered with the leading youth charity in the city, Positive Youth Foundation, to support at-risk young people by providing hot food, recreational activities, homework support and access to youth workers. Further initiatives included money management sessions for care leavers, respite opportunities for young carers and holiday activities with food provisions for SEND children. Coventry Building Society also delivered economic crime sessions for young people particularly vulnerable to cybercrime and money laundering.

“For us, social mobility means achieving strong representation of colleagues from working class backgrounds across all roles in the business, particularly at senior levels.”

What are the key enabling factors for Coventry Building Society to advance social mobility?

Strategic investment, strong partnerships and active colleague engagement have all been key enablers for Coventry Building Society. Investing over £700,000 into its Better Futures Programme has allowed the building society to achieve large-scale impact and to develop strategic long-term partnerships in the community. Colleague participation has also been a key enabler, with more than 500 colleagues volunteering over 4,000 hours to deliver the Better Futures programme. Underpinning each of these factors is strong leadership at Coventry Building Society, which ensures social mobility remains a core strategic commitment.

What challenges has Coventry Building Society faced on social mobility?

While partnerships have been a key driver for Coventry Building Society's social mobility efforts, maintaining them has presented several challenges. Navigating timetable changes and variable attendance have been two key issues when working with schools. To overcome these challenges, Coventry Building Society introduced service-level agreements to ensure shared responsibility for the success of initiatives. Another challenge has been addressing diverse needs within schools, particularly in relation to students with SEND. To ensure programme content was accessible and appropriate for all students, the building society worked closely with teachers to tailor and adapt sessions.

How does Coventry Building Society define social mobility success?

Coventry Building Society defines social mobility success as ensuring positive outcomes for young people from LSEBs, in Coventry and beyond. It aims to tackle the attainment gap, raise aspirations and improve long-term employment prospects. So far, its success in advancing social mobility is apparent from the impact of its Better Futures programme. Future success for Coventry Building Society will be the expansion of the programme into Manchester, facilitated by increased support from employee volunteers.

What next for Coventry Building Society on social mobility?

Looking ahead, Coventry Building Society aims to expand the reach of its Better Futures programme by increasing school involvement and supporting a greater number of children and young people from LSEBs. Coventry Building Society will continue adapting and improving its work experience to meet the needs of this target group. Through its charity partnerships, the organisation also aims to broaden its support within the community.

Additionally, Coventry Building Society plans to widen its data-driven focus to explore the barriers faced by young people from LSEBs. Within the business, the building society also plans to focus on career progression, with targeted talent development to support employees from LSEBs and ensure they have access to equal opportunities.

With thanks to Belinda Brown (Senior Community Specialist – Secondary Schools, Coventry Building Society) and Becky Welch (Senior Community Specialist – Primary Schools, Coventry Building Society) who were interviewed for this case study.



Community Programme of the Year | Smith+Nephew

Smith+Nephew

About Smith+Nephew

Smith+Nephew is a global medical technology company, with a focus on the repair, regeneration and replacement of soft and hard tissue. The company employs over 17,000 people globally. Since the 1850s, Smith+Nephew has operated in Hull – a city with a diverse population and areas where improving social mobility remains a priority. As one of the city's largest employers, the company is deeply embedded in the local community.

What were Smith+Nephew's winning activities in 2024-25?

Smith+Nephew won Community Programme of the Year for its STEM Careers Outreach Programme, an initiative designed to broaden awareness of STEM pathways and help young people from underrepresented backgrounds to explore future careers in MedTech. In 2024-25, the programme was delivered in partnership with primary schools, secondary schools and universities across the company's Hull and Watford sites.

Smith+Nephew delivered a wide range of activities as part of the STEM Careers Outreach Programme in 2024-25. Through events with primary and secondary schools and an annual STEM Career Conference, the company introduced STEM and STEM-linked careers to over 1,250 students from LSEBs. Smith+Nephew also ran in-school demonstrations to showcase experiments and its medical technology to students. Longer-running initiatives included a programme supporting students aged 16 to 19 to progress from education to employment, and a structured work experience programme. Through its work experience, Smith+Nephew aimed to improve students' technical and soft skills, and also tailored activities to students' interests. Further initiatives in 2024-25 included STEM activities supporting girls, ethnic minority students, students with SEND and students for whom English is an additional language (EAL).



"It's about really giving everyone the same opportunity, showing them what doors there are and helping them to go through those doors, if that's what they want to do."

What are the key enabling factors for Smith+Nephew to advance social mobility?

Smith+Nephew's social mobility work has been enabled by multiple factors. Staff commitment has been central, with employees volunteering to serve as mentors and offering their expertise across the STEM Outreach Programme. Strong leadership has been key, providing the organisational backing needed for development and ongoing delivery of the programme. Smith+Nephew has also cultivated a culture that prioritises social mobility, which is reinforced through its employee inclusion groups. Finally, Smith+Nephew has strengthened its social mobility work and extended the reach of its programmes through partnerships and collaboration with external organisations.

What challenges has Smith+Nephew faced on social mobility?

Smith+Nephew has encountered practical and operational challenges related to constraints at its facilities. For example, Smith+Nephew sites contain confidential information and technology, while large and hazardous machinery presents a health and safety concern. During on-site visits, it was therefore essential to ensure sufficient volunteer capacity for constant student supervision. Health and safety procedures – such as using designated paths between buildings – also allowed the company to provide on-site work experience safely and appropriately. Additional care was also required when involving students in Smith+Nephew's labs and surgeon training facility – which include working with biological tissue – during work experience. The company allocated extra preparation time to ensure students understood what to expect during their work experience and how to engage respectfully with the materials.

How does Smith+Nephew define social mobility success?

For Smith+Nephew, social mobility success is measured both internally and externally. Internally, success is reflected in more diverse teams, and by ensuring social mobility is a sustained priority throughout the organisation. Externally, Smith+Nephew's success is demonstrated through positive outcomes for young people from LSEBs within its communities. Smith+Nephew also celebrates individual success stories, including a number of beneficiaries from underrepresented backgrounds who had never previously considered a career in STEM, and went on to study medical engineering at university.

What next for Smith+Nephew on social mobility?

