INTERVIEW WITH SOCIAL MOBILITY FOUNDATION CEO
SARAH ATKINSON

Matthew Marshall is a 17-year-old student from Liverpool. At the beginning of his Social Mobility Foundation journey, having only joined our programme two months earlier, Matthew sat down to interview our CEO.

MATTHEW:
The future is technology. So, how do you think technology will impact social mobility as we enter an increasingly digital age?

SARAH:
One of the things that technology has really helped with is overcoming some geographical barriers. It was especially helpful to keep things going during the pandemic, and, since then, we’ve been able to do great things for our students that live outside of major cities. Our students, living anywhere in the UK can access support, virtual placements, and work experience opportunities.

MATTHEW:
It certainly is going to be like a brave new world, to quote Huxley.

The impact of the pandemic on the education and mental health of young people has been one of the charity’s main focuses over the past year. Do you believe the effects of this period have fully emerged yet and how can they be mitigated?

SARAH:
It’s been devastating. And no, I don’t think we have really seen the full, long-term impact.

We know what happened immediately, in terms of the lack of access, lack of enrichment activities and limitations on social interaction. Research shows it’s still having an effect, and it’s going to be still having an effect for a long time.

We saw this ourselves last summer when we were able to run in-person work experience and residentials again for the first time since the pandemic. It was wonderful to bring people together, but the students joining those activities were showing the effects of not having had these opportunities for a while. Their confidence was a bit lower and they needed extra support.

There’s a lot that we can do, and we’re very conscious that this isn’t just about education recovery, this is about confidence recovery, social capital recovery and enrichment as well. I wish that there was more attention from government and policymakers on that.

Young people are fantastically resilient and determined, they still want to achieve the things they’ve always wanted to achieve.

MATTHEW:
With your new, smoother online application, you can have students from across the country come to be a part of your programme. I agree with you about technology’s impact on the charity. I’ve seen how it can make things better.

SARAH:
We see that in the world of work as well. I think tech advancements can be harnessed to eliminate bias. Some big companies are using AI for recruitment by creating skills profiles to look at applications. This can be better than having humans with biases reading CVs and making judgements about the kind of university someone went to – technology can be used to identify the potential behind the application. However, algorithms are built by people, and we saw a couple of years ago with school assessments how bias can be built into an algorithm. The bias can just become even more powerful. So, if you want to use technology to eliminate bias you have to be really intentional about that.

MATTHEW:
It’s about raising awareness of the issues, whether that’s academic work or ensuring that people have the skills needed to keep social mobility progressing.

I would imagine that, right now, another of your key concerns will be the cost-of-living crisis. The Sutton Trust commissioned research which reported that 74% of teachers have seen a decreased level of concentration in students in the last few months as the crisis has risen. What can be done to prevent the crisis from negatively impacting social mobility?

SARAH:
It’s heartbreaking to think about the impact on concentration and the impact this will have on young people achieving their potential.

From government, it’s critical there is financial support for learning and study. In higher education, as well as that financial support, understanding the context that students are learning in.

For example, most of our students have to take paid work alongside studying at university. A bit more flexibility from universities about students’ priorities and time constraints is needed. Employers too need to recognise this, and make sure the opportunities they offer are funded and flexible.

The generation that’s been affected by Covid doesn’t want to be the generation that’s been damaged by Covid. They want to be the generation that’s come through, and it’s our job to help them.
This year, we campaigned on the class pay gap. As well as helping students navigate this crisis, and it’s brilliant to see more employers measuring their pay gap and publishing it.

In your role as CEO of the Foundation, what has been your proudest achievement so far?

SARAH: Gosh, so much to be proud of! Just thinking about this past year, I think there’s three things I’d highlight.

One is the new student application service. I’m proud of the product that we created, which is a much better, cleaner product; it’s a better experience for students applying, and for our staff.

I am proud of the way we did it and that we co-designed it with students. And I’m proud of the team, because it’s difficult making this kind of change – especially as a charity, with limited resources.

