



# Joining and thriving?

## Advancing Social Mobility in 2023-24

Key Findings from the UK Social Mobility Awards 2024

FULL REPORT

UK  
SOCIAL  
MOBILITY  
AWARDS

In association with

**nationalgrid**

Organised by: **Making the Leap.**

# 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](http://www.somo.uk).

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

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# Foreword

Social mobility isn't just about fairness—it's a key to unlocking national competitiveness. With a new government prioritising economic growth, addressing the UK's skills gap has never been more urgent.

DocuSign's Digital Maturity Report <sup>1</sup> estimates that 72% of UK businesses are experiencing shortages in key areas like AI, data analytics, and cybersecurity. In their report, The New Economics Foundation <sup>2</sup>, paints a similar picture relating to skills for the emerging Green Economy. The message is clear, to drive sustainable growth, we need to rethink our traditional hiring practices and open doors to talent from all backgrounds.

For business leaders and HR professionals, this is an exciting opportunity. By expanding recruitment beyond familiar circles, we can explore a wealth of untapped potential. Just like sports teams that scout for talent based on skill, not background, businesses can thrive by building teams that bring diverse experiences and perspectives. It's not just the right thing to do—it's a smart business move that will help us adapt to evolving market demands.

In sports, the success of a team is based on the performance of its players. The same applies to business. Companies that actively recruit and develop talent from a wider range of lived experiences are positioning themselves for success while also supporting the UK's economic recovery.

The UK Social Mobility Awards report showcases many forward-thinking companies that are already leading the way, boosting both their own performance and the nation's growth.

To all business leaders: the future of our economy depends on how well we identify, nurture, and retain diverse talent. Building winning teams starts with embracing the idea that talent is everywhere. The UK Social Mobility Awards are blazing a trail for the creation of a more inclusive, competitive, and thriving economy. One that benefits everyone in society.



**Sir Kenneth Olisa OBE**

**Chair**

UK Social Mobility Awards Judging Panel

<sup>1</sup> DocuSign's Digital Maturity Report 2024.

<sup>2</sup> Skills for a new economy: New Economics Foundation.

# What did employers do to advance social mobility in 2024?

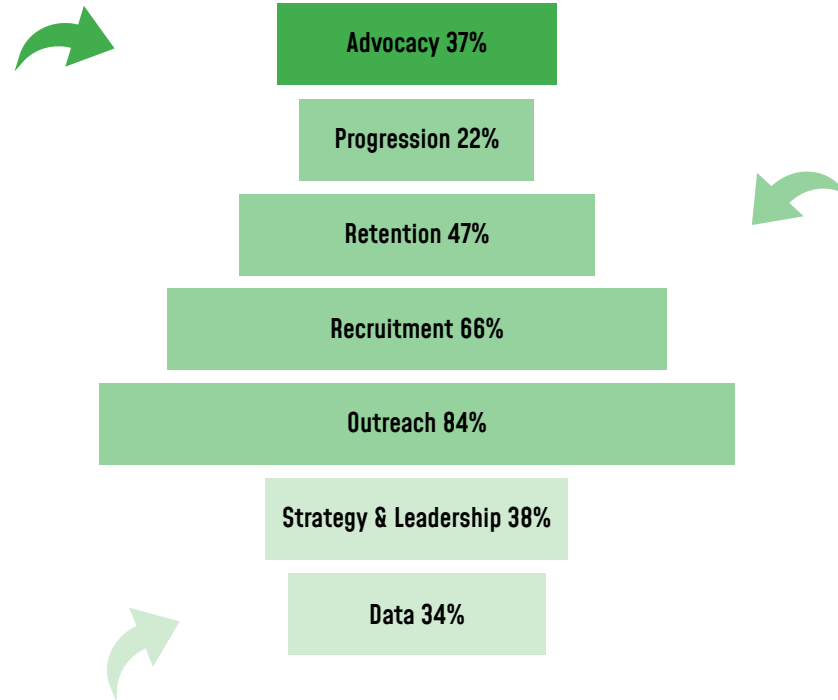
The [UK Social Mobility Awards](#) is an annual nationwide leadership initiative organised by grassroots social mobility charity [Making The Leap](#). In 2024, private and public sector organisations employing almost 1.3 million people entered the UK Social Mobility Awards. This infographic presents the percentage of UK Social Mobility Awards entrants who reported activities across each stage of the social mobility journey in 2023-24. Read the full research report at [www.somo.uk/publications/somos-2024-key-findings-report](http://www.somo.uk/publications/somos-2024-key-findings-report).

## Taking the lead

Employers across public and private sectors engaged in networks and initiatives dedicated to advancing social mobility in 2023-24. Organisations such as Progress Together, PRIME, and the 93% Club have seen growing membership and support, bringing together like-minded employers. Through collaboration both within and across sectors, employers this year have facilitated important discussions to **advocate** for socio-economic equity, exploring collective actions to drive meaningful progress in social mobility.

## Building the foundations

In 2023-24, more employers used a range of methods to collect employee socio-economic background (SEB) **data**, including qualitative approaches such as interviews and listening groups. These methods enabled employers to gain valuable insight into LSEB employees experiences throughout the employee journey, helping to identify the barriers these employees face. Among best practices, employers have published SEB pay gap reports, set targets, and used SEB to identify key areas for social mobility **strategies**. Employers' approaches to social mobility were either integrated into their wider DEI commitments or as standalone strategies.

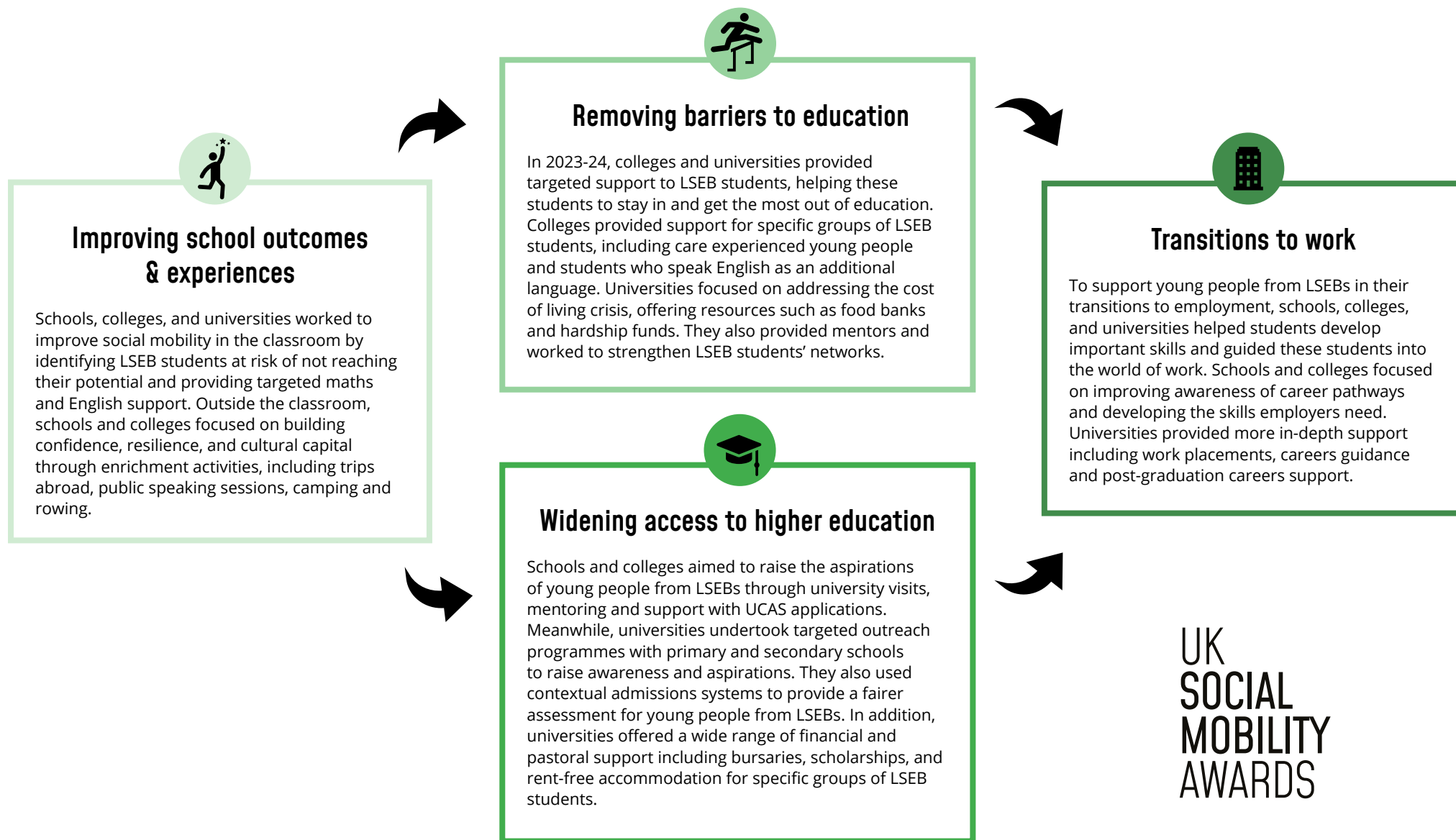


## Doing the work

Most UK Social Mobility Awards 2024 entrants reported wide-ranging **outreach** activities, allowing employers to engage with young people from LSEBs, educating and inspiring them to explore careers across sectors. While more employers have introduced inclusive hiring practices and broadened career pathways, this has not been translated into an active drive to **recruit** LSEB candidates. Employers' Social Mobility Networks reflect employers' commitment to **retaining** LSEB employees, acting as allies and mentors for colleagues from similar backgrounds. However, there remains a lack of reported **progression** initiatives. In examples of best practice, employers conducted progression analyses and offered employees clear frameworks for progression.

# What did **educators** do to advance social mobility in 2024?

The [UK Social Mobility Awards](#) is an annual nationwide leadership initiative organised by grassroots social mobility charity [Making The Leap](#). This infographic presents a summary of the key social mobility activities done by schools, colleges, and universities who entered the UK Social Mobility Awards in 2024. Read the full research report at [www.somo.uk/publications/somos-2024-key-findings-report](http://www.somo.uk/publications/somos-2024-key-findings-report).



UK  
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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



# 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 mobility<sup>3</sup>. 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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.



**Full report**

# Introduction



## The UK Social Mobility Awards

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

## What is social mobility?

Social mobility is typically defined as creating opportunities for individuals from less advantaged socio-economic backgrounds (LSEBs) to become more economically successful <sup>4</sup>. At Making The Leap, our aim is to make social mobility a reality in the UK, which would mean **everyone has access to:**

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

<sup>4</sup> Social Mobility Commission (2021) *Socio-economic diversity and inclusion. Employers' toolkit: Cross Industry Edition*. London: Social Mobility Commission.

## Social mobility in the UK

An individual's circumstances and background still substantially impact the chances of obtaining upward social mobility in the UK <sup>5</sup>. Recent findings reveal how geographic location impacts individuals' experience of social mobility. Across local authorities, there are variable experiences of social mobility enablers, including conditions of childhood, labour market opportunities, and innovation and growth. Areas in London or surrounding Home Counties are most likely to offer social mobility enablers <sup>6</sup>. In 2022, the disadvantage attainment gap at age 16 widened further in the UK <sup>7</sup>, and prospects of finding a job became more challenging due to the vacancy rate falling between 2022-23 <sup>8</sup>. Through an intersectional lens, while evidence suggests that some racialised communities may experience higher rates of educational mobility, this is not yet mirrored in current levels of occupational mobility <sup>9</sup>.

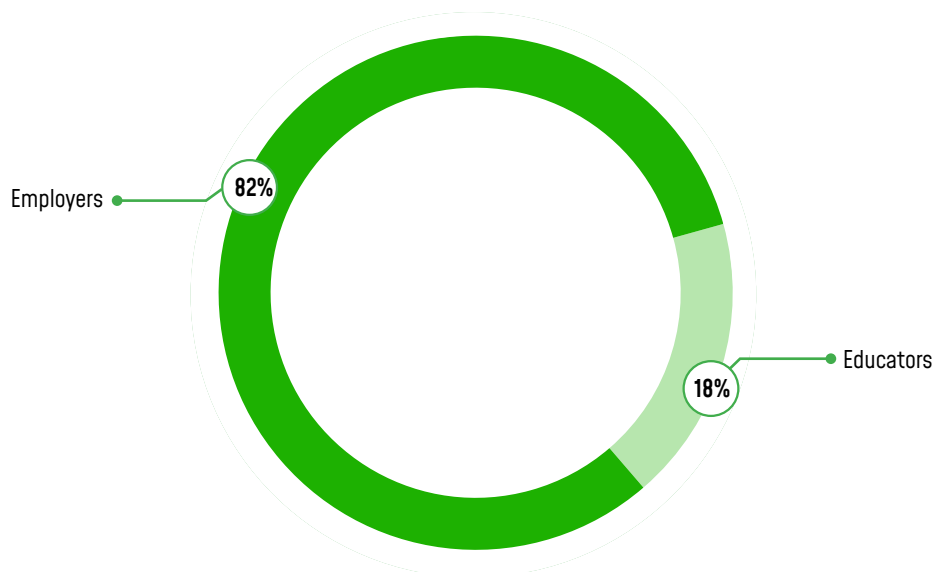
Though we are yet to achieve our goal of social mobility becoming a reality in the UK, there are reasons for us to remain optimistic and signs that we are stepping closer towards our objective. Nationally, there has been growing participation in social mobility initiatives such as Social Mobility Day, which this year convened individuals from entry level to leadership roles in sharing moments of social mobility success. In addition, initiatives including the Social Mobility Employer Index and UK Social Mobility Awards continue to be strong. During 2023-24, organisations across sectors included socio-economic status as part of pay gap reports, some of which are publishing this type of data for the first time. Several organisations are currently collecting SEB employee data and preparing to incorporate this into their pay gap reports in the near future. In the retail industry, 67% of retailers include social mobility in their D&I strategy, up from 20% in 2021 <sup>10</sup>.

In this report, we examine the work done by employers and educators to advance social mobility in 2023-24, based on their entries to the UK Social Mobility Awards 2024. By providing in-depth insights into social mobility activities from workplaces and educational provisions across the UK, the report offers evidence to inform and inspire organisations to take wider action to improve social mobility in the UK.

## Who entered the UK Social Mobility Awards in 2024?

Over 80% of UK Social Mobility Awards 2024 entrants were employers, with educational institutions representing just under 20% (see Figure 1). As in previous years, we of course recognise that schools, colleges and universities are also major employers - however, their UK Social Mobility Awards 2024 entries focused on their work to bridge the gap by advancing social mobility through education. We therefore describe these organisations as 'educators', rather than as employers.

**Figure 1:** UK Social Mobility Awards 2024 entrants - employers and educators



<sup>5</sup> Social Mobility Commission (2023) *The State of the Nation: People and Places*. London: Social Mobility Commission.

<sup>6</sup> Social Mobility Commission (2024) *The State of the Nation 2024: Local to National, Mapping Opportunities for All* London: Social Mobility Commission

<sup>7</sup> The disadvantage attainment gap at highest levels since 2011-12.

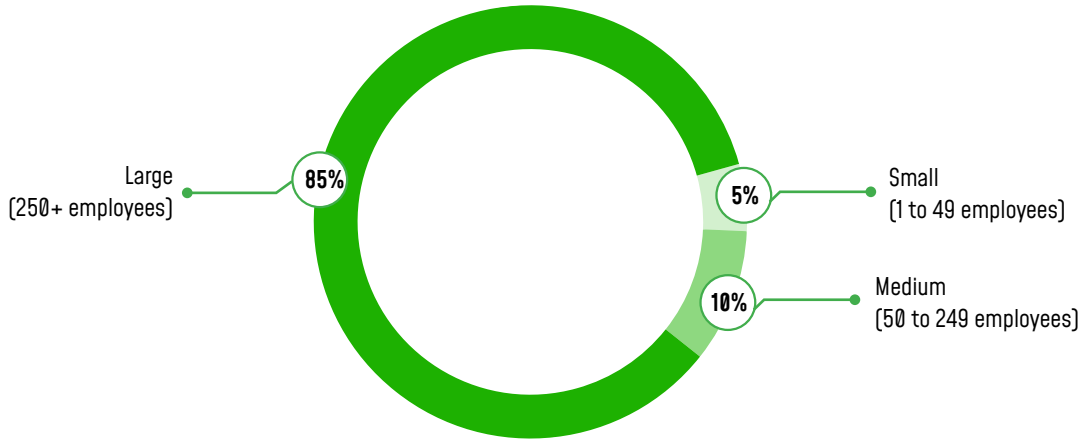
<sup>8</sup> The vacancy rate decreasing for every unemployed person from 0.9 to 0.7 between 2022 to 2023.