Smith+Nephew plans to build on the foundations of its current social mobility work and to expand the scale and impact of its initiatives. The company aims to deliver its STEM Outreach Programme over a longer period, to provide sustained support. This will include establishing new partnerships with primary and secondary schools. Internally, Smith+Nephew aims to tailor its recruitment processes, to encourage more young people from LSEBs to see the organisation as an accessible, inclusive and desirable place to work. Smith+Nephew also plans to further develop its early career options such as internships, to offer structured pathways into careers at the organisation.

With thanks to Jo Barraud (Director, Evidence Communications, Smith+Nephew) and Allan Hunt (Research & Development Director, Smith+Nephew), who were interviewed for this case study.



Recruitment Programme of the Year | DLA Piper



About DLA Piper

DLA Piper International (EMEA and Asia Pacific) is a law firm with over 7,000 employees, operating across over 40 offices in more than 30 countries. The firm supports its clients in achieving their goals on cross-border projects, critical transactions and high-stakes disputes. DLA Piper has transformed their delivery of legal services through their pursuit of innovation, and aims to create a more just and sustainable future through its pro bono work and community investment around the world.

What were DLA Piper's winning activities in 2024-25?

DLA Piper International won Recruitment Programme of the Year for its dedication to hiring young people from LSEBs who aspire to a legal career. Through its Solicitor Apprenticeship programme, in 2024-25 the firm focused on removing recruitment barriers and provided support for candidates across the UK.

DLA Piper International adopted a wide range of actions as part of its inclusive recruitment approach. This included removing minimum academic requirements, implementing the RARE contextualised recruitment system, introducing CV blind interviewing, adopting a strengths-based assessment model, and introducing mandatory inclusive recruitment training for all staff involved in the hiring process. Together, these measures ensured that the firm assessed applicants within the context of their circumstances, reduced the risk of unconscious bias, and placed a greater emphasis on potential, skills and aptitude rather than prior experience alone.

DLA Piper International also provided pre-assessment coaching to help all candidates feel more prepared and confident. For successful apprentices, the firm provided an apprentice grant to help with relocation, and covered apprentices' travel and dress code expenses. Based on apprentices' feedback, DLA Piper International introduced resilience and communication workshops, and expanded its study leave policy to support apprentices' academic success. Reflecting the impact of the firm's inclusive recruitment approach, 83% of its apprentices were state educated in 2024-25, and 83% were first-generation university students.

“Advancing socio-economic inclusion is critically important for our firm and sector. We are determined to play our part in ensuring a person's background does not dictate what they aspire to do for work, or where they end up in life.”

What are the key enabling factors for DLA Piper to advance social mobility?

DLA Piper's work to advance social mobility is enabled by a range of factors. By collaborating with like-minded stakeholders, the firm provides targeted outreach activities to young people from LSEBs, raising awareness of the different careers and roles within the firm and providing a range of support. Within the firm, senior leaders have played a pivotal role by actively championing social mobility. Open and transparent communication has also ensured that staff understand and support the firm's social mobility strategy.

What challenges has DLA Piper faced on social mobility?

As DLA Piper International continues to build momentum in its social mobility work, it has faced similar challenges to many other organisations. For example, much of the firm's outreach work relies on colleagues volunteering their time. To enable participation, the firm provides two days of paid volunteering leave, with contributions included as part of colleagues' performance reviews. As the firm continues to highlight the value of social mobility, its social mobility network Horizons helps to ensure engagement is high and embedded across teams. Alongside centrally-run activities, the network has regional committees to ensure programmes are locally relevant and impactful.

How does DLA Piper define social mobility success?

For DLA Piper International, social mobility success involves a continually improving and evolving approach. This includes regularly reviewing and strengthening existing initiatives, and developing new activities. Success is demonstrated through tangible outcomes, such as solicitor apprentices qualifying as solicitors within the firm. In the longer term, the firm's success will be measured by equitable progression not only across the firm, but also the legal profession – ensuring that all employees, regardless of background, have fair and transparent opportunities to develop, progress and succeed.

What next for DLA Piper on social mobility?

Looking ahead, DLA Piper International has a strong focus on improving data collection, to better understand social mobility across all stages of the employee life cycle. Improving SEB data quality will support more robust analysis, including class pay gap reporting. DLA Piper International is also creating content to support colleagues from LSEBs in their career progression, and exploring how similar support can be delivered across its international offices, where appropriate. The firm's ultimate long-term goal is to ensure no young person ever feels a law career is out of reach because of their background.

With thanks to Marie Broad (Social Impact Manager, DLA Piper), Suzi Cameron (Community Programme Supervisor, DLA Piper) and Katie Holbrook (International Early Careers Talent Acquisition Manager, DLA Piper), who were interviewed for this case study.



Social Mobility Network of the Year | NatWest



About NatWest

NatWest is one of the UK's leading banking institutions, serving over 20 million customers. Spanning retail, commercial, and private banking, NatWest employs nearly 62,000 people globally, and 44,000 people in the UK. NatWest believes in purpose-led banking and an inclusive working culture, and aims to provide banking that is available to all.

What were NatWest's winning activities in 2024-25?

NatWest won Social Mobility Network of the Year in recognition of the bank's Socio-Economic Inclusion Working Group. Overall, the Working Group focuses on socio-economic background and how it intersects with other forms of disadvantage to create barriers to opportunities and progression within the finance sector. In 2024-25, the Working Group used a new engagement model guided by three main workstreams: Education & Awareness, Career Progression, and Regional & Intersectional Challenges.

Across these areas, the Working Group's key activities included tailored communication to share authentic stories of LSEB employees, and to promote relatable role models as a way to inspire colleagues. The Working Group adopted a collaborative approach, with examples including an internal event that brought together 500 colleagues to have honest conversations about class, opportunity, and aspiration; and an external roundtable hosting 22 organisations to share strategies on winning over leadership. Further activities included facilitating mentoring through a Multicultural Network to connect colleagues from different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, and to promote empathy and understanding.



"NatWest has a responsibility to focus on social mobility, because of the contribution we can make to society. In some ways social mobility is the most inclusive agenda of all, because it wraps in so many different characteristics."

What are the key enabling factors for NatWest to advance social mobility?

NatWest's Socio-Economic Inclusion Working Group attributes its success to investment in quality research and improving the visibility and input of senior leaders from LSEBs. The Working Group uses research to create targeted social mobility interventions, and also uses anonymised insights to inform senior leaders about the experiences and challenges faced by LSEB employees. These factors allow the Working Group to measure progress and secure buy-in for socio-economic inclusion from the highest levels.

