The Eagles effect: Two decades of social mobility

Dr Carmen Nicoara

Head of Research and Impact

ELBA

Sally Roberts

Eagles Programme Director

ELBA

October 2025

www.elba-1.org.uk

www.london-works.com

www.eagles.org.uk

Acknowledgements

This 20-year impact evaluation of ELBA's (East London Business Alliance) Eagles programme would not have been possible without the collective efforts of many individuals and organisations. We would like to extend our deepest thanks to:

The corporate partners

A heartfelt thank you to the 80 employer partners who have hosted Eagles over the past two decades. Your commitment to nurturing diverse talent has been central to the programme's success.

Allen & Overy
AXA Insurance
Bank of America
Barclays
Beazley
Big Alliance
Bradfield Group
Broadgate Estates
BT
Bupa
Cambridge House
Canary Wharf Group
Catlin Insurance
CBRE Investment Management
Centre of the Cell
Charles Russell Speechlys
Chaucer
Citi
City of London
Clifford Chance
Clyde & Co
CMS
Corporate Citizenship Credit Suisse
DAC Beachcroft
Dare
Deutsche Bank
DLA Piper
East London NHS Foundation Trust
ELBA
EY
FCA
Fitch Ratings
Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer
FTI Consulting
Hammerson
Heart of the City
Herbert Smith Freehills
Historic Royal Palaces
Tower of London
House of Lords
Howden Group Holdings
ING
ISS Facility Services
KPMG
Linklaters
Lloyds
London Market Group
London Borough of Tower Hamlets
London City Airport
London Air Ambulance
M&G
McFarlanes
Macquarie
Marsh
Metropolitan Police
Morgan Stanley
MUFG
National Theatre
NatWest
Nomura
Olswang
Poplar Harca
Prudential
Rendall & Rittner
Royal London
RBS
RSA
Schroders
Shell
Slaughter & May
SLR Consulting,
Stephenson Harwood
Swan Housing
T.Rowe Price
Teacher Development Trust
The Switch
Thomson Reuters
Tower Hamlets Primary Care Trust
Tower Hamlets Homes
Zurich

The Eagles alumni community

We are grateful to all 487 Eagles who have taken part in the programme since its inception in 2005 - and especially to the 255 alumni who shared their stories, reflections and time for this evaluation.

The ELBA team (past and present)

This programme would not have thrived without the tireless efforts of the ELBA delivery and leadership team. Special thanks to the founders, Sally Roberts, Louise Muller, Selina Uddin, Forida Khanom; and to Sophie Critchlow and Farzana Ali for their vision, dedication and long-standing support for the Eagles community.

Your belief in the power of equitable opportunity has made this journey - and this report - possible.

Table of Contents

Table of tables

Table of figures

1. Introduction

Eagles was launched by ELBA in 2005 as a pioneering social mobility initiative rooted in the belief that talent is equally distributed, but opportunity is not. Designed to support young people from some of London's most disadvantaged boroughs, the programme has provided structured, paid routes into professional employment for hundreds of graduates from underrepresented backgrounds.

The Eagles effect: Two decades of social mobility, a 20-year anniversary report offers a landmark retrospective: combining long-term career data, earnings analysis and lived experiences to evaluate the programme's role in advancing social mobility over two decades. It aims to quantify the economic and occupational uplift experienced by alumni, while also capturing the intangible impacts on confidence, cultural capital and social belonging.

Since its inception, Eagles has:

- Supported 487 participants.
- Partnered with 80 corporate hosts across sectors such as finance, law, consulting, sustainability and the public sector.
- Created pathways into professions for candidates often overlooked by mainstream recruitment practices.

As the programme has evolved, so too have the ambitions of its alumni – with many now in leadership roles, driving change across their industries. Yet the structural barriers that Eagles set out to dismantle remain pervasive. Understanding how participants have navigated these barriers - and how the programme has supported them - is central to this impact evaluation.

The findings presented in this report are based on three main data sources:

1. A large-scale alumni survey (May 2025), distributed to all known Eagles participants who had completed the programme since 2005:
    - 255 alumni responded, representing a 58% response rate.
    - The survey captured demographic, educational and employment trajectories, along with reflections on the programme's impact.
2. Qualitative interviews with CSR Eagles, exploring their career pathways, inclusion experiences and reflections on social mobility. (*Apppendix 1*)
3. Corporate partner interviews, providing employer perspectives on alumni performance, development and organisational impact.

This report is not just a retrospective. *The Eagles effect: two decades of social mobility* serves as a strategic learning tool - for ELBA, corporate partners, policymakers, and other stakeholders - offering concrete evidence of what works, and where future social mobility efforts must focus to dismantle deep-rooted inequality in London's labour market.

2. The social mobility landscape in east London

East London stands as a unique case study in the geography of opportunity and inequality. While London as a whole significantly outperforms the rest of England on social mobility measures, this regional advantage masks profound internal disparities that leave many talented young people trapped by their postcode. The boroughs of Hackney, Newham and Tower Hamlets - where Eagles concentrates its efforts - exemplify this paradox: areas of immense cultural vibrancy and economic

potential where structural barriers continue to limit life chances for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

2.1. The UK's social mobility challenge

The United Kingdom faces a persistent social mobility crisis that has shown little improvement over decades. Young people born today have similar income mobility rates to those born in 1970, and the UK stands near the bottom of the international league table for both social mobility and inequality when compared to other developed nations. The country ranks below Nordic countries like Denmark, Norway, Finland and Sweden, as well as countries like Spain, Canada, Australia and Japan on an OECD measure of intergenerational income mobility (*Sutton Trust, 2025*).

The statistics paint a stark picture of intergenerational disadvantage. According to the Social Mobility Commission's 2023 findings, those from higher professional backgrounds earn 18% more than those from a lower working class background, even with the same level of education. More specifically, company employees from working class backgrounds are paid £7,575 less per year than those from professional-managerial origins (*Social Mobility Commission, 2023*; see also *Startups, 2024*).

The data shows that average incomes increased steadily from the age of 25 to 35 years, and tended to flatten out after. However, the average increase was greater for young people from professional backgrounds than for those from intermediate or working class backgrounds, indicating that socioeconomic disadvantage compounds over time rather than diminishing with age and experience (*Social Mobility Commission, 2024).*

2.2. London's social mobility paradox

London presents a complex picture when viewed through a social mobility lens. Four London boroughs and Four Local Authorities near London score favourably on all three indices in the Social Mobility Commission's measurements, and this pattern may be driven by the expanding opportunities that the London Metropolitan area as a whole has seen, rather than by the policies and conditions of specific boroughs. In effect, the London economic environment can be thought of as a 'rising tide that raises all ships' (*ibid.*).

However, this metropolitan advantage conceals deep internal disparities. London has one of the highest poverty rates in the country - with one in four Londoners living in poverty (*Trust for London, 2025).* Perhaps more troubling, even when those from lower income backgrounds succeed in entering professional employment, they earn - on average - £10,660 less per year than those whose parents are in higher professional jobs – compared to a gap of £6,800 nationally (*Mayor's Fund for London)*.

The borough-level data reveals the extent of this inequality. Barking and Dagenham, Brent, Camden, Ealing, Enfield, Hounslow, Newham, Redbridge, Tower Hamlets, Westminster and all have poverty rates higher than the London average, while half of boroughs also have higher levels of poverty than England as a whole. In total, 16 out of 32 have higher levels of poverty than the England average. Only three have lower – Bromley, Merton and Richmond (*Trust for London, 2025*).

2.3. East London's concentrated disadvantage

Eagles target boroughs – Hackney, Newham and Tower Hamlets- represent some of London's starkest examples of entrenched inequality. Despite their proximity to major economic centres like Canary Wharf, the City and Stratford's innovation hubs, these boroughs consistently underperform on key socioeconomic indicators, including child poverty, unemployment and educational attainment.

Child poverty rates remain among England's highest:

- The four boroughs with the highest levels of child poverty are all in inner and east London - Hackney, Islington, Newham and Tower Hamlets. In these boroughs, more than 40% of children are in poverty.
- Children born in these boroughs are more than twice as likely to be growing up in poverty than those in wealthier boroughs, such as Richmond or Kingston (*Trust for London, 2025*).

2.4. The “mobility trap” in a global city

The concept of the "mobility trap" is particularly acute in east London. Despite unprecedented levels of public investment - from the 2012 Olympic regeneration to Crossrail connectivity - too few local residents from disadvantaged backgrounds access the high-skilled, high-paid roles created in their vicinity. This reflects broader patterns identified by researchers: regions where London's uniquely competitive labour market prevents young people from low income backgrounds from accessing higher status careers (*Mayor’s Fund for London*).

The barriers are systemic rather than individual:

- Network deficits: professional opportunities often depend on social connections that disadvantaged young people lack.
- Cultural capital gaps: success in professional environments requires tacit knowledge about norms, behaviours and expectations that are unfamiliar to first-generation professionals.
- Educational penalties: Russell Group graduates were found to account for 49% of employees in the creative arts and 81% in the legal sector, despite Russell Group institutions only educating 6% of the total population (*Zero Gravity, 2022*).

