



Joining and thriving?

Advancing Social Mobility in 2023-24

Key Findings from the UK Social Mobility Awards 2024

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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 2023-24, as well as barriers overcome and key enablers to effective social mobility work. Based on analysis of entries to the UK Social Mobility Awards 2024, we examine social mobility activities from organisations employing close to 1.3 million people across sectors including finance, law, professional services, media, government, and real estate. 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 have recognised and celebrated UK employers and educators working to improve social mobility since 2017. The UK Social Mobility Awards are organised by Making The Leap, a London-based social mobility 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 2024 winners, please visit: www.somo.uk.

About the authors

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Executive summary



The UK Social Mobility Awards

An individual's circumstances and background, including parental occupation, geographic location, and generational wealth still significantly impact the chances of obtaining upward social mobility³. Though we are yet to achieve our goal of social mobility becoming a reality in the UK, there are reasons for us to remain optimistic and signs that we are stepping closer towards our objective as employers' and education providers' investment in social mobility continue to grow. The UK Social Mobility Awards 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 UK Social Mobility Awards are organised by grassroots social mobility 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 UK Social Mobility Awards in 2024?

In total, employers who entered the UK Social Mobility Awards in 2024 employed close to 1.3 million people across the UK. This year, employers from 20 sectors reported their activities to advance social mobility. Across these sectors, employers in the finance, legal, and professional services sectors were most likely to be represented among UK Social Mobility Awards 2024 entrants. This year, we observed an increase in the proportion of entries from employers from the media and local authorities. Among educators, half of entries came from universities, with 44% 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 *Joining and thriving? Advancing social mobility in 2023-24*

In our annual Key Findings Report, we examine *what* employers and educators did to advance social mobility in 2023-24, 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 2024 UK Social Mobility Awards. 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 2023-24.

³ Social Mobility Commission (2023) The State of the Nation: People and Places. London: Social Mobility Commission.

Key Finding 1

Many employers have launched community and pre-recruitment initiatives for individuals from less advantaged socio-economic backgrounds (LSEBs). However, there remains a lack of significant progress in the **actual employment** of LSEB candidates.

Outreach efforts continue to provide individuals from underrepresented backgrounds with valuable insights, information, and increased awareness about career pathways and opportunities across various sectors. This year, employers from both the public and private sectors collaborated with education providers across the UK, particularly in areas identified as social mobility cold spots, to engage and inspire young people from less advantaged socio-economic backgrounds (LSEBs). Through partnerships with expert organisations, employers reached individuals facing socio-economic disadvantages. Similar to last year, a majority of employers (84%) reported conducting outreach activities in 2024. To enhance accessibility, more initiatives—including panel events, masterclasses, insight days, and work experience opportunities—were delivered virtually. Additionally, employers offered structured mentoring and financial support, such as bursaries and scholarships, to help young people access the skills and education needed to navigate the ever-evolving world of work.

For socio-economic diversity to become a reality in the workplace, employers must actively recruit individuals from less advantaged socio-economic backgrounds (LSEBs). Unfortunately, we have yet to see consistent efforts by employers to drive this change. Best practices, particularly in the legal sector, include using data to identify gaps, ringfencing opportunities, and employing LSEB candidates through alternative pathways to employment. Some employers removed academic entry requirements and introduced technology and training to address discrimination in recruitment processes. In 2024, more employers (66%) reported implementing diverse recruitment strategies compared to 2023 (52%), reflecting a greater focus on inclusive hiring practices rather than a significant increase in roles offered to LSEB candidates. Apprenticeships, a key focus in both public and private sectors, were used to enhance access to entry-level positions.

Key Finding 2

The growth of **Social Mobility Networks** highlights employers' and individuals' commitment to advancing social mobility. Employers are working to raise awareness of the barriers faced by LSEB employees and to create a stronger sense of belonging for these employees.

This year has seen a positive shift toward employers' creating working environments that enhance LSEB employees' sense of belonging and value authenticity in the workplace, rather than helping these employees to 'fit in'. To improve retention of LSEB employees, many employers have launched or expanded Social Mobility Networks. Notably, the rise in retention activities in 2024, with 47% compared to 35% in 2023, reflects the popularity of the new UK Social Mobility Awards category, Social Mobility Network of the Year, which is an encouraging development. As part of these efforts, senior leaders from LSEBs have shared their social mobility stories to offer inspiration and demonstrate possible pathways to success. Additionally, more employers have raised pay for entry-level roles, improving financial viability for individuals from LSEBs.

Despite efforts, people from LSEBs remain underrepresented at senior levels across many sectors in the UK. Disappointingly, only 22% of employers reported activities focused on progression initiatives in 2024. However, there are signs of positive action, such as employers conducting progression analyses to identify gaps. Some employers are changing their approaches to career progression based on insights into LSEB employees' experiences and their barriers to career progression. In the legal and professional services sectors, some employers are planning to implement independent work allocation systems to minimise bias. Key actions from employers committed to creating clear progression opportunities include ensuring pay transparency and establishing clear frameworks that outline the skills, experience, and training needed to progress up the ladder.

Key Finding 3

Best practices for advancing social mobility were shaped by diverse **data** and **integrated strategies** that were backed by **expert partners**. These were **championed by leaders, social mobility networks, and dedicated individuals** all passionate about the cause.

- Social mobility strategies, targets, and initiatives were shaped by employers collecting a broad range of **data**. More employers expanded their methods to better understand their workforce, pay gaps, and progression rates. In 2024, Social Mobility Networks played a crucial role in encouraging employees to declare SEB data, highlighting its importance. Additionally, some employers gathered qualitative insights to gain a deeper understanding of LSEB employees' experiences and barriers across the employee journey.
- Employers adopted varied approaches to developing **integrated** social mobility **strategies**. Some incorporated social mobility into their existing EDI, CSR or ESG commitments, using the same reported measures applied to other protected characteristics. Others opted to create distinct frameworks and actions plans specifically aimed at advancing social mobility in their organisations.
- **Partnering** with **experts** offered employers access to a pipeline of talented individuals, valuable insights into social mobility practices across the employee journey, and opportunities to collaborate with like-minded organisations committed to advancing social mobility.
- In 2023-24, social mobility has been advocated for by **passionate leaders** who integrate it into their organisational commitments to improve equality. Additionally, **social mobility champions** – whether working individually or as part of **social mobility networks** – have devoted time outside of their roles to remove the barriers that LSEB employees face in the workplace and act as allies for employees from similar backgrounds.

Key Finding 4

Targeted interventions for LSEB students involved collecting **data** to identify effective financial and pastoral support strategies. Education providers implemented these strategies to improve attendance, **academic attainment**, and social mobility opportunities for young people.

Schools and colleges have aimed to enhance **academic attainment** for LSEB students by implementing targeted interventions and programmes tailored to specific groups. Some institutions have focused on offering language support for non-native speakers, specialised assistance for refugees and asylum seekers, and dedicated programmes to aid students with care experience in their transition to further education. In addition, schools and colleges have offered enrichment activities, teaching young people essential skills for the world of work.

Universities have worked to enhance the experiences of LSEB students in response to the cost of living crisis. They have sought insights directly from students to understand their needs and provide practical support, particularly surrounding housing and food. Additionally, some universities have used **data** collection to better grasp students' circumstances, leading to the implementation of targeted interventions that have also helped improve survey response rates.