

SOCIAL MOBILITY LANDSCAPE REVIEW

Summary Report

A rapid review of the literature on the policy and stakeholder landscape for improving social mobility through education in England

October 2021



 better
purpose



GLOSSARY

- **Absolute mobility:** Percentage of individuals achieving better or worse life outcomes than another group (e.g. their parents).
- **Achievement gap:** The unequal or inequitable distribution of educational results and benefits between groups of pupils.
- **Cultural capital:** Having the means through a vast array of experiences and access to skill development to be knowledgeable about a wide range of culture and to be able to discuss its value and merits.
- **Economic capital:** An individual's economic resources such as cash, assets and property.
- **Further education:** Further education (FE) includes any study after secondary education that's not part of higher education (that is, not taken as part of an undergraduate or graduate degree).
- **Foundational literacy and numeracy:** Skills that are the building blocks to learning other skills, giving pupils the foundations to access high-order skills and other parts of the curriculum.
- **Global Social Mobility Index:** An numerical index created by the World Economic Forum to benchmark global economies on the extent to which they provide the conditions in which their citizens can thrive regardless of their socio-economic status at birth.
- **Higher education:** Higher education is third level education after school. It takes places at universities and Further Education colleges and normally includes undergraduate and postgraduate study.
- **Intergenerational mobility:** Refers to the relationship between the socio-economic status of parents and the status their children will attain as adults.
- **Intergenerational persistence:** When there is a strong association between the socio- economic status of parents and that of their offspring later in life.
- **Intersectional impacts:** The interconnected nature of social categorisations such as race, class, and gender, which create overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.
- **Intragenerational mobility:** The ability of a specific individual to move up or down the ladder within his or her lifetime.
- **Multigenerational mobility:** Social mobility measured across multiple generations of individuals.
- **Relative mobility:** Whether the ranking of adults against *their* peers is (or is not) tied to the ranking of their parents against their peers.
- **Social capital:** Resources and advantages one gets from the groups they belong to and the people they know.
- **Social integration:** The process during which newcomers or minorities are incorporated into the social structure of the host society



ACRONYMS

- **CSJ:** Centre for Social Justice
- **CPD:** Continuous professional development
- **DfE:** Department for Education
- **EAL:** English as an additional language
- **EEF:** Education Endowment Foundation
- **EIF:** Early Intervention Foundation
- **EPI:** Education Policy Institute
- **ESRC:** Economic and Social Research Council
- **EYFS:** Early years foundation stage
- **FE:** Further education
- **FSM:** Free school meals
- **GCSE:** General Certificate of Secondary Education
- **HE:** Higher Education
- **HMRC:** Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs
- **IFS:** Institute for Fiscal Studies
- **KS1:** Key Stage 1
- **KS2:** Key Stage 2
- **NEET:** Not in education, employment or training
- **OFSTED:** Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
- **SEN:** Special education needs
- **SEND:** Special education needs and disabilities
- **STEM:** Sciences, technology, engineering and mathematics
- **WEF:** World Economic Forum



HAVING A SHARED UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT SOCIAL MOBILITY MEANS IS CRITICAL TO BETTER SUPPORTING IT

Introduction

- The Leathersellers' Company commissioned this report to help better understand social mobility. The report summarises the literature surrounding social mobility, with a particular focus on the policy context and landscape of key stakeholders in the education sector (from the early years to higher education) working to improve social mobility in England.
- Based on a selective review of the literature, the report aims to:



How do leading organisations define social mobility?

- Many organisations over the past decade have sought to define the concept of social mobility and highlight its importance.

“Social mobility is about creating decent lives for all and ensuring that everyone can realise their potential whatever they choose to pursue. This involves much more than capturing a few deserving individuals into ‘elite’ groups.”

Major & Machin, 2020

“Social mobility is the potential for those to achieve success regardless of their background.”

