

EMPL \_YER  
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MO BILITY  
F \_ UNDATION®



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# Top 75 Employers

1	PwC UK	19	bp	37	Charles Russell Speechlys	56	British Land PLC
2	Browne Jacobson	19	Osborne Clarke LLP	37	Savills (UK) Limited	56	Mace
3	Grant Thornton UK LLP	19	Slaughter and May	38	Mears Group plc	57	Deloitte UK LLP
4	KPMG UK	20	Weightmans LLP	39	AMS	58	RPC LLP
5	Accenture	21	DWF	40	Eversheds Sutherland	59	Haringey Council
6	Linklaters	22	Ashurst LLP	41	Auto Trader UK	60	Radcliffe Chambers
7	Allen & Overy LLP	22	Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer	41	Clyde & Co LLP	61	ITV
8	Severn Trent	22	Schroders	42	BlackRock	62	Macquarie
9	BCLP	23	Macfarlanes LLP	43	Norton Rose Fulbright LLP	63	Farrer & Co LLP
10	Department for Work and Pensions	24	Enterprise Rent-A-Car	44	Co-op	64	Teach First
11	Womble Bond Dickinson (UK) LLP	24	Hogan Lovells	44	Jacobs	65	Stewarts Law LLP
12	DLA Piper	25	Aviva	44	Ofcom	65	White & Case
13	Baker McKenzie	26	EY	45	Simmons and Simmons LLP	66	Fidelity International
14	Lewis Silkin LLP	27	Department for Transport	46	TLT LLP	67	HSBC UK
14	Phoenix Group	28	Santander	47	Burges Salmon LLP	68	Direct Line Group
15	Sparta Global Limited	29	Goldman Sachs	48	M&G plc	69	Coca-Cola Europacific Partners (CCEP)
16	Squire Patton Boggs	30	Brodies LLP	49	National Grid	70	Gibson Dunn & Crutcher UK LLP
17	CMS	31	The BBC	50	Pinsent Masons	70	Weil, Gotshal & Manges (London) LLP
18	Cabinet Office	31	Shepherd and Wedderburn LLP	51	Sharpe Pritchard LLP	71	Department for Education
		32	Hymans Robertson	52	Mishcon de Reya LLP	72	Royal Air Force
		32	Mayer Brown International LLP	53	Burness Paull LLP	73	Birmingham Repertory Theatre Ltd
		33	Frontline	53	Stephenson Harwood	74	Barclays PLC
		34	FDM Group	54	Legal and General	75	Historic England
		35	Clifford Chance LLP	55	Amazon		
		36	Addleshaw Goddard LLP	55	OC&C Strategy Consultants		



# Foreword

**The Social Mobility Employer Index, now in its seventh year, demonstrates that change is possible.**

As young people face evermore challenging circumstances, we urge all employers to work with us to drive meaningful change.

Britain has a problem – compared with other developed nations, we have high levels of child poverty and low levels of social mobility. A child born into a low-income family today has just a one in eight chance of becoming a high-income earner as an adult. While gender and racial inequality have received growing attention over recent years, social class has too often been the poor relation. It is time to put that right.

The perma-crisis of the last 15 years – the global financial crisis, the pandemic, the cost-of-living crisis – has made things worse, not better. And it is the young generation who pays the price. The attainment gap between low-income kids and their better-off peers is widening, not narrowing. Home ownership rates among the under-30s have halved in just two decades. The great British promise – that each generation would do better than the last – feels broken.

Across the political spectrum there has been a renewed focus on addressing these divisions. Social mobility and levelling up have become part of the modern political lexicon but words have not been met with meaningful macro-actions. Where politics has been weak, institutions in civil society have grown increasingly strong. Schools, universities and employers have stepped up to the plate and are finding their own answers to Britain's social mobility problem.

In the seventh year of our Social Mobility Employer Index, we see more employers removing obstacles to opportunity for young people so that what their parents or guardians did, where they grew up and what school they went to does not restrict life chances. Many employers have removed minimum grade requirements for graduates, apprentices and school leavers to ensure these routes into work are accessible for young people from all backgrounds. Others are using contextual recruitment to level the playing field between applicants. Growing numbers of Index entrants are measuring their class pay gap and setting meaningful targets to close it. Currently, employees from working-class backgrounds are typically paid an average of £6,718 less per year than those from professional backgrounds for the same work. It is therefore very welcoming that employers are now focused not just on who gets in, but who gets on.

So there is progress. Yet too many employers still offer unpaid internships. This is exclusive by design, creating a locked room where only those with familial financial support have the key. Similarly, while many Index entrants provide apprenticeships, extensive evidence suggests that those from low socioeconomic backgrounds are underrepresented in both higher and degree level apprenticeships.

All the employers who enter the Index are striving to do the right thing. They are all trying to play their part in addressing Britain's appallingly low levels of social mobility. The best are showing that change is possible. Yet only a small minority of our country's employers enter the Index. That is why, in the next twelve months as we approach the next general election, we will be looking to each of the main political parties to set out their agenda for social change. Politicians need to mobilise councils, mayors, colleges, schools, universities and above all employers to ensure that aptitude and ability, not background or birth, determines success. To make a dent in the social mobility problem the next government will need to harness the power that employers have to change lives.

**Those employers in the Index show what can be done. Government action is required to bring those efforts to scale.**

**Rt Hon. Alan Milburn**  
Chair, The Social Mobility Foundation



# Executive Summary

The Social Mobility Employer Index analyses what employers are doing to improve social mobility across seven critical employee milestones and an optional employee survey. It highlights the need to take a holistic approach to make sure that outreach efforts feed into recruitment pipelines and ultimately create equity in who gets in, who gets on and who belongs. The Index celebrates those who are taking action to make their organisation more accessible and inclusive to individuals from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

We know that social mobility is a complex issue made up of many factors. This can make it difficult to know where to start. However, there are steps employers and policymakers can take to create a society where talent from all backgrounds is nurtured, harnessed and rewarded.

The recommendations in this report are based on the evidence of what works and informed by the views of 1,000 young people from low socioeconomic backgrounds gained through our

Unheard Voices survey. More information about this is available in the appendices of the report.

Please note that the data is presented as a percentage of entrants that answered each section rather than as a percentage of the total number of entrants. For example, statistics in the Work With Young People section are calculated using 132 as a sample size to ensure that only those that answered were reflected in the results. This increases the statistical accuracy of our findings by removing the impact that zero or blank figures have on the results.

We would like to thank colleagues at [The Bridge Group](#) for knowledge shared from their [research on social mobility](#) to help guide our recommendations, as well as support provided during the data analysis and marking phases of the Index.

## 01 Work With Young People

This section reviews how effectively employers target young people from low socioeconomic backgrounds and whether they offer accessible routes into their profession. Barriers at the start of the employee journey may have a negative effect on the diversity of talent available during recruitment, so understanding what works within outreach is a critical first step for any organisation wanting to improve social mobility.

While it is positive that employers offer a variety of work experience opportunities, they are not truly accessible if equipment is not provided, and are not truly beneficial to young people if they are not evaluated correctly. Whether it's covering travel expenses for in person opportunities, or providing digital equipment needed to engage with virtual or hybrid opportunities, not enough employers offer additional support to young people from low socioeconomic backgrounds who are less likely to be able to access the opportunity. Less than half (47%) of Index entrants that offer virtual work experience provide Wi-Fi routers, dongles, data bundles or other equipment needed by young people participating, which is not good enough.



## 02 Routes Into The Employer

This section details the steps employers take to create well-structured routes into the organisation. Having multiple routes into an organisation, such as graduate, apprenticeship and school leaver programmes, and ensuring they are truly accessible, benefits social mobility. This year, 85.3% of entrants offered an apprenticeship scheme, 84.6% had a graduate recruitment programme and 26.6% welcomed school leavers into their organisation.

However, the socioeconomic diversity of each intake is not what we would expect from Index entrants. Just 23.3% of graduates, 37.5% of apprentices and 45.9% of school leavers were from a low socioeconomic background based on parental/guardian occupation data.

Furthermore, three Index entrants offered unpaid internships this year. Extensive evidence shows that unpaid opportunities create a locked room where only those with familiar financial support have the key.

## 03 Attraction

This section details the steps that employers take to attract diverse applicants to their schemes. Focusing on a narrow group of elite institutions, such as Russell Group universities, for graduate attraction, or assuming that all students have the knowledge and confidence needed to navigate the apprenticeship system, tends to exclude those from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

We were pleased that 55.4% of Index entrants who offer apprenticeships run initiatives to attract applicants and increase the success rate of those from low socioeconomic backgrounds. However, as with previous years, too many graduate employers focus attraction efforts on Russell Group universities.

Almost half (49.1%) of all in person outreach undertaken by entrants this year was conducted at institutions in the Russell Group, which is concerning given that young people from the most advantaged backgrounds are five times more likely to attend Russell Group universities than those from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

## 04 Recruitment and Selection

This section examines recruitment and selection processes that tend to disadvantage people from low socioeconomic backgrounds. The best-performing employers in the Index are using contextual recruitment, removing minimum grade requirements and providing financial support to ensure candidates from all backgrounds have an equal chance to succeed.

We were pleased to see this year that employers are recognising that grades alone are not a good indicator of in-work performance. We applaud 56.8% of Index entrants for using contextual recruitment, as well as the 32.6% that do not look at grades at all. It is more critical than ever that employers consider contextual recruitment given that the young people from low socioeconomic backgrounds who are now ready to enter the workforce suffered more lost learning and experienced longer school closures during the pandemic, which impacted their attainment.



## 05 Data Collection

This section focuses on how effectively employers collect and analyse data on the socioeconomic profile of their workforce. The Index recognises companies that collect data and rigorously analyse it, using the insights it gives them to improve their socioeconomic diversity. Collecting and analysing data is among the most important steps employers can take to track social mobility in their organisation and the effectiveness of their strategies.

While 83.2% of entrants conduct an annual diversity survey, including questions on socioeconomic background, only 77.3% collect three or more data points for current employees. For new hires, the figure is 71.2%. Completion rates for these questions were mixed, with some close to 100% and some as low as 10%.

## 06 Progression, Culture & Experienced Hires

This section examines how employers measure the progression of their existing employees and the strategies undertaken to create an inclusive workplace culture. Social mobility is not just about individuals getting in – it is also about who gets on and feels like they belong in the workplace.

A lack of networks and sponsorship drastically impacts progression prospects for employees from low socioeconomic backgrounds. We are disappointed that only 21.8% of Index entrants have analysed the role of sponsors in their organisation to see whether staff from low socioeconomic backgrounds receive a comparable level of support from colleagues at higher levels.

A welcoming culture can help employees from low socioeconomic backgrounds feel as though they belong in the workplace, which positively impacts productivity and retention. While 64.1% of Index entrants have examined whether employees from low socioeconomic backgrounds feel that workplace culture is welcoming to them, significantly less offer diversity training focused on socioeconomic background (30.5%).

We know that these factors combined limit progression and contribute towards a class pay gap, whereby individuals from working-class backgrounds are paid less than peers from professional backgrounds when working in the same role. It is positive that 14% of Index entrants recognise this and measure their class pay gap. We would now like others to follow their example.

## 07 Advocacy

This section focuses on the advocacy work that organisations do to improve social mobility in their workplaces and in their sphere of influence, including the supply chain. Those who perform highly in this section are the employers who take action to engage staff, suppliers, and clients in their efforts.

We are pleased that 81.8% of Index entrants have targets relating to overall workforce diversity. However, fewer have targets specific to socioeconomic background. We want more employers to set meaningful targets to show their commitment to social mobility and increase socioeconomic diversity within their sector.

Given that 58% of Index entrants told us their clients have demanded action on socioeconomic background, there is more reason than ever for employers to advocate for social mobility. They should act with purpose, intent and transparency, leading in their sector if they have more resource, to ensure best practice is shared.

