



Working with class: The state of social immobility in graduate recruitment

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Foreword

This report makes an important contribution to today's discussion around diversity, social mobility and inclusion in British businesses: important because it brings together insights from students and graduates, experts, and graduate employers. In doing so we reveal the tensions that exist across these three groups.

As a relatively new member of the team, what attracted me to Debut was its demonstrable passion and clear commitment to levelling the employment playing field and creating opportunity for all. This report makes it abundantly clear that, despite all of the good work being done by recruitment teams and individuals, progress is too slow and there is much, much, more to be done on improving diversity, social mobility and inclusion in British businesses.

As James Turner, CEO at the Sutton Trust told us, "every part of the (graduate recruitment) process is a greater challenge for people from disadvantaged backgrounds". At Debut, we don't think that's acceptable, so it's great to share examples of recruitment best practice with you.

Our candidates told us about the difficulties of decoding an opaque cultural fit that seems designed to keep them out. One that expects them to change who they are. But the benefits of a 'cultural add' approach vastly outweigh such narrow thinking, while urging employers to consider just how important working culture is to young talent today.

At the heart of our thinking at Debut is the need to improve social mobility in the UK. This is, of course, an important dimension of diversity, but also one that adds another vital layer to all of the other dimensions. While we are clear that social mobility is a significant historic challenge, that is no excuse for continued inertia.

Our collective responsibility is to help as many young people as possible to have "unlimited ambition" and provide visible references that make that a practical reality.

We know this requires investment and resources in educational outreach, but no business is too small, busy or poorly resourced not to be able to play a part.

While this is a clear moral issue, it's also a major business and economic one. Perhaps if people start to talk more assertively about the costs to the UK economy of not improving social mobility or optimising diversity then this may change. Within the report we have referenced evidence that the cost to the UK economy of not improving social mobility or optimising diversity equates to £270bn per year.

I hope this report will provide valuable insights and inspire you to address the UK's social immobility challenge for today's students and graduates.



James Bennett, CEO at Debut



Research approach

Debut would like to thank all of those who generously gave their time and shared their experience and insight in support of this project.

We are especially grateful to the following individuals and organisations for participating in direct telephone interviews;

Meta Versluys, Assistant HR Manager, **BKL**

Maria Da Costa, EMEAR Talent Acquisition Lead, **Cisco**

Alice Scott, Chief Executive, **Development Beyond Learning**

Andri Stephanou, Student Employer Brand & Attraction Senior Manager, **EY**

Charlotte Leer, Emerging Talent Recruitment manager, **HSBC**

James Turner, Chief Executive, **The Sutton Trust**

Shefali Roy, Chief Operating Officer, **TrueLayer**

Gill Hardy, Head of Executive Talent EMEA, **WPP**

We would also like to thank the young talent who supported the project. This report includes insights from a dedicated online workshop with six current students and recent graduates, and through an online survey completed by 165 Debut users aged 18 to 25.

All input from employers and candidates were collected in April 2019.

Introduction

Setting the scene

Debut has explored the terrain through the primary lens of diversity, social mobility, and inclusion. This complements previous research by Debut including our pioneering candidate segmentation.

We invest in this research partly for our own benefit. To improve the service we provide to our candidates and the strategic support we provide to our employer clients. But given our mission to level the playing field and provide opportunities for all there can be little doubt as to the benefit of sharing such work more broadly.

At Debut, we are passionate about the opportunity and believe we must unlock the potential of the widest possible cross-section of society. We know that this makes business sense, we're sure you probably do too.

Yet despite the high profile given to the subject over the last twenty years, the reality is that progress has been far too slow.

The British business community remains overwhelmingly pale, male, stale and middle class. In fact, there are more Chief Executives called Dave, and Andrew, across the FTSE 350 than there are women!

We are very clear about the historic and contemporary scale of the challenge. Historic in relation to UK social mobility, contemporary with regard to the multiple dimensions of diversity. But we are equally clear that this is not an excuse for a lack of action.

We know the challenge can appear daunting. In this report we've provided practical advice and insights from graduate employers and experts in the space, together with original insights from candidates and students themselves. You may at times note a tension between these perspectives, not least in the area of inclusive business cultures.

In fact, our research suggests that 35% of young people are deterred from applying for roles at organisations with a predominately middle to upper class profile. That's 2.4 million young people extrapolated out – an enormous segment to be neglected at a time when skills crises are at an all-time high. Call it what you will, we call this professional exclusion.

At Debut we are lucky to work with a range of ambitious and progressive employers. Every day we are impressed by the sincerity and commitment of individual talent managers and their teams. We see, and have shared here, a variety of innovative techniques being adopted across the recruitment process, including the contrasting roles of contextual selection and blind recruitment techniques.

And we know that where Debut can make a real difference is during early stage attraction and engagement of young talent. You know how competitive the market for early talent is today and expanding the talent pipeline can be a vital source of competitive advantage.

More broadly, genuine, sustained, change within the UK has to start much further upstream, especially at education level. It is vital to long term success that all businesses play their part in increasing awareness and understanding of the world of work, igniting ambition and inspiring success, providing diverse role models and new opportunities for experience, learning and networking.

No business is too small, too busy or too poorly resourced to play a part, and there are many specialist organisations and partnership opportunities for those that need support.

Much like younger generations, you might describe Debut as 'digitally and socially native', with much of our early engagement work designed to help young talent better understand and appreciate their strengths, and to support candidates on their journey to application readiness. Yet even we have been surprised by the response to increased digitalisation within the recruitment process. It is clear that there is more to be done to meet their expectations for personalisation, responsiveness and relevance.

And while we can't directly affect the inclusive culture aspect of diversity and inclusion (D&I), we do have a duty to our candidates and employer partners to highlight just how critical an issue this is for young talent. Deloitte's research, for example, found that in contrast to Gen Y (Millennials – born 1981-1995), for Gen Z (born 1996-2010) the working culture was more important than pay and benefits to their choice of employer.

Put simply, D without I makes no sense, and can only lead to a revolving door scenario, damaging individuals and organisations alike. In fact, every time that door revolves, another group of candidates will be deterred from applying to your business, such is the power of peer-to-peer advice and experience.

1. https://www.exeter.ac.uk/news/featurednews/title_707873_en.html

Previous Debut research revealed that one third of potential female candidates are deterred from applying to companies with an egregious gender pay gap – while a significantly larger group will have had their confidence in the business damaged significantly (90%+).

As you will see this extends to other areas, with a particular issue being the transparent communication of starting salaries. 'Competitive salary' is just not good enough and lends itself to a lack of trust. Not without good reason given, recently published research from Bath University² speaks of a two-tier graduate recruitment system including significant pay differentials by university, gender and ethnicity. This is in the context of increasing BAME recruitment, wider university access and greater gender parity in recruitment.

Little wonder that many young prospects are cynical as to the extent to which leading companies are sincere in their stated objectives. Employers underestimate this generation at their peril. They are savvy and intuitive interpreters of what they see in the world; comfortable with consumerism, highly brand literate, digitally native, socially and globally aware.

- 2,316,475 students at UK Higher Education Institutions (HEI) in 2016/2017
- 757,300 students received Higher Education Qualifications in 2016/17
- 70% of undergraduate students go straight into work
- 74% of graduates are employed in professional jobs (16/17)
- 91% are in work or study six months after graduation
- 55% of 1st degree students are female; but only 17-18% in Computer Science, Engineering and Tech
- 10% of people aged 16 to 24 years do not identify as (exclusively) heterosexual
- 18% increase in UK domiciled BAME student enrolments between 2013-14 and 2017-18
- 3% decline in UK domiciled White student enrolments between 2013-14 and 2017-18
- 24% BAME share of all UK HE students 2017-2018
- 13% of 2017-18 UK HE entrants had a disability
- 19% of UK working age adults are disabled
- 38% increase in students with a disability between 2013-14 and 2017-18
- 5% of disadvantaged young people enter the most selective HE institutions – vs 12% on average
- 26% of young people from low income families enter HE compared to 43% of their better-off peers
- 64% of state A-level students entered HE compared to 81% in the Independent sector (2016-17)
- 22% of state school students went to the most selective institutions compared to 61% in independent sector

2. <https://www.bath.ac.uk/announcements/diversity-figures-reveal-deep-seated-inequalities-internally-within-elite-multinational-firms/>

Understanding diversity and inclusion

It is important at the outset to be clear on the primary dimensions typically referred to in relation to diversity including age, ethnicity, gender, impairment, race, and sexuality.

For many businesses, possibly addressing the subject from a legal or reputational perspective, one or more of these dimensions will form the basis of their approach. For example, increasing the number of women on leadership teams or increasing the share of BAME employment candidates.

