

**Bridge
Group**
research
action
equality

Making social equality a reality

Bridge Group impact report 2024

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The Bridge Group is a registered charity.
Registered charity no. 1162144

Welcome

As Chair of the Board of Trustees and Chief Executive respectively, it is with excitement and appreciation that we present this impact report. During the last remarkable years, the Bridge Group has remained at the forefront of advancing social mobility across the UK – and beyond.

Our programme of research across the education and employer sectors has featured multi-year commissions with key partners – including the Sutton Trust, the Social Mobility Foundation, and employers and regulators across sectors.

We have pioneered practical guides to address socio-economic pay gaps and inclusive recruitment toolkits, most recently for the screen industries. In-depth analyses and evidence-informed advice for law firms, sector groups (including Access Accountancy and Progress Together) and professional bodies have been instrumental in our pursuit of a more equitable society.

Much has changed during these years, but our dedication to robust evidence, and to making real change happen, is unwavering. This report encapsulates our dedication to creating opportunities and reducing barriers, ensuring a fair chance for all.

Our impact has only been possible through collaboration, and with a formidable team of staff and trustees. As we craft our strategy for August 2024 onward, we invite you to join us as we shape a better future for everyone.

Hephzibah Adeosun and Nik Miller



Evidence-based social change, in numbers

*January 2020 - December 2023

133

Number of organisations we have advised since 2009

Quadrupled

Number of recruits from lower socio-economic backgrounds to the Civil Service Fast Stream since our work began in 2016

22 million

Number of data points our research has analysed*

630+

Number of interviews undertaken in our research*

1010

Number of attendees who participated in our 15 events*

96%

Percentage of those attending our events who said that it will impact positively on their practice*

90+

Number of times we were mentioned in the media, including the Guardian, the Daily Telegraph, The Times, The Sunday Times, the Financial Times and the BBC*

55 thousand

Unique visitors to our website*

Our impact in the financial and legal sectors



The Bridge Group has led the way in equipping and supporting employers to realise the benefits of socio-economic diversity

Slaughter and May

Uzma Hamid-Dizier, Director of Responsible Business at Slaughter and May, describes how we contributed as they became the [first major British law firm to publish social mobility targets](#): “We partnered with the Bridge Group because of their expertise in analysis and making practical recommendations. Their contribution ensured that the project was executed in the most impactful way.”

“The support of the Bridge Group was instrumental in helping us to set targets; they helped build stakeholder trust, which enabled us to achieve robust targets based on reliable data and a clear plan of action.”

KPMG

Bina Mehta, Chair at KPMG UK, said: “The Bridge Group has led the way in equipping and supporting employers to realise the benefits of socio-economic diversity – and the way in which this has important positive effects in other areas of diversity. Their robust approach to research in this area, and knowledge about what really makes a difference, is unparalleled. At KPMG, we have been fortunate enough to work with the Bridge Group over the last decade – including, most recently, [their pioneering study into progression at KPMG.](#)”

Case study: Driving impact through regulatory practice

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We welcome both the robust review and the recommendations, which will help us to realise the benefits

In 2020, the Bridge Group [undertook research](#) commissioned by the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) which found that the new Solicitors Qualification Examination has a fair assessment design, and that the qualification could help to improve diversity in the legal sector. However, the Bridge Group went on to recommend that the SRA should do more to address all the diversity challenges in the legal profession. Paul Philip, Chief Executive of the SRA said: “We are pleased this report recognises the progress we have made, and we welcome both the robust review and the recommendations, which will help us to realise the benefits for everyone.”

[Research undertaken by the Bridge Group](#) explored the Judicial Diversity Forum (JDF)’s officials’ views and experiences of the outcomes and impact of their diversity and inclusion initiatives. Matthew Hill, Chief Executive of the Legal Services Board said: “Assessing the impact of efforts to improve the diversity of the judiciary is crucial to achieving progress. The Bridge Group has outlined that an effective approach to the design and evaluation of initiatives is one with

clear aims and targeted and collaborative action. The JDF has focused on incorporating these recommendations into its actions and priorities for 2022/23 to maximise our chances of success in addressing the remaining barriers to a diverse and inclusive judiciary.”

