

THE BRITISH OPPORTUNITY INDEX

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How Great Britain's largest
companies drive economic
mobility and positive career
outcome for their employees

INTRODUCTION

Which British companies truly deliver on the promise of career growth and rewards for hard work? Where can ambitious workers ascend their employer's ranks—and where might those same workers be relegated to dead end jobs?

These questions have never been more critical for workers, employers, and the British economy. With living costs soaring, workers need clear information about where their careers can flourish. Employers facing a tight labour market must attract, develop, and retain the talent to thrive. And as Britain's productivity continues to slump, both government and employers need to embrace proven models for unlocking growth.

We launch the British Opportunity Index at this pivotal juncture. This groundbreaking tool cuts through corporate rhetoric to reveal which firms

genuinely promote growth in skills and offer their employees real prospects for upward mobility. Drawing on real-world outcomes data from platforms like LinkedIn and Glassdoor, we provide an unvarnished view of how employers perform on crucial metrics like hiring practices, compensation, career mobility, and workplace culture.

Great Britain stands at a crossroads – or, perhaps, an inflection point. As the nation grapples with the most formidable economic challenges in a generation, the need to unlock the full potential of its workforce has never been more pressing. The British Opportunity Index provides a means to advance that purpose by directing workers to employers where they can build successful careers and by provoking employers to review their practices and consider those embraced by peers.

INTRODUCTION

What is the Index?

This Index is the first-of-its-kind, outside-in assessment of British firms drawn from real-world data on workers' outcomes. Firms do not opt in or out of the Index and no employee surveys are involved. Instead, we leverage big-data analytics of career history data to construct an Index that measures worker advancement while controlling for occupation. In other words, we compare companies position-by-position; we do not compare the Software Engineers of BT to the Cashiers at Asda. Instead, we compare the Accountants at Asda to the Accountants at BT, the Financial Analysts at Barclays to those at HSBC, and so on for each occupation.

The British Opportunity Index draws upon the groundbreaking research leveraged to construct the American Opportunity Index, which launched its third iteration in October 2024. The American Opportunity Index, developed in partnership with the Burning Glass Institute, the Schultz Family Foundation, and the Harvard Business School Project on Managing the Future of Work Initiative, debuted as the first-of-its-kind corporate scorecard of worker mobility that leveraged purely outside-in data to assess America's Fortune 500 companies. The British Opportunity Index builds on this work and applies a similarly novel lens to assess companies in the United Kingdom.

We leverage this analysis to assess firms across four broad categories:

- › **Promotion** – We assess companies based on both on how workers are promoted internally (how often are workers moving up and are they receiving material pay bumps when they do?) and on how they find strong opportunities when they leave the firm. In other words, when workers move to a new employer, has the experience they have gained prepared them for better opportunity in their next role?
- › **Pay** – This category measures both how well workers are paid relative to those in the same role elsewhere and how much their pay has grown over time.
- › **Access** – We measure how open firms are to hiring workers without experience, and whether they hire workers without bachelor's degrees.
- › **Culture** – Finally, we assess the Retention rates at a firm to test whether the firm has built a culture in which people want to build a career, as well as the share of Leaders Drawn from Within, as a proxy for whether the firm's culture is oriented toward advancement.

For full details on how each category is measured, see the Appendix.

OUR FINDINGS

In developing the Index, we uncovered several key findings:

1

Corporate practice matters: We uncovered substantial differences in a worker's mobility depending on where they worked, even after controlling for factors such as occupation – demonstrating that corporate practice, itself, is a major determinant of the opportunities afforded to employees.

2

Industry is not destiny: Firms across a range of sectors demonstrated strong performance on various Index metrics, indicating that business models and industry economics are not as much of a constraint on investing in workers as many assume.

3

Firms have agency: The minimal correlation between metrics suggests that firms are likely making conscious choices in the investments they are making in their workforce.

