BRIDGE group

# Inspiring Policy:

## Graduate Outcomes and Social Mobility

February 2016

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*"We need collective responsibility and collaborative action.*

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BRIDGE group

The Bridge Group is an independent, charitable policy association researching and promoting social mobility.

We offer senior stakeholders expert guidance on policy, drawing on our associates and the latest research. Since its launch in 2010 at Google UK (hosted by the Rt. Hon Alan Milburn), the Group has established itself as an authoritative voice on social mobility. The Deputy Prime-Minister presented the Group's inaugural strategy in 2011, in the subsequent year the Group secured financial support from Google and KPMG, and in 2013 the President of the CBI hosted a reception to showcase the Group's work.

In 2014 an office was established at King's College London. Most recently, the charity completed a research commission from the Cabinet Office to investigate social mobility in the Civil Service, and has grown the core team and group of trustees.

www.thebridgegroup.org.uk

# Foreword

One of the most significant developments in the social mobility debate over the last decade has been the increased focus on graduate outcomes and progression into the professions. This is welcome, since it emphasises the need to look beyond university access. The advent of higher tuition fees, a recession that engendered a more competitive graduate employment landscape, and a more discriminating sense of value amongst students have all sharpened the focus on outcomes. These trends in higher education have been matched by an increasing interest from employers in achieving greater diversity in recruitment, responding to a commercial need for new approaches to seek and identify potential, and to guard against overlooking talent.

It is against this backdrop that we share insights from a range of colleagues, and set these within an outline of the relevant issues. The subject of student progression and social mobility is by no means new (many valuable sources are referenced here), though it is a debate in which the voices of those leading change are rarely heard. This paper provides a forum for their views and experiences, in which we aim to:

- present the key issues affecting progression amongst students from lower socio-economic backgrounds (SEB), and provide specific illustrations of how they might be addressed, while directing thinking towards policy solutions;

- provoke challenge and debate, particularly in areas where this has been minimal to date, and where the rewards of policy innovations could be significant; and

- offer a foundation from which the Bridge Group, and our wider community of associates, can shape our focus in this area for the coming year.

Solutions to the challenges of social mobility require collective responsibility and collaborative action: as with all of our work, our definition of policy is broad and includes the behaviours of Government, universities, employers, and third sector organisations. In the pages that follow, you will find contributions that offer both strategic and practical approaches.

We welcome this opportunity to promote cross-sector debate, and thank the wide range of contributors who have helped us to shape this discussion. We invite you to read their commentary in the same spirit in which it was submitted. Colleagues have been careful to state that their submissions are neither declarations of exemplary practice, nor an indication that peers are not also delivering impactful practice. And in publishing colleagues' views, the Bridge Group is not claiming to concur with them all, just as our contributors are similarly unlikely to agree with all of ours.

We hope you will join the debate.

**Nik Miller**
**Director, The Bridge Group**

**With the Board of Trustees:**

Deb Conner  Dr Penelope Griffin
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# Executive Summary

Innovative and impactful work is already underway to widen opportunities for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. As part of this, universities, employers, and the third sector are coming together to collaborate and design models of effective practice that, if duplicated and scaled up, will promote social mobility.

The strongest message that comes from this report is the need for collective responsibility and collaborative action. Universities have a critical role, but they do not hold the panacea to social mobility. In fact, the boundaries of universities' roles in combatting social immobility are rarely voiced; entrenched inequalities in the school and college sector are inherited and, unless employers continue to make greater progress, gains in higher education policy risk being annulled after graduation.

Student progression is a joint, and joined-up, endeavour, and a multi-faceted process. Contributions to this report demonstrate that we are moving ever closer to understanding ways in which that process might be optimised.

However, a report such as this also inevitably identifies areas where further work needs to be done if we are to achieve the outcomes we seek. Certain assumptions within the social mobility debate are controversial. For example, some see the idea that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds lack certain characteristics that might aid their progression in employment as a deficit model. Others take a more pragmatic approach and incorporate correct cutlery usage into the induction programme. Both approaches can be consistent with a commitment to seeking diverse recruits precisely because of the wider range of attitudes, outlooks and experiences they might bring to the firm.

There is a considerable amount of work to be done regarding the use of data to support increased workforce diversity. Problems collecting data from students and job candidates can make it difficult to build understanding of patterns at a national level, let alone assist recruitment at the level of individual firms. The use of different datasets between employers makes comparison difficult, and the use of single or problematic datasets risks doing more harm than good. Data should be used not only to monitor the diversity of new recruits, but to help employers to understand in-firm progression and success from a diversity perspective. Research evidence, combined with practical experience, is demonstrating the effectiveness of a number of new recruitment practices, such as contextual recruitment or the removal of academic screening. It is crucial that new developments – such as name-blind recruitment – are assessed with the same rigour, and that we move towards the creation of a holistic model of recruitment which optimises the chance of achieving diversity.

Whilst we have suggested the need to develop more of a regional approach - linking universities, employers, and the third sector - to recognise distinct geographical issues, we have not been able to pursue this in sufficient detail in this piece. The recent publication of the Social Mobility Index by the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission adds to the need to look more closely at progression routes at a local level to better understand geographical patterns in educational inequality.

We are aware that we are examining the student recruitment process as perceived by institutional leaders and employers, and that the student voice is not represented. It is the job of future work to capture the student experience and perceived barriers to progression in higher education and graduate employment. But it is hoped that this report will have value for graduates as it summarises key messages from recruiters and career services, which might shape behaviour and influence decision making.

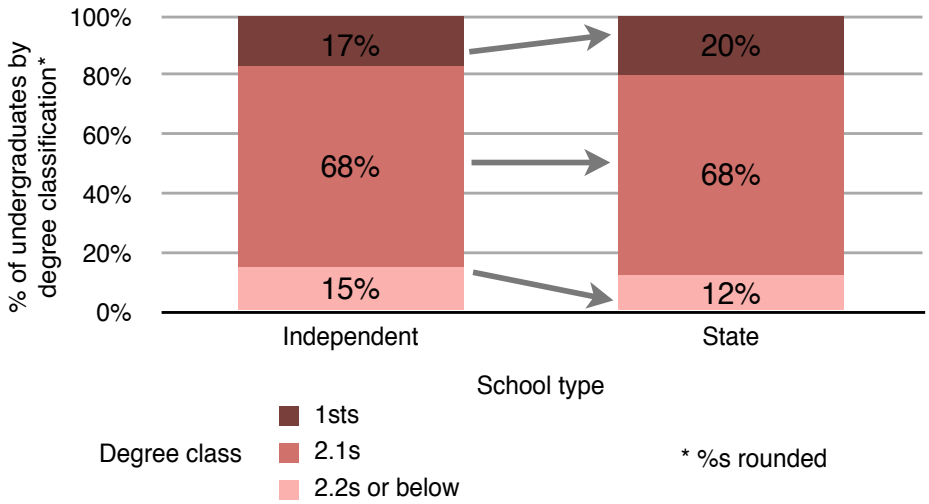
# Policy Context

**1.** Graduate outcomes are being given increasing weight in debates and formal assessments concerned with quality and efficiency in higher education, most recently in the Green Paper from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS)[1]. In relation to social mobility, this has implications that are both conceptual and practical. For example, if institutional success is increasingly measured against graduate earnings, could this indirectly incentivise universities to admit fewer students whose outcomes are typically worse against this measure? Are university careers services sufficiently resourced to respond to their new responsibility for quantitative success measures? Does this reaffirm the need for employers to seek a more diverse talent base, or locate the responsibility squarely with universities?

**2.** Higher education plays a critical role in enabling social mobility; however, until quite recently, policy has been almost exclusively focused on input measures. Financial incentives and national directives have encouraged institutions to recruit increased numbers of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds (SEB), whilst far less attention has been given to their outcomes. There is impactful activity (and much is highlighted here), but sector-wide there is modest evidence that universities are delivering on their responsibility to develop graduate employability amongst students from lower SEBs. It is ultimately limiting to invest in recruiting these students in greater numbers, without corresponding investment to support retention, achievement, and effective progression into graduate employment.

**3.** There is a strong evidence base to challenge previous assumptions about the levelling effect of higher education: disadvantage is not negated by securing a university place, in spite of evidence – see, for example, Figure 1 below – suggesting that, once at university, students from lower SEBs attain more highly on average than students from higher SEBs.

***Fig 1: The percentage of undergraduates achieving different degree classes at the University of Bristol categorised by school type[2]***



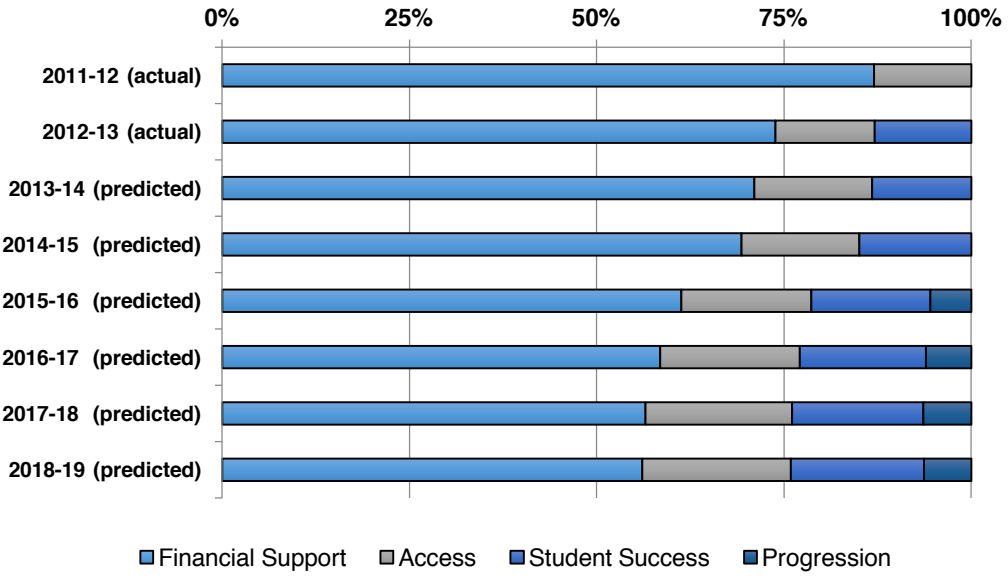

[1] www.gov.uk/government/consultations/higher-education-teaching-excellence-social-mobility-and-student-choice
[2] Adapted by UpReach from A. Hoare & R. Johnston, Widening Participation Through Admissions Policy - a British Case Study of School and University Performance, University of Bristol, (2010)

**4.** In relation to degree outcomes at the Russell Group and (former) 1994 Group, >20% of state-school-educated graduates achieve first-class degrees, in contrast to 17% of independently educated graduates.[3] However, academic performance is not matched by equal access to the professions, with a gap of up to 15%, and those graduates from less advantaged backgrounds who do access the professions earn significantly less (>£3,000) annually. A recent report from BIS also highlights that:

> *"73% of those who came from the most advantaged backgrounds before Higher Education were in the most advantaged occupation groups six months after graduating in 2012/13. 67% of those from less advantaged backgrounds were in the most advantaged occupation groups".*[4]

**5.** Recent reports concerned with this subject are giving greater prominence to the role of university careers services in supporting the outcomes for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds[5]. This paper is published while the Government is analysing the responses to its consultation on the Higher Education Green Paper[6]. Regardless of the outcome of the ongoing consultation, the Green Paper strongly reiterates, and builds on, the view that higher education is a significant driver of opportunity. Thus a continued commitment to access (and a boosted focus on graduate outcomes) is highly likely. The challenge will lie in setting targets based on evidence and research, and translating commendable aims into pragmatic actions. The Office for Fair Access (OFFA), the independent public body whose role as a regulator is to promote fair access to higher education, is likely to continue playing a key role in this, primarily through the scrutiny and approval of universities' access agreements[7]. The figure below illustrates the reported and predicted breakdown of access agreement spend, reflecting a trend towards student success and progression; Rachel Tooth from OFFA provides thoughts on this issue, below Figure 2.

***Fig 2: Reported and predicted institutional access agreement spend (Source: OFFA)***




[3] Analysis of data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency's University Leaver's Survey.
[4] www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/363238/BIS_performance_indicators_-_Graduate_outcomes_Oct_14.pdf
[5] For example: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/80188/Higher-Education.pdf
[6] www.gov.uk/government/consultations/higher-education-teaching-excellence-social-mobility-and-student-choice
[7] www.offa.org.uk/access-agreements/

## Policy in Support of Graduate Outcomes

**Rachael Tooth**
**Head of Evidence and Good Practice, The Office for Fair Access (OFFA)**

In order that fair access is truly meaningful, we work across the whole student lifecycle to ensure that students are supported to succeed in higher education and are prepared for employment or postgraduate study. Our strategic plan sets out the specific target: "To improve rates of progression into graduate-level employment or further study for students from underrepresented and disadvantaged groups and narrow the gap in successful outcomes."'

The main way we drive change in the sector is by providing guidance to institutions, and then assessing and monitoring access agreements – documents in which universities and colleges set out their tuition fees and how they plan to improve and sustain fair access at every stage of the student lifecycle (access, student success and progression). Our quantitative and qualitative analysis of access agreements shows us that – in their access agreements - universities and colleges report progression activity in three main areas: 'employability skills', 'career development, advice and guidance', and 'placements, internships, and work experience'. Examples of these types of activities are outlined in more detail below.

83 per cent of 2015-16 access agreements mention activities to develop employability skills, including:

- student ambassador schemes;
- targeted employability support for students from under-represented groups;
- mentoring for students from employers and alumni;
- free language courses;
- a curriculum focused on employment;
- support for extra-curricular activities;
- visits to workplaces and talks from employers and alumni; and
- entrepreneurship programs.

67 per cent of 2015-16 access agreements mention career development, advice and guidance, including:

- specialist careers and progression advice;
- long-term support providing students with guidance and referral opportunities (for example support and referral to agencies for debt or budgeting advice, volunteering, counselling and job opportunities); and
- advice and guidance immediately after graduation.

88 per cent of 2015-16 access agreements mention placements, internships and work experience, including:

- financial support to help disadvantaged students meet the costs of transport, accommodation and other living costs associated with internships and work placements;
- reduced fees for placement years; and
- one university mentions a centre with specific remit for supporting disadvantaged students to undertake internships.

It is clear from the activity reported to OFFA in access agreements that institutions are working to support students as they prepare to progress from undergraduate study into employment or postgraduate study. Despite this important work, there remain significant discrepancies in outcomes for different groups of students, and particularly between those students from the most and least advantaged backgrounds. OFFA will continue to work with the sector to deliver improvements to the rates of progression into graduate-level employment and postgraduate study for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. We recognise that universities and colleges are only one of a number of key contributors to achieving this outcome and so are looking to support the sector to work in partnership with employers and third sector organisations to make sure that all students are supported to achieve their full potential.

**6.** As outlined above, Universities have a critical role, but they do not hold the panacea to inequality in progression. In fact, the boundaries of universities' roles in combatting social immobility are rarely voiced; entrenched inequalities in the school and college sector are inherited and, unless employers continue to make greater contributions, gains in higher education policy risk being annulled after graduation.

**7.** In the third sector, we have seen a significant increase in the number of social enterprises and charitable organisations aimed at promoting social mobility through, for example, brokering interactions between employers and universities. The coordinating role played by

these organisations is critical to sustaining, and scaling up, activity to promote social mobility, although the sector's current fragmentation and duplication risks rendering it unnavigable for most employers.

**8.** Amongst employers, an initial wave of proclamations was made around the publication of the Milburn report on 'Fair Access to the Professions'[8] in 2009, and we are now experiencing a second wave of interest that is, encouragingly, more concerned with evidence and action. Most large employers are now actively seeking greater socio-economic diversity in their workforce, partly stimulated by Government (in the form of the Social Mobility Business Compact[9], for example). An agenda that has historically been concerned with egalitarianism and corporate social responsibility is now maturing into commercially driven activity to discover hidden talent. As further scrutiny is applied to businesses to monitor and evaluate their practices, we are observing change: improved data (on the quantity and impact of engagement activities, and on recruitment procedures and outcomes) is helping call attention to good practice, highlighting areas for improvement, and enabling us to monitor progress more accurately. This is helping to inform the business case for work in this area, but there is still much to do to discriminate between fleeting, celebratory announcements, and robust evidence of impact. Stephen Isherwood and Jane Clark reflect on the potential, and crucial, role of employers.

