

Helping employers increase socio-economic diversity and inclusion

The Social Mobility Commission launches a new guide to help employers attract and retain talented people from all social backgrounds today (6 Feb 2020).

The Socio-economic diversity and inclusion employers' toolkit, created by the Bridge Group, gives practical and cost-effective recommendations to help ensure that talented and skilled job seekers from poorer backgrounds are not overlooked.

Under the guidelines jobseekers and staff may be routinely asked to give details of the school they went to, their parents' occupations, and even whether they were on free school meals.

The aim is to help break through the traditional 'old boys' network', where recruiters can favour candidates they know, or those with more privileged social status.

Boosting representation from diverse social backgrounds is a powerful tool for employers in the constant struggle to attract and retain the best people.

Research underpinning the toolkit includes a survey of 7 leading law firms. The data shows that employees educated at state schools are 75% more likely to feature in the top 10% of performers than those educated at independent schools.

The suggested questions on social background would always be voluntary and anonymised. Employers committed to broadening the social diversity of their workforces would then use the information to check the fairness of their application, recruitment and promotion processes.

Sandra Wallace, Social Mobility Commissioner and Joint Managing Director UK and Europe, DLA Piper says:

Embracing social mobility isn't just the smart thing to do, it's the fair thing to do. Improving socio-economic diversity in the workplace is just as important as all other inclusion and diversity initiatives.

When I was starting on my legal journey, I was told I wouldn't become a lawyer because I didn't go to the right university and I didn't get the highest grades. Overcoming these barriers has not been easy.

Building a wide and diverse talent pool is critical to the success of organisations of any sector and size. Organisations keen to future-proof themselves are already embracing social mobility as the new diversity

frontier.

Steven Cooper, Social Mobility Commissioner and CEO at C. Hoare and Co said:

Some of the best talent, particularly talent that develops over time, comes from less obvious places. The challenge is how to find that talent in the first place, and then nurture it to ensure employees' potential is fulfilled.

Recent research from the commission has shown that working class people account for just over a third of the workforce in professional occupations, whereas 60% come from professional backgrounds. Similarly, while only 7% of the public were privately educated, 71% of barristers and 27% of CEOs attended independent schools.

Nik Miller, Chief Executive of the Bridge Group, said:

The toolkit uses the evidence base to offer practical ways in which all employers can be more equal, access new talent, and develop more inclusive workplaces. It should become a guide for all leading employers that care about these matters.

Catherine McGuinness, Policy Chair at the City of London Corporation added:

When employees are drawn from a small talent pool, it can result in less innovation, more 'groupthink' and reactive rather than proactive problem-solving.

If the UK is to remain globally competitive and people from all parts of the country are to access jobs, businesses nationwide will need to ensure that they champion social mobility and diversity.

The commission is also launching a [Social Mobility Works microsite](#) – featuring both inclusive content and a directory of organisations to support employers in the social mobility area.

Over the coming months, the commission will publish specialised toolkits for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), retail, and the professional financial services sector.

Notes to editors

The Social Mobility Commission monitors progress towards improving Social Mobility in the UK and promotes social mobility in England.

The Social Mobility Commission board comprises:

- Dame Martina Milburn (Chair)

- Alastair da Costa, Chair of Capital City College Group
- Farrah Storr, Editor-in-chief of Elle
- Harvey Matthewson, Aviation Activity Officer at Aerobility
- Jessica Oghenegweke, Broadcast & Digital Programme Coordinator at The Roundhouse
- Jody Walker, Senior Vice President at TJX Europe (TK Maxx and Home Sense in the UK)
- Liz Williams, Director, Digital Society, BT Group
- Pippa Dunn, Founder of Broody, helping entrepreneurs and start ups
- Saeed Atcha, Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Youth Leads UK
- Sam Friedman, Associate Professor in Sociology at London School of Economics
- Sammy Wright, Vice Principal of Southmoor Academy, Sunderland
- Sandra Wallace, Joint Managing Director UK & Europe, DLA Piper
- Steven Cooper, Chief Executive Officer, C. Hoare & Co