**Elitist Britain: Methodology**

**How did we define “the elite”?**

There is no definitive list of who “the elite” in Britain are and there are several different ways in which it could be defined:

* The most wealthy and highest earning individuals in the country (e.g. those in the rich list or in high earning professions such as investment banking).
* The individuals with the most political power and influence (e.g. politicians, top journalists and high ranking public officials).
* Those at the top of key institutions in the country (e.g. senior judges, top police officers, top army officers, university Vice Chancellors).
* Those who play a key role in the country’s cultural life (e.g. pop stars, top sports starts).

Our intention has been to identify a cross-section of the country’s elite in each of these different areas - given the subjective nature of “the elite” as a concept it is inevitable that our list is not comprehensive.

However, we hope that our list is broad enough to help shed light on the extent to which people from more advantaged social backgrounds are more likely to reach the top positions in society. We have also deliberately used a similar methodology to earlier work carried out by the Sutton Trust in defining some of the “elite areas” to allow us to look at changes over time.

**How did we identify the leading people in each of these elite areas?**

Our next task was to identify a list of the leading people within each area. The table on the next page describes how we went about this and the sources we used to identify people within each area.

The Annex to this methodology paper provides a full list of all of the people we included in the study within each domain. Overall, we looked at the social backgrounds of more than 4,000 leading figures in the UK.

| Profession: | Source:  |
| --- | --- |
| Armed Forces | All Generals of 2 star rank or above i.e. General, Lieutenant General, Major General, Air Chief Marshal, Air Marshal, Air Vice Marshal; and Admiral, Vice Admiral, Rear Admiral **Source:** Ministry of Defence website, March 2014 |
| BBC Executives | Senior BBC Executives listed on the BBC website for transparency purposes**Source**BBC website lists of highest paid and other notable staff, March 2014 |
| Cabinet | UK Government Cabinet Ministers (full Cabinet members)**Source**UK Government, July 2014 |
| Constables and Police and Crime Commissioners | Chief Constables and Police and Crime Commissioners for every Constabulary in the UK and senior Metropolitan Police Officers**Source**UK Government, March 2014 |
| Cricket - England  | Players who played for England in Test, One Day Internationals or Twenty 20 matches between April 2013 to March 2014**Source** BBC Sport  |
| Diplomats | Heads of UK Missions Abroad (including Embassies and High Commissions) **Source**Foreign Office website, March 2014 |
| Football – England | England squad for the Fifa World Cup 2014**Source**Data taken from Sutton Trust, June 2014 <http://www.suttontrust.com/news/blog/englands-level-playing-field/>  |
| FTSE 350 | Chief Executives of companies listed on the FTSE 350**Source**Websites of companies listed on the FTSE 350, March 2014 |
| Junior Ministers | UK Government Junior Ministers**Source**UK Government, March 2014 |
| Local Government CEOs | Chief Executive of Local Authorities in England**Source** Local authority websites, March 2014 |
| Local Government Leaders | Political leaders of Local Authorities in England**Source** Local authority websites, March 2014 |
| Lords | Members of the House of Lords**Source** UK Parliament website, March 2014 |
| MPs | All members of Parliament**Source**UK Parliament website, July 2014 |
| Newspaper Columnists | List of every columnist on UK national newspapers**Source** Websites of UK national newspapers, March 2014 |
| Permanent Secretaries | All Permanent Secretaries of UK Government departments listed on the Civil Service website**Source**UK Civil Service website, March 2014 |
| Pop Stars | UK artists who had one of the top 40 selling albums of 2010, 2011, 2012 or 2013**Source**Official Charts Company website, March 2014 |
| Public Body CEOs | Chief Executives of Non-Ministerial Departments, Executive Non Departmental Public Bodies and Executive Agencies**Source**Cabinet Office, *Public Bodies 2013* |
| Public Body Chairs  | Chairs of Non-Ministerial Departments, Executive Non Departmental Public Bodies and Executive Agencies**Source**Cabinet Office, *Public Bodies 2013* |
| Radio 4 Influential Women | Radio 4’s list of the 100 most powerful women in the UK today**Source**Women’s Hour, *The Power List 2013*, 2013 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/3J92brPmK0hskzhpTV3CrZ0/the-power-list-2013>  |
| The Sunday Times Rich List | List of the most wealthy people in the UK, according to the Sunday Times**Source**The Sunday Times, May 2014 |
| Rugby Union - English, Scottish and Welsh Teams | Members of the England, Scotland and Wales squads for Round 4 of the Six Nations, 8-9 March 2014**Source**BBC Sport website |
| Select Committees | All Commons Select Committee Members**Source**UK Parliament website, March 2014 |
| Select Committee Chairs | All Commons Select Committee Chairs**Source**UK Parliament website, July 2014 |
| Senior Judges | Lord Chief Justice, Supreme Court Judges, Lord and Lady Justices of Appeal and High Court Judges**Source**Ministry of Justice website, March 2014 |
| Shadow Cabinet | UK Government Shadow Cabinet Ministers (including other non-Cabinet Shadow Ministers who attend Shadow Cabinet)**Source**The Labour Party, July 2014 |
| Top 100 Media | Based on earlier Sutton Trust research and methods, to allow for effective comparison. This method includes 26 newspaper and periodical editors, 22 political editors and columnists, 33 news/politics broadcasters and 19 broadcast news/politics editors. This involved use of personal judgement and the application of the Sutton Trust’s previous research methods**Source**Sutton Trust, *The Educational Backgrounds of Leading Journalists*, 2006 and websites of newspapers and broadcasters, March 2014 |
| TV, Film and Music  | People included in the Sunday Times ‘Richest in TV and Film’ List and ‘Top Music Millionaires’ List**Source**The Sunday Times, May 2014 |
| Vice-Chancellors | Vice Chancellors of 127 UK Universities**Source**Universities UK, March 2014 |