I’m particularly proud of Stay Down, the film that we created. This is a piece about the class pay gap, and how, in the workplace, people from working-class backgrounds can feel unwelcome. We worked with partners on this very creative approach – it’s a short horror film and it’s beautiful. It really powerfully tells the story of what it feels like to be underestimated and held back, not because you’re not good enough or you’re not working hard enough, but because people see you as not the same, not ‘what we expect’. It’s been great to see the response from people who’ve seen it. It has sparked really brave conversations, and I’m so proud that we were able to do that and to do it so well.

The third thing to highlight from this year is that we were given the Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Award for volunteering. We are one of just 20 charities in the UK that won that award, for working with volunteers to support young people.

It’s such an honour and shows the importance of what we do and the difference we make. And that’s just from this year, I could talk about so many other highlights so many other proudest moments.

MATTHEW: That brings us to the end of my questions. Is there anything that you’d like to ask me as a student who’s taking part in the programme?

SARAH: I want to know what made you think it was worth applying to our programme because you have a lot of things going on in your life, and you have lots of choices about how you spend your time. What made you come and spend your time on the programme?

SARAH: Someone asked me the other day if I’d like the Social Mobility Foundation to be a household name. I said I don’t much mind if we are a household name, but I want social mobility to be a normal topic, something that everyone understands.
This year, we have refined our strategy to help us meet the challenge of low social mobility head on. 

This has been one of the most turbulent periods for social mobility in recent memory. On the one hand, we work in an increasingly difficult context. The number of people eligible for free school meals has dramatically increased due to the economic consequences of Covid-19 and the cost-of-living crisis. This means many more young people are now eligible for our programmes. These same young people are much further behind in their education due to Covid-related school closures and absence. More interventions are urgently needed to start closing the attainment gap again. 

A demographic UK ‘youth bulge’ – where the number of 18-year-olds is forecast to grow by 25% between 2020 and 2030 – will see higher education become even more competitive, with the increased pressure likely to be felt most by aspiring first-generation students. 

On the other hand, we have never had a greater understanding of what all young people need to thrive in education and work. There is more academic evidence about the most effective interventions to increase social mobility. More employer-led research has singled out socioeconomic background as a major factor in pay and progression inequality. More socially mobile people are in influential positions talking about their lived experience. 

As for us, another year of data and testimony from our Aspiring Professionals Programme and Social Mobility Employer Index, alongside Department for Opportunities campaigns, is showing how to get social mobility going again. We know what it takes to create a society that nurtures, harnesses and rewards talent from all social backgrounds. We must work together to unlock potential, broaden horizons and create opportunities. For individuals, yes, and for employers and our society too. We all benefit when more young people can let their natural talent shine.

With our new vision, mission and strategy, we can capitalise on this moment with optimism and energy to transform the lives of individuals, the UK’s workplaces and our wider society.

Our Vision
A society where talent from all backgrounds is nurtured, harnessed and rewarded.

Our Mission
We unlock potential, broaden horizons and create opportunities with and for ambitious young people who face structural barriers in education and work due to their socioeconomic background.

Our Approach
We believe that the systems that lead to low social mobility can be redesigned.

Until that happens, employers have a responsibility to improve the recruitment and retention of people from under-represented socioeconomic backgrounds. Individuals from these backgrounds also need the networks, knowledge and skills – all difficult to gain through the state school system right now – to navigate the barriers placed in front of them because of where they were born, went to school, or the occupation of their parents or guardians.

That’s why we work at an individual, employer and system level. These interventions inform each other, and, when combined, become greater than the sum of their parts. For example, if students on our Aspiring Professionals Programme report an emerging need or new difficulty, this shapes the assessment questions in our Employer Index. The Department for Opportunities can then undertake further research to inform its policy priorities and lobby government for structural change.
The impact on young people’s mental health

We have all lived through significant economic and social turmoil in recent years. This has been keenly felt by younger people. When we are younger, we usually encounter remarkable opportunities to discover, learn from and adapt to the world around us. The pressures of the cost-of-living crisis are combining powerfully with the aftershocks of Covid to limit these opportunities. This is adding strain to young people’s lives, just as they are forging their sense of who they are and what they want from the world.

