



PwC: Insights on a social mobility journey

**Broadening access to opportunities through
partnership, programmes and advocacy**

November 2023

Foreword by Kevin Ellis, Senior Partner, PwC UK



There's no better route out of a challenging start than a good job. Social mobility is about opening the door to opportunity and getting on the path to success.

Yet many people find barriers against that door that are not there for others. Too often, someone's chances in life and their prospects are constrained by their background. This is clearly unfair – and something that as a large employer we have an opportunity and responsibility to do something about.

The business imperative for social mobility is also clear. If opportunity narrows, labour markets shrink, and UK workforces become one-dimensional. Businesses need diversity of talent and thought.

In my sector there are two key issues - as a sector we need diversity to relate to clients, and also we're a skills training ground not only for our sector but an escalator for all industries and careers beyond.

Looking at our continuing journey at PwC, I'm grateful for all the people across our business and beyond who are helping us make progress. Many have shared their insights in this report.

If there's one thing I'd reflect on it's that no individual organisation can do it alone. We have to work with others – including educators, local government, charities, and other businesses – and advocate alongside them.

This report brings together a range of voices and perspectives to illustrate that collaboration. I'm proud of the strides the sector has made to support social mobility – with many firms ranked in the Social Mobility Foundation's Employer Index – but we collectively have a lot further to go.

A handwritten signature in white ink that reads "Kevin Ellis". The signature is fluid and cursive, written on a dark background.



Guide to this report



This report is written very much in the spirit of advocacy, a core part of our social mobility strategy. It's about sharing insights and reflections through the voices of people we have worked with across PwC and outside, and others who care deeply about the topic.

The focus is on broadening access to jobs and related outreach, rather than the other facets of social mobility for a business.

Key messages

While each person has a different story, three key messages run through the narratives:

1. Early intervention is crucial. School outreach is a mainstay of our social mobility action. Testimonies from young people visiting the workplace for the first time demonstrate the impact of providing intervention at early ages.
2. Recruitment processes must be open to finding and assessing potential in different ways. The application process for any job can be daunting and difficult. But it's harder if, for example, someone is the first person in their family to apply for a professional job, and they have fewer people from whom to get support and guidance.
3. Businesses have to be embedded in the community. To boost opportunities in a community, you have to engage with that community. Rarely can such impact be had from within your own four walls. Collaboration and outreach are crucial.

Our report includes background on social mobility challenges in the UK, drawing on research and data. It highlights why social mobility is important to us as a business, and outlines our journey so far.

The report is split into three key sections:

1. Raising aspirations and the skills of young people
2. Broadening pathways to work and the benefits
3. Measuring our impact - turning outreach to jobs, and jobs to careers

Also included are ten practical steps to advance social mobility as a business.

Contents

Page 1	Foreword: Kevin Ellis, Chairman, PwC UK
Page 3	Chapter 1: Social mobility in the UK today Sarah Atkinson, Chief Executive, The Social Mobility Foundation
Page 4	Chapter 2: About us - our social mobility journey
Page 7	Chapter 3: Raising aspirations and the skills of young people Community outreach Lulzim Osmani, Head of Education Business Alliance, Southwark Council Annie McAnulty, Programme Manager, The Sutton Trust Dawn Lloyd-Williams, Employer Development Coordinator, West Yorkshire Combined Authority Huw Thomas, Leader of Cardiff Council Schools outreach Simon Wareham, Assistant Headteacher, South Moor Academy Ruth Hopkins, Year 6 Teacher, PSHE and Careers Lead, Woodland Primary School
Page 12	Chapter 4: Broadening pathways into work and the benefits Guest contribution: Steph McGovern, TV Presenter and Journalist Programme Spotlight: The Tax Compliance Academy Programme spotlight: Technology Degree Apprenticeshp Mark Smith, Chief Executive, Ada National College for Digital Skills Karen Blackett OBE, President, WPP UK and Chancellor, University of Portsmouth Cathy Baxter, Head of Early Careers, PwC UK Programme spotlight: Flying Start Degree Helen Currie, Degree Programme Director, Newcastle University's Flying Start Programme
Page 19	Chapter 5: Measuring our impact - turning outreach to jobs, and jobs to careers Vicki Broadhurst, Head of Inclusion, Culture and Wellbeing, PwC UK
Page 22	Chapter 6: 10-point plan for advancing social mobility as a business
Page 23	Chapter 7: Final reflections: Ian Elliott, Chief People Officer

Chapter 1: Social mobility in the UK today

**Sarah Atkinson, Chief Executive,
The Social Mobility Foundation**

“Most people would agree that success should come through talent and hard work. But the truth is that in the UK today, where you grew up and went to school, and what your parents or guardians did for a living, has much more influence on your education and career outcomes. The educational attainment gap is growing, and in the cost-of-living crisis young people from lower income families are even less able to seize opportunities open to their wealthier peers. That isn’t good for our economy – we need to harness everyone’s skills and capabilities. And it isn’t good for our society, if young people or whole communities are left out of aspiration and success.

We need to unlock the potential of young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds, and the workplace is as important as the classroom in creating opportunities. Businesses have huge capability to drive change: through outreach into under-served communities, changing the way they recruit, looking beyond narrow and tired views of what constitutes ‘talent’. Businesses also stand to benefit hugely from accessing a broader pool and improving workforce engagement. We want to see a world where young people from all backgrounds feel they belong in our most successful companies – at every level, from the post room to the boardroom.

It’s welcome that employers like PwC continue to lead and share their progress on social mobility. Keep setting an example, speaking out and showing others the benefits of nurturing, harnessing and rewarding talent regardless of background.”

The UK social mobility challenge today

“ It may be harder now than at any point in over half a century to move up if you are born in a position of disadvantage

Adults in the UK with lower working-class parents are about **3x** as likely to be in a lower working-class occupation themselves (30%) as adults with higher professional parents (11%)

State of the Nation 2023

41% Of young people believe what they achieve in life is determined by their socio-economic background.

Co-op, 2023

1 In 3 poorer young people are **not in sustained work or education** 5 years after GCSEs compared to 1 in 7 of their wealthier peers.

Teach First, 2022

<1 In 5 disadvantaged undergraduates attended a Russell Group University in 2020.

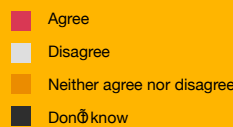
FT, 2023

1 In 3 first generation university students believe they won’t achieve their career goals.

Co-op 2023

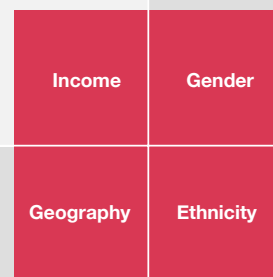
Belief that people have Equal opportunities to get ahead has plateaued since 2009

Sutton Trust 2023



People from working-class backgrounds are paid **£6,718 less per year** than peers from professional-managerial backgrounds.

Social Mobility Foundation, 2022



Only 19% of rural teenagers are able to take part in work experience which aligns with their career aspirations, against 39% of urban teenagers.

Aldridge Foundation, 2023

Only 8% of women moved from a lower working class background to a higher professional job compared with 14% of men

Social Mobility Commission 2023

Black Caribbean, Black African, Mixed Pakistani and Indian Individuals are **more likely to be unemployed** than White British young people from the same socio-economic background

State of the Nation, 2023

Chapter 2:

About us – our social mobility journey

We provide advice and services to more than 30,000 clients - from start-ups, charities and family businesses, through to vast public companies.

Doing our job well requires many skilled and talented people. We recruit and train large numbers each year, including auditors, technologists, tax advisers, and consultants.

There's a clear link between our business strategy, our community work and our recruitment. We need a diverse mix of people to match our diverse mix of clients. We need different perspectives and skills; people who understand their clients and what they're trying to achieve in their markets and communities.

But while attracting people from all backgrounds has long been important, we haven't always had a social mobility strategy or team.

