Advancing Social Mobility in Scotland

June 2025

Supported by the BITC Scotland Board and Social Mobility Working Group

Contents

Purpose of this Report

This report forms part of our Business in the Community (BITC) Scotland Leadership Board vision to *create a fairer and greener world,* driven by fairer and greener businesses. This will only be possible through the power of a network of leaders committed to changing their business and leveraging the power of working together to deliver positive economic, social, and environmental change.

Business, government, and third sector organisations are critical to our success. It is no longer good enough to simply have ambitions but instead we must embed a mindset of driving change, measuring impact, and in doing so, create opportunities for Scotland's citizens – regardless of their background. We must fundamentally simplify and make the implementation of recommendations to achieve our stated purpose easier for businesses.

With this latter point in mind as our guiding principle, we do not intend to duplicate the plethora of information already available but instead simplify the landscape for all.

This report instead provides an easy to understand and use framework for businesses, of all shapes and sizes, to assess how they are driving social mobility and contributing effectively to the social and economic positioning across Scotland, not just today, but in anticipation of tomorrow.

The Social Mobility Working Group reviewed the current landscape in Scotland, assessed available data on the drivers of Social Mobility, and aim to provide practical examples, recommendations and suggestions for you to consider, regardless of your level of maturity in this space, current capacity, or your capability at this time.

Whilst statistics and facts are important, equally as important, is the 'voice' of individuals – those who are currently employed, as well as those in our community who are currently furthest removed from the labour market and find themselves residing within a custodial environment.

By simplifying the approach to Social Mobility, our aim is to engage businesses who are committed to playing their part in improving the social and economic status of our beautiful country by creating opportunities for everyone, regardless of their background, status or

residence, or their ambition to progress. In doing so, we clarify the clear benefits of extending businesses' thinking on how to engage talent that come from all walks of life, each person has a significant contribution to make to our businesses' success. Moreover, working with likeminded organisations to enrich our approach and maximise positive impact for society and our communities.

Foreword & Commentary

Chair's Foreword
Angela Halliday, BITC Social Mobility Working Group Chair
Social Impact Director, Sodexo UK&I

Social mobility has long been a key issue in the UK. Ultimately, the aim is to create a level playing field for all, regardless of socio-economic background. However, due to today's levels of economic inactivity, and sporadic access to progression within the workplace, this still remains elusive for some individuals across our communities, and within our workplaces.

The challenge of driving social mobility is not only multifaceted but deeply entrenched in the inequalities that persist across our regions in Scotland, where we could debate that we have distinct economic and social factors that contribute to lower social mobility; profoundly impacting individuals and communities.

We know that the determinants of lower social mobility are extensive, ranging from education, access to healthcare, stable housing, income inequality, low public confidence, younger generations doing less well than their parents in terms of pay, progress and home ownership, as well as unconscious bias pertaining to either an individual's social background, accent, geographic location etc, which are just a few of the root causes. All of which create a cycle of disadvantage that people perceive difficult to break, particularly those born into less advantaged socio-economic backgrounds.

Business has an opportunity to go beyond obligations set by legislation or regulatory requirements when recruiting or supporting colleagues. We should aim for positive outcomes

to become more focused on ways to empower those in our communities to break this cycle. We have a significant role to play in reshaping the future of social mobility.

We must acknowledge creating opportunities for all is not just a moral imperative; it is a business imperative and so we must all take responsibility and be responsible in our actions. It is widely recognised that an engaged and diverse workforce brings different perspectives and ideas into the organisation that can ultimately provide a direct economic benefit to businesses. Failure to do so will continue to hinder our nations potential for improving broader social and economic development. It is this business opportunity to have sustainable outcomes that needs to be embedded, rather than this being seen as just a good social thing to do.

The importance of collaboration cannot be overstated in this regard. The challenges of improving social mobility in Scotland, and indeed across the UK, require a collective effort. Business leaders, civil society, local and national governments, and educational institutions must come together, leveraging their unique resources and expertise, to drive sustainable change. It is through collaboration that we can create a future where every individual has the opportunity to thrive - regardless of their background or circumstances.

Businesses are already playing a pivotal role in community engagement, with some leading the charge by developing innovative programs that offer mentoring, apprenticeships, and pathways to career advancement for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. These initiatives are not just an investment in the individuals they serve, but in the communities from which they come.

By coming together to address social mobility, we can amplify our impact and create a stronger, more resilient society for all.

Judith Cruickshank
BITC Scotland Leadership Board Chair,
MD, Commercial Mid-Market, Royal Bank of Scotland
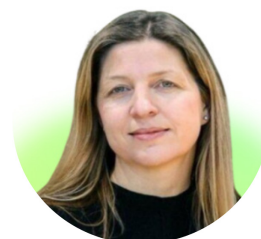
Greater socio-economic diversity ensures that colleagues come with a variety of backgrounds and diversity of perspectives that can help businesses reach a wider range of audiences and be more innovative and relevant.

At RBS/NatWest, we are committed to creating an inclusive environment where all colleagues have the same opportunity to progress their careers, regardless of their socio-economic background. More broadly, through the Progress Together Coalition, we are working to build a financial services sector in which employees from all socio-economic backgrounds are enabled to succeed.

The work that we are delivering at Business in the Community will help businesses in all sectors across Scotland benchmark their current approach to social mobility and better understand what actions they can take to improve. From a social justice perspective, this is the right thing to do for individuals, but it also has the potential to supercharge the local economy.

Louisa Macdonnell
BITC Scotland Director

Whether you're at the start of a journey to improve the social-economic diversity and mobility of your work force or well embedded on your journey, this new analysis of best practice in Scotland and beyond, should be your starting point. Developed by senior business leaders from Business in the Community members in Scotland to be an inspiration to other businesses, large and small, the time to act is now.

I am incredibly proud of the work that our members are doing across Scotland. This report I believe will support each of them to do more, and I hope, encourage others committed to driving Social Mobility to get involved.

Executive Summary

All businesses are familiar with the context of, and importance and influence that the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DE&I) agenda has and continues to have on our day-to-day lives – at home and at work - more so since the introduction of legislation: the Equality Act 2010. This Act brought together over one hundred separate pieces of legislation in an attempt to strengthen and simplify long-standing legislation that promoted equality in the areas of nine protected characteristics.[1]

This Act was very much welcomed by government, industry bodies, individuals. It recognises benefits of having a diverse society, and workforce. In doing so, helps sound decisions get made; representative of the different perspectives of society, notwithstanding solid evidence[2] that suggests a diverse workforce increases productivity, profitability, and increased engagement levels —among colleagues and clients. Today, however, there is no similar Act for those from more diverse socio-economic groups; hence why it is important for businesses to step up and advance social mobility for all.

It makes good business sense. Whether you are in the private, public or third sector, embedding practices that drive social mobility which lead to an increase in productivity, profitability (everyone needs to make money, or break even —to reinvest surplus, to improve public services, or to satisfy investors and/or shareholders). Making a profit should not be a "shameful" ambition. By achieving a profit, we can all continue to do social good today, tomorrow, and the next day! This is the single most fundamental benefit that we need to drive change. As economic and geopolitical environments remain dynamic, we see constantly that perceived "nice to have" initiatives get de-prioritised or are left to run out of steam.

