

Social mobility

Updated May 2021

Law firms rely on the quality of their people and win business by reflecting the clients and communities they serve. Using modern recruitment practices can help you access the widest talent pool and prevent you excluding bright candidates from a less privileged socio-economic background.

The resources here provide advice from experts in social mobility and examples of practical steps that you can take to make sure you 'encourage equality diversity and inclusion' (SRA Principle 6 [https://www.sra.org.uk/solicitors/standards-regulations/principles/]) in your workplace.

Understand your data

In spring 2021, we updated the diversity questions we use in mySRA regarding socio economic background. These updates reflect the latest best practice advice from the Social Mobility Commission.

[https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/understanding-a-workforces-socio-economic-background-for-change] We will be using the same questions in the next firm diversity data survey in summer 2021.

Remove barriers and encourage social mobility

The Social Mobility Commission's Employer's Toolkit for the Financial and Professional Services Sector [https://socialmobilityworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/SMC-Financial-and-professional-services-sector-toolkit_WEB_Dec-2020_FINAL_web.pdf], published in December 2020, outlines practical steps you can take to remove barriers for those from a less privileged background and improve diversity and inclusion in your firm. It offers guidance on how to move from 'developing' to 'optimising' the impact of your work.

For further advice on how you can make best use of the social mobility data you collect from your employees and how to set up internships and apprenticeships, read Sutton Trust's Social Mobility in the Workplace – An employer's guide [https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/social-mobility-in-the-workplace-an-employers-guide/].

Further support is also available via The Law Society's social mobility ambassadors scheme. [https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/campaigns/social-mobility-ambassadors] This promotes role models from non-traditional backgrounds who have achieved their ambitions and are willing to support their peers within the profession.

Work with others

There are a number of schemes within our sector which bring firms together to promote and develop social mobility.

PRIME

PRIME [<https://primecommitment.co.uk/about-prime>] is 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. PRIME members make the PRIME commitment [<https://primecommitment.co.uk/articles/the-prime-commitment>] , which helps make sure students get the same high-quality experience no matter what firm they are at. Read about the experiences and benefits that law firms Norton Rose Fulbright [<https://primecommitment.co.uk/articles/norton-rose-fulbright>] and Ashurst LLP [<https://primecommitment.co.uk/articles/ensuring-continuity-for-students-during-covid-19-moving-to-a-virtual-work-experience-programme>] have gained from offering PRIME programmes.

Social Mobility Business Partnership (SMBP)

SMBP [<https://smbp.org.uk/>] provides work experience and ongoing support to students interested in a career in law, business or finance.

Aspiring Solicitors

Aspiring Solicitors [<https://www.aspiringsolicitors.co.uk/>] works with law firms and legal teams to support their recruitment of diverse talent.

More information

Review the data that we publish in our law firm diversity data tool [<https://www.sra.org.uk/sra/equality-diversity/diversity-profession/>] about social mobility in the sector.

The Bridge group have carried out an intersectional review of progression in the legal sector in its report Socio-economic background and progression to partner in the law [<https://www.thebridgegroup.org.uk/news/partner-law>] , which challenges “the myth of meritocracy in pathways to partnership”. The report looks at how ethnicity and gender combine with socio-economic background to amplify inequalities in rates of progression.

As well as assuring consistent high standards, the new routes to qualification introduced with the Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE) will remove unjustified barriers for aspiring solicitors and encourage new and diverse pathways to qualification. Students can read more about routes into

the profession [<https://www.sra.org.uk/become-solicitor/sqe/>] on the Student section of our website.