



EQUALITY
GROUP

IDENTITY AT WORK

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Within the UK, social mobility has been virtually stagnant since 2014 with entry into professional occupations remaining largely dependent on parent's careers, professional networks and access to educational opportunities. Nationally representative research by Equality Group highlights the truth about social mobility in the UK. The data finds that 76% of Brits believe that those with higher class-status have increased access to 'better' careers/job opportunities regardless of experience or qualifications. This is not aided by the fact that the Equalities Act of 2010 – an act introduced to make discrimination illegal within the workplace when recruiting new staff – does not include class and/or socio-economic status in its measure of diversity.

Key statistics



76% of Brits believe people with higher socio-economic status have increased access to 'better' careers/job opportunities regardless of experience or qualifications



36% of Brits state there are no working-class/ lower socio-economic people on their management board within the business they work for



55% of Brits believe there is a stigma around regional dialects, especially in London, that acts as a barrier to securing corporate jobs



Almost 10% of Brits choose not to reveal the true location they were born and raised as they are worried it is stigmatised



16% of Brits wish they had known or had better guidance around how to dress and how to present themselves before their first interview, as their background definitely disadvantaged them



22% of professionals believe that in order to be successful in their career, they have had to alter the way they speak and change their dialect



12% of Brits stated that, since working in their current profession, their families have commented on the fact they now speak 'posh'/ have lost their regional accent



Almost 10% of Brits have hidden where they grew up out of fear that they will be unable to access particular professional/social networks if they knew their backgrounds

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This means that as professional guidelines stipulate, businesses aren't legally required to hire across the breadth of British society. This is despite 60% of the UK workforce identifying as coming from a working class background. The workplace consequences of this are vast, with professionals purposefully hiding their regional accents and hometowns in order to avoid any impediment to their professional development.

The prevalence of class-based discrimination within the UK and its tangible impact on recruitment, professional development and inequality is therefore something that requires immediate attention from business leaders, hiring managers and the policy decision makers who are central to Boris' new Government.

Contextualising Equality Group's research and the sense of injustice felt by millions of working Brits, the Social Mobility Commission has confirmed that those from better-off backgrounds are 80% more likely to end up in professional jobs than their working-class counterparts. Given this, it is time businesses look beyond the surface and acknowledge that diversity isn't simply hinged on ethnicity and gender but also includes socio-economic status.

An academic journal on 'The Class Pay Gap in Higher Professional and Managerial Occupations' found that professionals from lower socio-economic classes were less likely to ask for pay rises and promotions due to a fear about 'not fitting in'. This is an understandable concern given that 36% of Brits have declared that there are no lower socio-economic people on their management board within the business they work for. This double edge sword means that it is not only how our social-economic status is perceived that could inhibit our career progression, but moreover, our own self-perception of class that can influence our employment status.

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Hephzi Pemberton, Founder and CEO

'It is a shocking reality that in 2019, 76% of professionals correctly regard the workplace as not promoting equal opportunities that are free from class bias. As companies are not legally required to hire from a range of socio-economic classes, businesses need to step up and address the benefits that come from diversity of thought and experience and hire accordingly. Businesses need to reassess their hiring practices to ensure that they offer equality of opportunity based on academic and professional experience and not ethnicity, gender or class. It is unacceptable that such a significant proportion of the British population believe that they need to change their accents or hide their background to flourish within their professional environments. Employees should be proud of their backgrounds and their professional environments should value their diversity of experience and thought, not dampen it. As a society of business leaders, decision-makers and professionals, we need to take it upon ourselves to create a diverse workforce, not merely as a way of ticking diversity quotas, but because diverse teams inspire new innovation and perspectives, driving profitability; it make good business sense.' – Hephzi Pemberton

About Equality Group

Equality Group harnesses the power of diverse leaders for Finance, Technology and Social Impact. They change the business landscape by widening the range of exceptional candidates and offering them unique leadership opportunities. Their consultancy service helps companies attract, retain and develop diverse talent, which our Executive Search service headhunts.