Following recommendations made by the Bridge Group, Ofcom introduced a series of questions into their TV questionnaire that measured social mobility progress. They also list the Bridge Group on their website as a reference point for broadcasters.

The Financial Conduct Authority referenced the work of the Bridge Group in its sector-wide consultation ‘Diversity and inclusion in the financial sector – working together to drive change’ and their ‘Diversity Annual Report 2021/22’.

The consultation paper ‘Diversity and Inclusion in PRA-regulated firms’ setting out the Prudential Regulation Authority (PRA)’s proposed rules and expectations aimed at improving diversity and inclusion in PRA-regulated firms also cited Bridge Group research.



Case study: Informing outreach at the Sutton Trust

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The Bridge Group name is known and respected, and brings weight to the reports

The Sutton Trust champions social mobility through programmes, research and policy influence. With thousands of young people from less advantaged backgrounds attending their programmes to access universities and careers, ongoing research and evaluation are key.

The Bridge Group has been working with the Sutton Trust to evaluate existing outreach programmes and to research the need for additional developments in specific professions and sectors, such as [engineering](#) and [technology](#).

Director of Programmes Katy Hampshire and Head of University Access and Digital Jonny Tyndall say that the Bridge Group's knowledge of access and social mobility in the higher education and employment sectors is what helps it to stand out. Katy notes that the Bridge Group name is known and respected, and “brings weight to the reports”. This is of value when the Sutton Trust takes them to stakeholders.

The Sutton Trust values the Bridge Group's impartial, honest feedback. “We're confident of the quality and independence of the work, and the

reputation of the Bridge Group is important for us,” comments Katy.

Jonny points to the value of consistency of methodology across programmes and projects as well as over time: “The longitudinal data, and consistent working with the Bridge Group over the last five years, has given us a really useful reference point for comparison. We got a genuine comparison on our programmes pre-, during, and post-pandemic. That's feeding into our bigger strategic decision about online versus in-person programme delivery ... the Bridge Group reports are an important part of that decision.”

The Trust also places high value on qualitative insights. Katy notes that interview findings help the Trust to “... get under the skin of programme delivery, and help us prioritise practical actions that improve the quality of our delivery, sharing of best practice and increasing impact.”

The Bridge Group's recommendations continue to inform improvements to programmes, both in the United Kingdom and the United States.



Case study: Employer consortium Progress Together

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Progress Together was founded because of the evidence presented by the Bridge Group

Progress Together is a not-for-profit membership body that was launched in May 2022 to create equity of progression for individuals in the financial services sector.

In 2020, there was an absence of sector-wide discussion, engagement, and action in relation to socio-economic diversity (SED). This changed with the launch of the Bridge Group's [City of London Corporation-commissioned report](#).

Sophie Hulm, Chief Executive of [Progress Together](#), comments on the release of that influential report: “People got up and noticed. The data was so stark. In particular, the link to job performance, highlighting the waste of energy and of talent. Businesses wanted to do something about it.”

Not only did the report on SED raise awareness in the sector, it led directly to the creation of the Government-commissioned Socio-Economic Diversity Taskforce that recommended, and led to, the creation of Progress Together. The Bridge Group report was an essential driver for action: “Progress Together was founded because of the evidence presented by the Bridge Group.

The report was instrumental in the Government commissioning the taskforce. Over 100 key figures in the sector engaged as a direct result of the clear evidence and calls to action in the report.”

The Bridge Group has been commissioned by Progress Together since its formation, leading on data analysis for the consortium. Last year, the charity analysed the largest ever dataset of its kind, revealing that [socio-economic background is more likely to impact a person's route to success in financial services than gender or ethnicity](#).

Sophie recognises the impact of the Bridge Group in identifying what needs to be done: “We could have become a talking shop. But we avoided this, and will generate impact quicker, because we had the evidence right from the start. We understand the importance of this and have identified being ‘data-driven’ as one of our four key values.”

She also reviews the working partnership: “The Bridge Group gives us additional reliability, profile and reputation. Its collaboration, expertise and rigour has helped us deliver everything we've achieved so far.”



