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Social Mobility Pay Gap Report 2024

May 2025

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Social mobility pay gap report 2024

In this report, we present the socio-economic breakdown of our workforce, along with our 2024 social mobility pay gap statistics. We explain the factors contributing to these gaps and outline the actions we are taking to enhance social mobility both within Lewis Silkin and across the wider legal profession.

“The legal profession has long been perceived as an exclusive domain, accessible mainly to those from privileged backgrounds. At Lewis Silkin, we want to challenge that perception and change the reality.

Our recent ranking of 7th in the Social Mobility Index is a testament to our ongoing efforts to create a more accessible workplace. But this progress doesn’t mean our work is done. We are determined to continue broadening access to the profession, and not just at Lewis Silkin. We are committed to sharing what we learn about improving social mobility with our clients, contacts, and anyone who wants their organisation to do more in this area.

In any organisation, diversity of socio-economic backgrounds isn’t just a matter of fairness—it drives better thinking, more innovation, and brilliant client service. We want to ensure that talented individuals from all walks of life have the opportunity to thrive at Lewis Silkin. We know there’s more work to do, but our commitment to advancing social mobility within our firm and across the legal sector remains unwavering.”

Jo Farmer, Joint Managing Partner

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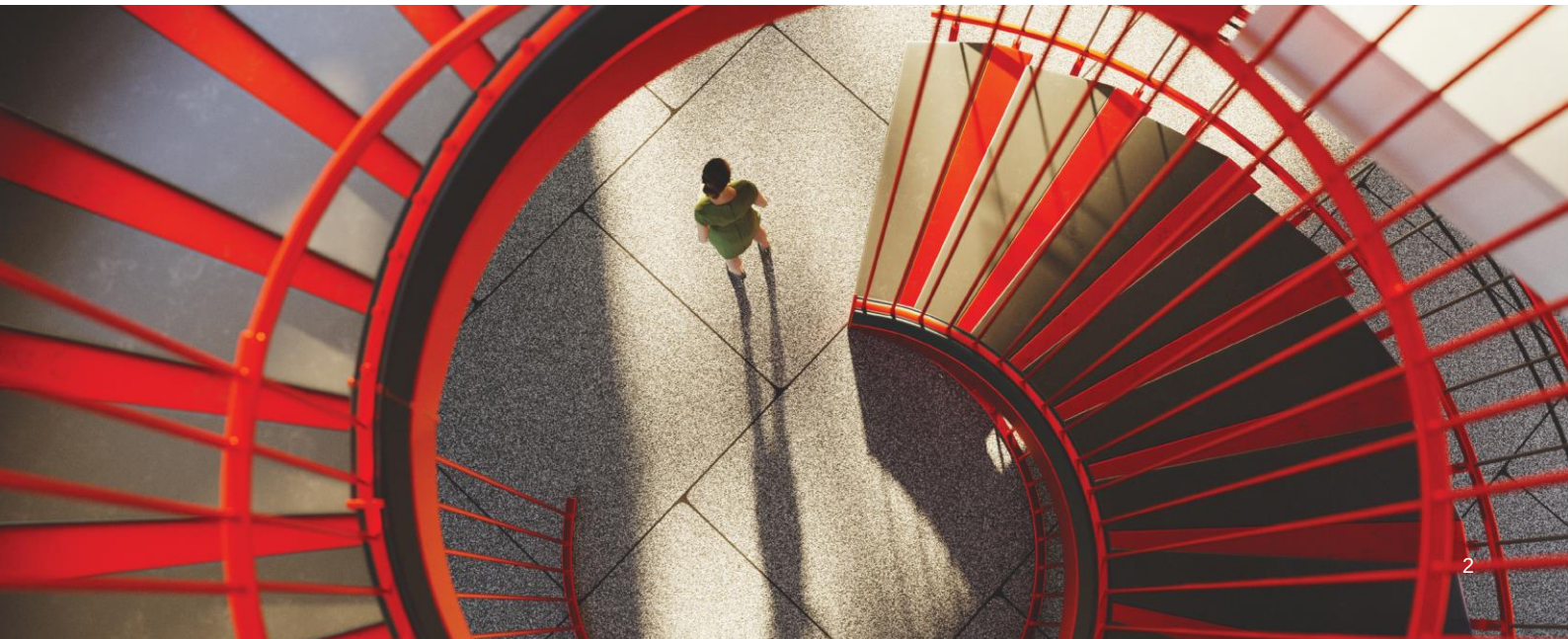