# Overview of Entrants

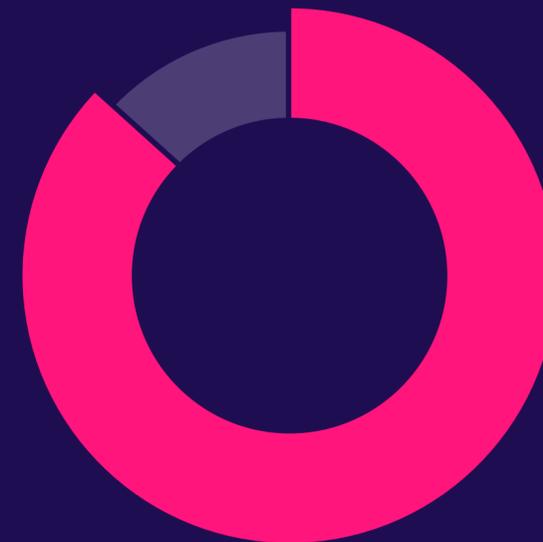
**143 organisations** entered this year from across the private, public and voluntary sectors. In total, they employ over one million people in the UK (1,082,348).

**More than 75%** of entrants have submitted entries before, showing the value employers place on the Index as the leading voice in employer-led social mobility.

In fact, **93.8% of returning entrants** told us they enter the Index because the feedback helps them improve their organisation.

143

organisations  
entered in 2023

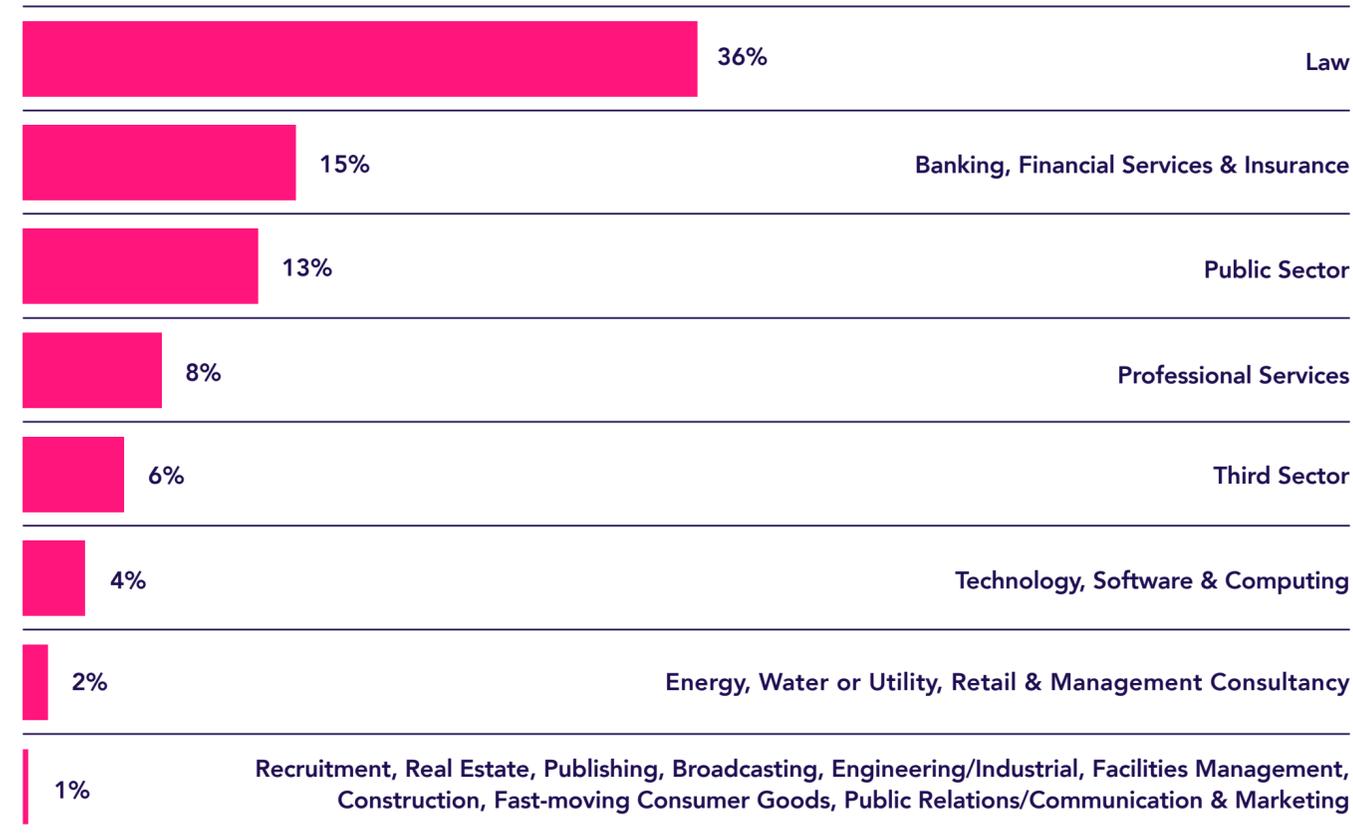


New and Returning Entrants

21% New

79% Returning

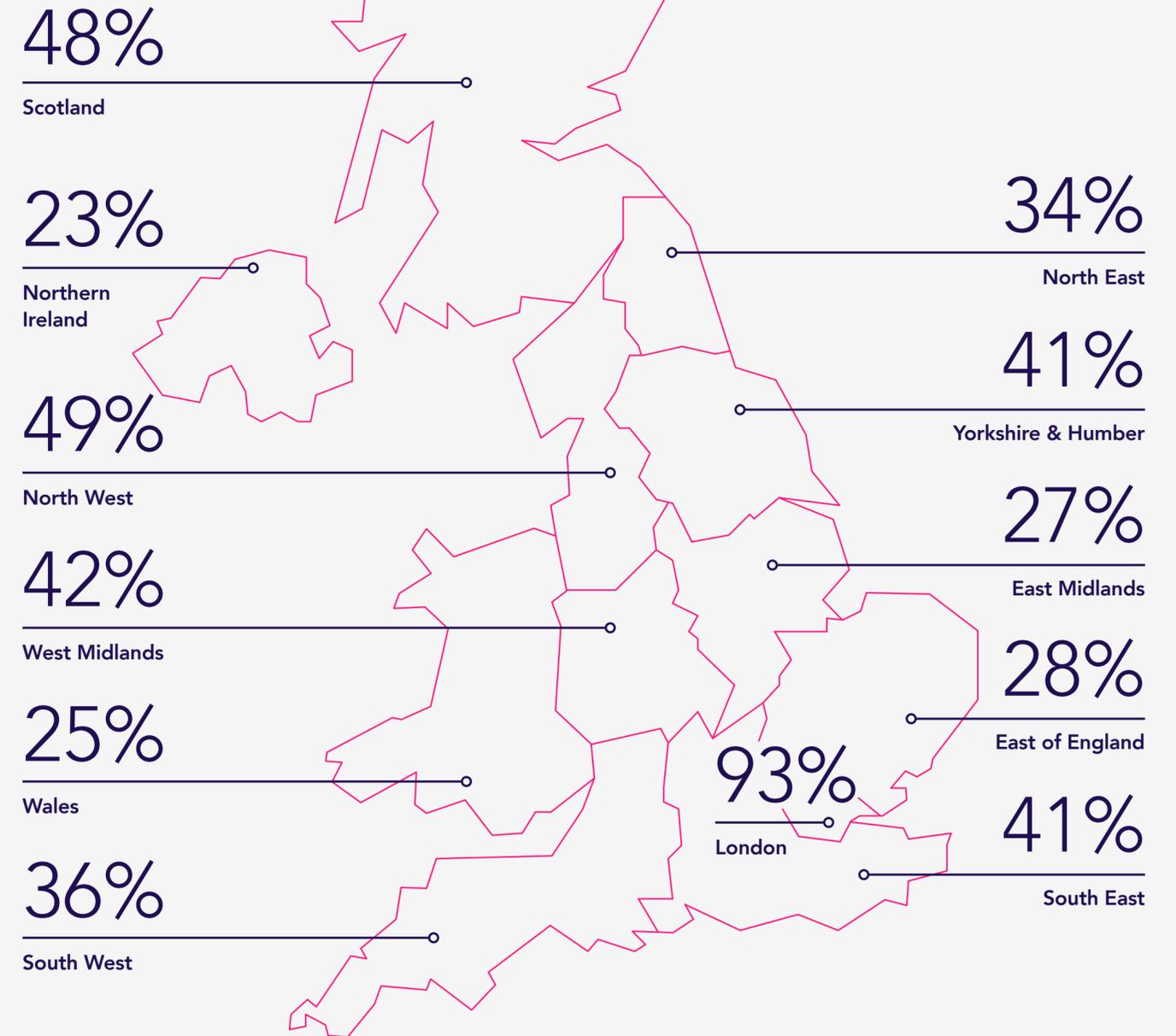
## Overview of entrants by sector



Law retained its place as the best-represented sector in 2023. After law, the sectors with the most entries were banking, financial services and insurance, and the public sector. The least represented sectors are recruitment, real estate, publishing, broadcasting, engineering/industrial, facilities management, construction, fast-moving consumer goods, public relations, communication and marketing. We would like more organisations in these sectors to engage with the Index next year to show their commitment to social mobility.

London is the most common region to have an office, with 93% of Index entrants having an office there. Significantly fewer entrants have offices in Northern Ireland (23%), Wales (25%) and the East Midlands (27%). We know that many organisations have their primary office in London, with hubs in other cities, but more employers native to these areas should look to enter the Index and share insights about social mobility in their region.

## UK regions in which entrants have an office



# 01 Work With Young People

This section reviews how effectively employers target young people from low socioeconomic backgrounds and whether they offer accessible routes into their profession.

Barriers at the start of the employee journey prevent social mobility and may have a negative effect on the diversity of talent that employers can access during recruitment.

We assess three critical areas that act as barriers to opportunity: geography, the digital divide and how effectively employers evaluate the impact of their outreach work to identify areas for improvement.

132

organisations  
answered this section



## Geography

The UK has significant geographic inequality. The top-performing areas economically are city regions, particularly London and the South East, while rural areas perform significantly worse. The most competitive professional jobs are situated in London, meaning young people are often required to travel miles to participate in opportunities.

Patterns of geographic mobility increase regional skills inequality as more of those looking for highly-skilled roles move to access opportunities, particularly to London.

To achieve equity of outcome for all young people, organisations must offer support to areas with the worst social mobility outcomes across all performance indicators. We encourage employers to utilise the Social Mobility Commission's Data Explorer Tool to understand where best to target efforts. We also encourage the government to work with local governments and mayors to develop place-based strategies for improving social mobility.



### Recommendations for **Employers**

Be clear about the financial support available to candidates and cover travel costs upfront to remove geographical and economic barriers. If individuals must travel a significant distance, factor this into start times for opportunities or roles to ensure it is manageable.

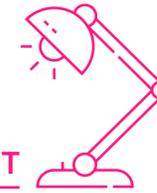
Utilise the Social Mobility Commission's Data Explorer Tool to understand where to target resources.



### Recommendations for **Policymakers**

Create the conditions so that every young person can access high-quality opportunities to gain knowledge and experience of the workplace. We encourage the government to work with local governments and mayors to develop place-based strategies for social mobility.

England and Wales should assess the impact and benefits of free or subsidised public transport for young people to enable access to career opportunities.