Sutton Trust, 2019

“The Government’s focus is on relative social mobility. For any given level of skill and ambition, regardless of an individual’s background, everyone should have an equal chance of getting the job they want or reaching a higher income bracket.”

Deloitte, n.d.

“Social mobility is breaking the link between family income and educational achievement.”

EEF, 2018

“A fair society is an open society, one in which every individual is free to succeed. What ought to count is how hard you work and the skills and talents you possess, not the school you went to or the jobs your parents did.”

-HM Government, 2011



SOCIAL MOBILITY IS A BROAD CONCEPT, BUT A COMMON PRINCIPLE IS FOR PEOPLE TO ACHIEVE THEIR POTENTIAL REGARDLESS OF BACKGROUND

How is success on social mobility defined in the literature?

There is a substantial body of literature on the subject which identifies the desirable outcomes of social mobility for individuals and society as a whole

How do we define social mobility in the context of this report?

Social mobility is the idea that every child or young person facing disadvantage is supported to realise their full potential, whatever pathways they choose to pursue.



Sources: CSJ (2021), Deloitte (n.d.), EEF (2018), EPI (2018), HM Government (2011), Jerrim (2021), Kennedy (2010), Major & Machin (2020), Social Mobility Commission (2014, 2019), Sutton Trust (2019, 2021), Social Mobility UK (2020, 2021).



THE ROOT CAUSES OF DISADVANTAGE ARE COMPLEX AND INTERCONNECTED

Children and youth facing disadvantage do not have access to fair and equal opportunities to realise their full potential. The **root causes of disadvantage are complex and interconnected** and, overall, result in poorer education and life outcomes. These causes can be categorised as individual dimensions, family and household dimensions, and dimensions within the wider system (see problem tree on next page).

 **Individual dimensions** include gender divides which are seen at school where girls tend to perform better academically than boys and the gap has been widening in recent years. Women are more likely to go to university, but this does not translate into higher earnings. Women are overrepresented in lower paid jobs. Post-16 choices are still highly gendered with girls being less likely to take up STEM subjects. Some of the widest school achievement gaps are seen in children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), and individuals with disabilities are under-represented in higher education and higher paid professions.

 Beyond the individual, **family and household dimensions** can be important determinants of disadvantage. There is a strong link between household income and educational achievement at all levels. Geographical location and economic context can also have an influence; for instance, opportunities for social mobility are higher in London than elsewhere in the country, though important differences exist between boroughs within London as well. The gap in life expectancy between affluent and deprived areas has been growing over the past 15 years. Ethnicity trends are also observable; the lowest performing groups in London are black Caribbean and free school meal-eligible white boys, and while access to university is improving for ethnic minority students, inequalities continue in terms of which university they attend, levels of dropout, and degree attainment. Opportunities for social mobility are higher in London than elsewhere in the country, although there is significant variation in social mobility opportunities between individual boroughs.

 Within the **wider system**, attitudes are important; although a majority of people believe that inequalities are unfair and should be addressed by government action, 38% believe that higher earners should be able to buy better education for their children. Those in influential positions (e.g. politics, judiciary and business) are five times more likely to have been to fee-paying schools than the general population. Globalisation and rapid technological changes have created larger gaps, widening inequalities in the workplace which create even deeper societal divides for future generations. Recently, adversity facing the more disadvantaged has been exacerbated by lockdowns through the **COVID-19 pandemic**.