Our approach

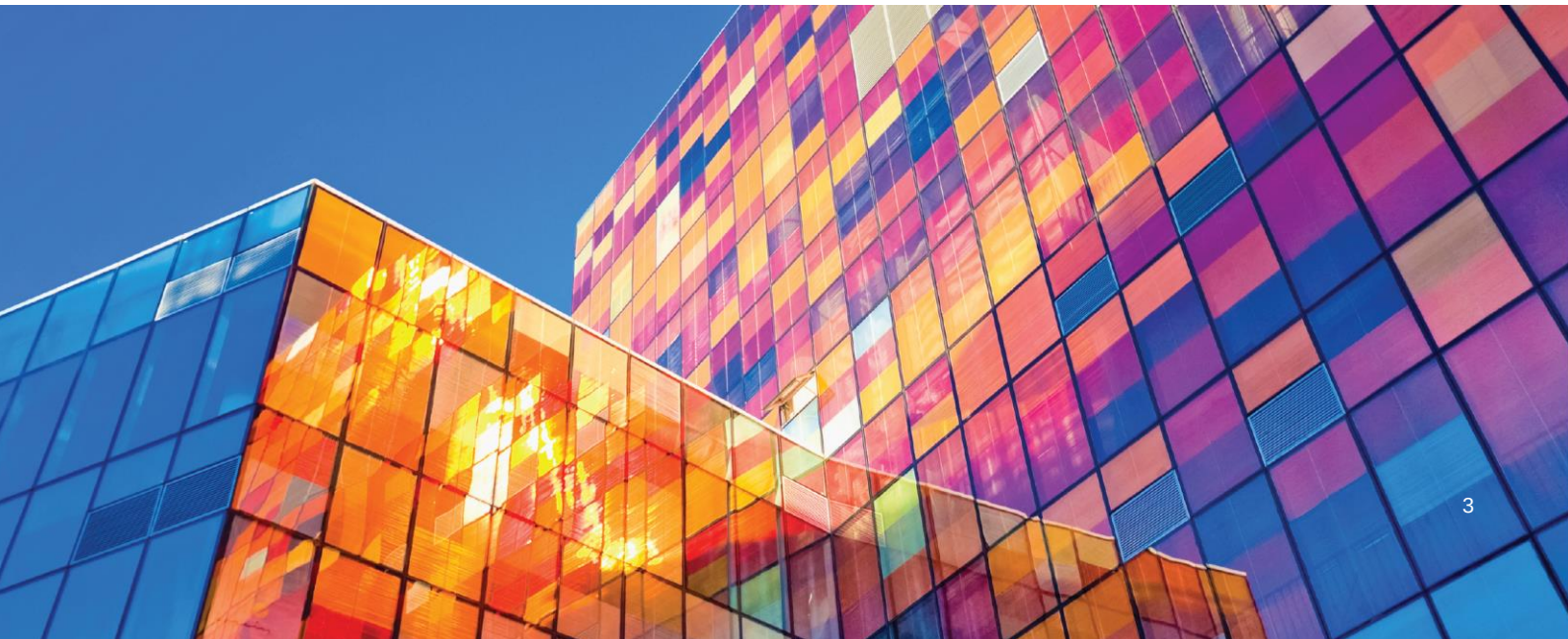
We have followed guidance on data collection and analysis set out by the Social Mobility Commission and asked employees and partners to provide information about their background voluntarily. We have data relating to:

- Socio-economic background (based on parental occupation at age 14)
- Whether they received free school meals (if they attended school after 1980)
- Whether they attended a state school (and if so whether comprehensive or selective/grammar) or private school
- Whether either of their parents graduated and gained a degree

Using this information, we applied the same methodology used in gender pay gap reporting in order to calculate a series of pay gap statistics, using 5 April 2024 as our “snapshot” date. We referred to the Social Mobility Foundation’s guidance[1].

In this report we have also included a breakdown of the socio-economic profile of our workforce.

[1] “Levelling the Playing Field”



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Our workforce

In this section we publish data on the socio-economic profile of our workforce as of 5 April 2024.