Yet the appreciation and understanding of diversity continues to develop, such that today organisations are also looking at regionality, social mobility and neurodiversity as important primary dimensions to consider.

In fact, it is argued that there are as many as 38 dimensions of diversity with the most visible, primary, differences regarded as the tip of the iceberg. Once we start to consider the intersections between all of these dimensions, “the individual ceases to be a member of a certain nation, ethnicity, race or gender group and becomes a unique multidimensional kaleidoscope.”³

Which is a wonderful way of capturing the shift from a formal or legal approach to diversity and toward a truly inclusive working culture that celebrates and embraces all human difference.

Some people talk about diversity issues as like peeling the layers of an onion. The following definitions may help to see how the concept becomes increasingly complex:

- **“Many different types of people being included in something”**
- **“Any dimension that can be used to differentiate groups and people from each other”**
- **“The collective, all-encompassing mix of human differences and similarities along any given dimension”**
- **“That which differentiates one group of people from another along primary and secondary dimension”**

Even such a brief overview of the different definitions and interpretations of diversity reveals the challenges facing organisations. While a measurement-driven approach will tend to focus on the primary, and most visible, dimensions of diversity, a committed ethical approach will go deeper into the intersections between different dimensions – for

example, gender, ethnicity and social background – in order to build a truly diverse workforce and inclusive culture.

The issue persists even for more progressive, ethically committed organisations. It is a simple fact that cultural transformation is hard work, requiring sustained leadership commitment to see it through.

Maria Da Costa, EMEAR Talent Acquisition Lead, shared with us the work being done at Cisco to build such a Culture of Inclusion, emphasising that this is a living and breathing philosophy rather than a policy aspiration with their latest thinking crystallised in the Cisco Principles launched this year.

Perhaps the key piece of advice to increase and develop diversity in business is clarity in what you are trying to achieve, as espoused by James Turner, Sutton Trust CEO, when he says:

“You need to be clear on what the issues and objectives are for your organisation and then decide on the approach that you want to take in addressing each.”

Such advice is realised in practice by Meta Versluys, Assistant HR Manager at BKL, who referred to the simple fact that 19 of the 20 company partners are male – a clear problem that needs to be addressed.

It was particularly interesting to hear our expert interviewees share their understanding of what diversity really means in the context of careers and especially recruitment processes.

As such we heard Gill Hardy, Head of Executive Talent EMEA, talk about the WPP ambition being, “to level the playing field, enabling as wide a range of candidates as possible to show their potential (value).”

Note the focus on recruiting for individual potential and how that subtly shifts the emphasis away from backward facing educational attainment and relevant work experience. For some recruiters, simply narrowing their focus to university achievements, experience and results alone – rather than earlier education – immediately

3. Maier C 2002. *Leading Diversity: A Conceptual Framework*. St. Gallen: Institute for Leadership ND hr Management

increases the diversity of candidates, for others this is complemented by contextual academic scoring, provided by specialist partners.

Importantly Hardy highlighted that WPP work to avoid focusing on relevant work experience – or the type of deliberate leadership experience only received by the socially advantaged – to the exclusion of the paid-employment which is a necessity for many less advantaged students. As such WPP candidates are encouraged to think through what they have gained and learned from all experiences and work undertaken.

For Charlotte Leer, Emerging Talent Recruitment Manager UK, at HSBC, “within the broad diversity concept, it is diversity of thinking that has the greatest positive business impact.” Arguing that this requires an experiential as well as a demographic approach.

Alice Scott, Chief Executive at Development Beyond Learning, goes deeper in her definition of diversity, arguing that diversity is “about how we can help everyone to have limitless ambition.”

Scott went on to share one of her favourite quotes,

“you cannot be what you cannot see.”

Andri Stephanou, Student Employer Brand and Attraction Senior Manager from EY, also picked up on the importance of visibility for candidates and new employees stating, “it’s really important for people to be able to see different role models in practice, it supports ambition and positive aspirations, for instance thinking ‘I can do this too, I can achieve success’.”

More broadly, from a socio-economic perspective, it speaks to the importance of improved careers education, information and insight at school level – especially in those schools across the UK with little history of sending children into higher education or on to professional careers. The emphasis here is on improving social mobility by improving awareness and understanding of career options and requirements.

All of our interviewees talked about the positive momentum in the market with regard to diversity and inclusion issues, with James Turner, Chief Executive at the Sutton Trust reflecting that the debate had become broader and more sophisticated over the last five years, “we are discussing more issues around top end

mobility, not just access to university but also high-level apprenticeships, for example. And the debate has become more nuanced, moving beyond the bald facts of the challenge and toward discussion and experimentation with new solution.”

And yet, Turner reflects that progress is slow and we are not yet seeing positive outcomes, such that,

“the truth is that relatively disadvantaged young people are still struggling to get ahead and face worse outcomes than their more advantaged peers.”

In essence, an individual’s life chances continue to be significantly determined by their parents’ life-experience. In fact, the UK has one of the lowest levels of social mobility in the world, as reflected in numerous international surveys. OECD analysis suggests that it would take 150 years for a child from a poor UK family to earn the national average⁴ and that global social mobility has stalled if not gone into reverse as a result of widening inequality.

For a similar, quantified, perspective on the challenges of delivering on diversity, take the example of London’s Metropolitan Police. The Met are striving to create a diverse workforce that reflects the communities that it serves. Yet, at the current rate of progress, it is estimated that this will take at least another 100 years⁵.

Speaking with the Sutton Trust on the suggestion that UK social mobility is unchanged in 800 years⁶, Turner reflected, “the UK is a particularly class-based society, and this hasn’t changed significantly over time [but] what we have seen are periods of greater or lesser mobility.”

The latest work from the UK Social Mobility Commission highlights the fact that individuals with a professional background are 80% more likely to get a professional job than their less privileged peers.

Even when those from a working-class background get a professional start, they are paid on average 17% less than their privileged peers.

4. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/jun/15/social-mobility-in-richest-countries-has-stalled-since-1990s>

5. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/feb/19/met-police-disproportionately-white-for-another-100-years>

6. [Surnames and Social Mobility \(Clark, Cummins, 2013\)](#)

All of which only serves to emphasise the scale of the challenge facing today's recruiters and employers, but also, crucially, our education system. In fact, Turner argues that the key factor behind weak social mobility in the UK is:

"The de facto segregation of education, not just between public and private schools but also within the state – system and between locations, meaning the affluent and advantaged are able to cluster together, while the less advantaged are taught in different schools."

With such an overview, there can be little doubt as to the significant challenges and complexities of delivering on a diversity and inclusion remit in the UK, and yet we have also, already, heard some practical tips as to how to navigate this terrain effectively in terms of clarity and focus.

This is all the more important when considering the limited resources available to many recruiters to deliver on their aspirations for improved diversity, mobility and inclusion.

Yet the scale of the challenge is mirrored by the size of the opportunity, for the individual lives affected, for communities and society, and for individual businesses in terms of competitive advantage.

It is a hugely competitive recruitment market out there with too many employers seeing diminishing returns from traditional channels and routes to market. Yet today's digital technologies and social channels offer a powerful, personal, highly scalable and cost-effective route to the widest possible audience enabling progressive employers to connect with local schools and international talent alike.

Recruitment process innovation

Many companies today are changing their approach to recruitment in response to the diversity imperative. We have for example already referenced WPP's commitment to hiring for potential while both EY and HSBC emphasised their focus on individual candidate strengths.

Blind recruitment techniques (intended to counter the role of unconscious biases in selection) remove identification details from applications. In this way they aim to create a level playing field, or an objective framework and to support the selection of the best talent, no matter the individual profile.

The seminal example of blind recruitment in practice dates back to 1952 and the Boston Symphony Orchestra. In order to address the enduring lack of women selected for the orchestra blind recruitment (auditioning behind a

screen) was deployed with positive results – all the more so when heels were removed from the equation!

Such a light hearted reference belies the significance of our unconscious biases, with only 32% of UK recruiters confident that they are not prejudiced when it comes to hiring staff and extensive research showing the impact of, variously, gender, white sounding names, religious indicators and more on selection decisions.

Blind recruitment practices are not without their critics⁷ but are being increasingly adopted by employers, with Adecco estimating that 35% of UK businesses are using some form of blind recruitment while estimates suggest \$8bn has been spent globally on unconscious bias training initiatives.

HSBC are enthusiastic supporters of blind recruitment, while EY have gone as far as to remove the individual final interview from their recruitment process in favour of an assessment centre overseen by five moderators.