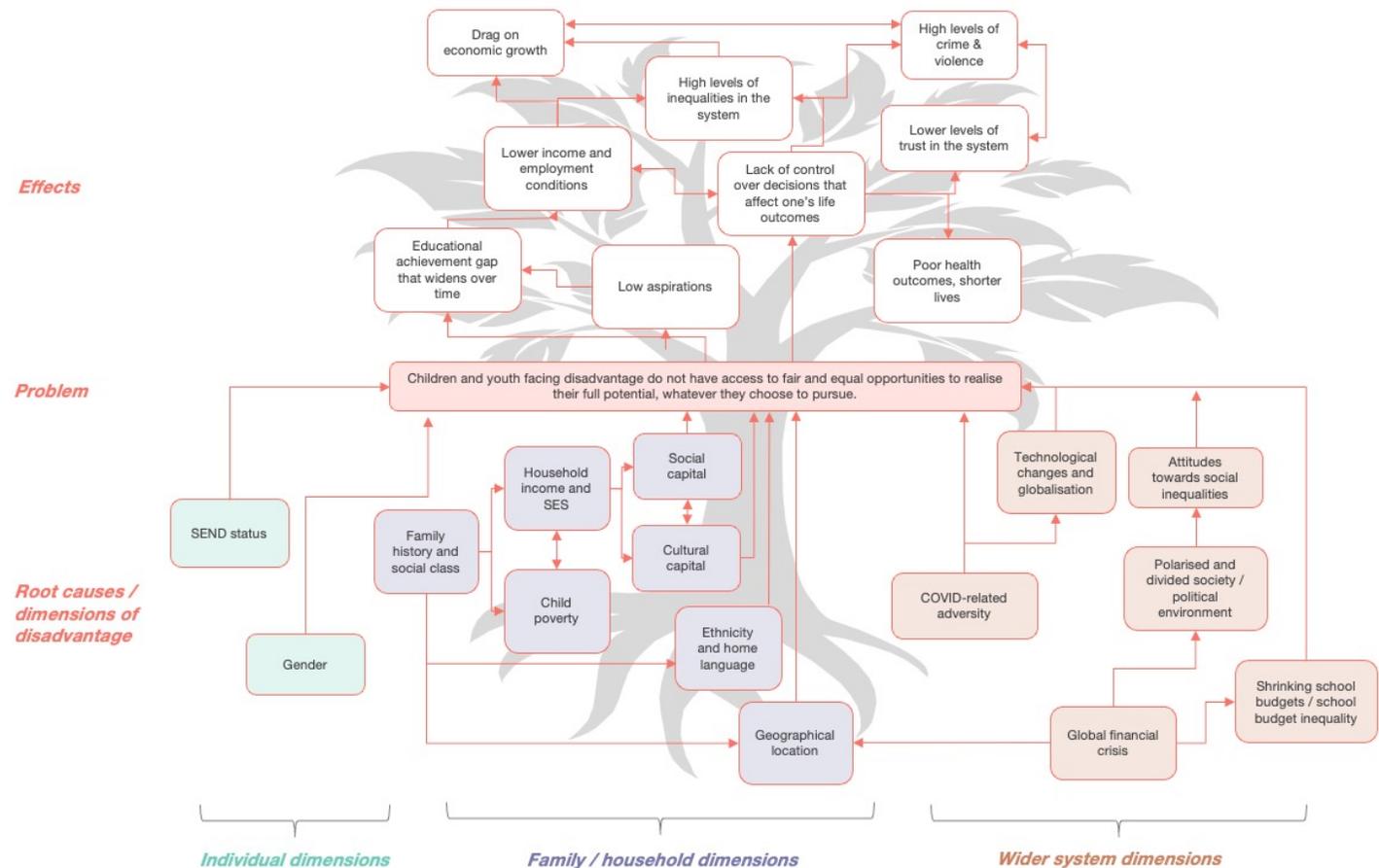


THERE IS A COMPLEX WEB OF CAUSES OF SOCIAL INEQUALITY LINKED TO DIFFERENT DIMENSIONS OF DISADVANTAGE

The problem tree approach

The problem tree explores the anatomy of the complex causes and effects of a problem and how these might be related to each other.

