A black and white photograph of a young man with dreadlocks, smiling broadly. He is wearing a denim jacket and has a white earphone cord visible. The image is slightly faded to allow the text to stand out. Red vertical bars are on the left and right sides of the cover.

Equal tech report 2020/21

Youth employability post COVID-19

introduction.

The greatest career challenge of a generation.

In this report, we assess the impact of the pandemic on the career prospects of young people and the long-term influence of employment inequality.

To get to the roots of the issue, we surveyed three groups:

- **INDUSTRY LEADERS:** How are businesses in different sectors supporting social mobility in early careers?
- **EDUCATORS:** How can we bridge the gap between education and employment?
- **COMMUNITY LEADERS:** What are the implications of unemployment on mental health in marginalised communities?

This research brings together practical suggestions and novel solutions from leaders who are *making change happen*.

How has your organisation or employer been impacted by Covid-19?

You will have seen projects delayed, purse-strings tightened, teams made smaller and personal progression hampered by the pandemic. The uncertainty of the past (almost) 24 months has hurt all of us, but the pressure, the ambiguity and the lack of career opportunities brought on by Covid-19 has affected emerging talent the most. The impact was systemic, deep and disproportionate.

LSE research* found young workers were twice as likely to lose their jobs during the pandemic compared to older employees, and that employment and earnings losses were more pronounced for women, the self-employed and those who grew up in a low-income family.

It is more important than ever to collectively - and critically - assess the state of youth employability in our institutions. Whether you are an employer, educator, or community partner who supports underrepresented groups, we are all in powerful positions to minimise the impact of Covid-19 on social mobility and emerging career opportunities. But we must act now.

Welcome to the inaugural Equal Tech Report, the first time we are bringing together the groups who can influence change for early careers in a post-pandemic world. We have surveyed more than 160 individuals from organisations across almost every industry sector – from CEOs and CTOs to junior hiring professionals – UK universities, community partners and graduate groups. Whatever your place in the early-careers journey, this report will shine a light on what can be learned from our shared experience and how we can better prioritise the people who will be transforming our businesses, communities and society in the future.

*Social Mobility: Evidence and Policy - published 26.10.21 by LSE's Centre for Economic Performance (CEP)



by **David Rai**,
Sparta Global CEO

introduction.

Five things to do with this report



1

Benchmark your youth employability agenda
Understand how your social mobility and youth employability plans measure up against similar institutions. See where to make changes.



2

Hear from your peers
Read how leaders from industry, education and community have responded to the employability crises initiated by the Covid-19 pandemic.



3

Realise the value of training
Understand the critical role training plays in educating teams about diverse talent, youth employability and social mobility – then turn training into positive action.



4

Understand the impact on all players
The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted employers, education and underserved communities within the early careers market – but how do they all intersect? Explore intersectionality.



5

Advocate for early careers
Start a conversation with decision makers and influence change for early careers talent in our post-pandemic world. Discover where to start.

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In this post-Covid era, it is more important than ever for employers to invest in junior talent to futureproof their businesses. Graduates and emerging talent have been through a lot during the pandemic – with their studies and career prospects dramatically impacted – but they have grown more resilient and adaptable as a result. Today’s junior talent can truly add valuable diversity and energy into your business.

Purnima Sen, Sparta Global Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Director

findings.

Industry insights.

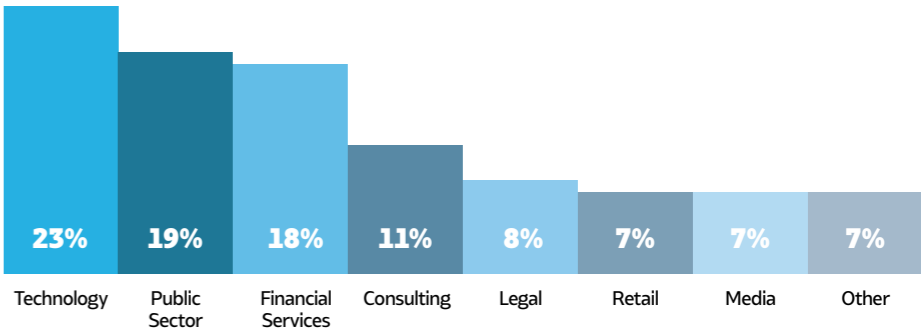
How are UK businesses reacting to rising youth employment inequalities, and what can be done to champion disadvantaged talent post Covid-19? Our research explored the perspectives of executives in different industries to gauge corporate responsiveness and approach to social mobility in early careers.

Who did we speak to?

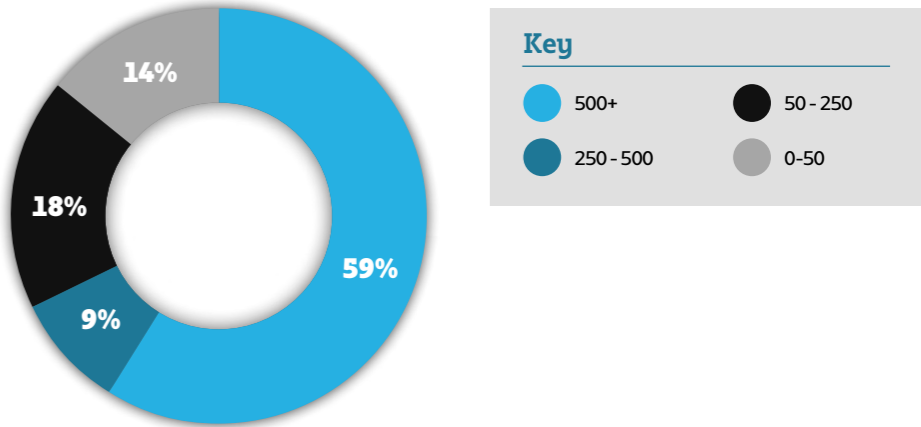
To better understand the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the UK youth labour market, we surveyed a cross-sectorial pool of business executives.