Data is powerful! It allows us to be results-driven, to understand issues at their root cause, to find out what is working and what is not and use that information to drive decisions more effectively. In the social mobility space, data is critically important, but often not available, or under-utilised. It is evident that not all businesses have the capacity, capability, or the understanding of why data is so important to driving up social mobility. There are numerous

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[1] Equality Act 2010: guidance - GOV.UK
[2] D&I at Work Facing up to the business case CIPD

frameworks and examples of best practice in place. We have found that the nature of the data being requested can often create suspicion, nervousness, and questioning of the 'trust' between employer and employee. This report provides recommendations on how to incrementally increase the validity of any data being captured, ensuring decisions are informed, employees can tangibly see the benefits of providing data – *action not words*!

Voice of the People is more important than Voice of the Business. We undertook listening sessions with a varied sample of our community population. This included those in work, previously in work, and for whom, work will be a 'life changing' event - should employers afford them the opportunity when their life circumstances are re-balanced. Our conclusion, we urge organisations to put socio-economic diversity at the heart of their business model.

#ShiftMindsets

Coinciding with the Social Mobility Day theme in 2025 of **#ShiftMindsets**, our report aims to provide ways in which businesses can challenge themselves on what they are doing in the social mobility space – enough? Not enough? Not even started? Listening to our people, and sharing their stories is a first step to shattering stereotypes, proving that *backgrounds should never be a barrier to opportunity*.

Social Mobility – what is it, and why it is important?

The complexities of social mobility are significant. Businesses, individuals and public sector bodies can easily get confused by the depth and breadth of the social mobility challenge, its varied definitions and numerous measurement frameworks that help articulate intended outcomes.

This is further compounded by an underlying assumption often made regarding what a successful career path is. It is often assumed a successful career path is defined by high earning potential, a prominent position within an organisation, power, and that these ingredients are a determinant to happiness and well-being. But are they?

In preparing this report with BITC Leaders and representatives from our communities and workplaces, a resounding message from this consultation process was "*keep it simple, concise and fundamentally achievable for businesses regardless of size, sector or status to*

understand and effectively accelerate their contribution to mobilising Scotland." This is what we aim to do within this report.

Defining Social Mobility

There are multiple definitions of what social mobility is out there, each with the same ambition, just articulated in different ways.

For the purpose of this paper, we will focus on the "So what?" of Social Mobility – to encourage thinking on how businesses should approach Social Mobility and a little less on the 'what' it is. By doing a little, a lot of impact can be made.

In compiling this report, many discussions, cross-sectoral views and considerations were taken. We examined academic definitions and 'shorthand' definitions but have instead decided to focus on a clear statement that will influence and inform what you do, by thinking about why you do it.

It is to this effect that we ask you to just keep one thing in mind, regardless of your level of maturity and pro-activity in driving social mobility, that:

Social background should not dictate opportunities available to individuals.

By simplifying social mobility in this way, we aim to give flexibility for businesses to apply practices and policies that are aligned to their organisational values, ambitions, and the communities in which they operate, ultimately creating '**Opportunities for All'.**

> *There is not and will never be a 'one size fits all' approach to Social Mobility*

Political Landscape

The UK's social mobility landscape remains a critical issue, underscored by a shortage of detailed data on the socioeconomic backgrounds of the workforce. With a new Labour government and its Mission 5 agenda "*Breaking Down Barriers to Opportunity",* the call for

reforming legislative frameworks such as the Social Value Act and Equality Act is more urgent than ever.

These reforms aim to bolster social accountability, promote genuine inclusivity across sectors and support transparency through comprehensive data collection. The recent announcement of the *Office for Equality and Opportunity* marks a significant step towards addressing entrenched barriers to opportunity in the UK, and will inevitably impact the way in which Scotland, and in particular businesses are expected to contribute to improving social mobility.

The Scottish government's social mobility strategy aims to: ***Open up opportunities for people from disadvantaged backgrounds, create greater meritocracy, and address the different capabilities of different places.***

- **Transparency and Accountability**: clear, standardised reporting of socio-economic data; demonstrating inclusivity.

- **Informed Policy and Decision-Making**: With comprehensive data, organisations can develop policies that promote genuine inclusivity, targeting barriers that impact disadvantaged employees and communities.

- **Guidance**: To encourage meaningful activity that drives social mobility where, and for whom it matters most. Social Mobility is inherent within the Community Wealth Building Scotland Bill (2025), a benchmark in achieving ambitions to tackle economic and wealth inequality.

The main trend in Scotland that impacts social mobility is the rate of economic inactivity that has been increasing in significance since 2019/2020. Evidence suggests that this recent upturn is driven by long-term ill-health and disability status. The Scottish government has outlined its intent to improve engagement with employers; building links and relationships across all sectors to better develop policies and processes that are meaningful and aim to make a tangible impact on social mobility across the country.

This includes, but is not restricted to, skills development and attainment (pre and post securing employment) closing the skills gap for key groups, access to long-term sustainable employment, outlining progression routes for all employees, tackling health inequalities, social networks, cultural diversity, geographic location, social class, public confidence in self

and business, ethnicity, educational attainment, work history, social background (criminal history, military experience, care experience, unemployment etc).

Poverty, inequality and academic attainment are cited as the main contributing factors to individuals being able to leverage opportunities available to them. Evidence suggests that the life chances of young people is impaired as a result of these two contributing factors to their

Low socially mobility costs the UK economy £140bn per annum. Even modest increases could increase the UK's GDP growth by 2-4% a year [World Economic Forum]

success[3]. The Scottish Household Survey (SHS) is the main source of data on people's housing circumstances in Scotland, and articulates a continuous cross-sectional survey, based on a sample of the population in private residences across Scotland (circa 11,000). Coupled with research associated with academic attainment[4].

The link between inequality and what this means for social mobility, and how this affects the intergenerational transfer of advantage, or indeed, disadvantage suggests that higher income inequality plays a stronger role in determining the outcomes of young people as they progress into adulthood, and for adults, inhibits their ability to 'break the cycle' of economic inactivity, or lack of progression leading to higher earning that ultimately improves their social position in the workplace, community, or social circles[5].

Overall, whilst a range of data for Scotland is available, the broader impact on social mobility is relatively unknown. This presents an opportunity for businesses to lead from the front.

The odds of those from professional backgrounds ending up in professional jobs is 2.5 times more likely than from those from less advantaged backgrounds – there is an evident 'class pay gap' within professions, especially for those from working class backgrounds
[Strathclyde University]

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[3] Life chances of young people in Scotland: evidence review
[4] Academic Attainment Scotland
[5] Social_mobility_and_the_intergenerational_transfer_of_advantage_in_Scotland.pdf

Businesses are critical to influencing factors such as education, employment, wellbeing, and economic inactivity that is impairing Scotland's position as a 'creator of change in mobilising the country.'

This is compounded with the clear fact that not only does it make sense for our country, but it makes sense for the prosperity and growth of our business. Our success is predicated on the success of our communities, our country – be this stimulation of our economy, improved physical health and wellbeing as well as financial wellbeing, or indeed our sense of 'good citizenship' – creating an equitable field for all to play, be this individuals, businesses, or communities as a whole.

Your role

Businesses are vital to addressing the disparities we all see, feel and hear in Scotland. If we are to elevate social mobility, improve the societal and economic impact for our communities and – leave behind a legacy, this is the best way to position society for the future.

If Social Mobility in the UK increased to the average across Western Europe, GDP could be roughly 2% higher [Sutton Trust]

The compelling evidence of the societal and economic benefits for communities and businesses is strong.

