



## COVID-19 and Social Mobility Impact Brief #5: Graduate Recruitment and Access to the Workplace



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### KEY FINDINGS

- Opportunities for young people to get experience of the workplace have been impacted considerably by the COVID-19 crisis. Many firms who previously offered internships or work experience placements have cancelled them, with just over three fifths (61%) of employers surveyed cancelling some or all of their placements. Only about a third of firms continued all their usual placements either in person or online.
- The impact on internships and other placements is set to last beyond the immediate crisis. Almost half (48%) of organisations surveyed think there will be fewer of these opportunities in their businesses over the next year.
- Small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) were the most likely to have cancelled internships and work experience placements, with 49% doing so, compared to just 29% of larger employers.
- Research from previous economic downturns suggests the current economic crisis is likely to have a considerable impact on young people entering the job market this year. However, so far, the pandemic appears to have had a mixed impact on employers' plans for graduate employment going forward. While a sizable proportion of the graduate employers surveyed said they are expecting to hire fewer (33%) or no (6%) graduates over the next year, 27% anticipated hiring more.
- Current undergraduate students are however already feeling the impact of the crisis. 46% said the pandemic has had a negative impact on their ability to gain graduate employment; including 18% having had work experience placements cancelled or postponed, 15% citing reduced access to their university careers service, 11% having interviews cancelled, and 4% having a job offer withdrawn.
- With far fewer opportunities likely to be available in the workplace in the aftermath of the pandemic, promoting social mobility and fair access to those that remain will be more important than ever. Encouragingly, just under a third (29%) of the employers surveyed said social mobility and socio-economic diversity would be more of a priority in the next two years in the aftermath of the pandemic, although a small proportion (11%) said it would be less of a priority for them due to the crisis.
- Employers outside of London were considerably less likely to say that social mobility would be more of a priority for their sector going forward (22% compared to 48% of London-based employers). However, this may in part be explained by an over-representation of larger employers in London, with 43% of larger employers overall saying so compared to just 24% of employers surveyed from SMEs.
- Employers surveyed were mixed on whether the pandemic will make it easier or harder for their sector to take action on social mobility. Almost a quarter (23%) said it would make taking action on social mobility in the workplace more difficult, with just under half (49%) saying it would have no impact.
- Due to the pandemic, the majority of students have had a prolonged period of time outside of education this year, with the largest impacts felt by those from the poorest backgrounds. Employers surveyed were divided on whether firms would take time missed from education into account in any future hiring decisions. A sizeable proportion of employers (44%) said employers in their sector were likely to do so, however a similar proportion (42%) said they were unlikely to.
- Over half (54%) of larger employers said others in their sector were likely to take time missed from education into account, compared to just 41% of employers in SMEs. Employers inside of London were more likely to think others in their sector would take this into account.

### INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has already had a considerable impact on Britain's job market. Job vacancies have reduced by 65% compared to the same period last year,<sup>1</sup> with thousands of jobs already lost,<sup>2</sup> and just under a third of businesses planning to cut the size of their workforce in the next three

months.<sup>3</sup> The Office for Budget responsibility has predicted that overall unemployment (which stood at 3.9% between March and May this year) could rise to as high as 13% in the wake of the crisis;<sup>4</sup> considerably higher than following the 2008 recession, when it reached a high of 8%.<sup>5</sup>

Young people entering the job market this year are likely to be particularly badly hit,<sup>6</sup> with youth unemployment following the 2008 recession twice that of the overall unemployment rate.<sup>7</sup> The Resolution Foundation estimate an additional 640,000 18 to 24 year olds could find themselves unemployed this year,<sup>8</sup> with young people claiming out of work benefits

already having doubled in the last few months.<sup>9</sup> Some academics predict the youth unemployment rate could even go above 25% due to the economic impacts of the pandemic, with young people who grew up in poorer families already at a higher risk of experiencing unemployment.<sup>10</sup>

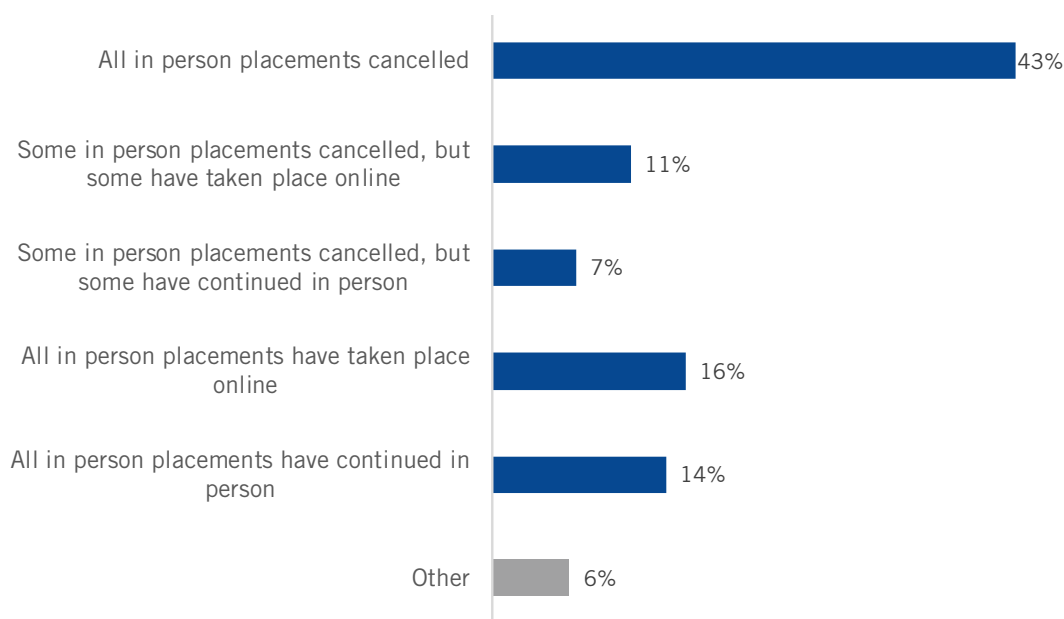
In economic downturns, young graduates suffer a considerable impact on their potential earnings. Those entering the workplace during a recession suffer long term impacts, with scarring effects on earnings lasting for years, long after the economy itself has recovered.<sup>11</sup>

