



Social Mobility  
Commission



# **Social Mobility Commission Business Plan 2022 to 2023**

**A fresh approach to social mobility**

**October 2022**



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# 1. Welcome

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The Social Mobility Commission has seen several iterations since its establishment by the Child Poverty Act 2010. In November 2021, we began a new phase under Chair Katharine Birbalsingh and Deputy Chair Alun Francis.

Katharine and Alun have already set out their fresh approach, through the Chair's inaugural [speech](#) and our flagship annual report, [State of the Nation 2022](#). Ideas and ways of thinking are important, because you can't get to the right solutions without asking the right questions. But we also know, from speaking to our many stakeholders, that you have been keen to see us move from talk to action. That is what this business plan does.

Through our 5 key areas - State of the Nation 2023, Data for Social Mobility, Education and Families, Employment and Routes to Work, and Economy and Enterprise - we have set out an agenda for this year that is ambitious but achievable.

In some areas we plan to get stuck in straight away. Employers up and down the country have been doing fantastic work to support social mobility, and we want to continue to help them on that journey. We plan to improve the quality of information available to students in time for this year's decision making rounds. And we want the government to use the metrics we've laid out in our new index as measures of success, particularly in the context of levelling up.

In others we think it's important to take a more measured approach. We want to be confident we've taken a full look at the evidence and consulted the sector before setting out our stall. So we'll be using this year to develop thinking for our flagship parenting campaign, to launch later in 2023. We'll be exploring how schools can be better engines of social mobility. And we'll look at how and where the Social Mobility Commission can best add value to the great economy debate.

We publish this plan at a difficult time, with rising interest rates and a cost of living crisis looming. Some might say that makes change and reform challenging. But key to our approach is to look not just at how we can do more, but also how we can do things differently.

That means taking a long term approach, being innovative, being rigorous in our approach, and crucially working with others across the sector, in government and in society. It also means listening to others' views and experience to enrich our own approach.

So if there is anything in this business plan which sparks your interest, or where you'd like to get involved, please do get in touch. We look forward to hearing from you.

John Craven,

Head of SMC Secretariat

## 2. About the Commission

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### Our Commissioners

The Social Mobility Commission Chair and Deputy were appointed in November 2021, with further Commissioners appointed in September 2022. Each Commissioner is appointed for a term of 4 years.

The Commission is supported by a small secretariat who are based in Glasgow, York and London. The secretariat works to deliver Commissioners' priorities and ensure the Commission meets its statutory responsibilities.

### Chair



**Katharine Birbalsingh CBE**

Katharine Birbalsingh is the Chair of the Social Mobility Commission and Headmistress and co-founder of Michaela Community School in Wembley, London. Michaela is known for its tough love behaviour systems, knowledge curriculum and teaching of kindness and gratitude. In 2017, OFSTED graded the school as “Outstanding” in every category. In 2022, almost 75% of all GCSEs were graded 9 to 7 (A\* to A). 98% of pupils achieved a 4+ (C or above) in both English and Maths, with 99% of all pupils achieving grade 9 to 4 (A\* to C) in at least 5 subjects.

Katharine read Philosophy and Modern Languages at The University of Oxford and has always taught in inner London. She has made numerous appearances on television and radio and has written for several UK publications. Katharine has written 2 books and edited a third, plus a fourth called *The Power of Culture* which was published in June 2020.

## Deputy Chair



**Alun Francis OBE**

Alun Francis is the Deputy Chair of the Social Mobility Commission and Principal and Chief Executive of Oldham College since 2010.

During this time the college has been redeveloped with an investment of over £45m, with new facilities to support technical education from entry to degree level. The college has developed a reputation for strong teaching and learning, and has won a number of prestigious awards for its Teaching for Distinction CPD programme and its provision for special needs learners. It was nominated Further Education (FE) College of the Year at the 2019 TES Awards and in 2020 for innovation around remote learning.

Prior to joining the college Alun had a varied career in local government, regeneration, youth work and education, including primary, secondary and higher education. Alun has a strong interest in the economics of what is now referred to as “levelling up” and sees FE colleges in general and Oldham College in particular as having a critical role to play in addressing this challenge.