4

Every firm has room to improve: Even the top firms on the British Opportunity Index do not excel on every dimension. Every firm demonstrates both strengths and areas for development; all have the potential to learn by embracing best practices.

OUR FINDINGS

1

CORPORATE PRACTICE MATTERS

The major finding in this work is that workers can experience vastly different sets of opportunities based on their employer – even relative to those in the same role at other firms. These differences are, in many cases, striking. For example...

Workers at **top firms on the index** have vastly different career outcomes relative to workers at firms at the **bottom of the index**



TOP QUINTILE FIRMS ARE

2.3x

MORE LIKELY

TO **PROMOTE WORKERS INTERNALLY**
THAN **BOTTOM QUINTILE FIRMS**



TOP FIRMS ARE

57%

MORE LIKELY

TO **RETAIN TALENT**
THAN **BOTTOM QUINTILE FIRMS**



TOP QUINTILE FIRMS

PAY 2.7x

MORE FOR THE **SAME ROLES**

THAN **BOTTOM QUINTILE FIRMS**



TOP QUINTILE FIRMS ARE

85%

MORE LIKELY

TO **HIRE WORKERS WITHOUT DEGREES**
FOR THE SAME ROLES
THAN **BOTTOM QUINTILE FIRMS**



OUR FINDINGS

1

CORPORATE PRACTICE MATTERS

Those differences persist at the occupational level. Some of those differences are easy for job applicants to discern. Software Developers at Meta, for instance, are paid 40% more than those at the sports betting company Entain. Others, however, may surprise you. While Burberry and Chanel are both luxury retailers, Burberry hires customer service workers without university degrees 60% more often than Chanel. Similarly, Amazon promotes its Customer Service Workers nearly three times more often than does Marks & Spencer.



FINANCIAL MANAGERS

3.5x

MORE OFTEN PROMOTED
THAN AT ABRDN



CUSTOMER SERVICE WORKERS

2.9x

MORE OFTEN PROMOTED
THAN AT MARKS&SPENCER



RETAIL SUPERVISORS

26%

HIGHER RETENTION RATE
THAN TESCO



HR MANAGERS

59%

HIGHER RETENTION RATE
THAN ROYAL MAIL

OUR FINDINGS

1

CORPORATE PRACTICE MATTERS

 **Meta**

SOFTWARE DEVELOPERS

43%

HIGHER PAY THAN AT ENTAIN

AstraZeneca 

BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE ANALYSTS

47%

HIGHER PAY THAN AT GSK

AIRBUS

SALES MANAGERS

84%

HIRED WITHOUT DEGREES MORE OFTEN
THAN AT BAE SYSTEMS

BURBERRY

CUSTOMER SERVICE WORKERS

58%

HIRED WITHOUT DEGREES MORE OFTEN
THAN AT CHANEL

2

INDUSTRY IS NOT DESTINY

Many lists of the best places to work are dominated by banks and technology firms – who presumably enjoy the margins to invest in workplace features and staff perquisites that employees cheer. However, the Index reveals a different story: firms that excel at creating the single most important outcome for their workers—upward mobility—exist across sectors and employ a range of business models.

Consider, for example, the Retail Sector – often invoked as an example of a sector with such razor thin margins that firms cannot invest in creating opportunity for their workforces. However, we see in our data many Retailers with thriving cultures of workforce advancement. A diverse slate of firms exhibit strengths across different metrics. Burberry is among the top third of firms in the British Index at promoting its workers. Meanwhile, Primary Stores and Sainsbury’s are two of the best firms in the entire Index on the metric of Advancement Beyond – which measures how often workers leaving the firm find higher paying employment elsewhere, demonstrating that an employer has prepared a worker for longer-term success. Iceland Foods is one of the top firms in the Index across sectors at hiring workers without experience. Kingfisher, meanwhile, is in the top third of firms in Retention, especially notable given the common struggles of Retailers to keep their employees. And perhaps it should come as no surprise that the co-op, Co-operative Group Limited, receives some of the highest marks at our “Leaders From Within” metric – which measures the share of leadership-level employees promoted up from within the ranks of the firm.

