

# SOCIAL MOBILITY EMPLOYER INDEX 2026

## GUIDANCE NOTES AND SURVEY CHANGES

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# THE SOCIAL MOBILITY EMPLOYER INDEX: OVERVIEW

This document has been designed to support you with your submission to the Social Mobility Employer Index.

Please read the document before entering. Should you have any questions once you have read this, please contact the team at [employerindex@socialmobility.org.uk](mailto:employerindex@socialmobility.org.uk)

## **What is the Social Mobility Employer Index?**

The Social Mobility Employer Index (The Index) is an annual employer benchmarking tool for organisations looking to understand how they are performing on social mobility and where they can improve. We assess the steps being taken to ensure that employers are open to talent from all social backgrounds.

The Employer Index analyses who gets in, who gets on and who belongs in the workplace and can help you attract, retain, and progress the top talent from all backgrounds. It is comprised of questions directed at employers and assess all stages of the employment lifecycle.

## **Why enter the Employer Index?**

Since launching in 2017, the Index has illustrated that the workplace is as important as the classroom for improving social mobility. Rewarding ability, not background, is not only the right thing to do, but good for employers too. By recruiting, developing, and retaining a diverse workforce, employers can access the best talent pool, reduce the risk of groupthink, and gain a competitive edge.

## **What you will receive for entering the Index**

When you enter the Index, you will receive:

A report with advice across each section of the Index, tailored to your submission and designed to help you to improve. This covers each section of the Index and provides feedback on your performance, as well as best practice. Employers consistently tell us this is the most valuable aspect of entering the Index. You do not have to fill in each section to secure the advice, since we offer guidance and best practice to support you in areas you have not yet begun work on.

A communications pack with collateral to promote your involvement in the Index for internal and external audiences.

You will also receive a logo which can be used in your email signature, website and across your social media channels.

## **Payment for the Index**

There is an entry fee of £1,400 (+VAT). This contribution to our charity will help us develop and deliver the Index in a sustainable way. Charities and small employers (49 employees or fewer) are exempt. Sectoral insights for legal, banking, financial services and insurance, and professional services are available for an additional fee of £600 (+VAT). Any organisation can purchase the sector analysis, you will be able to indicate if you would like to when you submit.

If you find the entry fee will prohibit your organisation from entering the Index, please contact [employerindex@socialmobility.org.uk](mailto:employerindex@socialmobility.org.uk).

