The educational backgrounds of Britain's leading people

Elitist Britain 2025

About the Sutton Trust

The Sutton Trust is the UK's leading social mobility charity. Our programmes empower young people to access life-changing opportunities, and our research influences national change to deliver a fairer future.

As an independent charity, our work is entirely reliant on the generous support of our community of donors.

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Forewords

Nick Harrison
Chief Executive,
the Sutton Trust

Since the first Elitist Britain report in 2014, Britain has experienced seismic change. The COVID-19 pandemic dramatically impacted children's education, Brexit reshaped many industries, and AI is now transforming how we work. We've faced a prolonged cost-of-living crisis, even as we've celebrated sporting triumphs – particularly for women – alongside advances in medicine and technology. After 14 years of Conservative government, the political tide turned towards Labour in last year's election.

Yet through all these changes, Britain's elite – those in the most influential roles in our country – continue to be dominated by the privately educated and graduates of the most prestigious universities, notably Oxford and Cambridge. Our country is changing, yet our leaders, on the whole, are not.

Over the last decade, diversity initiatives have rightly focused on improving access for women, people from a wider range of ethnic backgrounds, and those with disabilities. But we have not put the same focus on socio-economic background: what many of us would call 'class'. Disadvantage gaps open early and run deep in our country. Sutton Trust research has found time and again that young people from less well-off backgrounds miss out on opportunities in education and employment that more privileged youngsters take for granted. This is not only profoundly unfair; it is also a critical waste of talent, squeezed out by the elite education pipeline.

If Britain is to thrive, we need to draw on all the talent we have available. Many of our Sutton Trust partners have already taken important steps to open opportunities to young people from a wider range of backgrounds, and we are proud of the progress that has been made. Government, too, has begun to recognise the challenge through its Opportunity Mission. Nonetheless, we have much further to go to break down barriers and unlock the sustainable and inclusive growth our country needs.

This report lays bare the scale of the challenge, and in doing so calls for a Britain where opportunity is open to all, and where our leaders better reflect the country they serve.

Britain's elite – those in the most influential roles in our country – continue to be dominated by the privately educated and graduates of the most prestigious universities, notably Oxford and Cambridge.

Mary Osofisan
Co-Chair, the Sutton Trust Alumni Leadership Board

Equality and equity have become popular buzzwords in relation to social mobility, but what do they mean? Equality is the notion that everyone should have access to the same opportunities. Equity acknowledges that there are socio-economic factors that may impact one's ability not only to access such opportunities but also to thrive and operate within them.

This report reveals that individuals who are privately educated are heavily overrepresented among the most powerful and influential people in this country. If 93% of pupils in the UK are state educated, then this should be reflected across all sectors and positions in society. However, unfortunately, it is not. For me, it is disheartening to see that the spectre of power still sits mainly with Britain's elite.

As a black woman of colour, from a low socio-economic background, there are intersectional challenges which I face – just being me. Growing up, although I had an ambitious spirit, there were barriers to realising my dreams. Being the first in many respects meant that I didn't have anyone in my immediate surroundings who had led the path I was seeking to take. Fortunately, I was able to benefit from various social mobility organisations along my journey, including the Sutton Trust. They helped to bridge the gap and raise my aspirations towards higher education.

The sad reality is that many young people from disadvantaged backgrounds still face major challenges finding employment and progressing in their careers, regardless of ability or ambition. They may lack the confidence to apply for roles in industries or organisations where they are underrepresented or feel underqualified. Additionally, they often lack financial security to undertake unpaid internships, which can discourage them from applying. When I reached the workplace, I often found that the most senior leadership was not representative of society and certainly not of me.

Although much work is being done to widen access to higher education and career opportunities, this report shows there is still a lot of change to be made if we want true equity to exist in the UK.

The sad reality is that many young people from disadvantaged backgrounds still face major challenges finding employment and progressing in their careers, regardless of ability or ambition.

Key findings

The six years since Elitist Britain 2019 have been a time of political and social turbulence at home and abroad, including wars, a pandemic, a cost of living crisis, and five prime ministers. Racial diversity and inclusion leapt to the top of the agenda, before becoming subject of a 'culture war', while the 2024 General Election saw unprecedented political fragmentation, with many rejecting 'establishment' parties on both the right and left.

Elitist Britain 2025 finds that despite this volitility, there has been little change in the backgrounds of Britain's 'elite'.

Elites are over 5 times more likely to have attended a fee-paying school than the general population. Attendance at prestigious universities is also common, with elites over 5 times more likely to have gone to a Russell Group university and 21 times more likely to have gone to Oxford or Cambridge. The pipeline from independent school to elite universities remains strong, with 1 in 4 members of the elite having gone from an independent school to a Russell Group university.

The proportion of privately educated elites has barely changed since 2019.

36% of those working in Britain's top jobs went to a private school, compared to 39% in 2019. The biggest drops have been in the cabinet - with a change in government - down 32 percentage points, permanent secretaries (down 12), pop stars, local government leaders and the news media (down 10 each), with big increases in the shadow cabinet, cricket and FTSE chairs. Oxbridge attendance has fallen slightly from 24% in 2019 to 21% now, with university attendance overall staying above 80%. The biggest changes in Oxbridge attendance outside the cabinet/shadow cabinet were among entrepreneurs (up 11pp), permanent secretaries (up 10pp), news media (down 13pp) and the armed forces (down 8pp).

Politics

Since the last edition of Elitist Britain, the country has moved from a Conservative to Labour government, bringing an increase in comprehensively educated MPs, now up to 62% of the House of Commons. 24% were privately educated, down from 29% in 2019. Notably, the cabinet is now far more representative of the population it serves, with 7% educated privately, compared to 39% in 2019. However, the House of Lords has remained an area with substantial numbers privately educated, at 52% (compared to 50% in 2014). This rises to 95% for hereditary peers. Outside Westminster, the proportion of local government leaders from private school backgrounds has halved, to just 10%.

Business

Heads of many of Britain's richest companies were educated abroad; including 53% of FTSE 100 CEOs. When considering only those educated in the UK, 37% of FTSE CEOs and 68% of FTSE chairs went to private schools (the latter rising by 15 percentage points since 2019). The old boys network remains strongest amongst chairs, with as many as 41% of those educated in

the UK having attended both private school and Oxbridge. Over half of UK educated members of the Sunday Times Rich List went to private school, as did 54% of their Young Power List.

Media

Across the Elitist Britain series, media has remained highly unrepresentative. The gap is particularly prominent amongst newspaper columnists (50% privately educated), political commentators (47%) and BBC executives (38%), with BBC executives in particular up 10 percentage points since 2019. Oxbridge still holds sway among opinion formers, with over 40% of columnists and political commentators attending the two universities. Podcasters, added for the first time, mirrored traditional media in terms of private school (45%). Contrastingly, 18% of the newly featured group of 'influencers and content creators' attended private school, and just 51% attended university, indicating new pathways to success.

Third sector and policy

New for Elitist Britain 2025, data on the third sector reveals that 34% of charity CEOs attended a private school, as did 25% of think tank senior leaders. At 37%, think tank senior staff rank 8th out of 46 professions in terms of Oxbridge attendance. As expected, the backgrounds of trade union leaders were more representative of the general population, with 12% attending private school and just 2% attending Oxbridge, with 55% attending university, among the lowest in the report.

Whitehall and public bodies

At 53%, private school attendance amongst Britain's diplomats is one of the highest figures in this report and has remained at this level since 2014. 47% of permanent secretaries have attended, down from 59% in 2019. Permanent secretaries (66%) and diplomats (44%) also have some of the highest Oxbridge attendance figures.

Public servants

Some of the highest figures for private school attendance are seen in this chapter, with 63% of the armed forces and 62% of senior judges having attended. These figures have been consistently high across the Elitist Britain series. Senior judges also remain the profession with the highest proportion of Oxbridge graduates, up 4 percentage points at 75%.

Creative industries

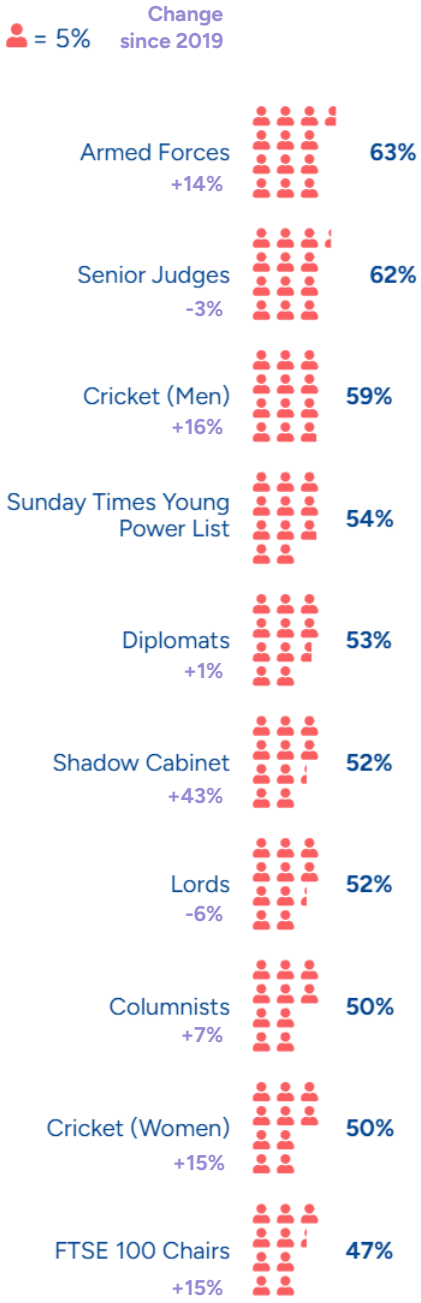
Pop music has remained an industry with low levels of private school attendance (10%) compared to many other professions. In acting, 32% have attended a private school, marking a continued decline since 2014 (when 44% attended). Contrastingly, university attendance amongst actors has risen from 42% to 68% and is higher than the 52% seen in 2014. 40% attended UK universities outside of the Russell Group, including specialist arts institutions.

Sport

Private school attendance is most varied amongst Britain's sporting stars, from 4% of women's footballers to 59% of men's cricketers. For both the men's and women's England cricket teams, private school attendance has notably risen by 16 and 15 percentage points respectively since 2019. University attendance also varies from 0% for men's footballers to 71% for women's rugby players. University attendance has declined particularly in women's football (down 24 percentage points since 2019), cricket (down 23pp) and rugby (down 9pp), reflecting increased popularity, investment and professionalisation in women's sport.

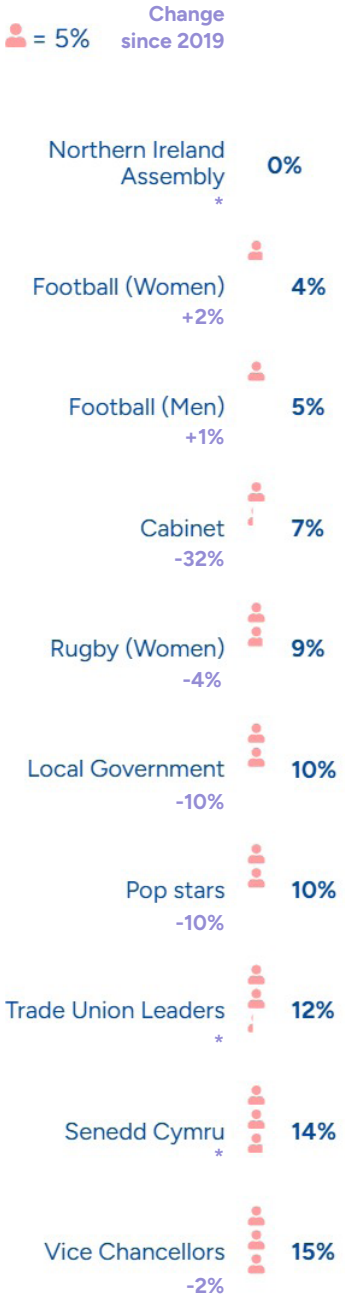
In numbers

The 10 professions with the **highest independent school** attendance



Whole UK population: **7%**

The 10 professions with the **lowest independent school** attendance



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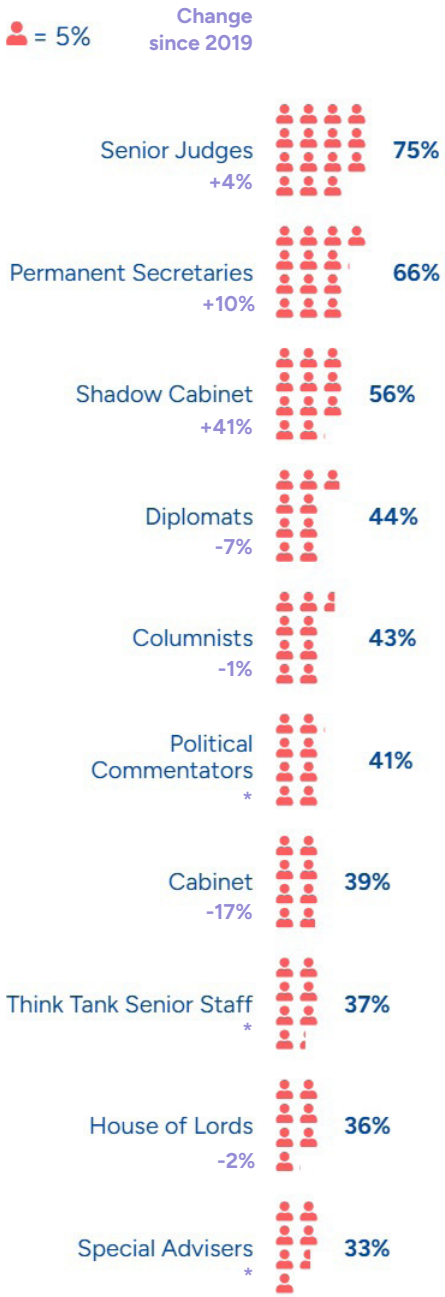
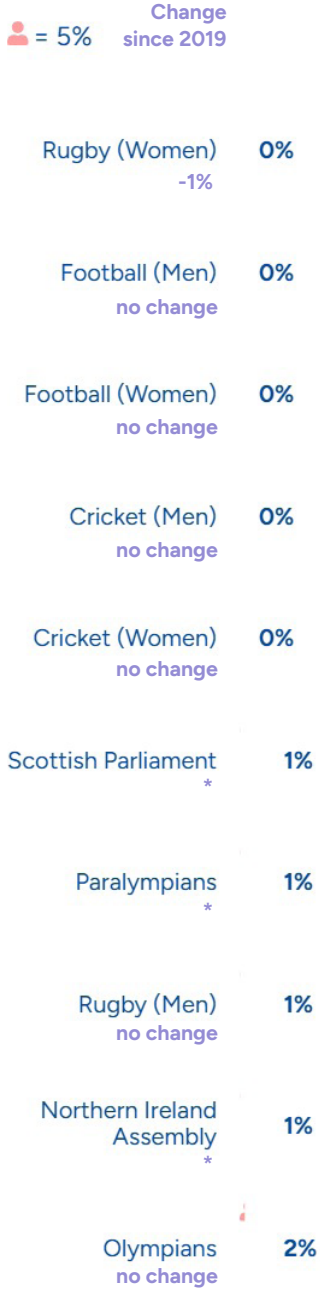
The 10 professions with the **highest Oxbridge** attendance



Whole UK population: **Less than 1%**

The 10 professions with the **lowest Oxbridge** attendance



* Not available

Policy recommendations

Opportunities should be more evenly spread across Britain, and social class should be put at the heart of the diversity and inclusion agenda. Those from low-income backgrounds and left behind areas should not be excluded from diversity efforts, from schooling to jobs at the top of society. As part of this mission:

The Government should:

1. **Follow through on their commitment to enact the "Socio-economic duty clause" of the Equality Act 2010** which would require public bodies to take socio-economic background into account, as well as other characteristics.

2. **Commission a review on adding social class as a protected characteristic.** The diversity agenda should not neglect social class, but the legal and practical implications of such a move should be examined in detail.

3. **Require employers with over 250 employees to report on the socio-economic background of their workforce, and class pay gaps.** Collecting data on socio-economic background allows employers to understand the make-up of their workforce and identify access and progression gaps.

4. **Ban unpaid internships over 4 weeks and improve enforcement of minimum wage legislation.** Government should follow through on the pre-election commitment to ban unpaid internships outside formal education and training courses.

5. **Widen access to life skills, careers guidance, extra-curricular activities and a broader curriculum in schools.** All students should have access to high quality careers advice and activities that inspire their career choices. Access to activities that develop life skills, as well as a wider range of subjects (particularly in the creative arts and languages) should form a key outcome of the Curriculum and Assessment Review, as well as the forthcoming Schools White Paper. Changes should be underpinned with funding to ensure all schools can offer such activities.

Employers should:

1. **Widen their talent pipeline by:**

   - Recruiting from a wider group of universities beyond the Russell Group, as well as those with other qualifications like apprenticeships, including sharing details of recruitment rounds, internships and graduate schemes more widely.
   - Examining whether academic requirements or thresholds are genuinely required to do the job at hand.

- Where school grades are used to sift candidates, take the context they were achieved into account, including using contextual recruitment tools.
- Ensuring the use of AI in recruitment does not lead to further marginalising under-represented groups.

2 **Collect data on the socio-economic background of their applicants and workforce.** Under-representation is difficult to tackle without better data on the problem. The Sutton Trust, Social Mobility Commission and others recommend asking about parental occupation at age 14 as the main measure to use. Larger employers should take the lead to encourage smaller employers to do the same.

3 **Address differences in retention and promotion rates between employees of different socio-economic backgrounds.** Employers should monitor class pay gaps and ensure both promotion and work allocation processes are fair and transparent, as well as setting up mentoring schemes for those from under-represented backgrounds. They should create an inclusive, welcoming culture that celebrates diversity and different backgrounds.

4 **Collaborate with schools, colleges and universities and community organisations so that students from disadvantaged backgrounds are supported in their transition from education into the workplace.** Employers should use organisations working with young people to target outreach and work experience opportunities to under-represented groups. Crucially, they should continue to connect with students who participate in outreach programmes to ensure they are supported with job applications and their first steps into the workplace.

5 **Take a sector leadership role if they are making significant efforts to tackle social mobility, and share best practice** to develop a rich evidence bank that all employers can follow. Sector collaboration is key, and models such as PRIME (in the Law sector), Access Accountancy and the Sutton Trust's Tech Future Taskforce could be looked to by other sectors.

More detailed guidance for employers looking to improve social mobility is contained in the Sutton Trust's 'Social Mobility in the Workplace: An Employer's Guide'.

Schools, colleges and universities should:

1 **Universities, particularly the most selective institutions, should extend use of contextual admissions, including reduced grade contextual offers, more extensively to open up access to students from less privileged backgrounds.** Universities should place particular focus on evidence-based interventions to improve access from under-represented groups.

2 **Schools and colleges should ensure pupils from all backgrounds can access and engage with high quality careers guidance and work experience opportunities.** There should be clear responsibility for careers guidance within a school's senior leadership team and governors, and work with Pupil Premium Leads to ensure the school's strategy takes the needs of such students into account, for instance support for those without connections to professional occupations in finding work experience.

Introduction

Context

The 2019 edition of Elitist Britain concluded that there was still much work to be done across society, in the workplace and in education to address decades of inequality in access to the highest positions in UK society.[1] That report identified an increasingly fragmented society with people showing a 'profound misunderstanding of each other's worries and concerns,' and 'large swathes of the country feeling left behind by an increasingly London-centric economy.'[2]

Since 2019 this has only deepened, as the UK has gone through a turbulent period of national and international events. The Covid-19 pandemic had contrasting effects. For a time it enhanced ideas of national identity and social cohesion through support for the NHS, key workers and emergency services.[3] However, incidents such as the revelations about Downing Street partying exacerbated a sense of 'them and us' and disillusionment with the political elite.[4]

Divides between haves and have nots have been accentuated by a drawn-out cost of living crisis with spikes in interest rates, stubborn inflation, high energy prices, rising use of food banks, and a widespread sense of having to cut back even on basics.[5] This has been accompanied by deepening social divides, a trend also seen internationally, particularly by education, with non-university graduates feeling increasingly alienated with political backlashes against issues such as immigration and diversity. The change of government in 2024 has not stemmed this tide, despite introducing the most working-class cabinet on record[6], and an "Opportunity Mission" that seeks to break down barriers for people from all backgrounds.

This is the context in which Elitist Britain 2025 is published. This report seeks to explore who gets to the top of British society, across a variety of sectors, as well as who gets to make decisions that shape society.

Six years may not be a long time in terms of social mobility. Social change usually takes time, particularly when focusing on senior roles as this report does.[7] However, there have been significant social changes in that period. The topic of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) now has a higher profile, despite recent backlashes in the US, and the corporate sector is increasingly waking up to the importance, and potential benefits, of social mobility.

Yet, social mobility in the UK remains stubbornly low[8] and many of the factors contributing to it – educational attainment gaps for instance - have been exacerbated by recent events.[9] Recent Sutton Trust research revealed the regional disparities in social mobility particularly between London and the rest of the country.[10] Sutton Trust polling in 2024 showed that the general public think that class differences are as large, if not larger than in the past. 83% thought that there is a big class gap in Britain today with 63% saying it is either bigger or the same as 50 years ago.[11] Meanwhile, many of the UK's professions, such as medicine or the creative industries, remain elite, in some cases despite considerable efforts to address the issue.[12]

Against this backdrop, this report seeks to identify where change has started to happen. Where, if at all, do we see changes in the social backgrounds of the UK's elites? This report looks at those who have reached the top of British society, but the purpose of the UK elites?

The path to the top

This report looks at those who have reached the top of British society, but the purpose of the analysis is as much about the journey as the destination. Education is a key part of that journey, and in particular, the UK's private school sector is a clear driver of continuing elitism.[13] It also serves as an accessible proxy for socio-economic background. While some low and moderate income pupils attend private schools on bursaries, full means-tested bursaries account for only 1% of places.[14] Analysis of data from the COSMO longitudinal study shows that 74% of independent school attendees in Year 11 are from the top quarter of household incomes (over £74,000 per annum after tax, in 2025 terms), and just 13% from the entire bottom half of the income distribution.

Pupils at private schools tend to have a range of advantages compared to their state school peers. These range from equipment and facilities, to class sizes, sporting and cultural resources, careers support,[15] and networks of peers from well-off families.[16]

It is also important to recognise that not all state schools are equal. It has long been the case that grammar schools are disproportionately middle class.[17] However, Sutton Trust research has also shown that on average the top performing comprehensive schools in England are also socially selective,[18] with intakes that are more advantaged than the average school and unrepresentative of their local area.[19] This means that within our analysis, there are almost certainly other hidden inequalities.

The university pipeline

Which university someone attends also affects their future job prospects and earnings. Research from the Institute for Fiscal Studies found that five years after graduation male graduates of Russell Group universities earn over 40% (35% for female graduates) more than those who attended the average post-1992 institution.[20] Some Oxbridge courses lead to earnings double those of other graduates in the same subject.[21] As well as education in itself, elite universities, like elite schools, also give their students the advantages of reputation, prestige and enhanced social and cultural capital.[22] Research in the US and reproduced in the UK has demonstrated the importance of social capital (networking and connections) at a young age for future earnings.[23]

However, gaps in access to these elite universities remain stubbornly wide, with those from lower socio-economic backgrounds still less likely to attend one of these institutions, even when they have the grades. Inevitably this has a negative impact on later earnings.[24]

> *"Sutton Trust research has also shown that on average the top performing comprehensive schools in England are also socially selective."*

Historically, Oxford and Cambridge have been dominated by private school students. In the early 1960s only 34% of students at Oxford and 27% at Cambridge came from state secondary schools.[25] However, as both universities have become attentive to diverse intakes, things have started to change, and by 2022 this had risen to 68% and 72.5% respectively,[26] even if slipping backwards since. In 2024 66.2% of UK undergraduates at Oxford university came from state schools with 71% at Cambridge.[27] This represents significant progress, but to contrast, in 2024, 88% of A-level students went to state-funded schools or colleges.[28] While Oxford and Cambridge stand out, many other selective universities also have low rates of students from less well-off backgrounds.

Given the barriers faced by students from these backgrounds, or left-behind areas of the country, in attending such institutions, employers who focus on Oxbridge and the Russell Group are often missing out on talent that hasn't come through these narrow pathways. This serves as a block on social mobility.

Employment barriers

The barriers to elite professions do not disappear after university. Recent research focused on accountancy and professional services, law and the public sector, found that most of the socio-economic background inequalities observed in entry to professional occupations are driven by recruitment decisions from employers.[29] Graduates from working class backgrounds are well represented in the applicant pools for professional occupations, but they are 32% less likely to get a job offer than applicants from professional backgrounds. The same research also found that privately educated applicants were 9% more likely to get a job offer than otherwise similar state-educated applicants.

Defining the 'elite'

In this edition of Elitist Britain we take a similar approach to identifying who to include in the UK's 'elite' as we did in 2019. That is, we have chosen the categories of elite roles applying two basic criteria:

1. Roles with the highest prestige and wealth, which are among the most coveted in society.
2. Roles with substantial power and influence over people's lives, making decisions that affect all of us day to day.

The background of people in these roles is important, because if they are disproportionately filled by people from a similar background with a narrow range of life experiences, then they often do not represent the perspectives of the broader population. Given that many of these roles also bring with them many social and economic rewards, it is also fundamentally a matter of fairness and equity.

In this 2025 edition we have expanded the number and range of categories. In particular, we have included leading figures from charities and think tanks to recognise their important social, political and media influence. To take the changing media and technology landscape into account we have also included podcasters, as well as influencers and content creators alongside more traditional media. We have expanded the political section to include members of the devolved parliaments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland as well as the Houses of Commons and Lords. We have also added special political advisers for their influence on government figures and policy at the highest level.

As Reeves and Friedman identified in their analysis of the British elite, wealth, in terms of property and financial assets, not only gives protection against economic instability, it also enables individuals to invest in their own educational, cultural and social capital and that of their families.[30] Given this significance, and the importance of the property sector for shaping the economy more broadly, we have included the wealthiest figures from the property sector here. We have also incorporated members of the Sunday Times Young Power list to acknowledge the importance of emerging and next generation members of the elite.

Finally, we have added the category of trades union leaders for this edition. Despite legislation over recent decades limiting their powers and reducing membership,[31] recent industrial action among teachers, doctors, train drivers and others shows that they can still influence public debate and attitudes, as well as government policy.

Inevitably there will be categories that might have been but are not included here. However, with this expanded range of categories we hope to have covered a wide range of the key leading roles in UK society, offering an insight into the extent to which the UK is truly meritocratic.

Patterns of participation

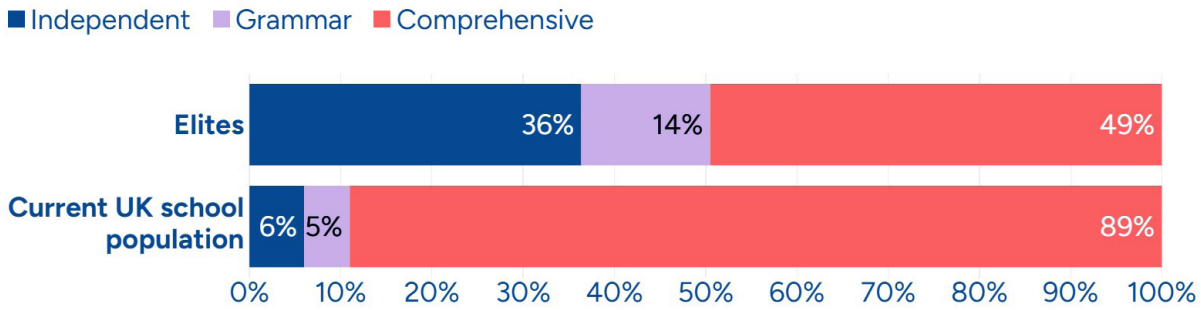
School

As Figure 1 shows, there is still a stark contrast between the proportions of privately and comprehensively educated people among the elites identified in this report compared to the current school population. Overall, 36% of the elite were privately educated (down slightly from 39% in 2019) compared to just 6% of the current school population and 7% of the population more broadly. This means that, even now, members of the elite are still more than five times more likely to have gone to a private school than the general population.

Nonetheless, this figure will be an underestimate for age groups who attended school in the 1960s before the comprehensive reforms, for whom the proportion was around 25%.

Looking only at sectors covered in both 2019 and 2025 reports, the independently educated proportion only dropped by 2 percentage points underlining the lack of progress. Meanwhile the number of those educated abroad increased by 1 percentage point.

Figure 1: School type attended by the elite compared to the current UK population



Note: Excludes members of the elite schooled outside the UK

In 2025,[32] around 6% of the pupils in England are in independent schools and 94% in state schools of some kind.[33] In the devolved nations the proportion of privately educated is smaller – 4% in Scotland,[34] 2% in Wales,[35] and less than 1% in Northern Ireland.[36] However, comparing the proportions of elite figures who went to different kinds of schools is more complex given changes in education policy over time. In the early 1960s around 8% of pupils attended independent schools. This has fluctuated around the 6-8% mark ever since.[37]

For this research, which covers a wide range of ages, we use 7% as the comparison figure which best reflects the longer term trends. For grammar schools, the proportion has remained consistent at around 5% since the late 70s.[38]

> *"36% of the elite were privately educated (down slightly from 39% in 2019) compared to just 6% of the current school population and 7% of the population more broadly. This means that even now members of the elite are still more than five times more likely to have gone to a private school than the general population."*

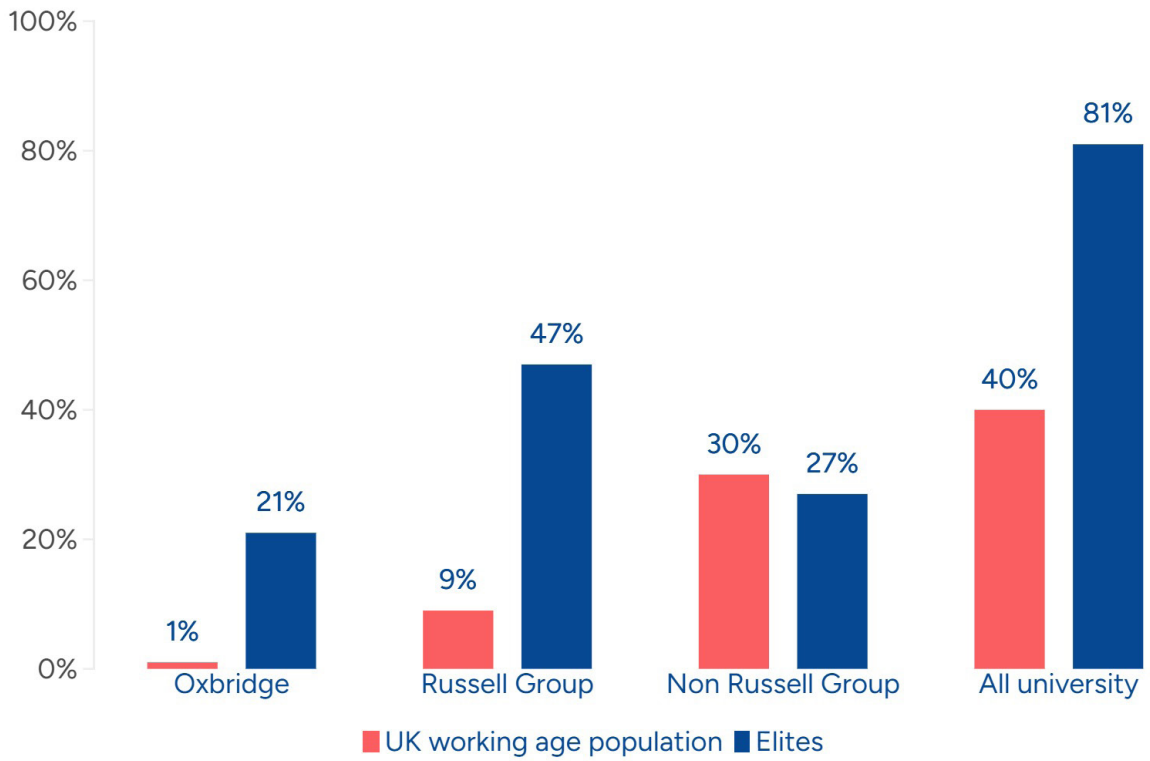
University

As Figure 2 shows, members of the elite were twice as likely to go to university, were over 5 times more likely to have gone to a Russell Group university and 21 times more likely to have gone to Oxbridge than the general population. Notably, members of the elite were less likely to have gone to a non-Russell Group university than the general population.

As with schools, regarding relation to university attendance compared to the general population, there has been some change since 2019. The best available statistics from the ONS show that 40% of the UK working age population had a degree qualification of some kind. However, this figure is not comparable with the numbers used in Elitist Britain 2019 due to the way the data was collected which may include some qualifications not at undergraduate degree level.

That said, an increase in graduate numbers can be expected. On the one hand we have seen higher education participation rates continue to rise.[39] In 2006 the entry rate for 18-year-olds into higher education institutions was 24.7%. This peaked at 38.2% in 2021 and dropped back slightly to 36.4% in 2024,[40] while those leaving the working age population (here taken as over 64) were much less likely to attend university. We estimate about 9% of the general population attended Russell Group universities (including Oxbridge) with less than 1% going to Oxbridge (see Figure 2).[41]

Figure 2: University type attended by the elite compared to the UK's working age population



The Educational Pathways of Britain's Elite

The data also allows us to look at combinations of school and university types, allowing us to see in detail the most common educational pathways to the elite. In this way we can understand how likely it is that the members of a leading group in UK society went from private school to a Russell Group university or from a comprehensive school to Oxbridge.

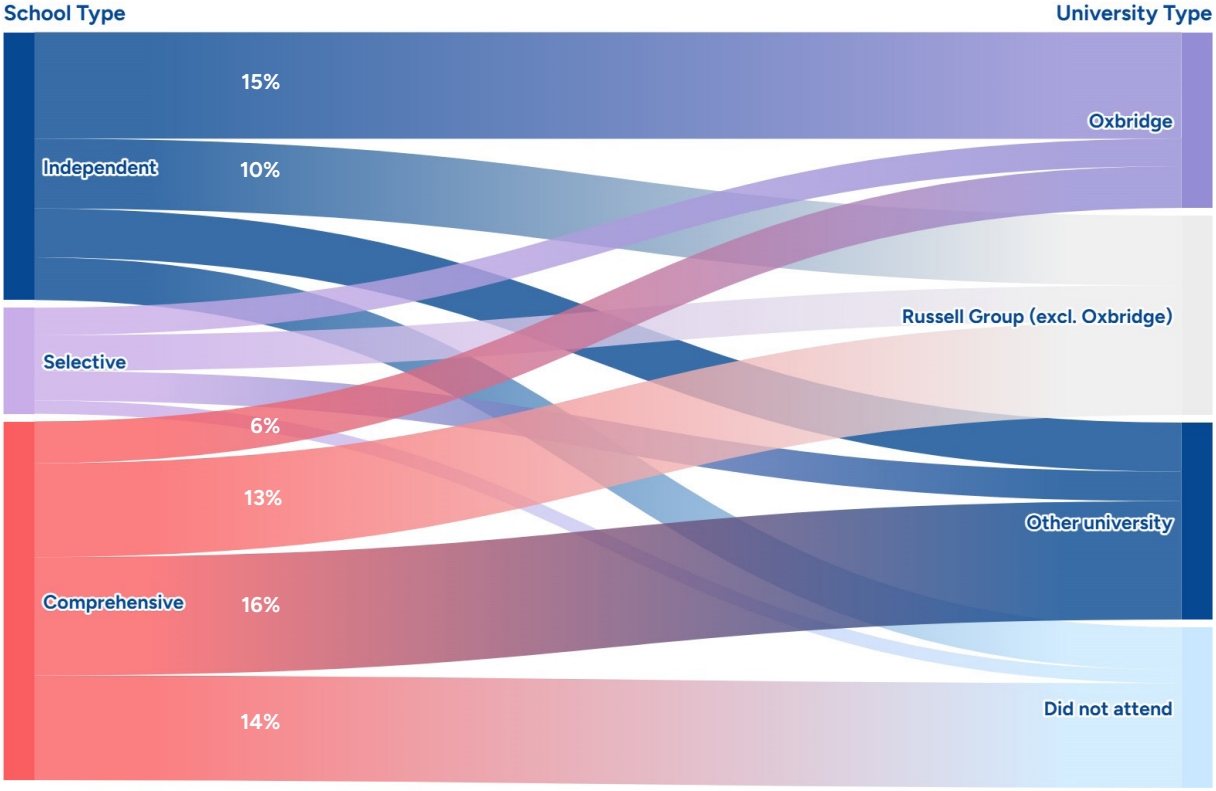
The Sankey diagram below identifies these pathways across all the elite categories discussed in subsequent pages of this report. The length of the coloured blocks on the left represents the proportion of all those who went to different types of schools (see also Figure 1). On the right hand side the coloured blocks represent the subsequent university category for each school type.

