



Social Mobility
Commission



Annual review & business plan 2020

A year of innovation and collaboration



Social Mobility Commission

About the Commission

The Social Mobility Commission is an independent advisory non-departmental public body established under the Life Chances Act 2010 as modified by the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016. It has a duty to assess progress in improving social mobility in the UK and to promote social mobility in England.

This report was written by Sasha Morgan, Jill Sherman and Catherine Bassindale, with contributions from the Secretariat.

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www.gov.uk/government/organisations/social-mobility-commission

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Contents

01. Welcome	02
02. About us	05
Our Commissioners	06
Our role	09
Our values	10
Our statutory objectives	11
Our strategic objectives	11
03. What we did	12
Key milestones	13
04. How we did it	16
Strengthening partnerships	17
Expanding our influencing activities	20
Improving visibility	24
Superior analysis	34
Increasing engagement	40
05. What we'll do next	47
Business plan: redefining the socio-political agenda	48
Governance	59
Postscript by the Commissioners	62

01. Welcome



| Welcome to the annual review

The Commission has been defining and shaping the debate around social mobility and socio-economic inequalities for the past 10 years. This group of Commissioners has taken on that legacy for the past two years and we are proud of what we have achieved.

In this extraordinarily challenging year, we have made significant strides in influencing government policy, while making meaningful connections with employers and embarking upon an ambitious programme of activities. We have also led the way with ground-breaking research and analysis that is helping to define modern Britain and bring about sustainable change.

As this report will illustrate, 2020 was an exciting year of transition for the Social Mobility Commission (SMC). We have worked hard to achieve our objective of building a society in

which people, regardless of background, can make meaningful choices about how to improve their lives and those of their children.

We have created coalitions with the aim of removing blockages and systemic barriers that prevent people from exercising choice.

We have promoted paths of opportunity for those in positions of disadvantage, so that everyone has a decent chance of a better future.

Our mission is to create a society where the circumstances of birth do not determine outcomes in life. This has been our role since we were established in 2010 as the Child Poverty Commission, and then as the Social Mobility Commission since 2016.

Two years ago, the Commission underwent significant changes in personnel and we have been building on the strong foundations established by our previous Chairs, Alan Milburn and Dame Martina Milburn. We have moved into a phase of rapid delivery. New approaches trialled in 2019 are developing into successful programmes. The most significant of these is our work with employers to help boost the recruitment of those from poorer backgrounds.

In addition to the planned work-streams, the Commission reacted quickly to undertake work to support the national response to the COVID-19 crisis.

We are pleased with what we have achieved. In line with last year's strategy we have significantly increased the scale and depth of our collaborations. In our first year we officially joined forces with two institutions. Roll forward 12 months and we have established relationships, partnerships or collaborations with over 40.

Our partnerships are varied and promote change at the frontline. For example, we have initiated work with local authorities so that they use our data to address localised social mobility barriers, and supported

employers so that they can improve diversity in the workforce. We have delivered a record number of masterclasses and training sessions, translating our research into material that can transform policy, behaviours and individual choices.

We have delivered our statutory responsibility to promote and increase public awareness of social mobility in England. Commissioner public engagements have increased, and we have reached wider audiences.

We have raised the profile and frequency with which social mobility and economic disparities have been discussed in the media. Our investment in social media channels means that we have been able to get the call to action well beyond Westminster, and communicate with more business leaders and young people.

Yet a crucial part of our function is influencing parliamentarians, politicians and policy makers. Strengthening our partnership with the All Party Parliamentary Group on Social Mobility, we now have much slicker processes for disseminating relevant research information in a timely way. We have been able to provide area by area re-cuts of data which shed new light on the regional variations in outcomes for disadvantaged youngsters.

Collaborating with organisations such as the Local Government Association (a SMC Ambassador organisation) and the Local Government Information Unit, we are developing a programme to identify ways to rebalance the socio-economic differences within today's United Kingdom.

We have maintained our reputation for producing insightful, relevant analysis and data. This year, our research and evidence exposed how the current delivery of apprenticeships fails those from deprived backgrounds at every stage of the journey. Our seminal report 'Monitoring social mobility 2013-2020' acknowledged areas where the government should be rightly praised for progress but also laid bare the extent to

which little or no progress has been made in addressing the big issues that stymie social mobility. We have a strong pipeline of evidence that is near completion, or has been recently commissioned, to ensure that the pace of discovery does not slow down.

In a year that has been decimated by COVID-19, and that presented political, professional and personal challenges, we still have much to be thankful for as a Commission. We are incredibly grateful for the support of the educationalists, third sector programme delivery organisations, academics and businesses who have generously contributed to our thinking.

Our thanks go to the ever-growing group of Social Mobility Ambassadors who each bring something valuable to the table.

We also value the work of the social mobility networks across government. They understand the challenges of poor social mobility and impress us with the way that they apply that to the myriad of everyday policy challenges. It's vitally important for us to do more with them to improve policy making and legislation.

We would like to acknowledge the huge contribution of Dame Martina Milburn, our previous Chair, who did so much to create and set the tone for how we work together as a Commission and convinced government that

an increase in investment to push forward change would be worth it.

We continue to be grateful for the passion and breadth of perspective that we get from our Commissioners. We are aware that we need to improve and strengthen our governance arrangements to support the tireless work of our Secretariat. We will continue to press for appropriate levels of autonomy so that we can ensure that the SMC team is better resourced in future.

Despite the challenges, there is so much to be positive about. We are pleased that some of our policy recommendations have been acted on by the government – such as our repeated calls to increase funding for further education (resulting in a £400m boost for the sector). We also called for changes to the exam system for 2021– and Ofqual listened.

As we prepare to move to the Cabinet Office from 1 April 2021, we look forward to taking a more influential role in addressing social and regional inequality. We will strengthen our efforts to ensure that policy is translated into action and work with regional leaders to drive forward progress. There is an urgent need for levelling up and putting policy recommendations in place and we will be there to see it through and champion the most vulnerable members in our society.



Steven Cooper and Sandra Wallace
Interim Co-Chairs of the Social Mobility Commission

02. About us



Our Commissioners

We have 12 outstanding Commissioners, all leaders in their field and from diverse backgrounds. Each Commissioner is appointed for a term of three years. They joined us two years ago and have made great progress in that time. We look forward to seeing what we can achieve together during their third year in the role.

The Commissioners draw upon their varied geographic, cultural, gender, racial, age and professional experiences to monitor, influence and progress social mobility.

Each Commissioner has a specialism which allows us to broaden and deepen our work across an extensive range of areas. The Commissioners are supported by a Secretariat team.

Interim Co-Chairs



Steven Cooper

Steven is the Chair of Experian UK and incoming CEO of Aldermore Bank Plc. His portfolio includes Apprenticeships, Labour Market and the Economy.

Region: London

2020 highlight: “Launching the employers’ programme to improve socio-economic diversity and inclusion.”



Sandra Wallace

Sandra is a Partner and Joint Managing Director at law firm DLA Piper.

Her portfolio includes Regional Engagement and Employers.

Region: West Midlands (Birmingham)

2020 highlight: “Our report ‘Moving out to move on’ – coming from Birmingham, it’s good to see a report that recognises the regional perspective and that you have to move out to move on.”

Commissioners



Saeed Atcha MBE

Saeed is Chief Executive of the charity Youth Leads UK and is Commissioner for Young People and Vulnerable Groups.

Region: North West (Bolton)

2020 highlight: “Empowering localities such as the Greater Manchester Combined Authority to use our research and knowledge to create and implement their own social mobility strategies according to the needs of local people.”



Alastair Da Costa

Alastair is Chair of Capital City College Group and Board Director of the London School of Economics – his portfolio includes Adult Skills and Further Education.

Region: Yorkshire and the Humber (Leeds)

2020 highlight: “Our statutory report, ‘Monitoring social mobility 2013-2020’, which took a deeper look at social mobility improvement and what still needed to be achieved at a government level, was a major achievement.”



Pippa Dunn

Pippa, Commissioner for Enterprise and Small Business, is the Co-Founder of Broody, which aims to turn great ideas into successful businesses.

Region: London and Scotland

2020 highlight: “‘The long shadow of deprivation’ report – it’s the most comprehensive look yet at identifying geographical areas with the poorest social mobility prospects.”



Sam Friedman

Sam is Associate Professor in Sociology at the London School of Economics and the co-author of The Class Ceiling – his portfolio includes Data, Insight and Downward Mobility.

Region: London and Scotland

2020 highlight: “Overseeing the publication of a range of ground-breaking pieces of SMC research, especially ‘The long shadow of deprivation’, and seeing the immediate policy impact such work can and has generated.”



Harvey Matthewson

Harvey is Aviation Activity Officer at Aerobility, a charity which runs aviation activities for disabled people. His remit includes Disability and Health.

Region: South East (Fleet – Hampshire)

2020 highlight: “The rollout of our toolkit for employers which offers practical help for those on the ground but also increases the focus on disability and ill health.”



Jessica Oghenegweke

Jessica, whose portfolio includes Early Years and Families, is a BBC Earth Kids presenter and student at Brunel University, studying for a BSc in global challenges.

Region: East (Norwich)

2020 highlight: “Developing our new Social Mobility Commission Instagram account, that showcases inspiring social mobility stories from a range of people across the UK – we’ve created an online community and also highlighted social mobility issues that still need addressing.”



Farrah Storr

Farrah, Editor-in-Chief of fashion magazine ELLE UK, has a portfolio including Culture, Arts and the Media.

Region: South East and North West (Kent and Salford)

2020 highlight: “Our ‘Moving out to move on’ report highlighted the naked truth many of us have known for years, particularly those in the creative industries. It was a huge wake-up call and formed the basis for our Social Mobility Commission and ELLE UK partnership.”



Jody Walker

Jody, director of retail company TJX Europe, leads on Employment, Progression and Housing.

Region: Yorkshire and the Humber (Bradford)

2020 highlight: “The participation, input and support from a very wide range of partners to create an employers’, toolkit that provides practical ways to positively move forward social mobility within organisations.”



Liz Williams MBE

Liz is CEO of FutureDotNow, a business-to-business coalition focused on accelerating the UK’s digital skills. She leads on Digital and the Future of Work.

Region: South East (Portsmouth)

2020 highlight: “Taking an impact approach to our work. Using our report ‘Monitoring social mobility 2013-2020’ to track progress of previous recommendations by government departments. Ensuring the focus is not on talk but action and results.”



Sammy Wright

Sammy, Commissioner for Schools and Higher Education, is Vice-Principal of Southmoor Academy in Sunderland.

Region: North East (Sunderland)

2020 highlight: “The pandemic has been an absolute nightmare for education – but it has led to a renewed focus on how to make the system fairer. My highlight has been the process of engaging with government and educationalists, and the increasing recognition the Commission has got for this.”

Our role

The Social Mobility Commission exists to create a United Kingdom where an individual's future isn't determined by the circumstances of their birth. We promote meaningful paths of opportunity for those in positions of disadvantage, so that everyone has a decent chance of a better future.

We are an independent advisory body, currently sponsored by the Department for Education. We will move to be sponsored by the Cabinet Office on 1 April 2021.

The Commission was established by the Child Poverty Act 2010. The Commission was previously referred to as the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission and is operated in accordance with the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016.



“This is the Commission’s tenth year of influencing policy at the highest level and pushing for sustainable change in areas including early years childcare, housing, education and apprenticeships. We have made great strides but there is still a long way to go.”

Sasha Morgan, Director of the Social Mobility Commission



Our values

Our aim is to maintain a healthy, sustainable and inclusive organisation that leverages the diverse experiences of our team to continuously improve strategy, analysis and policy development.

To achieve our objectives, we are...



Ambitious: shifting the landscape requires drive, determination and big-picture thinking.



Impact-driven: our focus is on making tangible changes.



Diverse, equal and inclusive: we are open to ideas, suggestions and thoughts. We treat people with respect, dignity and fairness regardless of their background and/or identity.



Collaborative: we work in partnership with other organisations, groups and individuals and people with similar or complementary ambitions and goals.



Team oriented: we make decisions following debate; policy decisions and recommendations are reached through a consensus with our Commissioners.



Curious and open: we recognise the rich perspective provided by our own experiences of disadvantage and social mobility. However, our insight and instinct is backed by good-quality data and analysis to ensure that our findings are robust.