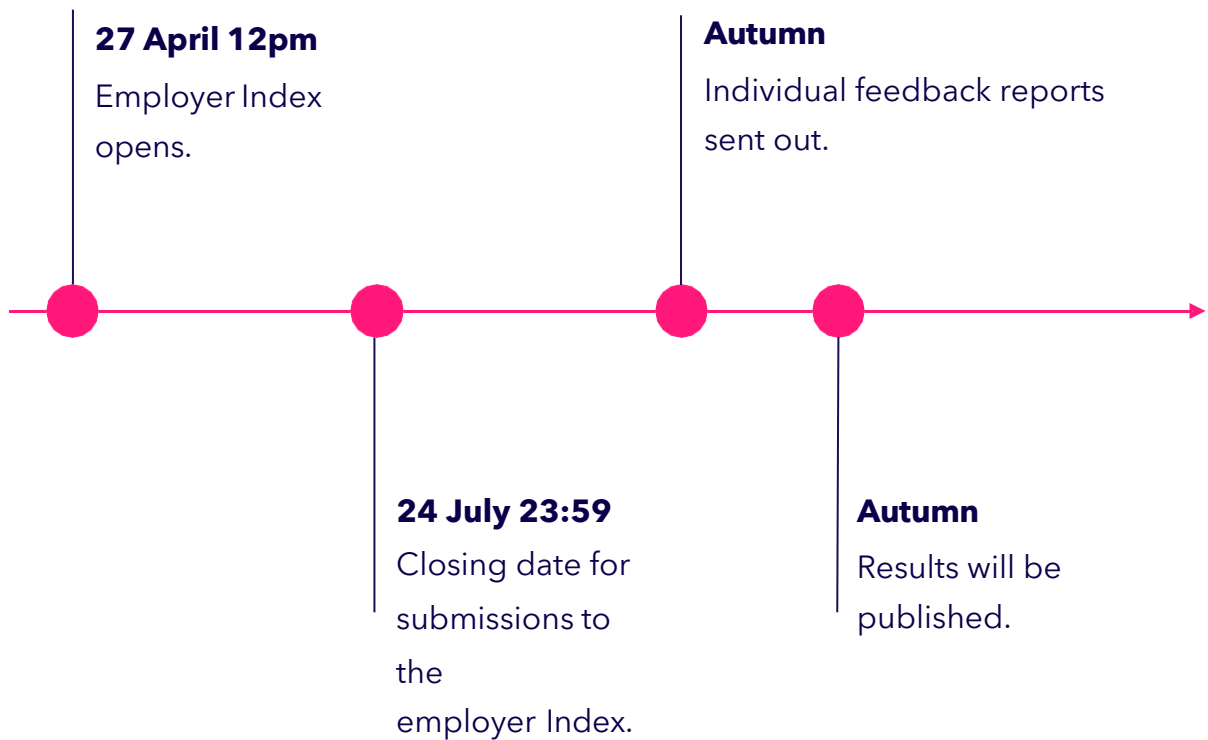
## **Entering the Index anonymously**

All employers choosing to take part will be entitled to remain completely anonymous but will still receive feedback on their performance. Scoring is confidential and will not be published.

## **Index terms and conditions**

Full details of the Index terms and conditions are to be found in the Index contract. If you enter the Index but do not adhere to the terms and conditions, we reserve the right to withhold your feedback report until payment has been made.

## 2026 TIMELINE



Employers are invited to submit their responses to the 2026 Index at any point from **27 April 2026, 12:00 to 24 July 2026, 23:59.**

# HOW TO COMPLETE YOUR INDEX SUBMISSION

**The Index survey will open on the portal on Monday 27<sup>th</sup> April at 12pm.**

You can complete your Index submission by filling out the survey on our portal. You can register for the portal on the [SMF website](#). During your online submission you will be asked to tick a box, agreeing to our terms and conditions. Once you have filled in the Basic Info section, you will be able to see all the questions for each section without needing to fill in any additional information. Please note, all submissions must be made through the online portal - other submission methods will not be accepted.

You can save your progress and return to the survey later by logging back into your online portal account. However, please ensure that you save your progress using the buttons at the bottom of the page for each section before leaving the portal. If you navigate away from the page before saving, any unsaved progress will be lost, so it's good practice to save regularly.

**If you would like to work on the survey with colleagues at the same time, you can download the survey as a Word document (via the portal) for offline collaboration.** Please note that this version is only supplied for your convenience, and you will need to transfer your answers to the online portal for submission before the deadline - we cannot accept submissions via Word format.

We do not advise working on the portal across multiple machines or multiple users at the same time, as this risks overwriting others' answers and you may lose progress. We advise having one primary portal user for your organisation. Please contact the SMF Employer Index team using the address below if you would like to update your organisation's account or contact details.

Once you have completed your submission, you will be able to download a copy of your completed survey. Please download a copy for your records.

After you have accepted the terms and conditions and officially made your submission by clicking 'Finish' on Section 9 of the survey, you will be asked for your preferred payment method. Your finance contact will then receive instructions for payment via email.

If you have any questions about the Index, please contact [employerindex@socialmobility.org.uk](mailto:employerindex@socialmobility.org.uk)

## Making a payment for your Index submission

Payment is typically made upon submission on our portal, via the Checkout.

- › You will have the option to add a Sectoral Report. Please see '**Payment for the Index**' above for details of fees and services provided.
- › Registered charities **or** other organisations with fewer than 50 employees are exempt from payment of the Index submission fee. However, if selected upon Checkout, the optional Sectoral Report remains a chargeable service to these organisations.
- › Payment may be made via invoice or credit card
- › Please contact us at [employerindex@socialmobility.org.uk](mailto:employerindex@socialmobility.org.uk) if you wish to pay prior to submission.
- › The payment deadline is **one month** after the closing date for submissions, at the latest.
- › Feedback Calls are available to purchase upon receiving your Feedback Report. Charities and organisations with <50 employees are not exempt from payment for the Feedback Call.
- › Please refer to our [Terms and Conditions](#), section 5 on Services and section 6 on Fees for further information. If you have any queries about payments and fees, please email [employerindex@socialmobility.org.uk](mailto:employerindex@socialmobility.org.uk)

## Data Protection

The data you provide in your submission to the Index will be controlled by the Social Mobility Foundation. No data will be passed to third parties. To read our data protection policy, please click [here](#).

## General guidance on completing your Index submission

The following pages are designed to guide you on what we're looking for in each section of the Index, along with additional notes for certain questions where clarification or context may be needed.