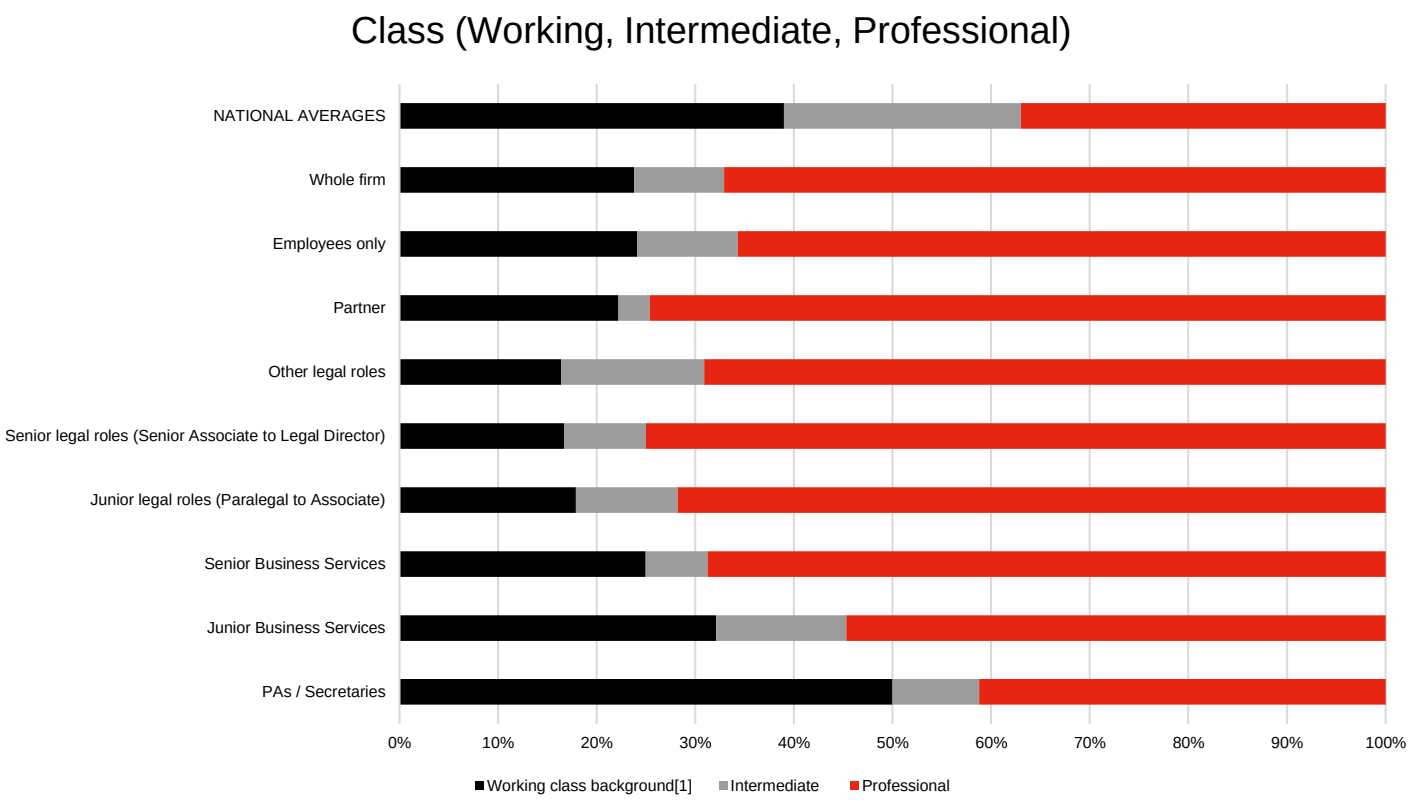
	Working class background[2]	Intermediate	Professional	Received free school meals	Attended comprehensive / academy	Attended private / public school (without a bursary)	Attended private / public school (with a bursary)	Attended grammar / selective state funded school	First in family to graduate from university
PAs / Secretaries	50.0%	8.8%	41.2%	23.8%	84.1%	2.3%	0.0%	13.6%	33.3%
Junior Business Services	32.1%	13.2%	54.7%	17.2%	64.6%	18.5%	0.0%	16.9%	44.2%
Senior Business Services	25.0%	6.3%	68.8%	11.9%	58.2%	22.4%	0.0%	19.4%	43.4%
Junior legal roles (Paralegal to Associate)	17.9%	10.3%	71.8%	11.3%	61.6%	27.9%	0.0%	10.5%	42.3%
Senior legal roles (Senior Associate to Legal Director)	16.7%	8.3%	75.0%	3.2%	48.4%	32.8%	0.0%	18.8%	44.3%
Other legal roles	16.4%	14.5%	69.1%	5.1%	53.3%	25.0%	1.7%	20.0%	42.1%
Partner	**22.2%**	**3.2%**	**74.6%**	**10.3%**	**41.2%**	**38.2%**	**0.0%**	**20.6%**	**49.3%**
Employees only	**24.1%**	**10.2%**	**65.7%**	**11.4%**	**60.6%**	**22.8%**	**0.3%**	**16.3%**	**42.4%**
Whole firm	**23.8%**	**9.1%**	**67.1%**	**11.2%**	**57.7%**	**25.1%**	**0.2%**	**17.0%**	**43.6%**
NATIONAL AVERAGES	**39.0%**	**24.0%**	**37.0%**	**15.0%**	**92.5%**	**7.5%**			**67.0%**

