



SOCIAL MOBILITY BUSINESS SEMINAR 2026

On 22nd April, the UK Social Mobility Awards hosted its ninth annual Social Mobility Business Seminar online, with support from our headline sponsor, National Grid. The Seminar convened public- and private-sector leaders, calling for action at every stage of the social mobility journey — from getting started to driving the agenda forward.

Overview

2026 Speakers and Panellists

MC & Moderator:

Tunde Banjoko, OBE (*Founder, UK Social Mobility Awards and Making The Leap*)

Keynote Speaker:

Darren Hardman (*CEO, Microsoft UK & Ireland*)

Speakers:

Rob Wilson (*Deputy Chair, Social Mobility Commission*)

Becky Simpson (*Project Manager, BrandPointZero*)

Kimone Telfer (*Project Director, BrandPointZero*)

Nina Slingsby (*CEO, OAHA*)

Panellists:

Emma Cody (*Tax Partner, PwC*)

Joanne Conway (*Head of Inclusion & Culture, EMEA & Asia Pacific, DLA Piper*)

Craig Hunter (*Head of Strategy, Performance, & Resilience, National Grid*)

John Kiely (*Partner & Head of Immigration, Howard Kennedy LLP*)

This year's seminar covered a range of topics, including how social mobility must adapt in an AI-driven economy — with a focus on measurable impact, skills-based opportunity and preventing technology from widening existing inequalities.

Speakers and panellists explored how investment, entrepreneurship, skills development and devolution can drive inclusive growth across the UK, alongside insights into what employers are doing and what best practice looks like across sectors. The programme also introduced this year's Social Mobility Day theme, *Stories Matter*, and featured a candid discussion on moving beyond good intentions to real progression, building inclusive workplace cultures and equipping people with the future-ready skills they need to thrive.



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Highlights from Speakers and Panellists

The speakers and panellists explored how leaders, employee networks, and businesses can drive progress on social mobility. Speakers stressed engaging leaders with clear, business-focused messaging, building strong social mobility networks through structure and storytelling, and preparing for AI's impact by boosting AI literacy, upskilling workforces and widening access to future talent pipelines.

Leadership: The Power of Influence

With action on social mobility slowing down in some sectors, our panellists offered advice on how to motivate business leaders to stay committed to social mobility:

- **Ask** questions to see what your leaders already know about social mobility.
- **Support** leaders to understand the importance of social mobility to the business.
- **Adapt** your approach when delivering information about social mobility. Explain why social mobility is important for business, assessing your strongest argument, moral or economic.

Social Mobility Networks: Empowering Employees

Social mobility networks are a powerful driver of social mobility in business. Our panellists highlighted several practical ways to build a meaningful network:

- **Set clear, simple objectives** to make progress achievable.
- **Promote meeting structure** to ensure discussion remains focused and productive.
- **Empower members** to encourage active participation and shared ownership.
- **Create space for storytelling** to help people connect through lived experiences.
- **Identify passionate, influential sponsors** to champion network goals.
- **Be ambitious but realistic** to balance aspiration with feasibility.

AI: A Proactive Approach

Insights from our speakers and panellists highlighted that we have entered a period of AI-driven transformation, which is fundamentally reshaping opportunity across the UK. AI is a present and pressing challenge – one that could negatively influence social mobility if not addressed proactively. What advice did our speakers and panellists offer on the topic?

- **Acknowledgement:** AI is reshaping the labour market, and AI literacy is essential. As roles evolve, younger generations – particularly young people from less-advantaged socio-economic backgrounds – are likely to feel the greatest impact.
- **Responsibility:** Businesses have a duty to upskill their workforce, ensuring employees have a strong understanding of AI and are equipped for technological change.
- **Investment:** Organisations have an opportunity to invest in new talent pipelines, ensuring that AI-related skills are accessible to all individuals, at the pace and scale the labour market demands
- **Action:** Through robust outreach programmes, businesses can support young people entering the workforce by helping them understand how to use AI effectively across the employment cycle.

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SOCIAL MOBILITY DAY 2026

Overview

Social Mobility Day is a national moment dedicated to championing equitable employment opportunities for all. As the Supporters Toolkit states, “engaging with social mobility is way more than a gesture — it’s a strategic investment which can directly benefit your organisation’s bottom line.” By embracing socio-economic diversity, organisations gain fresh perspectives, stronger creativity, better decision-making, and a competitive edge. In 2025, supporters shared their Shift Moments — the turning points that challenged expectations and shifted mindsets. In 2026, the theme is **#StoriesMatter**: a call to spotlight the chapters that shaped us, challenged assumptions, and opened doors.

Why #StoriesMatter

Stories shape how we see the world and our place in it. Our supporter toolkit explains that “stories make opportunity visible... they turn abstract ideas into something real, human and achievable.” This year, supporters are encouraged to share stories that:

- Challenged perceptions
- Changed a path
- Opened a door
- Proved that background should never be a barrier

By sharing these stories, we help shift outdated narratives and empower people from less advantaged backgrounds to see what’s possible.

The Supporters Toolkit offers three simple, “flexible” chapters: **Turn Over a New Leaf, The Plot Twist, and In a Land Not So Far Away**. Supporters can engage with one, two, or all three.

Get Involved

Whether you’re an individual, a small team, or a large organisation, you can play a part. As the pack reminds us: “You don’t need to do everything... engage with one ask, a few, or all of them – whatever feels right.” **Every story shared, every conversation started, and every barrier removed helps write the next chapter.**

Find out more and download the Supporters Toolkit at socialmobilityday.com.

#STORIESMATTER

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UK SOCIAL MOBILITY AWARDS 2026

The UK Social Mobility Awards exist to put the advancement of social mobility at the heart of how organisations operate across the country. The SOMOs are the first awards of their kind, created specifically to recognise and encourage the actions that genuinely improve social mobility within Britain's companies and institutions. They spotlight best practice, celebrate innovation, and elevate social mobility to the same level of importance as other key diversity issues. The 2026 Awards, in association with National Grid, celebrates 10 years of the SOMOs.

We believe that by raising awareness and celebrating the people and organisations driving change, we can collectively move social mobility forward year after year. The awards feature 14 categories — 3 individual and 11 organisational — each designed to highlight areas where meaningful progress can be made through the right actions. Entries for the UK Social Mobility Awards 2026 open on 27 April and close on 26 June. Winners will be announced at the gala event on 6 October. Find out more and enter at somo.uk.

Entering the 2026 SOMOs

The UK Social Mobility Awards were the first national awards dedicated entirely to recognising progress in social mobility. Winning positions your organisation as a genuine leader in this space — boosting team pride, celebrating the work that made it possible, and helping you attract top talent.

By entering this year's awards, you will:

- Showcase your team's achievements and the real impact you've made on social mobility.
- Have your work reviewed by an expert panel of respected judges.
- Benchmark your progress against organisations across the UK.
- Gain valuable media visibility.
- Lift team morale by celebrating work that truly stands out.
- Help share and spread best practice nationwide.



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