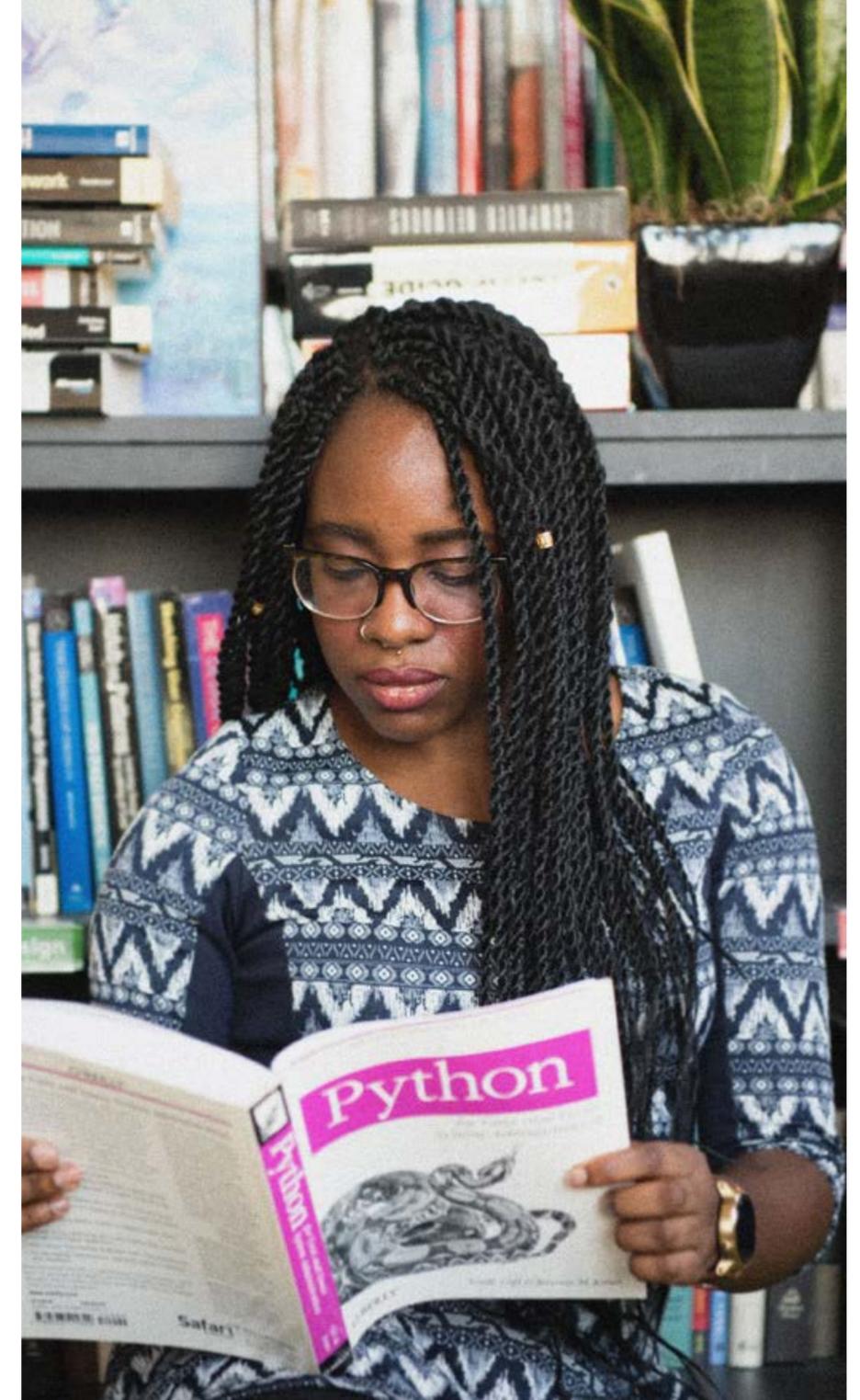


### SPOTLIGHT

## Barriers to access

We know one of the barriers employers and charities face is being able to get into schools to offer opportunities to young people. We appreciate this is a nuanced problem, and we are currently undertaking research with the Centre for Education and Youth to understand how to rectify this.

We hope to share recommendations with employers, the wider charity sector and policymakers in 2024.



## Digital Divide

Only 47% of Index entrants offer Wi-Fi routers, dongles, data bundles or other equipment to young people they work with to ensure they can fully and easily participate in work experience opportunities.



### Recommendations for Employers

Provide young people with the necessary equipment and ensure they have internet access to be able to participate in virtual work experience.



### Recommendations for Policymakers

Provide all young people with an internet connection as identified in our [Youth Manifesto](#).

Support current and continued work to strengthen infrastructure, such as 5G and gigabit broadband, to make remote access a reality across the whole of the UK.



## Evaluating Impact of Outreach Activity

Understanding how many young people from outreach activities enter and make it through the recruitment process is crucial for any widening participation strategy. It helps employers develop early careers work and identify potential barriers for those from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

Effective evaluation requires ongoing analysis of how interventions work, what impact they have, and how they contribute to long-term student outcomes. Too few Index entrants evaluate outcomes.

Index entrants are most likely to evaluate outreach using ad-hoc feedback from participants (78%), alongside pre and post feedback surveys (77%) that are provided at the start and end of interventions only. They are least likely to track career (40%) and educational outcomes (37%).



### Recommendations for Employers

UCAS's [Outreach Evaluator](#) has been developed to support partners who are unable to collect student outcome data themselves. It is designed to help partners measure the work they do to engage young people from low socioeconomic backgrounds and how this impacts their progression to higher education. We encourage employers to become familiar with this tool to better understand the impact their outreach work has on social mobility.



### Recommendations for Policymakers

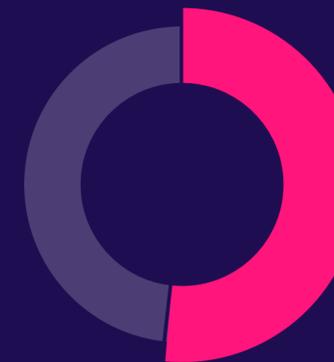
Signpost employers to the relevant national careers body ([Careers & Enterprise Company](#) in England, [Skills Development Scotland](#) and [Employment and Enterprise Bureaus in Wales](#)) to support them to ensure outreach is as impactful as possible.

## WHAT DO YOUNG PEOPLE SAY?



17%

rarely or never have access to broadband when they need it at home



51%

say they have access to a laptop or computer to support study and work from home



39%

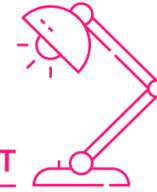
have access to reliable broadband



“

Without this internship I would have never met anyone practising law in London or from such a prestigious firm – it just doesn't happen where I'm from. The fact this placement had loads of information alongside tasks to build and practice your skills was incredible.

—  
SMF Student,  
Freshfields Programme



### SPOTLIGHT

## Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer are breaking down geographical and digital barriers and evaluating their programme to make sure it is impactful

The award-winning [Aspiring Professionals Programme delivered by the Social Mobility Foundation with Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer](#) is an example of effective targeting in areas where opportunities for work are limited. Through our partnership we support high-achieving young people from social mobility cold spots and a diverse range of ethnic backgrounds.

Together we have developed a three-year blended programme that provides a sustained pipeline for underrepresented talent. The programme includes work experience, skills sessions, virtual elements, and mentoring relationships.

In their second year, young people on the month-long residential internship are paid the living wage for their work. Freshfields also cover the costs of digital devices, accommodation, and bills to eliminate the financial pressures that can often accompany work experience for early careers professionals.

Lessons learned from each cohort are used to evaluate the impact of the programme and make changes for the following year.

# 02

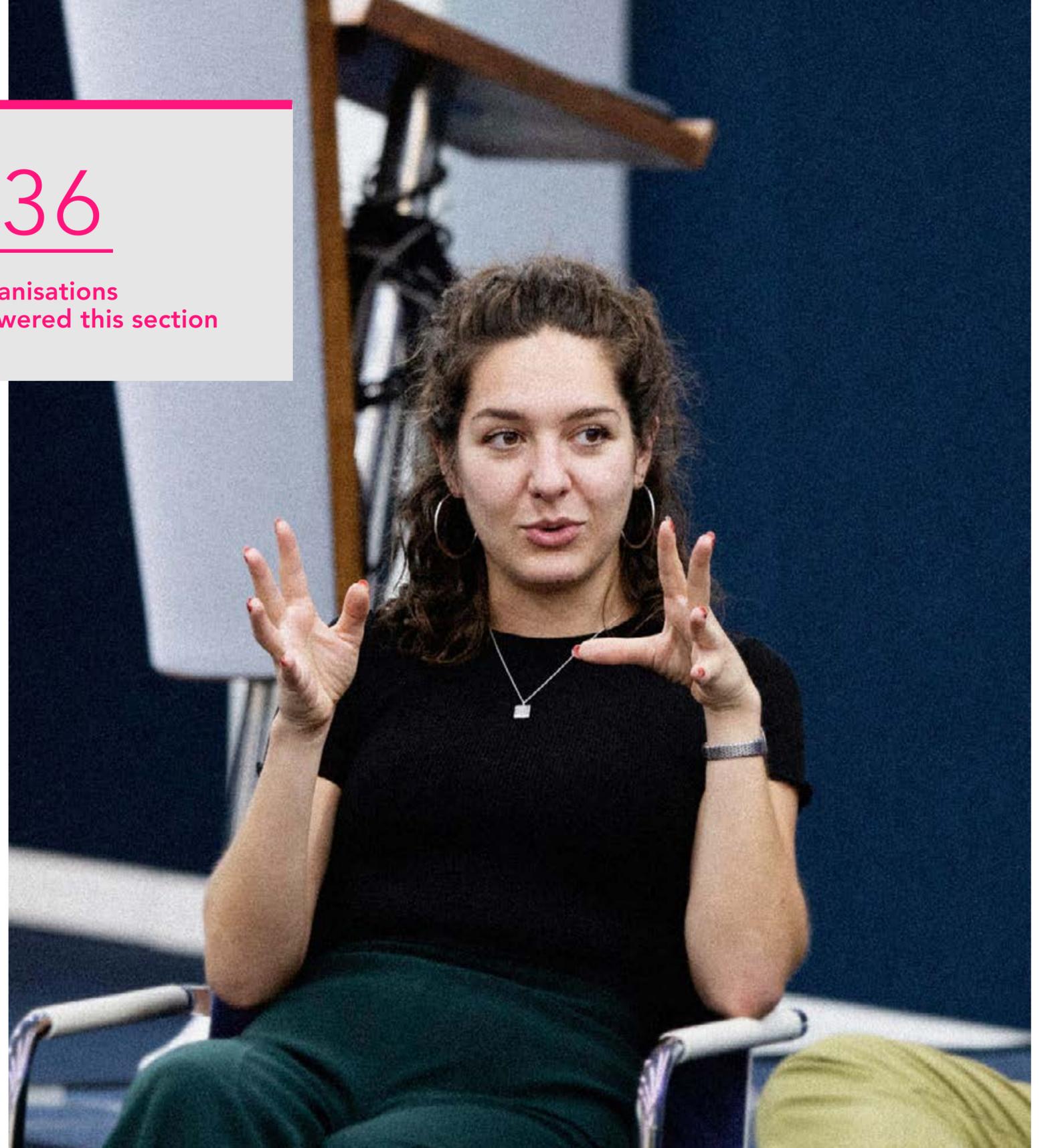
## Routes Into The Employer

This section details the steps employers take to create well-structured routes into the organisation. Having multiple routes into an organisation, such as school leaver, apprenticeship and graduate programmes, and ensuring they are truly accessible, benefits social mobility.

However, it is critical these opportunities are truly open to all. We know that often young people are not made aware of all the options available to them or, crucially, financial barriers prevent them from participating.