People from lower socio-economic backgrounds are already under-represented in the professional workforce,<sup>12</sup> with those in Britain's top jobs five times more likely to have attended a private school than the population as a whole.<sup>13</sup> With fewer opportunities available to graduates, the pandemic is likely to have a considerable impact on access to the professions, and consequently on social mobility. We know that when opportunities are scarce, they tend to be kept close to those with resources, connections and know-how. Thus, the economic impact of the coronavirus risks worsening these existing access gaps.

The pandemic will not only impact on access to graduate roles, but also to the internship and work experience opportunities which are an important route into the professional workplace for young people.<sup>14</sup> While many firms have moved opportunities online (including placements in Sutton Trust Pathways Programmes), this will not have been possible for all, with some organisations scrapping their schemes entirely. If a large number of these opportunities are cut, many young people will lose out on a vital step into the world of work.

This report is the fifth in a series looking at the immediate impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on social mobility. It will look at the fall out

Figure 1. Impacts of the pandemic on work experience placements and internships



Source: YouGov survey of employers, 18-29 June 2020.

for work experience placements and internships, the impact on hiring for graduate roles, and the ability of workplaces to take action to promote social mobility. The evidence for this report comes from three sources: a YouGov survey of HR decision makers; a YouthSight Survey of current undergraduate students; and discussions with a small number of graduate employers.<sup>15</sup>

As the economic impact of the pandemic is becoming clearer, businesses will have many difficult decisions to make in the months to come. As opportunities become harder to come by, taking action to promote social mobility and socio-economic diversity in the workplace will be more important than ever. That is why, alongside this impact brief, we have also published comprehensive guidance for employers looking to open up opportunity in their organisations.<sup>16</sup>

## INTERNSHIPS AND WORK EXPERIENCE

Due to the national lockdown, all employees able to do so have been encouraged to work from home since the end of March. Many companies' physical offices have been empty, with remote work quickly becoming the norm for millions of office workers.

Closing their offices will have impacted on the ability of many companies to run their usual internship and work experience placements. Some of this may be temporary, for example organisations needing time to adapt to online delivery and remote training. For other firms, the impacts may be longer lasting, either due to the financial effects of the crisis or the difficulty of moving placements online. A reduction of opportunities is likely to impact on young people's progression to the workplace, with previous Sutton Trust research finding just under half (46%) of young graduates under 24 having taken up at least one internship.<sup>17</sup> This year's cohort of young people entering the workplace could therefore be adversely affected compared to other cohorts.

Looking at employers surveyed who had previously offered work experience placements or internships (56% of those polled), a sizeable proportion (61%) cancelled either some or all of the opportunities that they usually offer. Only about a third of firms have been able to continue all of their usual internships or work experience placements, either moving them online or continuing delivery in person (Figure 1).

We spoke to a small group of graduate employers on the impact the pandemic has had for placements at their firms. For some, internships and work experience opportunities were being

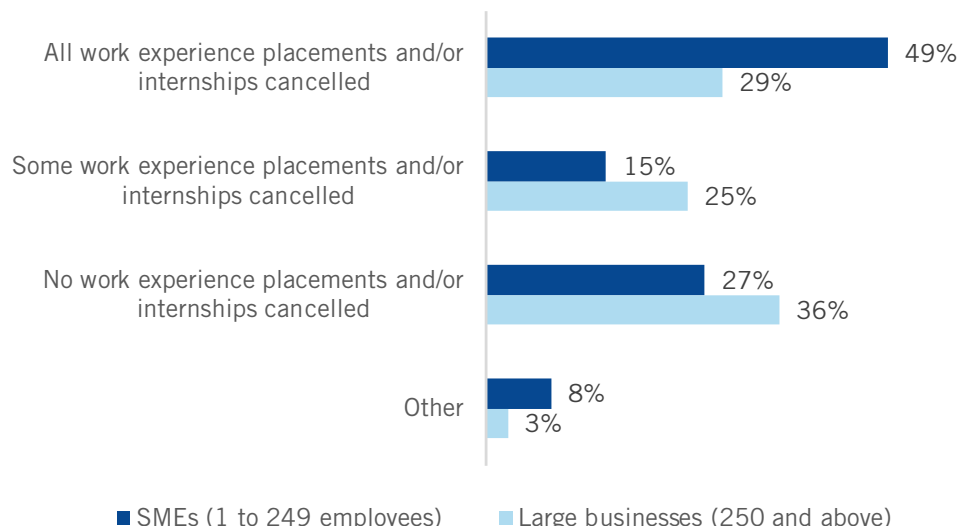
postponed to allow preparation for their schemes to, hopefully, run towards the end of this year. Additionally, concerns over internet access and home working arrangements were flagged when discussing moving programmes online. To mitigate this, one employer shared that they had reduced the length of the working day and made sure take-away tasks were a part of their provision, so those with poor internet connections or limited access to a computer could complete work in their own time.