2.5. A case for programmatic intervention

The persistent nature of these disparities, despite London's overall economic dynamism, underscores the need for strategic, place-based interventions. According to the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS), UK social mobility is now at its worst in over 50 years, suggesting that market forces alone are insufficient to break cycles of disadvantage.

London boroughs' spending power per person has fallen 37% in real terms by 2020, compared to 29% across the rest of England, with almost half of London's youth centres having closed, indicating that public sector capacity to address these challenges has diminished just as inequality has intensified (*Mayor’s Fund for London*).

Against this backdrop, Eagles represents a critical intervention model: providing paid entry routes into professional careers, building cultural capital and confidence, and creating long-term alumni networks that can sustain career progression. The programme directly addresses the structural barriers that prevent talented young people from east London from converting their potential into professional success, offering both immediate job access and the longer-term support necessary for sustained upward mobility.

3. Programme evolution: 2005 - 2025

Eagles Graduate Development Programme was developed in 2005 as a response to the very high level of graduate unemployment and under-employment in east London. Research at the time showed that local graduates were unlikely to have parents who had been through the British education system and this, coupled with financial and/or social pressures, made academic success more difficult to achieve. Consultation with local employers at the time revealed that they tended to perceive local graduates as lacking in social capital and other attributes that can contribute to self-confidence and career awareness.

Eagles was designed to address these issues by providing three weeks of pre-placement employability training followed by a six-month placement in the CSR department of major employers in the City and Canary Wharf. In this way the graduates were able to learn what it means to be a 'professional' and, at the end of the programme, to access jobs commensurate with their skills and ability.

3.1. Funding

At the start, Eagles was entirely funded by the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, supported by Tower Hamlets College and only open to Tower Hamlets residents. Over the next few years, we secured various pockets of regeneration funding and were able to open the programme to the wider east London community. Companies hosting an Eagle were, over time, asked to contribute to the costs of the programme and for many years now, the programme has been 100% funded by the participating companies.

3.2. New themed programmes

We pride ourselves on being responsive to the need and requests of companies looking to recruit new, diverse talent. To that end, over the years we have run a range of differently focused programmes. From our original CSR Eagles, we went on to develop HR Eagles, where interns were based in HR departments including in Canary Wharf Group, Deutsche Bank and Thomson Reuters; closely followed by NHS Eagles when we worked closely with Bart Hospital Trust. In 2017, we developed Property Management Eagles in partnership with Broadgate Estates and Rendall and Rittner; and in 2021 Document and Design Eagles with CMS.

3.3. Bespoke programmes

We were delighted to be asked by ING in 2015 to develop a bespoke ING Eagles initiative. Here, the graduates are placed in business areas across the bank, including Communications and Events, Compliance and Credit, Counterparty Risk, Finance Business Services, Legal, Political Risk Insurance and Procurement. We started with six interns in 2016 and, since then, the initiative has grown, with 165 people now having gone through the programme. There has been enormous support internally, with ING employees fully behind the initiative. The programme has greatly improved graduates' employability skills and shown that the world of banking and financial services is within their reach. There is also clear evidence of progression with former Eagles found across the bank; many now in managerial positions and hosting an intern themselves.

In 2021 we were asked by CBRE Investment Management to work with them to develop a bespoke Eagles programme. Targeting graduates interested in the Real Estate investment industry, the firm offered opportunities in a range of departments including Client Accounting, Direct and Indirect investment strategies teams, Private Infrastructure and Research. We are now in our fifth year of running this very popular programme, with 24 graduates having benefited from the experience. CBRE IM has demonstrated unwavering commitment, with placement managers going above and beyond to equip interns with new skills and employability. It has been very rewarding to see the graduates go on to launch successful careers within the industry.

3.4. Looking to the future

The issues today are as critical as they were twenty years ago: social mobility not only remains stubbornly low, but there is some evidence that it is getting worse or at least stagnating, especially for people born into disadvantaged backgrounds.

What *has* changed, however, is the growing awareness and proactive engagement from our partner companies. Many are now taking meaningful steps to address these issues. A wide range of in-house initiatives have emerged, complementing the work we do at ELBA.

There will always be a place for Eagles - we like to think of ourselves as pioneers in the field of social mobility. Here's to the next 20 years!

4. Methodology and research design

This 20-year impact evaluation of Eagles draws on a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative survey analysis with qualitative interviews involving both alumni and corporate partners. The methodology was designed to capture longitudinal career trajectories, intergenerational social mobility, and lived experiences of programme participants, from 2005 to 2025.

4.1. Survey design and response rate

The primary dataset is derived from a comprehensive alumni survey distributed in May 2025 to all known Eagles participants who had completed the programme since it's inception in 2005. A total of 255 alumni responded, representing a 58% response rate. The survey included 26 questions across six sections, covering demographic background, education, current employment, socioeconomic origins, career progression and perceptions of the programme's impact.

Survey questions drew on validated measures from key social mobility frameworks, including the UK Social Mobility Commission (2015), Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) and the Sutton Trust. Income bands were aligned with IFS earnings deciles; and occupational classifications followed the UK's National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC) system.

The survey included both ordinal-scale and open-ended questions to allow for quantitative benchmarking and deeper narrative insight. Participants had the option to remain anonymous, though many voluntarily provided identifying information to support data matching and follow-up case studies.

4.2. Supplementary interviews

Two additional strands of qualitative research were undertaken:

1. CR/Sustainability alumni interviews – a series of in-depth interviews were conducted with Eagles alumni who participated in CSR-focused programmes. These interviews explored career pathways, workplace inclusion, and perceived long-term impact on the CSR landscape (see Appendix 1).
2. Employer interviews – semi-structured interviews were conducted with corporate partners who hosted or hired Eagles alumni over the past two decades. These captured employer views on the programme, the impact of Eagles on organisational culture, and their perspectives on how the social mobility landscape has evolved since the programme's inception over 20 years ago.

4.3. Role classification and earnings data

For the analysis of occupational progression (Section 6), roles were categorised into standard tiers based on job titles and industry conventions.

- **Mid-level roles** included Analyst, Officer, Executive, Specialist and Manager positions - typically requiring several years of experience and representing professional progression.

- **Senior roles** included Director, Head of Department, Vice President and equivalent leadership posts.

Salary and occupational data reflect two key points in time: first post-programme job and current role. While this provides a robust snapshot of career growth, it does not track every job change between these points.

4.4. Limitations and considerations

- Sample sizes for alumni who completed the programme 16–20 years ago are smaller (n=16), limiting statistical confidence for this subgroup.
- As participation in the survey was voluntary, there may be a response bias towards alumni with more positive experiences or successful outcomes.
- The analysis does not capture informal or freelance work that may fall outside traditional job classification systems.

Despite these caveats, the findings offer a compelling longitudinal view of intergenerational mobility and career advancement among Eagles alumni.

5. Participant demographics and background

This section presents a comprehensive analysis of the demographic composition and socioeconomic background of Eagles programme participants based on the 20-year anniversary survey responses.

Note: This analysis reflects the demographics of survey respondents in 2025, representing participants across all programme years (2005-2025). This is not a longitudinal comparison of the same individuals, but rather a cross-sectional view of programme alumni at different career stages.

5.1. Age distribution and career stage analysis

Table 1: Current age distribution
(249 responses, 6 skipped)

Age range	Percentage
20-24 years	24%
25-29 years	34%
30-34 years	28%
35-39 years	10%
40-44 years	4%

Table 2: Time since programme completion
(240 responses, 15 skipped)

Years since completion	Percentage
0-2 years	19%
3-5 years	27%
6-10 years	34%
11-15 years	11%
16-20 years	9%

The correlation between age and time since programme completion is strong, as most participants begin Eagles between ages 20-24. This dual analysis reveals:

- Recent completers (0-2 years): 19% are in the immediate post-programme phase, establishing their careers.
- Early progression (3-5 years): 27% are building on their foundation, moving from entry to mid-level roles.
- Established professionals (6-10 years): 34% represent the largest cohort, typically showing significant career advancement.
- Senior trajectory (11-15 years): 11% have had substantial time to progress to senior positions.

- Long-term impact (16-20 years): 9% demonstrate the programme's sustained influence over nearly two decades.

5.2. Gender distribution

Table 3: Gender distribution
(253 responses, 2 skipped)

Gender	Percentage
Female	72%
Male	27%
Non-binary	1%

Strong female participation

- 72% female participation demonstrates the programme's success in engaging women from disadvantaged east London communities.
- Particularly significant given historical barriers to women's professional advancement in target communities.

