



Breaking Down Barriers Commission:

The Vision and Purpose





0. Foreword

Nick Forbes CBE,

Chair of the Breaking Down Barriers Commission and Former Member of Keir Starmer's Shadow Cabinet

The Purpose Coalition exists to improve social mobility. Over the last five years, we have supported a wide range of businesses, universities, NHS Trusts and local authorities to make positive impacts where they can – whether that be for their staff, their customers, their patients, or their local community. In doing so, we have built up an evidence base of what works, as well as a fast-growing network of progressive business and organisational leaders who are committed to changing our society for the better.

As our work has developed and evolved into a goals-based framework that any organisation

of any size or sector can use as a guide, we have found it easier to connect people working on similar issues and themes. Given that the UK is now less than 12 months away from the next General Election, this powerful sense of advocacy for change is coming into sharp focus.

The Breaking Down Barriers Commission that we are launching is the next milestone on our journey towards greater social mobility. Led by a cohort of pioneering business leaders, we aim to capture existing innovation, as well as design and offer further recommendations that can be taken up by industry. Importantly, this needs to be done

in anticipation of a stronger sense of partnership with the next Government; we don't expect any Government to have all the answers, but neither do we want to allow our country to continue to waste talent because this agenda is seen as secondary to other, more immediate, political headwinds.

In fact, although there has been much talk about the UK's economic productivity challenges, this is rarely linked to the wider social barriers that prevent more people from achieving their full potential. So taking action to tackle these barriers isn't just about creating more opportunities, it's about improving our economy too.

As someone deeply entrenched in Labour politics throughout my working life, I know how committed Labour is to this agenda. Whilst the language of 'opportunity for all' may be different to 'levelling up', I think both are fundamentally about creating a fairer society where everyone, regardless of their background, feels it's an equal playing field. But where Labour sometimes misses the bigger picture is when formulaic approaches are imposed to demonstrate greater equality. This may deal with some of the presenting symptoms of impaired social mobility, but it doesn't necessarily deal with the underlying causes. That's why a new partnership between Government and industry, based on mutual respect and honest dialogue about what can be achieved, is essential.

'Levelling Up' emerged amidst a background of disenchantment with the status quo, and a realisation that our centralised approach to Government holds the whole country back. It also struck a rich political seam for the Conservatives; many communities that had previously been thought of as Labour heartlands found the promise of a better future under Boris Johnson's Government a compelling reason to change the voting habits of a lifetime.

But five years on, little actual progress has been made. The inequalities gaps, whether they be geographical, social or economic, are getting

bigger not smaller. Worse, making these promises but failing to deliver on them has undermined faith and trust in the very concept of a democratically elected Government being able to make any difference to the quality of people's lives. Disenchantment and division have got deeper.

The goals-based framework that we have developed helps shift thinking about the lack of social mobility being a 'too big to tackle' or 'not my issue' challenge into one where people can see more clearly how they can make a real difference. At a time when our national political debates feel more fragmented and tribal than ever, this approach (which translates the UN Sustainable Development Goals into a UK context) creates much-needed safe space for politicians across the political spectrum to come together and remain focused on the practical, evidence-based approach about what positive change can look like.

Keir Starmer has recognised the need for a radically different approach as well. By setting out five long term 'missions' for national renewal that are deliberately focused on outcomes, with an expectation of collaboration across different sectors, he is presenting a clean break with the past. And the fifth mission, 'Opportunity For All', is a call to action. There's much for the next Government to do that will make a difference – modernising and improving access to childcare, revising the skills system to focus on new challenges, investing in infrastructure that better connects people and jobs. But alongside that we need to redefine the role of business in society, and find new ways of constructive engagement with Government.

This Commission aims to show how far along that journey we already are, and celebrate the successes achieved so far by consistent, progressive leadership. But it also aims to set out what more we can do, as part of a renewed contract – collectively and also in partnership with Government – that aims to genuinely transform the UK into a country where opportunity is truly available to all.

1. What is Breaking Down Barriers?

Breaking down barriers to opportunity, as articulated in the Labour mission 'Opportunity for All', represents a fundamental commitment to ensuring that every individual, regardless of background or circumstance, has equitable access to pathways of advancement and prosperity. This concept, while echoing themes of social mobility and aspiration championed by other political parties, embodies a distinctively Labour ethos that is rooted in the pursuit of social justice and equality of opportunity.

Every previous government has adopted its own language in an attempt to address the same challenge. Margaret Thatcher aimed to deliver equality of opportunity, Tony Blair was committed to social justice, David Cameron focused on social mobility, and Boris Johnson promised to level up left behind communities across the country. The language has evolved over time; but language differences are sometimes over-interpreted as difference from the must note, however the outcomes delivered must comprehensively change.

In outlining Labour's missions for governance, Sir Keir Starmer identified the imperative of breaking down barriers as an underpinning of the party's vision for a more inclusive society. This mission, akin to the Conservatives' notion of 'levelling up', illustrates a shared recognition across the political spectrum of the pivotal role that social mobility plays in shaping electoral and social dynamics.

However, Labour's approach to breaking down barriers to opportunity is distinguished by a commitment to learning from the shortcomings of past initiatives – particularly the levelling up agenda championed by former Prime Minister Boris Johnson. Despite lofty promises to redress

regional disparities and foster inclusive growth, the reality paints a starkly different picture.

Under the guise of levelling up, the government pledged to eradicate geographical inequalities and create an environment where talent could flourish irrespective of location. Yet, nearly five years on, the tangible outcomes of this agenda remain elusive. The Centre for Cities think tank reveal a concerning trend of 'levelling down', with the UK lagging behind its OECD counterparts in terms of social mobility since 2010, with the average person an estimated £10,200 poorer¹.

Despite targeted investments in regions like the North East, exemplified by initiatives in areas like Teesside, the overarching narrative is one of exacerbating interregional inequalities rather than addressing them. The promise of opportunity remains unfulfilled, leaving many communities disillusioned and disenfranchised – far away from opportunity.

Labour's commitment to breaking down barriers to opportunity necessitates a departure from the rhetoric-driven approaches of the past. It demands a nuanced understanding of the structural challenges that contribute to inequality and a comprehensive dedication to implementing pragmatic solutions that empower communities and individuals to realise their full potential.

Breaking down barriers encapsulates Labour's unwavering resolve to forge a society where opportunity is not a privilege reserved for the few, but a birthright afforded to all. It represents a departure from the semantics of political rhetoric and a steadfast commitment to effecting tangible change in the lives of ordinary citizens across the nation.