Impacts varied by company size. Small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) were 20 percentage points more likely than larger firms to report cancelling all of their programmes, with 49% doing so compared to just 29% of larger employers. It may be that larger employers are more able to shoulder any costs and logistical challenges associated with moving delivery online, or they may see these costs as more worthwhile if they are running larger scale internship programmes (Figure 2).

The impact on internships and work experience placements has also differed slightly by region. Comparing responses of employers in London to those in other parts of the UK, those outside of the capital were more likely (5 percentage points) to have cancelled all their placements, and were also less likely to have moved some or all of their opportunities online, with 24% having done so compared to 33% of employers based in London.

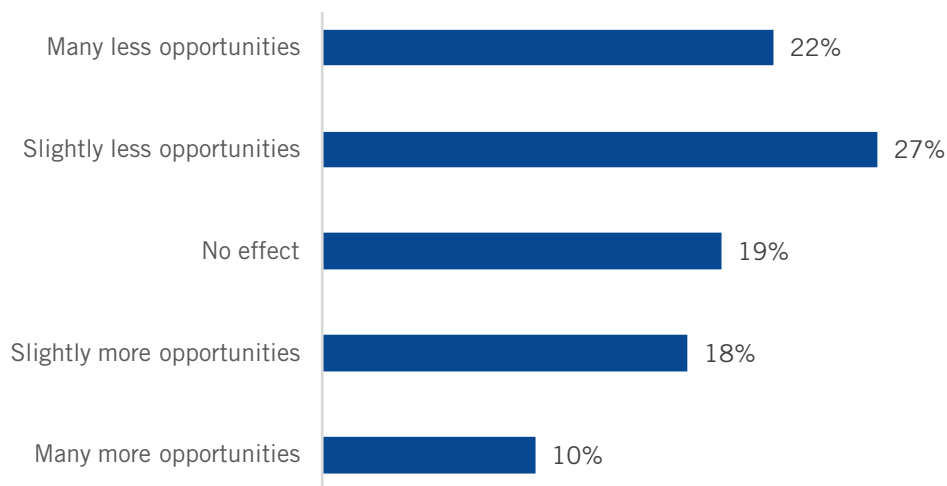
Employers outside of London surveyed here were more likely to be SMEs, which may help to explain these differences. However, regardless of the underlying cause, given there are already fewer opportunities outside of the capital (previous Sutton Trust research has shown that a large proportion of internships and work experience opportunities are concentrated in London),<sup>18</sup> any reduction in placements in other regions of the UK is particularly concerning, given their value to those who are unable to or cannot afford to take up a

Figure 2. How coronavirus has impacted work experience placements and internships, by size of business



Source: YouGov survey of employers, 18-29 June 2020.

Figure 3. Expected effect of coronavirus on work experience placements and/or internships over next 12 months



Source: YouGov survey of employers, 18-29 June 2020.

position in London.

Looking at the future impact on work experience placements and internships, nearly half of the employers surveyed (48%) thought there would be fewer of these opportunities over the next year. More than a fifth (22%) said there would be many fewer opportunities (Figure 3). SMEs were 5 percentage points more likely to say there would be either slightly or far fewer opportunities, at 50% compared to 45% of larger employers.

Employers outside of London were also more likely to report they expect to offer fewer internships and work experience opportunities next year. Half of the employers surveyed here outside of London said they ex-

pected to offer slightly or many fewer placements at their organisation over the next 12 months; this is 6 percentage points less than employers mainly operating in London.

However, many employers have been able to successfully move internships and work experience placements online, as outlined in case study 1.

## GRADUATE RECRUITMENT

Graduates looking to enter the job market this year are likely to be severely affected by the economic downturn following the coronavirus pandemic.

Employers who had recruited graduates within the last year (53% of

## CASE STUDY 1: LINKLATERS

Linklaters is a multinational law firm, which offers a variety of work experience and Vacation Scheme placements; through which it recruits aspiring lawyers onto Training Contracts with the organisation.

As the firm has been unable to run face-to-face programmes this year, they have worked with external partners, including the Sutton Trust, to organise virtual work experience opportunities and online question and answer sessions. Linklaters was also the first City firm to work with a first of its kind online internship that will allow students from anywhere in the UK to experience working at a global law firm. Through the Inside Sherpa platform, Linklaters have been able to offer free online internships where students can interact with virtual clients and colleagues in a way that replicates the day-to-day work of the firm.