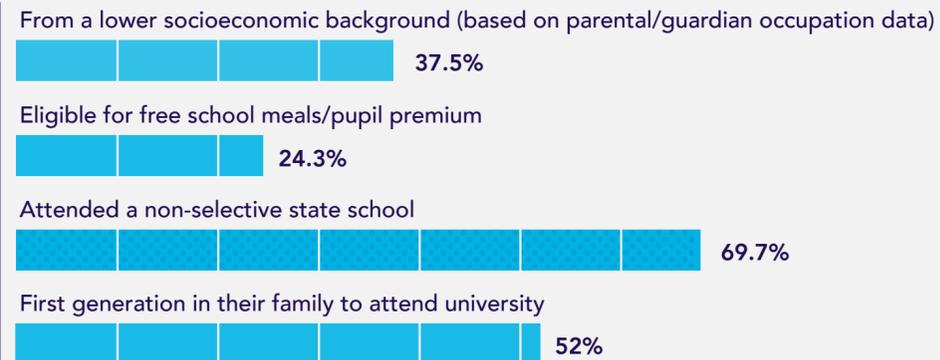
136

organisations  
answered this section

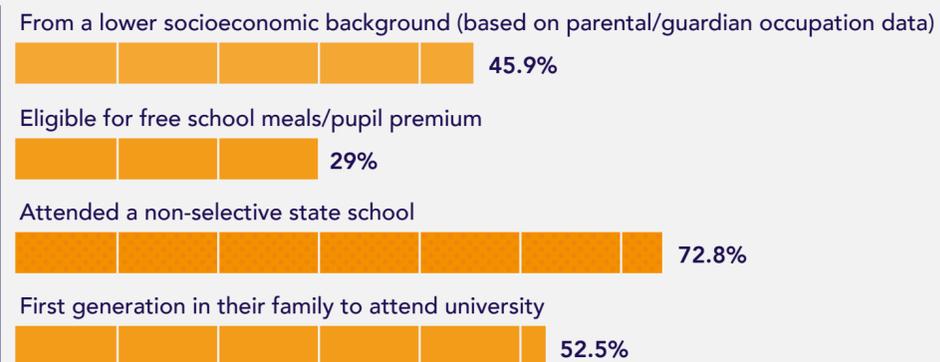


## Socioeconomic diversity of this year's intakes

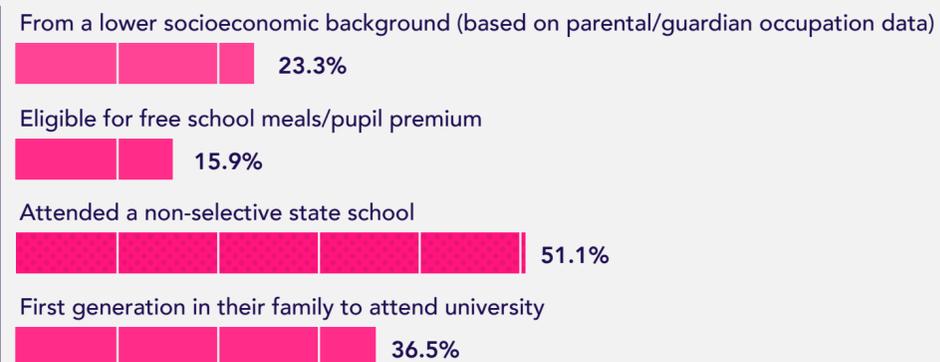
### Apprenticeship



### School Leaver



### Graduate



## Apprenticeships

Just 37.5% of apprentices supported by Index entrants were from a low socioeconomic background based on parental/guardian occupation data.

Although this compares favourably to this year's graduate intake, we know that young people from low socioeconomic backgrounds are still underrepresented as apprentices.

This is increasingly the case for the most competitive apprenticeship opportunities, with twice as many degree apprentices coming from the wealthiest areas compared to the poorest.

Inequality in access creates a disadvantage gap in progression opportunities and careers earnings through the apprentice journey, particularly among levy-supported apprentices.



### Recommendations for Employers

Review the socioeconomic background of each apprenticeship intake to ensure this route is having the desired impact and improving the diversity of your recruitment pool.



### Recommendations for Policymakers

Invest in young people's skills by incentivising employers to increase supply of apprenticeship opportunities and target young people in the most deprived communities.

Introduce a 'Growth and Skills' levy to maintain and ring-fence current apprenticeship funding, as well as providing new funding for broader skills provision.

Increase real terms funding for schools and review the funding formula so that financial support is rebalanced towards schools with the most challenging intakes and the highest need.

## School Leaver Programmes

Just 26.6% of Index entrants offered a school leaver programme.

School leaver programmes provide a direct route into the world of work. They allow young people to earn a wage while they learn, and provide opportunities to learn skills, meet new people, travel, and gain the confidence and capabilities needed for success in the workplace.

Young people from low socioeconomic backgrounds surveyed as part of our Unheard Voices research are most likely to want to enter the world of work when they leave school or college. Employers must provide genuine alternatives to graduate routes that offer parity of progression between those with a degree level qualification and those without.



### Recommendations for Employers

Invest in a well-structured school leaver programme that offers parity of progression with graduate and apprenticeship schemes.



## Graduate Schemes

84.6% of Index entrants this year had a graduate recruitment programme. Together they offered 42,534 graduate places.

Across the employers who offered graduate routes, only 23.3% of those opportunities went to young people from a low socioeconomic background based on parental/guardian occupation data, which is lower than both apprenticeship (37.5%) and school leaver (45.9%) intakes.

Concerningly, the average acceptance rate for graduates from Russell Group institutions (3.9%) is higher than all other UK universities (2.6%). We know that young people from the most advantaged backgrounds are five times more likely to attend Russell Group universities than those from low socioeconomic backgrounds, so this is worrying for social mobility.

We urge employers to ensure their graduate schemes are accessible and that they're not disproportionately favouring individuals who attended Russell Group universities. Every talented individual, regardless of their university choice, deserves an equal shot at success.



### Recommendations for Employers

Review the socioeconomic background of each graduate intake to ensure this route is improving the diversity of your recruitment pool.



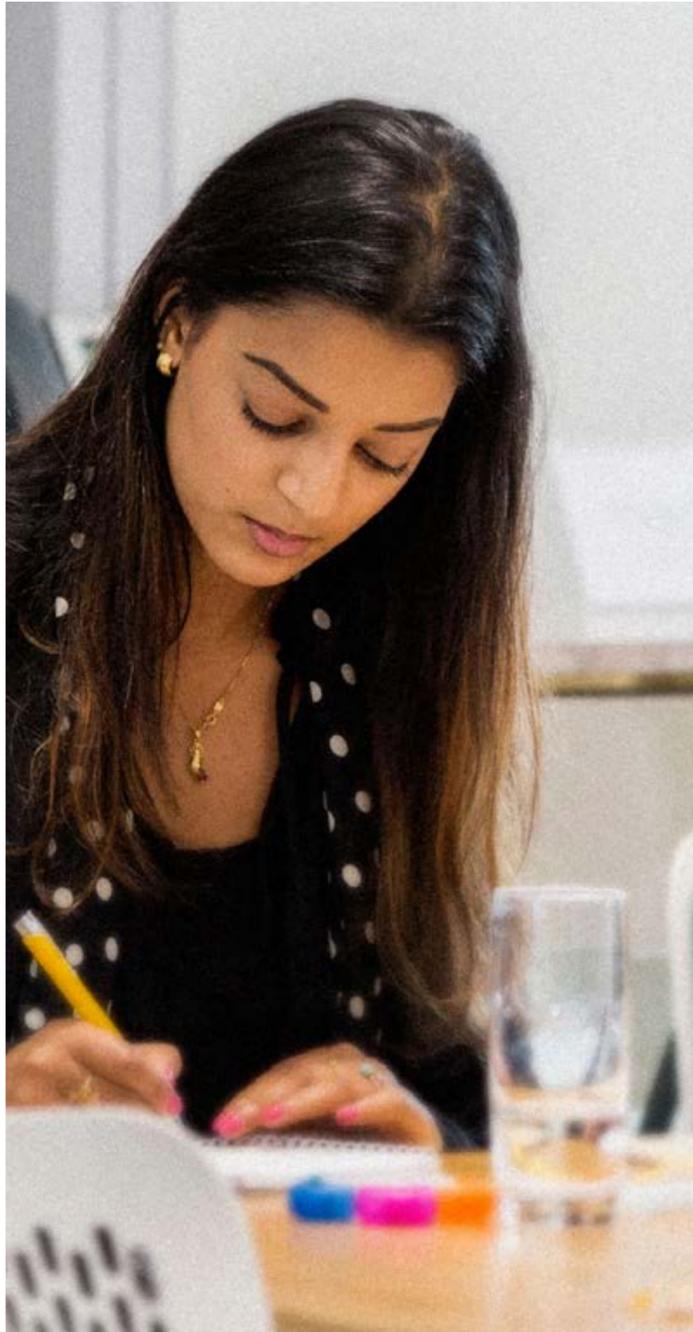


## Unpaid Internships

Three Index entrants offered unpaid internships. This is not the example that social mobility trailblazers should set.

Unpaid internships are unethical. They rob many young people of opportunity because only a small percentage can afford to work for free, even for short periods of time. This contributes to a system where young people from low socioeconomic backgrounds are pushed out of opportunities that improve employability.

Unpaid internships also often rely on existing connections to workplaces, which creates a locked room for young people without access to these.




### Recommendations for **Employers**

Pay all interns the National Living Wage. 85.1% of Index employers do this already, now we need others to follow suit.

Offer paid, structured internships which involve a rigorous selection process and provide a reference at the end.

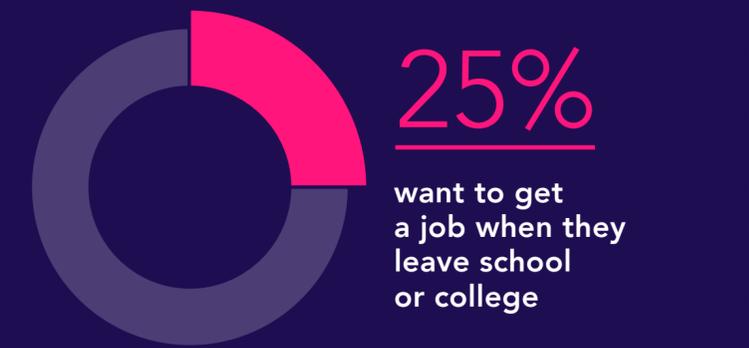
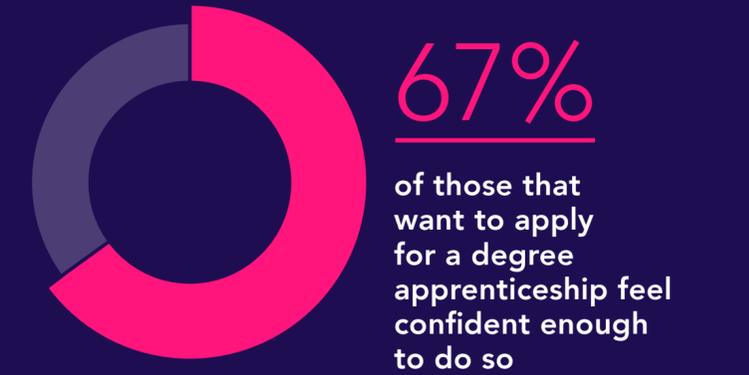
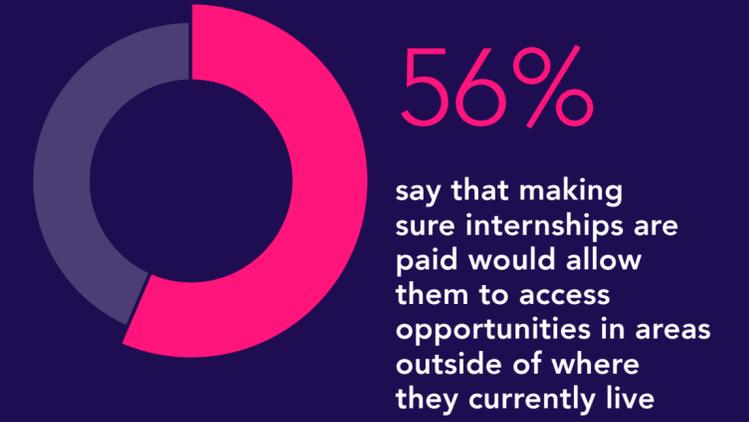


### Recommendations for **Policymakers**

Enforce the ban on unpaid internships and minimum wage legislation.



WHAT DO YOUNG PEOPLE SAY?