5.3. Ethnic background and community representation

(248 responses, 7 skipped)

Ethnic community representation[1] and distribution

a. **Bangladeshi/Bengali community (40%)**, inclusive of the following self-defined ethnic identities:
   i. Bangladeshi
   ii. British Bangladeshi
   iii. Bengali
   iv. British Bengali
   v. Asian - Bangladeshi

   This remains the largest single ethnic community, reflecting the programme's historical focus on Tower Hamlets' Bangladeshi community, though proportionally lower than the 2015 report's 64%.

b. **Black communities (22%),** inclusive of the following self-defined ethnic identities:
   i. Black African
   ii. Black British African
   iii. Black British
   iv. Black Caribbean
   v. Black British Caribbean

[1] Methodology note: Participants provided self-defined ethnic identity responses, creating rich, nuanced data that respects individual identity complexity. Analysis preserves this detail while identifying broader patterns.

vi. African
vii. African - Somali
viii. Somali
ix. Black African Caribbean

c. **South Asian communities (15%),** inclusive of the following self-defined ethnic identities:
   i. Pakistani
   ii. British Pakistani
   iii. Indian
   iv. British Indian
   v. Indian Tamil
   vi. South Asian
   vii. Southeast Asian

d. **White communities (8%),** inclusive of the following self-defined ethnic identities:
   i. White British
   ii. White
   iii. White European
   iv. White - Polish
   v. White other - Iberian Portuguese
   vi. English

e. **Mixed heritage (5%),** inclusive of the following self-defined ethnic identities:
   i. Mixed white Asian Caribbean
   ii. Mixed white and black Caribbean
   iii. Black British / Mixed Irish

f. **Communities from across the rest of the world (10%),** inclusive of the following self-defined ethnic identities:
   i. Greek Cypriot
   ii. Chinese
   iii. Vietnamese
   iv. Albanian
   v. Arab
   vi. Filipino
   vii. Mauritian
   viii. Nepalese
   ix. Kosovan
   x. Caucasian - Central Asian
   xi. Ukrainian
   xii. "My parents are from Iraq. I was born in the UK"

Geographic-ethnic correlation

The ethnic diversity aligns with east London's demographic composition:

- Tower Hamlets: historically 40% Muslim, large Bangladeshi community
- Newham: highly diverse with significant South Asian and African communities
- Hackney: growing African and Caribbean communities
- Programme responsiveness: ethnic representation reflects target borough demographics

5.4. Borough representation

Table 4: Borough representation
(253 responses, 2 skipped)

Borough	Percentage
Tower Hamlets	32%
Newham	14%
Redbridge	10%
Hackney	4%
Waltham Forest	4%
Islington	2%
Other London Boroughs	27%
Outside London	7%

Social deprivation context

- Core target boroughs (Hackney, Newham, Tower Hamlets) have >40% child poverty rates, with 50% of participants from these highest-need areas.
- 27% from other London boroughs and 7% from outside London indicates programme growth while maintaining disadvantage targeting.
- Geographic distribution aligns with programme expansion over time while preserving focus on east London's most deprived communities.

6. Employment outcomes and career progression

Eagles was designed not only to unlock access to professional employment for young people from east London, but also to give them the tools for achieving long-term progression within these careers. This section tracks the employment journeys of alumni from their first job placements to their current senior roles, highlighting patterns of advancement, lateral movement and sectoral shifts. The data reveal a consistent trajectory of upward mobility, with the vast majority of participants beginning in entry-level roles and progressing into mid- and senior-level positions within 5 to 10 years.

The findings challenge long-standing assumptions about the limits of social mobility for disadvantaged groups, particularly in highly competitive sectors such as finance or law. They also show how the programme fosters not just job access, but sustained career development, equipping participants with the skills, networks and confidence to navigate complex professional landscapes over time. Through detailed role function analysis and progression mapping, this section illustrates how the programme acts as a launchpad for long-term success.

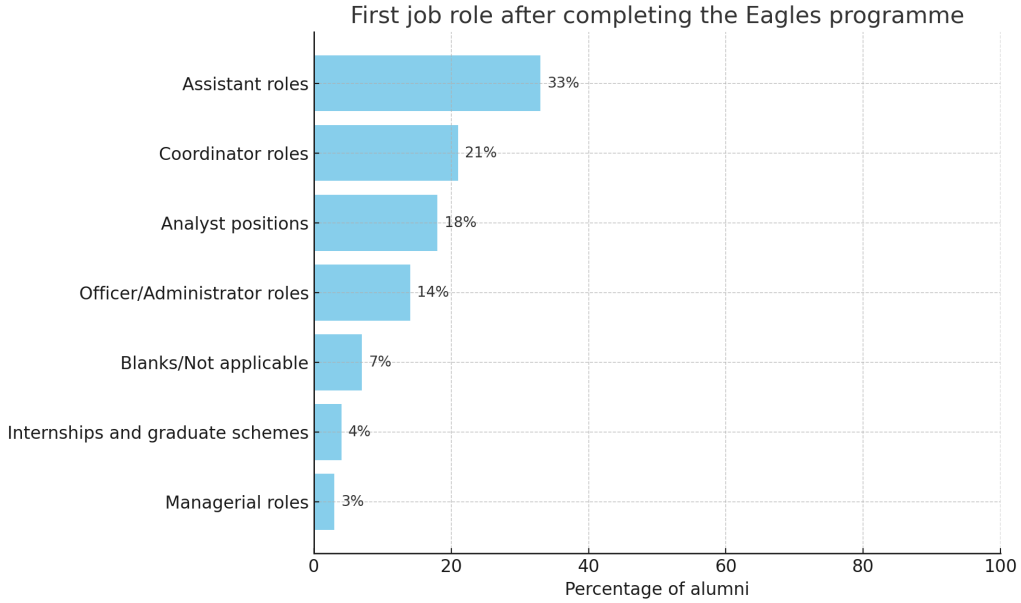
6.1. First job role analysis (post-programme employment)

90% of Eagles alumni began their post-Eagles careers in clearly entry-level roles, positions typically designed for recent graduates or early-career professionals. These roles offered foundational experience and exposure to professional environments across sectors.

The most common entry-level categories included:

- Assistant roles (e.g. HR Assistant, CSR Assistant, Marketing Assistant)
- Coordinator roles (e.g. Project Coordinator, Programme Coordinator)
- Analyst positions (e.g. Data Analyst, Credit Analyst, Market Analyst)
- Officer/Administrator roles (e.g. Compliance Officer, Administrative Officer)
- Internships and graduate schemes

Figure 1: First job role after completing the Eagles programme



These first jobs (post-programme) served as springboards, equipping alumni with early confidence and capabilities that contributed to the significant career progression analysed in the following section.

6.2. Career progression rate and patterns

The Eagles programme's impact on career advancement becomes clear when tracking alumni progress over time. The data reveals a powerful story of professional growth, with most participants achieving significant advancement within their first decade post-programme.

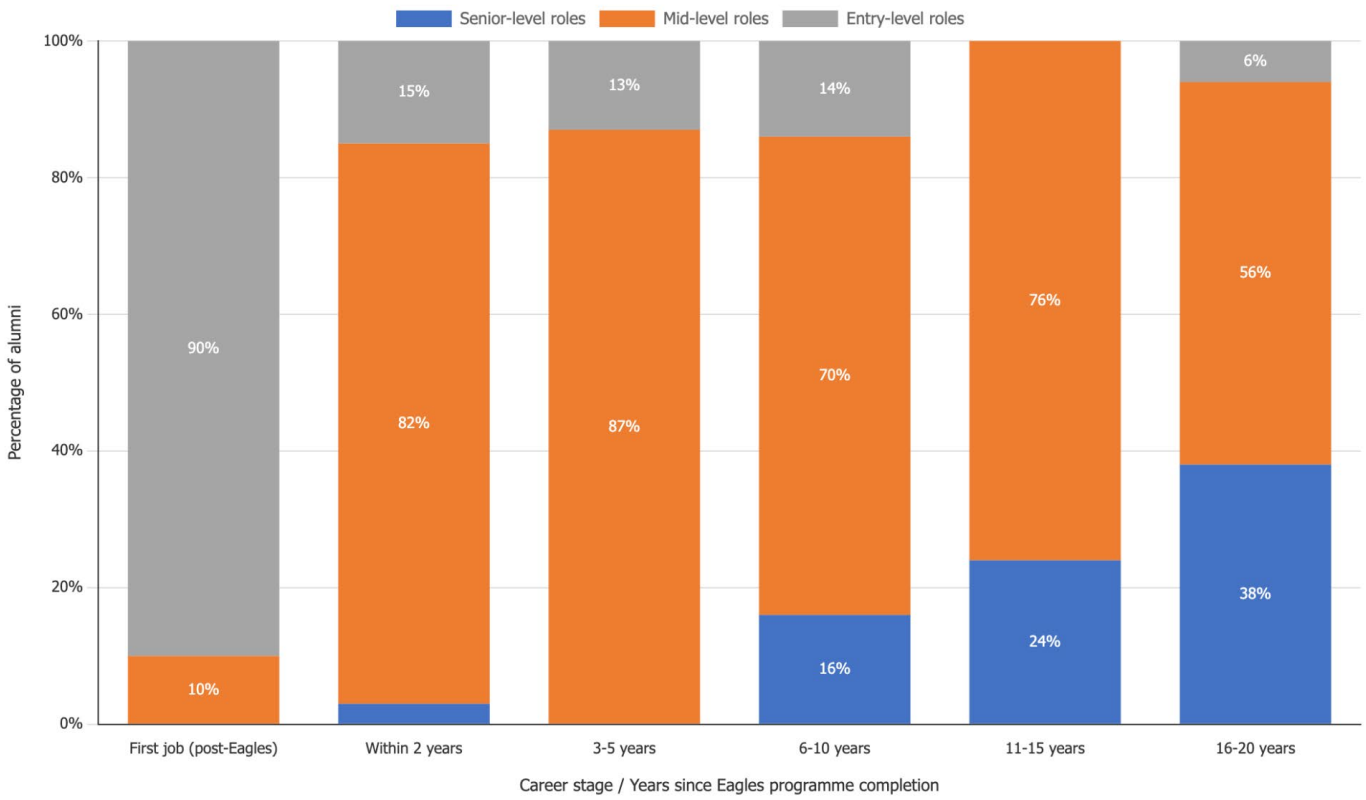
How careers evolve over time

Figure 2 tracks 195 alumni across different stages of their careers, from recent programme completers to those who finished Eagles two decades ago. Three clear patterns emerge:

1. Rapid early advancement - within just two years, only 15% remain in entry-level positions, with 82% having already progressed to mid-level roles.
2. Steady senior progression - senior-level representation grows consistently - from 3% in early years to 38% among those 16-20 years post-programme.