As the firm's main offices are in London, moving school-age work experiences online has allowed students from further afield to gain insight into the legal industry and enabled a larger cohort of students to take part, as an online space doesn't have the same constraints on participation as an event run in an office.

Vacation Scheme opportunities have also been moved online, albeit for a shorter period. The firm's Summer Vacation Scheme is typically 4 weeks, but moved to 2 weeks' in the virtual format (although participants are paid for 3 weeks). Vuyo Kwitshana, Trainee Recruitment Advisor at Linklaters, said that "paying our placement holders at a rate above London Living Wage is important to us as we are aware that many young people may be facing increased financial difficulties at this time, such as the loss of a part time job".

However, as programmes are virtual, students may be missing out on immersing themselves in an office environment, which the firm said is often a 'gamechanger' for students, especially those with less office experience. Some concerns have also been raised regarding the content of the work experience, "although we are carrying on with some forms of work experience, a reduction in face-to-face opportunities across the sector more widely could affect students' aspirations to enter the world of Law. Social mobility will therefore continue to be at the forefront of our minds in the next few years".

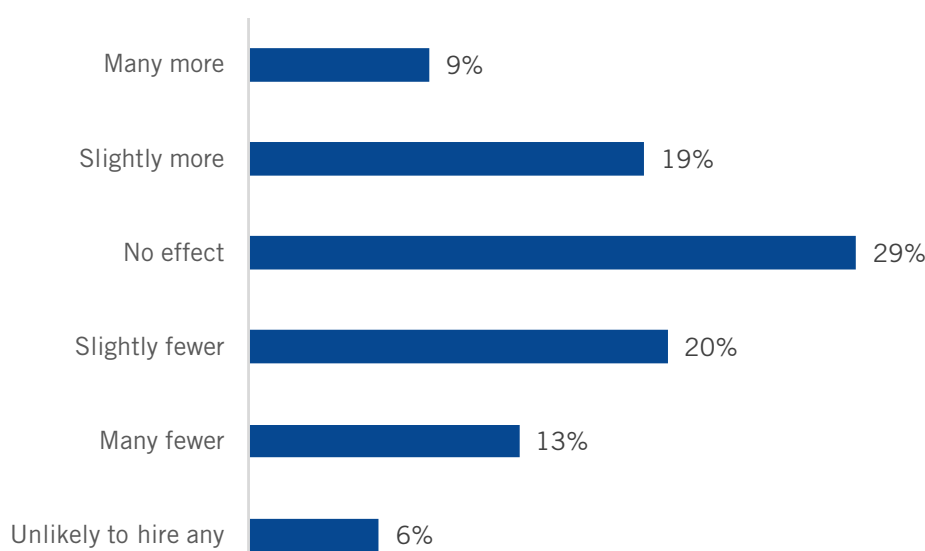
A group of new trainee recruits were virtually onboarded to Linklaters in March. For this coming year's recruitment, the firm are developing virtual campus events and career fairs, as well as more online Q and A opportunities.

employers surveyed) were asked whether they expected to hire graduates within the next year.

Perhaps surprisingly, responses were mixed. While a third (33%) expected to hire fewer graduates and 6% expected to hire no graduates at all, 27% said they expect to hire more graduates and a further 29% expected no difference in the number of graduates hired (Figure 4). This perhaps reflects optimism in the economy rebounding moving into 2021. There were few differences in response to this question between SMEs and larger employers.

During conversations with employers, concerns arose over a loss of face-to-face social contact and difficulty emulating group activities and work-shadowing online, which are important parts of graduate onboarding, as well as work experience and internships. To manage this, one employer told us they had set up a trainee buddy scheme and regularly offer non-compulsory social sessions

Figure 4. Expected hiring of recent university graduates by graduate employers over next 12 months due to coronavirus



Source: YouGov survey of employers, 18-29 June 2020.

to ensure trainees and placement holders feel part of the organisation. Undergraduate students were also surveyed in late spring to look at whether the pandemic had impacted on their ability to gain graduate employment. Just under half (46%) of students reported at least one impact;

18% have had work experience placements cancelled or postponed, 15% were less able to access their university career service, 11% have had interviews cancelled and 4% have had job offers withdrawn. Only 30% reported no impact on their employment prospects (Figure 5).



## SOCIAL MOBILITY IN THE WORKPLACE

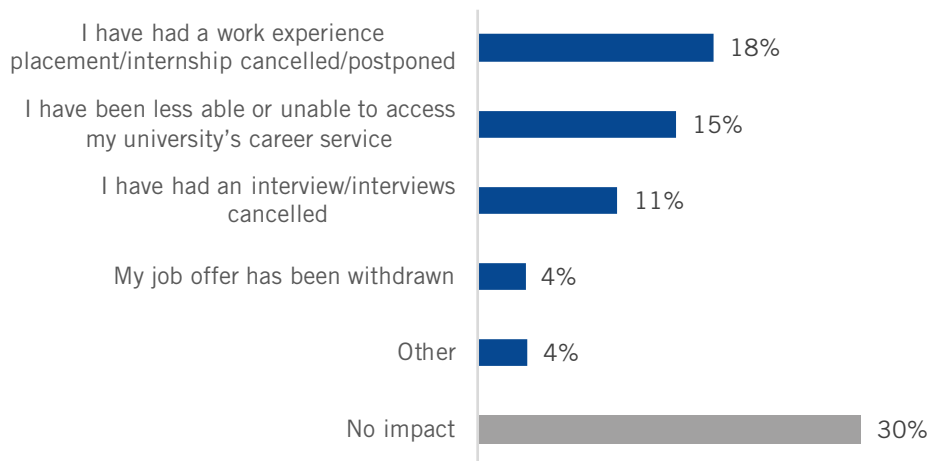
If the economic impacts of the pandemic do result in many fewer opportunities in the job market, then ensuring fair access to roles which are still available will be more important than ever.

