

# Voice of the Forager:

Enhancing Social  
Mobility in the UK

November 2021

# CONTENTS

---

**02** ABOUT THIS STUDY

**03** OUR LEARNINGS

**07** IMPACT OF OPEN-ACCESS LEARNING

**08** WHERE TO FROM HERE

---



”

## A fair society

is an open society, one in which every individual is free to succeed...

---

No one should be prevented from **fulfilling their potential** by the circumstances of their birth.

---

What ought to count is **how hard you work** and the skills and talent you possess, not the school you went to or the jobs your parents did.

- Opening Doors, Breaking Barriers: A Strategy for Social Mobility, UK Government (April 2011).

# About this Study

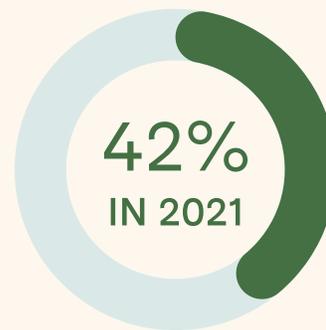


Economic Forum have acknowledged that employers that create more equitable school-to-work transitions can also play an incredibly impactful role in progressing social mobility. And this is reflected in broader expectations, with an increasing number of individuals surveyed by the UK Government in 2019 agreeing that employers should take action to improve social mobility.

The UK has historically had one of the poorest track records in the developed world on social mobility, being “a measure of how free people are to improve their position in society”.<sup>1</sup> Based on the World Economic Forum’s Global Social Mobility Index, the UK is ranked 21 out of 82 global economies, behind countries like Denmark, Iceland, Slovenia and Malta.<sup>2</sup> Further, social mobility has remained virtually stagnant in the UK since 2014.<sup>3</sup> While this paints a bleak picture, there have been and continue to be a multitude of initiatives underway led by corporates, not-for-profits and the like which seek to address the myriad factors curtailing social mobility in the UK.

One factor considered to be the great equaliser is education. For too long, those from historically underserved communities have not had access to the same educational opportunities as those from wealthier communities. While access to education at a government policy level takes us a significant leap forward - efforts cannot stop there if the UK is going to truly shift the dial for future generations.

Organisations such as the Social Mobility Commission, Sutton Trust and the World



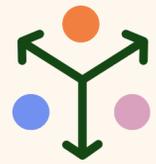
VS.



Social Barometer 2021,  
Social Mobility Commission  
(11 March 2021)

At Forage, we are fortunate to have access to a large and global community of early talent. As firm believers in the importance of equitable access to opportunities, we wanted to better understand what role, if any, social mobility issues played within our community. Do they feel empowered to pursue the career of their dreams or do they feel hindered by generationally entrenched inequities? Accordingly, in August 2021 we invited 95,000 members of our UK community to complete an in-depth study. 2,209 individuals chose to participate and this report sets out our findings.

# Our Learnings

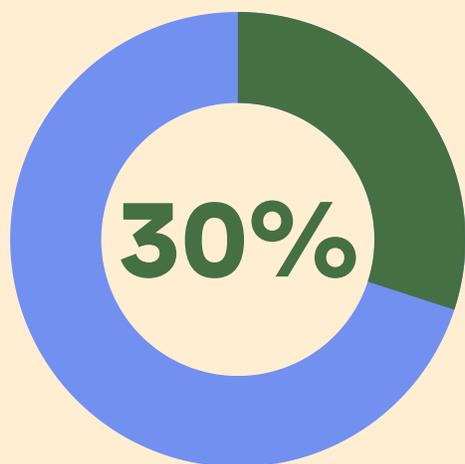
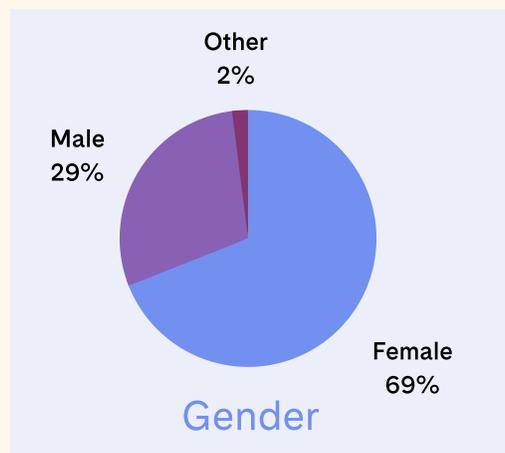
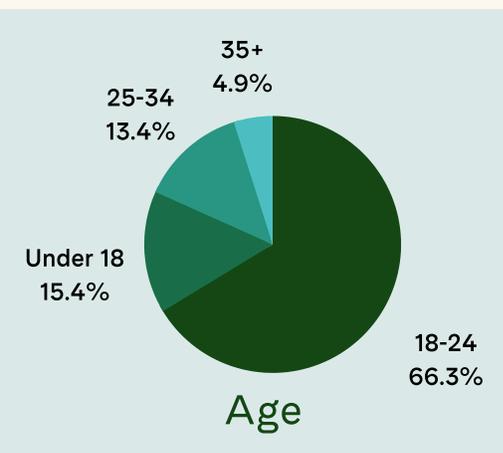