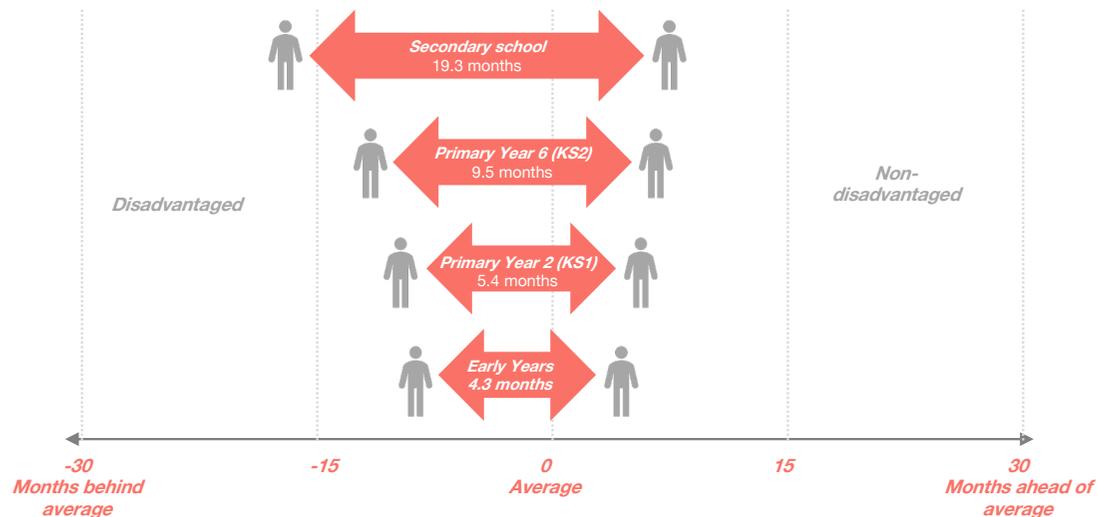
- The **trunk** of the tree represents the **main problem** under consideration: *“Children and youth facing disadvantage do not have access to fair and equal opportunities to realise their full potential, whatever they choose to pursue.”*
- The **roots** of the tree represent the **underlying causes** of the problem. The next slides examine these in more depth.
- The **branches** and eventually the **leaves** of the tree represent the **effects or consequences** of the problem. These are the changes sought by social mobility interventions. They are examined further later in this report, in the section “The Possible Solutions”.



THE CAUSES OF SOCIAL DISADVANTAGE CAN HAVE INTERSECTIONAL IMPACTS AND BUILD OVER TIME

- The factors causing social disadvantage can combine, and if not addressed, can build over time such that any gaps between disadvantaged and privileged pupils increases as young people reach adulthood.
- The gap grows due to pupils in the disadvantage group falling further behind over time, highlighting the need to target interventions to this group.

This graph illustrates the estimated gap, in months, between pupils from economically disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged backgrounds at different stages of education.



Note: Graph reproduced from EEF (2018) which uses data from EPI (2018). Disadvantaged is defined as pupils eligible for free school meals as a proxy measure of economic disadvantage. Non-disadvantaged is defined as pupils not eligible for free school meals.

Sources: EEF (2018), EPI (2018), HM Government (2011), Kennedy (2010), OECD (2018).

How are social mobility outcomes measured?

- Measures used depend on the perspective taken, for example:
 - Within the lifetime of an individual (**intragenerational mobility**).
 - Between an individual and their offspring (**intergenerational mobility**).
 - Between multiple generations (**multigenerational mobility**).
- In the education sector, measures typically focus on educational outcomes of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds compared to that of their more privileged peers.
- Metrics used differ at different stages. For example:
 - **Foundational:** Cognitive ability, EYFS outcomes.
 - **School years:** Attainment levels, progress levels, number of good GCSEs, level of aspiration.
 - **Post-16 transitions:** Remaining in education, employment or training, admission to HE, admission to selective HE institutions, labour market rates.
 - **Higher education:** English Social Mobility Index – a measure of Universities' contribution to social mobility.