OUR FINDINGS

3

FIRMS HAVE AGENCY

Intriguingly, we found minimal correlation between firm performance across metrics. That is, the firms that were strong on one dimension weren't necessarily strong on others. This adds evidence that firms' hands aren't forced by sectoral dynamics or market forces. Rather, each dimension of their performance reflects a strategic choice, whether or not purposely made, about how they invest in talent and about which elements of employee experience they choose to invest in. That each choice is independent underscores that firms have agency in shaping opportunity for their workers.

Metric	Wages	Retention	Advancement Beyond	Wage Growth	Degree Barriers	First Jobs	Advancement Within
Wages	1	0.25	-0.13	0.05	-0.12	-0.32	0.08
Retention	0.25	1	-0.11	0.05	0.03	-0.32	0.05
Advancement Beyond	-0.13	-0.11	1	0.03	0.01	0.06	0.15
Wage Growth	0.05	0.05	0.03	1	-0.01	-0.06	-0.02
Degree Barriers	-0.12	0.03	0.01	-0.01	1	0.07	0.01
First Jobs	-0.32	-0.32	0.06	-0.06	0.07	1	0
Advancement Within	0.08	0.05	0.15	-0.02	0.01	0	1

4

EVERY FIRM HAS ROOM TO GROW

On a related note, no firm is top ranked in every metric.

For example, pest control business Rentokil receives top marks on Culture and Access, meaning the firm does a good job at hiring workers without degrees or experience, and at retaining those workers. However, it ranks near the bottom of the Index in Pay and Promotion.

Meanwhile, Vodafone offers the strongest Promotion pathways in Great Britain, but only about average on Culture and Pay. We recognise different workers have different priorities – what’s more, the same worker is likely to have varying priorities at different points in her career. Some prioritise stability – in the form of high wages and a secure job, while others are most concerned with career growth and promotion opportunities.

While many firms have room to grow, many of the firms who do well in the British Opportunity Index also perform well in the American Opportunity Index. While these two indices are constructed slightly differently, some consistency in performance for large conglomerates indicates that, in some instances, opportunity creation practices cross national borders.

By analysing firms across these metrics, we hope to give workers the visibility and agency to chart their own careers and find the employers that align with their personal goals and priorities.

Looking Ahead

The British Opportunity Index marks a new era in how we understand and advance career opportunity. By highlighting the critical role of employer practices in shaping worker outcomes, we aim to empower workers to make more informed decisions about their careers while challenging employers to rethink and refine their approaches to talent investment.

As Britain navigates a complex economic landscape, at least one imperative is clear: unlocking the full potential of its workforce is not just a necessity but an opportunity. The Index reveals that transformative outcomes are within reach for firms across all industries. The Index provides a foundation for a more inclusive and dynamic labor market. By sparking dialogue and driving action, it aims to equip workers with the agency to chart fulfilling careers and inspire employers to lead the way in building a more prosperous and equitable future for all.

APPENDIX: METHODOLOGY

This analysis is drawn from the career histories of hundreds of thousands of workers across Great Britain. A description of our methodology, including how each metric was constructed, can be found below.

We include all major occupations in the British Opportunity Index. Therefore, the Index spans a wide range of jobs – from highly educated professions like attorneys and doctors to occupations that often feature less educated workers (e.g., customer service workers, truck drivers). We apply statistical controls to ensure we are comparing occupation-to-occupation. This ensures, for example, that the high share of highly paid Software Developers at Meta is not responsible for its high score on Wages.

We leveraged three primary data sources to construct the Index:

- › **The Burning Glass Institute career histories database:** Nearly 1M British workers gathered from an array of sources, including LinkedIn profiles, CV's, and profiles posted on other sites
- › **Lightcast Job Postings data:** This data, spanning millions of real time job postings, enables us to estimate the occupational mix present at each company
- › **Glassdoor salary data:** We partner with Glassdoor to gather self-reported salary data

Metric: Promotion

Are workers moving up within the firm or moving out to better jobs?