*“Social Mobility in England is a Postcode Lottery.”<sup>4</sup>*

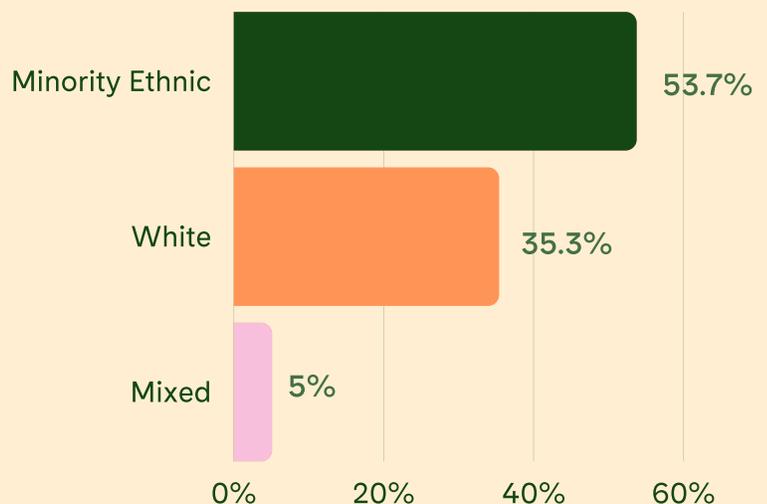
Our study was conducted on an opt-in basis, with no filtering criteria applied. The questions were framed to gain a better understanding of Forage’s UK community, particularly their background and perspectives on an anonymous basis. We were therefore surprised to see the level of representation of individuals commonly associated as coming from historically underserved communities. In fact, many of the traits considered

‘obstacles’ by the World Economic Forum such as ethnicity, lack of parental attendance of university or low socioeconomic background were brought to the surface across our study participants. We also found that a significant number of Foragers identified as coming from a less socially mobile background, according to the criteria set out by the UK Government’s criteria around social mobility indicators.

This is what we learned about our Forage community in the UK.

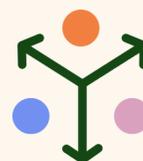


Identified as either a Refugee, Asylum Seeker or Migrant



*“Recognition of all universities, not just Oxbridge.”*

- Voice of UK Forager Study Participant



82.5%



Of those that attended school in the UK, 82.5% attended **non-fee paying schools.**