<sup>9</sup> The link between the experience of upward educational mobility not transpiring into experiences of upward occupational mobility for some racialised communities.

<sup>10</sup> British Retail Consortium & The MBS Group (2024) *Tracking progress on diversity and inclusion in UK retail*. London: The MBS Group.

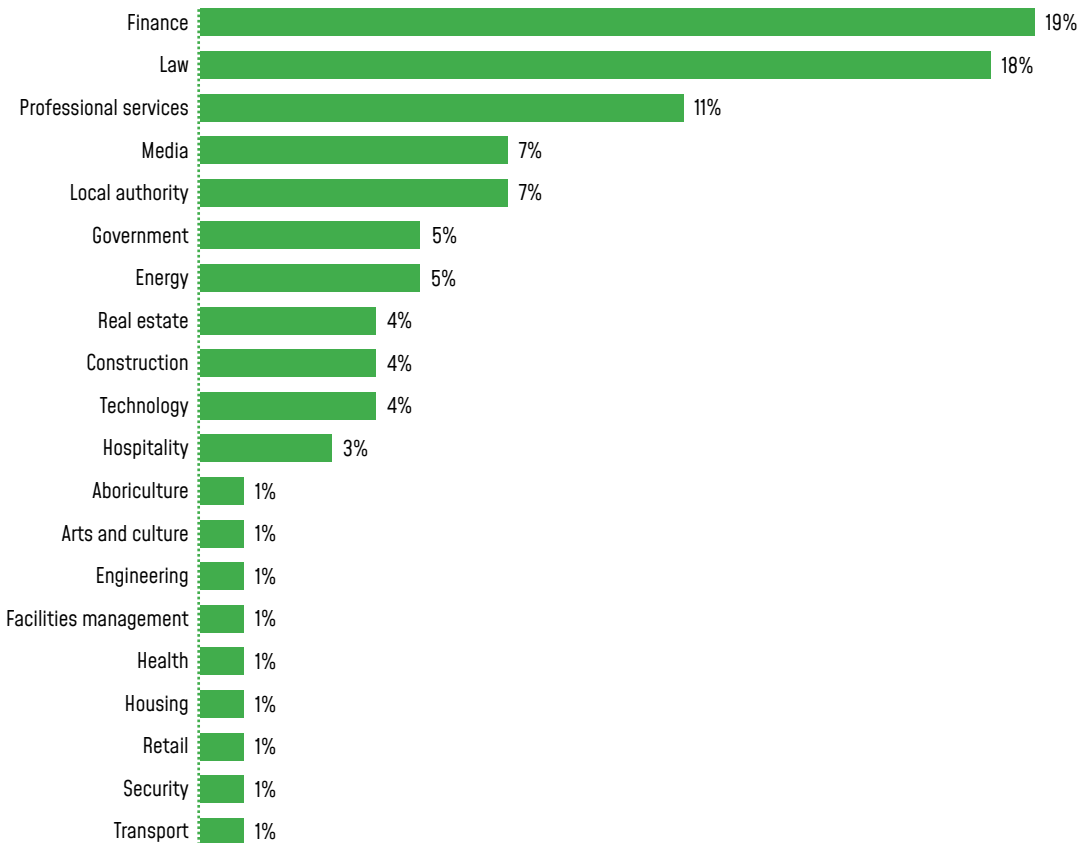
In total, employers who entered the UK Social Mobility Awards in 2024 employed close to 1.3 million people across the UK. 85% of employers were large organisations, employing over 250 people, with lower proportions of medium and small organisations 10% and 5% respectively – (see Figure 2). Among large organisations, 32% employed 1,000 to 5,000 people, while a further 16% employing between 5,001 and 10,000, and 29% employing over 10,000 employees.

**Figure 2:** UK Social Mobility Awards 2024 employers by size



Employers from 20 employment sectors entered the UK Social Mobility Awards in 2024 (see Figure 3), representing a larger range of organisations compared to 2023. As in previous years, finance (19%), law (18%) and professional services (11%) were the most represented sectors among UK Social Mobility Awards entrants, which is an ongoing reflection of aims to address the under-representation of LSEB individuals in these sectors. This year, we have seen a rise in entrants from creative and public sectors, including media (11%), local authority (7%), and government (5%).

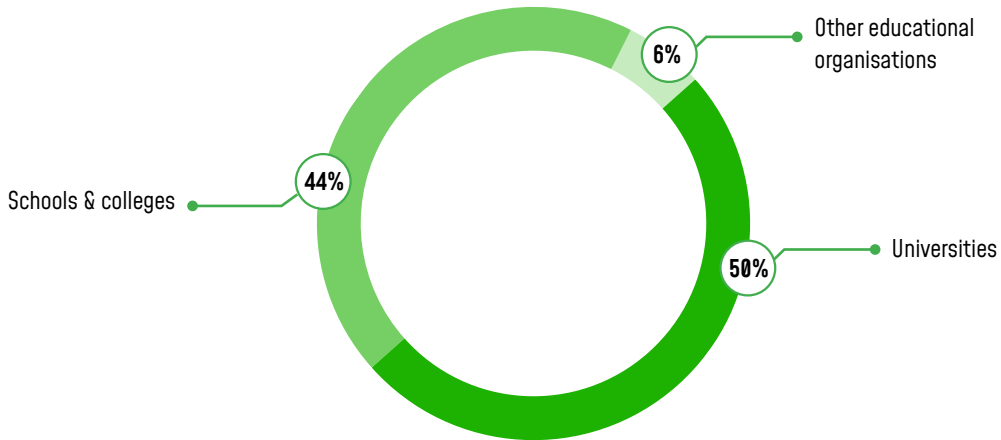
**Figure 3:** UK Social Mobility Awards 2024 employers by sector





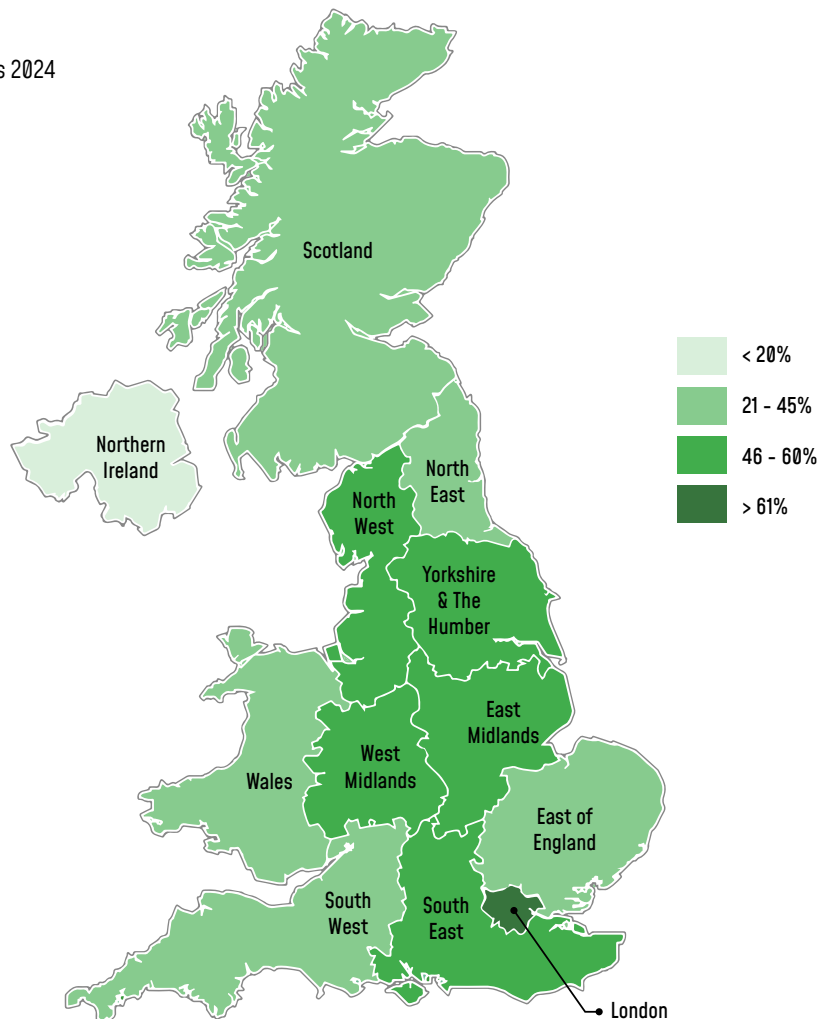
Among educators, half of UK Social Mobility Awards 2024 entries came from universities, and just under half came from schools and colleges, with 44% from schools and colleges, and 6% from other types of educational organisations (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: UK Social Mobility Awards 2024 educators by institution type



All UK Social Mobility Awards 2024 entrants were asked to report the locations of their social mobility activities over 2023-24 (see Figure 5). Compared to 2023, there has been an increased proportion of reported activities across all regions in England. Specifically, there has been an increase in reported activities in the North East (45%) and Yorkshire and The Humber (47%). Similarly to 2023, entrants were most likely to report social mobility activities in London (81%), followed by the South East of England (57%). Regions with a high concentration of social mobility cold spots such as the North West (54%), and West Midlands (52%) were well represented among this year’s entrants’ activities.

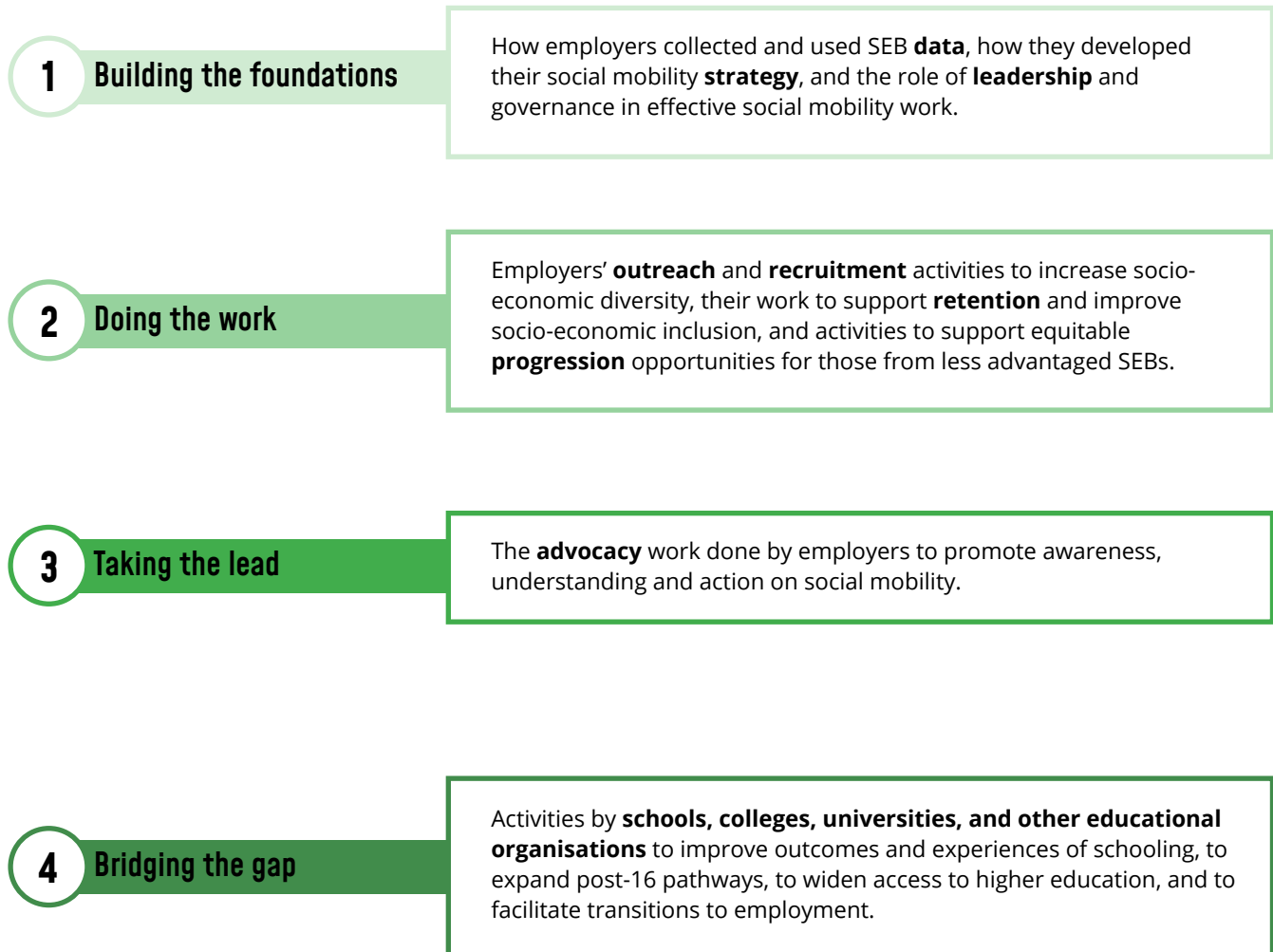
Figure 5: UK Social Mobility Awards 2024 activities by location



## Navigating this report

This report presents key findings from all eligible entries to the UK Social Mobility Awards 2024, which describe social mobility activities undertaken from January 2023 to March 2024. Based on thematic analysis of entries, we explore *what* employers and educators did to advance social mobility, as well as *how* they did it – the challenges overcome, and the enabling factors that supported effective social mobility work.

The first three report chapters focus on what **employers** did to advance social mobility in 2023-24, while the fourth chapter focuses on **educators'** social mobility activities over the same period. The chapters can be read chronologically, or can be used as standalone reference chapters to inform specific stages of social mobility work.





# 1

## **Building the foundations**

Data, strategy and leadership

# Data



## Overview

Employee socio-economic background (SEB) data was a key area of focus for employers this year. Collecting SEB data allowed employers to track LSEB candidates outcomes and employees' journeys from entering the organisation to progressing within it, enabling employers to identify barriers and evaluate the effectiveness of social mobility strategies.

For employers at the start of their social mobility journeys, collecting SEB data helped establish a baseline for future progress. Employers further on in their social mobility journeys focused on expanding their data collection by improving SEB declaration rates, publishing pay gap reports, and analysing recruitment, retention and progression rates. A positive trend this year was the increased emphasis on actively listening to employees' concerns and exploring new areas such as day-to-day experiences for LSEB employees. By incorporating qualitative data collection methods and considering LSEB employees' preferences to data collection, employers gained deeper insights into LSEB employees' experience in the workplace.

## Collecting data

How can your organisation begin to make effective progress if it does not know its starting point? Collecting employee SEB data is essential for evidence-based decision making and for measuring distance travelled. In 2023-24, employers focused on increasing the type of SEB data they collected as well as improving declaration rates to inform social mobility targets, develop strategies, and measure progress. This year, more employers also made a commitment to publish their social mobility pay gap figures to extend their accountability beyond board level, to employees', clients and wider networks.

Internally, employers focused on two types of SEB data collection: recruitment data and existing staff data. As recruitment initiatives are a vital part of the social mobility strategy for many employers, collecting data on those who apply for roles and on the outcomes of applications made by LSEB individuals was common, particularly in the legal and professional services sectors. Employers including **A&O Shearman, Linklaters, KPMG** and **PwC** all collected SEB data on those applying for work experience, apprenticeships and permanent positions to track the number of LSEB applications and their outcomes.

Employers recognised that social mobility is not just about creating strategies and initiatives that support individuals getting into work, but also about getting on and creating accessible opportunities for progressing up the ladder. The main methods of understanding LSEB employees' retention and progression rates were, staff surveys and specific diversity-related surveys. Employers across sectors used a range of questions to gather this data, including the four recommended SEB questions from the [Social Mobility Commission's](#) Toolkit. Many employers anonymised and analysed this data at an aggregate level to identify trends across the employee journey. **Savills** began collecting SEB data for the first time this year, achieving a 70% response rate which enabled them to run their first social mobility pay gap analysis.

Employers also used SEB employee data to understand whether and how LSEB employees move through the organisation and to identify the barriers that these employees face in terms of progression. For example, **KPMG** use employee SEB data to measure equality of outcomes across a range of areas including pay, performance and promotions.

Declaration rates continued to be a challenge for employers in 2023-24, and most activities around data collection focused on increasing employee response rates to surveys. Social Mobility Networks have played a key role in this across sectors, both in communicating the relevance and importance of SEB questions as well as creating an environment in which LSEB employees feel confident in sharing information about their background. **Standard Chartered**, with the leadership of Tracey McDermott, were able to increase their response rate to SEB questions from 36% in 2023 to 98% in 2024. Both **Nationwide Building Society** and **BlackRock** ran specific internal communication campaigns across the organisation to improve response rates. Nationwide collected data of around 9,000 employees in four months as a result of a mixed approach of targeted and organisation-wide communications, including storytelling and helping employees to understand why data collection was important. Other employers, including **DWP**, ran communication campaigns during Social Mobility Week to raise awareness of the importance of SEB data and in 2024, their reporting was over 75% for the first time, largely due to the work done by Leanne Williams and her team.