We can see that, like 2019, there is a strong pathway from private schools into Oxbridge (15% of all elites). While this is down slightly from 17% six years ago, it means those who went from private school to Oxbridge are still around 38 times more likely to become a member of the elite than average.

Despite recent increases in state school participation at Oxbridge, this is yet to filter through to the elite, with just 6% of all elites having gone from comprehensives to Oxbridge, unchanged since 2019. Elite members at Oxbridge were more than twice as likely to have gone to a private school than a comprehensive school, despite the fact that around 88% of the population went to state comprehensives.

Compared to 2019 we can see an alternative route into the elite emerging from comprehensive school to non-Russell Group university (16%, up 4 percentage points since 2019). Indeed, this is now slightly larger than the traditional private school-Oxbridge pathway, perhaps reflecting higher education expansion from the 90s onward.

Nonetheless, the most common pathway overall is still from private school through a Russell Group university (including Oxbridge). Nearly a quarter of the UK elite (24%) has come through this route.



Politics

Introduction

Politicians, and those that advise them, are arguably the most influential people in the country. What they do and decide affects us all, from the taxes we pay to the public services we receive; from the NHS and education through to welfare benefits or national security. It makes a difference if MPs are former soldiers, landlords, nurses or doctors if they are voting on defence policy, protection for renters, or the health service. Similarly, their experiences in education will often shape their attitudes and approach to education policymaking.

Sutton Trust polling in 2024 found that only 28% of people felt that politicians come from all walks of life reflecting the wider public.[42] It is important therefore to ask who our politicians are and what are their backgrounds. How representative are their educational experiences of the broader population they serve?

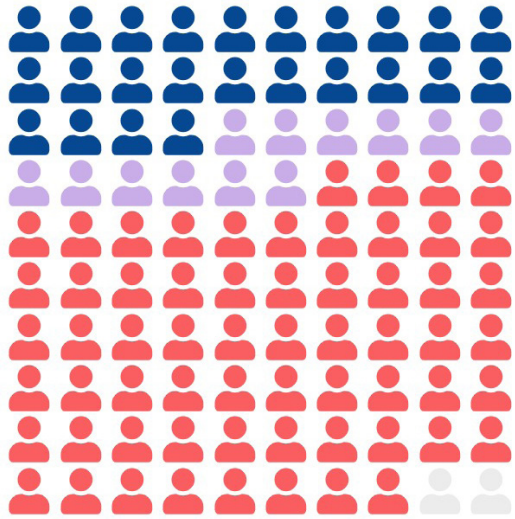
Since the last edition of Elitist Britain in 2019 the country has seen two general elections, four different prime ministers and multiple cabinets. Characterised by some of the most volatile turnover in UK political leadership in recent times, this period in the UK has also been accompanied by a sharp drop in public satisfaction and trust in politicians.[43]

Politicians also shape our education system through their policy decisions, from academisation to VAT on private schools. Education policy and spending directly affects what happens in all schools, the university system and vocational and technical education, including apprenticeships. Consequently, it is valuable that those deciding such policies have rounded experiences of the whole state education system, including the less selective parts, which serve the vast majority of the population.

Sections

Politics | Members of parliament

School attendance



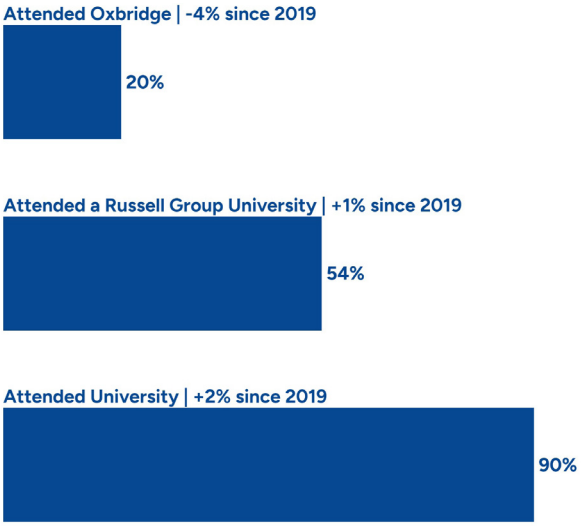
24% attended an **Independent school** **-6%** since 2019

12% attended a **Grammar school** **-5%** since 2019

62% attended a **Comprehensive school** **+10%** since 2019

Attended school outside the UK

University attendance



Who becomes an MP is not only decided by the electorate. Even before parliamentary elections take place, candidates (apart from independents) are selected first by their parties. They must also have the means to fund a campaign and travel to multiple meetings. Many MPs have previously worked in politics or public affairs with politics increasingly becoming a career in itself. Most Conservative and Labour MPs elected in 2019 had previously held other elected offices while less than one percent had manual worker backgrounds.[44] The proportion of privately educated MPs has been dropping in recent years.[45]

School and university background

The educational backgrounds of previous Conservative-led parliaments in 2019 and 2017 were broadly consistent. However, the Labour victory in 2024 brought substantial change.

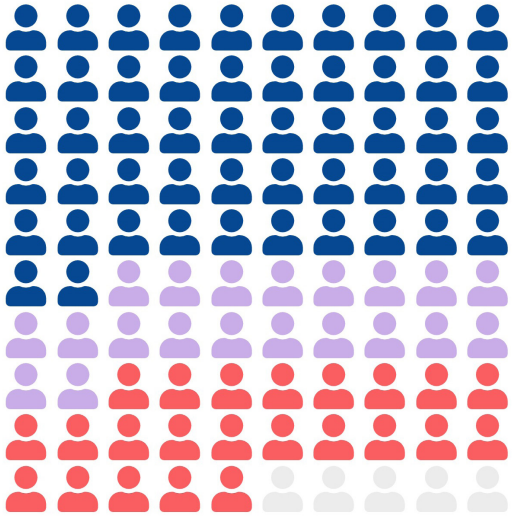
In the current government 24% of MPs were privately educated, a record low, down from 29% in 2019. Meanwhile the proportion of MPs educated in comprehensive schools rose by 9 percentage points to 62%. Only 12% attended grammar schools, with ever fewer MPs educated before the comprehensive system was established in the 1960s.[46]

These changes largely reflect the swing from Conservative to Labour (around 200 MPs) and a greater number of Liberal Democrats. The proportion of MPs in each party who attended private school here is largely unchanged from 2019. However, the size of the swing to Labour amplified the overall changes.

Despite the shift in school backgrounds, there has been very little change in university attendance in recent parliaments. 54% of MPs attended Oxbridge or other Russell Group institutions in 2017,[47] 2019[48] and 2024.[49] Similarly, the proportion of Oxbridge educated MPs is little changed from 2019.

Politics | House of Lords

School attendance



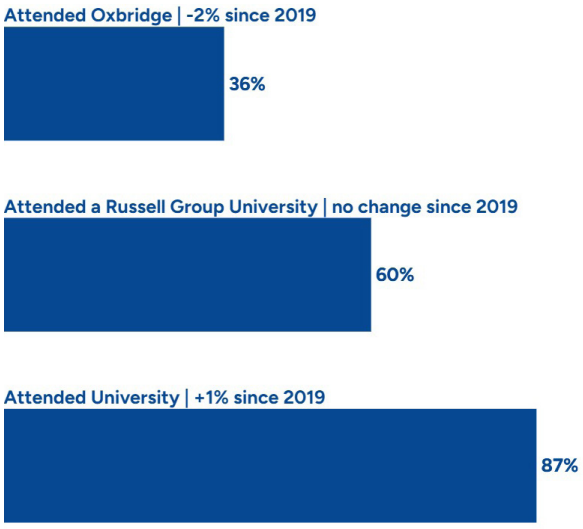
52% attended an **Independent school** **-6%** since 2019

20% attended a **Grammar school** **-2%** since 2019

23% attended a **Comprehensive school** **+6%** since 2019

Attended school outside the UK

University attendance



There are three ways to become a peer: political appointment by the prime minister, inheritance, or by occupying certain roles such as Archbishop of Canterbury. There are currently 718 life peers, 86 hereditary peers and 24 bishops in the 829 member House.

However, historic bills currently going through parliament will soon transform its composition, removing the remaining hereditary peers and increasing the number of female bishops.[50] Most peers are appointed, making the balance of power in the House of Lords susceptible to political manoeuvring. Indeed, prime ministerial appointments often court controversy.[51]

School and university background

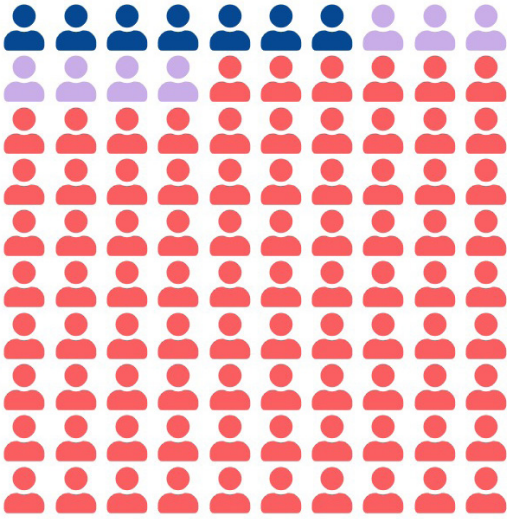
Around half of peers have come from a private school background for many years. In 2014 it was 50%, rising considerably in 2019 to 57% but now dropping back to 52%. In 2005 this was 62%.[52]

Strikingly, 95% of the remaining hereditary peers went to private schools, and over half went to Eton alone. Excluding hereditary peers, the proportion of privately educated peers drops to 47%.

Meanwhile, the university backgrounds of peers have barely changed since 2019. In 2025, 60% went to a Russell Group university (including 36% Oxbridge). In 2019 the figure was 60%, which has only slightly changed from 2014.[53] Excluding hereditary peers makes little difference, with 36% still Oxbridge educated and 61% having attended Russell Group universities (including Oxbridge). However, 12% of non-hereditary peers did not attend university.

Politics | The cabinet

School attendance



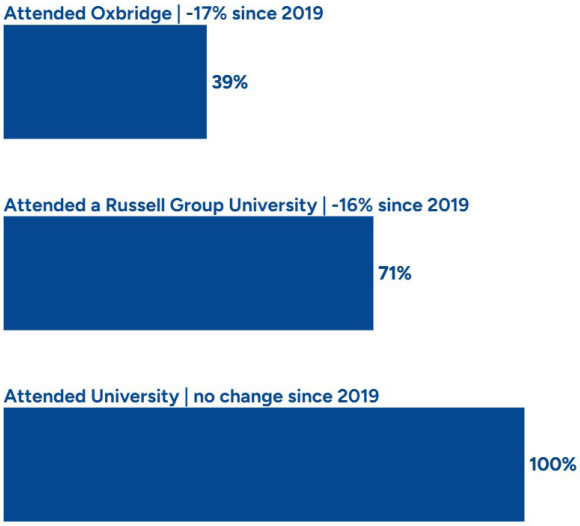
7% attended an **Independent school** **-32%** since 2019

7% attended a **Grammar school** **-10%** since 2019

86% attended a **Comprehensive school** **+43%** since 2019

Attended school outside the UK

University attendance



The cabinet represents the core of government decision making. It comprises the prime minister and the most senior government ministers. Members of the cabinet and shadow cabinet are generally MPs though can be from the House of Lords.

Direct appointment to the House of Lords has therefore sometimes been used to bring formerly non-politicians into government. In 2024 Keir Starmer gave peerages to Sir Patrick Vallance, former MP and minister Baroness Jacqui Smith, Baron James Timpson and Baron Hermer in order to bring them into the cabinet.

School and university background

Keir Starmer's cabinet in 2025 is groundbreaking with just 7% privately educated members (86% comprehensive and 7% grammar) compared with 39% in 2019. His first cabinet in 2024, with one privately educated member, was already by far the least privately educated cabinet in history[54] and the first to be proportionately similar to the general population (7%).

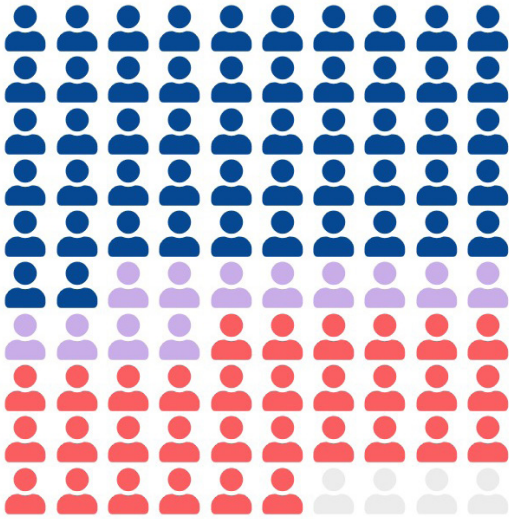
By contrast, all previous cabinets in the preceding parliament under Boris Johnson, Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak were at least 60% privately educated.[55] Theresa May's cabinet in 2016 (30%) was the only Conservative cabinet in the post-war period to be lower than 50% privately educated.[56]

However, in terms of university education, the cabinet is even less representative of the general population than the overall cohort of MPs. 39% of the cabinet in 2025 went to Oxbridge, 32% to other Russell Group institutions and 29% to non-Russell Group universities.

"Keir Starmer's cabinet in 2025 is groundbreaking with just 7% privately educated members (86% comprehensive and 7% grammar) compared with 39% in 2019."

Politics | The shadow cabinet

School attendance



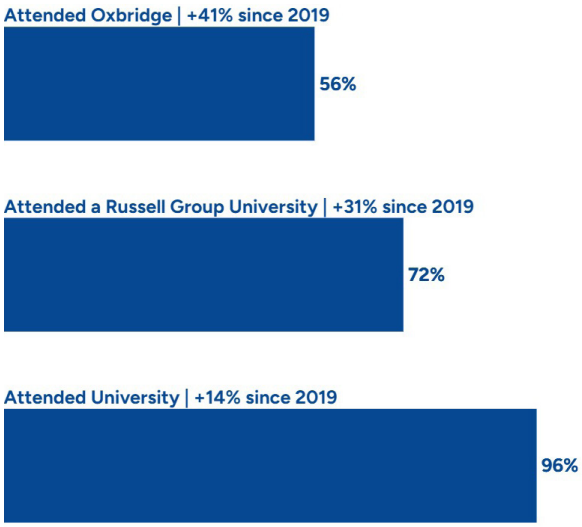
52% attended an **Independent school** **+43%** since 2019

12% attended a **Grammar school** **-3%** since 2019

32% attended a **Comprehensive school** **-44%** since 2019

Attended school outside the UK

University attendance



The shadow cabinet, selected by the leader of the opposition, matches opposition politicians to ministerial roles with the key responsibility of holding government ministers to account. Consequently, the shadow cabinet has a key role to play in the democratic process. The shadow cabinet also plays an important role in formulating opposition policy in response to the government and in preparation for holding office in the future.

School and university background

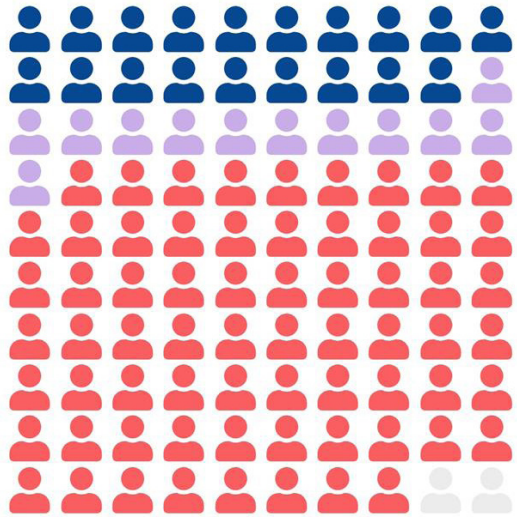
The 2025 shadow cabinet under Conservative leader Kemi Badenoch is more traditional in its constitution with 52% privately educated, 32% comprehensively educated and 12% grammar school educated. However, that does mean that this is the most comprehensively educated Conservative cabinet or shadow cabinet since that of Theresa May in 2018.[57]

In terms of university education, 56% of the shadow cabinet attended Oxbridge, 16% other Russell Group and 24% other universities. Only one person in the shadow cabinet did not attend university.

The 2025 shadow cabinet under Conservative leader Kemi Badenoch is more traditional in its constitution with 52% privately educated, 32% comprehensively educated and 12% grammar school educated.

Politics | Junior ministers

School attendance



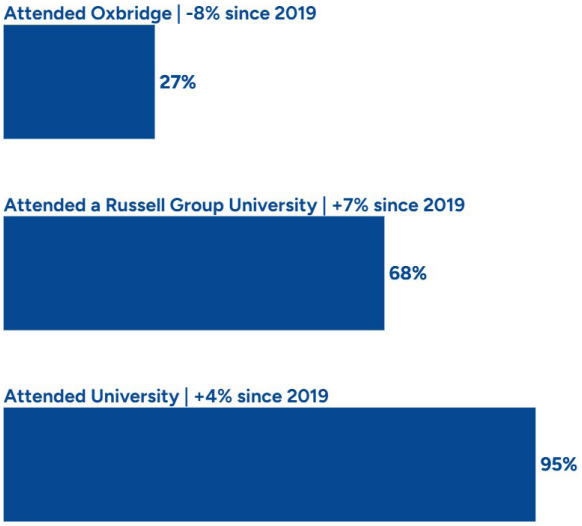
23% attended an **Independent school** **-29%** since 2019

12% attended a **Grammar school** **-6%** since 2019

63% attended a **Comprehensive school** **+35%** since 2019

Attended school outside the UK

University attendance



Junior ministers do not generally attend cabinet, but play important roles in government. There are two kinds of junior ministers, ministers of state and parliamentary secretaries, appointed by the King on the advice of the prime minister. Their responsibilities are delegated by the relevant secretary of state (member of cabinet) and include specific areas within a broader cabinet remit.

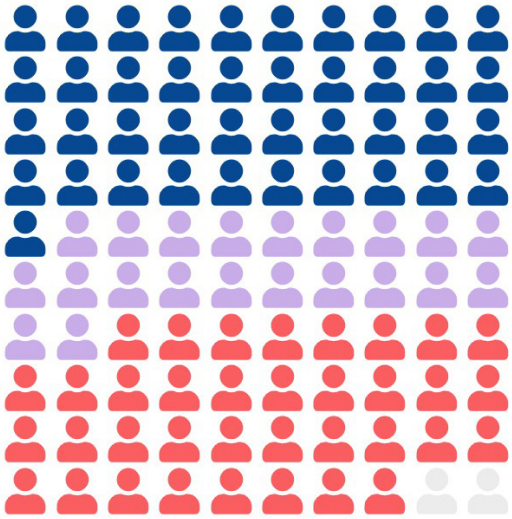
School and university background

Far more junior ministers (23%) than cabinet members were privately educated and considerably fewer (63%) went to state comprehensives. However, this compares starkly to the 52% of junior ministers privately educated in 2019 (under Theresa May).

Although more likely to have attended private school, junior ministers are less likely than their cabinet colleagues to have attended the most selective universities: 27% went to Oxbridge while 41% went to other Russell Group universities. Five junior ministers did not attend university.

Politics | Shadow junior ministers

School attendance



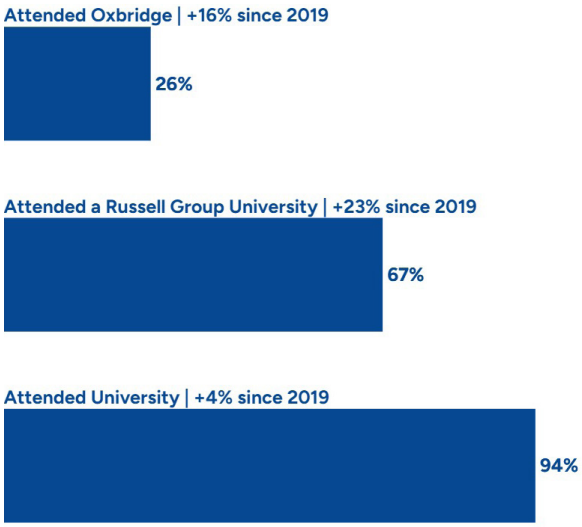
41% attended an **Independent school** **+23%** since 2019

21% attended a **Grammar school** **+6%** since 2019

36% attended a **Comprehensive school** **-30%** since 2019

Attended school outside the UK

University attendance

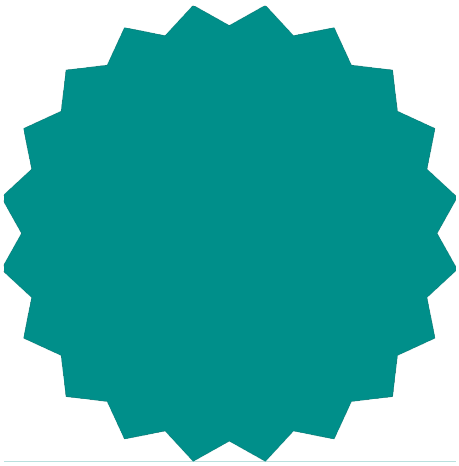


As with the cabinet and shadow cabinet, shadow junior ministers play an important role in the scrutiny of government and holding ministers to account. Like their shadow cabinet colleagues they also play important roles in the formulation of opposition policy.

School and university background

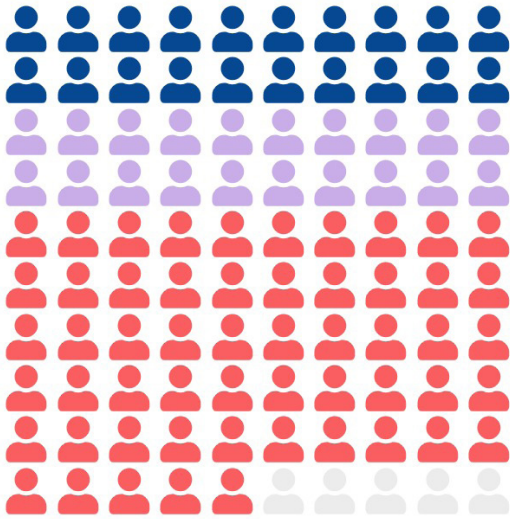
Shadow junior ministers in 2025 are 41% privately educated, up from 18% in 2019 and while only 36% attended a comprehensive school, this is far less than the 66% seen in 2019.

Shadow junior ministers are slightly less likely to be Oxbridge educated (26% - the same as for non-Russell Group universities) than their government opponents and less than half as likely as their shadow cabinet colleagues (56%). 41% of shadow junior ministers went to other Russell Group universities. Four shadow junior ministers did not attend university.



Politics | Special political advisers (Spads)

School attendance



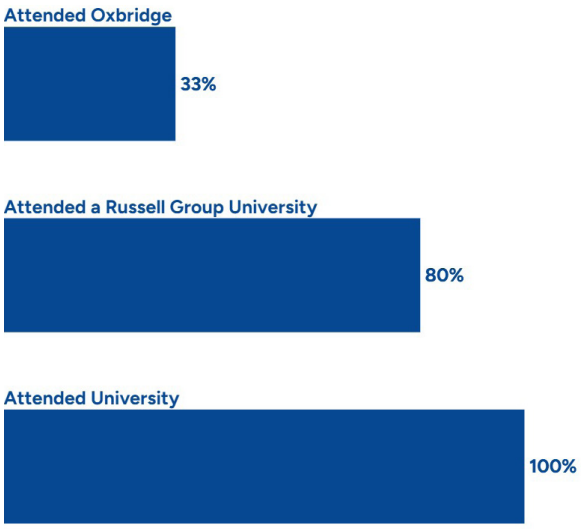
20% attended an **Independent school**

20% attended a Grammar school

55% attended a Comprehensive school

Attended school outside the UK

University attendance



Special political advisers (Spads) are a new category in Elitist Britain 2025. They are appointed by ministers, with prime ministerial approval, to give advice on party-political issues, communications or their particular areas of expertise.[58] This category includes the prime minister's speech writer and political appointees in No 10 Downing Street. Spads are often seen as wielding significant influence on senior ministers and government policy. Given their unelected status, with roles often advertised and shared within existing networks, this can be a controversial issue.[59]

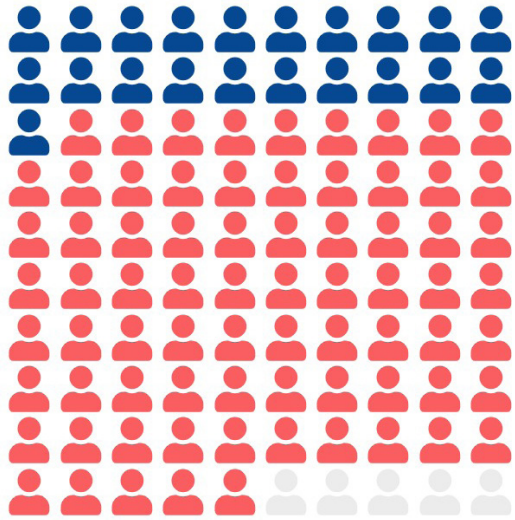
School and university background

As we have seen, the school backgrounds of MPs, cabinet and shadow cabinet members, junior and shadow junior ministers vary considerably. However, there is far more consistency across all of these categories in terms of university education.

Spads have similar higher education backgrounds to all of these groups with 80% attending Russell group universities, including 33% who went to Oxbridge. This is particularly similar to the university background of the cabinet (71% and 39% respectively). In terms of schooling, Spads are more like MPs in general with 20% attending private schools and 75% attending state schools. One difference, however, is the higher proportion having attended grammar schools as opposed to comprehensives (20% of Spads and 12% of MPs). A higher proportion of Spads than MPs were also internationally educated (6% compared to 2%).

Politics | Scottish Parliament

School attendance



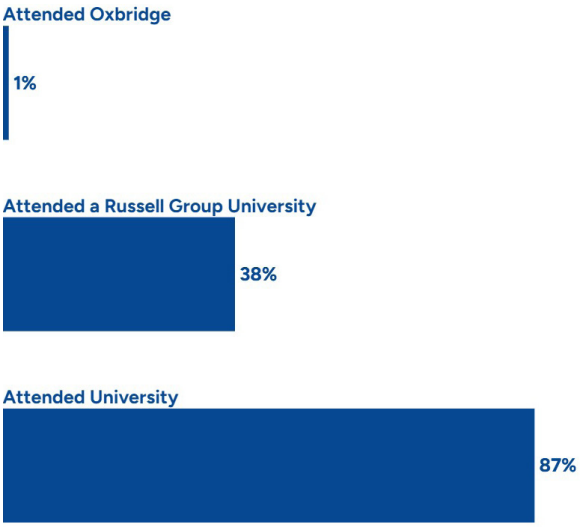
21% attended an **Independent school**

0% attended a Grammar school

74% attended a Comprehensive school

Attended school outside the UK

University attendance



Devolved parliaments in the UK play an important part in its democratic procedures and have considerable influence over the lives of the people in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Elitist Britain 2025 is the first edition to look at the backgrounds of such parliaments.

The Scottish public voted for devolution in 1997 and has seen increasingly devolved powers since, particularly in 2014 and 2016 following the narrowly failed referendum on Scottish independence. There are 129 elected Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) which sits in Holyrood, Edinburgh.

The Scottish Parliament has responsibility for a wide range of policies and government including education, housing, healthcare, agriculture, forestry and fishing, the justice system, the environment, local government and collecting taxes (including income tax). It has partial responsibility also for transport and the welfare system.[60] The Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP) has held power in the Scottish Parliament since 2007.

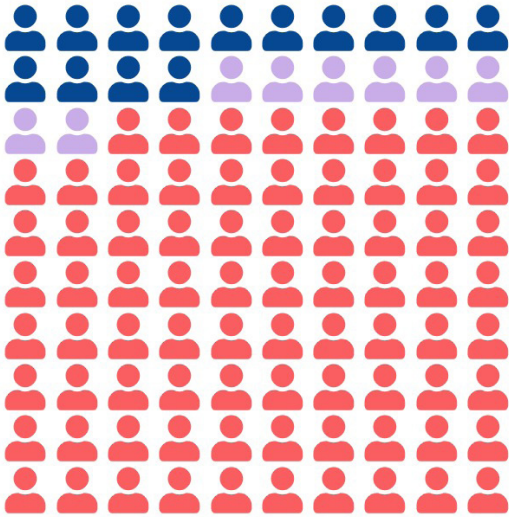
School and university background

In terms of school backgrounds, the Scottish Parliament is similar to that in Westminster with 74% having attended comprehensive schools and 21% independent schools. However, it is worth noting that a smaller proportion of the Scottish population attend private schools than in the UK as a whole. The annual census of private school attendance in 2023 showed that 4.1% of pupils in Scotland went to independent schools.[61] As highlighted in the report's introduction, attendance is higher in England.[62]

However, when it comes to university attendance, there is a far lower proportion of Oxbridge educated MSPs, just 1%, than the 20% of MPs in Westminster. 37% of MSPs went to other Russell Group institutions and only 13% did not go to university. A considerably greater proportion of MSPs went to other non-Russell Group universities (47%) compared to Westminster MPs (34%).

Politics | Senedd Cymru

School attendance



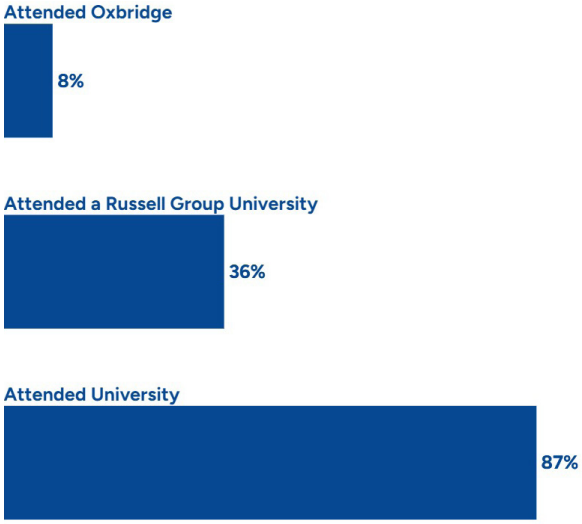
14% attended an **Independent school**

8% attended a Grammar school

78% attended a Comprehensive school

Attended school outside the UK

University attendance



Like Scotland, Wales voted for a devolved parliament in 1997 leading to the establishment of the National Assembly of Wales which was renamed the Senedd Cymru (Welsh Parliament) in 2020. There are 60 elected members of the Senedd (MS's). The Labour Party has formed the largest part of all governments, whether as a majority, minority or coalition, in Wales since the Senedd held its first election in 1999.

As with the other devolved parliaments, the Westminster parliament retains control of defence and national security, foreign policy, immigration, citizenship and tax. However, like the Scottish Parliament the Senedd has a range of responsibilities including education, healthcare, housing, local government, agriculture, forestry and fishing, the environment, transport and some taxes. It is also responsible for the promotion, protection and use of the Welsh language.

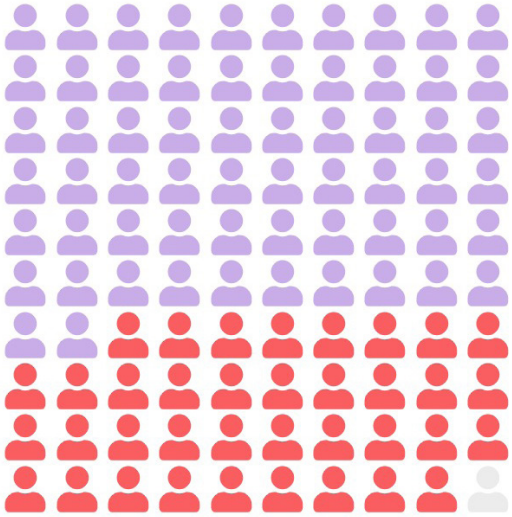
School and university background

A much smaller proportion of MSs, just 14%, went to private schools than in either the Westminster or Holyrood parliaments.

The vast majority, 78%, went to comprehensives and 8% went to selective state schools. This is related to the higher proportion of Labour MSs in the parliament, more of whom went to comprehensive schools. In terms of university attendance, the Senedd has a very similar constitution to the Scottish Parliament only with a slightly higher proportion of Oxbridge-educated MSs than in Scotland. As in Scotland 13% of MSs did not attend university and 47% went to non-Russell Group institutions. 36% went to Russell Group universities – 38% in Scotland – but in the Welsh case this included 8% who went to Oxbridge.

Politics | Northern Ireland Assembly

School attendance



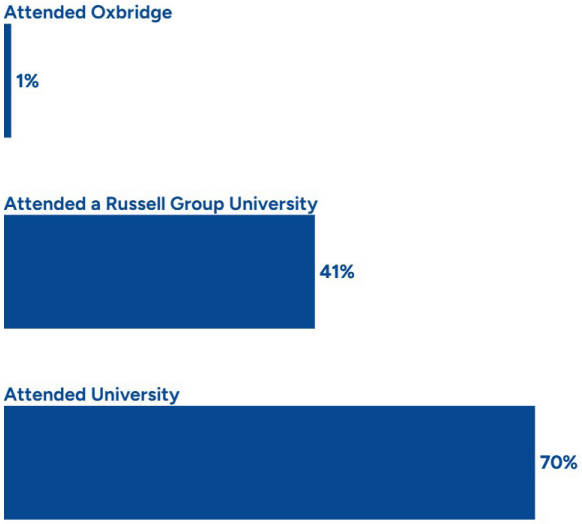
0% attended an **Independent school**

62% attended a Grammar school

37% attended a Comprehensive school

Attended school outside the UK

University attendance



The Northern Ireland Assembly at Stormont in Belfast is different from the other devolved parliaments. It was established following a referendum in 1998 as part of the Good Friday Agreement. The Assembly's responsibilities include education, health and culture. The Westminster parliament retains responsibility for other key areas including defence and elections.

Uniquely, Northern Ireland has a power-sharing arrangement with the leadership of the government held jointly and equally by the two largest parties in the Assembly. In recent years governance in Northern Ireland has been interrupted due to disagreements between the two main parties, leading to the intermittent dissolution of the Assembly.

School and university background

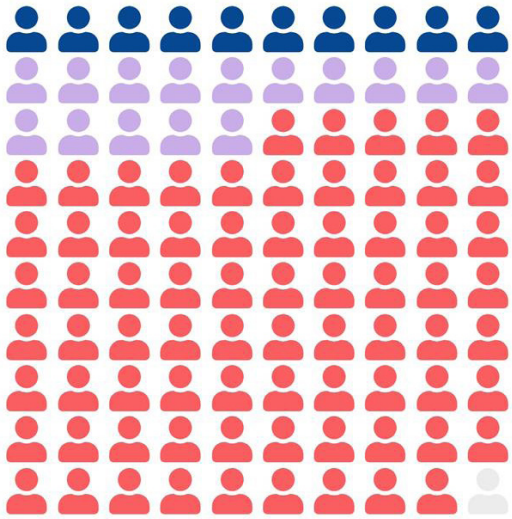
The educational backgrounds of the 90 elected Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) is quite different from the other UK parliaments. This is partly a reflection of the different education system in Northern Ireland[63] where very few pupils go to private schools (just 0.2% in 2024-25)[64] and a large proportion of secondary schools operate academically selective admissions. In 2024-25, 42% of secondary pupils went to grammar schools.[65]

Among MLAs, the grammar/non-grammar proportions are reversed with 62% having attended grammar schools and 37% non-grammar schools. There is little difference in the school backgrounds of MLAs for the two main parties.

MLAs' university backgrounds also contrast with those of other UK parliaments. Most notably, 30% of MLAs did not attend university. Many MLAs went to university locally in Northern Ireland. For instance, 41% went to Russell Group institutions, but more than 80% of that proportion went to Queen's University Belfast and of the 30% who went to non-Russell Group universities, 75% went to Ulster University. DUP MLAs were more likely to have not attended university (45%) than Sinn Féin MLAs (29%).

Politics | Local government

School attendance



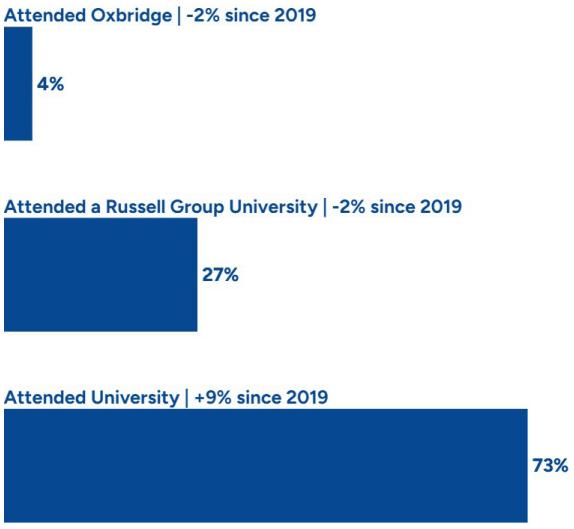
10% attended an **Independent school** **-10%** since 2019

16% attended a Grammar school **-12%** since 2019

74% attended a Comprehensive school **+24%** since 2019

Attended school outside the UK

University attendance



Local government plays a vital part in public service delivery with responsibilities for schools, housing, planning, social care, rubbish collection, and much more. Local councils are run by publicly elected councillors who oversee the operation of council business and services. The sector also employs more than a million people.[66] In this section we include the elected heads of local authorities and directly elected local authority and combined authority mayors ('metro mayors') but not council employees. Mayors are only elected in some regions of England and Wales.[67]

School and university background

Local government leaders are on average more representative of the general population in terms of schooling than MPs or other parliamentarians. Only 10% of local government leaders went to private school which, although slightly more than the national average, is still less than half of the rate in Westminster.