- We do not anticipate that all organisations will be able to answer every question or section of the Index, and we understand that all employers are at different stages. We only require organisations complete Section 0: Organisation Information and one required question in Section 9: *"Overall, how would you rate your experience of completing the Index survey this year?"* to submit to the Index. All entrants will receive a feedback report with key recommendations based on our insights and best practice. However, the more detail entrants are able to provide in their submission, the more bespoke our recommendations will be.
- At the beginning of each section, you will be asked if you will be submitting

answers to that section. If you will not be submitting answers to a section, please state the reason why in the follow-up question, as this information will be helpful when reviewing your submission. If you are unable to answer a question, please leave it blank or, if the option is given, indicate that the question doesn't apply to you, e.g. select 'We don't offer an apprenticeship scheme'.

- ▶ Quality is much more important than quantity in your responses. Please only provide information that is relevant to the question and keep answers concise. You can repeat information about initiatives if they are relevant to multiple questions.
- ▶ If you have new initiatives and/or something is in its infancy and you do not yet have evidence of the impact, **please do** share information with us on what you are hoping to achieve.
- ▶ Whilst it is great that you may have some initiatives in place to support broader diversity and inclusion efforts, **initiatives focused explicitly and solely on other diversity characteristics are out of scope of the Social Mobility Employer Index**. Please only focus on initiatives specific to social mobility and use the space to provide as much detail as possible on the activity, how it has been targeted to reach individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and the outcomes: both in terms of your organisation and for the individuals.
- ▶ The marking criteria for the Index is strictly confidential. Guidance information that is shared publicly is made available to all prospective entrants.

# WHAT IS COVERED IN THE INDEX

The Index analyses who gets in, who gets on and who belongs in the workplace and is comprised of eight sections:

<b>Section</b>  <b>1</b>	<b>PRE-18 OUTREACH AND WORK WITH YOUNG PEOPLE</b>  In this section we are looking at how effectively employers target young people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and whether your outreach provides accessible routes into your organisation for those with an interest and aptitude. The Index rewards employers that offer well-targeted and well-evaluated programmes that are accessible to all.
<b>Section</b>  <b>2</b>	<b>ATTRACTION AND POST-18 OUTREACH</b>  In this section we are considering the extent to which organisations attract and engage individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds onto their graduate, apprenticeship, and school leaver programmes. The Index rewards employers that make an active effort to diversify their attraction methods, ensuring they reach those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.
<b>Section</b>  <b>3</b>	<b>RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION</b>  In this section we are examining recruitment and selection processes that too often reward 'polish' - having the accent, appearance, or behaviours commonly associated with applicants from more privileged backgrounds - over potential. The best-performing employers in the Index engage in two categories of action to address this: a) removing barriers that prevent individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds progressing to selection, and b) rewarding current ability and future potential over past academic performance.
<b>Section</b>  <b>4</b>	<b>ROUTES INTO THE EMPLOYER</b>  In this section we are looking at the steps that employers are taking to create well-structured routes into their organisations. Employers who perform well target all entry routes to people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds; hire based on potential and pay fairly for the routes into their organisations.

<p>Section</p> <p><b>5</b></p>	<p><b>DATA COLLECTION</b></p> <p>This section examines how employers collect and analyse data to understand their workforce’s socioeconomic profile. The Index recognises companies that collect data and rigorously analyse it, using the insights it gives them to improve their socioeconomic diversity.</p>
<p>Section</p> <p><b>6</b></p>	<p><b>PAY, PROGRESSION AND RETENTION</b></p> <p>Social mobility is not just about individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds entering a higher-paid career; it is equally about having the ability to flourish and progress at work. This section explores financial security in roles and the support provided to employees to progress in their careers. Employers who perform well in this section will have explored the impact of socioeconomic background on pay, progression and retention in their organisation and implemented support to employees from lower socioeconomic backgrounds to allow them to thrive.</p>
<p>SECTION</p> <p><b>7</b></p>	<p><b>CULTURE AND INTERNAL ADVOCACY</b></p> <p>This section examines the strategies undertaken to create an inclusive workplace culture and the work going on within the organisation to support employees from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Employers who perform well in this section will have undertaken a robust exercise to understand the experiences of people from lower socioeconomic background, will have senior buy-in for social mobility strategies and will have set targets to improve their socioeconomic diversity.</p>
<p>Section</p> <p><b>8</b></p>	<p><b>EXTERNAL ADVOCACY</b></p> <p>This section reviews the external advocacy work that organisations do to improve social mobility. Those who perform highly in this section are the employers who leverage their influence to encourage external stakeholders to act on social mobility.</p>

# WHAT HAS CHANGED IN THE INDEX FOR 2026

There are only two changes that have been made to the 2026 Employer Index survey compared with 2025:

- Two new questions on apprenticeship outreach have been added to Section 1.
- A new Section 9 has been added to seek feedback from employers on their experience of entering the Index. These questions are not marked and so will not affect your results.

