

# SOCIAL MOBILITY FACTSHEET

Institution of  
**MECHANICAL  
ENGINEERS**



Improving the world through engineering

# SOCIAL MOBILITY

## An Introduction

You may have heard the term 'social mobility' before and may have wondered what it means, this factsheet breaks it down for you.

Social mobility refers to 'social hierarchy' and here in the UK we refer to social hierarchy as 'class'.

Whilst lots of people believe that class is now an outdated ideal that once helped to clarify who the Ladies, Lords/Kings and Queens of the world were, it is still sadly very much a real challenge for many parts of the world.

In the UK there are a number of classes that group a variety of people together and are traditionally based around wealth, occupation, education and/or where someone lives. Social hierarchy tends to be passed from generation to generation and a recent study even suggest that by the age of three, poorer children are estimated to be, on average, nine months behind children from more wealthy backgrounds.

Let's take a look at the main class definitions to understand each group a little more:

### **Lower Class**

This social group consists mostly of people who are unemployed and/or homeless people. This group is regularly dismissed throughout society and are often wrongly looked at as 'bringing it on themselves'.

### **Working Class**

A social group consisting mostly of people who are in lower skilled or manual work and who receive low pay, they tend not enter into higher education following secondary/high school.

Sometimes this group are wrongly accused of being lazy or unskilled.

### **Upper Class**

The smallest of the social groups, this social group consists mostly of people who tend to have been born into family wealth and can be perceived as holding the highest status in society. Sometimes this group of people are wrongly accused of being entitled.

### **Middle Class**

A social group consisting mostly of people who tend to go to university, work in a mid-income and higher skilled work and have parents who went to university. They sit between the working and upper classes and sometimes they can be wrongly accused of demonising the working class.

### **Working Poor**

Recently a new class has emerged which is called 'working poor' this group of people are those that are working, however, they live in poverty due to lack of opportunity with education and work and as new generations are born, the cycle continues. This group sits between the lower and working class.

## **Enter Social Mobility**

This is where social mobility comes in, when organisations, governments and education providers look at the adjustments they can make to create more opportunities for those in the lower classes they move up the social hierarchy and are able to live outside of poverty and in comfort. This then naturally creates more opportunities for the next generation to have access to more opportunities, therefore levelling out the playing field for all people within society and with 4 in 5 people (79%) say there is a large gap between social classes in the UK today it's still an important topic to focus on.

## Things you can do to support social mobility:

- Be considerate, remember our classes are part of our identity and people are usually proud of their class
- Volunteer at a local centre and support your local community – even just an hour a week makes a difference
- Encourage your department to hire more apprentices and trainees without a university background
- Never treat someone different because of their accent or the way they communicate
- Where you have influence, consider discounts on your products or discounted free access to your services for people from lower income backgrounds
- When looking at suppliers and partnership organisations, collaborate with companies and universities that promote social mobility