[8] http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/http:/www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/227102/fair-access.pdf

## Employers Must Avoid Being Left Behind

### Stephen Isherwood
### Chief Executive, Association of Graduate Recruiters (AGR)

Two years ago only 15% of AGR members were measuring the social background of their graduate intakes. Now 25% are. And 35% now have measures in place to increase the proportion of people hired from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. Why are they doing this? Political pressure is no doubt a factor. The Social Mobility Commission has frequently highlighted how the political and professional classes do not reflect society as a whole. The judiciary, political establishment, media and business boardrooms are disproportionately staffed by those from certain schools and universities. Inequality of outcomes is not though a purely political issue. Employers from all sectors are coming to the realisation that business performance is at risk. Talent that could give a competitive advantage is being overlooked, and a workforce that does not relate to its clients and customers is going to struggle competitively. Social mobility is no longer only on the CSR team's agenda. Some sectors have embraced the challenge more than others. The legal sector in particular has taken significant steps to improve access to the profession. Initiatives such as PRIME, the use of blind assessment and contextual data are highly innovative. Over 70% of law firms have programmes in place to address social mobility. And other sectors are following their lead. The major accountancy firms are implementing many of the programmes pioneered in the legal sector. It is the engineering, construction and energy sectors that lag. Less than 15% of companies in these industries are engaged in the issue, despite having such significant skills shortages – the highest proportion of unfilled vacancies in the AGR Annual Survey.

A barrier to action for employers in the past has been how to conduct a balanced and fair selection process for diverse candidates, such as where to flex academic criteria, how to target students when the degree studied is not a criterion, and how to modify selection processes that have proved historically successful. Pioneered by a number of universities in their admission strategies, contextual data allows recruiters to assess individuals in relation to their school's performance and personal histories. Students who would previously have been overlooked have successfully entered elite universities and often gone on to outperform their academic peers. Contextual data is enabling employers to maintain objectivity in selection methodologies, whilst identifying and progressing individuals they would previously have rejected on application. By targeting a wider range of universities, investing in smarter assessment tools and by removing school and university details from the papers an interviewer sees, employers are hiring differently. But we must not become complacent. Three quarters of employers are not measuring the profile of their intake; without measurement, creating a case for action or assessing the impact of programmes is difficult. Over two thirds of employers are still doing nothing.

I am confident that as evidence accumulates that organisational performance is enhanced by a socially diverse intake, we will soon see the majority of employers actively engaged. Do not get left behind.

### Jane Clark
### Head of Graduate Resourcing, Barclays

The business case for achieving a diverse workforce is well rehearsed, and there are numerous reports and research articles to support this. For employers, this has created an opportunity to challenge recruitment practices and policies, to ensure that perceived 'barriers to entry' are recognised and addressed. We have seen much new practice in the past months, with a number of employers removing academic requirements, introducing name-blind recruitment and, similar to Barclays, introducing contextualised screening in the selection process. Contextualised screening is a tool that gives recruiters a range of standardised data on candidates' economic background and personal circumstances, which in turn aids levelling the playing field by considering the context in which the candidate's academic achievements have been gained. A number of employers have also scrutinised their assessment centre and selection processes, monitoring any adverse impact that could disadvantage groups of graduates unintentionally. At Barclays, we went a step further and provided unconscious bias training for all our assessors and line managers interviewing candidates. This helps raise awareness of our subconscious preconceptions about others. Employers have also increased partnerships with schools and universities by introducing mentoring and organising insight days. All these measures are working towards a more even playing field in terms of social mobility, but there still is a long way to go. Collecting data around social mobility measures is still challenging for employers due to the sensitive nature of questions; however, it is important for employers to keep up the momentum and to move beyond recruitment into considering organisational cultures

# Student Progression and the Role of Higher Education

## University Careers Services' Contribution to Student Outcomes

**9.** The link between employability and higher education has been encouraged in the UK to a greater extent than in many other countries,[10] and historically the Robbins Report and the Dearing Report[11] highlighted the importance of higher education in stimulating the acquisition of skills vital to the modern economy. Against this backdrop, there has been surprisingly little focus on the roles and responsibilities of university careers services in supporting successful outcomes amongst students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Traditionally, university careers services have mainly served the needs of individual students who presented themselves as requiring support, whereas today they typically exercise a universal responsibility for student employment outcomes.

**10.** Across much of the higher education sector, the resourcing of careers services significantly lags behind the increased importance of the profession – both to institutional success, and to the success of individual students. This can be exacerbated by employers' increased expectations about the capacity of careers services to broker links internally, to aid them in the competitive quest for talent, and to reach students who have traditionally been harder to engage. The evidence suggests that while some employers express satisfaction in their relationships with careers services, many choose to by-pass them and make direct approaches to faculty staff.[12]

**11.** As higher education policy focuses more sharply on the critical role that careers services play in promoting graduate outcomes amongst students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, there is some uncertainty in the literature about the impact of existing practices. The Futuretrack report[13] on transitions into employment, for example, found that the use of career services by students was modest (almost half of 130,000 participants in the research had never visited their careers service), and there was little evidence to suggest that participation impacted on career outcomes.[14] Research from the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) also recently found that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds were more likely to draw on informal sources for advice, such as websites, and were less likely to access more formal careers provision.[15] Detailing these headline findings risks overlooking many examples of good institutional practice, but they also indicate that the challenge may be double-edged: students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are harder to engage, and the development of provision that will have a positive impact on their outcomes requires approaches that are not yet commonplace. David Johnston reflects on this, and some wider thinking, below.

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[10] Bowers-Brown, T. and Harvey, L. (2004) *Are There Too Many Graduates in the UK? A Literature Review and Analysis of Graduate employability*, Centre for Research and Evaluation, Sheffield Hallam University http://mt.educarchile.cl/MT/jjbrunner/archives/libros/Tendencias/pdf/Too%20manygraduates.pdf

[11] www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/robbins/ and http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/ncihe

[12] www.gov.uk/government/publications/employers-graduate-recruitment-and-selection-practices

[13] www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/futuretrack/news1/stage_4_report_final_06_03_2013.pdf

[14] www.hecsu.ac.uk/assets/assets/documents/Futuretrack_Stage_4_Final_report_6th_Nov_2012.pdf

[15] www.agcas.org.uk/agcas_resources/575-Graduate-Success-Project-Report-An-investigation-of-graduate-transitions-social-mobility-and-the-HEAR

**Careers Complacency: Even Elite Universities Should Work Harder for Social Mobility**

**David Johnston**
**Chief Executive, Social Mobility Foundation**

If you were going to work for a university careers service and wanted the easiest life, you'd probably opt for one of the country's elite universities: no shortage of prestigious firms knocking at the door and, as the access figures confirm, plenty of undergraduates from professional families who arrive with a certain level of knowledge about their career options already. You're not likely to struggle to fill seats at the company presentation or dinner, but whether those who could most benefit from such events are in attendance is quite another matter.

Whilst all of our universities have a certain proportion of students from low-income backgrounds rarely are these students well-targeted by the universities themselves for career opportunities. Yet going to a particular university does not by itself take care of your future. Too often the plethora of insight days, presentations and dinners firms offer pass the sort of young people the Social Mobility Foundation targets by as they don't know to look for them. They can't afford to undertake advertised unpaid placements to build up their CV nor do they have the family connections to get opportunities that are not advertised – yet data indicate up to 50% of people hired in certain sectors by firms undertook a placement there beforehand. Without our guidance, they often think their final year is the time to start looking for a job, where their more privileged peers already have one lined up. There is too often a deficit in confidence, knowledge and familiarity between less privileged students and their peers.

Whilst these problems do not begin at university, university career services should be playing a much more central role in the lives of students to ensure that being an undergraduate at their institution truly improves social mobility. Universities should target less privileged undergraduates from the first term of first year with a programme that actively builds their understanding, knowledge and confidence to approach employer recruitment processes rather than creating more booklets and website pages that rarely provide true insight. Their undergraduates need to regularly undertake the type of assessment tasks they'll need to undertake at firms before the firms meet them, and learn how they can compete against those who may have more connections but do not have more ability than them. Such support should extend to practising the social occasions where people 'network to get work'. Some universities refuse to advertise unpaid internships; they should go further and as a matter of course create partnerships with firms that ensure their undergraduates don't need to have an uncle at an investment bank to get a placement at one.

Employers have significant purchasing power and should push universities to up their game: if they can't get the applicants they need to diversify their firms at the traditional targets, they should start working with universities that can provide them in much greater numbers yet too often fail to attract their interest.

**12.** In recognising students from lower socio-economic backgrounds have particular needs in relation to careers services, an operational challenge arises in targeting interventions to address this need – both from the perspective of employing effective data, and the potential objections from those students not included. There is institutional data to mine in this respect, in order to help define the characteristics of those students who typically underachieve in relation to employment outcomes, and to identify those interventions that have greatest impact on student outcomes when accounting for other factors. This mode of analytics and exploration of "learning gain" is already at the heart of some institutions' approaches and part of a wider programme of work funded by the Higher Education Funding Council.[16] Paul Blackmore explores this in more detail.

[16] www.hefce.ac.uk/lt/lg/

**Data Matters**

**Paul Blackmore**
**Head of Student Employability, University of Exeter**

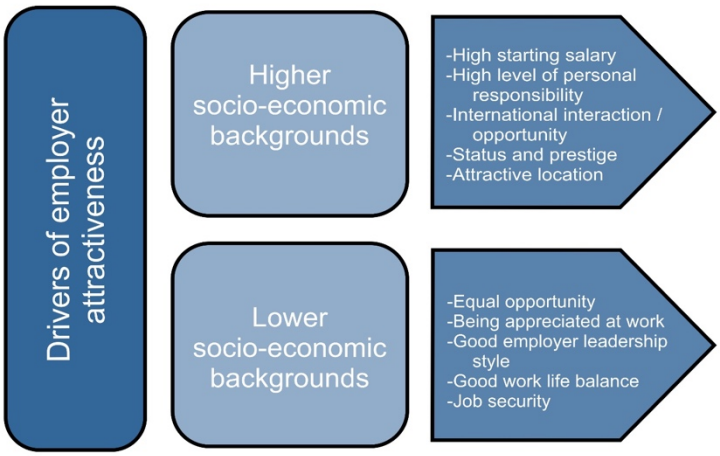
Whilst graduate destination data can provide useful information regarding the overall success of universities supplying the labour market, many commentators regard the reporting of employment status and salary only six months after graduation as a crude measure for the effectiveness of employability interventions received by students whilst attending University. This is due to the complex factors that typically make up an individual's propensity for securing a graduate-level job. These may include some or all of the following: mode of study (full-time, part-time, with or without Study Abroad experience), academic achievement, student home location, personal mobility, degree subject choice, prior work experience, age, ethnicity, gender, career sector aspiration and other economic and personal lifestyle influencers. These factors apply to all students before the added complexity of social mobility factors might be considered.

To help our students, and in particular those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, Exeter is developing a range of tools and early warning mechanisms using student predictive analytics and measures of 'learning gain'. This will aid a better understanding by both the students and University support providers in determining how best to develop effective learning techniques and create career development plans relevant to an individual's particular circumstance so that they are able to successfully pursue their ambitions upon leaving University. Whilst this will assist all students in all aspects of planning for life after university, it will be of considerable help to those students who come from non-traditional HE backgrounds and more readily provide them with the insight to identify such issues and navigate them successfully. For the University this provides an opportunity to implement, evaluate and fine tune provision designed specifically for disadvantaged groups of students.

**13.** The sector also needs to develop a more sophisticated understanding of students' views in relation to employment priorities, and how these might vary between socio-economic groups. The most recent findings from Trendence give an insight into the aggregated views of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds in relation to employment motivations, and point towards the need for greater differentiation of careers service provision and approaches from employers. The figure below illustrates the main differences in the drivers of employer attractiveness between two groups; these findings are supported by other research on this topic.[17] Students from higher socio-economic groups appear to prioritise drivers such as salary, personal responsibility, status and prestige, whereas the lower SEB groups prioritise work-life balance, leadership style, and job security.

[17] www.hecsu.ac.uk/assets/assets/documents/Working_class.pdf

***Figure 3:*** ***Differences in drivers of employer attractiveness amongst different SEB groups (Trendence: 2015, n>40,000)***




**14.** These data are useful, but caution should be exercised when considering aggregated views of diverse cohorts of students. Another assumption that is implicit in much of the discourse, and prevalent in the recent BIS Green Paper, is the conflation of under-represented groups. The potential consequence of homogenising students from lower socio-economic backgrounds is a limited understanding of the needs of distinct populations within this group, and a correspondingly standardised approach that supports everyone minimally, but nobody optimally. The Unite Foundation report on the needs of care leavers and students estranged from their family highlights this point.[18] Additionally, far too little consideration has been given to the employability needs of part-time and mature students for whom experiences prior to, and during, higher education are typically different from traditional undergraduates. More fundamentally, a crude measure of success attached to graduate earnings cannot account for the varied ambitions and personal choices of students from all socio-economic backgrounds.

**15.** Diversity amongst employers also needs to be considered more carefully in any recommendations that are made to careers services (and students). The small and medium enterprise (SME) sector has expressed a sense of being overlooked by careers services, which tend to work more closely with large graduate employers who are better resourced and able to offer outreach events, work experience programmes, and provide mentors.[19] This is a particular issue for SMEs located at a distance from universities. Graduates working for SMEs were found to be more likely to have secured their job through personal contacts. As the SME sector grows, and likely plays an increasing role in the graduate market, this is likely to have significant implications for social mobility.

**16.** This requirement for personalised careers services will be familiar to colleagues working in this area. However, it is only likely to be achieved where institutions have successfully placed career planning and guidance alongside the curriculum, challenging the boundaries between academic work and employability. Many institutions have been engaging with strategies to achieve this approach for years, although it can be challenging when academic colleagues have ultimate ownership over curriculum decisions; below Catherine Richardson offers her own thoughts on this challenge.

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[18] www.unite-group.co.uk/binaries/375/674/unite-foundation-new-start-report.pdf
[19] www.gov.uk/government/publications/employers-graduate-recruitment-and-selection-practices

## Engaging the Academic Community

**Catherine Richardson**
**Head of Centre, Careers, Employability and Enterprise Centre (CEEC), Durham University**

Over the last few years, the CEEC has made significant progress in developing partnership working between academic departments, colleges and the central student support services. These relationships are aimed at supporting the Employability and Enterprise Skills Strategy, and the key performance indicators set by University Council. There is an institution-wide commitment to employability through this comprehensive Strategy. The Careers Centre plays a coordinating role at institutional level and works directly with departments, colleges and students. Each Careers Adviser has responsibility for a caseload of departments. Correspondingly, each department has a named Academic Employability Champion among its staff with whom CEEC works very closely. Undergraduate departments and postgraduate faculties work with the Careers staff to develop the employability aspect of their action plan developed as a result of their annual review. Some examples of best practice arising from these actions plans are given below.

**Engineering and Computer Science** – The Careers Centre is involved with the Industrial Partnership Committee and associated activities including employer visits and liaison and is also supporting a new departmental career event for final year BEng students by delivering guidance on effective CVs and Covering Letters.

**Music -** alumni careers afternoons were held within the department where alumni from a range of sectors shared their career and progression experiences directly with students through presentations and open discussions, followed by informal networking.

**Psychology –** a programme of speakers is delivered, which is tailored to the department and student interests, from psychology professionals and relevant organisations. CEEC also delivered an academic staff briefing to provide an update on careers support available for Psychology staff and students and also supported the department to develop its 'Psychology in the Workplace' module.

**Modern Languages** - Skills development sessions are provided to PGT students in collaboration with the department and are integrated into their placement preparation and selection activity. The sessions develop students' ability to reflect on and articulate their employability skills effectively. The workshops include application and CV development, orientated specifically to language focused employment options, drawing from feedback from language employers. They include practice assessment centre activity which is also used to help in matching students to placements.

**English Language Centre** - DISEP (Durham International Student Employability Programme) is a collaborative project and partnership between the Careers, Employability and Enterprise Centre and the English Language Centre at Durham University. This innovative collaboration combines specialist knowledge of professionally qualified and experienced Careers Advisers with the expertise of Teachers of English for Specific Academic Purposes relating to international student language and cultural issues as well as capitalising upon their ready access to Durham's international student body.