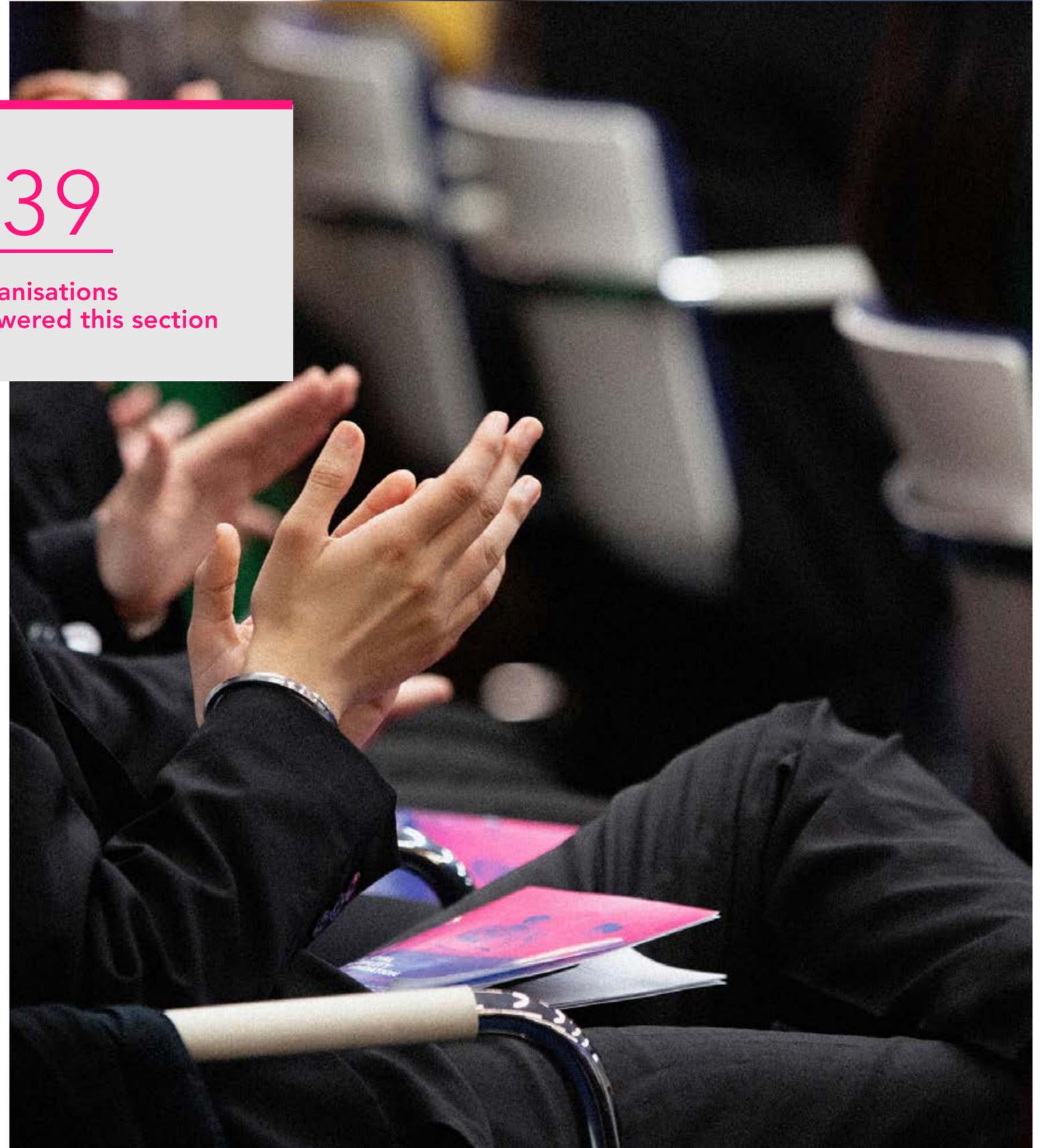
# 03 Attraction

This section details the steps that employers are taking to attract a diverse range of applicants to their graduate and apprenticeship programmes.

Focusing on a narrow group of elite institutions, such as Russell Group universities, for graduate attraction, or assuming that all students have the knowledge and confidence needed to navigate the apprenticeship system, tends to exclude students from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

139

organisations  
answered this section



## Apprenticeship Outreach

It should not be assumed that all young people have equal access to high quality careers guidance on apprenticeships, networks to help them spot the best opportunities, or advice from teachers, parents or guardians to navigate and compete successfully in the application process.

Those from low socioeconomic backgrounds are substantially less likely to have the networks and knowledge needed to help them navigate the application process and access the most competitive apprenticeships.

To ensure all young people have the tools and confidence needed to make informed decisions about apprenticeships, initiatives must be put in place to support those from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

55.4% of Index entrants that offer apprenticeships recognise this and run initiatives to attract applicants and increase the success rate of those from low socioeconomic backgrounds.



### Recommendations for Employers

Diversify your attraction strategy for all routes in, particularly apprenticeship intakes.

Ensure information about apprenticeship routes in is widely available and do not assume that applicants from a low socioeconomic background will be attracted to opportunities offered.

## Russell Group Universities

Too many graduate employers unduly favour universities which belong to the Russell Group when attracting talent, despite the fact there is almost no evidence that these graduates perform better in employment.

It is therefore disappointing that, among Index entrants who recruit graduates, successful hires are more commonly recruited from the Russell Group. Durham University, University College London, University of Cambridge, Exeter University and University of Oxford are the most highly represented.

Furthermore, 49.1% of all in person outreach undertaken by entrants was conducted at Russell Group universities, implying that these institutions are favoured when attracting new talent. In person outreach builds closer relationships and can support the development of soft skills, such as networking, so an unequal focus on Russell Group universities does little to level the playing field.



### Recommendations for Employers

Maintain a good balance between in person university visits to Russell Group and non-Russell Group universities.

Track the conversion rate of Russell Group and non-Russell Group applicants to acceptances to ensure that efforts expended during attraction translate into a more diverse recruitment pool.

Ensure virtual university outreach is the same quality as in person, offering the same opportunities to network and develop soft skills.

## Evaluation

High-quality evaluation is needed to adopt an evidence-based approach to attraction. Increased focus should be put on monitoring the background of attendees at university events to ensure these enable social mobility rather than inhibit it. As little as 23.4% of Index entrants do this.



### Recommendations for Employers

Lessons in effective evaluation can be learned from the higher education sector. The Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education (TASO) works to develop robust, causal evidence on widening access in higher education using a standard evaluation framework. Employers should look to adopt similar processes.



## WHAT DO YOUNG PEOPLE SAY?



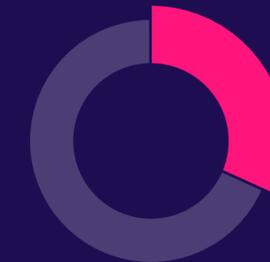
33%

received careers guidance on degree apprenticeships



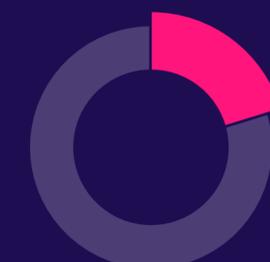
59%

feel confident enough to take up a place on a higher level apprenticeship



33%

had careers guidance on apprenticeships



20%

feel that Russell Group institutions are very accessible to them

## SPOTLIGHT



### Partnerships that aid attraction

Farrer & Co utilises various initiatives to support its attraction strategy.

The firm used feedback from last year's Index to better understand the difficulties that schools in social mobility cold spots face when accessing opportunities, and its lawyers also provide [mentorship for young people](#) who are interested in careers in law through our mentoring scheme.

#### Other partnerships include:

- [PRIME](#), [IntoUniversity](#) and [Rare](#), to diversify intakes by providing opportunities for young people from low socioeconomic backgrounds.
- [Sutton Trust](#), to support young people from low socioeconomic backgrounds on the [Pathways to Law](#) programme.
- [Young Professionals](#), to raise awareness of the solicitor apprenticeship scheme.
- [Amazing Apprenticeships](#), to educate people outside of the education system about opportunities at the firm, including parents and carers.

We applaud Farrer & Co for investing in initiatives that provide young people with the tools and knowledge needed to access the most competitive opportunities.



# 04 Recruitment and Selection

This section examines recruitment and selection processes that tend to disadvantage people from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

The best-performing employers in the Index are using contextual recruitment, removing minimum grade requirements and providing financial support to ensure candidates from all backgrounds have an equal chance to succeed.

141

organisations  
answered this section



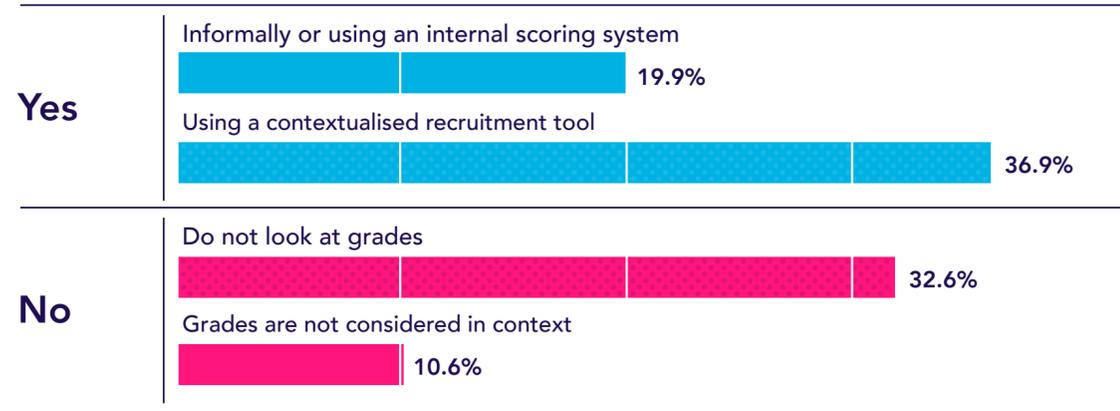
## Contextual Recruitment

The impact of the pandemic on the attainment gap has been severe. [The gap between A-level students from low and high socioeconomic backgrounds is the largest since measures began.](#) There are also pronounced differences in attainment across UK regions that are in line with areas most impacted by lockdowns during the pandemic.

Given that the aims of the government's flagship National Tutoring Programme were not fully realised, it is more critical than ever before that employers adopt contextual recruitment. We were pleased to see 56.8% of Index entrants use contextual recruitment, while 32.6% do not look at grades at all.

We are, however, disappointed that 10.6% do not consider context during recruitment and hope to see this addressed by developing more inclusive hiring practices.

### Those using contextual recruitment



#### Recommendations for **Employers**

Understand the national and regional attainment gap as important context for recruitment.

Consider the use of contextual tools such as REALrating or Rare Recruitment to help place applicants' academic grades in context, such as requirement for minimum grades.



#### Recommendations for **Policymakers**

Create a national strategy for closing the attainment gap.

Develop and resource tutoring as a core, long-term part of national efforts to close the attainment gap.



## Finance

We are pleased to see many Index entrants recognise the impact of the cost-of-living crisis and provide financial support to candidates from low-income backgrounds: 52.4% pay for travel to interviews and 32.9% pay for accommodation.



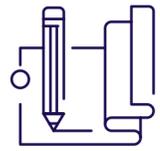
#### Recommendations for **Employers**

Cover the costs of travel and accommodation for interviews.



#### Recommendations for **Policymakers**

Share guidance and best practice from government schemes that support job seekers. These include the [Travel to Interview Scheme](#), which supports the cost of travel for interviews that are more than 25 miles from the candidate's home address, and the [Flexible Support Fund](#), which supports candidates with expenses for travel and equipment, as well as the clothing needed to start work.



## Minimum Grade Requirements

Increasingly more employers recognise that academic grades rarely correlate with in-role performance, particularly if context is not considered.

We applaud employers that have removed minimum grade requirements. This year, 24.1% of Index entrants removed minimum grade requirements for their apprentice entry route, 18.4% for their school leaver programme and 25.5% for their graduate scheme.



### Recommendations for **Employers**

Remove grade requirements or assess academic grades in context.

Recruit for potential and be alert to the socioeconomic biases inherent in recruitment.



### Recommendations for **Policymakers**

Undertake research on the relationship between academic achievement and in-work performance.