What challenges has NatWest faced on social mobility?

The Working Group has encountered two main challenges. Firstly, there was a concern that social mobility might 'compete' with other DEI initiatives. To overcome this, the Working Group adopted an intersectional and collaborative approach, which has strengthened the bank's social mobility and DEI work as a whole. Secondly, the Working Group initially had concerns about obtaining quality socio-economic background data, since employees were not always comfortable disclosing their socio-economic background. The Working Group made sure that employees were well-informed about the purposes of SEB data collection, and how the data would be used, which has supported impressive response rates over time.

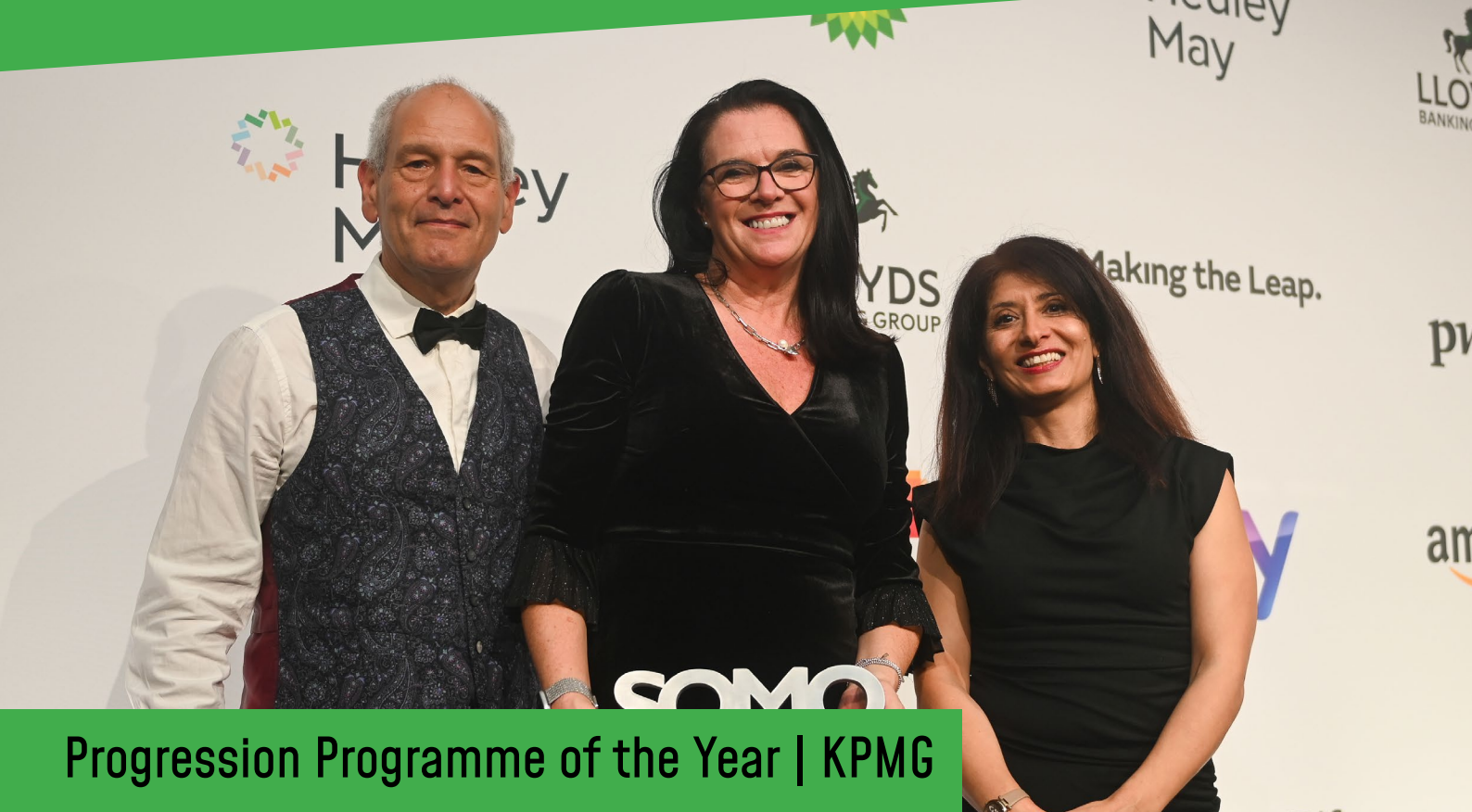
How does NatWest define social mobility success?

For NatWest, social mobility success will be when LSEB individuals have fair access to jobs, choose to stay, and are able to progress within the bank, including to the most senior roles. Even if LSEB employees choose not to stay at NatWest, the bank aims to support their development so they can reach their potential with any employer. NatWest also views social mobility success in wider terms: increasing access to banking facilities and improving financial education, to support social mobility among its customers as well as its employees.

What next for NatWest on social mobility?

In the long term, NatWest aims to ensure that its employees are demographically representative of the UK as a whole. To achieve this, in 2026 and beyond, the Socio-Economic Inclusion Working Group will be implementing a range of targeted programmes and initiatives to address the multiple and intersectional barriers experienced by LSEB employees, and to improve LSEB representation among senior leaders.

With thanks to Liam Fogarty (Industrial Relations Manager, NatWest), who was interviewed for this case study.



Progression Programme of the Year | KPMG



About KPMG

KPMG LLP operates from 20 offices across the UK with approximately 17,000 partners and staff. It is part of a global network of independent professional services firms providing Audit, Legal, Tax, and Advisory services. The organisation has set ambitious targets of improving social mobility within the firm and the communities it works in by 2030. This includes targets to increase the number of partners from LSEBs, and by providing one million young people the opportunity to build their skills through the Opening Doors to Opportunities Programme.

What were KPMG's winning activities in 2024-25?

KPMG won Progression Programme of the Year for its targeted interventions to support the career development of LSEB employees. Through a number of initiatives, KPMG focused on embedding inclusion into every stage of the employee journey in 2024-25. Each of these initiatives was underpinned by data collection and analysis, with a strategic focus on equitable outcomes.

Reach, KPMG's promotion readiness programme, was delivered across business units, supported 96 managers going for promotions, and was targeted at colleagues from non-professional backgrounds. The programme involved workshops and coaching sessions focused on interview preparation and career planning. 66% of Reach participants were promoted in 2024-25, with 57% of promoted colleagues coming from lower or intermediate SEBs.

