



Diversifying Real Estate: Social Mobility

Guidebook commissioned by CPA & WPA NextGen

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London Property Alliance

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This guidebook aims to help individuals and organisations make central London's real estate sector more inclusive and reflective of our capital's diverse communities. It addresses key barriers to social mobility in relation to recruitment and retention of workers and suggests simple ways for organisations and individuals to implement positive change. It provides best practice examples, signposts to resources, and reflects on personal experiences.

This guidebook has been informed by interviews and roundtables with members, co-opted experts and social mobility specialists, along with stakeholders from local government, including the City of London Corporation.

We hope that this guidebook will inspire and inform our members at Westminster Property Association (WPA) and City Property Association (CPA), and the wider property industry, so that together we can make our profession more inclusive, diverse, and dynamic.

This booklet is part of a series of themed guides commissioned by WPA and CPA's NextGen networks, produced by London Property Alliance, and supported by Gardiner & Theobald.

Find out more at londonpropertyalliance.com

Foreword

Property professionals create the built environment where London's diverse communities live, work, play and come together.

However, the backgrounds of the people leading on the investment, design and curation of the capital's newest buildings can be starkly different to their future users - because the real estate industry is disproportionately drawn from more privileged backgrounds. By creating barriers for disadvantaged people, for example through recruitment practices or workplace culture, we are limiting the talent pool.

Across Westminster and the City, we host the headquarters of a significant proportion of the property sector. As such, we have an opportunity to effect change across this key sector, through action amongst the partnership. We recognise the challenges to make the sector a place for people from all backgrounds, but we cannot afford to wait.

In Westminster, we have one of the most diverse and highly skilled local workforces in the country - 180 different nationalities, speaking over 150 languages. As a major local employer, the Council works with local organisations to help ensure our workforce reflects the communities we represent. Through changes to our recruitment practices, we have been able to make changes - 100% of our most recent intake of Digital Business apprentices were from Westminster and 95% identified as having a global majority background.

There is more that we can do, and the Council welcomes this guide which provides us all with a range of practical suggestions to help achieve meaningful change. We value the WPA and CPA's leadership and commitment to supporting diversity, and the ambition to support social mobility.

A diverse team is good for business, and a socially diverse property industry will help create a more dynamic, resilient and fairer city with genuine opportunities for the communities that live on its doorsteps.



Stella Abani MBE,
Westminster City Council
Director of Economy & Skills

Understanding the challenge

Class is often overlooked in efforts to improve diversity. It can be more complex and less visible than other demographic indicators, such as gender and race. Socio-economic background is not a protected characteristic under the 2010 Equality Act, and excluding people from the workforce can often be explained by the perceived need for a ‘cultural fit.’¹

The UK has one of lowest levels of social mobility (defined as the movement of individuals or groups up or down the socio-economic ladder) in the developed world². Whilst most people would agree that an individual’s background shouldn’t determine their future, social structures often dictate a person’s access to education and job opportunities. It is widely believed³ that the pandemic, and subsequent cost of living crisis, have deepened social inequality.

The problem is particularly acute in the real estate sector. Research by the Bridge Group⁴, supported by the JLL UK Foundation, shows that almost half (45%) of staff at the surveyed property firms attended an independent or selective school. This compares to just 7% of the UK population who were privately educated and 5% who attended selective state schools.

52% of senior property executives⁴ are considered to have a higher socio-economic background based on parental occupation. This is less representative than Members of Parliament, FTSE 350 Chairs or BBC executives. Indeed, real estate companies have a lower proportion of employees from lower socio-economic backgrounds compared to leading law firms, accountancy firms or government departments.

There are clear intersections between class and other diversity areas. The Bridge Group’s research⁴ revealed that men are 21% more likely to be from higher socio-economic backgrounds than women; and White employees are 40% more likely to be from higher socio-economic backgrounds than those who identify as Black.

Our industry can be perceived as exclusive and nepotistic¹, with access disproportionately available to young people who already have ties to the real estate professions through family, friendships or school connections; and progression is made easier by knowledge of un-written codes in company culture. A focus on social mobility is vital for creating a genuinely inclusive and fair workplace, and a property industry that reflects London’s diverse communities. As the City of London Corporation sets out for the launch of its Socio-Economic Diversity Taskforce⁵ for the UK’s financial and professional services, the vision is for “equity of progression – where high performance is valued over ‘fit’ and ‘polish.’”