Case study: Collaboration with the Social Mobility Foundation

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Our long-standing and trusted partnership enables us to achieve greater impact together

The Social Mobility Foundation has had a longstanding relationship with the Bridge Group, originating in the creation of the Social Mobility Employer Index in 2017. Talking about the relationship between the two charities, Sarah Atkinson, Chief Executive of the Social Mobility Foundation, says: “The Bridge Group and the [Social Mobility Foundation](#) have a shared vision of a society where talent from all social backgrounds is properly rewarded. We know our organisations are motivated by the same values and outcomes. Together, we have a powerful combination of skills and experience.”

Sarah describes how the creation of the Social Mobility Employer Index, which was established to encourage firms to become more accessible to individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds (SEBs), was one of the most successful partnerships: “The Bridge Group’s advice was instrumental in supporting us as we developed the Index, which has been an authoritative influence on social mobility in the United Kingdom.”

Another recent piece of collaborative work was the creation of the [Class Pay Gap Guide for employers](#): a free, practical guide to help organisations calculate their socio-economic pay

gap, and set targets. Sarah felt encouraged: “This work has such a strong practical element – taking all the mystery out of class pay gaps and giving organisations the confidence in their abilities to do something proactive.”

Sarah highlights another piece of collaborative research which explored the early career and progression experiences of recent graduates from lower SEBs: “The research found that [alumni from our Aspiring Professionals Programme performed significantly better than their peers nationally](#), demonstrating the positive impact of our programme in enabling young people to succeed in their career goals.” However, the research also highlighted additional barriers early career professionals from lower SEBs face in navigating their chosen career pathway and fitting into workplace cultures: “We are determined to do more to tackle these barriers and ensure that the young people we support don’t just get in but get on and feel confident they belong in their careers.”

Sarah adds that it has been fulfilling for individuals to work together, sharing skills and building capacity: “Our long-standing and trusted partnership enables us to achieve greater impact together.”



Case study: Ongoing impact at the Civil Service Fast Stream

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We now have over 20% representation of people from lower socio-economic backgrounds

In 2016, when the Bridge Group's report [Socio-Economic Diversity in the Fast Stream](#) was published, 4.2% of Civil Service Fast Stream recruits were from a lower socio-economic background (SEB), based on parental occupation.

Seven years later, Phil Wilson, Head of Training, Assessment and Curriculum at the Civil Service Fast Stream reports that the scheme now has “over 20% of people recruited from lower SEBs, which is characteristic of the university population at large.” (This includes a slight re-definition of how parental occupation is measured).

The research explored the barriers relating to application and appointment among those from lower SEBs – and made a series of practical recommendations. Phil says: “One of the most useful aspects of the work was the granular analysis of the data, and the insights this afforded. It was so helpful to understand exactly what was going on at every stage of the application process.”

Another essential element was the set of practical recommendations, which proved to be very influential within the Cabinet Office, gaining full endorsement from the senior sponsor: “To get

that seal of approval was very powerful indeed and laid the foundations for real change to be made.”

Phil considers which of the specific reforms have made the most difference: “Changes to the recruitment stage and rethinking cognitive testing has proven to be very effective. So has the mechanism of leveraging internships to deliver permanent recruitment, which has been used to identify individuals by their socio-economic background and then to support them to achieve permanent roles.”

The Bridge Group has subsequently been commissioned to research the experiences of those on the Fast Stream scheme itself: their progression, inclusion and the culture.

Phil is excited to be starting this project and working once again with the Bridge Group with its “insightful and measured” approach. He explains: “We are looking forward to finding out what has been happening to those that were selected for their roles, particularly how internships have led on to permanent graduate programme roles. We want to see how the recruits have progressed and whether they are prospering.”



Sharing our findings



The Bridge Group has become a world leader in efforts to improve the socio-economic diversity ...

An important objective of the Bridge Group is to share our expertise with as many individuals, organisations and institutions as possible.

Over the last four years, the Bridge Group has hosted 14 events, mostly online, to provide attendees with top tips, approaches and tools to help make meaningful change.

Recently, following the launch of a guide that offers step-by-step advice for employers that want to set meaningful targets for socio-economic diversity and drive change, we held an [online seminar with the Social Mobility Foundation](#) full of practical tips for organisations that are interested in reporting their class pay gap.

Earlier in 2023, we examined the [benefits and drawbacks of online outreach](#). Our focussed session drew on the Bridge Group's extensive research and evaluation of outreach, targeting sixth-form students from lower socio-economic

backgrounds and their progression to university and graduate-level jobs.