DISEP's input and practice-based workshops depart markedly from the traditional content and delivery style of university careers services by drawing on the pedagogical approaches commonly used by the ELC to engage and reach international students. For example, careers' input on the STAR approach has been discourse analysed by ELC tutors to design a series of activities which empower students to understand and apply this strategically. Similarly, culturally expected behaviour in creating first impressions through using small-talk is explored through videos, discussion and feedback. The programme is designed to encourage effective career planning and build international students' confidence and abilities in preparing for the selection process and demonstrating their employability skills to national and international graduate recruiters.

# Drivers of Student Outcomes

## Extra-curricular Participation

**17.** The current discourse about graduate outcomes is built on a number of assumptions; the recent Green Paper, for example, frames student success in terms of graduate earnings. Many colleagues will find it problematic to define the purpose of teaching and learning in higher education as a vehicle for securing high graduate salaries, yet many students legitimately share a concern for a just return on investment, especially in the context of higher fees and the removal of the maintenance grant.[20] This may be especially acute amongst students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. One voice largely absent from this discussion is that of students, or at least, some parts of the student body. The Bridge Group has plans to work more closely with the National Union of Students and to provide a vehicle through which their views might be more actively included in the social mobility debate.

**18.** An area worthy of more robust debate is the extent to which students boost their employability through participation in extra-curricular activities. The skills learned during study, but not necessarily through it, have been shown to affect graduate outcomes considerably. Choice of degree course (and institution) play a role in this, but the lower levels of participation in extra-curricular activities amongst students from lower SEBs is also beginning to emerge as a key differentiator of successful outcomes.[21] Stuart (2011) has led research on the effects of extra-curricular activities, and her work provides an insight into experiences of students from varied backgrounds. The studies indicate that lower levels of participation are due to a combination of individual student characteristics and preferences, the opportunities available at the institution attended, and the role of networks and work experience[22]. These findings were also explored further by Futuretrack:

> *"The lower proportions of graduates from [lower SEBs] who have engaged in these activities, and the possibility that this is a result of exclusion based on personal characteristics, demonstrates the extent to which ability to make full use of higher education experiences can further reinforce disadvantage, despite having the potential to enable graduates to overcome it."* [23]

**19.** Research from Trendence[24] is providing some new insight into the differential rates in participation with extra-curricular and work-related activities amongst students from different SEBs, and the impact of this on graduate outcomes.

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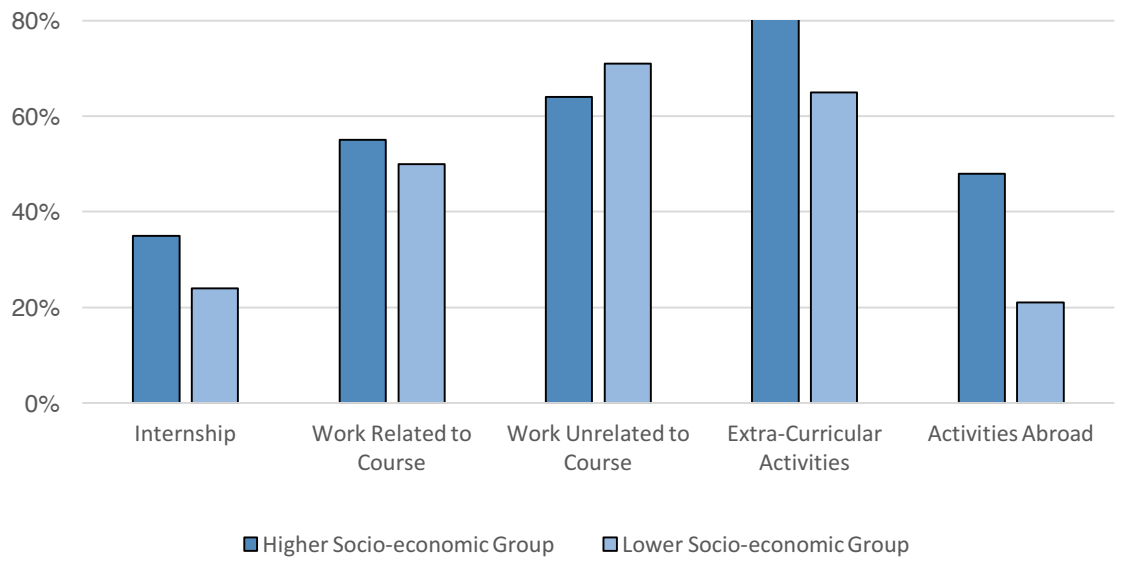
[20] www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-33444557
[21] www.bristol.ac.uk/spais/research/paired-peers/
[22] http://staff.lincoln.ac.uk/mstuart
[23] www.hecsu.ac.uk/assets/assets/documents/Futuretrack_Stage_4_Final_report_6th_Nov_2012.pdf
[24] http://gtimedia.co.uk/work/products/trendence

*Fig. 4: Experiences of students by socio-economic background, n>40,000 (Trendence: 2015)*

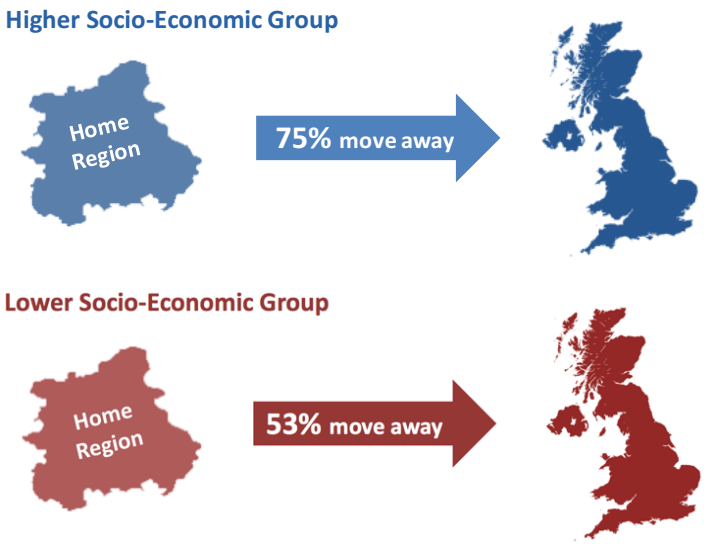



**20.** This evidence of differential participation in opportunities might partially explain discrepancies in graduate outcomes, once attainment, subject and institution are controlled for, though more research needs to be undertaken. This raises an important question about whose responsibility it is to address this 'deficit', and from what angle. Should the aim be to enable all students to experience a wide-range of opportunities, or does the assumption that participation in these activities creates 'better' employees require closer scrutiny? Our response, evidenced by the contributions herein, is that universities, employers, and students have a collective responsibility; each stakeholder must be committed to addressing this challenge of differential access to opportunities if sustainable solutions are to be achieved.

## Geography

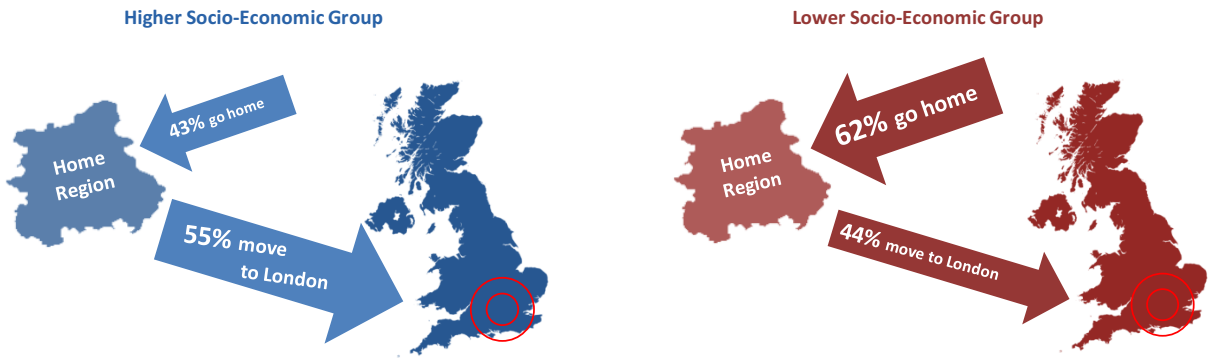
**21.** An underexplored factor affecting differential access to opportunity, and student progression, is geography. There is an established evidence base demonstrating that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are less likely to move away from home to study and, if they do, they are more likely to return to their home region on graduation (and much less likely to move to London where the majority of the most competitive graduate

*Fig. 5: Student mobility on entering university (Trendence: 2015)*



jobs are to found).[25] Employers may assume that graduates are geographically mobile; greater consideration needs to be given to the potential limitations in this regard for those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Furthermore, there is also an uneven distribution of work experience opportunities, with the majority being based in London and the South East: given the value attached to work experience by employers, we should be more concerned about the accessibility of such experiences to all students.

***Fig. 6: Student mobility on graduation (Trendence: 2015)***




**22.** Part-time and mature students are also more likely to find local employment and, while it is too early to comment on the effectiveness of the National Networks for Collaborative Outreach[26], we are interested to evidence successful models of regional collaboration to ensure the greater accessibility, and more even distribution, of graduate opportunities.

## Social Capital

**23.** The debate on employability skills is often connected to notions of social capital: in order for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds to succeed, they must be equipped with the attributes, values, and characteristics that are valued by employers. Many of our contributors reference this (some indirectly), and research findings from the University Alliance suggest that the development of social capital at university is vital to enable equality of opportunity[27].

**24.** This deficit model is uncomfortable for some, for it is built on the idea that many students from lower socio-economic backgrounds lack the attributes valued by employers, and remedial work is therefore required for them to acquire characteristics typically associated with students from higher socio-economic backgrounds. A more informed and candid debate needs to explore and resolve this fundamental assumption. It is noteworthy that employers contributing to this piece, including some of the most competitive, attest to the commercial advantages of recruiting students with “non-traditional” experiences and skills, and therefore might be seen to challenge this deficit model. This debate might helpfully precede any grand gestures that place demands on careers services to mould students’ character attributes in ways that could ultimately be counterproductive. Bob Athwal and Johnny Rich offer their own contribution to this debate.

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[25] www.agcas.org.uk/articles/694-Graduate-Success-Project-AGCAS-findings-launched
[26] www.hefce.ac.uk/sas/nnco/
[27] www.unialliance.ac.uk/blog/2014/05/14/closing-the-gap-unlocking-opportunity-through-higher-education/

## Creating Opportunities and Opening Doors

**Bob Athwal,**
**Director of Student Experience, University of Leicester**

Promoting fair access to university is an essential, but insufficient, objective in realising social mobility. Many students from lower socio-economic backgrounds have the intellectual capability, but lack the social skills of their peers. It is easy in this situation to regard oneself as inadequate, because it is hard to associate with the backgrounds of university peer groups. Many students from these backgrounds actively deselect themselves from applying to the most competitive graduate employers, simply because they know less about them. Many students I engage with do have high aspirations, and have arrived at university ready to walk through the doors it opens, but it can be hard for them to navigate the array of opportunities.

Many graduate employers have traditionally targeted a handful of universities, but they are starting to cast their nets wider. This is just the start. The business case for greater diversity now has good traction in most quarters, since a diverse talent base supports companies to access emerging business sectors. However, my plea to universities is this: open those doors, but once students are in, sustain your commitment and support them in preparing for recruitment. The main reason students fail selection processes, in my experience, is that they enter the competition before they have properly reflected on their skills, strengths and interests, and planned how they can articulate this to an employer. Many students from lower socio-economic groups have had a powerful experience in getting to university, but they sometimes do not fully comprehend how this achievement can be compellingly articulated to employers. At the University of Leicester, we have carefully designed interventions to support each student in reflecting and preparing, and we adopt a 'no prep, no entry' approach to all of our employer events and extra / co-curricula interventions.

You don't ace a degree unless you do the work; the same goes for your career. That is the reason why employers complain about the lack of students that are work ready, or that they fail to fill their employer vacancies - even in a recession. Universities rely on the majority of students with social capital to lead the way with the most competitive employers (hence why they are continually targeted), and can implicitly neglect their less advantaged students – the social mobility agenda was primarily to get them in the door, partly a response to Government incentives. Universities have to change. They still exist to benefit society and humankind, but they are also preparing the majority for a career. It is imperative that we help students through institutions like my own - to help them learn how to apply the intellectual curiosity that academic colleagues have taught them, and to translate this into the context of employment.

## Employability and Social Capital

**Johnny Rich,**
**Founder, PUSH**

Employers, students and universities all have a rough idea of what employability is when they consider it. Unfortunately, they don't consider it much. This is a shame, not least because research strongly suggests that the very action of a student considering their employability improves it and makes them more open to enhancing it further. The same applies to those who are trying to create it or looking for it. Basically, if you understand what you are trying to develop, it's easier to develop.

However, there is one aspect of employability that even fewer people like to discuss because it is a tightrope of political correctness and raises particularly stubborn problems. That aspect is social capital and we need to face up to the uneasy truth that it has both desirable and undesirable elements in the context of careers. In a recent paper for the Higher Education Policy Institute, I outlined how public policy and practice in higher education could be improved to encourage students' self-reflection on their employability, to measure learning gain in this area and to create a plain and common language.

This last point is important because without a common, easily understood way of talking about employability, it is hard for students – especially those most disenfranchised by their backgrounds in terms of career support – to recognise what they stand to gain from higher education, to ensure they get it and to articulate it in a way that prospective employers can recognise. Employability is very different from employment and to improve either we need to understand better how people get jobs. In my paper I suggested that employability is a mix of three key elements: knowledge (which higher education is relatively good at transmitting and measuring); skills (which it is good at, but could be better); and social capital.

Within 'social capital', I bundled many things that some would argue don't belong in the same box. They talk about 'human capital', 'emergent capital'. Whatever we call it, these distinctions that employers exercise include social factors like class, accent and the ability to use the right fork. There's also height, weight, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, physical ability, attractiveness and age – attributes that most of us would agree should almost never play a part in whether someone gets a job, but which often do, consciously or subconsciously. From a recruiter's perspective, these are awkward. Even the most enlightened employer knows they have to chase the pennies of customers who may not be as enlightened themselves. They may feel fairness has a cost.

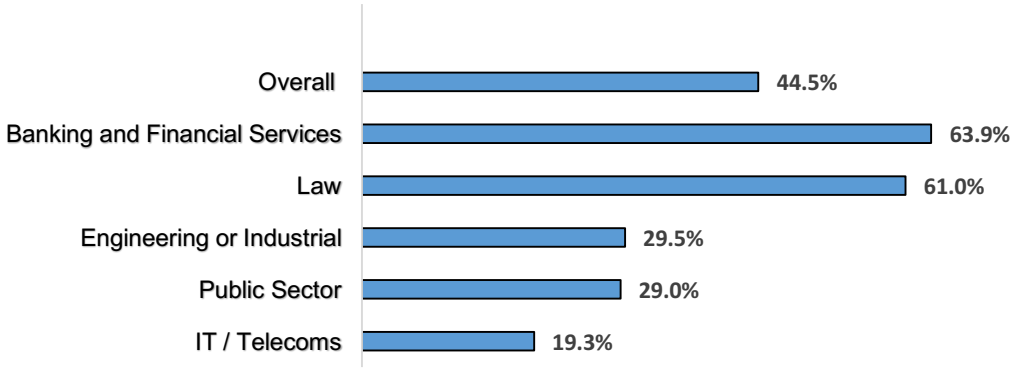
However, social capital is far from all bad. It also includes attitudes and behaviours that we might well want to do more to encourage, such as resilience, politeness, networking, an ethos of customer service, humour, even a (well proportioned) sense of entitlement. These are all highly employable attributes and if students from disadvantaged backgrounds can exhibit them to the same degree as the more privileged, it might go a long way to levelling their opportunities. Sadly, these are precisely the qualities that independent schools have a good reputation of developing and that follows the students into selective universities too. It is hard to unpick whether this is because selective schools and universities prefer students who have or are likely to develop those qualities, or because the schools and universities instil them. It's probably a bit of both.

