

Socio-economic Background and Early Career Progression in the Law

Summary Report

September 2018

BRIDGE
group

Obviously, when I'm here I play the middle-class version of me to fit in. I can see the cultural dominance. You have to consciously work at not assimilating, but that's hard and also may count against you for progression. I don't fit in at work, and I now don't fit in back at home either.

Interviewee in this research

How can it be right that the creation, development and enforcement of the law should be the exclusive preserve of those who happen to have been born to the 'right' parents? It cannot – so why perpetuate it?

Nicholas Cheffings, Chair of Hogan Lovells and PRIME (2016)

Whilst talent is sometimes presented by firms as though it is an unproblematic concept, it is in fact highly ambiguous. Research suggests that this ambiguity is a key factor encouraging firms to rely on proxy measures of potential associated with middle-class status, thus accentuating rather than reducing, non-educational barriers to entry and, possibly, career progression.

Social Mobility Commission Report (2015)

Progression is a complex combination of factors. I, and I'm sure others, don't know exactly how it works. It's tied to how well you're known, the work you do (not just the quality, but how high profile it is), your confidence, your networking. All things that overly confident private school types have 'pre-installed'. On the surface there's meritocracy, but it's much, much more complicated than that.

Interviewee in this research

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Executive Summary

Diversity in the legal profession is receiving increased attention amongst employers and educators, motivated mainly by concerns about equality and access to talent, and in response to pressure from policy-makers and the media. Extensive research highlights the main factors contributing to this; they include unequal educational attainment, access to careers guidance, university access, financial obstacles, access to work experience, and the recruiting practices of employers.

While there have been encouraging efforts to achieve increased diversity amongst entry hires (through cross-sector initiatives, and from within individual firms), much less attention has been paid to how trainees in the profession may progress differentially by socio-economic background. The focus has been primarily on who gets in, with far less regard for who stays on, who gets ahead, and how.

This study reveals unequal progression amongst trainees and associates, provides new insights into the causal factors, and offers recommendations to promote greater equality in the profession.

Working across eight global legal firms and using mixed research methods we explore, with over 2,800 early career professionals, the correlation between background characteristics, and progression and retention. We focus primarily on socio-economic background, but also consider gender and ethnicity, recognising important relationships between diversity characteristics, and the way in which these interactions can colour and compound factors that affect progression.

The data reveal that the population of trainees and associates across the eight firms is deeply unrepresentative of the eligible candidate pool: for example, 46% of early career solicitors attended independent school (compared to 18% of school pupils nationally at Key Stage Five). Early career solicitors from lower socio-economic backgrounds are overrepresented amongst those who leave, and less well-represented in the associate population, compared to trainees.

These findings, which indicate unequal progression and a lack of diversity, are apparent despite higher performance on average amongst those who were state school educated. For example, amongst state school trainees, 14% receive the highest performance ratings, compared to 8% of independently educated trainees.

To explore the factors contributing to these dynamics, we interviewed sixty early career professionals (leavers and current employees) and senior partners across the participating firms. Employees and leavers identify that the dominant culture of firms typically benefits individuals

and groups from higher socio-economic backgrounds. This is explained in part on the basis that personality traits considered essential to get ahead are closely linked to social background; but often these have little correlation with work performance. There is also significant evidence of “Micro-aggressions”: everyday words or acts that communicate denigrating messages to certain groups who are perceived as different, for example by gender, ethnicity, and/or socio-economic background. Many employees from lower socio-economic backgrounds feel obliged to manage carefully their differences; they often feel pressure from peers and senior colleagues to assimilate into the dominant culture, which requires significant effort that could otherwise be expended on delivering professional performance.

We explore in more detail these matters and provide firms with a range of practical recommendations. These include: socialising the findings herein and creating spaces for them to be discussed amongst the workforce (including calling out prejudicial actions); collating, monitoring and analysing diversity data with more rigour; scrutinising in more detail the processes associated with work allocation; educating the workforce on interpreting signals of talent; and understanding better the motivations for career sorting.

