

# JOHN & ANOUSKA

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**To start things off, what are your thoughts on the current situation of social mobility in the UK?**

**JC:** I guess we've observed a problem for a considerable period and we've been aware that generational social exclusion or lack of social mobility opportunities has become a blocker to accessing the deepest pools of talent in the country. But whilst we have observed the problem, there hasn't been a pick-up on the momentum that has been taking place in other advanced countries that have allowed some of the social barriers to be lifted, and for different hiring techniques and different structures to be implemented. Actually, there's some sense that maybe the position in the UK is getting worse. I've been given the opportunity to work closely with companies within the legal profession who are tackling the issue such as the Prime Network. It was set up as a result of the perception of social exclusion amongst some of us who'd come from poorer backgrounds that it is harder now than it was 30 years ago to get into the legal profession – both from the perspective of the number of candidates pursuing law, but also because some of the expectations that law firms, and certainly leading law firms, were imposing when hiring.

**Looking more specifically at the financial sector, what are your thoughts on social mobility within this sphere?**

**AR:** We know that this sector is lagging behind others. There was research conducted last year that showed that in most other industries, only one in 10 children choose to follow their parents into the same industry. However, 41 per cent of young people working in British banking have parents already working in the sector. If this is creating a lack of inclusion, then this is something we need to address. In order to represent our customers more effectively

and be a responsible employer in the UK, we need to break this tradition by attracting and retaining from a diverse and wide talent pool

**JC:** For me, it's a joint perception from the financial services' sector and the legal profession, because I cross both areas. From a legal profession standpoint, several initiatives have launched over the last 10 to 12 years which includes some useful practices that we can leverage in terms of an approach, such as blind CVs, or looking for diverse graduate talent, not just those that have come through red brick universities. At Santander, we've reflected on some of the structural change that might be required, and that's why in addition to signing up to a social mobility pledge last year, we have started to think about employment opportunities throughout the business, because we do hire plenty of people from lower socio-economic backgrounds but many of those are perhaps in the more operational environments and in our call centres.

**RESEARCH CONDUCTED  
LAST YEAR SHOWED THAT  
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## At Santander, how important is it for you to support social mobility in the organisation and why so?

**AR:** For our organisation to be successful, everyday inclusion is key. By attracting, retaining and rewarding the most talented people, regardless of their start in life, will help us create a thriving workplace and one where colleagues are able to bring their whole selves to work. It is important that we have in place the right outreach and programmes that attract a wide range of future employees from across the UK.

**JC:** It's increasingly a positive focus within the organisation. Social mobility is a spinal means by which we access all strands of diversity, because you tend to find that people from lower socio-economic backgrounds do represent a broad range of diverse talent.

# EVERYDAY INCLUSION IS PIVOTAL FOR US IN TERMS OF THE SUCCESS OF OUR ORGANISATION.

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## Looking at the barriers to breaking into a career in banking, what do you see them to be, how do you see them being overcome and what role do employers play in this?

**AR:** We know that the traditional routes into banking have been the graduate schemes and that hiring managers looked for graduates from Russell Group Universities. In addition, the increase in the university fees a number of years ago has created a huge barrier for those from a lower socio-economic background. With the resurgence of apprenticeships, and more importantly moving these from the blue-collar industries into professional services, has opened up opportunities to recruit emerging talent in a different way. As an organisation we've

focused our attention to offering degree apprenticeships which give people access to a career in banking – learning whilst earning – and this has opened up an entry route for more diverse individuals to join us.

**JC:** We're also very focused on the early in career piece, because by going into schools through the delivery of our WorkWise programme, in those 'first steps' type moments, we can encourage confidence and belief amongst the students, by showcasing role models and anecdotes that bring to life what it is like to work in a large organisation. So, when we send our enthusiastic colleagues as volunteers – visits which they have done by the thousands – they're bringing it to life for young people. It's a 'yes you can' attitude. During these sessions at the schools, there are several things we run through such as how to build a CV; how to conduct yourself in interviews – and that's related to some of the things that some of our other colleagues, like Iain Gallagher, in our Emerging Talent team, have been doing. It even goes as far to looking at how we can get kids from really socially deprived backgrounds to a position where they might be able to get the right clothes on their back for an interview through signposting to a local charity.

## What initiatives (internal and recruitment focused) that you have touched on, have been stood out for you in helping to accelerate social mobility?

**AR:** For me it has to be our apprenticeships which I've touched on already. I am so proud of my team who lead emerging talent – they have been instrumental in shaping our offering to support social mobility. One of the key drivers is that we do not run any of our apprenticeship schemes in our London offices, focusing instead on hosting apprentices in our Leicester, Milton Keynes and Bradford offices. Of the apprentices that we've hired, we've had 14% disclose that they had free school meals, which is above the national average, signs that through data we are starting to understand the impact that our decisions might be having.

And as John has mentioned, we are not only focused on bringing people in. 25% of our apprenticeships are designed to support the

professional development of our existing colleagues, who have been with us for a few years in our branch network or in contact centres who want to progress their career. We're also now opening up opportunities for them to do degree apprenticeships with us.