Having a diverse workforce directly contributes to increased employee engagement, productivity, profitability, and overall wellbeing and satisfaction amongst Scotland's workforces. There is much research available that of all the diversity characteristics, socio-economic background has the strongest impact on an individual's ability to progress into, and within the workplace – more than any other Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (EDI) indicator.

Therefore, whilst the moral and ethical reasons are vital, so are the economic benefits when it comes to elevating social mobility. This is why, businesses must develop a deeper understanding of the communities where this operates.

Businesses must seek to learn about and adopt inclusive practices in response to need. In doing so, businesses can then tailor their processes and policies to ensure that they make a tangible contribution to narrowing the gap for community residents, and employees, particularly where there are evident regional, local, inequalities.

Understanding who needs your support

There are over twenty diverse groups living across our communities in Scotland. Only a small number of these groups are currently covered by any kind of legislation in terms of equitable access to opportunity. Examples of those dependent on businesses targeting their efforts include:
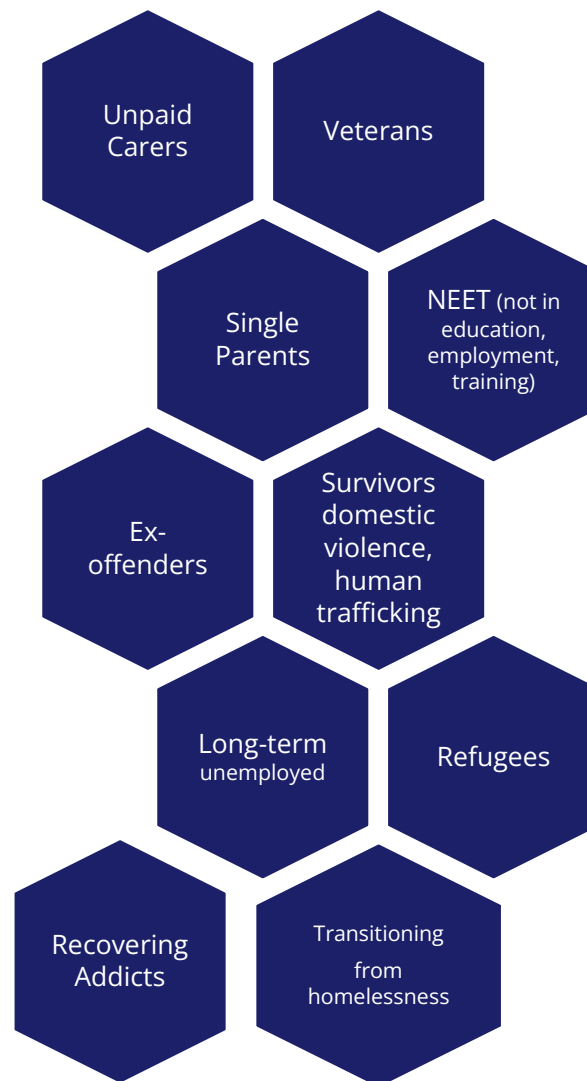
There are a wide range of specialist organisations that focus on one or more of these groups. They each focus on individual pathways to support people to be ready to consider, engage, and sustain employment. A simple web-search of organisations in your area will bring to life the network available to you, and advice on how to engage with them in order to support your ambition for each group.

EMPLOYABILITY
in **SCOTLAND**

Employability in Scotland website provides useful information on the programmes, support and organisations involved in engaging community residents with work opportunities. Employability in Scotland Information

Whilst many of these groups you may assume are unemployed, a number of them are currently in employment, and may already be part of your own workforce.

Limited socio-economic disclosure or data capture methods can often lead to employers being unaware of the social background of many of its employees. This can often lead to individuals potentially not receiving the support they require and reduces their likelihood of sustaining employment in the longer-term. The Working Group found that where this is the case, individuals experienced low self-confidence, lack of self-belief, compounding potential educational underachievement, systemic exclusion, ultimately impairing their ability to enter or progress within the workplace, engage in academic studies to further their career, or meet needs of employers.

Businesses are key to creating transparency to encourage and empower employees to disclose their social background and their aspirations, to increase their mobility in and across the workplace.

This principle should be applied when attracting talent into your business by encouraging disclosure as early as possible within the recruitment process. It is essential that once you 'know', you have adequate support mechanisms, policies or practices to support individuals' success.

Our recommendation – take a '**Less is More Approach'.** Pick one or two of these groups that resonate with your business, and are relevant across the communities that you operate, then, and only then, place a focus on these through your strategy and policy development, recruitment practices, data capture methods, and evaluation!

We cannot tackle all of these groups or be effective in shifting the dial for each of them. Go deep, that way you will make more of an impact.

Understanding your business needs

At the end of this report, you will find a **Balanced Scorecard.** This provides guidance on self-assessment, and recommended actions in advancing social mobility within your organisation. The Scorecard aims to help you understand:

- Your level of maturity in Social Mobility.

- Actions and recommendations you could take in improving your maturity.

At the start of your journey, or whilst reviewing your current status, every organisation must better understand the communities they are serving, and how social mobility fits into overall business goals. Only then will you be able to design, develop, and deliver innovative ways to tackle the societal and economic challenges of the communities that you serve, and that will yield the business benefits you require – productivity, profitability, engagement.

We all want to be the client, supplier, partner, or employer of choice!

Demonstrating tangible impact for society is crucial to your performance, productivity, client engagement, and authenticity in being part of Scotland's business community – excellence in corporate citizenship!

We must remember -
if it is important to our people, our communities, then it must be important to us!

Measuring your effectiveness - *Is key to your continual success*

We recognise that our ability to demonstrate the responsible steps we are taking towards a fairer society for all can be complex, and data is not always readily available. We suggest starting with what you do have, decide what you would want, and develop your thinking and planning in line with how you evolve your capabilities, systems and governance to shape your actions, culture and behaviours.

That said, we know that we can only measure and make informed decisions based on the data that we capture – and this is where it becomes complex, and a challenge for many businesses, regardless of their shape or size!

There are a many toolkits, frameworks, and standards publicly available. Whilst this report does not recommend a singular way to measure social mobility, we do recommend that you familiarise yourself with the choices available to you; and build your understanding as to what is, or what is not achievable for your business today, whilst planning for what your capabilities may be tomorrow.

Based on the work of the BITC Social Mobility Working Group, useful information and guidance on how businesses can effectively contribute to shifting the social mobility dial across Scotland is provided at the end of this report. This is supplemented by a range of case studies, powerful in articulating the impact on individuals and communities, more so than numbers.

Across many of the measurement frameworks available, the most common data sets recommended to help businesses start to understand their workforce, identify gaps, develop targeted initiatives to improve socio-economic diversity and progression includes:

> **Parental occupation**
> **School type attended**
> **Free school meal eligibility**
> **Parental education**

The above should, where possible, be aligned with data that historically has been commonly captured:

- Health status, including any disabilities

- Race, religion

- Gender

- Age

- Post Code

- Academic attainment.

More complex data that is sometimes available includes:

- Housing status – experience of homelessness, transitional housing circumstances, temporary /unstable accommodation

- Caring responsibilities – whether individuals were/are a Care Leaver, having caring responsibilities

- Offending history – whilst we promote businesses to support the "Ban the Box" campaign, some occupations and roles require a Disclosure Scotland record check

- Military background – veteran, reservists, or part of a military family.