The rewards of better practice in this area would be significant including: a more representative, productive, profitable and committed legal workforce; and the reinforcing of the sector’s place as a national thought leader on social mobility. However, the potential advantages of increased socio-economic diversity in the law will never be realised without a corresponding commitment to inclusion. Moreover, it is in nobody’s interests to encourage talented individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds into a professional culture that does not enable them to thrive – least of all the candidate’s.

The firms participating in this research are:

- Allen & Overy
- Bryan Cave Leighton Paisner
- Clifford Chance
- Dentons
- Hogan Lovells
- Holman Fenwick Willan
- Linklaters
- Pinsent Masons

This is a summary report of a comprehensive research report submitted to these firms.

Key Findings

Generally:

- **Many drivers of diversity and unequal progression are societal** and include: unequal access to higher education; economic and cultural resources that flow from a person's family background; and familial and professional networks established from a young age. While there is a critical role for the profession to play in addressing these macro issues, ameliorating these systemic matters is largely beyond the gift of law firms.
- **However, this research also identifies significant factors within leading legal employers that contribute to unequal attrition and progression by socio-economic background.** These are concerned primarily with the effects of dominant cultures, the way in which talent is defined and identified, and the mechanisms for scaffolding experience and allocating work.
- **These matters are not necessarily correlated with ability, or intelligence, and are often loaded in favour of those from higher socio-economic backgrounds.** We consider that the barriers created by firms are not constructs of overt discrimination or even unconscious bias. Instead, they are a consequence of how socio-economic background, gender and ethnicity shape perceptions about who is deemed appropriate for progression and promotion, which can then determine who has access to the opportunities to join the track to senior roles in the legal profession.

From the quantitative data:

- **With regard to socio-economic background, the trainee and associate population across the participating firms is deeply unrepresentative of the eligible candidate pool.** Aggregated across all participating firms, only 54% of early career solicitors educated in the UK attended state schools (compared to 82% nationally at Key Stage Five) and 28% represent the first generation in their family to attend university; additionally 51% of the trainee and associate population are female and 73% are of White ethnicity.

- **There is an assumption that firms are becoming more socially diverse at entry level and, over time, this diversity will be reflected at the top; the evidence from this research indicates strongly that we should strongly challenge this assumption.** In other words, the assumption is that should someone from a lower socio-economic background gain access, following that point opportunities for progression are equal, and depending solely on objective factors such as competence and hard work.
- **Those from lower socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to be the highest performers in their firms, compared to their more advantaged peers,** though the data in this regard have some limitations. Amongst state school trainees, 14% receive the highest review ratings compared to 8% of independently schooled trainees; similarly 14% of first generation university trainees receive high performance review ratings compared to 10% of their non-first generation university peers. This same pattern of 'outperformance' is found across the firms for male employees and those of White ethnicity.
- **Despite this, those from lower socio-economic backgrounds appear on average less likely to progress in their early career;** this is also true for those who are from ethnic backgrounds other than 'White'. For example, the proportion of first generation early career solicitors falls from 30% of trainees to 27% of associates, and the proportion of employees of White ethnicity increases from 69% of trainees to 75% of associates.
- **Those who attended state school are less likely to be retained compared to their peers from higher socio-economic backgrounds.** State school attendees make up 55% of trainee leavers compared to 53% of trainee employees, and 57% of associate leavers compared to 53% of associate employees. The main reason for leaving among trainees is end of contract or fixed term employment (80%); however, this percentage is much higher for those educated in state schools (88%) compared to those educated in independent schools (71%).

From the interview data:

- **There is a perceived tendency to recruit and progress solicitors in favour of the familiar,** choosing solicitors who share similar traits to those who currently dominate the profession, rather than recruiting candidates with a stronger regard to the competences

required to excel in the profession. Pressures associated with tight timeframes (linked to winning and delivering client work, and promotions processes) can exacerbate a tendency for partners and senior associates to promote individuals who are the most visible, or most immediately known to them through professional and informal social contact.