¹ Centre for Cities, Every part of the UK has been levelled down since 2010, leaving average person £10,200 poorer, Centre for Cities Press Release, 2024. < <https://www.centreforcities.org/press/cities-outlook-2024-press-release/> > [10/04/24]

2. The Breaking Down Barriers Commission

The Breaking Down Barriers Commission, chaired by former Member of Keir Starmer's Shadow Cabinet Nick Forbes CBE, is a newly launched and leading initiative within the Purpose Coalition. The Purpose Coalition – over 70 leading purpose-led organisations including businesses, universities, and NHS Trusts – is dedicated to harnessing the collective influence of businesses and organisations in driving change and driving equality of opportunity.

On the back of this work, the Purpose Coalition is launching the Breaking Down Barriers Commission – led by Northern Gas Networks, Curtins, and Hitachi Rail as key founding members – alongside organisations across the Purpose Coalition.

At its core, the Breaking Down Barriers Commission is underpinned by a commitment to redefining the role of businesses as responsible stewards of society, tasked with the objective of breaking down barriers to opportunity for all. This imperative transcends political affiliations, resonating with the underpinning values of social justice and economic equality championed by the Labour Party.

The Commission on Breaking Down Barriers to Opportunity represents a collaborative effort to shape a future where businesses not only prioritise profitability but also actively contribute to the advancement of their customers, colleagues, and communities. By fostering inclusive practices and championing initiatives that promote equality and opportunity, organisations can create a more equitable and prosperous society.

Key Labour Party figures have pledged their support to the Breaking Down Barriers Pledge, signifying a commitment community in constituencies across the UK:

- Catherine Atkinson, Labour Candidate for Derby North
- Jonathan Brash, Labour Candidate for Hartlepool
- Shaun Davies, Labour Candidate for Telford
- Conor Naismith, Labour Candidate for Crewe and Nantwich
- Darren Paffey, Labour Candidate for Southampton Itchen
- Andrew Ranger, Labour Candidate for Wrexham
- Michelle Scrogam, Labour Candidate for Barrow and Furness
- David Taylor, Labour Candidate for Hemel Hempstead

Regardless of the outcome of the forthcoming election, the issue of responsible business practices and their role in breaking down barriers should remain at the centre of national discourse. The Commission's efforts stand as a testament to the transformative power of collaboration and collective action in driving national transformation.



By fostering inclusive practices and championing initiatives that promote equality and opportunity, organisations can create a more equitable and prosperous society.



3. Identifying the Barriers to Opportunity

The Breaking Down Barriers Commission is underpinned by a framework that sets out the 14 core barriers to opportunity that exist across Britain – the Purpose Goals. This leading and unique framework is adopted by organisations committed to breaking down those barriers.

The Goals, developed by the Purpose Coalition, collectively map out the key barriers to opportunity in the UK, offering a blueprint for businesses and other organisations to focus their efforts. The 14 Purpose Goals encompass a broad range of societal and economic issues, from early childhood development to workplace inclusivity, highlighting the multifaceted nature of inequality and the need for a comprehensive approach by responsible businesses and other organisations.

The Goals also emphasise areas where many businesses and other organisations have best practice to share on issues such as fair career progression, open recruitment, and good health and wellbeing.

For businesses and other organisations, the Goals provide a structured framework to assess and enhance their positive role in society by working to break down each of the 14 barriers to opportunity.

The Goals have been adopted by more than 100 businesses and other organisations including Leonardo, UK Power Networks, bp, the Co-op Group, Sodexo, Pennon Group, Channel 4, Reed, the BBC, NHS Trusts, UK councils and UK universities amongst others.



3.1. Strong Foundations in Early Years

Purpose Goal 1, Strong Foundations in Early Years, identifies and seeks to address the critical importance of establishing a robust educational groundwork during a child's formative years. Recognised as a pivotal barrier to opportunity, Purpose Goal 1 illustrates the necessity of early intervention and support to ensure equitable access to education and a successful foundation that underpins a child's development.

Despite efforts to improve early years provision, challenges persist. While 96% of childcare providers have received positive Good or Outstanding OFSTED evaluations, the proportion judged Outstanding has decreased in recent years². This trend raises concerns about the quality and consistency of early years education, particularly for vulnerable children who may already face significant barriers.

More widely, development statistics on young children from under-resourced backgrounds across the UK display the gap between those who face the most significant barriers to opportunity. In 2022, 49.1% of children eligible for free school meals achieve a 'good level of development' by the Early Years Foundation Stage – compared to 68.8% of non-free school meal eligible children³. The 19.6 percentage difference at such a young age illustrates the importance of a focus by organisations across the public and private sector on early years development.



Purpose Goal 1, Strong Foundation in Early Years, outlines the imperative of addressing disparities in early years education to mitigate the barriers to opportunity faced by disadvantaged children as a critical part of a wider focus on Britain's development. By ensuring access to high-quality provision and targeted support for children from disadvantaged and under-resourced backgrounds, purpose-led organisations can lay the groundwork for a more equitable and prosperous future, where every child has the opportunity to thrive from the very beginning of their educational journey.



Where every child has the opportunity to thrive from the very beginning of their educational journey.

² Katy Morton, Deprived children less likely to achieve a good level of development, reveal EYFSP results, Nursery World, 2022.
³ < <https://www.nurseryworld.co.uk/news/article/deprived-children-less-likely-to-achieve-a-good-level-of-development-reveal-eyfsp-results> > [10/04/24]



3.2. Successful School Years

Purpose Goal 2, Successful School Years, addresses the significant barrier to opportunity posed by the lack of successful educational experiences during a young person’s time in school. It emphasises the critical importance of not only academic achievement but also broader personal development during these years.

When the Purpose Coalition began its work on the barriers to opportunity that exist across Britain, it outlined the persistent challenges in narrowing the attainment gap between the most and least privileged students in schools across Britain. Even before the onset of COVID-19, research indicated a significant disparity in learning outcomes, with disadvantaged young people lagging behind their peers by the equivalent of 19 months by Key Stage 4.

Years on, the disruptions caused by the pandemic – with disadvantaged students disproportionately affected by school closures and the challenges of remote learning – and subsequent rises in the cost-of-living, have only exacerbated these inequalities.

The statistics reveal concerning trends in GCSE outcomes. Overall, among 16-year-olds in England, 70.3% of all 2023 awards were at grade 4 or above, marking a decrease of 5.0 percentage points compared to 2022⁴. At the higher end of the distribution, 22.4% of all awards were at grade 7 or above in 2023, showing a decrease of 4.6 percentage points compared to 2022⁵.

Particularly alarming is the widening of the ‘disadvantage gap index’. In the 2021 to 2022 school year, only 50% of all pupils achieved a pass – grade 5 or above – in both GCSE English and maths. This figure dropped to 30% for disadvantaged pupils, compared to 57% for all other pupils⁶. The disadvantage gap index, which measures the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and all other pupils, was at its widest in 2021/22 since the 2011/12 school year⁷.