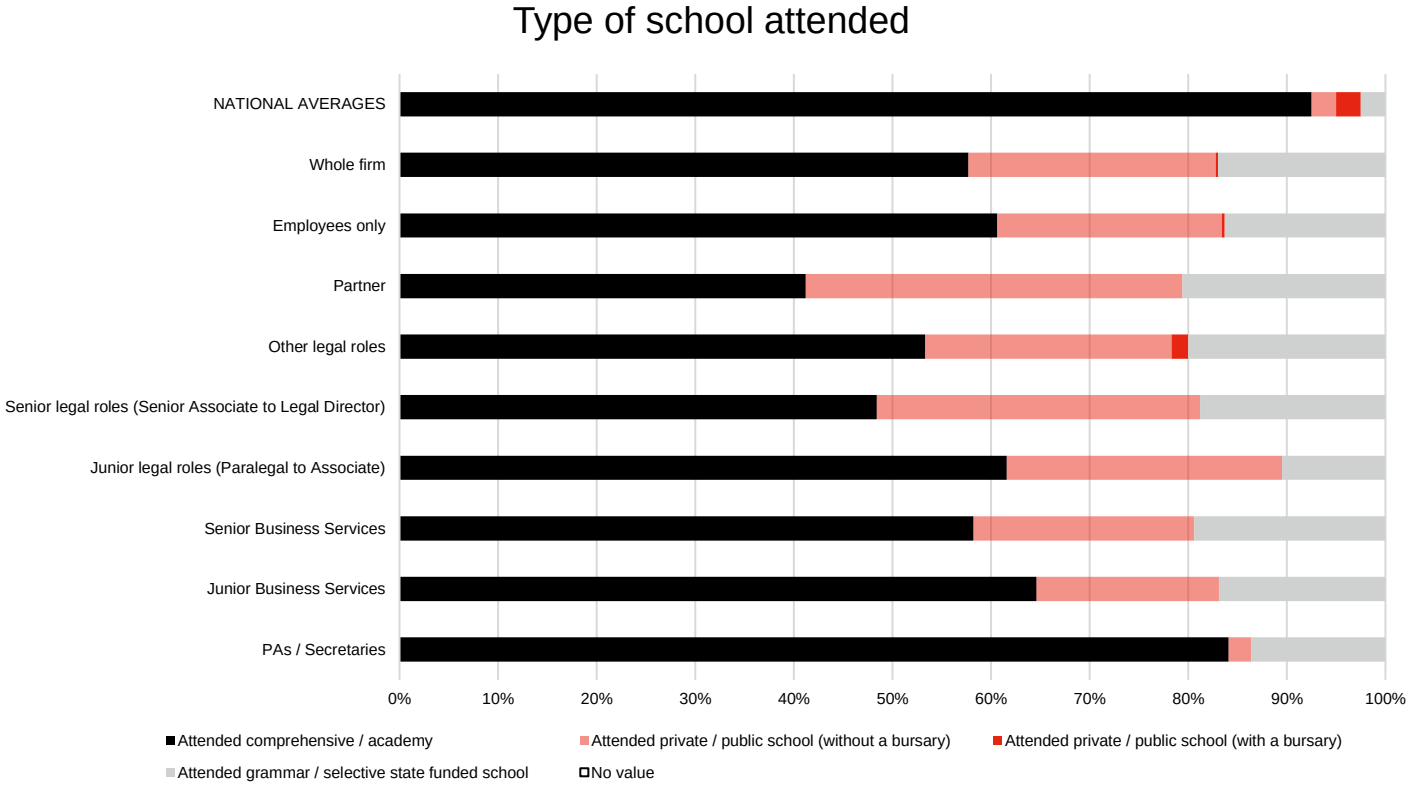
	Class	Free school meals	Type of school attended	First generation to attend university
Response rates	**77.2%**	**76.5%**	**79.6%**	**67.5%**

Our response rates remain high.

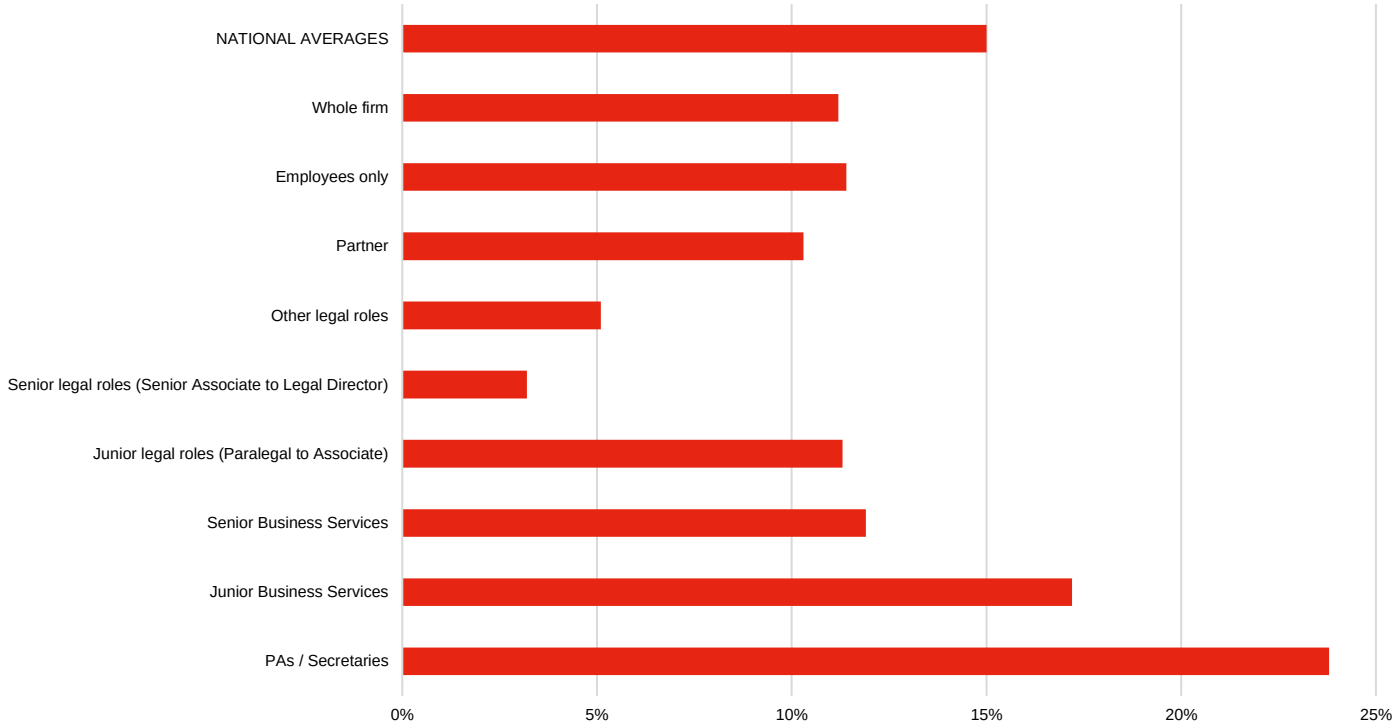
[2] This is determined using parental occupation at age 14 - we follow the recommendations set out by the Social Mobility Commission in its employer toolkit. Although research shows that parental occupation is the best measure of socio economic advantage, we recognise that it is only one indicator, which is why we have chosen to report across different measures.