Employers surveyed were asked whether they thought social mobility and socio-economic diversity would be more or less of a priority in their sector over the next two years. Encouragingly, nearly a third (29%) of respondents said they thought it would be more of a priority for businesses in their industry, reflecting a continuation of increased awareness in recent years. However, just over 1 in 10 (11%) said that the areas are likely to be less of a priority (Figure 6). One of the employers we spoke to told us that both before and during the pandemic they have been seeing social mobility rise-up the agenda with their corporate clients, who wanted to know what the organisation was doing to promote it amongst their staff. In some cases, the pandemic has increased the salience of diversity issues in the workplace.

Those working in the IT and Telecoms sectors, as well as employers in finance and accounting were particularly likely to say social mobility and socio-economic diversity would be more of a priority in their industry (38% and 37% compared to 29% of employers overall), whilst a high proportion of respondents from the manufacturing sector anticipated social mobility in fact becoming less of a priority (18% compared to 11% overall).

Employers outside of London were less than half as likely to say that social mobility would be more of a priority (22% compared to 48% of London-based employers). Again, this may in part be explained by an over-representation of larger employers in London. Just under half (43%) of larger employers reported that social mobility would be much or somewhat more of a priority in the next 12 months, compared to 24% of employers surveyed from SMEs.

Figure 5. Impact of the pandemic on employment prospects of university students



Source: YouthSight survey of UK undergraduate students, 9-14 April 2020.

### CASE STUDY 2: PwC

PwC is a professional services firm which recruits school and college students, undergraduates and graduates.

For a period during Covid-19 the firm's offices were temporarily closed and as a result PwC had to adapt their approach to their usual in-office work experience programmes. For example, given the office closures they were unable to run the 6 week summer internship programme so instead they offered the students who were due to join the internship an alternative opportunity, a graduate role the following year, while also making materials related to the placement available online for those who would have taken part.

As well as changes to undergraduate programmes, the PwC Insight Week programme for year 12 students was adapted and run as a virtual programme. This involved both pre-recorded and live sessions covering areas from employability skills to career stories presented by employees, uploaded online for young people to access and was open to all applicants of the PwC Insight Week programme. PwC have also found some benefits moving to an online programme, which allowed them to reach a larger number of students from a wider range of geographical areas.

PwC have also adapted their onboarding process for new hires. The firm has two intakes, a smaller cohort in March and a larger one in September. Their March graduate joiners were virtually onboarded, and PwC have been able to successfully deliver their induction and training virtually too. Wellbeing and inclusion were at the centre of the experience for new starters, the organisation worked on making sure the right support was in place and on creating a peer group dynamic, while staff worked remotely.

Looking to the future, Hollie Crompton, social mobility lead at PwC commented, "we are aware that Covid-19 is having a disproportionate impact on young people due to disruptions in education, services and employment. Businesses will need to take an active role in working with others in this space to help tackle the opportunity gap, create and fill jobs and help youth to access the skills they need. We're committed to continuing to deliver opportunities and skills, with social mobility at the front of our approach".

Whilst these findings suggest good intentions by many employers, a sizeable proportion thought that change in their sector would be harder after the pandemic. Just under a quarter

(23%) of employers thought it would be 'slightly' or 'much' harder for businesses in their sector to improve social mobility over the next two years, although reassuringly, a similar

proportion of employers surveyed thought it will in fact be easier (21%), and many employers (49%) thought it would have no impact (Figure 7).

SMEs were 4 percentage points more likely to report that it would be harder to improve social mobility in this sector than larger employers (24% compared to 20%). A high proportion (30%) of those working in hospitality & leisure thought businesses in their sector would find this harder to do following the COVID-19 pandemic.