From local to national

It was in the early 2000s that we started to see the art of the possible - initially in Southwark, as one of the first large businesses to move south of the river in London. We were running many local volunteering programmes with schools, academies and social enterprises, and linking these to our recruitment activity. The game changer was the creation in 2011 of our very own social enterprise next to our office - the Brigade Bar & Kitchen - a restaurant providing employment opportunities for disadvantaged people in collaboration

"We saw how volunteering helped our own staff develop, how social enterprises could help us deliver programmes in schools, and that together we can support people to achieve more, whether in PwC or beyond."

David Adair, Director of Community Engagement

with The Beyond Food Foundation. We set up a related network for social entrepreneurs, collaborating with The School for Social Entrepreneurs and Social Enterprise UK.

The appointment of our first head of social mobility in 2016 was another key moment, introducing a social mobility strategy. This was in turn instrumental to the decision to open a new office in Bradford.

Breaking down barriers

We've been on a mission to break down barriers into the firm. Removing UCAS points as an entry criteria for graduate roles was a key moment in 2015, topped last year by the removal of the 2.1 criteria. The announcements didn't go without criticism, with some commentators questioning if we were going too far. But we know from data and experience that academic performance is not the only measure of talent and potential.

The power of data and measurement

You don't need to be an accountant to recognise the importance of data to measure improvement. In 2015 we started asking our people to provide information on their socio-economic background. We ask the occupation of their highest earning parent when they were 14, which is regarded as the most reliable measure of socio-economic background. Over time our people have become much more comfortable with providing this - now over 84% of people disclose the data, and we use it to judge if we really are increasing the proportion of those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. By asking this of students on our outreach programmes and applicants to our recruitment processes, we can ensure that our targeted social mobility approach is focused on those who need our support. We're now reviewing how background influences pay and progression to senior roles. In 2022 we published our socio-economic pay gap for the first time, and we have this year published workforce targets by grade.

Key Milestones

- **2002** – Launched the Flying Start degree and school leaver programmes - alternative and more affordable pathways to work.
- **2011** – Created our own social enterprise, The Brigade Bar & Kitchen.
- **2015** – Removed UCAS points as an entry criteria for graduate roles.
- **2016** – Appointed our first head of social mobility, created a dedicated team and strategy.
- **2018** – Launched our Technology Degree Apprenticeship programme in partnership with five universities.
- **2019** – Opened our office in Bradford.
- **2021** – Published our socio-economic background pay gap and socio-economic background data by grade for the first time.
- **2022** – Removed 2:1 criteria for undergraduate and graduate roles.
- **2023** – Published targets for representation of our workforce from lower socio-economic backgrounds by grade up to 2030.



Chapter 2: About us – our social mobility journey

The journey continues

We've certainly made good progress - some 17.5% of our people come from lower socio-economic backgrounds, up from 14% two years ago, when we first published data. This is a testament to the work you will read about in this report - targeted outreach to social mobility coldspots and removing barriers to recruitment for those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. But there's clearly much more work to do. We're committed to listening and learning from others, and challenging ourselves to go further.

“Our vision at PwC UK is to lead by example as a social mobility employer – by being a truly inclusive organisation which enables people from all backgrounds to develop their careers and succeed in life; and by using our skills and resources to enable people from lower socio-economic backgrounds to make the most of their potential.”

Hollie Crompton,
Social Mobility Lead, PwC UK



PwC UK's social mobility strategy has three focus areas:



Community

Targeting support to improve the social mobility of disadvantaged communities across the UK



Advocacy

Collaborating with others and advocating for the importance of improving social mobility



Inclusion

Recruiting more people from Lower Socio-Economic Backgrounds (LSEB) and helping those we recruit to progress while at PwC

To make this strategy a reality, our key is **collaboration**. That is why this report is voiced by our people and organisations across business, civil society, and communities. They work on social mobility first-hand every day and are the advocates for a more equal playing field for opportunity across the UK.

Chapter 2: About us – our social mobility journey

Milestones on our journey so far:

2002 - Launched the Flying Start degree and school leaver programmes, creating an alternative and more affordable pathway to work.

2005 - Extended volunteering support to regional schools based on the Southwark model.

2011 - The School of Social Entrepreneurs and Social Enterprise UK offices opened in our social enterprise hub in Southwark.

2014/15 - Started asking our applicants and people to provide their socio-economic background information.

2016 - Appointed our first head of social mobility, created a dedicated team and strategy.

2020 - 2023 - Honoured employment offers made to school leavers regardless of actual A level results due to disruption to education caused by Covid-19.

2021 - Published our socio-economic background pay gap and socio-economic background data by grade for the first time.

2022 - Expanded entry routes for non-graduates through our Technology Degree Apprenticeship partnership with Ada College.

2023 - Announced the creation of 1,000 new high-skilled jobs in Cardiff.

2003 - Developed a skills based volunteering programme with Southwark Education Business Partnership, including mentoring.

2011 - Created our own social enterprise next to our office in Southwark, The Brigade Bar & Kitchen.

2012 - Launched Higher Apprenticeship scheme.

2015 - Removed UCAS points as an entry criteria for graduate roles and undergraduate roles (2016).

2017 - Signed up as a Cornerstone Employer in the Bradford Opportunity Area with our Office Senior Partner representing business on the Opportunity Area Board.

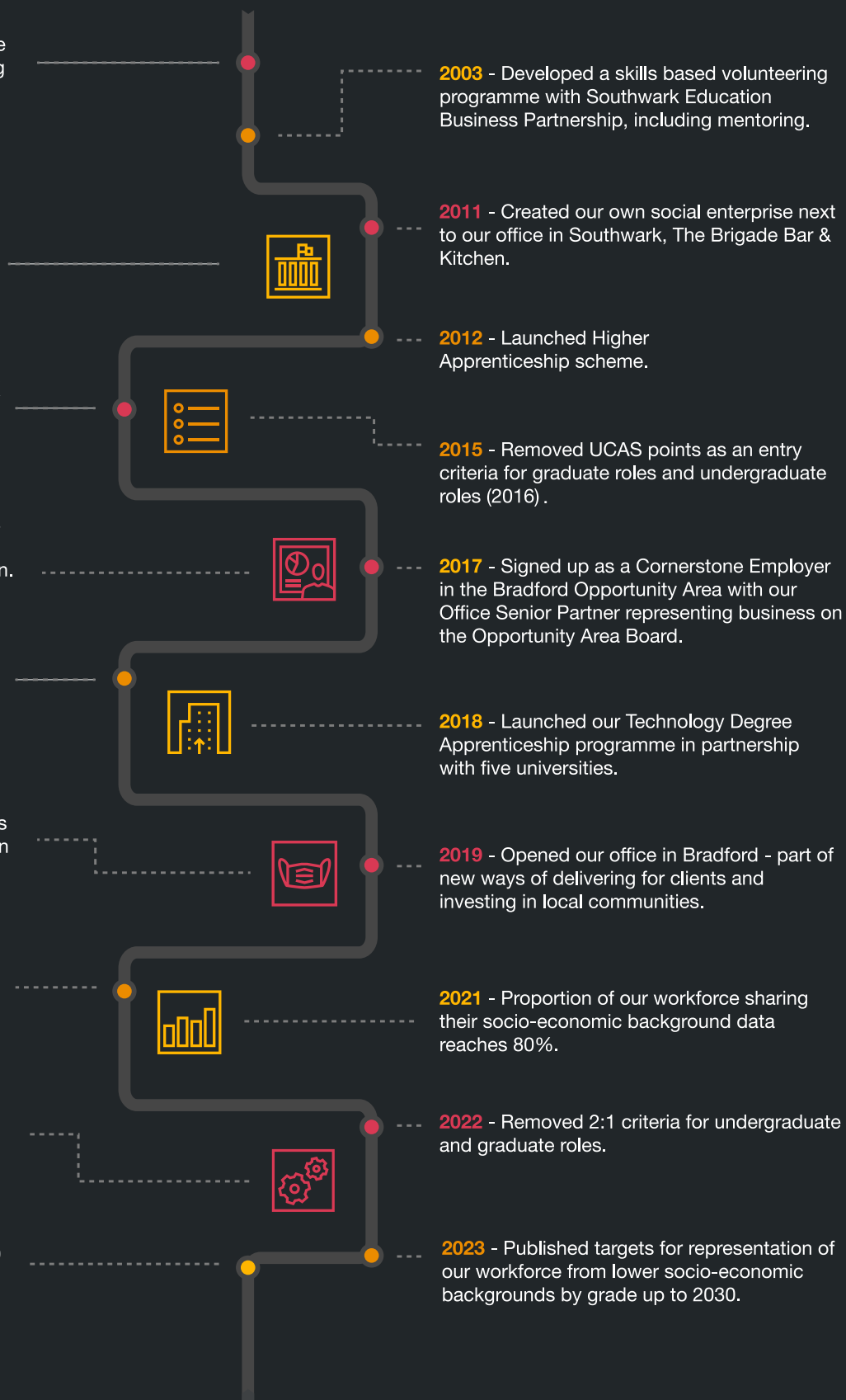
2018 - Launched our Technology Degree Apprenticeship programme in partnership with five universities.