Doing more to develop these attitudes and behaviours has been a growing theme in recent years in school policy. Education Secretary Nicky Morgan has, for example, provided significant funding for initiatives supporting 'character education'. What might universities and BIS learn from this? Traditionally, universities were great places to develop 'character', particularly through extra-curricular activities. However, ironically, the focus on a degree as a career qualification that has accompanied the expansion of higher education (rather than – at least in part – a broader life experience) may have diminished the very employability that students hope and expect to acquire. This is partly due to funding pressures meaning that fewer students have time to explore interests outside their studies and their shelf-stacking jobs that offer limited employability development value. Of course, the most disadvantaged students are – as ever – hardest hit by these tendencies. To harness higher education to the improvement of social mobility, we need to support students in developing their employability, helping them to understand the importance of it for their future careers and also offering practical advice. It is not simply about helping them to become better educated and skilled, but it is about creating opportunities for them to develop attitudes and characteristics that employers might find attractive.

## Internships, Placements and Networks

**25.** High Fliers research[28] identifies that large recruiters expect that a third of this year's full-time graduate positions will be filled by graduates who have already worked within their organisations, through internships, placements or vacation work. More than 90% of the UK's leading graduate employers are offering paid work experience programmes during the 2015-2016 academic year, but the extent to which these experiences are accessible to all students, regardless of background, is an issue that remains to be explored in sufficient detail.

***Fig. 7: Percentage of interns converted into graduate hires by sector (AGR: 2015)***




**26.** Given the extent to which work experience, and in particular formal internships, are a passport to many competitive professions, this is an area that requires greater attention. In 2014, the Bridge Group hosted a series of policy seminars on access to the creative industries. Amongst other findings[29], we found this to be the sector most commonly accused of requiring students to undertake unpaid work to gain access. Research from the Social Market Foundation[30] has explored three possible reasons to explain why young people from low-income groups might be under-represented among unpaid internships in the creative industries:

- Credit constraints – not being able to afford to work for free.
- Network constraints – not having the right personal contacts to raise aspirations and access unpaid internships in the creative industries.
- Information constraints – not having sufficient knowledge about whether an unpaid internship is a worthwhile investment for one's future career.

**27.** Alongside concerns that unpaid internships are an important factor in restricting fair access (which is more pronounced in some sectors), we have also spoken publicly about the even more worrying practice of unadvertised internships, and the lack of internship programmes that are designed to engage under-represented groups[31]. Universities need to work in partnership with employers to address these challenges; Liz Wilkinson shares her approach, below.

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[28] www.highfliers.co.uk/download/2016/graduate_market/GMRelease16.pdf
[29] Detailed on the website: www.thebridgegroup.org.uk
[30] www.smf.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/Publication-Disconnected-Social-mobility-and-the-creative-industries.pdf
[31] A notable exception in this regard: www.gov.uk/guidance/civil-service-fast-stream-summer-diversity-internship-programme

## Place the Gold and Polish the Silver

**Liz Wilkinson**
**Director of Careers and Employability, Royal Holloway University of London**

Many students and employers consider long placements too complex and time-consuming, but research shows that the best preparation for graduate work success is relevant student work experience. We have created a well timed, mass game changer that prepares our students to understand employers' requirements and to achieve graduate level work quickly.

Our methodology is an educational competition for a tailored two week micro-placement that takes second year undergraduate students through a four month coaching and selection process. In 2014/15 we delivered this initiative to 8 academic departments, which impacted 37% of the eligible students (291 out of 866 competing for 74 placements). On the current model of operation, we have the scope to impact 2465 students in the course of their degree. We seek to deliver a cost-effective placement methodology that benefits many students, not just a few. This intervention is timed to ensure that students get the benefit of work-based learning in their second year when they are best placed to learn the lessons and modify their life tactics. Moreover, the personalised approach to feedback and placement matching offers the best learning gain for students, especially those whose employability chances are not already uplifted by family social capital.

Many students find traditional placement and internship options off-putting and over-competitive. Many able students retreat away from the graduate labour market when they should be leaning in. We engage them by offering 2-4 week placements that are time-efficient, transparent and targeted. The first key to career success is to stimulate motivation, so that's what we do. We offer the prize of personal advocacy and endorsement for the first step into their chosen field, an opportunity for which it is really worth breaking a sweat. Students undertake a real recruitment process as they compete. They are coached to excel with formative written feedback on their CVs before the assessment starts in earnest. Then they play it for real with CV short listing and interviews by panels including employers and academic staff. At each stage of the cut they get feedback with the aim of improving the job hunting game of every player.

We brief the successful students on how to make the most of that placement and require them to complete a structured reflective log so that they extract the most learning from the experience. We emphasise the value of the placement by including it in their degree transcript. Annual review of the feedback from students and employers ensures that the employability messages and the placements stay as fresh and relevant as possible.

UNITE Student Insight Report 2015 published research which shows a national picture of 50% of eligible students turning down placement opportunities for these three main reasons: concern about graduation delay, concern about costs and lack of confidence. This correlates with our direct experience at Royal Holloway of the nature of student reluctance to take up some work experience opportunities. We also observe some additional deterrents for less advantaged students. For example, they may not be able to afford the risk of giving up a reliable but not career enhancing part-time job. Or they may have less informal knowledge of the graduate labour market and how to leverage entry level jobs. They may also feel they need to know what they want to do before they seek work experience. It is clear that provision of work experience opportunities is not enough unless those opportunities are clearly seen to be attractive, approachable and financially viable.

Our methodology offers career exploratory micro-placements so that students who are still window-shopping for their next step are encouraged to take part as well as those who are already committed to a particular career track. We enable unfocused students to clarify their careers motivations through the whole coaching and placement process and thus bring a better personal narrative to the graduate labour market. This scheme does not just polish the "gold", it also improves the odds of the "silver". The innovative penetration of this scheme to previously unreached students and employers is supported by the technology approach we developed to deliver written CV & interview feedback at high volume quickly through Moodle, our Virtual Learning Environment. As our student administration is streamlined, our employer service can be tailored to take time to understand their needs as we match the right students. This makes it low risk for small organisations which do not have an established placement infrastructure. It also offers employers deeper institutional engagement with the option of interviewing alongside academics and careers staff. We have framed it so that academic departments see it as aligned rather than in conflict with the academic curriculum. Many departments are now keen to participate in a scheme that showcases the career potential of bright students studying traditional academic subjects.

## Alumni Support

**28.** Alumni are a significantly under-used resource in promoting student progression amongst students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Graduates can be mobilised to contribute to the professional success of students through: mentoring; structured, paid placements; support during application and interview processes; and by facilitating access to the professional networks that more affluent students might have established through family links.

**29.** Policy initiatives to mobilise alumni could have a significant impact on progression outcomes, and also promise to deliver this in a cost-effective way. While formal careers talks or workshops from alumni can support students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, a number of universities have demonstrated that promoting informal online and phone contact is often preferred by these students, is more flexible in its delivery, is scalable, and has the potential to develop into something more significant – including placements, consulting on job applications, and introductions to other professional contacts. Universities should be tasked with managing the supply (encouraging alumni to become 'professional contacts') and the demand (encouraging students from disadvantaged backgrounds to take advantage of this resource) for the scheme. A nationally coordinated online facility for connecting alumni and students and standardised marketing and guidance materials would help to stimulate activity in this area. There are risks associated with an initiative of this nature and the Bridge Group will explore with institutions the development of employability programmes targeted at more disadvantaged students, driven by the mobilisation of alumni.

**30.** University graduates are also becoming increasingly important sources of fundraising, to boost bursary or scholarship funds, for example. Donors to schools and universities are increasingly interested in issues of social mobility and access to higher education. This is typically motivated by a desire to enable others to benefit from the advantages they experienced, provoked by the attention that social mobility is receiving in the press and in policy debates. In the last financial year, institutions in the UK raised a total of £643m of philanthropic funding from alumni and other sources. This total figure eclipses the amount allocated in 2014/15 to the student opportunity fund[32] (though of course it is not entirely dedicated to supporting social mobility), and has become a critical funding stream to support access. We are keen to gain greater insights into the extent to which this funding stream is supporting student progression, in order to understand where it is being directed and to uncover the practices of successful institutions. To achieve this, the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) should disaggregate the analysis in its annual report to include a section on philanthropy to support student access and progression. This would provide a clearer understanding of the landscape, and enable us to evidence the impact of this funding stream and make recommendations about how it might achieve greater impact.

## Global Mobility

**31.** Employers value graduates who can demonstrate competencies associated with global experiences, and there is much evidence to indicate that work and study opportunities overseas offer a significant boost to students' employability. Research conducted by AGR and the National Centre for Universities and Business concluded that:

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[32] www.hefce.ac.uk/sas/funding/

*"UK graduates must raise their aspirations for the global competencies that employers will increasingly demand. If UK graduates cannot fulfil these expectations, employers can and will recruit from outside the UK. Experience of working overseas and immersion in a different culture can catapult a graduate into being considered for rewarding and challenging roles."* [33]

**32.** A large-scale 2014 study[34] on the impact of the Erasmus student exchange programme found that graduates with international experience were significantly more successful in the job market. These students were half as likely to experience unemployment and, five years after graduation, their unemployment rate is 23% lower than their peers. The study also found that graduates with international experience were more likely to be in more senior roles five years after graduation, compared with graduates who had not spent time overseas during studies.

**33.** Access to these opportunities is too often the preserve of the privileged. Research from the Higher Education International Unit (HEIU) reveals that participation rates in international mobility opportunities were heavily skewed towards the more affluent, and that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to need additional institutional support. [35] There is a risk that this trend will serve to exacerbate differential access to opportunities: the social patterning of the students undertaking overseas study and work experience risks predominantly advantaging those already advantaged by background. In line with recommendations from HEIU, students' international mobility should be explicit in institutions' access agreements, and socio-economic data on international mobility should be included in the annual data returns to Higher Education Statistics Agency. Laura Mackenzie reflects on the approach at King's College London, below.

[33] www.agcas.org.uk/assets/download?file=4460&parent=1710
[34] http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-14-1025_en.htm
[35] http://go.international.ac.uk/content/research-and-evidence/go-international-research/gone-international-mobile-students-and-the-0

**Passports to Success**

**Laura Mackenzie**
**Head of Careers & Employability, King's College London**

King's is an institution that operates globally in terms of its student and staff demographic, its research collaborations and impact, and its partnerships with organisations across the world. Harnessing this outlook to enhance the employability of all our students is something we have been thinking about a lot recently. We believe strongly in the transformative power of different cultural experiences, and the potential employability benefits for students in adopting a broader world view and developing their strengths in new environments.

Research from various sources indicates that international mobility contributes to improved academic, employment and salary outcomes for graduates and so our International Strategy includes some ambitious targets for student global mobility, to increase the numbers of our students who are involved in some kind of international experience as part of their wider King's experience, from a period of Study Aboard, to undertaking research placement outside the UK, volunteering overseas or working in collaboration with students from institutions outside the UK. However, we also recognise the challenges that some students face in accessing these opportunities and have been doing research into barriers our students face and how we might overcome these.

- A more extensive range of activities, durations and destinations for Study Abroad – to include shorter periods of time and 'virtual' mobility experiences
- Creation of a new Global Internships Programme to source work-based opportunities for students across the world
- Establishment of a student mobility fund to support students from low participation backgrounds to access Study Abroad and international internship opportunities
- Ongoing research into students' perceptions around, and experiences of, international study/work experiences to create an ongoing evidence base to our strategic planning.
- Work to create and support larger internal networks of students who can support one another to take on the challenge of an international experience and 'normalise' this for some students.
- Work with specific faculties to look at the academic programme needs and patterns for different disciplines and how international experiences can be incorporated most effectively in each area

We haven't cracked it yet, and there is much work still to do to ensure that all our students feel ready and able to undertake an international experience, but we are laying the groundwork and continuing to ask our students what makes the difference so we can support them to access these opportunities and then make the most of them for future career development.

## Access to Postgraduate Education

**34.** Postgraduate study is associated with enhanced employability, higher earnings and entry to particular professions. As a result, access to postgraduate study is increasingly framed as a social justice issue; recent research notes worrying inequalities in terms of progression to postgraduate education, and the Government has warned that if barriers to postgraduate education persist, there will be a significant detrimental effect upon social mobility. Paul Wakeling comments below on his research in relation to this topic. This work calls for greater information, advice and guidance for undergraduates, aimed at supporting progression routes into further study for those who would benefit from it. This is particularly important in navigating the labyrinth of fragmented funding opportunities associated with postgraduate study, with many awards attached to specific courses at individual institutions.

## The Social Mobility Timebomb

**Dr Paul Wakeling**
**Researcher, the University of York**

Postgraduate qualifications are gaining increasing prominence in debates about university access and social mobility. Alan Milburn, the outgoing Social Mobility and Child Poverty commissioner, has suggested that postgraduate study is a 'social mobility timebomb'. The Sutton Trust, Higher Education Commission and others have also identified postgraduate education as a 'new frontier' for widening participation. While postgraduate study has not (yet) reached the mass participation levels of undergraduate education, it has grown rapidly in recent years. Fifty years ago, postgraduates comprised about one in every twenty higher education students in the UK; today it is more like one in five. A major spike in postgraduate numbers occurred around the same time as the early 1990s take off in student numbers more generally.

While postgraduate qualifications have perhaps suffered from an image problem – they were seen as 'too academic' and narrowly-focussed – the data on postgraduates' employment and salary outcomes give a different impression. Many employers do not formally distinguish between first-degree and higher-degree graduates in their recruitment processes. Some will even suggest that certain postgraduates are overqualified or that years of additional study do not necessarily add to employability. What (some) employers say and what they do can be quite different however, as on average those with postgraduate qualifications are more likely to be employed, more likely to be in a job which fits their skills, and over time will accrue a salary premium in comparison to those with a first degree only.

Research by LSE's Centre for Economic Performance suggests that the postgraduate premium has grown even while postgraduate numbers have increased, bucking the usual expectations regarding supply, demand and price. Social science provides two potential (and competing) explanations for the growth of postgraduate qualifications. On the one hand, a complex, knowledge-based economy increases demand for very highly-skilled labour. On the other hand, qualifications are a signal to employers of the general aptitude of potential employees. This increases the demand for ever higher qualifications as individuals look to secure an advantage in the queue for the most rewarding positions. If access to postgraduate study is unequal, then there is every reason to be concerned, since efforts to widen participation to first degrees could easily be annulled by those inequalities simply 'passing up' to the next, postgraduate, level.

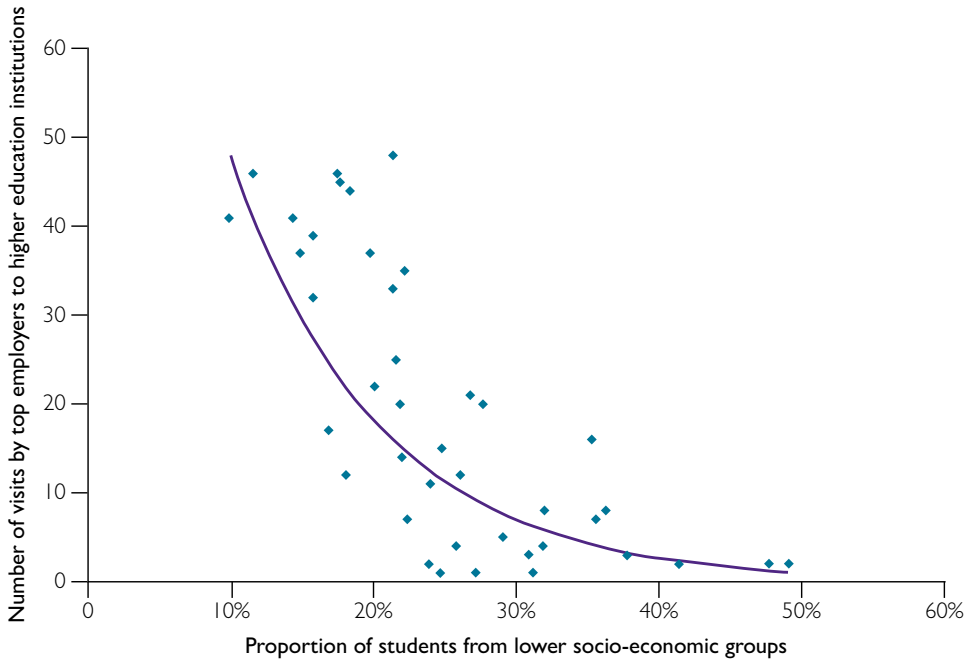
There are known inequalities in entry to postgraduate qualifications such as masters degrees and doctorates by socio-economic background, ethnicity and gender. Students from less well-off backgrounds face a substantial financial barrier in continuing to postgraduate level since the comprehensive UK student loan system stops after the first degree. Nearly three quarters of British masters students studying in England have no financial backing and fees can be higher than those at undergraduate level. Clearly, those without access to independent financial support, such as through their family, will not be able to continue, no matter how well qualified. In England, the introduction of £10,000 loans for masters study from 2016/17 will partially bridge the funding gap. However, we should not lose sight of other barriers to postgraduate access. Just as at undergraduate level, questions of information, advice and guidance, participation cold spots, and social and cultural capital will feature in patterns of progression into postgraduate study for graduates of different backgrounds. We are only just beginning to understand how postgraduate participation access unfolds. Continuing to shine a light on this area of growing importance for higher education and employment is crucial in maintaining the vitality and diversity of our professions and society.