Collection of socio-economic data has never been more important if employers are to do the right thing for all their people and the communities in which they operate. However, it should only be collected where it will make a material difference. Create a positive impact through your actions as a result of having this data.

This reinforces the feedback that we received from employees as part of our consultation i.e. lack of trust, misunderstanding why data requests are being made. The importance of the messaging between employer and employee is critical to ensure that employees understand why this data is being requested, the confidential treatment of this data, but most importantly what employers will do with it **– Improve the workplace experience and create opportunities for all!**

It has been evidenced by many organisations that getting the messaging right from the outset will yield a higher engagement level from employees to provide data, and underpinned by continual consultation and inclusive practices, such as employee networks, will assist how businesses structure their social mobility strategy, policies and evaluation.

Our findings

What businesses are saying?

Overall, from a significant sample of members of BITC who were surveyed, we found that there are diverse approaches being taken, and multiple challenges to be found across the following themes.

- Organisational understanding of social mobility – awareness raising of social mobility as a diversity issue was found to be disparate, and as such, there has been slow progress in forming cohesive strategies around socio-economic diversity and social mobility. This is also the case for the economic benefit (as opposed to moral obligation).

- Communications – what social mobility is, what 'we' are doing in this respect; variable methods for sharing organisational approach e.g. intranets, web pages and promotional (less evidence on specific policies and practices), both shared via the internal and external communications evident, albeit mostly internal sharing via the organisation's intranet, at team meetings, newsletters and webinars. External communications often found on web pages, promotional branding materials, although, we found there was primarily a focus on DEI as opposed to broader socio-economic diversity [6].

- Data collection – from no data to comprehensive data capture processes in place (subsequent analysis of data variable); overall, limited findings on 'leader status' organisations. General finding was that there is hesitancy among employees to share individual experiences; that existing data collection systems are not user-friendly, and there are efforts underway to improve participation and system usability.

- Common data points collected – postcode information in some cases, childhood and current postcode that could be used to assess socio-economic journey; Household & Educational background – main household earner's profession, school type (age 11 – 16yrs), free school meal eligibility, and parents' highest educational attainment. These data points concur with those recommended by the Social Mobility Commission.

- Additional data indicators – carer status, veteran status, housing situation (pre-employment, and during employment); criminal convictions limited particularly for those supporting 'Ban the Box' [7]. There is a need to consider issues that intersect with other diversity challenges. This requires a holistic approach, and a need for integration with broader DEI frameworks. A number cited that validated statistics to meet client expectations. Pay gaps remain an issue within social mobility efforts.

- Employee reluctance – to share personal data, cultural resistance, recruitment complexities, and a perceived potential lack of support (if sharing information that is sensitive).

[6] Groups not covered by legislation, 9 protected characteristics

[7] Ban the Box Campaign - Business in the Community

- Processes and Systems – upgrading of data captures processes and systems; ongoing learning and adaptation to achieve greater inclusion and impact sporadic.

- Methodology – questionnaires administered during onboarding or job applications; employee input where requests to voluntarily provide via surveys were made and included broader data requests via diversity surveys and annual declaration; and progression tracking which is monitored alongside broader DE&I metrics.

- Initiatives and Programmes – organisational approaches varied from none happening, to multiple initiatives across local communities (and not always necessarily, designed to meet need).

- Collaboration – partnerships and affiliations in the main were evident, however, the impact of these, and how they had been targeted to meet local needs was less evident in most cases. Positioning and prioritising by fostering partnerships was inconsistent.

Below are some steps organisations can take to understand the voluntary network across Scotland, and how to engage with organisations aligned to your community, ambition, and purpose.

*The **Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations** is the membership organisation for Scotland's charities, voluntary organisations and social enterprises. There are over 3,000 organisations who are part of this community, and a directory of these organisations can be found at Membership directory - SCVO.*

***Social Enterprise UK** (SEUK) lead the world's largest network of businesses with a social purpose. SEUK raises awareness of social enterprise with different audiences, and support connection between social enterprises and private, public and social sectors. A director of the social enterprise network can be found at Social Enterprise UK Directory.*

Business Summary – Top 3 Themes

Social Mobility

Less positive findings

Positive findings practice

Understanding & Communications

Less positive findings	Positive findings practice
Social Moblity as a diversity issue - was found to be disparate.	Importance of having a good understanding of extended DE&I agenda, and practices that support diversity, inclusive working and attraction.
Slow progress in forming cohesive strategies around socio-economic diversity and social mobility practices.	Clear messaging to employees as to why employers are looking to capture socio-economic data.

Data

Less positive findings	Positive findings practice
Ranged from no data being collected. DE&I data being collected (compliance). Hesitancy amongst employees to share. Systems not user-friendly.	Some data collected e.g. postcodes, in some cases childhood v adult postcodes; main household earner's profession, school type, free school meal eligibility, educational attainment.

Engagement

Less positive findings	Positive findings practice
Employee reluctance to share data - why? Lack of understanding who to collaborate with. Fostering & maintaining partnerships. No specific initiatives/programmes in place.	Initiatives & Programmes in place with 3rd sector organisations . Directories available to signpost businesses to engaging with local partners. BITC Network and other networks insightful; supportive and lead to practical actions.

Examples of best practice

Employment and Recruitment Practices[8]

- Ban the Box supporter

- Removal of degree requirements and traditional qualifications

- Targeted employment efforts – social recruitment strategies underpinned by local need

- Using alternative selection methods e.g. gamified assessments and values-based questions, adapted to meet those with additional support needs

- Offering guaranteed interviews for specific groups e.g. ex-offenders, the long-term unemployed, refugees, individuals from specific communities (identified as social mobility cold spots)

- Running dedicated employment programmes (e.g., "Foundation Ready to Work," "Starting Fresh", "10,000 Black Interns")

- Opening Doors employer status

- Signatory of the Race at Work Charter

- Providing employability support through corporate volunteering initiatives (Job Coaching)

- Third Sector Partnerships – those supporting underrepresented groups into work

- Focusing on early careers through apprenticeships, internships, and work placements

- Disability Confident Status

- Local hiring practices reflect community demographics – insight can be found via Scotland's Census matrix as well as range of ONS data sets.

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[8] No One Left Behind: employability strategic plan 2024 to 2027 - gov.scot

Some initiatives that enable and empower businesses led by Business in the Community include:

Learning & Development

- Providing tailored mentoring, coaching, and career development programmes.

- Supporting employability for marginalised groups; leveraging apprenticeships and internships, and Welfare to Work programmes (paid and unpaid, ideally paid at Living Wage rates) in targeting under-represented groups.

- Extending probation periods and offering role-specific training.

- Responsible Business Ambassadors working to raise awareness and counter opposition.

Community Support & Outreach

- Partnering with schools and youth initiatives – strategic relationship, co-designing & delivering targeted interventions.

- Funding school support programmes such as breakfast clubs, work placements.

- Work experience, work tasters, job shadowing available to under-represented groups.

- Engaging with young people – employability, career workshops, CV writing, mock interviews.

- Providing mentoring to both teachers (as part of their CIPD) and pupils (as part of the curriculum – suggest partnering with specialist organisations; minimise contact and relationship management challenges that schools may experience). Organisations include Wildhearts, Social Enterprise UK and Powering Futures.

- Collective problem solving – business, pupils, teaching staff.

Financial Support

- Offering financial grants and bursaries where possible, or accessing these to support continued development of your social mobility strategy / practices.