While there have been improvements in the proportion of Good and Outstanding OFSTED-rated primary schools – with an increase from 89% to 90% since August 2022 – there has been a stagnation in secondary school performance across the UK⁸.

The proportion of Good and Outstanding secondary schools remained unchanged at 80% in 2021/22 compared to the previous year⁹. Additionally, since 2019, the proportion of schools judged Outstanding at their most recent inspection has decreased from 20% to 17%, whereas the percentage judged good has increased from 66% to 72%¹⁰.

Purpose Goal 2, Successful School Years, outlines this imperative – to address the disparities in education outcomes throughout school years as a key barrier to opportunity. By focusing not only on academic attainment but also on holistic personal development, Britain can work towards creating a more equitable education system where every student has the opportunity to succeed, regardless of their background or circumstances.

⁴ EPI Analysis, Analysis: GCSE Results Day 2023, Education Policy Institute, 2023. < <https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/analysis-gcse-results-day-2023/> > [10/04/24] ⁵ “
⁶ State of the Nation, Attainment at age 16, Social Mobility Commission, 2022. < [https://social-mobility.data.gov.uk/intermediate_outcomes/compulsory_school_age_\(5_to_16_years\)/attainment_at_age_16](https://social-mobility.data.gov.uk/intermediate_outcomes/compulsory_school_age_(5_to_16_years)/attainment_at_age_16) > [10/04/24] ⁷ “
⁸ Ofsted Official Statistics, Main findings: State-funded schools inspections and outcomes as at 31st December 2022, GOV.UK, 2023. < <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/state-funded-schools-inspections-and-outcomes-as-at-31-december-2022/main-findings-state-funded-schools-inspections-and-outcomes-as-at-31-december-2022#:~:text=The%20proportion%20of%20good%20and%20outstanding%20primary%20schools%20has%20increased,remained%20unchanged%2C%20at%2080%25> > [10/04/24] ⁹ “

3 Positive destinations Post 16+



3.3. Positive Destinations Post 16+

Purpose Goal 3, Positive Destinations Post 16+, addresses the significant barrier to opportunity posed by a lack of access to varied pathways when leaving secondary school. It emphasises the crucial role of providing a number of varied and inclusive pathways to young people as they transition into adulthood, ensuring every young person has the tools and necessary prospects to continue to develop and reach their potential across every vocation or educational interest.

When looking right across Britain, the importance of Purpose Goal 3 is illustrated by the disparities in educational attainment and outcomes between disadvantaged students and their non-disadvantaged peers.

Only 42% of disadvantaged students achieve Level 3 qualifications by age 19, compared to 67% of their non-disadvantaged counterparts¹⁰. Similarly, 57% of disadvantaged students achieve Level 2 in both English and maths by age 19, compared to 81% of their non-disadvantaged peers¹². These statistics highlight the significant barrier faced by students simply as a result of their background in accessing higher levels of education and achieving academic success.

The data on participation rates amongst 16–18-year-olds further highlights the disparities. The participation rate stands at overall 78.7%, indicating a slight decrease of 0.9 percentage points since the end of 2021¹³. While this rate is relatively high, it is important to note that there has been a decline from the highest rate in recent times – 82.4% at the end of 2014¹⁴.



This decline indicates the challenges in ensuring continued engagement and participation in education and training among young people as a result of the challenges faced across the country.

Purpose Goal 3, Positive Destinations Post 16+, highlights the imperative of strategic and varied pathways for all young people, regardless of background or circumstances. This is a critical challenge for Britain – by addressing these barriers, the UK can empower all young people to pursue higher education or vocational training.

¹⁰ Ofsted Official Statistics, Main findings: State-funded schools inspections and outcomes as at 31st December 2022, GOV.UK, 2023. <<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/state-funded-schools-inspections-and-outcomes-as-at-31-december-2022/main-findings-state-funded-schools-inspections-and-outcomes-as-at-31-december-2022#:~:text=The%20proportion%20of%20good%20and%20outstanding%20primary%20schools%20has%20increased,remained%20unchanged%2C%20at%2080%25>> [10/04/24]

¹¹ DFE, A world-class education system: The Advanced British Standard consultation, Department for Education, 2023. <https://consult.education.gov.uk/advanced-british-standards-directorate/the-advanced-british-standard/supporting_documents/A%20worldclass%20education%20system%20The%20Advanced%20British%20Standard%20consultation.pdf> [10/04/24] ¹²

¹³ National Statistics, Participation in education, training and employment age 16 to 18, GOV.UK, 2022. <<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/participation-in-education-and-training-and-employment>> [10/04/24] ¹⁴



3.4. Right Advice and Experiences

Purpose Goal 4, Right Advice and Experiences, identifies and seeks to address the significant barrier to opportunity posed by a lack of access to the appropriate guidance and experiences at crucial junctures in a young person’s life. It highlights the importance of providing timely and relevant advice and opportunities to support individuals in making informed decisions about their education, training, and future careers.

Recent statistics on NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) rates among 16–18-year-olds and 18-year-olds illustrates the challenges faced by young people in accessing appropriate opportunities at the right time.

The NEET rate for 16–18-year-olds stood at 8.4% in October 2023, marking an increase of 1.3 percentage points since the end of 2021¹⁵. Similarly, the NEET rate for 18-year-olds has risen by 6.1 percentage points since the end of 2021, reaching 15.9%¹⁶. These figures indicate a concerning trend of increasing disengagement among young people – a challenge for both the economy, individuals and communities across the UK.



The data on higher education progression rates by age 19 also highlights disparities between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students.



The data on higher education progression rates by age 19 also highlights disparities between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students. While the overall progression rate has increased to 46.8% in 2021/22¹⁷, the progression rate for disadvantaged pupils remains significantly lower at 32.5%, compared to 51.7% for non-disadvantaged pupils¹⁸. This discrepancy highlights the need for targeted support and guidance to ensure that all young people, regardless of their background, have access to the opportunities they need to succeed.

Purpose Goal 4, Right Advice and Experiences, highlights the importance of ensuring all young people are supported in making informed decisions about their futures. By addressing barriers to access and ensuring equitable training and educational opportunities for all, Britain can empower individuals to reach their full potential and contribute positively to their communities and the wider economy.

¹⁵ National Statistics, Participation in education, training and employment age 16 to 18, GOV.UK, 2022. < <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/participation-in-education-and-training-and-employment> > [10/04/24]¹⁶⁻¹⁸ "



3.5. Open Recruitment

Purpose Goal 5, Open Recruitment, outlines the necessity of open opportunities and strategic, fair, and inclusive recruitment practices to ensure that all individuals have the opportunity to maximise their potential. It emphasises the importance of breaking down barriers and ensuring equal access to career opportunities for individuals from diverse backgrounds.