- **Both employees and leavers recognise “unconscious bias”, citing that the dominant culture of firms typically benefits those from higher socio-economic backgrounds.** This is explained in part on the basis that personality traits considered essential for ‘getting ahead’ are typically closely linked to social background.
- **The people who get ahead in the legal profession are often characterised as extroverted, appearing “confident”, “charismatic”, and having “gravitas”.** They are typically described as “driven” and “ambitious”, but also as people who are “well known”, “sociable”, and good “self-promoters”. Alongside having the appetite and stamina to work long hours, they are good at managing their “personal brand” and constantly seek to increase their “visibility”.
- **Where progression and work allocation are strongly affected by visibility and extroversion, this potentially creates barriers for progression for those from lower socio-economic backgrounds.** Many interviewees noted that characteristics associated with extroversion are situational: extroversion is most easily played out in environments where one feels comfortable, and it is often less easy to present in this way if one feels different, where micro-aggressions erode confidence over time, or one is less able to relate to the dominant group and the associated experiences, social and cultural references, and modes of humour.
- **Employees from lower socio-economic backgrounds often manage carefully their differences to assimilate and this can cost them (and the firm) in terms of professional performance.** Many interviewees from lower socio-economic backgrounds feel intense pressure to fit in and assimilate into the dominant culture and, to mitigate the sense of being different, employees resort to different coping strategies such as toning down an accent, adjusting speech, avoiding certain conversation topics, and feigning interest in more prevalent conversation topics. Assimilating for those outside of the dominant cultural experience is identified as “exhausting”, “tricky”, “worrying”, and

“draining”. Difficulties with assimilating and perceptions of fit can lead to loss of confidence, less inclination to speak up in meetings, and less engagement in social interactions – all of which can provide senior colleagues with forms of ‘evidence’ that work against those from lower socio-economic backgrounds when decisions are made about work allocation and progression.

- **There is significant evidence of “Micro-aggressions” in the profession. These are everyday words or acts which send denigrating messages to certain groups who are perceived as different by, for example, gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic background.** The net effect over time of these demeaning, often subtle, actions is to make individuals from minority groups feel inferior or excluded. Members of the dominant culture are often unaware that these comments or behaviours cause such harm, as there is often no overt intention to offend. There is evidence from our interviews that there is complacency amongst some senior leaders in this regard; they are not diligent in calling out such behaviour and, in some cases, they can contribute to these dynamics.
- **There is a clear view that certain areas of work, and certain teams within a firm, have more or less desirable cultures for those from different backgrounds.** In particular there are more aggressive and “macho” cultures that many from low socio-economic backgrounds are not drawn to (litigation for example), and active decisions are made to avoid these areas. This notion appears to be well known, and widely talked about, without any suggestion of change – it is accepted as the norm and not seen as discriminatory or problematic. Indeed, there is often a conception that certain practice areas are ‘naturally’ suited to people with certain personality types and social identity characteristics including socio-economic background and gender. This belief enables exclusive cultures to persist.
- **Most fundamentally, there are inconsistent and often ambiguous definitions associated with ‘talent’ both within and between firms.** There are often perceptions about the characteristics of an effective solicitor, which have been established over centuries by the dominant population (i.e. affluent white men). These perceptions are not necessarily evidenced and can be grounded in assumption. There is a clear danger that these assumptions regarding talent are associated strongly with educational or social background (framed as proxy measures in the full report), rather than solely on the ability to perform well in the role. This can have a compounding negative effect where

individuals make the inaccurate assumption that their own definition of talent is shared across the firm and beyond.