3. Mid-level stability - the majority of alumni (56-87%) occupy mid-level positions across all time periods, representing the core professional tier where most build their careers.

Figure 2: Career progression since programme completion



Alumni career paths demonstrate clear vertical progression from first post-programme roles. Examples include:

- CSR Assistant → Corporate Responsibility Manager → Senior Vice President ESG
- Data Analyst → Senior Data Analyst → Head of Analytics
- HR Assistant → HR Advisor → Director of HR Consulting
- Compliance Officer → Senior Compliance Officer
- Project Coordinator → Project Manager → Head of Programmes
- Analyst → Senior Analyst → Associate Director
- Marketing Assistant → Marketing Executive → Head of Marketing

In addition to vertical advancement, 14% of respondents reported strategic lateral moves, such as:

- Shifting from traditional finance to ESG and sustainability roles
- Moving from private sector to public or third sector work
- Transitioning from corporate to consulting/advisory positions

Finally, a number of alumni have secured international opportunities, including roles in Dubai and Reykjavik, or positions within global companies with international portfolios.

Overall career outcomes

Looking across all 255 survey respondents regardless of when they completed Eagles:

- 36% currently hold senior positions (Director, VP, Head of Department)
- 49% occupy mid-level roles (Manager, Analyst, Specialist, Advisor)
- 5% remain in early-career positions
- 3% are currently unemployed
- 7% have roles that couldn't be classified

Note: These overall percentages include respondents at all career stages - from recent graduates (46% completed Eagles within the past 5 years) to those who finished 20 years ago. The time-based analysis above shows how these outcomes develop over time.

Examples of current senior positions include:

- Director-level: Deputy Director, Group Finance Director, Director of HR Consulting
- Head/Lead roles: Head of Social Impact Strategy, Head of Programmes, Head of Marketing
- Senior specialists: Senior Manager, Senior Analyst, Senior Associate
- VP / AVP roles: Senior Vice President (ESG), Associate Vice President (Investment Banking)

6.3. Critical distinction: role function vs sector

A critical distinction in analysing alumni outcomes is between the role function (what alumni do in their jobs) and the sector they work in. This distinction reveals the multifaceted career trajectories supported by the Eagles programme.

Current role functions[2] (what alumni do)

Based on self-reported job functions, the dominant areas include:

- CSR/Sustainability roles: 35%
- Finance roles: 30%
- Compliance roles: 10%
- HR roles: 10%
- Legal roles: 8%
- IT/Technology roles: 8%
- Communications roles: 8%

Current sectors (where alumni work)

From employer analysis, alumni are clustered across:

- Financial Services: 40%
- Legal Services: 10%
- Technology & Data: 10%
- HR & Learning Development: 8%

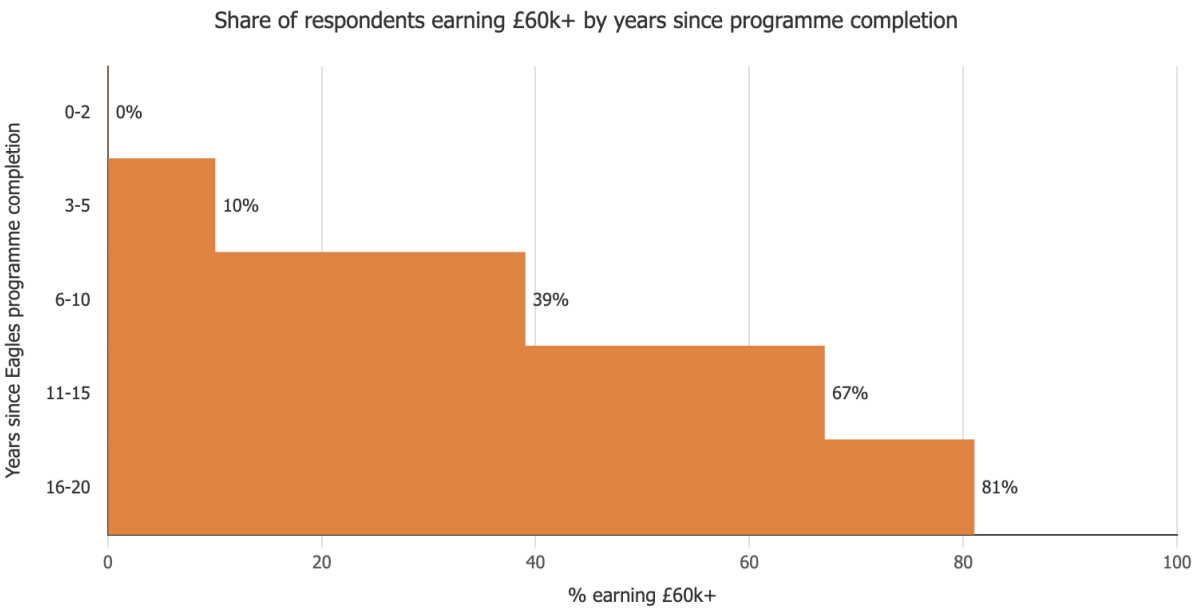
[2] These categories are not mutually exclusive; some alumni selected multiple areas.

- Consulting: 7%
- Public Sector: 5%

7. Earnings analysis and economic impact

Over 31% of respondents now earn £60,000 or more, and nearly 7% report six-figure salaries (£100,000+). This confirms substantial upward economic mobility from overwhelmingly entry-level starts (Section 6).

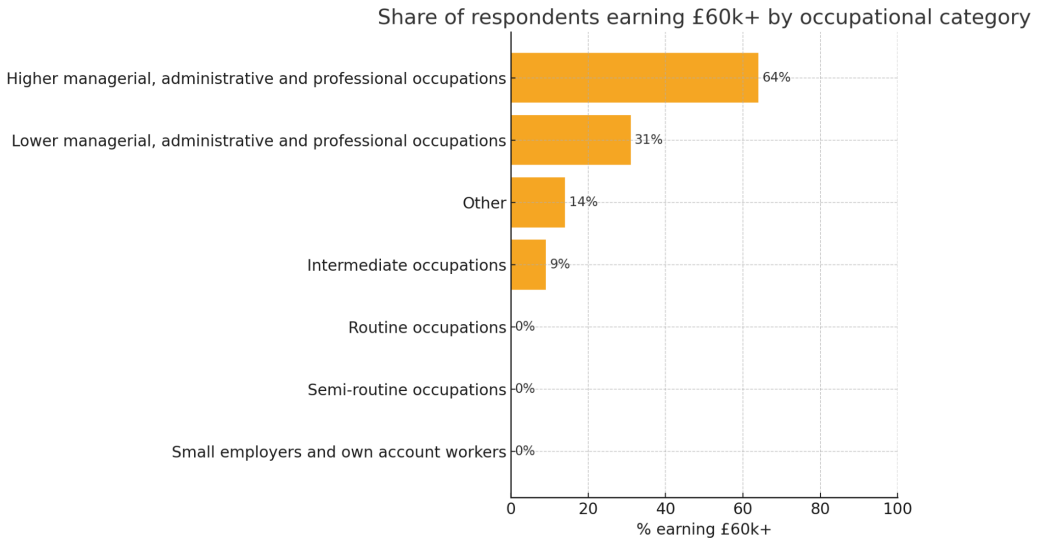
Figure 3: Share of respondents earning £60k+ by years since programme completion



This progression, as visualised in Figure 3, significantly outpaces typical graduate trajectories. While the UK graduate median salary five years post-graduation is £31,400, Eagles alumni show 10% already earning nearly double this amount at the 3-5 year mark.

Occupational class magnifies the effect (Figure 4). Eagles alumni in higher managerial, administrative and professional occupations are the most likely to earn £60k+, followed by those in lower managerial/professional roles. Those in intermediate, semi-routine and routine occupations are far less represented in the top salary bands, yet the data show visible transitions into higher-paying managerial/professional roles over time, not just pay mobility but also occupational class advancement.

Figure 4: Share of respondents earning £60k+ by occupational category



Taken together, the data show the Eagles Programme not only supports access into professional careers, but sustains long-term earnings growth, with a meaningful subset climbing into high-income and leadership positions, particularly 5 years after programme completion.