2019 - Opened our office in Bradford - part of new ways of delivering for clients and investing in local communities.

2021 - Proportion of our workforce sharing their socio-economic background data reaches 80%.

2022 - Removed 2:1 criteria for undergraduate and graduate roles.

2023 - Published targets for representation of our workforce from lower socio-economic backgrounds by grade up to 2030.



Chapter 3: Raising aspirations and the skills of young people

We engage with schools and communities to raise both the aspirations of young people and their awareness of workplace opportunities. In the early years of our work, we recognised the significance of employer encounters for young people. Ever since, we have focused on increasing the impact of these experiences.

As a result, our outreach is purposefully broad, not only working with the communities we're based in, but extending our reach to those beyond our office footprint. We recognise that many of the young people who need extra support are the ones who can't see us or other major businesses in their local area.

To give a sense of the work that's possible across regions, we've captured a few of our standout partnerships over the years:

Southwark Education Business Alliance

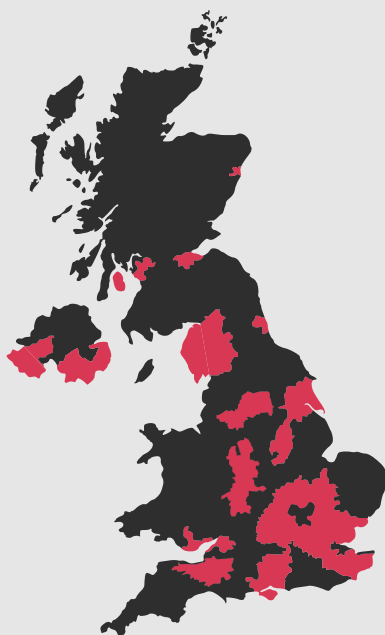
Lulzim Osmani, Head of Education Business Alliance, Southwark Council

"At the start of the millennium, Southwark in London was a very different place to what we know now. The Shard was just an architect's dream, and the Tate Modern was only beginning to open its doors. It was an area of intense need with roughly a third of children living in poverty. It was at this time that PwC became one of the founding organisations to work with Southwark Council to set up the Education Business Alliance (EBA). The EBA was set up to bring schools and businesses together to prepare young people across Southwark for the world of work.

PwC provided funding, student mentoring and headteacher coaching. They organised careers fairs and many more specific employability projects.

Our partnership lasted for several years and was integral to the EBA becoming a resilient, self-financing organisation. When the government stopped providing the EBA with any funding during the period of austerity, PwC helped us set up a sustainable financing model that we rely on to this day."

Counties our in-person social mobility programmes have reached



Cities/towns our in-person social mobility programmes have reached



Chapter 3: Raising aspirations and the skills of young people

Business Insight Week with The Sutton Trust

Annie McAnulty, Programme Manager, The Sutton Trust

“In 2014, PwC opened its doors to young people, including those on the Sutton Trust’s pathways programme, to provide them with an in-office work experience programme: Business Insight Week.

With half the places ringfenced for those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, students were immersed in working life at PwC, with an emphasis on building their confidence and providing them with skills for the future. Crucially, the week-long work experience placement was paid, removing one of the key barriers to accessing such opportunities. After completing the programme, students also got the chance to fast-track for a school leaver or apprenticeship position at PwC.

In 2020, the programme had to be adapted due to the lockdown constraints of Covid-19. Today, PwC has built on the success of the programme to deliver Virtual Insight Week and New World New Skills work experience. This means larger numbers of students can be reached from a wider range of geographical areas of the UK, while still offering the invaluable paid-for work experience across PwC offices, ring fenced for those from lower socio-economic backgrounds..

There are many things that have made our partnership so successful over the years. Creativity and open-mindedness are essential, but at the root is a deep, genuine alignment around wanting to improve social mobility, keeping young people at the heart and centre of every decision, and approaching everything with a data-driven mindset.”

- Outreach in 100% of social mobility cold spots in England. Students supported across all four UK nations; every region in England, Northern Ireland and Scotland and all but one in Wales.
- PwC partners with over 25 organisations as social mobility outreach collaborators, whilst delivering 14 programmes of our own.
- In FY 2022, 3064 PwC staff volunteered 6856 hours on social mobility outreach programmes.
- 63% of students mentored through our social mobility mentoring schemes were in receipt of free school meals.
- 645 students have completed our New World New Skills Work Experience, only open to students from lower socio-economic backgrounds or schools with a higher than average proportion of students in receipt of free school meals.



Chapter 3: Raising aspirations and the skills of young people

Driving social mobility by boosting employability in Bradford

Dawn Lloyd-Williams, Employer Development Coordinator, West Yorkshire Combined Authority

“PwC and the West Yorkshire Combined Authority have worked closely together. As a cornerstone employer, PwC has reached over 2500 young people across Leeds and Bradford alone.

A particular highlight so far has been PwC’s involvement in a report we produced which looks at how businesses can collaborate with, and employ, young people with special education needs and disability (SEND). Their input has helped to shape a highly valued resource called the SEND Employer Toolkit, which is now being accessed by businesses across the region, aiding inclusive growth. By advocating for other businesses to adopt best practice, it sets an example for others to follow and is an important part of how big businesses can make a difference in regions.”

Investing in digital jobs and skills in Cardiff

This year, we announced a programme of major investment that will create over a thousand high-skilled jobs in Cardiff over the next five years, in a broad range of disciplines but with a particular focus on digital and technology. The firm’s investment will include a contribution from the Welsh Government, who will contribute £2m over the five-year period, which will be ring-fenced for PwC to drive inclusion, upskilling and economic growth in the wider regional ecosystem. We’re making a significant investment to support Wales’ growth agenda, including community engagement programmes focused on improving skills, opportunities and access to careers for people from lower socio-economic and diverse backgrounds; and raising aspiration in underrepresented communities.

John-Paul Barker, Regional Market Leader for PwC in Wales and the West

“Often, in the underrepresented communities we want to recruit from, there is a lack of awareness of the opportunities that the professional services industry offers, and the accessibility of reskilling and training services. Welsh Government’s support will enable us to supercharge our social mobility and community engagement programmes and maximise our opportunities to reach the best talent across South Wales.”

Huw Thomas, Leader of Cardiff Council

“The creation of 1,000 new highly-skilled jobs and a commitment to access talent from our underrepresented communities is great news for our city.

“This investment is a vote of confidence in Cardiff and its workforce, and we look forward to supporting PwC’s local management team in delivering their exciting vision for the Cardiff Office.”

We’ve been able to support over 17,500 school students with workplace skills development



Chapter 3: Raising aspirations and the skills of young people

Schools outreach

At the heart of engaging with a community is getting into the schools that serve it.