The firm also introduced Thrive Together, a six-month peer mentoring programme which aimed to foster cross-sector collaboration and personal development. With nearly 100 mid-career professionals from LSEBs taking part, the programme paired KPMG middle managers with peers within the firm and across nine client organisations. The programme included peer mentoring, virtual presentations on social mobility and interactive lunch-and-learn sessions.



"We've set our ambition at senior levels because a fairer future isn't only about opening the door – it's about ensuring people can progress and succeed once they're here. By focusing on areas where we know there is under-representation, we can take targeted, positive action that supports long-term, sustainable change."

What are the key enabling factors for KPMG to advance social mobility?

A significant driver of KPMG's social mobility work has been high-quality data collection. By asking the right questions and gathering detailed data, the firm has gained a good understanding of the challenges faced by its LSEB employees. This has allowed KPMG to introduce targeted interventions where they are most needed. The firm's Social Mobility Network plays a key role in providing social mobility champions and role models for people from LSEBs within and beyond KPMG. Their work helps to demonstrate accessible pathways to progression at the firm. Collaboration is at the heart of KPMG's approach; by working with a range of partners and external organisations, the firm is able to broaden its reach and impact.

What challenges has KPMG faced on social mobility?

An ongoing challenge for KPMG has been creating a workplace where LSEB colleagues feel comfortable discussing their backgrounds and lived experiences. Alongside targeted progression programmes and leadership on social mobility, KPMG is breaking down barriers for their employees to 'come as they are' to the workplace. The firm's Social Mobility Network has played a key role in promoting an open, safe and inclusive environment. Another ongoing priority has been ensuring colleagues understand why SEB questions are asked, and how the data are used. For example, to build trust and engagement, the firm has run campaigns to help colleagues understand how their data supports positive actions through KPMG's suite of Inclusion, Diversity and Equity (IDE) programmes.

How does KPMG define social mobility success?

KPMG believes that an individual's background should not determine their future success. Success is therefore demonstrated by employees' positive outcomes and experiences, evidenced by data across the employee life cycle and feedback from participants on its social mobility programmes. These sources allow the firm to reflect on its social mobility initiatives, assess what has worked well, and compare outcomes and progress year on year. Ultimately, KPMG wants a workforce that better reflects the make-up of wider society, including a balance of colleagues from low, intermediate and higher SEBs.

What next for KPMG on social mobility?

Looking ahead, KPMG's social mobility work will continue to evolve, underpinned by a strong data-driven approach. With 24% of its partners currently from LSEBs, the firm has set an ambition of 29% by 2030. The firm also aims to reach one million young people from LSEBs through its place-based social mobility programmes by 2030. KPMG will continue to amplify LSEB individuals' lived experiences through its Social Mobility Network, advocacy and campaigns to ensure these employees are part of shaping sustainable cultural change.

With thanks to Beth Russell (Assistant Manager - Inclusion, Diversity and Equity Team, KPMG) and Mark Russell (Manager - Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity Team, KPMG), who were interviewed for this case study.



Innovation | Formula 1®

About Formula 1®



Formula 1® (F1®) is the world's most prestigious motor racing competition. The FIA Formula 1 World Championship™ represents the pinnacle of motorsport, with a season consisting of 24 races known as Grands Prix. These events take place across 21 countries and five continents. As an organisation, F1 is responsible for promoting the Championship and managing its associated commercial rights.

What were Formula 1's winning activities in 2024-25?

Formula 1 won the Innovation category for its programme The Next Grand Prix (TNGP). TNGP was designed by F1 to challenge and inspire state school students, and to introduce them to a range of careers and roles. During TNGP, students are asked to step in the shoes of a race promoter and pitch a concept for a new Grand Prix to a panel of F1 senior colleagues. In 2024-25, F1 adapted its delivery of TNGP, hosting workshops at four City law firms.

Delivered by F1 colleagues, each session began with an introduction to F1, which outlined five key areas of the organisation (commercial, finance, law, marketing and sustainability) and explained the attributes needed to succeed in each. Student groups were then paired with mentors, assigned a bid location and fact file built around key factors that determine a successful F1 race. They then presented their bid to a panel of senior F1 staff, who selected a winning bid.

In October 2024, F1 hosted TNGP Championship Final, inviting the winning groups from each workshop to compete for the overall champion title. All finalists presented their bids to a panel of senior judges, including F1's Chief Legal Officer. After their presentations, students also had the opportunity to network with F1 colleagues from across the business.

“We are motivated by providing meaningful opportunities to those who don't have them. That's what any work experience should be, and that's been the core motivation for The Next Grand Prix.”

What are the key enabling factors for Formula 1 to advance social mobility?

Internal and external collaboration are key enablers for TNGP. Internally, F1's Legal and HR teams have played a key role in developing and establishing the delivery model, while F1 colleagues from across the business volunteer as mentors, provide individual expertise, and act as judges on TNGP panels. Buy-in from senior leadership is also a key element in terms of ongoing support and delivery, including the participation of senior leaders in TNGP Championship Final. Externally, collaboration with the Social Mobility Business Partnership (SMBP) and a range of City law firms has enabled F1 to reach more students, scale up TNGP's delivery model, and offer additional mentors to support students.

What challenges has Formula 1 faced on social mobility?

F1 has faced operational challenges linked to the administrative time and volunteer capacity required to deliver TNGP. The original delivery model required a significant number of volunteers, as well as securing suitable locations for the workshop, and these requirements only increased as the programme scaled up. F1's collaborative approach was key to ensure quality was not compromised with increased quantity. By working with City law firms, F1 was able to access office space and additional volunteers, and to reduce the administrative time required from F1 staff.

While scaling up TNGP, another challenge was ensuring delivery remained consistent across law firms. To overcome this challenge, F1 allocated time to training volunteers from each firm, to ensure they understood the content of the workshop and how best to support participating students.

How does Formula 1 define social mobility success?

Through TNGP, F1 aims to provide young people with meaningful work experience. Success is therefore supporting students to develop business skills that they can put into practice, introducing them to a range of careers they were not previously aware of, and encouraging them to consider new career options. F1 is also focused on tracking the impact of its programmes against intended objectives and reporting success within its ESG reports.

What next for Formula 1 on social mobility?