Definition

Advancement Within (Internal Promotion)

A promotion is defined as a transition to a higher paying role. The analysis only considers those with a minimum employment duration of three months. To factor in the relevancy of data, we apply annual weights based on the recency of the promotion, with promotions in more recent years assigned greater importance.

It is a composite of three variables assessing:

- › How likely are workers to be promoted at least once (**Promotion Probability**);
- › How likely are workers to be promoted more than once over time (**Continued Promotion**);
- › How big of a salary bump they can expect to receive at each promotion (**Promotion Quality**).

Advancement Beyond

This metric evaluates how likely workers are to receive a “promotion” into a better role when they move on to a new employer. An external promotion is defined as a transition to a job at another company with a salary increase of 10% or more. We apply annual weights based on the recency of the promotion date, such that more recent transitions impact the firm’s score more than older ones.

Source: Burning Glass Institute career history and Glassdoor compensation datasets.

Metric: Hiring

How likely are people without university education or little work experience to get hired?

Definition

Degree Barriers

The percentage of job starters within a given occupation whose educational attainment is below a bachelor's degree. Our assessment derives from three distinct cohorts of job starters, with more recent cohorts accorded higher weight in the analysis.

First Jobs

The percentage of starting jobs with less than three years of prior experience. Our evaluation encompasses three cohorts of job starters, with more recent cohorts accorded greater emphasis in the analysis.

Source: Burning Glass Institute career history and Lightcast job postings datasets.

Metric: Culture

How likely are workers to stay at the firm and to become people leaders?

Definition

Retention

This metric measures how long workers stay with the employer. We assess three overlapping 3-year cohorts at the occupation level, with windowed periods closer to the present accorded greater weight in the analysis.

Leaders From Within

The share of leadership-level employees who have climbed the ranks internally within the company. We begin by identifying all present-day employees and isolating those whose occupations fall within the top 20% pay bracket. From this subset, we calculate the proportion of individuals who in the past held a different role within the same company outside of this top 20% pay bracket.

Source: Burning Glass Institute career history and Glassdoor compensation datasets.

Metric: Pay

How well do workers get paid and how much their wages raise over time?

Definition

Wage

This metric compares how workers in the same occupation are paid at different employers. This relies on evaluations of the median wage for each. To facilitate direct comparisons for the same occupations across different companies, we convert these median wage scores into quintiles.

Wage Growth

This metric evaluates the degree of wage growth for workers who stayed at a given employer for three or more years. This analysis relies on analysing the initial salary and occupation of all workers and on determining the percentage growth in their wages over a three-year period.

Source: Burning Glass Institute career history and Glassdoor compensation datasets.

APPENDIX: TABLES

TOP COMPANIES IN ACCESS

1. ROYAL MAIL GROUP LIMITED
2. DCC PLC
3. VISTRY GROUP PLC
4. PERSIMMON PLC
5. UPS
6. TAYLOR WIMPEY PLC
7. BARRATT DEVELOPMENTS PLC
8. COMPUTACENTER PLC
9. SPIRAX-SARCO ENGINEERING PLC
10. SCHRODERS PLC
11. XPO LOGISTICS
12. HC-ONE
13. LIBERTY GLOBAL LTD-A
14. RIGHTMOVE PLC
15. JD SPORTS FASHION PLC
16. MAN GROUP PLC / JERSEY
17. GXO LOGISTICS UK LIMITED
18. RENTOKIL INITIAL PLC
19. WINCANTON
20. MCDONALD'S RESTAURANTS LIMITED
21. BRITISH LAND CO PLC
22. SANCTUARY
23. OCADO GROUP PLC
24. NATWEST GROUP PLC
25. POUNDLAND LIMITED
26. GREGGS PLC
27. BBC
28. JET2.COM AND JET2HOLIDAYS
29. CARE UK
30. ENTAIN PLC