- **Employees from lower socio-economic backgrounds can interpret professional assimilation as moving away from, or renouncing, their own existing culture and heritage, and the implications of this are currently underexplored.** Interviewees from lower socio-economic backgrounds reference the negative psychological effects of assimilating into an unfamiliar professional culture. They also identify that the effect of trying to locate themselves in both their own heritage, and the dominant cultures of the legal profession, is that they feel part of neither.
- **There are contradictory views about the ways that clients can fuel and exacerbate aspects of unequal progression, or support the drive for greater diversity and inclusion with respect to socio-economic background.** On the one hand, clients are often considered to demand greater diversity with respect to socio-economic background (thereby providing a driver for change); and on the other hand, clients are perceived to expect a certain 'type' of solicitor (i.e. from a higher socio-economic background) to pitch for work, and there is risk associated with not meeting these expectations.
- **There is a range of important intersections between socio-economic background, gender and ethnicity,** including the way in which these background characteristics are experienced in combination, and their compounding effects on progression. Further research (outside of the scope of this report) is required to look more specifically at these matters in relation to progression in the legal profession.

Recommendations

In the shorter term (i.e. in the next six months):

- A. Socialise this research, internally at minimum, but with our strongest endorsement to engage externally.** The findings from this summary and the full report should be the basis to create opportunities for open conversations to take place, and for those at all levels to contribute. While there is much awareness around the lack of diversity in terms of gender and ethnicity at senior levels, the narrative and debate surrounding diversity and inclusion with respect to socio-economic background is much less established. There are also some dominant views that are erroneous, including a perception that the lack of socio-economic diversity in the law is primarily a matter of access, as opposed to inequalities associated with inclusion and career progression.
- B. Senior managers and those on the trajectory to partner are a critical audience to engage in this debate.** While our evidence indicates that trainees and the most senior staff are engaged thoughtfully in this agenda, evidence from interviewees suggests a higher level of ambivalence amongst senior managers on the track to partner (clearly this varies between firms, based on the different structures of each). This community of decision-makers and future leaders need to be more actively engaged in this debate, especially where they are concerned that the diversity and inclusion agenda could drive positive discrimination that will directly affect their own professional progress.
- C. Use these conversations as a platform for developing a strong, single narrative** about diversity and inclusion with respect to socio-economic background. This should include, for example, an authentic articulation of why diversity and inclusion are important, the rewards of getting it right (or the risks of not doing so), specific key actions that firms are taking, and the accountabilities that are in place. The narrative should also include clarity about how diversity targets will be set and managed, and should articulate clearly the business case for diversity (such as: improved customer and client engagement; widening the talent pool; retaining talent; employee satisfaction; better decision-making and innovation; social responsibility; and improved public image and trust).

D. Recognise that initiatives and programmes are important, but far from sufficient.

In our interviews, there was much discussion about, for example, mentoring programmes and diversity weeks. The prevailing view from interviewees (and corroborated in the research literature) is that while these initiatives can play an important role, their impact on addressing challenges around inclusion is typically minimal, and they can actually distract from addressing more fundamental and systemic issues that contribute to unequal progress by socio-economic background, such as definitions of talent and client perceptions.

E. Interrogate the way in which talent is defined and identified. One of our most important findings is the inconsistent definition associated with talent, both within and between firms, i.e. what makes a good solicitor? There are embedded perceptions about the characteristics of an effective solicitor, which have been established over centuries by the dominant population (affluent white men). We encourage firms to work internally and collaboratively with each other to define more clearly the competences associated with effective practice (drawing and building on the SRA Statement of Solicitor Competence), and looking to future requirements accounting for factors such as the role of technology in the profession. It is likely to be useful in this process to identify characteristics that are less important, and identify where putting a premium on specific traits could inadvertently discriminate against some groups.

F. All legal firms and the Solicitors Regulation Authority should follow the Bridge Group's best practice guidance on the collection and analyses of socio-economic data, to help understand better the challenges associated with progression, to inform policy changes, and to evidence effective practice and progress in this area. This guidance is available free of charges on the Bridge Group website.