## Commissioners



**Matthew Goodwin**

Matthew Goodwin is a Professor of Political Science at the University of Kent and was previously Senior Fellow at the Royal Institute for International Affairs, Chatham House, and Fellow at the Legatum Institute.

He is the author of many books, articles and research reports and has worked in the social sciences for more than twenty years. He was previously seconded to the Department for Communities and Local Government and has advised more than 200 organisations around the world on issues relating to social mobility, social cohesion, and political volatility.



**Parminder Kohli**

Parminder Kohli has 26 years of senior leadership experience across 7 different industries, 3 continents and 4 organisations - the last 20 years of which are with Shell.

He is currently Senior Vice President Europe, Middle East and Africa for Shell Lubricants business accountable for delivering the bottom line of the business in 100 plus countries within the region.

In May 2022 he was named one of Involve Empower's Top 100 Senior Executives for his work on Diversity and Inclusion. He was a Non Executive Director for Success For All Educational Trust which runs 3 secondary schools in London Borough of Havering between 2018 to 2020.



**Resham Kotecha**

Resham Kotecha is the Head of Policy and Government Affairs, EMEA at Wise.

Resham has worked for over a decade on tackling social mobility, volunteering with the Prince's Trust and the Shaw Trust, and giving talks around the UK. Resham worked for a think tank focused on social mobility and served on a Home Office Windrush Working Group. Resham is the Head of Engagement for Women2Win, a Trustee of the Fawcett Society and a Board member at the John Smith Centre.

She holds a Bachelor's degree in Economics from Cambridge University and has been recognised as a 'Global Shaper' by the World Economic Forum.



**Dr Raghib Ali**

Dr Raghib Ali has a number of roles, including Senior Clinical Research Associate at the MRC Epidemiology Unit at the University of Cambridge. His main research interests are the aetiology and prevention of non communicable diseases, and establishing prospective cohort studies in populations which have not previously been studied.

He co-authored a submission to the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities on the major causes of mortality and their risk factors in the UK.



**Rob Wilson**

Rob Wilson is the current Chair of the Community Bank, and was previously Chair of an IT company. Until June 2017, Rob was a Minister at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, and before this was a Minister for Cabinet Office. During this time, Rob was responsible for reforming charity fundraising and the National Citizen Service, as well as implementing the Prime Minister's 'Big Society' agenda.



**Ryan Henson**

Ryan Henson has been Chief Executive Officer at the Coalition for Global Prosperity, a think tank specialising in international development, since April 2020. Prior to joining the Coalition, Ryan worked for CAFOD, the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development, and on human rights policy at the Ministry of Justice.

Ryan serves as a Reservist in the Royal Air Force and is a founding trustee of Diversity in Development, a social mobility charity working to widen access to the international development sector.



## 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 Cabinet Office. Prior to April 2021 the Commission was sponsored by the Department for Education.

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

## Our statutory responsibilities

We have a statutory responsibility to:

- promote 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

We can also be asked by ministers to provide advice on how to improve social mobility in England. This advice must then be published.



### 3. A fresh approach to social mobility

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The past 2 years have seen a pandemic, a European war, and a growing cost of living crisis. There were already a great many challenges to deal with before all these new crises arose, not least the issue of differences in opportunity across the country.

This makes it all the more important that we approach the challenge of improving social mobility with clarity, and that we make recommendations that will make a difference.

Firstly, it is essential that we establish some discipline about how the term social mobility is used and how social mobility is measured. This business plan outlines how the Commission will do that, through our new index framework and through our work on data for social mobility.

In our view, too many interventions have focused on getting people to leave the place where they grew up, acquire brilliant academic credentials, and gain entry into an elite professional occupation. There is nothing wrong with this view of social mobility, but it is not enough.

We want to move away from a narrow focus on 'long' upward mobility, moving a few from the 'bottom' into the 'top', to a broader view of different kinds of social mobility, sometimes over shorter distances, for a greater number of people

This means getting the whole sector thinking differently and collecting and using data differently.

It means being clearer about the instances where mobility is working well and being clearer about the various factors which help to make this happen. And it means being clearer about obstacles which hold people back and how they might be removed.