- Real living wage is provided, flexible payment options are available to employees, including new starters, to provide additional support as they make the transition into work, including apprentices and interns.

Collaboration

- Corporates coming together with the third sector (charities & social enterprises); examples in your toolkit of useful information.

- BITC network/movement helps support broader social mobility efforts.

- Scotland Against Modern Slavery & BSA Modern Slavery Council: Ethical employment practices.

- Perception that there are limited collaboration opportunities. Businesses are encouraged to engage SCVO [9] to understand the third sector partnership organisations in your local community.

- The King's Trust [10] & The Forage: Provides support and virtual work experience for disadvantaged youth.

- Government & local collaborations and Skills Development Scotland: Work to improve employability skills and regional social mobility. Additionally, outreach with Prime & Regulatory bodies identified as significantly helping expand businesses' access to diverse talent pools.

- Social Enterprise UK - "Buy Social Corporate Challenge".

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[9] Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations

[10] The King's Trust | Confidence, courses, careers

Ambition
Strategy / Policies and Data

Action
Targeted Social Recruitment & Development Pathways

Advancement
Partnerships with Purpose

Directory links found at the end of the report to SCVO, SEUK and Employability in Scotland.

People's Voice

The Working Group felt it was important to not only undertake an environmental scan of Social Mobility in Scotland and across the UK, and hear from businesses' experience, but equally, if not more important, hear firsthand from individuals; their thoughts, understanding and experiences that have either accelerated their mobility, or inhibited their mobility.

Huge thanks to everyone who participating as their insight directly relates to the recommendations and actions suggested within this report.

In-work Participants - A sample of those in-work across multiple age groups, with varying levels of educational attainment, who reside in different communities across Scotland. The group were asked about their understanding of Social Mobility, what it meant to self, others, and their business. In general, the group has a solid understanding of what we mean by 'social mobility', determining it is about the ability to "improve your life", recognising that not everyone starts from the same place, and as such, those from what was described as disadvantaged backgrounds, faced more hurdles than those perceived to be more 'advantaged'.

Examples were given where individuals felt they had to ***"work twice as hard"*** than others, but when they got the chance, they took advantage of it. Whilst some felt it has been easier due

to their family circumstances, or educational attainment, it was very much dependent on the effort individuals also put in.

The barriers identified for most participants was the belief that much recognition is given to qualification attainment, and the networks individuals have in place which enhances the opportunities they are exposed to. This was brought to life where they cited businesses saying that it is equal but have barriers in place such as the need for a degree. A number of participants felt they had been 'overlooked' when it came to promotions, or opportunities for development as they didn't have the 'right' qualifications or connections.

Enablers were cited as being offered such as mentoring, or workplace training programmes; these should be available to everyone, as this isn't always the case. Opportunities that focused on skills rather than qualifications were seen as being a key step for businesses in supporting individuals and giving them the opportunity to showcase their skills and talent, more so than academic routeways. The ask of businesses is to recognise the diverse skills that all citizens can bring to the workplace, not just educational history but instead what they can do. Practical steps include more internships, apprenticeships and work experience opportunities targeted at disadvantaged groups.

Overall, participants recognised a shift as of late in terms of mobilising the workforce, but there is still much more to be done and room for improvement. This centred around true inclusiveness by creating fairer access to opportunities, improving mentoring, training and the recognition of real-life skills.

Participants in Custody - Male and female prisoners at different stages of their custodial sentence participated. What the majority had in common was a less than positive experience of the education system, securing employment, periods of long-term unemployment, and diverse life circumstances that impeded their ability to not only get into work, but sustain employment, or other determinants that directly impacted their aspirational levels, such as engagement with employers, education, or other institutions, often directly contributing to decision making on involvement with criminal activity. Sessions focused on the Purpose Goals, with each goal representing core barriers to opportunity that exist for individuals.

[Source: Purpose Coalition, Purpose Goals, 2024]

The Top 3 findings that individuals believed to be an inhibitor included:

Financial Poverty / Lack of Money Management skills – cited by participants as a significant contributing factor that led them to not pursue or sustain employment, but instead, pursue crime that would help them out of poverty (financial gain crimes).

Mental Health – a significant factor that directly contributed to the inability to find work, or moreover, sustain employment. This was particularly prevalent with males who highlighted that toxic masculinity discourages men from seeking support, and therefore, is a determinant factor in securing or sustaining employment.

Education Attainment – many had sporadic attendance at school, often as a result of home circumstances. Whilst they may not have achieved grades perceived to be desirable to employers, they have found that they have skills and talent that are transferable to job opportunities, particularly, practical skills, logic and reasoning, and customer engagement – none of which are recognised qualifications at school, but certainly desirable within our workplaces.

What they believed was an enabler – employers affording them the opportunity to 'start fresh' upon release, recognise their 'softer skills', and the lessons and skills learned or improved whilst in custody. They ask that employers mirror their hopes and aspirations for the future for them, their family and community by creating opportunities to demonstrate

the value they can bring back into society, and in doing so, support the productivity and success of a business.

Your Blueprint for Success

If we are to remove the overly structured compliance and box-ticking approach normally associated with many responsible business practices and move into a world that is flexible to meet business needs, the needs of our people, and that of our communities – then a "**blueprint for success**" is required to support businesses on their journey to embedding best practice.

By adopting a flexible, integrated, and outcome-focused approach to ensuring that ***social background should not dictate opportunities available to individuals,*** we can then empower business', employees, and partners to generate meaningful social impact through the behaviours of the business, its people, and partners.

The social mobility blueprint intends to provide a high-level overview of areas businesses may wish to consider in improving and transforming the way that they engage with, and understand their communities, partners, and employees in increasing social mobility across Scotland. This is what we would regard as Leader/Innovator status.

Social Mobility Balanced Scorecard

Beyond compliance – consider how you are delivering wider economic and social benefits.

- Understand your own people, those in your community, and the regional disparities that exist – then map these to your organisational values, purpose, and corporate ambitions (talent attraction, brand positioning, productivity, and profitability).

- Targeted approach to addressing inequalities, narrowing the gap for those in our community, and within our workforce.

- Identify company-wide goals, taking a "less is more" approach i.e. Top three actions to be taken.

- Keep asking yourself the "So what?" question to all that you do and challenge yourself and others around you.

Business Strategy Integration: Aligning profit (surplus) to Purpose
- Ensure your approach to Social Mobility is seamlessly integrated into your business strategy, rather than being treated as an isolated responsible business activity, aligning where relevant to national policies and market intelligence to underpin how and where you will prioritise social mobility.

- Understand the intersectionality of, and benefits of diversifying your workforce, in particular, socio-economic backgrounds to truly make an impact. These benefits will include economic, employee attraction, engagement and retention, and brand positioning as a minimum.

- Undertake an analysis of barriers (perceived or otherwise) to implementing social mobility initiatives, ways of doing business, and identify solutions and opportunities for improvement, implementation.

Outcome-Focused Approach: *Measure what matters*
Understanding the impact of your actions is fundamentally what will lead to your success, and the continued development of driving social mobility across your business and the country.

There are a number of frameworks and standards to support businesses at varying levels of maturity in delivering social mobility activity. However, it is important you decide what is important to you, and why, before selecting a measurement framework. This will ensure that your approach is authentic, aligns with your corporate ambitions, and values as a business.