G. Firms should submit detailed workforce diversity data (including information on progression and pay) to a trusted third party to benchmark data anonymously across the sector, and to begin to explore in more detail why there is significant variance between firms with respect to socio-economic diversity. The established PRIME programme could offer an important vehicle for undertaking this analysis, and we encourage firms to consider the progress that has been made in this regard by Access Accountancy.

In the medium term (i.e. six months) and beyond:

- H. Diversity needs to be managed throughout the entire talent pipeline and not just at the recruitment level.** There is currently a widespread (and unjustified) belief that diversity matters only at the recruitment level. More efforts are needed to retain talent and support employees throughout their career. The presence of under-represented groups in senior leadership positions is not in itself indicative of successful diversity and inclusion policies. Proactive policies on managing diversity should be established across all levels and at all stages (from attraction to development, retention, mentorship, sponsorship and progression).
- I. Provide insight sessions to all employees as an embedded part of wider diversity training to address the key matters highlighted in this report.** This should build on, but go beyond, any existing training on “unconscious bias” and be linked directly to the principles and values of law firms. Choosing to support someone who shares your cultural and social traits is a conscious decision, and so is the creation of a dominant culture that excludes, or hinders, some individuals because of their background. There is a need to address the factors which affect progression (highlighted in this report) and realise that certain behaviours have an impact on who is getting ahead. While any such training should be located in the importance of diversity and inclusion, the ultimate reward of this might usefully be articulated in terms of securing and maximising talent, as a vehicle for increased profitability.
- J. Deliver a strong message about the implications and consequences of micro-aggressions.** Firms should address the fact that seemingly innocent behaviours are in fact “conscious” and have a harmful impact. This involves raising awareness about the effects of repeated micro-aggressions on employees’ self-confidence and sense of belonging. Micro-aggressions are difficult to challenge in isolation but have a clear cumulative effect. Key to this is experiential learning, which can be delivered via a range of methods. It crucially involves employees consciously experiencing what it means to be different, and in turn becoming more aware of their own privilege. Put another way, where the dominant culture is white and middle-class, people who fit those categories experience themselves as the ‘norm’. Experiential learning, where individuals actively experience how it feels to be ‘different’, in either a training or workplace environment, can help employees to understand how privilege functions in everyday life.

- K. Challenge, within firms and across the sector, the pervasive and accepted view that parts of the legal profession are suited better to those from higher socio-economic backgrounds.** Take measures to improve cultures within different teams/areas of laws. Certain (sub)cultures mean employees are deliberately or indirectly orienting themselves into other areas of laws (or out of law altogether) which compromises diversity. While it is expected that some departments may be more or less diverse (e.g. more female or male oriented) measures should be taken to limit “sorting” effects. Consideration will need to be given to subcultures within firms, particularly regarding career sorting and where diversity and inclusion challenges are most acute.
- L. Ensure that networking and social events do not exclude certain groups.** Social and networking events should be more diverse in scope, and more inclusive to not penalise solicitors from disadvantaged backgrounds or those with caring or other responsibilities. Our research shows that certain groups self-exclude from certain types of activities especially when they feel that they do not “fit in”. In this respect it would also be useful to provide appropriate support to help under-represented groups acclimatise (as opposed to assimilate) to different cultural practices.
- M. Introduce much greater transparency relating to decisions about progression, promotion and work allocation.** The extent to which performance reviews affect progression is unclear, and there is no formal advice as to what early career solicitors should be doing to make it to partnership. It is currently up to each individual to work out the “rules of the game” and to use a high degree of personal initiative. While the assignment of career development partners may be useful, there is a need to establish clear guidelines. Currently becoming “well known” and “visible” in the firm are some of the key strategies identified to get ahead; less elusive targets need to be defined and articulated.

Scope and Methodology

This study has explored the following research questions:

- Is there any correlation between training and early career retention, and socio-economic background?
- If so, what are the factors that contribute to this correlation?
- What practicable recommendations can be implemented to reduce the effects of socio-economic background on retention, and to ensure all hires can thrive regardless of background?

