

Fact Sheet 4: Social Mobility Explained for Employers

Purpose: To help SMEs understand social mobility and their role in creating inclusive, opportunity-driven workplaces.

What is Social Mobility?

Social mobility refers to a person's ability to **move between socio-economic classes**.

Barriers can prevent talented young people from accessing opportunities, regardless of their skills or potential.

Common barriers include:

- Limited professional networks
- Lack of formal work experience
- Financial pressure to prioritise immediate income
- Recruitment systems favouring traditional qualifications or polished CVs

Why SMEs Matter

- SMEs form the majority of the UK workforce and often **provide local employment in communities**.
- SMEs can offer **flexible, meaningful entry points** that larger employers may overlook.
- Example: A 16–18-year-old may gain paid work experience or apprenticeship at a small business that wouldn't be offered at a national company.

Context:

- Research shows that work-based learning early in a career **boosts long-term earning potential** and career resilience.

- SMEs can have a disproportionate impact locally by connecting young people to work opportunities.

Links:

- Social Mobility Commission: socialmobility.independent-commission.uk
- The King's Trust – business advice: www.kingstrust.org.uk/how-we-can-help/who-else/business-advice

Social Mobility in Practice for SMEs

Steps SMEs can take:

1. **Review job requirements:** Focus on skills, behaviours, and potential over formal qualifications.
2. **Diversify recruitment routes:** Engage local training providers, community organisations, or apprenticeships.
3. **Offer structured onboarding:** Support young people transitioning from education to work.
4. **Mentor & buddy systems:** Reduce attrition, improve engagement, and support retention.

Context:

- Evidence shows that young employees who feel supported are more productive and engaged.
- Structured support reduces risk of early drop-out and increases long-term retention.



Measuring Impact

- Track **referrals, hires, or placements** of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Gather **mentor and SME reflections** to capture improvements in confidence, awareness, and inclusivity.
- Use app-based reflections or simple internal records for ongoing improvement.

Practical Resources for SMEs

- **Careers & Enterprise Company:**
www.careersandenterprise.co.uk – advice on connecting to schools and young people.
- **Creative Access:** creativeaccess.org.uk – inclusive talent pipelines for young people.
- **Local youth organisations / borough employment services** – often provide referral pathways and support packages.

Quick Tip:

SMEs do not need to reinvent recruitment; connecting to existing programmes allows them to have a **strong social mobility impact with minimal overhead.**