The Social Mobility Working Group does not recommend any particular methodology, as it is imperative that each business understands their intended outcomes, the relevance to their business and the communities where they operate. However, at the end of this report you will find further reading (reports and methodologies that are in the public domain for further review and consideration)

Social Mobility Ecosystem Development: Build a supportive environment for all

No matter how big or small we may be, we cannot shift the dial on social mobility alone. As Helen Keller said: "Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much" – therefore, consider your partnerships and do not hesitate in reaching out to others to understand best practice, or things to avoid in implementing and embedding your approach to Social Mobility.

Scotland is renowned for fostering a collaborative environment where government, businesses, and the third sector can work together. However, relationships are not always determined to be strategic, but often established to meet practical needs, demands, or a time-bound topic or activity.

Corporates, in particular, should seek to shift from relationships to strategic partnerships with the third sector, creating an opportunity to co-design social mobility activity and ensuring a more sustainable way of creating lasting impact in the longer-term. Strategic Partnerships are ultimately found to be more flexible, outcome-focused, and truly collaborative – creating a vibrant, innovative, and impactful approach that leads to tangible impact.

Cross-sector / industry collaboration is important when seeking to leverage specialisms that tackle specific challenges in our communities, or workplaces e.g. third sector. The reach, scale and investment capabilities of larger organisations working strategically with specialist third sector organisations creates a collaborative model that encourages a collective approach to tackling social issues, and amplifying impact.

Moreover, supporting the capability and capacity of the third sector to sustain in the longer-term through partnering with corporates is a tangible, long-term strategy. This will help demonstrate commitment and conviction to not only tackle real-time challenges, but mitigate continuation of disparities, exclusion in the medium to longer term:

- If you are a corporate, then reach out to the third sector and offer your support.
- If you are in the third sector, then ask for assistance.
- If you are in the public sector, encourage above.

Understand

Workforce / Community Priorities

Listen to your People, Communities, Partners

Consider what this means to you?

Improve Data Systems

Improve what you capture, measure, analyse; relax recruitment methods to make more accessible and relevant; pay gap reporting

Promote

Social Mobility as an extension to diversity agenda

Diverse Talent Pipeline

Build diverse pipeline using data collected; identify gaps; target your approach; Adopt 'Social Recruitment' practices that target diverse groups

Collaborate

Work with others; build an eco-system for success e.g. 3rd Sector partnerships, Specialist organisations that engage with under-represented socio-economic groups

Create Opportunities

Apprenticeships, Internships, Work Experience, Internal Progression Routeways

EMBED

Organisational Strategies, Policies, Practices

Keep it simple

Creating your Social Mobility Pledge

By making your Pledge on how you will contribute towards increasing social mobility across Scotland – no matter how big or small your steps are be assured that you can make a meaningful contribution in a tangible, impactful way. Every business has their part to play in creating positive impact on the societal and economic challenges that Scotland faces today.

Be clear about your INTENT

The goal of social mobility for both companies and countries is to ensure that people are not disadvantaged because of their social, health, educational, ethnic, or economic background. It is important to recognise that talent comes from all walks of life and enabling those most talented to progress rather than those who are dealt the best postcode, academic history, or social standing.

Be realistic on the ACTION you can take

- **Take it one step at a time** – focus on doing one thing well before moving onto the next. This may be creating a strategy, developing a policy or procedure, or educating your people.

- **Embed social mobility** – it is a business imperative to aide your growth, profitability (surplus generation), brand positioning as well as attracting, and retaining the best talent.

- **Go beyond what is expected** – this doesn't always mean additional work or costs, but instead, it is about thinking differently, more creatively, on how your actions can deliver wider societal and economic benefits as a result of being a good corporate citizen, not because legislation dictates.

- **Engage with others –** reach out to other organisations who can support you with your social mobility journey. We are all trying to achieve the same thing! BITC members will be delivering information sessions to all organisations. Engage the voluntary sector. They are specialists operating at the heart of our communities and know our communities best.

Be practical on your ability to measure OUTCOMES

- Not all businesses have robust data capture and reporting systems – so start with what you have got, then develop an action plan to improve the way in which you use data to inform decisions and influence strategy and working practices. Embed your intent and ambitions into your existing policies and practices. This is the only way to drive the culture and behaviours you wish to see.

- **Data is king - equally as important is story telling**. Case studies must not be underestimated when reporting your success. Bring to life the impact you make through an individual or community story. This is worth more than any spreadsheet. Be close to your people and your communities; see, feel, and hear the difference you are making. **Celebrate and communicate!**

INTENT – ACTION - OUTCOME

Acknowledgements and thanks:

Our Short-Life Social Mobility Working Group - In 2024 the Scotland Leadership Board of Business in the Community (BITC) commissioned a short-life working group, comprising cross-representation of BITC members operating in Scotland. The aim was to articulate ways in which its members could champion, collaborate, and communicate to the wider business network in Scotland how businesses' can make more of an impact on social mobility.

Our aim was to simplify ways in which businesses who are committed to Social Mobility could take either their first, or next steps in creating opportunity for those in our communities and enhance mobility within our workforce. Members of the working group researched, consulted with employees, partners, and peers; shared their own experiences, and corporate good practice as part of this paper. A series of listening sessions helped us gain the 'voice of the people;' helping us to understand their mobility journey first hand.

Thank you for taking the time to review, and we hope that you find the information we have provided helps you take practical steps to elevate your approach to social mobility across Scotland.

Next Steps

The BITC Scotland Social Mobility Working Group members have committed to delivering a schedule of **Lunch and Learn sessions** from late 2025 into early 2026.

These sessions will be open to all businesses across Scotland, not just BITC members.

The intent is to provide practical tips and techniques to either start your social mobility journey or advance it.

Social Media posts will be used to capture expressions of interest initially and then later will provide links to specific dates for the lunch and learn sessions.

Employees from low socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to experience in-work poverty. BITC has launched an in-work poverty project to work with businesses in Scotland to identify interventions that tackle in-work poverty among employees. The project aims to develop and implement a practical tool for employers to address and alleviate in-work poverty.

To find out more about the in-work poverty project, contact: Paula.Cruz@bitc.org.uk

To discuss any aspect of this report or find out more on how BITC can support your social mobility journey contact: advisory@bitc.org.uk

For any general information about BITC: Info.Scotland@bitc.org.uk

APPENDICES

1) Social Mobility Balanced Scorecard – Maturity Assessment & Actions to Accelerate

Social Mobility Balanced Scorecard

Maturity Assessment

	Follower *Not yet started; compliance driven only*	**Mature** *Pro-active approach*	**Leader / Innovator** *Embedding and Elevating approach*
Intent	• Lack understanding of Social Mobility agenda. • Minimal, to no evidence that Social Mobility is core to business success. • Understands, but no action taken.	• Understands the importance of having a diverse workforce - committed to tracking socio-economic backgrounds and acting upon this. • Evident in business strategy (website, policies – even if only specific to core DE&I requirements at this time).	• Social Mobility Policy in place. • Lead Social Mobility Officer (FTE or additional duties). • Socio-economic data capture.
Action	• No specific action being taken to diversify workforce, other than ensuring a compliance approach is taken e.g. DE&I only • No structured partnerships in place to activate social mobility practices e.g. social recruitment, outreach activity.	• Policies and practices in place. • Engagement with community agencies to enrich the makeup of workforce (out with 9 protected characteristics).	• Analysis of socio-economic data that informs and influences decision making, policy design and development. • Ongoing Action Plan in place to continually improve and evolve approach, practices and policies.
Outcomes	• Little to no understanding of workforce demographics or DE&I profile. • Basic personnel data captured.	• Partnerships in place to engage diverse workforce. • Assigned roles & responsibilities – operational/functional/leadership.	• Tailored approach to resourcing and progression to further enrich your workforce and create equitable opportunities for all. • Theory of Change Model (or equivalent) in place – focusing on Impact of activity.