## SECTION 1: PRE-18 OUTREACH AND WORK WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

**Q: Does your pre-18 outreach include information/guidance on apprenticeships?**

- Yes
- No
- We don't offer apprenticeships

**Q: Please provide details on your apprenticeship outreach (1,200 characters max)**

## SECTION 9: YOUR INDEX EXPERIENCE

**Q: Overall, how would you rate your experience of completing the Index survey this year? \***

- Very positive
- Positive
- Neutral
- Negative
- Very negative

**Q: What worked well, and what could be improved?**

**Q: What have been the main barriers to entering or engaging with the Index for your organisation?** Select up to three

Length or complexity of the survey

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Data availability or maturity

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Internal capacity or resourcing

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Senior leadership buy-in

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Technical/platform challenges

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No significant barriers

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Other (please specify)

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**Q: (For returning entrants only) To what extent has repeated participation in the Index supported progress on social mobility in your organisation?**

Significantly

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Moderately

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A little

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Not at all

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Too early to tell

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**Q: What, if anything, has been most valuable about participating in the Index over multiple cycles?**

**Q: Which of the following would your organisation be most interested in as part of a wider employer offer from the Social Mobility Foundation?** Select all that apply

Social mobility 101 sessions

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- Practical 'how to improve' workshops

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- More case studies or success stories

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- Senior leader training on social mobility

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- Employer networking and peer learning

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- Learning resources and toolkits

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- None of the above

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- Other (please specify)

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**Q: Why does entering the Social Mobility Employer Index matter to your organisation?** Select all that apply

- It matters to senior leadership

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- It provides external benchmarking against peers

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- It supports our ESG strategy and reporting

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- It helps build an internal case for change and investment

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- It supports talent attraction, progression or retention

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- Other (please specify)

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**Q: Is there anything else you'd like to share about your experience of the Index, or what would make it more valuable for your organisation in future cycles?**

# APPENDIX 1: INTERNAL ALIGNMENT

Index Survey Section	Likely internal owners (illustrative examples)	Notes / Prompts
1-2: Outreach	CSR/Social Impact, Early Careers	Where do you already partner externally? How targeted is outreach?
3: Recruitment and Selection	Early Careers, HR/Talent Acquisition	Minimum grades? Contextual recruitment? Agency briefs?
4: Routes into Employer	Early Careers, HR/Talent Acquisition	Internships/apprenticeships: pay, advertising, and ringfencing?
5: Data Collection	Digital, DEI, Operations	What's collected today? Self-ID plans? Board/leadership data?
6: Pay, Progression and Retention	HR, L&D	Any class pay gap analysis? Allocation and progression processes?
7-8: Culture & Advocacy	DEI, Comms, ERGs/Networks, Leadership	Targets? Training? Supplier/client influence?

# GLOSSARY

## General Terms

Term	Explanation
<b>Socioeconomic background (SEB)</b>	<p>Socioeconomic background is the term used to refer to the set of social and economic circumstances in which an individual grew up. Socioeconomic background is an objective measure. The Social Mobility Commission suggests asking four questions to determine an individual's socioeconomic background:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>› What was the occupation of your main household earner when you were about aged 14?</li><li>› Which type of school did you attend for the most time between the ages of 11 and 16?</li><li>› If you finished school after 1980, were you eligible for free school meals at any point during your school years?</li><li>› Did either of your parents attend university and gain a degree (e.g. BA/BSc or equivalent) by the time you were 18? (only to be used when recruiting for a graduate scheme)</li></ul> <p>For more information on what to collect, how to collect and measure it, take a look at the <a href="#">Social Mobility Commission's toolkit</a>.</p>
<b>Social Mobility</b>	<p>Social mobility is the link between a person's occupation or income and the occupation or income of their parents. Where there is a strong link, there is a lower level of social mobility. Where there is a weak link, there is a higher level of social mobility.</p>
<b>Intersectionality</b>	<p>Intersectionality refers to the overlap of more than one diversity characteristic or aspects of a person's background or circumstances. It also refers to the possible effect of this in compounding a person's experience of inequality.</p>
<b>Class pay gap</b>	<p>The class pay gap is the difference in average hourly earnings between those from a lower socioeconomic background and those from a higher socioeconomic background. For organisations interested in understanding how to measure, report and close the class pay gap, do review our <a href="#">'how to guide'</a>.</p>