A range of employers including **DLA Piper UK LLP**, **Slaughter and May**, and **Sky** used qualitative approaches, sometimes with the support of expert partners, to improve response rates. Employers conducted focus groups or wider listening projects to understand the experiences of LSEB employees and identify barriers to SEB survey questions. For example, Sky collected feedback and conducted focus groups with candidates and existing employees to explore why declaration rates were low. They found that there was discomfort with the number and natures of the questions being used and this led to them scaling back data collection to only recording parental occupation at the age of 14. Slaughter and May received similar feedback from employees which also led them to using parental occupation at age 14 for all social mobility targets within the firm.

In 2023-24, there was a notable shift, particularly within the legal sector, from employers working to support LSEB employees to 'fit in', enabling individuals to be themselves and understanding the value that authenticity has in the workplace. This was reflected in some employers' data collection, including **Lewis Silkin LLP**, who collected data on whether employees feel that they fit in, if they have felt they should change the way they look, and if they feel that they can be themselves in the workplace. Meanwhile, **DLA Piper UK LLP** analysed behavioural questions at a SEB level and noted that responses to 'I feel comfortable being myself at work' were similar across SEB groups. Data has also been collected by some employers during exit interviews to understand LSEB employees' experiences of working for the employer and to understand whether these experiences had contributed to their decision to leave their role.

## What were the enablers and challenges to collecting and using SEB data?

### Enablers

#### Harnessing the power of networks

Social Mobility Networks took a leading role this year in communicating the need for collecting SEB data and creating an environment in which LSEB employees felt confident in declaring information on their background.

#### Working with expert partners

Employers hired partners to collect and analyse data, and help develop targets and strategies. These organisations can bring new perspectives, specialist skills, and can help to ensure that employees feel confident that SEB data will lead to positive change.

#### Gaining qualitative insight

Employers used methods such as interviews, focus groups, and wider listening projects to understand the barriers to completing SEB related questions in surveys. These approaches can also provide richer levels of insight about how LSEB employees feel at work and the impact that day-to-day interactions can have on their career.

### Challenges

#### Reluctance to provide SEB data

Employers continue to report that their employees were reluctant to answer SEB questions, possibly through fear of discrimination and a lack of clarity on the significance of declaring this information.

#### Global challenges

Employers that are part of a non-UK based global organisation often faced additional challenges in communicating the benefit of collecting SEB related data to an overseas parent company.

#### Complexity of social mobility

Social mobility is not defined by one single characteristic and intersectional characteristics such as gender, ethnicity and religion can also affect individuals' experience. Some employers faced challenges in balancing collecting enough data to explore different experiences without making employees feel uncomfortable about the level of personal information asked.

## From data to action

Employers across sectors used the data they collected on employee SEB to develop their approach to social mobility, set targets, and improve understanding both within their organisation and the wider sector. Many employers have worked with expert partners to analyse their data and help to develop strategies.

Employers including **KPMG**, **Linklaters**, **Nationwide Building Society** and **Slaughter and May** partnered with The Bridge Group to analyse their employee data, identify the barriers to LSEBs, and set targets. Nationwide's workforce data analysis explored the effects of hiring and progression by SEB as well as intersectionality impacts. The research highlighted the need for action to reduce disparities in progression, and they are now working with The Bridge Group to explore setting targets.

**Browne Jacobson** partnered with University of Nottingham as part of a Knowledge Transfer Project, supported by UKRI Innovate UK funding. They conducted research into experiences of LSEB employees. Drawing on quantitative and qualitative data, the research identified six barriers faced by LSEB employees in progressing within the firm, including that LSEB employees were likely to 'mask' while at work, feeling the need to change their behaviour to fit in and that this affected their ability to focus on their role, making it more difficult to progress. In response to this research, the firm is working to improve internal communication and HR processes.

Higher response rates to internal SEB surveys improve understanding and strategy development but also allow for greater reporting of data. In recent years, there has been a move to publish SEB pay gap reports among some employers, mainly in the legal sector. **Browne Jacobson**, **Lewis Silkin**, **Linklaters** and **Slaughter and May**, publish their SEB pay gap figures annually to provide transparency to their employees and in the hope of improving social mobility across the sector. Similarly, **KPMG** publishes social mobility data, including pay gap data as part of their Annual Review.

# **Strategy and leadership**



## Overview

Employers took steps to integrate social mobility into their organisation, either by embedding social mobility within existing DEI strategies or by developing a standalone social mobility strategy. This year, there has been a move to employers voluntarily recognising SEB as a distinguishing characteristic, ensuring that activities receive the resource, funding and senior attention they need and to send a message to employees that social mobility is a priority.

Social mobility work could not be effectively delivered without the support of senior leaders, who were essential for setting employers' strategic direction, securing resources, and communicating the importance of social mobility within the organisation. This year, employee-led Social Mobility Networks emerged as a key enabler for social mobility work across sectors. These groups of LSEB employees and allies are instrumental in all aspects of social mobility activities including improving data collection and developing strategies, as well as advancing recruitment, retention and progression-related initiatives in their organisation. They also served as an engaged pool of potential volunteers for social mobility outreach work.

## Adopting a strategic approach to social mobility

Across sectors, most employers including **DWP, EY, ITN, JLL, Julius Baer International Limited, Knight Frank, and Pinsent Masons** have embedded social mobility within their diversity, equality, and inclusion strategies. This approach provided structure and resources which ensured accountability of social mobility work. In addition, this approach helped to establish reporting metrics which already exist for some protected characteristics, for example, pay gap analysis. Some employers, including **A&O Shearman, Goldman Sachs** and **Richmond and Wandsworth Borough Councils** have now recognised SEB as a specific diversity strand, equal to those required by the Equality Act (2010).

Alternatively, some employers have made the decision to separate social mobility from their broader DEI work, to ensure that it receives the resources and attention needed in key areas. For example, **Womble Bond Dickinson** established a specific social mobility agenda which has made it easier for the firm to identify and target specific areas for social mobility activities within the firm. This has led them to focus funding and time on their Early Talent Team to improve outcomes for LSEB candidates in the firm's recruitment programmes.

The approach to developing and managing social mobility strategies varied. Some employers, including **bp**, **Browne Jacobson**, **Charles Russell Speechlys**, **Compass Group UK & Ireland (Compass)**, and **DWP** have a single framework or strategy which covers all social mobility work. Compass' Our Social Promise, is a pledge for the company to support one million people by 2030 through jobs, training, community engagement and development. DWP's Social Mobility strategy has four overarching priorities that shape all social mobility work within the department. These are to; increase awareness of social mobility challenges and opportunities, inspire and support talent internally and externally, use data to support learning and development of actions, and to deliver value and accountability.

Other employers developed specific strategies or programmes for social mobility work relating to different areas including outreach, recruitment, retention and progression. **UK Health Security Agency's** 2023-2025 UKHSA Social Mobility Action Plan aims to make careers in science and public health accessible to individuals from LSEBs. **Amazon's** Career Choice Programme offers employees 95% prepaid tuition up to £8000 over four years for nationally recognised courses from more than 20 training providers throughout the UK. Since the launch, Amazon, has invested more than £55 million in training programmes in the UK. The programme is available to all entry-level roles, who can choose from more than 20 different programmes leading to in-demand jobs in fields such as transportation, technology, administration, and more. In addition, in 2024, the Career Choice programme expanded eligibility for its language benefit, making language programmes available to all eligible employees starting on their first day of employment.

## Establishing leadership and governance

In 2023-24, employee social mobility networks emerged as the main approach for advancing social mobility work within an organisation. These networks, either emerging as grassroots groups or initiated by a single social mobility champion, have become vital for employers to develop strategies, connect LSEBs employees and allies, and increase awareness and understanding of social mobility. They also act as a source for engaged volunteers to support social mobility outreach programmes.

This year, some employers in the finance and legal sectors expanded their social mobility networks, including **Nationwide Building Society** which grew its Social Mobility Network to more than 800 members. Meanwhile, **BlackRock** recognised its Social Mobility & Allies Network, with more than 1,300 members, as an official global employee network after being established by employees in the UK in 2021. In the legal sector, **DLA Piper UK LLP** launched its social mobility network, Horizons, in 2023 and **Browne Jacobson** grew its network by 50% this year, mainly due to the work of Grace Osborne. **Linklaters** reduced barriers to volunteering by introducing billable credits for contributions to DEI, including the work done by its well-established social mobility network. Since the policy was introduced, over 500 hours have been recorded by network members for social mobility activities.

In government, **DWP's** social mobility network, under the leadership of Leanne Williams, has worked to increase understanding of social mobility within the department and across the Civil Service more widely; through promoting the benefits of declaring SEB information and supporting the professional development of LSEB colleagues. **UK Health Security Agency's** network offered career guidance, and professional development opportunities tailored for LSEB employees. The Civil Service also has a Cross-Government Socio-economic Diversity Network which supports work being done within individual departments and provides guidance to get social mobility work done.

Across other sectors, in media, **BBC** increased the number of members in its RAISED network by 20% to 1,100 members who work to provide a voice and advocacy for LSEB employees and to promote the voices and interests of LSEB audiences. In professional services, **EY** launched its first social mobility network in 2023, which in the past year has grown to 300 members and has organised eight events. Finally, in real estate, **Savills** has created a social mobility network aiming to create a community and safe space for LSEB employees.

## What were the enablers and challenges to effective strategy and leadership?

### Enablers

#### Senior sponsorship

The involvement of senior, particularly board level sponsors, was highlighted by employers as the key for social mobility activity. These sponsors were able to raise the profile of social mobility, secure funding and resources, change policies, and help raise awareness at every level of the business.

#### Embracing intersectionality

Encouraging employees to join networks and get involved in multiple identity networks, as well as exploring how social mobility intersects with other characteristics, broadened engagement and helped to create more targeted and inclusive programmes.

#### Social mobility work is work

A large proportion of social mobility activities have been undertaken around employees' day-to-day roles. This can create pressure on both the employers and individual employees. By recognising social mobility activities as chargeable time, paid volunteering days, or creating social mobility roles, employers can provide the time and space needed to make real changes.

#### Culture trumps strategy

many employers highlighted how their culture, values and ethos enable social mobility. Strategies, targets and frameworks will not work if they are at odds with an employer's existing workplace culture.



An emerging theme for 2023-24 is how social mobility networks have harnessed the benefits of incorporating intersectionality by encouraging employees to embrace multiple aspects of their identity and for employee networks to work collaboratively. Employers across sectors have looked to overcome the challenge of LSEB employees who identify more strongly with other identity networks, such as gender, ethnicity and sexuality, leaving less space for social mobility. **A&O Shearman** ensured that there is communication between the firm's different affinity groups so that key social mobility issues are viewed through multiple lenses. Similarly, **Linklaters** supported collaboration between the firm's social mobility and gender, ethnicity, LGBTQIA+, and carers networks to ensure that an intersectional approach is taken. **Sky** tackled this issue through its Champions Programme which recruited social mobility champions from existing employee networks to work together on social mobility issues, considering the needs of different communities within the organisation.

Outside of employee networks, there were a range of other approaches taken to organise social mobility work. Many employers developed social mobility committees or working groups which work alongside employee networks to create social mobility action plans and monitor progress towards targets. For example, at **Aviva**, Sally Elmer runs a DEI working group with 16 colleagues. At **Charles Russell Speechlys**, David Savage has become the firm's first Social Mobility Partner, sitting on the firm's Diversity Board. Alternatively, some organisations incorporated social mobility strategies within environment, social, and governance (ESG) or Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) commitments. For example, **EMCOR UK's** social mobility strategy was led by the ESG team, alongside a Steering Group responsible for representing Ability, Beliefs, Culture, Gender, Generation and Identity. Lastly, in 2024, **Browne Jacobson** invested in hiring a dedicated social mobility team to ensure that social mobility activities do not need to be fitted in around employees' day-to-day work.

Across these approaches, employers emphasised the importance of senior leadership in social mobility initiatives, with many naming senior sponsorship as the greatest enabling factor in getting social mobility work done. Employers including **A&O Shearman, EY, Goldman Sachs, Julius Baer International Limited, Knight Frank, KPMG, Pinsent Masons, PwC, and Standard Chartered** all highlighted the importance of senior leaders in their social mobility work. This sponsorship takes different forms. In most cases, social mobility work is promoted and sponsored by a board level executive, helping to ensure that the issue is taken seriously and gets the resources needed. In others, social mobility work is led at board level. For example, **KPMG's** social mobility action plan is sponsored by the Chief Executive, with actions delivered centrally in collaboration with colleagues across the business. Senior leaders are accountable for local progress against targets.

While employers across sectors emphasised the importance of senior leaders in creating the right environment for improving social mobility, the work itself is often done by passionate LSEB employees, who work tirelessly on outreach, recruitment, retention, progression and advocacy activities alongside their core role. The importance that these individuals have in raising awareness of social mobility, providing support to colleagues and working to develop programmes to support social mobility both internally and externally, cannot be overstated.

At **EY**, Natalie Stuart, who is currently on the graduate scheme, has made a huge contribution to the new social mobility network this year, including sharing the challenges she has experienced in her role and in holding host sessions with every level at EY, including partners. At **NatWest Group**, Zinat Kwakye, currently an apprentice at the bank, became an apprenticeship ambassador and a role model for other young black women who face disadvantage, encouraging them to think about a career in technology. At **Faegre Drinker Biddle & Reath LLP**, Paige Izquierdo co-created the firm's London DEI Committee with another colleague shortly after joining the firm on a training contract. Finally, at **dentsu**, Rebekah Sollom spearheaded an effort to hire individuals from LSEBs into the media industry and her team exceeded its social mobility targets two years in a row.

## Challenges

### Social mobility is not a legally protected characteristic

Many employers highlighted the barriers they have faced in raising awareness of social mobility and encouraging engagement both within their organisation and across the wider sector. This led to challenges including reluctance to form another employee network, in addition to ones covering legally protected characteristics, and a belief that social mobility targets and activities could be safely ignored.

### Breaking new ground is difficult

While being the first to do something can be rewarding, it is also risky and challenging. Several employers who have created new ways of working in social mobility have highlighted how difficult it is to be first and having no best practice or mistakes to learn from.

### Size is a challenge

The size and geographical spread of some organisations, particularly government employers, was highlighted as a barrier to engagement and communication. Some employers said they were unable to communicate with all employees in the organisation at once, thus requiring careful planning and a network approach.



# 2

## Doing the work

Outreach, recruitment, retention & progression



## Overview

Employer outreach programmes educate young people from LSEBs about career pathways, develop soft and technical skills, provide experience of the workplace, and provide support through a range of initiatives. Examples of outreach work for 2023-24 included school visits, careers fairs, improving employability and digital skills, providing mentoring and work experience programmes. This year, there was an increase in virtual opportunities to improve accessibility. Employers across public and private sectors provided pastoral and financial support to young people from LSEBs through targeted mentoring and scholarships or bursaries to progress, to support young people on the pathway to their chosen career.

Community outreach programmes were run by employers to help improve social mobility for specific LSEB groups either locally or nationally. This year, employers focused on tackling child poverty and the impact this has on education by supporting young people from LSEBs with numeracy or literacy and reducing digital poverty.

## Raising awareness about career pathways

Working with schools to raise awareness and educate young people about specific careers or sectors remained a key element of employers' outreach work across sectors in 2023-24. Public sector employers delivered a wide range of outreach activities with schools, colleges and universities.

Among national agencies and government employers, **DWP** provided teachers and students with information on a wide range of available traineeships and apprenticeships via their 128 Schools Outreach Advisors, engaging with young people across the UK to promote diverse career pathways. **RAF Air Cadets** delivered an insight day for more than 1,000 cadets from across the UK to raise awareness of careers in science and aviation, and **UK Health Security Agency** visited schools and hosted fairs to raise awareness of careers in STEM, including opportunities in sciences and cyber. Meanwhile, the **NHS** directed their outreach activities in schools located in areas of London with high levels of deprivation, aiming to inspire young people to consider the diverse careers in the NHS, including in finance.

Local authorities, including **Cardiff Council**, **Sheffield City Council**, and **Tower Hamlets Council** collaborated with employers to educate children and young people about the types of careers available in their local area. Tower Hamlets Council's Careers & Social Mobility Team has engaged with over 9,500 residents and 280 employers over the past year, including careers fairs, insight days and school visits, to enhance career aspirations and opportunities for people aged under 25 in the council area. The aim of the programme is to promote high-quality careers education that equips young people with the knowledge, skills, and mindsets they need to navigate the increasingly complex world of work and to empower them to make informed decisions, particularly for those lacking substantial social capital. Sheffield City Council's See It Be It campaign aims to improve life chances and career choices through meaningful employer encounters in areas with levels of high deprivation across the city. In the past year, they collaborated with 118 local businesses to deliver career talks, enterprise challenges, workplace visits, mock interviews, and employability skills workshops resulting in over 16,000 student interactions. Cardiff Council's Cardiff Commitment supported over 20,000 pupil engagements during the last academic year, utilising the 400+ employers within their network to further their vision of working together to inspire all the city's children and young people towards a better future.