Our statutory objectives

One of the SMC's most important tasks is to hold the government to account for the delivery of our recommendations. We have a statutory responsibility to:

- promote social mobility in England
- provide advice to ministers on how to improve social mobility in England
- carry out and publish research in relation to social mobility
- set out our views, in an annual monitoring report, on the progress made towards improving social mobility in the United Kingdom, which is then laid before Parliament



Our strategic objectives

We set ourselves ambitious strategic objectives. These are outlined in this report and focus on the following core areas:

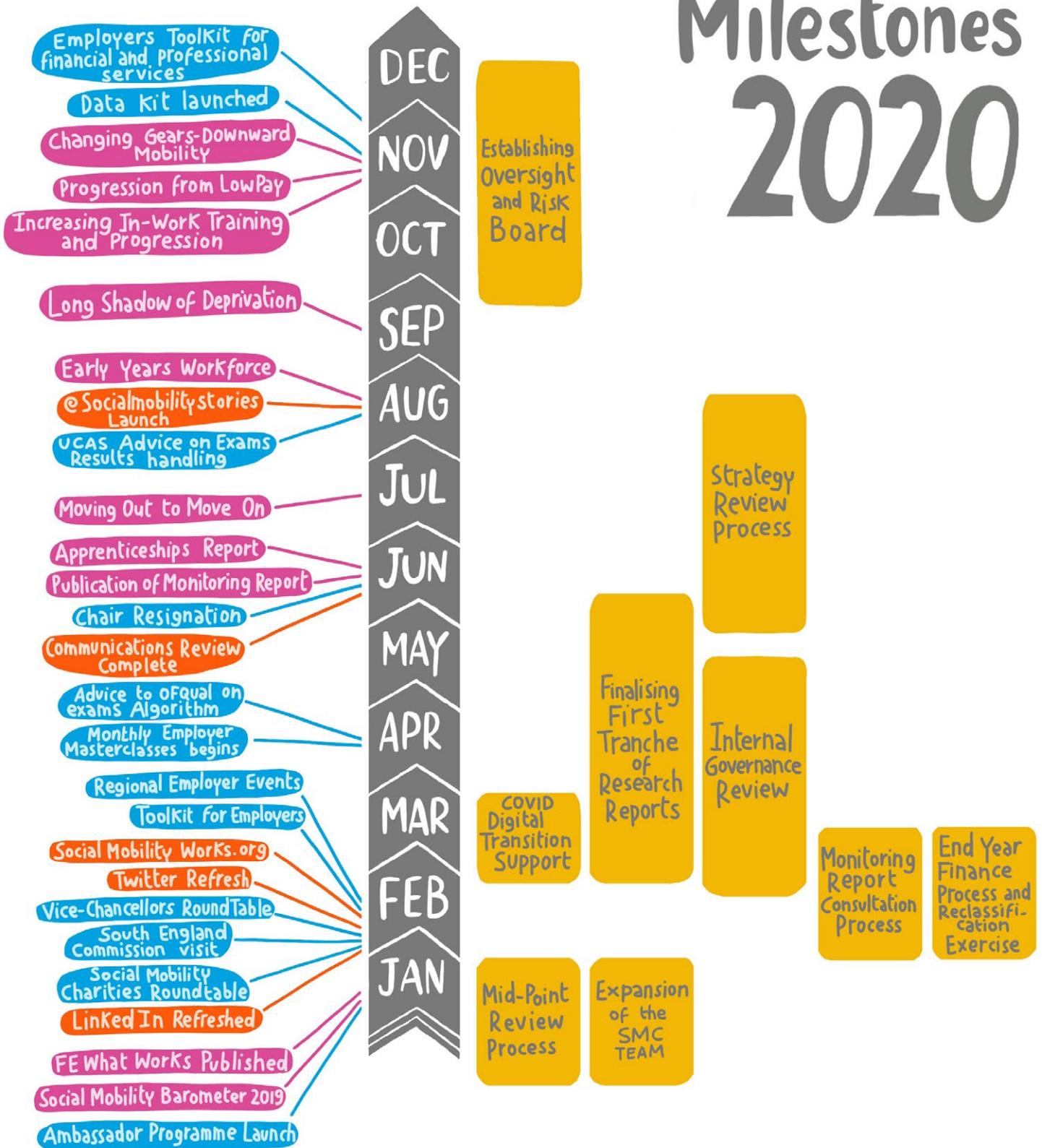
- improving and expanding our influencing activities
- driving action on social mobility in England
- leading on social mobility policy



03. What we did



KEY Milestones 2020



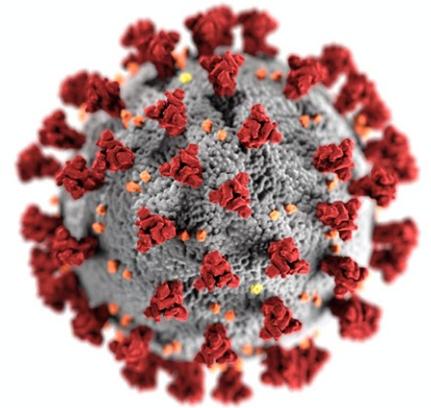
- Events
- Research Reports and Publications
- Digital Communication
- Internal Projects



Context

It has been a hugely difficult 12 months for everyone but the pandemic has made our work more relevant than ever. COVID-19 is hitting the most disadvantaged groups hardest due to job losses, lack of work experience, cramped housing, isolation, school disruption, poor digital access and a host of other factors.

Even before the pandemic started, our work was ramping up substantially with a very ambitious programme of research and many more engagements between Commissioners and other stakeholders. When it hit, there was an even greater sense of urgency to share, collaborate and deliver.



“Much has been spoken about everyone being in the same COVID storm, but those without digital capability and confidence are at sea without life rafts, buoyancy aids or the ability to swim. Digital exclusion remains a genuine issue for the most disadvantaged and without concerted action it will continue to present a barrier to social mobility and hamper the UK’s recovery.”

Liz Williams MBE, Social Mobility Commissioner leading on Digital and the Future of Work



We would like to thank our Ambassador organisations for their support over the year, stress-testing our reports, providing case studies, championing our work and providing their own intelligence to help promote social mobility.

Achievements

Despite the challenges, we have delivered our most ambitious programme to date.

Key highlights include:

- launching an employers' programme and microsite for businesses to help recruit more people from disadvantaged backgrounds
- publishing 13 ground-breaking research reports on aspects of social mobility which got widespread media pick-up
- reaching out to a younger audience

In addition we built up our network of Ambassador organisations to help spread our message, held dozens of seminars, webinars, training sessions and masterclasses, and launched a campaign for increased resources on further education.



In 2020 we produced 13 ground-breaking research reports on aspects of social mobility

04. How we did it



Strengthening partnerships

Our objective is to encourage institutions to embed social mobility in their approaches to strategy, policy and delivery. This year, we have worked extensively with social mobility charities (such as Power2 and Brightside) as they play a key role in delivering change and improving social, educational and employment outcomes for people facing disadvantage.

Commissioners' engagements



2019

102

2020

320

We champion and celebrate good practice – for example, through sponsoring and judging the UK Social Mobility Awards and the upReach Awards. Our role also includes promoting greater collaboration between the organisations that forge paths of opportunity for young people from low socio-economic backgrounds.

Charities

In the last 12 months we have had much closer relations with charities working in the social mobility space and in February we hosted our first dinner with nearly two dozen charity CEOs. We used the gathering to foster collaborative working relationships in a sector that has a common purpose but is often highly competitive. We now work closely with charities on the employers' programme and

communications but we also support them in practical ways. During the early months of the pandemic, for example, we paid for a consultancy team to help some charities move their programmes online by creating a digital toolkit.

Ambassador organisations

Nineteen organisations that share our aims and values have been given 'Ambassador' status. They have given us invaluable support over the last 12 months by championing both our programmes and our research, as well as contributing to roundtables and other high-profile events. They have stress-tested recommendations in our reports and provided their own intelligence to help promote social mobility.

“Weeks into my role at Career Ready, I attended a dinner hosted by the Social Mobility Commission. I was inspired by what we can potentially achieve when we work together to achieve positive change. The SMC's convening role is vital as it enhances our ability to learn from each other and collaborate, so that we can become greater than the sum of our parts.”

Tokunbo Ajasa-Oluwa, Chief Executive of Career Ready, an organisation that gives young people career support to kick-start their futures



Supporting charities through the pandemic



When COVID-19 hit, we saw that many social mobility charities did not have the skills needed to take their activities online. In response, we partnered with CAST to help nine charities fast-track their transformation and launch digital versions of their programmes, directly helping around 380 participants. The impact is ongoing and many more young people will be supported over 2021.

One of the beneficiaries was UpRising, a national youth leadership development and employability charity that wanted to take its month-long intensive employability programme online. “We had no idea how to translate our face-to-face work online, but support from the Social Mobility Commission made it all possible”, says Marc Whitmore, Chief Executive of UpRising. “Thirty young people took part in the Summer 2020 digital programme, growing their networks, confidence, knowledge and skills. The impact for UpRising itself has been considerable and led to us winning a bid to support 400 young people nationally with the online programme.”

Ikram, who participated in the programme, says: “Having access to it has completely changed my life.”

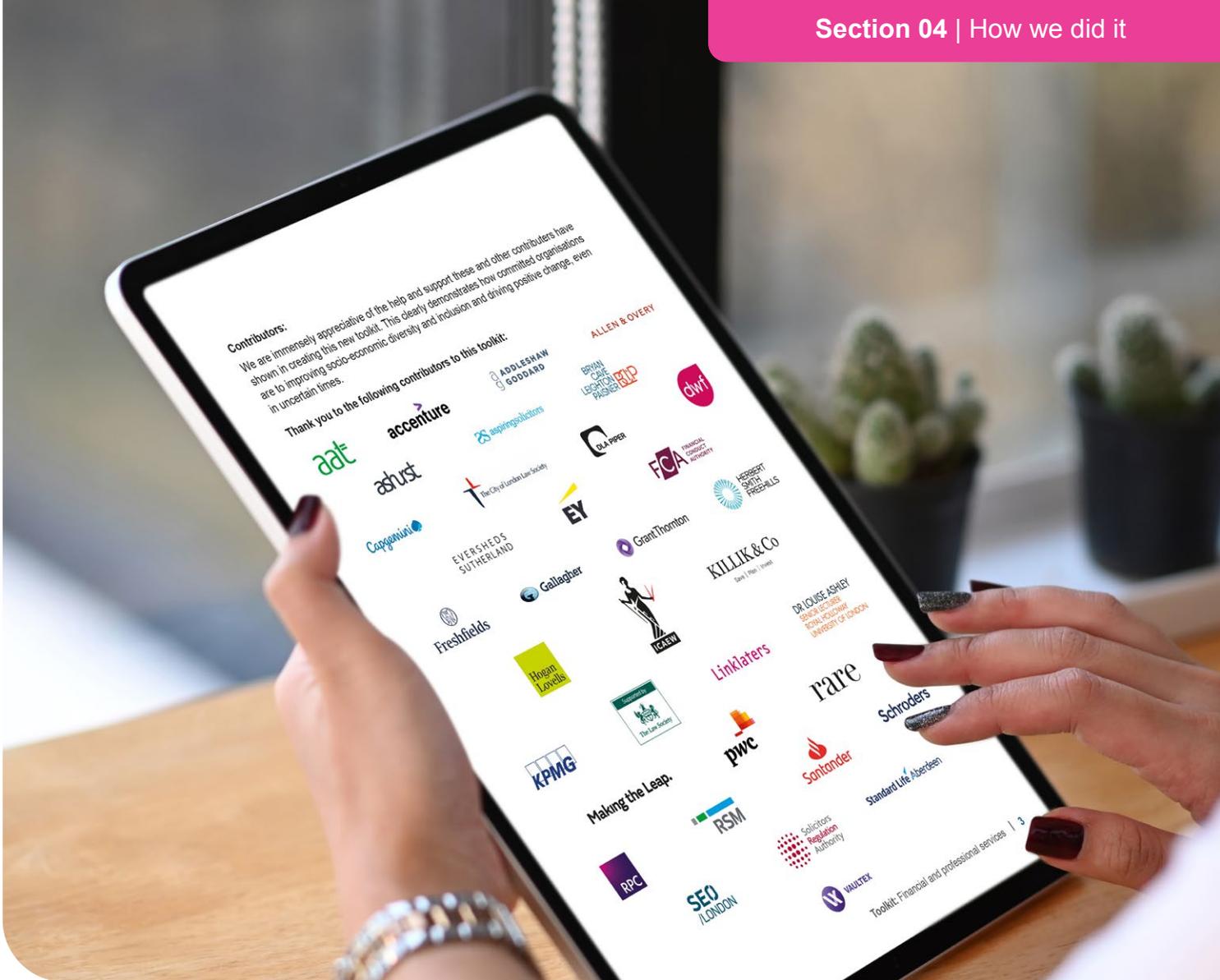
Who we work with

The Social Mobility Commission is currently sponsored by the Department for Education. From 1 April 2021, we will be moving to the Cabinet Office.

We are pleased to work closely with many government departments and agencies, a huge range of social mobility charities, employers, think tanks, research bodies, academics and our 19 Ambassador organisations.