Despite positive significant progress in this area, represented by an impressive unemployment rate of 3.8% in December 2022¹⁹, significant inequalities exist by ethnicity and gender – highlighting the need for refreshed focus on Purpose Goal 5. The unemployment rate is notably higher for people from minority ethnic backgrounds compared to those from a White ethnic background – the rate for women from a Pakistani or Bangladeshi ethnic background was 10.7%, significantly higher than the overall female unemployment rate of 3.7%²⁰.



Women are also working less hours, with a significant proportion of women in employment working part-time – 38% of women compared to 14% of men.

Recent trends also indicate a worrying and worsening trend for all women in employment. In October to December 2023, the female employment rate was 72.1%, down from a record high of 72.4% in December 2019 to February 2020²¹. This decline in the female employment rate contrasts with the male employment rate of 78.1%²². Women are also working less hours, with a significant proportion of women in employment working part-time – 38% of women compared to 14% of men²³. These statistics highlight the need for targeted interventions to address barriers to full-time employment and promote gender equality across the workforce through recruitment processes.

Through Purpose Goal 5, Open Recruitment, the public and private sector can work to address the workforce disparities based on ethnicity and gender – fostering a more inclusive and diverse working Britain. This will help the country harness the full potential of its talent pool and promote greater social and economic mobility.

¹⁹Brigid Francis-Devine et al., Women and the UK economy, House of Commons Library, 4th March 2024. ²⁰⁻²³ *



3.6. Fair Career Progression

Purpose Goal 6, Fair Career Progression, identifies and addresses the barrier to opportunity posed by a lack of fair opportunities for career advancement and development. It emphasises the importance of all empowering all individuals with the chance to continually develop and progress in their careers, beyond their initial education, to foster personal growth and ensure economic stability.

Despite, as mentioned previously, positive rises in employment rates across the UK, there has also been a rise in precarious employment – highlighting concerns regarding job insecurity and limited opportunities for career development. In 2023, approximately 1.18 million people were on zero-hour contracts, representing a significant increase from the previous year and indicating a worrying trend towards uncertain employment arrangements²⁴. New analysis also reveals a record number of young workers on zero-hour contracts, with an additional 88,000 16–24-year-olds joining this type of employment between 2022–2023²⁵.

The recent trend in precarious employment also highlights the disparities in zero-hour contract employment based on demographic factors. Young workers aged 16–24 are now 5.9 times more likely to be on zero-hour contracts, with one in ten young workers in the UK being on these contracts in 2023²⁶. Additionally, black workers are 2.7 times more likely than white workers to be on zero-hour contracts, while women are 1.2 times more likely than men to be on such contracts²⁷. These figures highlight the disproportionate impact of uncertain employment arrangements on marginalised groups, exacerbating existing inequalities in career progression and economic opportunities.

Purpose Goal 6, Fair Career Progression, highlights the critical challenge of ensuring development opportunities and wider career progression is available and open to all, regardless of background or circumstances. This is critical to ensuring all have the chance to advance and thrive in their chosen fields, as well as creating a more equitable and sustainable labour market.



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²⁴ D. Clark, Number of employees on a zero-hours contract in the UK from 2000 to 2023, Statista, 2024. < [²⁶⁻²⁷ "](https://www.statista.com/statistics/414896/employees-with-zero-hours-contracts-number/#:~:text=In%202023%20there%20were%20approximately,this%20type%20of%20employment%20contract.> [10/04/24] ²⁵ Work Foundation, UK continues to fall behind rest of the world as zero-hour contracts reach record numbers – and it's young people bearing the brunt, FE News, March 21st 2024. < <a href=)



3.7. Widening Access to Savings and Responsible Credit

Purpose Goal 7, Widening Access to Savings and Responsible Credit, identifies and seeks to address the barrier to opportunity posed by an unstable financial position. It emphasises the critical importance of financial security and access to capital in enabling individuals to seize opportunities and achieve their full potential.

Across Britain, an increasing number of individuals and families are facing challenges in accessing savings and credit facilities – severely hindering their ability to navigate life’s challenges and pursue their goals.

Despite advances in the medium-term, with workplace pension participation experiencing significant increases over the years – rising from 47% to 79% of UK employees between 2012 and 2021²⁸ – the short-term rises in the cost-of-living are deepening inequalities across Britain. This is displayed by a considerable gap in financial security, with around a quarter of UK adults having less than £100 in their savings account, and one in six people having no savings at all²⁹.



A survey by Debt Justice also revealed that a record 6.7 million people in Britain are facing financial difficulties



A survey by Debt Justice also revealed that a record 6.7 million people in Britain are facing financial difficulties, with significant numbers struggling to meet their credit or bill payments. This issue disproportionately affects younger age groups, with 29% of 18- to 24-year-olds and a quarter of 25- to 34-year-olds having missed three or more credit or bill payments in the last six months³⁰.

By working together across sectors and industries to address barriers to savings and widen responsible credit opportunities through financial literacy and inclusion, individuals can be empowered individuals to make informed financial decisions, mitigate financial risks, and seize opportunities for personal and economic advancement.

²⁸ DWP, Workplace pension participation and savings trends of eligible employees: 2009 to 2022, GOV.UK, 2023. < <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/workplace-pension-participation-and-savings-trends-2009-to-2022/workplace-pension-participation-and-savings-trends-of-eligible-employees-2009-to-2022#:~:text=Workplace%20pension%20participation%20of%20UK,%C2%A3115.9%20billion%20in%202022> > [10/04/24]

²⁹ Lucinda O'Brien, UK savings statistics 2024, Money, 2024. < <https://www.money.co.uk/savings-accounts/savings-statistics#:~:text=According%20to%20a%20survey%20by,having%20no%20savings%20at%20all> > [10/04/24] ³⁰ Hilary Osbourne, Record 6.7m people in Britain are in financial difficulty, warns debt charity, The Guardian, 2024. < <https://www.theguardian.com/money/2024/mar/18/record-numbers-of-uk-people-in-debt-warns-charity> > [10/04/24]



3.8. Good Health and Wellbeing

Purpose Goal 8, Good Health and Wellbeing, highlights the critical importance of addressing physical and mental health and wellbeing inequalities to drive opportunity equality and improve overall quality of life. It emphasises the profound impact that good health and wellbeing have on individuals' ability to fulfil their potential and participate fully in society.

Concerningly, there are stark disparities in health outcomes and wellbeing indicators across different demographics. In England, significant discrepancies in life expectancy exist between the most deprived and least deprived areas. For men, the difference is 9.4 years, with those in the most deprived areas having a life expectancy of 74.1 years compared to 83.5 years for those in the least deprived areas³¹. For women, the difference is slightly smaller at 7.7 years.³² More widely, recent trends indicate a trend in living standards across the board dropping across the UK as a result of concerning declines in overall life expectancy – with life expectancy at birth in the UK falling from 79.3 years for males and 83.0 years for females in 2017–2019 to 78.6 years for males and 82.6 years for females in 2020–2022³³. This illustrates the urgent need to address underlying factors contributing to deteriorating health outcomes.