7.1. Benchmarking Eagles alumni earnings against London and national datasets

Median estimated earnings among Eagles alumni significantly exceed both national and London-wide medians, particularly from age 30 onwards and among those in professional roles.

London Full-Time Salary Benchmark (all workers)

Median gross annual pay (London): £47,455

Office for National Statistics (ONS), Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE), 2024

https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/earnings-workplace-borough/

UK Graduate Salary Benchmark (5 years post-graduation)

Median salary for graduates 5 years after first degree graduation (England): £31,400

Department for Education (DfE), Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO), 2025 release for tax year 2022-23

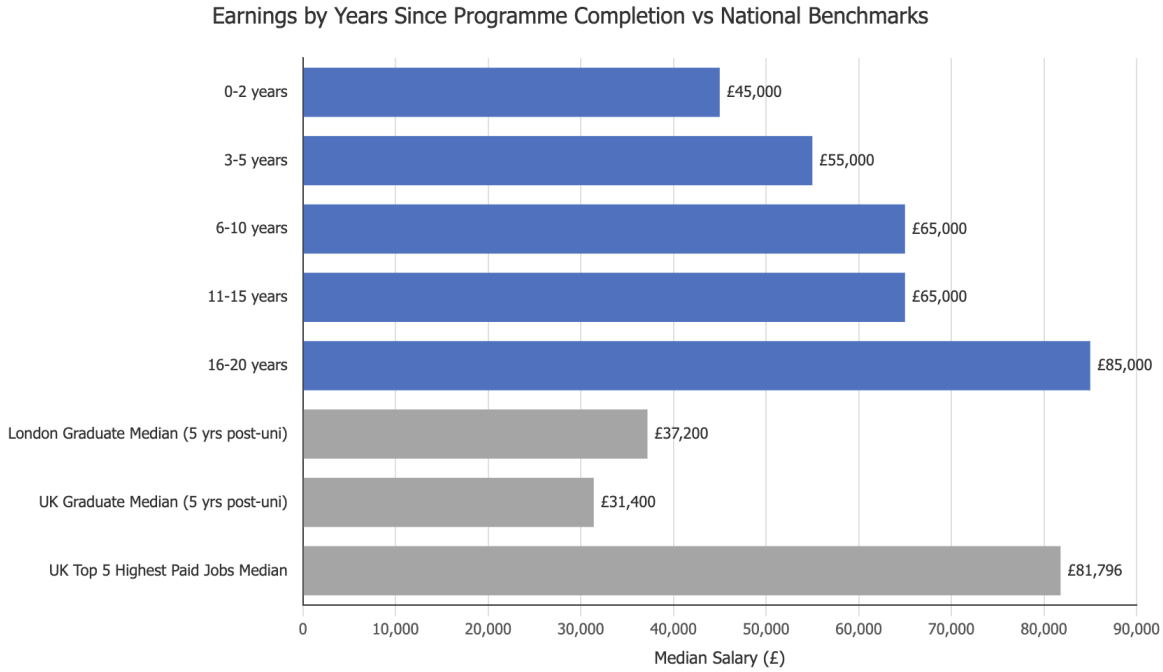
https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/leo-graduate-and-postgraduate-outcomes/2022-23

7.2. Key comparison findings

Figure 5 shows a clear upward trajectory in earnings among Eagles alumni, mapped by years since completing the programme. Even in the early stages (within 0–2 years) alumni are already earning near the London median salary (£47,455), with the 3–5 year group exceeding both the UK graduate median (£31,400) and London-wide benchmarks (*DfE LEO, 2025 for tax year 22/23*).

Between 6 and 15 years, median salaries climb to £65,000, indicating rapid career progression and sustained gains. But it is the 16–20 year cohort that stands out most: reporting a median salary of £85,000, this group exceeds the national average for the UK's top 5 highest-paid jobs (£81,796)[3] (*Forbes, 2025*).

Figure 5: Earnings by years since programme completion vs national benchmarks



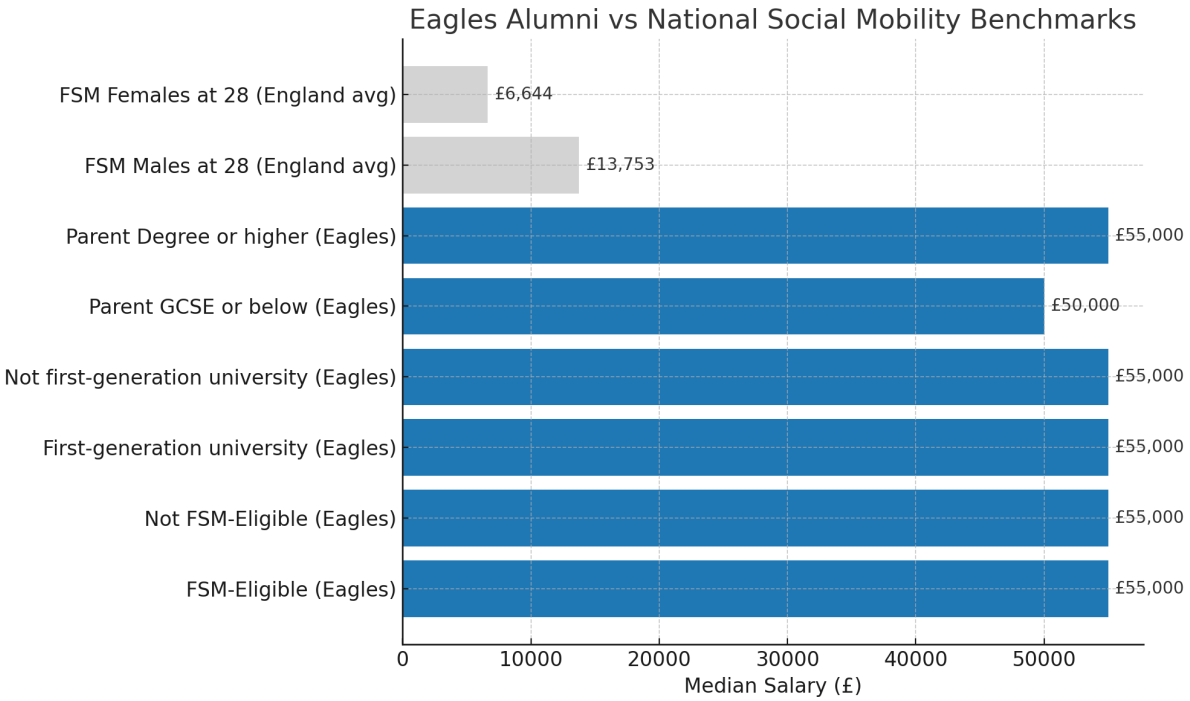
8. Social mobility indicators

This section assesses the programme's effectiveness in supporting long-term social mobility, using indicators such as parental education, free school meal (FSM) eligibility and first-generation university access. The findings show that Eagles alumni, regardless of socioeconomic background, achieve median earnings far above national comparators for disadvantaged young people.

According to the Sutton Trust's 2025 Opportunity Index, London ranks as the leading region for social mobility in England, occupying 42 of the top 50 parliamentary constituencies for life chances. However, significant inequality persists within the capital, particularly in east London boroughs such as Newham and Tower Hamlets. Against this backdrop, the outcomes achieved by Eagles alumni are particularly striking. The Eagles Programme not only leverages London's broader mobility advantage but raises the bar well above both regional and national norms.

[3] Pilots and air traffic controllers, IT Directors, Chief Executives, Marketing, Sales and Advertising Directors, Public Relations and Communications Directors.

Figure 6: Eagles alumni vs national social mobility benchmarks



8.1. Free school meal[4] eligibility

Just over half of Eagles respondents (57%) reported being eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) during their time at school, while 40% were not eligible, and 3% selected "Other" or did not provide a definitive answer. These rates are broadly aligned with the high FSM eligibility levels in the east London boroughs where Eagles recruits most heavily: Hackney (45%), Tower Hamlets (43.3%) and Newham (37.9%) (*Department for Education, 2025*). This reflects the programme's embeddedness in areas of entrenched socioeconomic disadvantage and reinforces the relevance of FSM as a contextual indicator for assessing equity in outcomes.

- 198 alumni responded to the wider set of social mobility questions. Of these, FSM-eligible participants (57%) had a median salary of £55,000, identical to those who were not FSM-eligible. This equality in outcomes stands in stark contrast to national figures:
- FSM males in England at age 28 earn a median of £13,753.
- FSM females earn just £6,644 (*BIT, 2024*).

The programme clearly outperforms typical trajectories for FSM-eligible individuals. By age 30–34, Eagles alumni are earning 3–4 times the FSM national median.

8.2. First-generation university graduates

A majority of Eagles respondents (59%) were the first in their family to attend university; a factor nationally linked to reduced access to professional networks, internships and graduate job

[4] While FSM eligibility captures an important slice of economic disadvantage, it only offers a rough binary indicator and fails to reflect the broader gradient of poverty. The Education Policy Institute (2025) finds that FSM registration increasingly misaligns with underlying child poverty - notably among larger families, certain ethnic groups (especially Pakistani and Bangladeshi families), and in less deprived areas - meaning many children in working-poor households fall outside that category (*see also Impetus, 2025*).

opportunities (*The Sutton Trust, 2023*). Among Eagles alumni, these first-generation graduates reported a median income of £55,000, identical to peers from families with university-educated parents, indicating that the programme has levelled post-graduation outcomes despite differences in starting advantage.

