

# DLA PIPER LEVELLING UP LAW





# FOREWORD

Having experienced the power of social mobility in my own career, I am determined to help others benefit from it too.

The UK remains engulfed in a social mobility vacuum and journeys like mine – from a disadvantaged background to pursuing and achieving my career aspirations – are needlessly rare.

In the vast majority of cases, where a person starts in life defines where they finish. It is still too often background, not potential, that remains one of the most dominant predictors of outcomes in life.

Part of the problem is that while talent is spread evenly around the country, opportunity is not. This means opportunity often gets hoarded in certain areas of the country, while others are neglected.

Britain's lack of social mobility can also be attributed to long-established attitudes and outdated practices among employers.

Research carried out by the Social Mobility Pledge shows that personal ties with people at the top of organisations continue to aid employee progress in various sectors.

Unfair recruitment practices that take into account information irrelevant to how suitable a person is for a job are also creating social mobility barriers. A person's background, their perceived social class or where they were

brought up should have no bearing on hiring or promotion decisions.

Fortunately, this is not an unresolvable situation and the tide is turning.

Through the Social Mobility Pledge, we are seeing more and more organisations stepping up their efforts to support social mobility. Their impact is not only on those individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds who are finally being given a fair shot at fulfilling their potential.

These efforts are also injecting opportunity into communities that could otherwise have been left behind in terms of jobs and prosperity. This has considerable economic benefits.

DLA Piper has demonstrated how businesses can lead on tackling the societal problems this country faces, by reaching out to communities and levelling up opportunity across the country.

The firm is leading our efforts in the legal sector, and is a clear example of business-led best practice in boosting social mobility. It is among 400 organisations that have signed the Social Mobility Pledge, a number that represents over three million employees.

**The Rt Hon Justine Greening**  
Founder of the Social Mobility Pledge and  
former Secretary of State for Education



Talent is everywhere. Opportunity is not.

People from lower socioeconomic backgrounds often face multiple barriers to a career in law. This contributes to a lack of genuine socioeconomic diversity in the legal profession. The causes of these barriers are complex. The solutions require collaboration between business, government, the education sector and our communities.

We're a stronger profession if our people come from a wide range of backgrounds. If difference is embraced, valued, and helps define the role of lawyers in our society. Through the combined perspectives and experiences of a diverse population, the profession can continue to play a fundamental part in addressing the most important and challenging issues facing our world.

As one of the world's leading business law firms, we're in a fortunate position to be able to commit our people, resources and networks to advancing social mobility.

We pledge to support those who face significant challenges entering and succeeding in the legal profession.

Through the focused collection and analysis of key data, we continue to explore and implement different ways of improving social mobility and can track our performance against set objectives.

This report is all about actions. What we've done so far, what we're doing now, and what we'll do next.

**Simon Levine**  
Global Co-CEO

**Andrew Darwin**  
Global Co-Chair

**Sandra Wallace**  
Joint Managing Director, UK and Europe

**Liam Cowell**  
Country Managing Partner, UK



# 1. CHALLENGES TO SOCIAL MOBILITY

The UK has deep-rooted barriers to social mobility preventing many people from fulfilling their potential.

Instead of career development being driven by hard work and talent, it is often limited by the many factors blocking social mobility.

These include an uneven spread of opportunity across the country and the prevalence of a “who you know” culture at many employers.

Recruitment and progression decisions should be made on merit and suitability, but where a person grew up can help – or hinder – their chances.

According to The Bridge Group’s report *Socio-economic Background and Early Career Progression in the Law*:

“There is a perceived tendency to recruit and progress solicitors in favour of the familiar, choosing solicitors who share similar traits to those who currently dominate the profession,

rather than recruiting candidates with a stronger regard to the competences required to excel in the profession.”

A 2019 poll by the Social Mobility Pledge shows most employees believe connections with senior managers and the “right background” improve a person’s chances of securing a job or promotion.

In the survey of 2,000 UK workers, 37% of respondents described knowing influential people in a business as “essential” to securing opportunities.

Only one in four believed work ethic was an influential factor in getting hired or promoted, and only 21% said talent played a key role.

In fact, Britain’s social mobility barriers start shaping life trajectories long before people seek their first step on the career ladder.