THE UK RANKS 21ST IN THE WORLD ON SOCIAL MOBILITY ACCORDING TO WEF, BUT LAGS BEHIND EUROPEAN NEIGHBOURS

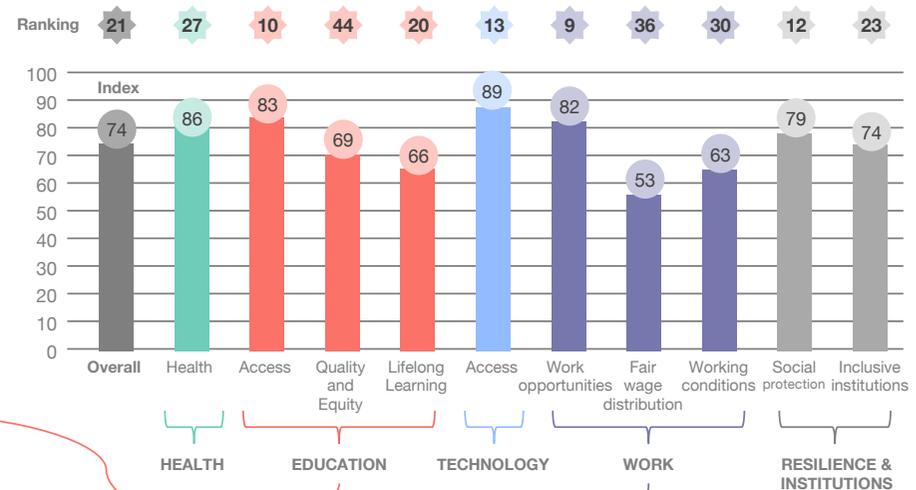
Global Social Mobility Index, WEF 2020

With a score of 74.4 overall, the United Kingdom ranks 21st on the index, situated amongst the high-income countries that dominate the higher rankings, but behind a number of other European countries including the Scandinavian countries, France, Germany, the Czech Republic, and Belgium, as well as behind countries such as Australia, Canada and Japan.

(Note that the index does not provide a separate score for the different nations within the UK)

The UK scores well in terms of Education Access, but less well in Education Quality and Equity because of high pupil-to-teacher ratios (especially in pre-primary), significant disparities in educational quality between schools, and limited social diversity within schools.

While social protection access is good, labour market policies to help long term unemployed back to work are weak. The UK ranks poorly compared to peers on Fair Wages.



ENGLAND REMAINS A DIVIDED COUNTRY, WHERE INEQUALITY HAS GOT WORSE IN THE LAST 50 YEARS

The spatial divide



- The economic output per person is £43,629 in London compared with less than £19,000 in the North-East of England.
- Two thirds of the population of London are graduates, compared with one third in the North-East of England.
- Limited educational and employment opportunities in some parts of the country lead to social 'hollowing out' where middle class jobs disappear, leaving only lower paid jobs and wealth concentrated amongst the rich.

The income and wealth divide



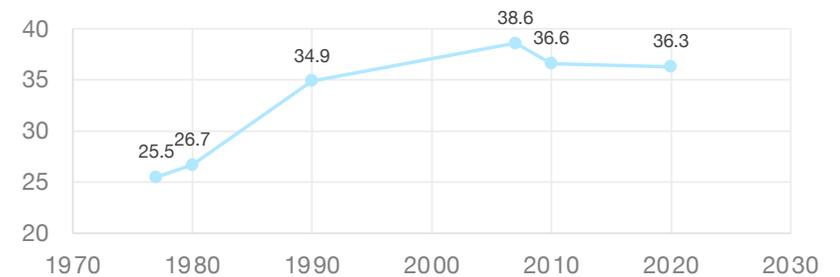
- Between 1997 and 2017, the bottom fifth of households saw their incomes increase by just over £10 per week. Incomes increased by just over £300 per week for the top fifth.
- In 1998, the highest earners were paid 47 times more than the lowest; by 2015 the equivalent gap was 128 times more.

The generational divide



- Poverty amongst pensioners halved between 1997 and 2017, and on average their income exceeds the income of adults who are in work.
- Each generation is no longer doing better than the previous one; those born in the 1980s are the first post war cohort not to start work with a higher income than their parents.