## Pre-18 and Post-18 Outreach

Term	Explanation
<b>Outreach</b>	<p>Outreach, according to the <a href="#">Social Mobility Commission</a> is a way to raise awareness of an organisation or career sector, and “maximise engagement with a wide range of prospective applicants”. It differs from hiring in that outreach targets a larger pool of prospective applicants, whereas hiring is focused on filling active roles.</p> <p>Types of outreach include:</p> <p><b>Face-to-face outreach</b></p> <p>Face-to-face outreach can be done online or in-person, but always involves a real-time interaction with a person. It can take the form of talks &amp; presentations, mentoring, visits to or from schools, skills delivery etc.</p> <p><b>In-person outreach</b></p> <p>In-person outreach is carried out predominantly in-person, where the participants meet in an office or professional environment.</p> <p><b>Online/virtual outreach</b></p> <p>Virtual or digital outreach is not delivered by a person, but instead takes the form of online courses/videos/Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) or virtual work experience (where there is no human interaction) .</p> <p><b>Hybrid outreach</b></p> <p>Hybrid outreach can take a range of the above forms, and offers a blend of in-person attendance, online access to pre-recorded or live events and may also involve face-to-face elements.</p>

## Routes into the employer

Term	Explanation
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## Apprenticeships

An apprenticeship includes:

- paid employment with holiday leave
- hands-on-experience in a sector/role of interest
- at least 20% off-the-job training
- formal assessment which leads to a nationally recognised qualification

Within England, Wales and Northern Ireland, one of the following qualification levels will be achieved depending on the apprenticeship level:

	Level	Equivalent education level
Intermediate	2	GCSE
Advanced	3	A level
Higher	4,5,6 and 7	Foundation degree and above
Degree	6 and 7	Bachelor's or master's degree

The following apprenticeships are on offer in Scotland:

### Foundation Apprenticeships

- › For pupils in S3 to S6 (aged 13-18). They choose this qualification as part of their subject choices and work with employers. There are 12 different Foundation Apprenticeship types available to study at SCQF Level 6 (Level 3 equivalent). There are also 3 available at SCQF Level 4/5 (Level 1/2 equivalent) at some schools as part of a pilot.

### Modern Apprenticeships

- › Primarily aimed at people from statutory school leaving age up to 24, although there's no upper age limit. A Modern Apprentice is employed and works towards a qualification with a college or learning provider. A Modern Apprentice can achieve a qualification at a variety of SCQF

	<p>levels, from certificates at SCQF Level 4/5 to SCQF Level 11 (Level 2- Level 7 equivalent).</p> <p><b>Graduate Apprenticeships</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ For anyone statutory school leaving age or above - there's no upper age limit. A Graduate Apprentice is employed and works full-time while gaining an Honors or Masters degree (Level 6 and 7 equivalent). This is the equivalent to a Degree Apprenticeship in England and Wales.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Degree-level Apprenticeships</b></p>	<p>Degree-level apprenticeships are apprenticeships provided at level 6 and 7, with level 6 being the equivalent of a Bachelor's degree and level 7 being the equivalent of a Master's degree. Apprentices on a degree-level apprenticeship do not gain an Honors or Master's degree, unlike with a degree apprenticeship.</p>
<p><b>Degree Apprenticeships</b></p>	<p>Degree apprenticeships are apprenticeships where you can gain a BA (Hons) or BSc (Hons) degree with a university whilst working. These are called Graduate Apprenticeships in Scotland.</p>
<p><b>School Leaver Programmes</b></p>	<p>School leaver schemes are usually similar to graduate schemes, except they're aimed at school leavers. To start a school leaver scheme, you'll need to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› be 18 or over</li> <li>› not be in full-time education</li> </ul> <p>Employers create their own school leaver schemes, so each one will be slightly different. It may involve:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› following a training programme</li> <li>› earning a qualification, but not always</li> <li>› rotating between different locations with the same company</li> <li>› completing training online, in college or at a university</li> </ul>

