

# Road Podcast “Social Mobility”



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**6 Minute English Social Mobility**

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**Rob:** Hello, I'm Rob, and Yvonne has joined me for today's 6 Minute English. Hello, Yvonne!

**Yvonne:** Hello, Rob.

**Rob:** Today, we're talking about **social mobility** in the UK and a plan by the government to try and improve it.

**Yvonne:** Social mobility is a big issue, and something that is very important.

**Rob:** Yes, and the coalition government in the UK is hoping its new **strategy** will help make things better for everyone. Now, today I wanted to ask you, according to government statistics what percentage of the UK population has attended an independent or private school? Is it:

- a) 7%
- b) 12% or
- c) 24%

**Yvonne:** I'm going to say 24%.

**Rob:** OK! Interesting. Well, as usual, I'll give you the answer at the end of today's "6 Minute English". So let's talk about social mobility. Would you like to explain what this term really means, Yvonne?

**Yvonne:** Sure. Social mobility describes the extent an individual's

status can change in terms of their position in a **social hierarchy**.

**Rob:** A social hierarchy. So this is about the class system. But how can we tell which class a person belongs to?

**Yvonne:** Well, this is often defined by a person's **material wealth**, their occupation and their education. So this is what the government's new strategy is hoping to improve for everyone.

**Rob:** Yes, but it particularly aims to give more **opportunities** to poorer people from

the lower class, some of which live in poverty. Let's hear from the government's social mobility tsar, Alan Milburn. He spoke to the BBC about the aim of improving social mobility.

## **Insert 1: Alan Milburn**

**What social mobility is in the end is about breaking the link between a person's class or income being dependent on the class or income of their parents, and unfortunately our country tends to have a stronger**

correlation between parental income and class, and children's income and class, than comparable countries.

**Rob:** So Alan Milburn says in the UK there is a strong **correlation** – or link –

between the income and class of parents and the income and class of their children.

**Yvonne:** Oh, so he's suggesting that people who are poorer and in a lower class now are in the same situation as their parents were?

**Rob:** Mm, that's right and this is worse than in other similar countries. That's why he says we need to break this link.

**Yvonne:** To break the link. But Rob, how is the government hoping to do that?

**Rob:** Well, shall we hear from David Willetts? He's the Universities and Science minister.

He can explain the government's new approach.

**Insert 2: David Willetts**



You've got a clear statement of how at each stage these kind of hinges, these moments in people's lives when they make crucial transitions - we want those transitions to be better for everyone. We want for everyone to see much more clearly what their opportunities are and how they can seize them.

**Yvonne:** So David Willetts is talking about improving the **crucial transitions** in people's lives. What are those Rob?

**Rob:** Well, these crucial transitions are the important points in our lives where we can make a decision that could have **consequences** later on. Things

like which school we go to, which university we choose, or which career we take.

**Yvonne:** Ah, these are important choices or key decisions. So the government wants to make it easier for people to know what their opportunities are and how they can access them.

**Rob:** Or what David Willetts said was, "how they can **seize** them" – or get them. The ultimate vision for this strategy is to create a fairer society. But, of course, this government plan is just a

strategy - it's not a policy and there's no extra money.

**Yvonne:** Hmm. Well, maybe we should hear from Frances Cairncross who's an economist. She thinks it's not the government's **responsibility** to improve social mobility.

### Insert 3: Frances Cairncross

I approve of anything that increases the chances for young people of getting ahead, but a lot of the things that improve those chances happen in the family, they don't

happen at a government level. They happen if you have parents who talk to you, if you have parents who care whether you finish your homework. That's part of social mobility and it's an extremely important part.

**Yvonne:** That's Frances Cairncross, who says she approves of any initiative - or idea - that helps young people, but many things that improve the chances of them getting ahead come from home.

**Rob:** Yes. She believes that much of the responsibility comes from the parents. If they talk to

their children, take an interest in their homework, it can really help them get ahead in life.

**Yvonne:** Mm. Well, maybe she has a point there, Rob! Now, Rob, it's time you gave me the answer to your question.

**Rob** Ah yes. I asked you, according to government statistics, what percentage of the UK population has attended an independent or private school? Was it 7%, 12% or 24%?

**Yvonne:** And I said 24%, but I think I'm terribly wrong.

**Rob:** Ah, you can't change your mind now! I'm afraid you are wrong. The answer is actually just 7%. OK, Yvonne, please could you remind us of some of the words that we used in today's programme.

**Yvonne:** social mobility  
a strategy  
social hierarchy  
material wealth  
opportunities  
a correlation between

crucial transitions  
consequences  
to seize  
responsibility

**Rob:** Thanks so much, Yvonne.

**Yvonne:** You're welcome. And that's  
all for today, but do join us  
again for more "6 Minute  
English" soon.

**Both:** Goodbye!

## Vocabulary and definitions

<b>social mobility</b>	how much a person's position and privileges
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	in society are allowed to change (often due to their financial situation or social background)
<b>a strategy</b>	a detailed plan of action
<b>social hierarchy</b>	a system in which people occupy different positions based on their wealth or privileges available to them
<b>material wealth</b>	money and property owned
<b>opportunities</b>	situations in which it is possible for someone to do something



<b>a correlation between</b>	a link, or a close connection, between
<b>crucial transitions</b>	changes or alterations which could prove important in the future
<b>consequences</b>	the results of earlier decisions or actions
<b>to seize</b>	to take hold of quickly and firmly
<b>responsibility</b>	accepting ownership of something, often a problem

## Road Podcast

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