Employers in the legal sector, including **Browne Jacobson**, **DLA Piper UK LLP**, **Lewis Silkin LLP** and **Womble Bond Dickinson** delivered a diverse range of outreach programmes to young people across the UK. In some cases, activities were led by early career legal professionals hoping to improve awareness and understanding of pathways into careers in law. Natalia Brozek at DLA Piper UK LLP started at the firm as an apprentice and now works with organisations including The Girls Network, The Careers People's Academy Programme, and Legal Cheek to promote this route into the profession. More widely, the firm delivered a programme with the Ahead Partnership to provide under-16s in Leeds with an insight into a range of professions at their offices in the city. Lewis Silkin LLP forged links with 26 schools in social mobility cold spots to inform young people about the types of careers available within the firm as well as enlightening young people on the variable routes into a career in law, including apprenticeships. Womble Bond Dickinson aimed to make their outreach programmes as accessible as possible by hosting webinars that students, parents, and teachers can access throughout the year, which provide information about different roles available at the firm and routes into the sector. The webinars are held at the end of the school day and are available for anyone to watch on YouTube to improve accessibility to young people across the UK.

In the finance sector, **Nationwide Building Society** and **NatWest Group** both delivered outreach programmes with schools or universities focusing on careers in STEM. **BlackRock** encouraged employees to return to their own, or other schools or colleges in social mobility cold spots across the UK to inspire young people and share opportunities available in the sector.

In the real estate sector, **JLL** and **Knight Frank** worked with Property Pathfinders to deliver careers talks, summer schools, and work experience opportunities. **Savills** has an established programme, Savills with Schools, that has the aim of encouraging local offices to develop partnerships with schools to raise awareness about careers in property. By providing a resource hub including templates and content, the hub has made it easier for colleagues to deliver talks. So far, the programme has led to 25 school partnerships, including one in Dagenham.

In construction, employers delivered awareness raising programmes in schools across the UK to improve awareness of pathways into the sector, including apprenticeships. **The Clancy Group**, with the leadership of Hannah Leggatt, joined panels at school events to discuss how to get into careers in construction. They also worked with Women in Engineering in schools in areas with high levels of deprivation across the UK to inspire underrepresented groups to opportunities in the sector. Meanwhile, **McGinley Support Services** delivered their McGinley Upskilling Programme, totalling 210 hours

## What were the enablers and challenges to outreach activities?

### Enablers

#### Buy-in from senior leaders

Support from senior leaders was vital to securing the time, resources and engagement needed to make initiatives successful.

#### Targets and ringfenced volunteering time

Setting social value targets and providing paid and supported volunteering days were key enablers of outreach work. Often, these were time intensive and benefited from financial investment.

#### Making participation as easy as possible

Offering virtual sessions or courses for teachers and participants, as well as making materials as useable as possible. For example, by aligning resources with the curriculum made engagement easier.

#### Acknowledging the barriers individuals from LSEBs face

Many outreach programmes were designed or revised following feedback from LSEB participants, expert partners, or impact data. This led to removing barriers to participation, including providing more virtual experiences and providing financial support to improve the accessibility of opportunities.

of engagement with young people living in areas with high levels of deprivation across the UK, to help them understand and explore potential career paths in the infrastructure sector.

In Media, **ITN** ran a series of online sessions through their School 90-minute Outreach Masterclasses. The sessions were conducted via Zoom with young people across the country. **dentsu** delivered 26 insight sessions for people aged 16-24 from underrepresented backgrounds to give them an introduction to a range of career opportunities within the media industry. **So-Motive** supported their clients by raising awareness of equitable opportunities and careers in sectors such as engineering, energy, and sport through visualising their concepts via video production and photography.

Across other sectors, including energy and technology, employers delivered awareness raising programmes focussing on STEM. **Blackbullion**, working in partnership with Wise and **Amazon**, hosted webinars reaching more than 200 students, designed to raise awareness about pathways into careers in technology. Jon Hering, Blackbullion, also delivered talks across London to LSEB students, to broaden understanding of young peoples' options after finishing college. Finally, **Worley** delivered 58 events which aimed to encourage and inspire young people from primary school to university level, mainly in areas with levels of high deprivation in West London, to explore careers in STEM. The events gave students the opportunity to experience presentations, skills workshops, mentoring, open office days, and employability-focused workshops.

## Developing Skills

Employers across finance, law, government, professional services, technology, and real estate sectors all ran programmes aimed to improve employability skills such as CV writing and interviewing. In addition to supporting these core skills, employers ran a wide range of additional programmes on financial literacy and digital skills.

In the finance sector, employers including **Aviva**, **Barclays UK**, **Nationwide Building Society**, **Pemberton Asset Management**, **Snoop**, and **Standard Chartered** delivered programmes to improve financial literacy, digital skills and employability skills. Aviva's Skills Masterclass Workshops, led by Sally Elmer, aimed to improve young peoples' financial literacy, mock interview skills, and to help young people understand their personal values. Barclay's Code Playground Programme provides resources including workbooks, videos and live events which are aligned to the Key Stage 2 curriculum, to aid schools in teaching children vital coding, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. In Scotland, the bank delivered Barclays Bigs, Local Littles, which involved colleagues attending a local school weekly to deliver sessions on mindset, the economy, and budgeting. They also ran sessions to help develop and explore non-financial skills including design, by getting young people to work together to design a new bank branch. Pemberton Asset Management worked closely with a local school in Pimlico to provide the students with valuable learning experiences and insight into the professional working life within Finance including mock interviews, insight days, Q&A sessions, and career panels. Finally, Nationwide supported around 57,000 children across the UK in 2023-24 as part of their Money Lessons initiative to teach children financial skills such as budgeting, savings and financial safety. They also partnered with MAMA.codes and iDEA to deliver STEM-related outreach activities to more than 6,400 students in social mobility cold spots.

Professional services firms including **Amberjack**, **Kearney**, **KPMG**, **PA Consulting**, **Pinsent Masons** and **PwC** built strong connections with expert partners to deliver impactful skills development programmes. In 2023, KPMG launched Opening Doors to Opportunities, a commitment to give one million young people the opportunity to develop their skills by 2030 by working in partnership with more than 20 social mobility charities including The Talent Foundry, to deliver national school employability workshops and world of work visits, and The Access Project, Action Tutoring, Chapter One and One Million Mentors to deliver mentoring and tutoring programmes. PwC also partnered with the Talent Foundry, supporting LSEB school and college students to build their employability skills and gain access to local, regional, and national employers. Pinsent Masons, worked

## Challenges

### Time

Most programmes are run as an addition to the day-to-day roles of employees. This placed pressure on the employer, volunteers, and their colleagues to ensure that commitments to outreach programmes were met without negatively impacting work.

### Resources

Most employers delivered their programmes with budget constraints which meant they needed to think carefully about how to make an impact. The use of technology and collaboration with other organisations helped to overcome this.

### Awareness and engagement

Reaching potential programme participants continues to be a challenge. Partnerships are often key to overcoming this, but many programmes may also benefit from clear, relevant, and engaging communications about their programmes to connect with potential participants or teachers.

with Upskill Me to run a Business Society and Law Society, both of which are student groups enabling Year 12 students from schools in social mobility cold spots to get career ready by actively engaging in networking sessions, mock trials, industry visits, and Dragons' Den style challenges. PA Consulting, working in partnership with 3Pillars Project, Catch22, Revolving Doors, StandOut, and Unlocked, delivered their Second Chance programme, supporting serving prisoners and people with convictions with professional development opportunities including CV writing, interview skills, and employability sessions.

In the legal sector, **DLA Piper UK LLP** delivered employability skills training to students in Coventry, Rugby and Bradford. In partnership with the 93% Club's Social Mobility Factory in April 2024, the firm ran a day of employability sessions for 300 state educated students across the UK. **Norton Rose Fulbright LLP** delivered its mock interview week for students at schools in areas with high levels of deprivation and low levels of progression to higher education to support them with their next step after school.

Across other sectors, employers including **EMCOR UK** and **Sky** focused on developing digital and technology skills. Sky delivered the Sky Up Academy Studios, which created opportunities for students to create news reports and short story trailers in their studios and immersive experiences across the UK, teaching digital skills. Since launching in 2022, Sky have visited 68 schools in 13 social mobility cold spots across the UK and Ireland. **Knight Frank** and **Worley** delivered employability skills workshops in local schools. Knight Frank worked with two local schools to deliver mock interview workshops and speed networking sessions aimed at developing skills and raising awareness about career pathways into real estate. Meanwhile, **Heathrow's Employment & Skills Academy** Essential Skills Masterclasses reached students aged over 16 across Harrow, Richmond, Uxbridge College and West London College, engaging and equipping mainstream and SEND students with vital employability and problem-solving skills. This year, they also collaborated with Skills Builder Partnership to develop a range of scenarios based on real events at Heathrow. **Amentum**, in partnership with Chapter One, have delivered more than 5,000 online reading sessions to young people in areas with high levels of deprivation, including in West Cumbria, since September 2023. Their online delivery approach reduces the challenges for schools hosting visitors and encourages up-take for volunteers, removing time traveling between the office and the respective school. This year, **Sodexo**, through the work of the Sodexo Stop Hunger Foundation, has provided 150 primary school children<sup>11</sup> in Tower Hamlets and Deptford the opportunity to take part in a Business, Enterprise, Employability (BEE) programme focussing on money management and financial concepts.

Finally, in the public sector, **DWP** continued to provide guidance to young people across the UK about the local labour market, delivering messages on what to expect when entering the workplace and information on the soft skills employers expect. They also delivered employability skills and careers advice workshops to students who were most at risk of becoming NEET, helping these students to make informed choices based on the full range of options available, including apprenticeships and traineeships.

## Exposure to work environments

This year, employers offered a range of in-person and virtual programmes including work experience, insight days, and internships to young people from LSEBs from age 14 to graduate level. These programmes aimed to raise awareness about careers in the respective sectors and offer young people valuable opportunities to develop soft and technical skills.

A wide range of programmes targeting LSEB individuals of different ages were offered by law firms. For LSEB individuals aged under 18, **Faegre Drinker Biddle & Reath LLP**, **Lewis Silkin LLP**, **Linklaters**, **Norton Rose Fulbright LLP**, **Slaughter and May**, and **Womble Bond Dickinson** hosted office-based or virtual insight days or held work experience programmes to improve understanding about the numerous careers available in law and to develop young peoples' essential skills. Faegre Drinker Biddle & Reath LLP worked with two local schools in Southwark to offer work experience and insight days to students interested in pursuing legal careers who may not otherwise have had ready access to such opportunities with a city law firm. Linklaters' Business Foundation course provided 163 students aged 15-18 attending non-fee-paying schools work experience placements which could be completed online or in-person to maximise inclusivity. In support of the Pathways to Law Programme, Womble Bond Dickinson offered office-based work experience placements to A-level LSEB students, who were interested in pursuing a career in law. During this, the young people had the opportunity to work alongside trainees and apprentices and gain insight into office life and legal careers.

For university students and graduates, **Browne Jacobson** and **Norton Rose Fulbright LLP** offered paid, in-person work experience positions to those from LSEBs. Norton Rose Fulbright LLP offered paid work experience placements with

<sup>11</sup> Figure accurate as of September 2024.

activities for LSEB students near London and Newcastle. The placement included a mock assessment centre, client insight days, and hybrid work shadowing across legal and business teams. Meanwhile, Browne Jacobson's FAIRE programme offered 80 fully paid work experience places to LSEB students which provided paid travel and accommodation expenses for those who needed it. The firm also partnered with Forage to launch two virtual internship programmes, including a programme for aspiring barristers aimed to broaden access to career progression for aspiring young lawyers. The programmes are free to access, and each student is provided a certificate upon completing the programme to enhance their CV.

Professional services firms also offered a range of work exposure programmes. In 2024, **KPMG** launched the new Abilities Talent Insight Programme, specifically designed to provide first year students with disabilities or a long-term health condition an immersive introduction to careers at KPMG, offering opportunities for skills development. The three-day programme offered students a salary equivalent to the Real Living Wage, with travel expenses paid upfront by the firm as well as the opportunity to convert to KPMG's Vacation Programme starting in 2025. **Kearney** hosted four LSEB school leavers for their Big City Bright Future internship, selected through a competitive process run in partnership with IntoUniversity. The internship was a two-week immersive experience at Kearney's London office, starting with a two-day training session led by consulting professionals. Finally, **Grant Thornton UK LLP** worked to improve access to their work experience and internship programmes by ringfencing 60% of placements for non-selective state school students and by allowing more time for applications, after finding that this improved accessibility for LSEB candidates.

In the finance sector, **Citi**, **Nationwide Building Society** and **Pemberton Asset Management** offered paid internships to LSEB university students. Pemberton, partnering with 10,000 Black Interns and UpReach, continued to work towards fairer access for paid finance sector internships and in 2024, 50% of the internship participants were from diverse or less advantaged backgrounds. Citi has aimed to maximise access to internships for LSEB students, particularly those who may not be able to join an in-person summer programme, due to caring or work responsibilities, by offering a six-week paid virtual internship on their Citi Social Mobility Programme.

Across other sectors, a range of insight sessions and work experience programmes were offered for school aged and young people from LSEBs. **NTT DATA Business Solutions UK&I** ran their Brighter Future Initiative workshops for local state primary and secondary schools. Their secondary school participants also took part in a competition to come up with an automation concept that would make a difference to society. The winner was offered a two-week paid internship in July 2023, where they learnt more about the business and developed skills in Robotic Program Automation. Meanwhile, some employers partnered with external organisations to develop their outreach activities. **JLL**, in partnership with Meta and Springpod, ran a virtual work experience programme promoting careers in real estate for young people from a diverse range of backgrounds, with almost 1 in 3 participants receiving free school meals. In the energy sector, **bp**, in partnership with Career Ready, offered four-week placements to students meeting specific social mobility criteria, and through their partnership with the Social Mobility Foundation's APP Programme, they have offered 39 young people residential placements by covering travel and accommodation costs to candidates outside the reach of their offices. Finally, in the public sector, **DWP** used its extensive network of employers to offer work experience placements through its Movement to Work programme. DWP offered 1,921 placements in 2023 and have a further 1,620 in the pipeline for 2024. **Cardiff Council's** Hospitality Engagement programme, in partnership with Compass Group, provided a 10-week culinary programme to students in a school located in an area of Cardiff with high levels of deprivation. There are plans to expand the programme to provide young people with support with job applications and to identify young people for apprenticeship opportunities.

## Inspiring and supporting young people

To provide longer term professional and pastoral support to LSEB individuals, employers provided mentoring, coaching, and skills development programmes either in partnership with social mobility initiatives or as part of their wider outreach work.

In finance, **Aviva** partnered with Career Ready to mentor students across York, providing guidance on academic choices, career pathways, and personal development. **Julius Baer International** provided mentorship to Social Mobility Foundation students through their formal mentoring programme. **Standard Chartered** partnered with RISE to offer a nine-month employability programme including six months of mentorship, skills training and industry insights to support talented young people with racialised backgrounds into sustained and meaningful work.

Law firms, including **Browne Jacobson**, **Charles Russell Speechlys**, **DLA Piper UK LLP**, **Lewis Silkin LLP**, **Linklaters**, and **Slaughter and May** ran structured mentoring programmes to help break down barriers to the profession for talented young people from LSEBs. Charles Russell Speechlys' Career Start Programme provided mentoring, work experience and development opportunities to students from LSEBs over a five-year programme.

DLA Piper UK LLP's Head Start programme welcomed 35 new participants this year. The programme offers a range of support over five years, to support talented young people from LSEBs to explore the legal profession. In addition to mentoring, work placements and skills development, participants are offered financial assistance for study-related items such as laptops, internet access, travel, books, and business wear.

**A&O Shearman** created their own programme, ReStart to support people over 50 who are unemployed, on their journey back to employment. A programme of tailored support to get participants work ready by building resilience, developing a personal brand, gaining employability skills, receiving practical advice about work search, and taking part in mock interviews. In addition, each participant was matched with a mentor at the firm, and they were also offered a place on a 10-week coaching course.