This parity contrasts with national trends: first-generation graduates in the UK generally earn less than continuing-generation peers, with the earnings gap widening 3–5 years post-graduation (*Adamecz-Völgyi et al., 2022*). London's higher concentration of first-generation students and its wide access to universities helps partially explain the over-representation in the Eagles cohort. However, research shows that first-generation students in London still face persistent inequalities due to commuting, caring responsibilities or lower social capital (*Sutton Trust, 2018*).

To contextualise this further: 36% of Eagles respondents said neither of their parents or guardians had any formal qualifications, while just 19% came from degree-educated households. The majority were from families where the highest level of education was GCSEs (22%) or A Levels (20%). These figures highlight the extent to which the programme has supported upward mobility among those from low-qualification backgrounds.

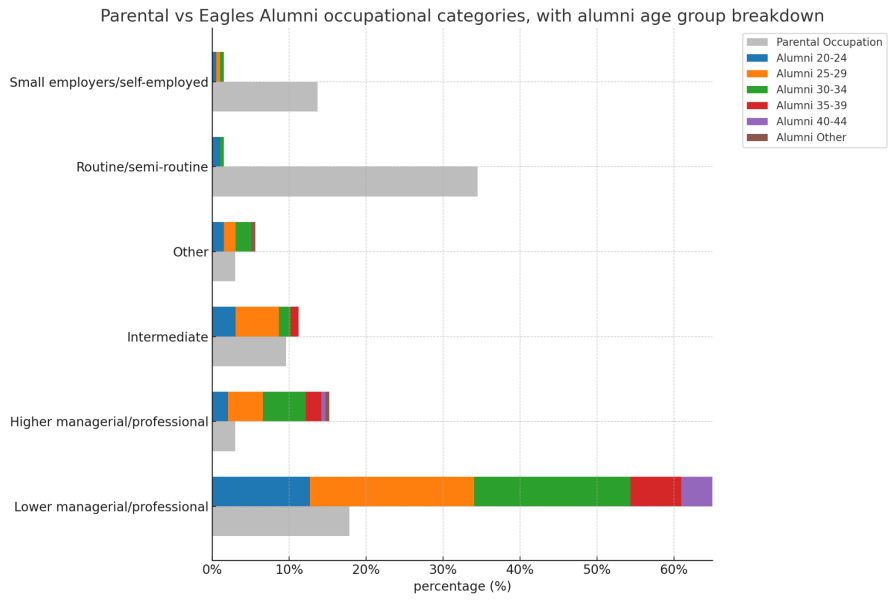
Occupational outcomes reflect similar trends. Among alumni from non-degree-educated families, none reported being in higher managerial or professional roles. However, over 68% are now in lower managerial or professional roles (closely mirroring the overall alumni population), suggesting a strong trajectory into professional careers despite educational disadvantage at home.

8.3. Intergenerational occupational mobility

Comparing Eagles alumni's current occupational categories with those of their main household earner when they were aged 14 reveals striking upward mobility:

- 80% of Eagles alumni are now in higher or lower managerial/professional occupations, compared to just 25% of their parents.
- Routine and semi-routine parental occupations (e.g., cleaners, kitchen assistants, warehouse workers, delivery drivers) made up 35% of the parental generation, but now account for just 1.5% of alumni.
- Higher managerial/professional roles (e.g., senior executives, doctors, lawyers) were rare among parents (3%). Today, 15% of alumni hold these roles.

Figure 7: Parental vs Eagles alumni occupational categories, with alumni age group breakdown



This occupational shift demonstrates not just income gains but qualitative mobility into elite and professional classes, a shift that academic research suggests is one of the hardest forms of social mobility to achieve (*Social Mobility Commission, 2024; IFS, 2023*).

Nationally, 52% of people from a lower working-class background have gone on to work in professional or intermediate jobs, and 61% of those from a higher working-class background have done so (*Social Mobility Commission, 2023*), compared to 80% of Eagles alumni.

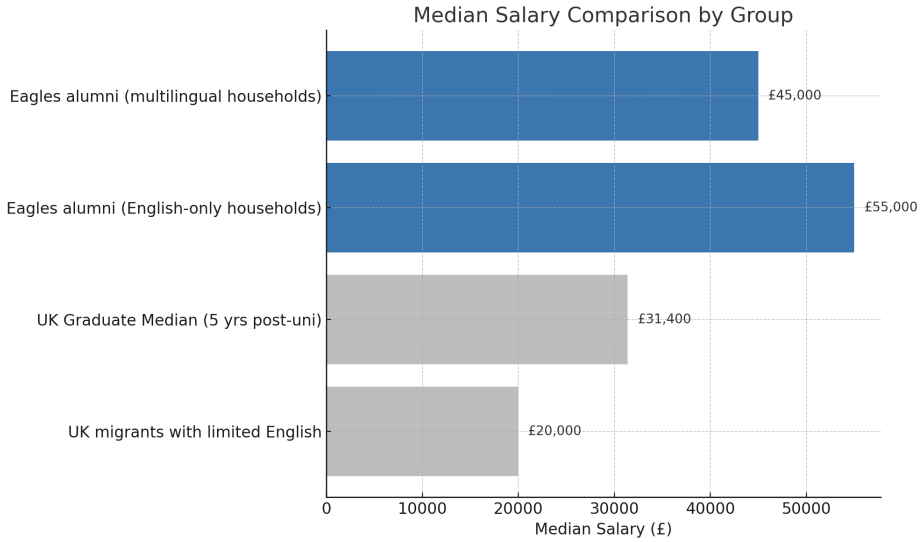
8.4. Commuting and multilingual households

70% of Eagles alumni lived at home during university - typically framed in the literature as a disadvantage. National research warns of the "commuter penalty," where home-based students miss out on social capital, internships and job market edge (*Sutton Trust, 2018; COSMO, 2023*). Yet, for Eagles alumni, the data suggests a different outcome[5].

- 16% of the "lived at home" group are now in higher managerial roles, compared to 12% of those who lived away.
- 68% of the "lived at home" group are in lower managerial/professional roles, compared to 67% of those who lived away

Many of these alumni were also navigating linguistic and cultural complexity at home. 79% of Eagles alumni grew up in households where a language other than English was spoken, reflecting east London's cultural and linguistic diversity. Nationally, research by the Social Mobility Commission (State of the Nation, 2022) shows that children from non-English-speaking households can face additional barriers, such as reduced access to early networks and lower confidence in settings where English is dominant.

Figure 8: Median salary comparison by group



Despite facing structural barriers commonly associated with speaking a language other than English at home, Eagles alumni (particularly those from multilingual households) outperform national trends. Their earnings far exceed both the UK graduate median five years post-university (£31,400)

[5] It is important to note here that living at home during university has a different context in London compared to the rest of the UK. London is home to a high concentration of leading universities (UCL, King's, LSE, Queen Mary, Imperial, etc.), and commuting is generally accessible by public transport (TfL data show over 50% of students rely on buses or the Underground for daily travel). This differs from other UK regions, where moving away to university often implies long-distance relocation.

and the estimated earnings of migrants with limited English (£20,000). These results suggest that the Eagles programme may play a critical role in mitigating systemic disadvantages, supporting strong wage progression even among groups typically underrepresented in higher-earning trajectories.

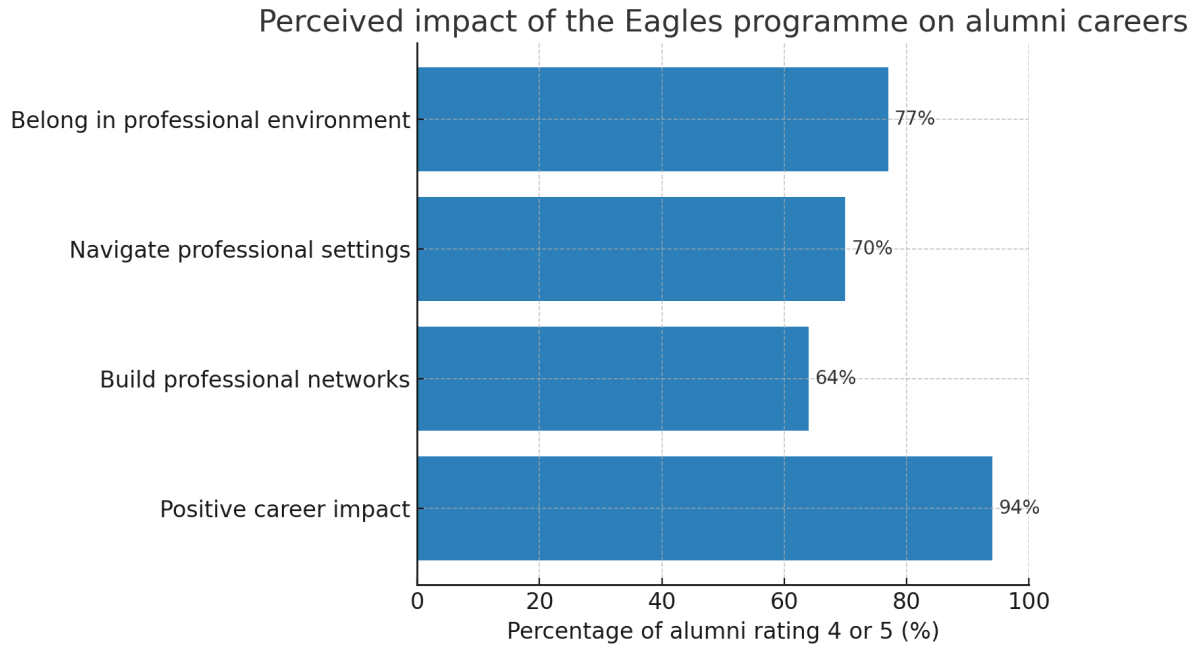
8.5. Perceived impact and lived experience of social mobility

While Sections 8.1–8.4 demonstrate measurable outcomes in earnings and occupational mobility, the lived experiences of Eagles alumni reveal the programme's deeper influence on confidence, identity and social capital. Alumni describe how Eagles provided the access, networks and skills necessary to thrive in environments that would otherwise have been unfamiliar or inaccessible.