### Highest Education Level

Secondary school or national equivalent

37%

Bachelor's degree

33.5%

Graduate/  
Advanced degree

16.6%

25.3%

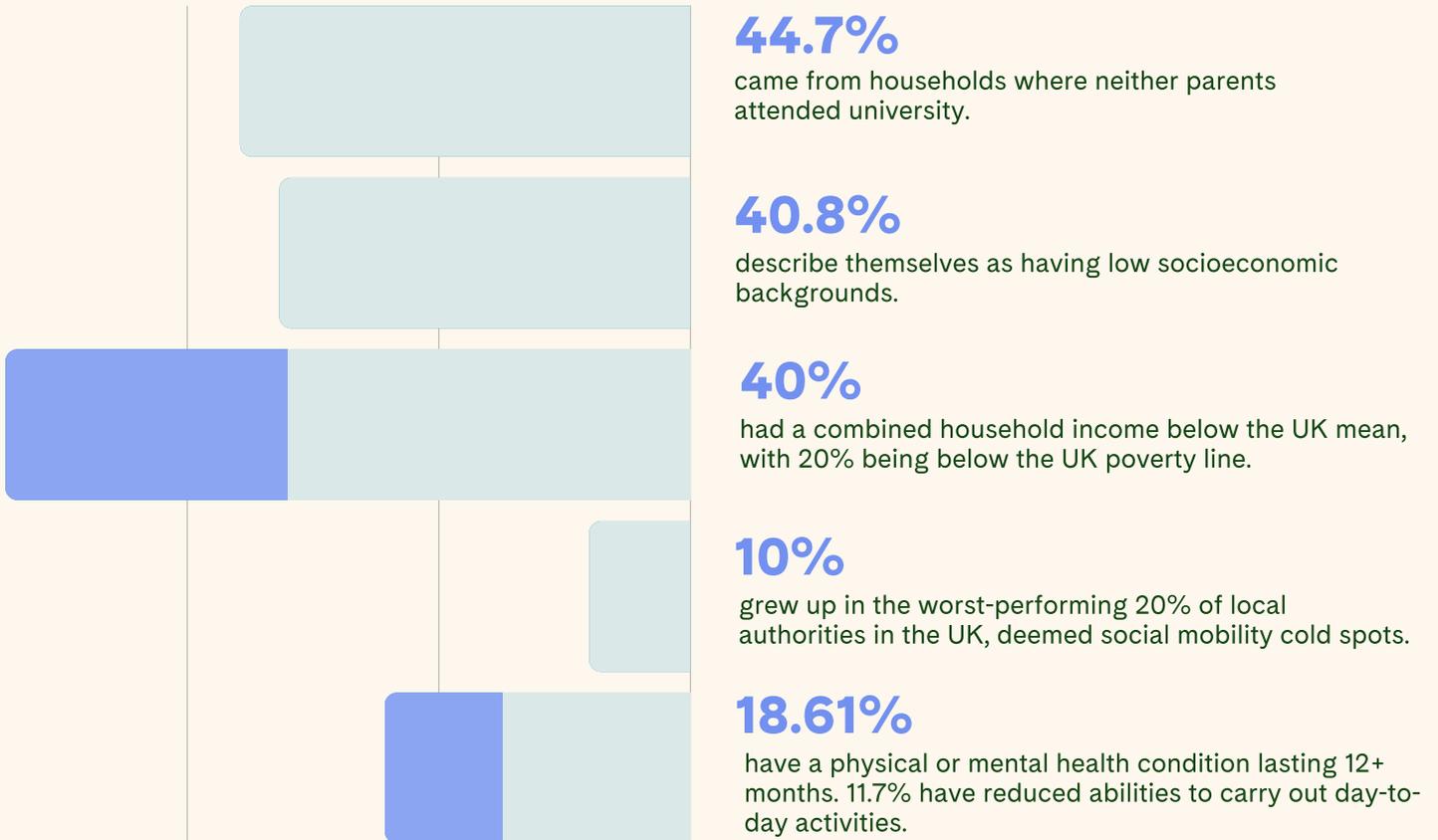


Of those that responded, 25.3% were **eligible for free school meals.**

*“Help us - we don't always have family to ask for advice.”*

- Voice of UK Forager Study Participant

## Household Circumstances



In light of the incredibly impactful role employers can play, we asked our study participants about their perceptions of employers and their initiatives to bolster social mobility within their workforces.

## Just over 50%

were either on the fence or disagreed that employers' current social mobility initiatives are working.

When we asked what employers should be doing instead, the most common themes of feedback centred on:



### Blind Interviews

Blind interviews, with no names or questions about ethnic backgrounds.



### University Diversity

Transitioning away from over-reliance on top-tier universities and focusing more on individual merits and potential.