We will undertake research to get a better understanding of what real people actually think about social mobility, so we can ensure the work of the Commission is aligned to their needs and wants.





We are also concerned about how some perspectives tend to dominate the policy debate. Widening access to university, for example, has not brought the dividends many hoped for, and has diverted attention away from the 50% that pursue other routes.

Meanwhile, not enough attention has been paid to improving the skills of those at the bottom, both adults and young people whose opportunities, because of a lack of basic literacy, numeracy and employability skills, are extremely limited.

And there is a particular challenge for people living in neighbourhoods and places where, for a whole variety of reasons, educational and economic outcomes appear to be poor across generations.

The above is not to say that we reject all the work that has already been done. But we will be taking a fresh approach, which sees social mobility as the process of enabling everyone to find and apply their talents in ways that they enjoy and gives them purpose. We want to ask different questions, for example, on talent, ability, families, culture and values. And we want to start a wider conversation across the sector about how to do that.

We passionately believe that with a sharper lens, which really spots where the problems lie, we can find out what works and start making a difference. In the end, it's about ensuring that everyone has a decent chance to succeed, whatever their background.

It's about people being able to change their stars.



## 4. Engagement and communications

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The Social Mobility Commission is a leading voice on social mobility in the UK. In the years ahead, we aim to improve social mobility by shaping the way people approach the challenge of social mobility, and influencing behaviour change in parents, educators, young people, employers, academics, funders, policymakers and the third sector.

### How will we do this?

- as part of our strategic plan, we will develop a broader theory of change, setting out how the Commission can act to improve social mobility. This will include how the Commission can most effectively communicate the messages within the annual statutory monitoring report and our broader research to a wider audience
- we aim to ensure that Social Mobility Commission communication is engaging and creative by taking a multimedia approach. We will engage parents, teachers, young people, employers, funders, researchers and charities through events, social media and other means, to effect behaviour change across society
- we will establish clear positions on key social mobility issues. This covers both those issues identified in our work programme, and other broader issues
- where we identify evidence gaps, we will create recommendations for researchers to prioritise. Where there are social mobility issues that are not receiving sufficient attention from stakeholders, we will champion them to foundations and philanthropists
- when we find transformational impact being achieved by organisations or specific interventions, we will showcase it, actively promoting the sharing of best practice
- we will launch a new monthly Newsletter to communicate updates about our work, including key campaigns or research publications.

### Develop a series of podcasts

The Social Mobility Commission will release a series of podcasts aimed at sparking debate on social mobility, raising awareness of our approach and highlighting emerging research.

Throughout the series, different guests will engage in key debates on topics such as parenting, the evolving use of technology and the future of education. These conversations will contribute to and shape the discourse around social mobility in the UK.

## Social Mobility Index interactive tool

We are exploring options to bring the Social Mobility Index framework to a wider audience through an accessible interactive tool. This would enable a broad range of social mobility practitioners to make use of the data it offers.

## Enhancing our online and social media presence

To reach selected target audiences, we will continue to grow our social media presence. As of 1 October 2022, we had made steady progress in increasing the number of followers on Twitter and LinkedIn, but aim to do much more.

 <b>14.8k</b>		 <b>14.8k</b>	 <b>1.7k</b>
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We plan to revamp our online content and make it more relevant and navigable for different audiences. We aim to provide an information and signposting hub that speaks to all key stakeholders interested in Social Mobility, including:

- parents
- young people
- teachers and schools
- employers
- charities and foundations
- research / data



# 5. Plan for 2022 to 2023

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## 5.1 State of the Nation 2023



<b>Aim:</b>	To provide a comprehensive annual update of social mobility across the UK, including a detailed look at geographical variation across the country.
<b>Impact:</b>	To inform the UK Government's policy on social mobility, as well as influence local and combined authorities, employers and educational institutions to ramp up their efforts where gaps remain largest.