Our workforce (stacked bar charts)

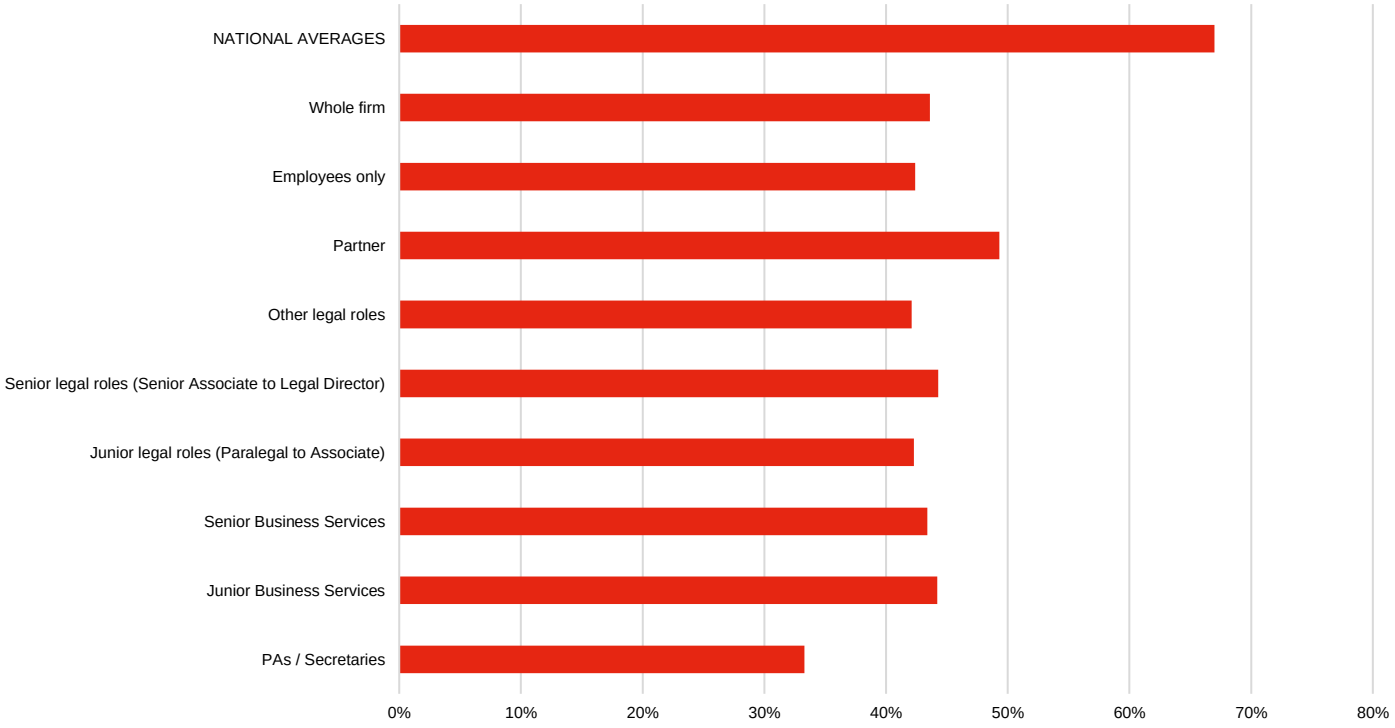




Received free school meals



First in family to graduate from university (%)



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Socio-economic background or “class”

What is this?

The Social Mobility Commission recommends defining an individual’s socio-economic background using the occupation of the highest earner in their household when they were aged 14. Using this guidance, we asked people to choose from a range of options. We then grouped these choices according to the guidance.

According to the guidance, examples of ‘working class’ occupations include electrician, farm worker, train driver, cleaner, security guard and plumber. Examples of ‘intermediate class’ occupations are secretary, call centre agent, nursery nurse and restaurant manager. Examples of ‘professional class’ occupations are teacher, nurse, accountant, solicitor, scientist and police officer.