# Student Progression and the Role of Employers

**35.** Socio-economic background continues to be a major factor shaping students' access to the professions, and there is great variation in the scale and quality of employers' activity to promote wider access. There is also stark variation by sector, as recently observed by the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission: "Law and professional service firms are doing most to improve social mobility; engineering and construction firms least"[36].

**36.** The worrying rates of progression of students from lower socio-economic groups into professional firms can be attributed, in part, to their low participation rates at the most selective institutions. Though there have been some changes in policy at the margin, many employers have continued to target a small number of elite institutions[37]; the figure below shows that the top employers are most likely to undertake attraction visits to universities with a low proportion of students from lower SEBs.

***Fig 8: Visits by top employers to university campuses[38]***




**37.** The university league tables can be unhelpful in this respect, as little is currently done to measure institutions that offer 'value added' to their students (i.e. outcomes relative to input). The published league tables typically reflect historic reputation; Brown's policy paper in 2014 on this topic gained little traction[39], and we encourage colleagues to revisit some of its

[36] www.gov.uk/government/news/state-of-the-nation-2015-report-published
[37] www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/80188/Higher-Education.pdf
[38] *Ibid*
[39] http://www.centreforum.org/assets/pubs/he-as-a-tool-of-social-mobility.pdf

principles, including its proposal to develop separate rankings for different types of institutions and courses that add value to students, in particular those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. The recent Green Paper also responds to this concern; the proposed Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) might prove a useful tool for employers in making decisions about the graduates they recruit and, similarly, help employers to move away from a reliance upon proxies for teaching quality, such as entry requirements, thereby helping to recalibrate the tendency to target elite institutions.

**38.** The lack of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds in top firms is only partly a consequence of targeting recruitment on elite universities. The way in which employers define talent, and the selection tools and approaches relating to this, must also be taken into account. Meaningful impact on socio-economic diversity requires a critical review of the whole recruitment pipeline, from attraction through to selection, induction and progression in the workplace. Crucially, this pipeline cannot be understood, and effective solutions designed, without the effective collection and analysis of data.

**39.** The Bridge Group recently supported the Cabinet Office and the Civil Service Fast Stream in adopting a rigorous, evidence-based approach to data analysis; employers are encouraged to review this approach in the context of their own recruitment strategies.[40] The furtherance of the social mobility agenda is dependent on greater transparency and exploration of the data, in order that the challenges are better understood, and that new approaches can be developed and effectively evaluated. We urge colleagues to review the evidence in this recent report, for while we appreciate there are many good employer practices in place elsewhere, we are not aware of another employer demonstrating the same public commitment to evidence informed change, and transparency. We look forward to exploring impact in relation to the report's recommendations, recognising that implementation poses its own challenges.

**40.** Context matters in the debate about the role and responsibilities of employers. It is important to recognise that, similarly to universities, each organisation has its own legacy, culture and leadership style – often associated with the products and services of the business. For some employers, then, the social mobility agenda can sit uncomfortably, and for others it is an integral part of daily life. Here, Donna Miller discusses the context of her organisation.

[40] www.gov.uk/government/news/plan-to-end-inequality-in-the-public-sector

**Company DNA Driving Diversity**

**Donna Miller**
**HR Director, Enterprise Holdings**

As I often network with companies that are grappling with diversity, I now realise that it was plain good fortune that as a wide-eyed graduate, I joined a company some 25 years ago that had an "open doors" policy engrained in its values. Enterprise Rent-A-Car has always believed in engaging with people from all backgrounds and creating policies that make it easier for everyone to work with us and do their best. It's not something we do because it has suddenly become topical or a fad. It simply means we can increase the pool of people to work for us. Diversity is part of our DNA and has been since the company was founded in 1957.

Diversity is also drilled into all of our systems and processes relating to people. We have a very regional business - in the UK, we recruit graduates to over 400 locations around the country, within 10 miles of almost anyone. So we also have a regional recruitment team with responsibility for building close relationships with universities in their territories. This gives us breadth and depth of relationships with a wide range of universities. In fact, we monitor the performance of applicants through our assessment centres and through their careers with us. It will come as little surprise to learn that whilst candidates from Russell Group universities are excellent, they do not outperform candidates from other universities. If only it were that easy to predict performance. The same is equally true when we try to establish the link between degree subject and degree result to eventual business achievement - there just isn't one.

We host regional recruiting events and assessment centres regionally so candidates don't have to fund travel to London for an interview. In fact, we now recruit our contact centre team virtually to save them the cost and inconvenience of an unnecessary trip, as all of the skills and aptitudes we are looking for are actually better assessed by phone. We've learnt that graduates don't necessarily know how to network, or behave at work socially – or even know how to host a customer at a restaurant. We provide training on all of that - even how to use the right cutlery with the right food at the right time.

We now have two years of data both from our recruitment process and also from our senior managers, who were recruited between 10 and 20 years ago. We track a range of factors, including having a parent who went to university, being eligible for free school meals or eligibility for other maintenance support. The fact that almost three out of five Enterprise managers did not have degree-qualified parents, and that almost one in five was eligible for free school meals, means that we know our diversity strategy has been effective for a long time. We continue to measure and benchmark, and we've been fortunate to be recognised for our achievements in promoting social mobility with awards from TargetJobs and at the Financial Times' Architects of Meritocracy Awards. With or without the awards, diversity will always be central to our company culture and practice because there is such overwhelming evidence that it works for everyone, and that it makes Enterprise a great place to work.

## Leadership and Measures of Success

**41.** The two key ingredients for unlocking systemic change to promote social mobility are: senior sponsorship within the organisation; and the intelligent use of data to diagnose the challenges inherent in recruitment pipelines, to design and deliver impactful policy responses, and to measure progress. In much of our work with employers to support greater socio-economic diversity, capacity for change is largely dependent on engagement and proactive support at the most senior level. Strategic coordination of activities (including marketing, recruitment, corporate social responsibility, and schools outreach) is required, alongside a willingness to invest resource in designing an overarching, evidence-based strategy for promoting social mobility, and this will only be achieved if the senior leadership team views employee diversity as a core value.

**42.** Once diversity has been embraced in this way, employers that are serious about this agenda must approach this business challenge with the same analytical rigour and focus that would be applied to other organisational challenges. An important aspect of this, which is often overlooked, is the need to develop measures of success; an effective strategy defines measures to evaluate its effectiveness. Employers are encouraged to consider:

**A.** The socio-economic patterning of their intake over time;

**B.** This patterning and progress compared to similar employers;

**C.** Programme-related outputs of initiatives designed to promote socio-economic diversity (e.g. schools outreach);

**D.** The applicant and intake population compared to the eligible candidate pool; and

**E.** Progression within the firm in relation to the socio-economic background of employees.

**43.** Measures (A) and (D) are likely to be the most pertinent and cost-effective to measure. A pre-requisite for operationalising the measurement of the applicant and intake population compared to the eligible candidate pool (D) is to ensure measures for socio-economic background that are consistent with those used in the higher education sector. Melanie Richards explores these various considerations in more detail.

**Senior Sponsorship and Smart Data**

**Melanie Richards**
**UK Vice Chairman, KPMG**

One of the key challenges facing organisations is talent. How to recruit it, retain it and reward it to help drive real success. Whatever sector our clients are in, we know that behind it all they need the right people to succeed. For a firm like KPMG where our product is effectively our people and their skills, it quite rightly is at the top of the agenda. Clearly a large focus is on recruitment and we know better commercial performance comes from the innovation that happens between different people when we do away with group-think and celebrate diversity of thought. Recruiting employees from all social backgrounds and across the strands of diversity gives us an array of viewpoints on client matters, foresight in our decisions and challenge around our actions.

So for us social mobility underpins our commercial strategy as well as ensuring we act as a responsible business that promotes a workforce able to respond to the rapidly changing world our clients live in. Executing an effective social mobility strategy starts with taking an honest view of the whole organisation in our local context. The questions I put to myself, to my colleagues at KPMG and to all organisations committed to social mobility are simple: "Are we doing enough to inspire confidence in young people from disadvantaged backgrounds that they really can succeed in workplaces like ours? Are leaders empowering the systemic change to our recruitment, retention and promotion process that will embed mobility and opportunity?"

We have to define measures of success relevant to the purpose of the organisation. At KPMG this absolutely starts at the top. Our Board is confident that harnessing the talent of underrepresented communities builds better businesses - ethically and commercially. We have set clear accountability for social mobility across our leadership to drive change that impacts on our business outcomes. Senior leaders must personally champion the structural and policy changes needed to improve processes and, in doing so, send clear signals to clients and colleagues about the value we place on this critical issue.

The strategy itself must be wide reaching – recognising that barriers and bias genuinely exist in attraction, recruitment and beyond. It must be specific – including measures of success, accountability and action. It must be collaborative – between internal colleagues and external partners. And it must lead to practical change: last year KPMG introduced a Balanced Scorecard approach to look at academic performance in relation to intellectual capability and work experience, with the recruitment team able to adjust minimum criteria for fairer evaluation. A number of leading businesses – including the twelve Social Mobility Business Compact Champions, of which KPMG is one – are already reviewing how they engage with universities, widen entry routes, identify talent, and make recruitment decisions to guard against adverse impact on those from disadvantaged backgrounds. For example, this year some large employers have announced a shift in how they recruit, from the traditional reliance on UCAS points to new online testing systems developed to assess a candidate's aptitude.

I am acutely aware of the risk that applicants from traditional talent pools will still be overrepresented in these positions, as this simply changes the channel they have to go through. We are currently exploring quantitative evidence about the predictive validity of prior attainment on future performance and the robustness of online tests as a valid assessment of ability. I do, however, welcome any initial move to broaden access. KPMG has been a proud supporter of the Bridge Group since 2012, funding and promoting robust and innovative data-driven approaches. Most recently we have worked together to develop analytical tools to better target those universities and courses that will help attract diverse candidates into the recruitment processes, promoting diversity in the pipeline.

## Leveraging Data

**44.** We have been surprised in our dealings with some employers that data (internal management information and recruitment data, and external intelligence) is so little used to support an effective and efficient approach to socio-economic diversity. The smart use of data is critical to achieving meaningful and valid change in this area: it should inform the design of policy changes and interventions through diagnosing the challenge, and point towards areas that

require attention. Data enables employers to target activity towards those candidates who will benefit from it most, and underpins the evaluation of impact and progress. Data alone cannot provide sustainable solutions, but it minimises the risk of error and maximises the likelihood of success. The role of data in measuring impact is also critical in supporting sector-wide efforts to identify the most effective, efficient and fair approaches in achieving greater social mobility. Examples of the way in which data can be used are highlighted below, by Henry Morris.

### Cholera in Soho; Diversity Data

**Henry Morris**
**Founder & CEO, PiC**

In 1854, a doctor in London was unconvinced by the widely held belief that cholera was spread by 'bad air'. To prove his theory, Doctor Snow collected data on cholera deaths in Soho. He saw that the disease seemed to be clustered around a particular water pump on what is now Broadwick Street. With this data, Snow was able to sway the council to disable the well, an evidence-based recommendation which was later credited with ending the disease's outbreak in that part of London.

If Snow's era was characterised by a lack of data, in 2016 we're overwhelmed by data. According to IBM, 90% of data today has been created in the last 2 years alone and by 2020, experts predict a 4,300% increase in the quantity of data produced each year. Like Snow, business recognises the power of data. UPS, the shipping company, have used their GPS data to create more efficient driving routes, saving 3 million gallons of fuel in 2011 alone. If data-driven decisions have improved business performance in logistics, it stands to reason an evidence-based approach could offer significant benefits in HR and diversity.

The benefits of improving diversity are clear. McKinsey, for example, have shown that diverse teams lead to stronger business performance. So how can employees see the benefits of diversity by unlocking access to top jobs with data? There is a wealth of information on social diversity at universities across the UK. By understanding and leveraging this data, employers can better target their marketing activities to attract candidates that might not otherwise have applied to them. Employers can also work with organisations like upReach to support candidates from less-privileged backgrounds to successfully navigate the recruitment process.

With marketing activity now being targeted in an evidence-based way, the next step is for an employer to prove that they are indeed attracting a diverse group of students, and that their recruitment process is not favouring any particular group. This can be achieved by integrating a contextual tool into their recruitment process. Having understood the social diversity in their application process quantitatively, an employer can if appropriate, build the business case for using verifiable contextual information to influence their recruitment decisions. In the same way that understanding the social diversity of an employer's student intake is helpful, understanding the social diversity of the current workforce brings significant benefits. Firstly, an employer can understand if particular social groups are leaving or progressing more readily than their peers. This is particularly important in light of the research I commissioned with the Sutton Trust which showed that employees from less-privileged background appear to advance in the professions more readily than their peers. Secondly, it becomes possible to quantify the impact that diversifying the student intake is having on the broader organisation's social diversity.

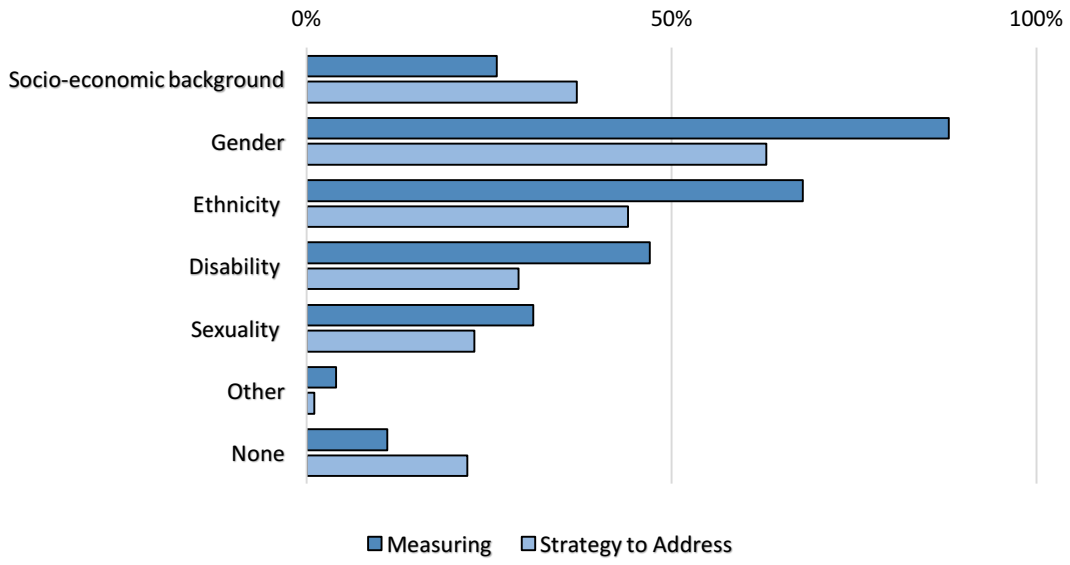
If Doctor Snow had data for not just Soho, but the whole of London, perhaps his findings would have been taken more seriously. Sadly, for him, it wasn't until after his death that his conclusions were recognised and acted on. In 2016 we have a real opportunity to take quantities of data Snow could never have imagined, and use the approach he pioneered to unlock access to top jobs. Doing so is not just in organisations own interest, but in society's also.