To deliver these objectives, we have undertaken:

- Quantitative analyses, comprising:
 - socio-economic background (e.g., secondary school type, first generation to attend university status), gender, and ethnicity data for an aggregated dataset of 2,802 early career solicitors across seven firms, including trainees and associates and employees and leavers;
 - descriptive statistics on the background characteristics of all early career solicitors (trainees and associates) aggregated and by firm;
 - descriptive statistics on the background characteristics of the trainee population compared to the associate population at the aggregate level and by firm;
 - descriptive and test statistics on the background characteristics of current employees versus leavers at the aggregate level;

- descriptive and modelling statistics on the allocation of highest review ratings by background characteristics at the aggregate level; and
 - comparison of reason for leaving by background characteristics and at trainee versus associate stage at the aggregate level.
- Interviews, comprising:
 - 28 early career solicitors from lower socio-economic backgrounds retained in their firm;
 - 14 early career solicitors who have left their firm during training or early career (moving to other firms or out of sector); and
 - 14 senior partners and leaders.
 - Synthesis of these findings with our extensive knowledge and experience within the law sector, and more broadly across the professions, and higher education.

Quantitative data analysis was tailored to the data that were made available by firms and compared across firms at the aggregate level. Where more detailed data were provided by firms, this enabled greater granularity of analysis. The primary focus of the quantitative data analysis was on the comparison between trainees and associates, and between current employees and leavers, in order to highlight differences in the socio-economic composition of these populations. The results of these comparisons begin to provide insight into the patterns of progression and retention for early career solicitors of different backgrounds at the aggregate level and by firm.

The secondary focus of the quantitative data analysis was on the allocation of review ratings, differences in reasons for leaving, and relationships among background characteristics. These sections of the analysis provide additional detail regarding the backgrounds of early career solicitors and possible differences in how they experience the beginning of their law career.

Interviews were shaped around topic guides (available in the full report) with experienced interviewers taking a conversational approach to draw out individual narratives. Interviewers took an iterative approach, identifying and cross-checking emergent themes in later interviews. Qualitative data from the interviews were collated and coded to identify key themes. These themes were then validated across all interviewers. Each theme identified is a valid reflection of the comprehensive qualitative research.

Interviewees were invited by each firm to volunteer to be interviewed; a purposive sample was then selected from this list. Interviews focused on those in the early stages of their career (trainees and associates with up to four years of post-qualification experience). We also identified a sample of senior partners, because these colleagues are part of the community of important decision-makers, making formal and informal decisions about the progression of junior employees, and determining how firms define talent and shaping the organisational cultures.

Closing Remarks

The Bridge Group has now undertaken many significant studies on equality and diversity in the professions, and has helped design strategies to promote reform with a range of leading employers. This experience has informed this study. The recommendations we propose are designed to support the legal sector on the journey to realising the advantages of effective diversity and inclusion.

Our work in the legal sector now spans over five years, during which time we have provided significant insight, challenge and support. This piece is an especially important study, since it marks a shift in focus, moving from recruitment and selection to inclusion and progression. As in other areas, the sector has shown leadership in the transparency and rigour with which it has approached this important issue; it is now incumbent upon the firms included in this study and the wider profession to act on this new insight, and to encourage others to do the same. We look forward to continuing our partnership on this vital journey.

Sincere thanks to the numerous employees across the firms who have made this study possible including: those who have provided the leadership to enable this research; those who responded quickly and professionally to our detailed data requests; and those involved as interviewees, all of whom did so with generosity and thoughtfulness.

About the Bridge Group and the Primary Researchers

The Bridge Group

The Bridge Group is a charitable policy association, based at King's College London, that researches and promotes social equality. Since its launch in 2010 at Google UK, the Group has established itself as an authoritative, independent voice, and has undertaken a wide range of high-profile commissions, including from the Cabinet Office, the Wellcome Trust, and KPMG.