Department
for Education



We worked with many leading employers to create our toolkit

Our Ambassador organisations





Expanding our influencing activities

As an arm's-length body, our primary objective is to hold government to account on social mobility and differential outcomes for those from low socio-economic backgrounds. We achieve this by providing evidence-based recommendations for policy change and shaping the debate so that government departments understand what they need to do to improve social mobility.

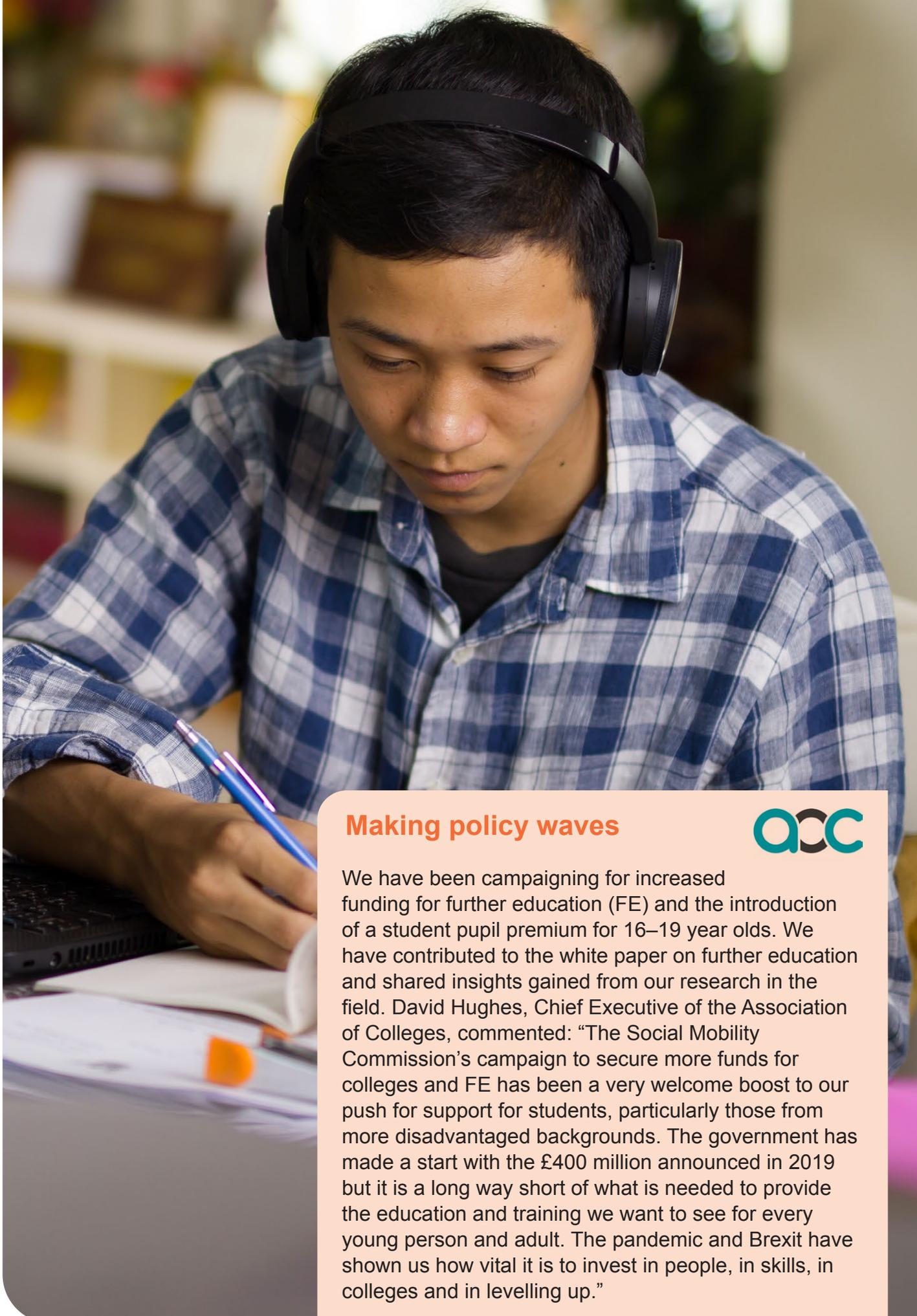
As documented in our report 'Monitoring social mobility 2013 to 2020', which was published in June, a significant reason behind the slow progress since 2013 has been the lack of a cross-governmental strategy. Successive governments' efforts in increasing social mobility have been largely confined to the Department for Education. We welcome our upcoming move to the Cabinet Office, and the recent announcement that a unit within the Equality Hub will cover socio-economic and geographical disparities. This is in line with our recommendations. The next stage is to support the government to make the most of this change and set a framework for what cross-government co-ordinated social mobility action should look like.

Advising on exam alternatives

In April, we advised Ofqual on managing alternatives to examinations during the pandemic. We flagged up the problems that algorithmic moderation might cause – and although much of this advice went unheeded, by both Ofqual and the Department for Education, it established our ability to give early warning signals about how policy delivery and design can have a negative impact on the most disadvantaged. Our advice is now being noted. In December, our Commissioner Sammy Wright was appointed to support the Ofqual board.

To promote social mobility across government, we have been increasing our contribution to cross-government networks and sharing evidence with them. We collaborate with the All Party Parliamentary Group on Social Mobility and hold regular meetings with departmental leaders, including permanent secretaries and ministers. The Prime Minister receives a report from us every quarter.

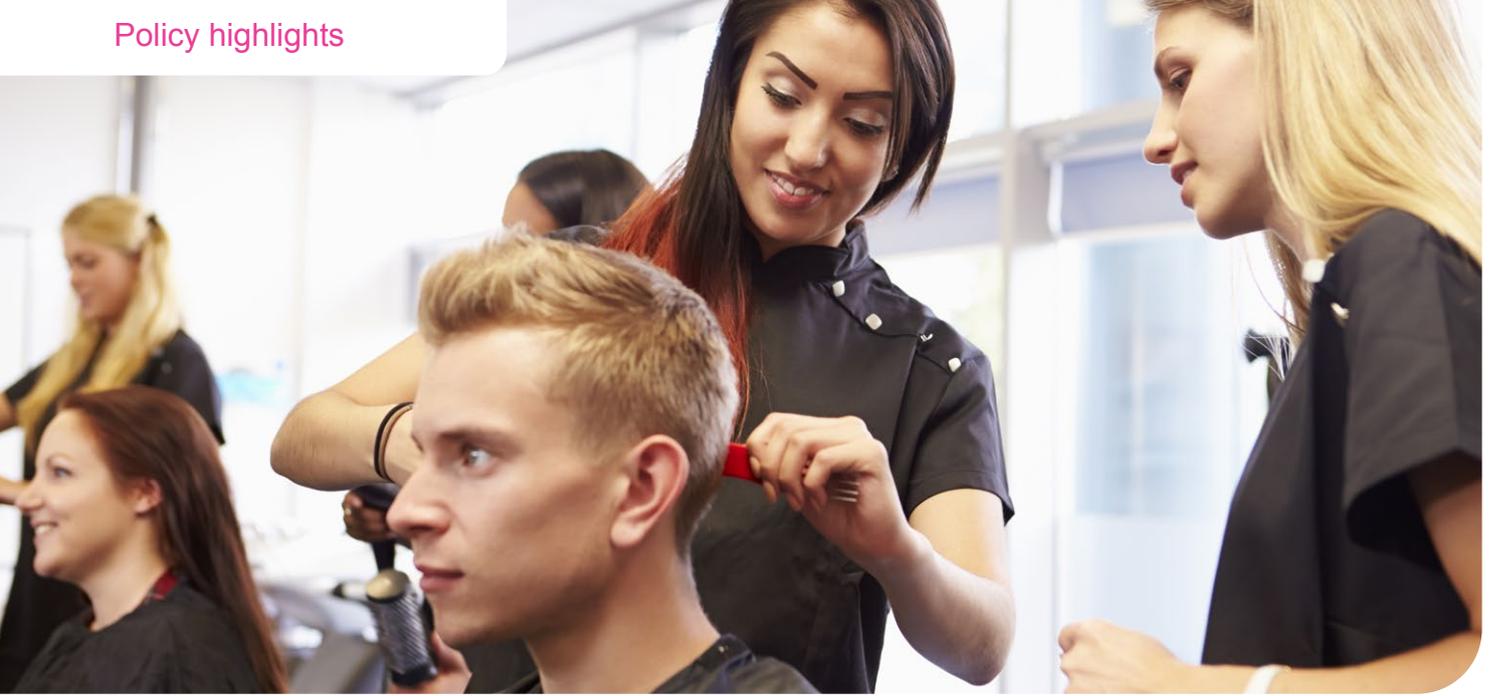
Part of our contribution is to make bold recommendations, which may not seem immediately feasible but set the direction for future policy – for example, by arguing in favour of a student pupil premium to ensure that older disadvantaged students are given adequate support as they embark on their post-16 studies.



Making policy waves



We have been campaigning for increased funding for further education (FE) and the introduction of a student pupil premium for 16–19 year olds. We have contributed to the white paper on further education and shared insights gained from our research in the field. David Hughes, Chief Executive of the Association of Colleges, commented: “The Social Mobility Commission’s campaign to secure more funds for colleges and FE has been a very welcome boost to our push for support for students, particularly those from more disadvantaged backgrounds. The government has made a start with the £400 million announced in 2019 but it is a long way short of what is needed to provide the education and training we want to see for every young person and adult. The pandemic and Brexit have shown us how vital it is to invest in people, in skills, in colleges and in levelling up.”



Policy highlights



January 2020

Further education: putting recommendations into action

In our report 'Improving attainment among disadvantaged students in the FE and adult learning sector', we identified a gap in evidence-based interventions to improve outcomes for those most in need.

We recommended setting up a What Works Centre and hosted policy workshops and meetings with key stakeholders. We have had initial encouraging words from the Secretary of State for Education but will press further to ensure that this crucial support for the FE sector is implemented.

 <http://bit.ly/2XFfMVc>

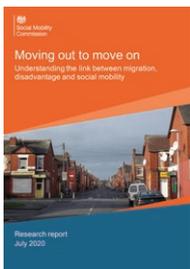


June 2020

Apprenticeships and social mobility: fulfilling potential

We identified concerning trends for socio-economic disparities in the apprenticeship system and then commissioned research from the Centre for Vocational Education Research (CVER). Our ground-breaking report, 'Apprenticeships and social mobility', was the result. We have set a challenging target for the Department for Education (DfE) to close the disadvantage gaps in apprenticeships by the end of this Parliament. We have engaged a wide range of stakeholders across DfE, including the relevant ministers. Our employers' programme is putting intelligence into action by feeding into the public sector apprenticeship strategy and working with some of the largest apprenticeship providers in the country to improve outcomes.

 <http://bit.ly/3ibs55c>



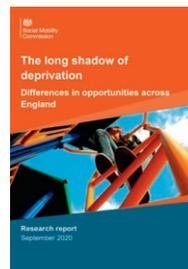
July 2020

Moving out to move on: understanding the link between migration, disadvantage and social mobility

Our analysis revealed that those who move to London and the South East really are better off – and earn on average 33% more. The Commission urged local leaders, including city mayors, to get together with employers and educators to drive forward investment in skills, training and jobs. The report, published in the middle of the first COVID-19 wave, raised a debate on whether working at home could boost social mobility in rural and coastal areas. We recommended that firms and government departments should increase the number of offices and recruitment activity in areas outside London and the South East. This policy is already underway in central government.



<http://bit.ly/2N5ie5D>



September 2020

The long shadow of deprivation: differences in opportunities across England

This is our most comprehensive study of geographic socio-economic disparities. The research tracked sons from disadvantaged families who were born between 1986 and 1988, and went to state schools in England, and followed them from age 16 to 28. The study identified the ‘coldest’ areas in England for social mobility and income. We are now working with local leaders to ensure that our findings inform the development of central, regional and local government policy and service design. The work has already had impact: the report’s findings have been used as supporting evidence for a major multi-million pound spending review bid.



<http://bit.ly/39tIRtl>

Improving visibility



Commissioner Sammy Wright on Newsnight in January 2021

This year we secured widespread coverage of our work in the broadcast and print media. Our Commissioners were interviewed on radio and TV and by national newspapers including The Times, The Guardian and The Independent.

Commissioners were invited on BBC Radio 4's Today programme at least six times this year and we are regularly asked on Sky, Radio 5 Live, Talk Radio, Times Radio and ITV. In the last 12 months we have worked hard to communicate our messages more effectively beyond audiences in London and the South East. To achieve this we have published reports highlighting data and policy

recommendations that are relevant to all regions of the country. This approach has yielded fruit and our coverage has increased on regional TV, radio and in the local press.