Our respondents span a wide range of industries, with a focus on the service sector. We have grouped them into seven main categories for this report: technology (23%), public sector (19%), financial services (18%), consulting (11%), legal (8%), retail (7%), and media (7%).

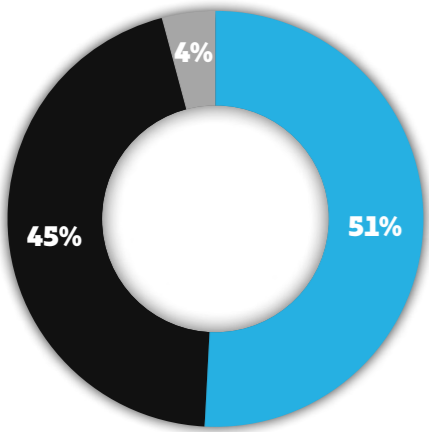
Which industry sector do you work in?



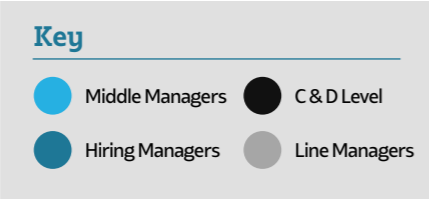
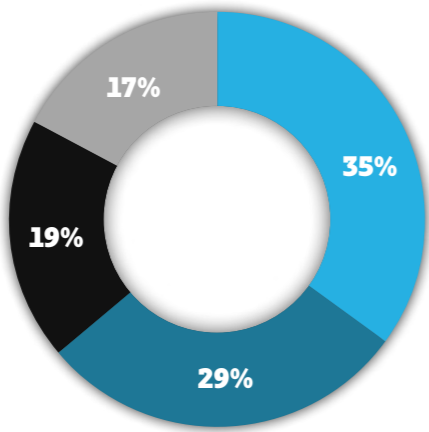
What is the size of your organisation?



What is your gender?



What is your role?



Are companies committed to social mobility in early careers?

There is a clear agreement amongst our respondents that the Covid-19 crisis impacted their junior recruitment activity in 2020, particularly between Q2 and Q4, with most talent attraction and onboarding initiatives – including graduate programmes, internships, and work experience opportunities – halted or significantly reduced during this time.

Although recruitment levels rose in Q1 and Q2 of 2021, our respondents indicated that the pandemic worsened their companies’ junior talent shortage and diversity. However, it emerges that industry leaders are becoming increasingly aware of the youth employment gap and its implications for the future of ED&I.



My greatest preconception was that I would not match up to the capabilities or ever be as good as my white, male counterparts – but I was wrong. I have found that with the right training, education and experience, I am very much capable of succeeding in a technology career and I hope to be part of a history that sees the shift in having more diversity in the industry – especially in the most senior posts.”

Tsitsi Zendera, Business Analysis Spartan

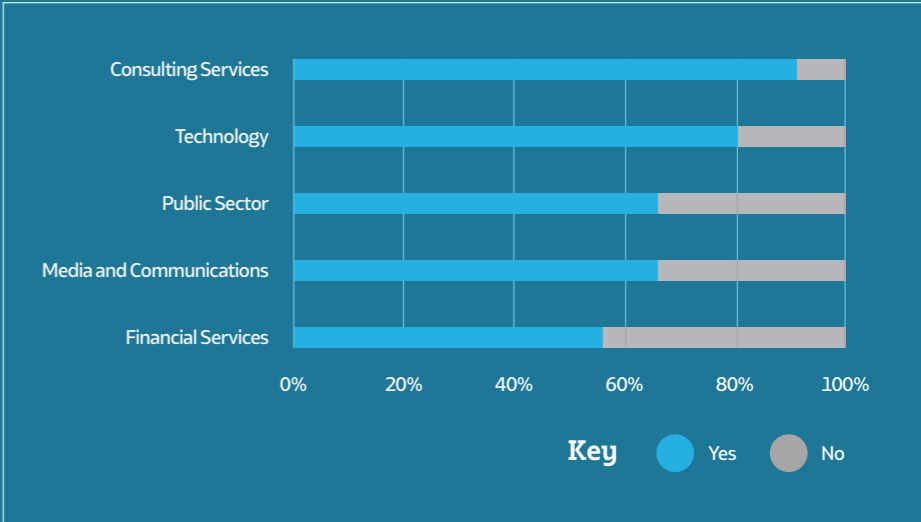


When we consider these responses collectively, we learn that equal youth employment is becoming a new focus area for corporate social responsibility. This is a very promising sign, as more companies are starting to pay attention to the role of early talent mobility as something that is integral for the success of their ED&I objectives post Covid-19.

Who is investing in early careers social mobility programmes, and why?

The level of commitment towards the equal youth employment agenda varies between industries. Companies in consulting services, technology, public sector, media, and financial services topped the board in showing concrete commitment towards implementing early talent mobility programmes. Respondents in these sectors were able to demonstrate that they are currently investing money, time, and resources in the development of targeted opportunities for disadvantaged youth to build a more equal workforce post Covid-19.

Who is investing in creating early talent social mobility programmes?



We asked executives in these industries to explain why they consider equal youth employment to be a top business priority.

The top reasons reported were:



Corporate Social Responsibility

27% of respondents feel that it is imperative for their companies to give back to society and support social participation post Covid-19.



Culture change

A frequently cited reason for investing in the attraction of young people from diverse socio-economic groups is a desire to improve organisational cultures.



Succession planning

A common perception held by our respondents is that early social mobility programmes also serve a strategic role, as they can help identify and develop future leaders within geographies. This suggests a growing recognition of the long-term effects of inclusive youth engagement on regional talent attraction, retention, and progression.



Improved representation of customer base

Another prominent motive for investing in early social mobility programmes is the need to diversify and improve customer experience and understanding. Our respondents told us that by leveraging the voices of young people from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, they have been able to gain crucial insights into the needs and buying behaviours of their target markets.