The community a person is born in significantly influences their chances of attending a good school.





Education and skills outcomes – such as academic results – vary widely across the country, and this variance influences the likelihood of a person being primed for a career in which they can unlock their potential and go further in life than their parents – a widely recognised benchmark for social mobility.

This doesn't just have a profound impact on the individual's life; it also causes a ripple effect in the wider community.

As noted in the Department for Education report *Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential*:

“Areas with better education outcomes develop a higher skill base, higher productivity, greater economic returns and become more attractive to both highly skilled people and investment, building a capacity to improve even further. For areas with lower education outcomes, the reverse is the case – they can become trapped in a low skills cycle.”

The report cited evidence that a child in one of England's most deprived areas was ten times more likely to go to a “requires improvement” or inadequate secondary school than a child in one of the least-deprived areas.

Also, while nearly nine in ten children in London attended a good or outstanding secondary school, in Blackpool and Knowsley it was only one in five.

The report also shows that, on average, 40% of the overall gap between disadvantaged 16-year-olds and their peers has already emerged by the age of five.

All this shows that the social mobility problem starts curbing potential from a very young age, and continues to stalk individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds beyond education and throughout their working lives. Interventions to solve it must begin as early as possible in childhood and influence change all the way through the career journey.





# 2. DLA PIPER AND LEGAL SECTOR BEST PRACTICE

DLA Piper is a global law firm with offices in over 40 countries across the Americas, Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Asia Pacific. Officially formed in a 2005 merger between US- and UK-based firms, its origins can be traced back to 19th-century Yorkshire.

The firm's focus on social mobility is an integral factor in its continued growth and development. Both in the UK and internationally, social mobility-driven policies and practices are ingrained in the business, with a recognition of the need to find and nurture talent from the widest pool of candidates possible.

Law is too often not the first choice of career for people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Major law firms like DLA Piper are leading on long-term and impact-driven access programmes to change this. DLA Piper has been at the forefront of industry-wide improvements in recent years.

In a competitive industry, DLA Piper is committed to being transparent and collaborative with other law firms and improving the profession's social mobility impact.



# 2.1 COMMUNITY OUTREACH

A key part of DLA Piper's work is providing access and opportunity to aspiring lawyers who face multiple barriers in entering the legal profession.

DLA Piper works closely with partners, including The Sutton Trust and The Bridge Group, to develop, deliver and evaluate their community programmes. These initiatives help young people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and run over a number of years, with multiple opportunities for participants to engage in learning and network-building.

## 2.1.1 PRIME Commitment

To make a real difference, the sector needs to be ambitious and collaborative, and to track its progress rigorously.

DLA Piper is a founding member of the PRIME Commitment, an alliance of over 70 UK law firms committed to improving access to the legal profession through quality work experience for those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. The firm sits on the PRIME board, and is leading a working group to evaluate the impact of the work they do across the sector.

## 2.1.2 Head Start

As well as the PRIME Commitment, DLA Piper has introduced its own work-placement practices through its Head Start programme.

Head Start eases the path of people from under-represented groups into the legal profession, and helps them overcome barriers that might prevent them progressing into the law and succeeding in their careers.

DLA Piper works with each student for three years, providing financial assistance and a tailored course of mentoring, training and internships. This approach develops the participant's skills, confidence and networks.

After completion, students are linked to the firm's global graduate recruitment programme and are encouraged to pursue the right opportunities for them.



## 2.1.3 Boosting social mobility around the world

DLA Piper's Global Scholarships Programme is a unique opportunity for future lawyers and leaders. The firm supports talented law students in developing countries through internships, tuition payments, mentoring and peer and professional network-building. The aim is to assist the next generation of lawyers achieve their potential, build global networks, develop leadership skills, and in time contribute

to effective rule of law in countries where it is needed most. At the time of this report, the programme has 54 students from 17 countries across Asia, Africa and Latin America.

New Perimeter, the firm's nonprofit affiliate, provides pro bono legal assistance in underserved areas around the world. This pro bono work supports women's advancement; children's rights; asylum seekers, refugees and stateless people; and access to justice and the rule of law. The initiative mirrors the purpose of the firm's other social mobility-boosting work.