This also means the proportion of privately educated council leaders has halved since 2019 (20%). This is also true of grammar school educated council leaders: 16% in 2025 compared to 28% in 2019. 74% went to comprehensives up from 50% in 2019.

Local government leaders are also much less likely to have attended the most selective universities or to have gone to university at all, with 27% not having attended, though this is fewer than in 2019 (36%). Conservative local leaders, at 39%, were the least likely to have gone to university. Overall, 27% of all council leaders had attended Russell Group institutions.

"Local government leaders are on average more representative of the general population in terms of schooling than MPs or other parliamentarians."

Politics | Discussion

The political landscape in the UK has changed considerably over the last few years. The 2024 general election and 2025 local elections have revealed significantly changing voter attitudes in what seems to be an increasingly volatile environment. In particular, Reform UK saw a 12.3 percentage point gain in vote share (2% to 14.3%), even if it only produced a handful of seats.[68] There was also a notable increase in the proportion of votes for the Green Party (2.7% to 6.8%) and independents (3.6% to 6.1%). This was followed by the local elections in 2025 which returned 677 Reform UK councillors, giving the party overall control of 10 councils where previously they had none.

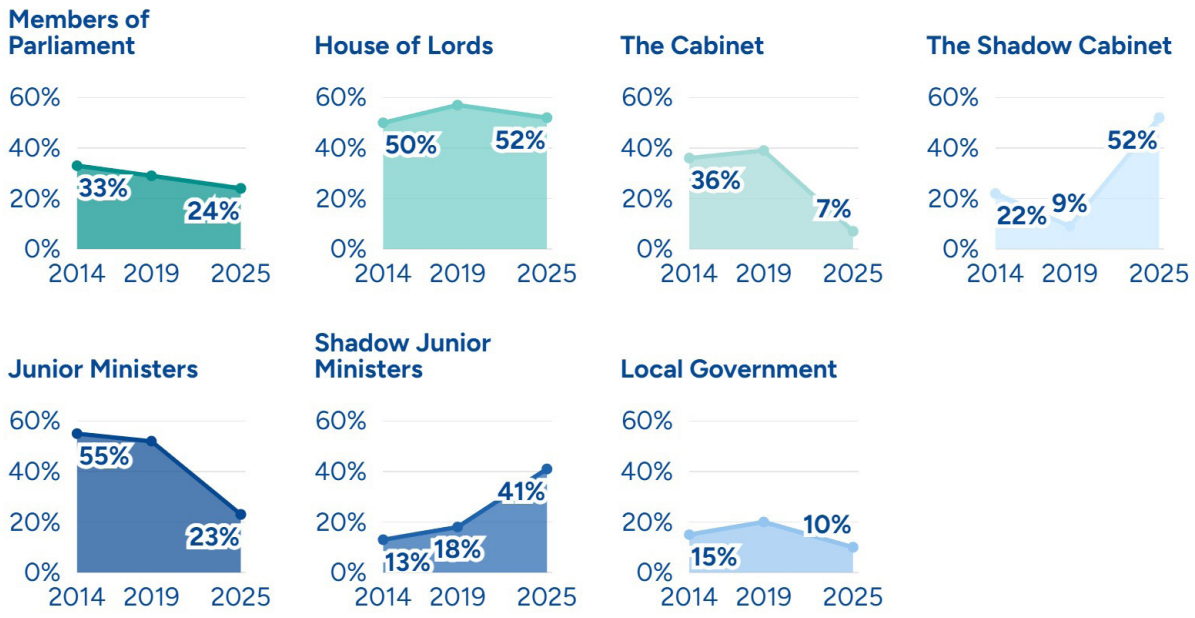
These election results have seen a large shift in the school backgrounds of MPs, with the proportion privately educated at a record low of 24% (even if that is still just over 3 times the proportion in the general population). This was accompanied by an increase in the proportion of comprehensive-educated MPs and a comprehensive-educated cabinet. In this context of sweeping political change, it is also striking what has remained constant. Despite a shift in school backgrounds, there is far less change in university backgrounds of MPs.

And despite the growing popularity of Reform UK, even if 3 of the party's 5 MPs were privately educated, the small numbers make little impact on the parliament as a whole.

> *"These election results have seen a large shift in the school backgrounds of MPs, with the proportion privately educated at a record low of 24% (even if that is still just over 3 times the proportion in the general population)."*

At the same time the educational backgrounds of members of the House of Lords is barely changed since 2019 and remains even more unrepresentative of the general population. However, this research has shown that measures currently going through parliament to remove the remaining hereditary peers would make a significant difference. There is still a long way to go before the House of Lords is representative of the general population, but this does suggest the move to exclude hereditary peers is a step in the right direction.

Proportion privately educated over time



In this edition of Elitist Britain, we have included new political categories for the first time, which also bring insights into the broader political landscape. For instance, there is a striking similarity between the educational background of SPADs and Westminster MPs in terms of schooling and even closer between SPADs and the cabinet in terms of elite university backgrounds. This aligns with the trend towards more career politicians. Most MPs now go to university with most in the two largest parties coming from backgrounds as local councillors. MPs are increasingly university educated with more than half attending Russell Group institutions. We appear to be witnessing the emergence of a different kind of political elite – slightly less privately but nonetheless elite educated.

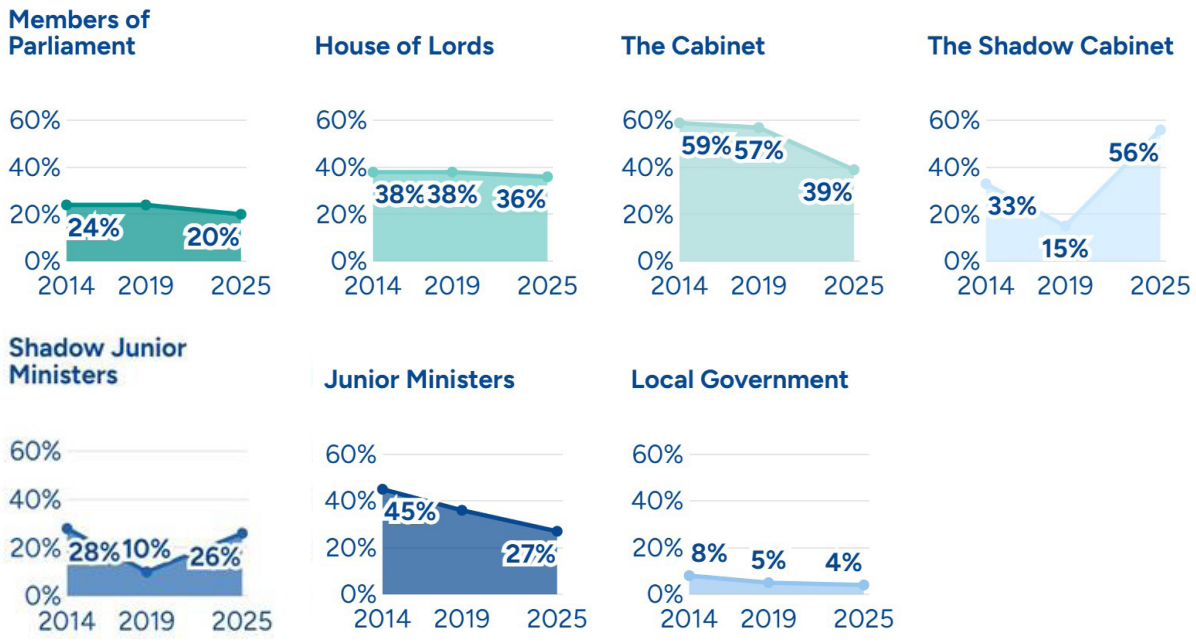
Another striking feature is the contrast between the educational backgrounds of Westminster MPs compared to members of the devolved parliaments. In general, smaller proportions have attended elite and selective institutions and larger proportions did not attend university at all.

These differences partly reflect local differences in education systems – particularly in Northern Ireland – but also suggest that devolved parliaments overall are more representative of the educational backgrounds of the populations they represent than the Westminster parliament.

Generally, local government has become more representative of the general population than in 2019 with the proportion of privately educated council leaders halving from 20% to 10%. Local government leaders also more closely represent the backgrounds of the general population than Westminster MPs.

Generally, local government has become more representative of the general population than in 2019 with the proportion of privately educated council leaders halving from 20% to 10%

Proportion Oxbridge educated over time



Case study

Laura Trott
Conservative Party MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Education

The importance of a good education was drilled into me as a young child by my family, who while not working in politics, did strongly believe in public service.

As a child I attended my local Church of England primary school, before then progressing to the local comprehensive, and whilst my secondary school did not have the best reputation, I was exceptionally lucky to be taught by many excellent teachers.

It was during my time at secondary school that I attended a Sutton Trust Summer School, and it is no exaggeration to say this experience changed my life. It opened my eyes to the possibility of university – and with the support of the Sutton Trust and my teachers, I was thrilled to be accepted to study History and Economics at Oxford.

As the first in my family to go to university, it was hard to know what to expect, but my years at Oxford are filled with happy memories, and much hard work. **As one of only a handful of state school-educated students in my intake, I certainly noticed the difference in our education. The quality and depth of my peers was on a different level.** I had never been taught critical thinking, debating, or really structure writing – but they were skills I caught up with alongside my studies.

From a young age, I wanted to be a politician and seeing John Major as Prime Minister, who was also state educated, cemented in my mind that this was a path I wanted to explore. I joined the Conservative Party in my teens, and while attending a Conservative Women's event I asked Jeremy Hunt if I could do some work experience in his office, which was an invaluable experience.

I went on to hold a range of roles in the Party, including political advisor and Director of Strategic Communications in Number 10. However, being an MP was always my dream, and it was the privilege of my life to be elected as the MP for Sevenoaks, Swanley and the Dartford Villages in 2019.

Politics is often criticised for being inaccessible, but anyone can join their local party, and all jobs are usually posted centrally so everyone can see the opportunities available.

I certainly recognise that there are some barriers to accessing the sector, particularly when it comes to being an MP. These are partly about confidence and networks, but most importantly, it is about the quality of education – and what that education enables you to go on and do.

I feel hopeful about the future. There have been significant improvements in the quality of state education in this country, and that is what will make a difference to people being able to get into all professions, including politics. Social mobility is about creating a fair society. Individual effort and application are essential, but everybody should have the opportunity to make something of their life and do well.

The confidence the Sutton Trust Summer School gave me, set me on a path I could only have dreamed about, and I will always be incredibly grateful.

Business and wealth

Introduction

In this section we look at business and wealth, with a focus on the people who lead the most successful companies, and those who have the largest amount of private wealth.

Socio-economic background can have an impact on someone's chances to succeed in business in a wide variety of ways, from the role of inherited wealth, the importance of networks, the ability to take risks with a financial safety net, and because personal attributes such as accents influence the way people are perceived.[69]

While the share of wealth held by the richest families has been fairly stable over the past 30 years, there has been a dramatic increase in the absolute difference in wealth between the richest and the poorest households in the UK.[70] As a result, wealth, or the absence of wealth, is having a bigger impact on people's lives more than ever before.[71] During the cost-of-living crisis those with private wealth have been protected from the adverse effects of rising inflation and falling real incomes.[72]

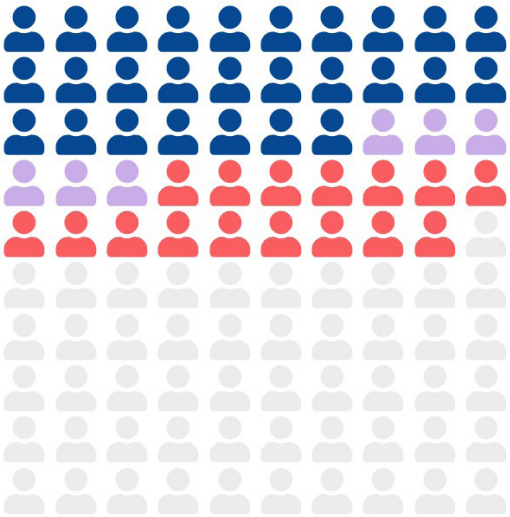
Whilst there have been efforts to make business more inclusive, work on social mobility is patchy.[73] There is no regular reporting, for example, on the class pay gap[74] and just one in ten companies have specific schemes to support employees in terms of social mobility.[75]

In this section, we look at individuals from across the business sector - including FTSE 100 companies, tech firms and PR firms - who lead some of the country's largest companies and influence how society views business. For the first time, we are focusing on the next generation of leading figures in this sector, by including the Sunday Times Young Power List. We also look at individuals with the largest amount of private wealth. As property and housing play a significant role in the economy, as both a store of wealth and a source of income, we have also included top property and landowners for the first time.

Sections

Business and wealth | Sunday Times Rich List

School attendance



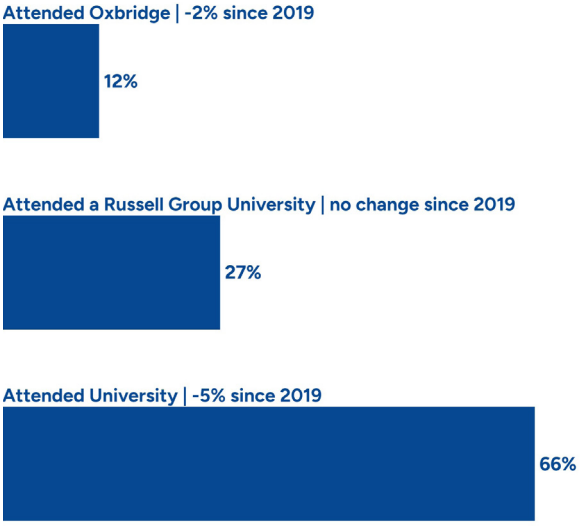
27% attended an **Independent school** **no change** since 2019

6% attended a Grammar school **-4%** since 2019

16% attended a Comprehensive school **+4%** since 2019

Attended school outside the UK

University attendance



The Sunday Times Rich List is a list of the wealthiest people or families in the country, by net worth. Non-British citizens are included on this list, but all individuals work or live predominantly in the UK, or have strong links to the country, such as those who have donated to British political parties or charities. The list is updated annually; findings here apply to 2025's top 100 entries.

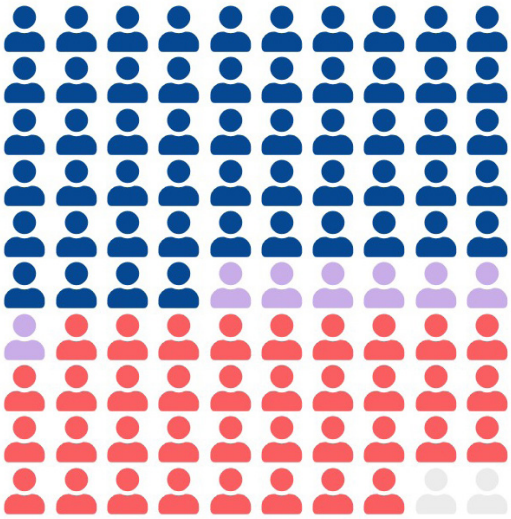
School and university background

Attendance of independent schools for people on the Rich List is high and has remained stable over the past five years. 27% attended an independent school in the UK, which is similar to 2019. As previously, a substantial number of people on the Rich List were educated abroad (51%). When looking at those educated in the UK only, the proportion of privately educated individuals is much higher, with 56% attending an independent school. This is one of the highest proportions of privately educated individuals in this report, and significantly above the 7% in the UK population. The figure is similar to 2019 (57%). The main changes for school attendance are seen in the proportions attending grammar versus comprehensive schools.

The proportion of the Rich List who attended Oxbridge has been stable over the past decade (12% in 2025, versus 14% in 2019 and 12% in 2014). This is relatively low amongst Britain's Elites, although the proportion is higher (18%) when looking only at those who attended university in the UK. Just over a quarter of all the Rich List attended a Russell Group university and 8% attended a non-Russell Group university, both figures which have been stable over the past ten years. Changes are mostly seen in those not attending university at all. A third of people on the 2025 Rich List (34%) did not attend university, which is higher than in previous years (28% in 2019 and 29% in 2014).

Business and wealth | Sunday Times Young Power List

School attendance



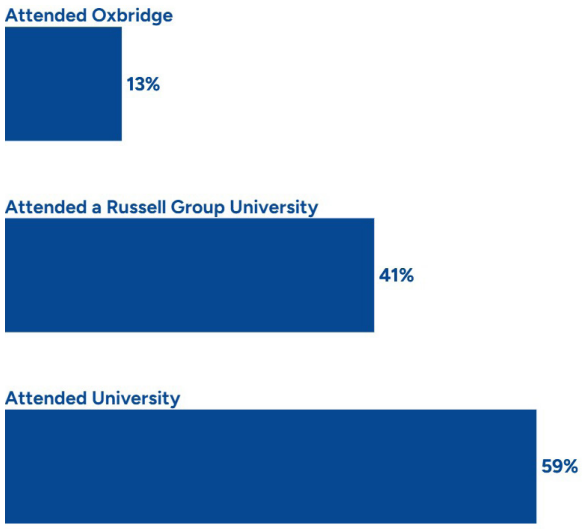
54% attended an **Independent school**

7% attended a Grammar school

37% attended a Comprehensive school

Attended school outside the UK

University attendance



The Sunday Times began publishing their Young Power List in 2024. Designed to 'celebrate talent, tenacity and hard work',[76] the list is selected by the organisation's editors, who chose inspiring individuals under the age of 30 from industries including sport, music and influencing. Individuals from both the 2024 and 2025 lists are included in the following section.

School and university background

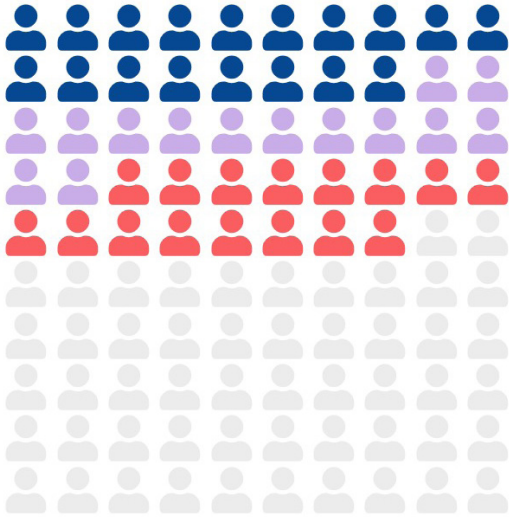
Over half of individuals from the Young Power List were privately educated (54%). That is almost eight times greater than the general population, making it one of the lists in this report with the highest proportion of privately educated individuals. It is also higher than the figure for the Sunday Times Rich List 2025. On the other hand, just over a third of individuals attended comprehensive school (37%).

As for university attendance, around two fifths of the list did not have a university degree. This is partly due to the nature of the list, with some too young to have attended university, and with many entering their fields before the age of 18. The same proportion attended a Russell Group university (41%), with 13% having attended Oxford or Cambridge.

"Over half of individuals from the Young Power List were privately educated (54%). That is almost eight times greater than the general population, making it one of the lists in this report with the highest proportion of privately educated individuals."

Business and wealth | FTSE100 CEOs

School attendance



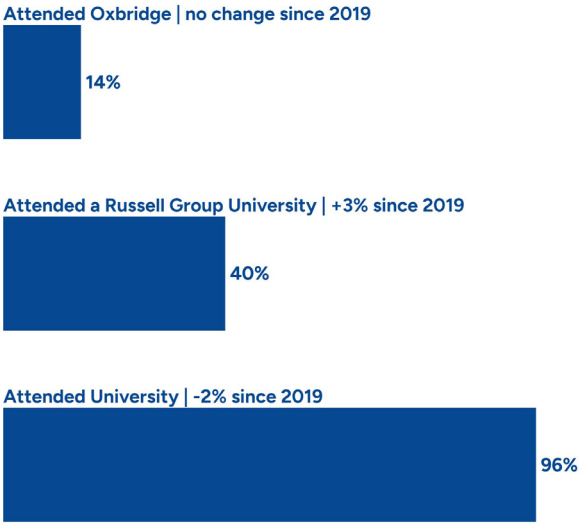
18% attended an **Independent school** **-5%** since 2019

14% attended a Grammar school **+3%** since 2019

16% attended a Comprehensive school **-1%** since 2019

Attended school outside the UK

University attendance



The Financial Times Stock Exchange has a weighted stock market index of 100 organisations, which includes the 100 highest value companies listed on the London Stock Exchange. The index is one of the most widely used UK stock market indicators, with businesses from the worlds of banking, energy, food, insurance and more. Here, we consider the chief executives (CEOs) of the firms listed. They are individuals with notable wealth and influence over their large organisations' daily activities.

School and university background

Over half of FTSE100 CEOs attended schools outside of the UK (53%) which is roughly similar to the proportion of internationally schooled CEOs in 2019 (49%). When looking at CEOs who were schooled in the UK only, almost two fifths of CEOs attended private school (37%), down 7 percentage points since 2019. However this difference was mostly caused by an increase in individuals educated at grammar schools, which went from 22% in 2019 up to 29% in 2025.

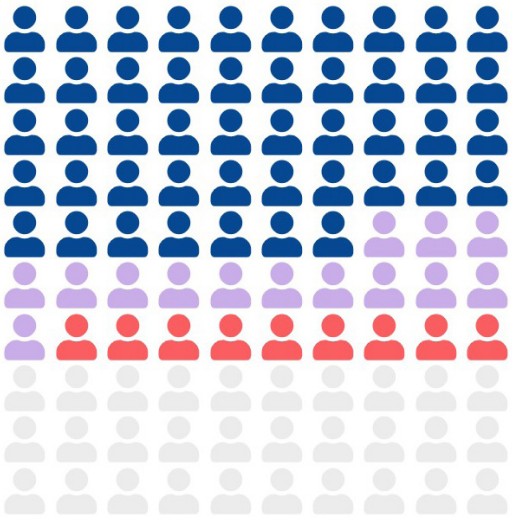
The proportion of comprehensively educated CEOs remained stable at around a third (34%).

Almost all FTSE100 CEOs attended university (96%), which has not changed significantly since 2019. Almost half got their degree outside of the UK (47%). While around 14% received their first degree from Oxbridge, this increases to 25% when only looking at those educated in the UK, which has also not changed since 2019. Two fifths of CEOs attended a Russell Group university in 2025 (40%), which increases to almost three quarters when only considering those educated in the UK (74%). This proportion has decreased since 2019 when 91% of those educated in the UK attended a Russell Group university.

Our 2019 report looked at FTSE350 companies. As this year, we narrowed the category down to FTSE100 companies, comparisons are based on a re-analysis of 2019 data, only including the FTSE100 companies to ensure comparability.

Business and wealth | FTSE100 Chairs

School attendance



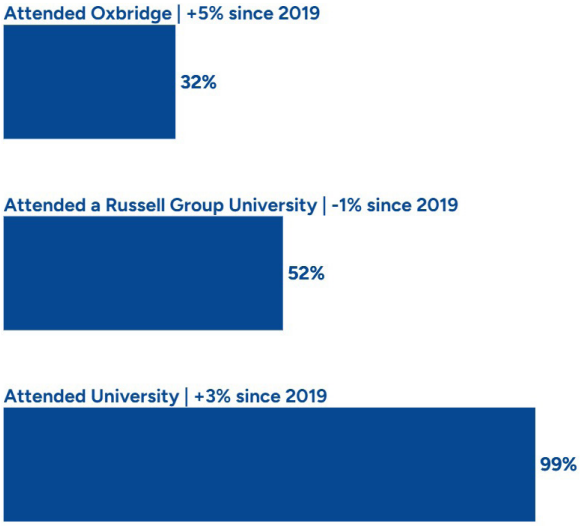
47% attended an **Independent school** **+15%** since 2019

14% attended a **Grammar school** **-4%** since 2019

9% attended a **Comprehensive school** **-1%** since 2019

Attended school outside the UK

University attendance



Whilst chairs have less oversight over the daily running of a business compared to a CEO, they have significant influence on overall strategy and governance. Additionally, chairs have usually previously been a CEO themselves, sometimes of the same company, then staying on to offer support and advice to their successor.

School and university background

Almost half of FTSE100 chairs were privately educated (47%), which has notably increased by 15 percentage points since 2019. Almost a third of chairs were educated internationally, and when only considering those educated in the UK, over two thirds were educated privately (68%), making it the most privately educated profession in this report, and has increased significantly since 2019 (53%). Additionally when only looking at those educated in the UK, roughly 1 in 10 attended a comprehensive school (13%) and one fifth attended grammar school (20%) compared to 30% and 17% in 2019 respectively.

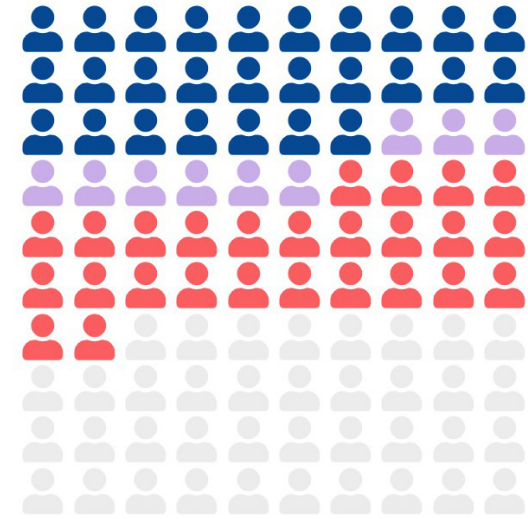
"Overall, FTSE100 chairs were more likely to be privately educated, and more likely to be Oxbridge educated, than their CEO counterparts."

Virtually all FTSE100 chairs attended university, with just under a third attending either Oxford or Cambridge (32%). This proportion has increased by 5 percentage points since 2019 (27%). Just over half of all chairs attended a Russell Group (52%), which has not changed since 2019. Oxbridge attendance increases to 45% when only looking at those educated in the UK, which would make it one of the professions with the highest Oxbridge attendance in this report.

Overall, FTSE100 chairs were over twice as likely to be privately educated and Oxbridge educated than their CEO counterparts.

Business and wealth | Entrepreneurs/ start-ups

School attendance



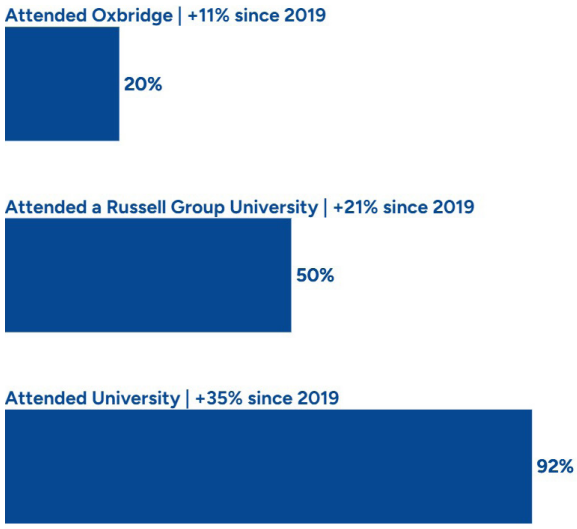
27% attended an **Independent school** **-7%** since 2019

9% attended a **Grammar school** **-6%** since 2019

26% attended a **Comprehensive school** **-13%** since 2019

Attended school outside the UK

University attendance



Entrepreneurs take a large risk when setting up a company, often using a significant sum of their own money. While not all start-ups are successful, and some run successfully with modest earnings (compared to larger companies discussed in this report), some become extremely successful and their founders gain significant wealth and influence. The next section considers a particularly elite group of such companies, founders of 'unicorn' companies, which are privately owned start-ups worth $1 billion or more.

School and university background

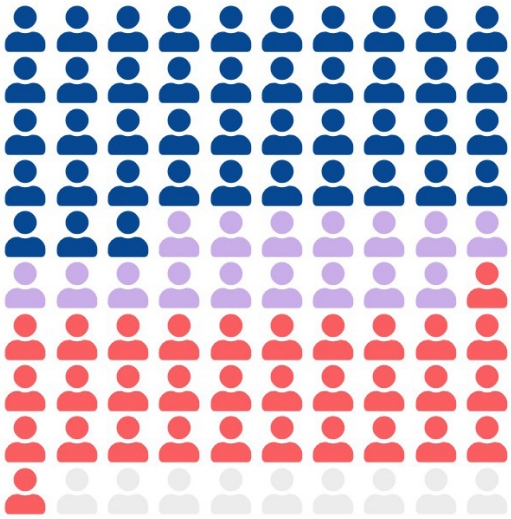
Just over a quarter of entrepreneurs attended private school, marking a decline since 2019. A similar figure (26%) attended a comprehensive school, whilst 38% were internationally educated.

One fifth of entrepreneurs in this section attended Oxbridge. Half attended a Russell Group while the vast majority have a university degree (92%). Just over a quarter (26%) of entrepreneurs in this list have a university degree from outside of the UK. When only considering those educated in the UK, 27% of entrepreneurs were educated in Oxbridge, which is roughly similar to the proportion of UK-educated FTSE100 CEOs. These proportions are much higher than the entrepreneurs included in our 2019 report, although these differences may come down to changes in the methodology.

One fifth of entrepreneurs in this section attended Oxbridge. Half attended a Russell Group while the vast majority have a university degree (92%).

Business and wealth | PR consultancy CEOs

School attendance



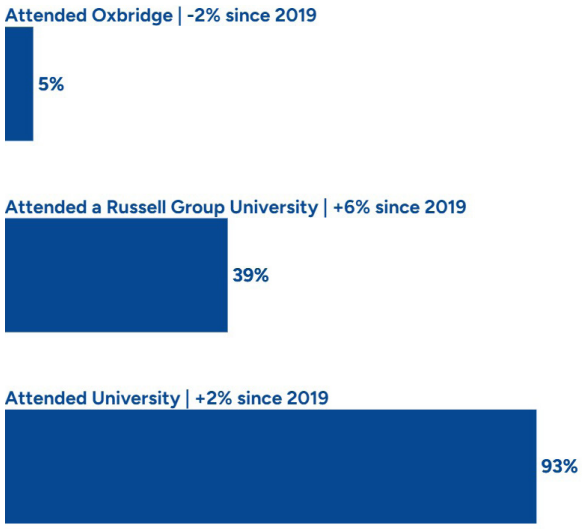
43% attended an **Independent school** **+9%** since 2019

16% attended a **Grammar school** **+3%** since 2019

32% attended a **Comprehensive school** **+2%** since 2019

Attended school outside the UK

University attendance



PR consultancies work with a range of organisations (from political parties to global businesses) as well as individuals to manage their image and perception amongst a range of audiences in order to gain a positive reputation. They may also manage brand awareness for some clients. Additionally, they have influence over key media outputs from their clients, including on screen, online and in print. The list here also includes Public Affairs (PA) agencies; these firms focus on government relations and public policy.

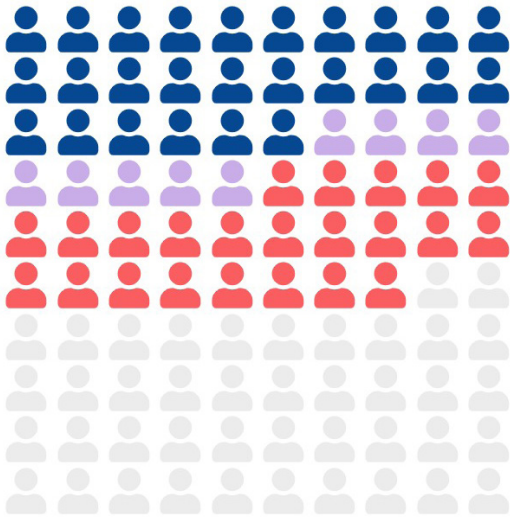
School and university background

43% of PR consultancy CEOs attended private school, which is over double the proportion of FTSE100 CEOs. This proportion has also increased 9 percentage points since 2019 (34%). 32% were educated at comprehensive schools, which has not changed significantly since 2019 (30%). Most of the increase in the proportion of private schooled individuals was due to a decrease in internationally schooled individuals, which dropped from 24% in 2019 to just 9% in 2025.

An overwhelming majority of PR consultancy CEOs have a university degree (93%), up slightly from 91% in 2019. However, only 5% attended Oxbridge, making it one of the professions with the lowest Oxbridge attendance in this section. Around 43% of PR CEOs attended universities other than the Russell Group. This proportion is higher than other categories in this section, and has increased since 2019, however this mostly reflected a lower proportion of people being educated internationally. These proportions are also roughly similar to FTSE 100 CEOs aside from Oxbridge attendance, which is less common for PR CEOs.

Business and wealth | Tech firm CEOs

School attendance



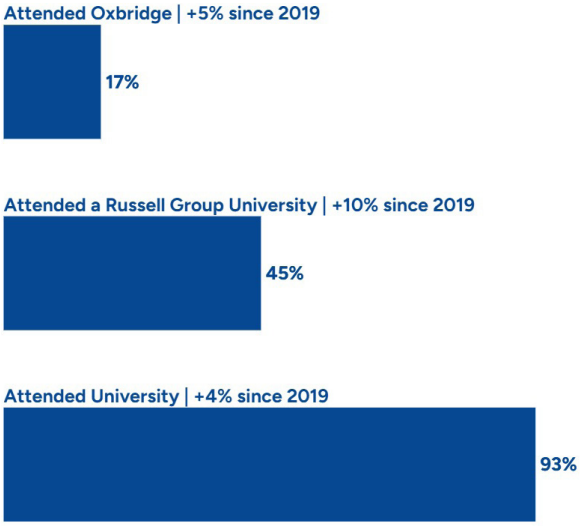
26% attended an **Independent school** **no change** since 2019

9% attended a Grammar school **+6%** since 2019

23% attended a Comprehensive school **-6%** since 2019

Attended school outside the UK

University attendance



This section covers the backgrounds of CEOs from the most rapidly growing tech industry firms, according to the Sunday Times. These are privately owned companies which appear to be defying the trend of slow economic growth seen elsewhere in the UK. Such firms include those working in fintech, biotech and software. Notably, this list sees an increase in the number of artificial intelligence (AI) organisations compared to when this sector was last looked at in Elitist Britain 2019.

School and university background

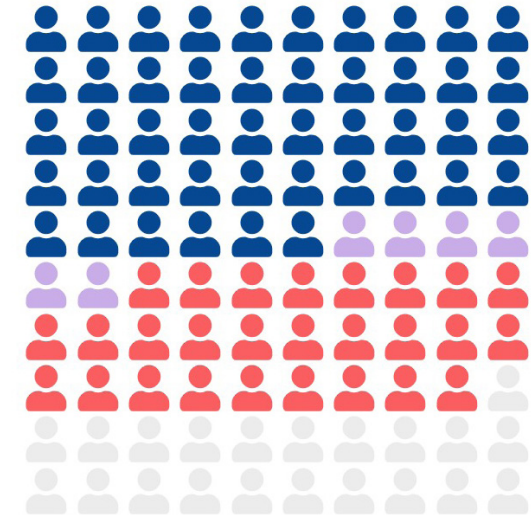
Just over a quarter of tech firm CEOs attended private school (26%), which is unchanged from 2019. This is 8 percentage points higher than the FTSE100 CEOs, suggesting less diverse backgrounds for the tech firm CEOs. However, also similar to the FTSE100, a significant proportion of CEOs were educated internationally (42%), leaving just under a quarter educated at comprehensive schools, which has gone down since 2019. When excluding international schools, over two fifths were educated at private schools (45%) and two fifths were educated at comprehensive schools (39%).

The overwhelming majority of tech firm CEOs attended university (93%), which has increased slightly compared to 2019. 17% attended Oxbridge, which has increased 5 percentage points since 2019, and is similar to the proportion of Oxbridge educated FTSE100 CEOs. 45% of tech firm CEOs went to a Russell Group, which has also increased 10 percentage points since 2019 and almost 3 in 10 attended university outside of the UK.

"Just over a quarter of tech firm CEOs attended private school (26%), which is unchanged from 2019. This is 8 percentage points higher than the FTSE100 CEOs, suggesting less diverse backgrounds for the tech firm CEOs."