Creating inclusive working environments where people from less advantaged backgrounds has the following benefits:



Hearing new ideas and perspectives, which is especially important when creating buildings and places where socio-economically diverse Londoners will live, work and play



A moral imperative to open up a fantastic range of well-paid and rewarding careers to a wider group of people



Expanding the talent pool



Improving other diversity areas, such as gender and race

Supporting social mobility in the real estate sector

1. Make the business case for socio-economic diversity

- Think of improving diversity as an investment. For example, diverse talent will provide a better understanding of your customer base, or stakeholders, resulting in stronger commercial returns and improved customer service
- Work hard to understand the social-economic status of your workforce: both existing staff and incoming recruits. This can be done through workplace surveys (which need to be handled sensitively, see table on pg. 11 for more information), as well as identifying social mobility gaps during recruitment and exit interviews.

Resource: The Social Mobility Employer Index is an annual benchmarking tool for organisations looking to understand how they are performing on social mobility and where they can improve.

The Social Mobility Foundation assesses the steps being taken by the employer to make sure they are open to talent from all social backgrounds and provides a tailored report offering recommendations on how to widen accessibility.

www.socialmobility.org.uk/index

2. Attract talent

Advertising job opportunities

- Show how careers in property are about people and placemaking, we're not all estate agents!
- Avoid using term 'competitive salary' in job adverts: transparency is key. Clearly set out the pay and hours as people may not know what to expect
- Review recruitment processes and job descriptions e.g. consider shifting from CVs to application forms or consider using 'blind' CVs. [This article](#)⁶ from BAME in Property explores the pros and cons of blind CV practices
- Consider stating "we are open to taking people with no experience, or with transferable skills", if appropriate
- Include your company's D&I statement in the advert to show your commitment to inclusivity
- Work with recruiters that specialise in supporting underrepresented groups into roles
- Consider offering reasonable travel expenses where candidates, especially those just starting out, are travelling from a distance for the interview. These costs particularly impact those from lower socio-economic backgrounds

Resource: Rare Recruitment is a specialist diversity recruitment company with expertise in graduate recruitment and development. It uses digital tools to provide real time contextual information allowing employers to identify exceptional candidates they might otherwise miss.

www.rarerecruitment.co.uk

Addressing economic barriers

- The cost of academic study may prevent people from using this traditional pathway to property. If your company has the resource, consider degree sponsorship or bursaries for under-represented groups (for example, by supporting students through Pathways to Property – see below)

Resource: Pathways to Property aims to widen access to the real estate profession by raising awareness of and aspirations about the vast range of careers available within the sector.

Led by Reading Real Estate Foundation at Henley Business School, University of Reading, and fully funded by the industry, the project works with students, teachers, career advisors and parents to highlight to those from less advantaged and non-traditional backgrounds the opportunities available within the sector. Activities include an annual Summer School, work experience week, e-mentoring programme, engaging with schools and colleges throughout the UK at careers events and delivering a successful open online course about starting a career in real estate.

<https://linktr.ee/PathwaystoProperty>

Work experience and training

- Consider offering paid apprenticeships, internships and other placements which create opportunities for a wider pool of talent without traditional qualifications, and people who were born in social mobility 'coldspots'⁷ (such as coastal areas and industrial towns)
- Try to reduce the recruitment of people already known to the organisation (e.g. a director's child or a friend's child), and instead actively seek young people from under-represented backgrounds.
- Consider offering internships and work experience places to young people in the regeneration areas you work in

Resource: Social Mobility Foundation's (SMF) One +1 campaign makes it easy for professionals to offer an additional work experience placement to a bright student without connections.