Reduced talent costs

Our respondents highlighted that early social mobility initiatives can help reduce diversity hiring costs. By tapping into their local talent pools, social mobility initiatives are helping companies advance their ED&I talent targets, while saving costs on candidate generation, attraction, and onboarding.

Of the people managers surveyed, 48% told us that early social mobility programmes have directly increased the representation of talent from marginalised communities within their teams, which, in turn, has promoted inclusion and sense of belonging within their companies.

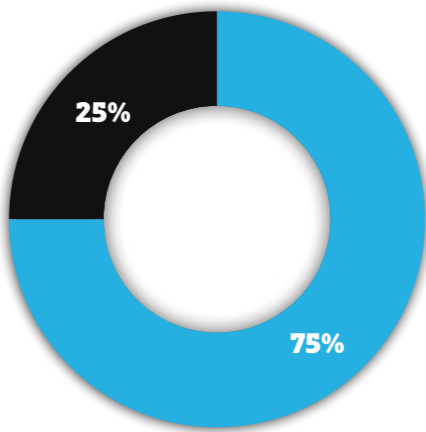
When we control by company size, we see that large organisations tend to have more structured social mobility programmes in place, when compared to smaller businesses. This is most likely due to the fact that large organisations typically have more resources and capabilities to invest in ED&I. This is a positive sign, as large employers have the ability to influence the national employment picture and drive long-lasting change.

On the other hand, it's worth noting that smaller companies appear to be more agile in their approach to social mobility and have the potential to pivot new ideas faster.

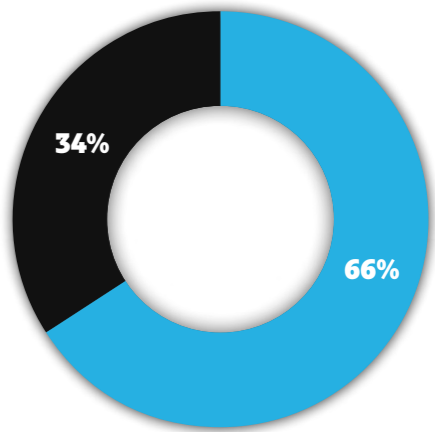
Does awareness equal change?

Despite broad agreement on the necessity of social mobility interventions in junior talent recruitment, industry awareness doesn't always translate into change.

Do you have internal training for hiring teams that focuses on social mobility?



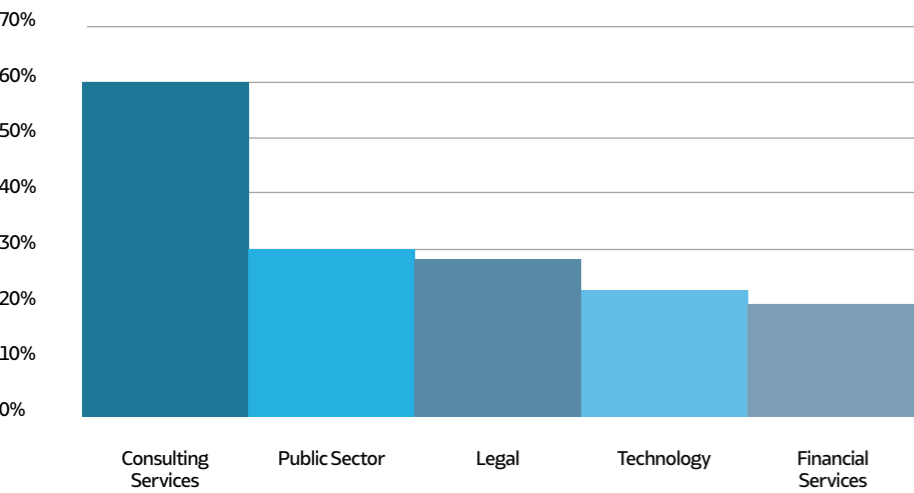
Do you currently tailor your talent attraction process to be inclusive of young people from under-served backgrounds?



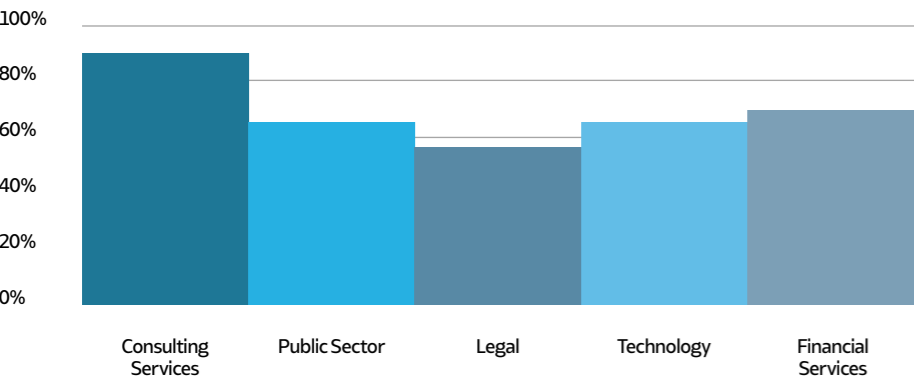
While the importance of youth mobility is gaining visibility across industries, many companies are failing to adapt their talent processes to reflect their social mobility promises.

The good news is that when businesses choose to empower their recruitment teams through social mobility learning and training, their talent engagement methodologies do evolve, because employees become better equipped to accelerate progress. This is clear if we look at our research; when we control for sector-specific performance, we find that **the top five industries that have invested in internal social mobility training (consulting services, public sector, legal, technology and financial services) are the same industries that have been able to effectively pivot their recruitment efforts.**

Do you have internal training for hiring teams that focuses on social mobility?



Do you currently tailor your talent attraction process to be inclusive of young people from under-served communities?



This proves that internal education is the first step towards implementing action-oriented approaches.

How to improve the career prospects of young people from low-income backgrounds.