Our pay gap statistics

These statistics are calculated by comparing the average (mean/median) person of a working class background against the average person who is not from this background. Positive values (ie greater than 0%) show that the mean/median person from a working class background is paid less than the mean/median person not from this background. Negative values (ie less than 0%) show the reverse.

	Employees only	Partners only	Whole firm
Mean pay gap	-8.8%	-10.6%	-5.9%
Median pay gap	-8.5%	-3.0%	-0.6%
Mean bonus gap	11.9%	-9.4%	2.4%
Median bonus gap	14.2%	-16.7%	1.4%
Proportion of intermediate/professional class people who received a bonus	76.6%	87.8%	78.4%
Proportion of working class people who received a bonus	72.3%	85.7%	74.2%
Lower quartile (percentage of working class people)	25.0%	25.0%	25.3%
Lower-mid quartile (percentage of working class people)	20.5%	20.0%	21.2%
Upper-mid quartile (percentage of working class people)	21.7%	6.3%	25.3%
Upper quartile (percentage of working class people)	28.9%	37.5%	23.2%

Our class pay gaps are relatively low across employees, partners, and the whole firm.

As in previous years, class has some correlation with age due to the way it is determined—based on parental occupation at age 14. This means that older individuals may be more likely to have been classified as “working class”. The higher proportion of “working class” individuals among our partner population continues to play a role in lowering the overall mean pay gap. We also have a very good response rate from our partners: 68 out of 89 have provided this data.

The distribution of working-class individuals across pay quartiles shows some shifts. Notably, among partners, the percentage of working-class individuals in the upper quartile has increased to 37.5%. We are pleased to have strong working class representation at the very top of our business, who are able to act as role models for others.

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Free school meals

What is this?

We asked people to state whether they received free school meals at any point during their education.

This is a measure of extreme economic disadvantage. The poorest 15% of the UK population receive free school meals. By measuring this, we hope to understand the degree to which our workplace is accessible to the poorest in society.

Our pay gap statistics

These statistics are calculated by comparing the average (mean/median) person of who received free school meals against the average person who did not receive free school meals. We followed Social Mobility Commission guidance and excluded anyone who did not attend school after 1980.

	Employees only	Partners only	Whole firm
Mean pay gap	18.8%	-23.8%	2.0%
Median pay gap	31.2%	-60.1%	29.1%
Mean bonus gap	2.9%	-39.5%	-17.7%
Median bonus gap	6.1%	-50.0%	1.6%
Proportion of people who DID NOT receive free school meals who received a bonus	76.0%	88.5%	77.9%
Proportion of people who DID receive free school meals who received a bonus	73.8%	85.7%	75.5%
Lower quartile (percentage who received free school meals)	13.2%	11.8%	13.9%
Lower-mid quartile (percentage who received free school meals)	16.5%	5.9%	13.9%
Upper-mid quartile (percentage who received free school meals)	7.7%	5.9%	8.3%
Upper quartile (percentage who received free school meals)	7.6%	17.6%	8.3%

Overall our gaps are lower than last year. As shown above, 15% of the UK population receive free school meals but 11.4% of our workforce (and 10.3% of our partners) received them. Because it is such a small proportion of the workforce, it means these gaps are potentially more changeable. The addition or removal of just a few extra people could have a big impact on averages and so change the gap (particularly among our partner population statistics, who given seniority are more likely to have gone to school before free school meals were introduced). Any conclusions drawn from the data must therefore be done only with that important caveat.

That said, we are pleased to see some improvement in our gaps although part of the reason for the improvement in gaps in all groups: employees only, partners and the whole firm.

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Type of school attended

What is this?

We asked people to state what type of school they attended at age 14. This is a measure of extreme economic advantage. The options were:

- State comprehensive / academy
- Grammar / selective state school
- Private / public school (with a bursary)
- Private / public school (without a bursary)

Our pay gap statistics

These statistics are calculated by comparing the average (mean/median) person who went to a state comprehensive / academy against the average person who did not go to a state comprehensive / academy.

	Employees only	Partners only	Whole firm
Mean pay gap	-5.3%	9.1%	34.9%
Median pay gap	2.3%	10.2%	30.0%
Mean bonus gap	-3.9%	11.9%	25.6%
Median bonus gap	2.5%	25.0%	24.8%
Proportion of those who DID NOT attend a state comprehensive/academy that received a bonus	74.3%	85.0%	75.6%
Proportion of those who DID attend a state comprehensive/academy that received a bonus	77.4%	92.9%	77.6%
Lower quartile (percentage who went to state comprehensive/academy)	60.2%	52.9%	60.8%
Lower-mid quartile (percentage who went to state comprehensive/academy)	62.4%	35.3%	65.6%
Upper-mid quartile (percentage who went to state comprehensive/academy)	55.9%	41.2%	65.6%
Upper quartile (percentage who went to state comprehensive/academy)	63.8%	35.3%	42.1%

In the UK, 7.5% of people went to a private/public or grammar school (either with or without a bursary). In our workplace, and in common with the rest of the legal industry, people from this background are overrepresented: 39.4% of our employees (42% in 2023) – and 58.8% of our partners – went to private / public or grammar schools.