In contrast to blind recruitment techniques, we have contextual selection and admissions practices which very deliberately seek to factor into a student's scores a measure of the educational context in which they were achieved – an approach pioneered by Cambridge University. For the Sutton Trust there are important benefits of this approach in supporting a commitment to social mobility.

It is a simple fact that someone from a less advantaged background, attending state school in a relatively deprived area, will have to overcome significant barriers to reach the same levels of attainment as their more privileged and privately educated peers. Contextual scoring seeks to take this into account and so to better reflect achievement and future potential.

Understood in such terms, contextual practices, like blind recruitment techniques, also seek to level the playing field between candidates. The difference being that a contextual approach is based on a deeper appreciation and understanding of inequality and dis/advantage.

For Scott at Development Beyond Learning, what is really important here is to change the context around decision making and this extends to include addressing the power dynamics within a selection panel (the HIPPO effect⁸),

7. <https://www.peoplemanagement.co.uk/long-reads/articles/blind-recruitment-secret-perfect-hire>

8. <https://corporate-rebels.com/hippo-effect/>

using a diverse interview panel, and avoiding any shortlist with no diverse candidates or with only one. Either only serves to reinforce existing biases.

Workplace culture

The scale of the diversity and inclusion challenge is reflected in the feedback from our candidates and students.

There is little doubt as to the interest in workplace cultures among young talent, with many highlighting issues around culture within the recruitment process. The classic expression of this surrounds the idea of cultural fit – with the message appearing to be that THEY need to fit into OUR culture.

This speaks to our unconscious, similarity, bias, which Scott of Development Beyond Learning emphasised is activated even more intensely at moments of stress (e.g. during selection decisions), and reflects a wider body of literature critiquing homogenous cultures predicated on cultural fit rather than cultural add – with the latter switching the emphasis toward difference and what an individual can add to the company culture, “only those employers willing to stretch the boundaries of their culture by hiring those who add something different will experience true diversity”⁹.

Such an approach is endorsed by Da Costa at Cisco, who emphasises the importance of hiring teams being brave and taking risks in recruitment – while acknowledging that this is not always enabled by restrictive short-term targets and incentives. In this view businesses need to balance short- and long-term goals and so enable their hiring teams to be brave, to hire for potential, and to take risks on young talent.

Increasingly businesses are recognising the vital role of culture in relation to diversity and inclusion. After all, a failure to develop an inclusive cultural approach will only lead to a revolving door scenario with potentially damaging consequences for individuals and hiring companies. For example, in 2018 WPP hired its first Group Culture Director, clearly signalling the importance of the working environment and culture to their business.

Cultural transformation is a huge challenge of course and there can be little doubt that where a business is natively diverse this can be a significant advantage. As Shefali Roy, COO at TrueLayer commented, “it can be very hard for established businesses to change direction and create a truly diverse and inclusive culture.”

We have already briefly referenced the cultural work being

undertaken at Cisco as explained to us by Da Costa. The Cisco Principles are an impressive body of work and are complemented by a People Deal for all employees, created on the premise that “culture is a two-way street”. As such the deal makes it clear what is expected of employees and what they can expect in return.

What stood out from the Cisco approach is that these cultural principles are directly integrated into performance reviews, while Cisco have also, through their Office of Inclusion and Collaboration, enabled employees to anonymously speak up and to open cases regarding breaches of the principle – by whomever within the organisation.

This is clearly a multi-layered commitment designed to address one of the critiques voiced by our young talent. They reported that while they had met many inspiring company leaders (passionate and sincere in their commitment to diversity and inclusion) they subsequently felt that this message was not reaching or resonating with middle-management – creating a disconnect between the brand promise and the reality on arrival.

Versluys from BKL, added a mid-sized business perspective to this stating, “the whole company is engaged with the D&I approach through away days and similar. The business does not have diversity or inclusion policies as such. BKL focus on embedding these principles into our business culture.”

While this, highly differentiating approach, speaks to the dynamics of a smaller business it also speaks to candidate expectations of big businesses. As Leer at HSBC said,

“for young people today diversity is not a thing, not an issue; it’s their everyday reality and they want to work for companies where it’s also an everyday reality.”

There is a well known phrase from Verna Myer, a USA Diversity Consultant hired by Netflix last year, that says, “diversity is being invited to the party while inclusion is being asked to dance.”

While that in itself is a scenario that most people can relate to, others have added another line so that it reads, “diversity is being invited to the party, inclusion is being asked to dance, belonging is dancing like no-one is watching.”

9. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbeshumanresourcescouncil/2018/04/03/the-benefits-and-shortcomings-of-blind-hiring-in-the-recruitment-process/#4378c62738a3>

This idea of belonging is particularly powerful in relation to business culture and one that Scott of Development Beyond Learning is particularly interested in. In fact, she highlighted that people today are starting to speak about, "I&D in recognition that diversity without inclusion is bad for people and bad for business – this leads to an accelerated appreciation of the importance of belonging."

As we go on to discuss the business and economic rationale for diversity and inclusion it is vital that we don't lose sight of such a simple, familiar, and yet powerful concept as belonging. We are sure that everyone can relate to the relationship between such a sense of security and our performance, in whatever field or walk of life.

What does belonging mean in practice? Perhaps that a Muslim employee doesn't find it difficult to ask for a prayer space or to explain that they don't drink alcohol and so are not interested in going to the pub – a painful personal experience shared by one of our candidates during our research.

Indeed, Leer at HSBC noted that the most important part of job hunting is finding the right working culture for you as an individual. As such it is imperative for businesses to be open and honest about their workplace culture, ensuring that all candidates are able to make informed choices.



The business and economic case for diversity

Particularly striking in our research was the confidence with which our interviewees confirmed that D&I has clear and obvious business benefits. For example, Versluys from BKL argued that we all know the benefits in terms of culture, productivity and customer satisfaction but went on to say, “a diverse and inclusive culture is more enjoyable, and happy people do better work and provide better client service; which in turn creates happier and more satisfied customers.”

This perspective was endorsed by Roy at TrueLayer, who agreed that authentically diverse and inclusive environments are much more fun. Roy also shared an interesting design and technology perspective, arguing that one of the key issues that should drive a commitment to D&I is, “product differentiation, without diversity you find the same groups of people designing products for themselves. Diverse products deliver diverse revenue streams, and without diverse teams you will build deficient products that aren’t as good as they could be.”

Having worked at Apple, Roy is well placed to reflect on their commitment to exhaustive design testing and product excellence, but also to note their continued challenges in terms of the diversity of their leadership, design and engineering teams, with very little female representation, for example. In fact, across the tech landscape what stands out for Roy is the lack of female and especially BAME female business founders.

This flies in the face of the evidence that shows that start-up teams including at least one female outperform their male peers significantly¹⁰. In addition, BCG research¹¹ shows that women seeking investment capital are likely to receive less than half of the sum given to male business founders – despite generating greater revenues, and, as above, outperforming all male start-ups by 63%. This is unsurprising when we hear that only 8% of the Venture Capital (VC) community are female and only 1% are BAME¹².

Both examples, product design and VC investments, highlight the importance of diversity to decision making and the avoidance of group thinking. It is in this sense that we hear organisations talk about the importance of their teams reflecting the diversity of their customers and communities.

In considering the business case for diversity the McKinsey Global Institute has produced some important work, with the 2018 Delivering Through Diversity report serving to update the analysis undertaken as part of the 2015 Why Diversity Matters paper.

As they reflect¹³, many successful companies now regard I&D – note the reversal – as a source of competitive advantage and specifically as a key enabler of growth. And yet progress has been slow since the 2015 study with only marginal gains in female and BAME executive leadership representation among those companies studied.

McKinsey report that the top quartile for gender diversity outperform their peers by 21% on profitability – with ethnic diversity leading to 33% outperformance – while those in the bottom quartile for diversity (gender or ethnicity) are 29% less likely to outperform their peers.

At the UK level, the McKinsey research shows a significant gap between the 22% of UK university students and the 8% of UK company executives who identify as BAME, while also highlighting that over 50% of the UK businesses studied had zero BAME representation on their board or executive teams.

Overall the McKinsey work highlights that more diverse companies are:

- **Better able to attract talent**
- **Seeing improvements in customer orientation**
- **Seeing improved employee satisfaction**
- **Delivering better decisions**
- **Securing their licence to operate**

10. <https://www.businessinsider.com/female-founders-outperform-male-peers-2015-7?r=US&IR=T>

11. <https://www.bcg.com/publications/2018/why-women-owned-startups-are-better-bet.aspx>

12. HBR: The Other Diversity Dividend (Jul-Aug 2018), Paul Gompers & Silpa Kovvali

13. McKinsey & Co, Delivering Through Diversity, Jan 2018

The value of socio-economic diversity

Turning to take a closer look at the UK market we are fortunate to have some excellent analysis available from CEBR in partnership with INvolve. The 2018 Value of Diversity report¹⁴ aims to do exactly as the title suggests.