Since we began our social mobility work, we have targeted outreach towards schools with a higher-than-average proportion of students eligible for free school meals and/or located in a social mobility cold spot.

We've expanded our activities over the years – from office visits to lesson toolkits, mentoring, and paid work experience opportunities. Our aim is to make a difference by engaging with young people from diverse backgrounds to raise awareness of the world of work.

More than ever, schools in social mobility cold spots are facing significant challenges. Lost learning over the pandemic and a cost of living crisis exacerbates the barriers for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. We hope that our contribution through collaborative partnerships, employability skills and inspiring role models can support schools to enhance career opportunities for their students.

Simon Wareham, Assistant Headteacher, South Moor Academy

“Southmoor Academy serves a very mixed catchment consisting of areas of affluence and ones of significant disadvantage. We have an above-average number of students who are eligible for free school meals.

We have worked with PwC for the past three years, which has involved PwC volunteers supporting our careers fair, while delivering classroom sessions on financial management and routes into their organisation.

Our partnership particularly comes alive when the students can connect their school studies with the world of work. For example, the financial management sessions were delivered to Year 9 students at a time when they were learning this in school. It's so important for students to see how what they're learning in the classroom will support them in the future, not just in terms of content but also skills, especially for students from disadvantaged backgrounds who do not often have the possibility of developing work-ready skills at home.

Working with businesses like PwC gives our students the opportunity to understand that future careers within these organisations are accessible and achievable to all students, particularly those from a lower socio-economic background.”

Anton, Aged 14/Year 10

“It was amazing to see a fountain in the middle of an office building and the views from the windows were incredible. We had the opportunity to improve our problem-solving skills by designing a vending machine and then improve our speaking skills by presenting our ideas.”

Eguono, Aged 14/Year 10

“We had the opportunity to really develop our employability skills - allowing us to use the transferable skills we are learning in school in a real-world environment, such as teamwork.”

Chapter 3: Raising aspirations and the skills of young people

**Ruth Hopkins, Year 6 Teacher,
PSHE and Careers Lead,
Woodland Primary School**

“Co-op Academy Woodlands serves a complex community; pupils face multiple challenges to learning including those relating to deprivation, attendance, behaviour, mobility and parental engagement. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is 64.8% (national 24%). The proportion of pupils whose first language is not English is 63.7% (national 21%).

As the Careers-Related Learning lead for our school, developing our students’ aspirations is a huge priority for me. Many of our students, who have been brought up in 3rd and 4th generations of non-working families, have very little knowledge of the world of work.

Last year, we were incredibly fortunate to be the first school to work with PwC on their Primary pilot, which involved taking the pupils to visit a PwC office.

Being able to visit a “real-life” workplace, meeting employees and hearing from one of the senior leaders, all helped to give our students a wider sense of the world.

The students looked in awe at the offices and what PwC had to offer. All the volunteers we encountered took an interest, and the children were made to feel valued by the senior leader who was enthusiastic about them joining his team in the future.

Businesses being able to offer children, of all ages, some form of workplace experience is key to driving social mobility. It helps them believe that they can break the cycle of deprivation and make a change for themselves.”

Jessica, Aged 11, Year 6

“My favourite part of Careers Week was our visit to PwC. The glass lifts were so cool and I loved our code cracking activity. I hope I can go back and visit when I go to High School.”

Nicolas, Aged 11, Year 6

‘I loved PwC and everyone was so nice. The helpers told us what they did and it was inspiring. I want to work for PwC when I’m older and the CEO said we could!’



Chapter 4: Broadening pathways into work and the benefits

Creating opportunity for school leavers.

At PwC, we have a variety of ways school leavers can join the firm. We recognise that further education is a choice, not a prerequisite, for talent.

Our apprenticeship and school leaver positions have parity of esteem - ensuring you can reach the same seniority in the organisation at the same or quicker rates than graduates. Equally, creating talent pipelines for those who have already established careers without a degree has proven to be incredibly valuable.

This shows mixing real-world, practical business training with the option to study towards qualifications can turbocharge any career. Add into the mix a competitive salary and established support networks, and you can have a recipe for success. It has certainly worked for Danni and Martin:

Danni Whaler, Senior Manager, PwC UK

“I first joined PwC as a Secretarial Assistant when I was 19. A family friend told me they had joined PwC without going to university and there were plenty of opportunities to grow in the firm. I remember getting the call from the recruiter with the offer and I was so excited.

Fast forward 10 years and I am now a Senior Manager, leading our Consulting Early Careers Recruitment team.”

Martin Cowie, Audit Partner, PwC UK

“I have been at PwC for 33 years, having joined directly from school. The opportunity came through a school careers advisor and instantly appealed to me as I wasn't convinced I could afford to go to university. Coming into the office from school can be a frightening experience but the staff were super supportive.”

Guest contribution:

Steph McGovern, TV Presenter and Journalist

“Leaving school should be one of the most exciting times of your life. You should walk out feeling equipped to be able to work in whatever sector you want.

And yet lots of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds do not feel like this. Instead, they come out thinking that they are not clever and that they have limited options.

Why?

Because many of them have not had the structure in their lives to be able to learn and get through the purely academic assessments our society is obsessed with. They might be sharing beds, caring for parents or siblings, they might be frequently hungry or cold or tired. Things that would make learning, revising and sitting exams difficult.

I have seen this first hand at the school I went to, and with the young people I work with now.

They have so many transferable skills that have helped them survive, which is exactly what our economy needs to thrive, but unfortunately very few people tell them or show them how they are useful in an education or work setting.

Society divides us before we even reach adulthood. We are either clever, or we are not, simply based on whether we pass academic exams. This is madness. Everyone learns in different ways and that's why I am so passionate about the importance of vocational training being given parity to the pure academic route.

People have been snobby about skills for too long. As a business journalist, I have visited more than 1,000 workplaces across the UK and seen first-hand how some of the most skilled people are not the workers typically classed as skilled. The pandemic showed us that in abundance too. There is a simple explanation for this: people who have done on-the-job training or vocational qualifications are not seen as being as clever as those who have followed a purely academic route.

This is wrong. I did an apprenticeship supported by a local college and it has helped me in every job I've had, from engineer at Black & Decker to BBC journalist to Channel 4 host. It gave me transferable skills. I honestly don't think I would have been as successful as I am without it.

And yet this type of learning is woefully undervalued. This is why we have a skills gap. We are not properly promoting the range of options out there and giving them equal credibility. Similarly, many organisations are still siloed in their recruitment thinking, focussing on university fairs instead of the wealth of riches coming out of Further Education colleges or University Technical Colleges. I am lucky enough to visit these places regularly and see the great training going on. There are lots of incredible young people leaving these places with all the skills our economy desperately needs.

Let's shout about that and broaden everyone's mind on what clever looks like.”



I did an apprenticeship supported by a local college and it has helped me in every job I've had.

Chapter 4: Broadening pathways into work and the benefits

Programme Spotlight: The Tax Compliance Academy

The newly created Tax Compliance Academy challenges the traditional entry routes into technical roles at PwC. The Academy's new skills-based approach to experienced hire recruitment opens-up opportunities to candidates who may have previously been met with barriers to developing a career in tax.

The recruitment process puts skills demonstration before educational background, allowing access to an untapped market of strong candidates who may not have continued into further education but have developed valuable transferable skills through prior work and life experience.

With no prior tax knowledge or experience needed, the Academy begins with a two-year programme of structured upskilling, incorporating a formal schedule of training and on the job coaching and experience in the Compliance Services team. Afterwards, individuals remain in permanent employment and can progress their career within Tax Compliance or explore other roles in PwC.