Despite this, we see that our gaps are low in both the employee only and partner only statistics. Our conclusions from this are that, although we continue to have substantial overrepresentation of those who attended private or selective schools, this does not appear to have a difference on opportunities for career progression.

That said, our whole firm statistics are much higher. This is because there is a big difference between the proportions of employees and of partners who attended selective education. When these groups are combined, the greater underrepresentation in the partner group causes a sizeable gap. Historically, partners were more likely to have attended private or selective schools, reflecting past recruitment trends in the legal industry. While this is still evident in our data, it is gradually changing as more diverse cohorts progress through the firm. Over time, we expect this shift to be reflected in our partner population, further reducing any firmwide gap.

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First generation university

What is this?

We asked people “if you went to university, were you the first generation in your family to do so?”.

Although this is not a measure of social background, attending university gives a nuanced form of cultural advantage, as organisational cultures can favour graduates. Being the ‘first in family’ to attend signals that someone may have had a potential lack of support to navigate university and entry into the graduate workforce. If pay gaps calculated on this basis are high, it suggests that people with that advantage may be more likely to succeed. They may find it easier to be recruited and have successful careers.

Our pay gap statistics

These statistics are calculated by comparing the average (mean / median) person of who was the first generation in their family to graduate from university against the average (mean / median) person who is not the first generation in their family to graduate from university. We excluded all people who did not wish to provide this information or who had not provided any response.

	Employees only	Partners only	Whole firm
Mean pay gap	-3.3%	-1.9%	-15.2%
Median pay gap	6.5%	-1.5%	-3.2%
Mean bonus gap	-2.0%	2.1%	-9.6%
Median bonus gap	4.3%	0.0%	-6.4%
Proportion of people who WERE NOT first generation to attend university who received a bonus	74.9%	91.4%	77.4%
Proportion of people who WERE first generation to attend university who received a bonus	77.6%	85.3%	79.2%
Lower quartile (percentage of people who were the first generation to graduate from university)	37.2%	52.9%	42.7%
Lower-mid quartile (percentage of people who were the first generation to graduate from university)	48.7%	44.4%	41.5%
Upper-mid quartile (percentage of people who were the first generation to graduate from university)	33.8%	52.9%	37.9%
Upper quartile (percentage of people who were the first generation to graduate from university)	45.1%	47.1%	49.0%

Our low pay gaps suggest that we are effectively supporting employees from diverse backgrounds and ensuring that any initial advantages—such as having university-educated parents—do not translate into continued disparities within our workplace.

Among our lawyers, 44.5% were the first in their family to attend university, compared to 67% across all sectors. Notably, a higher proportion of our partners come from first-generation university backgrounds than our overall workforce. This is a positive indicator of social mobility within the firm. However, it may also reflect generational trends—many partners are older, and university attendance has increased significantly over the past 20-30 years. Because partners are the highest earners, this demographic factor helps explain why our mean pay gap for the whole firm is lower than the median gap, as median figures are less influenced by outliers at the top of the pay scale.

What we are doing to improve social mobility

We are taking a number of steps to improve social mobility, within both our firm and our industry.

Social mobility cold spot outreach

We deliver remote and in-person careers events to secondary school students (mostly Year 10 and above) in areas with low social mobility (known as social mobility 'cold spots'). Over the 2024/25 financial year, we ran 24 sessions in schools these areas.

We also make positive use of our position as advisors to many large employers in various sectors by encouraging clients to take part in our outreach events. These events aim to raise aspirations and provide the advice and support needed to achieve them. We build lasting relationships and attendees at our cold spot events have gone on to subsequently win our essay competitions, take part in our mentorship scheme and carry out work experience at the firm.

Mentoring schemes

Our Mentoring Scheme is a nine-month programme for students aged 16-18, many of whom attend school in social mobility cold spots. Our mentors meet regularly with their mentees and help them with their career aspirations (in the legal sector or otherwise) by offering advice, information and resources about various paths, whether related to university, apprenticeships or job experience. Our mentors come from across the firm including lawyers, accountants, paralegals and project managers. We currently have 58 mentor-mentee pairings. We strive to offer integrated opportunities, including in-person office visits to meet with their mentors and work experience opportunities.

Internal mentoring

Since our last report, we created have an internal mentoring programme targeted at those from less advantaged socio-economic backgrounds. The programme was a response to a survey, in which a large proportion of those who self-identified as working class highlighted a desire for mentoring to help with career progression.

The structured programme creates a reciprocal mentoring partnership between two colleagues at the firm, who will then meet on a monthly basis to discuss personal career progression to the mentee. We hope that the mentors involved in this programme will gain new insights into the wider barriers that individuals can face in the workplace, and, given their senior roles, take steps to mitigate them.

Our internal mentoring scheme is in its early days still. We currently have 11 mentor-mentee pairings and are receiving good feedback, though are committed to adapting and enhancing the program to ensure all parties are gaining from it.