# 2.2 ACCESS AND INSIGHT

A key part of the Social Mobility Pledge is that organisations commit to providing access to paid and meaningful work experience, internships and workplace insights.

Social Mobility Pledge founder Justine Greening said: "It is a credit to DLA Piper that it fulfils these criteria in several ways. DLA Piper has shown its commitment to opening access into the legal sector through Head Start, through open days that allow young people to see the opportunities in the firm, and through work placements in the form of an Insight Programme and summer internships."

## 2.2.1 Open days

DLA Piper's open days give attendees an opportunity to learn about the firm, business law in general, and the legal sector.

They provide insight into life as a lawyer in a global law firm, information for those wishing to apply for an Insight Programme or summer internship, and an opportunity to meet people at the firm.

Students from any year group or degree discipline may apply for the open days, which are held in each of the firm's UK locations.

## 2.2.2 Insight Programme

The Insight Programme offers a look at life at a global business law firm. Delegates can hear from the firm's senior leaders, participate in professional skills training, gain insights on practice groups, and attend networking events.

The programme is aimed at first-year law students or penultimate-year non-law students.



## 2.2.3 Summer internships

Over three weeks, students have the opportunity to experience life as a solicitor at DLA Piper. They participate in professional skills training, attend networking events and take part in responsible business activities.

Students can experience different parts of the firm, working with different teams of solicitors with varied focuses and specialisms. They spend the second and third weeks of the summer internship on work experience placements in two practice groups at their chosen office location.

The internships help prepare students for the world of work, teaching them key skills that will boost their chances of gaining a graduate role.

They are also an opportunity to engage with senior leaders who can inspire and help guide the students.

DLA Piper has focused on progression in its summer internships: the majority of successful training contract applicants were also summer interns with the firm.





## 2.2.4 Graduate Programme

The Graduate Programme is designed to be inclusive to people from all backgrounds. It aims to propel graduates into long, successful and varied careers in which their potential is unlocked. Positions are offered at each UK office.

During their placement, candidates rotate through eight practice groups, learning both the law and practical skills for their career. They are also encouraged to think big. The international induction in London provides an opportunity to meet global peers and start building an international network.

Over 80% of those accepted onto the Graduate Programme have also participated in the firm's Insight Programme. This suggests DLA Piper's outreach approach is bringing new talent into the legal sector.

During the Graduate Programme, recruits have the opportunity to apply for an international secondment. As well as experiencing life in a different country, they can develop their legal knowledge in another jurisdiction and grow their professional networks.





## 2.3 RECRUITMENT

Starting a job for the first time or changing employer can be one of the most significant milestones in someone's life. It is important that organisations get this process right and make it as fair and inclusive as possible. As part of its social mobility commitment, DLA Piper has, in recent years, overhauled its recruitment policy to remove any unfair barriers.

DLA Piper has demonstrated that it is fully committed to delivering this. The firm has a strong track record of delivering fair and transparent recruitment across both gender and ethnic minority representation, and representation of those from lower-income backgrounds, such as those who have received free school meals.

DLA Piper also uses contextual recruitment systems that enable assessors to review candidates' achievements in the context of their starting points in life and the barriers they might have faced as a result. The firm has also removed minimum academic entry requirements for graduates, which helps to assess a candidate's true potential.

The firm has moved from a competencies-based model focused on traditional indicators of talent, such as university performance, to a strengths-based model that considers each individual's aptitude and potential. This helps to reduce unconscious bias and "past-focus" questioning that favours candidates from more privileged backgrounds.

The removal of unfair barriers in the recruitment process also includes the eradication of legal jargon and needless procedural complexities that might disadvantage people in certain situations. This ensures that applicants are judged purely on their talent and potential to do the job, rather than their background or other factors beyond their control that are irrelevant to their suitability for the role.

DLA Piper continues to innovate its recruitment practices to reach the widest possible pool of talent – and to focus on a person's potential over their background.

The result is a comprehensive system of welcoming the brightest talent into the legal sector, regardless of background or circumstances.





# 2.4 CULTURE

DLA Piper's approach to diversity and inclusion has belonging at its heart. The firm is taking steps to ensure that whoever a person is, wherever and whenever they join, and however long they stay, by joining the firm they become part of the family.