**You touched on data - data is critical in understanding socio-economic make-up of your organisation - what challenges are there in this?**

**JC:** Clearly, there are certain characteristics that are easy to record, and then there are other characteristics that are quite hard and not historically collected when people are recruited. I think the challenge from completing the Social Mobility Employer Index, in the same way it is for us as an employer to collect from colleagues, is what data to collect - it's not a one size fits all solution just by looking at schools and universities attended. As it becomes more normal to talk about social mobility antecedents, we probably will get much richer data but it's going to be a long time before we can embed that data driven view. That's why we're trying to initiate change through organisational culture as a first step through our traineeships, apprenticeships, partnerships with our 85 partner universities and the launch of our social mobility network. They all have a central cultural focus on "Let everybody have a chance and recognise that diversity in an organisation, and a broad range of social backgrounds does improve the quality of the firm." So, by driving that cultural change, we will change the data points even if they're not easy to measure.

Initiatives like our WorkWise programme with schools, traineeships and apprenticeships are supported by a network we launched 18 months ago, which is purely volunteer and they're doing a lot of great work in connecting with external partners. From nowhere, there's over 400 supporters getting stuck in and connecting different parts of the ecosystem.

We've also had the conversations about 'where have we got offices that are near social mobility cold spots?' Whitehaven, for example, Newcastle on Teesside, and what could we do to create a connectivity that will improve the chances of kids out of poverty.

**It's great to hear all the different approaches to drive forward social mobility but you're very right in that, data will definitely follow but it's interesting to hear how different organisations are tackling this, as like you mentioned it is lacking and needs steps & cultural initiatives in place before we can have hard stats.**

**Are there any further activities or initiatives do you have in place looking forward to keeping social mobility in the conversation?**

**AR:** Well, I think probably John's just alluded to a number of them. It's imperative that we continue to keep all inclusion measures, including social mobility, on the agenda. It's important that we advocate for change and work with peers as we have been doing to help change the industry's approach to social mobility. We continuously evaluate the measures and activity we are doing to support social mobility and spread that activity out through our Social Mobility employee-led network using this wonderful band of 400 supporters. Also by continuing with the apprenticeship piece, continuing with our partnerships with the universities where we can support people to get paid work experience as interns with SME businesses, which will give them a step onto the ladder.

**PEOPLE FROM LOWER SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUNDS DO REPRESENT A BROAD RANGE OF DIVERSE TALENT.**

**How do you internally communicate the benefits of social mobility to your employers and the importance of the initiatives in place?**

**AR:** We ensure we talk about them. We share examples, using our intranet and our networks extensively to share good stories about things changing in the organisation. For example, -highlighting being recognised externally as a top employer for social mobility, or highlighting the stories of individuals within the organisation who may have taken an apprenticeship role and they might choose to talk about their background, but sharing that insight more widely in the organisation without necessarily branding it as social mobility. It's just about letting colleagues know that they can talk about their lived experiences.

**JC:** What has helped is through some of the initiatives we've had in the past for traineeships, like blind CVs - which highlights to colleagues 'stop looking at someone as a statistical outcome at a moment in time in their lives, start looking at them as a human being and their raw talents'. Work out how to coach and develop them because of course the circumstance in which you grow up and the predicate of your birth may well impact what you can achieve by 16 or 18 in a written exam, but it doesn't mean that you're formed and final at that age and therefore let's take the human being, see how they perform as a human being when they've had a little bit of coaching and they've perhaps got a bit more confidence. See how they work in a setting and assess them on that rather than a static piece of paper which is their exam results. So try and make it real and get away from the 'computer says no' model.

**Lastly, if you were talking to other employers who may be starting to introduce social mobility initiatives, or alternate ways to do so, what advice would you give & why is it important for employers to be backing SM to put this issue on the map?**

**JC:** You don't have an option. If you want diverse talent in your organisation, then you need to have a broad approach to where you look for that talent, how you look to keep your organisation energised and don't be daunted by it.

Start with small steps, learn from others like us who've only made small steps but are happy to share our experiences, and learn from the Social Mobility Foundation, the commission and all the charitable

organisations who do great work. Build an ecosystem, communicate well, educate your own people, and take a structured approach to it. Think about it end to end in terms of how new employees can get in and get on.

**AR:** And it is also about harnessing the energy within the organisation, which is what John talked about - the employee-led network with the energy to help drive the agenda. It's not the organisation forcing people to engage with this, the energy is coming from within, and so that's another opportunity for organisations to just tap into something that's probably already there.

**JC:** That's when I get excited because altruism is the lowest common denominator for everyone. They want to do some good because people then feel good about doing something good. When you say to them, "Get stuck into this. Change the way we think about talent; how we access people; give people an opportunity" they get excited and they put great energy towards it. Colleagues feel proud, they're more productive because they believe in what they're doing and what the organisation is doing. So I think it's a great business driver. It's not just the right thing to do.

**Exactly. Working for a company that cares about making a difference in communities and wanting to be as inclusive as possible, is a great attraction for talent.**