Survey responses show that the programme significantly strengthened alumni's sense of belonging and ability to operate in professional settings:

- 77% said Eagles helped them feel like they belong in a professional environment.
- 70% said it helped them understand how to navigate professional settings.
- 64% said it helped them build useful professional networks.
- 94% agreed that taking part in Eagles had a positive impact on their career progression.

Figure 9: Perceived impact of the Eagles programme on alumni careers



Qualitative responses underline how Eagles bridges the gap between potential and opportunity:

> *"Without the Eagles programme I don't think I would have gotten the subsequent roles I did. Having the big bank name on my CV and the experience helped me obtain other roles within the banking and finance industry."*

> *"After struggling at university with poor mental health, Eagles provided me with a supportive opportunity to enter the workplace."*

"The Eagles ING Programme gave me an opportunity and a foot in the door. On paper, it should not have been difficult for me to enter my profession, but without social mobility programmes like Eagles, I may not have been given that chance – most of the time you only need one!"

"Just remembering how difficult it was with grad applications based on grades alone. Eagles gave us a great opportunity for visibility and set us up for success."

These stories reflect how the programme transforms perceived ability into tangible upward mobility, by addressing barriers in confidence, cultural navigation and social capital.

9. Corporate impact and organisational change

We spoke to representatives from 10 organisations offering Eagles placements, on a range of topics including their views on the programme, what worked well and what could be improved, the impact of Eagles on organisational culture, and their perspectives on the broader CSR landscape and how it has evolved since the programme's inception over 20 years ago.

Representatives ranged from junior team members who had been through the Eagles programme themselves, to the Sustainable Banking Lead for Financial Capability and Head of People roles at major Investment Institutions.

- Bank of America
- CBRE Investment Management
- CMS
- Fitch
- ING
- Macfarlanes
- MUFG
- Natwest
- Royal London
- SLR Consulting
- Zurich

9.1. Feedback overview

Each business representative was enthusiastic about the positive impact of Eagles at both a professional and personal level. The passion and commitment of the interns, their professional contribution to the teams they were placed in, the sense of pride and cultural cohesion created through participation in the programme and the development of the interns skills, were all cited as factors in the continued involvement of the organisations involved.

"The programme has been fantastic. I have nothing but positive things to say about it and

can honestly say, there wasn't any interns we wouldn't have employed. Really high calibre."

The improvement of the interns' career trajectory, which could in turn go on to improve their socio economic status and that of their families, was in many cases not the primary factor for choosing the Eagles programme. Rather, it was a decision made on the need for talent and capacity. However, the programme's clear ability to positively impact the lives of so many young people over the course of its 20-year history certainly stood it apart from other social mobility programmes making similar claims.

"What makes me want to work with ELBA? The fact that this is real life, having a real impact. A real person and opportunity that is very tangible. We stopped thinking of this as a charity a long time ago - this is a unique pipeline of diverse talent that we often go on to employ. It benefits our company; it's a commercial approach"

The reputation, experience, track record and professionalism of the Eagles management team was recognised by each respondent as a clear differentiator from other, newer entrants to the graduate development sector. The ability to understand what organisations needed, to be responsive and efficient at responding to questions and addressing issues, and the day-to-day running of the programme, and developing and supporting the Eagles during their internships were considered very impressive.

"I have found the Eagles so much more efficient than comparable programmes. This is a professional outfit. The support, the shortlisting, the adverts, are phenomenal. The programme is an investment, but the ROI is massive."

"The feedback loop with Sally and her team is excellent; she has helped us navigate so many sensitive things over the years."

Several respondents were eager to be ambassadors for the programme in order that more businesses would be able to experience having an Eagle in their organisation; and we should make sure to take them up on that.

9.2. The core structure of Eagles

Respondents overwhelmingly felt that the core programme was highly effective in its current format, evidenced by its twenty-year track record of success, and that the fundamental principles and structure shouldn't be changed significantly.

"When working with new partners, stick to the core structure of the programme, with minimum standards of preparation. Don't bend on that. The quality is so authentic, its real and I trust it. I wouldn't change anything else. They should demand a level of seriousness and commitment from those who want to join the programme, so that the interns get the commitment they deserve."

A recurring theme for consideration was the length of the programme, with six months generally not being seen as long enough to experience a significant improvement in the skills and capabilities of interns, and therefore a return on investment made in terms of cost and time from managers. However, it was recognised that not all organisations could commit to a 12-month programme, and that it should remain an option to current and prospective organisations.

9.3. Reasons for choosing Eagles

Most respondents cited multiple reasons for choosing the Eagles programme. The fact that interns didn't affect their headcount was a big factor as it made hiring easier, faster and less impactful on their bottom line. The talent of the interns was considered to be of an outstanding quality, with the pre-screening process celebrated as bringing outstanding candidates to their doors.

> *"It's a fantastic programme that provides access to untapped talent and an additional talent pool - we have seen the success and impact of the programme – it speaks for itself."*

Social mobility was of course an important factor, but most respondents were eager to stress that they didn't view their involvement in the programme solely as a charitable initiative, rather a critical talent pipeline that has a big impact on the teams they are placed in.

> *"The reason we started was because it was a way of getting extra resource that is not on our headcount - an Eagle gives junior support without having to secure sign-off. But more importantly, and the reason we continue to choose Eagles, is that we feel strongly that as a sustainable banking team, we live the values we hope to see in society, including making sure that people from underrepresented groups are employed in the bank. This programme helps to secure the next generation of CSR professionals."*

> *"The management of the programme, the preparation, training and pre-screening, and the ongoing support of the Eagles was a big selling point."*

> *"A really important selling point is that they do all the work and manage it - arranging the development side, the recall days, and this is very rare compared to other programmes; much more tailored and specific."*

9.4. The impact of Eagles on organisational culture

All respondents were positive about the cultural impact of Eagles on the teams they were working with, bringing a fresh perspective to the workplace and a willingness to learn and be involved.

Feedback was mixed on the levels of awareness of Eagles within the broader organisation, with some citing that the programme was celebrated at all levels, and others that it was relatively unknown outside of their immediate teams.

> *"Most senior people are really interested in the programme - who is coming in and what teams they're on. They are really proud of what we do and feel like they are giving something back."*

All representatives said that they would find it easier to raise awareness of the programme, gain broader support and have greater cultural impact if they were provided with materials which clearly made the business case for getting involved.

> *"Their trajectory has been so impressive. Those that have gone elsewhere, to see them thriving in law firms and insurance companies etc is amazing."*

Being able to celebrate the successes of Eagle interns who had gone through the programme, at their own organisation but across the programme more broadly, and were now enjoying professional success at organisations across London, was considered a positive and useful asset to have.

9.5. Ways to evolve and modernise the programme

Respondents had a range of suggestions for how to evolve and adapt elements of the programme in line with the changing CSR and broader geopolitical landscape.

At a practical level, most respondents agreed that a more flexible pre-training programme that adapted to the needs of businesses and the corporate landscape would be a good idea.

This could include sessions on the latest trends and terminology in corporate responsibility, ESG and purpose-driven communications, or the use of AI and critical thinking.

They also suggested that providing greater access to employers in real-life scenarios would give Eagle interns a better sense of the corporate office environment and set clear expectations for what is expected of them, both from a technical and cultural perspective.

> *"The fact that we got involved in their training was really great for us, and for our Eagles. There is something really beneficial in giving back, giving them our insight and seeing the positive impact. Our colleague flew over from Zurich to do the session. One thing I will say about the cohort is that they are really engaged and enthusiastic. We will run the same session again this year."*

9.6. Better preparing businesses

Respondents were very positive about their interactions with the team managing the Eagles programme. They provided a few suggestions for how the team might help businesses be well briefed and best prepared to help their Eagles interns hit the ground running.

They suggested that receiving slightly more detailed briefing materials outlining what is required of them as managers, and examples of how other businesses have onboarded Eagle interns, would provide inspiration and help to shape what they go on to deliver themselves. Additional background on the interns themselves and the extent of their exposure to corporate environments would also help the onboarding process. A detailed schedule of the first few months, outlining when the recall days are, and regular check-ins with managers, were also cited as useful additions.