One of these factors may be the prevalence of obesity and individuals considered to be overweight – with 64.3% of adults in England being classed as overweight or obese in 2021³⁴. This figure represents a significant long-term increase from 52.9% in 1993, with obesity rates rising from 14.9% to 28.0% over the same period³⁵. Notably, obesity and overweight prevalence is higher in the most deprived areas compared to the least deprived areas³⁶.

Health and wellbeing challenges are often intersectional and overlapping, with mental health issues, including loneliness and anxiety, also presenting significant public health concerns. A considerable proportion of UK adults report experiencing loneliness, with approximately 7.1% experiencing chronic loneliness³⁷. Rates of anxiety have also increased over time with 22.5% of UK adults reporting high anxiety levels in recent surveys³⁸. Both have significant impacts on mental and physical health over time – as well as impacting individual's wider development and living standards as a result.

This is illustrated in the rate of Healthy Life Expectancy (HLE). HLE is an indicator of the length of time a person will spend without significant health challenges and has shown concerning trends in recent years.

³¹ The Health Foundation, Life expectancy and healthy life expectancy at birth by deprivation, 2022. < [³⁴ Carl Baker, Obesity Statistics, House of Commons Library, 2023. < \[³⁸ "\]\(https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn03336/#:~:text=Adult%20obesity%20in%20England,is%20classified%20as%20'overweight'.> \[10/04/24\] ³⁵–³⁶ ³⁷ Campaign to End Loneliness, Facts and statistics about loneliness, 2022. < [10/04/24] ³² ³³ Julian Buxton, National life tables – life expectancy in the UK 2020 to 2022, ONS, 11th January 2024. < <a href=)



In 2019–2021, HLE at birth for females was 61.1 years and for males was 60.4 years³⁹. However, HLE has fallen for both genders over recent years, with a downward trend observed since 2014–2016 for females and 2015–2017 for males⁴⁰. Most alarmingly, the gap in HLE between the most deprived and least deprived areas is substantial, with females in the most deprived areas experiencing almost 25 years less HLE than those in the least deprived areas, and males experiencing a difference of 26 years⁴¹.

The wider impact of these health trends on the workplace cannot be overstated. The average rate of employee absence now stands at 7.8 days per employee per year,⁴² with absenteeism due

to financial distress costing UK employers £3.7 billion in 2023.⁴³ This rise in absenteeism, attributed to various factors including illness and stress, highlights the importance of addressing health and wellbeing in the workplace to mitigate costs and promote productivity⁴⁴ as well as boosting the wider economy.

Purpose Goal 8, Good Health and Wellbeing has arguably never been so important in recent times. The role of organisations in securing the health and wellbeing of employees has improved significantly in recent years, however a strategic whole-system approach to Goal 8 is needed to address the current challenges.

³⁹ National Records of Scotland, Over a third of life spent in poor health for most deprived, 14th December 2022. < <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/news/2022/over-a-third-of-life-spent-in-poor-health-for-most-deprived> > [10/04/24] ⁴⁰⁻⁴¹ ⁴² CIPD, Sick leave rate jumps to the highest in a decade, CIPD, October 2023. < <https://www.cipd.org/uk/views-and-insights/thought-leadership/cipd-voice/sickness-absence-rate-jumps/> > [10/04/24] ⁴³ Aegon Content Team, How much is absenteeism and presenteeism costing your business?, Aegon, 2024. < <https://www.aegon.co.uk/employer/insights/how-much-is-absenteeism-and-presenteeism-costing-your-business> > [10/04/24] ⁴⁴



3.9. Extending Enterprise

Purpose Goal 9, Extending Enterprise, highlights the significance of promoting private enterprise and entrepreneurship as essential components in breaking down barriers to opportunity.

Encouraging individuals and communities to create their own employment opportunities not only fosters economic growth but also empowers people to harness their talents and ideas to drive local development, improving the socioeconomic nature of communities across the UK.

The number of SMEs is a useful indicator to the UK's performance against Goal 9, with notable trends in the business population over recent years reflecting both periods of growth and contraction. Between 2010 and 2023, the business population in the UK increased by 1.1 million, representing a 24% rise⁴⁵. However, this growth was not uniform, with fluctuations observed in different periods. For instance, there was a peak in business numbers at the start of 2020 before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the UK's withdrawal from the European Union. Subsequently, between 2020 and 2023, the business population decreased by 425,000 (7.1%), reflecting the economic challenges posed by these events⁴⁶.



Britain can unlock untapped potential and foster more vibrant and resilient local economies.

Despite overall decreases in the business population in the short-term, Britain has experienced nuanced changes in the composition of businesses. The number of employing businesses increased by 32,000 – 2.3% – while non-employing business numbers decreased by 458,000 – 10.0% – between 2020 and 2023⁴⁷. Notably, this decrease in non-employing businesses was primarily driven by a decline in unregistered businesses, emphasising the challenges faced by the smallest enterprises during this period⁴⁸.

Encouragingly, in recent years Britain has taken impressive strides towards gender diversity in entrepreneurship. While male-led companies continue to dominate the business landscape, there has been a notable increase in women-led companies. In 2021, women-led companies comprised 20% of total new incorporations, up from 16% in 2018⁴⁹. This trend indicates progress towards fostering an inclusive environment for entrepreneurship and expanding opportunities for women across business.

Purpose Goal 9, Extending Enterprise, emphasises the importance of fostering a culture of entrepreneurship and expanding opportunities for private enterprise as key drivers of social mobility and economic prosperity. By empowering individuals, particularly those in underserved communities, to create their own businesses, Britain can unlock untapped potential and foster more vibrant and resilient local economies.

⁴⁵ DBT, Business population estimates for the UK and regions 2023, GOV.UK, 2023. < <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/business-population-estimates-2023/business-population-estimates-for-the-uk-and-regions-2023-statistical-release#:~:text=Figure%203%3A%20Non%20employing%20and,2010%20and%202019%20to%202023&text=Overall%2C%20the%20number%20of%20SMEs,employing%20businesses%20grew%20by%2018%25> > [10/04/24] ⁴⁶⁻⁴⁸ ⁴⁹ James Andrews, UK diversity in business statistics 2023, Money, 2023. < <https://www.money.co.uk/business/business-statistics/diversity-in-business-statistics#:~:text=Whilst%20male%20led%20companies%20still,up%20from%2016%25%20in%202018> > [10/04/24]

10 Closing the digital divide



3.10. Closing the Digital and AI Divide

Purpose Goal 10, Closing the Digital Divide and AI Divide, identifies and works to address the disparities in digital access and proficiency to ensure equality of opportunity in the digital and ever digitising age.