## Measuring Socio-economic Background

**45.** Approximately 25% of top employers measure the socio-economic background of their graduate intake.[41] However, there remains no consensus between them as to *how* to measure socio-economic background. Without a standardised approach, progress in this area is compromised; it is problematic to compare employers, to evaluate the impact of specific approaches, and to diagnose what is happening across different sectors to inform policy solutions. There is however some progress in the right direction, in that many employers have adopted the basic measures outlined in the Social Mobility Toolkit.[42] These should now be augmented with more robust measures, and we present below some of the findings from our recently published Cabinet Office report[43].

**46.** Although only approximately a quarter of employers are monitoring socio-economic diversity amongst their graduate intake, many more have specific strategies to address it. This is not the case across other diversity measures, and is a prime example of the underuse of data in this area. Clearly, many employers are attempting to address socio-economic diversity without a proper understanding of: the scale of the problem they face; how to achieve the greatest impact in tackling it; or how then to evaluate the impact achieved.

***Fig 9: The % of employers that are monitoring diversity indicators and have active strategies to address them (source: AGR 2015)***

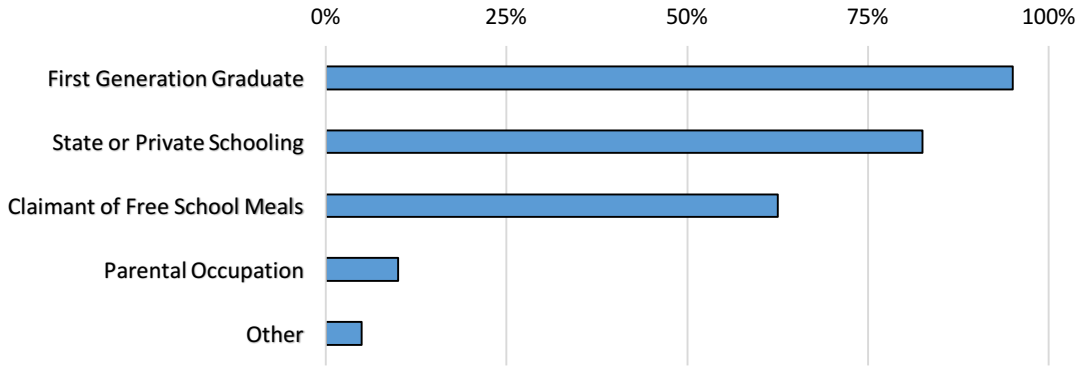



**47.** With regards to what is being measured, amongst those employers who are collating candidates' socio-economic background, practice is inconsistent and typically based on measures that are assessed as being crude, and sometimes impossible to verify. Employers

[41] High Fliers 2015 and AGR www.highfliers.co.uk/download/2015/graduate_market/GMReport15.pdf
[42] www.professionsforgood.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/SocialMobilityToolkit-2014-low-res.pdf
[43] www.gov.uk/government/news/plan-to-end-inequality-in-the-public-sector

typically use more than one measure; the most widely-used metric is whether an applicant is a first generation graduate (95.0%), followed by their type of schooling (82.5%), and whether they had been in receipt of free school meals (62.5%). The inherent complexity of socio-economic background and this varying use of metrics means that progress on social mobility is more complicated to track across organisations than the progress on other diversity indicators such as gender or ethnicity.

***Figure 10: Measures of SEB diversity used by employers (source: AGR)***




**48.** Receipt of FSM is not a reliable indicator of socio-economic disadvantage when used in isolation. This argument is well rehearsed elsewhere; analysis in 2012 from the Department for Education[44] demonstrated that 14% of pupils entitled to FSM were not claiming them (the proportion was the same for both primary school and secondary school aged pupils), and that the proportion was as high as 1 in 3 in certain Local Authorities. One of the implications is that a reasonable proportion of pupils who are entitled to FSM may not be aware of this. The eligibility criteria for FSM is also changeable, and more fundamentally, FSM may reveal information about a candidate's parental income, but little information about their occupation or relative social status. FSM is also a crude measure of household income, since it does not distinguish between low income and very low income, or between those households just above and far above the threshold for eligibility.

**49.** Furthermore, the collection of information about school or college type is often too broad to be useful. The range of institutions that fall into the category "state-run, non-selective" is wide, and the disbursement of bursaries and scholarships (which are not typically associated with economic need) within the independent school sector is too varied to determine the extent of disadvantage indicated by being a recipient.

**50.** It is important to achieve consensus on how to measure socio-economic background if we are to identify effectively candidates who have experienced social, educational, cultural and/or economic disadvantages which are likely, based on research findings, to have impacted negatively on access to university and the professions. Alongside considering the possibility of benchmarking socio-economic diversity with other employers, it is also important to consider the comparability of this information against the eligible candidate pool, i.e. the higher education population. The higher education sector has also been tackling for decades

[44] www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/183380/DFE-RR235.pdf

the question of how best to measure socio-economic background, as institutional benchmarks and the allocation of public funds are partly informed by these indicators. The employer sector therefore has a lot to learn from HE in this area and would be wise to watch closely its approach to measuring socio-economic background. [45]

**51.** We have closely reviewed pertinent research in this area and current HE practices. As a result, we recommend that the following data should be collected in order to assess applicants' SEB:

- School attended at KS4 (typically GCSE) and KS5 (typically A-Level). This indicator focuses on the average performance at the school or college attended, relative to the average national performance in the given year. Lower SEB pupils tend to be overrepresented in schools that add least value to their performance, in terms of both formal attainment and progression to higher education.[46]

- Home postcode at age 14, which can be assessed against three well established socio-economic indices (Indices of Multiple Deprivation, IDACI and POLAR3). We know that progression rates to university and into the professions are lower amongst those candidates whose postcodes are ranked lower in these indices. These indices are used extensively by the Higher Education Funding Council to identify SEB and by universities to identify pupils to target for widening participation activities and contextual recruitment.[47]

- Parental NS-SEC[48] using the self-coding methodology, for the highest earning parent / carer.

- Parental experience of higher education.

- Receipt of free school meals.

**52.** Ultimately, a composite measure should be aimed for, as this represents good practice and acknowledges that no single indicator can sufficiently reveal the multiple forms of social, economic, cultural, and educational disadvantage that affect access to university and the professions. Such a measure can be generated via a flagging system (i.e. an applicant reaches one, or more, criteria against a number of indicators) or a composite score that accounts for each indicator. Most selective universities have used socio-economic indicators in this way for many years and, more recently, some employers have also started to adopt this more sophisticated approach, including through commercial products developed specifically for this purpose.

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[45] www.hesa.ac.uk/pis
[46] www.offa.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/OFFA-Strategic-Plan-2015-2020.pdf
[47] For example: www.manchester.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/applications/after-you-apply/contextual-data/
[48] http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/classifications/current-standard-classifications/soc2010/soc2010-volume-3-ns-sec--rebased-on-soc2010--user-manual/index.html

## The Case for Greater Collaboration

**53.** While some large employers have been at the vanguard of policy and practice in relation to social mobility for a number of years, it is vital that collaboration is encouraged between the professions, and with other sectors to achieve widespread and impactful change. However, in light of the huge mix of stakeholders engaged in social mobility activities, it can be hard for firms to identify which organisations offer the most valuable, long-term partnerships.

**54.** Collaboration can take many forms, often involving co-delivery of strategic programmes (such as those between charities and the professions, or schools and firms) or agreeing set standards (such as those between firms in a specific profession, or between professions). In many cases, the third sector is able to support firms by identifying groups of students and/or universities to work with. As a result of such effective collaborations, innovative programmes are developed to target students from lower socio-economic background and support them into and through the recruitment process.

**55.** We strongly advocate greater collaborative working within the professions, and between firms, universities and the third sector. While many firms and professions are doing a great deal to support social mobility programmes, too few are joined up or are meaningfully transferable to other career routes. Just as the overarching business case for social mobility in the professions has not yet been sufficiently clearly articulated to be taken as read, the Bridge Group strongly believes that the underpinning rationale for collaborative models of working has also been understated.

**56.** Collaboration between professions, universities, and the third sector offers greater economies of scale, and greater opportunities for robust evaluative models, which are typically longitudinal and therefore expensive. One of the risks for firms that are committed to evaluation is that if research reveals ineffective practices it may undermine the internal case for action within the firm. Collaborative models also develop more effective sharing of good practice between sectors and individual firms. The impact of peer pressure in catalysing additional investment to support social mobility should not be underestimated. As additional collaborative models are developed, and successful programmes are translated into different sectors, it is critical that good practice is celebrated and that scalability is considered. Strategic collaborations offer firms valuable opportunities to share resource, to achieve greater return on investment and increase the scope of work. For example, by pooling resources, firms can collaboratively invest in online platforms to support their outreach programmes, or spread activity in a strategic way that avoids duplication, and ensures the profession/field is widely represented across a region. More fundamentally, collaborative models make sense pedagogically: by combining university outreach with outreach from the professions, integrated provision can more actively demonstrate to school pupils the links between school level study, higher education and professional employment.

## Campus Attraction Strategies

**57.** Effective graduate recruitment prioritises access to the best talent, and delivers inclusivity with efficiency. It is therefore little wonder that competitive employers focus their efforts on the most selective universities. It is not unreasonable for them to assume that candidates at the most selective institutions will demonstrate the sort of excellent performance they require, and at an efficient concentration. However, while the institution that a student attends in some ways reflects ability, it also encodes unfair advantage to students from higher socio-economic

backgrounds. Students at the most selective universities, on average, have greater access to social capital, are given more support on their journey to university, have wider social networks, and more careers support. We can make a reasonable assumption that by favouring students who had disproportionate access to these advantages, many employers are missing talented candidates who would perform exceptionally given the opportunity.

**58.** In planning their engagement with universities, regardless of which institution they are visiting, employers should be more alive to the increasing focus within universities for supporting the employability of students from lower socio-economic groups; a trend which is partly being provoked by the allocation of funds through universities' Access Agreements to support student progression and employability as elaborated in the first section of this report. As a result, institutions are actively designing more interventions (such as mentoring and assessment centre support) to support students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Tempting though it is in a competitive recruitment marketplace for firms to seek to differentiate themselves through bespoke, branded approaches to diversity, the greatest and fastest gain is surely to be found where employers connect strategically with existing university initiatives.

**59.** Employers should also consider collaborating with both Careers Services and academic departments to develop activities that make a direct contribution to teaching and learning in specific subject areas. This practice:

- addresses the problem of student self-selection, i.e. reduces the likelihood of only speaking with those already aware of a particular employer intending to apply.
- showcases what is at the heart of the relevant role, i.e. what is involved in the job.
- responds to universities' needs for 'real-life' learning within the curriculum.
- develops relationships with academic members of staff, who are key influencers on students' career choices.

**60.** This is discussed in greater detail in our recent report[49], and the recent publication from BIS also presents some useful models for engaging universities in this regard.[50] Emma Godden from Teach First discusses their approach below, connecting with the earlier discussion on using data to support effective change. This is followed by Rob Fryer, from Deloitte, who reflects on his firm's approach to campus recruitment with their approach to selection.

[49] www.thebridgegroup.org.uk/bridge-group-report-on-socio-economic-diversity-in-the-fast-stream/
[50] www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/474251/BIS-15-464-employer-graduate-recruitment.pdf

## Trends and Transparency

**Emma Godden**
**Senior Recruitment Officer, Teach First**

Teach First is the UK's largest graduate recruiter. Last year we delivered 1685 teachers to schools in low-income communities. We recognise that students need positive role models from a diverse range of ethnic backgrounds. To ensure equality in our recruitment we collect data to analyse key recruitment trends, ensuring we are attracting candidates from diverse backgrounds. This is an established part of our anonymised equal opportunities monitoring – from when candidates take part in campus events to when they apply to join our programmes. The data we collect is analysed regularly by our graduate recruitment team to monitor our progress. As well as highlighting these groups as soon as they register their interest, our diversity tracker helped us identify the shortcomings in our process when attracting from these talent pools.

The data populates our diversity tracker and individual graduate recruitment reporting tools. We are then able to regularly extract intelligence to understand how different groups perform at each stage of the recruitment process. We can then develop methods to provide support to our candidates, enabling them to perform to their full potential, for example, BAME-focused debates/skills sessions on campus.

Using the diversity tracker and individual graduate recruitment reporting tools we were able to identify and compare different groups' performances at each stage of the recruitment process. For example, we found that BAME candidates performed didn't perform as well at assessment stages as other groups. We monitor our target universities, comparing figures against data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency, to identify our reach versus the overall spread of BAME students. This data helps individual recruiters to overcome challenges in attracting BAME candidates and improving success rates at different stages of the selection process.

Members of the graduate recruitment leadership team belong to a diversity panel within the graduate recruitment department and are accountable for reporting using the diversity tracker alongside inputs from across the wider organisation to create strategic actions for the department. Best practice has also been shared across the organisation, through an org-wide diversity steering group, with a view to other departments mirroring our best practice. The organisation's management team have championed the design of these new tools as a way of evaluating our diversity monitoring methods. Annually we publish a profile of our cohort, detailing percentages for BAME, gender and social mobility indicators. This is featured on our website, used internally for benchmarking and shared amongst our candidates.

**Seeking Hidden Talent**

**Rob Fryer**
**Head of Student Recruitment, Deloitte**

We want to provide the best service to our clients, bringing diversity of thought to provide innovative solutions to our clients' biggest challenges. We do this by recruiting the best people, from a diverse range of backgrounds and by creating an environment that helps everyone to succeed. We are supporting social mobility and have changed the way we recruit students, to enhance the service we can provide to our clients and to make an impact that matters to our clients and to society. We have developed a targeted attraction and selection process to ensure we engage a broad range of students and give each of them fair access to opportunities within our firm.

We recruit beyond the most selective universities and we hired from over 75 UK institutions in 2014, of which 51 were outside the Russell Group. To specifically attract and engage students from low-socio economic backgrounds, we support two key programmes:

Deloitte is a founding partner of the UpReach social mobility charity and Deloitte volunteers act as mentors to students from less-privileged backgrounds taking in the programme. We also offer internships and employment opportunities to participating students and since the programme launched as a pilot in January 2013, 17 students have joined Deloitte having taken part in UpReach.

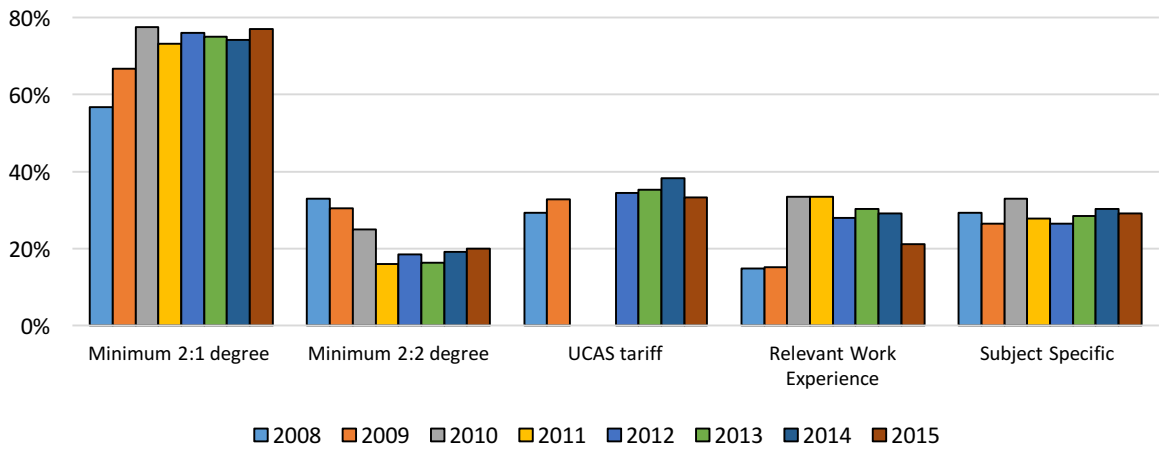
Deloitte is working with the social enterprise WildHearts to invite students from universities recognised as serving students from a range of socio-economic backgrounds to participate in the Micro-Tyco entrepreneurial challenge. WildHearts and Deloitte are also engaging University of Leicester to develop an entrepreneurial Minor with Micro-Tyco as the practical element of the qualification. The programme pilot will engage up to 80 university students this year, with students from winning teams being considered for a paid internship at the firm. We believe this is a unique way to engage and identify talent, giving young people the opportunity to show their entrepreneurial flair and business acumen in a practical context, providing a differentiated route into our business for students who may not shine in a traditional interview setting.