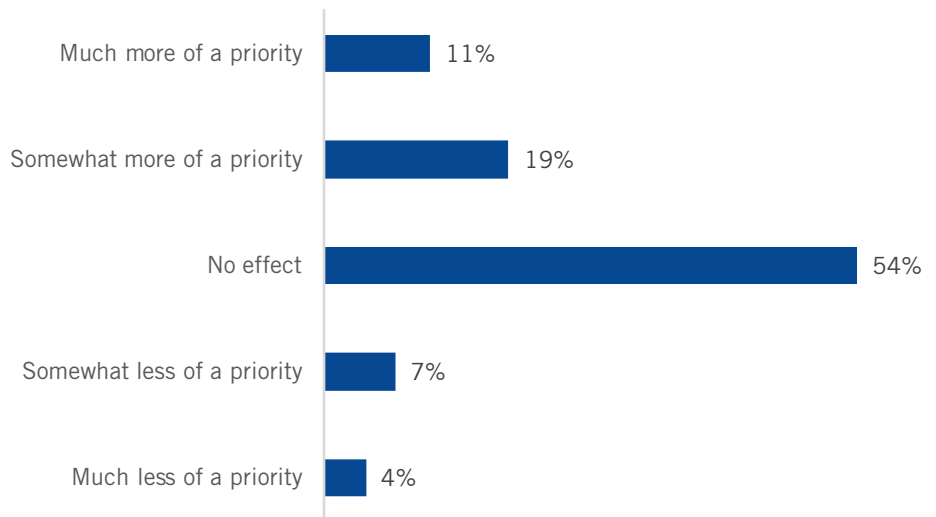
One of the Trust's key recommendations on social mobility in the workplace is that employers should look at achievements contextually, for example taking into account that gaining three As from a deprived school may have been more difficult than gaining three As from an academically selective school serving a wealthy area. During lockdown, students have had very different educational experiences, with poorer students less likely to have the resources needed (for example a laptop or internet connection) to be able to access learning online and less likely to be in schools providing regular online sessions.<sup>19</sup>

Given many young people have missed time from education due to COVID-19, employers were asked whether businesses in their sector would be likely to take this missed education into account as a mitigating factor in future hiring decisions, for example by being more lenient about the grades expected, or of any gaps in young people's learning.

Employers were divided on this question; as Figure 8 shows. 44% of the employers surveyed said they thought businesses would consider this missed education as a mitigating factor (with 14% saying they thought it was very likely businesses would do so) compared to 42% who thought it was unlikely (with 15% saying it was very unlikely).

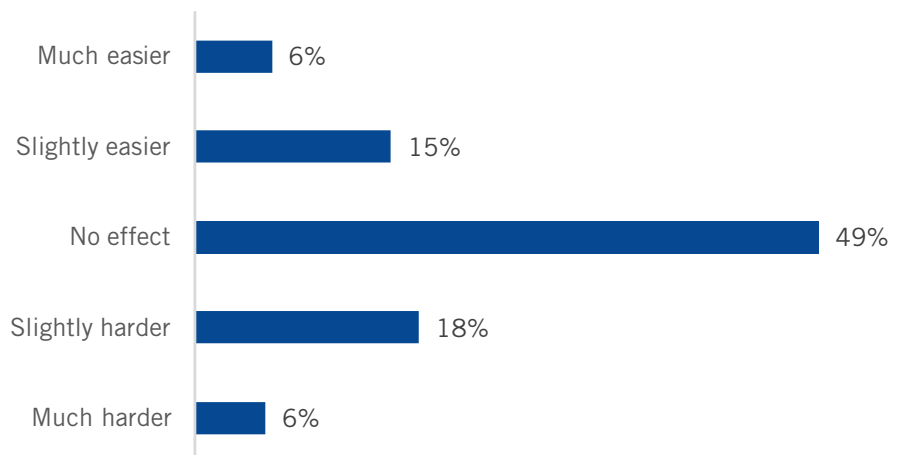
Larger employers were more likely to say employers in their sector would take these changes into account; 54% compared to 41% SMEs. However, a higher proportion of employers mainly operating outside London said they thought others in their sector

Figure 6. Employer views on whether social mobility will be more or less of a priority in their sector over the next 2 years



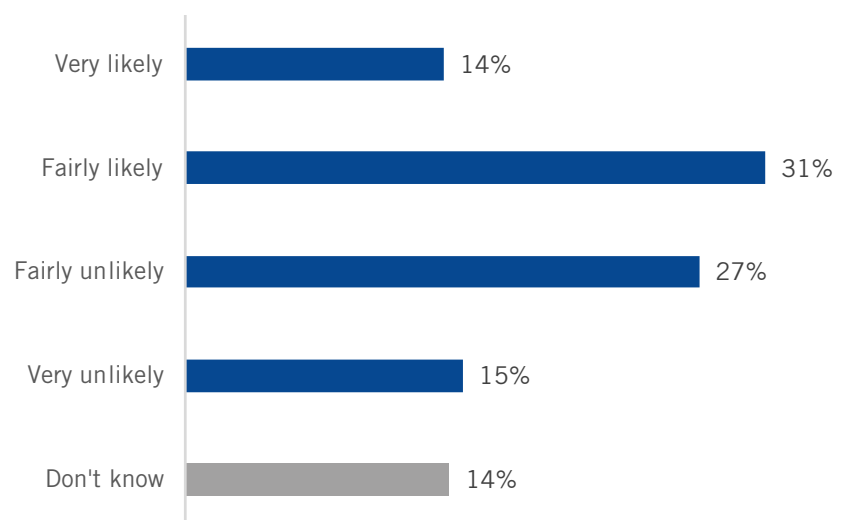
Source: YouGov survey of employers, 18-29 June 2020.

Figure 7. Employer views on whether improving social mobility and socio-economic diversity in their sector will be easier or harder over next 2 years



Source: YouGov survey of employers, 18-29 June 2020.