Laura Sargent, Senior Manager, Tax Transformation, PwC UK and part of the team that designed the Tax Compliance Academy

"The programme only launched in July 2023 and we've been blown away by the interest, receiving an unprecedented number of applications for a non-student programme. By emphasising the skills we value during the application process, we are already seeing members bringing diversity of thought and skills to our work. So far, 53% of members have been from lower socio-economic backgrounds, 53% have been from minority ethnic groups and 42% have been female. I'm so proud

to be trailblazing an approach that broadens how, and who, we offer roles to; reimagining the perception of the "right fit" for a professional services firm."

Adam Ihsan, Tax Compliance Academy member

"I neither have a degree nor any relevant qualifications that I thought would make me an attractive employee in the corporate world, but in 2019 I purchased some shares in a FTSE100 company and decided to learn how to interpret a company report thanks to a Warren Buffett Youtube video!

After some soul-searching on my career, I liaised with one of the Big Four who informed me that I would need to redo exams to be eligible to apply for an entry level role, which would have taken me 7-8 years to complete.

A friend then sent me a link to the Tax Compliance Academy role and encouraged me to apply, although I didn't think I'd get in. Since being part of PwC I feel like I've had my very own "Great Leap Forward". I can honestly say this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity."

Anthony Thomason, Tax Compliance Academy member

"The Tax Compliance Academy has opened up doors for people like me. I knew I had a lot to offer a firm like PwC, but in the past have felt disheartened when opportunities were only available to individuals with a degree or those who had already worked in a similar role.

Not being in a position to go back to square one, I felt that firms were missing out by not providing diverse demographics with the same opportunities. The Tax Compliance Academy has changed that and it's great to be a part of it."

53%

Proportion of academy members from lower socio-economic backgrounds

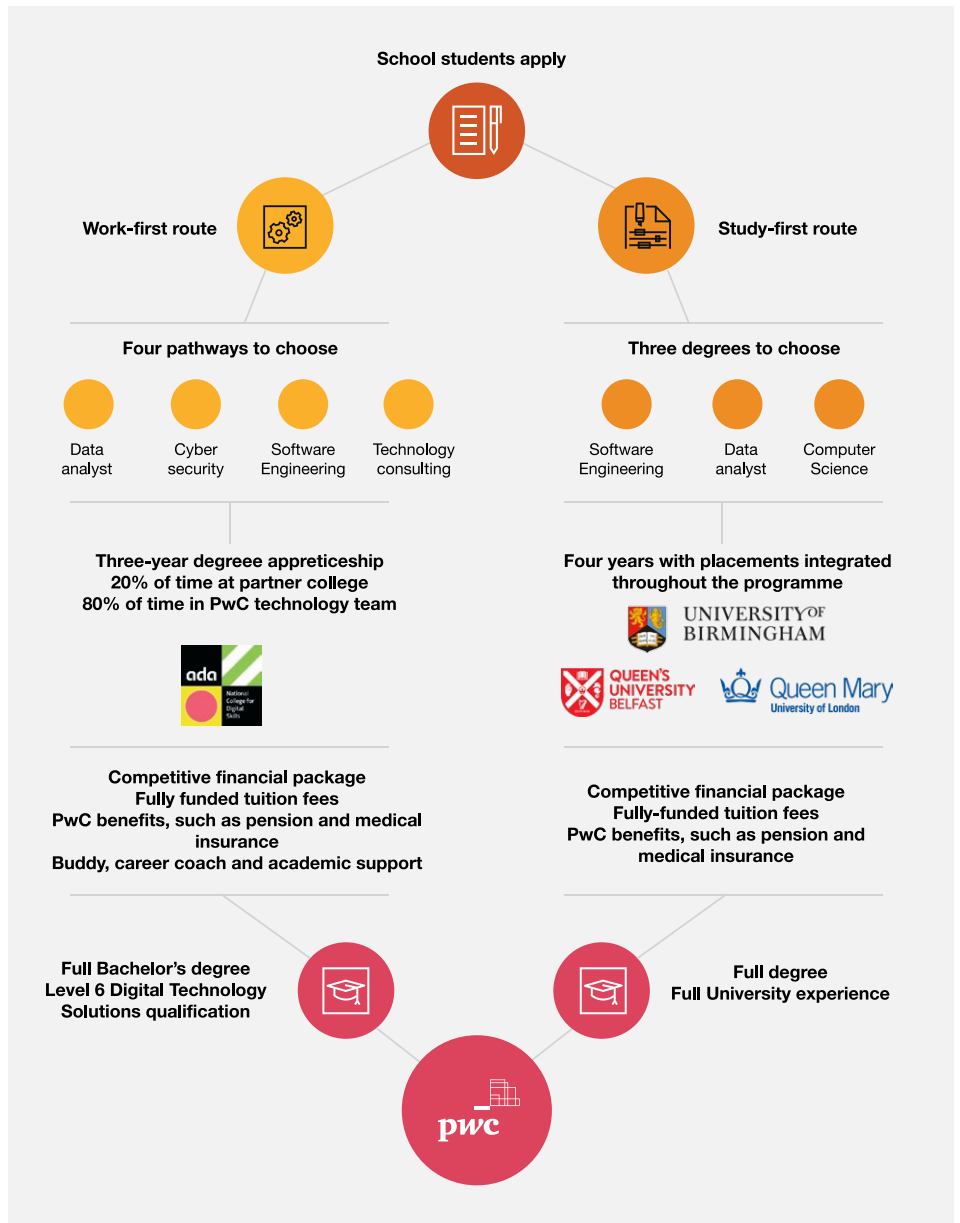
Chapter 4: Broadening pathways into work and the benefits

Programme spotlight: Technology Degree Apprenticeship

Our Technology Degree Apprenticeship (TDA) programme acknowledges that people have diverse learning styles and should be provided with multiple pathways to grow their careers.

The programme is a way of getting hands-on experience and studying toward a fully funded degree – all while earning a salary. This sees participants graduating without debt, and often continuing their career with PwC after completing the programme. Given that we're positioning ourselves for the future, we have recently re-launched the TDA programme to put a greater focus on Artificial Intelligence (AI), which will include a dedicated AI week for students at PwC's offices.

Thanks to our partner institutions, such as Ada College, participants of the programme like Salome and Mohsin are becoming equipped with degrees to succeed in a fast-evolving UK economy.



Chapter 4: Broadening pathways into work and the benefits

Mark Smith, Chief Executive, Ada National College for Digital Skills

“Ada was established with a mission to provide pathways into high-quality tech careers for young people from low-income backgrounds. We are leveraging the tech sector as an engine for social mobility because the opportunities in tech are amazing. It doesn’t matter how much money your parents had, what your background is, or if you know the right people growing up.

When we’re working with mission-aligned employers like PwC, together, we go to where the potential applicants are and say: these opportunities are for you, we need you and we’ll support you every step of the way.

Doing this together is what makes the difference - and that’s why our partnership with PwC has worked so well. From day 1, we have regularly communicated and collaborated on each aspect of the programme, from the wording on the vacancy description, to key elements of the learning experience. We’ve been able to share expertise and resources, knowing that we are both after the same thing.

Once apprentices are on the programme, the partnership we have built with PwC is even more important, because a genuine commitment to social mobility means being prepared to ask what we might do differently each time a blocker comes up. This might mean helping an apprentice with caring commitments to juggle everything, or looking at what advice and support can be offered on housing and accommodation at the start.

We love working with PwC because they are fully committed to the mission, open to advice and suggestions, but, of course, also have a wealth of expertise and innovative ideas themselves - so it goes both ways!”

Salome Tirado Okeze, tech degree apprentice (study-first)

“I first learned about PwC’s Tech Degree Apprenticeship programme while I was at school. My parents were adamant that I should get a degree, and the programme worked around this problem because it meant that I could study and get experience, all while being paid a salary and without any tuition fees.

As a minority, I had imposter syndrome and felt that I wasn’t smart enough to be accepted. The day I heard the news, my parents danced around the living room, chanting, “Salome is going to university debt-free!”. During my apprenticeship, I decided to make it my mission to encourage others from all backgrounds to apply. I published a viral TikTok which caught the attention of PwC’s senior leadership team, I’ve delivered sessions to hundreds of students from disadvantaged backgrounds and taken part in PwC’s diversity mentorship programme.