Social Mobility Balanced Scorecard
Actions to accelerate

	Follower *Not yet started; compliance driven only*	**Mature** *Pro-active approach*	**Leader / Innovator** *Embedding and Elevating approach*
Intent	• Research Social Mobility; making it relatable to your business (relevant and proportionate approach). • Social Mobility is a key topic across leadership discussions. • Understand what socio-economic group(s) are important to you, and why.	• Embed Social Mobility into policies and practices. • Identify forums where social mobility momentum is maintained, progressed.	• Social Mobility Strategy – underpinned by evidence of action leading to change. • Incentivise your business, colleagues to diverse the workforce. • Strategic alignment, target setting & monitoring.
Action	• Understand your workforce – snapshot of current profile. • Revise recruitment & progression practices to ensure inclusive, wider approach. • Engage community / niche organisations to support you with your journey.	• Recruitment practices outlined, collaboration with community / niche agencies in place. • Targets set – reported, monitored. • Engage your workforce – survey/listening sessions to understand what is important to them; then action.	• Social Mobility KPIs – captured, tracked, evaluated. • Targets set that reflect needs of communities that you operate in. • Social Recruitment Policy embedded, evidenced by success in increasing diversity in workforce.
Outcomes	• Identify a strategic owner of Social Mobility. • Training/ business coaching completed to aide your social mobility journey. • Action Plan in place to progress to "Mature".	• Case studies captured – communicated and celebrated. • Data set identified for socio-economic backgrounds, captured and considered (relative to communities you serve).	• Community-needs led approach. • Dataset captured on socio-economic backgrounds; analysed and action plan in place based on findings. • People strategy underpinned by needs of communities, socio-economic (incl. DE&I) workforce profile.

2) TOOLBOX OF USEFUL INFORMATION

Opening Doors — Advancing Social Mobility

Business in the Community (BITC) has a longstanding commitment to advancing social mobility by improving outcomes in education, employment, wellbeing, and inclusion. Its flagship inclusive recruitment campaign, Opening Doors, offers a strategic, evidence-based framework for employers committed to inclusive recruitment and widening access to opportunity.

Built around the Five Keys to Inclusive Recruitment, this resource provides practical guidance to reduce bias, prioritise skills over traditional credentials, and broaden access to quality employment, particularly for those from underrepresented or disadvantaged backgrounds.

Since its launch, Opening Doors has helped make over 1.4 million jobs more inclusive, with over 120 employers taking meaningful action. Research underpinning the campaign shows that more than 40% of jobseekers, especially those from low socio-economic backgrounds, older age groups, disabled individuals, and ethnically diverse communities, believe employers should focus more on skills and potential, not just qualifications and experience.

The campaign encourages employers to:

- Review and adapt hiring processes to remove barriers.
- Embed skills-first recruitment strategies.
- Promote equity and access throughout the hiring journey.

Examples of employer activity include:

- **Phoenix Group:** Redesigned assessment processes to reflect core job skills.

- **Lloyds Banking Group:** Applied a skills-based lens to attract talent from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- **Enterprise Mobility:** Invested in early talent development to improve social mobility outcomes.

Opening Doors is a key tool for businesses aiming to embed fairer recruitment practices and build more diverse, innovative, and socially responsible teams.

- Opening Doors: What Works Report - Business in the Community
- Reducing Intersectional Bias in Recruitment Toolkit - Business in the Community
- Upskilling for All - Business in the Community
- Upskilling for All: no one left behind - Business in the Community
- Opening Doors Employers - Business in the Community
- Ban the Box Employer's Guide - Business in the Community

Other relevant resources:
- Census Maps - Understanding your communities
- No One Left Behind: Scotland Employability Strategic Plan
- Purpose Coalition Social Scopes Measurement Standard - Social Scopes Measurement Standard
- Skills Development Scotland
- Social Mobility Commission - The Social Mobility Index
- Social Mobility Employer Toolkit Cross-industry toolkit
- Social Mobility Foundation - The Social Mobility Foundation
- Social_mobility_and_the_intergenerational_transfer_of_advantage_in_Scotland.pdf
- Social Mobility Top 75 Employer Index - The Social Mobility Employer Index
- Sutton Trust – Employer's Guide to Social Mobility in the Workplace - Social Mobility Toolkit

3) **Collaboration with others** - to support your ambitions and understand the power of the available network in Scotland, organisations listed below are examples of where members of the Social Mobility Working Group have had positive interaction in supporting their Social Mobility activity.

Membership, Industry Bodies and National Programmes

- Business in the Community Scotland – responsible business network fin Scotland, working together to improve social mobility and climate action.

- Employability in Scotland | Supporting the employability sector in Scotland – information portal for all employability services across Scotland

- Social Enterprise UK – membership body for social enterprises across the UK; working together to create a fairer economy and more sustainable future for everyone.

- Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations - community body of over 3,000 members, supporting the voluntary sector to thrive whilst creating a fairer and more inclusive Scotland.

- Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) Education Scotland – prepares learners for their future pathways and transition into the world of work; part of Scotland's curriculum and aligned to Scotland's young employment strategy

Community Organisations

4) Case Studies – Bringing Social Mobility to life.

Examples of practical steps other businesses have taken to elevate their approach to social mobility.

Aegon UK

Tackling barriers at Aegon to improve diversity in the talent pipeline

In 2024, Aegon UK refreshed its inclusion, equity and diversity strategy, placing social inclusion at its core. This built on a long-standing commitment to community impact. Historically, efforts to support social mobility were organic - driven by passionate colleagues mentoring, volunteering, and fundraising for causes close to their hearts.

The main challenge that Aegon wanted to address was transforming recruitment and progression to better reflect the wider community.

The tangible actions included:

- Introducing alternative entry routes such as apprenticeships and internships
- Removing CV requirements for entry-level roles
- Implementing behavioural assessments
- Adding salary transparency and candidate guidance materials to level the playing field
- Building systems to collect socio-economic background data
- Launched a person-centred onboarding experience

- Engaged with local partners to help increase opportunities for young people

By aligning its customer proposition with social inclusion and rationalising its charity partnerships, Aegon created a focused, high-impact model. Within a year, the company evolved from initiative-led goodwill to a deliberate strategy aimed at breaking down barriers and enabling upward mobility—ensuring its workforce better reflects the communities it serves. The next stage of this process is to measure the impact of the actions and show the change they have created.

CBRE

Opening Doors at CBRE Through Community Collaboration
CBRE's "Opening Doors" campaign exemplifies how strategic partnerships can be a powerful lever for social mobility. Recognising that systemic barriers require systemic solutions, CBRE embedded collaboration at the heart of its approach—partnering with organisations that reach and uplift underrepresented talent.

Through its relationship with Career Ready, CBRE provided mentorship and structured support to students, while also generating £500k in Social Value, as measured by the National Social Value Framework. The company further expanded its reach by funding the launch of the Migrant Leaders mobile app in April 2024, enabling scalable mentor-mentee matching and broader access.