The divide manifests in various forms, including limited access to the internet, lack of affordable devices and hardware, insufficient digital skills, and disparities in socio-economic backgrounds. Closing this gap is imperative to enable individuals and communities to fully participate in modern British society.

Overall, Britain has made significant strides in breaking down digital barriers. According to Ofcom's Connected Nations Report, as of January 2023, 99.7% of UK households had access to a decent broadband connection⁵⁰. Nearly 22.4 million homes, constituting 75% of all UK households, could also now access gigabit-capable broadband services, reflecting a continuous expansion of faster internet services⁵¹.

Despite these advancements however, challenges persist in bridging the digital divide comprehensively, with socio-economic disparities playing a significant role in exacerbating the digital divide, particularly in access to work in the more lucrative, digitally focused sectors of the future.

Engineers from more advantaged socio-economic backgrounds are almost four times more likely to progress to intermediate, managerial, or professional roles by the age of 30–39 compared to those from less advantaged background⁵².

This disparity is only set to increase as a result of the rise in AI – directly correlating to the broader issues of unequal access to opportunities and resources, perpetuating social and economic inequalities.

Addressing Purpose Goal 10 requires a multi-faceted approach encompassing infrastructure development, affordability initiatives, digital skills training, and efforts to promote inclusion across the board. By ensuring universal access to high-speed internet, providing support for acquiring necessary digital tools, and offering training programmes to improve digital literacy, Britain can empower individuals from all backgrounds to thrive in the digital age.



⁵⁰ Max Beckett, UK broadband access statistics 2023, USwitch, 2023. <

⁵² Science and Technology Committee, Diversity and Inclusion in STEM, UK Parliament, 24th March 2023. < <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5803/cmselect/cmsctech/95/report.html>> [10/04/24]



3.11. Infrastructure for Opportunity

Purpose Goal 11, Infrastructure for Opportunity, identifies the need for robust and reliable infrastructure to overcome barriers to opportunity. Insufficient infrastructure directly impedes access to opportunities, particularly for communities furthest away from urban centres. Investment⁵³ in transportation infrastructure, including roads and railways, is essential for connecting people with opportunities and promoting economic mobility.

Disparities in transportation funding allocation in regions across Britain outline the importance of equitable investment and its relationship with the promotion of opportunities. London has historically received the most funding, with £944 per person in 2017, followed by Scotland at £618⁵⁴. Conversely, the East Midlands received just £220, the North East £291, and Northern Ireland £302⁵⁵. Equal distribution of transportation funding is essential for ensuring that all communities have access to reliable and efficient transportation networks, and people and goods can move across the country freely.

Locally, the performance of scheduled bus and train services is crucial for ensuring reliable and timely transportation. Data shows

a significant recent decrease in the proportion of non-frequent scheduled bus services running on time in England, from 89.10% in 2020/21 to 79.90% in 2022/23⁵⁶. Rail performance has also decreased in recent years, with 67.8% of trains arriving within 59 seconds of their scheduled arrival time in between April 2022 and March 2023 – a decrease of 5.3 percentage points on the previous year⁵⁷.

The number of complaints closed regarding rail services between April 2022 and March 2023 also increased significantly compared to the previous year, with 346,758 complaints closed, reflecting a 22.7% increase⁵⁸. While this may indicate increased awareness and reporting of service issues, it also highlights the importance of addressing quality and reliability concerns in rail as a key enabler to the economy as well as being an industry Britain has traditionally globally led.

Through Purpose Goal 11, Infrastructure for Opportunity, the barriers poor and unreliable infrastructure can cause, particularly in transportation networks, are vital to identify and address. Infrastructure is critical to enabling individuals to access education, employment, and essential services.



Disparities in transportation funding allocation in regions across Britain outlines the importance of equitable investment and its relationship with the promotion of opportunities.

⁵³ DFT, Rail factsheet: 2023, GOV.UK, 2024. < [https://www.investmentmonitor.ai/features/public-transport-system-inequality-uk-london/?cf-view](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/rail-factsheet-2023/rail-factsheet-2023#:~:text=Rail%20performance,-Punctuality%20decreased%20and&text=In%20the%20FYE%20March%202023,compared%20with%20the%20previous%20year.> 10/04/24 ⁵⁴ Sebastian Shehadi, Why the gap? The reasons behind public transport inequality in UK cities, Investment Monitor, 2023. < <a href=) [10/04/24] ⁵⁵ ⁵⁶ DFT, Proportion of non-frequent scheduled bus services running on time in England, LG Inform, 2023. < https://lginform.local.gov.uk/reports/lgastandard?mod-metric=140&mod-area=E92000001&mod-group=AllMetropolitanBoroughLalnCountry_England&mod-type=namedComparisonGroup [10/04/24] ⁵⁷ DFT, Rail factsheet: 2023, GOV.UK, 2024. < [18](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/rail-factsheet-2023/rail-factsheet-2023#:~:text=Rail%20performance,-Punctuality%20decreased%20and&text=In%20the%20FYE%20March%202023,compared%20with%20the%20previous%20year.> 10/04/24 ⁵⁸</p>
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12 Building homes & sustainable communities



3.12. Building Homes and Sustainable Communities

Purpose Goal 12, Building Homes and Sustainable Communities, aims to address the significant barriers to opportunity caused by inadequate housing and unsustainable communities. Access to safe, affordable homes and the creation of sustainable communities are fundamental to fostering long-term prosperity and equal opportunity access.

The UK has faced significant challenges in recent years in sustaining and adding to its housing stock. In 2021-22, 14% or 3.5 million households in England lived in homes that failed the Decent Homes Standard, with a higher proportion of private renters living in non-decent homes compared to other tenures⁵⁹. Non-decent housing poses direct health risks, such as exposure to hazards and lack of modern facilities – contributing to health problems and injuries which directly impact access to opportunity.

Despite improvements over time, the rate of progress in housing quality has slowed significantly. While the proportion of non-decent homes fell from 35% in 2006 to 15% in 2020, the rate of improvement slowed notably after 2012, highlighting the need for renewed efforts to address housing quality and repair⁶⁰.



Despite improvements over time, the rate of progress in housing quality has slowed significantly.

More widely, homeownership rates in the UK have experienced long-term decline, with 50% of UK adults owning their own homes as of July 2023 – down from 63% between 2016 and 2018⁶¹. This trend highlights the challenges many individuals and families face in securing a long-term home – which is often seen as a key indicator of housing and financial stability, as well as being critical to the wider growth of the economy.