### More Skilling Opportunities

More opportunities for those from low socioeconomic backgrounds or whose parents did not attend university to gain practical skills, particularly skills that will benefit them in a role with the company itself.



### Greater circumstantial recognition

More recognition and accommodation of the fact that those with a poorer background will have limited access to opportunities and therefore less work experience.



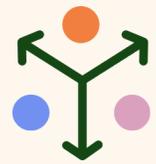
It is notable that many of the suggestions align with the World Economic Forum's recommendations, including focusing on meritocracy in hiring, actively participating in technical education programmes and providing skilling opportunities.<sup>5</sup>



It's simple. In a crowded fishing spot, a smart fisherman will move to a different pool to find more fish. They'll want the best fish no matter where they're fishing. It's the same for companies - they need to branch out.



# The Impact of Open-Access Virtual Opportunities



While there is no simple solution to enhancing social mobility, we wanted to explore what role open-access (that is, no barriers to entry from a cost, background or registration perspective) virtual skilling opportunities specifically played during the critical period of transitioning from school to work for our study participants.

Our study participants stated that the top 3 reasons they took part in such online skilling opportunities were to:

1

Improve their CV

2

Increase job opportunities

3

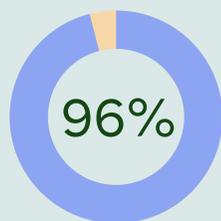
Gain skills

“Don’t just treat it as lip service or use tokenistic promotional imagery, we see through it. Just make it easier for people to get experience and hire according to a merit-based system.”

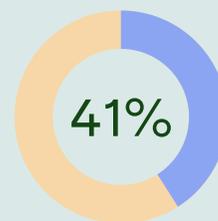
Number 3 is unsurprising given another Forage study found that only 14% of participants believed university provided the skills necessary for the workplace).<sup>6</sup>



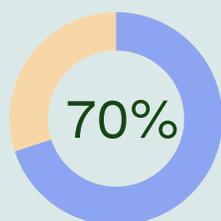
We further asked about the impact of virtual job simulations that were based on the actual work done at global employers like [HSBC](#), [Ashurst](#) and [Fidelity International](#). We learned that after our Foragers completed the virtual job simulations:



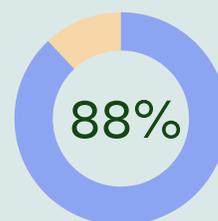
Felt more confident to apply for a role



Changed their mind about a career path



Felt more prepared for the world of work



Would recommend virtual job simulations

# Where to from here?



The current state of social mobility in the UK tells us that:



It will take five generations for those born in low-income families to approach the national mean income.<sup>7</sup>



Low social mobility costs £140bn a year over the period to 2050, amounting to £1.3trn lost GDP over the next 40 years.<sup>8</sup>

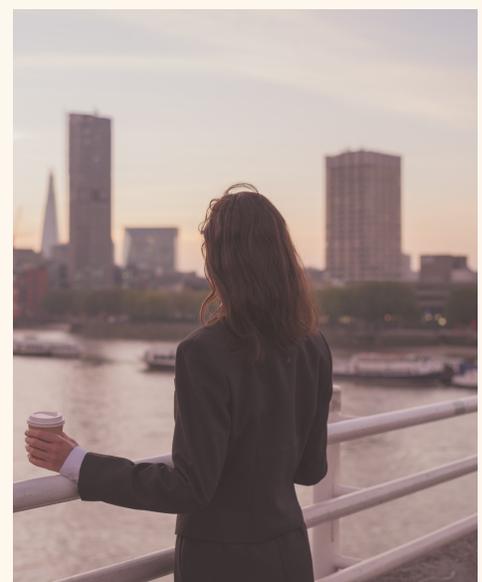
Not only is it the right thing to do, but it is in everybody's best interests to own the role they can play in enhancing social mobility - and employers are uniquely placed to create intragenerational mobility in a way that is entirely unprecedented. If we truly want to break the cycle of compound privilege that causes an incredibly large and exceptional

pool of historically underserved talent to opt out of the race entirely, we must think creatively about access. Whether it be access to skilling, mentorship opportunities, or even employment opportunities - employers must invest in giving back to a community of talent that has for too long been forgotten.