GINI Index of inequality



The GINI index measures inequality across society. The higher the number (out of 100), the more unequal the society. The UK in 2020 was 36.3, compared to 25 in Denmark, and 38 in the USA.



WHILE THERE ARE MANY IMPRESSIVE ORGANISATIONS WORKING TO ADDRESS SOCIAL MOBILITY, THERE IS LIMITED CENTRAL COORDINATION

The role of government: While there is political will, there is no central department with responsibility for social mobility.

- The **Department for Education** has a range of policies aimed at addressing disadvantage in England, such as free school meals, 15 and 30-hour childcare funding, pupil premium, SEN inclusion and Disability Access, and the National Tutoring Programme. The early years foundation stage (EYFS) sets standards for early learning, which are regulated by **OFSTED** (a separate body).
- The **Department for Work and Pensions** is responsible for policies that impact those on low incomes, such as universal credit and child benefit, working with **HMRC** and the **Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government**.
- The cabinet reshuffle that took place in September 2021 gave responsibility for the 'levelling up' agenda to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.
- The **Social Mobility Commission** is an advisory, non-departmental public body, which promotes social mobility across all sectors, carries out and publishes research on social mobility, and advises Ministers.

Key influencers: Several high-profile organisations have an important role in influencing government, and in making the case for change.

Important influencers within the education sector include:

- The **Sutton Trust** - aims to improve social mobility and address educational disadvantage through programmes, research, and policy influence.
- The **Education Policy Institute** - aims to raise standards in education (with a particular focus on disadvantage) through data analysis and research which informs the public and holds government to account.
- The **Education Endowment Foundation** - focuses on improving educational attainment of the poorest pupils in English schools, through summarising evidence, and producing guidance and tools for policy makers and practitioners.

Delivery organisations: Some large players operate nationally, but the landscape is mainly localised and fragmented

- **TeachFirst** aims to address educational inequality by providing training and tools for schools in disadvantaged communities. Through the well-known graduate teacher training programme, TeachFirst builds ambassador networks in the public and private sectors to help address education disadvantage.
- The **Equality Trust** aims to reduce economic and social inequality by building local networks and movements for social change, mobilising a diverse range of local organisations and groups from all sectors, and focusing particularly on youth working through schools and colleges.

"Everyone knows that talent and energy and enthusiasm and flair are evenly spread across the UK, it is opportunity that is not, and it is the mission of this government to unite and level up across the whole of the UK" - Boris Johnson (2021)

THE SOCIAL MOBILITY STORY IN LONDON IS COMPLEX

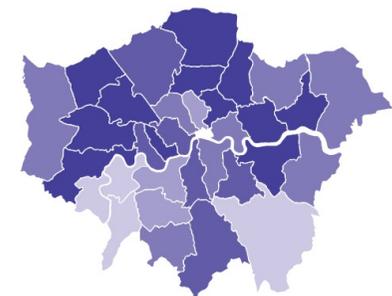
London pupils perform well compared to the rest of England, but this does not always translate into upward social mobility in adulthood.

- **Since 2000 London's schools have improved dramatically**, moving from the worst region in terms of GCSE and A Level results to the best. This has been credited to a commitment to reform, school improvement and improving the quality of teaching and school governance.
- Despite this, **those from London's most deprived neighbourhoods do worse in employment** compared to peers in the rest of England (see Figure to the right).
- London boroughs with the lowest levels of social mobility in adulthood include, for example, Enfield, Haringey, Tower Hamlets, Hackney, Newham, Barking & Dagenham, Harrow, Hounslow, Ealing, Brent, Harrow. Not far ahead are boroughs including Lewisham, Lambeth, Croydon and Barnet.
- **Deprivation (including child poverty) remains a major issue for London boroughs.** Half of London boroughs rank among the most deprived third of English local authorities. Tower Hamlets is the most deprived in England according to income deprivation among children and older people. A number of other London boroughs feature in the top 20, including Islington, Hackney, Barking & Dagenham, Enfield, Lambeth and Lewisham.
- **Social mobility remains on the political agenda for London;** a [10-year Social Mobility Strategy \(2018-28\)](#) was published by the Mayor's Office in 2018.