Community safety is another critical aspect of Purpose Goal 12 and the promotion of sustainable communities. The total number of recorded crimes in the year ending September 2023 increased slightly compared to the previous year, with notable increases in shoplifting and fraud offences⁶². Additionally, the annual Crime Survey for England and Wales estimated a rise in anti-social behaviour (ASB) experiences or witnessing, reaching its highest level in six years⁶³. This directly impacts the number of businesses and people who want to live in certain communities, as well as impacting the quality of life for local residents.

Purpose Goal 12, Building Homes and Sustainable Communities, identifies housing quality, affordability, and community safety as essential components to contributing to local regions where individuals and families can thrive – but that currently operate as significant barriers to opportunity.

⁵⁹ DLUHC, English Housing Survey 2021 to 2022: housing quality and condition, GOV.UK, 2023. < <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-housing-survey-2021-to-2022-housing-quality-and-condition/english-housing-survey-2021-to-2022-housing-quality-and-condition#:text=In%202021%2D22%2C%2014%25,living%20in%20all%20other%20tenures> > [10/04/24] ⁶⁰ The Health Foundation, Proportion of households living in non-decent homes by tenure, 2023. < <https://www.health.org.uk/evidence-hub/housing/housing-quality/trends-in-non-decent-homes-by-tenure> > [10/04/24] ⁶¹ Avant Homes, 40+ Home Ownership Statistics for the UK in 2024, 6th February 2024. < <https://www.avanthomes.co.uk/about-avant/newsroom/40-home-ownership-statistics-for-the-uk-in-2024#:text=Comparing%20this%20with%20previous%20housing,Whilst%2022%25%20have%20a%20mortgage> > [10/04/24] ⁶² Pete Jones, Crime in England and Wales: year ending September 2023, ONS, 2024. < <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/crimeinenglandandwales/yearendingseptember2023#:text=Overall%2C%206.7%20million%20crimes%20were,not%20included%20in%20the%20CSEW> > [10/04/24] ⁶³ Crime Survey for England and Wales, The rise of antisocial behaviour: Can we stop it?, Cited in Resolve, 2023. < <https://www.resolveuk.org.uk/the-hub/blog-and-articles/7-the-rise-of-antisocial-behaviour-can-we-stop-it#:text=The%20rise%20of%20anti%20social,highlevel%20for%20six%20years> > [10/04/24]



3.13. Harnessing the Energy Transition and Net Zero

Purpose Goal 13, Harnessing the Energy Transition and Net Zero, focuses on leveraging the transition to a Net Zero economy as an opportunity to create new careers and roles, particularly in areas where they can have the most significant impact. This is part of a wider necessary push to transition the UK economy to clean energy – focusing on the opportunities created by the transition, and negating the barriers it may cause.

Overall, Britain is making steady progress towards Net Zero. In 2023, fossil fuels accounted for just 33% of UK electricity supplies, their lowest share ever recorded⁶⁴. This breakdown includes gas at 31%, coal slightly above 1%, and oil just below 1%. Meanwhile, low-carbon sources made up 56% of the total, with renewables contributing 43% and nuclear 13%⁶⁵. The remaining electricity generation came from imports (7%) and other sources (3%), such as waste incineration. This shift towards low-carbon energy has led to the lowest-ever carbon intensity of electricity generated in the UK, averaging 162g of carbon dioxide per kilowatt hour⁶⁶.

Despite these advancements, the UK is still far from achieving its ambitious targets. The current Government aims for 95% low-carbon electricity by 2030 and a fully decarbonised grid by 2035⁶⁷ – highlighting the need for transformative efforts to accelerate the transition.

Britain is also displaying steady progress in terms of greenhouse gas emissions, with UK emissions on a residence basis estimated at 151 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent at the beginning of 2023, representing a 1.4% decrease compared to the beginning of 2022⁶⁸. This indicates some progress in reducing emissions, albeit incremental.

Estimates of green jobs in the UK provide insights into the new employment opportunities being created as a result of this transition. ‘Green Jobs’ are those considered to be contributing to, protecting or restoring the environment, including activities that mitigate or adapt to climate change⁶⁹.

Using various approaches, employment in green jobs was estimated to be around 526,000 full-time equivalents (FTE) in the UK in 2020, compared with 507,000 FTE in 2015⁷⁰. This suggests a gradual increase in green job opportunities over time, however much more focus is needed to transform the UK into a thriving green economy – taking advantage of the transition to break down barriers to opportunity in communities across the country.

Purpose Goal 13 focuses on harnessing the energy transition and achieving Net Zero emissions to take advantage of the significant economic and employment opportunities, as well as highlighting areas where the barriers are impacting regions and the country’s green development.

⁶⁴ Simon Evans et al., Analysis: UK electricity from fossil fuels drops to lowest level since 1957, Carbon Brief, 2024. < <https://www.carbonbrief.org/analysis-uk-electricity-from-fossil-fuels-drops-to-lowest-level-since-1957/#:~:text=As%20a%20result%2C%20fossil%20fuels,43%25%20and%20nuclear%2013%25%20> [10/04/24] ⁶⁵⁻⁶⁷ ⁶⁸ Gemma Thomas et al., Experimental estimates of quarterly greenhouse gas emissions, ONS, 2023. < <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/environmentalaccounts/bulletins/experimentalestimatesofquarterlygreenhousegasemissionsresidencebasisuk/quarterlyantomar2023> [10/04/24] ⁶⁹ Gemma Thomas, Experimental estimates of green jobs, ONS, 2023. < <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/environmentalaccounts/bulletins/experimentalestimatesofgreenjobsuk/2023> [10/04/24] ⁷⁰ "



3.14. Achieve Equality through Diversity and Inclusion

Purpose Goal 14, Achieve Equality through Diversity and Inclusion, is a fundamental pillar in the pathway towards a fair and prosperous society, and represents one of the most significant and intersectional barriers to opportunity.

Through Purpose Goal 14, supporting organisations to achieve diversity – encompassing gender, ethnicity, sexuality, disability, and other factors – is not just a moral imperative but a strategic advantage. Diverse teams make better decisions, foster innovation, and ensure a wider representation of perspectives, which is essential for driving progress and prosperity across Britain.

In the UK, significant strides have been made since 2011 towards achieving gender balance in leadership positions, thanks to voluntary business-led actions and government support. The latest report findings reveal that women now hold over one-third of all leadership roles in FTSE 350 companies⁷¹. While this marks considerable progress, there is still work to be done to meet the 40% target by the end of 2025.

Although 56% of FTSE 350 companies are making strides towards gender balance, others must be empowered to refocus their efforts. Private companies more widely are also making progress, with women occupying 36% of leadership positions in the top 50 businesses⁷². The UK's second place ranking internationally in gender diversity illustrates the strategic and transformative impact of its unique voluntary approach.