In 2026, F1 aims to deepen its partnerships, continue shaping its social mobility work within the communities it serves and understanding how to support their needs. F1 also hopes to expand its reach to more areas, and to engage a greater number of young people from underrepresented groups. This includes strengthening programmes focused on STEM support and developing further initiatives within the legal sector.

With thanks to Jade Alogba (Inclusion Business Partner, Formula 1) and Alex Edmiston (Lead Counsel, Media and Content, Formula 1) who were interviewed for this case study.



Small Business of the Year | Rockleigh Arboriculture



About Rockleigh Ltd

Rockleigh is a tree surgery and landscape maintenance company. Established in 2016, Rockleigh is a growing business with 22 employees. While Rockleigh is a Midlands-based organisation, it serves customers across the UK.

What were Rockleigh's winning activities in 2024-25?

Rockleigh won Small Business of the Year for their commitment to providing alternative post-16 education and training opportunities, specifically by supporting neurodivergent young people into arboriculture careers.

Rockleigh's traineeship scheme used a holistic approach to support young people. This involved creating tailored material to address individual learning needs and taking an innovative approach to teaching and learning. For example, Rockleigh created and implemented a dyslexia-friendly app so that staff could confidently carry out risk assessments and review materials. In another innovative example, Rockleigh replaced long site reports with shorter documents that highlighted key information. This improved accessibility and reduced the stress that neurodivergent trainees experienced when faced with lengthy documents. The company also implemented individualised training plans, which were adapted to match each trainee's learning pace and style.

In addition to their traineeship scheme, Rockleigh staff undertook tree surgery demonstrations in local primary and secondary schools, and partnered with local charities and foundations, to inform neurodivergent pupils about career options in the arboriculture industry. This included teaching 8- to 11-year-olds about nature and arboriculture through a holistic day experience. These activities opened up opportunities to young people that may not have previously seen arboriculture as a viable career path.

“People who are valued will always do more. If the staff are happy and they can be themselves without being judged, the work is better.”

What are the key enabling factors for Rockleigh to advance social mobility?

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Rockleigh noticed an increased demand for tree surgery, but a shortage of tree surgeons to meet this demand. When new applicants came through, Rockleigh observed a common theme of neurodivergence among applicants. Responding to this gap in the market by training young people has proved a key enabling factor for the business to grow while also supporting social mobility. Another enabling factor has been raising awareness about Rockleigh's training scheme, from online promotion, participation in awards initiatives, careers fairs, and word-of-mouth in the local community. Lastly, Rockleigh has placed a significant emphasis on team bonding, which supports staff retention within the business.

What challenges has Rockleigh faced on social mobility?

In 2024-25, a key challenge for Rockleigh was ensuring that all staff felt fully supported with tasks that require concentration and confidence. Another challenge arose from individualised learning, as staff learning at different paces sometimes felt demotivated when comparing themselves to their colleagues' progress. To address both challenges, Rockleigh developed personalised learning plans and goals, and also emphasised that learning and progression would differ between team members.

How does Rockleigh define social mobility success?

When it comes to social mobility, Rockleigh defines success as the fulfilment and progression of all staff in the arboriculture industry. For the company, this means supporting young people in their career journeys, from trainees all the way to managerial roles. Ultimately, Rockleigh acknowledges that success looks different to different people. But for the company, supporting a neurodivergent young person who may lack confidence or qualifications, and witnessing them progress, is a key form of success.

What next for Rockleigh on social mobility?

In 2026, Rockleigh plans to continue growing as a business, and to continue supporting the progression of their team. This will include continuing to facilitate the individualised training of neurodivergent staff members, and promoting a positive and collaborative atmosphere.

With thanks to Renée Watters & Tom Watters (Co-Directors, Rockleigh Ltd), who were interviewed for this case study.



Tech for Social Mobility | PA Consulting



About PA Consulting

PA Consulting is an innovation and transformation consultancy. Its diverse teams of experts combine innovative thinking and breakthrough technologies to progress further, faster. The firm's 4,000 employees work across 19 locations, including the UK, Ireland, US, Nordics, Netherlands, to support innovation in industries including consumer and manufacturing, defence and security, energy and utilities, financial services, government and public services, health and life sciences, and transport.

What were PA Consulting's winning activities in 2024-25?

PA won the Tech for Social Mobility Award for its Skill Up programme, working in collaboration with a wide range of charities and organisations funded through The PA Foundation. In 2024-25, Skill Up delivered targeted support to LSEB individuals across the UK, directly supporting over 12,000 people through 1,000 volunteer hours.

The programme sought to help people overcome barriers and build the confidence, skills, and ambition to thrive through technology. It did this through tailored digital training – such as coding, web design, and creative technologies alongside mentoring, and career guidance for marginalised young people. A key element of the programme was a 12-week digital and coding course designed for women with lived experience of the criminal justice system. To build women's economic independence and support their transition into their community, this course provided personalised learning materials, one-to-one support, and technical training.

Bursaries funded by The PA Foundation supported students from across the UK who were experiencing significant barriers to continuing their education, and enabled them to undertake undergraduate study in STEM and related fields. These bursaries were awarded to those facing severe financial hardship, creating opportunities to pursue subjects such as Computer Science and Biotechnology. PA volunteers complemented the bursaries with wraparound mentoring and career guidance.



"Technology is a great leveller – when we make it accessible, we unlock human potential. Digital skills and innovation should open doors for everyone, no matter where their journey begins."

Other activities included empowering the next generation in tech by supporting community educators to deliver hands-on digital making sessions, providing role models to inspire young women and girls into STEM careers as well as running hackathons and workplace visits for young people from LSEBs.

What are the key enabling factors for PA to advance social mobility?

A combination of internal and external factors has contributed to PA's ability to advance social mobility. Internally, PA has benefitted from high levels of engagement, with employees and senior leaders actively championing social mobility and contributing to initiatives. Meanwhile, a dedicated Community Engagement Committee within the firm has increased the visibility of initiatives for people from LSEBs. Externally, PA's strategic partnerships with charities and organisations have provided direct access to a range of hard-to-reach groups.

What challenges has PA faced on social mobility?

PA encountered a number of challenges when delivering its social mobility programmes. A notable difficulty was engaging groups defined as "hard-to-reach". To address this challenge, PA partnered with a range of specialist organisations, which allowed the firm to reach those most in need.

How does PA define social mobility success?