Research by the Prince’s Trust in October 2022 showed that 16–25-year-olds are experiencing significant anxiety due to living through these difficulties. 60% of participants reported feeling scared about their generation’s future, and one-third felt their job prospects would never recover after the pandemic.

Our Unheard Voices research – which surveys the experiences and attitudes of young people aged 16–18 – showed that, unsurprisingly, young people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds feel more anxious (70%) about the cost-of-living crisis compared to their better-off peers (56%).

60% Feeling scared about their generation’s future
70% Feeling anxious about the cost-of-living crisis
1/3 Feeling their job prospects won’t recover

69% of young people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are changing their university plans because of the cost-of-living crisis, compared to 62% of those from more privileged backgrounds.

44% of young people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are now having to get a job to support their studies, compared to 29% of those from more privileged backgrounds.

We campaign on structural social mobility issues and amplify the voices of young people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

> Read more from page 35

Influencing employers

We influence employers to ensure people with potential can get in and get on in professional life.

> Read more from page 31

Directly supporting young people

We nurture the knowledge, confidence and networks of high-achieving young people through our programmes.

> Read more from page 11

The impact on higher education

Unheard Voices found that 69% of young people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are changing their university plans because of the cost-of-living crisis, compared to 62% of those from more privileged backgrounds.

62% Unpaid internships
15% Travel-paid internships
8% Young people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are missing out on early career opportunities because, unlike their more privileged peers, they are unable to work for free.

44% of young people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are now having to get a job to support their studies, compared to 29% of those from more privileged backgrounds.

The impact on early careers

Our Social Mobility Employer Index found that 8% of employer entrants still host unpaid internships, while a further 15% only paid travel.

The ability to move across the country to access better jobs and higher wages is heavily determined by socioeconomic background, particularly in the context of soaring rent and travel prices.
The Aspiring Professionals Programme helps talented young people reach their full potential.

Students on the programme gain new skills, networks and opportunities to help them access and thrive in the top universities and high-status professions.

We work with people who face structural barriers to accessing opportunities in education and work because of where they grew up, went to school or the occupation of their parents/guardians.

Students join the programme in Year 12, lower sixth or S5 and our support continues until they gain their first professional role.

The total number of students in our 2022/23 cohort:

2,145

APP City
For students living in and near Birmingham, Cardiff, Glasgow, Leeds, Liverpool, London, Manchester, and Newcastle.

APP Employer Insight
For students living anywhere in the UK wanting to gain in-depth insight into specific organisations. We deliver this strand of the programme with employers like: Akin Gump, BP, Freshfields, HSF, JP Morgan, NHS England, PA Consulting, White & Case.

APP Reach
For all other eligible students across the UK.

Our support helps young aspiring professionals across a range of priority sectors:

Accountancy | Architecture | Banking & Finance | Biology & Chemistry | Business

Digital | Engineering & Physics | Law | Media & Comms | Medicine | Politics

PILLARS OF SUPPORT

Mentoring
Students receive support from a volunteer mentor working in the student's chosen sector. The mentoring relationship provides advice and guidance.

Tailored skills sessions and career workshops
Students gain experience in interacting with professionals and are equipped with the knowledge needed to thrive in their chosen careers.

University application support
Students are set up for success in higher education with free visits to top universities and personal statement support.

Internships with top employers
Students are offered opportunities to gain first-hand experiences in their chosen profession.

SUSTAINABILITY SPOTLIGHT

We have been helping young people from lower socioeconomic access social impact and sustainability careers since 2019.

We know that these students – who are equally as passionate and talented as their more affluent peers – do not get equal access to social impact and sustainability opportunities and roles.