This strategy promotes better-balanced people systems and processes, supporting the firm's wider aims to level the playing field. The firm is committed to challenging and reducing systemic bias throughout the full employee lifecycle, and to giving all its people a fair opportunity to succeed and thrive.

The strategy also looks at the external role the firm plays in making business better. DLA Piper's clients expect it to field diverse and talented teams. The firm regularly partners with clients, community groups and charities to work through some of the shared challenges many institutions face to be fit for the future and welcoming to as broad a pool of talent as possible.

## ROLE MODELS

There is a long history of senior people at the firm who have, both internally and externally, talked about their journeys and the fact that they come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

Simon Levine, the firm's Global Co-CEO, is on the Board of the Office for Students in the UK. The Board's role is to improve access to, and the overall experience of those in, higher education. Simon champions identifying and amplifying talent of all young people.

In 2018, Sandra Wallace was appointed one of only 12 Social Mobility Commissioners in the UK. Sandra is a key driver for the firm's social mobility strategy.

Janet Legrand QC (Hon) is a former Senior Partner of the firm and was a founding board member of PRIME. Her personal stories and commitment to social mobility have inspired many to consider a career in law.



It is clear that the power of role models is understood at DLA Piper; Simon, Sandra and Janet have made a huge impact on people at the firm. An inclusion role model campaign is planned as one of the ways in which the firm hopes to allow everyone to bring their whole self, and their story, to work.

## **PARTNERSHIPS**

Through strategic partnerships with nonprofits and other organisations, DLA Piper seeks ways of collaborating on improving diversity and inclusion in the legal industry.

In the Americas, for example, the firm is involved with the Leadership Council on Legal Diversity, the Diversity and Flexibility Alliance, and several scholarship programmes that encourage people from disadvantaged backgrounds to pursue legal careers.

In the UK, the firm is a member of ENEI, CityParents, Working Families and Stonewall. DLA Piper also works with Carers UK, which provides support for those with caring responsibilities.

## **KNOWLEDGE AND LEARNING**

The themes of cross-cultural teaming and leading inclusively are offered as part of the wider learning and development offering. Online learning, knowledge summits, workshops, plenaries and a variety of tools and resources all support the embedding of these principles in the firm's culture.

## **AGILE WORKING AND FLEXIBILITY**

Part of the firm's diversity and inclusion strategy is a recognition that its people may have responsibilities outside work that require flexibility. WorkSmart, an informal agile working policy, was launched in 2019. It empowers everyone working at DLA Piper to work in a way that helps them meet their commitments both in and outside work. The firm recognises that high performance goes hand-in-hand with flexibility and choice. This dynamic and flexible way of working was developed as a direct response to crowdsourced feedback during the firm's CEO challenge consultation.



# 2.5 DATA AND IMPACT

DLA Piper is building an evidence base for its social mobility work.

It acknowledges the need to better understand its people through effective data collection and management, to ensure fair access to opportunities to enter and succeed at all levels.

By measuring its interventions, the firm is developing an informed, data-led approach to improving equality of opportunity in the legal sector.

The firm works with nonprofit consultancy The Bridge Group to analytically gauge the effectiveness of programmes such as Head Start, gathering vital data to improve and finesse these interventions.

DLA Piper also collects qualitative data from programme participants, interviewing them about their experiences and measuring their progress and changing behaviours and attitudes.

Both quantitative and qualitative data sets are used to shape DLA Piper's approach to potential and existing employees. The influence of this data is seen throughout the business, including in the design of outreach and engagement schemes and in how HR activities are measured and analysed.

Crucially, in terms of addressing the social mobility challenge, this data is helping to establish the strengths, characteristics and experiences that make a successful lawyer regardless of grades or background.

As part of this work, a firmwide employee engagement survey was carried out in 2019. The comprehensive poll included 54 questions on a range of topics including background, attitudes towards working life, personal experiences and social mobility.

The results provide a foundation on which changes and improvements can be made to fine-tune the firm's status as an equality of opportunity creator.



## **CASE STUDY: JANET LEGRAND QC (HON) IS A FORMER SENIOR PARTNER AND BOARD CHAIR OF DLA PIPER**



Janet's parents both left school at 14 but encouraged her in her education. She attended the local state primary and grammar schools in her home town of Isleworth, Middlesex. During one of many challenging discussions in her teens, her dad suggested that she should become a lawyer because she could "argue the hind leg off a donkey."