Social mobility index

Since 2021 we have risen from 59th in the index to 7th - we are really pleased with this continued progress. We are really pleased to be a top ten employers and are committed to maintaining our high ranking on the Social Mobility Foundation's Employer Index.

We have achieved this brilliant result because of our dedicated and committed social mobility group. Made up of around 30 individuals from across the firm, the group is are empowered to take action on the feedback we receive from the Employer Index.

Improving access to the legal sector: apprenticeships

We have embraced alternative methods of accessing the legal sector, and have a number of apprentices in the firm in both legal and non-legal roles.

Our first cohort of solicitor apprentices joined the firm in 2021 and will qualify in 2027. In September 2022 we also welcomed our third solicitor apprentice to the firm, and in September 2024 we welcomed our newest two solicitor apprentices.

We now have a total of five solicitor apprentices in the firm and will continue to recruit more in future.

Social mobility week

We hold an annual social mobility week in January each year. In 2025, we shared a series of blogs written by our workforce about their own social mobility stories. We also shared film, book and documentary resources to help raise awareness of social mobility issues. We ran a survey to find out more about perceptions of class within the firm and, as this is our third year running this, track the effectiveness of our activities at driving change but also perceptions of change.

External events

We are passionate advocates for social mobility. As part of our unwavering commitment to advancing social mobility, in November 2024 we launched an ambitious free event series designed to raise awareness and tackle the most pressing social mobility challenges, with a focus on delivering practical and actionable insights to drive change. Our inaugural event set a high bar, featuring a powerful keynote from Professor Lee Elliot Major, the UK's first Professor of Social Mobility, who shared cutting-edge research and actionable strategies for breaking down systemic barriers to opportunity.

Building on that momentum, our second event in March 2025 brought together a panel of social mobility leaders from the financial services and creative industries, focused on delivering concrete, practical strategies to enhance progression and retention within organisations. This series is about much more than networking and discussion; the event series is about equipping employers with the tools, knowledge, and inspiration to create meaningful, measurable progress.

We want our clients and contacts to be as passionate about driving social mobility change as we are, so that they can not just drive change in their own organisations, but persuade others to do the same. We will be continuing our event series with two more events in 25/26.

Data and analysis

We have proactively built an internal social mobility dataset. By being open and transparent about our objectives, the vast majority of our workforce has chosen to voluntarily provide data about their socio-economic backgrounds, which we use to inform decision making.

Sutton Trust

We're proud to support the Sutton Trust, a charity that champions social mobility through programmes, research and policy influence. Through our partnership, we work together to help young people from disadvantaged backgrounds access the legal profession and drive social mobility. We support the Sutton Trust's Pathways to Law programme, levelling the playing field when it comes to accessing networks, information, and critical work experience placements.

In the last, year, we hosted two Sutton Trust students for work experience in our Cardiff office, focusing on geographical areas with the greatest need. We also organised two internal events with the Trust. One addressing accent bias and social mobility, with approximately half of the firm attending. The second event addressed the importance of early years and reading in the context of social mobility, this event connected with our existing primary school reading schemes and aimed to increase staff awareness of social mobility issues, aligning with our key partnership objectives. Additionally, six of our colleagues volunteered and represented the firm at various events as part of Sutton Trust's Pathways to Law programme. Through mentorship, advice, and sharing their personal experiences, our volunteers played a crucial role in inspiring the next generation of talent.

Since our partnership commenced, we have fundraised nearly £34,000 for the Sutton Trust cause.

PRIME

We are a member of PRIME (an alliance of law firms across the UK and Republic of Ireland determined to improve access to, and socio-economic diversity within, the legal profession). As part of our PRIME commitment we offer work experience placements for students from less privileged backgrounds who might otherwise not have the opportunity to access careers in the legal world.

Rare

We use the Rare Contextual Recruitment System for our graduate roles, which uses data to help us identify candidates with the greatest potential. The system compares the economic and social circumstances of applicants to produce contextual data on every candidate, allowing us to spot talent we might otherwise have missed, and ensure we build an even richer and more diverse staff population.

Progress on Targets

We have set a number of challenging targets to push ourselves to do more in a range of areas:

- **By 2025, to be carrying out more than 20 outreach sessions each year in social mobility cold spot areas**
  - Last year we reported that we met this target and carried out 22 sessions. In the 2024-25 financial year, we went even further and achieved 31 sessions.
  - We recognise that focusing on cold spots alone may be too limiting – there may be smaller areas of deprivation sitting within larger areas that are not classed as social mobility cold spots. We need to be more sophisticated with our targeting and so will not focus on cold spots alone. Our outreach has been expanded to schools in London that also need our support.
- **By 2027, to achieve a ranking in the top ten of all employers in the social mobility index**
  - We achieved this target 3 years early.
- **By 2033, to have one or more previous attendees of a social mobility cold spot outreach event working for the firm as a qualified solicitor**
  - This remains a long term, aspirational target. We continue to provide ongoing opportunities and support to students who have previously attended our cold spot careers events, including our annual essay competition.
  - We have previously awarded a £3,000 annual bursary to a previous careers event attendee and current law student.

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