For PA, social mobility success is about creating equitable access to education, skills development, and meaningful employment, particularly within STEM. A key indicator of success would be a firm that is representative of wider society; to achieve this, shorter-term success would be young people seeing PA as a good place to work, applying for roles, and succeeding within the firm.

What next for PA on social mobility?

PA aims to improve its understanding of LSEB young people's needs, and how it can meet those needs through its social mobility initiatives. This will involve improving data collection, understanding how to use outreach more effectively to attract LSEB individuals to the firm, and expanding its mentoring initiatives. The firm will also continue building long-term and sustainable relationships with its charity partners and organisations.

With thanks to Jack McMahon (Global Head of Communities, PA Consulting and Director, PA Foundation) and Fiona Scott (Senior Community Engagement Manager, PA Consulting), who were interviewed for this case study.



School / College of the Year | Bolton School



About Bolton School

Bolton School is an independent day school located in Greater Manchester. Supporting children aged 0-18, Bolton School offers a nursery and infant school, as well as single-sex junior schools, senior schools, and sixth forms. Founded over 500 years ago, Bolton School is dedicated to supporting and developing all children and young people who attend the school.

What were Bolton School's winning activities in 2024-25?

Bolton School was awarded School/College of the Year for its long-standing commitment to social mobility and its work to support young people from LSEBs. As an independent school, Bolton is dedicated to ensuring talented children are able to access high-quality education regardless of their financial background. In 2024-25, Bolton School helped students from LSEBs to reach their full potential through strategic partnerships and ongoing support. Backed by philanthropic giving, the school secured bursary placements for 20% of its senior school students.

Students who received bursaries in 2024-25 benefitted from additional financial assistance and personalised pastoral care, which ensured they could thrive throughout their education. Beyond the classroom, the school facilitated an additional alumni mentorship scheme for the future success of its students. Additionally, Bolton School launched its Open Futures Bursary Campaign, which aimed to raise awareness and expand access to its bursary scheme.

The school's commitment to social mobility was further reflected in its activities beyond the school and across the local region. Through community partnerships, Bolton School identified eligible bursary candidates, and encouraged potential applicants from low-income families to view independent education as an accessible option. By collaborating with over 80 local schools and universities on activities to raise aspirations, the school reached over 2,000 students beyond its own school community.



"We aim to cast our net as widely as possible, and to create social mobility by allowing access to the school irrespective of parental wealth and previous education."

What are the key enabling factors for Bolton School to advance social mobility?

Bolton School's historic focus on inclusivity provides a strong foundation for its social mobility work. This commitment is reflected at all levels of leadership and governance, ensuring social mobility remains a priority for the school. Additionally, Bolton School Alumni's ongoing support and generosity has been a key enabler to fund educational opportunities for young people from all backgrounds. Finally, thanks to Bolton School teachers volunteering their time, the school has been able to raise awareness of its bursary scheme across the region.

What challenges has Bolton School faced on social mobility?

An ongoing challenge for the school is to highlight its commitment to widening access to students from LSEBs, which is not always understood based on wider perceptions of independent schools. Another challenge is that Bolton School's bursary scheme relies solely on philanthropic funding, which means fundraising is an ongoing priority for the school. This is to cover funding both for bursaries themselves, and dedicated resources for the outreach initiatives required to engage potential bursary students.

How does Bolton School define social mobility success?

For Bolton School, success means creating opportunities for every child with potential, regardless of financial means and circumstance. The school aims to do this by ensuring students from LSEBs are able to access the school, and to benefit equally from the opportunities it provides. On an individual level, the school views success as all students thriving academically and being equipped to achieve their goals. In the long term, success for Bolton School is not only seeing former bursary recipients having successful careers, but also choosing to give back through the school's mentorship programme.

What next for Bolton School on social mobility?

Looking ahead, Bolton School is preparing to celebrate 50 years of funding its own bursaries in 2026. Continuing to use a collaborative effort to support LSEB students, Bolton School hopes to increase partnerships which allow the school to support those from LSEBs within the school and in the community. Bolton School also hopes to further widen access, with a target of 1 in 3 pupils being supported through its bursary scheme.

With thanks to Philip Britton (Head of Foundation, Bolton School) and Laura Firth (Director of Development, Alumni Relations and Marketing, Bolton School), who were interviewed for this case study.



University of the Year | University of Exeter

About University of Exeter

The University of Exeter is a research-intensive Russell Group institution, known for its teaching excellence and world-leading research in fields such as climate change. In 2023, the university was awarded Triple Gold in the Teaching Excellence Framework, in recognition of outstanding student experiences and outcomes. Approximately 30,000 students are enrolled in the university, which has three campuses located in South West England.



What were the University of Exeter's winning activities in 2024-25?

The University of Exeter was awarded University of the Year in recognition of its commitment to support individuals from LSEBs across its student and staff body. The university's social mobility achievements in 2024-25 were built on a strategy of three core interlinked pillars: student success, staff inclusion and regional impact. Key activities across these three pillars in 2024-25 included:

- **Student success:** The university's "Success for All" programme involved academics and students collaborating to address barriers to equal opportunities within the university. Focus areas included student access, key transition points throughout higher education, inclusive educational practices, and progression to graduate outcomes.
- **Staff inclusion:** Through staff networks, the university gathered insights on staff experience, which allowed them to use lived experiences to inform and influence internal working culture and policies.
- **Regional impact:** The university formalised partnerships with local authorities, further education colleges, and local employers in the South West, with a focus on aligning education and skills provision with regional economic needs. Community-based programmes to raise aspirations, improve academic attainment, and increase access to higher education included Aspire North Devon and Community Exe.



"With more diversity, we can offer a better educational experience - it leads to a better exchange of views and enriches the university as a whole."

What are the key enabling factors for the University of Exeter to advance social mobility?

Several factors allow the University of Exeter to advance social mobility. Through formalised regional partnerships, such as the South West Social Mobility Commission, the university is able to expand the reach of its social mobility initiatives. Another enabler is using a data-driven design and research carried out by its Centre for Social Mobility, to develop targeted interventions and to maximise impact. Additionally, the University of Exeter uses strategic alignment and leadership to embed inclusive practices across the institution so they become 'business as usual'. The University's Success for All Network of social mobility champions is another key enabler in driving forward innovation and good practice.

What challenges has the University of Exeter faced on social mobility?