In the past year we have introduced two significant changes to our selection practices to ensure our selection processes better support candidates from a range of backgrounds, demonstrating our belief that it's not where you're from, it's where you're going that matters. In 2015 we introduced school and university blind recruitment for all our internship, school-leaver and graduate opportunities. Blind recruitment helps to ensure that our recruiters do not consciously or unconsciously favour those who attended a certain school or university, so that job offers are made on the basis of present potential, not past personal circumstance. We also now contextualise academic achievement, enabling us to recognise grades achieved by students in the context of the school and university attended, as well as taking into consideration other potential factors such as time spent in care. We are the largest professional services and graduate recruiter to use this approach.

## Approaches to Candidate Selection

**61.** Much of the literature cites candidate screening criteria as a significant factor contributing to the lack of socio-economic diversity in the professions. Many employers have recently received positive press for removing the requirement for a specific UCAS tariff; the figure below details trends in employers' use of screening criteria. However, most practices have remained fairly static. These data also suggest that as some employers removed the screening requirement for a 2:2 degree from 2008 – 2011, these same employers, in practice, have increased the actual requirement to a 2:1, rather than removing it altogether.

***Fig. 11:*** ***Initial application screening criteria across all employers (Source: AGR). UCAS data not collected in 2010 and 2011***




**62.** It has been largely assumed that the consequence of employers reducing, or removing, aspects of screening criteria (including, in some cases, removing the need for a degree) will result in greater diversity amongst candidates appointed to the job. However, unless this more inclusive approach to accepting candidates' applications is matched with a critical review of the tools used to select them, there is a risk that little progress will be made. We know from our work with a range of employers that particular selection tools, especially those used in mass recruitment (e.g. some online tests) intrinsically disadvantage candidates from lower socio-economic groups. We have also found that this effect is stronger in tests that candidates can practice. There is also increasing evidence regarding conscious and unconscious bias in relation to recruitment practices and candidates from lower socio-economic background, and the way in which some employers might risk mistaking confidence for competence. Louise Ashley and colleagues summarise their recent study on this subject, below. This is followed by reflections on progressive practices and impact evaluation from Rachel Hill and Helen Baldwyn, at Grant Thornton.

## A Twin Approach to Progressive Change

**Dr Louise Ashley, Royal Holloway University of London, with:**
**Prof Jo Duberley**
**Prof Hilary Sommerlad**
**Prof Dora Scholarios**

The Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission recently published the report: A qualitative evaluation of non-educational barriers to the elite professions. As co-authors of this report, we focus here on two particular challenges and associated recommendations.

First, a lack of diversity on the basis of social background amongst new graduates joining elite firms can be traced most obviously to a lack of diversity in the applicant base. For example, typically just twenty-five percent of applicants to elite accountancy firms have attended a non-selective state school. This compares to almost ninety percent of the population. This figure can be partly explained because elite firms recruit predominantly from elite universities, where the student base is not representative of society at large. Yet even despite this, students educated at non-selective state schools may self-select out of the application process in relatively high numbers, on the basis that they feel they will not 'fit-in' or that their academic credentials will not prove strong enough.

Second, but related, our study found that definitions of talent within the professions are closely aligned with characteristics such as "polish", confidence and certain forms of cultural competence. These aptitudes or competencies are arguably easier to acquire for individuals from more affluent backgrounds. That firms adopt this approach is in one sense pragmatic, not least because graduate recruitment and selection are characterised by uncertainty. In this context, recruiters may seek to manage their perceptions of risk by focusing on proxies for quality such as social background and education, or 'appropriate' speech and mannerisms, in addition to apparently more objective measures such as credentials and qualifications. Current professionals in our study said though that there is little doubt that their firms are missing out on excellent aspirant professionals as a result, because they may present somewhat differently compared to their more privileged peers, sometimes making it more difficult to spot potential.

These findings give rise to two key recommendations. First, firms should reconsider both the nature and the scope of their campus attraction strategies. For example, campus events at elite universities are designed to attract the most ambitious students, and this is important given the rigours of professional life. However, care should be taken that as firms project an elite and exclusive image, this does not inadvertently discourage students who are confident and able, yet may not initially place themselves in this category. Firms could also rethink the scope of their attraction strategies to encompass a wider range of universities than those from which they traditionally recruit, which have a more diverse student base. Second, firms should critically interrogate the way in which they define and identify 'talent', and work towards more inclusive methods of identifying potential. This is essential, not least because there is little point in encouraging higher numbers of socially diverse candidates to apply to firms, if current definitions of talent mean that those candidates have a limited chance of success. Indeed, any such measures could have ethical implications.

Change will not of course be achieved by employers working alone. Social mobility is a complex problem which requires co-ordinated action by educators and policy-makers as well. Against this backdrop it is good news that many firms are already working hard to achieve improved outcomes. A wide range of initiatives have been introduced and are having results, although there is a need for better and more data to help us see clearly, what works and what does not. It must also be noted that although there is a strong business case in favour of attracting more diverse candidates, there are nevertheless clear benefits to firms in maintaining the status quo, not least because mainstream approaches to recruitment and selection are both effective and highly efficient. In order to break through these barriers, strong leadership from influential figures within firms will prove essential, and it is likely that they will act not purely on the basis of competitive advantage, but also because driving progressive change is the right thing to do.

## Exploring the Impact of Removing Screening Criteria

**Rachel Hill, Senior Manager (Social Mobility) and Helen Baldwyn, Resourcing Manager**
**Grant Thornton**

We are proud to have led our industry in removing academic requirements for all of our entry level programmes in 2013 and are delighted to see more employers starting to embark on a similar journey. Our decision was part of a broader shift in our approach to trainee assessment where academic attainment is still recognised, but part of a wider candidate story alongside non-academic achievements and a focus on behaviours and shared values.

Since then, we have removed the emphasis placed on relevant work experience and reframed the way in which we position, and assess, extra-curricular achievement in order to take into account individual context relative to previous access to opportunity. We have launched digital interviewing for all trainee programmes which negates the need for time and travel costs and as a result, were able to re-invest the money we saved into providing 1:1 candidate coaching for all of our candidates before, and after, their online interviews. We have also created an online, user-generated community for all of our candidates to connect with us, and each-other, understanding the immense value of networks and the fact that not everyone has equal access to them. These initiatives have been a great success, and we hope go some way to levelling the playing field for students where recruitment skills coaching is less readily available. Regardless of whether or not students choose to join us, we hope to provide valuable insights to inspire their future thinking.

We continually challenge ourselves to ensure non-discrimination in our recruitment and for the 2015 season, we have intentionally chosen aptitude tests that have shown no adverse impact across gender, ethnicity and social mobility groups. In order to truly mitigate against adverse impact based on social context, we also recognise that it extends beyond recruitment alone and into the support frameworks provided once trainees have joined us. We continually monitor and refine our approach and can see that that broader thinking enriches the diversity of our talent pools. As a result of adopting a more flexible approach to selection, we are successfully widening university recruitment beyond the most selective universities and tapping into new talent pools. In 2014, 12% of our intake would have been previously unable to apply on the basis of academics alone, and in 2015, this figure rose to 21%. Of the 12% hired below previous academic requirements in our 2014 trainee intake, 29% were from universities we had not previously engaged with until the 2013-2014 recruitment season. In 2015, 49% of all applications came from universities outside of the Russell Group.

We monitor the socio-economic background of our applicants and current employees and now that our first cohort of trainees who joined under flexible academics in 2014 have spent one year with us, we are measuring our internal recruitment and performance data to robustly measure impact. Looking at the social characteristics of our talent pipelines relative to our intake, and seeing how the background characteristics of candidates impact on their success at each stage of selection and beyond, will provide us with insightful evidence on which to build our future priorities.

With so many new initiatives currently being discussed in our industry, we are committed to better understanding our own talent pools and making the choices that are right for us. We would expect other firms to see themselves in a similar, unique way, adopting the right initiatives based on what their own data tells them and we look forward to sharing and learning from our collective insights.

As a Champion of the Social Mobility Business Compact, we set out clear annual plans to expand and promote social mobility. Our CEO, Sacha Romanovitch, is Chair of the Access Accountancy Patron Group, demonstrating her commitment to the wider social mobility agenda. Active engagement from Sacha and our strategic leadership team ensures that we continually link social mobility with how we do business. For us, social mobility firmly connects with our firm's strategy and purpose to shape the environment for business and people to grow. We have come a long way over the last few years and are excited about what lies ahead. Widening access is a key responsibility for all business and it can't stop at the point of offering an interview, or even at the point of offering a career opportunity. It's a commitment that requires a mind-set shift towards longer term measurement and strategic vision. Through the power of communities, collaboration and working together, we can break down social barriers, and change the landscape of opportunity for future generations.

**63.** Amongst some employers, an increased focus on screening criteria has not been matched by a sufficient focus on the use of selection tools in the recruitment process. Employers might explore greater use of strengths-based assessment throughout the selection process, which has been shown to deliver a focus on potential over previous experiences. There is much evidence to show that candidates from lower socio-economic groups have less access to the opportunities and experiences from which to draw examples throughout the selection process. Competency interviews typically include a series of enquiries at the interviewer's discretion, which creates opportunities for unconscious bias. There is a building evidence base to show that the combination of capability and motivation, tested through this approach, is a strong predictor of future performance. Alex Linley and Tom Banham present their thoughts.

**Strengths–Based Recruitment: In Principle**

**Alex Linley**
**CEO, CAPP**

Strengths-based recruitment is the most fair, most valid approach, with no adverse impact, for recruiting candidates who are the best fit for roles, irrespective of their social background.
Strengths-based recruitment delivers a focus on the identification of future potential, rather than relying on past experience alone. Strengths are assessed in relation to both performance and energy, so that candidates are recruited not just for what they can do (performance), but also for what they love to do (energy and motivation). It is this combination of capability and motivation that delivers business results, as well as being hallmarks of future potential.

Candidates from less advantaged backgrounds are faced with two systemic disadvantages in a traditional competency-based recruitment process. First, they are less likely to have had access to opportunities for immersion in organisational contexts (such as work experience and internships) or in pseudo-organisational contexts (such as extra-curricular clubs and societies). As a result, they may not have the wealth of experience of relevant examples with which to illustrate their responses to a competency-based question. Second, interviewers inevitably form an impression within the first seconds of meeting a candidate. These first impressions can then colour how they conduct the interview (especially with the bias of recruiting in one's own image). With competency interviews using a series of probes at the discretion of the interviewer, huge potential for unconscious bias is introduced. The interviewer can then lead the interview to get the outcome they want (wittingly or unwittingly), based on their first impressions of the candidate.

In contrast, a strengths-based interview follows a set structure and format that delivers a consistent candidate experience for all candidates, levelling the playing field as a result.
First, strengths-based interviews explicitly draw from a candidate's experience across all areas of their life as appropriate. Strengths can be demonstrated in work contexts, certainly, but also in dealing with upset friends, mentoring a cousin with her maths homework, or building a rapport with a fellow passenger on the bus as you travelled in (all of which are examples I have heard given).

Second, strengths-based interviews are constructed around a series of questions that are designed to elicit whether a person has the strengths that are required for the role. They are more structured and tend to have more, but much shorter, questions. This allows a much fuller picture of a candidate to be developed. Interviewers do not probe in strengths-based interviews. This removes a huge source of unconscious bias. It also ensures that judgements are made on a consistent assessment of the evidence presented, rather than being unduly influenced by the interviewer's first impressions. When interviewing candidates from diverse social backgrounds, this really matters. In practice, I have personally had the experience on a number of occasions of changing my view (from first impressions) of the candidate, purely as a result of paying attention to the evidence provided in response to the strengths-based interview questions. This is what interviews and interviewing should be about.

**Strengths–Based Recruitment: In Practice**

**Tom Banham,**
**Head of Academy Talent, Nestle**

Nestlé have used strengths-based recruitment to remove their academic screening criteria and focus on assessment outcomes alone. As a result, 21% of the people they hired in the last cycle would not have been eligible under their old criteria. In 2015, Nestlé won three of seven AGR awards for 2015: Best School Leaver Strategy; Best Diversity and Inclusion Strategy; and the Best of the Best Award.

The firm's vision was to reach out to a diverse talent pool and implement an assessment process that did not prevent talented individuals, regardless of gender, ethnicity, disability or socio-economic background, from progressing through the process. The approach was multi-faceted, and included using assessment data and insights to remove screening criteria which had been used previously (300 UCAS points and a 2.1 degree). This widened and diversified the talent pool and enabled applications from a wider range of individuals, removing the narrow focus on individuals from a specific background.

Nestlé's experience was that candidates from higher SEB groups often out-perform their peers in competency-based assessment methods, as greater access to extra-curricular opportunities and professional networks provides experience to draw upon. They introduced strengths-based assessment tools, which consider the combination of capability and energy, providing better assessment of potential. Nestlé implemented a strengths-based strategy and define the indicators for success, identifying eight core strengths and numerical capability as key criteria. The assessments designed to measure these criteria include a Situational Strengths Test (SST) and Numerical Reasoning Test (NRT). These both use future-focused, hypothetical scenarios to assess a candidate's potential, rather than relying on past experience.

Selecting a strengths-based assessment strategy has enabled candidates to demonstrate their potential, regardless of background or previous experience, and has resulted in a more diverse candidate pipeline. This is evidenced by the diversity statistics described below. It was clearly demonstrated throughout the process that the assessment methods utilised do not favour or advantage any particular demographic group. The SST has supported the diversity and social mobility with no adverse impact shown across the diversity or social mobility measures:

- Free school meals / not = 38.9% / 38.7% pass
- Income support / not = 40.7% / 38.5% pass
- Parent attended university / not = 38.7% / 38.8% pass
- Fee paying school / state school = 38.5% / 41.2% pass

The NRT has supported diversity and social mobility with no adverse impact shown across the diversity or social mobility measures:

- Free school meals / not = 39.4% / 50.0% pass
- Income support / not = 43.3% / 49.6% pass
- Parent attended university / not = 50.4% / 47.0% pass
- Fee paying school / state school = 55.2% / 50.7% pass

**64.** The Prime Minister recently announced the pledge from organisations to recruit on a 'name blind' basis to address discrimination, on the understanding that removing names from graduate job applications will reduce potential discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity, nationality or gender. However, while it makes for a good soundbite there is in fact little evidence of such discrimination, or that this approach to recruitment will support socio-economic diversity. And with the proposed extension of this policy to university admissions we will be following these developments closely in order to build a stronger understanding of their potential impact on social mobility. Felix Hebblethwaite shares the experiences at Linklaters.

**Building an Evidence Base for Blind Recruitment**

**Felix Hebblethwaite**
**Global Head of Recruitment and Resourcing, Linklaters**

Linklaters is committed to increasing social mobility. This commitment is made while recognising the significant challenges this presents to our business. Some of these are common to all organisations and some just to our sector, but others are particular to us - the processes, systems and habits that we may think work well already. For some time, we have been exploring new ways of tackling these ingrained behaviours and are only now beginning to understand where interventions are most effective.

Blind recruitment, for example, is rarely out of the news with the UK government championing 'name blind' recruitment to reduce gender and racial bias. Seeking to widen the social diversity of our trainee pool, we recently trialled a blind interview process by removing names of schools/colleges and universities from a sample of applicants to our undergraduate summer vacation scheme. Contrary to expectations, we recruited more students from a recognisable pool of elite universities, and there was less diversity in terms of socio-economic backgrounds. So, what does work? Accounting for performance relative to school norm did bring some encouraging results and we have developed this work, through contextual recruitment, which we employed for the first time for our 2015 graduate recruitment. Through this system, A-level grades are directly comparable with average performance in the candidate's school, with aspects of personal and economic disadvantage additionally flagged. In so doing, the system highlights the socio-economic challenges overcome by a student who may otherwise appear to be underperforming in achievement of grades or supporting experience. We expect this tool to help us look rather more at the substance than the polish, ensuring that we are employing intelligent, well-rounded individuals from more walks of life, each of whom will, of course, bring fresh and valuable perspectives to our business.