Youth (16-18) Social Mobility Index by London borough



Adulthood Social Mobility Index (18+) social mobility index by London borough



Note: Figure reproduced from Oliver Wyman (2020).



DESPITE THE CHALLENGES, THERE IS A BODY OF EVIDENCE INDICATING HOW INTERVENTIONS CAN BE SUCCESSFUL AT EACH YOUTH LIFE STAGE

Early Years

School Years

Further Education

Access to Higher Education

Why is this stage important?

During the early years, a foundation of the cognitive, non-cognitive and character skills required to succeed at school are developed. Early years education is critical to breaking the cycle of inter-generational disadvantage.

During the school years, foundational literacy and numeracy skills are solidified to support the acquisition of other subjects and critical thought. Social and physical skills form part of the holistic development which prepares young people for success in further / higher education and work.

The qualifications and skills gained through further education increase individuals' lifetime earnings and potential for improved social mobility more broadly. The sector also has close ties to local employers and can more readily respond to local skills needs.

Higher education or university provides knowledge, experience, skills that lead to many high skilled (and higher paid) professional jobs. It offers both credentials and contacts that will be important for success in working life.

What are the challenges?

- Pre-school funding is insufficient to deliver high-quality early years provision, constraining access for lower income families.
- Children from wealthier families spend more hours in pre-school.
- Some children from disadvantaged backgrounds start school almost a year behind their peers.

- The attainment gaps accelerate at each learning phase: persistently disadvantaged pupils end primary school over a year behind non-disadvantaged peers and are over two years behind by the end of secondary school.
- Children are disengaging from school at an alarming rate, as measured by "severely absent rates" in schools from year-to-year.

- The proportion of children from disadvantaged backgrounds leaving government schools without basic qualifications (5 good GCSEs or equivalent) remains high.
- Post-16 education is becoming more segregated between students living in disadvantaged areas and those living in affluent areas of the country.

- Students from the most affluent areas are more than twice as likely to enter higher education than those in the most deprived areas (and six times more likely for the most selective universities).
- People with disabilities are underrepresented in higher education and students with disabilities have somewhat worse outcomes.

What makes a difference?

- Widening access to high-quality early years provision for all, especially those who are disadvantaged.
- Quality support to identify and address development gaps as early as possible to prevent gaps appearing which widen with age.
- High-intensity, wide-ranging support to parents (including mothers-to-be).

- Quality support to address gaps in development and learning as early as possible.
- Fair and broad opportunities for academic progression.
- Focusing on producing autonomous, well-rounded citizens, not just individuals who can make a good living.

- Fair and broad opportunities for academic or career progression - these should include academic and vocational options and seamless transition between these.
- Disadvantaged young people should be identified and supported to transition through further education, with appropriate funding.

- Ensure fairer access to university for the most disadvantaged (e.g. targeted offers, reporting on the socio-economic backgrounds of their students).
- Offer support for positive transition experiences and academic outcomes for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Increased clarity about, and availability of, financial support for disadvantaged students.

Sources: Cavaglia and others (2020), CSJ (2021), D'Arcy & Finch (2016), EEF (2018), EPI (2018), Hubble & Botlon (2021), Major & Machin (2020), Social Mobility Commission (2020, 2021), Social Mobility and Poverty Commission (2014).