9.7. Keep the recall days challenging and relevant for the Eagles

Respondents were very positive about the recall days and how effective they were at building the foundations of professional networks for the Eagles interns and allowing them to share experiences and support each other during their internship and beyond. While positive about the content of the learning sessions in the recall days, some fed back that their interns did not always feel that they were being challenged, and that the learning didn't always keep pace with their workplace development.

9.8. Cost isn't a problem as long as the ROI is clear

The majority of respondents agreed that Eagles provides a clear return on their investment. They all agreed that making a strong business case for why companies should choose Eagles would help to attract new corporate partners and to further sell and promote the programme within their own organisations.

> *"Cost-wise, I wouldn't want to pay them less."*

9.9. Stand out and celebrate successes

Respondents said that an updated brand and messaging, which kept the essence of the Eagles programme but had a refreshed and modern feel, would help to differentiate it from similar organisations providing social mobility programmes.

Respondents were clear that the longstanding success of Eagles was a factor that could be celebrated more visibly in materials and on business-facing owned channels such as LinkedIn. Organisational case studies, statistics, information about the success of the programme and profiles that showcased the impact it has had on the lives and careers of previous Eagles interns would be particularly useful.

> *"Show the real impact of it. Their track record. The success stories are amazing. As the years go by, everything is about buzz words. Eagles has a lot of substance"*

Most respondents said they would be keen to act as advocates for the programme, either in written materials as an approved case study, or as ambassadors online, at events or promotional roadshows. The only caveat would be that their time is used carefully and sparingly, with lots of notice given.

10. Future direction and recommendations

Twenty years on, Eagles has built a strong foundation of impact, with alumni highlighting significant career progression, network development and personal growth. Alumni overwhelmingly credit the programme for shaping their career trajectories, but their feedback also offers rich insight into how future iterations can deepen impact and ensure sustainability. This section summarises key recommendations grounded in alumni experience and data, with the aim of strengthening the programme's delivery and its value to partners.

1. Strengthen alumni engagement and aftercare

While Eagles was described as a "transformational" experience, many alumni noted a sharp drop-off in structured engagement after their placement year. Several requested opportunities for reconnection, alumni networking and long-term mentorship. Establishing a dedicated alumni network (with events, peer mentorship and continuing professional development) would extend the programme's value well beyond its initial phase and help retain talent within partner organisations.

2. Expand employer participation across sectors

Alumni consistently praised their host organisations but also expressed a desire for greater sectoral diversity. Expanding employer partnerships - particularly in industries like asset management, policy, media and creative sectors - would help match the varied aspirations of participants and widen the programme's reach.

3. Reinforce mentorship structures

While some placements provided exceptional guidance, others lacked structured mentorship. Participants highlighted that regular check-ins, clear development goals and stronger mentor matching would improve their experience. Setting minimum engagement expectations across all employers can help standardise support and avoid variability.

4. Embed practical work readiness and financial literacy

Several alumni requested more support in navigating the early stages of work, particularly around contracts, pensions and salary expectations. Workshops or toolkits addressing financial literacy, negotiation and workplace norms could equip Eagles with the confidence to thrive and support host employers in onboarding more smoothly.

5. Support inclusive practice within partner organisations

Some participants shared that their teams were not fully briefed on the programme's mission, leading to feelings of invisibility or tokenism. Light-touch onboarding sessions or one-pagers for line managers could help clarify the unique purpose of the programme and how best to support emerging talent from underrepresented backgrounds.

By addressing these points, the programme can build on its strong foundation and offer an even more powerful springboard for talented young people, while deepening value for employers committed to equity and long-term impact.

Conclusion

Eagles has proven that with the right opportunities, support and belief, young people from disadvantaged communities can not only access professional careers but thrive in them, breaking generational cycles and reshaping leadership landscapes.

The stories and data shared in this report are more than statistics - they are testaments to potential realised and barriers dismantled.

As we celebrate this 20-year milestone, we look forward with renewed ambition, deepening impact, expanding partnerships and unlocking even greater futures.

Here's to the next 20 years of transformation.

Appendix 1: Spotlight on CR/Sustainability Eagles

CR/Sustainability Eagles was designed to help recent graduates access careers in Corporate Social (CR), sustainability and other purpose-led sectors. It is the original Eagles programme and has been running for the entire 20 years.

We carried out some qualitative research to look at the long-term impact of the programme on the CSR landscape and how the sector has evolved over the last two decades. We spoke to 30 former Eagles who have pursued careers in CR/sustainability-related careers.

Impact on career

The CR Eagles programme has had a transformative impact on participants' career journeys - scoring an average of 9.71 out of 10 for its influence on career progression. For many, Eagles was their first exposure to the corporate world and acted as a crucial gateway into CR, sustainability and ESG.

The programme helped build core skills, confidence and a sense of belonging, especially among those who previously felt excluded from corporate spaces. It also created a supportive peer network, making the experience less isolating and more empowering.

Participants overwhelmingly stated they would not have taken the same path without Eagles. Many would have remained in retail, warehouse work or pursued unrelated careers simply due to lack of access and awareness.

> *"I didn't know CSR existed. I wouldn't be doing this job without Eagles."*

> *"It made the City feel more approachable and opened doors I didn't know were there."*

Barriers to career progression

Participants were asked if they experienced ongoing barriers to career progression. The most commonly cited experience was imposter syndrome - often tied to being the only visibly diverse person in the room.

> *"I had imposter syndrome at first. I questioned myself, whereas other people just do it. I was always looking for people similar to myself. I was the only person with a scarf. You feel like you're representing your people. You get over it".*

While outright discrimination wasn't widespread, several respondents experienced subtle systemic issues. Some experienced gender and ethnic bias, including microaggressions, being overlooked or suspected pay disparities.

It was also felt that the CR sector lacks clear progression routes, with some noting lower pay and limited opportunities compared to other fields. Young participants often felt unprepared to negotiate pay or promotions.

> *"CR is a niche area. You have to move around to progress."*

Impact of Eagles on CR teams and companies

> *"Companies who've had Eagles do their business slightly differently."*

Participants believed that having an Eagle on the team brought both practical support and strategic value, while also helping companies become more inclusive and socially aware.

- **Greater Awareness and Inclusion**
  The Eagles interns helped raise awareness of cultural, religious and social mobility issues. Their presence led to changes such as introducing prayer spaces and halal food options, and helped teams better understand the communities they aimed to serve.

  "Nobody looked like me or had the lived experience I have – that's powerful."

  "It had an impact on strategy – we talked about barriers Muslim people might face."

  Eagles helped organisations 'walk the talk' on inclusion, often prompting lasting improvements in policies, behaviours and mindset.

- **Strategic and operational contribution**
  Eagles interns made a meaningful contribution to under-resourced teams, supporting project delivery while also giving junior staff the chance to develop management skills. Their insights helped shape more relevant and inclusive initiatives.

Impact of Eagles on the CR landscape in London

The programme has had a subtle yet meaningful influence on the Corporate Responsibility sector in London. Eagles is recognised as one of the few entry routes into the sector for individuals from underrepresented backgrounds.

Though low in visibility, the cumulative contribution of Eagles alumni - in ideas, lived experience and representation - has played it part in shaping the sector from within. Described by one as "insidious in a positive way," its impact is seen through the growing presence of Eagles alumni across CR roles and events.

How important is social mobility to employers?

While the term wasn't widely used two decades ago, social mobility is now universally recognised as a core priority by companies. It was often described as a key pillar of CR, closely connected to broader Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) efforts.

"It's a core pillar of our CR work, and a priority in our business functions."

Many companies have introduced their own measurable commitments, such as ring-fencing opportunities. Entry-level schemes and apprenticeships are seen as vital tools for driving social mobility and fostering inclusion.

CR is evolving and so must CR Eagles

The CR landscape is evolving rapidly. Social mobility initiatives are increasingly managed in-house by early careers teams, with programmes such as summer internships and apprenticeships.

CR has become more specialised and is now subject to greater scrutiny. Today, only large companies tend to have dedicated Corporate Responsibility teams, and there are fewer junior or social impact roles available. The focus is shifting away from traditional CSR towards sustainability and environmental roles, which often require specific qualifications and experience.

While CR teams have become more established, they are leaner due to budget cuts, hiring freeze, and pressures to reduce headcount. Spending needs to deliver maximum impact, and some question the value of investing in a programme that supports one individual when funds might create broader impact elsewhere.

In addition, companies (particularly US firms) are mindful of the 'Trump effect' and reputational risk, leading them to scale back, rebrand, or defend their diversity and inclusion efforts amid growing political and legal scrutiny

To a certain extent, we can be viewed as victims of our own success. When companies offer Eagles permanent roles, they frequently withdraw from taking on new participants, limiting fresh opportunities. Of the 31 interviewees, 12 were hired by their placement companies, representing 12 fewer opportunities going forward.

Next steps for CR Eagles

In the light of this evolution, to remain relevant and impactful the Eagles programme needs a clear business case tailored to current company priorities and aligned with evolving business needs.