<p><b>Graduate Schemes</b></p>	<p>A graduate scheme is a structured training program that doubles as an entry-level job. They usually last a couple of years and allow individuals to learn more about the different areas of a company. Employees on a graduate scheme are paid a full wage and (usually) are entitled to all employee benefits. The main difference between graduate schemes and graduate jobs is that schemes are very structured, with training along the way.</p>
<p><b>Entry-level jobs</b></p>	<p>An entry-level job is a role for people with little training and experience. They may be full-or part-time roles and are often targeted towards school-leavers or recent graduates. Entry-level positions are prevalent in every industry and can vary significantly in their specific requirements.</p> <p>Though some of these roles require an academic qualification, most entry-level employees develop skills that are relevant to the role through on-the-job training.</p>
<p><b>Experienced hires</b></p>	<p>Experienced hires refers to anyone in the recruitment pipeline that is already in employment.</p>
<p><b>Work experience</b></p>	<p>The term 'work experience' generally refers to a specified period of time that a person spends with your business, during which they have an opportunity to learn directly about working life and the working environment.</p> <p>Some work experience positions offer people the chance to try their hand at particular tasks, others simply provide an opportunity to watch and learn. The nature, length and arrangements for work experience vary greatly. Someone's entitlement to the minimum wage will depend on whether the work experience offered makes the individual a worker for minimum wage purposes.</p>

## Internship

Work experience can be called a 'placement' or an 'internship'. Internships are sometimes understood to be positions requiring a higher level of qualification than other forms of work experience and are associated with gaining experience for a professional career. However, the term 'intern' has no legal status under minimum wage law. Entitlement to the minimum wage does not depend on what someone is called, the type of work they do, how the work is described (such as 'unpaid' or 'expenses only') or the profession or sector they work in. What matters is whether the agreement or arrangement they have with you makes them a worker for minimum wage purposes. [See 'Who gets the minimum wage'](#).

Some forms of work experience, including placements and internships, may be referred to as 'unpaid work' or 'expenses only', where someone gives their services free of charge in order to develop or maintain their skills. Organisations offering such positions should check if the person is a [volunteer](#) for minimum wage purposes or if an exemption applies. If the person is not a genuine volunteer and is not exempt, then you must pay them at least the minimum wage.

## Education

[Types of school: Overview - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Term	Explanation
<b>Non-selective state schools</b>	Non-selective state schools are any schools funded by the government/ local authority, which do not select pupils based on academic ability. They may, however, have other entry requirements such as where a pupil lives (the catchment area).
<b>Faith Schools</b>	<p>Faith schools must follow the national curriculum, but they can choose what they teach in religious studies.</p> <p>Faith schools may have different admissions criteria and staffing policies to state schools, although anyone can apply for a place.</p>

<p><b>Free schools</b></p>	<p>Free schools are funded by the government but are not run by the local authority. They have more control over how they do things.</p> <p>They're 'all-ability' schools, so cannot use academic selection processes like a grammar school.</p> <p>Free schools can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ set their own pay and conditions for staff</li> <li>▪ change the length of school terms and the school day</li> </ul> <p>They do not have to follow the national curriculum.</p>
<p><b>Academies</b></p>	<p>Academies receive funding directly from the government and are run by an academy trust. They have more control over how they do things than community schools. Academies do not charge fees. Academies can be selective if they converted from a school that was selective.</p> <p>They can be selective if they have converted from a school with this status. Academies have their own admissions authorities and can select children on faith grounds when oversubscribed. Government limits the amount of faith selection at some faith academies, depending on the school's background.</p> <p>Academies are inspected by <a href="#">Ofsted</a>. They must follow the same rules on <a href="#">admissions</a>, <a href="#">special educational needs</a> and <a href="#">exclusions</a> as other state schools and students sit the same exams.</p> <p>Academies have more control over how they do things, for example they do not have to follow the <a href="#">national curriculum</a> and can set their own term times.</p> <p>Some schools choose to become academies. If a school funded by the local authority is judged as 'inadequate' by Ofsted then it must become an academy.</p>
<p><b>City technology colleges</b></p>	<p>City technology colleges and 'the city college for the technology of the arts' are independent schools in urban areas that are free to go to. They're funded by central government - companies can also contribute.</p> <p>City technology colleges emphasise teaching science and technology.</p> <p>The city college for the technology of the arts teaches technology in its application of performing and creative arts, for example by offering interactive digital design courses.</p>