Business and wealth | Property and Landowners

School attendance



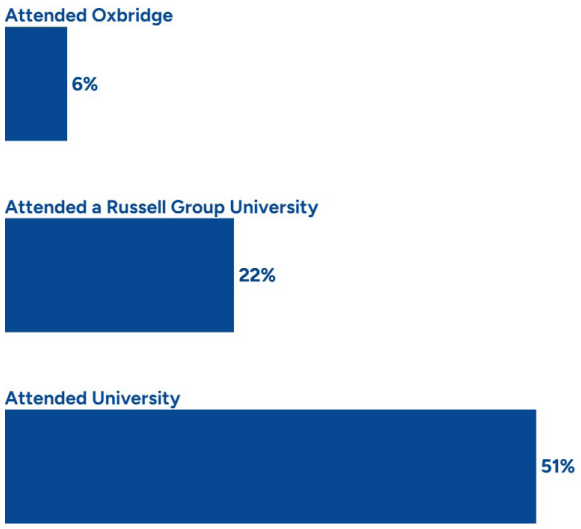
46% attended an **Independent school**

6% attended a Grammar school

27% attended a Comprehensive school

Attended school outside the UK

University attendance



For the first time in Elitist Britain, the following section considers a subsection of the Sunday Times Rich List for individuals who have property and/or land listed as their main source of wealth. Property and land ownership often correlates with the investment of a large sum of money, which can provide long-term financial stability for those holding it. Property owners also have a key voice in planning decisions which can impact the general population, not least due to increasing house prices and decreasing housing availability in the UK.

School and university background

Data for this group was notably difficult compared to other professions in Elitist Britain. This raises an interesting point in itself; the richest owners of land and property in Britain are typically from older generations and have notably absent profiles in press and social media materials. The results here only cover around half of those featured on our list.

Of those for whom data was available, almost half attended an independent school. This is one of the higher figures seen across Elitist Britain 2025. A high proportion (21%) attended an international school. Just over a quarter attended a state comprehensive.

University attendance is somewhat lower than many other professions in this research, at 51%, but is still higher than the average for the UK population. 22% attended a Russell Group institution, with 6% attending Oxbridge. This is perhaps an indicator of the aristocratic ownership of land and property, whereby those with significant wealth in their family do not attend university to further their career.

Business and wealth | Discussion

Overall, privately educated individuals are overrepresented among leading businesspeople (34%, compared to 7% of the working population). The disparity becomes particularly stark when we take out those educated overseas; this section then becomes the most privately educated sector in this report, with over half having attended private schools. UK-educated FTSE 100 chairs are the most privately educated group in this report.

Moreover, the proportions of privately educated FTSE 100 chairs and PR consultancy CEOs have actually grown since 2019. Overall, more individuals in this category attended Oxbridge too, with FTSE 100 chairs, entrepreneurs and tech firm CEOs all more likely to have an undergraduate degree from Oxbridge compared to 2019.

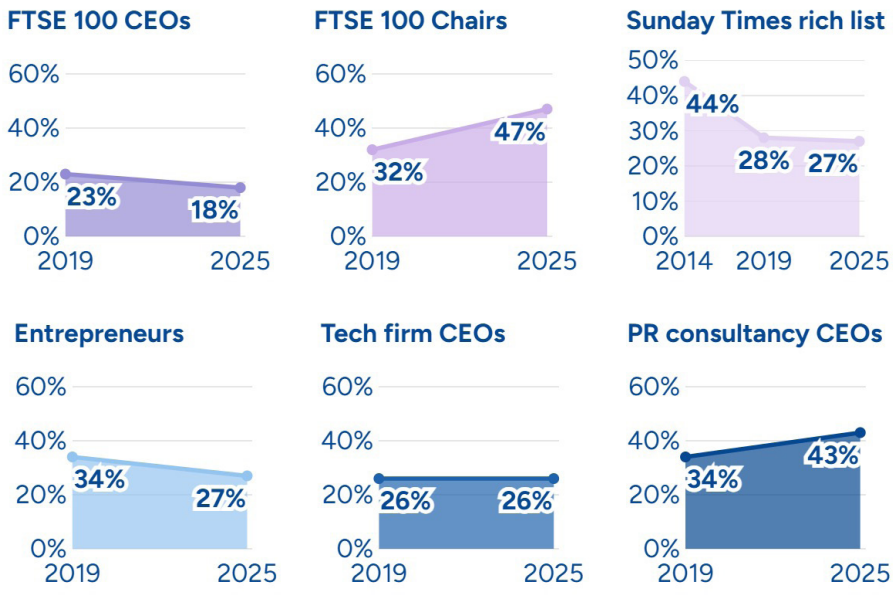
Across businesses, there are initiatives for improving representation, particularly at CEO and board level. However, these initiatives have often focused on gender and ethnicity rather than socio-economic factors,[77] and have also faced some challenges recently with a political drive against diversity and inclusion programmes in the US.

Buy-in is important at the CEO and board level as they can have decision-making powers on diversity initiatives in their companies.

A lack of diversity among senior leaders in business also risks a disconnect between leadership and their end-consumers, which can impact on a firm's competitiveness and innovation. Ultimately, representation of people from different socio-economic backgrounds is good business. Despite this, only one in six executives view improving socio-economic workforce diversity as a top priority, while fewer than a fifth have published a related target or goal.[78]

With much of the FTSE 100 dominated by the financial sector, it is interesting to note that a spotlight on senior roles in UK financial services found socio-economic background had a greater impact on career progression than gender or ethnicity.[79] That report also highlighted a lack of diversity at the top level, with 89% of senior leaders coming from a higher socio-economic background compared to 67% of those at junior levels. An Accenture report found that barriers to progression can include stigma related to talking about socio-economic background, lack of inclusive culture, and lower exposure to careers advice and guidance, which can mean employees from lower socio-economic backgrounds are less likely to put themselves forward for promotion.[80]

Proportion privately educated over time



Nevertheless, there are many ways that businesses can help improve recruitment, retention, pay gaps and progression of people from lower socio-economic backgrounds. These include reporting transparently on socio-economic background from entry through to progression, offering apprenticeship (as well as more varied) routes into careers, and creating inclusive and supportive cultures through mentoring and networks. The Sutton Trust has produced an employer's guide to social mobility in the workplace, which includes advice from measuring socio-economic diversity to best practice for recruitment and retention.[81]

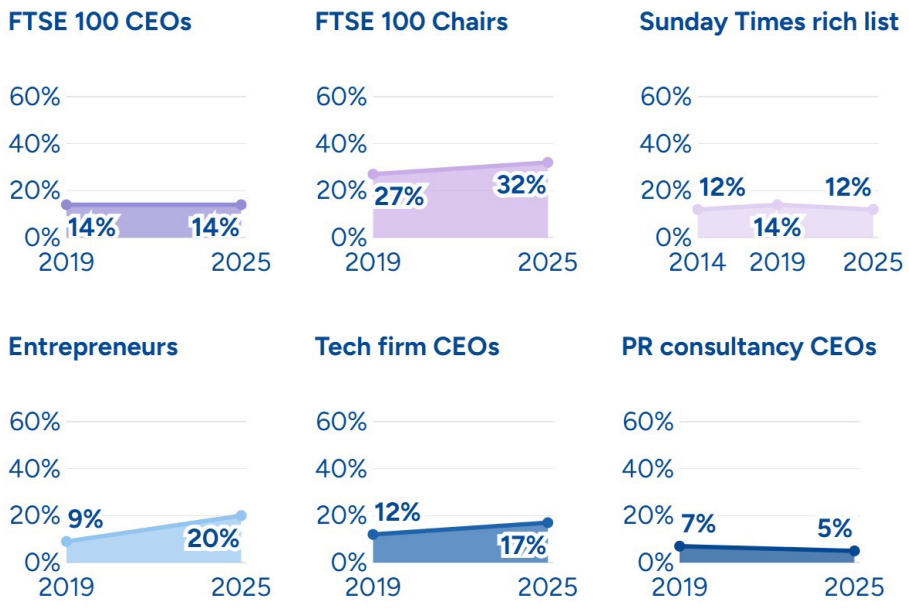
This issue is particularly pressing in the tech sector. Touted as one of the fastest growing sectors - and one of the most unequal[82] - it's important for schools to teach skills from the onset, and for tech companies to foster inclusive practices.

With entrepreneurship a key pillar to the UK's economic growth strategy, it's vital that anyone with a vision has the opportunity to start a business, and that shouldn't be reliant on family background. Unfortunately, that tends to be the case in the UK, with one study showing that three quarters of founders came from advantaged socio-economic backgrounds.[83] The most obvious barrier is lack of access to capital for founding a business, and a lack of financial support which is especially crucial in the early days of a business. However, fostering entrepreneurial skills and expertise through education can also be key.

"Wealth inequality is high and growing in the UK, with the top 10% owning around 60% of the nation's wealth. This goes hand in hand with the growing importance of intergenerational wealth. High levels of wealth inequality can really hinder opportunity."

Finally, this section has also looked at the issue of wealth. Wealth inequality is high and growing in the UK, with the top 10% owning around 60% of the nation's wealth.[84] This goes hand in hand with the growing importance of intergenerational wealth.[85] High levels of wealth inequality can really hinder opportunity. As parental wealth becomes increasingly important for young people to succeed, opportunity becomes increasingly limited.

Proportion Oxbridge educated over time



Case study

Rob Harper
CEO, Rowden Technologies

I was born in Yeovil and raised in a Somerset town. My dad served in the Navy and later commissioned as an officer. My mum worked in all kinds of roles - from school dinner lady to project manager - sometimes two at once. I grew up in a culture of effort: if something needed doing, you worked until it was done. Hard work was expected and assumed to be rewarded.

School was mixed. A regional comprehensive where a few great teachers stood out, but resources were limited and there wasn't much of a culture of ambition. University definitely wasn't the goal for most. At 16, I joined the Army, drawn by the promise of adventure. I trained at the Army Apprenticeship College before progressing into the Royal Signals, eventually qualifying as a radio operator in the Airborne Forces. I deployed frequently and got early exposure to real responsibility.

My experience in the military was overwhelmingly positive. While there are pockets of tradition that blur with elitism, I didn't experience that directly. The Army gave me structure, technical grounding, and a deep understanding of leadership. At 28, I was awarded an MBE for work in counter-terrorism - recognition that reflected a system which, while not rankless, is more classless than most. Merit counted.

An injury ended my operational career, and after gaining some exposure to defence technology projects, I made the choice to leave. I had no capital, but I'd identified a clear gap in radio and network systems and believed I could close it. That became Rowden Technologies. Today, we're an engineering company of 100+ people, delivering mission-critical capabilities across national security and infrastructure sectors.

Business life in the UK has been very different from military service. The system outside is shaped less by merit and more by signals - how you speak, who you know, whether you fit the expected image. These factors quietly determine access to finance, shape credibility, and define the boundaries of professional networks. I've had people ask who really runs the company. I've had speaking opportunities withdrawn because I wasn't considered 'polished' enough.

This exclusion isn't always overt, but it's constant. We need to challenge the depth of unconscious bias and elitist pattern recognition. **A well-spoken, well-dressed individual walks into a room in the UK and is rarely questioned for belonging or ability.** That same assumption doesn't extend to regional entrepreneurs. Lazy typecasting must end if we're serious about reversing the UK's current economic challenges. But it's not insurmountable and change doesn't need to wait on policy. Every person at every level can act.

Social mobility is often framed as an issue of fairness, but it is also a matter of national productivity. If we want to revitalise the UK economy, we need to back ambitious entrepreneurs to tackle the world's hardest problems. That means drawing from the full spectrum of society and making sure that capital, opportunity, and trust reach those who can deliver.

Media

Introduction

News and media outlets have a key role to play in informing the public of stories that affect their daily lives, whether the story is on global affairs; a sporting success or a debate over a recent election. The backgrounds of editors, writers and presenters can influence the stories chosen to be told, and without a diverse pool amongst the media profession, some stories may not be chosen to be told at all. Even with the best intentions, biases can slip through.

The media can also hold key figures and institutions to account, thus it is vital that the media workforce has a diverse set of voices representing all cultures, political parties and social groups. Representation is particularly important for screen-based media. Audiences can feel disconnected from the story if they fail to see others with a similar class or background, and this can also perpetuate inequalities in access to the profession.[86] The UK is far away from having a representative media workforce - for instance, previous research found that just 12% of journalists were from working-class backgrounds.[87]

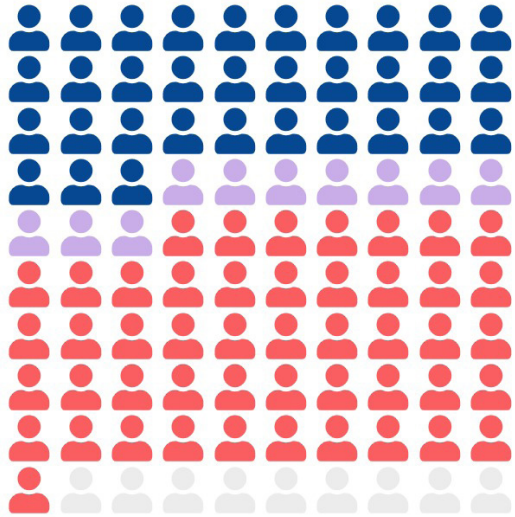
In light of this, the following section considers the socio-economic backgrounds of those working across the media industry, from those working for print to those providing commentary on screen.

This chapter also acknowledges how popular news sources have changed considerably since earlier editions of Elitist Britain. Notably, social media platforms like TikTok have seen rapid growth over the past 5 years. Around 1 in 2 adults use social media as a key source for daily news, with 8 in 10 of those aged 16 to 24 using online platforms as their main news source.[88] To acknowledge this trend, influencers and content creators are included in this edition. Podcasters are also included, as podcasts continued to gain listenership and importance in the media landscape over the past six years.

Sections

Media | News Media 100

School attendance



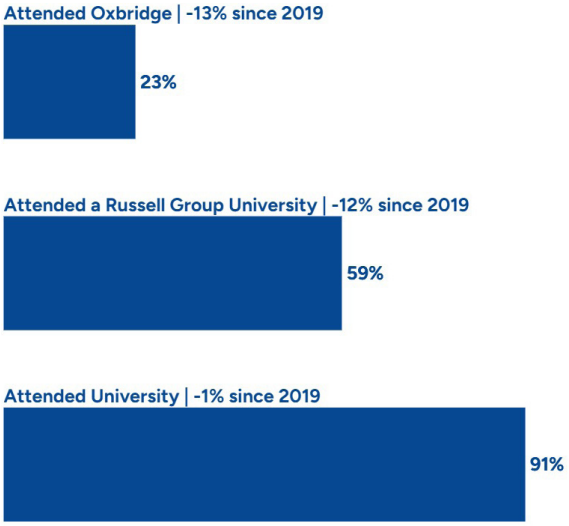
33% attended an **Independent school** **-10%** since 2019

10% attended a **Grammar school** **-10%** since 2019

48% attended a **Comprehensive school** **+14%** since 2019

Attended school outside the UK

University attendance



The following data applies to a set of 100 professionals across news and media, selected by the Sutton Trust to comprehensively cover the elite working at the most popular national TV, radio, online and print news outlets, as well as regional outlets. Editors, digital editors and lead presenters are recognised here. The list was compiled using materials from Reuters, OFCOM, YouGov and Press Gazette to determine the media outlets featured, and the number of figures from each outlet are proportional to their popularity, with a number of figures from outlets like the BBC and ITV featuring in this 100.

School and university background

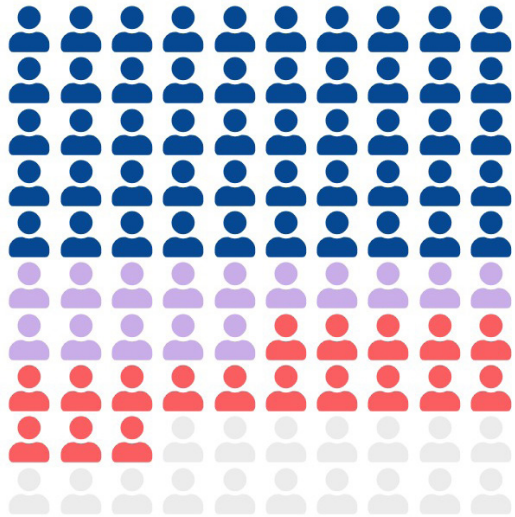
33% of leading news and media professionals went to private school, with 10% attending a state grammar. Once one of the categories with the highest figures for private school attendance, the figure has fallen by 10 percentage points, from 43% in 2019, and 54% in 2014. Grammar school attendance for this group has also consistently fallen, from 26% in 2014 to 20% in 2019.

In terms of higher education, the vast majority (91%) have attended university. 59% attended a Russell Group, with just over 1 in 5 (23%) attending Oxbridge. There has been a notable fall in Russell Group attendance from the 71% seen in 2019 and 74% in 2014. The figure attending Oxbridge has fallen by 13 percentage points from 36%. This continues the downward trend from 2014, where attendance to Oxbridge was 45%.

"33% of leading news and media professionals went to private school, with 10% attending a state grammar. Once one of the categories with the highest figures for private school attendance, the figure has fallen by 10 percentage points, from 43% in 2019, and 54% in 2014."

Media | Newspaper columnists

School attendance



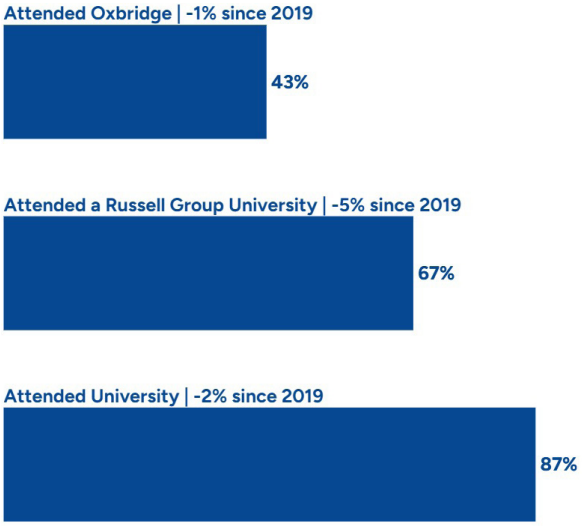
50% attended an **Independent school** **+7%** since 2019

15% attended a **Grammar school** **-10%** since 2019

18% attended a **Comprehensive school** **No change** since 2019

Attended school outside the UK

University attendance



Columnists tend to have more freedom in the pieces they write and more of their personal opinion can feed into their commentary. Some may not have had a long career in journalism, such as an academic with a notable reputation in a particular area. As this is a large group, a cross-section has been taken from a week's worth of articles to provide a snapshot of columnists and their backgrounds. Columnists here contributed to at least one of the following most-read papers in the UK: the Daily Mail, the Guardian, the Sun, the Telegraph or the Times.

School and university background

Half of newspaper columnists here attended private school, up from 44% in 2019 and 43% in 2014. This is the highest in this chapter. At the same time, comprehensive school attendance has remained relatively stable at 18%. Back in 2014, the figure was 5 percentage points higher at 23%.

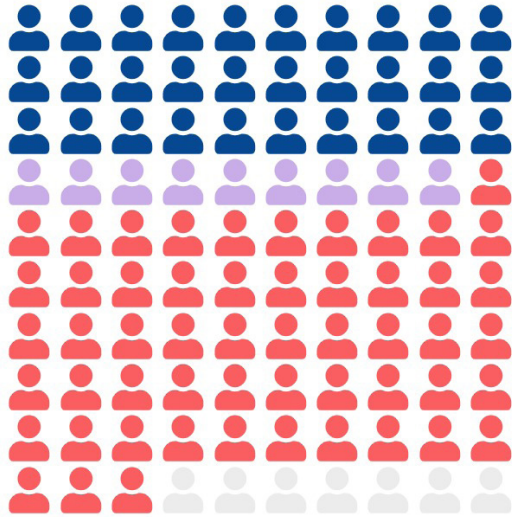
Again, looking at university attendance, there has been little change overall, with 87% attending compared to 89% in 2019 and 86% in 2014. Oxbridge remains dominant, with 43% attending, compared to 44% in 2019 and 47% in 2014.

"Half of newspaper columnists here attended private school, up from 44% in 2019 and 43% in 2014, This is the highest in this chapter. At the same time, comprehensive school attendance has remained relatively stable at 18%. Back in 2014, the figure was 5 percentage points higher at 23%."

It is worth noting that the genres covered by the columnists included have fluctuated across the editions of Elitist Britain, with 2019 focusing mainly on those commenting on politics; and both 2014 and 2025 including broader areas like sport. However, proportions over time when looking at university attendance have barely changed.

Media | Journalists

School attendance



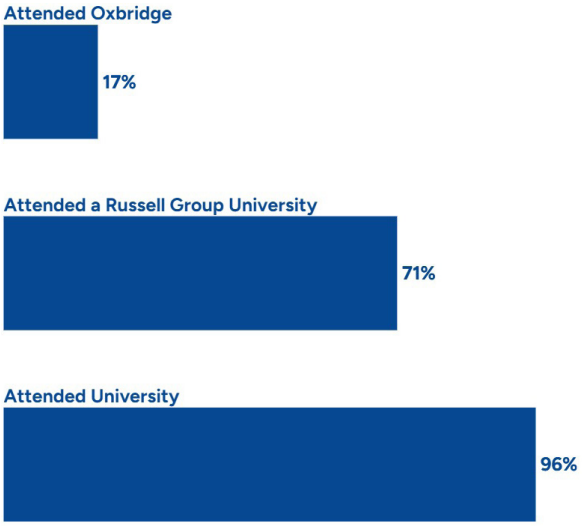
30% attended an **Independent school**

9% attended a **Grammar school**

54% attended a **Comprehensive school**

Attended school outside the UK

University attendance



Similarly to our columnist methodology, this group is made up of those who contributed to an article for one of the most popular national newspapers, this time from a sample day in 2025. This sample is large enough to indicate the general trend of socio-economic background amongst UK journalists. Their articles sit across the fields of business, education, economy, finance, home affairs, politics and social affairs.

School and university background

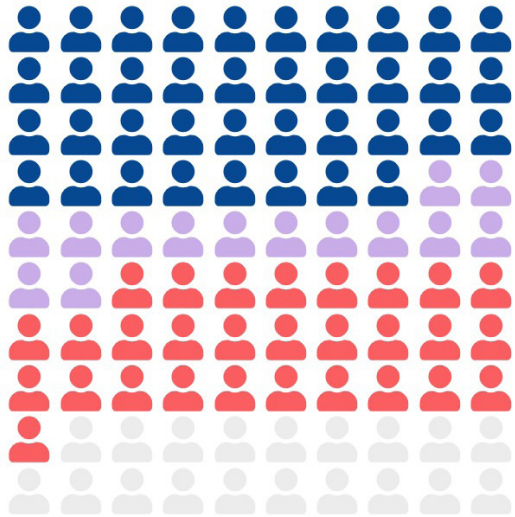
30% of the journalists included here attended a private school – this is notably different to columnists, where 50% attended. Even though the figure here is lower than that of columnists, indicating more of a diversity in socio-economic background amongst those potentially more junior in their career, the figure is still around 4 times as high as the UK average for private school attendance of 7%. 54% attended a state comprehensive school whilst 9% attended a state grammar.

University attendance, however, is actually higher amongst journalists at 96% (one of the highest figures seen in this report) compared to 87% of columnists. 71% attended a Russell Group institution, with almost a fifth (17%) attending Oxbridge. University attendance for all of the lists in this chapter covering newspapers (columnists, political commentators and the News Media 100, in addition to journalists) is at 87% or above.

30% of the journalists included here attended a private school – this is notably different to columnists, where 50% attended.

Media | BBC Executives

School attendance



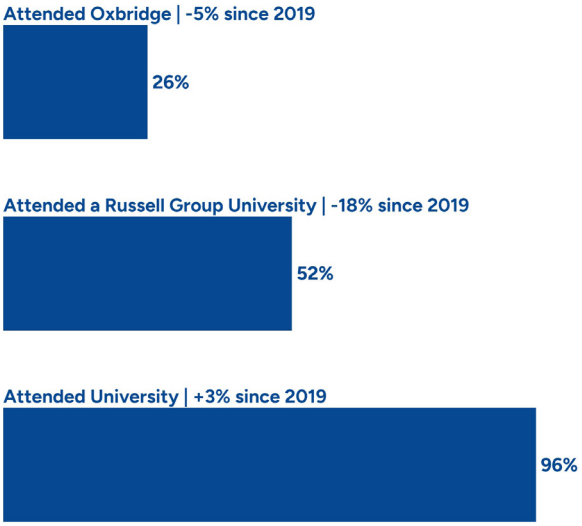
38% attended an **Independent school** **+10%** since 2019

14% attended a **Grammar school** **-6%** since 2019

29% attended a **Comprehensive school** **-16%** since 2019

Attended school outside the UK

University attendance



This section considers senior executives working across the BBC. As the UK's main state broadcaster, impartiality is a key principle set out in its royal charter. This is particularly relevant to coverage of politics and global conflicts. The content the broadcaster creates should also represent the diverse population it is designed to serve. Executives in this section are from all corners of the BBC, from music and sport content to brand design and financial operations.

School and university background

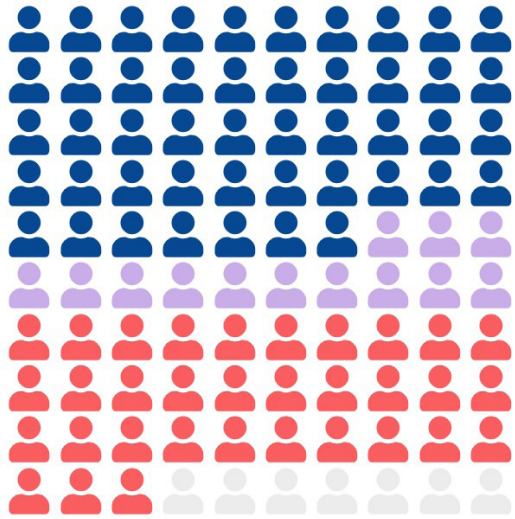
Over a third (38%) of BBC executives attended private school, marking an increase of 10 percentage points since 2019, where 29% attended. 26% were found to attend in 2014's data. There is also a large increase in the proportion attending international schools, at 19% compared to just 6% in 2019. The figure is closer to the 13% seen in 2014's data. State comprehensive school attendance has fallen by 16 percentage points from 45% in 2019 to 29% in 2025 respectively; in 2014, the figure was 37%. These figures indicate a reverse in the trend of boosting socio-economic diversity amongst BBC executives.

"State comprehensive school attendance has fallen by 16 percentage points from 45% in 2019 to 29% in 2025 respectively; in 2014, the figure was 37%."

96% of BBC executives attended university (making it a profession with one of the highest university attendance figures in this report), with 26% attending Oxbridge. Attendance was 93% overall in 2019 and 92% in 2014, although the proportion who attended a Russell Group has actually fallen. Oxbridge attendance has also fallen from 31% in 2019 and 33% in 2014, whilst, as with schools, attendance at international universities has risen.

Media | Political commentators

School attendance



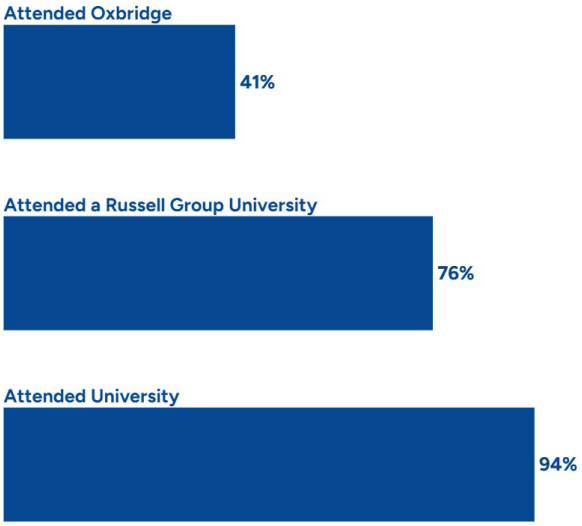
47% attended an **Independent school**

13% attended a Grammar school

33% attended a Comprehensive school

Attended school outside the UK

University attendance



New for Elitist Britain 2025, this section considers those who make appearances as 'talking heads' on the UK's most popular political programmes as well as hosts of the most listened-to political podcasts. These individuals have a big impact on political debate as well as current affairs 'hot topics' and can perhaps exaggerate their opinions to gain popularity. Those featured may have another job at a national media outlet, whilst others may have no association with a national organisation and use television, radio and podcasts to share their views to large audiences on many platforms.

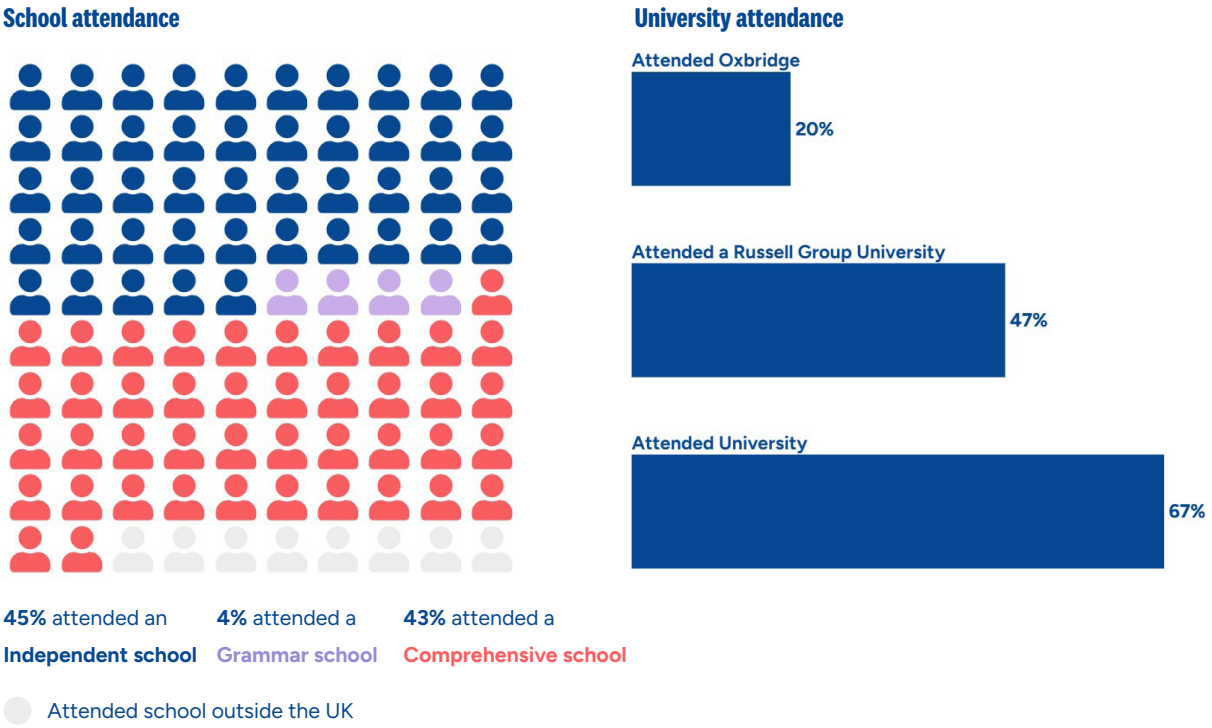
School and university background

47% of political commentators attended an independent school; the second-highest figure in this chapter, just after columnists. A third attended a state comprehensive school, which is the third-lowest figures after columnists once again and BBC executives.

The vast majority of political commentators attended university. Oxbridge attendance is one of the highest in this whole report, at 41%, with around three quarters of commentators attending Russell Group universities.

47% of political commentators attended an independent school; the second-highest figure in this chapter, just after columnists. A third attended a state comprehensive school, which is the third-lowest figures after columnists once again and BBC executives.

Media | Podcasters



Podcasts are one of the most-rapidly expanding forms of media in the 2020s, providing an alternative to mainstream media outlets and connecting audiences that tend not to look to traditional media for content. The nature of audio-only content, often presented in a more relaxed style than outlets like television, means that podcasters can make reactive content to big stories and release it quickly. New for 2025, this list considers the backgrounds of those hosting the 100 most popular UK-based podcasts, covering genres from sport to current affairs.

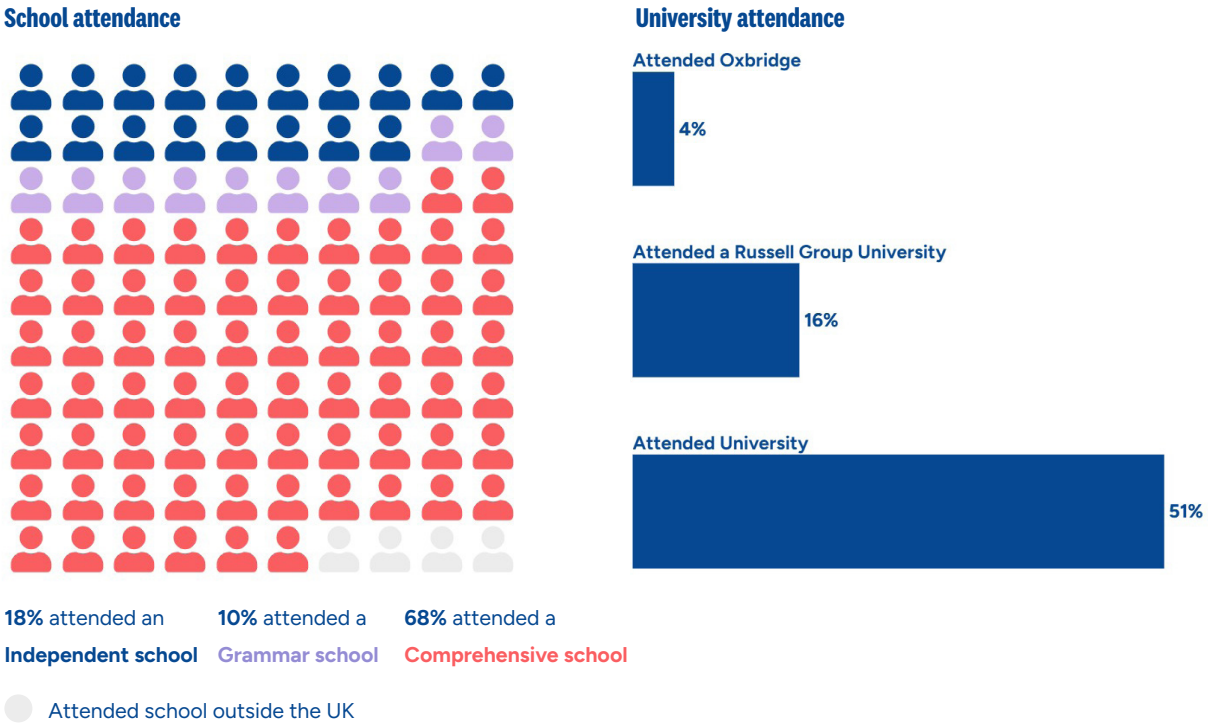
School and university background

Nearly half (45%) of chart-topping podcasters attended a private school, meaning they are over 6 times more likely to have attended than the UK population as a whole. 43% attended a state comprehensive. The type of content these media professionals produce may be different and arguably wider ranging than others in this chapter, but it appears that, when considering school attendance, they are just as elite.

Looking at higher education, 67% of this group went to university. 1 in 5 went to Oxbridge, with 47% attending Russell Group universities overall. University attendance for podcasters is lower than all other professions listed in the media section, except the following category of influencers.

Podcasts are one of the most-rapidly expanding forms of media in the 2020s, providing an alternative to mainstream media outlets and connecting audiences that tend not to look to traditional media for content.

Media | Influencers and content creators



Thanks to social media, content can be created by someone on their phone and shared with a large audience in a matter of minutes. This has led to a boom in the profession of 'influencing', where individuals can comment on a particular issue or endorse a product and receive recognition from a large audience. Their thoughts are respected by their audience and can influence their opinions and purchasing decisions. This is a diverse profession that covers a wide range of genres. Therefore, this section considers both UK-based influencers from YouGov's popularity checker as well as winners of national influencer awards, in order to capture the most famous figures across many genres . This involves both YouTubers and others who use platforms like TikTok and Instagram for reviews, comedy sketches and more.

School and university background

At 18%, private school attendance for influencers and content creators is the lowest figure seen in the media chapter. 68% attended a state comprehensive, 10% attended a state grammar.

Just over half (51%) attended university, with 16% attending a Russell Group institution – within that, 4% went to Oxbridge. Again, this attendance figure is the lowest seen in the media chapter and is also one of the lowest figures seen across Elitist Britain 2025.

Influencers here are creating content on a wide range of areas, from vlogs of their daily life to endorsement of restaurants, films, products and more. This list arguably covers far more genres than the other media professions discussed in this report, which may explain why their educational backgrounds are more similar to UK population averages than professions like a newspaper columnist. Nevertheless, this group are still more than twice as likely to have attended private school.

"At 18%, private school attendance for influencers and content creators is the lowest figure seen in the media chapter."

Media | Discussion

The educational backgrounds of leading figures in many parts of the media are not representative of the population they are serving. The gap is particularly prominent amongst columnists, podcasters, political commentators, the News Media 100 and BBC executives, who are disproportionately more privately educated than the general population. At least 20% of the key figures in these professions are Oxbridge alumni, with nearly half having attended a Russell Group university.

"Columnists provide opinions and commentary, arguably giving them a great deal of influence over what perspectives are shared and archived. But the data here indicates that those from a wider range of backgrounds are not necessarily getting these opportunities."

It might be assumed that professions like vlogging and influencing are more accessible to those from wider backgrounds, as creators can upload content to many platforms for free, often using a phone rather than professional filming equipment. Data here indicates that, to some extent, this theory is true. But the same cannot be said for podcasting, the other form of rapidly rising media in this list. Popular podcasts are increasingly dominated by large media organisations, which is likely reflected in the backgrounds of the presenters.

