

**Tenders sought for research project**

**Non-educational barriers to entry to elite professions**

**Overview**

The Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission ([www.gov.uk/smcpc](http://www.gov.uk/smcpc)) is inviting proposals for qualitative research into the drivers of recruitment selection decisions in professional services firms – specifically major professional services firms, banking and elite consultancy organisation. This research forms part of the Social Mobility & Child Poverty Commission’s role as an advocate for social mobility in the UK.

The purpose of this work is to understand more about the ‘black box’ behind candidate selection and decisions around progression within the firm and how this helps –or hinders – social mobility. It should identify potential barriers to changes in business practices to promote fair access. Evidence should be gathered via qualitative methods, primarily interviews with key human resources and management personnel. Interviews would be expected to cover areas such as: the organisation’s recruitment approach and attitude towards social mobility, organisational dynamics, client needs and perceptions of client needs, HR processes and the process of training recruiters. Any quantitative analysis to support this would be welcome, for example data that is collected as part of the recruitment process. We would be keen to explore whether organisations have developed a business case to support social mobility activity or understand what drives businesses to promote social mobility friendly activities.

The successful bidder will have a track record of working in this subject area and will be an individual or group experienced in producing well-evidenced, newsworthy, conclusions. They will need to show evidence of how they can secure interviews with senior members of relevant staff in professional services firms.

This research will be commissioned via a single procurement phase, for which succinct proposals are invited. Assessment of tenders will be on the basis of the criteria at the end of this document. The contract between the Commission and the successful bidder will run from the date of issue until no later than the middle of March 2015. Research will be published on the Commission’s website and should be drafted with Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission branding and format.

Tenders should be submitted to [contact@smcpcommission.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:contact@smcpcommission.gsi.gov.uk) no later than 17:00 Tuesday 6 January. They should be in Word or PDF format and include:

* Your proposed approach to the research (2 sides max). You may wish to set out in this section:
  + Overview of qualitative approach, including key questions;
  + How you can add value and why you should be selected;
  + The specific industries and organisations you will approach, and total number of interviewees;
  + Timeline for research and risks.
* Examples of key relevant experience and individual/staff expertise and qualifications (1-2 sides max);
* Summary of costs (1 side max).

Communication of complex information in a straightforward way is necessary to this project. Therefore **tenders that exceed 5 sides of A4 will be not be considered**.

**Research questions**

This research will support the work of the Social Mobility & Child Poverty Commission in developing policy proposals to help the professions tackle the ‘demand side’ barriers to widening the pool of individuals from which they recruit and ensuring those from less advantaged backgrounds are able to progress to senior levels once recruited. In interviewing senior managers and HR staff from professional firms we require the successful bidder to establish a detailed picture of the firm’s approach. The sorts of questions we would expect bidders to include are:

* What initiatives an organisation has in place in relation to fair access/social mobility; how are these positioned between the organisations recruitment and community agendas/functions?
* Does an organisation have a clear notion of what ‘social mobility’ is or is it confused with other diversity initiatives; what does success look like in achieving mobility?
* What drives the organisational approach to candidate selection?
* Does an organisation reserve opportunities (internships etc) for those from disadvantaged backgrounds?
* What ‘gateways’ do applicants need to pass through (e.g. does organisation only recruit from certain universities/schools)?
* Has the organisation considered non-graduate routes such as higher apprenticeships? If so, why; if not, why not?
* What does organisational ‘fit’/unsuitability look like in terms of candidate characteristics?
* Whether social background influences job suitability and why (for example, perception of client expectations of staff biographies, accents etc)
* How are recruiters trained to ensure fairness?
* Where recruitment methods act as a barrier to mobility what is the right balance between altering methods and educating applicants?
* What approach is taken to recording diversity in applications and appointment in terms of a range of categories (socio-economic background, region, gender etc)
* What approaches are taken to pro-actively diversify the candidate pool and what is most successful in achieving this?
* How do the perceived barriers and dilutions differ between the graduate recruitment and schools/apprenticeship recruitment markets.

**Acceptable standards of bidders**

The following sets out the acceptable standards of bidders for this research and how these should be evidenced:

* Experience of working flexibly with clients in developing complex research and analysis;
* Clarity in communicating progress of work to clients and explaining issues that arise in a timely manner;
* Risk management expertise including track record in escalating risks to clients for discussion;
* If necessary, experience in working with other organisations as part of larger research programmes.
* A track record of research drawing on qualitative data resulting in news-worthy conclusions.

*In specific for this qualitative research*

* ability to draw on network of contacts to access senior members of staff in professional firms.

**Evaluation criteria**

Tenders will be evaluated against the criteria below. A primary weighting means the criteria will be given greater consideration in assessment of bids.

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| **Criteria** | **Potential examples** | **Weighting** |
| Team and organisational experience in conducting and presenting qualitative research | * Examples of research using interviews * Experience of presenting findings in catching and clear ways | Primary |
| Expertise of proposed staff | * Experience of staff in relevant research techniques * Experience of specific research in this area and familiarity with subject area | Primary |
| Ability to access suitable interviewees | * Range of sectors in which proposed interviewees work * Range of firms in which proposed interviewees work * Interviewees with variety of roles in organisation (e.g. HR, recruitment, management, account management etc) * Total number of proposed interviewees | Primary |
| Cost | * Estimation of cost for whole life of project | Primary |
| Experience in field of social mobility | * Examples of publications or other research demonstrating expertise * Examples of work adding substantially new contributions social mobility particularly labour market trajectories | Secondary |

**Delivery Requirements**

Based on commissioning in January 2015 the deadline for final products will be early/mid- March 2015. Final products should be in electronic format, using a style guide as supplied by the Social Mobility & Child Poverty Commission.

We estimate the research should cost no more than £15,000.