Across other sectors, mentoring programmes to support individuals from LSEBs were offered by **dentsu**, **SecuriGroup Ltd**, and **Worley**. Peter Nokes at SecuriGroup took part in the MCR Pathways initiative, to promote the security sector as a viable career option for young people through mentoring, and Worley mentored 21 LSEB students who were interested in a STEM career. In the creative industries, **Coldr** and, in professional services, **Kearney**, ran the communications for structured programmes to break down barriers to success in their sectors for specific LSEB groups. Somerset House's Black Business Residency (BBR) programme was set up to address the lack of representation for people with racialised backgrounds in UK creative industries by specifically supporting early-stage Black creative entrepreneurs. In partnership with Akil Benjamin, DOES, and Morgan Stanley, the programme has offered over 125 founders a 12-month in-person programme providing workspace, tailored mentorship and access to a supportive community of like-minded creative professionals. Kearney's Launchpad has supported over 30 founders from underrepresented backgrounds in partnerships with Hatch, Black Equity Organisation, start-up accelerators, venture firms, legal firms, and Series A/B start-ups. The initiative included a six-month mentorship programme, scholarship bursaries to selected accelerators, and access to a pitch competition.

This year, many employers, mainly in the legal and financial sectors, offered bursaries, scholarships or other types of education to young people from LSEBs so they can reach their potential. Law firms including **Brabners LLP**, **Charles Russell Speechlys**, **Lewis Silkin LLP** and **Linklaters** all offered financial support to LSEB students during their time at university. Leanne Instrall at Brabners introduced a dedicated social mobility bursary in memory of former Brabners Partner, Maurice Watkins CBE, on behalf of the firm to support LSEB students and aspiring law professionals. Between January 2023 and March 2024, the bursary released funding of £17,000 to young people from LSEBs in Manchester, including £5,000 to an aspiring barrister towards their tuition fees for the Bar course, and the purchase of a laptop for an aspiring solicitor from a single income household that is reliant on universal credit. Linklaters' Making Links Scholars is a 6-month scholarship programme which offers LSEB university students going into their penultimate year of university access to £6,000 in financial support as well as mentoring, coaching, and work experience.

In other sectors, **Nationwide Building Society**, in partnership with **Blackbullion**, offered nine scholarships of £3,500 per year for three years to students who received free school meals starting in September 2024. During their degree, the scholars will also be offered work experience, mentoring, and networking opportunities at Nationwide. **Kearney** awarded two £3,000 scholarships to Black university students, along with three mentorship programmes for top-performing candidates and **Savills** offered promising students bursaries for accredited property degrees.

## Supporting community level change

This year, employers delivered community outreach programmes to help tackle issues such as child poverty, digital exclusion, as well as support programmes aimed to improve literacy and numeracy for primary school children.

**Nationwide Building Society** and **Sandwell MBC** ran community programmes aiming to reduce child poverty and its impacts. Nationwide partnered with Action for Children to tackle child poverty and support vulnerable families experiencing financial hardship, and with Centrepont, to support young people with housing-related issues and to end youth homelessness. Sandwell MBC, in partnership with Children North East, ran the Poverty Proofing the School Day audit programme in schools to remove the barriers children living in poverty face to increased engagement in school life. The programme lead, Emily-Jayne Morgan, has developed this programme alongside her day-to-day role supporting 130 schools to grow and develop their Personal Development provision.

**Lewis Silkin LLP** and **KPMG** aimed to build literacy or numeracy skills in local primary schools. Jennifer Lee at KPMG has worked in partnership with the Liverpool International Tennis Tournament to host a Kids Day for primary school children across the Liverpool City Region that includes numeracy through sports games to help improve confidence in maths and inspire the children to dream big.



**Sodexo**, through the Sodexo Stop Hunger Foundation, worked in partnership with The Bread and Butter Thing on their Empowering Conversations project provided individualised support for women to develop pathways to education, training, volunteering, and work. Since April 2023, 27 sessions have been held, with over 500 women, 80% of whom were reliant on benefits and almost half were not in paid employment. The women have been supported through counselling-based sessions and use of the arts, in partnership with the Proper Job Theatre Company.

**Norton Rose Fulbright LLP** and **NTT DATA Business Solutions UK&I** worked to reduce digital exclusion by donating laptops. Norton Rose Fulbright repurposed old IT equipment which was then donated to students, schools, and charities who may not otherwise be able to afford the equipment. NTT DATA Business Solutions donated almost 100 laptops this year across Glasgow and South East London, supporting people who are socially isolated, homeless, refugees and asylum seekers, and older people.

## Recruitment



### Overview

Apprenticeships remained a key pillar of employers' social mobility recruitment strategies across sectors. To improve awareness of careers and pathways, employers engaged in school visits and targeted recruitment programmes, often partnering with education providers in social mobility cold spots or with social mobility organisations to reach the right candidates. LSEB apprenticeship candidates were identified through SEB data collection, and employers supported candidates through contextual recruitment approaches and targeted mentoring. This approach ensures individuals are hired based on skills and are given the best chance of success.

Employers used their outreach programmes, such as internships, work experience and/or bursary schemes to create employment opportunities for young people from LSEBs. Many employers collaborated with third sector organisations to run targeted recruitment programmes for young people from LSEBs, or specific groups facing socio-economic disadvantage including care-experienced students, prison leavers, and military communities. Many employers also committed to covering expenses and paying full-time salaries to LSEB individuals as part of pathways to employment.

This year there was a clear move towards employers introducing more inclusive hiring practices, with changes in how roles were advertised and how candidates were identified and assessed. Employers also introduced training, implemented contextual recruitment systems, and changed interviewing approaches to help remove bias from their recruitment process.

### Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships were often key to many employers' social mobility recruitment strategies. Employers offered social mobility apprenticeships across sectors including construction, energy, facilities management, finance, government, media, professional services, security, and transport. This year, employers have worked hard to ensure that apprenticeship positions were being offered to LSEB candidates through outreach work, partnerships, and recruitment strategies.

This year, **DWP** recruited 377 Social Mobility Apprentices, including offering roles to school leavers for the first time. The success of the scheme has led to the department being called on to provide advice and guidance to other Government departments to help shape this route into the Civil Service.

In the legal sector, **Browne Jacobson**, **Charles Russell Speechlys**, **DLA Piper UK LLP**, **Linklaters** and **Taylor Wessing LLP** offered solicitor apprenticeships to LSEB candidates, and **Slaughter and May** will launch their legal apprenticeship programme from September 2025. Some firms, including DLA Piper UK and Linklaters ensured that their apprenticeships were available to LSEB candidates through partnerships with organisations such as City Century, Uptree and the Bright Network to promote opportunities. Browne Jacobson have offered all their solicitor apprenticeship roles to LSEB individuals so far, and the firm is supporting the development of barrister apprenticeships and hopes to offer those as well. To ensure LSEB candidates were able to secure apprenticeship roles, a range of firms also used inclusive recruitment approaches and social mobility targets. **Flex Legal's** Flex Apprentice service has made it easier for legal teams to onboard junior socially mobile talent by working with charities including STRIVE and the Social Mobility Business Partnership to connect with LSEB candidates.

Across other sectors, some employers used their outreach programmes to promote their apprenticeship opportunities as well as provide a route into their schemes for LSEB candidates, by incorporating apprenticeship assessments or applications into wider outreach work such as internships or work experience programmes. **Heathrow Employment & Skills Academy** use their Engineering Insights Weeks to promote their Engineering Apprenticeship Programme to reach more local and diverse candidates. In the past year, five out of 21 participants of their Engineering Insights Week went on to secure an apprenticeship. **Julius Baer International Limited** offers all their summer internship positions to LSEB candidates and all interns are considered for apprenticeships at the end of their summer at the organisation.

At recruitment stage, employers used a range of approaches to defining LSEB candidates, including eligibility for free school meals, postcode of school, or candidates' home address. In the past five years, **NatWest Group** has hired more than 600 apprentices, with 89% of last years' intake being eligible for free school meals or living in a social mobility cold spot. Meanwhile, **Grant Thornton UK LLP** recruited 125 post-A Level apprentices in the past year, with 65% coming from non-selective state schools and 17% of these receiving free school meals. Ensuring that LSEB apprentices were provided the technical, pastoral, and financial support to stay in and develop in their roles was essential. **SecuriGroup Ltd** offer the Living Wage to their apprentices. NatWest Group's Elevate programme provides apprentices with a preparation bootcamp and additional 12 months of coaching once in a role.

Across sectors, the success of apprenticeship programmes was often attributed to passionate internal advocates including senior leaders and junior colleagues, some of whom had taken the apprenticeship route into the profession themselves. In the legal sector, at **Taylor Wessing LLP**, Paul Leamy, was instrumental in the introduction of solicitor apprenticeships at the firm and now acts as a Partner Champion for Solicitor Apprenticeships, working with the firm's Early Careers Team to implement the programme, and promoting opportunities to aspiring solicitors at events and in online content. At **Linklaters**, Patrick McCann has led the way by collaborating with external partners to offer young people from diverse backgrounds the opportunity to work at the firm. At **DLA Piper UK**, Ben Morton has worked to challenge internal perceptions of the apprenticeship route as well as supporting apprentices coming into the firm.

Across other sectors, Sally Elmer at **Aviva** fought to create Level 4 Accountancy Apprenticeship programme in Finance specifically for one young person she met during a school visit in 2022. The scheme will be extended to four new apprentices this year and Sally is also working to grow the scheme to offer Level 5 Apprenticeships in Finance

## What were the enablers and challenges to recruitment activities?

### Enablers

#### Labour shortages

The skills and recruitment gaps existing in some sectors has led employers to creating targeted recruitment and training programmes for LSEB candidates.

#### Harnessing technology

Recruitment and assessment software can be used to help remove bias from the process and to contextualise the achievements and behaviours of LSEB candidates, increasing their chance of success.

#### Seeking feedback and focusing on pastoral care

Employers who have been running LSEB recruitment programmes for several years can benefit from collecting feedback on the candidates' experiences. Employers that reflect on how to tackle barriers can make meaningful changes to their organisation. Many employers highlighted the enormous benefit that pastoral support can bring to LSEB candidates during the recruitment process.

#### Partnerships

Working with a range of expert partners continues to be a key enabler of increasing LSEB recruitment and improving processes. Partners support employers with connecting LSEB employees and providing fair assessments through facilitating recruitment processes or providing training to hiring managers.

and to create Project Management and Investment Operations roles at Level 4. Finally, at **DWP**, Leanne Williams has led the department's hugely successful Apprenticeship programme and Lisa Blevins-Clarke worked with local schools in Newcastle to identify social mobility apprenticeship candidates to recruit the first school leavers to the programme.

## Alternative pathways to employment

Structured routes from wider outreach programmes into permanent roles continue to be the main alternative pathway to employment. Many employers, including **bp**, **Goldman Sachs**, **ITN**, **Kearney**, **KPMG**, **Macquarie Group**, **Nationwide Building Society**, **Norton Rose Fulbright LLP**, **PwC** use their work experience schemes, internship programmes, or their bursary schemes to identify potential LSEB candidates for full-time roles.

In partnership with the Princes Trust, **bp** provided paid retail work placements for 33 young people from LSEBs, which led to offering 24 participants full-time permanent positions. **ITN's** Catalyst scheme offered young people from social mobility cold spots and from universities that do not have long-standing relations with big news companies, a fully funded, expenses paid, week working at ITN. Led by Roohi Hasan, the scheme has supported 30 young people, half of whom have since secured permanent, contract or freelance work with ITN.

**KPMG's** Social Mobility Talent Insight Programme offered an intensive, three-day, face-to-face experience for LSEB students, culminating in an assessment centre that offered successful participants a conversion opportunity to join KPMG's Graduate or Vacation Programme. Of the 49 who have taken part, 16 were offered a Vacation 2025 role and 20 secured offers to join KPMG's Graduate Programme.

**PwC** offered a one week, paid, in-person work experience programme for Year 12 LSEB students using Access Accountancy criteria. Students were recruited in partnership with Social Mobility Foundation, Career Ready and Sutton Trust and applicants completed a much shorter recruitment process than PwC's typical school leaver and graduate application process. Participants in the programme were also offered a fast-tracked application for a 2024 school leaver role, with some securing a permanent position at PwC, with training and qualification opportunities.

**Macquarie Group's** Rise to It programme aims to reach young people in Year 12 from London and beyond, offering students from diverse backgrounds the opportunity to learn about commodities, global markets, and asset management, while gaining valuable work experience in the city. The programme provides a wide range of support to young people from (LSEBs), including their university tuition and living costs being covered. Participants are also offered a week of work experience, access to Macquarie's Insight programme and Summer Internship, and a place on Macquarie's Graduate programme. Participants are supported and selected by Macquarie employees, including Macquarie's Early Careers team, and the Rise to It programme's strategic partners.

**Pemberton Asset Management** and **PwC** worked with UpReach to support LSEB students into graduate roles. This partnership helps to connect employers with high potential LSEB undergraduates as well as giving candidates the best chance of success through intensive support and by creating more inclusive assessments. This year, Pemberton offered three-month contracts to two UpReach candidates, and one successful intern from last year's cohort has secured full-time employment at the firm. PwC's Social Mobility Programme offers a three-day, paid work experience scheme for LSEB undergraduates, recruited with the support of UpReach, who could be assessed for a summer internship or graduate offer.

This year, the **NHS** trialled a programme to offer training positions to young people living in areas with levels of high deprivation. The five young people on the pilot scheme have been working in NHS organisations since September 2023, during which they have

## Challenges

### Providing support

Non-profit employers highlighted the barriers they faced in providing the additional support and flexibility that some LSEB candidates may need to succeed in a recruitment process. This includes supporting young people to obtain photo ID or being able to travel for a face-to-face interview.

### Focusing on culture fit

Many employers highlighted attitudinal barriers among those involved in recruitment which can lead to them hiring people they feel will fit in with the existing culture rather than thinking about how diverse types of candidates might improve or enhance the organisation.

### Offering fairness, not advantage

Some employers described resistance internally to new recruitment programmes and processes, with some assuming changes would lead to LSEB candidates being given preference to other candidates for roles.

benefited from development days focusing on key skills such as CV writing, interview skills, IT skills, and clinical experience days. Currently, the cohort are now receiving further training relevant to obtaining roles within the NHS.

Employers also worked to break down barriers to employment for LSEB individuals by supporting work search and career's brokerage services. **AMS's** Recruit Train Deploy service supports people through various digital pathways offering cost-free, wrap around support from day one of training, including pastoral care, employability training, and proactively seeking employment for individuals following completion. **McGinley Support Services** runs a monthly drop-in training session for DWP work coaches nationally to help them to understand how to advise their candidates, increasing their referral rate from the DWP by 43%. Finally, **Richmond and Wandsworth Borough Councils** Work Match service links up businesses with local people searching for jobs and apprenticeship opportunities, and offers candidates extensive support including training, interview coaching and guidance with applications. By March 2024, the Work Match initiative in Richmond had supported around 150 residents into employment, whilst the longer-standing Work Match initiative in Wandsworth had supported its 2,500th resident into employment in the borough in February 2024. **Cardiff Council's** Flexible Support Employment Pathways offers training and internship opportunities to young people with additional learning needs. To date, 75% of interns have successfully transitioned into paid employment.

## Targeted employment programmes

This year, employers ran employment programmes aimed at supporting care leavers, prison leavers, military veterans, social housing tenants, and young people who are NEET.

Young people leaving care were supported into employment through targeted programmes or recruitment partnerships at **Amazon**, **EMCOR UK** and **Compass**. Amazon's JOBS Project is a work readiness programme developed by Amazon in partnership with Barnardo's to support care leavers and other vulnerable young people (aged 18-29) to gain the confidence, skills, and experience needed to secure sustainable employment. The programme consists of a 10-week work readiness course, delivered by Barnardo's, focused on building participants' job-readiness, mental and physical wellbeing, and workplace skills. To date, 91% of JOBS Project graduates have gone on to join Amazon where they are offered additional support through mentors, buddies, and access to progression programmes.

Prison leavers and people with previous convictions were supported into employment by **Compass**, **KPMG** and **McGinley Support Services**. McGinley operate a referral system with 91 prisons in the UK, to place candidates into work or training when they leave the prison system to both those with existing qualifications and those with an interest in the sector.

Military veterans were supported by **Decipher Cyber** and **Milestone Infrastructure**. Decipher Cyber's CyBur focuses on bringing cyber security to the education market easily and cost-effectively to support veterans and young learners, supporting 100 people into the cyber security sector in the past year. Milestone Infrastructure's Military Accelerated Programme have supported four veterans into roles, through tailored development plans to aid transition to a highways career without having to start at the 'bottom rung' of the careers ladder.

**Karbon Homes's** New Start scheme offers a paid work placement for social housing residents across the North East of England. No previous experience is required, and roles offer flexible working patterns based on candidates' needs and circumstances. Of the 2023 intake, 11 of the 14 residents who took part went on to secure permanent positions with their placement employers.