We’re embedding sustainability into our Aspiring Professionals Programme: improving our students’ commercial awareness of sustainability and helping them get internships and work placements in the sector.

Our research in this area helps us to understand the sustainability priorities in different sectors, the type of jobs available and the barriers to those jobs for young people who may be structurally held back.
We are committed to supporting students across the UK.

Our programme is designed to support young people who live in cities, towns and rural areas across the four nations of the United Kingdom.

The Social Mobility Commission ranks local authorities in England on a range of social mobility measures. Areas ranking the lowest are known as ‘cold spots’, and require the most targeted support.

449 students in our 2022 cohort were from social mobility cold spots.

We have offices in Birmingham, Cardiff, Glasgow, Leeds, Liverpool, London, Manchester, and Newcastle.

I believe that where I have grown up has limited my opportunity to easily access higher education. Growing up in a disadvantaged area has forced me to work much harder than someone who just happens to be born in a wealthier location.”

Corby | Northamptonshire
APP Student

Coming from a small town in the North, the likelihood of being able to go to a big city university is low, as funding is often concentrated in the South with many aristocratic institutions laying in the heart of London. Often youth from deprived areas rely on organisations such as the SMF to allow them to explore the wider corporate world.”

Dudley | Birmingham
APP Student
### Outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Of cohort attending university</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of cohort attending Russell Group universities</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of cohort in full-time work or further education</td>
<td>98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of cohort in highly skilled full-time employment</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### In Numbers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Number</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students placed on internships</td>
<td>970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Events delivered to students</td>
<td>350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students placed on internships across employers</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students said that we helped improve the quality of their UCAS application</td>
<td>82%</td>
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</tbody>
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**3.2 The Aspiring Professionals Programme: At a Glance**

- **2,145 aspiring professionals** joined our programme.
- **98%** were either first generation in their family to attend university, received free school meals, or both.
3.3
SKILLS SESSIONS

Our skills sessions help aspiring professionals approach higher education, job applications, and build the confidence to enter professional life.

533 secondary students and 188 undergraduate students attended 40 skills sessions and workshops in 2022.

100% of Recruitment Success attendees said it helped them to gain the skills to succeed in assessment centres.

98% of Skills for Success attendees said it helped them to recognise and utilise their personal brand.

95% of All About Interviews attendees said it taught them how to be successful in various types of interviews.

88% of student attendees said they were likely to research ESG after attending the event.

I thoroughly enjoyed the session and particularly appreciated that we were taken through each skill for success in a step-by-step format. The personal branding session was my favourite as I had not heard of this before and now feel I can use my personal brand and be the best version of myself.”

Student attending the Skills for Success session 2022

THE ESG AGENDA

Our most recent sustainability event, The ESG Agenda (Environment, Social, and Governance), attracted students from across the UK.

Students were matched with employers from their chosen sector, including the BBC, Dr. Martens and KPMG. This created opportunities for students to discuss and debate sustainability issues with professionals in their chosen field, and to learn about jobs in the ESG sector.

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We give students the guidance, encouragement and support to write competitive university applications. Our programme provides access to admissions events, mentoring and one-to-one personal statement checking.

22 university visits, workshops and events facilitated.
295 students matched with
19 university advice and guidance events delivered.
211 volunteer personal statement checkers.

The insight given on university applications, the world of work and university life was invaluable in the application that I made to study at Oxford University. I received an offer to study Law at Worcester College, Oxford and cannot express enough how thankful I am to the Social Mobility Foundation for their help.”

Mert Alacam
APP Student
Newcastle Upon Tyne

I met new people and we all became friends, but at the same time I got to talk with some undergraduates and was very intrigued about their journey.”

APP student who attended the Durham University visit in 2022
3.5
MENTORING AND VOLUNTEERS

Mentors have a huge impact on our students’ lives.
We match new joiners to the programme with a volunteer mentor for at least a year. We also offer undergraduate students a six-month mentoring relationship.