To successfully promote social mobility in early careers, companies need to engage in social value projects that promote wider access to opportunities and deliver positive change at a grassroots level.

We set out to identify the most impactful business approaches currently in use to empower next generation of workers from less privileged backgrounds.

Technology

- Use tech training academies
- Offer coding classes
- Kickstarter programmes
- Bootcamps
- University outreach
- Increase internship opportunities

Public Sector

- Outreach programmes
- Reach out to local communities
- Social media outreach
- Provide interview prep
- Reduce specialist criteria
- Offer training
- Challenge assumptions when hiring

Consulting services

- Offer more inclusive careers events
- Leverage training academies
- Approach schools in under-served areas
- Offer training
- Move from ‘cultural fit’ to ‘cultural add’
- Engagement with schools
- Boost entry-level recruitment
- Virtual/remote internships

Retail

- Apprenticeships
- Campus recruitment
- Mentoring

Financial services

- Apprenticeships
- Inclusive graduate programmes
- Provision of educational resources
- More entry-level intake
- Cover moving costs
- Internships
- Mentoring
- Training

Legal

- Broader apprenticeship options
- Work with training academies
- Internal training on social mobility

Media and communications

- Hiring apprentices
- Meaningful work placements
- Mentoring at school
- Partnerships with colleges and universities

Other

- Community engagement

We analysed evidence-based interventions that have been shown to positively affect early talent mobility, and collated a 7-step action plan for change:

1. Be present in the community

Companies that encourage involvement in the community are shown to experience more diverse candidate engagement within their regions. 42% of hiring managers surveyed reported that publishing their junior roles to the local community of talent has resulted in increased socio-economic diversity in their entry level talent pipelines.

2. Partner with an inclusive range of universities, schools, and community groups

One of the main drivers of socio-economic diversity in entry level recruitment is engagement with educational bodies. And yet, 19% of business executives surveyed said that they primarily source candidates from Russell Group universities, and a further 14% said that they are more likely to hire graduates from those institutions. Although great efforts are being made by Russell Group universities to increase the diversity of their student populations, young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are still underrepresented. So, by favouring candidates from such a small range of institutions, businesses continue to miss out on less privileged youth.

Conversely, companies that have expanded their outreach strategies are now attracting a wider and more diverse audience. For example, businesses that engage with non-Russell Group universities, state schools and community educational networks reported an average 18% increase in the number of entry level recruits from low-income backgrounds.

3. Consider digital connectivity

When looking to engage, assess and onboard talent, it's important to remember that young people from low-income families may face barriers to the recruitment process related to lack of digital resources. These may include affordability and access to connected devices (e.g. laptops and smartphones) and to internet connectivity.

12% of employers surveyed said that they have invested in expanding digital accessibility by offering or donating laptops throughout the pandemic, which has positively impacted the application outcomes of disadvantaged youth.

4. Promote wider access to digital skills

More than half (51%) of employers surveyed said that technical skills are particularly sought-after for entry level jobs, with this trend predicted to grow post Covid-19. This means that if businesses want to increase the socio-economic diversity of their entry-level hires in the future, they should invest in promoting digital skills to young people now.

Some employers are already tackling the digital skills imperative by partnering with tech training academies to attract, train and onboard inclusive digital teams. This approach provides valuable opportunities for disadvantaged youth who cannot afford a university education to upskill and secure an alternative route into employment.

5. Review your entry-level criteria for bias

Of those surveyed, 22% believe that on-the-job training programmes, internships, and work experience schemes will play an important role in boosting youth employment post Covid-19, but voiced concerns over the inclusivity of their companies' entry criteria. Work experience schemes are often marketed towards disadvantaged youth. However, without a conscious effort to level the playing field, entry barriers will remain in place.

One concern that arose from the research was that access to interview skills, business etiquette and professional vocabulary is often the result of the environment people are immersed in, and as such is not equally distributed in society. As a result, young people from less privileged backgrounds who are not exposed to interview practice opportunities and industry networks can find it harder to develop the soft skills employers are looking for.

6. Recognise and share role models

Role model stories provide evidence that the company welcomes and embraces socio-economic diversity. They showcase the full scope of career paths and opportunities that exist within a business, while shining a spotlight on the experiences of the individuals who have successfully overcome barriers and achieved their professional goals.

7. Take intersectionality seriously

ED&I conversations within organisations are very often designed one-dimensionally along a single axis of inequality, such as social status. However, a better way to understand inequality is by looking at the combination of different axes of disadvantage that influence one another and are unique to individuals. A conversation on socio-economic inclusion that doesn't consider other aspects of identity may be limiting.

Are role models crucial to empower youth from underprivileged background?

37% said yes.

industry insights.

Industry stories.

“Young people are often not aware of the opportunities out there or how to get them. While university is still a great choice for many, it’s not the only route through to a good job. Graduates often find themselves overqualified and unemployed as well as lacking the real-world experience needed to find work. Our education system must promote all routes through to work equally and use up-to-date labour market information to improve careers advice and guidance for all. Young people also need access to employers from an early age to help them see what their futures could be. Bite-sized, digitally-enabled and flexible learning should be prioritised to help more young people access education.”

Kirstie Donnelly, CEO City & Guilds



Monica Stancu, Experienced D&I manager, a One Young World Ambassador and a mentor at Migrant Leaders

“Talent is everywhere but opportunity is not. Innovative products and healthy profits are the result of talented people with diverse perspectives working in environments that allow them to flourish. Accelerating social mobility can only be done by working in partnership, as this is a common challenge. Effective social mobility strategies take an intersectional approach and consider that social identities can overlap, creating compounding experiences of disadvantage. We need to stop confusing confidence with competence and remember that our definitions of professionalism are subjective. Wasted potential holds us back so we all have a role to play in building a fairer world.”