Determined to pursue a career and support herself, she decided to investigate further. With no connection to the law, she enrolled on a law O-level course at night school.

With strong O-level grades, Janet applied to read law at Trinity Hall, Cambridge; the first from her school to do so. She recalls proposing in her interview that the college should offer her a place based on her A-level results because her school had no experience of the entrance examination. Early advocacy with her dad paid off and, in 1977, she became a trailblazer as one of the first female undergraduates in the college's history.

Janet joined DLA Piper as a partner in 1991 and joined the partnership board in 1999, serving for 20 years. During this time, the entrepreneurial partnership grew the business to become the major international firm it is today.

The youngest and first female Senior Partner, Janet was a founding board member of PRIME and established the firm's Leadership Alliance for Women. She also serves on the board of the firm's Global Scholarships Programme.

In 2018, she was proud to be appointed Queen's Counsel Honoris Causa. The Ministry of Justice's citation described her as "a pioneer in enhancing the role of women in the law, promoting social mobility, diversity and inclusion within her firm and the wider profession."

Janet is a member of the Advisory Panel of IntoUniverity, the largest widening access charity in the UK. She inspires countless young people from similar backgrounds to consider a career in law and mentors many in realising that ambition.

## CASE STUDY: ELIA MONTORIO IS A CORPORATE PARTNER AT DLA PIPER



As one of five children born to an immigrant family, Elia learnt early in life about the importance of diversity – both cultural and socioeconomic.

Growing up with parents who had two jobs each, Elia and her twin sister would, from a young age, help their mother with her second job as a night cleaner in an office building.

They would race around the office floors, emptying the bins and cleaning, as their mother was often too tired, and then do their homework from the office desks, while their mother finished her work.

Elia's tenacity and the influence of her parents – who encouraged all their children to aspire to great things – led her to focus on education, in which she thrived. Elia and her siblings were the first generation of their family to go to university. They had no blueprint to follow.

She qualified as a lawyer and moved to DLA Piper in 1993, joining a small team in which each member recognised the importance of teamwork and diversity. They also prioritised hard work and an entrepreneurial spirit, mirroring the ethos of the migrant community in which Elia had grown up.

Although DLA Piper has grown to become a major global law firm, that ethos and culture has remained and blossomed.

During her time at the firm, Elia has championed diversity and inclusion, recognising that a business is stronger by identifying potential over polish and ensuring that everyone, regardless of background, should be included and encouraged to develop.

“To me, diversity is a core strength of any business. It reflects an approach that looks beyond boundaries and draws in the full range of perspective and talent. It keeps the business fresh, outward-looking and innovative.

“It is crucial to make people feel like they belong, can be themselves and can contribute as themselves. From a legal viewpoint, clients care about capability and empathy, not background. The benefit that firms receive from inclusivity is immeasurable.”



## CASE STUDY: KATIE ZACHARCZUK IS A TRAINEE SOLICITOR AT DLA PIPER



Katie Zacharczuk was raised in Liverpool, in a working-class neighbourhood. She is the only person in her family to have attended university.

Katie always had an interest in law due to her keen interest in theory and philosophy, as well as in the world of business. A career as a solicitor allows her to combine academically interesting work with real-world commercial application.

Katie's family have always been supportive of her career choice, though they were also aware of the barriers that she may face due to her background and lack of networks. Despite this, they believed that her hard work and perseverance would allow her to achieve her ambitions.

Her involvement with social mobility programmes has been invaluable. Her first experience with DLA Piper was during a work experience placement, organised through The Sutton Trust's Pathways to Law Plus programme. The programme also linked Katie with a mentor from DLA Piper, who provided support and advice during her time at university.

Katie's connection with the firm continued when she successfully applied for a vacation scheme. Graduating from Newcastle University with a law degree in 2018, she is now a trainee solicitor at DLA Piper.

"When I began the training contract, I was very self-conscious that my strong Liverpool accent stood out, but over time I've realised I can be myself. We're encouraged to embrace our backgrounds and this has really helped me gain confidence.