<p><b>State boarding schools</b></p>	<p>State boarding schools provide free education but charge fees for boarding. Most state boarding schools are academies; some are free schools, and some are run by local authorities.</p> <p>State boarding schools give priority to children who have a particular need to board and will assess children's suitability for boarding.</p>
<p><b>Community schools</b></p>	<p>Community schools, which are sometimes called local authority-maintained schools, are not influenced by business or religious groups and follow the national curriculum.</p>
<p><b>Foundation schools and voluntary schools</b></p>	<p>Foundation schools and voluntary schools are funded by the local authority but have more freedom to change the way they do things - sometimes they are supported by representatives from religious groups.</p>
<p><b>Grammar schools/ selective state schools</b></p>	<p>Grammar schools can be run by the local authority, a foundation body, or an academy trust - they select their pupils based on academic ability and there is a test to get in. Importantly some schools are called 'grammar' but are non-selective, it's therefore important to go by the Department for Education data record not just the name.</p>
<p><b>Private schools</b></p>	<p>Private schools (also known as 'independent schools') charge fees to attend instead of being funded by the government. Pupils do not have to follow the national curriculum.</p> <p>All private schools must be registered with the government and are inspected regularly.</p>
<p><b>Attainment gap</b></p>	<p>The attainment gap refers to the disparity in educational attainment between students from lower and higher socioeconomic backgrounds. The gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers at key stage 2 (primary) and key stage 4 (secondary) is a key measure the Department of Education (DfE) uses to judge its performance.</p> <p>Measures of attainment gaps at both primary and secondary have historically been based upon comparing the proportions of pupils in each group achieving an expected standard - particularly level 4 in reading, writing and maths at the end of key stage 2, and 5 good passes including English and maths at GCSE.</p>

<p><b>Free school meals</b></p>	<p><b>England</b></p> <p>Free school meals are available to pupils in receipt of, or whose parent/guardian(s) are in receipt of, one or more of the following benefits:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› income-related Employment and Support Allowance</li> <li>› support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999</li> <li>› the guaranteed element of Pension Credit</li> <li>› Child Tax Credit (provided the parent/guardian(s) are not also entitled to Working Tax Credit and have an annual gross income of no more than £16,190)</li> <li>› Working Tax Credit run-on - paid for 4 weeks after the parent/guardian(s) stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit</li> <li>› Universal Credit - if the parent/guardian(s) apply on or after 1 April 2018, their household income must be less than £7,400 a year (after tax and not including any benefits they receive)</li> </ul> <p>See link for particulars on earnings for Universal Credit <a href="https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk">Free school meals (publishing.service.gov.uk)</a></p> <p>Eligibility varies slightly in NI, Scotland, and Wales. See the below links for the eligibility criteria:  <a href="https://www.mygov.scot">School meals - mygov.scot</a>  <a href="https://gov.wales">Find out about free school meals   GOV.WALES</a>  <a href="https://nidirect">Nutrition and school lunches   nidirect</a></p>
<p><b>Russell group universities</b></p>	<p>The Russell Group is an organisation of 24 universities (including the original six red brick universities) that have a shared focus on research and a reputation for academic achievement.</p> <p>The institutions in the Russell Group are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. University of Birmingham</li> <li>2. University of Bristol</li> <li>3. University of Cambridge</li> <li>4. Cardiff University</li> <li>5. Durham University</li> <li>6. University of Edinburgh</li> <li>7. University of Exeter</li> <li>8. University of Glasgow</li> <li>9. Imperial College London</li> <li>10. King's College London</li> <li>11. University of Leeds</li> <li>12. University of Liverpool</li> <li>13. London School of Economics &amp; Political Science</li> </ol>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>14. University of Manchester</li> <li>15. Newcastle University</li> <li>16. University of Nottingham</li> <li>17. University of Oxford</li> <li>18. Queen Mary, University of London</li> <li>19. Queen's University Belfast</li> <li>20. University of Sheffield</li> <li>21. University of Southampton</li> <li>22. University College London</li> <li>23. University of Warwick</li> <li>24. University of York</li> </ol>
<p><b>High tariff universities</b></p>	<p>The UK's 'high tariff' universities are those requiring the strongest A Level grades and the most UCAS points for entry. Higher education providers are divided into 3 groups (low, medium, and high tariff) – roughly equal in size – according to the average number of UCAS points achieved by students joining them.</p> <p>The groups are adjusted every year according to the tariff points for that year.</p> <p>UCAS score data is based on the average (mean) UCAS points scores of undergraduate students aged 20 and under.</p>
<p><b>POLAR</b></p>	<p>The <b>POLAR</b> classification places local areas into five quintiles, based on the higher education participation rates of 18-year-olds in the locality. Those with the lowest percentages are placed into quintile 1 and are considered to be the most disadvantaged, with quintile 5 having the highest rates.</p> <p>An individual is deemed to be from a low participation neighbourhood if their area falls into quintile 1.</p>
<p><b>TUNDRA</b></p>	<p><b>TUNDRA</b> (tracking underrepresentation by area) is an area-based measure that uses tracking of state-funded mainstream school pupils in England to calculate young participation. It is an official statistic.</p> <p>TUNDRA classifies local areas across England into five equal groups – or quintiles – based on the proportion of 16-year-old state-funded mainstream school pupils who participate in higher education aged 18 or 19 years. Quintile one shows the lowest rate of participation. Quintile five shows the highest rate of participation.</p> <p>TUNDRA MSOA uses Middle Super Output Area (MSOA) as the definition of local area, and TUNDRA LSOA uses Lower Super Output Area (LSOA) as the definition of local area.</p>