## SPOTLIGHT

### The business benefit to dropping minimum grade requirements



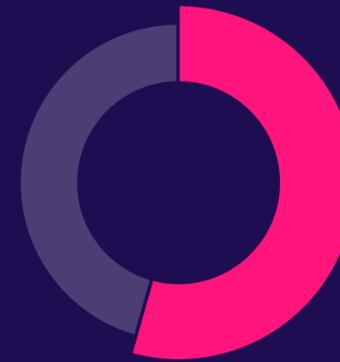
Schroders' purpose is to deliver excellent investment performance for its clients through active management. An inclusive environment which embraces diversity of thought helps achieve that purpose, allowing for richer discussions and more informed decision-making.

Schroders has been making substantial changes to assessing talent and potential since 2019. Included in this is the decision to remove minimum grade requirements for all routes into the organisation. This approach aims to dismantle societal and systemic barriers that hinder diverse talent from realising their full potential.

As part of early careers recruitment, Schroders introduced three gamified assessments designed to evaluate the skills required for various roles. Each assessment was informed by the performance data of current role holders and has been tested on a select group to ensure their effectiveness. Furthermore, hiring managers do not have visibility of candidates' CVs, including their grades or university attended, until the assessment centre stage. This practice allows Schroders to hire based on skills needs, reducing the impact of unconscious biases that may arise from traditional recruitment processes or CV screening which often prioritise "fit" and "polish".

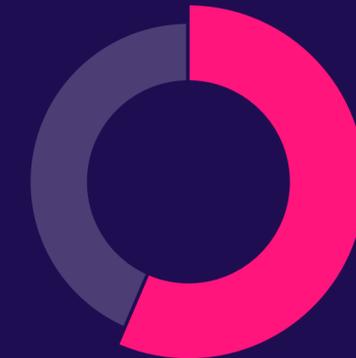
By implementing these measures, Schroders aims to create a fair and inclusive recruitment process that focuses on skills and potential.

## WHAT DO YOUNG PEOPLE SAY?



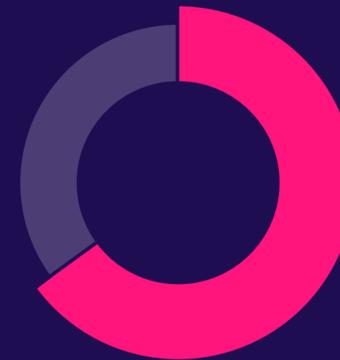
55%

currently access or have previously accessed the National Tutoring Programme



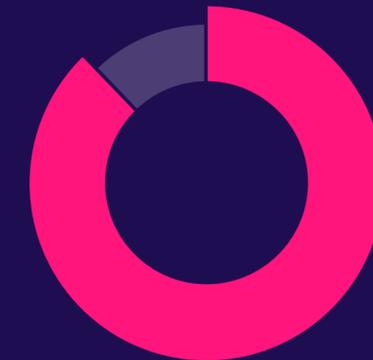
57%

say that an employer covering travel expenses and accommodation costs would allow them to access work experience or intern opportunities outside of where they live



70%

agree that removing minimum grade requirements would encourage diversity in the workplace



82%

say that hiring processes that consider the context of school or college on attainment would encourage diversity in the workplace

# 05 Data Collection

This section focuses on how effectively employers collect and analyse data on the socioeconomic profile of their workforce.

This is pivotal for understanding whether organisations are making progress on improving social mobility and assessing who gets in, who gets on and who belongs.

What gets measured gets done, and data collection is a critical component to smashing the class ceiling.

132

organisations  
answered this section





## Data Collection

The Social Mobility Commission recommends collecting the following data to understand to socioeconomic profile of their organisation:

- What was the occupation of your main household earner when you were aged about 14?
- Which type of school did you attend for the most time between the ages of 11 and 16?
- If you finished school after 1980, were you eligible for free school meals at any point during your school years?
- Did either of your parents or guardians attend university and gain a degree (e.g., BA/BSc or equivalent) by the time you were 18?

Only 77.3% of Index entrants collect three or more data points for current employees. For new hires, the figure is 71.2%. Completion rates for these questions were mixed, with some close to 100% and some as low as 10%.

Collecting this data helps employers set goals and measure the impact of strategies implemented to reduce the effect of the class ceiling and to determine who gets in, who gets on and who belongs in organisations.

Employers should collect data to compare their performance on socioeconomic diversity with their sector norm, understand if they have business areas doing better or worse, and measure if their activity is achieving desired outcomes.



### Recommendations for **Employers**

Collect socioeconomic background data for new hires, current employees and unsuccessful applicants, collecting data on parental or guardian occupation as a minimum, and at least three data points total as good practice.



### Recommendations for **Policymakers**

Industry bodies and sector regulators should encourage and facilitate workforce socioeconomic background data collection and reporting. We welcome the Financial Conduct Authority's recent consultation exploring sector-wide socioeconomic data collection and would encourage others to follow suit.

## SPOTLIGHT

### Using data to drive diversity: a case study in best practice



The Department for Work and Pensions have conducted a deep dive on workforce data. This has been broken down in various categories, including socioeconomic background and occupation area. The data found that representation of senior leadership from a low socioeconomic background is significantly higher than the Index average.

Senior leaders from low socioeconomic backgrounds role model their experience through blogs, events, mentoring and coaching. They share their lived experiences and provide guidance on their career journey across staff to raise awareness and celebrate those that face more barriers to get in and on in the workplace.



## Diversity Surveys

83.2% of Index entrants conduct an annual diversity survey.

A third make it mandatory to complete, with the option for employees to stipulate 'I prefer not to say'. This provides insight into how comfortable employees are sharing socioeconomic background data.

Setting a target for responses (or making it mandatory with an opt-out) will help employers understand the barriers that exist in their organisation and act as a valuable mechanism to receive feedback on which initiatives are working.



### Recommendations for **Employers**

Collect socioeconomic background data for new hires, current employees and unsuccessful applicants.

Set completion rate targets that align with the [Social Mobility Commission's recommendation of 70%](#).



### Recommendations for **Policymakers**

The Government should consult on mandatory workforce socioeconomic background reporting for employers with over 250 employers.

## The Boardroom

Diversity must start at the top of an organisation. Often, the most senior employees, including Board members, come from privileged backgrounds while those in junior positions are overwhelmingly from low socioeconomic backgrounds. We are disappointed that Index entrants follow the same trend.

Increased focus on gender diversity has led to substantial progress over the past decade. Employers must now better harness the insights of their data to make real and meaningful change for socioeconomic diversity.

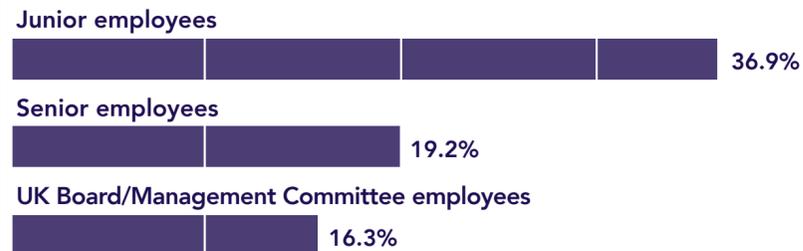


### Recommendations for Employers

Collect board socioeconomic diversity data and report alongside gender and ethnicity data in the company's annual report.

## Socioeconomic diversity at all levels

Are from a low socioeconomic background based on the occupation of their parent(s) or guardian(s)



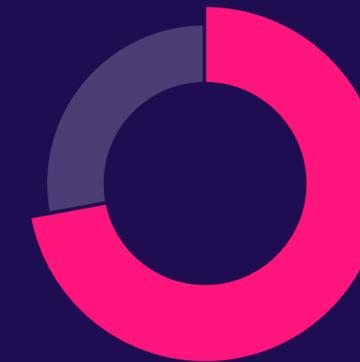
Attended a private school



Received a degree from a Russell Group university

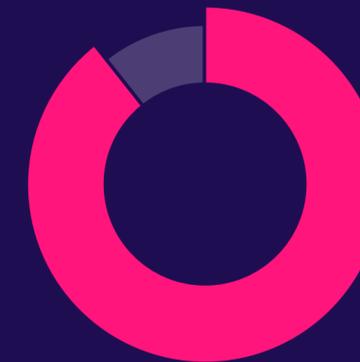


## WHAT DO YOUNG PEOPLE SAY?



74%

would feel quite comfortable or very comfortable sharing data with an employer about their background to help improve social mobility



85%

say that an action plan for diversity would encourage diversity in the workplace



06

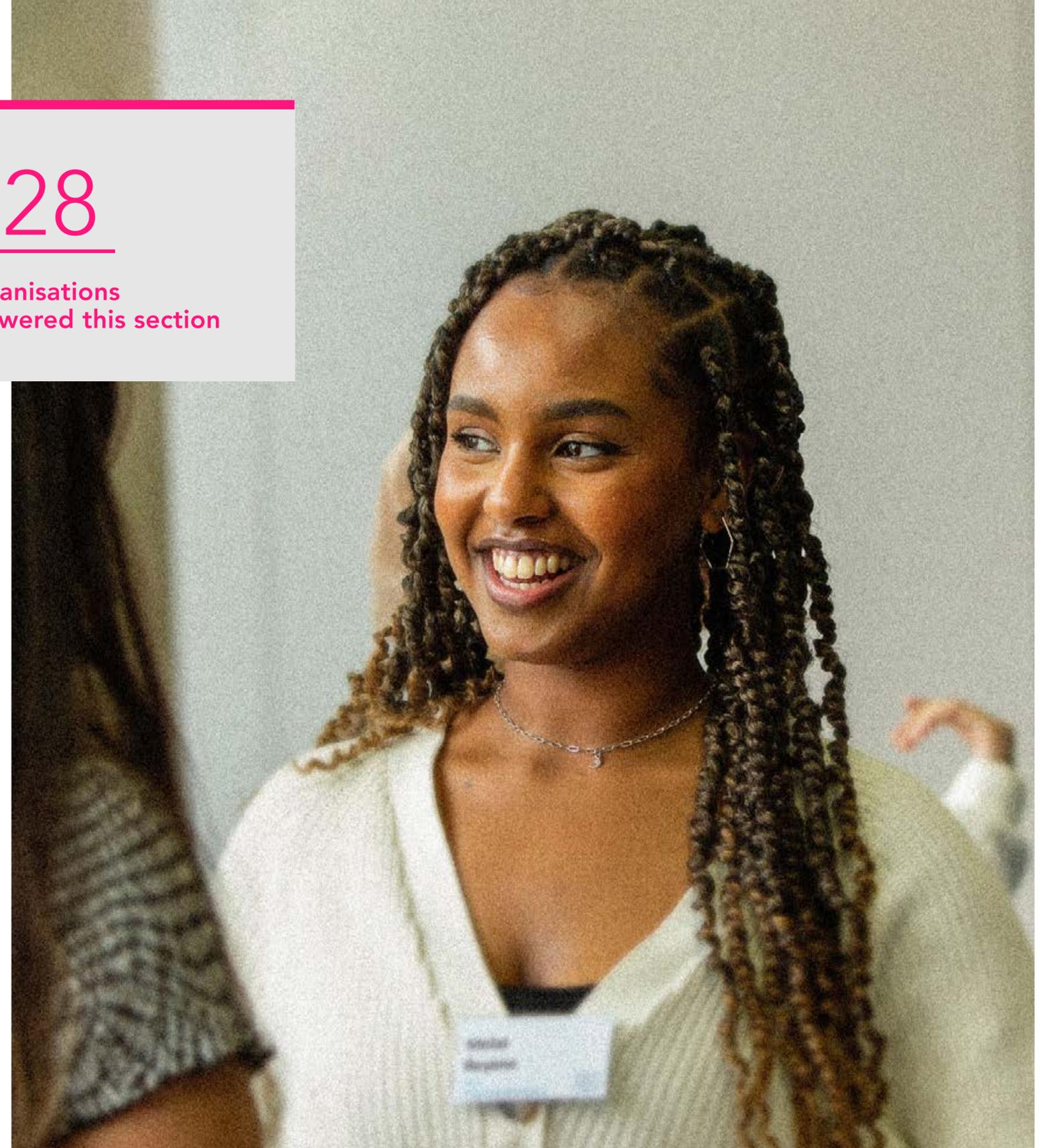
# Progression, Culture & Experienced Hires

This section examines how employers measure the progression of their existing employees and the strategies undertaken to create an inclusive workplace culture. Social mobility is not just about individuals getting in – it is also about who gets on and feels like they belong in the workplace.