Dave Edwards, Applications Director, Gallagher

“As we emerge from the pandemic there is a focus on building back better, making the best of the learnings we have made over the last 18 months, and taking the opportunity to create more resilient societies. I believe this applies to building a stronger, more diverse workforce and early career action is critical to making this a reality. At Gallagher, we have made a commitment to shaping our workforce to better reflect the society and world in which we operate and this starts with talent acquisition and ensuring the right conditions are in place for everyone to achieve their full potential. Putting together people who see the same thing in different ways and welcoming and encouraging diverse opinions and backgrounds inevitably leads to a healthier, more innovative team and ultimately more profitable business that meets the evolving needs of our customers.”



Steve Green, Executive Director and Head of Data Office, SMBC

“Coming from a very large family in Birmingham, where no-one stayed in education past 16, and almost no-one worked in a corporate office, it was clear that there are lots of hugely capable people in this country who do not get the opportunity to fully exploit their potential. Too many people still feel like they can’t do certain jobs or have certain careers. They lack role models who can help them navigate their career, or they come across firms who only want a certain type of person to fill their vacancies. Effective social mobility is key to ensuring people have the clarity on what is possible, the understanding of how to get there, and the chance to do so. Getting this right is also hugely important to ensure organisations can identify and exploit new ideas and innovations. History shows us that groupthink is almost never a good approach. I am therefore passionate about good social mobility because it benefits the individual, the people around them (who are more likely to believe their talents will also be appreciated), and the companies they work for.”

findings.

University insights.



Has Covid deepened the employment gap between more and less privileged graduates? How are universities responding, and what support do they need from employers to level the playing field? Our research explored the perspectives of academics and student employability professionals who are helping graduates navigate a difficult job market.

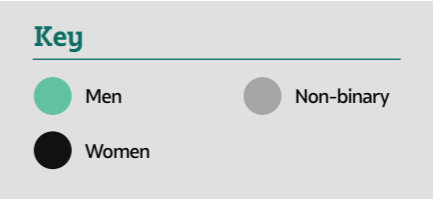
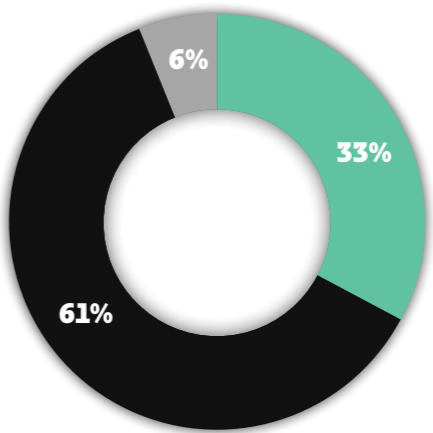
Who did we speak to?

To better understand the academic response to the Covid-19 graduate employment crisis, we spoke with educators in 40 UK universities.

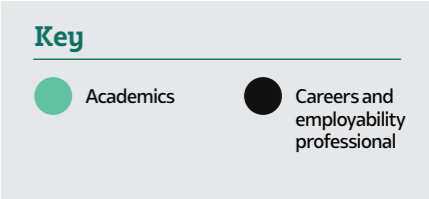
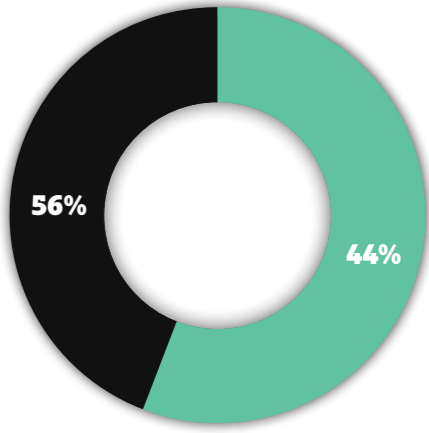
The data supplied by our respondents comes from universities across the UK, the majority of which are in London and the South East (68%), with the remaining 32% based in the South West, in the Midlands, and in the North West. 19% of these are Russell Group universities and 81% are outside of the Russell Group.

Our respondents hold various student-facing roles. We have grouped them into two broad categories for this report: academics (56%) and employability professionals (44%). The former group includes lecturers and associate lectures, readers, professors, and deans of faculties who share a research interest in social mobility, while the latter includes career advisors, student employment consultants, and heads of career services.

What is your gender?



Which faculty do you belong to?



Have you noticed a reduction in the number of graduates finding immediate employment during the Covid outbreak?

78% said
yes.

How has Covid impacted the career prospects of graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds?

Of university professionals, 78% told us they have seen a drastic reduction in the number of graduates finding immediate employment during the pandemic.

While all graduates were negatively impacted, 63% of respondents disclosed that students from low-income families were significantly more likely to lose learning opportunities, experience cancelled work experience and financial hardships as result of Covid when compared to their more privileged counterparts.

63%

found that graduates from economically challenged families suffered worse consequences in terms of employment when compared to more privileged students.

When we explore the causes of these inequalities, we found that the introduction of remote teaching during the pandemic had a greater impact on students from lower-income backgrounds who experienced a challenging home-study environment. One of the themes that emerged from the survey was that the home environment has critical implications on students' learning progress.

Some of the most cited factors that hindered the performance of low-income students during remote teaching included:

- Lack of appropriate space in the home to study, focus, practise, and perform during exams.
- Lack of privacy, particularly in small, shared, or over-crowded homes.
- Lack of direct parental guidance, such as help, support and guidance with studying and assignments.
- Lack of opportunities for engagement in learning-stimulation activities.

These factors contributed to exacerbating the challenges that disadvantaged students already face.

Students whose parents work in low-skilled or semi-skilled occupations normally rely on their universities to connect and engage with employers in professional services. When this structure of support was compromised by the changes brought on by Covid, they were among the worst hit.

The research shows that students from less privileged backgrounds who are statistically more at risk of increased vulnerability were more affected by the lack of support and extra services required to secure employment, resulting in widening disparities between those who experience socio-economic barriers and those who don't.