This is, of course, just one part of Linklaters' wider social mobility strategy. Over the past year, our approach has been further shaped by our engagement with fellow Social Mobility Business Compact Champions, a group set up in November 2014 by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills to create a benchmark for social mobility. When we face the same challenges, it makes sense to discuss common solutions. Only through such collaboration will we properly address social mobility at root and at scale.

**65.** The Bridge Group published guidance on contextual recruitment in 2015[51]. Executed effectively by trained staff, using robust, reliable measures, contextual recruitment should result in the recruitment of able graduates who perform highly in the job and whose collective breadth of experience enriches the organisation. Where mismanaged, contextual recruitment could fail to deliver diversity, or could even recruit applicants who subsequently struggle. Contextual recruitment should be informed by robust evidence, with the measures taken closely tailored to the issues identified. This includes the rationale for targeting applicants with particular background characteristics, as well as adjustments to assessment criteria and methods, so that these provide equal opportunity for all applicants to demonstrate their potential.

**66.** Contextual recruitment involves considering a range of information about an applicant in addition to formal attainment measures such as degree classification and school examination grades. This can include contextual data: information about the applicant's personal and educational background, of a quantitative and /or qualitative nature. It can also include relevant skills and experience, demonstrated through a range of contexts, including inclusively conducted assessments and interviews. It does not normally include protected characteristics covered by equality legislation (such as race and religion), as it is normally unlawful to treat one applicant more or less favourably than another on these grounds.

[51] www.thebridgegroup.org.uk

**67.** For example, an organisation may judge an applicant's school exam results in the context of the circumstances in which they were achieved. The average performance at the applicant's school is one way of assessing this context. Many universities use average school performance data, because research shows that students with slightly lower grades from low-performing schools do just as well at university as otherwise similar students from high-performing schools. Contextual recruitment, more broadly, includes providing equality of opportunity to all applicants throughout the recruitment process, from access to internships and graduate recruitment fairs, to assessments and interviews. It includes taking appropriate measures to address the different opportunities applicants may have experienced in their education and personal lives, so that, for example, applicants from lower SEBs have the opportunity to demonstrate their potential in an assessment.

**68.** Just as contextual data is one aspect of contextual recruitment, so too is contextual recruitment part of a wider strategy for promoting diversity and inclusion. Organisations should ensure that appropriate effort and resource is dedicated to supporting the effective transition of recruits from less advantaged backgrounds into the organisation and their subsequent high performance in the job. There may be practical challenges associated with integrating systems for flagging applicants (and making adjustments), particularly where there are high volumes of applications. Both at this stage and once successful recruits move into induction and training it is likely to be more productive if the provision is shaped to respond to the needs of *all* new recruits. Monitoring, evaluation and the ongoing refinement of processes are critical to developing the most effective practices locally, and should be embedded at inception. The following contributions expand on these themes.

*Fig. 12: Good practice guide to contextual recruitment (Bridge Group: 2015)*

| ***Key features of an effective system of contextual recruitment*** | | |
|---|---|---|
| **1** | **Interrogating the existing recruitment pipeline and building evidence** | The recruitment pipeline has been investigated (first importing additional data as necessary) to:<br>• diagnose the extent to which different aspects of the recruitment process may disadvantage applicants with particular characteristics;<br>• better understand any correlation between recruits' background characteristics and their performance in the firm;<br>• establish a baseline from which to measure impact and progress. |
| **2** | **Securing leadership commitment** | There is a shared vision across the organisation, with senior champions promoting engagement, communications and consistency across recruitment teams.<br>Resourcing is adequate for effective implementation and there is an integrated long-term plan. |
| **3** | **Designing evidence-based approaches** | Evidence from (1) is used to agree clear aims for contextual recruitment.<br>Additional data is imported as necessary, is well understood, and is incorporated into the recruitment system.<br>Legal advice is sought before confirming details of:<br>• which applicants will be flagged, using options from a recommended range of contextual data<br>• how they may be treated differently, if at all<br>• any changes to assessment criteria and methods (for example, grade requirements, interviews and tests) so that they provide equal opportunity for all applicants to demonstrate their potential<br>• piloting new arrangements. |
| **4** | **Strategic and operational integration** | After initial pilots, any necessary adjustments are made to recruitment processes; this may include changes to allow implementation across high volumes of applications.<br>There are processes in place to monitor and evaluate the impact of measures taken on the recruitment pipeline, and their contribution towards diversity and inclusion targets.<br>Contextual recruitment is integrated into the wider strategy for diversity and inclusion, and ensure that these are complementary.<br>Induction and training are inclusive, providing all recruits with equal opportunity to make a successful transition into the organisation and perform well. |
| **5** | **Consistent and transparent communication** | Communication with internal stakeholders on the rationale, use and impact of contextual recruitment is transparent, consistent and clear.<br>Colleagues involved in recruitment receive appropriate training.<br>All colleagues use agreed external messaging about contextual recruitment. All communications with applicants and potential applicants through all relevant channels (online, campus visits, direct communications etc.) are timely, transparent and consistent. This includes communications relating to internships and other pre-application opportunities. |

## A Whole Firm Approach to Contextual Recruitment

**Sarah Langton,**
**Head of Resourcing, Clifford Chance**

At Clifford Chance we believe in providing opportunities for the people who are best able to serve our clients based on merit, regardless of background, and we continuously strive to ensure that there are no barriers to equality of opportunity. With a strong record on diversity, we believe that social background should neither be a barrier to law nor a successful career at Clifford Chance.

Our approach to improving access to the profession is twofold, working at the same time to raise the aspirations of school children and also to attract the best university talent regardless of background.

To make our approach a success and to ensure that it genuinely improves access, it has required the support and involvement of the whole firm and has been championed by Laura King, Global Head of HR and Talent.

Some of our initiatives include:

- Intelligent Aid – a unique competition to help students from a wider range of universities and backgrounds gain vacation scheme places and ultimately jobs at Clifford Chance
- Reforms to selection, including the introduction of CV blind interviews and broader capture of socioeconomic background information
- Broadening our reach and targeting across the UK university population
- Working with expert third party organisations to make real progress on widening access to the profession
- And finally, looking at the financial assistance we provide so that no strong candidate feels the need to self-select out of embarking on a career at Clifford Chance on the basis of financial means.

As long ago as early 2013 we were looking to engage in social activity beyond our PRIME commitment in order to familiarise people from a wider range of backgrounds with our firm. We had worked in partnership with Rare, focusing on race, for a number of years, and, when they invited us to masterclass at their office on social mobility, we went along. The class presented Rare's research, which was still at that point very much a work in progress, into how best to identify disadvantage.

In December 2013 Rare launched its research into social mobility in graduate recruitment, sponsored by Clifford Chance, and the Rare Contextual Recruitment Working Group was formed. The Group met over the course of 2014 and oversaw the creation of an algorithm with twelve data points, and two new datasets, one of residential addresses and another of UK schools, to inform the algorithm. By summer 2014 the system was up and running - and then the technical challenge began. We knew that if this contextual data was to be usable it had to integrate, seamlessly, with our Applicant Tracking System. As Founding Partners of the Contextual Recruitment System, or CRS as it came to be called, we were the first to commit to building the CRS into our process. And after prolonged scoping conversations, this work began in early 2015. And the integration wasn't just a software build. Instead we had to think about exactly how we recruit, because in order to work out where you want to see contextual data and how you want it displayed, you have to know what you will use it for. In partnership with our application tracking system provider, and Rare, we worked out what we wanted. The system finally went live in June 2015, on a trial basis, and then permanently in October 2015.

## Lessons in Contextual Recruitment from Higher Education

**Raphael Mokades with Joshua Oware**
**Rare Recruitment**

Our 2013 research report, 'Social Mobility in Graduate Recruitment: what graduate recruiters can learn from contextual admissions to universities', looked for the first time at how recruiters might draw inspiration from the admissions practices of top universities. Just over two years later, following the successful launch of our Contextual Recruitment System (CRS), our thinking has developed a little. We can identify three things that universities do that graduate recruiters can learn from – and one thing that universities do not do that graduate recruiters are starting to do. The things universities have been doing for many years that recruiters are now starting to do are: (a) measuring social mobility, (b) making adjusted offers for social mobility candidates, and (c) offering specific support to those candidates before they begin their degrees. Let's look at each of these.

Measurement. In so much as firms do measure, they tend to use simplistic proxy metrics such as state school / independent school, which – even at the most basic level – ignore students on bursaries, and wealthy students at grammar schools, for example. Universities have been way ahead on this, combining self-declared student information at the point of application through UCAS, with complex datasets showing, for example, average A Level grades in given schools in given years, the likelihood that a candidate from a certain postcode will make it to university, and other socioeconomic characteristics, too. The CRS has built on universities' efforts, and – following a yearlong effort by our Contextual Recruitment Working Group, made up of over 25 employers and universities – has now designed a system that we think adequately measures disadvantage. The system is already in use by 20 top employers.

Adjustment. Universities have long viewed candidates' achievements in context. Four As and four A*s at GCSE, for example, is well below average at St Paul's Girls' School (average seven A*s), but massively above average at Greig City Academy in Haringey, where the average is below five Cs. Universities don't have hard-and-fast grade expectations, but instead look at grades in context – so, quite possibly, our 4A, 4A* candidate gets to Oxbridge interview if she comes from Greig City, but not if she comes from St Paul's. Employers, enabled by the CRS, are now starting to adopt this approach.

Support. Universities give candidates to whom contextual offers have been made extra support. This ranges from an extra term, or even an extra year's teaching before the usual course start date, to financial support, mentoring, and buddying to help with careers opportunities. Some (law) firms are already committed to such, bespoke, development for ethnic minority trainees, for example, but – to the best of our knowledge – none yet have a comprehensive support programme in place specifically for candidates from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The thing universities don't do, yet, is use exactly the same criteria for measuring and defining disadvantage. Contextual data is inert without processes that turn it into useful, efficient, and empowering information. Here, employers may have an advantage. The 20-odd firms who have together adopted the CRS will between them run tens of thousands of applications through the system, this graduate recruitment season. A consequence: in Spring 2016, we will have a uniquely rich dataset, which will allow us – for the first time – to answer, for example, questions like 'how many candidates come from disadvantaged backgrounds?' 'What's the level of disadvantaged candidates we should be aiming to get on our training programme?' 'What's best practice in terms of representation?'

For universities and businesses alike, to make a real, measurable, and sustainable difference when it comes to social mobility, we must learn from each other's practices and innovations. We must combine them where necessary. And, critically, we must agree on common denominators. Such common measures will allow us to assess how far we've come, and how far we have to go.

## Progression within the Firm

**69.** As outlined earlier, the debate in the higher education sector on social mobility has seen the initial focus on access (getting in) now holding equal place alongside concerns about students' outcomes (getting ahead). This same journey, in terms of conceptualising and understanding the challenges of social mobility, is now beginning to take place in the employer sector: whilst the issue of access to the professions is relatively well understood, there is limited understanding of the impact of entrants' backgrounds on success once in graduate employment (see previous section on 'Measuring socio-economic background').

**70.** Sam Friedman expands on this topic, below. This adds to research undertaken by National Institute for Economic and Social Research[52], which explores the different outcomes of graduates by socio-economic background, investigating the prospects of graduates three and a half years after graduation:

- Private school graduates in top jobs earn £4,500 more than their state school counterparts. Their salaries also increase more quickly than for state school graduates – growing by £3,000 more over the same three-year period.

- Half of this pay difference can be explained by the variables such as type of higher education institution attended or prior academic achievement.

- Half cannot be explained by factors accounted for in this research. This suggests that non-academic skills such as articulacy or assertiveness could play an important role in accessing high-status jobs, and wider societal factors may also play a role

- Graduates from less privileged backgrounds are marginally more likely to remain in high-status jobs, with 71% still in such employment three and half years after graduation (compared to 65% for their more privileged peers)

[52] www.suttontrust.com/newsarchive/privately-educated-graduates-in-top-jobs-get-bigger-pay-rises/

## The "Class" Ceiling

**Dr Sam Friedman**
**Researcher, London School of Economics**

The hidden barriers, or 'glass ceilings', preventing women and minority ethnic groups from getting to the top of elite occupations are well documented. However, until now, questions of class - and specifically class origin – have been curiously absent from discussions of the glass ceiling. Instead, the main political issue in terms of class and social mobility has been the problem of 'fair access' into Britain's high-status occupations.

While certainly important, there is a danger of reducing social mobility to this one-dimensional issue of access. In particular it assumes that social mobility finishes at the point of occupational entry. But the reality is that while many of those from working-class backgrounds may secure admission into elite occupations, they do not necessarily go on to achieve the same levels of success as those from more privileged backgrounds. In a recent project, Laurison and Friedman have been investigating exactly this issue of social mobility within elite occupations.

In doing so, they have purposively borrowed the 'glass ceiling' to argue that it is also possible to identify a 'class ceiling' in Britain which is preventing the upwardly mobile from enjoying equivalent earnings to those from upper middle-class backgrounds. Their analysis examines data from the 2014 Labour Force Survey (LFS), Britain's largest employment survey with a sample of 95,950. Here they analyse respondents in the 63 occupations that make up Class 1 of the Government's National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC). They then look at the class origins of those in these occupations, and most importantly how their income varies according to their class background (using NS-SEC classes 1-8).

Their results, to be published in the American Sociological Review, are very striking. They show that those in elite occupations whose parents were unemployed or in semi-routine and routine working-class jobs ('the long-range upwardly mobile') earn, on average, sixteen percent less than those from privileged backgrounds. This class-origin pay gap translates to about £7,350 lower annual earnings. This difference is partly explained by the upwardly mobile being employed in smaller firms and working outside London, but it remains substantial (around £4300 a year) even after controlling for a variety of important predictors of earnings, such as ethnicity, gender, age, human capital (educational qualifications, job tenure, and training), hours worked, firm size, and whether a person works in the public or private sector.

Laurison and Friedman are also able to use the detail provided by the LFS to explore in detail various sub-groups. This reveals telling variations in the nature of the class pay gap. They show, for example, that the pay gap is more consistent and larger among professionals than among managers; that upwardly mobile women face a 'double disadvantage' when compared to stable men, and that the size of the pay gap is larger for older generations.

Finally, they also look at individual elite occupations, finding very telling variations. At one end of the scale, engineering provides a notable exemplar of meritocracy, with negligible differences in pay regardless of social background. In contrast, the results reveal the arresting scale of disadvantage experienced by the children of the working classes in accountancy, finance and IT. The socially mobile in finance, for example, have predicted earnings of £11,200 less per year than otherwise similar privileged colleagues. This disadvantage also tends to increase the longer the range of mobility.

These findings, Laurison and Friedman argue, point toward the urgent need to go 'beyond access' in addressing social mobility and take very seriously the existence of not just the glass but also the class ceiling.

# Conclusions

**71.** This paper describes a range of issues relating to student progression in the context of social mobility. These issues begin early, including a student's choice of university, and continue throughout their degree. Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are less likely to participate in the type of extra-curricular activities that are attractive to employers. They are less likely to make use of careers services, or apply for internships. And once graduated, the job market they are seeking to enter may be skewed against them. Selection criteria and processes may not provide equality of opportunity to demonstrate suitability for a job, or even be underpinned by robust methodology. And our final contributor highlights that successfully entering even some of the most prestigious occupations does not place an upwardly mobile graduate on a level footing with their peers.

**72.** We have covered and considered a wide range of related issues, identifying assumptions that need to be challenged, and a need for collaborative and coordinated actions to be taken. We suggest what the key features of good practice in contextual recruitment might look like. Whilst recognising that there is still much to do, it is also important to acknowledge that action is being taken, with employers, third sector bodies and universities all working to address these issues. The challenge comes in ensuring that those actions and activities are: evidence informed to ensure efficacy; collaborative or complementary to ensure positive impact; and embrace the full student lifecycle to ensure meaningful and significant change is achieved.

**73.** Our contributors illuminate these issues with real-life illustrations – of the issues, but also of how some universities, employers and organisations are already successfully addressing them. Taken together in this report, they collectively form a critical mass that inspires change. This is a complex area and we are not presenting this report as a menu of easy solutions: it is essential that approaches are tailored to local conditions. However, we believe that sharing the practice described here will be of practical assistance to others.

**74.** This report, along with the outcomes of the Bridge Group annual conference (February 2016) will help to inform our collective thinking, and will guide our policy development throughout 2016. We hope you will join the debate.

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