CBRE also partnered with the Drive Forward Foundation to support care-experienced young people into sustainable employment. These partnerships were complemented by educational outreach in schools and universities, mentorship programmes, and inclusive policies that ensured all employees could engage meaningfully.

The results were striking: a 300% increase in graduate applications, a 10% rise in ethnically diverse graduate hires, and significant growth in applicants from non-fee-paying schools and those who received free school meals. CBRE's collaborative model not only diversified its talent pipeline but also fostered a culture of empowerment and inclusion—demonstrating that when businesses open doors, communities walk through them.

Co-op

Co-op Publishes First Socioeconomic Pay Gap Report
In July 2024, the Co-op became the first UK retailer to publish a socioeconomic pay gap report, reinforcing its commitment to supporting colleagues from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. The report, based on voluntary data from 48% of its 57,000 colleagues, found a mean pay gap of 5.2% between those from lower and higher socioeconomic backgrounds.

Findings also showed that colleagues from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are less likely to progress into senior roles, with women from these backgrounds facing the largest pay gaps. The Co-op has responded by strengthening its Social Mobility Plan—delivering more mentoring, financial wellbeing support, and an intersectionality development programme. It aims to increase data collection to 80% of colleagues over the next 12 months.

Crucially, the Co-op is using this data to influence wider change, calling on government to make socioeconomic background the tenth protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010.

CEO Shirine Khoury-Haq said, "By holding ourselves accountable and outlining the steps we will take to address inequality within our business, we hope to inspire long-lasting change at a societal level."

Enterprise Mobility

Recognise non-traditional or informal work experience and humanise recruitment methods Over 45,000 candidates apply for 1,300 graduate positions each year at Enterprise Mobility. Despite the huge volume of applications, they ensure that each and every one is screened by a person.

Leigh Lafever-Ayer, VP/Human Resources Director, UK and Ireland at Enterprise Mobility said "Understanding and nurturing a person's potential is the cornerstone of our recruitment process". We know that many jobseekers, particularly young people and those from lower

socioeconomic backgrounds, struggle to identify and articulate their skills. They often overlook skills acquired through part-time jobs or hobbies, which show they have the attitude we're looking for. That's why it's so important that we apply the human touch – we don't leave it up to chance that the candidate will know what we want and how to present it in their CV."

This personal approach continues throughout the entire recruitment process:

- No use at all of AI in the selection process

- No psychometric tests, online tests or assessment centres

Enterprise Mobility uses a people-first approach to interviewing, including:

- Offering weekly coaching sessions to all candidates

- Including one member of the recruitment team, hiring manager and recent recruit to answer a candidate's potential questions

- Positioning an 'Interview' as a conversation between two people

- Inviting the candidate on a branch visit, during which the candidate sits with the team for several hours to experiences with the hiring manager

"The whole process is an opportunity to get to know each other and to work out whether we might be a good fit – it's a two-way street. This time and attention in the recruitment process increases the diversity of the workforce we employ, and our retention rates. We have also seen an increase in the success rate of candidates."

Sodexo

<u>Creating Second Chances at Sodexo</u>

Sodexo's "Starting Fresh" strategy is a powerful example of how creating opportunities can transform lives and drive social mobility. Drawing on over 30 years of experience managing prisons, Sodexo developed a comprehensive programme to support prison-leavers into employment—helping individuals start anew while addressing labour shortages across industries.

The strategy includes free guidance for UK businesses on inclusive recruitment, backed by evidence of improved productivity and engagement. Sodexo tackles stigma through

awareness campaigns and facilitates direct engagement between employers and prison-leavers via in-prison employer days. Internally, Sodexo leads by example, actively recruiting individuals with convictions and offering a Guaranteed Interview Scheme for eligible candidates.

Collaboration is central to the programme's success. Sodexo partners with organisations such as New Futures Network, HMPPS, and The Oswin Project to co-design training and employment pathways. An Employer Toolkit supports businesses in adopting inclusive practices.

The impact is significant: over 700 individuals placed into work in 2024, including 100 within Sodexo, and £2.7 million in social return on investment. Businesses report reduced recruitment costs and improved performance. Recognised with the 2024 Footprint Award for Social Impact and Diversity, Sodexo's approach proves that when organisations create opportunities, they unlock potential and foster inclusive growth.

Wheatley Group
Wheatley is changing lives through social mobility
At Wheatley Group, social mobility is not a new priority – it's a founding principle.

Through its Foundation and employability initiative, Wheatley Works, has embedded opportunities into the core of its housing, care, property management, and community services throughout Scotland.

Wheatley Works provides tailored, person-centred support to help customers build skills, confidence, and financial independence. In the financial year 2024–2025, we delivered over 1000 training and employment opportunities, with 40% of those opportunities secured within the Group.

Programmes such as Environmental Roots and Changing Lives offer practical pathways into work for individuals with limited or no qualifications or work experience. Initiatives such as Progress for Parents and Moving Forward address specific barriers faced by parents and young people, while the Way Ahead partnership supports those farthest from the labour

market, including individuals with convictions, addictions, and those experiencing homelessness.

Wheatley also invests in learning and digital inclusion. This year, over 2200 people accessed free internet and digital skills training, and more than 80 tenants received bursaries to pursue further and higher education.

A review of its bursary programme has enhanced accessibility, resulting in a 73% increase in applications and a more diverse group of recipients.

To measure the impact of our work, the Foundation uses the Housing Associations' Charitable Trust (HACT) Social Value Tool, which employs a Treasury-approved wellbeing valuation model.

Since April 2024, Wheatley has delivered over £8 million in social value through the outcomes achieved across Wheatley Works, bursaries, and digital skills programmes.

Social mobility is embedded in every layer of Wheatley's work, creating real and lasting change each day and supporting our mission of making homes and lives better.

Powering Futures
Delivering Social Mobility through Education and Workplace Programmes
Since its inception in 2020, Powering Futures has been dedicated to bridging the gap between education and industry. By collaborating with over 180 Scottish businesses and engaging more than 5,000 young people, the organisation fosters social mobility and sustainability through accredited programmes that develop critical meta-skills and real-world problem-solving abilities.

Powering Futures introduced a:

- SCQF Level 6 Accredited Schools Programme: a 30-week course to develop meta-skills through sustainability challenges, with classroom teachers and industry partners.

- 14-Week Workplace Challenge: CPD-accredited for 16–25yrs, to create business case pitches for senior leaders, thereby enhancing productivity and time-to-value in roles.

These programmes are designed to be accessible, with no cost to schools, supported by volunteers and business partners.

The programmes track participant numbers, demographics and monitor participation hours, and collect feedback from students, teachers, and business partners. In addition, they assess the implementation of student-proposed solutions within partner organisations.

The programmes results include:

- Increased confidence and employability among participants
- Strengthened connections between education and industry sectors
- Accelerated onboarding and integration of young employees
- Improved bottom line due to the sustainability-focused solutions
- For businesses looking to implement similar responsible business practices, please:
- Consider both educational goals and industry needs when you partner with Schools
- Provide real-world challenges to give young people opportunities to foster skills that benefit both the individual and the organisation.
- Regularly assess the outcomes of programmes to ensure they meet objectives and provide value to all stakeholders.

Business in the Community

Business in the Community is the UK's largest and most influential responsible business network dedicated to building a fairer and greener world together, supported by His Majesty the King for over 40 years. We inspire, engage and challenge purposeful leaders to take practical action to mobilise their collective strength as a force for good in society.