### What we will do:

State of the Nation 2023 will aim to report on the full range of indicators as set out in our new comprehensive measurement framework for social mobility. As shown in figure 1.0, these include:

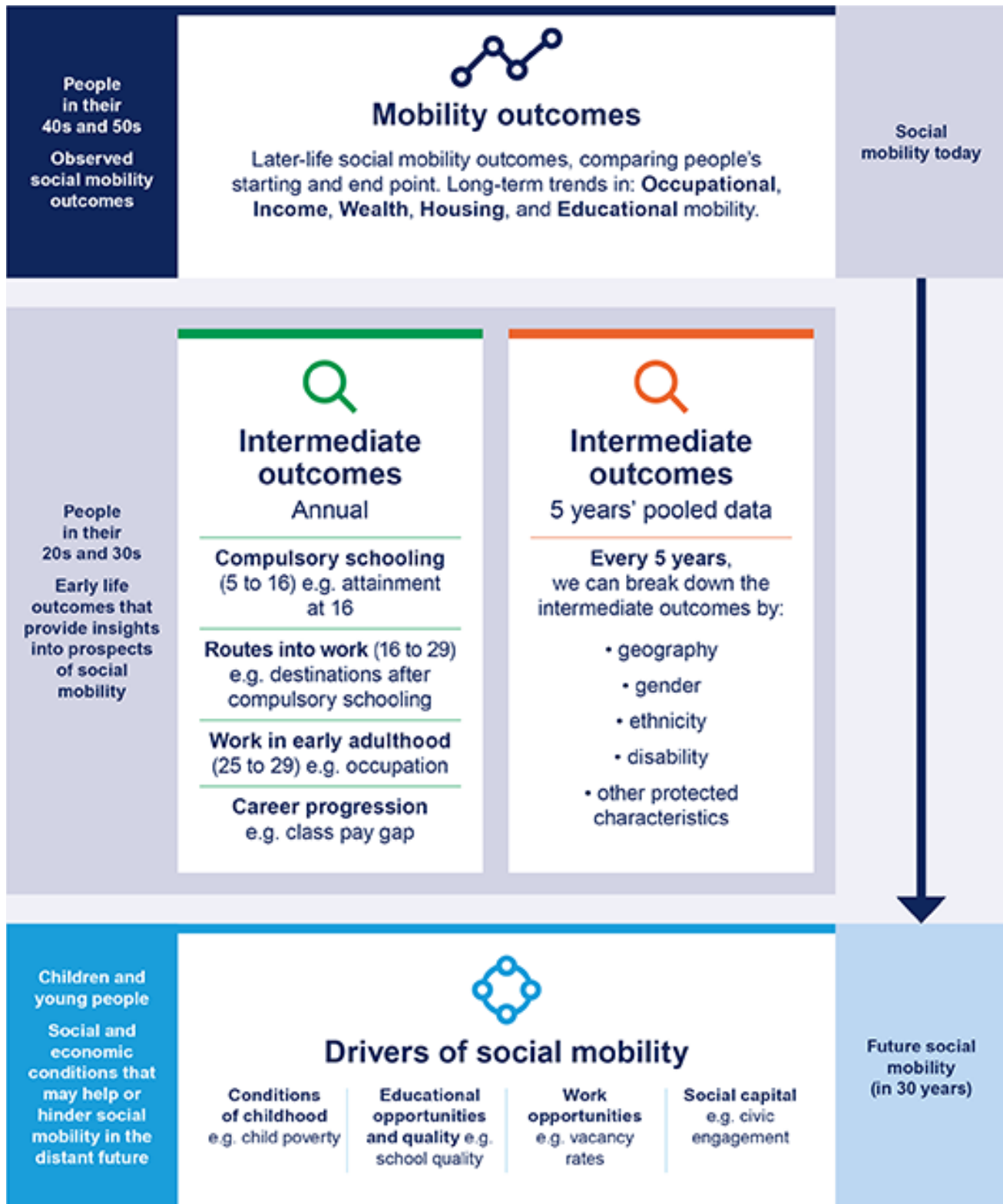
- **mobility outcomes** in the adult population, covering primarily occupational mobility, as well as income, wealth, housing, and educational mobility
- **5-yearly measures of the intermediate outcomes**, based on pooled data of intersectionality between socio-economic background and other characteristics (such as sex, ethnicity, disability, and place)
- **annual measures of intermediate outcomes** such as educational attainment and post-school transitions into the labour market
- **drivers** of social mobility, including conditions of childhood, educational and work opportunities, and social capital, to understand what the future social mobility trends might look like – we look at these conditions across the UK as a whole, and not by socio-economic background

This greater level of detail will allow us to understand where – and for whom – social mobility prospects are looking better or worse, and to take the first steps to a more evidence-based approach to tackling social mobility problems, where they exist.