2,524 volunteer mentors were recruited from 639 organisations in 2022.

2,097 of these professionals volunteered to mentor a school-age programme student and 427 professionals volunteered to mentor a university student.

1,066 mentoring pairs attended an in-person mentor meetup.

As a mentor, I really enjoyed providing guidance and coaching to Zahraa.

We maintained an open and continuous dialogue throughout the programme discussing various career and university options where I was able to leverage my experience and (hopefully!) provide useful guidance. I personally found the mentorship very rewarding and look forward to many more years volunteering with the fantastic SMFI!*

Tom Wardle
Assistant Manager
Valuations, CF, KPMG LLP

I feel as though having a mentor really opened me up to greater opportunities.

The guidance that Tom offered has been invaluable and I feel as though I have truly gained a lot from the programme. He was able to offer advice from an experienced position, advice which I would not have been able to access elsewhere and also pushed me to take on more ambitious opportunities. I would love to become a mentor in the future.”

Zahraa
APP Student

CELEBRATING THE QUEEN ELIZABETH II PLATINUM JUBILEE VOLUNTEERING AWARD

We were honoured to receive the Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Volunteering Award in December 2022.

The award is the UK’s highest award for voluntary service. It is given to charities that do exceptional work to empower young people.

Our volunteers share life-changing knowledge and encouragement to young people from working-class backgrounds.

This award recognises our:
- Mentors
- Personal statement checkers
- Event speakers
- Trustees
- Staff development volunteers

Thank you to the Queen’s Award for Voluntary Service for this fitting tribute to our volunteers in honour of Her Late Majesty The Queen’s Platinum Jubilee.
In collaboration with our employer partners, we offer young people on our Aspiring Professionals Programme work placements. This provides a transformative, first-hand insight into professional life.

117
internships and residential programmes were delivered in 2022.

970
students placed on internships across 129 employers.

What our students say

My first week at Ketchum was incredible; it’s been better than I could have ever imagined it to be. It’s felt very natural and easy to get settled in, I don’t feel afraid to ask any ‘silly’ questions as I know that everyone is more than happy to help explain things if I’m a little lost. It’s been really nice to be able to shadow and learn from my team but to also interact with others from different departments.

Undergraduate Student
Six-month internship
Ketchum PR

Working in partnership with the SMF this year has been a fantastic experience – the talent that we’ve been fortunate enough to bring into Ketchum on our Kickstart at Ketchum programme has been exceptional. From our first meeting with the Aspiring Professionals team to planning our next summer intake of interns, we’ve felt supported and guided to create the most valuable experience for our interns possible.

Stephanie Hall
Ketchum PR

What our employer says

Every single Dods employee that we interacted with tried to make the experience as insightful as they possibly could, and they succeeded! I definitely want to return to Dods in the future as the political intelligence aspect was extremely attractive to me, and the timetable of a Dods employee is so varied. The experience was well organised, extremely insightful and overall, very rewarding. It was amazing to get a taste of what a future political career will involve.

Sixth-form Student
One-week work experience
Dods Group

Although the students arrived to us as level-headed, passionate and intelligent individuals, over the course of the week it was a pleasure to watch them grow in confidence, and to develop a greater understanding of the subject area and a professional working environment. Several of my colleagues commented on how switched-on they were, and how well they engaged with the work. One remarked that they had excellent lateral thinking – a real asset in any organisation. We were all sad to see the students go, and would happily have them back in a heartbeat. One thing I know for sure is that each of them has a bright future ahead.

Tom Hunter
Principal Political Consultant
Dods Group

Sustainability spotlight

We held five careers-focused events in 2022-23, including: Sustainable Campaigning, Sustainability in Fashion, Young Women’s Series – Sustainability and A path into Politics and Policy: Think Tanks
3.7 GRADUATE RECRUITMENT PIPELINE

Our graduate recruitment pipeline, built in partnership with our dedicated employer partners, gives programme students the best chance of success.