The findings are explosive, suggesting that the most diverse UK companies – across the dimensions of ethnicity, gender and sexuality – are 45% more likely to outperform their industry average than their least diverse peers.

The measure of financial performance chosen for the analysis is turnover per capita.

Also, of interest, is the finding that those companies with the most developed diversity policies were 54% more likely to outperform their industry average than those of their peers with the least developed policies. This strong correlation suggests that for larger and more complex organisations, in contrast to the SME community, policies really do make a significant difference, especially to the inclusivity dynamic.

Overall there is a clear recognition of the relationship between diversity and inclusion and that to achieve the best results requires a commitment to active management, policies, guidelines and processes to be in place. An interesting parallel drawn by the CEBR and INvolve, is in relation to city economic performance.

The UK is seen to be among the leading nations in the world for ethnic and cultural diversity, with London today regarded as a Global City, with 40%+ of the population having a BAME identity.

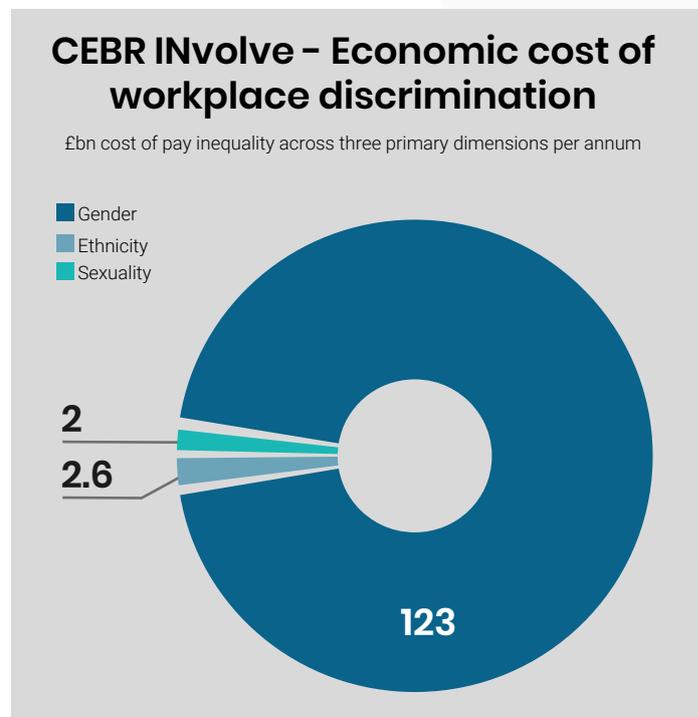
This echoes comments from Roy at TrueLayer, reflecting on the differences between working in London and Silicon Valley. Roy contrasted the physical nature of London with the socially disconnected Silicon Valley bubble. While London may be changing, the physical fact of proximity with diverse individuals and communities is inescapable, not least given the high use of public transport in the city. In Shefali's view, in London at its best, "people are

confronted with a diverse world every day and can see that they and their work are but a small part of the whole."

CEBR's analysis finds a 20% gender pay gap (Full Time Equivalent) between men and women, in line with findings from the Institute of Fiscal Studies, while also exploring the gender education gap in parallel. Worth noting here that the Learning & Educational Outcomes data from ONS (2018) reveals a 30% gender pay gap emerging within 10 years of graduation.

The ethnic picture was much more mixed with Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Black groups – the three most negatively impacted – while Chinese, Indian and Mixed-Ethnicities are doing the most well. In terms of sexuality, the evidence base is limited but it appears that those who are bi-sexual or other are significantly negatively impacted while gay earnings are aligned with heterosexual earnings.

The overall figures that CEBR have produced suggest that such workplace discrimination is costing individuals and the UK economy as a whole a figure approaching £130bn. This includes an estimated £123bn arising from gender disparities, £2.6bn from ethnicity and £2.0bn from sexuality disparities.



In fact, subsequent research from the Resolution Foundation in 2018 suggested that the BAME pay gap is costing the UK economy £3.2bn.

14. <https://www.out-standing.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/The-Value-of-Diversity-Final-09.04.18.pdf>

The cost of low social mobility?

As big as those numbers are, they are at least matched by the estimated cost of poor social mobility in the UK. Analysis undertaken by BCG, on behalf of the Sutton Trust back in 2010, estimated that on current trends, poor social mobility would cost the UK economy £140bn per annum by 2050 – a cumulative loss of £1.3trn over the 40 years of the projection.

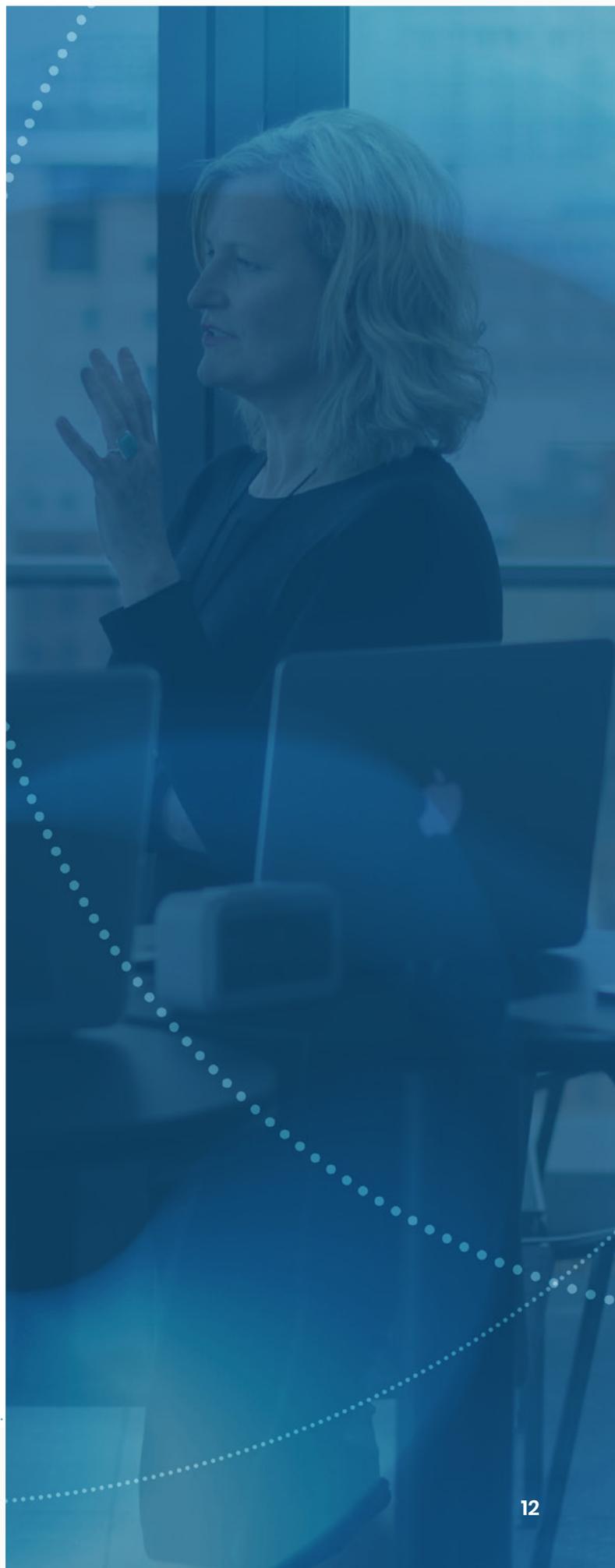
This analysis is based on the opportunity cost of not bringing below average students in the UK to the national average educational performance.

Put together that adds up to a highly conservative estimate of an at least £270bn per annum loss to the UK economy by not optimising diversity and inclusion by 2050. A cumulative loss of at least £2.5trn by 2050.

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Consider at least two additional factors to put these figures into context:

- **The first is the overall loss to the UK economy of the economic and social potential that could be unlocked by diverse leadership teams, diverse role models, and unlimited ambition among young people. This would surely only drive more growth into UK GDP figures while positively impacting on wider social costs.**
- **Secondly, the analysis of economic discrimination only covers the three dimensions of gender, ethnicity and sexuality with age, disability and neurodiversity obvious additional dimensions to be considered among a much longer list.**



Understanding the audience

At the heart of the literature surrounding Gen Z (those born from 1996-) is a focus on their individuality and fluid approach to self-definition and identity, most striking in the context of gender definition and sexual orientation. This has immediate and practical implications for recruiters and employers, but also and especially in terms of building a genuinely inclusive culture. Note the CEBR evidence of pay discrimination impacting on people identifying as bisexual (or other).