Measuring, reporting on and setting targets to close the class pay gap is best practice in this area and shows a commitment to ensuring there is equality in careers earnings when employees from low socioeconomic backgrounds are able to progress.

128

organisations  
answered this section



## Internal Sponsorship

Sponsors are internal colleagues at a higher level who can support and promote employees. They can influence and aid careers by helping form connections at work. Having a sponsor also pays – those with a sponsor are paid 11.6% more than those without.

Sponsorship is most common when there is ‘cultural affinity’ – that is, when both people are from the same background with similar interests. In organisations where senior leadership is dominated by those from privileged backgrounds, like the ones in this year’s Index, it is likely that sponsorship benefits employees from those same backgrounds at a disproportionate rate.



### Recommendations for **Employers**

Collect data on pay, retention and progression by socioeconomic background.

Screen our short film, STAY DOWN. The film explores the self-presentational markers of a privileged class background that propel the careers of some and stagnate the careers of others. Within this is an exploration of sponsorship and the compounding effect it has when paired with other markers of being from a low socioeconomic background.

Discuss the issues raised by the film; this can open up powerful conversations about inequalities in the workplace.



## Workplace Culture

The culture of the workplace usually replicates the culture of the dominant group which, as shown in the previous section, are those from more privileged backgrounds.

Employees from low socioeconomic backgrounds therefore must navigate a difficult minefield of unwritten rules and unconscious biases on their journey to belong. This is a drain on their productivity.

Ensuring that all staff feel as though they belong in the workplace is key to retaining the best talent. If those from low socioeconomic backgrounds do not feel welcome, they are less likely to both stay for long periods of time and be represented at the most senior levels of organisations.



### Recommendations for **Employers**

Assess the organisational culture to see whether those from low socioeconomic backgrounds feel it is welcoming to them and make changes where necessary.

Create a staff network for social mobility and create sponsorship or mentoring programmes for staff from low socioeconomic backgrounds.



## The Class Pay Gap

People from low socioeconomic backgrounds are increasingly getting into organisations but they are less likely to get on due to structural barriers to progression.

The existence of a class pay gap is evidence that an organisation is paying those from low socioeconomic backgrounds less than their more privileged peers. Wider evidence on this issue found by both the Social Mobility Commission and ourselves shows that employees from working-class backgrounds may be less likely to ask for pay rises, have less access to networks and work opportunities or, in some cases, exclude themselves from promotion from fear of not “fitting in”. Other explanations for the class pay gap could include conscious or unconscious discrimination or more subtle employment processes which lead to cultural matching in the workplace.

It is positive that 14% of Index entrants measure their class pay gap. We would like to see this become commonplace to ensure equity in the workplace.



### Recommendations for **Employers**

Analyse pay data to see whether your organisation has a class pay gap.

Report on this and commit to closing it.

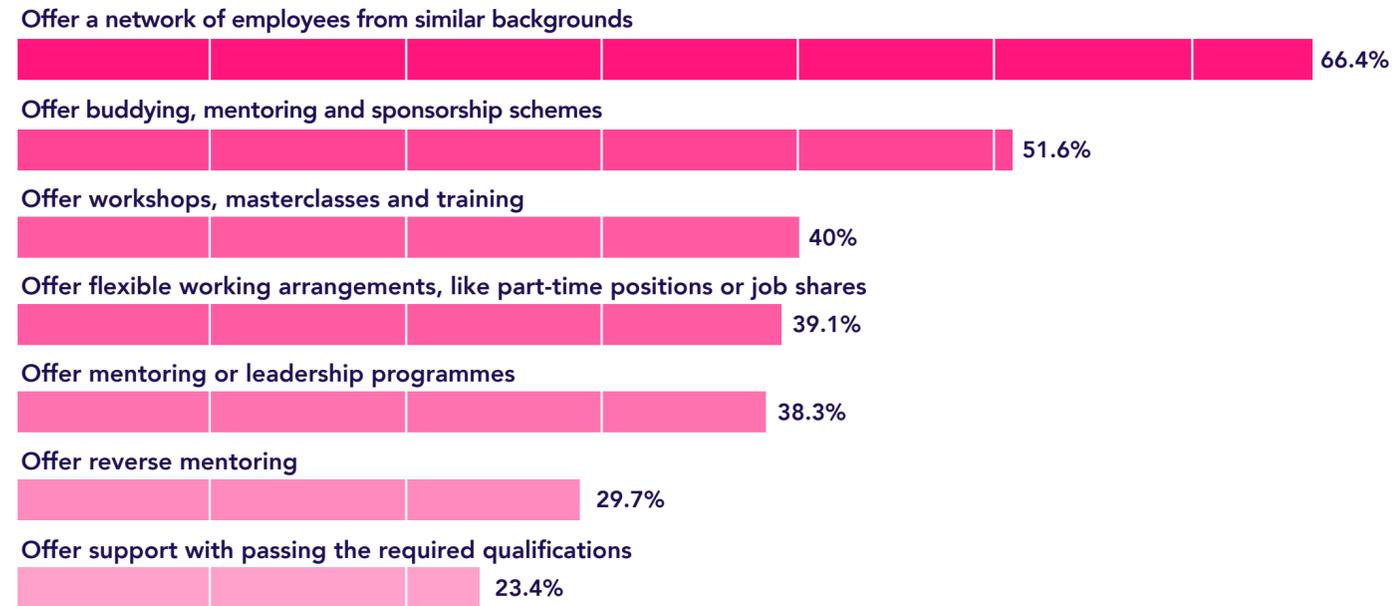


### Recommendations for **Policymakers**

Mandate socioeconomic background reporting for all firms with over 250 employees.



## Initiatives Offered to Support Progression



### SPOTLIGHT



## Using mentoring to unlock potential and aid progression

Long-term mentoring opportunities targeted at individuals from low socioeconomic backgrounds can help improve career outcomes and mitigate the difficulty for some of finding internal sponsors.

BlackRock has created over a hundred social mobility focused mentoring relationships since 2022. Feedback provided at the end of each cycle informs changes in the next, allowing the programme to adapt to the needs of staff from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

The most recent process paired 28 early careers and 24 senior professionals.

The firm is currently launching a reverse mentorship programme alongside its social mobility network to support employees from low socioeconomic backgrounds. The programme will start with junior staff before expanding to include leadership to raise awareness of social mobility and its importance at the most senior levels.

### SPOTLIGHT



## Breaking down barriers: assessing workplace culture

An organisation's culture is critical to an individual's sense of belonging and often an organisation's ability to retain talent.

PwC has collected data on workplace culture for many years, monitoring feedback from internal employee forums, staff engagement surveys and the Index's employee survey. This year, the firm went further, commissioning two in-depth projects to understand the cultural experience of working at PwC with a particular focus on socioeconomic background.

A project with Thinks Insight and Strategy analysed the experience of recent joiners and prospective employees through diary entries, which revealed many initially felt that PwC was intimidating. However, as participants became more familiar with the organisation, they found it far more inclusive. One participant wrote: "I'm really pleased I got hired here because the atmosphere, especially at the associate level, is inclusive and friendly."

### WHAT DO YOUNG PEOPLE SAY?



77%

say they would be put off a career if they felt like they wouldn't fit in



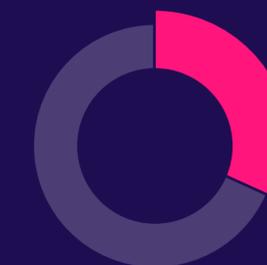
46%

are worried about the negative impact their class background will have on job opportunities



82%

say they would be put off a career if there is a lack of shared values between them and the organisation



45%

have been discriminated against based on their accent

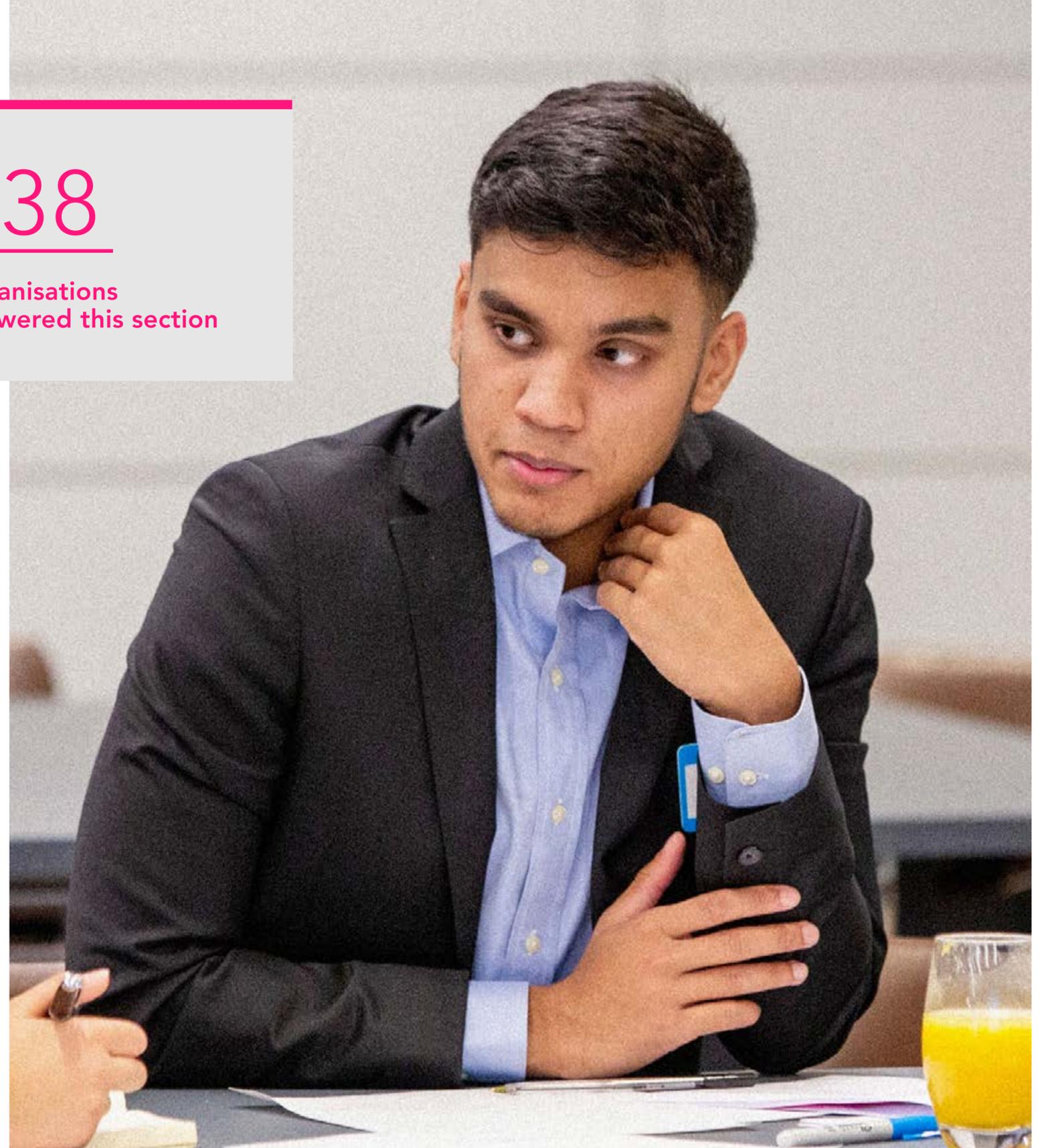
# 07 Advocacy

This section focuses on how employers use their capacity to advocate for social mobility both inside their organisation and in their sphere of influence, including the supply chain.

In the current economic climate and in the wake of the pandemic, employers need to advocate for change faster. We encourage them to act with purpose, intent and transparency.

138

organisations  
answered this section



# 1 Purpose

Given that 58.0% of Index entrants told us that clients have demanded action on socioeconomic background, there is more reason than ever to advocate for social mobility.