104 students were matched to specialised volunteers who helped them to navigate the job application process.

448 students through to the online test stage and 42 students to the final stages of recruitment processes.

24 students received internship or undergraduate placement offers.

13 students were offered places on a Spring Insight programme.

8 students were offered graduate jobs.

83% who received offers said our support helped them to secure their employment offer.

90% who accessed our Pipeline Recruitment Support said it helped them prepare effectively and apply for opportunities that would help them grow in their careers.

89% who accessed our Pipeline Recruitment Support felt we helped them build a strong application for their career path of choice.

Thank you to our partners who helped offer our tailored application support in 2022:
Students attend our Insight Events for insider tips and tricks.

Our partners, Smart Works, support students who identify as women with interview clothes and confidence-building.

Students are paired with a professional buddy and we call them before and after interviews and assessment centres.

Volunteers check CVs, applications, offer career advice or mock interviews through our Recruitment Success Service.

Students access exclusive application guidance.

Students flag their applications with us and can be fast-tracked.

Our students receive internship or job offers.

As a student from a disadvantaged background, it can be challenging to break into sectors like that of Banking & Finance. The SMF opened the door to opportunities that allowed me to gain relevant experience to boost my CV and learn about the potential pathways available to me. My favourite experience on the programme was a summer internship at Frontier Economics. As a BSc Economics student, I learnt how to apply my degree through competition regulation and public policy, within the day to day of economic consulting.

This opportunity allowed me to network with like-minded individuals and taught me how to conduct myself in the professional workplace. It was through this that I was able to leverage many experiences and develop my soft skills to secure a summer internship at J.P Morgan.

I started the Aspiring Professional Programme around five years ago and can undoubtedly say that I wouldn’t be in my current position without the continual support from the incredible team here. The biggest lesson I will take away from the programme is that regardless of where you come from, your aspirations are always achievable!

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As a student from a disadvantaged background, it can be challenging to break into sectors like that of Banking & Finance. The SMF opened the door to opportunities that allowed me to gain relevant experience to boost my CV and learn about the potential pathways available to me. My favourite experience on the programme was a summer internship at Frontier Economics. As a BSc Economics student, I learnt how to apply my degree through competition regulation and public policy, within the day to day of economic consulting.

This opportunity allowed me to network with like-minded individuals and taught me how to conduct myself in the professional workplace. It was through this that I was able to leverage many experiences and develop my soft skills to secure a summer internship at J.P Morgan.

I started the Aspiring Professional Programme around five years ago and can undoubtedly say that I wouldn’t be in my current position without the continual support from the incredible team here. The biggest lesson I will take away from the programme is that regardless of where you come from, your aspirations are always achievable!
The Social Mobility Employer Index is an annual benchmarking and assessment tool for employers. The Index assesses an employer’s performance on seven areas of workplace social mobility, with an optional employee survey to add further context.

Every entrant receives a bespoke feedback report based on their entry. This details the health of social mobility inside their organisation, benchmarked against other entrants and advises on future actions.

We publish the data analysis, insights and best practice from each year in an annual key findings report. This gives an overview of social mobility in workplaces that are already committed to improving socioeconomic diversity.

The recommendations and insights in this year’s Index show how employers are responding to the cost-of-living crisis and the long-term effects of the pandemic.

Our Index guides employers through adapting their attraction, recruitment, progression and workplace culture to this new economic reality.

In 2022, both PwC and Santander dropped the 2:1 requirement for their graduate schemes. By focusing on talent over grades, these employers have been able to recruit people with high potential who might otherwise have been overlooked.
Our pilot scheme with third-sector membership body ACEVO helped ensure more charities were represented in the Index. Seven charities entered the Index for the first time in 2022.

ACEVO was delighted to have joined with the SMF on the Employer Index charity pilot last year. As representatives of civil society leaders, we are aware of the positive impact the Index has had to increase representations in our workspaces and show organisations the areas in which they can make improvements.