Figure 8. Will businesses in your sector take missed education due to COVID-19 into account as a mitigating factor in future hiring decisions



Source: YouGov survey of employers, 18-29 June 2020.

would not take missed education into account, with 45% saying they are very or fairly unlikely to do so, compared to 33% of those mainly operating in London. Variation was also seen across sectors. While 52% of those working in the IT and telecoms sector and in the finance and accounting industry said they were likely to take this into account, over half of respondents in the hospitality and leisure (54%) and manufacturing (52%) industries said they are either 'fairly' or 'very' unlikely to do so.

## DISCUSSION

The coronavirus pandemic is set to have a considerable impact on the British economy, with young people entering the workforce this year likely to shoulder some of the heaviest impacts of the economic fallout, including both school leavers and university graduates.

Many young people will miss out on work experience placements and internships, as these opportunities have been cancelled both during lockdown and beyond. A large proportion of undergraduate students are already feeling the impact on their access to support into graduate employment, and some employers are already planning to cut the number of graduates they will employ.

While some optimism remains, with many organisations expect graduate hiring to return to normal or increase within 12 months, evidence from previous downturns is clear the likely impact of the economic crisis will be far fewer roles available in the workforce going forward. Other recent research has found graduate roles are being cut by almost a quarter.<sup>20</sup> In the coming months and years, taking action to promote social mobility in the workplace will be more important than ever.

There are many steps employers can take to improve socio-economic diversity in the workplace, which are outlined in the Trust's newly released guide for employers.<sup>21</sup> This advice includes paying and openly advertising internships, contextualising recruitment practices and monitoring the socio-economic background of the workforce. The guidance also includes a section specifically on the corona-

virus pandemic, explaining how firms might best respond to the challenges raised while still promoting social mobility.

In the short term, employers should move experiences online wherever possible, to ensure this cohort of young people do not miss out on important opportunities to learn about the workplace. Importantly, we know that many young people will not have access to the resources needed to study or take part in placements remotely, for example the internet, a laptop or a quiet workspace.<sup>22</sup> Employers should take steps to make online work experience as accessible as possible. The Sutton Trust recently carried out a survey of our programme students, and based on those findings, we are recommending a maximum of 3 hours of live content per day, with tasks or other content accessible more flexibly where possible. As a rule, the longer materials are available online, the more accessible they will be for young people with limited internet access. And as restrictions begin to relax and guidelines allow, employers may also want to consider providing dedicated spaces which students can use if they do not have an adequate workspace at home.

Shifting delivery of work experience and outreach work online also provides opportunities for employers. Many big employers are based in London, making work experience difficult to access for anyone outside the capital who is not able to easily relocate. During lockdown, employers we spoke to have already starting to open out experiences to a geographically wider range of young people across the UK and are looking at ways to take learnings from the pandemic to widen their normal outreach and recruitment work.

Young people impacted by the pandemic have just as much potential and talent to offer employers as the generations before, but many, and particularly those from poorer backgrounds, will not have the same opportunity to showcase it. As Sutton Trust research has shown, young people's experience of remote learning has been far from equal,<sup>23</sup> with the Education Endowment Foundation estimating the crisis could reverse

a decade of progress in closing the attainment gap between the poorest students and their better-off peers.<sup>24</sup> This missed time will not be easily caught up and is likely to impact this cohort of young people throughout their time in education and into the workplace. Additionally, as outlined in this report, many young people will have missed out on work experience opportunities this year. It is important that employers take all of this into account in future hiring decisions, with advice on contextualising recruitment practises available in the Trust's guide for employers.<sup>25</sup>

The government's recently announced Plan for Jobs, including the Kickstart scheme,<sup>26</sup> funding for re-training, a boost in funding to apprenticeships, an expansion in careers advice and an increase in traineeships,<sup>27</sup> has largely been supported since it was announced, with government appearing to have taken on board valuable lessons from the 2008 recession. It has been welcome that the government have recognised the vital short and long term importance of youth unemployment.

However, some concerns have been raised, for example that the Kickstart scheme could displace apprenticeship starts for young people.<sup>28</sup> Employers will receive a much greater government subsidy for the Kickstart scheme than they will for taking on new apprentices, which is likely to make the scheme a much more attractive option for employers. This could lead to a fall in the number of apprenticeships available, which are likely to have a greater long-term value for both employers and young people. The government should ensure the Kickstart scheme fits together coherently with their apprenticeship offer, and wherever possible ensure progression routes are put in place, for example incentivising employers to offer young people apprenticeships with them after their time on the Kickstart scheme.

There is also currently no specific support for graduates in the government's plans. However, young people graduating this year are likely to suffer long term scarring effects due to the economic downturn, and without tailored support they risk being locked out of graduate level opportu-

nities. To address this issue, we are recommending that the government set aside a portion of the funding available for the Kickstart scheme for a programme targeted specifically at graduates, 'Kickstart Grads', with funding used to pay for internships with graduate employers. The scheme could be targeted at graduates most in need of support, for example prioritising places for graduates who have been unemployed since their graduation and are at increased risk of long-term unemployment. There is also a risk that some employers may use unpaid internships to supplement their paid workforce during this time. There is evidence this happened following the 2008 recession, the number of internships consistently rose between 2010 and 2017 whilst the number of entry level roles fell, with a large proportion being unpaid as well as unadvertised.<sup>29</sup> However, young people from the poorest households are the least able to shoulder the costs of working for free, estimated to be at £1,100 a month in London.<sup>30</sup> Places on 'Kickstart Grads' could therefore also be prioritised by household income, to target support at graduates from families the least able to shoulder these costs, for example giving priority to graduates who received the full maintenance loan during their time at university (students from families on an income of £25,000 a year or less).