	<p>The measure focuses on state-funded mainstream students who are typically included in geographically based outreach. Its main objective is to help outreach programmes identify and target areas of low participation more effectively.</p> <p>To read more about POLAR and TUNDRA, and their differences, please follow this <a href="#">link</a>.</p>
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## Hiring Practices

Term	Explanation
<b>Pool hiring</b>	Pool hiring is when appointments are made to a 'pool' rather than a specific role or department: the candidate is initially assessed as suitable by hiring managers, and only then subsequently allocated to a particular role. This practice is commonly used in the Civil Service and other public sector organisations.
<b>Contextual recruitment</b>	Contextual recruitment is taking an individual's circumstances into account when assessing their suitability for a role. For example, looking at a candidate's grades in the context of the school they attended. This is commonly done using a contextualized recruitment system (CRS), such as <a href="#">Rare</a> or <a href="#">REAL rating</a> . The way in which this is approached varies significantly between employers, such that an indication that 'contextual recruitment is being applied' can mean very different things are actually in place.
<b>Anonymous recruitment</b>	<p>An anonymous recruitment process involves removing the candidate's name and other identifying factors from their application, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Age</li> <li>› Address or location</li> <li>› Years of work experience</li> <li>› School or university names</li> </ul> <p>The idea is that removing such information makes it easier for hiring managers, recruiters, and HR professionals to make objective decisions about a candidate's skills, experience, and suitability for a role, and to lessen the risk of bias (whether conscious or unconscious bias) affecting the decision-making process.</p>
<b>Buddying</b>	Buddying is an informal role intended to provide support and advice in the workplace. Buddying may also be used to provide

	shadowing experiences for aspiring workers looking to reach the next level.
<b>Retention bonus</b>	A retention bonus is a financial reward offered as an incentive to keep a key employee in a role.
<b>Flagging</b>	Flagging a candidate is the practice of highlighting socioeconomic or other characteristics as part of an application which may result in the applicant being offered more support.

## Pay, progression and retention

Term	Explanation
<b>Sponsored Assessments/ Exams</b>	A sponsored exam refers to any examination or assessment for qualification(s) in which the employer pays for the candidate's fees or testing costs. In this context, the qualification is to the discretion of the employer and is not limited to higher education or apprenticeships.

## Fees and Payment

Term	Explanation
<b>Index entry fee</b>	Our Index Entry Fee covers the cost of marking and analysis of submissions. It is £1400+VAT for 2026 entries, and is payable by all entrants except those which are <b>exempt</b> .
<b>Exemption</b>	Charities <b>or</b> organisations with <50 employees are <b>exempt</b> from paying the Index Entry Fee. However, if they choose to purchase a Sectoral Report or Feedback call, these remain chargeable services.
<b>Sectoral report fee</b>	The Sectoral Report, is an optional additional analysis offered currently for Banking, Law or Professional Services, and benchmarks the performance of entrants within these sectors. It also provides a comparison between the entrant and their sector, offering examples of best practice and recommendations. Any organisation can purchase a Sectoral Report. Sectoral reports are priced at £600+VAT for 2026 entries.
<b>Feedback Call fee</b>	Once you have received your Feedback Report, there will be the option to purchase a Feedback Call. These are an in-depth discussion of your submission, results and recommendations and can be attended by several colleagues at your organisation. The Feedback Call fee is currently being

	confirmed.
<b>Payment terms and conditions</b>	Please refer to our <a href="#">Terms and Conditions</a> , section 5 on Services and section 6 on Fees for further information. If you have any queries about payments and fees, please email <a href="mailto:employerindex@socialmobility.org.uk">employerindex@socialmobility.org.uk</a>

Please contact [employerindex@socialmobility.org.uk](mailto:employerindex@socialmobility.org.uk) or **book in a call** or if you have any queries regarding the Index or your feedback.