Given the opportunity that we have had to talk to a number of experts and employers in the market, it was an obvious line of enquiry to get their thoughts on the attitudes and attributes of today's generation of candidates.

Perhaps unsurprisingly one of the most frequent adjectives used was curiosity, including reference to a commitment to continuous learning. Hardy at WPP was one to recognise this trait in today's candidates but also to discuss a very different learning style to those of previous generations:

"We recognise the need to respond to this positive trend in terms of providing varied learning opportunities, leveraging disparate sources of knowledge and ideas, covering a broader scope, using multiple formats, and including both professional and personal development topics."

Hardy also identified an attribute that covers most young people – the demand for regular and ongoing feedback on performance and progress. While many seem to see this as a negative attribute, Hardy embraces the positive motivation in terms of a commitment to personal progression, especially in the early years in a role and within a large, complex organisation.

For our candidates, of course, their appetite for feedback is specifically related to the recruitment process – with

many reporting that they have been particularly let down in this specific area.

While Roy at TrueLayer stated, "young people today seem to care more, are more curious or inquisitive, and are definitely engaged with sustainability, for example."

Roy made an interesting point about a loss or lack of boundaries, such as the blurring lines between work and home. Not only through digital and social connectivity but also because young co-workers, especially in London and major cities, are increasingly living together in shared accommodation too.

Extending from that point Leer at HSBC spoke of the importance of flexible working to all employees today, with HSBC having invested significantly in a secure technology infrastructure to make this a practical, productive reality for as many workers as possible.

This point was supported by Da Costa at Cisco, reflecting that today's candidates are focused on work-life balance in a way that previous generations were not. There is less willingness to sacrifice all in the pursuit of career than there may have been in the past. She sees this as a positive trend, noting the link to mental health and wellbeing awareness.

More broadly, Leer at HSBC argued that, "candidates today are brand consumers; they are looking for brands that fit with their values and principles."

While Andri at EY described today's candidates as, "super keen, very savvy, ahead of the game" and Da Costa at Cisco also spoke of a focus on "meaningful work".

In discussing today's young talent, it's impossible to avoid the importance of digital and especially social channels, with employers all recognising that you have to be relevant and visible to their lives. And yet, as we will go on to

explore, there are different ways of doing digital, and this audience expects a great deal of brands in this space.

By the time they graduate, many, if not most, of the Gen Z cohort will have had a smartphone for at least 10 years and have been using it to run their digital and social lives for much of that time. It is no coincidence that you will see significant reference to Gen Z waking up to issues surrounding social media and smartphone addiction and the downsides of such heavy consumption. All of which means that there are behavioural heuristics and expectations that can feel like a mystery to those observing from the distance of Millennial middle-age.

One employer conversation referred to candidates sharing questions and even answers across social media with little or no regard for the competitive nature of the scenario. Conversely, we have also heard of candidates boasting about their multiple job offers as the pursuit of the perfect job becomes another public form of self-expression.

This immersion in ephemeral mobile and social communications can be directly related to the growing phenomenon of 'ghosting' within the recruitment market – with candidates simply not turning up to interviews, assessment centres or similar appointments. This also speaks to the blurring of traditional work-life boundaries as discussed above.

To which point it was particularly interesting to hear Hardy at WPP talk of the importance of sometimes asking people to lean into the things that they would rather avoid including networking and face-to-face meetings.

Scott at Development Beyond Learning sounded a note of caution with regard to generational analyses, not least as no-one likes to be stereotyped in such a way, least of all the very generations that have been brought up to celebrate their uniqueness. Alice has a very simple test for such stereotypes; "you should always ask yourself whether you would say that of a gender, ethnic group or sexuality".

Versluys at BKL recognised that there are differences between the generations but works to educate and advise colleagues on how to work with such differences. What they absolutely don't want to do at BKL is to impose a homogenous culture and so to create a team of look-a-likes – exactly what some candidates feel they experience with some companies.

In a similar spirit, Da Costa at Cisco welcomed "the fresh perspectives that challenge other generations".

Principles, values and brands

Generation Z are particularly strongly associated with their values and principles, together with their willingness to take ownership of their choices and actions. Put simply they are aware of their power in the market and choose to use that in terms of the places they spend their money and the brands that they support. The same applies to their attitude toward employment of course.

Examples of global Gen Z political activists include Greta Thunberg and Malala Yousafzai – with sustainability and women's rights both high-profile causes for today's younger generations.

Candidates can today benefit from insight into any large company's gender pay performance, with Debut research suggesting that 1 in 3 female candidates would not pursue an application with a company with an egregious gender pay gap.

But that statistic is only the tip of the reputational iceberg with over 90% of women having strongly negative perceptions of such businesses, as well as almost 2 in 3 male candidates, while 15% of male candidates say they would also be deterred from applying to such a business.

And while transparency has been mandated on big businesses in this specific context there are many other areas that would also benefit. A key example is that of the graduate starting salary – often simply communicated as a competitive salary.

In our survey, candidates made it clear that they find this frustrating with two-thirds saying that this lack of transparency would put them off applying. Many of the reasons provided are highly pragmatic in terms of working out affordability across housing, transport and other issues, but others hint at an underlying lack of trust – one respondent noted, "I am worried that by stating competitive salary they will pay me less as a woman." Note the latest data from the Social Mobility Commission, such that graduates from working class backgrounds entering professional occupations earn on average 17% less than their more privileged peers. And yet, amid the mistrust, there is still hope that



businesses can step up, fill the political void and make a positive impact, while there is also a huge emphasis on the importance and value of an authentic, diverse and inclusive culture within an organisation, and the positive value driven by diverse leadership teams.

Younger generations don't demand diversity or equality, they expect it. And perhaps the most striking expression of this reality occurred during a candidate workshop when the moderator was asked to explain what was meant by 'employers striving to increase the diversity of their pipeline'.

Deloitte research¹⁵ makes clear that there has been a significant shift in priorities between Gen Y and Gen Z with the latter significantly more likely to prioritise the workplace culture, ahead of pay and benefits. A key point here, as reflected by Leer at HSBC is that today's candidates are "brand consumers" and highly literate ones at that; they will rapidly evaluate a brand against their key metrics, be they values, principles or culture in order to rule them in or out of their consideration set.

Debut candidate segmentation

It is also really important to be aware of the spectrum of audience needs as reflected in an innovative candidate segmentation undertaken by Debut. This revealing piece of work primarily designed to enable us to better understand and respond to the needs of candidates contains important insights for recruiters.

The central finding across the project is that over 70% of graduate candidates don't feel sufficiently supported through their journey, while 49% of students don't feel ready to apply when applications open – with reasons including self-confidence, self-awareness in terms of skills, and lack of market knowledge.

15. <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/global/Documents/About-Deloitte/gx-2018-millennial-survey-report.pdf>

Seeing the world from the other side

Our research with students and graduates reveals that candidates recognise how ultra-competitive the market is and are disappointed as to the opportunities they are given to express, and so differentiate, themselves.

In fact, only 36% agreed that they were “able to express yourself as an individual during the application process”, with 66% agreeing that “during face-to-face interviews you have to make changes to who you are and how you come across to make a good impression”.

This is quite the contrast with the aspirations of many employers and recruiters in the market today, and will be a disappointment to many, but is supported by further reflections including:

“We need more opportunities to show who we are and our potential, applications often don’t show true abilities”

“Applicants should be given a slot to express themselves because filling in an application form or submitting your CV is just not enough”

Supporting this critique, as we have referenced, are important insights into the centrality of company culture at interview and how this can be used to exclude people based on opaque and questionable criteria, with some even reflecting that “it makes you feel you can’t be a part of it”.

Thus, the work being done by employers to develop and promote an inclusive working culture is, in the experience of our candidates, not always reflected during the recruitment process. Indeed, some candidates spoke of feeling that there was a “demand for you to fit into their culture”.

This is a key area for employers to consider, with workplace culture a key priority for Gen Z candidates, as seen in the Deloitte research.

Equally with such high levels of sharing among students and candidates there is a clear danger of reputational damage from sustained negative experiences.

Another key theme surrounded the investment required of every applicant, as acknowledged by Leer at HSBC, whose own research suggests an average of 90 minutes is spent on every graduate application. This has been a priority for HSBC who have reduced the initial stages of submitting an enquiry to a 10-minute commitment from candidates.

Related to the question of the investment required of candidates is the return that is given to them, specifically in the form of constructive feedback for even early stage rejections. We heard of one candidate who had to wait for over six months for feedback from an assessment centre only to then receive a generic, impersonal rejection.