The challenges faced by the University of Exeter have primarily been due to external factors. The economic pressures of rising inflation and the cost-of-living crisis led to financial strain for students and the university alike. With tuition fees unchanged, and a decline in available funding, there has been an increased constraint on resources to support students. The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in gaps in learning, particularly for those from under-resourced backgrounds, which increased support needs to access and stay in higher education. The University of Exeter has responded by increasing its investment in student funding; expanding opportunities to 'earn as you learn' via Degree Apprenticeships and flexible student employment options; working in partnership with students to address affordability and support wellbeing; and making changes to its curriculum to embed inclusive teaching practice and offer greater transition support from school into higher education.

How does the University of Exeter define social mobility success?

The University of Exeter defines social mobility success across multiple levels. At an individual level, success is having a positive impact on outreach participants, helping them to overcome challenges and thrive at their specific stage of education. For the student population, success is improved accessibility, increased diversity and a rewarding student experience. Lastly, success for university staff is reflected in equal opportunities to develop and progress, and improved representation at the most senior levels.

What next for the University of Exeter on social mobility?

The University of Exeter plans to build on its progress by strengthening collaboration within the South West region to help address barriers to equal opportunity, and to broaden support for individuals from LSEBs. The university aims to increase both the number and accessibility of educational opportunities for local learners, particularly those in geographical cold spots or from marginalised backgrounds. The University of Exeter also aims to invest in further research to better understand the experiences of students from marginalised communities, and to improve student outcomes.

With thanks to Nicola Sinclair (Associate Director for Access, Participation and Outreach, University of Exeter) who was interviewed for this case study.



Champion of the Year | Malcolm Gomersall, Grant Thornton



About Malcolm Gomersall

Malcolm Gomersall is the CEO of Grant Thornton UK, a professional services firm operating across 26 locations in the UK. Malcolm joined Grant Thornton in 2001, and was instrumental in establishing the firm's approach to DEI. Over the past decade, he has focused on championing social mobility and transforming opportunities for young people from LSEBs.

What were Malcolm's winning activities in 2024-25?

Malcolm Gomersall was awarded Champion of the Year in recognition of his longstanding commitment to supporting young people from LSEBs and his leadership as an advocate for social mobility. As CEO of Grant Thornton, Malcolm has been deeply committed to the firm's social mobility agenda over the past decade, and has offered proactive, practical and vocal support for sustainable change.

Under Malcolm's leadership, Grant Thornton has made significant strides to understand and address socio-economic barriers within the firm from attracting underrepresented talent, to allocating work experience, ring-fencing internships and enabling progression and belonging. A key step towards this was allocating resources to data collection and the creation of a data dashboard, which has enabled the firm to analyse its class pay gap. In one example of social mobility impact since Malcolm became CEO, Grant Thornton's annual trainee intake now consists of around 50% school leavers.

An advocate for development and progression, Malcolm has introduced robust mentoring programmes at the firm. These include a group mentoring programme, and a reverse mentoring scheme through which the firm's partners are mentored by LSEB colleagues. To raise awareness more broadly across the firm, in 2024 Malcolm brought together over 5,500 colleagues on Social Mobility Day for a firm-wide, livestreamed event during which he shared his personal journey, and encouraged employees at all levels to share their stories.

Beyond the firm, Malcolm continues advocating for change and influencing the profession. He was a founding trustee for Access Accountancy, an organisation enabling access to professional



"For me personally, social mobility is about cutting through and actually finding opportunities for individuals to succeed according to their ability, rather than how they talk or where they were educated."

services for aspiring accountants from LSEBs. He has also worked with the Purpose Coalition to share lessons from Grant Thornton's work to improve recruitment and progression processes for LSEB candidates and employees. Additionally, the Grant Thornton Foundation, established in 2024, is channelling the firm's values into partnerships with charities that help young people overcome social barriers and achieve their potential.

What are the key enabling factors for Malcolm to advance social mobility?

Building and maintaining momentum around social mobility over the years has been a key enabling factor for Malcolm. These strong foundations have meant that Grant Thornton colleagues and partners already understand and recognise the strategic importance of social mobility whenever the firm introduces specific support. Another key enabler has been collecting and using data effectively. Thanks to focused efforts over a number of years, Grant Thornton has regularly achieved high response rates to its socio-economic background questions. In turn, this has provided the firm with high-quality data to identify areas for targeted action to address barriers faced by LSEB employees.

What challenges has Malcolm faced on social mobility?

Malcolm was one of the earliest voices in professional services to speak openly about social mobility, often having to articulate challenges and explain experiences that many from higher socio-economic backgrounds had never encountered. By making those barriers visible and understandable, he helped colleagues see not only why change mattered but how each of them could contribute to creating a more equitable path forward.

How does Malcolm define social mobility success?

For Malcolm, social mobility success is grounded in continuous improvement and long-term systemic change, driven by learning and improving each year. To ensure the firm's commitments to social mobility are sustainable, success is also reflected in the continued growth and activities of its Social Mobility Committee. Ultimately, Malcolm defines success as leaving a legacy of systemic change that enables social mobility, both at Grant Thornton and within the wider profession.

What next for Malcolm on social mobility?

In 2026 and beyond, Malcolm will continue to be a visible and vocal champion for social mobility within Grant Thornton and beyond, and will focus on broader external advocacy and sharing best practice to help other organisations. Malcolm hopes to investigate progression and pay within the firm, particularly to better understand its class pay gap and how to close it. To deepen the firm's targeted support for LSEB colleagues, Malcolm would like to expand on the firm's ongoing work in progressing LSEB talent, for example, addressing accent bias, developing further support for LSEB early career professionals and continuing to improve onboarding for employees from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds.

With thanks to Malcolm Gomersall (CEO, Grant Thornton UK), who was interviewed for this case study.



Mentor of the Year | Liam Wilkinson, Mears Group



About Liam Wilkinson

Liam started his career at Mears Group as an apprentice electrician in 2009, and became the organisation's Deputy Employee Director in 2024. Drawing on his experiences as someone from a less advantaged socio-economic background, Liam has inspired and supported apprentices and is a strong advocate for early careers and apprenticeship development.

What were Liam's winning activities in 2024-25?

