



Dear Reader,

It's been a busy few months at the Social Mobility Commission. Although we have had a change in leadership, and I have become Interim Chair, we have remained committed to our existing [business plan](#). The development of our State of the Nation 2023 report is well underway and the team is working hard on getting the analysis ready for publication in summer.

This quarter we have held our first in-person event since the pandemic which was on the labour market value of qualifications. At the event, the Minister for Equalities expressed his support for our call for young people to be provided with access to better information on the labour market outcomes of different further and higher education qualifications.

In addition, we have released our second [podcast](#) episode, this time on the role of contextualised admissions and recruitment. We have also published our [Interim Report](#), summarising the work we have done so far in response to the government's Inclusive Britain policy paper and setting out our actions for the year ahead.

As we set out in our last quarterly commentary, though we can't look closely at every issue with a link to social mobility, we aim to remain abreast of the full conversation. As such, in the commentary below we share some of the key research that has informed our wider thinking.

Alun Francis

Interim Chair of the Social Mobility Commission

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## Data and measurement

After publishing our report on the challenges of collecting and using [data for social mobility](#) last quarter, we have continued to pay close attention to emerging analysis. The IFS has

looked at patterns of [wealth transfers](#), drawing interesting conclusions on how wealth transfers increase the gaps between those with better-off and worse-off parents and entrench inequalities in total resources in early adult life, both in absolute and percentage terms. Similarly, [DEMOS](#) has looked into the wider implications of inheritances and gifts for social mobility, saying that inheritances are expected to make people from low wealth families (those in the bottom fifth of earning) 20% more likely to remain on low incomes.

In the charity space, [Action for Children](#) has produced a report comparing data on child poverty with in-work poverty to pose the question ‘does work pay’? They collated the latest estimates for various income-based poverty and hardship measures with estimates for the number of children in families affected by barriers to work. This ties well with the Learning and Work Institute’s [Missing Workers](#) report which unpicks trends in economic inactivity. They suggest that the government should expand advice and employment support for those outside the labour market who want to work.

## Education and Families

The Commission has continued looking into how [parents can be supported](#) to play a greater role in their children’s education. We were interested to read [recent qualitative analysis](#) from the National Literacy Trust and Chase Bank on how recent economic pressures have affected parent-child reading. Their analysis showed that time and cost pressures have negatively impacted parent-child reading. [KindredSquare’s](#) report on school readiness similarly suggests that young children are starting school with fewer written and verbal skills than in previous years. Their survey of teachers suggests that one cause could be a drop in the average time parents spend reading with their children alongside the impact of covid.

The Department for Education has also released an interesting report on the [economic benefits of effective reception classes in English schools](#). They found that children in the most effective reception classes can expect to earn more than their peers, in later life, and that children who are taught well in their first year of primary school go on to achieve better GCSE results in maths and English. They use this analysis to estimate that the top 2.5% performing reception classes of 27 pupils could add between £50,000 and £200,000 in present value to the UK economy - the equivalent of between £2,000 and £7,500 per pupil. Research findings like these renew our commitment to finding what works in the early years to ensure that we nurture young talent.

Aside from the early years, the Greater London Authority’s report on [effective practice in English and maths for adult learners in London](#) has offered interesting insight into ongoing education. One of their recommendations is that we do more to improve the visibility of English and maths learning opportunities to learners and stakeholders, to stimulate demand.

## Employment and routes to work

This quarter has been a busy quarter for exciting research on the future of the workforce. The Department for Education announced their proposals to support a [careers boost for young people](#) with sessions in primary schools on different careers. The [Sutton Trust](#) has undertaken an analysis of apprenticeships. Their review has found that the number and composition of apprenticeships has changed considerably since 2017 and, after drops in the number of apprenticeships available during the pandemic, numbers have still not recovered.

Along with the decline in apprenticeships, there has been an increase in the number of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) in recent years. Based on [ONS](#) data, the [Resolution Foundation](#) has warned that policy makers need to avoid an overly narrow focus on addressing labour shortages by boosting the employment prospects of over 50s and instead need to consider the different types of support different groups of young 'NEET' people will need to thrive.

To coincide with National Careers Week 2023 (6-11 March), The Careers & Enterprise Company published their annual state of the nation report, '[Ready for the Future: A review of Careers Education in England 21/22](#)'. The report draws on data and insight from young people, schools and colleges and employers to look at the current state of the careers education system. The report shows a clear relationship between high quality careers education and positive post-16 destinations, with the effect being twice as strong for schools serving the most economically disadvantaged students.

On 9th February we published our research report on the [labour market value of FE and HE qualifications](#), where we reviewed the current evidence and conducted our own analysis of young people's earnings after studying for qualifications in higher or further education. We found that, while most HE and FE qualifications were generally associated with increased future earnings, there were some courses which were associated with negative value-add, suggesting that some students may have been financially better off not attending university. Our associated [Interim Report](#) called for better information to be made available for prospective HE and FE students, to help them to make the best possible choices for their future.

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