For all the criticism of ghosting by candidates it is important to acknowledge that this isn’t a one-way street.

Much of the work being done to develop and streamline the recruitment process surrounds automation and digitalisation, surely natural territory for today’s candidates, and yet there is a surprising level of frustration with the approach – especially among candidates with atypical backgrounds, needs or borderline qualifications. One candidate reported being unable to declare their dyslexia at any stage in the online process.

“Graduate recruitment for any of the large companies is so impersonal and factory-like, the computer says no and no human seems to care”

This reflects the comments of Hardy at WPP who was acutely conscious of the need to avoid exactly this impersonal, routine, automated experience in favour of relevant, personalised communications at every stage in the recruitment process. Further candidate reflections include:

“Companies should give an applicant a chance to see them, because basing their decision on a video interview is not always accurate.”

“I would prefer it if applications were more direct, not through computer systems or video interviews, but telephone or face-to-face interviews would be more personal I think.”

“Removing A-Level/UCAS requirements would make for a far wider pool of candidates.”

“While I understand the need to filter applications, surely the degree classification has to come first?”

This speaks to the comments made by WPP earlier and to the broader contextual approach as recommended by the Sutton Trust.

Another element to consider in relation to diverse and relatively disadvantaged candidates, is the vital role of paid employment in sustaining them through their education and development. This is often in contrast with more advantaged peers who can afford to prioritise internships and relevant work experience, often achieved through family connections.

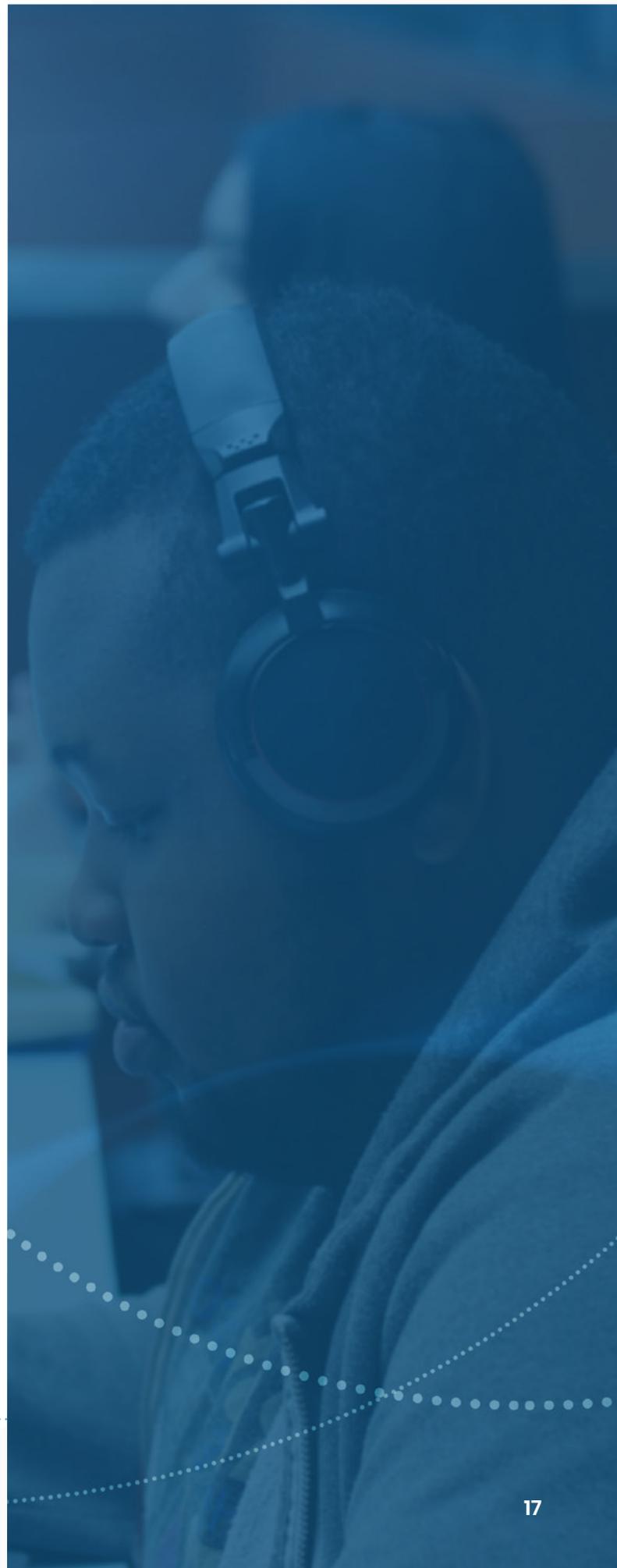
“In the personal profile there should be a section for work that’s not a placement or part of the degree.”

More broadly, we had some interesting discussions with our candidates around diversity, with some not even seeming to recognise the importance of the concept or what it is about. This is possibly a reflection of the Gen Z sense that diversity is a fact of contemporary life. For others there is little doubt that more needs to be done.

“Diversity and inclusion has to be a priority for companies.”

In fact, our survey showed that only 39% of candidates agreed that businesses are doing enough to hire candidates from diverse backgrounds.

As such it is incumbent on all of us in the field to respond to this critique and to consider where and how we can do more to support candidates from diverse socio-economic backgrounds to achieve their ambitions, realise their strengths and to fulfil their potential.



The critical role of technology

Digital channels and technology are central to today's attraction and recruitment practices. From social media advertising to robotic process automation, digital platforms and data are driving the market forward.

Smart businesses are using new analytic tools, including machine learning and AI, to optimise their candidate attraction collateral (words and phrases) for specific audiences, while also developing new insights and opportunities from using video (interview) data for example.

Digitalisation presents unprecedented opportunities for experimentation and testing of marketing tactics, enabling businesses to rapidly and cost-effectively trial new channels and platforms for their effectiveness. It also enables smart businesses to develop a rich and engaging approach to attracting candidates. At Debut, for example, we are able to support employers wanting to target specific socio-demographic groups across the regions and nations of the UK.

Much has been said and written about the role and value of gamification in different contexts, but there is a clear case for its value in this space and with this audience. Smartphone-orientated gamified approaches can be used to rapidly create a rich personality or strengths profile to the benefit of employers and candidates alike. These can then be mapped against job roles and opportunities, supported by relevant content.

The smartphone is, of course, the single most important device for candidates, but, as we have found at Debut, this should also be complemented with a desk-top compatible site. It remains the case that many people, no matter how young, are more comfortable using a larger device for more considered or sustained activities. Here it is important to think through the user experience and context, tailoring content accordingly.

That is just one part of the equation, and for large scale recruiters we should be very conscious of the comments shared above regarding the downsides of automation, ensuring that all automated communications benefit from the highest levels of personalisation and contextual relevance. Online scheduling is without question a major win for both parties, but this is also enhanced by personalisation.

We also need to remember that the benchmark for digital, automated, personalisation, should be that of excellent (physical) customer service. Or, possibly in the context of

this research report (Versluys at BKL, representing as they do the advantages of small scale) highly personal, process management.

“As a smaller business, BKL can be more responsive than others, and do provide feedback to every single candidate at every stage of the process. Where this is in response to assessment centres and the results of psychometric testing, we want to be sure that even unsuccessful candidates have a learning experience.”

That said, it was notable that Hardy of WPP was able to report positive feedback from their recruitment process, with even Hardy herself amazed to hear candidates saying how much they “enjoyed the experience”.

More broadly, we believe that technology should only be one part of the overall package. We know how important and effective face-to-face contact and communication can be, but also how challenging many candidates find networking events or recruitment fairs. Integrating digital preparations, including scheduling, into the latter could be particularly effective for those candidates who may be less confident than their peers.

In developing and sustaining a diverse talent pipeline, the approach should be designed to facilitate a personalised journey relevant to the individual and their starting point; whether an A-Level Student, 1st year undergraduate or Masters' Graduate.

It is also important to consider how to reward someone for their engagement. We heard during our research how disappointing it was for one candidate to have had no fast-track or otherwise favourable treatment at application stage – despite having been connected to and engaged with the employer for a number of years in advance. How can you overcome that, what can you offer?

The role of branding in a digital world

Young people have elevated authenticity – positioning it across all relevant principles and values – and judge relentlessly against this attribute. For brands this can be scary territory, one slip from a well-crafted public persona and they can be declared inauthentic, insincere or a fraud, with such judgement amplified and broadcast across social channels in an instant.

As such, all that we have said about the failure to build inclusive working cultures and the tension between diversity and inclusion within some organisations, is a dangerous brand vulnerability.