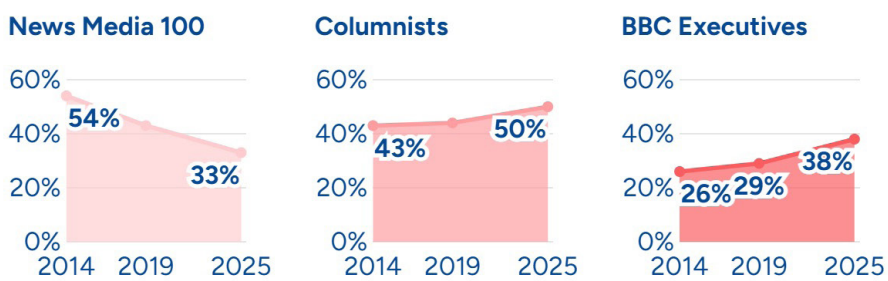
Class disparities are particularly stark among columnists, who were the least likely to go to a comprehensive school or a non-Russell group university. Columnists provide opinions and commentary, arguably giving them a great deal of influence over what perspectives are shared and archived. But the data here indicates that those from a wider range of backgrounds are not necessarily getting these opportunities. Comparing to data the Sutton Trust has from as early as the 80s, this has been the case for decades.[89]

It is notable that rates of private school attendance are higher among those who provide commentary – columnists, political commentators and podcasters - than those who report news. This means that those tasked with interpreting the news often come from a very narrow range of backgrounds, and there is little sign of progress.

This status quo is likely driven by many factors. For instance, long-term roles are becoming increasingly difficult to secure in journalism. Permanent contracts have fallen from 74% in 2015 to 65% in 2023. Within the same period, freelancers made up 17% of journalists and have increased to 28%.[90] The rising instability in income could mean that those without a financial safety net may choose to do something more secure.

Aside from the style of work offered, the decline of local media outlets is also impacting the number of entry-level jobs available.

Proportion privately educated over time



Local press and radio stations have traditionally served as entry points for early-career working-class journalists, whilst also providing communities with news coverage and content that is tailored to their local context. But for many regional outlets, including some featured on our News Media 100 list, private equity takeovers, monopolisation of major news outlets and the rise in online alternative sources of media have led to widespread job losses. Whilst some progress has been made in widening access to news media, fewer opportunities in these outlets have limited pathways for aspiring working-class journalists into the media industry.

One potential consequence of the disparities in background is that the media may inadvertently focus on reflecting the perspectives of those working within it. This can lead to criticisms that the media neglect the interests of most people, and at times, misrepresent social class.[91] The BBC has certainly received this scrutiny: Ofcom audience research has found that those from low socioe-conomic backgrounds are less satisfied with the BBC, even though they make up a larger share of the broadcast television audience. Some viewers expressed that their diminishing interest in TV is a result of the lack of representation of 'normal, working-class lives', and the prevalence of 'stereotypes' and 'tokenistic' characters.[92]

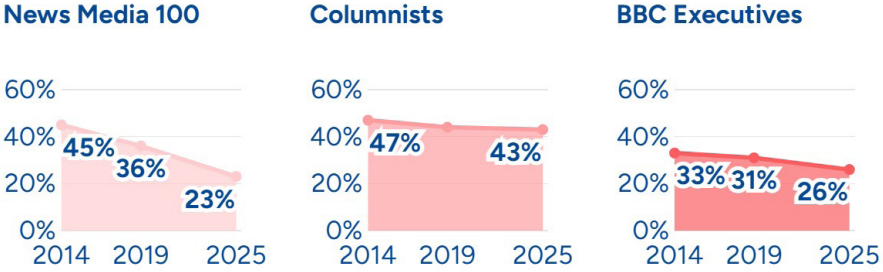
Taking this context into account, it is notable that this report has found that over a third of BBC executives attended private school, marking an increase of 10 percentage points since 2019, and almost all have been to university (these trends are underpinned by an increase in those educated internationally). Many presenters and journalists from the corporation are also featured in other elite lists in this chapter.

The corporation is, to an extent, recognising this and leading by example in collecting and publishing socio-economic data for its staff (amongst many other diversity measures); ITV has also set a 2027 target of at least 33% of staff coming from working-class backgrounds.[93] The most recent BBC data from March 2025 shows that 21% of the entire workforce and 20% of leadership are from a low socio-economic background based on household occupation, with slow but steady progress being made towards a target of 25% for all staff.[94]

"It is notable that rates of private school attendance are higher among those who provide commentary – columnists, political commentators and podcasters - than those who report news. This means that those tasked with interpreting the news often come from a very narrow range of backgrounds, and there is little sign of progress."

Measuring socio-economic background is a key stepping stone to identifying inequalities in access to a profession, but it is not a silver bullet. In an age where more traditional media outlets are losing out to online and often globally-owned competitors (mostly amongst younger audiences), firms should recognise the value of having a diverse workforce that creates representative content.[95]

Proportion Oxbridge educated over time



Third sector and policy

Introduction

For the first time we have included a section on the third sector and policy, looking at charities, trade unions, and think tanks. This sector has a big impact on society through their advocacy work, which shapes political discourse, informs policy making, and can lead to legislative change. Notably, trade unions play a prominent role in Labour policy making.

It can be difficult to start out in this sector. In charities and think tanks there is often fierce competition for roles and applicants are expected to have experience of working in the sector, even for entry-level roles. As a result, one of the main ways to get into the sector is through doing unpaid or low paid work, in the form of volunteering or internships.[96] As is the case for internships in other sectors featured in this report, those without financial support from family are more likely to be locked out of these opportunities.

Because of the way the sector is funded, entry-level roles in charities and think tanks are often insecure and low paid [97] [98] and can lack a clear route of progression. [99] [100] Concerns about pay and job security mean starting work in this sector can be difficult without additional financial support.

As one of the main routes into trade unions is through activism in the workplace, there are likely fewer barriers to working class people entering this part of the sector. This is because their activism may be motivated by experiences that they believe are linked to their class and other aspects of their background.

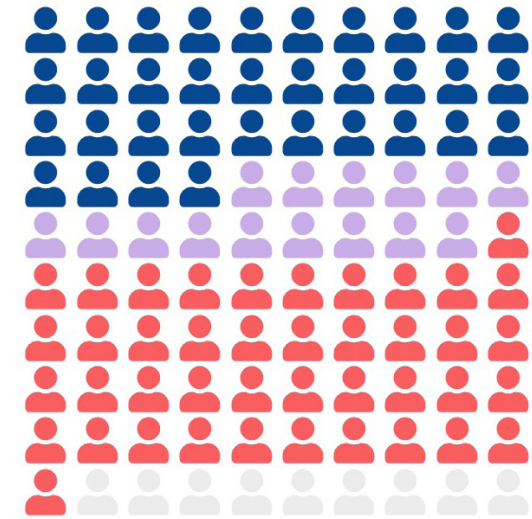
Location is also a factor in being able to get on in the third sector and policy. Many of the major trade unions and most charities and think tanks are located in London and the South East.[101] This makes it difficult for people in other regions to work in this sector, unless they are willing to relocate.

In this section we focus on the people who lead charities, trade unions, and think tanks as well as heads of research (think tanks). These are the people who set the agenda in the sector and across society.

Sections

Third sector and policy | Charity CEOs

School attendance



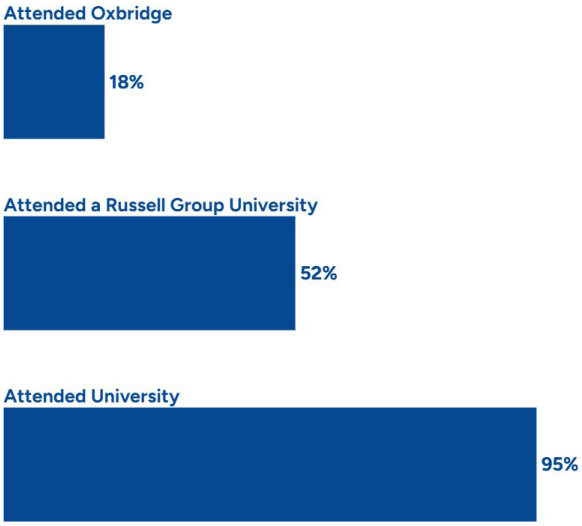
34% attended **Independent school**

15% attended **Grammar school**

42% attended **Comprehensive school**

Attended school outside the UK

University attendance



This list considers CEOs of the 100 most famous UK charities, according to polling organisation YouGov. The vast majority are national charities. Understanding who is at the top of charities is particularly important for those supporting marginalised groups, as having lived experience can bring expertise and insight to strategic decisions and policy. Diversity amongst senior staff, for example socio-economically, can ensure a wide range of perspectives that reflect those served by a charity are considered.

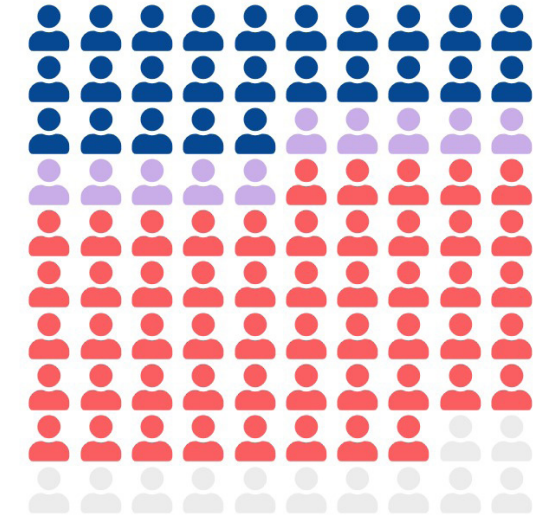
School and university background

Private school attendance for charity CEOs is the highest in this chapter, at 34%. State selective school attendance is also high, at 15%. Accordingly, with just over two fifths of charity CEOs having attended comprehensive school, this is one of the lowest proportions in this section, although this is notably more representative than FTSE 100 CEOs.

Almost all CEOs looked at here attended university, at 95%, just a small proportion lower than attendance for senior think tank staff, who also feature in this chapter. The majority attended a Russell Group institution (52%), with almost 1 in 5 attending Oxbridge.

Third sector and policy | Think tanks

School attendance



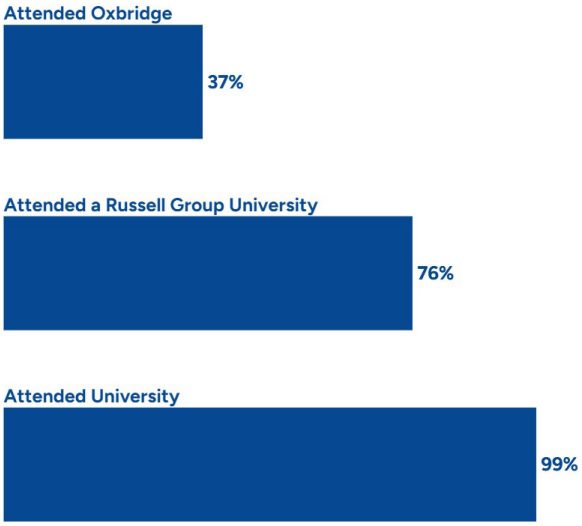
25% attended **Independent School**

10% attended **Grammar school**

53% attended **Comprehensive school**

Attended school outside the UK

University attendance



Think tanks are typically not-for-profit organisations that focus on specific public policy issues, aiming to influence both policymakers and the general public. These organisations have a similar role of influence to third sector organisations, particularly on technical policy details. Research from think tanks often gains high-profile media attention, which can influence public opinion and debate. Such research can also lead to influential discussions with policymakers. This list considers two significant senior roles at a range of UK think tanks; CEO/director and director/head of research.

School and university background

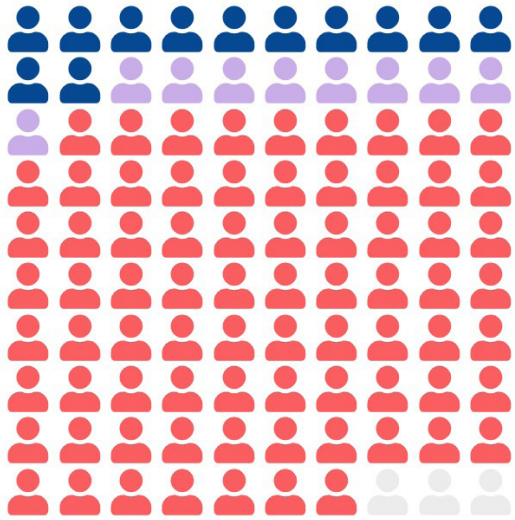
A quarter of leading figures in think tanks attended an independent school. This is in the mid-range for Britain's elites, although it is much higher than the 7% of the UK population.

Around one in ten leading figures in think tanks attended a grammar school.

Over a third of leading figures in think tanks attended Oxbridge. This is one of the highest proportions of Oxbridge educated individuals included in the report. Around three quarters attended Russell Group institutions.

Third sector and policy | Trade union leaders

School attendance



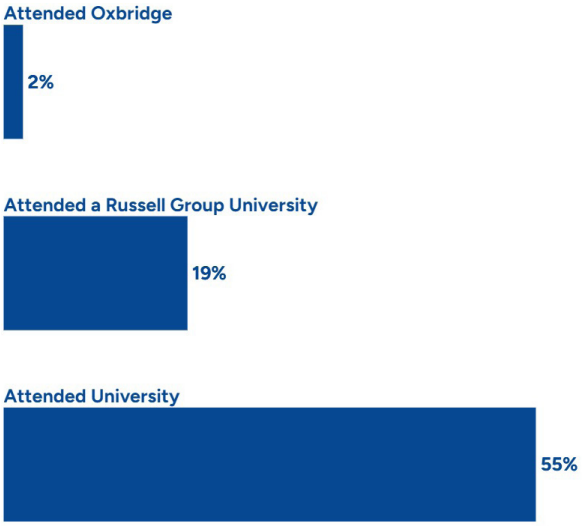
12% attended an **Independent School**

9% attended a Grammar school

76% attended a Comprehensive school

Attended school outside the UK

University attendance



This section looks at general secretaries and presidents from Trade Union Congress (TUC) affiliated trade unions. Particularly since Labour took control of UK government in July 2024, trade unions have notable influence on national policy. Even before then, Labour affiliated unions played a part in the final sign off of the party's manifesto.[102] They are also involved in other parts of the party's processes – for example endorsing potential MP candidates, which can have implications in the longlisting/ shortlisting process. While membership of a union has been declining over multiple decades, around 22% of employees are currently in a union.[103]

School and university background

Private school attendance for trade union leaders is at one of the lowest levels seen in Elitist Britian 2025, at 12%, though still slightly higher than the rate among the general population. 76% attended a state comprehensive school, substantially higher than the other categories in this section.

University attendance is also lower than the average seen in this chapter, at 55%. 19% have attended a Russell Group institution, with just 2% attending Oxbridge. Attendance may be lower here as some leaders may have worked their way up through the profession they represent, with many such sectors not requiring a degree.

Third sector and policy | Discussion

The educational background data for presented for charities and think thanks in this chapter makes for stark reading. Around a third of charity CEOs attended an independent school, despite only 7% of the UK population having done so. Almost all individuals attended university. And both areas also have some of the largest Oxbridge attendance figures seen in this report, with over a third of senior think tank staff attending.

Trade unions offer a significant contrast with others in this chapter, which is perhaps not surprising given the nature of these bodies. A trade union is designed to be a representative body of their respective workforce who can advocate for member's rights, so it can be assumed that equal opportunities for those from a range of socio-economic backgrounds would be important.

"Lived experience brings real-world understanding of the issues organisations are working on which can inform research and policy formation. Such experiences often interlink with educational background."

For example, the FDA (the union for civil servants and public sector servants), prides itself on improving entry and progression for those from working-class backgrounds.[104] But data here shows that this ethos may not be reflected in the educational backgrounds of senior leadership for some unions.

Diversity amongst the workforce is of vital importance for all the professions in this chapter. The backgrounds of who can access top jobs in these fields goes beyond educational background, as lived experience of the issues that some charities and third sector organisations work on, such as the care system, can be paramount. Lived experience brings real-world understanding of the issues organisations are working on which can inform research and policy formation. Such experiences often interlink with educational background, as well as other characteristics not covered in this research.

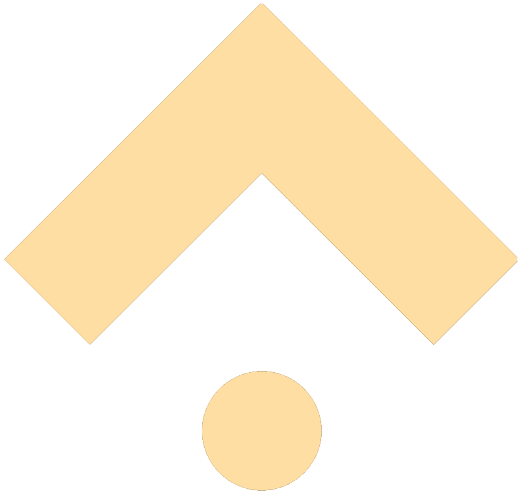
Across the third sector, work experience and internships are a common entry route, and having the right networks is crucial to find out about positions which are often not openly advertised.[105] As is the case for other industries discussed throughout this report, internships that are low paid (or not paid at all) and not openly advertised are likely not a viable option for a socio-economically disadvantaged young person, particularly when considering how lived experience and other elements of disadvantage come into play here.[106]

Poor development opportunities, a lack of awareness of career paths and fair pay are some of the barriers limiting access to this sector for socio-economically disadvantaged young people, as identified by the EY Foundation.[107] Such access issues have been recognised by staff at charities and think tanks themselves; a survey of staff across multiple organisations run by RECLAIM found that almost all respondents believed the sector had a class problem. 70% agreed that if there were more working-class people at all levels of their organisation, it would use different language about people on low incomes, whilst 54% agreed they would have different influencing priorities.[108]

Even organisations with the best intentions face issues with low public awareness. For instance, less than 4% of the population can name a think tank.[109] This has knock-on implications on invitations to and inclusion in careers fairs and other guidance activities. Qualitative research has also found that think tanks are not a welcoming or cultural fit for those from under-represented backgrounds, with some commenting on a lack of diversity amongst think tank representatives in the media.[110] Better outreach by this sector is certainly needed so that more disadvantaged young people can find out about the career. But this should come alongside improvements to entry-level roles, with better pay and progression opportunities.

Over recent years, there has been recognition within the sector that socio-economic diversity needs to improve. The Sutton Trust itself has long collected the socio-economic backgrounds of its staff. Organisations like the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) have set up entry-level schemes designed for those with no or little experience in the field.[111] The Think-Tank Operations Network also brings organisations like the Resolution Foundation and the Institute for Fiscal Studies together to improve awareness of careers in think tanks and share ideas to improve recruitment practices.[112] These groups should consider the results presented here, to bring further clarity to the scale of the access problem faced by this sector.

Talent is not concentrated in certain geographies, socio-economic groups, or schools. Yet at the moment some professions are still dominated by people who come from a very narrow background. This means we are limiting ourselves in finding the best and brightest people to do those jobs.



Case study

Charlotte Pickles
Director of Re:State

I grew up in New Milton, a small town on the south coast, where I lived with my parents and sister. My dad was a butcher, as his father had been. Neither of my parents went to university.

I went to the local comprehensive school. It was a big school that had some challenges - it wasn't unusual for there to be disruptions during class time – but overall, my school experience was good. I was lucky to have some excellent teachers. The sort of teachers who recognise potential and push those students to go further. These teachers challenged me and encouraged me to apply to Oxford.

I went on to study Modern History. I chose Oxford because I wanted to go somewhere with academic rigour where I would be challenged. Attending a Sutton Trust Summer School helped to demystify Oxford as an institution and made me feel that it was somewhere that I could go. This was further helped by the fact that one of my history teachers had studied at Oxford himself – I applied to the college he went to. I found some aspects of Oxford odd, but I found a great group of friends and also had a lot of fun during my time there.

After graduating I worked in retail, which allowed me to save money and enabled me to do an unpaid internship at a think tank in London. At the time, I had no idea what a think tank was and the kind of work they do. I ended up staying for nearly four years and went from intern to Director of Policy. Over the years I have worked in a range of roles across policy, the public sector, and government. I initially worked at Re:State (then called Reform) as the Deputy Director. I came back six years ago to take on the Director role.

I do think the sector, and think tanks in particular, are dominated by people from more privileged backgrounds. I don't think this is down to deliberate bias. But I do think there are some barriers to getting into the sector. One of the main barriers is lack of awareness; I think many people are simply not aware of think tanks and do not hear about opportunities available. This knowledge of the sector can be influenced by your family background or your environment. Location is another barrier. The vast majority of think tanks are in London, which is a hugely expensive place if you don't have family or friends that you can stay with. **Many roles in the sector require certain skills, such as confidence about public speaking and expressing yourself to different audiences. Family background and schooling can influence whether someone has been able to develop those skills.**

Talent is not concentrated in certain geographies, socio-economic groups, or schools. Yet at the moment some professions are still dominated by people who come from a very narrow background. This means we are limiting ourselves in finding the best and brightest people to do those jobs. But it also means that in those professions we lack the diversity of thought and experience that are crucial for getting the best results. Social mobility is important not just for getting the best talent, but also for getting the most out of that talent.

Whitehall and public bodies

Introduction

Alongside politicians (discussed in Section 1), there are other leading figures working at the heart of government to help develop and deliver policy, including senior civil servants and top executives of public bodies. These non-partisan roles cover a wide range of responsibilities, including supporting ministers, overseeing public services and providing support to the government in its daily operation.

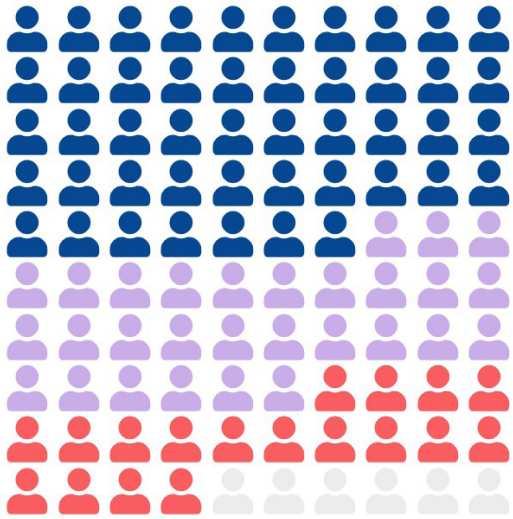
This section looks at permanent secretaries, diplomats and public body CEOs. Permanent secretaries are the most senior civil servants, often responsible for leading civil service departments, and appointed by the prime minister. Diplomats are also senior civil servants who represent and promote British interests overseas. Public bodies are publicly funded organisations working at arm's length from government and which cover a wide range of functions and responsibilities, from inspecting schools at Ofsted and providing research grants at research councils, to managing transport services at Transport for London and setting monetary policy at the Bank of England.[113]

These roles represent significant influence and power in the running of the country, meaning it's important that they represent the population and their interests. Making the civil service and public bodies more representative of the society they serve can help improve public trust, attract a diversity of ideas, and recruit and retain the most talented people. As Pat McFadden, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and responsible for the reform of the civil service has said, "government makes better decisions when it represents and understands the people we serve".[114]

Sections

Whitehall and public bodies | Permanent secretaries

School attendance



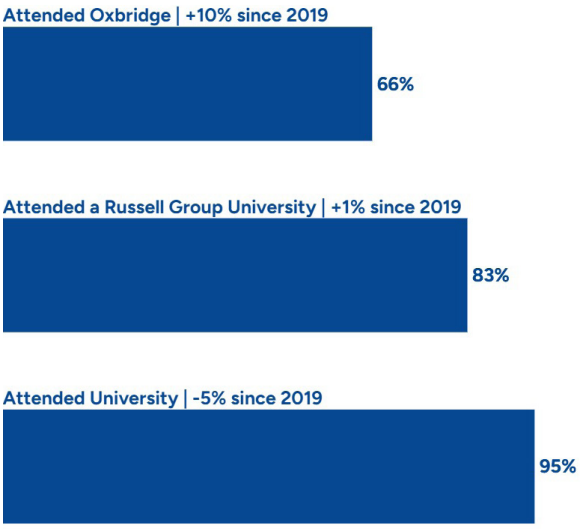
47% attended an **Independent school** **-12%** since 2019

18% attended a **Grammar school** **+4%** since 2019

29% attended a **Comprehensive school** **+2%** since 2019

Attended school outside the UK

University attendance



Permanent secretaries are the most senior civil servants, often leading civil service departments, although they can also include heads of some non-ministerial departments. There are roughly 40 permanent secretaries across the civil service. They are appointed by the prime minister on a non-partisan basis, typically following long careers in the civil service.[115] They are responsible for the leadership and day-to-day management of their departments and their budgets, and provide policy advice, particularly to their secretary of state.

School and university background

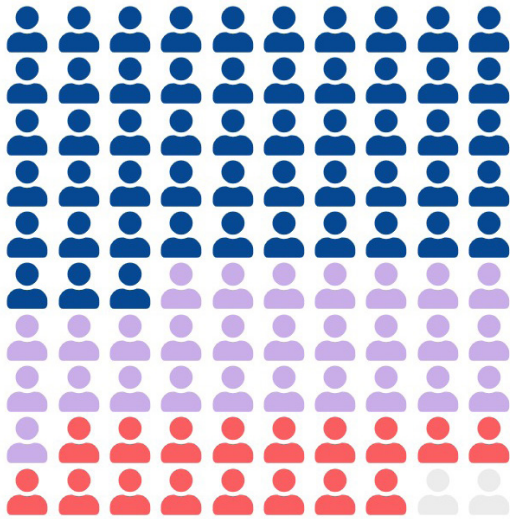
Almost half of permanent secretaries come from a private school background (47%). This proportion has decreased over the past five years by 12 percentage points and is the lowest proportion of private school attendance since 2014.

However, the difference was mostly due to a greater proportion of permanent secretaries having an internationally educated background. Fewer than one third of permanent secretaries attended a comprehensive school (29%), which has not changed much since 2019.

Two thirds of permanent secretaries are Oxbridge educated (66%), making it the second highest proportion of Oxbridge attendance in this report, behind senior judges. The proportion of Oxbridge educated people in this group has risen over the past 5 years by 10 percentage points. The overwhelming majority attended a Russell Group university (83%).

Whitehall and public bodies | Diplomats

School attendance



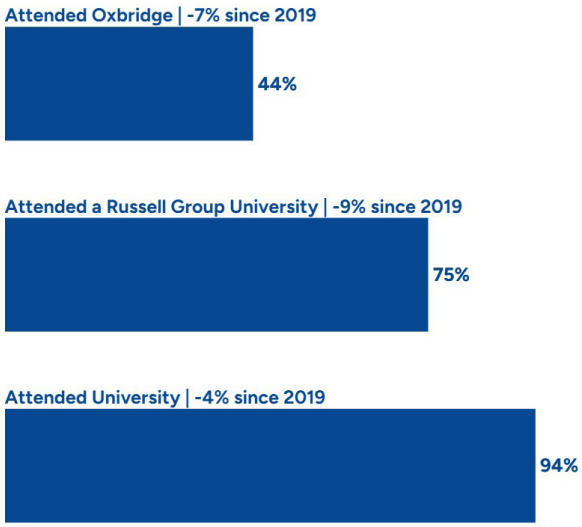
53% attended an **Independent school** **+1%** since 2019

17% attended a **Grammar school** **no change** since 2019

28% attended a **Comprehensive school**

Attended school outside the UK

University attendance



Diplomats lead missions in individual countries and international organisations and include ambassadors and high commissioners. They help promote and protect British interests, businesses and citizens overseas and are responsible for maintaining international relations, negotiating agreements and advocating for the UK's interests. They are appointed by the King, on recommendation from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and often have experience and training through the diplomatic service.

School and university background

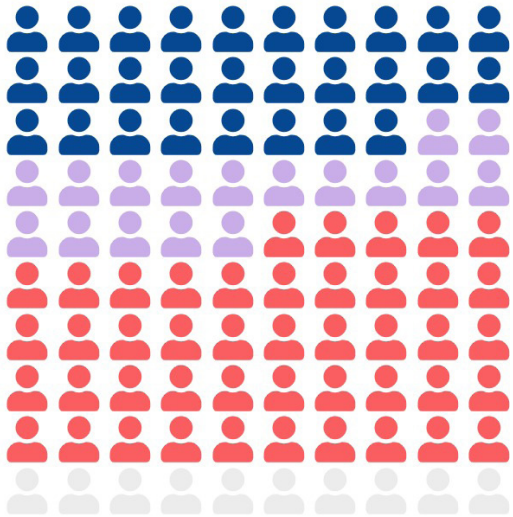
Over half of diplomats were privately educated (53%), making it amongst the highest proportion of privately educated people in this report. This proportion has remained relatively stable since 2014. The proportion of those with a state comprehensive background has also not changed much compared to 2019 (29%), however this is over twice the proportion compared to 2014 (11%). This change has mostly been through the decrease of those from a selective school background.

"Over half of diplomats were privately educated (53%), making it amongst the highest proportion of privately educated people in this report."

Just under half of British diplomats attended Oxford or Cambridge (44%), again making it one of the professions with the highest Oxbridge attendance in this report. This decreased by 7 percentage points over the past 5 years. Three quarters of diplomats were educated at a Russell Group university (75%), down from 84% in 2019. Overall, 94% of diplomats have been to university, with the majority of those having graduated from a UK university.

Whitehall and public bodies | Public body CEOs

School attendance



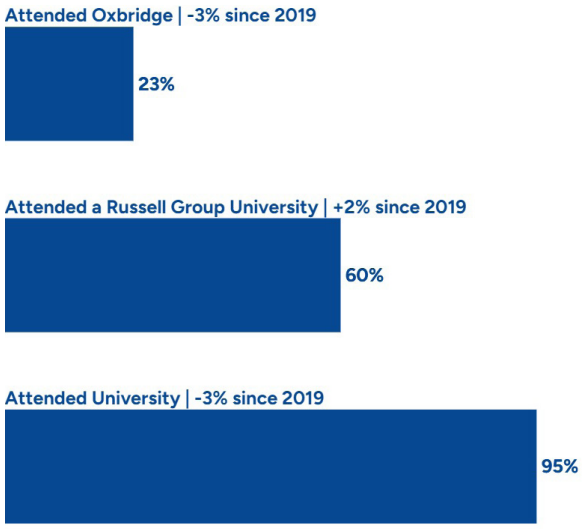
28% attended an **Independent school** **-3%** since 2019

17% attended a **Grammar school** **-10%** since 2019

45% attended a **Comprehensive school** **+14%** since 2019

Attended school outside the UK

University attendance



Public bodies are formally established organisations that are (at least partially) publicly funded to deliver public or government services. They cover a wide range of functions and responsibilities, from monitoring the quality of public services, regulatory duties and issuing patents and trademarks to running museums and national park authorities. They are generally independent from central government and have their own boards and CEOs.

This section covers arms-length bodies, a classification of public body that includes executive agencies, non-departmental public bodies and non-ministerial departments. CEO appointments are assured by the Commissioner for Public Appointments. Positions are often taken up by former politicians, longstanding public servants, or other high-profile people from public and private sector. Recent years have seen controversy in how public appointments are made.[116]

School and university background

Just over a quarter of public body CEOs (28%) were privately educated, with little change since 2019, although this proportion has fallen by 6 percentage points since 2014. 45% attended a comprehensive school, which has risen 14 percentage points since 2019, and 23 percentage points since 2014. However, most of this change has been through a decrease in the proportion of people with a grammar school background.

As for university, 23% attended Oxbridge, a proportion that has not changed significantly across the past decade. Russell Group and university attendance in general have also remained at similar proportions, with 95% of public body CEOs having a degree.

Whitehall and public bodies | Discussion

Overall, senior civil servants have some of the highest private school and Oxbridge attendance in this report, a fact that has not improved much since 2019. In fact, permanent secretaries have shown an increase in the proportion of those with an undergraduate degree from Oxford or Cambridge compared to 2019. The fact that so many leading people only come from two universities risks the diversity of thought and experiences needed to best run the country.

The civil service has repeatedly come under fire for under-representation of people from lower socio-economic backgrounds. In response, diversity and inclusivity has become a key priority of the civil service, emphasised in their Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2022 in which they incorporate a broader definition of diversity to include socio-economic, work experience and geographic backgrounds.[117] From social mobility champions to peer networks, the civil service also regularly collects data on socio-economic diversity. There have also been moves to decentralise the civil service, with a commitment to move 50% of UK-based senior civil servants outside of London by 2030 and relocate thousands of civil service jobs across the country.[118]

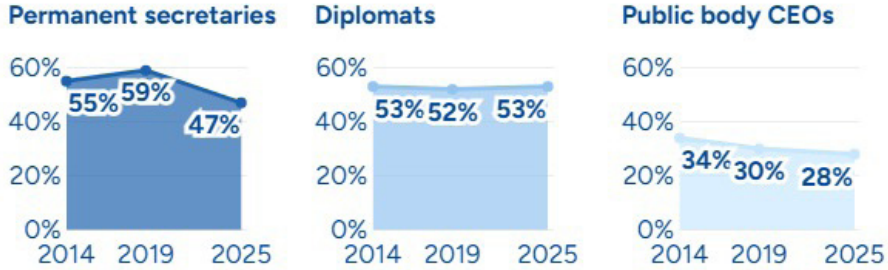
The civil service fast stream is one of the most highly sought-after graduate schemes in the UK.[119] The competitive selection process implements practices such as blind recruitment, which involves removing identifying information such as name and university, opening regional assessment centres, and from 2026 onwards, civil service internships will be restricted to students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, who in turn will be prioritised for entry to the Fast Stream.[120]

> *"The fact that so many leading people only come from two universities risks the diversity of thought and experiences needed to best run the country."*

Socio-economic diversity in the fast stream has improved over the past decade, with only 7.4% of entrants eligible for free school meals in 2016 compared to 15.5% in 2024.[121] While representation has improved somewhat, barriers remain, with individuals from private schools over twice as likely to be accepted onto the fast stream as those from state schools.

Once in the civil service, there are also barriers to career advancement. Roughly 70% of senior civil servants were from high socio-economic backgrounds, compared to 45% in the lowest grades, according to Institute for Government research.[122] Another report by the Social Mobility Commission (SMC) revealed that just 18% of senior civil servants came from disadvantaged backgrounds, with 1 in 4 having attended private school.[123]

Proportion privately educated over time



The SMC report indicated that there was a dominant behavioural code at the civil service that revolved around having the right accent, a certain way of presenting oneself and a certain approach to culture and politics. This behavioural code was required for promotion and was found be intimidating and alienating to those from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

The Foreign Office also champions diversity and inclusion, however they do not report on socio-economic diversity. A blog post written by a diplomat in 2021 emphasises the need for greater diversity in UK diplomacy to enhance innovation and counteract 'groupthink' and overall to ensure that diplomacy becomes more effective, resilient, and adaptive in the 21st century.[124] Unfortunately, there may be issues considering future recruitment pipelines when it comes to diplomacy. Despite the government's targets of 90% of pupils studying a language GCSE, those from the most deprived areas of England are 32% less likely to do so than those in the most affluent areas.[125]

There is less of a focus on socio-economic diversity within public bodies. While the Commissioner for Public Appointments reports annually on the diversity of new public appointees in terms of protected characteristics, they do not collect socio-economic data, so evidence of socio-economic diversity is poor.[126]

In 2022, a new improved digital service for public appointments was launched to meet government accessibility standards, however it's clear that there needs to be a focus on transparency and on socio-economic composition. As our research highlights, reporting on socio-economic data is an important first step. Public bodies, and their executive teams and boards, should be held accountable to the same level of scrutiny and transparency as the rest of the civil service, and follow the same practices to ensure diversity and inclusion.

As our research highlights, reporting on socio-economic data is an important first step. Public bodies, and their executive teams and boards, should be held accountable to the same level of scrutiny and transparency as the rest of the civil service, and follow the same practices to ensure diversity and inclusion.

Proportion Oxbridge educated over time

Case study

Miranda Biddle
CEO of the Independent Monitoring Authority for Citizen's Rights (IMA)

I grew up in a rural village in South Nottinghamshire and attended the local state schools – there was not really a choice of schools.

Whilst I was put in a lot of the top sets, I felt I was being talked down in terms of my expectations when I left school. This made me feel less confident at 16, so I had a few options set up including a youth training scheme and a local sixth form. I hedged my bets as I was brought up by a single working mum, so I knew I had to have a plan for as soon as school ended. To everyone's surprise, including my own, I did end up getting the grades for sixth form.

I decided to go down the sociology route as I liked the idea of working with people, going through clearing and choosing what is now the University of Hull and then completing postgraduate courses, including at Cambridge. I couldn't wait to spread my wings from my village and I absolutely loved the freedom being a student gave me. But without a grant to pay for studies, I certainly would not have gone. Someone like me probably wouldn't be able to study at university these days.