Based on the findings of our study, and consistent with the World Economic Forum's insights, we have formed the following recommendations on how employers can move the dial on social mobility:

## 1. Explore free virtual frameworks that provide participants with better career awareness, confidence and skills.

A recent Sutton Trust study found that 20% of working-class graduates could not afford to undertake physical work placement.<sup>9</sup> It further costs approximately £1,100 a month for an unpaid internship in London.<sup>10</sup> By leveraging a platform that is virtual and open-access, less socially mobile graduates can still benefit from gaining skills and experience without being restricted by travel or costs.





## 2. Consider leveraging alternate hiring signals that go beyond the university they went to or the marks they received.

While hiring signals such as university and GPA have enabled some employers to scale their review of applications each year, they can also be hiring signals that provide an unfair advantage to those of high social mobility, particularly those who have access to tutoring or networks to attend top-tier universities or achieve high results. Employers can consider looking for indicators of:

- **Intent:** a genuine interest and commitment to work for the company
- **Ability:** potential to perform in the role based on self-started initiatives to enhance their skill set (in the absence of formal work experience)
- **Engagement:** they understand and engage with the employer's values and vision

Virtual job simulations can provide a simple way to leverage these types of indicators.

## 3. Explore ways to make an impact throughout the school-to-work transition.

Many individuals from historically underserved communities choose to opt out of pursuing particular career paths either because it's not what they've been exposed to or it feels unattainable. Accordingly, employers should consider:

- Engaging as early as secondary school in order to not only showcase to young students the career options available to them, but inspire them with the skills to pursue those paths; and
- Engaging with young talent as they progress through their subsequent studies by creating open-access skilling programmes or skills-based curriculums that will increase their employability - and counter a lack of access to practical work experience and the impact this will have on their career prospects.



Do you want to learn more about how you can leverage virtual skilling frameworks to enhance social mobility? Contact us [here](#).

# Citations

---



1. 'Opening doors, breaking barriers: a strategy for social mobility', Policy Paper, United Kingdom Government Cabinet Office and Deputy Prime Minister's Office, published 5 April 2011.
2. 'The Global Social Mobility Report 2020: Equality, Opportunity and a New Economic Imperative', Insight Report, World Economic Forum, January 2020.
3. 'State of the Nation 2018-19: Social Mobility in Great Britain', Social Mobility Commission, 2019.
4. 'The long shadow of deprivation: Differences in opportunities across England', Research Report, Social Mobility Commission, 15 September 2020.
5. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/798687/SMC\\_State\\_of\\_Nation\\_2018-19\\_Summary.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/798687/SMC_State_of_Nation_2018-19_Summary.pdf)
6. Forage Voice of the Student Study 2021 (1700 Global Participants), March 2021.
7. 'The Global Social Mobility Report 2020: Equality, Opportunity and a New Economic Imperative', Insight Report, World Economic Forum, January 2020.
8. Ibid.
9. 'The University of Life: Employability and essential life skills at university', The Sutton Trust, 25 February 2021.
10. <https://www.suttontrust.com/our-priorities/access-to-the-workplace/>



# Forage

## Meet Forage.

We provide candidates, regardless of their circumstances, with the means to experience what it's like to work at some of the world's top employers, like BCG, Citibank, or GE. Our virtual job simulations empower students to find their right career fit, while enhancing their skills and work-readiness along the way.

For companies, it flips the hire-then-train model. It allows them to use workplace-specific training (rather than generic industry training) en masse as a recruiting tool. In doing so, they build a diverse network of current or future candidates and leverage high-fidelity signals to nurture, engage, and hire best-fit talent – who are conveniently upskilled in the role before they even start!

By providing open-access and virtual job simulations, company partners like JPMorgan Chase & Co., Electronic Arts, White & Case and SAP benefit from:

- A 24/7/365 virtual campus presence through Forage's university relationships
- Moving away from merely describing what they do to illustrating what they do in an interactive simulated environment – helping them stand out from their competitors
- Immediate and far-reaching goodwill by opening their doors to help train the workforce of the future and level the playing field

Contact us to learn more at [theforage.com](http://theforage.com).