During the coming months, good quality careers advice for young people graduating from university will be more important than ever.

Universities have an important role to play and should make sure advice is available online and that all students, especially those from poorer backgrounds, are able to access it. Advice from careers services should also be updated to include support with remote applications, such as advice on doing video interviews. A recent Office for Students briefing includes some useful examples of good practice from universities during the pandemic.<sup>31</sup> However, there is no statutory requirement for the provision of careers advice in universities, and provision can be variable.<sup>32</sup> The government should also ensure that there is good quality, accessible advice, which is tailored to graduates, available through job centres and the National Careers Service. This could be done by providing referrals to specialised recruitment agencies through these existing services.

In response to an uncertain job market, young graduates may instead opt for postgraduate study, allowing them to gain advanced skills while waiting for employment prospects to improve. And indeed, an increase in demand for postgraduate study was seen during the aftermath of the 2008 recession.<sup>33</sup> However, many young people will not be able to afford to take this route, as while loans for postgraduate study are available from the government, at just £11,000 per year,<sup>34</sup> they are unlikely to cover both a student's fees and their living costs. At the same time, many of the industries students often work in for additional income during their postgraduate

studies (such as hospitality or retail) have been severely impacted by the pandemic. While young people from better-off backgrounds may receive financial support from their families to bridge this gap, those from poorer backgrounds are unlikely to have this option. To open up access, the government should look at student finance options for postgrad study, for example increasing the master's loan for the next academic year for graduates from lower socio-economic backgrounds, to match the amount available for tuition and maintenance for undergraduate study. This support could be means-tested through the Student Loans Company, and could also be limited to graduates who achieved at least a 2.1 at undergraduate level.

The economic impact of the pandemic will have considerable and lasting consequences for social mobility, with the economic downturn likely to widen existing inequality,<sup>35</sup> and increase the number of children in households growing up in poverty.<sup>36</sup> As the Trust have demonstrated throughout this COVID-19 impact series, from early years,<sup>37</sup> through to schools,<sup>38</sup> apprenticeships,<sup>39</sup> access to university<sup>40</sup> and into the world of work, the crisis will impact on disadvantaged young people through every life stage. It will take a concerted effort, from all parts of society, to lessen this impact and ensure all young people have an equal chance to showcase their talent and potential.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

### For employers

- 1. Social mobility should not suffer because of the pandemic. With fewer jobs likely to be available, employers should redouble efforts to open up opportunities to the best talent.** This should include paying and openly advertising internships, contextualising recruitment practices and monitoring the socio-economic background of the workforce. Employers can find detailed advice on actions they can take to improve social mobility in our [Employer's Guidance](#), released today.
- 2. Employers should work to keep the pipeline into their industry open, including where possible moving experiences online.** Where internships, work experience placements or recruitment processes are moved online, employers should ensure they remain accessible, for example by providing tech equipment if needed. Interns and those doing placements should still be paid for their time, ideally at the Living Wage.
- 3. When moving recruitment online, employers can use it as a chance to widen the pool of young people reached.** An opportunity has arisen with the shift to online recruitment, with employers able to reach large numbers of young people, without geographical restrictions. Businesses should make full use of the move to online delivery to reach a wider pool of talent.
- 4. In future, employers should take into account that many students have missed time in education due to the pandemic.** Young people who have not been able to access online learning or impacted by missed exams should not be disadvantaged compared to those from other year groups. This will be particularly important for young people entering the world of work this year, but will continue to be an issue for years to come.
- 5. Where possible, employers should top up wages for young people on the government's Kickstart scheme,** from the National Minimum Wage to the Real Living Wage, to ensure all young people are able to access and benefit from these opportunities.

### For government and universities

- 6. The government should put in place specific support for graduates, including incentivising employers to offer paid internships with graduate employers, to ensure that talent is harnessed.** Youth unemployment will not be restricted to those with lower qualifications. Tailored support for graduates could form part of the government's recently announced Kickstart scheme, with Kickstart Grads prioritising those the most at risk, for example graduates who have already had a period of unemployment, and those from families on low incomes who were eligible for the full maintenance loan when at university.
- 7. Government should ensure high quality careers advice, applicable to graduates and those entering professional careers, is available.** This could be done through providing referrals to specialised recruitment agencies from job centres.
- 8. Financial support for postgraduate study should be increased for young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds.** More graduates are likely to opt for postgraduate study this year while waiting for the economic situation to improve, but due to the low level of financial support available and fewer options for part time work, this option will be unaffordable to many. This is a particular concern for graduates from lower socio-economic backgrounds, who will be less able to draw on their families for financial support. The government should increase the master's loan for the next academic year for graduates from poorer backgrounds, to match the amount available for undergraduate study.
- 9. University career guidance should be fully accessible online, prepare for the move to virtual recruitment, and have a particular focus on those from disadvantaged backgrounds.** Students graduating this year will face a difficult job market, universities should do all they can to give them help and support, even when they are unable to come to campus. Support should also be updated to include help with remote recruitment, including video interviews.

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