Liam was awarded Mentor of the Year for his work to support apprentices and trades employees at Mears Group, and for playing a pivotal role in improving Mears' mentorship and inclusion practices in 2024-25. Through conversations, collaboration and drawing on his own lived experience, Liam was able to identify key challenges faced by colleagues. He acted as a strong advocate for meaningful change at Mears Group and beyond.

For example, Liam was instrumental in updating apprenticeship processes at Mears Group, making them more accessible for those from non-professional backgrounds. Analysing survey data to understand apprentices' needs, Liam identified key challenges including the need for further support, clearer career pathways, practical barriers such as transport and digital access, and funding for essential tools. Working closely with colleagues, Liam helped to introduce more inclusive onboarding practices to address each of these areas.

Liam also directly mentored numerous apprentices through consistent check-ins, career advice, and wellbeing support. He championed employee networks at Mears Group, encouraging grassroots action and fostering a more inclusive environment. Additionally, in partnership with Rise Up, a charity that acts as a bridge to help connect employers with entry-level job seekers who face traditional barriers to employment, Liam supported the launch of a national mentoring scheme and championed a Building Aspirations project. This supported young people in Thurrock, an area with low youth employment. Liam also secured community sports grants through the Mears Foundation, the Group's charitable arm, providing support to young people in low-income communities.

“When entry-level staff are able to keep on climbing and get to whatever point they want to – for me, that’s a socially mobile organisation.”

What are the key enabling factors for Liam to advance social mobility?

Liam has effectively supported employees from LSEBs with the strong backing of leadership at Mears Group, who were open to hearing concerns and willing to provide the necessary resources to enable change. Along with the support of his colleagues, this gave Liam the reassurance that he was doing the right thing, and empowered him to take action. An additional enabling factor was apprentices' willingness to share their experiences openly, and to engage with the help offered. This created an environment for meaningful improvements.

What challenges has Liam faced on social mobility?

Liam has faced some challenges when trying to engage colleagues in organisational change. To address these challenges, Liam worked to improve colleagues' understanding of the benefits of addressing social mobility barriers, and improving the experiences of LSEB staff.

How does Liam define social mobility success?

For Liam, social mobility success will be achieved when the LSEB individuals he supports are no longer faced with barriers and glass ceilings to their career progression. Ultimately, Liam sees social mobility success as LSEB individuals being able to do what they want in their careers, with nothing holding them back.

What next for Liam on social mobility?

Liam intends to continue championing social mobility at Mears Group, focusing on big organisational improvements as well as small meaningful changes. He is committed to making a difference one person at a time, ensuring staff feel heard and supported. Liam will continue to take action to remove barriers to LSEB colleagues, and to open opportunities for all.

With thanks to Liam Wilkinson (Deputy Employee Director, Mears Group) who was interviewed for this case study.



Rising Star | Nichole Ama, Moore Kingston Smith



About Nichole Ama

Nichole Ama is an Assistant Manager at Moore Kingston Smith, a UK-based firm that provides accounting and advisory services to businesses in the UK and globally. Nichole qualified as an Institute of Chartered Accountants England & Wales (ICAEW) chartered accountant in 2022. With a passion for corporate social mobility, Nichole has been an advocate within her firm, in the accounting industry, and in her community.

What were Nichole's winning activities in 2024-25?

Nichole was awarded Rising Star of the Year for her dedication to support LSEB individuals both at Moore Kingston Smith and within the wider community. Nichole has been an advocate for a range of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) projects and is a member of Moore Kingston Smith's growing Social Mobility Committee Group. She also collaborated with external organisations to support LSEB individuals in her local community.

In 2024-25, Nichole was a consistent advocate for social mobility at Moore Kingston Smith, getting involved in initiatives, connecting with leadership, and supporting the firm's work experience programme. Nichole prides herself on representing what she advocates for, in her firm and in the accounting industry.

Beyond the firm, Nichole worked with the ICAEW on a new campaign to roll out a new chartered accountant examination structure. Supporting the ICAEW with its marketing strategy, Nichole was pictured for its magazine campaign and was also involved in a podcast to promote the rollout. Nichole also worked with the ICAEW to deliver keynote speeches to newly qualified accountants at their graduation ceremonies.

In further activities outside her firm, Nichole worked with Hackney Council to host an internal staff discussion about social mobility. This event aimed to raise awareness, and to support change to improve progression opportunities of LSEB staff. In collaboration with Rise, an accounting charity, Nichole also delivered business enterprise workshops for Years 10 and 11 in her community.



"Social mobility all starts with having a culture where you can be yourself. Being free to be who you are is definitely the starting point - and this can be hard in traditional professions."

What are the key enabling factors for Nichole to advance social mobility?

By fostering strong relationships both internally and externally, Nichole has been empowered to support LSEB individuals. With the support and enthusiasm of colleagues and leadership at Moore Kingston Smith, Nichole has been able to promote the importance of career progression for LSEB individuals within the firm. Nichole has also used data insights to show senior leaders how social mobility positively impacts the firm, which has secured buy-in for a sustained focus on social mobility. Additionally, by collaborating with external organisations and participating in a range of events and campaigns, Nichole has been able to broaden her reach as a social mobility advocate.

What challenges has Nichole faced on social mobility?

Nichole has encountered both personal and professional challenges while advocating for social mobility. On a personal level, Nichole has experienced imposter syndrome and moments of self-doubt, particularly when engaging with leadership or when attempting to introduce changes at the firm. The support of a strong colleague network helped Nichole to overcome these obstacles, and to encourage positive change at the firm. Professionally, Nichole has faced pressures when trying to identify existing resources and determine how to use them effectively to create accessible pathways for LSEB individuals.

How does Nichole define social mobility success?

For Nichole, social mobility success involves ensuring accessible career progression opportunities for LSEB individuals within the accounting industry. Success is also about supporting financial wellbeing for staff from LSEBs, to improve their confidence when managing money. Ultimately Nichole feels that social mobility success would be levelling the playing field for future generations.

What next for Nichole on social mobility?

Moving forward, Nichole hopes to support more targeted initiatives and programmes within Moore Kingston Smith, and to use career tracking data to further support her social mobility endeavours. Nichole also hopes to see increased representation and visibility of LSEB leaders in the accounting industry. On a personal level, Nichole hopes for more opportunities to be visible as a social mobility advocate, more grassroots support in her community, and to create long-lasting change on social mobility.

With thanks to Nichole Ama (Assistant Manager, Moore Kingston Smith) who was interviewed for this case study.



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