

**Bridge
Group**
research
action
equality

**Making
change,
together**

2009 – 2019

Bridge Group research action equality

Welcome

Ten years ago, a group of six volunteers decided to stop talking about advancing social equality and actually do something. The result was the Bridge Group – a non-profit consultancy committed to using research as a catalyst for evidence-based social change.

The team's work bridging employers, higher education and government has achieved a lasting impact on socio-economic diversity and equality. But there is still much to do: the issues that motivated the founding of the Bridge Group are more pertinent now than ever. Realising greater equality will require collective responsibility and collaborative action across sectors.

In these pages, we share the charity's vision for change and celebrate some of our most impactful work. We also look ahead, and outline how you can engage with us. We invite you to join us in writing our next chapter, as we remain dedicated to using evidence to inform action.

Nik Miller
Chief Executive

Evidence-based social change, in numbers

153 million

Number of data points our research has analysed

120

Number of organisations we have advised

1,220

Number of hours of interviews undertaken in our research

78%

Percentage of those attending our conference who said that it will impact positively on their practice

117%

Increase in the success rate for applicants from lower socio-economic backgrounds to the Civil Service Fast Stream after our work

Numbers relating to data points, organisations and hours of interview cover the period February 2016 to April 2019

“ Independent expertise gives organisations the evidence base they need to make change and try new things

Are universities the best way to boost social equality? Received wisdom holds that they are a great leveller: win a place to get ahead. But ground-breaking independent research from the Bridge Group has explained why this is a myth. In fact, the people for whom the cost to study at university is highest often benefit the least.

The report, *Social Mobility and University Careers Services*, demonstrates that students from more affluent backgrounds have better graduate outcomes compared to their less advantaged peers – and looks at what needs to be done to change this. It is the first report to investigate the part that careers services play in addressing the gap in graduate outcomes across socio-economic backgrounds.

Wide-ranging in scope, it drew on new evidence from more than 30 interviews with leading practitioners across 12 universities. “We felt that interrogating how careers services and universities support the employment and outcomes of disadvantaged students was vital,” says Richard Brabner, Director

of the UPP Foundation, which funded the research. “Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds have higher dropout rates and weaker outcomes. These impact their ability to succeed. We want to close those gaps.”

The report has helped to inform the grant-giving side of the UPP Foundation, helping it to understand how it might better support disadvantaged students to succeed both in, and after, university. “For example, the report found that activities such as study abroad programmes can have a proportionally higher impact on graduate earnings and outcomes for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds,” says Richard.

“As a result of this, we created a partnership supporting Universities UK International in their work to encourage UK students – particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds – to study, work or volunteer abroad as part of their degree programme. The report has shaped the conversation around what careers services provide and is informing action across the sector.”



“ Recruits from lower socio-economic backgrounds have doubled and continue to rise

The Civil Service Fast Stream programme had a challenge: its intake was less diverse, in terms of socio-economic background, than that of the University of Oxford. Wanting an outside perspective on the issue, the Cabinet Office commissioned the Bridge Group to interrogate the data and produce its 2016 report, *Socio-Economic Diversity in the Fast Stream*.

“Having that independent view gave us a real momentum,” says Phil Wilson, Head of Assessment and Diversity, Civil Service Fast Stream. “The Bridge Group brought everybody together at all levels in the organisation and helped to ensure recommendations were delivered.”

The report looked in depth at the recruitment process, identified problem areas and made a series of detailed recommendations to be actioned over a two-year period. “We adopted the full list,” says Phil.

And results have been swift. In 2016, when the report was published, just 4.2% of Fast Stream recruits were from a lower

socio-economic background. In 2017, that almost doubled to 8.3%, then rose to 9.1% in 2018.

The time from application to hire has been drastically reduced, with the quickest process taking less than 20 days. And, while the socio-economic background of candidates was a key focus, the Fast Stream has also seen improvements in other diversity characteristics, such as ethnicity.

Impact reached beyond Fast Stream: eight Civil Service departments feature in the Social Mobility Foundation’s Top 50 Employers in 2018, while Matt Hancock, then Minister for the Cabinet Office, wrote to 200 businesses in the wake of the report, urging them to take similar actions.

Finding ways to make the intake more diverse is vital to a healthy organisation, says Phil. “It’s about fairness and justice, of course. But the innovation and creativity you get when you have people from different backgrounds with a range of different viewpoints is invaluable.”



“ The work fostered an unprecedented level of collaboration: the result was action

The legal profession has recently stepped up efforts to increase socio-economic diversity among its hires. But what happens to people from lower socio-economic backgrounds once they're in? Where do their careers take them – and how do they compare with their more affluent peers?

In the first report of its kind, the Bridge Group brought together eight leading UK law firms to find out – and find ways to make change happen. Allen & Overy, Bryan Cave Leighton Paisner (BCLP), Clifford Chance, Dentons, Hogan Lovells, Holman Fenwick Willan, Linklaters and Pinsent Masons shared data on more than 2,800 early career professionals, and the Bridge Group undertook 60 interviews with current and former employees.