The report that generated the most media coverage this year was 'The long shadow of deprivation'.

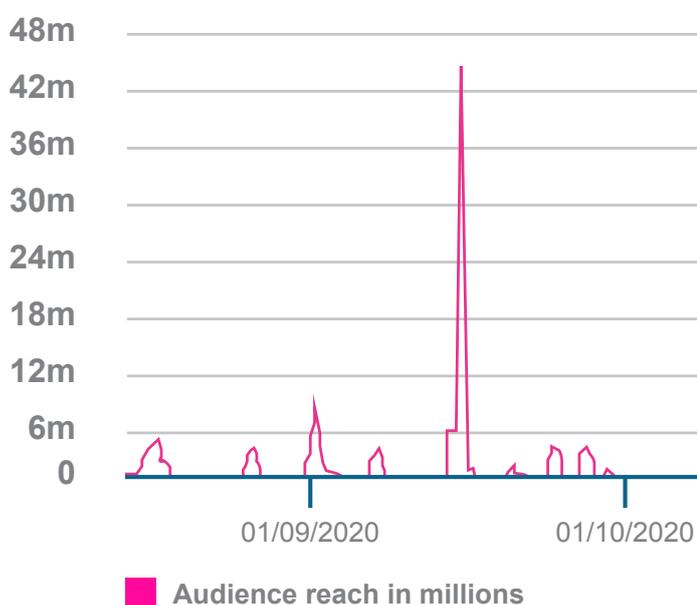


Making an impact

'The long shadow of deprivation' starkly illustrated that where you live matters. The report showed that boys on free school meals earned half as much by the age of 28 as those from areas of greater social mobility. It provided raw data for all the councils in England and earned us mentions in almost all the national press – The Times, The Guardian, FT, Daily Mail, The Independent, The Telegraph and The Daily Mirror. The regional press, including The Yorkshire Post and Manchester News, also picked it up. On the launch day, it was a main feature on BBC Radio 4's Today programme and Sandra Wallace, our interim Co-Chair, was interviewed. The story was also on Sky, LBC, ITV, Talk Radio, Times Radio and several regional stations.

Reaching millions through media activity

This graph shows how our reach can be dramatically extended with media activity, following the publication of a report. The spike coincides with the release of 'The long shadow of deprivation'.



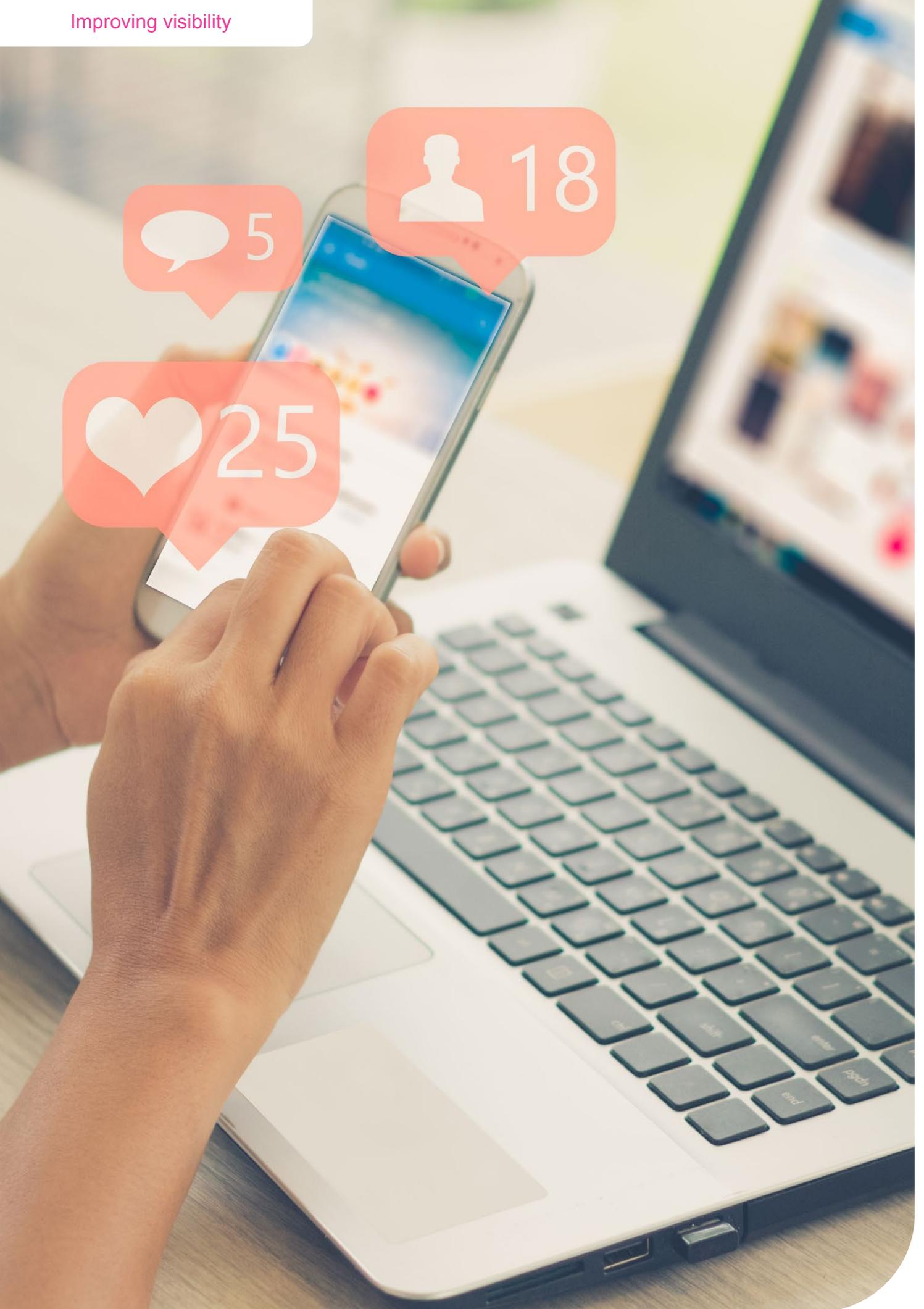
 **44.2** million people reached

 **190** references in press

 **8** national newspapers

 **47** radio mentions

 **11** regional newspapers



New audiences

Our strategy for the year

In the spring we did a thorough review of our communications to ensure that we were effectively promoting social mobility across all our channels. Until this year our main audiences had been politicians, think tanks, social mobility organisations and charities. But we were determined to reach beyond that by broadening our social media platforms. We drew up a new strategy with the aim of targeting two new audiences – young people and employers. We also made the decision to use personal stories as often as possible to convey our message, like Imriel's story....



socialmobilitystories I went to an all-girls state school which did not have the best reputation. I was one of only five students to get ten GCSEs at A to C.

I ended up at university and now I am the founder and CEO of @contentisqueenhq, which is a podcast, PR and marketing agency.

I credit much of my success to my mum. She had me when she was 19. When she got pregnant, she was kicked out of the house. Because she had us so young, she couldn't fulfil all the dreams she had for herself. So she placed that on us, in the best possible way.

Imriel, 31, London [#socialmobility](#)



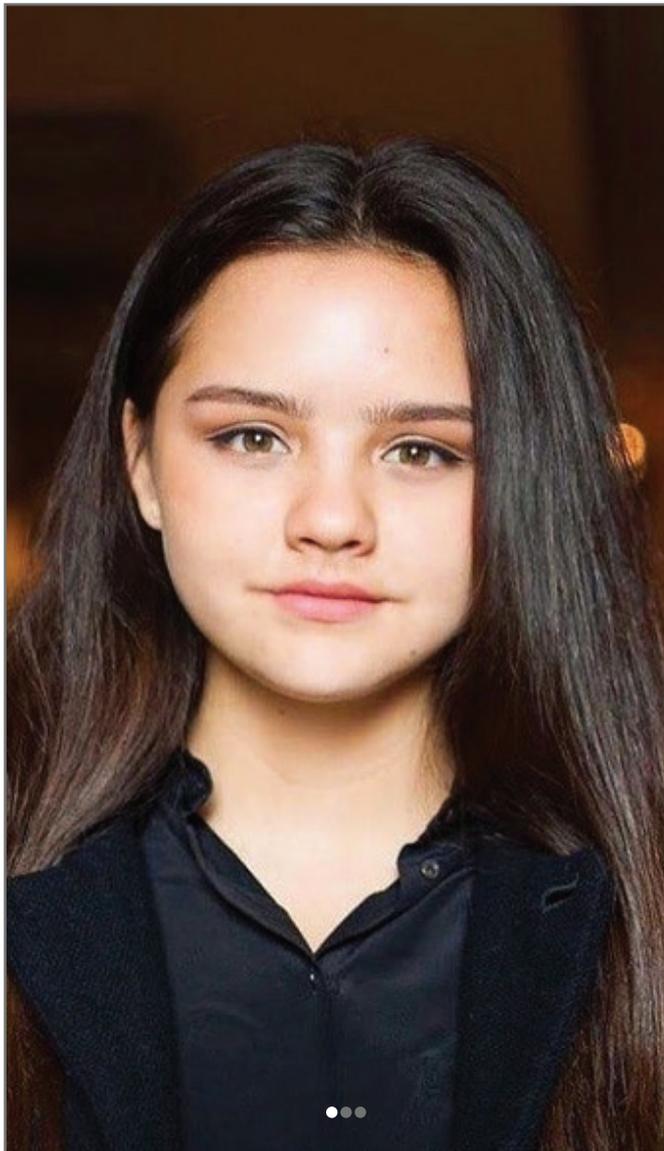
31 likes
OCTOBER 20



Throughout October 2020, Imriel collaborated with [#socialmobilitycommission](#) on a [#WannaBePodcast](#) to mark Black History Month.

Instagram

We set up a new Instagram account in August – *socialmobilitystories* — aimed at younger audiences. It started with a project involving young people from disadvantaged backgrounds telling their stories. The posts show their incredible achievements against all the odds.



socialmobilitystories I grew up in Leicester and home was a council estate, rife with poverty and crime. I distracted myself by studying hard.

I came out with the best GCSEs my school had ever seen, so started looking into scholarships for private schools. I applied – and got in. It was an immense culture shock. There was a strong pressure to perform but I had access to the very best personal and academic support.

Moving from a world with a thick glass ceiling, to one with plentiful opportunities, was an overwhelming experience. Now I hope to support other young people in my community so that they can see the light in their future, without having to go through what I did.

Rebecca, 20 [#socialmobility](#)

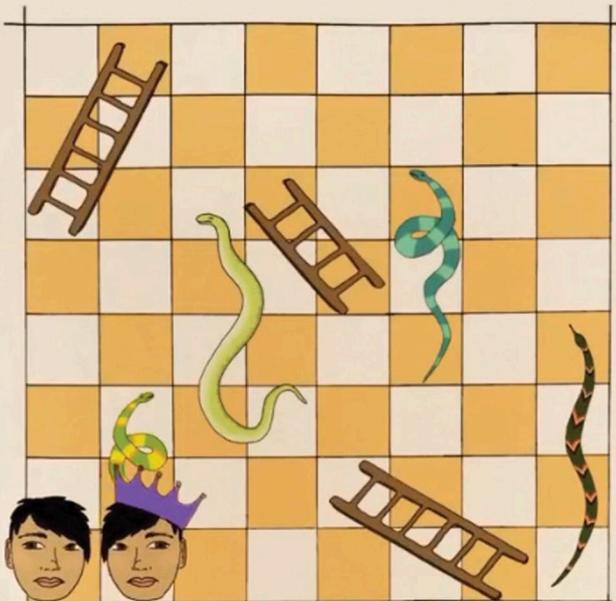


79 likes
AUGUST 21



In December we built on our success with a 'Snakes and Ladders' campaign animation that draws on findings from our research. Our Instagram is steadily growing and sharing important messages with a community of almost a thousand young people built up in only five months.

Should your background determine your future?



The rich child starts off life ahead, they are already **14%** more likely to be born a healthy weight.



socialmobilitystories This year has been a year like no other – and the challenges we've faced as a nation have had a huge impact on [#socialmobility](#).

Your background should not determine your future.

But the research we've published throughout 2020 has continued to prove that not everyone has a decent chance of a better future.

Depending on your circumstances, it's often a case of [#snakesandladders](#) – some people keep going up while others go down.



1,521 views

DECEMBER 7



Socialmobilitystories now links with several different media platforms including podcasts and videos. In 2021 we'll be launching a new chapter, [#covidcompromises](#), which is designed to give the 'lost generation' an opportunity to explain in their own words how their aspirations have been affected by the pandemic.