Since graduating, I have worked in many roles across the criminal justice system, starting as a probation service officer. I then took a spot on a Home Office sponsored training scheme in Sheffield – there were only a few locations offering the scheme, so not all of those interested could access the role. I felt my background maybe gave me the edge because I had communication skills and contextual understanding that other people didn't have. This opportunity connected me to many people and role models which others already had from their parents or social circles.

As I have progressed through my career, I have been conscious that I am breaking through glass ceilings. I have noticed my accent is different to many others around me. But over the years I have recognised that I am just as entitled to be in my position as my peers. I took a brave step in taking my current Wales-based role, as my family are in Northamptonshire.

In my field and across the civil service too, I still see that there is a certain art to succeeding in applications. Students aren't always aware of how to write them or deal with the assessment centre, whilst those with family or school connections sometimes get an upper hand. The profession also has a lot of acronyms and isn't always understandable to those looking for their first career. Particularly in policy roles, I feel the ceiling for progression is at a more junior level these days. Outreach and improved availability of work placements for students would allow young people from a wider range of backgrounds to learn more about the industry. Without this many capable students simply won't know that a career in criminal justice is out there.

Public servants

Introduction

Beyond Whitehall, local government and public bodies, there are a wide range of influential positions across the public sector. This section looks at some of the key roles at the top of the judiciary, academia, defence and law enforcement services. These roles are influential to many different parts of daily life, with individuals in charge of big budgets, strategic decisions, and ultimately responsible for shaping the services that the country uses every day.

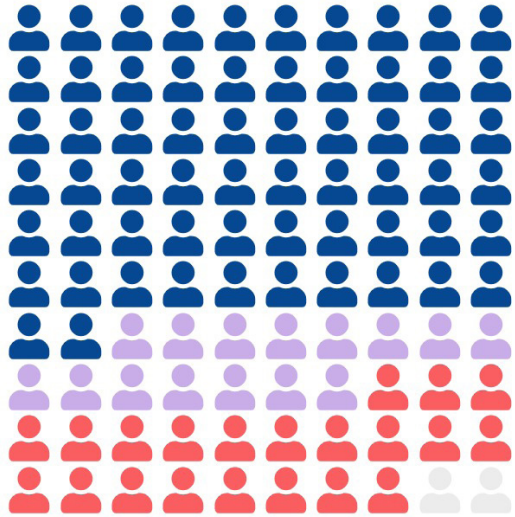
Sectors such as the judiciary, academia and law enforcement can all benefit from better representing the communities they serve. These services have the responsibility to protect, educate and provide services for the public, and to do so effectively and equitably, it's important to have voices and experiences from diverse backgrounds at the decision-making table. If these services are seen only to reflect a certain segment of society, public trust can be eroded.

As these roles cover a wide range of responsibilities, more detail will be given in each section of this chapter.

Sections

Public servants | Senior judges

School attendance



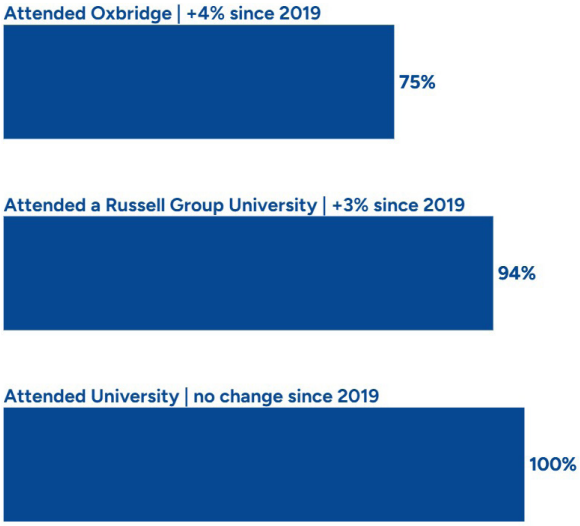
62% attended an **Independent school** **-3%** since 2019

15% attended a **Grammar school** **-4%** since 2019

21% attended a **Comprehensive school** **+8%** since 2019

Attended school outside the UK

University attendance



The senior judiciary comprises high-ranking judges in the UK's judicial system, including the Lady Chief Justice, Justices of the Supreme Court, Lady and Lord Justices of the Court of Appeal (the highest court in England and Wales) and judges of the High Court. These judges are responsible for ruling on some of the most important cases in the country, including constitutional matters, matters of national security, and appeals from lower courts. Senior judges typically have decades of legal experience as a solicitor, barrister or legal executive.

The senior judiciary, and the profession of law more generally, is known for its lack of diversity and barriers to entry for those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. However, it's important for the judiciary to reflect the country it serves. As a report prepared for the Ministry of Justice by the National Centre for Social Research stated: "The more diverse the judiciary, the more confidence the public will have that justice will be delivered equally to all".[127]

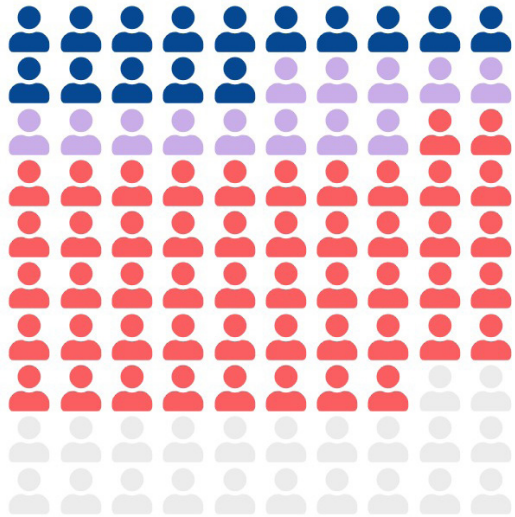
School and university background

The majority of senior judges attended a private school (62%). This has remained roughly the same since 2019, although has decreased from 71% in 2014. This makes the senior judiciary one of the professions with the highest private school attendance in this report, which is also in line with previous iterations of Elitist Britain. Only 21% of senior judges attended comprehensive schools although this has increased significantly since 2019, and is notably higher than the 4% seen in 2014.

Three quarters of senior judges earned a bachelor's degree in either Oxford or Cambridge, easily making it the profession with the highest Oxbridge attendance featured in this report. This has also not changed significantly since 2019; patterns of Oxbridge, Russell Group and university attendance in general have remained similar over the past decade. This may partially reflect the age of senior judges, as these positions do not have term limits, making the profession slow to change.

Public servants | Vice chancellors

School attendance



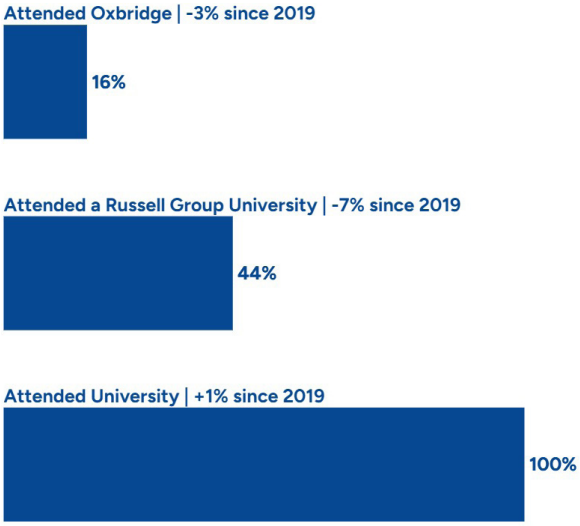
15% attended an **Independent school** **-2%** since 2019

13% attended a **Grammar school** **-20%** since 2019

50% attended a **Comprehensive school** **+17%** since 2019

Attended school outside the UK

University attendance



Vice chancellors are the chief executives of UK universities, responsible for the overall management and direction of their university. They are typically appointed by a committee, following a career in academia. Since our last report, higher education in the UK has been experiencing a financial crisis, with vice chancellors coming under fire for their high salaries in a climate where many universities are on the brink of bankruptcy.[128]

Vice chancellors, and higher education more broadly, are not just responsible for educating and training the next generation, but also for the direction of national and international research. It's vital therefore that these positions reflect a diversity of backgrounds. In the context of an escalating financial crisis, higher education needs public support more than ever, but it risks alienating the public with an elitist image of the 'ivory tower'.

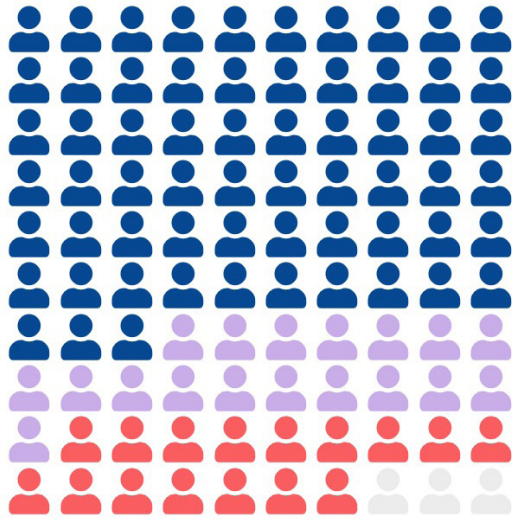
School and university background

Only 15% of vice chancellors were privately educated, making it one of the professions with the lowest private school attendance in this report. This has decreased slightly over the past decade. Half attended a comprehensive school (50%), although this proportion has increased significantly by 17 percentage points over the past 5 years, and 29 percentage points over the last decade. Most of this change is due to a decrease in those with a grammar school education, which sits at 13%. Around a fifth of vice chancellors were educated internationally.

Unsurprisingly, all vice chancellors had university degrees, with 17% of those having earned a degree outside of the UK. 44% of vice chancellors attended a Russell Group university, which has decreased by 7 percentage points since 2019, while 16% attended either Oxford or Cambridge.

Public servants | Armed forces

School attendance



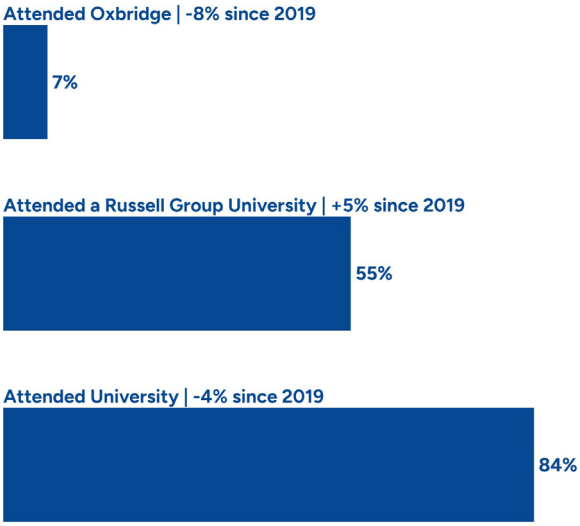
63% attended an **Independent school** **+14%** since 2019

18% attended a **Grammar school** **+3%** since 2019

16% attended a **Comprehensive school** **-19%** since 2019

Attended school outside the UK

University attendance



This list comprises generals of two-star rank and above from across the Ministry of Defence including the British Army, the Royal Air Force, the Royal Navy and Strategic Command. These officers command divisions of up to thousands of personnel and can also hold senior staff appointments in the Ministry of Defence, with responsibility for the strategy and direction of these organisations. Appointment processes vary, but generals usually have decades of experience in service.

The armed forces are known for having a socio-economic divide between officers and soldiers, with officers typically coming from higher socio-economic backgrounds or military families, whereas recruitment for the front line tends to over-recruit from lower socio-economic areas.[129] This recruitment practice is especially concerning as it often involves recruiting people under 18 who then leave education to join the armed forces.

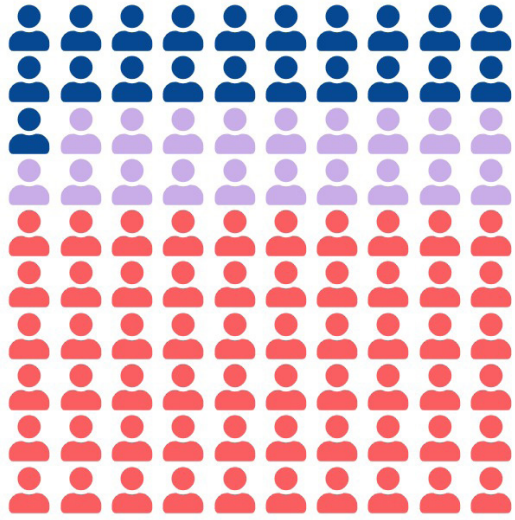
School and university background

The armed forces remain a profession where the privately educated are in a majority. The figures here are the highest in Elitist Britain 2025, at 63%. This figure has returned to levels seen in 2014's research, where 62% were privately educated. This profession also sees one of the higher grammar school attendance figures in the report, at 18%. Fluctuation over time may relate to the years in the field of the individuals covered in the sample but nevertheless, the armed forces consistently rank highly in terms of privately educated individuals compared to many other professions.

University attendance has stayed relatively stable across the three editions of Elitist Britain with at least 82% attending in each edition. Russell Group attendance has risen from 50% in 2014 and 2019. Oxbridge attendance has declined from 13% in 2014 to 7% in 2025.

Public servants | Police chiefs and PCCs

School attendance



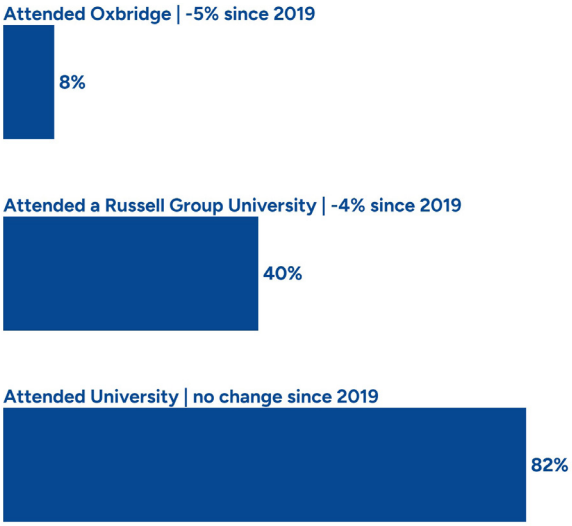
21% attended an **Independent school** **-3%** since 2019

19% attended a **Grammar school** **-2%** since 2019

60% attended a **Comprehensive school** **+6%** since 2019

Attended school outside the UK

University attendance



This list includes chief constables and Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) for every constabulary in the UK (or equivalent roles where applicable) and senior Metropolitan police officers. Chief constables are the top police officers in their force and are appointed by PCCs. They're typically appointed based on years of experience in the police force.

PCCs on the other hand are elected officials who are responsible for setting the budget and local policing priorities as well as holding the chief constable to account. There are 41 across England and Wales. The fourth round of elections for PCCs took place in 2024 after being introduced in 2012. In contrast to chief constables, these roles are political. While anyone can be a PCC candidate, they tend to have leadership experience or follow careers in politics.

The police force, particularly the Met, has a track record of accusations of institutional racism which has been linked with low proportions of minority ethnic officers. This tends to overlap with socio-economic background, and a lack of buy in from leadership.[130] People from lower socio-economic backgrounds are also more likely to be in areas with higher rates of crime, with a quarter of people living in the most deprived parts of the country also living in the top 10% of areas for crime.[131] The force has struggled with public trust in recent years due to a combination of high-profile incidents and these underlying trends.[132]

School and university background

Private school attendance amongst police chiefs and PCCs is at the lower end for professions covered in Elitist Britain. But at 21%, they are still three times more likely to have attended private school than the average person in the population that their force serves. This figure has remained relatively stable across the three Elitist Britian editions. Grammar school attendance also remains high relative to the other professions covered in this research.

Just under half have studied at a Russell Group institution, with 8% attending Oxbridge. Attendance of non-Russell Group institutions is at the higher end of figures seen in this report, at 42%, up from 39% in 2019 and 28% in 2014 respectively.

Public servants | Discussion

Overall, the backgrounds of public servants as a sector are mixed, with two of the most elitist professions included in this report (senior judges and armed forces), when looking at the proportions of privately educated individuals. On the other hand, vice chancellors are one of the least privately educated professions. While these facts have not changed much over the past five years, with senior judges the most elitist profession of both 2019 and 2014, it is positive that the proportion of state comprehensive educated judiciary has increased over the past five years from 13% to 22%.

"While these facts have not changed much over the past five years, with senior judges the most elitist profession of both 2019 and 2014, it is positive that the proportion of state comprehensive educated judiciary has increased over the past five years from 13% to 22%."

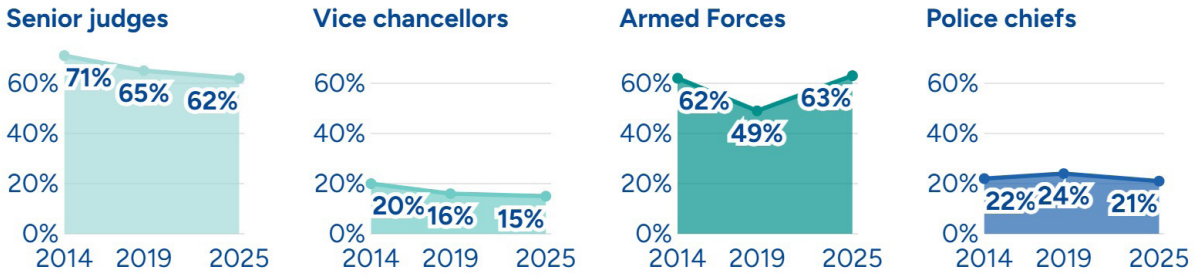
Law as a profession is notoriously difficult for people from lower socio-economic backgrounds to break into. A report prepared for the Ministry of Justice identified several barriers to access and recruitment into the legal profession. These included a preference for law degrees from selective universities, professional and informal networking, the high cost of legal training and the financial burden of unpaid work experience that especially impacts those from lower socio-economic backgrounds.[133] These barriers have been a longstanding concern, and many law firms have aimed to address the issues with a plethora of widening participation programmes, social mobility targets and strategies including scholarships, targeted recruitment, mentoring and social mobility networks.

The Sutton Trust offers a Pathways to Law programme for Year 13s, offering a work experience placement, skills and information workshops and mentoring and networking opportunities. However, progress is slow in the wider law profession, with 21% of lawyers having attended private school in 2025, down from 23% in 2023 according to the Solicitors Regulation Authority.[134] Yet this is low compared to the senior judiciary. Clearly, there is still a way to go before that group begins to better reflect the society they serve.

On the other side of the scale, vice chancellors are much more representative of the general population. Despite this, higher education has a reputation for under-representing those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, with barriers to academia including the high cost of training, the low pay of PhDs and the insecurity of early career researcher positions.

The problem of under-representation in universities starts at the undergraduate level with 4,700 state school students 'missing' from

Proportion privately educated over time



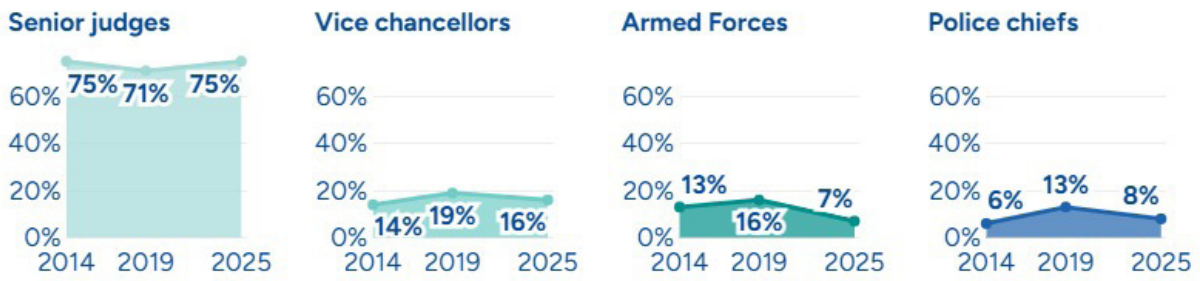
the most selective institutions each year according to the Sutton Trust.[135] While a lot of research has looked at the socio-economic diversity of students, less scrutiny has been paid to the academic staff and senior leadership levels.[136] Universities have a duty to widening participation and equal opportunities, so it's important that the leaders of these universities are also representative of different socio-economic backgrounds.

The armed forces have come under scrutiny for recruiting soldiers from poorer backgrounds, while officers tend to be from higher socio-economic backgrounds. Although they do not report on socio-economic background of recruits, research showed that recruitment of 16- and 17-year-olds was 57% higher in the poorest fifth of constituencies than the richest fifth.[137] On the other hand, the army and the RAF have been recognised as two of the top 100 employers in the country for social mobility by the SMF 2020 index. This is for their offering of apprenticeships, positive role modelling from senior soldiers, and their cadet programme, being praised for reaching lower socio-economic young people. Despite this, at the officer level there is clearly an issue with socio-economic diversity, indicating an issue with progression.

As for police chiefs and PCCs, while some attention has been paid to ethnic and gender representation, there has been less of a focus on socio-economic diversity. The Home Affairs Committee highlighted the importance of a representative force in their report on policing priorities, stating that "a police service that fails to attract, retain and progress diverse officers will be unable to demonstrate that it can meet the needs of diverse communities".[138] In general, the police force have struggled with recruitment and retention and are reportedly facing a crisis in 2025.[139] Recruitment and promotion of more socio-economically diverse officers may boost retention, and help to address lower public trust, especially among lower socio-economic groups.[140]

Universities have a duty to widening participation and equal opportunities, so it's important that the leaders of these universities are also representative of different socio-economic backgrounds.

Proportion Oxbridge educated over time



Case study

Professor Joe Yates
Vice chancellor, University of Wrexham

I grew up in Netherton, a relatively deprived area in North Liverpool with several large council estates built during the slum clearances after the war. My parents and grandparents had very little formal education but their appreciation of learning had a big influence on me. My parents had no qualifications but were very well read and intellectually sophisticated. My dad suffered from depression rooted in his traumatic experience of fighting in WW2 and he retired early due to ill health. This presented financial and other challenges but my family was very resilient. I had a strong supportive family that appreciated education, culture and debate with strong community ties too.

I went to a good local Catholic primary school with rigid discipline which even had a swimming bath thanks to support from the church. At secondary school there were some fantastic teachers but also a striking lack of expectation or ambition. The boys, including myself, were basically told by the careers teacher either to join the army or do YTS. Yet I am sure if we had gone to a more middle-class school a few miles down the road then we would have received quite different advice. But that was the expectation at the time.

There was no sixth form college in my area so I had to travel to do my A levels which I did not pass first time round for various reasons.

I transferred to Hugh Baird College of Further Education in Bootle and studied part time to retake them. I had to sign on benefits, which you could do at that time. Without that money it would have been a real struggle. I had exceptional teachers who had high academic standards and encouraged political awareness and debate. I flourished in this environment and this time with strong grades I went to De Montfort University, then a polytechnic, to study history, politics and media.

I experienced some discrimination at university as I moved away from Liverpool and afterwards also at work. With a strong Liverpudlian accent there were lots of stereotypical comments about Liverpool thieves, untrustworthy people and so on. **However, university was transformational for me and I have come to really appreciate the importance of the particular history and culture of post-92 universities for social mobility and people like me.** They have a history of delivering working class education which shaped their inclusive approach not only to their students but also disciplinary developments.

I did a Masters degree at Nottingham University and became a qualified social worker working in youth justice in communities like that I grew up in. Later I did my PhD at De Montfort and found my first academic job teaching probation officers. I went on to become Head of Criminology at Liverpool Moores University and stayed there for some years getting ever more senior roles working with a lot of disadvantaged students. Then the Vice Chancellor job at Wrexham came up. It is a small institution, but it feels like a positive space for me. There are some big challenges around poverty and participation rates and inclusive growth but it is a place where I feel I can make a difference.

Creative industries

Introduction

Stories and ideas from those working in the creative industries are what the general public see through TV shows, films, plays, music or dance. If this workforce is not diverse and representative of the wider population, then it is difficult for the content to be. Furthermore, representation is important among the most visible roles such as actors and musicians, if young people are to feel that 'people like them' can aspire to work in these industries.

There are a wide variety of roles both in and out of the limelight, but across both sides of the creative industries, access is unequal. Levels of social mobility have remained low since the 70s, with 16.4% of creative workers born between 1953 and 1962 having a working-class background, compared to just 7.9% for those born four decades later.[141] This is an issue that has received heightened media attention in recent years, particularly surrounding nepotism; the relatives of high-profile actors and musicians gaining a career in their or a similar industry.[142] But access issues in the creative sector are much broader than this. Indeed, as the Sutton Trust found in its 2024 research, A Class Act, younger adults from working-class backgrounds are four times less likely to work in the sector compared to their middle-class peers.[143] Upper-middle-class students also make up over half of the student body studying creative subjects at Oxbridge, King's and Bath.

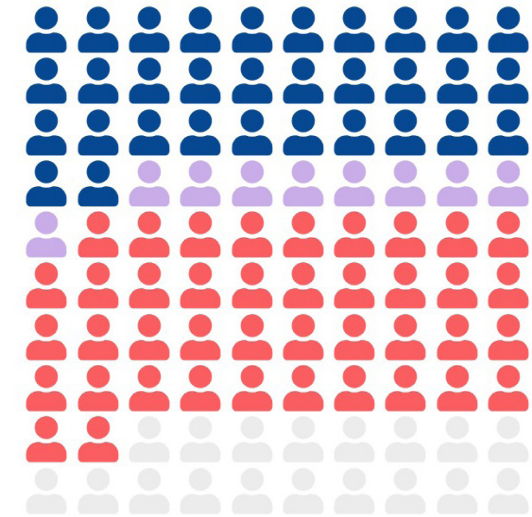
Barriers to diversity start at the very beginning of the pipeline. Despite the extensive value of creative industries to the UK economy (they added an estimated £126 billion in gross value to the economy and employed 2.4 million people in 2022),[144] the sector is increasingly undervalued in education. The number of pupils studying creative disciplines at GCSE and A Level declined by as much as 73% in some subjects between 2010 and 2023.[145] And the value of creative degrees has been diminished by critics who determine value by early career earnings.[146] This has the effect of creative professions becoming the preserve of those with a financial safety net.

To highlight patterns in access in these industries, this section looks at the educational backgrounds of high-profile actors and musicians.

Sections

Creative industries | Film and TV

School attendance



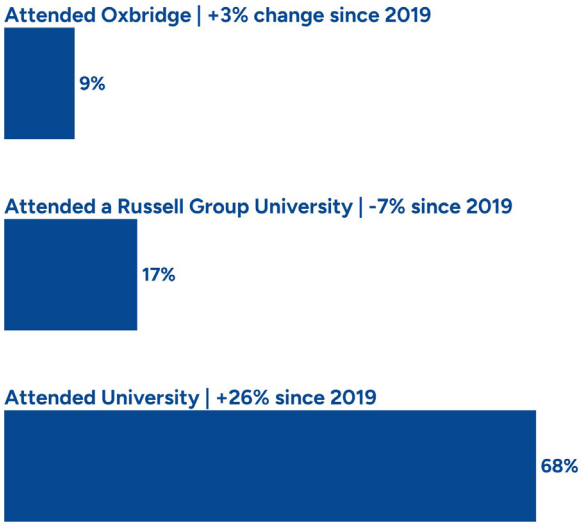
32% attended an **Independent school** **-6%** since 2019

9% attended a **Grammar school** **-9%** since 2019

41% attended a **Comprehensive school** **-1%** since 2019

Attended school outside the UK

University attendance



The sample for this section is made up of actors from the world of film and TV, who have had at least one BAFTA nomination since the 2019 awards ceremonies, up until and including the 2025 ceremonies. International actors are sometimes nominated for these awards, but here we have considered those born or based in the UK.

School and university background

Almost a third (32%) of leading actors attended an independent school, whilst 41% attended a state comprehensive. 15% were educated internationally, with a large proportion educated in the Republic of Ireland.

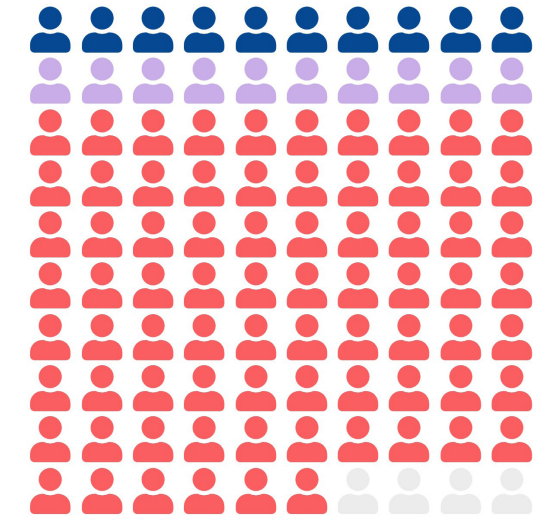
The proportion of actors who have attended an independent school has declined in recent years, but the figure is over four times the UK average (7%). In 2019, 38% had attended an independent school, and in a separate report from the Sutton Trust, Leading People 2016, 42% had attended.[147] 44% attended in 2014. These figures are based on slightly different methodologies, with musicians also included in 2019's and 2014's figures. Declines in independent school attendance here may also be linked to BAFTA recently altering their nomination criteria, aiming to improve diversity amongst nominees.

68% have attended university, with 32% attending a specialist institution for the arts. 17% attended a Russell Group institution, with 9% attending Oxbridge.

University attendance for this group has notably risen from 42% in 2019, and is also higher than the 52% seen in 2014. Despite this trend, Russell Group attendance has fallen from 24% in 2019, whilst Oxbridge attendance has slightly risen from 6% in 2019 to 9% in 2025.

Creative industries | Pop stars

School attendance



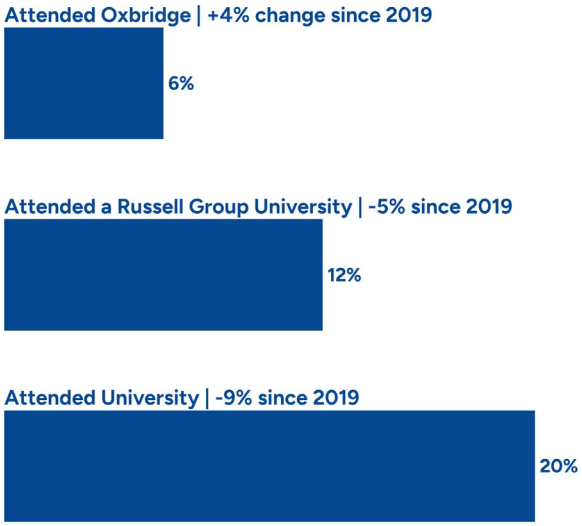
10% attended an **Independent School** **-10%** since 2025

10% attended a **Grammar school** **+5%** since 2014

76% attended a **Comprehensive school** **+2%** since 2014

Attended school outside the UK

University attendance



Here, we look at artists and band members who have had a top 40 selling album of the past 5 years. The UK music charts is becoming increasingly dominated by greatest hits albums, international artists and the large back catalogues of artists with long-standing careers, likely linked to the rise in streaming in recent years. We have therefore only considered artists born or primarily based in the UK.

School and university background

1 in 10 popular musicians attended an independent school, making this group of elites one of the few that is almost representative of the UK population in terms of school attendance (7% attend a private school). This figure has halved since 2019, where 1 in 5 had attended, continuing the decline from 2014 (22%). The vast majority (76%) attended a state comprehensive.

20% of popular musicians went to university, with 6% attending Oxbridge and 12% attending a Russell Group (including Oxbridge).

University attendance has declined by 9 percentage points since 2019, when almost a third (29%) had attended, and a further 9 percentage points when compared to Elitist Britain 2014. But Oxbridge attendance has actually risen, from 2% in 2019.

University attendance is low for this group likely because the artists have gained fame from a young age or spent their teenage years pursuing their career through touring and/or songwriting. But at the same time, several of those on this list who are in a group formed whilst studying at university.

It is also worth noting that the sample size here has almost halved since 2019, despite the same methodology being used. The dominance of international artists in the UK charts has increased in recent years, with global artists like Taylor Swift filling multiple spots on the bestseller list.[148]

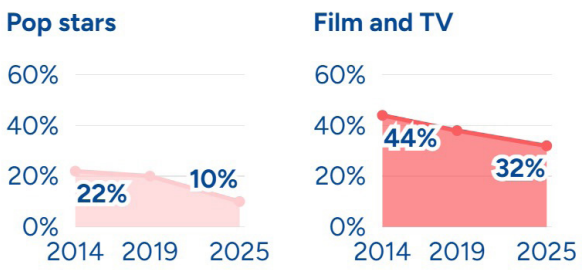
Creative industries | Discussion

Data in this section shows that film and television are two creative industries that private school students can access disproportionately compared to their state-educated peers. Whilst popular music seems to be more accessible, there are barriers for disadvantaged young people underneath the numbers here. And in other disciplines, such as classical music, access is far from equal; the Sutton Trust's *A Class Act* found that 43% of top-selling classical musicians have attended an independent school (over six times higher than the UK average of 7%). Additionally, data indicated that private school attendance was higher amongst TV and film directors compared to actors, and Oxbridge attendance was notably high amongst factual directors.[149]

In many creative disciplines, it is important for an aspiring young person to shape their craft through many years of practice and training.

> *"The Sutton Trust's A Class Act found that 43% of top-selling classical musicians have attended an independent school (over six times higher than the UK average of 7%)."*

Proportion of privately educated over time



Gaining creative qualifications at GCSE level and beyond is an important way of doing this, and such qualifications are often essential for entry to higher education courses, but access to such subjects has significantly declined over recent years.

As creative subjects are not currently featured in the English Baccalaureate (EBacc), schools working towards Baccalaureate targets are more inclined to focus on other subjects. And those financially stretched cannot afford the higher resource costs for subjects like Design and Technology.[150] These trends have not been seen at private schools, where a creative education is broadly encouraged to develop life skills, and creative extra-curricular activities are more widely offered.[151] Those from disadvantaged backgrounds are also missing out here, as fees for extra-curriculars outside of school are often expensive.

Barriers then persist for those looking to pursue a creative higher education. There are further costs on top of fees and the cost of living, including audition and consultation fees; portfolio development; and equipment and maintenance.

Many award-winning actors study at drama schools for courses whilst at school, for undergraduate study, or part-time at the start of their career. These schools are mainly concentrated in London, which are not as accessible for aspiring socio-economically disadvantaged actors outside of the city.[152]

This issue was investigated in the Sutton Trust's *A Class Act*, which found that Oxbridge's creative subjects had higher proportions of privately educated students (32%) than all other subjects at these two institutions (24%) and the overall average in higher education. Conservatoires such as the Royal Academy of Music (60%) and the Royal College of Music (56%) also had a notably high proportion of privately educated students.[153]

Gaining a degree was found to be crucial for creative employment; up to 69% of those working in core creative occupations (such as actors, dancers, artists and writers) had degrees, compared to 26% of the entire workforce.

The often precarious nature of employment in this field is also not a feasible option for many disadvantaged young people.[154] Unpaid internships are commonplace in the sector; previously the Sutton Trust found that creatives were often stuck in a cycle of unpaid placements, with 32% of interns in the creative sector saying they had completed 3 or more internships.[155] Roles are often based on short fixed-term contracts and are shared informally, shutting out those without a network of creative professionals. These types of roles are likely to be difficult for those from lower income families, as there is a lack of security for a stable income (particularly when contracts are short).

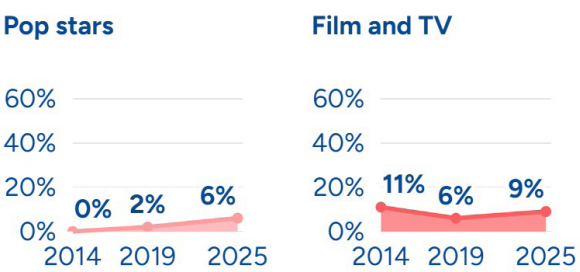
There has been notable recognition of these issues from many large employers and arts organisations. Examples include class being the subject of the acclaimed McTaggart lecture at Edinburgh TV festival in 2024 and Amazon setting up a Regional Creatives Fund for charities helping young people to enter a creative career.[156] Additionally, access to these creative subjects in schools is hoped to be a key part of the government's curriculum review.[157]

But those who were privately educated still are overrepresented at the top of many arts organisations – almost a third of directors and leaders at the organisations in receipt of the most Arts Council funding went to an independent school.[158]

These changes also come at a time when the arts are facing notable employment crises that threaten access for underrepresented groups. For example, in music, many grassroots venues where artists perform to attract labels and gain a fanbase are operating at a loss, with at least two venues closing every month.[159] Whilst in the acting profession, access schemes are being cut and local acting workshops are losing funding, which is notable given this research has seen an increase in actors having a university education.[160] Artificial Intelligence (AI) also poses a threat to the creation of art – over 400 musicians including Elton John and Dua Lipa have supported a campaign to prevent AI models being trained with copyrighted work.[161]

Without addressing these issues, it is a concern that those from poorer backgrounds may be hit the hardest, with fewer options for financial support to fall back on, and with access to the arts potentially going further backwards.

