



## SOCIAL MOBILITY: DELIVERING CHANGE THROUGH ESSENTIAL SKILLS

Social mobility – or the link between a person's occupation or income and the occupation or income of their parents<sup>i</sup> – has remained stubbornly fixed in the UK for generations.

There are problems with social mobility across the UK workforce, with high concentrations of independently educated people in senior roles within politics, the media, national and local government, and the private sector. Figures show that 48% of FTSE CEOs attended fee-paying schools, despite making up only 7% of the general population<sup>ii</sup>.

### Why is social mobility a business issue?

Research highlights that the three main business benefits of addressing social mobility are:

- Meeting new stakeholder and consumer expectations for businesses
- Improving diversity within your organisation
- Tackling shortages of talent<sup>iii</sup>.

These are echoed and expanded upon by the Social Mobility Commission, which surveyed business leaders to find that hiring from groups of people from disadvantaged backgrounds leads to increased productivity, better performance, and improved staff loyalty and engagement<sup>iv</sup>.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated existing divisions and risks halting or reversing years of progress from businesses, policymakers, and civil society. By the end of summer 2020, disadvantaged children had lost an average of 3 months of learning, putting them 18 months behind their peers<sup>v</sup>.

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## 30%

of lowest earners have lost their job or been furloughed, compared to 10% of highest earners<sup>vi</sup>

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## 6.8%

Projected UK unemployment rate for 2021<sup>vii</sup>

### Essential Skills – what role can they play?

To mitigate against the impact that Covid-19 is having on increasing the disadvantage gap we need to ensure that all individuals, regardless of background have access to the skills they need to both survive and thrive in education and employment. Essential skills as defined by the [Skills Builder Universal framework](#) are highly transferable skills which are needed in almost any job.

By supporting people to develop, recognise, and practice these skills we provide them with the ability to transfer across job roles and sectors. At a time of rising unemployment, this is more important than ever.

You are less likely to have the opportunity to identify and develop these skills if you are from a lower socio-economic background which puts you at a disadvantage in a jobs market where 93% of employers consider essential skills to be just as important, if not more important, than hard skills.<sup>viii</sup>

### What are businesses doing about it?

**Boots** is using the Skills Builder Universal Framework to make its recruitment journey simpler, easier, and quicker. Using simple language from the Framework about the essential skills required for a role, Boots has updated its Early Career Programme job adverts, interview packs for candidates and hiring managers, and adapted the language used when offering hints and tips for interviews.





Learning continues for all colleagues at Boots so the company has used the Skills Builder Universal Framework to design a range of bitesize learning aligned to core, advanced, and mastery skills that will meet the needs of different levels of skill development. Potential candidates, their parents, teachers and carers, and all colleagues can view more information about the partnership and the importance of these skills on the Apprenticeship Information Hub via [www.boots.jobs](http://www.boots.jobs).

With social mobility as an integral part of the future of the business, **KPMG** has adopted the Skills Builder Universal Framework across its outreach and employability programmes. It has found that the framework provides a structured and measurable way to build Essential Skills like creativity, problem solving, and teamwork with young people from the UK's most disadvantaged areas.

The eight skills also align with the key competencies KPMG looks for in its apprentices and graduates. It is trialling the framework with its Level 3 Business Administration apprentices through a series of workshops to support apprentices to achieve their end-point assessment standards. One of the key benefits KPMG has seen so far is an emerging consensus around a common language for talking about Essential Skills, with potential to deliver real impact for young people both inside and outside the organisation.

### Our calls to action

In response to growing inequalities, we are calling on responsible businesses to take the following actions:

#### 1. Kickstart new careers

In September 2020, the government launched its [Kickstart Scheme](#) to create opportunities for meaningful work experiences for young people, with wages subsidised by the government. BITC encourages all businesses to consider taking part in the scheme and has set out [guidance on what a quality work placement](#) should look like.

Research has shown that children from lower socio-economic backgrounds have less access to extra-curricular opportunities to develop soft skills<sup>ix</sup>. Therefore, a critical component of a quality work placement is to offer participants the means, motive, and support to develop their essential, transferable skills. The [Skills Builder Universal Framework](#) sets

out the eight essential skills that everyone needs to succeed in work.

#### 2. Open up your recruitment process

In order to ensure that every individual is able to access opportunities within your organisation, it is important to ensure that your recruitment processes are inclusive. This is especially important for young people and those entering the workplace for the first time. Through our [factsheet on future proofing qualifications](#) we outline how employers should adapt their recruitment practice to:

- **Not ask for previous experience for entry-level roles** - assess young people on their behaviour and essential skills instead.
- **Use clear language** - use clear job descriptions written in Plain English and outline all the stages of your process.
- **Offer feedback to all interviewed candidates** - you can support a young job applicant even if you cannot hire them.
- **Recognise that some young people will feel the effects more than others and target diverse groups accordingly** - your workforce should reflect your customers and your community.

#### 3. Restructure responsibly

Employers are balancing the tough economic choices they need to make now with longer term business success and sustainability. For some, this will mean reducing employee numbers. However, data shows that the burden of redundancies is falling disproportionately on diverse groups, with older workers, younger workers, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people and women at particular risk.

In our [Guide to Responsible Restructures](#), we call on organisations to understand the demographic make-up of their staff and conduct Equality Impact Assessments to ensure no groups are being unfairly disadvantaged by decisions about redundancies.

For more information about how your business can be supported to use Essential Skills to address the challenge of social mobility, please email [Katy.Neep@bitc.org.uk](mailto:Katy.Neep@bitc.org.uk)





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<sup>i</sup> Social Mobility Commission, Definition of social mobility [online], accessed at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/social-mobility-commission/about#definition-of-social-mobility>

<sup>ii</sup> The Sutton Trust (2019), Elitist Britain: the educational backgrounds of Britain's leading people [online], accessed at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/elitist-britain-2019>

<sup>iii</sup> Corporate Citizenship (2016), Social mobility: why it matters and what businesses can do about it [online], accessed: <https://corporate-citizenship.com/our-insights/social-mobility-matters-business/>

<sup>iv</sup> Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission (2013), Business and social mobility: a manifesto for change [online] accessed here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/business-and-social-mobility-a-manifesto-for-change>

<sup>v</sup> Education Policy Institute (2020), Preventing the disadvantage gap from increasing during and after the Covid-19 pandemic [online] Accessed here: <https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/disadvantage-gap-covid-19/>

<sup>vi</sup> Resolution Foundation (2020), Preventing the disadvantage gap from increasing during and after the COVID-19 pandemic [online], accessed here: [Preventing the disadvantage gap from increasing during and after the Covid-19 pandemic - Education Policy Institute \(epi.org.uk\)](https://www.epi.org.uk/preventing-the-disadvantage-gap-from-increasing-during-and-after-the-covid-19-pandemic-education-policy-institute)

<sup>vii</sup> Statista (2020) Forecasted unemployment rate in the UK from 2020 to 2025 [online], accessed here: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/374800/unemployment-rate-forecast/>

Development Economics (2015), The value of soft skills to the UK economy [online] accessed here: <https://www.allthingsic.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/The-Value-of-Soft-Skills-to-the-UK-Economy.pdf>

<sup>ix</sup> Social Mobility Commission (2019), An Unequal Playing Field: Extra-curricular activities, soft skills and social mobility [online], accessed here: [Extra-curricular activities, soft skills and social mobility - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/an-unequal-playing-field)