Twitter

The SMC Twitter account was already well established a few years ago but we wanted to develop our audiences by attracting more charities, educators, youth groups and others. We used responsive tweeting to pick up news and promote research and planned social media campaigns around report launches.

Over the year the number of followers jumped from 9.5k to 12.2k (a 28% rise). As COVID-19 took over the news agenda, we reacted rapidly to share information and guidance with partners and collaborators. We typically receive 6,500 impressions per day.

Our most successful single tweet was when we backed Marcus Rashford's campaign to extend free school meals for the holidays, which resulted in over 376,000 impressions, 1,000 likes, 221 retweets and 741 visits to our profile.

Our media coverage over just four days enabled us to reach an audience of...



1.2
million
people



400
references
in press



10
national
newspapers

Marcus Rashford and free school meals

There are 600,000 more children in relative poverty than there were eight years ago – a point we have made repeatedly as the pandemic has struck most forcefully in the UK's deprived areas. We know that good social mobility is not achievable in a country that has high levels of child poverty. Marcus Rashford, the footballer, underlined the link between child poverty and child hunger, as he campaigned to extend free school meal vouchers for poorer households to cover holiday periods. Our statement on Twitter supporting his cause, and challenging the government to take action, was picked up widely by broadcasters, the press and many politicians. Rashford's campaign worked and as a result more children will have had enough food over the holidays.



Social Mobility Commission ✓

@SMCommission

Read our statement in support of [@MarcusRashford](#)'s campaign to extend free school meals into the holidays



We need a much more ambitious programme to combat child poverty.

[#endchildfoodpoverty](#) [#nochildshouldgohungry](#) [#fsm](#)



Social Mobility
Commission

“ The Social Mobility Commission urges the Government to extend free school meals during school holidays until Covid restrictions are lifted as part of a wider move to combat child poverty.

We know that the current pandemic is having its greatest impact on the poorest regions in Britain where people are already struggling to afford food for their families. Our recent report, the Long Shadow of Deprivation, identified some of the 'coldest' social mobility spots in the country and many of these are now in the higher tiers of Covid restrictions.

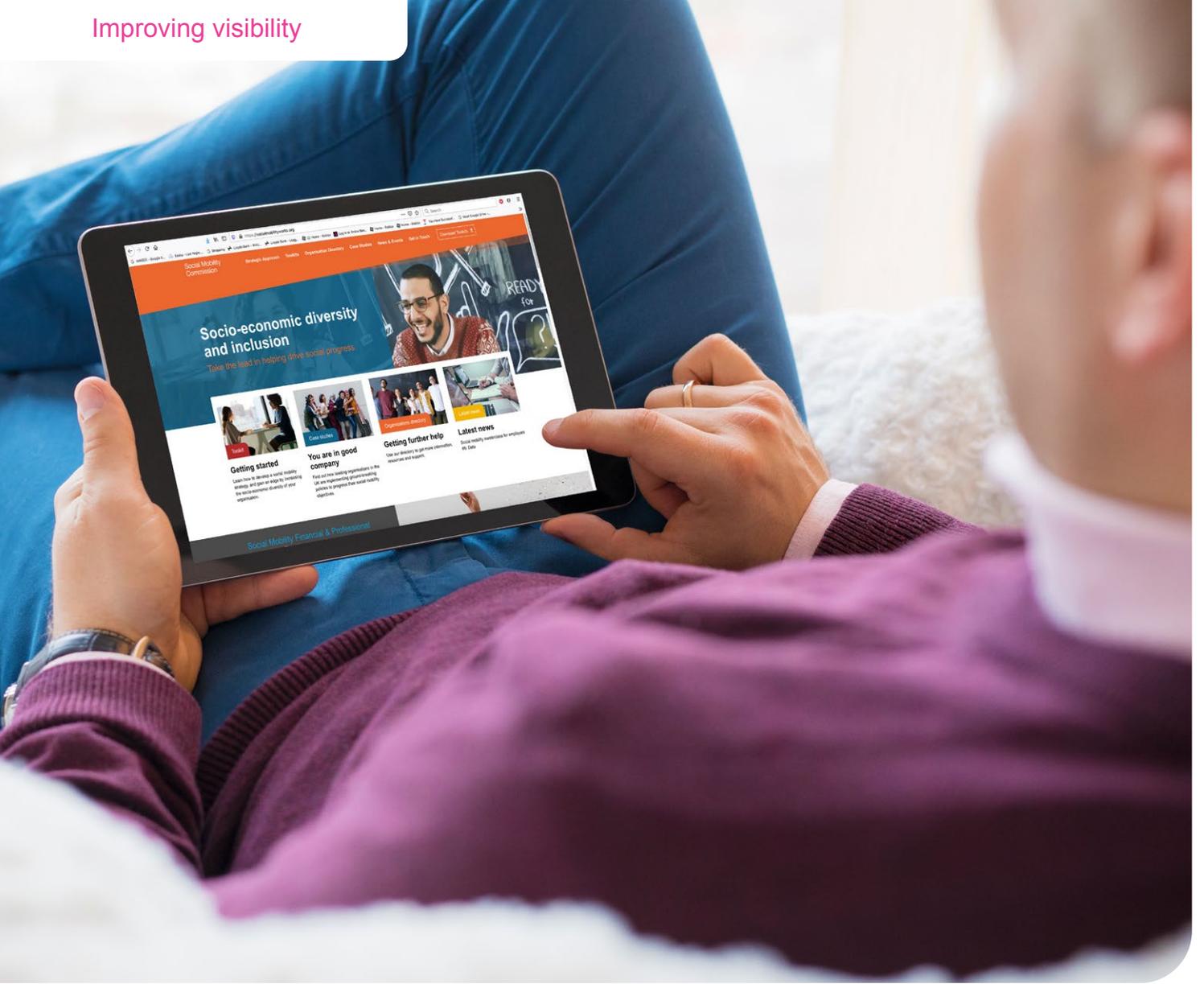
Our earlier research this year showed that 600,000 more children are in poverty than in 2012.

We believe the Government should do all it can to start reversing that trend. It should begin by ensuring that all children are properly fed. But it needs to go much further. We now need a much more ambitious programme to combat child poverty. ”

1:32 pm · 26 Oct 2020 · Twitter Web App

201 Retweets 20 Quote Tweets 1K Likes





socialmobilityworks.org

To support our new employers' programme, we established a microsite to help increase socio-economic diversity in the workplace.

socialmobilityworks.org is a new online resource to help employers recruit a more diverse workforce. Since the launch in February, there have been 24,746 page views and we have gained 7,147 users. The vast majority are accessing two key areas: our toolkit, and regular blogs which give overviews of our monthly masterclasses, research reports and more.



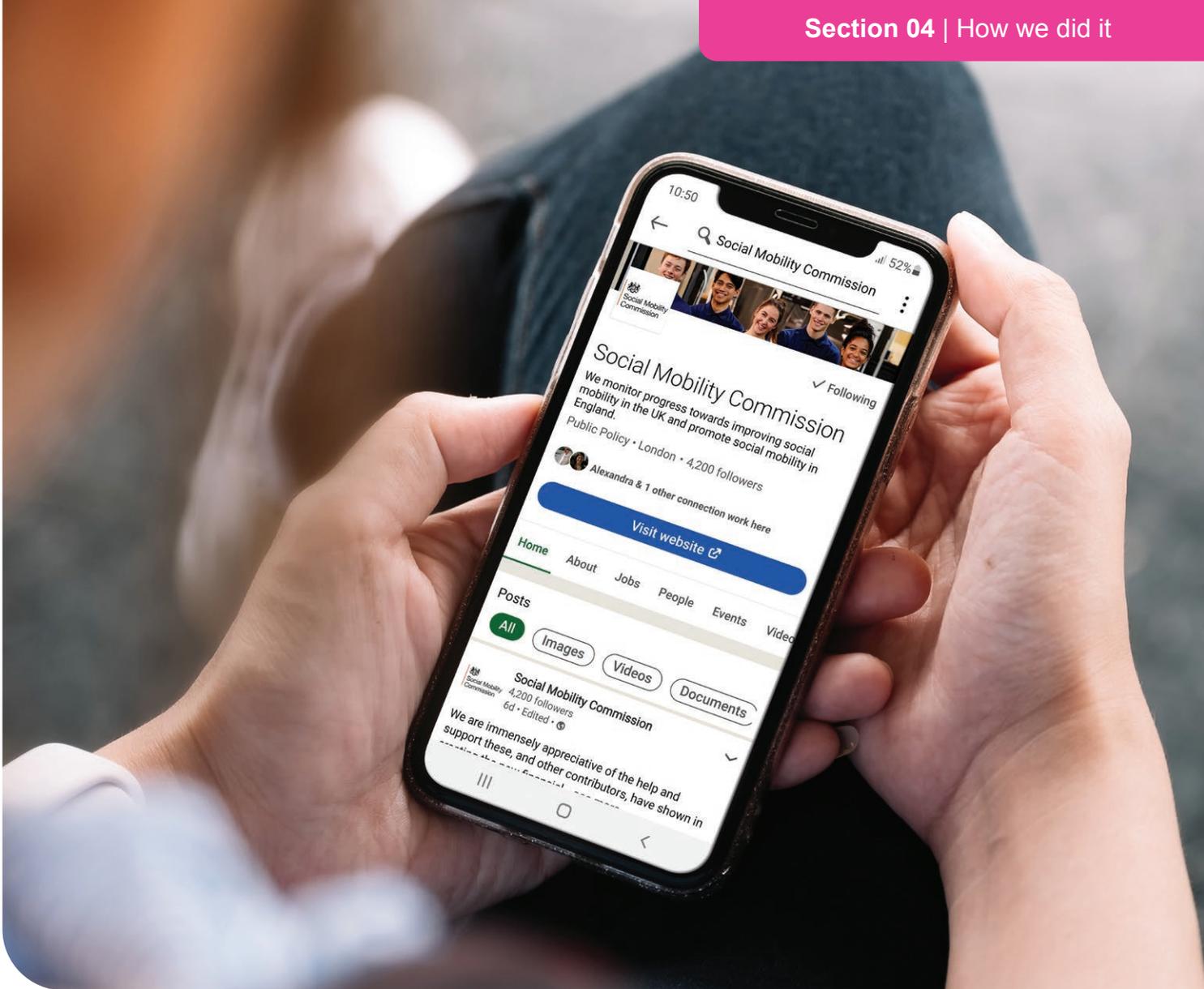
24,746

page views



7,147

users gained



LinkedIn

We redoubled our efforts on our existing LinkedIn platform to tie in with our programme for employers. We have built a solid senior-level audience in targeted sectors (most notably the retail, education, professional and public sectors) to mirror the focus of our work and now have over 4,600 followers.

Around one in five followers are in business development, which is our target audience. Individual post views regularly surpass 1,000 and sometimes go over 10,000, proving that this is a powerful platform for us to promote our messages.



4,600

LinkedIn
followers



500%

rise in
12 months

Superior analysis

World-class research

As a new cohort of Commissioners, in 2018, it was important for us to conduct a review of the existing research on social mobility so that we could focus on the most useful issues. We identified evidence gaps with the support of a panel of leading academics, chaired by our Commissioner Sam Friedman. After ensuring that we would complement the work of our peers, we commissioned an ambitious programme of research to break new ground and build on our legacy of excellence and innovation. The research enables us to fulfil our statutory remit to monitor social mobility, hold the government to account and put forward expert recommendations backed by robust evidence.

There is a pressing need for world-class data and analysis so that social mobility and the impact of socio-economic inequalities are firmly located on policy makers' agendas. This is particularly important in the light of COVID-19, which has resulted in the magnification and exposure of existing inequalities. We have also identified that more evidence is needed to support employers and other stakeholders so that they can deliver the changes needed to increase social mobility on the ground.

The Commission works with world-class researchers across the UK to provide cutting-edge research and analysis. This gives us a powerful evidence base to understand and act on the drivers of poor social mobility.





Our research studies from birth to work

In 2019, we commissioned 18 studies on subjects including early years, schools, apprenticeships, further education, mental and physical health, regional mobility and differences in intergenerational income across England. We finalised and published 13 pieces of work this year. They produced fascinating and often dispiriting insights into the way that those from disadvantaged backgrounds are held back in today's United Kingdom.



Monitoring social mobility

2013–2020: Is the government delivering on our recommendations?



Influential reports

A core plank of our statutory duty is to research socio-economic disparities and increase public understanding of social mobility issues. Our reports are published and shared with all our stakeholders, including peer social mobility organisations, all MPs and Members of the House of Lords.

We use our reports to influence policy, reach out to new audiences and promote awareness of social mobility. Several of our reports have led to recommendations to government and in some cases resulted in policy changes.