Looking back at all that I have accomplished as an apprentice, and all those that I’ve been able to encourage, I’m so proud. I can’t wait to see what I’ll do once I graduate.”

Mohsin Khan, tech degree apprentice (work-first)

“Transitioning from a university dropout to a tech-focused apprenticeship with PwC and Ada College has become a pivotal chapter in my story. The work-first pathway stood out due to its consistent work and study cycle, offering an environment for professional growth while still being able to learn. The emphasis on practical skills has given me a basis in software testing. Earning while learning has also granted me financial independence and the industry connections are paving the way for mentorship opportunities. Beyond a job, this apprenticeship has equipped me with the skills and confidence for a promising career.”

“

As a minority, I had imposter syndrome and felt that I wasn’t smart enough to be accepted.

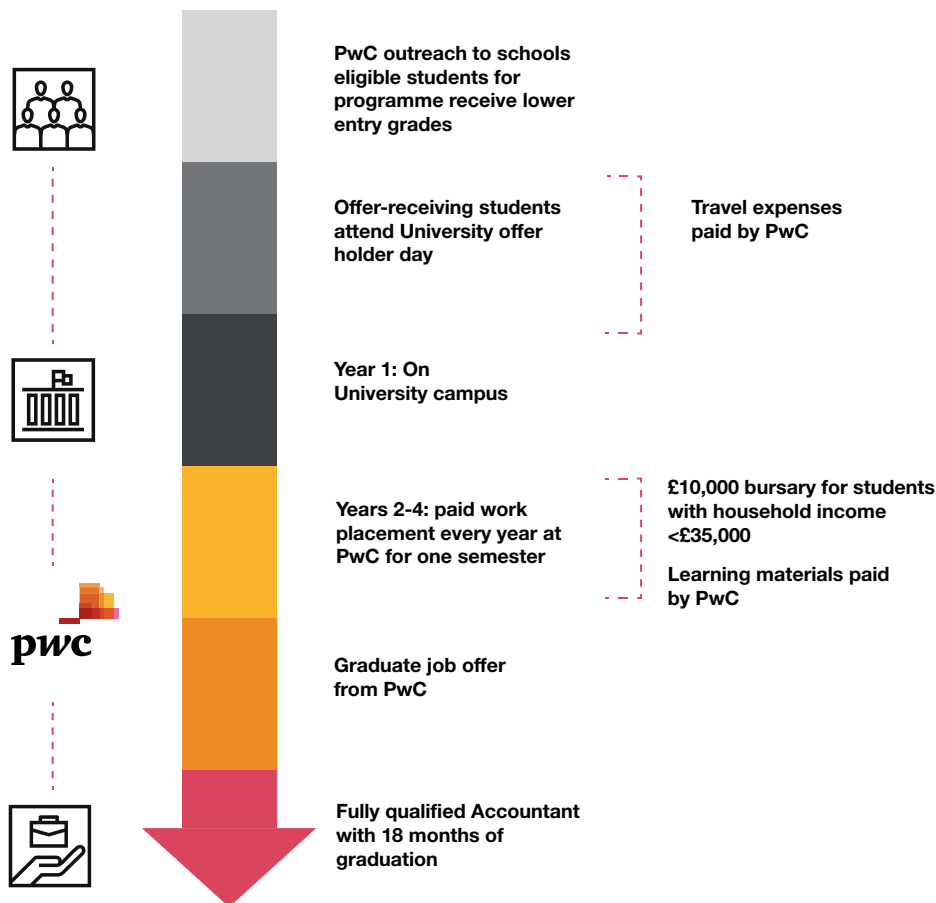


Chapter 4: Broadening pathways into work and the benefits

Programme spotlight: Flying Start Degree – accounting and business management

Our Flying Start Degree Programme has been running for over 20 years, supporting students through their university journey, equipping them with applicable skills through paid work experience at PwC and offering the opportunity to join the firm upon graduating.

We purposefully partner with universities that demonstrate a specific ability to support students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, as well as those universities with high proportions of target students, such as Queen Mary University of London. During their studies and placements, we provide students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds with financial support for learning materials and a bursary for eligible students.



Flying Start impact statistics

21%

of the Flying Start cohort were eligible for the bursary, and as a result, students eligible for free school meals joining the programme increased

from
6%
to
15%

The Flying Start accounting programme at Queen Mary University comprised of

47%

lower socio-economic background students, based on parental occupation, which is significantly above national benchmarks.

Participating universities



Chapter 4: Broadening pathways into work and the benefits

Helen Currie, Degree Programme Director, Newcastle University's Flying Start Programme

“Improving social mobility in Higher Education isn't simply about increasing the number of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds going to university. It's just as important they feel they belong within our academic community, and secure graduate employment when they leave us. All of this is possible with the innovative Flying Start degree.

Despite tuition fee funding and government support, higher education still isn't financially viable for many. For these students, Flying Start removes some of the financial barriers by providing bursaries to students from low-income households, covering the cost of their learning materials and enabling them to earn a competitive salary during their study - all funded by PwC.

For eligible students, we also offer a supported entry route through the programme. These applicants can receive a lower contextual admission offer, as well as receiving additional 1:1 support throughout their application, on results day and in the lead-up to their first day on campus.

At the admissions interview, many questions used to start with “can you tell me about a time when ...?”. This enabled students from more privileged backgrounds to talk about their travel and relevant work experience. However, students from lower socio-economic backgrounds often struggled to come up with answers to these types of questions, simply because they hadn't had the same opportunities to demonstrate their potential. As a result, we've now adapted the types of questions we ask to give everyone a fair chance of success.

Our data from the last 20 years of the Flying Start degree at Newcastle shows us that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, despite some entering with lower A-Level (or equivalent) grades, excel on this programme. The students show evidence of two crucial skills for success on arrival at university: self-motivation and independence. We see these students making the most of this opportunity and are motivated to get the graduate job at PwC when studying gets tough.”

Daniel Scott, Flying Start graduate

“Flying Start plays an important role in improving access into the accountancy world and especially the ‘Big Four’. The placement-style learning brings an understanding of the profession that a normal accountancy degree would not provide, as it covers challenges that often come up at PwC and introduces you gently into the profession. Without Flying Start I may not have had the confidence to apply for a job within a Big Four firm.

The paid placements and financial support are also vital, as many people from my background hesitate to go to university due to cost fears. Yet, they have the desire and hunger to be successful. If we truly want to improve social mobility, we must never leave that up to chance.”

During the reporting cycle of 2022, we provided support to over

100,950

students from socio-economic backgrounds

Reaching and recruiting University graduates from far and wide

Guest contribution:

Karen Blackett OBE, President, WPP UK and Chancellor, University of Portsmouth

“I write from a unique and privileged position of being both a UK business leader, as well as the Chancellor of the University of Portsmouth.

Any business wants to attract the very best talent, nurture them and enable them to progress, shine, and then deliver growth for the company. However, too often corporate organisations can be blinkered in believing that the very best talent only exists in certain institutions, limiting their exposure and access.

When recruiting and engaging young people to enter the world of work for the first time, I know that the following is of vital importance to hold front of mind.

Talent is everywhere, but opportunity is not (wise words spoken by the CEO of Creative UK, Cariline Norbury).

Diversity of thought within an organisation is not a problem to fix, but a solution for growth.

My own journey into the advertising industry, 30 years ago now, was one that needed resilience, the ability to pivot and perseverance. It was a closed network, nepotism was rife, and recruitment was predominantly from the Russell Group Universities and a small selection of Art colleges. In my view, an approach that runs the risk of seriously generating Group Think – the Achilles heel to any organisation.

Continued on next page

Chapter 4: Broadening pathways into work and the benefits

The pioneers and the misfits who energise creativity and drive innovation forward can come from any background, and from any place.