89% of university professionals surveyed stated that ensuring equal graduate employment opportunities will be a top priority for their universities going forward. Of these, 71% feel that Covid magnified existing conversations around socio-economic diversity in graduate careers, increasing the urgency of bespoke interventions.

Will promoting equal opportunities in youth employability be a priority of your careers teams in the next 12 months?

89% said
yes.

Encouragingly, we see that the vast majority of universities have adopted tailored career support programmes to support students from low-income backgrounds during the pandemic.

These include mentoring services aimed at connecting disadvantaged students with role models in industry, as well as training opportunities designed to increase student confidence ahead of interviews and assessments.

78%

have implemented tailored mentoring services to support social mobility.

76%

have implemented tailored training services to support social mobility.

What can employers do to foster effective social mobility collaboration with universities?

Unless we create the conditions for graduates from less-advantaged backgrounds to access and sustain top graduate jobs, the employment gap is only going to get worse post Covid. The key to advancing progress is collaboration between employers and universities.

We asked our academic partners what interventions are needed from graduate employers to support universities in their social mobility mission post Covid. The research highlighted the following recommendations:

Always adopt contextualised recruitment when hiring from universities.

Contextualised recruitment helps employers uncover what external factors may have contributed to a student’s grades and experience. It also helps employers look beyond traditional assessment criteria to identify resilient, driven, outperformers from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. Contextualised recruitment is about levelling the playing field, providing the resources and reasonable adjustments necessary to support candidates throughout the application process.

Volunteer time to help students understand their employability prospects.

Employers need to collaborate with universities to help less privileged students broaden their horizons, understand career pathways available, and develop the skills, networks and experiences needed for career success.

Our university partners voted the following initiatives as most effective for social mobility:

1. Virtual and in-person careers panels

These are shown to be particularly effective when conducted in an interactive format that encourages students to ask questions about career journeys and key skills for employment.

2. Virtual and in-person interview practice sessions

These allow students to practice speaking about themselves and gain confidence in their communication skills. These activities are particularly meaningful for candidates who don’t have family connections in professional services able to provide this type of support at home.

3. Virtual and in-person speed networking sessions

These help students gain valuable insights into different sectors and roles. Q&A formats appear to be particularly effective, as they allow students to voice their doubts, concerns, or hesitations in a psychologically safe environment. It’s beneficial to record these sessions where possible, so students can access or re-visit them from home.

4. Virtual and in-person career fairs

These allow employers to promote their companies to socially diverse student populations. When possible, employers should aim to include short practical activities/presentations that help students gain a greater understanding of their industries and business models.

5. Application guidelines

These include preparatory sessions ahead of psychometric tests, open days, technical and behavioural tests. These initiatives allow students without previous work experience to understand which assessment criteria are used by employers, and how to prepare accordingly.

6. Offering more opportunities for digital upskilling

According to our university partners, the future of graduate employment post Covid-19 is digital. This presents opportunities for employers to help the next generation of socially diverse talent to gain the digital skills they need to get employed.

Activities such as tech skills training, hackathons and coding workshops promote digital learning among students, empowering candidates from all backgrounds to future-proof their skillset.

university insights.

University stories.



“Employers and universities can work together by providing students with accessible opportunities to develop their professional networks and commercially relevant skills, both areas that have been harder to access during Covid-19. Universities can complement the industry expertise offered by employers by providing the encouragement and practical support that students need to engage effectively in these activities. Having a functioning computer and a quiet place to work is something that can be taken for granted by many, but we know that many students experience a form of ‘digital poverty’ and do not have access to a peaceful place to work or the equipment they need to meaningfully participate from their home setting. We are trying to address this at Greenwich by offering students access to the locations and technologies that they need, for example via investment in digital equipment loans, providing enhanced access to library and computing facilities, and by continuing to collaborate with partners like Sparta Global who genuinely care about the futures of our students. By working together in this way universities and employers can help remove some of the post Covid-19 employability barriers and enhance social mobility for all students, helping them to start opening doors that might otherwise have remained firmly shut.

Matthew Conneally, Employer Partnership Manager, University of Greenwich



“Many graduates have reconsidered their career plans whilst graduating and entering work during the Covid pandemic. While high profile sectors such as healthcare have motivated graduates to look at roles where they feel they can truly make a difference, and professional and technical industries offer more secure career progression, industries such as tourism and hospitality have really struggled. Graduates are less confident as they feel that finding and interviewing for highly skilled work is harder. The competition is fiercer than pre-pandemic levels and many will have already experienced redundancy from part-time work. The wellbeing of graduates, who could now be leaving university with large debts and uncertainty about their futures, is a big concern too. This must be considered by recruiters to ensure their behaviours do not negatively impact their confidence and resilience further. Know that underneath the seemingly nervous exteriors, there are some very talented individuals who are eager to learn and succeed.”

Michelle Everitt, Assistant Director of Student Experience and Head of Careers & Employability, University of Bedfordshire



findings.

Community partner insights.

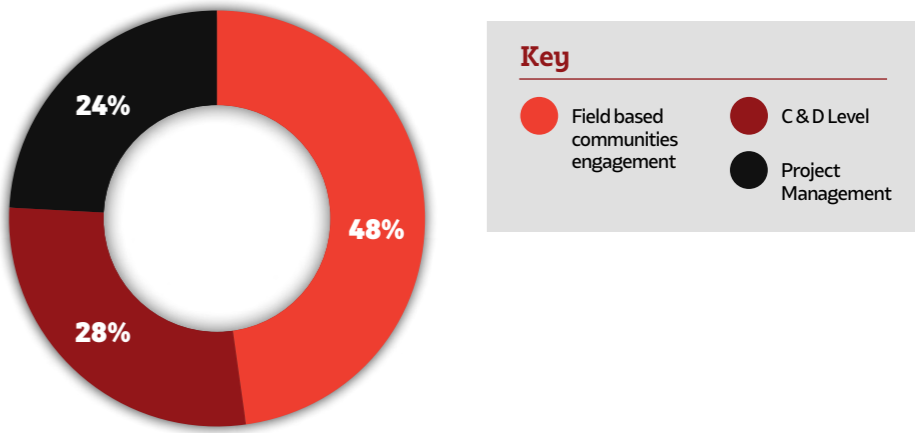


While working with universities is key to tackling socio-economic inequality in early careers, employers also have a duty to engage with those who do not follow traditional education routes. The barriers to accessing higher education are particularly severe for young people from low-income families, whose parents can't financially support them through the increasing costs of living and studying in the current economic climate. As part of this study, we engaged with third sector leaders who work with disadvantaged youth within communities, outside of academia.