Our annual statutory report has been an important tool for the Commission to make policy recommendations to government. In June, we provided a comprehensive

review of the last seven years of policy recommendations, 'Monitoring social mobility 2013 to 2020'. It revealed that a quarter of recommendations had been met but this was offset by a disappointing three-quarters that were either wholly untouched or only partially followed.

The responses from government departments also revealed an absence of any joined-up thinking in Whitehall, so our report called for a single unit at the heart of government to drive social mobility policy and action. We are pleased that the government has now taken action on this and is in the process of building capacity on socio-economic disparities within the Equality Hub.



<http://bit.ly/3bz1znp>

2020 reports for frontline action

We use our reports to advocate for change and inform new interventions. These studies enable us to identify policy levers and articulate the need for change. Thirteen reports were published in 2020 including the monitoring report and two toolkits for employers. All the reports can be downloaded from our website:

www.gov.uk/government/organisations/social-mobility-commission



February 2020

Socio-economic diversity and inclusion toolkit

We worked with the Bridge Group and consulted with dozens of academic experts, think tanks, charities and businesses to produce guidance for employers so that they can attract and retain talented people from poorer backgrounds. The result was our socio-economic diversity and inclusion toolkit for employers, which is being used to drive forward progress in the workplace. After further extensive consultations, another piece of work – our Data Kit – was launched in November.

What's a toolkit?

Toolkits provide practical guidance for employers seeking to incorporate diversity and inclusion into their HR policies. Our toolkits are the culmination of many months of working closely with hundreds of stakeholders including individual employers, regulatory and membership bodies.

 <http://bit.ly/3sqhbNQ>

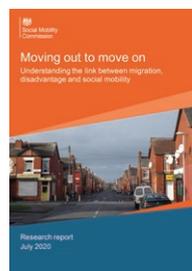


June 2020

Apprenticeships and social mobility

This showed starkly that disadvantaged young people are failed at every stage of the apprenticeship system. Between 2015 and 2018 there was a 36% decline in uptake from young people in lower socio-economic groups. We have since supported many of the largest apprenticeship employers in the UK to recruit from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. See the section on policy highlights on page 22.

<http://bit.ly/39s2lgU>

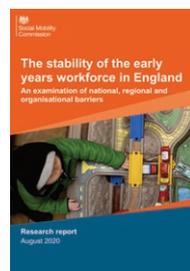


July 2020

Moving out to move on

Our analysis revealed that those who move to London and the South East really are better off. See the section on policy highlights on page 23.

<http://bit.ly/2N5ie5D>



August 2020

The stability of the early years workforce in England

This underlined the low pay, high workload and lack of career development for early years workers and the damaging impact this has on our most vulnerable children. The researchers discovered that one in eight workers earns less than £5 an hour. This has led to an unstable workforce with very high turnover. Our Commissioners called for greater career progression and wage rises to stabilise a workforce which is now so critical to child development. The report was seized on by early years organisations to push for a better deal for their workers. The National Minimum Wage and National Living Wage have recently been increased, benefitting around 2 million of the UK's lowest-paid workers, but more needs to be done.

<http://bit.ly/2KeQXfS>



September 2020

The long shadow of deprivation: differences in opportunities across England

Our most comprehensive study of geographic socio-economic disparities. See the section on policy highlights on page 23.

 <http://bit.ly/39tIRtl>

November 2020

Learning ladders: adult training and progression out of low pay

A report looking at the impact that adult training has on those trying to escape low pay. It offers steers to government on what a lifelong learning strategy should capture, and will feed into current discussions on further education and training.

 <http://bit.ly/3bDd0lu>

November 2020

Changing gears: understanding downward mobility

Our most recent report looks at which groups are most likely to move down an occupational group from their parents and examines how this can happen. One in five men and one in four women now experience downward

mobility. Women with children, particular immigrants, those without degrees, and the children of nurses, firefighters and the police are the most likely to move down. This research prompted a fresh debate about the 'elephant in the room'. It showed how in order for some to move up, others have to move down – sometimes by choice but often not.

 <http://bit.ly/2LRCyXy>

December 2020

Financial and professional services toolkit

We launched a toolkit, with the support of the City of London, to drive forward impactful change within the financial and professional sectors. We did cutting-edge research and consulted for months with dozens of leaders in the sector. Our toolkit has been designed to enable businesses to monitor their recruitment policies and retain a more diverse workforce.

For example, it can support employers to:

- measure and monitor class background
- find out if their organisation has a 'class ceiling'
- publish social mobility data
- create more inclusive cultures

 <http://bit.ly/3qiWZLW>

“As a large employer, we’re determined to do all we can to help make sure that someone’s talent and determination, and not their background, decides how far they progress in their career.”

Laura Hinton, Chief People Officer at PwC





Increasing engagement

We have made great strides this year in engaging more with the frontline – that is, the people making changes on the ground, including the country’s employers.

Employers

Employers play a key role in shaping the opportunities for over 32 million people at work in the UK. By adopting an inclusive approach, and investing in their employees’ education, training and progression, they can potentially break the cycle of sluggish social mobility. They also hold the levers to correct the class pay gap, which is larger than the gender pay gap but receives much less attention. However because socio-economic background is not a protected characteristic, action on social mobility in the workplace is contingent on employers’ voluntary commitment to this agenda, and change has been slow.

As a Commission we believe that a rising tide can lift all boats – and that a significant shift in behaviour can be achieved through pioneering employers and better tools and measurements. We are also pressing for a culture change among a critical mass of all employers, and not just the professions that we as social mobility organisations have traditionally focused on.

We can help them turn their aspirations into action. The solution is our range of toolkits and practical training sessions, which enable employers to monitor and develop their social mobility policies. Our advice to promote socio-economic diversity is easy to follow – for example, recommending just one question to ask when recruiting new staff.



The question of social mobility

After implementing our employers' programme, we found that many employers struggled to measure their workforces' socio-economic background. We launched a consultation to understand how we could simplify the process by devising one question which would provide simplicity and accuracy. Our aim was to make it easy for organisations to monitor social mobility, particularly those new to diversity. This was the result:

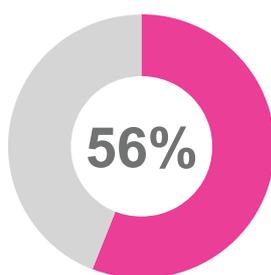
What was the occupation of your main household earner when you were about age 14?

- **Modern professional and traditional professional occupations such as:** teacher, nurse, physiotherapist, social worker, musician, police officer (sergeant or above), software designer, accountant, solicitor, medical practitioner, scientist, civil/mechanical engineer.
- **Senior, middle or junior managers or administrators such as:** finance manager, chief executive, large business owner, office manager, retail manager, bank manager, restaurant manager, warehouse manager.
- **Clerical and intermediate occupations such as:** secretary, personal assistant, call centre agent, clerical worker, nursery nurse.
- **Technical and craft occupations such as:** motor mechanic, plumber, printer, electrician, gardener, train driver.
- **Routine, semi-routine manual and service occupations such as:** postal worker, machine operative, security guard, caretaker, farm worker, catering assistant, sales assistant, HGV driver, cleaner, porter, packer, labourer, waiter/waitress, bar staff.
- **Long-term unemployed** (claimed Jobseeker's Allowance or earlier unemployment benefit for more than a year).
- **Small business owners who employed less than 25 people such as:** corner shop owners, small plumbing companies, retail shop owner, single restaurant or cafe owner, taxi owner, garage owner.
- **Other such as:** retired, this question does not apply to me, I don't know.
- **I prefer not to say.**

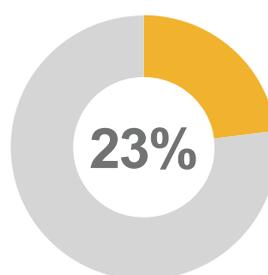
It's a privilege

Every few years, with our partner the Sutton Trust, we examine the backgrounds of around 5,000 high-ranking individuals across British society to see who gets to the top. Elitist Britain is a salutary reminder of the journey ahead of us...

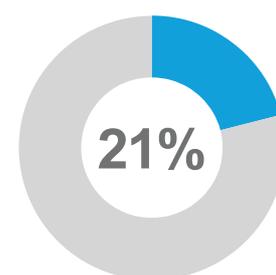
Elitist Britain 2019



of Britain's leading people come from professional backgrounds



come from intermediate backgrounds



come from working-class backgrounds

Creating a toolkit for change

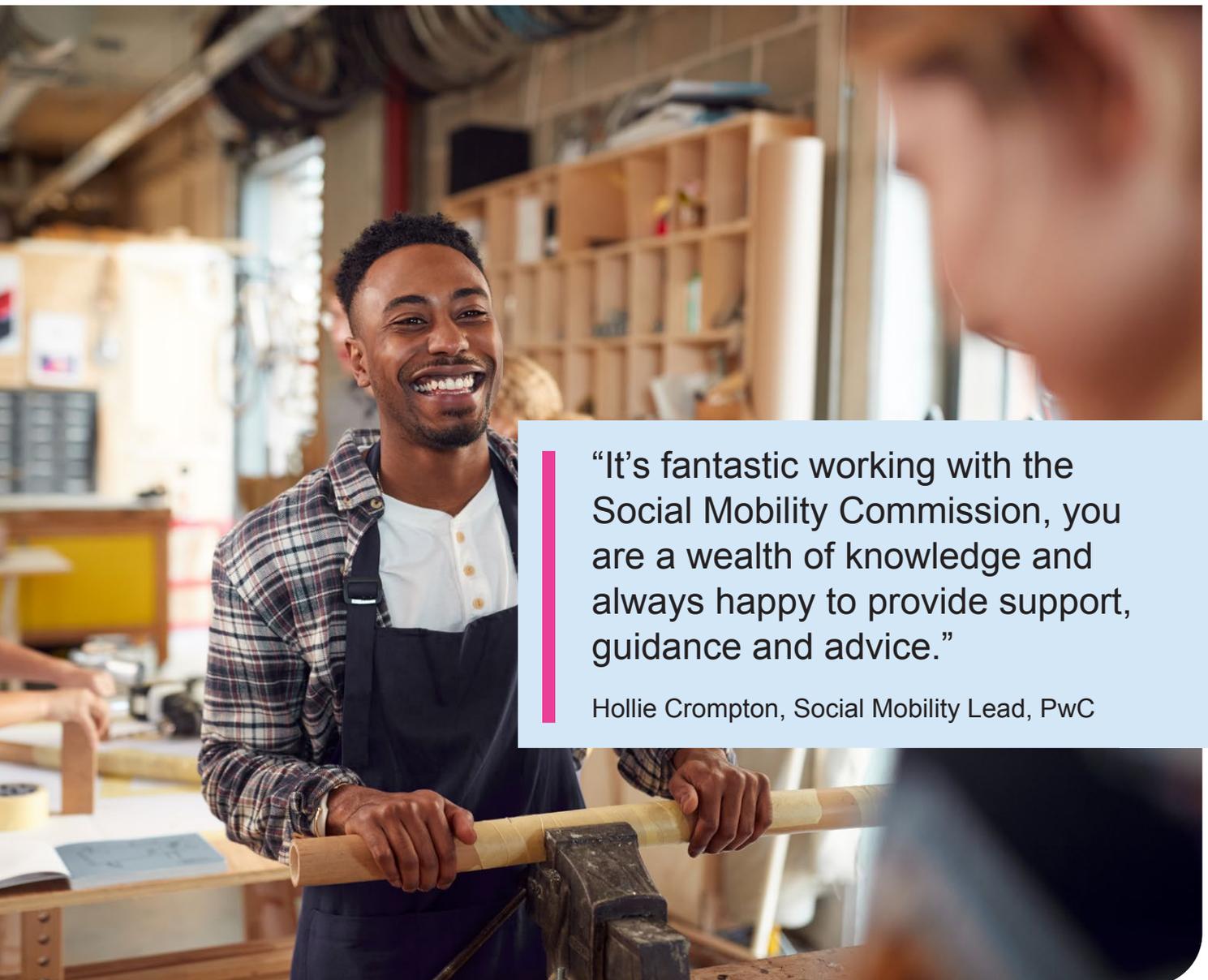
In February 2020, we published a cross-industry toolkit for employers, based on our research and consultations. It has been designed to give employers across all industries the ability to monitor diversity and inclusion in their recruitment, retention and promotion of staff.

Our launch event in London generated interest among a wide range of employers, many with workforces of over 1,000 people. Then we took our toolkit on a roadshow across the country, providing regional workshops which we moved online due to COVID-19. Our objective was twofold: to champion early adopters of a social mobility agenda and to encourage employers who are new to diversity and inclusion to start with the basics.

To roll out our toolkit...