Proportion of Oxbridge educated over time



Case study

Shakeel Haakim
Actor

I started to think about acting as a career in secondary school and I was keen to study drama at GCSE. However, my school in West London didn't offer the subject which really frustrated me and made me think that perhaps drama wasn't viable! I don't think that the school actively chose not to offer it, they just didn't have the resources to fund it. Thankfully another Sixth Form in the area offered drama at A Level.

I did apply to some theatre schools, but I really didn't know much about places like RADA (where I since have studied). I never really saw anyone like me studying there. Applying to loads of schools which all charged fees was just not affordable. I did spend some time with the National Youth Theatre, which was fantastic, but for several years after A Levels I worked full time as a supermarket manager to support myself and my family.

During that time, I still auditioned for acting roles, and when I saw who ended up getting some roles it was often those who were graduates. To an extent I'd say they had an upper hand. Some actors have the luxury of being able to afford constant drama school applications and can keep trying, but I couldn't.

After working for longer and after the COVID-19 pandemic, I was finally ready to apply for drama schools again and was accepted into RADA. Although I did get some bursaries as a student, I was one of few students who needed to do part-time work. Other students were shocked that I could juggle it, and I would say "well, I don't know anything else". In the summer I definitely noticed I wasn't getting the time to de-stress, but the extra funds really did support me to get the most out of drama school.

Unexpectedly I left RADA a little early and starred in Black Boys Who Have Considered Suicide When the Hue Gets Too Heavy on the West End. This play marked a big shift in the industry due to the themes it explored. I had seen the production previously and I was blown away. I really felt a personal connection to what I saw, which is so important to inspire young prospective actors. But there is a long way to go in terms of getting more stories like it on stage and screen.

Whilst the industry is making some progress, there are still stereotypes and storylines that are being perpetuated that I disagree with. A big part of tackling this is diversifying who is behind the scenes deciding what gets made. Household names and those with industry connections also are the ones who tend to get the main roles in breakout projects, which is an issue across the industry, but means that the pool of roles for Black or Global Majority actors is even smaller. Sometimes when a popular show is one of the first to tell the story of an underrepresented group, it has such a high bar and is expected to win loads of awards. I think there needs to be a space for projects that might not necessarily be a huge success commercially, but tell a more nuanced story, so that a more diverse range of experiences can be represented. This is particularly important for those starting out in the industry.

Sport

Introduction

Whilst some elite level sports, particularly football, have been publicly highlighted for their socio-economic accessibility, the higher echelons of many other sports are only reached by a select few.[162]

The reasons for this are manifold. Those who attend private schools likely have access to sports facilities that have seen significant investment from their school, from Olympic-sized swimming pools to even horse stables. They are also more likely to be taught by experienced and sometimes ex-professional staff. This means that their students have far easier access to such facilities and better opportunities to perfect their sporting skills, compared to those at many state schools.

The link between education and elite sports is also complex at a higher education level. Whilst for some sports, professionals can make a living and enter the industry straight after school, for others, university and a further career plan is essential. Some sports stars have to work a second job, as pay from their sport isn't high enough – this is particularly notable when comparing women's sporting careers to men's.[163]

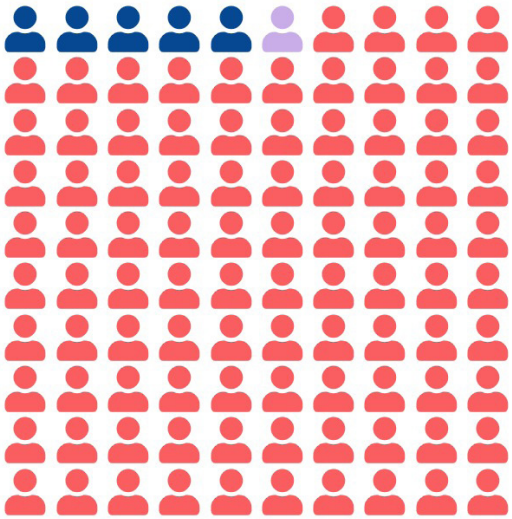
University societies and teams are also a rite of passage to many sports; for example, several university rowing clubs are linked to GB High Performance Academies, set up to identify and develop Olympic rowers.[164] Over 170 rowers who have competed in the famous Oxbridge boat race have gone on to be an Olympian.[165]

Since the last edition of Elitist Britain, there have been many success stories for British sports teams – with the Lionesses winning the 2025 and 2022 Football Euros;[166] and Team GB securing their third-highest medal tally at the Paris 2024 Olympic Games.[167] This section covers these sporting disciplines, as well as rugby and cricket, and Paralympics GB (new for 2025).

Sections

Sport | Football (Men)

School attendance



5% attended an **Independent school** **+1%** since 2019

1% attended a **Grammar school** **-3%** since 2019

93% attended a **Comprehensive school** **+4%** since 2019

Attended school outside the UK

"Several of those who attended a private school did so as it was attached to a football academy which covered the costs, such as St Bede's College which has a partnership with Manchester City's academy."

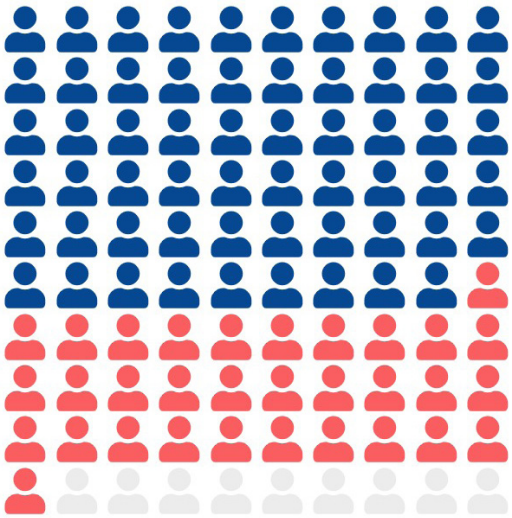
Here, we only present findings for school type. The route into professional football often begins at a young age through junior teams and club academy programmes, meaning they are in full-time employment straight after school. Indeed, none of the men's players from the national teams attended university, as was the case in 2019. Football is traditionally a working class sport, and has tended to have the lowest proportions of privately educated in the Elitist Britain series.

School attended

Considering the international football teams for England, Scotland and Wales, 5% had attended an independent school – just under the UK average. This has remained unchanged compared to 2019, but it should be noted that several of those who attended a private school did so as it was attached to a football academy which covered the costs, such as St Bede's College which has a partnership with Manchester City's academy. At 1%, grammar school attendance is down from 5% in 2019.

Sport | Cricket (Men)

School attendance



59% attended an **Independent school** **+16%** since 2019

0% attended a **Grammar school** **-3%** since 2019

32% attended a **Comprehensive school** **-11%** since 2019

Attended school outside the UK

"At 59%, cricketers are just over eight times more likely to have attended a private school than the UK population on average. Attendance has risen by 16 percentage points compared to 2019, continuing the upward trend from 33% in 2014."

As with men's football, in this section, we only present findings for school type. The route into cricket is similar to football to an extent, with junior teams and programmes paving the way to full-time employment after leaving school. University attendance amongst England men's cricket stars was low compared to other groups in this report, at 10% (relatively unchanged from 9% in 2019).

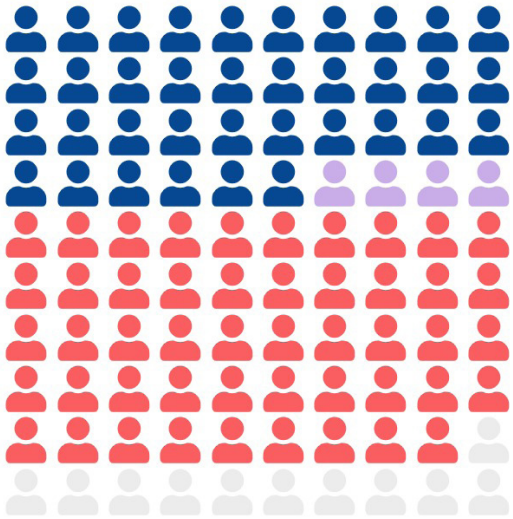
School attended

One of the most notable increases in private school attendance across the whole of Elitist Britain 2025 is for the England men's cricket team – an area where attendance has long been high. At 59%, cricketers are just over 8 times more likely to have attended a private school than the UK population on average. As with football, private school scholarships are sometimes given to cricket talents, including to former England captain Joe Root, and the trend of independent schools acting as development academies has been on the rise.[168] Private school attendance has risen by 16 percentage points compared to 2019, continuing the upward trend from 33% in 2014.

Opportunities can be limited because they often favour athletes who have come through their programme. This limits opportunities for those who come to the sport late or who cannot afford the facilities or equipment.

Sport | Rugby (Men)

School attendance



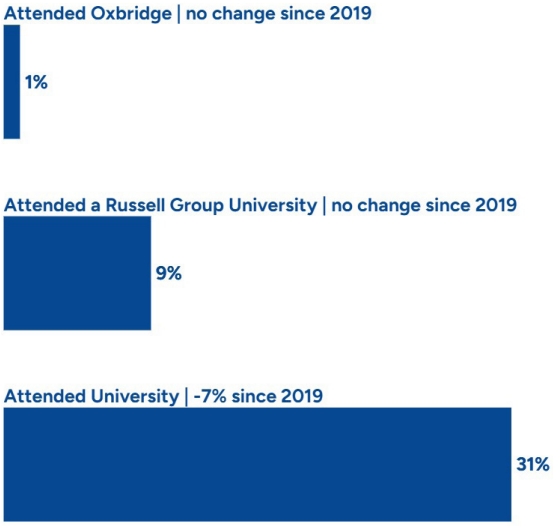
36% attended an **Independent school** **no change** since 2019

4% attended a Grammar school **-5%** since 2019

49% attended a Comprehensive school **+2%** since 2019

Attended school outside the UK

University attendance



In contrast with football and cricket, university attendance is more common amongst elite rugby players, with their sporting talent often nurtured through university clubs and facilities. This data applies to the England, Wales and Scotland national teams for the 2025 Rugby Union Six Nations.

School and university background

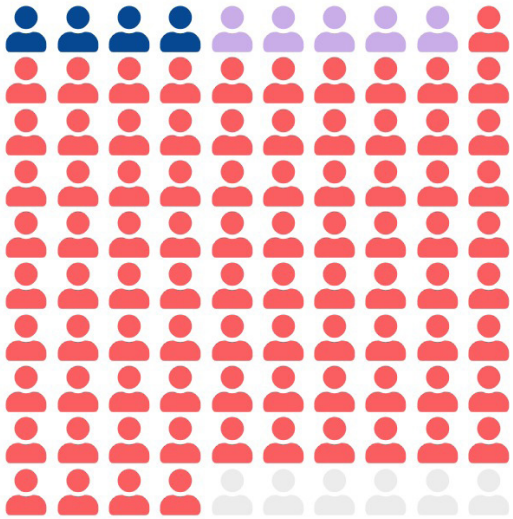
Private school attendance for this group remains relatively unchanged from 2019, at 36%. When comparing by nation, just over half of England's players went to a private school (up from 44% in 2019) while 39% of Scotland's players did so which, in contrast to England, has fallen from 49% in 2019. The proportion of Wales' players who were privately educated is relatively unchanged, at 14% compared to 16% in 2019.

31% of men's rugby players attended university, which is lower than most other sports covered in this report (excluding men's football and cricket), but still a notable proportion who may well have developed their profession in a university team. This has declined by 7 percentage points from 38% in 2019. The majority attended a non-Russell Group institution (15%) The proportion who attended a Russell Group remains unchanged at 9%.

In contrast with football and cricket, university attendance is more common amongst elite rugby players, with their sporting talent often nurtured through university clubs and facilities.

Sport | Football (Women)

School attendance



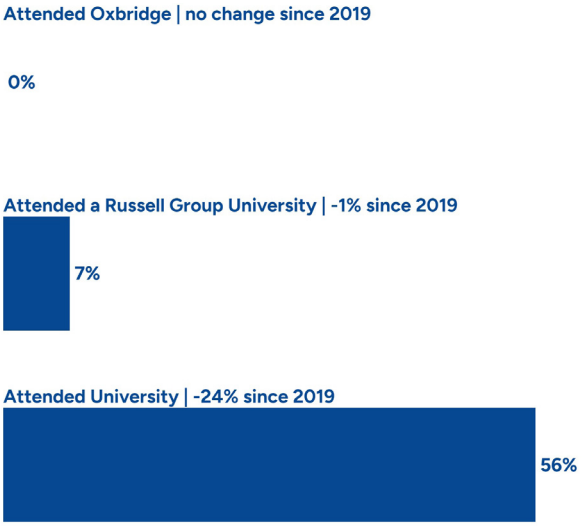
4% attended an **Independent school** +**2%** since 2019

5% attended a Grammar school **no change** since 2019

85% attended a Comprehensive school **-2%** since 2019

Attended school outside the UK

University attendance



Whilst there have been notable increases in popularity of women's sport across many disciplines since Elitist Britain 2019, the path to elite-level sport for women remains less straightforward than that for men. The prospects of long-term employment in sport, smaller professional rankings and large pay disparities compared to male teams means many women in sport still choose to pursue a career through higher education and outside of their sport to fall back on.

The following sections consider the women's national teams for football, cricket and rugby. First, we look at the women's football squads who represented their country for either the Women's Euros 2025 or the tournament's qualifiers.

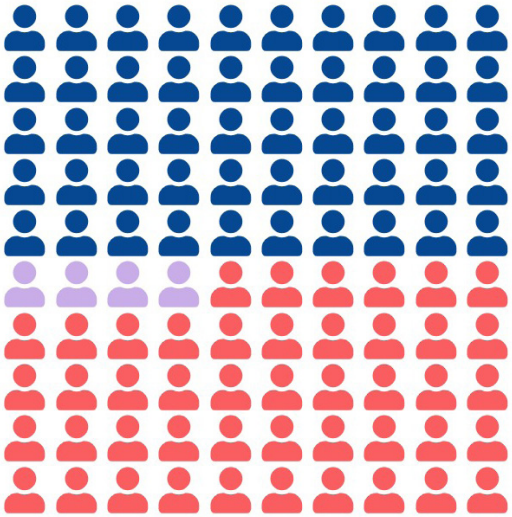
School and university background

Private school attendance for those in the England, Wales and Scotland women's football squads is lower than UK average and the men's teams, at 4% compared to 2% in 2019. The vast majority (85%) attended a state school.

56% of players have attended university, contrasting with the men's teams where no one attended. However, this figure marks one of the largest changes in this edition compared to Elitist Britain 2019, decreasing by 24 percentage points from 80%. This is likely linked to the significant growth in popularity of women's football over the past decade, with younger players reaching elite level earlier and larger salaries being available, providing a more viable long-term career. Of those who did attend university, the majority (36%) attended a non-Russell Group institution. The proportion attending a Russell Group has remained consistent. England's players were less than half as likely to have attended university compared to players from Wales and Scotland, potentially linked to more of England's lionesses playing for top-flight league teams and a larger public profile.

Sport | Cricket (Women)

School attendance



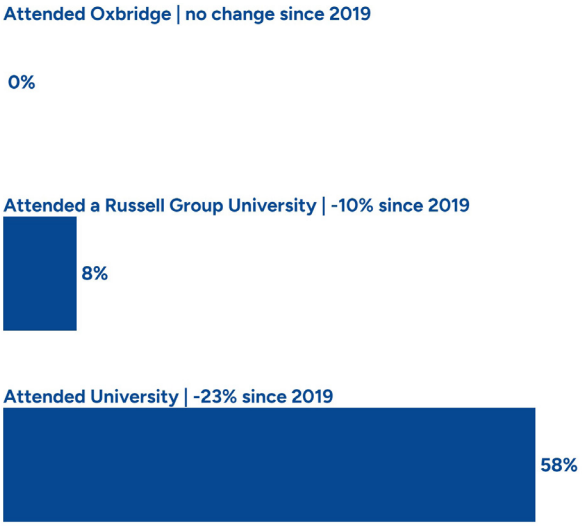
50% attended an **Independent school** **+15%** since 2019

4% attended a **Grammar school** **-11%** since 2019

46% attended a **Comprehensive school** **-4%** since 2019

Attended school outside the UK

University attendance



This section looks at women's cricket players who have represented England in at least one international match over the past year.

School and university background

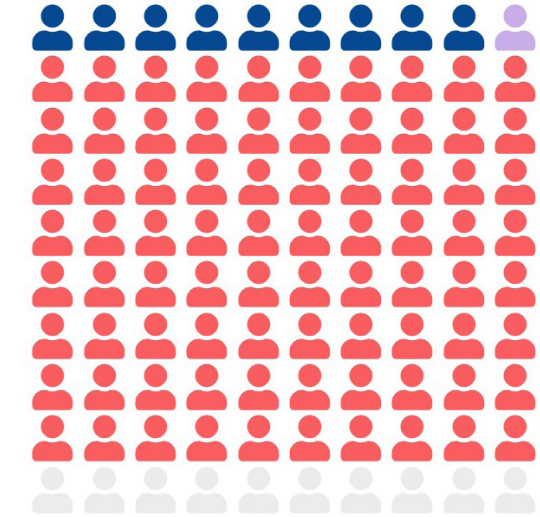
50% of players went to an independent school, around 9 percentage points lower than the men's players at 59%. Again like the men's players, this figure has notably risen by 15 percentage points from 35% in 2019. 46% attended a state comprehensive school, down by 4 percentage points from 50% in 2019.

58% attended university, down 23 percentage points from 82% in 2019. This figure is far higher than the 10% of the men's players who attended, but the decline from 2019 indicates that cricket may be becoming a more viable career option for female players, meaning they decide not to go to university, thanks to tournaments like The Hundred. Of those who went to university, the majority (50%) attended a non-Russell Group institution, but this figure has fallen by 14 percentage points compared to 2019, whilst Russell Group attendance has fallen from 18% in 2019 to 8% in 2025.

50% of players went to an independent school, around 9 percentage points lower than the men's players at 59%. Again like the men's players, this figure has notably risen by 15 percentage points from 35% in 2019.

Sport | Rugby (Women)

School attendance



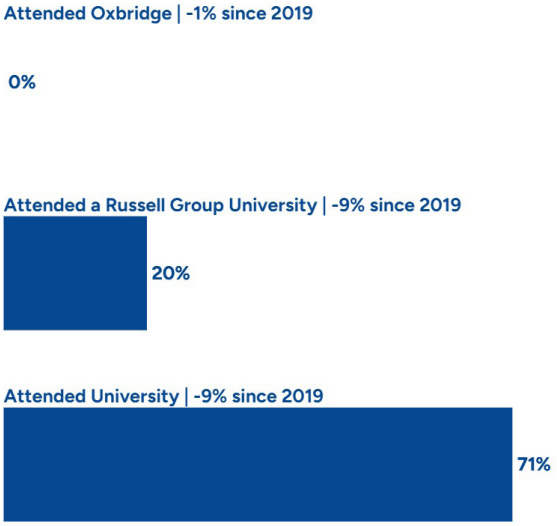
9% attended an **Independent school** **-4%** since 2019

1% attended a Grammar school **no change** since 2019

80% attended a Comprehensive school **-2%** since 2019

Attended school outside the UK

University attendance



Data here applies to players in the English, Scottish and Welsh national women's squads who took part in the Rugby Union Six Nations 2025.

School and university background

9% of players went to a private school, down slightly from 13% in 2019. Again, the trends here are different to the men's teams, where private school was notably higher at 36%. The vast majority (80%) attended a state comprehensive school, similar to the figure in 2019.

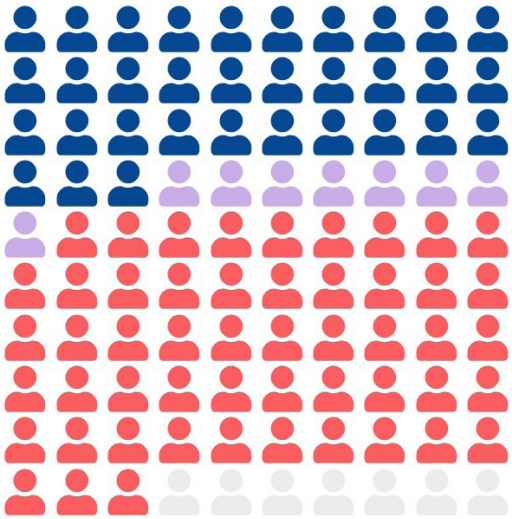
71% attended university, making the women's rugby players more than twice as likely to have attended than the men's players. There has been a 9 percentage point decline in attendance compared to 2019, where 79% attended, but this decline is not as large as those seen in women's football and cricket. As attendance is higher for men's players too, compared to other team sports, the data here indicates that attending university remains a stepping stone to elite-level rugby through university teams. But the higher attendance figures for women may be linked to the fact that women's rugby is less professionalised than men's, with the England team becoming fully professionalised in 2019, and Wales and Scotland following in more recent years.

"71% attended university, making the women's rugby players more than twice as likely to have attended than the men's players."

49% of players attended a non-Russell Group institution whilst 20% attended a Russell Group university.

Sport | Olympic Medallists (Paris 2024)

School attendance



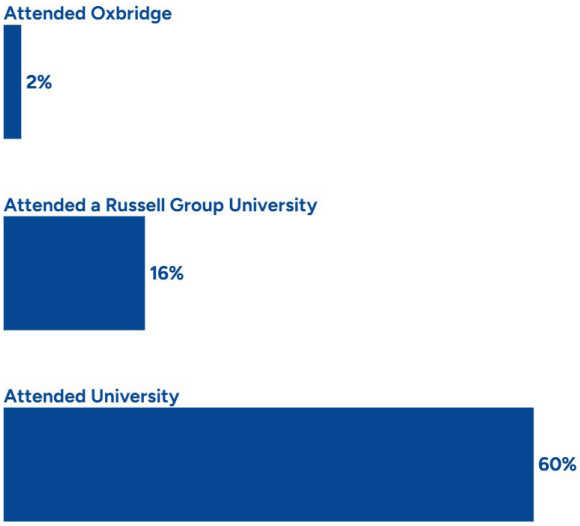
33% attended an **Independent school** **+2%** since 2019

8% attended a Grammar school **no change** since 2019

52% attended a Comprehensive school **-6%** since 2019

Attended school outside the UK

University attendance



Looking at the backgrounds of medallists at the Olympics gives insight into elite sport across many disciplines, both individual and team, from rowing and cycling to gymnastics and equestrian. The Sutton Trust has been looking at the educational backgrounds of Team GB medallists since the London 2012 games. In 2012, 36% had attended an independent school, which reduced to 32% in 2016. By 2021 however, the figure rose again to 40%.

School and university background

Private school attendance amongst Team GB has fluctuated over the past four games, falling by 7 percentage points for the team who earned a medal at the 2020 games in Tokyo (postponed to 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic) to 33% for the team who medalled in Paris. Medal-winning Olympians are nearly five times more likely to have attended private school compared to the population as a whole, with the figure remaining above 30% for the past four Olympic games. 8% attended a state grammar school.

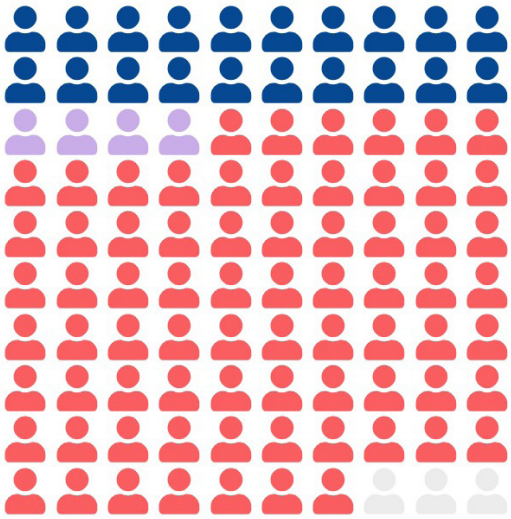
In rowing, where team GB had its third highest medal tally for the Paris games, 57% of medallists attended an independent school. In contrast, the most medals came from cycling, where only 6% were privately educated.

60% of Team GB medallists attended university – one of the highest figures seen in this chapter. This figure has risen by 5 percentage points since the Tokyo games, where 55% attended. 16% attended a Russell Group institution (down 4 percentage points from the 20% of Team GB for the Tokyo games), with 2% attending Oxbridge.

"In rowing, where team GB had its third highest medal tally for the Paris games, 57% of medallists attended an independent school. In contrast, the most medals came from cycling, where only 6% were privately educated."

Sport | Paralympic Medallists (Paris 2024)

School attendance



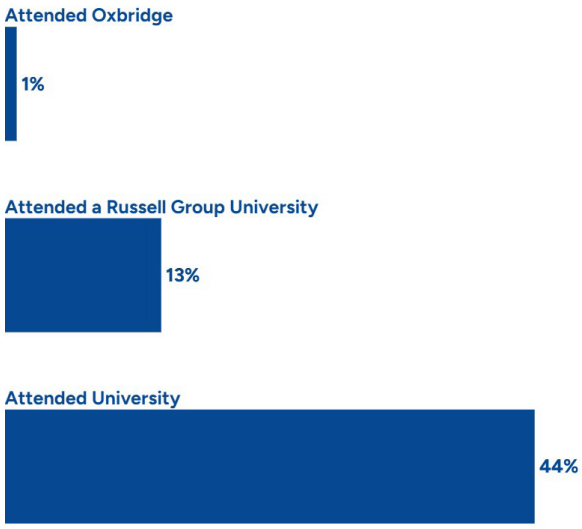
20% attended an **Independent school**

4% attended a **Grammar school**

73% attended a **Comprehensive school**

Attended school outside the UK

University attendance



For the first time, we have also looked at the educational backgrounds of medallists from Paralympics GB, considering those with a medal from Paris 2024. The fact that some of this group have attended a specialist SEND school should be taken into context here, but to remain comparable to other categories in this group, schools have still been categorised as state, selective, independent, international and home school.

School and university background

1 in 5 (20%) Paralympians who won a medal in Paris went to an independent school – lower than the 33% of the Olympic team who attended, but still higher than the population average. This figure does include SEND specialist institutions that charge fees. 73% attended a state school, including SEND specialist schools. As with Team GB, medallists from rowing were more likely to have attended a private school, at 40%.

44% attended university, compared to 60% of Olympic Team GB. 32% attended a non-Russell Group and 1% attended Oxbridge, with the rest attending other Russell Group institutions.

1 in 5 (20%) Paralympians who won a medal in Paris went to an independent school – lower than the 33% of the Olympic team who attended, but still higher than the population average.

Sport | Discussion

The educational backgrounds of those in the sporting professions covered here are highly variable, from football where private school attendance is at or below national level, to cricket where over half of those playing for England attended an independent school. At the higher education level, whilst men's footballers tend not to go to university, it remains common for women, and attendance remains high for many other sports.

After the 2012 Olympics in London, there was a legacy effort to increase participation in sport across the country.[169] But the results here show that even 13 years on, efforts have not translated into improvements in many elite-level sports. Aside from the education system, access is linked to the wide range of facilities and equipment that differ between sports. Disciplines with more specialised equipment like rowing tend to be more socially exclusive than sports that, to an extent, can take place in more public and informal spaces, like football.

Independent schools tend to have experienced and former professional teaching staff as well as high-quality sporting facilities on site; for example, several private schools have their own rowing clubs.[170]

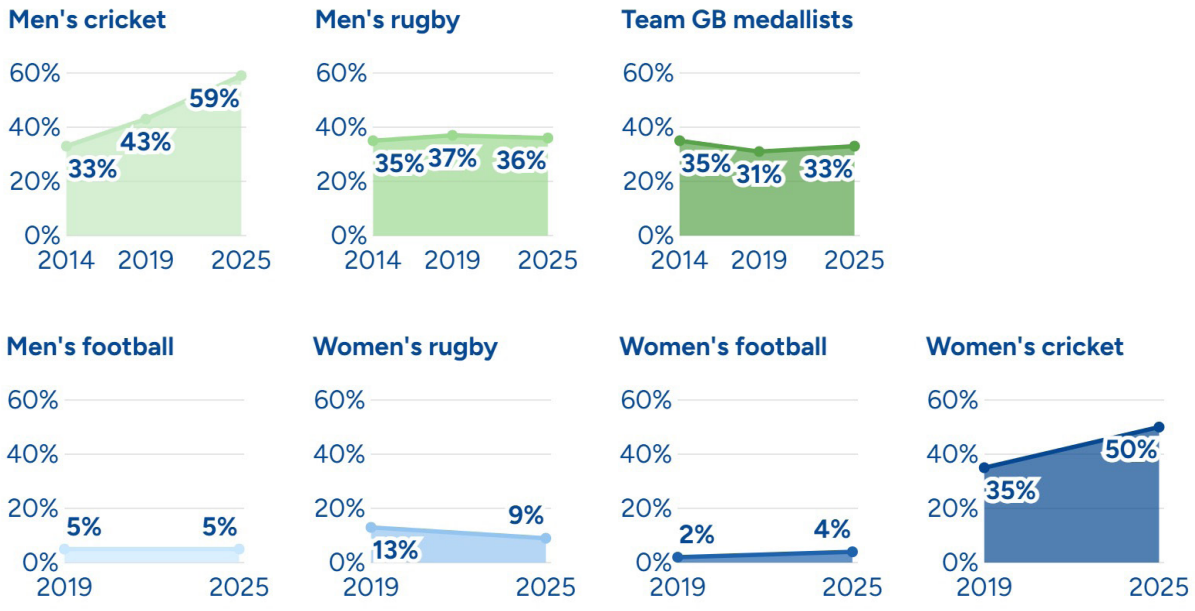
"After the 2012 Olympics in London, there was a legacy effort to increase participation in sport across the country. But the results here show that even 13 years on, efforts have not translated into improvements in many elite-level sports."

Private school pupils also have access to ten times more green space than the average state school student.[171]

It should be noted that private school scholarships can be given to students who excel in a sport from a young age. Several footballers, including England's Cole Palmer and Phil Foden, went to private school because attendance was attached to participation in a football academy, who paid for the places.[172] Some private schools also open up their sports facilities for taster days and for state school students to train, even if they don't attend (such as Olympian Adam Peaty).[173] Nevertheless, access to high-quality sporting facilities for disadvantaged young people remains limited.

Access to sporting facilities for those with a Special Educational Need and/or Disability (SEND) also intersects with this issue.

Proportion privately educated over time



Those diagnosed with SEND often need extra support or specialist equipment to be able to engage with sports and PE at school. But evidence shows this is not accessible for all; only 25% of disabled children say they take part in sport and activity all of the time at school, compared to 41% of non-disabled children.[174] This issue has been recognised by the government's Inclusion 2028 strategy, which aimed to improve access to PE and school sports.[175] This should certainly be evaluated to measure progress.

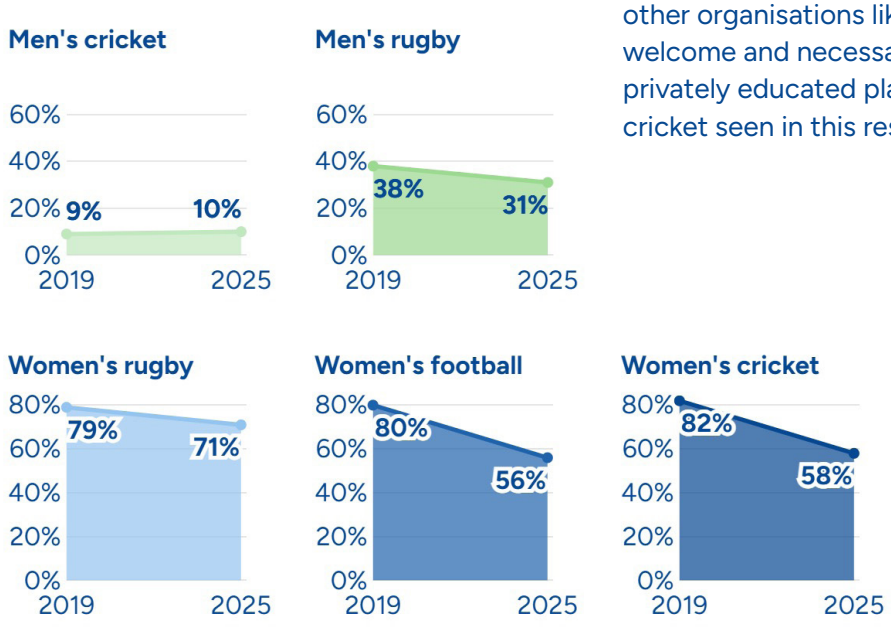
Aside from access through school, the cost of sports clubs and the required equipment is a further barrier for a disadvantaged young person. Regular practice is needed to pursue a sporting skill, but without stable financial support from family to pay for such activities, this is not an option for many children.

The link between education and elite sports extends to higher education for many disciplines. Oxbridge and other Russell Group universities tend to have top-level sport facilities. Other institutions with a sports specialism like Loughborough also offer high-standard training spaces and coaches.[176]

Whilst football, rugby, cricket players and some Olympic sportspeople (notably Gold medallists and those with a strong media profile) have high earnings through their club or sponsorship deals, pay for many other sports stars can be relatively low. This may lead many to keep one eye on their future prospects. For example, Lionesses captain Leah Williamson has pursued an accountancy course, through the Football Association, to support a career post-football.[177] It is however notable that university attendance for female footballers has declined when compared to 2019, suggesting football is becoming a more financially viable long-term career. Elsewhere, athletics has recently been criticised for not 'keeping pace' with other sports in terms of professionalisation, as funding from UK Sport has been reduced by 8% ahead of the 2028 Olympics in Los Angeles.[178] This may mean that some young talents look to other sports where they can earn more money or choose to not carry on with sport at all. It can also mean that some sports remain the preserve of those who can afford to live with low and/or precarious earnings.

Encouragingly, some sports appear to be recognising that they need to diversify their field. For example, the Marylebone Cricket Club Foundation are launching a nationwide cricket tournament for state schools in 2026, intending to increase participation amongst disadvantaged young children, following other organisations like the LTA.[179] This is both welcome and necessary given the increase in privately educated players reaching elite-level cricket seen in this research.

Proportion university educated over time



Case study

Dan Bigham
Olympic silver medallist at Paris 2024

Founder and Technical Director
WattShop
Head of Engineering, Red Bull - Bora - hansgrohe

I grew up in Staffordshire. I've always enjoyed sport and my parents gave me lots of opportunities to try things. When I was 12 my parents split up, and things got a little tighter financially. I didn't want to ask my mum to pay for things, and found ways to fund it myself. At sixth form we set up our own rugby team and raised funds to go on tour rather than asking our parents for money. I've carried that attitude into my sporting career. I loved maths at school and was particularly interested in how it can be applied in physics and engineering. So I chose to study an integrated master's at Oxford Brookes, because of their strong connections with Formula One.

I got into cycling at university. At one point, I realised there was a crossover between what I was learning and the sport I was enjoying. My lecturers were hugely supportive and would allow me to tweak my university work to include cycling. I discovered track cycling because I liked how clean it was from a modelling perspective. Although my cycling was going well, I did not consider becoming a professional cyclist. I felt I missed the boat on that because potential Olympic athletes are usually identified when they are teenagers.

When I left university, I started working for an engineering consultancy who predominantly worked with British Olympic sports teams. I also had more time for cycling, and it looked like I could be successful. But, I did not fit in with the elite cycling system. Instead, I set up my own cycling team with a group of friends. Between us, we had expertise in engineering, psychology and sports science, and found sponsorship to go and compete at the highest level. We raced as an independent team against national teams of big cycling nations. We had the freedom to try out our ideas and were very successful.

As my careers progressed, I worked simultaneously as a performance engineer for INEOS Grenadiers and racing for Great Britain, I broke the World Hour Record in 2022 and went to the 2024 Paris Olympics where we won a silver medal in the Men's Team Pursuit. Now I lead the engineering department at Red Bull - Bora - hansgrohe, one of the top world tour teams. Here, I continue to bring together my interests in engineering and my love for cycling.

There are massive barriers to accessing elite sports, but probably even more so in cycling because of the sheer costs. The type of equipment you have really impacts performance. **If you cannot afford it, you are at a severe disadvantage. You are less likely to get identified as a potential Olympic athlete, which means you miss out on all the support that is given to nurture the next generation of elite athletes, in terms of training camps, coaching, clothing, and nutrition**. I was able to get around that by setting up my own team, but even then, it can be difficult. Opportunities can be limited because they often favour athletes who have come through their programme. This limits opportunities for those who come to the sport late or who cannot afford the facilities or equipment.

Case study

Maxine Looby
President, University and College Union (UCU)

I grew up in Leicester. Both my parents worked in factories and we were a strong family unit even though my father died when I was about 11. I went to a local comprehensive school generally known as one of the worst schools in Leicester. The school drew pupils from diverse areas.

My main challenge was facing racism in school on a daily basis. You had to decide, do I fight my way through the bullies to get to my next class or do I take the long way around to avoid them but arrive late to class and get in trouble with the teacher? I was one of a very small number of black children in the school and this was the time of the BNP and the National Front so we were easy targets, the school, to be honest, didn't support us at all.

I left school at 16 with four or five CSEs and a couple of O levels. I knew I was capable of much more. I started doing youth and community work part time alongside studying for qualifications at the local college before going to Manchester Metropolitan University where I did a fast track Masters degree. It was such a breath of fresh air to finally be around people that understood what I'd been through.