Dr Louise Ashley, Bridge Group Fellow and Lecturer in Management and Organisational Behaviour at Royal Holloway, University of London

Louise specialises in researching the implementation and development of social equity programmes in large, multinational firms. Louise has published articles in leading academic journals and recently co-wrote the chapter on diversity and inclusion in the Oxford University Press Handbook of Professional Service Firms (2015). Her research has also been covered in mainstream media including The Times, Financial Times and The Guardian. Louise has recently completed a study examining the implementation of global inclusion programmes within large international firms. She led the team appointed by the government's Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission to understand non-educational barriers to the professions, published in 2015. Louise also consults to private sector and third sector organisations.

Dr Marianne Blattès, Bridge Group Research Officer

Marianne has a background in language policy and was recently awarded a PhD in Applied Linguistics from King's College London. Her research was partly funded by the International Research Foundation. She is particularly interested in how language is related to issues surrounding social inequality and access to education. She has presented papers at international conferences on the topic of linguistic justice and socio-economic mobility. Since 2010 Marianne has taught at the University of Oxford, the London School of Economics and

King's College London. During the final year of her PhD, as President of the Education Policy Centre at the King's Think Tank she conducted research on topics such as the barriers to education faced by refugees and migrants.

Dr Laura da Costa, Bridge Group Research Officer

Laura has a background in quantitative and qualitative educational research. She is interested in issues surrounding inequality and exclusion, and has conducted research on social mobility and fair assessment, while her PhD investigated the measurement of student motivation. Her postdoctoral work at Humboldt University (Berlin) examined educational assessment as a mechanism for the fair allocation of life chances across England, Sweden, and Germany. From 2015 to 2017, she worked at the Centre for Evaluation and Monitoring (CEM) at Durham University on the evaluation of programmes aimed at widening access to higher education (HE). Laura has worked recently with the Sutton Trust, University of Nottingham, Advancing Access, Education Endowment Foundation, and on a social mobility project for leading law firms.

Dr Sam Friedman, Bridge Group Fellow and Associate Professor at LSE

Sam's globally recognised research focuses on issues of social class and inequality, and particularly the cultural dimensions of contemporary class division. He is a key figure in the Department of Sociology, which has played a key role in establishing and developing the discipline since 1904. Today the Department maintains its commitment to identifying and investigating social inequalities. Sam's current research focuses directly on issues of social stratification. He has recently begun a project, funded by an ESRC Future Research Leaders grant, examining social mobility in Britain's elite occupations. The work shows that the upwardly mobile face a powerful and previously unrecognised 'class ceiling' within Britain's occupations.

Dr Kenton Lewis MBE, Head of Research and Lead Fellow, the Bridge Group

Kenton is an educational sociologist specialising in cultural change and equality; he was previously Partnership Manager at the Higher Education Academy, and formerly Head of Widening Access at St George's, University London. Kenton has significant experience in strategic development and policy implementation in relation to: teaching & learning; staff

development & training; fair access; widening participation; student recruitment; and admissions practices. He has presented nationally and internationally on these topics, with a focus on the development of professional identity, and on access to medicine and the professions allied to medicine. He is a Trustee and Fellow of the AUA, a Fellow of the CMI, a Principal Fellow of the HEA, a Fellow of the RSA, and was recognised in the 2014 New Year Honours with an MBE for services to Higher Education.

Nicholas Miller, Chief Executive of the Bridge Group

Nicholas is Chief Executive of the Bridge Group, and previously worked in the USA, at the University of Warwick, and was Director of Corporate Relations at the University of York. He has led impactful programmes of research that have been commissioned by, for example, EY, the BBC, the University of Oxford, the Cabinet Office, the Wellcome Trust, and Cass Business School. Nik is an experienced fundraiser, having secured millions of pounds from individuals, corporate firms (including Google and Goldman Sachs), and trusts. He was recently appointed to the KPMG Inclusive Leadership Board, is a founding member of the CASE Research Committee, a Fellow and Research Associate at the University of York, and a trustee of the Unite Foundation (disbursing over £8.5m to care leavers).

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