-  we hosted 8 masterclasses
-  attended by 184 employers
-  supported by over 50 trade bodies
-  representing 18 sectors
-  and 60% or more were managers, directors or CEOs

Working with the Social Mobility Foundation, we also established a scorecard for more advanced employers, so that they can benchmark Key Performance Indicators with best practice across the country.



“It’s fantastic working with the Social Mobility Commission, you are a wealth of knowledge and always happy to provide support, guidance and advice.”

Hollie Crompton, Social Mobility Lead, PwC

Tailored support for employers during COVID-19

The repercussions of the pandemic are disproportionately affecting the health and economic prospects of young people, low earners, women and people from particular ethnic minority backgrounds. Many employers have turned to us for guidance on how to mitigate the impact. To support them, we co-ordinated responses with charities in the sector, including our partners at the Social Mobility Foundation, Sutton Trust and Social Mobility Pledge, to determine the most pressing actions employers should take.

What we've learnt

Our research has told us that employers want:

- high-quality resources to support the business case for socio-economic diversity (which we provide through masterclasses and case studies on our microsite)
- ongoing opportunities to learn from best practice and to collaborate (so we have co-created a range of masterclasses and provide a directory of contacts on our microsite)

Additionally, we are developing a maturity assessment to help employers assess their performance and nudge them into doing more.

Financial and professional services

We have been tailoring the toolkit to sector-specific industries, so that we can increase collaborations – and have started

with financial and professional services. A new toolkit for this sector was launched in December. It was endorsed by dozens of leading organisations.

Following on from this, we have been asked to join a City of London Corporation task force to improve socio-economic diversity at senior levels in the City's financial and professional services. This will be co-chaired by Sandra Wallace, who is also our interim Co-Chair.

Expanding into other sectors

We have ambitious goals for our programme. In 2021, we will be creating additional tailored material for creative industries, retail and the public sector. We hope to co-deliver programmes and training with industry bodies like the Confederation of British Industry, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, the British Retail Consortium and more.

Sponsorship from Accenture

Our Commissioner Liz Williams brought Accenture on board as the inaugural sponsor of a SMC secondment. Throughout 2020, they subsidised the cost of a secondee to help grow our employers' programme. This was a win-win, enabling us to benefit from a talented individual and also resulting in a knowledge transfer back to a thriving consultancy. We thank Accenture and hope to work with other secondees in 2021.

Opening doors at ELLE magazine

In the summer, we launched a joint initiative with ELLE UK to find the next generation of creative talent...



ELLE UK intern Maria Isahac

The Social Mobility Commission recently collaborated with ELLE UK to give 12 students an incredible opportunity – the chance to work as a paid intern on the September issue of the fashion magazine. The aspiring creatives will also receive mentoring over the next year.

“Everyone deserves a door to be opened for them”, said Farrah Storr, one of our Commissioners and Editor-in-Chief of ELLE UK.

The students, aged 16 to 19, are from the UK’s overshadowed corners, where opportunities are statistically at their lowest. “When we spoke to the teachers in those coldspots we were very clear that we were

looking for students who demonstrated potential”, says Farrah.

“Every student was given a mentor from a different department and we got them to work on our cover story and our fashion shoots. We got our cover star, Adwoa Aboah, to talk to the students while she was on set. We showed them the fashion rail and we asked what they would like to see Adwoa wearing on the cover. They also helped to put together questions for the cover star and choose the images. Some of them had on-the-job writing, editing and styling lessons so it was very varied. They were all paid a salary.”

Maria Isahac, 19, found out that she had got onto the ELLE internship scheme shortly after her A-levels were cancelled due to COVID-19. “My friends started crying. They were all really proud of me”, she recalls.

Maria applied after a teacher from her secondary school in Sunderland spotted the opportunity. “I thought that maybe it could give me a head start and some connections to help me with my own career”, says Maria, who hopes to work in the fashion industry. She is now four months into her 12-month internship, juggling regular catch-ups with her mentor at ELLE and studying fashion design at the University of Leeds.

Maria, 19, found out that she had got onto the scheme shortly after her A-levels were cancelled due to COVID-19. “My friends started crying. They were all really proud of me”, she recalls.

ESTHER SIMUENE, 17
Enfield, London
Esther may study economics, politics and psychology, but she's always wanted to start a fashion brand. "Clothes allow me to express myself," she says. "With my own company, I could be as adventurous, creative and unique as I want."

ALEXANDRA PALADE, 16
Ipswich
Creating art has kept Alex going through lockdown. "I'm more creative and now I appreciate fashion in a new light." After English, sociology, and performing arts A levels, Alex hopes to step into the world of theatre. "I'd love to act or direct," she says.

KELSEY HENDRICKS, 18
Hounslow, London
Kelsey has chosen not to go to university after her studies in digital publishing, computer programming and creative media. "I think internships will be more beneficial." As for her long-term career goals: "I'd love to be a graphic designer but, most importantly, I hope to be happy."

AMY CLORLEY, 16
Stoke-on-Trent
Sketching clothes as a child sparked Amy's obsession with magazines. "Now writing is my passion," she says. Forming a bond with strangers through stories is so powerful. "In future, she wants more body diversity in the media. 'I want women and men to feel encouraged to embrace their natural bodies.'"

GABY REYNOLDS, 17
Sunderland
Art-obsessed Gabby is studying fine art, English and media. She's spent lockdown daydreaming about visiting galleries again, and hopes to do fashion design at university. "I want to explore a specialism in period costume design."

MALINA JITARU, 17
Hastings
Malina gets her creative side from her grandmother: "We spend evenings writing poems and she recently taught me how to knit." As she goes into her final year of sixth form, Malina hopes for a career in economics – which she currently studies alongside maths and history.

ANYA KIDDE-HANSEN, 16
Norwich
Growing up, Anya spent her time collaging outfits cut out from magazines. Currently studying geography, chemistry and biology, Anya's role model is her mother: "As a Black woman, she's faced a lot of discrimination, but she taught me I can achieve anything."

ERIN HALEY, 18
Ipswich, West Yorkshire
In lockdown, Erin has fallen in love with painting again. "I've had the freedom to explore new techniques." As well as art, she loves languages – this year, she's going to the University of Edinburgh to study Spanish and Chinese. "I want to travel and learn about other cultures and regional dialects."

MARIA ISAHAC, 19
Sunderland
Maria's career goal is inspired by the outfits her grandmother made for her and her sisters. "Living in a Filipino household influences my designs. I can't wait to juxtapose my heritage with British culture." Maria starts a fashion design course at the University of Leeds next month.

MEGAN LEIGH ROSS, 18
Manchester
Megan can't wait to start her fashion creative direction course at the University of Huddersfield this autumn. "I'm looking forward to a fresh start after an incomplete graduation." She hopes for a career in fashion, and is inspired by models such as Ashley Graham. "She's a positive role model for young women like me," she says.

LIBBY AUSTIN, 18
Birmingham
Designer to be Libby's main passion is protecting our environment. She's obsessed with second-hand shopping and Vivienne Westwood is her ultimate inspiration: "I like how she uses her clothes and voice to express her activism."

WISDOM CHARIS, 16
Highgate, London
Wisdom has her sights set on the film industry: "I'd love to own a film and TV company that shares underrepresented stories and champions projects by minority groups. Representation matters." She's set to do A levels in drama, film and media.

ELLE's class of 2020
This month, ELLE gave 12 STUDENTS FROM ACROSS THE COUNTRY unparalleled access to the making of the September issue. MEET THE NAMES AND FACES of tomorrow

Compiled by: Becky Higgins. Photography: Courtney O'Connell

TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE MAKING OF THIS ISSUE, and read over star Adwaja Abiodun's interview with the students, head to elle.com/uk

38 ELLE.COM/UK September 2020 39

One of Maria's highlights was seeing behind the scenes of the photoshoot for the cover: "The wardrobe was enormous for one person, it was quite a shock! That was my favourite bit."

Storr describes the scheme as a "dream" for the magazine. "You could see the mounting confidence in these young women", she says. "They were very quiet at the beginning and by the end it was like sitting in an editorial meeting with one of my teams. It was not only very fulfilling for us, it was very useful, because they came at things from a different angle. Body image and mental health came up a lot as subjects that they wanted to see addressed."



Farrah Storr, ELLE UK

"One of the young women said, 'the best thing about this entire experience is that I've met other people who are like me – and where I'm from, there aren't many other people like me'."

Farrah Storr, Editor-in-Chief of ELLE UK



ELLE

September 2020 £4.80

**ADWOA
ABOAH**
A SUPERMODEL'S TALE
OF SURVIVAL

**FINDING
CLOSURE**
THE GROWN-UPS' GUIDE
TO LETTING GO

**BORN
PRETTY**
THE CURSE OF BEING
BEAUTIFUL

Rebel
STYLE RULES

- 1. SHRED YOUR HEMS**
- 2. CLASH EVERYTHING**
- 3. THROW ON A BANDANA!**

05. What we'll do next





Business plan: redefining the socio-political agenda

We are entering the third year of this Commission's business planning cycle. The first two years were heavily research-focused in order to fill evidence gaps and build consensus among the Commissioners. Now that we have built our evidence base and piloted the effectiveness of interventions, such as the employers' programmes, we have established positions in a significant number of policy areas.

We therefore envisage that the majority of our visible work in 2021 will focus on influencing policy through 'landing' our recommendations, as well as further evidence gap filling. Given our new sponsorship arrangement with the Cabinet Office, we will also prioritise bringing the best of our advice together for follow-through and action.

Our priorities will include developing a strong programme around the long-term impacts of COVID-19 and vulnerable socio-economic groups. Work will continue on developing and evaluating policy and scrutinising spending decisions to see if they magnify disadvantage.

We will launch a programme of 'place-based engagements', establishing talks and roundtables with local leaders to disseminate our place-based research. The intention is to promote the development of policies and design services that will help to level up the socio-economic disparities.

Putting social mobility at the centre

We are concerned at the extent to which socio-economic diversity and issues around social mobility are underplayed across government, as noted in last year's monitoring report. The Commissioners will continue to make the case for a socio-economic duty to be enacted in legislation, and will also push for change through other means. This couldn't be more critical, as we start to see the devastating impact of COVID-19 on the most disadvantaged sectors of society.

Part of our solution is to make practical tools available to policy makers and decision makers. Our bold new 30-year framework for social mobility could act as a roadmap to a more equitable Britain within a generation. This will contain new indicators and metrics that the government can use to do health checks on performance and drive forward targeted and impactful improvements across all parts of the United Kingdom and its devolved nations.

We will consider issues such as what more we could do in education if we weren't limited to current measures of socio-economic disadvantage.

We will publish an insightful new piece of work that policy makers and MPs can use to assess the impact of new legislation on socio-economic and geographic disparities. We will also ensure that we're in touch with the concerns identified by disadvantaged groups across our country, using methods including a public opinion survey.

Following our exit from the EU, the Commission has reflected on the importance of the integrity of the Union. We have a statutory responsibility to monitor progress across the United Kingdom – and have been doing that very well in England – but we are aware that analysis for the other three nations needs to be stepped up. Our annual statutory report will aim to address this by undertaking our most in-depth look to date at Scotland and Wales, and our first in-depth analysis on Northern Ireland.

Our collaborative relationships across the United Kingdom will help to drive forward change and in particular address the huge disparities that have arisen due to COVID-19. We have agreed to work with the Scottish Poverty and Inequality Commission on the creation of a Youth Panel from across the United Kingdom that will help us to identify the chronic long-lasting effects of the pandemic on the lives of young people. The project will run for over a year, providing rapid read-outs at key stages to inform and shape the Commission's future work programme, identifying where we most need to press the government for change.



Shifting the dial on social mobility

Our cutting-edge research will focus on the following subjects in 2021, to ensure that social mobility is kept at the centre of political debate...

30 years: the next generation – this is our flagship project for 2021. We are developing a bold vision to achieve a more mobile society over the next 30 years, and a cutting-edge measurement framework to monitor progress towards this goal. This will create a blueprint for change at a societal level. We will be analysing the critical sticking points at each stage of the life cycle, and engaging with stakeholders across government, charities, business and academia to establish the levers needed to achieve change.

State of the nation – our annual monitoring report will cover the entire United Kingdom in depth and will analyse social mobility within each nation. We will synthesise key statistics on social mobility to provide a robust measure of progress and look at what is needed for the future.

Social mobility barometer – this is our annual poll run by YouGov providing us with views about social mobility and opportunities across the UK. It is used to highlight the ‘mood of the nation’ and inequalities in perceptions of opportunities and life chances.

Legislative assessment – along with the Education Select Committee, we believe that meaningful social change can be achieved through a systematic data-driven assessment of UK domestic policies. This includes flagging unforeseen negative impacts and making recommendations for positive change. In 2021 we will be piloting a new policy assessment methodology for social fairness which incorporates

geographic, socio-economic and broader social mobility factors.