**Defining people’s backgrounds**

Data on family income and social class background is not readily available and require detailed surveys of people’s circumstances when they were growing up.

Instead, we used school background and university background as a proxy for social background, looking at four different indicators:

* School attended at the start of secondary education (generally at age 11).[[1]](#footnote-1)
* Whether attended university when young (at age 21 or below).
* Whether attended Oxford or Cambridge when young (at age 21 or below).
* Whether attended one of the 24 universities currently in the Russell Group when young (when aged 21 or below)

We are aware of the limitations of school background as a proxy for social background. A small minority of people educated in private schools received means-tested scholarships either from their schools (according to the Independent Schools Council, around 1 per cent of private school pupils have all their fees paid in this way) or had all their fees paid under the Assisted Places Scheme. Similarly, many children educated in the state sector come from highly advantaged backgrounds. However, given that only 7 per cent of children attend independent schools and fees are such that the majority of those attending without financial support will be from highly affluent backgrounds, we consider independent school attendance to generally be a good proxy for coming from an advantaged background.

We are also aware that university attendance is not a good proxy for social background as attendance at the top universities is, in general meritocratic: those who get very good A-level results who apply to the most selective universities tend to get in. However, the social profiles of those at the top universities are narrower than the country as a whole - and were even narrower in previous decades. There is also evidence that fewer young people from less advantaged backgrounds enter top universities than would be expected looking at A-level results. Domination of top jobs by those from a narrow set of universities would, therefore, be indicative of narrowness in the social backgrounds of those who enter these jobs.

**How did we find out information about people’s social backgrounds?**

We conducted desk-based research using a range of different sources including:

* Who’s Who
* Linked in
* DODS People
* Internet searches

We supplemented this with direct communication where we were unable to find information through other methods. As a result, we are unable to publish disaggregated information about people’s social backgrounds for reasons of data protection – many of those who provided information from direct communication did so on the understanding that their personal details would not be published.

1. We classified schools based on the status of the school at the time the person in question entered the school. Direct Grant schools – where around a quarter of students had their fees paid by the state – were classified as independent schools, though this only makes a marginal difference to the results [↑](#footnote-ref-1)