**EMCOR UK**, **Rockleigh Ltd** and **UK Power Networks** all offered opportunities to young people who are NEET. Rockleigh Ltd recruits and trains young people facing barriers to work, including people with learning difficulties and individuals who are recovering from addiction, to work in arboriculture. UK Power Networks' The Power Among Us programme provided nine young people who are NEET in London a paid four-week tailored work experience programme and offered five of the participants a full-time role.

## Inclusive hiring practices

This year, employers made their hiring practices more inclusive by improving how their roles are advertised, assessing candidates' attitudes and potential rather than their qualifications, ringfencing roles for LSEB candidates, and by using technology and training to help tackle bias in recruitment decisions.

To increase applications from LSEB candidates, employers, including **Compass**, **Julius Baer International Limited** and **PwC** worked with expert partners to find the right people. Julius Baer International has worked closely with the Social Mobility Foundation and the Diversity Project to create a robust pipeline of talent from diverse backgrounds and is now recognising the first graduates from the programme who have gone on to undertake permanent roles in the organisation.

For employers advertising roles, **BBC** piloted a new approach to advertising roles this year by including pay ranges in their adverts in Wales and has since decided to roll out this change to all adverts globally. **Nationwide Building Society** also worked to provide transparency by including pay and rewards information in every job advert. Monica O'Brien at **SecuriGroup Ltd** revamped the company's advertising content and imagery to be more inclusive and used social media platforms to reach more diverse candidates.

Employers took a wide range of approaches to make assessments fairer to LSEB candidates. Many law firms, including **Browne Jacobson, DLA Piper UK LLP, Norton Rose Fulbright LLP, Slaughter and May** and **Womble Bond Dickinson** use the RARE contextual recruitment system which takes into consideration several socio-economic diversity indicators, and puts the achievements of each candidate into context. **Grant Thornton UK LLP** have partnered with Neurosight which uses AI to recognise and assess a candidate's behaviour in real time, for example, if they are experiencing anxiety during the assessment.

Employers across sectors, including **Browne Jacobson, Compass, dentsu, DLA Piper UK LLP, DWP, Grant Thornton UK LLP** and **Standard Chartered** removed minimum academic requirements for some or all of their roles. In addition to this, Browne Jacobson have introduced a 'second look' at LSEB candidates set to be rejected from the recruitment process. This year, 47% of the firm's solicitor training and 80% of their pupil barristers offers went to candidates previously ineligible to apply due to their academic grades.

There have been differing approaches to making interviews and assessment centres more inclusive. **NatWest Group** have removed online tests and instead use video interviews or in-person assessments to look for the skills needed for the role. **dentsu** have completely removed CVs from their assessment processes and instead focus on practical exercises, skills demonstrations, and behavioural assessments. **Womble Bond Dickinson** removed the essay question they used to use for entry roles and moved to a blended online assessment that measures potential.

**Grant Thornton UK LLP, NatWest Group** and **PwC** helped LSEB candidates to succeed by offering pre-interview coaching and training, helping to build the confidence and skills needed to secure a role. Grant Thornton UK LLP offers candidates a coaching call before their interview, and any candidate opting into their positive action group is supported by a specific recruiter and provided additional time and support for some aspects of the assessment.

Unconscious bias training for employees involved in recruitment was implemented by **DLA Piper UK LLP, Faegre Drinker Biddle & Reath LLP, Grant Thornton UK LLP** and **Sky**. Paige Izquierdo at Faegre Drinker Biddle & Reath organised training sessions by training provider Mission Diverse to help highlight and address unconscious bias in their processes. Sky recognised that there has been a preference for hiring people who fit the company's existing culture which led the company to introduce inclusive hiring training.

Finally, some law firms, including **DLA Piper UK LLP** and **Grant Thornton UK LLP** offered successful applicants support through pre-joiner engagement exercises. DLA Piper offered training, coaching, mentoring for incoming LSEB graduates to help them succeed and Grant Thornton UK LLP held workshops for school leavers to help them feel work ready.

## Retention



### Overview

In 2023-24, employers improved retention of LSEB employees by raising salaries of entry level positions, implementing mentoring programmes, and hosting events and training to increase awareness and understanding across their organisation. Social mobility networks were often central to employers' retention activities, offering new starters from LSEBs access to potential buddies or mentors, and organising events including LSEB storytelling and training on issues including accent bias.

This year, inclusion activities evolved from trying to support LSEB employees to succeed by 'fitting in', to recognising that people can best meet their potential by being their authentic selves, and that LSEB employees bring strengths to organisations, not just barriers to overcome. Employers communicated this message through storytelling from LSEB employees and senior leaders, workplace guides, and training for managers to tackle perceptions.

### Improving employment conditions

The main ways employers improved work conditions in 2023-24 was through increasing pay for entry level staff, including apprentices, to make roles more financially viable for LSEB candidates, and by providing other types of financial and pastoral support for trainees.

**EMCOR UK** introduced the Real Living Wage which resulted in an increase in pay for more than 800 employees. **DWP** offered its Social Mobility Apprentices a salary above the national living wage to provide them with greater financial stability, increasing the likelihood that they remain in their apprenticeship and progress on to take advantage of wider opportunities within the department.

In finance, **NatWest Group** and **Standard Chartered** increased their starting salaries, including for their apprenticeship programmes. This year, Standard Chartered offered an advertised starting salary of £28,000 for its apprenticeships to help enable LSEB candidates to take up the offer and support themselves away from the family home. NatWest increased its starting salary and offered employees a wide range of financial wellbeing training and opportunities to improve financial literacy and management. **SecuriGroup Ltd** provided flexibility to apprentices and other employees with caring or other work responsibilities by offering online training modules which can be completed at a time that suits the individual.

Law firms offered trainees a range of grants and financial support. For example, **Browne Jacobson** offered trainee solicitors a salary of £29-£38,000, study leave, in addition to paid course and assessment fees for some qualifications. Finally, **BBC** learnt that the nature of short-term freelance work in the media industry created barriers for LSEB contractors and in response, are now working to introduce minimum contract sizes and remediation periods for the corporation's freelance workers.

## Inclusion and belonging in the workplace

Onboarding programmes, buddy systems, and mentoring schemes were the most common approaches to creating an inclusive environment for LSEB employees. More widely, across sectors, employers' social mobility networks ran a wide range of programmes, events and activities to provide a sense of belonging to LSEB employees. This included organising networking events, regular social meet ups, and acting as a source of advice and allyship.

Ruby Barker at **DWP** created an extensive programme of support for her team's new school leaver social mobility apprentices, including holding multiple team building sessions before their first day to provide the 16-year-old apprentices the opportunity to get to know each other and feel more confident about starting work. Holly Wray at **Lewis Silkin** has been developing onboarding resources for LSEB new joiners and aims to introduce firm wide social mobility training, with a focus on identifying and addressing barriers individuals from LSEBs may face and tackle attrition amongst LSEB employees in the workplace. **NatWest Group** offered their Elevate apprentices up to a year of pastoral guidance in their role, including coaching where needed to enable them the best chance of success.

Mentoring schemes were the most common approach taken to support LSEB employees. Employers including **A&O Shearman, BlackRock, DLA Piper UK LLP, DWP, Lewis Silkin LLP, and Linklaters** all ran mentoring programmes which aimed to pair LSEB employees at different levels together to advance their personal and professional development. Employers' social mobility networks were vital to the success of mentoring programmes by creating a pool of potential mentors, providing guidance on creating successful mentoring relationships, and building confidence in LSEB employees to step forward and support one another. These relationships were particularly powerful where former LSEB apprentices or trainees had created an alumni group which then aimed to support new joiners to the programmes. Some mentors shared the challenges they faced in taking this step. Natalia Brozek at DLA Piper UK LLP had to tackle her own feelings of imposter syndrome to mentor new LSEB solicitor apprentices at the firm, feeling that she should not act as a role model for others due to her lack of self-belief, stemming from feeling like an outsider in the sector.

Buddy schemes were provided by employers across a range of sectors to pair LSEB joiners with another LSEB employee, aiming to make these employees feel less isolated and to help navigate the work environment. **BBC** and **Browne Jacobson** offered buddy schemes, mainly pairing new LSEB joiners with a member of the organisation's social mobility network.

Reverse mentoring programmes were used at **Aviva, BlackRock** and **Charles Russell Speechlys**, where LSEB employees were paired with senior leaders. These schemes aimed to increase understanding of the lived experiences and barriers that LSEB employees face in the organisation as well as the value that diversity can bring to the workplace. BlackRock's reverse mentoring scheme enables LSEB employees the opportunity to advise the organisation's leaders on how to build a more inclusive workplace.

This year, there was a distinct shift in tone among some employers, with fewer focusing on how they can support LSEB employees to fit in, by trying to influence how they dress, speak and behave. Instead, there has been a move to enabling LSEB employees to be themselves at work, freeing up their energy to focus on their roles, rather than concerns

## What were the enablers and challenges to retention activities?

### Enablers

#### The power of networks

Social Mobility Networks were pivotal in retention activities by running events and mentoring activities to support LSEB colleagues and improving awareness and understanding.

#### If I can see it, I can be it

hearing from LSEB senior leaders can help LSEB colleagues to believe that they too can progress to leadership level roles. These activities can also help to break down attitudinal barriers across organisations.

#### Understanding barriers

Employers worked with external organisations, academics and successful LSEBs from other sectors to help build awareness and understanding of the challenges faced by LSEB employees as well as the value they can bring to organisations.

### Challenges

#### Communications

Co-ordinating communications, events and activities across large organisations, particularly in the public sector, was a challenge, and this impacted the reach of some retention work. This has necessitated collaboration across networks and offices to ensure that retention work is successful.

#### Resistance

Some employers highlighted the persistent barriers faced in engaging colleagues about social mobility. Encouraging senior leaders to tell their stories, use of employee SEB data, and exploring intersectionality helped to start breaking down some of these barriers, but the issue is by no means solved.



about having to fit in at work. Employers including **Civil Service**, **Linklaters** and **Nationwide Building Society** highlighted the responsibility they must offer their employees to have the confidence to be their true authentic selves, rather than to assimilate. In the government, The Cross-Government Socio-Economic Diversity Network created a guide, *Thriving in the Workplace*, which aims to empower LSEB Civil Servants to be themselves at work, recognising the value these individuals bring to the sector and to also challenge existing cultures.

## Promoting awareness and understanding

Personal storytelling and training were the main ways that employers promoted awareness and understanding of social mobility. Many activities were arranged to participate in Social Mobility Day, or during internal Social Mobility Weeks to create a focus for social mobility work and raise awareness of organisations' wider programmes and networks.

Storytelling, at live events and in online content, was the most common approach taken to increase awareness and understanding of the experiences of LSEB colleagues, including the challenges they have faced and the strengths they bring to their roles. Employers including **Aviva**, **BlackRock**, **EY**, **Grant Thornton UK LLP**, **Linklaters**, **Pinsent Masons**, **Nationwide Building Society** and **Standard Chartered** highlighted the power and importance of sharing personal lived experiences, especially for senior LSEB leaders to talk about their career journey, and how they navigated and overcame the challenges they faced.

**Linklaters** regularly host storytelling sessions, seminars and client events to help build a culture of openness and authenticity, which include LSEB senior leaders sharing their experiences of progression within the firm. The firm highlighted how important storytelling has been in breaking down misconceptions about the 'typical Linklaters lawyer' with the aim of making LSEB employees feel more confident about their ability to be themselves and progress in the organisation. External speakers were also invited in for social mobility sessions, to share their experiences in their own sectors. **A&O Shearman** celebrated Social Mobility Day with guest speakers including Amol Rajan and Steph McGovern. Linklaters invited Steph McGovern to their International Women's Day celebration to hear the broadcaster discuss her career journey as a woman from an LSEB, covering topics including accent bias and imposter syndrome.

Some employers have also worked to raise awareness of intersectionality by running specific events on the experiences of LSEBs with other protected characteristics. **BBC** ran an event on SEB and neurodivergence. **BlackRock's** social mobility & allies network collaborated with other internal networks to host events on intersectionality, including around gender and socio-economic inclusion. **Lewis Silkin** ran an intersectional event focusing on LGBTQIA+ and social mobility during the firm's Social Mobility Week this year.

Training for senior leaders and managers was used by employers to increase self-awareness and ensure that they were supporting and valuing their LSEB team members. Sessions included accent bias and inclusive behaviour. **A&O Shearman** ran an accent bias in the workplace session with a Professor of Linguistics from Queen Mary University. **Aviva** ran inclusive behaviour training, attended by 96% of the company's Finance People Leaders in 2023. **Browne Jacobson** have introduced diversity and inclusion training which addresses social mobility challenges, including accent bias, and aim to have 100% of employees complete the training by August 2024. **Sky's** Courageous Conversations initiative aims to support people across the company to have open and honest discussions about social mobility, including how to show humility in navigating situations when they've said the wrong thing.

Training was also offered for LSEB employees to help overcome the psychological barriers that many employees described facing in the workplace. **Nationwide Building Society** ran workshops on Imposter Syndrome, Overcoming Adversity, Challenging the Inner Critic, and Understanding Biases. These workshops were attended by hundreds of employees, who following the sessions, reported increased feelings of confidence and resilience.

## Progression



### Overview

In 2023-24 best practice for progression involved employers using data collected on employees' progression routes to identify key barriers to getting on in work for LSEB employees and working to remove these. Key examples include changes to how work is allocated to help remove managerial bias and supporting LSEB employees develop the technical or soft skills they need to make the next step. LSEB employee development programmes were used to provide specific, structured routes into new roles, while other employers used mentoring or ad hoc training to help LSEB employees develop. This year, employers aimed to make roles more transparent by including pay and rewards information on job adverts so that LSEB employees could make informed choices about their next steps.

### Positive action to support promotion

In 2023-24, employers used data analysis to identify barriers to progression for LSEB employees and developed interventions to tackle these. There was also a focus on developing LSEB employees' confidence and soft skills to support them to meet their potential.

Employers highlighted the importance of collecting data on employees' progression routes to understand whether barriers to further progression, or 'class ceilings', existed in their organisation. They also collected data on LSEB employees' day to day experiences in the workplace and how these might affect perceptions or feelings about progression. **Slaughter and May's** progression analysis, conducted in partnership with The Bridge Group, found that LSEB employees do not experience barriers to progression once they are in the firm.

In the legal and professional services sectors, there was a focus on ensuring LSEB trainees and apprentices were given fair work allocation, enabling them to develop the skills and experiences needed to progress. **KPMG** conducted work allocation analysis across all DEI characteristics, and from this, the firm has initiated a project to embed interventions to ensure access to work is equitable. **Linklaters** recognises the potential for LSEB employees to be overlooked when it comes to allocation of the best work due to unconscious bias. To combat this potential, the firm received external training as well as introducing an independent work allocation system.

Employers supported LSEB employees to navigate through the organisations' respective career pathways, and provided technical skills training to help them progress. **Charles Russell Speechlys** are developing clear competency frameworks and promotion processes with the aim of supporting LSEB employees to understand what is required to progress within the organisation. **Compass** continued to offer each employee the opportunity to develop their career at the company through their apprenticeships and Careers Pathways Programme, by providing on the job training and formal training to develop skills and provide the experience needed to progress into specific roles.

Other employers focused on developing employees' soft skills to support progression. **DWP** used its internal Social Mobility Week to raise awareness of how LSEB employees in the department could use their background as a strength and explore the opportunities it can bring for progression. The department ran a "It starts with you" session, designed to encourage employees to take ownership of their development. **Sky's** Accelerate Your Career Programme is designed to support LSEB employees to overcome the barriers they face in the sector, by discussing careers pathways and helping them develop a growth mindset. **Linklaters** offered LSEB employees training on public speaking, presenting and networking in supportive sessions, which was introduced in response to requests from the firm's social mobility network.

## Targeted training and development

Employers offered career development mentoring and structured training programmes to support LSEB employees' career progression.

Career-focused mentoring was offered by employers across sectors including **Julius Baer International Limited, KPMG, Nationwide Building Society** and **Taylor Wessing LLP** who all delivered mentoring or structured coaching programmes that aimed to support LSEB employees' progression. At KPMG, Jenny Wilkinson led the implementation of a mentoring programme specifically designed to pair LSEB employees with senior leaders for guidance and support. The second cohort concluded in April 2024 with over 240 participants.

A wide range of targeted progression programmes were delivered this year. **Amazon's** Career Choice programme launched 10 years ago and in 2023, 1 in 10 employees took up the opportunity to access accredited education aligned to in-demand job roles and career pathways. The programme is open to all entry-level roles in the organisation and is designed to meet employees' starting point and to support them in moving towards a specific career pathway. **DWP's** Leaders Like You welcomed its second cohort this year, with 78% of participants identifying as LSEB, who will be offered executive coaching and access to a generous personal learning budget to support them into leadership roles within or outside the department.