COVID-19 – a joint project in collaboration with the Scottish Poverty and Inequality Commission on the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on disadvantaged young people.

Data for social mobility – one of the key challenges for designing policies which promote social mobility is having sufficiently detailed data on the populations they affect. This project will address this by assessing the use of data in policy decision making, and by conducting in-depth interviews with civil servants working in key policy areas for social mobility. It will appraise the current data and measures of socio-economic disadvantage, and produce a series of recommendations to government’s new Equality Data Programme to bring social mobility to the heart of policy making.



Education

Our aim is to drive forward change across educational settings, from early years through to higher education. A few of our future projects are outlined below...

Against the odds – a project identifying the characteristics and practices of schools that have been particularly successful at achieving good outcomes for students eligible for the pupil premium (which is a measure of socio-economic disadvantage) at Key Stage 4. This will be published with a toolkit that will provide guidance for schools on making the best use of the premium.

Balanced schools – a first-of-its-kind analysis examining the impact of peer mix on attainment, and how reforms to admission policies could impact on Key Stage 4 attainment and lifetime earnings. This work tackles policy issues – and provides a novel framework for assessing the impact of reforms on disadvantaged pupils.

Behavioural insights in careers advice – two behavioural insight trials to 'nudge' disadvantaged pupils, age 19 or under,

into engaging more with careers advice and encouraging them to consider the higher-returning options. This work provides evidence of the efficacy of these nudges and has implications for the delivery and design of digital careers advice platforms.

The road not taken: the drivers of course selection – research that analyses why disadvantaged students tend to cluster in courses with the lowest wage returns, across technical education and apprenticeships.

Early years – we will continue to speak out on the vital role of the early years. We know that experiences in early childhood are often the root cause of today's hardest social challenges, such as addiction, family breakdown and poor mental health. Vital interventions can improve social mobility if they happen early enough in the primary phase of education. We hope to continue to highlight the pressing issues affecting the most underprivileged children.





Working lives

A high number of our Commissioners work in commerce and business. From the start, we realised that we could have a big impact by encouraging the country's most significant businesses to undertake voluntary changes. The programme has grown rapidly and in 2021 we will continue the momentum by launching toolkits for social mobility. We are also filling in evidence gaps to help support the most influential sectors in the economy, so that they can transform the way they operate and lead the way for social mobility.

To bring about change, we will deliver the following...

Progression in the civil service by socio-economic background – working in collaboration with the Cabinet Office we will be analysing career blockages within the UK's Civil Service.

We will be publishing a large-scale study looking at barriers to advancement for...



456,410

UK Civil Service employees



585

Stakeholders



50

Associations



180

Individuals



6

Month period

We have carried out extensive research and engagement for our 2021 toolkits including consultations with...

“If we create an inclusive environment, that’s the best way of attracting and retaining a diverse workforce.”

Adrian Love, Recruitment Director at Accenture



Improving digital connectivity

Ofcom estimates that 9% of children in the UK (between 1.1m and 1.8m) do not have access to a laptop, desktop or tablet at home. The link between poverty and digital exclusion is clear: only 51% of households earning £6,000–10,000 have access to the internet at home, compared with 99% of households with an income over £40,001.

No access for young people means that their life chances are severely diminished, but this issue is not limited to the young. People of all ages on the wrong side of the digital divide are severely disadvantaged. Nine million adults cannot use the internet without support, and yet according to government research 82% of jobs require digital skills.

Connectivity also has a vital bearing on wellbeing, helping to combat feelings of isolation by connecting people of all ages during lockdown. Throughout the pandemic,

it's also meant that many people can work and learn remotely.

The importance of digital inclusion for future social mobility cannot be underestimated. However, the UK does not currently have a digital strategy which ensures no-one is left behind. We hope to drive positive and impactful change in this important area.

Key data:

- Nine million adults cannot use the internet without support – Lloyds Bank UK Consumer Digital Index 2020
- At least 82% of jobs require digital skills – DCMS No longer optional: employer demand for digital skills (publishing.service.gov.uk)



Health and wellbeing

COVID-19 has taken an extraordinary toll on the nation's health, with a disproportionate burden placed on the most disadvantaged groups. As the vaccine is rolled out, and the world starts to approach a new normal, the Commission will release a suite of studies looking at the relationships between social mobility outcomes and mental and physical health. We hope that they will offer a post-Marmot look at the ways in which socio-economic factors impact on the poorest members of society.

Mental health: the first systematic examination of the link between mental health and social mobility outcomes. This explores how access to mental health care and the efficacy of treatment varies by socio-economic status. It also examines how overlapping characteristics (such as ethnicity) can compound the impact on social mobility.

Poor health: the first in-depth appraisal of the relationship between poor physical health and social mobility outcomes. This work presents a new analysis of British cohort studies to uncover the stark relationship between health problems and poorer social mobility, with strong evidence to suggest that this relationship is causal. This work plugs a key gap in our knowledge and is more important than ever in light of the COVID-19 crisis.



Place and regionality programme

Our report 'The long shadow of deprivation' identified the nation's coldspots for social mobility. Following on from this, we have started a programme of engagement with local leaders, known as our 'place programme'. Our early meetings have convinced us that we need to invest more in analysing geographic socio-economic disparities. We have two key goals.

- 1.** The first goal is to disseminate the Commission's place-based research to local leaders. We will use our two reports 'The long shadow of deprivation' and 'Moving out to move on' as a springboard to facilitate conversations about what these findings mean for their local areas through workshops, training and guidance.
- 2.** The second goal is to actively work with local authorities to understand the key barriers blocking social mobility in their areas. We will use the Commission's powers to help them drive change – for example through advocacy or potentially funding small but scalable interventions based on best available evidence.



Meeting statutory responsibilities and strategic objectives

We will meet our responsibilities in 2021 by:

- tracking progress against the majority of core recommendations made in the previous Commission's term
- renewing our focus on place – in particular, expanding the social mobility index beyond its existing focus on education metrics
- strengthening our network of relationships and championing good practice

The previous Commission's research blueprint involved in-depth, long-term projects examining different policy areas and life stages impacted by social mobility. Building on this research excellence, we will identify any knowledge gaps and assess where to focus action and resources to deliver impact using our data and evidence. For the next 18 months, the overall weighting of our portfolio will be less research-heavy as we boost our internal processes and delivery capacity for programmes, policy and communications.

For us to be able to affect change, a number of operational challenges must be addressed. They include making highly technical academic reports accessible to a wider audience, exploring opportunities for historically neglected areas and balancing the short-term tenure of our energetic Commissioners with the long-term nature of social mobility changes.





Communications

Our priority over the next 12 months will be to ensure that we amplify our voice further. We have built up a strong reputation in 2020 as the go-to organisation on social mobility – trusted on our research and respected where we challenge government. The success of our new media channels in reaching new audiences shows there are untapped communities who want to know more about our work and its impact.

In 2021 we want to go further – by mounting one or two big campaigns in key programme areas, by pushing our message wider geographically and by ensuring our Commissioners are a constant presence across broadcast and print media.



Governance

Transparency

This report showcases many of our greatest achievements in 2020 but there are significant areas where we would like to see improvements in 2021.

The following section provides a summary of our financial and governance position. Because of our structure as an arm's-length body, we do not have an obligation to report on these matters, but our Commissioners are committed to transparency. This self-declaration is a reflection of that commitment.

Finance and governance

The Commission has had an annual programme budget of £2 million since April 2019. This represents a significant uplift from the Commission's funding in earlier years. The budget has enabled us to take forward our frontline engagement activity, including our employers' programme, our emerging place programme and our individual research projects.

In 2019–2020 the Commission did not have delegated authority for this budget, causing bureaucratic challenges. We expect that to change. We also did not have a framework agreement setting out our relationship to our

sponsor department. This is currently being addressed and we expect this to be in place by the end of the financial year 2020/21. Under the terms of the new framework agreement, the Commissioners have established a new Oversight and Risk Board to help secure support from the government when necessary.

Staffing

The Commission has an agreed administration budget to cover a core staff of approximately eight civil servants within its Secretariat. For most of the last year it has operated with an average of five officials – a reduction of over a third – because Commissioners lacked the power to use our administrative budget to backfill posts. These low staff levels, particularly among senior policy posts, have limited the Commission’s ability to fulfil its statutory duties on time and influence policy more directly.

In this challenging context Commissioners have sought to maximise their impact by focusing on frontline programme work – such as our employers’, place and youth programmes – where there was latitude to bring in contracted workers to deliver activities using our programme budget.

Commissioners are determined to strengthen these arrangements during the transition months as we transfer from the Department for Education to the Cabinet Office. Progress has been made here and we hope this will continue.

Appointments

All Commissioner appointments are made through the Cabinet Office Public Appointments Board process and approved by the Secretary of State. The Chair’s role is approved by Number 10.

Unusually, all of our 12 Commissioners were appointed on a standard three-year term which ends this November, rather than staggered terms, leaving us with the risk of a lack of continuity of cover when all the Commissioners’ terms end at once.

Dame Martina Milburn resigned from the post of Commission Chair in May 2020 but no appointment process has been put in place for a successor. Since then there have been two interim Co-Chairs, Steven Cooper and Sandra Wallace.

These combined issues impact on institutional knowledge transfer and may restrict the Commission’s ability to maintain momentum on its work programme.

We will continue to encourage the government to address this.







Postscript by the Commissioners

As we look out over the 2021–2022 horizon, our world looks profoundly different to the one in which the 12 of us stepped up to the challenge of rebuilding and renewing the work of the Social Mobility Commission in December 2018.

The socio-pandemic has resulted in the upending of life as we knew it. The lockdown which began in March 2020 meant that we lost our ability to connect with our friends and family in our usual ways. It renewed attention on the importance of our health and wellbeing and shed light on the interdependency between economic disadvantage, inequality and vulnerability to the virus.

The toll on millions of families across the country has been profound and is still continuing. Job losses mean there is a huge amount of instability, not only for those with the lowest incomes but for families that were only just coping pre-pandemic. It is imperative for us to ensure that the shocks experienced by these families do not decimate the futures of their children.

For young people entering the labour market, we recognise that they enter a search for jobs that is in many ways much more challenging than in the last great recession of 2008.



The pandemic has not just disrupted home lives. It has created a significant rupture in the ability of the country to provide acceptable levels of education. The closures of schools when we knew little about the virus was sensible, but the impact and loss of schooling has been severe. Our recent statement on education offers concrete proposals to help address this, such as offering some children a second chance, by retaking a school year.

For young people entering the labour market, the search for jobs is in many ways more challenging than in the last great recession of 2008. A key priority is to ensure that we do not lose a generation of talent.

As we write this, we are entering another phase of the pandemic, bringing more misery to families and businesses. However, despite

the treacherous road ahead, we can hope and plan for a better future. COVID-19 vaccines are being administered, providing light at the end of the tunnel for the economy, school children and elderly and vulnerable people. There is the emergence of a new geo-political order, with new opportunities arising from our exit from the European Union, potentially balancing out the risks, and enabling us to focus more on the four UK nations.

But so much needs to be done – and with great urgency, as the divisions in society have widened alarmingly over the past year. The Social Mobility Commission is more relevant than ever and our move to the Cabinet Office in April could not be more timely. It will enable us to influence policy on social and geographical inequality at the heart of government.

Our report 'Monitoring social mobility 2013 to 2020' made it clear that nothing will improve until ministers and officials across Whitehall start working together. We also know that social deprivation and lack of opportunities start at birth and can have an accumulative impact at every level of a child's progress through early years, school, college and then at work. So, within the Cabinet Office we can advise on the way that the centre can be re-wired to tackle social mobility, whether through welfare and taxation, higher-quality education or more apprenticeship and intern opportunities.

We will build on the regional research in 'The long shadow of deprivation', and our new 30-year project, to advise the new Equality Data Programme on how to pinpoint the areas with the least opportunities – suggesting refreshed metrics on social background, housing, transport, health and earnings.

As the Social Mobility Commission, our remit is to hold government to account, and that's something we continually strive to do. We will

challenge the status quo, and advocate on behalf of the most marginalised sectors, by commissioning evidence that monitors the divisions in society and identifies how we can move forward in a more equitable way. We intend to have a greater role in ensuring that policy is delivered and translated into action on the ground.

We are also reshaping the socio-economic landscape by encouraging employers and institutions to embed the principles of social mobility into their policies for the recruitment, retention and promotion of staff. This isn't just a moral imperative. Inclusive teams are more innovative, productive, loyal and cost-effective.

As we bring about change, the rewards are there for us all – and equality is worth fighting for. An individual's opportunities should not be determined by who their parents were or where they live. And everyone should have the chance to create a brighter future for themselves and their family. That's the world we want to live in now and we will help to achieve it.







Social Mobility
Commission