If you are arranging a work experience placement for a friend or relative, a SMF student (someone from a lower-socio economic background with high academic grades) would be their +1.

www.socialmobility.org.uk/oneplus1

Managing work experience days and internships

- Start by asking what people want from their experience, and shape the programme around that
- Consult with a local school or college in designing your programme and make sure the placements offered demonstrate the diversity of the industry e.g. HR, Finance, Law and Property roles
- Shadowing can be an effective experience to understand the reality of a job. A one- or two-day placement can be just as good as longer work experience, so don't be nervous about offering shorter but more intense experiences
- Ensure all interns and those on work experience have a mentor or 'buddy' who is tracking progress, checking in and ensuring they can get the best out of the opportunity. Try to make a buddy match who might identify with some of the challenges the young person is facing
- Connect with organisations that help give support. Speak to youth charities, such as the Young Westminster Foundation, for advice if you don't know where to start

Resource: 2-3 Degrees, in partnership with Young Westminster Foundation, collaborates with local businesses on the Mastering My Future programme to create meaningful career-focused opportunities for young people. This includes workshops and events, mentoring and work experience and training for businesses on how to work with young people.

www.youngwestminster.com/mastering-my-future

Other ways of connecting with diverse talent

- Engage with young people to promote careers in real estate as open to them, and explain the exciting, creative and well-paid opportunities our sector can provide. Make it relevant to the audience, for example using case studies on professionals who had non-traditional pathways into the industry
- Target school-age children with career talks, not just university students who have already chosen property-related courses.

Send staff from a diverse range of backgrounds to provide role models for the young people

- Consider how to engage with parents, teachers and careers advisors, as they are major influencers in a child's career choice
- Run mentoring programmes for young people, matching your own staff to individuals within the local community. For example, the Mayor's Fund offer mentoring opportunities for your staff

Resource: Career Ready is a national social mobility charity that works with employers, schools, and volunteers towards the goal of every young person having the opportunity to kickstart a rewarding career.

The organisation partners with employers to invest in young, diverse people across the UK, transforming lives, boosting social mobility, and helping employers tap into undiscovered talent. They provide young people with the mentoring, paid internships, skills masterclasses, and workplace visits in order to unlock new skills, discover new career opportunities, and achieve their potential.

www.careerready.org.uk/employers

Resource: Land Collective helps explain the diverse range of careers, and pathways into those careers, to young people from diverse backgrounds. The organisation hosts a programme of free events, employability programmes, an online networking platform; and creates inspiring career stories, research and media engagement to engage with people who wouldn't traditionally consider a career in property.

www.thelandcollective.com

Resource: Making the Leap, a social mobility charity which also runs the SOMO Social Mobility Awards and is one of the few Black-founded and led charities working in social mobility space.

<https://makingtheleap.org.uk>

3. Retain and promote staff

- A key challenge is the lack of representation of people from lower socio-economic backgrounds not making it to senior positions. Address the culture of your company to ensure that un-written codes and practices do not exclude people from less privileged backgrounds. For example, avoid designing client or internal networking around 'elitist' sports
- Make the career progression and promotion system as transparent as possible, so that biases (conscious and sub-

conscious) of middle managers do not translate into an unfair advantage for people from the same socio-economic or educational background

- Identify allies at senior level who will champion socio-economic diversity. Learn lessons from corporates such as KPMG that have a Social Mobility Employee Network and senior level sponsors / ambassadors for social mobility
- Review mentoring programmes and consider mentors of a similar age or seniority, rather than based on hierarchy
- Consider reverse mentoring programmes so more senior leaders can learn from junior staff from underrepresented backgrounds
- Share the stories of people from within your business who have come from different socioeconomic backgrounds
- Be mindful of intersectionality and class: the crossover into a professional property career can be doubly difficult, for example, for a women of colour from a working class background

Resource: An excellent and inspiring read is *People Like Us: What It Takes to Make it in Modern Britain* by Hashi Mohamed (2020, Profile Books). This book explains his social mobility journey from a child refugee, raised on benefits and attending some of the lowest-performing schools in the country – to becoming one of the highest rated planning barristers in England. It offers practical tips for employers, as well as young people at the beginning of their own social mobility journey.

Resource: The Westminster Employment Service (WES) promotes economic inclusion by connecting businesses to diverse communities looking for good quality work. WES can help your organisation deliver community recruitment events; reach diverse, skilled communities through its network of partner organisations; and provide a dedicated team of employment coaches and recruitment professionals.

Contact localjobs@westminster.gov.uk to see how WES can help your inclusive recruitment ambitions in central London.