**Nationwide Building Society** offered 16 LSEB employees the opportunity to complete a Level 6 Chartered Management degree, along with external mentoring from an independent life coach. The organisation was also part of the Accelerated Progress Programme which offers secondments and skills building for LSEB middle managers across five financial services organisations. This cross-firm initiative, developed with Progress Together, aims to tackle barriers faced by LSEB employees and cultivate a rich pool of talent in the sector.

## Transparent promotion structures

Employers that introduced clear salary bands and rewards information in their job adverts at all levels reported the positive impact this move has had on progression within their organisations and across their sectors more widely.

## What were the enablers and challenges to progression activities?

### Enablers

#### Data

Employers that were successful in collecting social mobility employee data found this invaluable in understanding whether and at what points LSEB employees met a 'class ceiling' in their organisations.

#### Leaders like me

While the Civil Service faced many challenges with social mobility work due to the size and complexity of its departments, this became an asset when creating interview panels for senior leadership programmes as they were able to ensure LSEB candidates were interviewed by at least one person from a similar SEB.

### Challenges

#### Where is the problem?

Employers across sectors highlighted the challenges they faced in identifying barriers to progression and appropriate interventions due to a lack of specific definition to measure LSEB, LSEB not being a protected characteristic, and gaps in employee SEB data. Encouraging self-declaration and discussing the importance of intersectionality with other characteristics was seen as essential to improving data on LSEB employees' outcomes.

#### It's hard being first

Trying to develop LSEB focused progression programmes without much or indeed any best practice available across some sectors was felt to be a barrier. Starting from scratch takes time and means that mistakes are likely to be made along the way.

**Nationwide Building Society** have worked to remove bias in recruitment at all levels by removing academic requirements and number of years' experience to avoid age bias. The organisation also includes pay and rewards information in every job advert to ensure transparency.

**BBC** also highlighted the positive impact that pay transparency can bring for progression. The corporation learnt that LSEB employees sometimes turned down job offers in their existing pay band when they learnt that the new role would pay less than their current one, and now hope to support LSEBs employees by being more transparent about pay from the outset.



# 3 Taking the lead

Advocacy



## Overview

Advocacy work in 2023-24 centred on partnerships with sector-based and cross-sector organisations. Work with established networks including Progress Together and PRIME continued this year, and employers were involved in numerous sector-based schemes and projects across the finance, professional services, legal and public sectors.

Cross-sector work included collaborations with The Sutton Trust and the 93% Club to take part in social mobility-focused events and conferences. A new initiative employers took part in this year was the launch of the 93% Club's Professional Network. Employers also organised their own events to raise awareness of the social mobility work they were doing or to bring expert speakers together for insightful panel discussions.

This year, positive actions, in advocacy included setting up a cross-sector scholarship fund, changes to procurement contracts to require social mobility actions, and calls for SEB data collection and reporting to be mandatory for certain types of employers.

## Promoting social mobility among peers

Employees working across the finance, legal, and professional services sectors have continued to create and advance sector-based social mobility networks and initiatives this year.

In the financial sector, membership of Progress Together continues to grow. In 2023, **Standard Chartered** joined the network to mark the company's commitment to social mobility, access support for their internal social mobility work as well as to share and learn best practice with their peers. After joining in 2022, **Nationwide Building Society** secured partnership status in the group and the company has provided internal data to help inform and shape further research on social mobility in the sector, hosted events, and set up Trailblazers, a cross-firm mentoring scheme for middle managers working in financial services. Other initiatives in the financial sector include **Julius Baer International Limited's** work with the Diversity Project, which works towards inclusion in investment and savings, and **Pemberton Asset Management's** work with the Investment Association, a body of UK Investment Managers which aims to improve social mobility. More widely, employers including **Grant Thornton UK LLP** and **PwC** have also continued to work with Access Accountancy.

Employers in the legal sector engaged with a wide range of networks and initiatives aimed at improving access to legal careers and to share best practice on progression strategies. Membership of PRIME continued for many law firms including **DLA Piper UK LLP**, **Norton Rose Fulbright LLP** and **Womble Bond Dickinson**. **Charles Russell Speechlys** worked with the Levelling Up Law Project, the first sector-wide initiative undertaken by the Purpose Coalition, aiming to create new and more accessible pathways from higher education into the legal sector. **Taylor Wessing** have worked with the Legal Sector Social Mobility Working Group, established by **KPMG**. The firm have also worked with City Century, a collaboration of over 50 law firms working to increase the number of solicitor apprentice roles. Leanne Instrall at **Brabners LLP** collaborated with the Breaking Down Barriers to Law project which offers a platform for sharing ideas and best practice. Finally, **Browne Jacobson** facilitated discussions with a consortium of legal firms, chambers, and inns of court looking to initiate a Barrister apprenticeship, supporting access into the profession.

In the Civil Service, **DWP** and **Food Standards Agency** have been part of the Cross-Government Socio-Economic Diversity Network, which aims to share best practice, organise events, and mentor others on ways to advance social mobility. To date, the network is estimated to have impacted around 100,000 individuals across the civil service network.

### Influencing wider audiences

This year, employers worked closely with cross-sector groups and initiatives including the 93% Club and The Sutton Trust, to both improve their internal social mobility work and to influence other employers. There were also cross-sector events and conferences which aimed to share best practice.

**DLA Piper UK LLP**, **EY**, **JLL**, **Slaughter and May** and **Taylor Wessing LLP** worked with the 93% Club, this year. Andrew Jolly at Slaughter and May led the firm to become a founding member of 93% Professionals in October 2023, and Lauren Trigg at JLL organised the launch of the 93% Club's Professional Network at the JLL offices in November 2023.

The Sutton Trust was also instrumental in convening employers across sectors together for events to share ideas, experiences and best practice, as well as organise targeted programmes of support. This year, **Lewis Silkin** as part of their involvement in The Sutton Trust, Holly Wray took part in the professionals panel and networking event at The Sutton Trust's annual Pathways to Law conference.

Across sectors, employers organised or took part in social mobility focused events and campaigns to raise awareness and share their experiences. In the legal sector, **Linklaters** produced a video to publicise the firm's social mobility initiatives and ran a client event to discuss the pivotal role of data in promoting social mobility within organisations. **Browne Jacobson** have worked with more than 50 clients this year to help them develop social mobility strategies, and the firm's social media channels recorded over 1.3 million views on social mobility posts.

In professional services, **KPMG** convened more than 300 clients at social mobility conferences, supporting cross-sector insights, programmes and research. The firm's Social Mobility Conferences, led by Jennifer Lee and David McIntosh Jr., facilitated a range of impactful panel discussions on social mobility issues including addressing social mobility through fair pay and work, the power of social mobility networks, and the impact of AI. In June 2024, the KPMG board leadership centre published the firm's second report examining socio-economic diversity on the boards of UK companies.

In technology, **Blackbullion** created National Scholarships Week to encourage businesses to create funding opportunities and raise aspirations for LSEB students. This year, the company worked with partners including **Nationwide** to launch over £800,000 in new scholarship funding for LSEB students. The programme was highlighted in two national newspapers, further raising the profile of social mobility.

## What were the enablers and challenges to advocacy activities?

### Enablers

#### Working in partnership

Advocacy was enabled by close working and collaboration both within and between sectors, as well as by building partnerships with social mobility charities and organisations.

### Challenges

#### Senior leadership buy-in

Convincing senior leaders to share data and experience with competitors, clients and the public is not always easy, especially on an issue that has no legal or regulatory requirement.

In the public sector, employers worked to improve social mobility, including through procurement contracts. **Richmond and Wandsworth Borough Councils** require bidders to demonstrate how they will deliver social value and negotiated hard to secure additional contributions to social mobility. A recent success in Wandsworth was a package of support worth more than £1.3m over the period of the contract from a major supplier, including the commitment to hiring eight LSEB employees. **DWP's** Social Mobility Pledge Consortium (SMPC) works with employers who want to develop their own social mobility agenda and have a specific pledge to provide access to ringfenced vacancies for DWP vulnerable customers in any geographical area.

Finally, **Nationwide** has worked to encourage regulators to make SEB data mandatory for firms to collect, report and disclose as part of the upcoming policies on diversity and inclusion. More widely, Debbie Crosbie, CEO of Nationwide, has spoken at events about the importance of leadership accountability and using data to drive social mobility progress.





# 4

## Bridging the gap

Schools, colleges and universities

## Schools and colleges



### Overview

In 2023-24, schools and colleges improved social mobility by raising academic achievement in the classroom and supporting LSEB students to develop skills, confidence, and cultural capital to help them make their best next step in education or work. Non-selective state schools and colleges provided targeted academic support for those most at risk of not meeting their potential in exams. Enrichment activities included trips abroad, outdoor activities and debating, to help LSEB students build their confidence and broaden their horizons. Schools and colleges supported LSEB students into further education, higher education and employment through career talks, university or workplace visits, and targeted skills development.

### Improving academic outcomes

In 2023-24, non-selective state schools and colleges focused on improving academic outcomes for less advantaged students through a range of targeted interventions. **Chelsea Academy** continued to identify and support students most at risk of not achieving at least a Grade 4 in Maths or English by providing extra tutoring. The school also hosted a revision-focused weekend residential trip which consisted of intensive revision combined with activities to support students in preparing for their exams. **Hull College** and **Leicester College** delivered wide ranging support for student groups identified as facing the most significant barriers to attainment and progression. Hull College implemented a transformative programme to ensure accessible learning is available to their diverse student body which includes more than 1,000 refugees and asylum seekers, by integrating Microsoft Translate, PowerPoint Live, and Immersive Reader into the ESOL curriculum. These technologies provide real-time translation and adaptive learning experiences, enabling non-English-speaking students to fully engage with the curriculum which has led to significant improvements in both attendance and achievement rates.

**Leicester College** has continued to expand its mentoring team which works to provide academic and pastoral support for students requiring additional support, including young adult carers and care experienced students. To maximise these students' outcomes, the College provides an adaptive learning environment for students, has small teaching groups, and tutors who are specialist key workers.

This year, universities also partnered with education providers to implement programmes which aimed to provide academic support to primary and secondary school aged LSEB students. **University of Bradford, University of Southampton** and **University of Winchester** all delivered bespoke programmes which provided Maths or English support for LSEB students in their local areas.

### Providing enrichment activities

This year, enrichment activities focused on building confidence, resilience and cultural capital in LSEB students. Non-selective state schools, including **Chelsea Academy** and **Tile Cross Academy**, offered a wide range of activities to help students develop non-academic skills and interests. Chelsea Academy ran debating, rowing, robotics, creative writing, the Duke of Edinburgh award and theatre trips for students. These activities were designed to help develop students' soft skills such as leadership, teamwork, communication, and self-belief. This year, the school encouraged students to take responsibility for their growth by launching their Flourish 8 programme which inspires students to actively engage in, reflect on, and take personal responsibility for recording the wide range of opportunities. The framework allows students to record and reflect on their activities across eight categories including Responsibility and Leadership, Future Pathways, and Serving Others. Since its launch in September 2023, over 2000 entries have been made by students and the school has seen increased participation in, and awareness of the range of activities they offer.

**Tile Cross Academy** offered a wide range of activities for students, including trips abroad, sporting activities, as well as public speaking and debate focused workshops and events. The school also accessed the government's Turing Scheme to fund many enrichment activities, including visits to partner schools in Hamburg and Paris and to fund ten pupils to attend the Junior Cadet Leadership Challenge at Fort Devens in Massachusetts. Further funding was accessed through the Ulysses Trust and Tall Ships Youth Trust to enable a group of ten girls to complete a five-day offshore voyage in the Solent. The school also engaged with the Speakers Trust to deliver a one-day public speaking workshop to 25 year 10 pupils and arranged for three pupils to attend a six-day English Speaking union Debate Academy residential at Stamford School which led to all three going on to gain fully funded boarding school places via RNCSEF.

In the Independent sector, **Christ's Hospital** launched its Expeditionary Education programme which placed environmental and outdoor learning as a central pillar of the school's approach to preparing students for the world of work. This initiative followed careful evaluation of feedback from alumni which highlighted a range of barriers young people had faced when entering the world of work. The programme took students out of their comfort zones to foster skills sought after by employers including team building and leadership skills.

### Creating inclusive school cultures

Schools and colleges worked to create an inclusive environment for LSEB students by understanding the specific needs of individuals or student groups and implementing wide ranging, flexible support. **Oasis Academy South Bank** puts care for the individual student at the centre of its culture and systems. For example, the school provides transport to students during their first weeks starting at university. Additional support includes the school organising and managing work experience during holidays and managing external agencies to ensure students are safe and having positive experiences.

**Hull College's** ESOL department, led by Tina Lynam, has focused on making the college, located in a City of Sanctuary, a warm, welcoming, and educational haven for students who speak English as an additional language. The college have used language software to make lessons and college life more accessible and inclusive for students who speak English as an additional language. The college aims to improve

## What were the enablers and challenges for schools and colleges?

### Enablers

#### Working in partnership

All schools and colleges engaged with partners to deliver support and programmes to LSEB students, including working with other schools, colleges, universities, charities, and employers. These partnerships offered vital sources of knowledge, support, funding, and opportunities to support LSEB students excel and take their next steps.

#### Engagement and development of staff

The passion and focus of staff at all levels as well as the openness to training and learning from specialists helped to ensure that LSEB students with a wide range of experiences and needs were supported.

#### Funding

Direct or indirect funding for programmes and initiatives was vital, particularly in delivering enrichment activities and inclusion programmes. Some schools and colleges aimed to secure as much funding as possible from national grant schemes to provide opportunities to their students.

### Challenges

#### Barriers to engagement

Often the students who would benefit the most from additional support and opportunities can be the hardest to engage. Schools and colleges aimed to overcome this with systems of flexible and targeted support, often delivered in partnership with specialist organisations.

#### Lack of staff, time and resources

Many schools and colleges faced issues with staff turnover, temporary staff, and unfilled vacancies, as well as a lack of internal funding for social mobility work. This means that schools and colleges often rely on teachers having the willingness and capacity to deliver enrichment activities and other social mobility work on their own time and with few resources.

both educational and personal outcomes for individual students and to benefit the wider community by supporting integration, understanding and greater economic prosperity within the city. As many of the students supported with the language assistance are refugees or asylum seekers, the college has taken a trauma-focused approach, with the aim of helping to heal as well as educate the students.

**Leicester College** delivered a wide range of support to LSEB students, including targeted support for specific groups such as young adult carers, care experienced young people and asylum seekers. Last year, the college offered a Summer Engagement Programme for students, which offered mentoring, mental health and counselling support, college tours, and activities. The college has also offered laptop loans to students who are unable to purchase their own and partnered with a food bank to distribute food parcels to students in need. Since 2020, the college has worked to identify, track the progress of and provide support to young adult carers. The college's in-house youth worker also held sessions with looked after young people and unaccompanied asylum seekers to help them adjust to adult life in UK by learning about Citizenship, British Values, and the college's values.

## Pathways to FE, HE, and employment

To prepare young people for entering the workplace, non-selective state schools and colleges aimed to broaden LSEB students' horizons and explore a range of opportunities in education and the world of work. They also supported students in developing the skills and qualities that employers are looking for to strengthen their chances of success.

**Chelsea Academy** begin preparing students for university and careers from Year 7 to raise young peoples' aspirations and improve their understanding of the pathways to their chosen career. This included hosting career talks with people from a range of industries and workplace visits. In the Sixth Form, students attend a weekly talk with a professional or academic as well as having the opportunity to practice interview skills and to take part in work experience and internships. The school offers a range of support for students to help during crucial points, including deciding on university choices and completing UCAS applications, such as facilitating visits to campuses. Students who receive Pupil Premium are also offered more extensive support through The Access Project which provides academic tutoring and mentoring ahead of starting university.

**Oasis Academy South Bank** also provide in-depth support to Sixth Form students through a specific careers programme which helps introduce students to the different careers' pathways open to them and to ensure they are equipped with the relevant information for them to take the best next step either at university or in a degree apprenticeship. The school works closely with a range of partner organisations to offer this support, including the Brilliant Club, Making The Leap, the Sutton Trust, and Construction Youth Trust. This allows every student in the Sixth Form to apply for a university summer school, attend career and pathway insight events, complete the Brilliant Club's Scholars programme. In addition, students can undertake work experience, network with employers and receive one-to-one support with their UCAS application.

Colleges offered targeted support to help specific groups of secondary aged LSEB students make the best next step. **Leicester College** focused on supporting care experienced students transition into FE college by providing a range of events and mentoring to help these students feel able to pursue further education and take part in college life. Types of support included Year 11 visits to the college, specialist mentoring, and a summer programme to prepare these students for college. **Gower College Swansea's** Apprenticeships for All initiative supported both new and existing apprenticeship students with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) to secure apprenticeship success and career progression. Neurodiversity specialists were brought into the college's apprenticeships team to develop new resources and training programmes, raise awareness of additional learning needs, and provide specialist support for staff, learners and employers. This resulted in a significant increase in the number of apprentices recruited with additional learning needs, and an increase in achievement rates for these apprentices. Apprentices on the scheme can access flexible assessment methods, additional support sessions, and accessibility adaptations. The college has also supported the Novus Gower resettlement programme which delivers innovative learning for individuals in South Wales who are serving a prison sentence to aid their rehabilitation and ensure they are equipped with the skills that local employers are looking for.