Unfortunately, at this moment in time, the Russell Group of Universities tend to over-represent those who are privately educated – approximately 20% of their student intake on average. Of course, this is unrepresentative of the population where only 1 in 14 people are privately educated.

Compounding this can be the misconception that only the top universities produce the quality of graduates needed to enter the corporate world. I would implore any leader responsible for future proofing their business to reconsider this hypothesis.

The Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), provides an independent review of teaching quality across higher education providers in England, undertaken by the Office for Students. Gold is the highest possible rating and this year, several non-Russell Group Universities received the top accolade. At the University of Portsmouth, 96% of our students are state educated and we have also been awarded Gold status – I can testify that talent absolutely exists here!

Quite simply, if you want to grow, and for your organisation to really thrive, it is essential to remember that incredible talent exists everywhere, you just need to give that talent the opportunity.”

Cathy Baxter, Head of Early Careers, PwC UK

“Widening access to lower-socioeconomic background (LSEB) graduates isn’t a one size fits all approach. Our outreach is done in many ways, and we continuously adjust our offering. The starting point is working with a wide variety of universities - last recruitment season, we visited over 100 UK universities as part of our in-person campus campaign. As part of these visits, we work closely with university careers teams to provide tailored skills sessions and use our own data from previous years to see what support is most suited to the students at each university, to help them get the best from our selection process. Looking beyond London is also a central part of our strategy, to ensure we reach social mobility cold spots and create opportunities to join PwC across the country. Last recruitment season, c60% of our graduate roles were recruited into our regional offices. In 2022 we announced the removal of the 2:1 degree requirement from our selection process. The intention is to drive radical changes in the social mobility and diversity of the professional services’ industry, and how companies assess potential more broadly. The move enabled us to further diversify our graduate intake through broader access to talented young people studying a range of disciplines at a large number of universities. Graduates from lower socio-economic backgrounds are a strength of PwC. We are focused on evolving our opportunities in line with feedback from students, partner organisations and the marketplace, to create better access routes for LSEB graduates into PwC, like Kiah and Brooklyn.”

Kiah Gilford-Wilcox, Associate, PwC UK Graduate Business Programme

“Coming from a small, ex-mining village in Derbyshire as a first-generation university student, the path into top graduate jobs is certainly not well trodden. After university, following in my family’s footsteps, I went into public sector work where I first interacted with PwC. I was inspired by the PwC project team and thought ‘this is a job I want’. Since joining, the life aspirations I had as a bright kid from a poor background that never really felt achievable - suddenly now do. I’ve been introduced to a wealth of opportunities already, and I’m really looking forward to a long and successful career with PwC.”

Brooklyn Jones, Senior Audit Associate, PwC UK

“I grew up in Weston-super-Mare, where my mum has been a cleaner and my dad has had a range of manual jobs. I went to a local state school and college, and was able to study Accounting and Finance at the University of Bristol after receiving a contextual offer based on parental income and my postcode through their ‘Access to Bristol’ scheme. Joining PwC has been a big adjustment for me. While I was at university, my main aim was just getting into PwC. I have now been working here for two years, and it’s a shock that what I viewed as the ‘end goal’ back then is now the start of my whole career and there are so many opportunities.”



Chapter 5: Measuring our impact – turning outreach to jobs, and jobs to careers

By widening our outreach and broadening the ways in which people can join the firm, we're ultimately trying to impact aspirations and life outcomes.

We want to help people build successful careers whether at PwC or elsewhere.

By measuring impact we can see what's working and evolve our approach.

We collect data on our outreach work, our workforce and the experiences of young people engaging with us. We can also see impact through the journeys of those who joined us without a degree progressing into senior roles and our culture changing over time.

From outreach to recruitment

Looking at how outreach is translating to recruitment we can see that:

91%

of New World, New Skills work experience students could see themselves working at a place like PwC with many highlighting culture, flexibility, support available and particularly the positive working environment which makes PwC an attractive place to work.

Students applying to us after work experience are six times more likely to secure a permanent role compared with the average school leaver applicant.

700

students secured one of our School and College or Apprenticeship roles last year as a result of engaging with our outreach at some point in their education.

Siva Umapathykumar, tech degree apprentice and Sutton Trust alumni

“When I first learned about the PwC degree apprenticeship programme, I instantly recognised it as an opportunity I couldn't pass up. I'd had the invaluable insight of studying Computer Science at a university through the Sutton Trust Summer School scheme. The chance to gain real-world experience while simultaneously pursuing my studies was incredibly appealing, and the fact that PwC would fully fund my programme made it all the more enticing. In my current role, I am in a year-long placement within Tax Technology at PwC. This experience has provided me with a wealth of insights into how technology is utilised within the industry. Working full-time has not only deepened my technical knowledge but also honed the essential soft skills required to thrive in

the professional world. I've developed strong communication, teamwork, and problem-solving skills that are vital for success in the industry.”

The most exciting part of our social mobility story is that we know it doesn't stop once you've joined the organisation. We can see the impact of diversifying our routes into PwC and removing barriers, even in our senior leaders.

Danni Whaler, Senior Manager:

“I thought that to be successful at a big professional services firm, you would need to have a degree and join a graduate programme, however my career has been very different - it's been a journey in which PwC and my colleagues have supported me every step of the way, giving me the opportunity to work in various roles, develop new skills and make lifelong friendships.”



Chapter 5: Measuring our impact - turning outreach to jobs, and jobs to careers

Measuring impact within PwC

If you don't know what your workforce looks like - how do you know how to improve its socio-economic diversity? For many years we have been collecting aspects of socio-economic background data to understand our people and how we can use recruitment to increase representation. We now ask four questions - which are all recommended by the Social Mobility Commission and focus on parental occupation as our primary measure of socio-economic background.

In 2018, we had socio-economic background data for less than 25% of our employees, so were unable to analyse a full dataset and complete a robust analysis of the impact of an individual's socio-economic background on their career with us.

We launched an internal campaign to gather the socio-economic background data of our people, based on parental occupation. 84% of PwC staff have now shared their socio-economic background with us - meaning that we have a strong and diverse data set from which to draw insights and targets.

Essential elements of the campaign were:

1. Leadership and advocacy that reinforced the value of data
2. Building trust that helped individuals feel comfortable sharing personal information
3. Being transparent by explaining how the data will be used
4. Being consistent through a sustained focus on requesting data throughout the year
5. Maintaining confidentiality by securely storing data
6. Making it meaningful by providing examples of how data is used in analysing and communicating pay gaps, monitoring applications and hires, and career progression
7. Modifying language such as inviting individuals to "share" instead of "disclose" their data
8. Appealing to all by always having a "prefer not to share" option

Turning jobs to careers

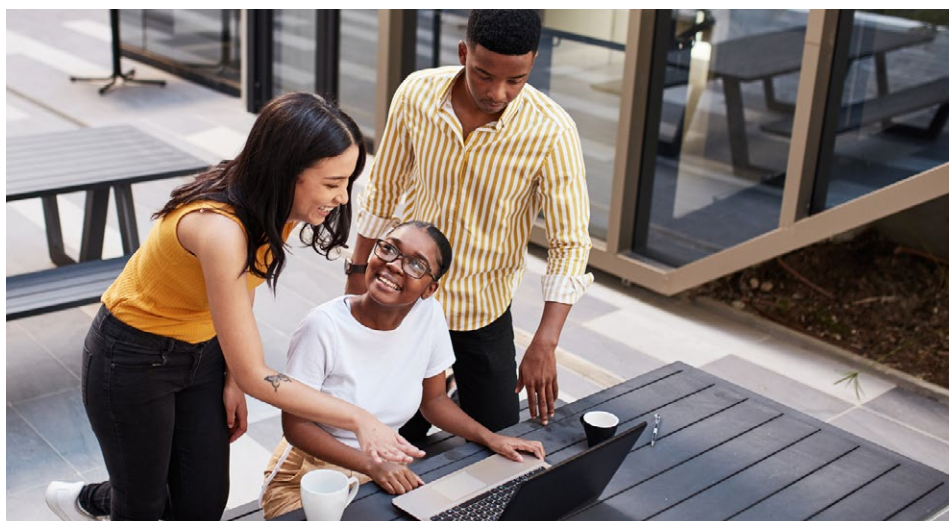
We now know the socio-economic background of 95% of our people. But this is just the start. Now we need to embed initiatives to see that diversity increase over time - and across every level of the firm. Ultimately we want to ensure we're not widening access into the firm, but increasing opportunity to progress through the ranks. That's why we've launched targets for socio-economic background as part of our 2023 Annual Report. By 2030, we aim to have greater representation of lower socio-economic talent at all levels, including:

- Firmwide target 28%
- Associate: 35%
- Senior Associate: 32%
- Manager: 30%
- Senior Manager: 25%
- Director: 18%
- Partner 15%

Our approach, which has been informed by detailed workforce analysis conducted with University College London, is designed to deliver measurable outcomes. And, as we did for gender and ethnicity, we have used predictive analytics to set our first ever socio-economic background targets for FY30. These are both challenging and aspirational, and by sharing these targets publicly we are holding ourselves accountable for making progress.

Martin Cowie, Partner:

"I've had the opportunity to do different things and work in different offices, including three client secondments, working in four offices in the UK and spending six years in Sydney. I have also been the People Partner for Northern Audit. Not having a degree has not impacted on any of the above opportunities!"



Chapter 5: Measuring our impact - turning outreach to jobs, and jobs to careers

Supporting careers through an inclusive culture

To attract people from different backgrounds, they have to believe they will fit into an organisation, so creating an inclusive culture is key. Likewise, people are more likely to reach their full potential if the culture is inclusive and supportive.

Vicki Broadhurst, Head of Inclusion, Culture and Wellbeing, PwC UK

“I know the perception of some is that our profession can't be a home for talent from lower socio-economic backgrounds, and although we have done a lot to try and change this, we still have some way to go. It is imperative that potential candidates know we welcome people from all backgrounds.

I say that as someone who's dedicated most of their working life to growing a career here, having arrived over 25 years ago as an HR administrator. Proving that PwC wants people from all walks of life, to develop their own potential, is always at the forefront of my mind.

In this report, you've read a lot about the outreach and engagement work we do in schools, universities and organisations throughout the UK. This work is a critical starting point for us as it is in these communities that we can start to sow the seeds of an inclusive and welcoming work environment for young people from less privileged backgrounds. It's important to me that we get out there and demonstrate to young people that a PwC employee looks and sounds just like them.

One of our greatest assets is our culture. We're a people business, so we should be a business where our people feel valued and included. We mean those words when we say them. We make them real by our actions and our systems: flexible working patterns for all and flexible bank holidays to support other cultural holidays; dedicated structured support for those starting out on their career; flexible benefits that meet your needs, and hybrid development opportunities.

From your arrival at one of our offices, you'll be connected to buddies who can support you day to day and show you the ropes, career coaches who can support your development and are accountable for your performance, and a relationship leader for work support. You can also join one of our 14 people networks, to celebrate and share the cultures that everyone brings with them to the workplace.

I have built my PwC career starting in Leeds and now in Birmingham, visiting, but never based in London. It's allowed me to chart my own course over the years. There is far more to be done and there's a team of us who get up each morning with a mission to help do it. We aim to make sure every instance or event is in line with our culture, and every hurdle to someone from a lower socio-economic background is there for us to dismantle. I think I have one of the best jobs, but I never doubt the responsibility and enormity that comes with it.”



Chapter 6: 10-point plan for advancing social mobility as a business

We've heard from a wide range of voices across this report about how UK businesses can advance social mobility, as well as the impact this can have on people's lives.

We believe there are 10 practical steps which businesses can implement to drive their involvement in addressing the UK's social mobility challenge. Whether you are at the start of this journey as a business, or further along, this is what we've learnt with our partners and young people which we believe works and has an impact:

1. Develop a social mobility strategy and ensure someone has responsibility for it.
2. Find the leader(s) who will be your social mobility advocate(s). Start to identify senior figures with lived experience who can share their stories.
3. Learn from other areas of diversity such as any work you've done on gender and ethnicity. Do you have Employee Resource groups or networks? Have you adapted processes such as how you allocate work or support and mentor people?
4. Gather data on socio-economic background, explain to applicants and staff why you want it and what you're going to do with it, analyse the data and use it to implement an inclusion strategy.
5. Set objectives and targets for representation of those from lower socio-economic backgrounds within your workforce, with buy-in and accountability from senior management.
6. Think about what skills and academic qualifications you need for roles and don't include any unnecessary ones in job descriptions/specifications and ensure you have a range of routes into your business available. Don't only recruit people with degrees. Think of ways in which your outreach strategy can engage with groups who are not traditionally employed by your organisation and how that can transition into employment.
7. Deliver outreach programmes to upskill young people regardless of their choice of career and raise awareness of your organisation/industry. This can be run in-house, or you can work with the hundreds of organisations at both local and national level providing targeted outreach to different schools, students and locations.
8. Collaborate with other organisations. Start by engaging with the advisory organisations (Social Mobility Commission, Social Mobility Foundation, Progress Together, Skills Builder). Then you might identify organisations who can support outreach. Engage with others in your industry, however far along the journey they are - can you work on an initiative together? (examples such as PRIME, Access Accountancy and RISE).
9. Set up a social mobility network. Make it separate from other employee resource groups recognising that some of those who come from lower socio-economic backgrounds will have a unique and unifying experience and others may be part of other resource groups.
10. Benchmark your organisation against best practice using tools like the social mobility employer index, address feedback provided to aid your development.

Chapter 7: Final reflections – Ian Elliott, Chief People Officer, PwC UK



“External challenges can often throw issues we have the power to change into sharper relief. Widening inequality reminds us that, as an organisation of our size and standing, we must continue to find new ways of creating quality career opportunities across the country.

“Across the country” is key here - we take pride in our network of 19 offices throughout the four nations of the United Kingdom, and the diversity of our more than 25,000 people. If we’re to create a culture of fairness, equality and opportunity, our work has to be felt by our people, clients and communities in every corner of the country.

There are many aspects to be considered when looking to improve social mobility. The focus of this report has been our work on access and outreach, because that’s where every journey has to begin. Once you have attracted people, you can then focus on retaining, developing and progressing them - something we are also taking targeted action on. But if you’re looking for somewhere to start, it’s vital to help people from all backgrounds consider the career opportunities available to them. For us, it’s secondary whether that’s with us or elsewhere.

The main focus - and the benefit to UK plc - is to get people interested and engaged in the first place. Businesses cannot expect the workforce of the future to inherently know the thousands of different ways they can learn, progress and earn. It’s up to us to signpost the opportunities. We also recognise that we can’t achieve change at scale on our own and there is a clear need for greater collaboration between business, education providers and charities at both national and local levels.

I’ve been lucky enough in my time at the firm to be alongside young people as they experience their first time in our offices. You can see their minds light up as they take in what the world of work has to offer.

But we can’t rest on our laurels once we have people in the building. We must use the momentum to ask: “where next?”. In addition to helping people get in, we need to help them get on, and to transform high-quality jobs into high-quality careers.

Matching access and progression is a winning equation for social mobility into the future. We’ve got the wealth of stories and programmes in this report to spur us forward and I can’t wait to see where we go from here.”

Thank you

[pwc.co.uk](https://www.pwc.co.uk)

This content is for general information purposes only, and should not be used as a substitute for consultation with professional advisors.

© 2023 PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP. All rights reserved. PwC refers to the UK member firm, and may sometimes refer to the PwC network. Each member firm is a separate legal entity. Please see www.pwc.com/structure for further details.