If you are championing your commitment to diversity and difference, while the revolving door is spinning people back out of the business, then you will have a major problem with authenticity and brand perceptions, and you can expect this to impact negatively on future applications.

We have already seen the impact of the mandatory publication of large company gender pay performance data, how much more of a response might we expect if similar data, as is demanded by many, were made available for ethnicity, social mobility, university or any of the other dimensions of diversity?

As the recent work by Bath University makes clear there is a major, and insufficiently recognised problem with pay discrimination in the UK. One that persists even as more companies make public their commitment to diversity and inclusion and are publicly working to expand and diversify their talent pipeline.

92% of female candidates have a negative perception of companies with a large gender pay gap

67% of candidates would be deterred from applying to a job without a transparent salary

Yet, as we have noted cultural transformation is incredibly challenging, especially for large, complex, international organisations. So far, we have noted how slow the pace of change is across the different dimensions of diversity. Therefore a key opportunity arises for enterprises with regard to their openness and honesty regarding the challenges that they face.

This is tricky terrain to negotiate, but in the face of the demand for authenticity it's an exciting idea to explore. Put simply, rather than presenting the shiny new face

of diversity as the de facto business culture, how about making it clear that this is an aspiration and that today's young talent will be in the vanguard of change, with all of the challenges that may potentially bring?

As we have noted, for young talent diversity is a given, an everyday reality. As such, no business can expect too many plaudits for successfully making diversity as natural as it is in candidates' everyday life. However, they can expect a backlash when the promises that are made are not matched by the reality on the ground.

Where brands can gain profile and plaudits is through consumer campaigns making a stand on issues of diversity and inclusion with recent examples including Nike, P&G and HSBC.

There is an increasing expectation that brands do take a stand on key progressive issues in the face of populist politics today and you can be sure that young talent will be watching closely.

A strong brand is more important today than ever, in a crowded commercial communications landscape it is, more than ever, a vital signifier. Consider what a brand actually is; it is a promise. It frames your expectations of that organisation, its values and its approach. It is the primary filter for savvy consumers today.

As young people first consider where and for who they would like to work, they will rely on these established brand perceptions initially, before drilling deeper into the brands that appear on their radar for the first time during their job search. If the perception is that of a white, middle to upper class organisation then you can expect significant numbers to be immediately deterred from pursuing their interest.

Sadly, not least given their contemporary, innovative, nature, many of today's leading technology companies have experienced significant issues with their own workplace cultures, reflecting a failure to build this into their values at the earliest stages of business development. Too often this is a direct result of a lack of diversity among the founders and their teams. And while



many seem ready to accept these cultural issues as one of the growing pains of fast-growth operations, there are simple steps that can and should be taken.

In talking about brands these days, we rapidly move toward the importance of the customer experience, defined as the totality of the experience across all brand touchpoints. Today that can and must extend to the candidate and employee experience.

Social media plays a vital role in this space with Da Costa of Cisco, for example, highlighting that social media is where potential candidates look at the very beginning of the process and it is then the last thing that they check before deciding whether to join an organisation.

Cisco are therefore acutely conscious of the role of their employees as brand ambassadors across social channels. They have established a platform (#wearecisco) for all such communications and encourage employees to share their experiences and to connect with interested individuals.

Indeed, diverse and inclusive cultures tend to be happier places to work with greater employee engagement, satisfaction and mutual trust. Scott helped us to simplify this by introducing the beguilingly familiar concept of belonging. Little wonder that employees tend to be more trusted than brands by consumers. Now that really does turn the tables in the pursuit of authenticity.

It is after all very easy for businesses and employer organisations more generally to forget who owns the brand.

What does different look like?

Pulling together the different strands of our project including secondary research, expert and employer interviews, candidate workshops, survey and previous Debut research outputs we are now able to put together a composite presentation of what a different, progressive and inclusive approach might look like.

We could do worse by way of a guiding light than to consider the words of Turner at the Sutton Trust,

“every part of the process is a greater challenge for people from disadvantaged backgrounds.”

Our primary emphasis here is on the external face of the attraction, engagement and recruitment process, the elements that will help you to reach and resonate with a more diverse candidate pool.

Building the pipeline

The first aspect clearly surrounds the attraction and engagement of young talent as early in the process as possible especially including schools and FE college programmes. There are many specialist organisations who can assist employers in such outreach work, which should include a diverse range of employee ambassadors – for their own as well for the students’ benefit. Relevant examples of good practice include the Sutton Trust Pathway to the Professions programme.

Linked to school and college outreach might be participation in work experience programmes and also the targeting and finding of internships for those from less advantaged backgrounds. Both elements offer a vital route into the world of work, often the first experience of a professional environment many will have seen.

For those slightly more advanced in their careers thinking, it is essential to develop a rich digital media presence that provides effective reach across the diverse communities and geographies of the UK.

As Stephanou at EY emphasised, it is vital to put the work into understanding local and regional channels as well as the national picture. Social channels and video outputs are of course important along with the opportunity to connect with relevant employees and company contacts. Such a strategy might include a programme of digital games

and tests to explore strengths and potential. Relevant examples of good practice include #wearecisco.

Supporting the journey

Previous Debut research has introduced an innovative candidate segmentation that serves to emphasise how widespread the need for support among young talent is – 72% of all of those surveyed – and also that up to 50% of candidates do not feel application ready.

With young talent typically considering their future careers, at least intermittently, from the age of 16 onwards there is a major opportunity to positively impact on those figures long before the point of application. It should be recognised at the outset that such an investment is not only for the benefit of the individual business but more importantly for the benefit of the individuals themselves. That said, you should consider how participation in any such programme can be recognised or rewarded should they choose to apply to your business.

A digital platform is of course going to be a significant part of any affordable and scalable programme and should be designed in such a way as to be grazable, with bite size exercises that can be completed on a smartphone at any time of day. For every gamer playing on the bus, tube or train of a morning, how many can we convert to career preparation exercises?

Flexing eligibility criteria

There is an increasing appreciation of the qualities required of relatively disadvantaged young talent in order to match the qualifications of their more advantaged peers. Such additional demands should be recognised in the form of contextual selection, typically focused on A-Level grades or UCAS points. We have also heard from employers who argue that limiting their focus to higher education achievements and outcomes alone immediately increases diversity.

Yet, with the latest data from the Office for Students front of mind, employers might also consider greater flexibility with regard to higher education outcomes for relatively disadvantaged candidates. With a 13% attainment gap between white and BAME students this is a major social issue that employers should be considering.

Beyond contextual scoring, employers should also consider the role and value of apprenticeships for their business. Versluys at BKL saw the merit of this route

in terms of increasing the diversity of the pipeline while Stephanou at EY reported a doubling of apprenticeship applications between 2017-2018.

Revisiting personal attributes, experience and skills

Too many candidates can feel excluded by the demands and constraints of personal statements and a complementary focus on relevant work experience and demonstrable skills for example.

At the very least employers need to enable candidates to reflect on lessons learnt from paid employment, rather than relevant work experience, and rather than focusing on established skills to focus on potential and personal strengths. Wherever possible, tasks and tests should not be susceptible to the influence of coaching and support.

Work needs to be done to help candidates identify the strengths that they have developed as a result of their personal circumstances, be that acting as a carer, looking after younger siblings or managing all official interactions for non-English speaking parents, as well as through community and sporting activities.

Too often it can feel that you must have climbed Mount Everest, swam the English Channel or taken a travelling gap year in order to cut-through. And if they have taken a gap year make sure to check the itinerary and the number of non-English speaking countries visited!

Enabling self-expression

Closely linked to the above is to increase the opportunity for candidates to present themselves as they would choose to do so. This was a key frustration for our candidates and one that could be relatively easily resolved with a more imaginative approach.

You will see a very different side of candidates if you can engage them on their own terrain – with a structured (to facilitate comparative scoring) presentation on their passions for example.

The message from employers must be that we want you for who you are, not for who we can make you. It was striking in our research to hear that a highly articulate BAME candidate was told they were too forceful – when you suspect the very same qualities would be welcomed among from a more traditional (white?) candidate.

If in doubt, interview

A number of our candidates, and young talent more generally, have lamented the growth of automated video interviews and the lack of flexibility (and humanity) within digitalised processes more generally. There is a very clear sense that in the pursuit of efficiency such processes serve to exclude the borderline candidate and those with non-standard backgrounds and qualifications. If you can see the potential but have doubts, then whenever possible do take the risk and interview.

Conclusions and recommendations

It's clear that despite all of the good work being done in the market there is a significant tension between the perspectives of employers and those of young talent – with culture, diversity and inclusion a key issue for many.