There is a growing consciousness of socioeconomic disadvantage; an area which we included in our Pay and Equalities Survey last year for the first time and will do so again this year. We know more work is to be done to close the gap between individuals from low-income backgrounds and their better-off peers, and we look forward to future collaboration with the SMF in this space.

Jane Ide  
CEO  
ACEVO

Influencing business to improve social mobility

The City of London Taskforce

Our Chief Executive sat on the City of London Taskforce to improve the socioeconomic diversity of financial and professional services.

The final report set targets for more representation of people from working-class backgrounds in senior positions. It also recommended that employers collect, analyse and report on their socioeconomic background data, and enter the Index to receive our bespoke feedback on improving social mobility.

The UK Music Diversity Report

We helped UK Music collect socioeconomic data on the music industry workforce for the first time. The UK Music Diversity Report included a spotlight on our work and our advice on how UK music businesses can increase social mobility.

The Index is a vital tool for any organisation seeking to build a social mobility strategy and attract top talent. As an organisation, Enterprise will continue to put comprehensive plans in place using feedback from the Index, with the aim to contribute to a fairer society and enhance our inclusive culture so that everyone is valued for their potential, results and merit.

Ryan Johnson  
MD UK and Ireland  
Enterprise Rent-A-Car

What employers say

Our aim is to ensure everyone has the same chances to succeed and progress in our industry, regardless of their socioeconomic background and this is a core pillar of the firm’s strategy. What is particularly valuable for employers who enter the Index is the feedback you receive from SMF about what more you can do and where you need to focus our activity.

Over the past five years, we have taken on board the SMF feedback and as a result we’ve become more diverse, we’ve created more inclusive and accessible processes; and it’s helped us create a values-led, vibrant environment.

Caroline Green  
Senior Partner  
Browne Jacobson (#1 Social Mobility Employer 2022)
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The Department for Opportunities (DO) is our advocacy and campaigning arm.

Our point of view is informed by an understanding of our audience’s motivations, the views of young people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and insights from our programmes and work with employers.
THE ISSUE
A class pay gap exists in modern Britain. We commissioned research in 2022, which found that those from working-class backgrounds are paid £6,718 less per year than their more privileged peers. Worse still, gender and ethnicity intersect with class to create a double disadvantage. Working-class women are paid £7,331 less than women from professional-managerial origins, even when working in the same role. The same comparison among men shows a class pay gap of £6,667. When considering ethnicity, this often resulted in further increases in the pay gap.

STAY DOWN
STAY DOWN is a chilling horror film that depicts classism in the workplace as an insidious force holding people down but rarely showing itself explicitly.

Using horror film techniques to bring to life the impact of social class disadvantage in the workplace, STAY DOWN was designed to challenge assumptions and enable brave conversations.

Released just in time for Halloween season, the film, directed by Thomas James and starring Michael Socha, Jo Hartley and Jonathan Hyde, premiered at The Roundhouse in London and was livestreamed across multiple platforms.

CLASS PAY GAP DAY
14th November 2022 marked the day in the year when professionals from working-class backgrounds effectively stopped earning compared to their more privileged peers. We used this date to publish our new research and launch the second phase of our Class Pay Gap campaign, urging employers to report, measure and close their class pay gap and the Government to consult on mandatory reporting of socioeconomic data by employers with over 250 employees.
FLEXIBLE FUTURES

THE CAMPAIGN
Flexible Futures is our campaign to support and inspire young people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds during the highly stressful exam results season. During the summer of 2022, we offered support and guidance across four themes: wellbeing, practical support such as templates to appeal exam grades, promoting alternative pathways, and career advice.

THE IMPACT
Flexible Futures received extensive social media success, reaching thousands of young people during exam results season.

130,000
reached on Instagram.

102,000
Twitter impressions.

Engagement from key student and employer bodies including student money website Save the Student, and the Institute of Student Employers.