Supporting social mobility in the real estate sector

At Board level	At middle management	At NextGen
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capture more data on the socioeconomic backgrounds of your staff, in order to understand and improve a lack of class diversity. (Be sure to explain to your employees why you are doing this, the feedback will be held anonymously and only shared at an aggregate level, why it's important and what you will do if there are huge discrepancies. Often employees can hold back on this information as historically it's been barrier) • Commit sufficient resources to addressing socio-economic diversity e.g., funding internships, apprenticeships or running effective work experience programmes • Engage in reverse mentoring to better understand the challenges of your employees from lower socio-economic backgrounds and use findings to inform programmes and policies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement a programme to attract diverse talent. This could be anything from an apprenticeship programme to school visits • Review recruiting practices and job specifications • Address workplace culture • Make the promotion system as transparent as possible • Identify where some employees might need extra support and training and ensure there is an action plan in place. Not everyone has had the same opportunities in life and may need a helping hand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get in touch with your school or university and offer to visit and speak with students; or connect teachers with people in the industry. Talk to young people about the range of exciting and well-paid careers in the industry – and explain how the profession is about people and placemaking. Explain the opportunity to shape local communities and to work in different cities and countries. Point out how working in property right now gives people an opportunity to combat climate change • Ask questions within your organisation to bring social mobility to the fore. For example, ask 'what are our policies around recruitment'? • Find or establish a network for discussing and championing social mobility

Case studies

Grosvenor works with ULI (Urban Land Institute) UK as well as local schools where they operate, encouraging their staff to volunteer in these locations and help spread the word about what property is and why it is a great career.

Since 2015 the organisations have been working together on the UrbanPlan programme, including workshops where disadvantaged secondary school students play a vital role in a mock land development proposal. Groups present to a set of judges their planning applications and a winner is selected. The programme has had a significant impact on exposing students to the real estate sector through active engagement, problem solving, and professional expertise.

<https://uk.uli.org/programs/urbanplan>

The City law firm **Macfarlanes** has a student outreach programme called 'Macfarlanes Legal Academy'. It is aimed at year 12 and 13 students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, targeting social mobility cold spots in particular.

Macfarlanes also runs a mentoring programme with London-based secondary school students from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

A separate scheme for university students includes first year insight days, vacation schemes and tailored social mobility programmes delivered in partnership with social mobility charity, upReach. The firm's first year skills development initiative is delivered to students from seven non-Russell Group universities situated in social mobility cold spots.

The firm launched the Macfarlanes training scholarship in partnership with Brunel University London in October 2022. Macfarlanes pays the full cost of scholars' tuition fees and provides paid summer work experience, a paid placement year at the firm, and mentoring from senior lawyers throughout their degree. After graduating, the aim is that scholars study the SQE and continue their training at the firm.

The Macfarlanes bursary is open to undergraduates attending any UK university. There are three grants available: technology grant, for those who need support accessing technology; accommodation grant, for those participating on vacation scheme, or the first-year skills development initiative and upReach work experience programmes; and a participation grant, for working students who cannot afford to miss work to attend a Macfarlanes event.

Similarly, the NFTS (National Film and Television School) offers bursaries that could provide a useful blueprint of funding provided by major companies in the sector.

AECOM partners with charities and local schools in Tower Hamlets to open up its work experience programme, and fix the issue of people only getting involved through family connections. For school students, the company offers a week's work experience to show opportunities across a spectrum of roles.

AECOM also has a 'Kick start' programme which works with people on universal credit to help them with CV writing, interview tips and career planning as well as offering guidance on how to get into the industry.

Gardiner & Theobald has been running its NewGen programme for several years which focuses on attracting a diversity of talent to the industry and creating social mobility for individuals who might not otherwise be given an opportunity. Working with charities such as Land Collective, 15 Billion EBP, Inspire, Construction Youth Trust and Career Ready, G&T volunteers give back to the communities they help build by upskilling local adults and young people. Through its 'Careers Carousels' those who need support meet with experienced professionals from all areas of the built environment, practicing skills such as pitching, presenting, developing career goals, networking, CV writing, interview prep and more.

As part of the firm's wider ESG strategy, G&T has also contributed to the London Real Estate Forum's Schools Day for many years. This is a unique opportunity for young professionals to engage and inspire a new cohort of city change makers. They help to bring career opportunities to life through engaging workshops where students imagine their dream workspace with the help of G&T volunteers. Take a look: <https://www.gardiner.com/stories/2022/creating-opportunities-for-a-new-generation-at-lref>

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