Remember some of the top-line facts, and ask yourself whether your business reflects these realities:

- **93% of people in the UK are educated in state schools**
- **50% of the population are female**
- **40%+ of London's population identifies as BAME**
- **19% of the working age population are disabled**
- **10% of the 16-24 year old population do not identify as heterosexual**

Debut is ideally placed to help employers to reach out to these audiences across the regions and nations of the UK, connecting and engaging with young talent wherever and whoever they might be.

We recognise that the true measure of success; invisible, unconscious, every-day inclusion will not deliver you any plaudits, it probably won't even get you much credit from prospective candidates. But we also know that it means you will not actively deter diverse candidates from considering your organisation as a place to work. And that capturing such data and tracking subsequent outcomes is vital to understanding the relationship between diversity and inclusion within your organisation.

Working with recruitment professionals every day we know how frustrating it can be for them when the candidates they have worked so hard to attract fail to progress or stay with the business as a consequence of their cultural experience, more specifically the disconnect between the brand promise and the employee experience.

This is yet another benefit of an authentic commitment to diversity and inclusion – employee retention. We all know that graduates today expect to change jobs and even careers frequently during their working life, with expectation for the tenure of their first professional role running at around two years. Some of this is natural and inevitable, but for others they will be responding to their specific circumstances including opportunities for progression and working culture.

10 expert recommendations

During this project we heard from experts and employers as to what recommendations they might have for other recruiters striving to increase diversity within their organisations.

It was fantastic to hear a rich range of views and we are delighted to share ten recommendations with you here.

1. Take the time to identify exactly what your issues and priorities are. Diversity and inclusion can feel like such big issues that paralysis or inertia can result. Take a step back and consider your approach carefully. Perhaps look at what is missing from your organisation – for instance, women on the leadership team – and consider how and where it may negatively impact on business performance.
2. Invest in building the pipeline as early as possible, reaching out especially to schools and colleges with little history of sending children into higher education or professional careers.
3. Consider the value of contextual admissions, as originally introduced by Cambridge University. The latest (Office for Students) research makes it clear that this should not just apply to A-Level grades and UCAS points, but could also be extended to university grades in light of the differentials in higher education outcomes by ethnicity and other dimensions of diversity.
4. Introduce structured interviews, an absolutely critical step toward objective candidate evaluation, ensuring that all candidates are judged against the same questioning criteria.
5. Use diverse evaluation or interview teams – ensuring that you have a diversity of perspective on each candidate, their cultural fit and their comfort with diversity and inclusion. This should be backed up with investment in creating and sustaining a culture where everyone feels that they belong.
6. Allow candidates to express and be themselves within the recruitment process. We have highlighted the frustration that many candidates have with their interview experience and the fact that only 36% said they felt able to express themselves. Consider how effective video is in achieving this goal.

Conclusions and recommendations

7. Reach out to specialist charities and organisations focused on issues of diversity, social mobility and inclusion. This can be especially valuable for smaller organisations and can help to accelerate and focus your work in the field. An example cited in our research is LTSB (Leadership through Sport & Business).

8. Be empathetic. Try to put yourself on the shoes of the candidates and to see the world from their side of the table – with a view to mitigating the negatives and accentuating the positives.

9. Talk to your people – candidates and new employees – and listen to them, try to do something for them and not just for the business.

10. Take a look at yourself and your assumptions, develop an open mind and be willing to take risks and to challenge the status quo, not least by focusing on potential and strengths.

The challenge, in terms of the history of social mobility and the contemporary face of diversity, is vast. However, it is imperative that we all seek to contribute as we can. As we said at the outset, it's our belief that no business is too small, too busy or too poorly resourced to play a part in this vital task.

It is clear to us that most recruiters sincerely want to help the diverse young talent within their orbit – but the key is to get more, and more diverse, young talent into those circles in order to benefit. Such an approach starts much further upstream and as the latest report from the Social Mobility Commission makes clear it involves a concerted and sustained effort across many dimensions of education and employment.

Don't think us naïve; we know that a serious and sustained commitment to improving diversity and social mobility requires additional investment and resources. We also know that we are living through a tough economic climate – but it's worth noting that today's business challenges are temporary while the challenges of professional exclusion are all too permanent.

Within the report we have covered many areas and issues that are outside of our direct remit, especially in terms of business culture. We have emphasised that we recognise the challenges of cultural transformation at scale, but we have also made it clear how important this is to our candidates and also that there are immediate, tangible and important steps that can be delivered by all businesses including pay parity and transparency.

Alongside the insights from our candidates we hope you will take advantage of the advice and recommendations shared by our experts and employers including: structured interviews, contextual admissions, personalisation, self-expression and specialist partnerships.

Finally, we hope you will join us in looking forward to a day when across Britain all young people can benefit from unlimited ambition, structured support and a fair chance of upward mobility and a rewarding career.



About Debut

We are an early talent recruitment platform that connects employers with relevant, diverse and high quality student and graduates.

With over 150,000 student and graduate profiles, employers can access their ideal candidates based on academic, psychometric, demographic and eligibility criteria. Using targeted push messages known as Talent Spots, employers leverage real-time engagement to connect with early talent through our award-winning app and online.

Debut has flipped early talent attraction on its head. Thanks to our data-driven solution, early talent managers can create scalable, cost-effective and unbiased attraction campaigns and activate passive talent. We deliver only relevant students and graduates to employers' talent pipeline.

 debut.careers/for-employers

 connect@debut.careers

 www.linkedin.com/company/debut-careers/

Additional resources

Having conducted extensive secondary research in preparation for the report we have here collated a set of 21 resources for your reference. These complement the footnotes within the report, provide direct access to additional research, and signpost relevant organisations.

Business Leader, Companies call for mandatory ethnicity pay gap reporting, 1 March 2019

<https://www.businessleader.co.uk/companies-call-for-mandatory-ethnicity-pay-gap-reporting/60767/>

Cabinet Office, Race Disparity Audit, October 2017 (revised March 2018)

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/686071/Revised_RDA_report_March_2018.pdf

Cabinet Office, UK Ethnicity Facts & Figures

<https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/>

CEBR & INVolve, The Value of Diversity, February 2018

<https://www.out-standing.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/The-Value-of-Diversity-Final-09.04.18.pdf>

CIPHR, What is blind recruitment – and does it work?, August 2018

<https://www.ciphr.com/features/what-is-blind-recruitment/>

Columbia Journalism Review, The origin of the term ‘intersectionality’, October 2018

https://www.cjr.org/language_corner/intersectionality.php

Deloitte, 2018 Deloitte Millennial Survey, 2018

<https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/global/Documents/About-Deloitte/gx-2018-millennial-survey-report.pdf>

Employers Network for Equality & Inclusion

<https://www.enei.org.uk/about-us/>

Institute of Student Employers, ISE Annual Student Recruitment Survey 2018, September 2018

https://ise.org.uk/global_engine/download.aspx?fileid=BB571CDD-2022-44FE-9749-08AEE71435A2

Leadership Through Sport and Business

<https://www.leadershipthroughsport.org/>

Luminate, Student enrolment trends, April 2019

<https://luminare.prospects.ac.uk/student-enrolment-trends>

McKinsey & Company, Diversity Matters, February 2015

<https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/mckinsey/business%20functions/organization/our%20insights/why%20diversity%20matters/diversity%20matters.ashx>

McKinsey & Company, Delivering through Diversity, January 2018

https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/McKinsey/Business%20Functions/Organization/Our%20Insights/Delivering%20through%20diversity/Delivering-through-diversity_full-report.ashx

Department for Education, Graduate outcomes (LEO): Employment and earnings outcomes of higher education graduates by subject studied and graduate characteristics, 2018

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/690859/SFR15_2018_Main_text.pdf

Relocate Global, Graduate employers increase recruitment – for chosen few, September 2018

<https://www.relocatemagazine.com/news/hr-graduate-employers-increase-recruitment--for-chosen-few-918-rholmes>

Social Mobility Commission, Social mobility in Great Britain – state of the Nation 2018 to 2019, April 2019

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-mobility-in-great-britain-state-of-the-nation-2018-to-2019>

Social Mobility Pledge

<https://www.socialmobilitypledge.org/>

The Sutton Trust, The Mobility Manifesto, 2010

https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/120100312_mobility_manifesto2010-3.pdf

The Sutton Trust, Access to Advantage, December 2018

<https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/AccessToAdvantage-2018.pdf>

Universities UK, Patterns and trends in UK higher education, September 2018

<https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/facts-and-stats/data-and-analysis/Pages/Patterns-and-trends-in-UK-higher-education-2018.aspx>

Universities UK, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic student attainment at UK universities: #closingthegap, May 2019

<https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2019/bame-student-attainment-uk-universities-closing-the-gap.pdf>