After university I went through various jobs since funding kept getting cut by the government. I did community work with young Caribbean children, marketing with Manchester City Council and was national youth work adviser for a national charity working with young people. I did a teaching qualification in my spare time and when I was made redundant once again I was able to fall back on that to get some temporary teaching at Oldham College and after some years was finally offered a permanent contract.

I've always been a union member and I started becoming more active. At first I was just advising people informally but then I became the branch rep, branch chair and branch secretary. I became regional secretary for the FE sector and people close to me urged me to run for national vice president. I was never interested in such roles and put my application in last minute so the result was really unexpected.

It has been tough but I am really proud of what I have done. The FE sector is the Cinderella sector and UCU has a very large HE membership and I have faced some prejudice. You'd think that unions would be more open to diversity but I've still faced loads of situations where I've had to fight back against prejudice linked to race and background.

Even more fundamentally for social mobility, however, is the intersectionality of different protected characteristics. The way these disadvantages intersect is crucial, but so hard to properly understand. We mustn't just pay lip service to values we espouse but have to take seriously how they are interrelated. We cannot just recognise class, race, sexuality and other characteristics but have to really understand how they intersect to perpetuate disadvantage.

Conclusions

Britain has seen some significant changes since the publication of Elitist Britain, both political and social, as well as a pandemic and ensuing economic crisis. A new government also brought a change in narrative towards social mobility in 2024, setting out its mission to break down barriers to opportunity so that those from all backgrounds and all parts of the country have equal chances to succeed.

This report, in combination with our 'Opportunity Index' report on geographical inequalities published in May 2025, demonstrates the scale of that challenge. Elitism in Britain has scarcely changed in the last six years, with many of the top roles in society still reserved for a privileged few. 36% of Britain's leading people in 2025 are privately educated, compared to 39% in 2019, with some of this difference a result of changing some of the categories between reports. 47% attended a Russell Group institution (relatively unchanged from 49% in 2019), with 21% having attended Oxbridge (down slightly 24% in 2019).

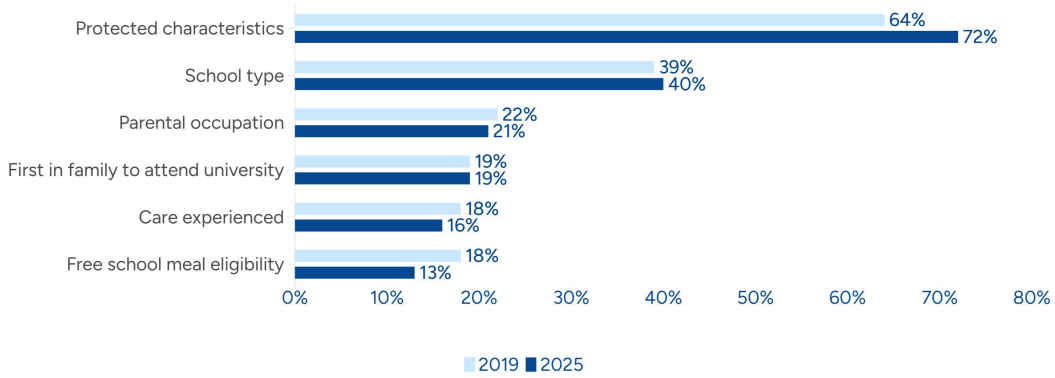
Behind these overall trends, many professions have remained dominated by private school attendees and Oxbridge graduates. Nine professions featured in Elitist Britain 2025 are made up of at least 50% of privately educated individuals, with armed forces the profession with the highest proportion of privately educated, at 63%. Senior judges have the highest proportion of Oxbridge graduates, at 75% (a 4 percentage point increase compared to 2019, where they again had the highest proportion of Oxbridge graduates). Notable increases in private school attendance have also been seen in professions like cricket, journalism (specifically columnists) and the armed forces. Oxbridge attendance has also risen amongst entrepreneurs and permanent secretaries.

However, some progress is evident elsewhere. Private school attendance amongst politicians has steadily declined over the last decade. Notably, as of mid-September 2025, the country now has one of the most representative cabinets in terms of school attendance, with 7% having attended private school (the same as national average), compared to 39% in 2019. Similarly local government leaders saw a 24 percentage point increase in those who attended comprehensive schools. Fewer actors and members of the News Media 100 have also come from a privately educated background (albeit this has not been reflected in other media segments in this report). Oxbridge over-representation has also fallen in several areas, including diplomats, the armed forces and the news media 100.

Nonetheless, it is clear that significant change is needed across numerous sectors in British society to improve social mobility. Elitist Britain focuses on those at the very top, but those who achieve these leadership roles are the end of a talent pipeline that excludes many from lower socio-economic backgrounds from the outset, and narrows further with higher levels of seniority. While in the long term, change needs to start at the bottom, this change is more likely when there is greater diversity of background and experience in decision-making roles.

"Government should follow through on their pledge to enact the 'Socio-economic Duty' clause of the Equality Act 2010, obligating public bodies to give due regard to how they can reduce the impact of socioeconomic disadvantage."

Figure 3: Proportion of large employers who collect different categories of data during recruitment



Many sectors, often amongst large firms, are beginning to see social class as an important characteristic to monitor alongside other areas like gender and ethnicity. However, a new survey of employers shows that progress in data collection has been slow. While more employers report gathering data on protected characteristics like gender and ethnicity, there is little change since 2019 on collection of socio-economic markers such as free school meal eligibility or parental social class.

Collecting data is a vital first step towards tackling these issues. While there are many different ways socio-economic background can be measured, the Sutton Trust, Social Mobility Commission and other social mobility charities have recommended that employers looking to begin their journey prioritise a question about parental occupation at age 14, to derive social class, a key predictor of later career pathways.[180] [181]

However, government has a part to play here too, requiring large employers (over 250 employees) to collect data on their applicants and workforce. There should also be a review of whether class should be added to the list of protected characteristics.

Government should follow through on their pledge to enact the 'Socio-economic Duty' clause of the Equality Act 2010, obligating public bodies to give due regard to how they can reduce the impact of socio-economic disadvantage.

While recent years have seen increased focus on diversity, too often class is left out of the conversation. Figure 3 shows the proportion of large employers with diversity goals in a variety of areas. There have been significant jumps across a variety of areas, but class and socio-economic characteristics continue to lag behind. While a significant increase in those looking at school background is positive, parental occupation, a more wide-ranging measure of background, remains comparatively low. Particularly in light of recent pushback against the diversity agenda, it is vital that class is put at the heart of diversity and inclusion.

Access to the workplace

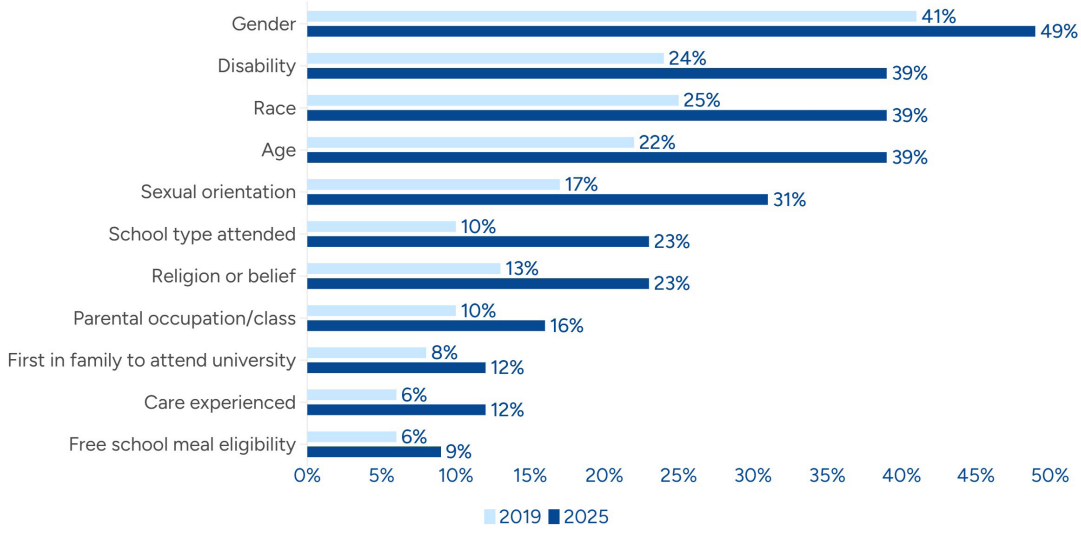
The Sutton Trust's *'Social Mobility in the Workplace: An Employer's Guide'* offers a roadmap for employers to tackle social mobility.[182] Data is the first step for employers to better understand the make-up of their staff and identify issues around access, progression, and pay gaps, as well as comparing different stages of the recruitment process. Recent research found that whilst applications to professional occupations by those from different socio-economic backgrounds tend to be equal, around half of the gap in offer rates between working-and middle-class graduates occurs at the face-to-face application stage.[183]

Alongside guidance for data collection, the Guide also sets out recommendations for recruitment, particularly at entry level. Where grades are used to sift candidates, employers should look at the context in which they were achieved, including underperforming schools and less advantaged neighbourhoods. This can be done informally, or through tools such as those offered by organisations including Rare and upReach. As well as this, employers should consider applications from those who have been to higher education institutions outside of the Russell Group, and those with other qualifications like apprenticeships. It is important to acknowledge the talent that exists beyond this pool of universities. The Sutton Trust's *'Universities and Social Mobility'* research demonstrated that actually most social mobility was driven by universities outside this group.[184]

All internship opportunities and entry level roles should also be openly advertised so they are not restricted to those with the right social capital and networks. Only 1 in 10 internships are openly advertised, with many instead shared through personal connections.[185] Recent research has shown the influence of social capital on career success and upward mobility. For example, an earnings premium of around £5,000 has been identified for those from areas where income groups are more mixed.[186]

Internships should also be paid roles of at least the National Minimum Wage, but preferably the Living Wage. Sutton Trust research has found that 61% of internships undertaken by recent graduates were unpaid or paid below the minimum wage.[187] Unpaid internships exclude many young people without financial

Figure 4: Proportion of large employers with diversity targets



support from relatives, and employers should take advantage of widening the talent pool in their hiring practices. However, government should remove any ambiguity around the legal status of these opportunities and ban unpaid internships over 4 weeks taken outside an educational context.

Collaboration is also key. Those taking a lead in these areas should recognise their expertise and share their practices with other employers so that a rich evidence base is available. Models such as the PRIME network in the law sector, and Access Accountancy should be looked to as examples,[188] as well as new and emerging partnerships like the Sutton Trust's Tech Future Taskforce.[189] The new Social Mobility Alliance, launched in 2025, will bring together expertise from charities working to support young people into careers and higher education.

Retaining a diverse workforce is at least as important as getting them in the door in the first place. Employers should ensure both promotion and work allocation processes are fair and transparent. Mentoring schemes can be useful,[190] particularly in environments where those from under-represented backgrounds may not have the same opportunities for 'organic' mentoring to arise through shared school or university backgrounds, or hobbies. To encourage retention, employers should create an inclusive, welcoming culture that celebrates diversity and different backgrounds, including organising social mobility networks and actively engaging with Social Mobility Day.

Artificial intelligence (AI) is going to pose serious questions for recruitment in coming years, particularly from an equity point of view. It is vital that use of AI by employers does not endanger diversity by reinforcing existing stereotypes, while seeking to adapt recruitment practices taking into account that many applicants will use AI tools.[191] There is also a danger that sophisticated use of AI will go under the radar, while those who do not use it well are more likely to be caught out. There are also increasing concerns across a variety of disciplines from law to media that AI could severely impact entry level roles. This could have profound effects on talent pipelines and opportunities for mobility in the near future.

The education pipeline

The education system underpins many of the inequalities seen in this report, and any holistic approach to increasing opportunity will require concerted efforts all the way from school to the workplace. It is important that employers collaborate with schools, colleges and universities so that students from disadvantaged backgrounds are supported in their transition into the workplace. This includes continuing engagement with those who participate in their outreach programmes, particularly to support their first steps into the workplace.

As discussed above, it is important that employers look to a wider range of universities to widen the talent pool they are recruiting from. But universities themselves, particularly those with high entry requirements, should redouble efforts on widening participation to those from disadvantaged backgrounds, which have stalled in recent years.

Greater use of contextual admissions, including reduced grade contextual offers, should play a key role in this. Practice should also be more transparent and consistent across the sector, so more students are aware of what is available to them. Evidence has shown that the use of such admissions practices does not negatively impact on graduate outcomes, notably earnings.[192]

> *"Access programmes like those offered by the Sutton Trust are also important. The new Higher Education Evaluation Library (HEEL) managed by Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education (TASO) should provide a rich range of evidence-backed interventions that institutions can follow.[193]"*

School

As underlined in this report, private school attendance is disproportionately high amongst Britain's elites. It is mostly the highest earners who both can afford and choose to send their children to Britain's private schools. This perpetuates the structure of privilege across generations who continue to pass through the private education system to well-paid roles in elite professions, and then send their own children to private school.[194] This is not conducive to making the most of wider talent across the country.

Regardless of the type of school pupils attend, all should have access to high-quality teaching and a rich curriculum, backed up by access to a range of extra-curricular activities. This will allow students to pursue their interests and develop their skills in areas they are considering studying further and potentially working in as an adult, as well as vital life skills. Such activities are particularly important for careers in the arts and sport, where skills need to be nurtured from a young age. It is vital however that schools from all areas are adequately funded to deliver a broad curriculum with great extra-curricular opportunities.

High quality careers guidance should also be available to all pupils, not just a privileged few. Funding and a lack of training are key barriers for the most disadvantaged state schools to offering careers guidance.[195] As part of an enhanced new careers strategy, schools will need to be resourced to offer valuable work experience opportunities, meeting the government's aim of 2 weeks' worth of experience to all pupils. Experience in the workplace can be extremely impactful for students, allowing them to gain important insights into the world of work and develop essential skills.[196] Without schools acting as a mediator to connect pupils with opportunities, placements are often reserved for those with social connections. Schools should work with organisations like The Careers and Enterprise Company to find and offer meaningful and high-quality placements, aligning with guidance set out in the Gatsby benchmarks.[197] Achieving greater socio-economic diversity and social mobility is not an easy task. Progress since the Sutton Trust began looking at educational backgrounds over 15 years ago has been slow. Success will require collaboration and concerted long-term action, as well as approaches that are tailored to individual sectors.

"Regardless of the type of school pupils attend, all should have access to high-quality teaching and a rich curriculum, backed up by access to a range of extra-curricular activities."

There is certainly no silver bullet, but the importance of widening opportunities to those from different backgrounds and areas of the country has never been more apparent. In a changing society, elite leaders in this country across a variety of walks of life continue to fail to represent the diverse population they are serving. If we are to break down barriers of opportunity, as the government have set out to do, this must change.

'The intersection of protective characteristics creates even more challenges and boundaries for some people and I don't think we have done enough work or understand enough the impact that has.'

Case study

Saleha Patel
Head of Pipeline and Commercialisation Strategy, Constructive Bio

I grew up in Bolton, where I lived with my parents and three siblings. My parents are first-generation immigrants who both worked in low-skilled jobs. This meant money was tight when I was growing up. I found the process of applying for university difficult to navigate since I was the first in my family to go to university and did not have anyone to advise me. Teachers at my school were encouraging, however, wider support for applying to university was limited.

I studied Biochemistry at the University of York after getting my place through clearing. When I arrived on campus, the lack of diversity was immediately apparent - both in terms of socio-economic and ethnic background - which was challenging. Nevertheless, I did well in my degree and went on to study a MSc in Bioscience Technology before moving to the University of Leicester for my PhD. I was lucky that my PhD, and later my Postdoc, were in collaboration with a pharmaceutical company. This gave me experience and contacts within industry which helped me to secure a job at AstraZeneca. After eight years in pharma in various roles, I moved to a biotech company, where I now lead the discovery and development strategy and execution of our internal therapeutics pipeline and commercialisation activities.

Socio-economic diversity is limited within the life sciences, pharmaceuticals and biotech sector. The main barrier is a lack of awareness. **At school I had no idea about the roles that existed within industry. I loved science however I was unaware of careers beyond medicine.** Geography is a further barrier. Investment is concentrated within the 'Golden Triangle', which is made up of Oxford, Cambridge, and London, reducing opportunities in other parts of the country.

Beyond access into the sector there is little to no support for first-generation professionals to navigate corporate environments. I struggled when I first entered the workplace - I didn't know how to set personal goals, how to approach my individual development plan and the value of building a network. Without the right connections, it can be difficult to progress in your career. For example, there are development programmes within large organisations, however, if you are from a low socioeconomic background, you often only become aware of them if you are identified as high potential talent. I was lucky that I was mentored and championed by senior leaders early on, and through their encouragement I was given access to many valuable opportunities. Although, I had to be flexible and available for these and not everyone is able to do that.

Social mobility is not just about fairness. It is about identifying untapped talent, nurturing the talent that exists within organisations and the opportunities we are missing out on as a result of not doing so. We are in the business of making life-saving medicines. If we do not address the lack of socio-economic diversity within the sector, we are losing valuable perspectives from the communities we intend to serve.

Appendix A

School (Part a)

Chapter	Profession/sector	Independent	change since 2019	Grammar	change since 2019	Comprehensive	change since 2019	International	change since 2019	*Population*	*Known*	*% Known*
Politics	Members of parliament	24%	-6%	12%	-5%	62%	+10%	2%	0%	650	553	85%
	House of Lords	52%	-6%	20%	-2%	23%	+6%	4%	0%	834	706	85%
	The cabinet	7%	-32%	7%	-10%	86%	+43%	0%	0%	28	28	100%
	The shadow cabinet	52%	+43%	12%	-3%	32%	-44%	4%	+4%	25	25	100%
	Junior ministers	23%	-29%	35%	+12%	63%	+35%	2%	+1%	98	91	93%
	Shadow junior ministers	41%	+23%	21%	+6%	36%	-30%	2%	+1%	70	61	87%
	SPADs	20%		20%		55%		5%		124	75	60%
	Scottish Parliament	21%		0%		74%		6%		129	102	79%
	Senedd Cymru	14%		8%		78%		0%		60	49	82%
	Northern Ireland Assembly	0%		62%		37%		2%		90	65	72%
	Local government	10%	-10%	15%	-12%	74%	+24%	1%	-1%	373	205	55%
Business and wealth	ST Rich List	27%	0%	6%	-4%	16%	+4%	51%	0%	132	102	77%
	ST Young Power List	54%		7%		37%		2%		55	46	84%
	FTSE 100 CEOs	18%	-5%	14%	+3%	16%	-1%	53%	+4%	100	74	74%
	FTSE 100 Chairs	47%	+15%	14%	-4%	9%	-1%	30%	-9%	76	57	75%
	Entrepreneurs/ start-ups	27%	-7%	9%	-6%	26%	-13%	38%	+26%	113	77	68%
	Tech firm CEOs	26%	0%	9%	+6%	23%	-6%	42%	+1%	105	65	62%
	Property and landowners	46%		6%		27%		21%		92	48	52%
	PR consultancy CEOs	43%	+9%	16%	+3%	32%	+2%	9%	-15%	171	88	51%
Media	News Media 100	33%	-10%	10%	-10%	48%	+14%	9%	+6%	100	67	67%
	Columnists	50%	+7%	15%	-10%	18%	0%	17%	+4%	129	103	80%
	Journalists	30%		9%		54%		6%		132	79	60%
	BBC Executives	38%	+10%	14%	-6%	29%	-16%	19%	+13%	130	73	56%
	Political commentators	47%		13%		33%		8%		96	86	90%
	Podcasters	45%		4%		43%		9%		145	128	88%
	Influencers and content creators	18%		10%		68%		5%		53	40	75%
Third sector and policy	Charity CEOs	34%		15%		42%		10%		104	62	60%
	Think tank senior staff	25%		10%		53%		12%		114	91	80%
	Trade union leaders	12%		9%		76%		3%		54	33	61%
Whitehall and public bodies	Permanent secretaries	47%	-12%	18%	+4%	29%	+2%	6%	+6%	44	34	77%
	Diplomats	53%	+1%	17%	0%	28%	-2%	2%	+1%	154	105	68%
	Public body CEOs	28%	-3%	17%	-10%	45%	+14%	10%	-1%	170	98	58%

School (Part b)

Chapter	Profession/sector	Independent	change since 2019	Grammar	change since 2019	Comprehensive	change since 2019	International	change since 2019	*Population*	*Known*	*% Knwon*
Public servants	Senior judges	62%	-3%	15%	-4%	21%	+8%	1%	-1%	158	149	94%
	Vice Chancellors	15%	-2%	13%	-20%	50%	+16%	22%	+5%	140	117	84%
	Armed Forces	63%	+14%	18%	+3%	16%	-19%	2%	+2%	91	49	54%
	Police Chiefs and PCCs	21%	-3%	19%	-2%	60%	+6%	0%	-1%	88	47	53%
Creative industries	Pop stars	10%	-10%	10%	+5%	76%	+2%	4%	+3%	50	49	98%
	Film and TV	32%	-6%	9%	-9%	41%	-1%	18%	+17%	103	97	94%
Sport	Football (Men)	5%	+1%	1%	-3%	93%	+4%	0%	-2%	80	74	93%
	Cricket (Men)	59%	+16%	0%	-3%	32%	-11%	10%	-1%	41	41	100%
	Rugby (Men)	36%	0%	4%	-5%	49%	+2%	11%	+3%	113	110	97%
	Rugby (Women)	9%	-4%	1%	0%	80%	-2%	9%	+6%	106	75	71%
	Football (Women)	4%	+2%	5%	+5%	85%	-9%	5%	+1%	69	55	80%
	Cricket (Women)	50%	+15%	4%	-11%	46%	-4%	0%	0%	32	24	75%
	Olympic Medallists (Paris 2024)	33%	+2%	8%	0%	52%	-6%	7%	+5%	131	122	93%
	Paralympic Medallists (Paris 2024)	20%		4%		73%		3%		117	96	82%

University (part a)

Chapter	Profession/sector	University	change since 2019	Russell Group incl. Oxb	change since 2019	Oxbridge	change since 2019	Non-Russell Group	change since 2019	International	change since 2019	No university	change since 2019	*Population*	*Known*	*% Known*
Politics	Members of parliament	90%	+2%	54%	+1%	20%	-4%	34%	+1%	1%	0%	10%	-2%	650	619	95%
	House of Lords	87%	+1%	60%	0%	36%	-2%	24%	0%	3%	+1%	13%	-1%	834	765	92%
	The cabinet	100%	0%	71%	-16%	39%	-17%	29%	+16%	0%	0%	0%	0%	28	28	100%
	The shadow cabinet	96%	+14%	72%	+31%	56%	+41%	24%	-17%	0%	0%	4%	-14%	25	25	100%
	Junior ministers	95%	+4%	68%	+7%	27%	-8%	26%	-4%	0%	0%	5%	-4%	98	95	97%
	Shadow junior ministers	94%	+4%	67%	+23%	26%	+16%	26%	-20%	1%	+1%	6%	-4%	70	70	100%
	SPADs	100%		80%		33%		16%		3%		0%		124	116	94%
	Scottish Parliament	87%		38%		1%		47%		2%		13%		129	114	88%
	Senedd Cymru	87%		36%		8%		47%		4%		13%		60	53	88%
	Northern Ireland Assembly	70%		41%		1%		30%		0%		30%		90	71	79%
	Local government	73%	+9%	27%	-2%	4%	-2%	46%	+12%	0%	0%	27%	-9%	373	250	67%
Business and wealth	ST Rich List	66%	-5%	27%	0%	12%	-2%	8%	-1%	32%	-4%	34%	+6%	132	116	88%
	ST Young Power List	59%		41%		13%		17%		2%		41%		55	54	98%
	FTSE 100 CEOs	96%	-2%	40%	+3%	14%	0%	9%	-10%	47%	+5%	4%	+2%	100	96	96%
	FTSE 100 Chairs	99%	+3%	52%	-1%	32%	+5%	17%	+5%	29%	-3%	1%	-3%	76	75	99%
	Entrepreneurs/ start-ups	92%	+35%	50%	+21%	20%	+11%	15%	-4%	26%	+18%	8%	-36%	113	106	94%
	Tech firm CEOs	93%	4%	45%	+10%	17%	+5%	21%	0%	28%	-6%	7%	-4%	105	87	83%
	Property and landowners	51%		22%		6%		18%		12%		49%		92	52	57%
	PR consultancy CEOs	93%	+2%	39%	+6%	5%	-2%	43%	+11%	11%	-15%	7%	-2%	171	152	89%
Media	News Media 100	91%	-1%	59%	-12%	23%	-13%	26%	+5%	6%	+6%	9%	+1%	100	88	88%
	Columnists	87%	-2%	67%	-5%	43%	-1%	9%	+4%	11%	-1%	13%	+2%	129	118	91%
	Journalists	96%		71%		17%		24%		2%		4%		132	114	86%
	BBC Executives	96%	+4%	52%	-18%	26%	-5%	30%	+12%	14%	+8%	3%	-4%	130	105	81%
	Political commentators	94%		76%		41%		11%		7%		6%		96	94	98%
	Podcasters	67%		47%		20%		15%		5%		33%		145	137	94%
	Influencers and content creators	51%		16%		4%		33%		2%		49%		53	49	92%

University (part b)

Chapter	Profession/sector	University	change since 2019	Russell Group incl. Oxb	change since 2019	Oxbridge	change since 2019	Non-Russell Group	change since 2019	International	change since 2019	No university	change since 2019	*Population*	*Known*	*% Known*
Third sector and policy	Charity CEOs	95%		52%		18%	0%	39%		4%		5%		104	82	79%
	Think tank senior staff	99%		76%		37%	0%	13%		10%		1%		114	107	94%
	Trade union leaders	55%		19%		2%	0%	36%		0%		45%		54	42	78%
Whitehall and public bodies	Permanent secretaries	95%	-5%	83%	+1%	66%	+10%	12%	-6%	0%	0%	5%	+5%	44	41	93%
	Diplomats	94%	-4%	75%	-9%	44%	-7%	17%	+3%	2%	+2%	6%	+4%	154	137	89%
	Public body CEOs	95%	-3%	60%	+2%	23%	-3%	30%	-1%	5%	-3%	5%	+3%	170	151	89%
Public servants	Senior judges	100%	0%	94%	+3%	75%	+4%	6%	-3%	1%	0%	0%	0%	158	156	99%
	Vice Chancellors	100%	+1%	44%	-7%	16%	-3%	39%	+5%	17%	+3%	0%	-1%	140	136	97%
	Armed Forces	84%	-4%	55%	+5%	7%	-8%	28%	-8%	0%	-1%	16%	+3%	91	67	74%
	Police Chiefs and PCCs	82%	0%	40%	-4%	8%	-5%	42%	+3%	0%	0%	18%	0%	88	62	70%
Creative industries	Pop stars	20%	-9%	12%	-5%	6%	+4%	8%	-4%	0%	0%	80%	+9%	50	50	100%
	Film and TV	68%	+26%	17%	-7%	9%	+3%	40%	+22%	11%	+11%	32%	-26%	103	102	99%
Sport	Football (Men)	0%		0%		0%	0%	0%		0%		100%		80	80	100%
	Cricket (Men)	10%	+1%	2%	+2%	0%	0%	7%	-2%	0%	0%	90%	-1%	41	41	100%
	Rugby (Men)	31%	-7%	9%	0%	1%	0%	15%	-12%	7%	+5%	69%	+7%	113	96	85%
	Rugby (Women)	71%	-9%	20%	-9%	0%	-1%	49%	-2%	2%	+2%	29%	+8%	106	92	87%
	Football (Women)	56%	-24%	7%	-1%	0%	0%	36%	-27%	13%	+4%	44%	+24%	69	61	88%
	Cricket (Women)	58%	-23%	8%	-10%	0%	0%	50%	-14%	0%	0%	42%	+24%	32	24	75%
	Olympic Medallists (Paris 2024)	60%		16%		2%	0%	30%		14%		40%		131	129	98%
	Paralympic Medallists (Paris 2024)	44%		13%		1%	0%	32%		0%		56%		117	111	95%

Appendix B - Methodology

School attendance

The type of school attended in this report is determined as where an individual spent the majority of their secondary education. This was used rather than primary school or college for several reasons, including the accessibility of the information and because this period is the run up to when someone takes their GCSE exams; a formative time, one where the biggest socio-economic gaps open up, and an important juncture in their education.

Whilst figures do not show everyone who has ever attended an independent school throughout their education, and the figure for ever attending is likely to be higher, we felt that the school someone spent the majority of their secondary education in was a fairer reflection of their experience within the school system.

Schools have been categorised into the following types: comprehensive, grammar, independent and international (schooled outside the UK). Additionally, a very small number of individuals (less than 10 in total) were home schooled and have been classified as such. Private schools are classified here as those which are both independent from government, and in which most pupils are fee-paying. Although Direct Grant grammar schools had some spaces paid for by local authorities, they remained outside of government control, and most pupils paid fees, so have therefore been categorised as private schools. These schools represent a small and declining proportion of those in the working age population.

State schools are classified as either comprehensive or grammar schools. Grammar schools are schools in which potential pupils sit an entry exam (the 11 plus) which aims to determine whether a student has high academic ability, with admissions decided on the basis of results in this exam. Comprehensive school is used here to cover all state schools which either required no exam for entry, or which did not require a high mark on the 11 plus to attend. This includes secondary moderns and the small number of technical schools which existed under the tripartite system. It also includes non-selective state schools in Scotland, which may not be referred to as comprehensives.

International schools are classified as their own group, due to the difficulty involved in categorising schools based in different educational systems, where the educational context is often very different to that in the UK.

School type was determined for the period in which the individual attended that school. For example, if a school was a grammar during the period in which an individual attended it, but has since become a comprehensive school, it has been categorised as a grammar. If a school became a comprehensive school part of the way through someone's attendance, but they were part of a grammar intake, their school's category was grammar.

University attendance

University type was determined by the institution where an individual completed an undergraduate degree. Those who have not finished a course have not been included.

Types of university have been grouped as Oxbridge (Oxford and Cambridge), the Russell Group (including Oxbridge), 'other' institutions (UK based) and international universities. We defined Russell Group attendance as whether someone attended a university which is currently in the Russell Group, rather than whether the university was in the group at the time the individual attended. Degrees from ex-polytechnics that have become universities are included. If someone clearly attended university, but the institution is unknown, we have classified them as having attended, but have not included them in breakdowns by university type.

Where postgraduate study is mentioned, this applies to qualifications such as an MA, MBA, PhD and PGCE, among others.

How was the data collected?

Data collection covered over 6,000 individuals. We conducted desk-based research using a range of different sources including LinkedIn, Who's Who, Local newspaper reports, Facebook/X, Bloomberg and Wikipedia. Gender was also identified through these sources, based on what individuals defined themselves as.

Where we were unable to find data publicly online, we contacted individuals through email and LinkedIn. As many of those who provided information from direct communication did so on the understanding that their personal details would not be published, we are unable to publish disaggregated information about people's social backgrounds.

60% was set as a minimum aim for the proportion of data collected for each group. However, for a small number of sections, we were unable to find information (as it was not available publicly, individuals chose not to provide us with it, or we could not find contact details for that individual). For university data, this applied to property/land (57%). For school data, this applied local government, property/land, PR consultancy CEOs, BBC executives, public body CEOs, armed forces and police chiefs (all had at least 50% of data available).

How were the professions chosen?

Many categories mirror those included in Elitist Britain in 2019, the Social Mobility Commission's Elitist Britain 2014,[198] and a similar Sutton Trust report, Leading People, from 2016.[199] New categories were included following a public consultation led by the Trust in 2024.

For many of the categories included here, there was a clear group of individuals to include, for example, all MPs or all permanent secretaries. For others, who to include in a list of the 'top' of a profession was more difficult. Wherever possible, we have used established lists created by others, ideally based on an objective measure (for example, someone's level of wealth, or album sales). Where no established list was available, we have created our own, using objective measures wherever possible to draw together a list of individuals to include.

A table summarising the descriptions of the groups included in this study can be found below:

Appendix B

Politics	Group
Members of Parliament	Sitting MPs as of 22nd May 2025 in all UK constituencies.
House of Lords	All members of the House of Lords, as of January 2025.
The cabinet	Members of the UK Government cabinet as of September 2025.
Shadow cabinet	Shadow Cabinet Ministers, as of August 2025.
Junior ministers	UK Government Junior Ministers, as of September 2025.
Shadow junior ministers	Shadow Junior Ministers, as of January 2025.
SPADs	Labour Party SPADs as of June 2025, according to DeHavilland.
Scottish Parliament	Scottish Parliament members, as of January 2025.
Welsh Senedd	Welsh Senedd members, as of January 2025.
Northern Ireland Assembly	NI assembly members, as of January 2025.
Local Government	Political leaders of Councils and Local Authorities in England and directly elected Mayors, as of May 2025.

Business and wealth	Group
ST Rich List	The top 100 wealthiest people in the UK in 2025, according to The Sunday Times Rich List.
ST Young Power list	The most inspiring people in the UK aged 30 and under in 2024 and 2025, according to The Sunday Times Young Power List.
FTSE 100 CEOs	Chief Executives of companies listed on the FTSE 100 as of January 2025.
FTSE100 Chairs	Chairs of companies listed on the FTSE 100 as of January 2025.
Entrepreneurs	Unicorn Companies list generated by beahurst.com [Accessed May 2025].
Tech firm CEOs	CEOs of the top 100 fastest-growing private technology companies in Britain as of 2025, according to the Sunday Times.
Property and landowners	Individuals featured on The Sunday Times Rich List 2025 with 'property/ land' as a source of wealth.
PR consultancy CEOs	CEOs of the Top 150 UK PR consultancies as of 2025, according to PR Week.

Media	Group
News Media 100	List curated by the Sutton Trust of editors and hosts across UK print, screen and audio media.
Columnists	Columnists from the top 5 most-read national newspapers from a sample week in March 2025.
Journalists	Journalists from the top 5 most-read national newspapers on a sample day in March 2025.
BBC Executives	Senior BBC Executives listed on the BBC website for transparency purposes, as of February 2025.
Political commentators	List of hosts and talking heads from top UK political podcasts and guest appearances on BBC/ITV landmark politics shows, from a sample week in February 2025.
Podcasters	Main presenters on UK-based podcasted featured on the February 2025 Podwatch chart.
Influencers and content creators	UK born/based influencers appearing on YouGov's top influencers Q1 2025, and nominees for BCreator Creator of the year, 2021-2024.

Third sector and policy	Group
Charity CEOs	CEOs of the Top 100 most famous UK-based charities among adults according to YouGov as of Q4 2024. Collected February 2025.
Think tank senior staff	Directors and head of research (or deputy director) from think tanks listed on Smart Thinking, up to February 2025.
Trade union leaders	General secretaries and presidents from TUC affiliated trade unions, as of May 2025.

Whitehall and public bodies	Group
Permanent Secretaries	All Permanent Secretaries of UK Government departments, as of May 2025.
Diplomats	Heads of UK Missions Abroad (including Embassies and High Commissions), as of March 2025.
Public body CEOs	Chief Executives of Non-Ministerial Departments, Executive Non-Departmental Public Bodies and Executive Agencies, as of March 2025.

Public servants	Group
Senior judges	Lady Chief Justice, Supreme Court Judges, Lord and Lady Justices of Appeal and High Court Judges as of January 2025.
Vice chancellors	Vice Chancellors of UK Universities as of January 2025.
Armed forces	A list of publicly available names for Generals of two star rank (NATO code of OF-7) or above, matching roles listed by the Ministry of Defence website in March 2025.
Police chiefs and PCCs	Chief Constables and Police and Crime Commissioners for every Constabulary in the UK and senior Metropolitan Police Officers, as of January 2025.

Creative industries	Group
Film and TV	BAFTA Film and TV Award winners for acting from 2019-2025.
Pop stars	UK artists (either born in or currently based in the UK) who had one of the top 40 selling albums of 2019-2024.

Sport	Group
Football (Men)	Squads for Euro 2024 for England, Scotland and Wales.
Cricket (Men)	England squad players who have taken part in an international match over the last year, up to March 2025.
Rugby (Men)	Six Nations 2025 squads for the England, Wales and Scotland Men's squads.
Rugby (Women)	Six Nations 2025 squads for the England, Wales and Scotland Women's squads.
Football (Women)	Squads for Euro 2025 for England, Scotland and Wales.
Cricket (Women)	England squad players who have taken part in an international match over the last year, up to March 2025.
Olympic Medallists (Paris 2024)	Great Britain medallists from the 2024 Olympic games in Paris.
Paralympic Medallists (Paris 2024)	Great Britain medallists from the 2024 Paralympic games in Paris.

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The Sutton Trust
9th Floor
Millbank Tower
21-24 Millbank
London, SW1P 4QP

T: 020 7802 1660
W: www.suttontrust.com
Bluesky: @suttontrust.bsky.social
LinkedIn: @TheSuttonTrust
Instagram: @sutton_trust
X: @suttontrust