Our survey extended to C-level and D-level executives and charity founders (28%), non-for-profit project managers (24%) and community workers who liaise directly with vulnerable young people (48%).

There is consensus among our respondents that 2020 was a devastating year for the communities they work with. Significantly, 85% of those surveyed told us that they registered an increase in the number of young people from under-served communities seeking additional support during the pandemic.

What is your job title?



Have you noticed an increase in the number of youths seeking employment support during the Covid outbreak?

85% said yes.

The impact of unemployment on mental health in disadvantaged youth.

One of the most important themes that arose from the research was the correlation between youth unemployment and mental health.

Our respondents feel strongly that the impact of unemployment spurred by Covid is not only financial, but also psychological. More than half (54%) of third sector workers surveyed told us that the lack of job prospects - combined with a strong sense of uncertainty about the future, loneliness, and isolation - reflected in mental health conditions escalating among disadvantaged youth during the pandemic.

Respondents highlighted that young people whose parents lost jobs during Covid were particularly susceptible to stress, anxiety, inactivity, and depression. Additionally, some young people experienced multiple pressures, especially those who had been bereaved or undergone traumatic experiences during the pandemic.

These combined factors risk long-term damage to communities by further isolating youth from low-income families, with detrimental consequences for social equity.



What we learn is that promoting equal access to early careers is a priority not only for business and the economy, but for community development, too.

Fair employment is critical to fostering mental health, wellbeing, and hopefulness about the future, supporting the economic resilience and mobility of low-income youth through social participation and neighbourhood revitalisation.

What’s needed: **a more authentic approach to corporate social responsibility.**

Amid growing industry attention to corporate social responsibility (CSR) issues, community-based workers are calling for more integrity from companies looking to engage with vulnerable youth.

While it’s a good sign that more companies are getting involved with youth projects, many third sector respondents raised concerns about the lack of authenticity that often hides behind CSR initiatives.

Businesses that engage in outreach activities purely in the interest of ticking a box in their ED&I agenda end up eroding trust and diluting their credibility within communities. Having a purpose beyond pure profit-making is required as the foundation to conduct youth empowerment projects that unlock lasting progress.

Companies that get this right ultimately contribute to strengthening society because they help instil a sense of participation through civic thinking, promoting confidence that the voices and experiences of young people will be heard and leveraged to influence change.

community partner insights.

Community partner stories.

“It is vital that employers work together to remove the barriers keeping young people out of employment, and that we understand that often there is more than one type of barrier they face. We must ensure our education and training, and our attraction and hiring practices, are fully inclusive to those of all genders, socioeconomic backgrounds, ethnicities and disabilities. We must also be mindful where intersectionality can make those barriers seem insurmountable. By making our workplace inclusive to all, we all win; our young people will have the jobs they need to succeed, and our businesses will be able to fill the talent gaps they need to succeed as well. But this will not happen automatically. It takes research like this and then real action from us as employers.”

Debbie Forster MBE, CEO at Tech Talent Charter



“The Sparta Global report highlights that we need a proactive and targeted approach to addressing youth employability. True inclusion would leave no-one behind and a broad-brush generalised approach to social mobility will not be adequate. Disaggregated data from numerous studies shows us that different groups are impacted by different challenges. The data also shows us that the gap starts very early in life and that Covid-19 has widened this gap. We are at a crossroad where we really can build back better. Our best tool for boosting youth employability is first a growth mindset, one that aims to give opportunities to every young person to fulfil their true potential no matter where they come from.”

Elham Fardad, CEO and Founder, Migrant Leaders



“This report highlights the importance that early careers engagement will bring to organisations committed to diversity. Businesses that take steps to promote their career opportunities to diverse groups of young people can both attract and retain high quality talent. It is clear that digital skills now provide the gateway not only to good quality work and higher rates of pay but to rewarding and successful careers. Teachers, young people and their parents all need to understand the extent to which digital skills are now essential within the workplace. This year we have launched new schemes linking digital businesses to schools that serve our most disadvantaged and diverse areas. These programmes are helping to get this message across, whilst showing young people – through role-modelling, networking and hands-on activity and work experience – what exciting opportunities lie ahead if they build their digital skills. “

Stephanie Burras CBE, CEO at Ahead Partnership



community partner insights.

Graduate stories.

“Personally, I have found job seeking in the tech market particularly difficult as there is a consistent under-representation of women in the digital space. Additionally, Covid19 has put a huge strain on our ability to find work. Coupling these two factors - of being a woman in tech and job hunting during the pandemic - I and many others in my shoes have found seeking employment at this time a near-impossible challenge. I was extremely surprised and grateful when I came across the opportunity that Sparta offered me. I joined an all-female software engineer training programme, as part of which we were given a platform to successfully enter a male-dominated industry. Undoubtedly, we have a long road ahead before we achieve full employment equality, but I am pleased and proud to see that Sparta is promoting an integral move in the right direction”

Anna Raman, Graduate Java SDET



“I do not feel that under-represented groups were fairly supported during the pandemic. It is a well-known fact racial bias from different organisations does still exist and as a result, affects the employability of ethnic minorities. The Black Lives Matter movement resulting from the George Floyd case definitely helped to shed more light on racial inequality. However, I find it disappointing that it took something so drastic to happen for under-represented groups to finally get more recognition. It is important to acknowledge that ethnic minorities bring more into a workplace than just their inherent “diversity”. I strongly believe that having a more diverse workforce improves creativity as employees have differing experiences, skills, lifestyles and beliefs that are used when formulating strategies and decisions.”