For the first time, we will be able to present data broken down by geography as well as protected characteristics. This is a huge and exciting step change in how social mobility has been reported in the UK previously.



**Figure 1.0:** The new Social Mobility Index



## 5.2 Data for Social Mobility



<b>Aim:</b>	To publish a new report with policy recommendations on how to improve social mobility data gaps and harmonisation.
<b>Impact:</b>	We hope for a whole of government effort to improve data for social mobility, involving the devolved administrations. If the data gaps we identify are filled, this could have significant benefits for identifying which interventions do and don't work for the future.

### What we will do:

We know it's challenging to measure social mobility well, which makes it all the more difficult to respond with the most effective policy decisions. There are a number of significant data gaps, for example, we can't measure the socio-economic background of children in school, apart from through Free School Meals (FSM), which is a binary measure with different eligibility criteria across the UK. Relatedly, there's no administrative dataset giving a family based picture of income as children are not linked to their parents. We also can't link the tax records of parents and children, making measuring income mobility more difficult, and we lack administrative datasets on occupation. These are only some of the challenges we face.

At the heart of all this is the lack of data harmonisation. Across the 4 nations, we have different indicators related to social mobility. This makes comparisons difficult.

This year we will publish a report on social mobility data issues. This will include our policy recommendations for moving forward. As a Commission we will be calling on the UK Government and devolved nations to address these gaps.



## 5.3 Education and families



<b>Aim:</b>	<b>To identify what works to enable every child to fulfil their potential</b>  <b>Families</b> To empower parents and carers with evidence-based advice on how to support the development of their child and promote good social mobility outcomes. To develop a better understanding of the impact of previous and current government family initiatives and strategies.  <b>Education</b> To understand what educational strategies work best to promote good outcomes for schools and students.
<b>Impact:</b>	Understanding ‘what works’ for families and schools can help us to raise awareness and advocate for the best evidence-based approaches to ensure that all children get the best start in life and ultimately, improve their social mobility prospects and fulfil their potential.

### What we will do:

Across both areas of education and families, we want to sharpen the policy focus and establish a better understanding of interventions which work.

We will review what practices schools are implementing to improve outcomes for pupil premium students, particularly those that perform well on Progress 8 measures. Against this background, we will develop a research project to understand how these practices may relate to students' progress, using both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

We are particularly interested in learning more about aspects of teaching quality and style.

Turning to families, we will review the evidence for parenting interventions to understand the impact of home learning and activities on children's outcomes. We will then use this information to test, develop, and launch a parenting campaign next financial year.

Our aim is to target parents universally with key messages on what they can do to help their children aged 0-5. We know that starting early is the best ingredient for a child to thrive in later life.

To shape our thinking, we will explore the impact of previous government-led initiatives targeting families to understand ‘what works’ in terms of enabling every child to fulfil their potential.



## 5.4 Employment and routes to work

<b>Aim:</b>	<p><b>Employers</b> To encourage employers to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• incorporate social mobility into their diversity and inclusion agendas</li><li>• adopt a broad range of routes into employment, widening access to the talent pool</li><li>• influence change through engagement with their peers; industry; clients; suppliers; and government</li></ul> <p><b>Value of qualifications and advice to students</b> To help disadvantaged students to choose the right courses for them and to boost their employment prospects, the Social Mobility Commission will seek to improve the information available to students about the labour market value of qualifications and, where possible, the impact of those qualifications on social mobility.</p> <p><b>Regulated professions</b> To understand the impact of regulated professions on social mobility in order to consider how regulation might be extended, reduced or amended.</p>
<b>Impact:</b>	<p><b>Employers</b> To impact social mobility in the UK by changing employers' behaviours. With only so much government policy can do to influence employers in a free market society, voluntary action is needed. Employers (alongside government and the third sector) can help address the issues faced by those from low-income backgrounds when they enter the workforce.</p> <p><b>Value of qualifications and advice to students</b> By gaining a better understanding of the link between qualifications and labour market outcomes, as well as improving the information and resources available to young people, we can help students make more informed decisions about which qualifications to take.</p> <p><b>Regulated professions</b> By understanding how regulation impacts social mobility, we can influence professions to think through what they could put in place to mitigate this.</p>

### What we will do:

Education is important to social mobility because it is about acquiring knowledge and developing cognitive and non-cognitive skills, but it is also about qualifications. These play an important role in recruitment and selection into different careers and professions.