Considering there is a positive link between [ESG performance and financial success](#), it is in business interest to embed action on socioeconomic diversity into these strategies.



## Recommendations for Employers

Include social mobility commitments, data, activity and outcomes in corporate ESG reporting.

Partner with charities and third sector organisations who advocate for social mobility.

### SPOTLIGHT

## Advocating for change beyond your sector



This year, Co-op launched a 9-point social mobility plan to break the class ceiling, which included creating a social mobility taskforce, changing internal job adverts to help employees see how their skills may suit a sideways move or promotion, improving their financial well-being offer and establishing a new mentoring scheme. They have also launched a campaign for socioeconomic background to become the 10th protected characteristic under the 2010 Equalities Act.

# 2 Intent

Playing a visible role in guiding action to improve social mobility enhances the performance of your sector and benefits business. That's why we want to see more employers setting targets to increase socioeconomic diversity in the workforce.

81.8% of Index entrants currently have targets relating to overall workforce diversity. When broken down to targets specific to socioeconomic background, the picture is less positive.

For example, just under a third (30.3%) have targets for socioeconomic diversity across occupation areas.

[Research](#) from the Bridge Group in partnership with Access Accountancy found significant differences in socioeconomic diversity of accountancy sector employees working in Tax compared with those working in Advisory. More employers should set targets to ensure the socioeconomic profile of their organisation is consistent across workstreams.

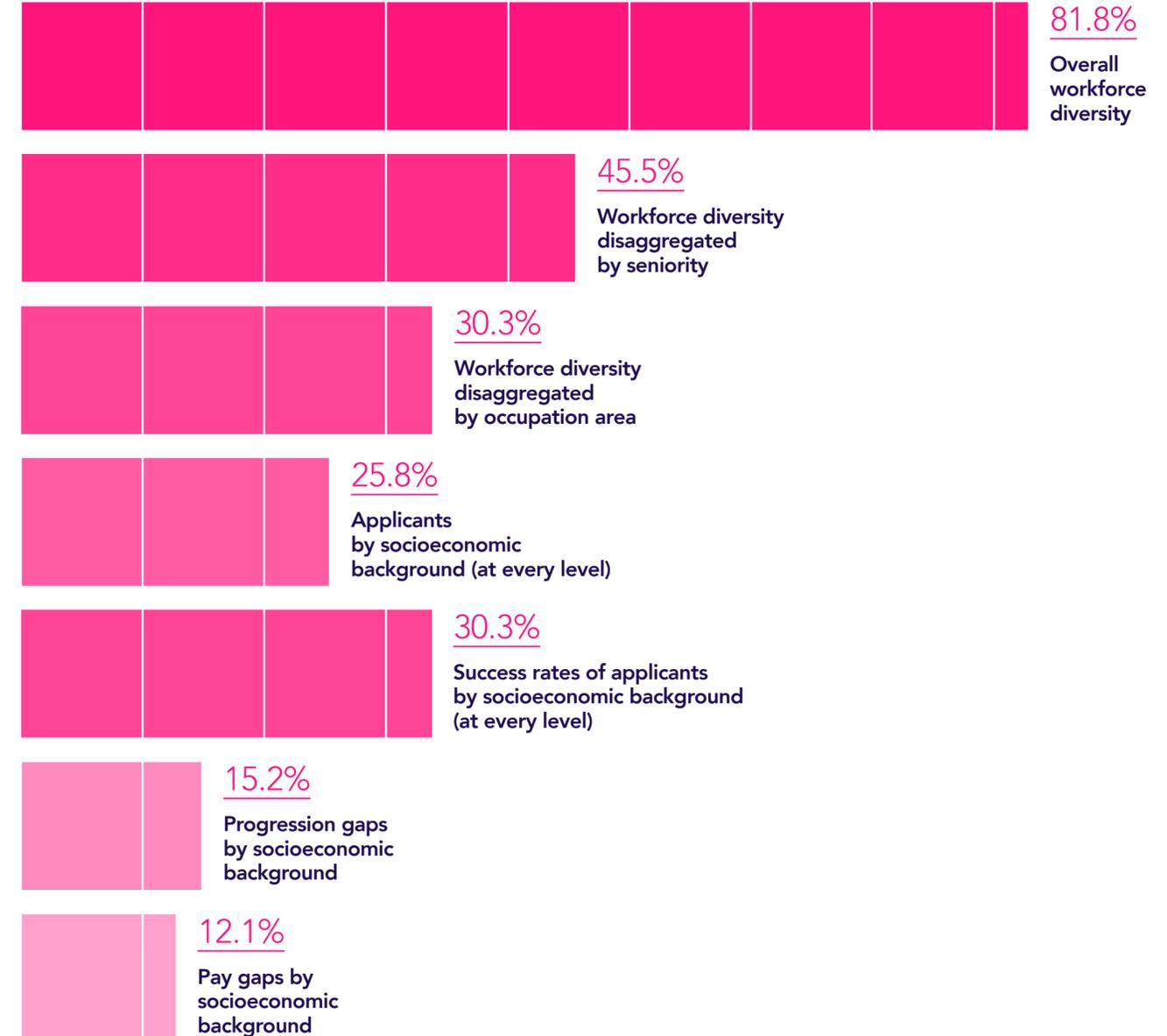


## Recommendations for Employers

Establish social mobility targets within the organisation and commit to strategies for achieving them.

Monitor targets at Board level.

## Targets relate to



# 3 Transparency

Engaging suppliers in social mobility action allows employers to add value beyond their organisation. The Public Services (Social Value) Act also requires public sector commissioners in England (and some in Wales) to consider how they could improve the economic, environmental and social wellbeing of their local area through their procurement activities.

55.1% of Index entrants encourage their suppliers to act on social mobility, which meaningfully supports the communities they work in. We would like to see more use their influence in a similar way.

Many organisations (84.1%) also participate in social mobility initiatives across their sector or industry to maximise collective efforts that incite systems change. Now they must share best practice to ensure lessons learned are shared widely with organisations in their supply chain or networks, particularly those that are less active on social mobility.



## Recommendations for Employers

Leverage your position within your supply chain and wider sector to encourage action on social mobility.

Develop an internal advocacy strategy and encourage employees to share their own social mobility stories.



## Recommendations for Policymakers

Enact Section 1 of the Equality Act, the Public Sector Duty, in England.

Use the Public Services (Social Value) Act to create skills and social mobility value, particularly regionally, through government spending and procurement.



## SPOTLIGHT

### #1 for Equality: The Socioeconomic Duty

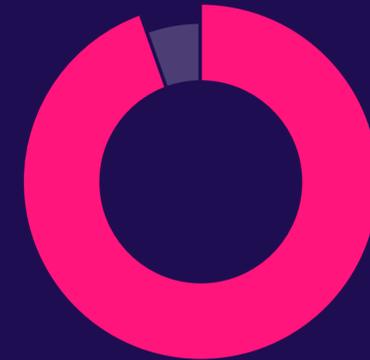
Section 1 of the Equality Act, the Public Sector Duty, requires public bodies to consider how to reduce the inequalities of outcome which result from socioeconomic disadvantage when making a strategic decision.

The Duty has been enacted in Scotland and Wales and has resulted in positive decisions being taken to support those from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

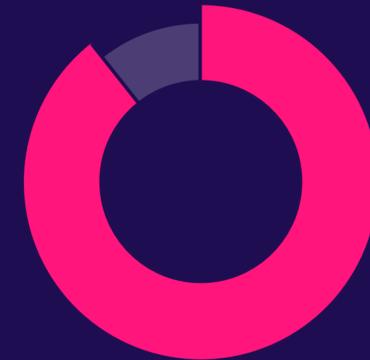
Local councils have also voluntarily enacted the Duty to tackle inequality across England, including [Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council](#), [North of Tyne Combined Authority](#), [Newcastle City Council](#), [Southwark Council](#) and [Derby City Council](#).



## WHAT DO YOUNG PEOPLE SAY?



**90%** would feel more enthusiastic about working for an employer who prioritised taking action on social mobility



**85%** say that targets to increase representation of underrepresented groups would encourage diversity in the workplace

# Appendix A

## Index Methodology

The Social Mobility Employer Index is comprised of two elements: questions that employers answer using qualitative and quantitative data, and an employee survey which was introduced in 2018. The former assesses employers' work across seven areas: their work with young people, routes into the employer, the attraction of staff, recruitment and selection, data collection, progression of staff and experienced hires, and advocacy.

The survey is to add insights and contextualise the data provided in submissions. Employers are then benchmarked against one another based on the results.

The Index questions are based on research from the Social Mobility Commission and leading academics working in this field. The Index has also been developed in consultation with, and following feedback from, the following advisory groups and individuals: Bridge Group, Stonewall, The Institute of Student Employers, Dr Louise Ashley, Royal Holloway, University of London and Claire Tunley (Head of Employability at City of London Corporation).

Working with any of these organisations or individuals does not give an employer any advantage in the Index process. Responses are marked anonymously so that those marking are not aware of any work the entrant does beyond their submission.

Since the inception of the Index, some questions have been refined and others have been added, for example on exit fees in 2022. For key questions, organisations are asked for several years of data in order to assess the impact of measures being taken.

Please note that the data is presented as a percentage of entrants that answered each section rather than as a percentage of the total number of entrants. For example, statistics in the Work With Young People section are calculated using 132 as a sample size to ensure

that only those that answered were reflected in the results. This increases the statistical accuracy of our findings by removing the impact that zero or blank figures have on the results.

Index submissions are considered and marked against the latest empirical evidence of what interventions effectively advance social mobility in the UK workplace. Our approach is rigorous and ensures a fair process, recognising that different sectors and individual businesses do things differently.

1

**Identifying a broad range of questions** that interrogate the various ways in which employers can contribute to social mobility.

2

**Weighting responses based on the evidence** as some areas have more impact on social mobility than others. For example, there is substantial evidence that providing work experience placements for young people is more impactful than general outreach; and that some approaches to recruitment lead to more equal outcomes compared to others.

3

**Weighting whole sections of the marking scheme** based on where maximum impact can be delivered. Within each section, every organisation is then categorised within a decile, so that modest differences in scoring do not then significantly affect the overall ranking.

4

**Recognising that not all organisations will score marks for each question.**

For example, they may not have formal graduate recruitment programmes because of their size. Therefore, organisations are ranked based on the percentage of available marks they have achieved.

# Appendix B



**The Social Mobility Foundation commissioned a survey of 2,000 young people aged 16-18, in school or college in the United Kingdom.**

The research was carried out by Platypus Research from 3rd - 17th July 2023. Of the 2,000 who answered, 1,000 were from low socioeconomic backgrounds and 1,000 were from high socioeconomic backgrounds. The low socioeconomic background sample includes those with a household income of less than £25,000 or young people from a D or E social grade.

The high socioeconomic background sample includes those with household income over £25,000 if living with parents or young people from a social grade ABC1C2.

## UNHEARD VOICES Methodology

Description	Social Grade	Social Class
<b>Senior, middle or junior managers or administrators such as:</b> finance manager, chief executive, large business owner, office manager, retail manager, bank manager, restaurant manager, warehouse manager.	AB	Professional
<b>Modern professional and traditional professional occupations such as:</b> teacher, nurse, physiotherapist, social worker, musician, police officer (sergeant or above), software designer, accountant, solicitor, medical practitioner, scientist, civil or mechanic engineer.	C1	Intermediate
<b>Clerical and intermediate occupations such as:</b> secretary, personal assistant, call centre agent, clerical worker, nursery nurse.	C2	Intermediate
<b>Technical and craft occupations such as:</b> motor mechanic, plumber, printer, electrician, gardener, train driver.	C2	Working/Lower
<b>Routine, semi-routine manual and service occupations such as:</b> postal worker, machine operative, security guard, caretaker, farm worker, catering assistant, sales assistant, HGV driver, cleaner, porter, packer, labourer, waiter/waitress, bar staff.	DE	Working/Lower
<b>Recently or long term unemployed (has been unemployed for less than a year).</b>	DE	Working/Lower

# Appendix C

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### Description

### Link

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