Among independent schools, **Christ's Hospital's** Expeditionary Education programme was designed to develop the skills and qualities in students ahead of entering the world of work. The programme was developed in response to feedback from alumni who highlighted the barriers they had faced in pursuing careers to help ensure the success of LSEB students. The programme has focused on developing outdoor skills such as bushcraft, navigation, and camping, as well as leadership and team building skills. As a result of promoting the programme on social media, two non-selective state primary academies in London with a high proportion of students from LSEBs will be partnering with Christ's Hospital for the 2024-25 programme, providing opportunities to 120 young people from LSEBs.

## Support and development for school staff

In 2023-24 staff development was focused on providing training to support specific student groups as well as funding specific roles to improve students' social mobility. **Tile Cross Academy** continued to fund a full time Head of Social Mobility to ensure the academy's capacity to identify and create opportunities for students and include these in the school's development plan.

Among colleges, **Hull College** delivered training for more than 500 members of staff to help them fully utilise the technologies put in place for their programme which supports students who speak English as an additional language. As part of this, two members of the college's team have become digital evangelists, helping other departments appreciate the benefits of digital technologies. The college also incorporated cultural sensitivity training into its professional development programmes to help create a more inclusive environment for students. Meanwhile, **Leicester College** expanded its mentoring team this year and now have a mentor who specialises in supporting young adult carers and care experienced students. Finally, **Gower College Swansea** brought in specialists in Neurodiversity/ and Cognitive ALN to help ensure the success of its Apprenticeships for All programme.

## Widening access to independent schools

**Christ's Hospital** continued to support social mobility through education, offering free or low-cost boarding places to 672 of the school's 866 students, making it the most diverse independent school in the country. Social mobility statistics for the school show that students on average go on to have a household income three times that of their parents and 98% of students go on to university, compared to 33% for their parents. **Tile Cross Academy** undertook a range of activities to support across Birmingham into independent school scholarships. Their work to help expand the Birmingham Schools Springboard Foundation will widen the access to fully funded boarding places to students across the city. The school also led a Preparation for Boarding residential at UK Sailing Academy aimed at Royal National Children's Springboard Foundation candidates from across the country to prepare them for the big step of joining a boarding school. The visit also served to develop a Springboard identity amongst the young people and create a support network of their peers on which they could share their excitement and challenges.

## Universities



### Overview

Universities focused on widening participation by improving access to higher education as well as providing financial support to students from LSEBs to enable them to get into and stay in university. Access was improved through universities' outreach work with young people from LSEBs in school or college, and through contextual admissions schemes, designed to improve application outcomes for LSEB applicants. Provision of degree apprenticeships provided more choice for young people from LSEBs, as well as clear career pathways to work through. A wide range of financial and pastoral support was provided, including bursaries, scholarships, food banks, hardship funds and mentoring. Universities supported LSEB students and graduates into work through work placements, careers guidance and post-graduate careers support.

Inclusion activities mostly focused on meeting LSEB students financial and academic needs but there were also examples of social mobility networks of LSEB staff, student and alumni, as well as social and cultural activities aimed to raise awareness of the work and experiences of LSEB members of the university community.

### Improving access

In 2023-24, universities worked to widen participation through outreach work in primary and secondary schools, the use of contextual admissions, the offer of financial support packages, and by delivering targeted programmes for specific LSEB student groups.

**Queen Mary University of London** and **University of Leeds** improved awareness of the university pathway to LSEB students by partnering with primary and secondary schools as well as aiming to improve academic outcomes and raise young peoples' aspirations. Queen Mary University of London's outreach curriculum supports students from Year 5 through to university entry, providing local LSEB students with academic support, skill-building activities, and career guidance, preparing them for university study. At sixth form, the university's Access to Queen Mary programme offers a two-year support package for students who are care-experienced, disabled, recipients of Free School Meals, and those from areas with high levels of socio-economic disadvantage. The programme offers academic enrichment activities, pastoral care, study skills, and employment opportunities. Evaluations of the programme show a 34% increase in awareness of university life, a 24% increase in academic skill readiness, and a 63% increase in application confidence.

**Queen Mary University of London, University of Bradford and University of Leeds** all ran contextual admissions schemes to improve application outcomes for LSEB students. University of Leeds' Access to Leeds contextual admissions scheme improved access for students applying for undergraduate courses by factoring in data such as students' home postcode rather than just academic grades. Evaluations show that there has been success in narrowing the access gap and lowering non-continuation rate for underrepresented groups in the past year. Meanwhile, University of Bradford's Progression Scheme supports undergraduate applicants who have not made their grades or whose personal and educational circumstances mean they could be less likely to receive an offer based on the university's standard entry criteria. **University of Winchester** guarantee an interview or offer of a place for all care leavers who apply to the university.

Bursaries and wider forms of financial support were offered by universities including **Queen Mary University of London, University of Bradford, University of Leeds, University of Southampton and University of Winchester**. This year, University of Bradford delivered a wide range of financial support to improve access to the university. As a University of Sanctuary, they offered tuition fee grants, including no fee places and course cost grants to asylum seekers and refugees with the aim to remove the financial barriers faced by this group in pursuing higher education courses. The university also introduced Howard Opportunities Scholarship aimed at encouraging more white males from LSEBs to enrol in higher education, and the Anita Rani Scholarship which offers financial support to four female students, who are in some way disadvantaged, to enter STEM subjects. University of Winchester also offered bursaries for specific student groups, including scholarships covering full fees for two refugees or dependents of refugees, and six scholarships for care leavers or people estranged from family, covering rent free accommodation for three years.

Universities also improved access to higher education by broadening their offer for students through degree apprenticeships and other types of higher education courses, designed to offer opportunities to students who would otherwise be unlikely to access university education. **Queen Mary University of London** offered degree apprenticeships from Level 4 to 7 as practical routes into professional roles. The university also works with Flying Start to offer a tailored programme to their accounting students, of which 76% were eligible for free school meals. This year, **University of Worcester** formed a new partnership with Dudley, Walsall, and Halesowen Colleges to provide higher education health related courses, including Nursing, in the Black Country. The aim of the programme is to offer high quality higher education courses to students in an area which has been historically underserved by higher education.

## Supporting students

This year, universities offered a wide range of financial and pastoral support to LSEB students, including financial support to cope with rising living costs, mentoring, and enabling LSEB students to achieve their academic potential.

Universities highlighted the financial barriers increasingly being faced by LSEB students due to the rising cost of living. Help with living costs was offered by many universities, including **Staffordshire University, University of Bradford and University of Southampton**. University of Bradford offers support to students from day one at university until up to 5 years after graduation. The university's student support includes a hardship fund and food banks, as well as help and support with finding accommodation, understanding, and managing finances and accessing the university's Student Support Fund. This year, University of Southampton allocated £900k to the university's Student Support, commuter, technology, and wellbeing funds, in response to the cost of living crisis.

## What were the enablers and challenges for universities?

### Enablers

#### Responding to students' needs

Universities tailored support to meet the specific needs of LSEB students by collecting quantitative or qualitative data on the experiences and barriers LSEB students faced. Universities noted that students were much more likely to respond to data collection exercises if an immediate useful outcome was offered, such as support services relevant to their responses.

#### Working in partnership

Universities partnered with schools to deliver outreach programmes and to widen access to LSEB students. They also partnered with employers to develop courses, fund bursaries, and create work experience and networking opportunities. Student Union partnerships were also key in providing support to students on campus, through the offer of food banks and social support.

#### Strategy and leadership

Support from senior leaders, including Vice Chancellors, in improving social mobility as well as formalising commitments in corporate strategies and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policies helped to create the right environment for social mobility work to succeed.

### Challenges

#### Student engagement

Universities that collected social mobility data or data on students' needs faced issues with low response rates. Universities tackled this by offering immediate useful services or tools after completing a survey and working with the Students Union to raise awareness and encourage engagement.

#### Attracting and retaining staff

some universities faced barriers to recruiting and retaining staff in new roles to support social mobility, including degree apprenticeship courses, due to tightness in the labour market for some sectors.

**Staffordshire University** worked closely with the students' union to support students experiencing financial hardship, including offering an on-campus foodbank and hardship fund. The university's approach to hardship support was based on a survey conducted to understand students' basic needs security, measuring the self-report prevalence of food, housing, and financial insecurities. The findings of the survey were used to develop targeted interventions to support students within the university as well as inform and influence the wider sector and government.

**Queen Mary University of London** ensured that LSEB students were able to fully engage with the opportunities available at university by offering these students access to role models, mentors, and business contacts that they could draw on for study projects. Students on the university's Flying Start accounting programme were offered extensive wrap-around support to help reduce failure and drop-out rates on the course. The support offered this year, in partnership with **PwC** contributed to all students passing all their first-year modules and continuing their course into the second year.

**London South Bank University** and **University of Leeds** both delivered programmes that aimed to improve academic and personal development. London South Bank University's Personal Development Plan tool enabled students to reflect on, and track the growth of, their own academic and practical development needs over time. Students' responses to the tool instantly link them to relevant services and support available, which has improved both retention and progression. It has also transformed how the university understands the needs of students and design services and in 2023-24, this has led to a 40% reduction in the number of students interrupting or withdrawing from their studies, and a 7% improvement in students passing their assessments on first attempt. University of Leeds has improved social mobility by addressing barriers in the Hidden Curriculum as part of the university's Curriculum Redefined programme, which recognises individual students' lived experiences, normalises errors as a part of learning, and provides more flexible opportunities to students, including international study and work placements.

## Improving employability

In 2023-24, universities improved employability through work placements, careers guidance and advice, and post-graduation careers support.

Work experience and work-skills development support was offered by **Staffordshire University**, **Queen Mary University of London** and **University of Leeds**. This year, Staffordshire University launched its Leadership Academy, as part of a skills-based enrichment programme and also established a Graduate Projects Office which provides work experience opportunities for students from underrepresented backgrounds. Queen Mary University of London's Student Ambassador Scheme provided students, particularly those from under-represented groups, with valuable work experience, enhancing their employability and supporting their transition into the workforce. The university's Flying Start programme students also benefitted from 90 fully funded placements with **PwC** as part of their accounting course. University of Leeds has aimed to make work experience placements more accessible to LSEB students by offering virtual work experience options as well as access to a working wardrobe, to ensure that students have access to the clothes needed for professional placements.

Support into graduate jobs was delivered in a range of ways. **University of Southampton's** MyGeneration career coaching programme continued, and this year the university worked with the Purpose Coalition to test an app which supports LSEB students to access graduate employment and career opportunities. **University of Bradford** and **University of Worcester** supported students into employment by developing relationships with employers, ensuring that their students had the skills employers need, and building relationships and networks to give their students access to high quality graduate jobs. University of Bradford works with local, national, and international employers to co-design course modules to ensure students have desirable skills, to create work opportunities, and to develop networks to benefit the university's students. Every graduate receives a six month check in with the university's careers and employability service which begins from a students' first year, right up to five years after graduation. The university also offers a range of wider support including an enterprise fund, a graduate internship programme and employability awards, all aimed at improving employability skills and offering support and encouragement to succeed in the working world.

## Improving socio-economic diversity and inclusion

Data collection, analysis and wider social mobility strategies mostly focused on improving socio-economic diversity and inclusion this year. **Staffordshire University** worked closely with its Students Union to launch a Basic Needs survey which sought to enhance the university's understanding of how food, financial, and housing insecurities affect students and to drive systemic changes to better support their wellbeing and academic success. The university aims to use the data to create sustainable and impactful change for its students, as well as provide a model that other education institutions could adopt. So far, more than 2,000 students have completed the survey, and the university have found that nearly 30% of students experienced high levels of food insecurity and 40% faced financial insecurity. These findings helped to shape student support services and scholarships at the university, including a new cost of living scholarship.



The university has also influenced policy makers, HE institutions, and charities by disseminating findings and developing policy proposals. They are also developing a new cost-of-living scholarship to study at the university.

This year, **University of Southampton** delivered a wide range of activities to improve social mobility and inclusion among university staff as well to raise awareness of social mobility and celebrate experiences of LSEB staff and students. The university was one of the first to collect SEB data as part of their recruitment process and include consideration of socio-economic status in their Equality Impact Assessments. The university's Social Mobility Network is made up of staff and students and this year grew to 220 members. The network promotes the assets that people from LSEBs bring to the university, raising awareness of issues relating to socio-economic background and achieving progress in institutional policies. It recently launched a podcast which produced ten episodes on social mobility related topics including accent bias and celebrated Social Mobility Day 2024 by sharing social mobility stories of senior leaders from LSEBs. This year, the university also curated a Class Ceiling photography exhibition showcasing the lived experiences of students, staff, and university alumni from LSEBs.

## Other

In addition to activities aimed at improving social mobility in the higher education sector, this year many universities also delivered programmes that aimed to improve academic outcomes and increase aspirations of young people from LSEBs in primary and secondary schools.

Additional support in Maths or English was delivered by **University of Bradford** and **University of Southampton** to help LSEB students in local schools to help bridge the attainment gap. University of Bradford's Maths Booster Tutoring Programme delivered bespoke maths tutoring for around 400 students who were identified as being at risk of achieving below Grade 4 in GCSE Maths in local schools. As well as helping to improve academic outcomes for local secondary school students, the programme benefits the university's students who are paid to train and work as tutors, offering them valuable employment skills, experience, and a source of income while studying. Meanwhile, University of Southampton responded to requests for literacy support from local schools after the pandemic and so far, they have supported more than 100 pupils with their reading.

**University of Winchester** continued its work on the Service Children Progression (SCiP) Alliance which brings together universities and schools to support the children of forces families who are less likely to go to university. The alliance provides resources for practitioners working with service children. The university also delivered a report on the educational disadvantage experienced by service children which led to the Office for Students including the group in its monitoring measures.

Finally, the **Institute of Coding** is supporting young people who are NEET across the UK by running a wide range of programmes with universities around the country to provide the necessary training and skills to enter employment. In 2023, the IoC launched the Click Start programme, a £12m nationwide training programme funded by Nominet, which aims to address the UK's digital skills gap while enhancing social mobility. Click Start is providing over 26,500 learners from underrepresented backgrounds with free, inclusive technical training and tailored personal and professional skills support, enabling them to pursue digital careers.

Click Start's regional programmes with universities around the country are working with charities to provide deeper provision for learners who faced substantial barriers to learning. These programmes combined technical training with confidence building, professional skill support, and ongoing in-employment mentoring, tailored to address barriers underrepresented groups face in differing parts of the country, such as rural poverty in the South West and Wales, women in the North-East of England, and underrepresented ethnicities in South London.



## Conclusions

# Conclusions



In this report, we have examined the work done by employers and educators to advance social mobility in 2023-24, based on evidence submitted to the UK Social Mobility Awards 2024. In this final chapter, we summarise key findings and areas for action to continue progress towards social mobility in the UK.

## 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 throughout 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.

# Appendix

## Submission process

The submissions process for the 2024 UK Social Mobility Awards opened in April 2024 and closed in June 2024. The awards were open to UK-based private and public sector employers, schools, colleges, and universities. Organisations were able to submit more than one entry to each individual category (for each person entered), but only one entry per organisation for each organisational category. Organisations were able to submit separate entries to as many relevant categories as they chose.

Social mobility-related activities conducted from 1 January 2023 to 31 March 2024 were eligible for consideration. Entrants were asked to provide a written submission via an online platform, which comprised: a 200-word executive summary, a 200-word description of the aims of their activities, a 600-word description of activity or activities, and 200 words each to describe any enabling factors, any challenges and how these were overcome, reach, and outcomes. Entrants were also asked to answer questions on their organisation's sector and size, the location of their social mobility activities in 2023-24, and beneficiary groups targeted by their activities.

## Permissions

Before submitting their award entries, all entrants confirmed that they gave consent for content from their entries to be used by Making The Leap for research purposes. Additionally, all entrants named in this report were invited to review named references to their organisations in a draft version of the report in August – October 2024.

## Analysis and reporting

Data from all eligible entries (n = 145) were analysed qualitatively using the Framework approach,<sup>12</sup> which allowed analysis within and across cases and themes. Within- and cross-case analysis was conducted to identify trends by sector and by type of activity across the employee journey.

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

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<sup>12</sup> Gale, N.K., Heath, G., Cameron, E., Rashid, S. & Redwood, S. (2013) Using the framework method for the analysis of qualitative data in multi-disciplinary health research. *BMC Medical Research Methodology* 13 (177). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2288-13-117>.