A considerable amount of work has taken place to improve social mobility by encouraging employers to consider how recruitment is done and to examine the emphasis given to qualifications – and to broaden the choice of pathways by reforming the qualifications system.

We continue to support employers to develop good practice in this area, and are keen to support further work into the comparative value of degrees, apprenticeships and technical education. But we also want to broaden our understanding of the way values become attached to different qualifications.

We will also explore how students might currently access information on the labour market value of qualifications. We will assess the current information and resources available and consider how the Social Mobility Commission can improve the advice students receive to help them make informed choices, whether through a campaign, creation of new resources or improved signposting.

We will also look to understand the practical aspects of regulated professions and how they impact social mobility. This includes understanding the impact regulation has on earnings, progression and the ability to enter and leave the profession.

We're excited to have launched an employer consultation to understand what activities and interventions employers are finding most effective in improving social mobility within their organisations and communities. We'll use the information provided to publish a "What Works" report later this year, as well as establishing an Employer Advisory Group to support the Commission's employer focused programme of work.

We'll continue to build our practical guidance and resources, firstly publishing our Building Blocks Toolkit. The toolkit has been designed as first step guidance to help businesses and organisations of all sizes, up and down the country, to access a wealth of untapped talent and kickstart their socio-economic diversity strategy. Following on from the success of previous sector specific toolkits, in early 2023, we'll collaborate with the sector to publish our 'Employers Toolkit: Retail'. We'll review the evidence on 'in-work progression' and build employer resources with partners.

We'll continue our ongoing employer engagement, hosting monthly employer events covering topics such as: mentoring; culture and leadership; data and outreach. We'll undertake specific communications campaigns that tie in with national dates to spark discussion on how employer activity can impact social mobility (e.g. around National Apprenticeship week). We'll also work with the Department for Education to build engagement and advocacy with employers around the new T Level qualifications, with our Deputy Chair Alun Francis playing an active role as a T Level Ambassador.





## 5.5 Economy and enterprise

<b>Aim:</b>	<p>To understand how initiatives to promote economic growth and enterprise can be harnessed to promote social mobility.</p> <p>To start development of a toolkit for combined authorities on how to strengthen social mobility in their areas.</p>
<b>Impact:</b>	<p>Local areas will have the latest advice and expertise to enable them to promote social mobility interventions for their context.</p>

### What we will do:

We are excited to start the development of a social mobility toolkit targeting local and combined authorities. This will provide information on the evidence-based interventions that drive social mobility, which areas can select from based on their context. We will provide advice on how to make social mobility a core target of efforts to address geographic inequalities across England (levelling up) as well as how to track progress.

Understanding the links between the economy, enterprise and how this impacts social mobility is an important area for the Social Mobility Commission. Year one will be about exploring this in greater detail, liaising with policy experts and academics to carve out the Social Mobility Commission's direction on the issue.





## 6. Looking ahead

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This business plan marks the beginning, following the appointment of new Commissioners in September 2022. During the course of the year, we anticipate that we may identify other areas of interest and as we continue to build our evidence base, we will identify new areas of work for future years, some of which we expect to announce during the course of this year.

We will soon set out our Strategic Plan for the full term of the Commissioners, and in July 2023 will update our Business Plan reporting on the progress made in our first year. The journey has just begun.

To lay solid foundations for the years ahead, we aim for the Commission to be a healthy, sustainable and inclusive organisation that leverages the diverse experiences of our team to continuously improve strategy, analysis and policy development.

We will do this by being:



**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 and suggestions. We treat people with respect, dignity and fairness regardless of their background and 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 some of our own experiences. However, our insight and instinct is backed by good-quality data and analysis to ensure that our findings are robust.



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