Our students were interviewed and we discussed our policy positions on BBC Radio 1, BBC Radio 4 and BBC Radio Scotland.

UNHEARD VOICES
Unheard Voices amplifies the voices of young people who have so much to say and lots to gain from fairer policies. Our regular surveys track the experiences and attitudes of young people aged 16-18, comparing findings by socioeconomic background, region and ethnicity.

11%
of young people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds said they have made up for the learning they had lost due to Covid-19.

1,819 young people surveyed in 2022

Our focus in 2022: education experiences, career choices, availability of work experience opportunities and career aspirations. Insights inform our programmes and employer advice as well as our policy influencing work.

We drew on the views and experiences of young people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds to develop our positions on:
- The National Tutoring Programme
- The return to pre-pandemic grading

SUSTAINABILITY SPOTLIGHT
STUDENT ADVOCACY
We secure advocacy opportunities in the sustainability and social impact sectors so students from all social backgrounds can access opportunities, gain experience and have a seat at the table. We’re encouraging our students to apply for advocacy opportunities with organisations like TFL, UNICEF, London Wildlife Trust and Zoological Society London and supporting those applications.

There was no catch up.
We were just expected to know everything. We were confused and had no way to recover the learning. Everything was hard but we allowed ourselves to fail to let the teachers know they needed to do something.

- Unheard Voices interview, 2022

1,819 young people surveyed in 2022
STUDENT VOICE

We’re always looking to deepen our understanding of our students’ values, opinions, and experiences whilst working with them to shape the future of the Social Mobility Foundation and the world around them.

Our new Student Voice project will place our young people and their lived experiences at the centre of our organisation. We will use our students’ voices as a red thread to tie our three interventions together and create measurable change for young people who face structural barriers because of their socioeconomic backgrounds.

This project is such an exciting development for us.

It sheds light on the great work we’re currently doing across the organisation and on the talent that our students have. I’m proud to be working on a project that values the experiences of our youth and actively works to keep up with the changing landscape that our students face. There’s a lot of work to be done on such an ambitious project, but we’re excited to find new ways to unlock potential, broaden horizons, and create opportunities with and for our students.”

Ellie Georgiou
Senior Development Coordinator
Social Mobility Foundation

Early Careers Programme

Alumni from our Aspiring Professionals Programme (APP) are ambitious, talented and determined. However, even if they ‘get in’, they are less likely to ‘get on’ in the early stages of their career compared to their more privileged peers. For example, they must decipher behavioural codes that determine ‘how things are done’. These codes are rarely written down, are always shifting and are especially hard to understand for first-generation professionals.

The pilot programme will draw on research undertaken with The Bridge Group and our expertise from the development and delivery of our student programme. We are aiming to help our alumni build strong professional networks and confidently navigate the early career recruitment processes.

The Early Careers Programme pilot sits alongside our work to influence employers and advocate for social mobility, and means our alumni are now represented and included in all three of our interventions. We will use insights from the pilot to inform our work with employers, our research and campaigns, and the future of our programme delivery.

I am so proud to be working on this pilot and am really looking forward to getting to know our alumni, learning from them and their experiences, and using this knowledge to drive forward our programme development.”

Sarah Crossan
Interim Programme Development Manager
Social Mobility Foundation

We aim to collaborate with our alumni to gain a deeper understanding of the hurdles to career progression and identify ways we can support our students in overcoming them. The knowledge we gain will inform our recommendations to employers on how to enhance social mobility in the workplace and provide us with valuable insights to drive our campaign to close the gap.”

Rosalind Goates
Head of Advocacy and Campaigns
Social Mobility Foundation

WHAT'S NEXT?
We would like to thank all the organisations and individuals who have worked with us, including:

The Board and staff are incredibly grateful to Matthew and Sian Westerman for their generous support.
If you would like to support our work or find out more, please get in touch:

@socialmobilityfoundation
@dept_for_opps

@SocialMobilityF
@dept_for_opps