A third recent event looked at Bridge Group research highlighting how [socio-economic background can often have a stronger effect on progression and pay](#), compared with other diversity characteristics, and how this diversity characteristic intersects with gender and ethnicity.

Over the last four years we have had speakers from global employers, professional organisations, membership bodies, foundations and not-for-profit organisations, and academic institutions.

During many of these events we facilitated collaborative working within professional consortia, or focused on specific industries and sectors including financial services, legal, real estate and architecture, engineering, creative and cultural industries, education and the third sector.

Professor Lee Elliot Major OBE, Professor of Social Mobility at the University of Exeter:

“The Bridge Group has become a world leader in the efforts to improve socio-economic diversity in the workplace. It is the powerful combination of data analysis and interview evidence that distinguishes its important work, alongside a focus on evidence-informed, practical actions to drive actual change.”

Find out how we can help you make a difference

We all get the why. But what about the how? Diversity. Inclusion. Social equality. Good for society, good for the economy. That's where the Bridge Group comes in. Using rigorous research and hard-won experience, we can help you identify and tackle the challenges you face in ways that will have an impact now – and into the future.

The Bridge Group brings expertise in three key areas:

By keeping research focused, framing research questions so they are relevant and producing practicable recommendations, tools and programmes to achieve change.

By expertly gathering, analysing and interpreting data, including quantitative data from large national sets, organisational data, and qualitative data from interviews and focus groups.

By offering research and recommendations that are responsive to context, by drawing on expertise from our network of Fellows and contributors, regarding organisational context and national policy drivers.

If you are tired of well-meaning mission statements and strategies that go nowhere, get in touch. You know change is possible.

We can help you make that change, now.

Our ambitions for the future and how you can help us

Our work has never been more necessary. As we deliver our 2024-26 strategy, this next chapter will be a period of growth and increasing our impact. Building on strong foundations, we will make positive change happen across sectors.

If you want to be part of crafting the Bridge Group's next chapter, please get in touch – we are actively fundraising for specific aspects of our work to complement our income from commissioned work.

Our partners

Organisations that have commissioned our work or supported our vision through philanthropy:

AAT
ACCA
[Access Accountancy](#)
AIA United Kingdom
Allen & Overy
Amazon UK
Approachable Accountants Ltd
AXA
BBC
BDO
Blick Rothenberg
Boston Consulting Group
British Council
Bryan Cave Leighton Paisner
Buzzacott
Cabinet Office
Channel 4
CIPFA
Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service
Cafcass
Cappfinity
Career Ready
CIMA
City of London Corporation
Civil Service Fast Stream
Clifford Chance
Deloitte
Dentons
Diageo
DLA Piper
Dublin City University
Duncan & Toplis
ESMA
EY
Facebook

Google.org
Grant Thornton
Haysmacintyre
Herbert Smith Freehills
Hogan Lovells
Holman Fenwick Willan
Honourable Society of the Inner Temple
ICAEW
Inc Arts
Independent Cinema Office
Independent Franchise Partners
Institute of Student Employers
Interpath
Jerwood Foundation
JLL UK Foundation
[Judicial Diversity Forum](#)
Kingston Smith
Kingston University
KPMG
Kreston Reeves
Lancaster University
[Law firms in our law consortia projects](#)
Legal Services Board
Linklaters
London Healthcare Education Group
London School of Economics and Political Science
London South Bank University
Mazars
MHA MacIntyre Hudson
Moore Stephens
Morgan Stanley

National Audit Office
Nationwide
Office for Students
Penguin Random House UK
Penningtons Manches Cooper
Pinsent Masons
Police Now
Price Bailey
[PRIME](#)
[Progress Together](#)
PwC
[Real estate firms in the 2020 research](#)
Royal Institute of British Architects
RSM
Sage Gateshead
Schroders
Screen Industries Growth Network (SIGN)
Slaughter and May
Smart Energy
Social Mobility Commission
Social Mobility Foundation
Solicitors Regulation Authority
TASO
The Sutton Trust
Teach First
The Inner Temple
University of Oxford
University of York
UPP Foundation
Uptree
Viacom
Wellcome Sanger Institute
Wellcome