"I have ambitions to qualify as a solicitor at DLA Piper and work hard to become more senior at the firm. I'm proud to be at DLA Piper, which is working towards removing all barriers to entering the legal profession. Volunteering on Head Start and contributing to the firm's social mobility work is important to me and something I want to continue throughout my career. I know how much value diversity brings, and I want to play a part in making the legal profession more open to everyone, no matter what their background is."

## CASE STUDY: MIRIAM AHMAD IS A HEAD START SCHOLAR



In 1996, Miriam Ahmad's family moved from Iraq to the UK, where she was born four years later. She currently lives in West London in an area where few young people go on to higher education. Despite this, Miriam is keen to achieve her goals and is pursuing a law degree at London City University. Miriam combines her studies with her role as student ambassador, and is also the primary carer for her mother.

Miriam's first experience with DLA Piper was during a work experience week organised through The Sutton Trust. On completion of the week, Miriam signed up for the firm's Head Start programme.

After hearing Janet Legrand speak about her own career pathway, Miriam reconsidered her ambition of becoming a criminal defence lawyer, and is now working towards a career in

commercial law. In her words, Miriam hadn't considered business law as an option for "someone like her." After her law degree, and due to her passion for advocacy, she plans to sit her Rights of Audience exam to become a solicitor advocate, a role she discovered during talks with her mentor.

Through her determination and can-do attitude, Miriam has built networks at DLA Piper by attending work placements and participating in the Know Your Rights programme. She has also built positive relationships with her mentors and DLA Piper colleagues.

"I want to give something back to my community, to help young people like me. To go back to my school, give everyone my email address and tell them to aim high and to not give up."

## **CASE STUDY: SHAYAAN REHMAN IS A TRAINEE SOLICITOR AT DLA PIPER**



Born and raised in London, Shayaan had a fairly working-class upbringing. His parents had not studied at university and he went to school at the local state comprehensive.

During his A-Level studies, Shayaan was fortunate enough to be offered a place to study law at a top university. Shayaan believes his successful application to university was due largely to the opportunities he had been afforded on various social mobility programmes from Year 10 onwards.

Shayaan's background allowed him to apply to schemes such as the Social Mobility Foundation's Aspiring Professionals programme, Pathways to Law, SEO Scholars and Future Reach. Without his involvement in these programmes, Shayaan feels his life would be very different.

"I owe a lot to all the programmes I was on from a young age. These gave me insight into the world of business and see opportunities I hadn't been aware of before."

## CASE STUDY: PHILLIP KELLY IS A PARTNER AT DLA PIPER



Phillip was the first in his family to go to university. He studied law at Leicester University, graduating in 2000.

On graduation, he was unsure whether practicing law was the right option for him. But he began working as a paralegal at what is now Gowling WLG in Birmingham, and soon discovered that he liked practicing law much more than studying it. He found that he loved the challenge, mental discipline and problem-solving mindset that law involves.

In 2003, Phillip moved to DLA Piper to begin a training contract. He qualified in 2005, and was made partner in 2018. Aware of the importance

of supporting students from less advantaged backgrounds, Phillip now mentors a student on the firm's Head Start programme. Drawing from his own experience, he recognises the importance of having access to opportunities that students can use to enhance their employability, build networks and increase self-confidence.

"I consider enhancing social mobility vital to DLA Piper. I am a firm believer that everyone with the potential to succeed should have the opportunity to do so, and that by increasing the diversity of our people we can only grow and improve as a business."

## CASE STUDY: ROB RUSSELL IS A PARTNER AND UK HEAD OF RESTRUCTURING AT DLA PIPER



Rob Russell comes from a working-class family in Liverpool. One of his earliest memories is overhearing his parents talking intensely over dinner; his father had been made redundant due to the recession in the early 80s and the company was going into insolvency.

Despite initial adversity, Rob's father went on to run a successful business of his own, instilling a strong work ethic in his family. Aware from a young age that he wanted to pursue a professional career, Rob decided to become a lawyer as he enjoyed negotiating and "having a row!"

This work ethic encouraged Rob to study hard at school. In 1995, he was accepted to study law and American studies at Keele University, becoming the first in his family to attend university.