That sense of shared enterprise was essential to the quality of the final work, says Tim Smith, Partner at BCLP. “The Bridge Group colleagues were able to foster an unprecedented collaboration and sharing of experience between the firms, which became especially important when we came to agree

the content and recommendations of the final report, *Socio-economic Background and Early Career Progression in the Law*. The result was that we had a compelling piece of research and some strong recommendations with which we could all work.”

BCLP, says Tim, has already begun thinking about how it might make changes. “The reception given to the research within our firm was a mixture of surprise, curiosity and horror. For the first time, we had reliable results based on data rather than just anecdotes or speculation. We are already implementing the recommendations to drive change.”

It's essential, he says, that the sector comes together to meet the diversity challenge – and having the right data is a key step. “Quite apart from the desire of law firms to do the right thing so far as diversity and equality of opportunity is concerned, the research gave tangible proof – if it were needed – that there is also an economic reason for law firms to get this right, to stop the migration of their top talent.”



“ It helped put a mirror up to our organisation: it has been a really powerful piece of work

Professional services firm **KPMG** has long recognised the benefits of socio-economic diversity and inclusion: it has led the way in increasing diversity among school leavers and graduate hires, in particular. So, when leaders wanted to understand whether – and how – gender, ethnicity and socio-economic background affect employees’ progression in the firm, they asked the Bridge Group to investigate.

The resulting report, *Diversity Characteristics and Progression at KPMG*, drew on extensive interviews with colleagues across the firm, from all levels, as well as interrogating the data in depth. In practical terms, it had considerable impact. Having established an evidence base on the barriers to progression within the organisation, all research recommendations are being implemented.

“The report gave us the evidence base to really warrant us doing a lot of the things we knew we had to do,” says Jenny Baskerville, KPMG Director and Co-head of Inclusion, Diversity and Social Equality. “Because we

are a numbers-driven organisation, it landed particularly well with people who were perhaps aware there were potential barriers but weren’t well versed in what the data showed us.”

Actions taken have included increased opportunities for open conversations about diversity; delivering key leadership messages on the impact of bypassing processes; a review of work allocation processes; and harnessing a single narrative about the importance the firm places on inclusion, diversity and social equality. This was crystallised in the firm’s launch of its Fairer Futures campaign.

Jenny points out that senior leadership are still referring to the report and using it. “The report helped put a mirror up to our organisation. It has been a really powerful piece of work,” she says. “KPMG will use this evidence and advice to inform policy reforms, to further ensure that all employees can thrive within the organisation, irrespective of background.”





Bringing people together to gather evidence and drive action



Photography by Ela Kapoor

At the Bridge Group, we want to help people interested in social equality to share their expertise and experience and find out about the latest research. We do this by bringing people together from across sectors through regular seminars and an annual conference.

Our conference always includes top tips, approaches and tools to help you make meaningful change. And it works. At the 2017 conference, 73% of participants reported that it had informed their views on social equality, while 78% said it would influence their practice.

Meanwhile, our policy seminars bring together senior colleagues from across sectors to collate evidence and identify solutions. We balance data-driven analysis with problem-solving discussion, drawing on participants' own experience.

We draw on these discussions to design policy recommendations and policy solutions that are sensitive to context and that have real impact. An example of this is the working group on rural and isolated issues affecting

progression to higher education. The group's discussions informed the development of the Bridge Group report *The Influence of Place* and its policy recommendations, which have received a highly positive reception among stakeholders and policy makers.

Another recent event brought experts together to improve understanding of the role of degree apprenticeships for social justice. This resulted in a series of practical recommendations for government, employers and higher education institutions.

We facilitate collaborative working within professional consortia, for example, in a group of top law firms. This involves our bringing together representatives who are already engaged in social equality and helping them to identify collective actions.

This group helped to inform the Bridge Group report *Socio-economic Background and Early Career Progression in the Law*, and it continues to work collaboratively to facilitate the implementation of the report's recommendations.

Find out how we can help you make a difference

We all get the why. But what about the how? Diversity. Inclusion. Social equality. Good for society, good for the economy. That's where the Bridge Group comes in. Using rigorous research and hard-won experience, we can help you identify and tackle the challenges you face in ways that will have impact now – and into the future.

Three things make us different.

First, we are evidence-driven. We bring together the empirical data with innovative, investigative enquiry to create an evidence base that you can use to make the case and spark change.

Second, we understand that getting social equality right is a complex issue in all sectors. The Bridge Group develops policy and carries out research for numerous organisations, and our cross-sector experience tells us that social equality and inclusion doesn't begin or end in the classroom or the C-suite.

Third, we are advocates for practical change. We consult closely with you, we interpret the data and present robust evidence for what should be done – and to evaluate what has been done. We actively seek to understand your priorities, and offer realistic solutions that work.

So, if you are tired of well-meaning mission statements and strategies that go nowhere, get in touch. You know change is possible.

We can help you make that change, now.

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Contact

enquiries@the-bridgegroup.co.uk

c/o King's College London
57 Waterloo Road,
London SE1 8WA

www.thebridgegroup.org.uk

The Bridge Group is a registered charity.
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