Ola Ajayi, Graduate Data Engineer



“I was working as a waiter before the pandemic and I think I would have been able to change careers before... but only eventually. I always knew that I wanted to move into the tech industry. However, I had planned for it to take me a long time - anywhere from three to four years. Whilst working in hospitality my hours were extremely unsociable and finding the time to take a course, to learn (or even go to the gym!) proved very difficult. Changing careers would have been impossible whilst I was still working, so coming across a training programme that offered an opportunity to learn and start a career at a time when I didn't have one was amazing for me. Being able to change my career in such a short amount of time while I was out of work has had a significant positive effect on my health and has truly changed my life”.

Zachary O'Malley, Graduate Business Analyst



“Entering the workforce during a pandemic undoubtedly changed the trajectory of the life I had envisioned for myself. After completing my Masters in Materials Engineering, it was quite concerning to see how many job opportunities I was losing. I would pass tests, have great interviews, and in many cases was being invited to assessment centres, but all ended in no further contact. I suppose the uncertainty of the times meant that countless employers pivoted towards prioritising retaining talent. After completing my first hundred-or-so applications, I began to look into the advice of those who were in my shoes after the recession in 2008. It helped me reaffirm that when times are tough, seizing every opportunity is pivotal. Broadening my horizons pointed me towards career opportunities in different industries – with some overseas in Canada and France. I came close to considering these, but I was fortunate to come across Sparta Global who were committed to me succeeding from the outset.”

Louis Goneta, Graduate Data Engineer

This report has been produced in partnership with social mobility charity, **Career Ready**. During the research phase of our Equal Tech Report study, we donated £5 to Career Ready for every completed survey. *Find out how this donation will be used to empower young people in the workplace.*



Career Ready.

At Career Ready we believe that every young person deserves the opportunity to enjoy a rewarding future. However, the lives of far too many young people are still determined by background, not potential. Those from more privileged backgrounds are more likely to enter further and higher education, secure professional jobs, and receive higher earnings. We exist to fix this.



We were founded in 2002 by leading business figures with a mission: to boost social mobility by empowering young people and giving them a network of workplace opportunities and support.

Since then, we've grown across the UK and supported over 150,000 young people in areas of need, from Essex to Elgin. And in 2021, our network of employer partners and volunteers helped to transform the lives of 58,000 young people in 394 schools and colleges across the UK.

Through our network we provide young people aged 16-18 with a structured programme built around rich, authentic experiences of the world of work. Our 12-18 month programme comprises a paid four-week internship, the support of a mentor, skills masterclasses, and workplace visits.

Working with a network of employers of all sizes and sectors, we are able to make a transformational difference to young lives, boost social mobility, and help employers to future-proof their businesses.

90% of alumni said they developed key workplace skills

88% of volunteers experienced at least one positive impact

87% of Career Ready alumni said our programme had a positive impact on their life

There's still so much more that we need to do to support young people and ensure their talents can flourish. The pandemic has exacerbated the challenges they face. Schools have been shut, workplace opportunities cut, futures put on hold.

That's why we're delighted to have worked in partnership with Sparta Global on this research into the challenges facing young people post Covid-19.

This report highlights not only the challenges facing future talent, but the role that employers, third-sector organisations, and volunteers can play in helping them to unlock their talents and thrive in the world of work.

There's no better way to help achieve this than by investing in young talent through paid experiences of the workplace and the support of mentors.



Sparta Global.

At Sparta Global, we believe the future of tech talent must be reflective of society today – innovative, creative and inclusive. This is why we are committed to providing award-winning technology training and career opportunities to passionate people from diverse communities – irrespective of gender, ethnicity or socio-economic background.

We help graduates, non-graduates, returners and career changers to kickstart a career in technology through paid training programmes in Data, Development, Engineering, Test, Business Analysis, and more. Across these 5-8 week programmes we equip our “Spartan” consultants with the technical and collaborative skills they need to hit the ground running on digital projects. Spartans are then assigned to work with our clients, helping to meet digital demand and join their pipeline of future talent leaders for a career with progression and longevity.



Young talent and social mobility should be the priority of every employer. Whether you're looking for results one or ten years down the line, there's simply no better way to future-proof your business. It connects you with new, diverse talent. It ensures that your workforce represents your future customers. It levels up the skillset of the next generation. At Career Ready, we've worked with employers of all sizes and sectors to make this possible for them through paid internships and mentoring – and we can do the same for you.”


Tokunbo Ajasa-Oluwa, Career Ready CEO

Invest in young talent and boost social mobility. Visit www.careerready.org.uk/employers to help transform young lives.

Much of the UK’s highest potential business and technology talent is excluded by traditional talent attraction.


Our approach is designed to solve this challenge:

1




Attract
Find people with a great aptitude for learning & tech

2




Train
Build their skills at our specialised academies

3



Deliver
Provide flexible, cost-effective skills for your digital projects

4



Convert
Take our Spartans on as full-time employees after agreed period

Being an inclusive employer is a fundamental aspect of the Sparta Global business model and championing diversity is firmly embedded in our DNA. We are committed to fostering equal opportunities in technology through our dedicated Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (ED&I) function and client advisory services (known as EDITs), our innovative approach to talent acquisition, and a willingness to accept candidates into our programme based on their attitude and aptitude – not experience.

Our organisation is:

32%

female

58%

first in family to go to university

52%

ethnic minority background

42%

from state schools, and 70% of this number recieved free school meals at some point



Some of the awards Sparta Global has proudly achieved:





We are a

Top 75 Employer

for social mobility





*If you have a digital skills demand, and want to support the progression of diverse early careers talent within your company, get in contact today at: **contactus@spartaglobal.com***

www.spartaglobal.com