INTERVENTIONS AND INVESTMENTS IN THE AREA OF SOCIAL MOBILITY NEED TO BE EARLY, HOLISTIC AND DATA-CENTRIC

Interventions should be early, holistic and data-centric

- **Early:** Disadvantage dramatically deepens over time and so intervention at the earliest stage possible is critical to giving children the best opportunity to break this cycle. There is a particularly strong case for investment in the early years, but every intervention should consider the earliest possible starting point.
- **Holistic:** Interventions should consider the many dimensions of social disadvantage in design and in measurement, noting that the causes of social disadvantage and effects of social mobility are complex and interwoven. This means that targeting a single cause of disadvantage (e.g. ethnicity) or a single outcome of interest (e.g. access to higher education) is unlikely to lead to meaningful and lasting change for individuals' social mobility.
- **Data-centric:** All interventions should build in the following:
 - Evidence-informed approaches – although the evidence base is richer in some areas than others (e.g. school years vs. post-16 and access to higher education), all interventions should be built on the existing knowledge base of what works.
 - Monitoring, evaluation and learning – a strategy for the intended impact and a plan for how this is measured should be central to the design process, to demonstrate effectiveness and learn for improvement.
 - A longitudinal view – given that the outcomes of social mobility may not be known until an individual has reached adulthood or middle-age (or by looking at future generations), tracking over time is essential to provide the richest data source for understanding impact.

Implications

Evidence gathered on promising practices suggest the following implications at the different education phases:

- **Early Years:** Consider offering financial support to disadvantaged families to access high-quality early years provision and interventions for targeted and high-intensity support to disadvantaged parents (including mothers-to-be) and those which address maternal health and well-being.
- **School Years:** Consider funding interventions which support basic skills development, such as high-quality tutoring programmes for the most disadvantaged, as well as interventions which prioritise remedial support (especially following extended school closures as a result of the pandemic). Consider also funding interventions which widen access to an holistic education, a broad range of extra-curricular activities and which support pupils' mental health and wellbeing.
- **Post-16:** Consider supporting interventions which help young people understand the options available to them post-16 and funding long-term research to generate evidence for the sector on what works to improve attainment amongst the most disadvantaged at post-16 level.
- **Higher education:** Consider supporting early intervention while students are still at school to change students' attitudes towards HE and to help them understand their options and the financial support available. Research is also needed on the impact of HE access interventions and how changing perceptions translates to increased participation in HE.

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

This report has been informed by a strong body of literature. Some key sources are highlighted here for interested parties and a full reference list is available on request.

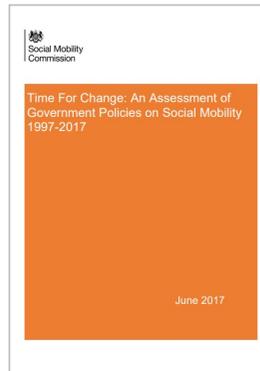


What do we know and what should we do about Social Mobility?

Lee Elliot Major and Stephen Machin (2020)

Provides an overview of the history of social mobility in England, as well as challenges and solutions

Available for purchase



[Time for Change: An assessment of government policies on Social Mobility 1997-2017](#)

Social Mobility Commission (2017)

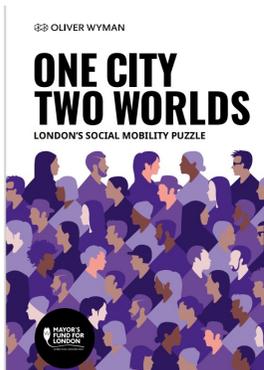
Policy review and recommendations covering early years, schools, young people and working lives



[State of the Nation](#)

Social Mobility Commission (2021)

Review of the impact of the pandemic on social mobility with recommendations



[One City Two Worlds](#)

Oliver Wyman (2020)

Analysis of London's policies and position on social mobility with recommendations



[Closing the Attainment Gap](#)

Education Endowment Foundation (2018)

Assessment of the attainment gap through the lens of children and young people, and then from the perspective of schools. It shares 15 key lessons on what works to close the gap



[A Broken Social Elevator?](#)

OECD (2018)

In-depth analysis of the factors contributing to social mobility from an international perspective

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