Although Rob applied to over 75 firms in his search for a training contract, he was unsuccessful in securing one ahead of starting law school. Without the benefit of bursaries or a training contract salary, Rob got a loan and worked part time to support himself at law school.

Graduating law school without a training contract, he worked in the HR team at Alliance & Leicester, then started work as a paralegal in London. Renting a room from his cousin, he made a four-hour round trip to the capital every day.

In 2001, Rob obtained a training contract, qualifying in 2003 at the age of 26. At the age of 32, Rob was offered partnership at DLA Piper, becoming location head within six years and taking over as head of the firm's UK Restructuring practice less than four years later.

He believes it's important to encourage and support young people from all backgrounds to work in the profession, and feels that the success of any business is built on the work ethic, motivation and resilience of its people.

"Many of the best people I've worked with are those who have known peril or hardship. The key is to understand that each setback is actually something that will propel you forward. Each experience takes you one step closer to where you need to be."



# 4. INSIGHTS

DLA Piper is working hard to support people from less privileged backgrounds who might not otherwise have considered a career in law.

Participation in PRIME demonstrates DLA Piper's drive to collaborate with peers and measure the effectiveness and success of current programmes. Its Head Start programme is market-leading and impact-driven, supporting young people in reaching their full potential.

Through the firm's open days and Insight Programme, DLA Piper is increasing accessibility for young people and helping raise their aspirations. Work placements, including summer internships, provide strong opportunities to develop valuable workplace skills and networks.

Recruitment practices are a pivotal factor in improving social mobility, and recruitment is often where people's social mobility journeys begin. DLA Piper has committed to ensuring transparency and fairness in its recruitment practices, resulting in a level playing field of competition for both internships and careers with the firm.

These fair practices have been demonstrated through the adoption of contextual recruitment, and the active recognition of candidates who have faced significant challenges in life. Company culture is a key factor in retaining people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Culture is hard to change, and is about more than just the intent to be a good and ethical business.

Inclusiveness, diversity and a commitment to social mobility are woven into DLA Piper's corporate values through partnerships, education, agile working and flexibility, and pipeline development.

This creates a workplace where uniqueness is respected, valued and embraced. It is a place where people from disadvantaged backgrounds can see a path for progress that is clear of any unfairly placed barriers.

DLA Piper recognises its responsibility as one of the world's leading global law firms to have meaningful social impact. It has demonstrated leading practice in boosting social mobility in the legal sector, and is setting an example of how businesses can increase opportunities across all sectors.





# 5. RECOMMENDATIONS

DLA Piper will continue to work with the Social Mobility Pledge, committing to the three pillars of partnering with local schools and colleges; increasing access to work placements for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds; and consistently reviewing and improving the fairness of recruitment practices.

- 1. Leadership across the sector:** As sector lead, DLA Piper is committed to collaborating across the legal sector to share the best practice included in this report, and to encourage other law firms to share its commitment to delivering a positive contribution to society and the economy by boosting social mobility.
- 2. Deliver innovative internal solutions:** DLA Piper is committed to finding the most innovative internal solutions to boosting social mobility. These data-driven solutions will help young people from the most disadvantaged backgrounds pursue careers in the legal sector.
- 3. Community action plan:** DLA Piper recognises its role in delivering a positive impact on the economy and wider society through boosting social mobility. Building on its strong internal commitments, the firm will develop and implement a community action plan with specific targets regarding the improvement of social mobility.



# 5.1 SPECIFIC GOALS FOR 2020–2023

Under the banner of its international social mobility strategy, DLA Piper has the following goals:

- Increase its support to young people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, through Head Start and other skilled volunteering programmes, with the aim of increasing the number of young people the firm works with by 25%.
- Implement a comprehensive and effective people data management system that can capture and host important information including social background information in jurisdictions where this is possible.
- Commit to being transparent and thoughtful with data the firm holds on its people, ensuring that there is equality of access to opportunities.
- Publish an annual social mobility scorecard that highlights activity, performance and progress to improve inclusion in the firm.
- Continue to be a leader in recruitment, using technology to reduce bias.
- Implement mentoring for recruits from a variety of backgrounds throughout the recruitment process and beyond.
- Provide the coaching, support and knowledge required to create a level playing field.