TOP COMPANIES IN PAY

1. COCA-COLA HBC AG-DI
2. ANGLO AMERICAN PLC
3. MAN GROUP PLC/JERSEY
4. BEAZLEY PLC
5. GOOGLE UK LIMITED
6. FACEBOOK UK LIMITED
7. HALEON PLC
8. PHILIPS
9. IMPERIAL BRANDS PLC
10. SSE PLC
11. NOVARTIS
12. MICROSOFT LIMITED
13. FLUTTER ENTERTAINMENT PLC-DI
14. SCHRODERS PLC
15. RELX PLC
16. BOEHRINGER INGELHEIM INTERNATIONAL
17. BP PLC
18. DEUTSCHE BANK AKTIENGESELLSCHAFT
19. BAYER
20. BRISTOL-MYERS SQUIBB
21. SOCIETE GENERALE
22. M&G PLC
23. COMMERZBANK AKTIENGESELLSCHAFT
24. INVESTEC PLC
25. SHELL PLC
26. LONDON STOCK EXCHANGE GROUP
27. PRIMARK STORES LIMITED
28. CARE UK
29. COMPUTACENTER PLC
30. NUFFIELD HEALTH

APPENDIX: TABLES

TOP COMPANIES IN MOBILITY

1. VODAFONE GROUP PLC
2. OCADO GROUP PLC
3. BT GROUP PLC
4. WM MORRISON SUPERMARKETS LIMITED
5. HSBC HOLDINGS PLC
6. LLOYDS BANKING GROUP PLC
7. AMAZON UK SERVICES LTD.
8. DELOITTE LLP
9. BBC
10. ACCENTURE
11. BARCLAYS PLC
12. PRICEWATERHOUSECOOPERS LLP
13. IQVIA
14. SOFTCAT PLC
15. SAINSBURY (J) PLC
16. MICROSOFT LIMITED
17. LIBERTY GLOBAL LTD-A
18. ROYAL MAIL GROUP LIMITED
19. NATWEST GROUP PLC
20. PAREXEL
21. CO-OPERATIVE GROUP LIMITED
22. JD SPORTS FASHION PLC
23. RECKITT BENCKISER GROUP PLC
24. ERNSTANDYOUNG
25. WISE PLC - A
26. ROLLS-ROYCE HOLDINGS PLC
27. WPP PLC
28. NEXT PLC
29. UNILEVER PLC
30. ASDA GROUP LIMITED

TOP COMPANIES IN RETAINING WORKERS

1. ERNST AND YOUNG
2. FACEBOOK UK LIMITED
3. AUTO TRADER GROUP PLC
4. ASTRAZENECA PLC
5. BAE SYSTEMS PLC
6. UNITED UTILITIES GROUP PLC
7. BEAZLEY PLC
8. ARUP GROUP LIMITED
9. GOOGLE UK LIMITED
10. ALMAC GROUP
11. BRISTOL-MYERS SQUIBB
12. LONDON UNDERGROUND LIMITED
13. ANGLO AMERICAN PLC
14. SPIRAX-SARCO ENGINEERING PLC
15. SPECSAVERS OPTICAL SUPERSTORES LIMITED
16. FEDEX
17. IMPERIAL BRANDS PLC
18. NATWEST GROUP PLC
19. BARRATT DEVELOPMENTS PLC
20. NETWORK RAIL INFRASTRUCTURE LIMITED
21. DANSKE BANK A/S
22. NATIONAL GRID PLC
23. DS SMITH PLC
24. LLOYDS BANKING GROUP PLC
25. BRITISH LAND CO PLC
26. COMPUTACENTER PLC
27. SEVERN TRENT PLC
28. HALEON PLC
29. ABRDN PLC
30. SOFTCAT PLC