Efforts to increase ethnic diversity in leadership positions across the private sector has also shown promise. The number of FTSE 350 companies with directors from ethnic minority backgrounds on their boards soared by 108% in 2021, with nearly half of these companies now including a director with minority ethnic background⁷³. This significant improvement reflects a growing recognition of the importance of ethnic diversity in corporate governance and decision-making processes. However, despite these positive developments, challenges persist in addressing the gender pay gap and ethnic pay disparities.

The gender pay gap, while declining over the years, remains a concern. As of April 2023, it stands at 7.7% across the country, with significant disparities between different age groups⁷⁴.

This indicates ongoing inequalities in the workplace that must be addressed through targeted interventions and policy measures. Data spanning a decade from 2012 to 2022 also reveals persistent ethnic pay gaps, with Black, African, Caribbean, or Black British employees consistently earning less than their White counterparts, highlighting entrenched inequalities⁷⁵.

Purpose Goal 14 highlights the critical importance of sustained efforts to promote diversity and inclusion in leadership positions across all sectors. Achieving Equality through Diversity and Inclusion is not merely a moral imperative but also an economic and social necessity. By harnessing the full potential of individuals from diverse backgrounds, society can unlock innovation, drive economic growth, and work towards equal access to opportunity for all.

⁷¹ FTSE Women Leaders Review, Achieving Gender Balance, FTSE Women Leaders, February 2024. ⁷² ⁷³ Caitlin Powell, Number of ethnic minority FTSE 350 directors jumped 108 per cent in 2021: study finds, People Management, 2021. < <https://www.peoplemanagement.co.uk/article/1743087/number-ethnic-minority-ftse-350-directors-jumped-108-per-cent-2021-research-finds> > [10/04/24] ⁷⁴ Nicola J White, Gender pay gap in the UK: 2023, ONS, 2023. < <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/bulletins/genderpaygapintheuk/2023#:~:text=The%20gender%20pay%20gap%20has,those%20aged%20under%2040%20years.>> [10/04/24] ⁷⁵ Emily Froud et al., Ethnicity pay gaps UK: 2012 to 2022, ONS, 2023. < <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/articles/ethnicitypaygapsingreatbritain/2012to2022> > [10/04/24]

4. Working in Partnership



The Purpose Coalition is introducing a new goal, Purpose Goal 15, on the back of its new and leading work through the Breaking Down Barriers Commission – highlighting the critical importance of Working in Partnership to boost opportunity across Britain.

Now more than ever, amidst challenges such as the rising cost of living and global trade tensions, collaboration between the public and private sectors is essential to address barriers to opportunity effectively.

The private sector, representing over 82% of the UK workforce, plays a pivotal role in facilitating equal access to opportunity and breaking down barriers. Strategic engagement with businesses is imperative for Labour's mission to promote equality of opportunity. However, there have been significant missed opportunities in leveraging the private sector's potential as a delivery partner for social and economic progress.

This has been signified by the relegation of 'levelling up' to a single Government department is a limitation that hampers effectiveness, it is an inherently intersection challenge. To truly advance the agenda, the focus must permeate through every department, with accountability resting at the highest levels of government.

Labour's agenda should extend beyond educational attainment to address social barriers comprehensively. A holistic approach – encompassing aspects like education, health, income, justice, housing, and culture – is crucial for tackling persistent inequalities.

The Purpose Coalition has embarked on identifying these barriers through its framework of 14 Purpose Goals, each representing a distinct social challenge. By garnering support from businesses and organisations, these goals aim to direct investments towards addressing societal needs effectively.



A holistic approach – encompassing aspects like education, health, income, justice, housing, and culture – is crucial for tackling persistent inequalities.

Keir Starmer and the Labour Party has the opportunity to transform his mission of breaking down barriers into a transformative strategy for the country. By broadening its remit and integrating it across Government departments, Labour can shift the trajectory towards 'levelling down' and create a fairer society where opportunity is accessible to talent everywhere.

The introduction of Purpose Goal 15, on the back of critical work by the Breaking Down Barriers Commission, underpins the importance of collaborative efforts as a wider enabler to boost opportunity at every stage. By fostering strategic alliances with unions and citizens assemblies, organisations can tap into diverse talent and perspectives, ensuring initiatives are grounded in the real-world needs of communities.

Trade unions as collaborative partnerships representing specific industries and sectors have experienced a decline in recent years. Union membership fell between 2021 and 2023 in a general trend downwards in overall UK workforce membership from 23.1% to 22.3⁷⁶. In the long-term, since 1995, union membership has as a proportion of employees fallen from 32.4% to 22.3% today⁷⁷. Effective partnership with unions is critical for organisations and sectors to ensure a diverse

and inclusive range of views is represented. It is however, not the only form of employee collaboration.

More and more organisations are beginning employee voice representative assemblies and groups, allowing colleagues to have more of a direct say in specific policies and workforce conditions. Research by the CIPD found that employers are finding effective employee voice mechanisms are contributing to increased trust, innovation, productivity and organisational improvement⁷⁸. For employees, self-expression in voice often results in feeling valued, increased job satisfaction, greater influence and better opportunities for development⁷⁹.

There is, however, work to be done. The CIPD survey found that over half of employers – 52% – do not use a form of employee representatives to inform and consult their workforce, such as through a staff council or forum⁸⁰. This, coupled with the long-term decline in trade union membership, signals the need for a renewed push towards working in partnership for both organisations across sectors and within workplaces with employees themselves, underneath a new Purpose Goal 15 – Working in Partnership.



4.1. Looking Forward

The Breaking Down Barriers Commission will be launching its findings and recommendations at the 2024 Labour Party Conference – after a period of consultation with business and wider society. The Breaking Down Barriers Commission, as part of its comprehensive work with Labour Party candidates, will be holding a key conference in June with the aim of equipping Labour candidates with the knowledge of business-led solutions and ideas, part of the process of building new partnerships between leaders in industry and politics that are focused on dismantling barriers to opportunity.

⁷⁶ CIPD, Trade unions: An introduction, 2023. < [https://www.cipd.org/uk/knowledge/factsheets/trade-unions-factsheet/#:~:text=According%20to%20May%202023%20UK,down%20from%2023.1%25%20in%202021> \[10/04/24\]](https://www.cipd.org/uk/knowledge/factsheets/trade-unions-factsheet/#:~:text=According%20to%20May%202023%20UK,down%20from%2023.1%25%20in%202021> [10/04/24]) ⁷⁷ DBT, Trade Union Membership: UK 1995 – 2022 Statistical Bulletin, The Department for Business and Trade, 24th May 2023. ⁷⁸ Rachel Suff, Collective Employee Voice, CIPD, July 2022. ⁷⁹⁻⁸⁰ "

