Beyond Elite Education

How families navigate access to the world's most selective careers

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Full paper: whogetsin.com/research/beyond-elite-education

Elite education is strongly associated with access to the most selective careers. But a credential is an entry ticket to a separate contest, run by employers on their own rules and their own calendar. This briefing sets out what the evidence shows about that contest, and where the evidence runs out.

Selection is a sequence of different tests.

Academic screens, timed reasoning tests, recorded interviews, case work and assessment centres each filter on something different.

Limit: employers' published processes, not observed practice.

The clock runs early.

For several sought-after UK routes the decisive application falls in the second year of a degree, roughly two years before a start date. US cycles run earlier.

Limit: named programmes; no multi-cycle trend claimed.

The rules are partly invisible.

For 30 of 67 selective employers checked, no official statement on AI in selection was located, including several leading banks and every private equity, hedge fund and trading firm checked.

Limit: purposive list, 23 Oct 2026; rules may be given privately.

What we can and cannot say

Well established

Elite schooling and universities are over-represented at the top of UK life (39 per cent independently educated among 5,000+ leading people, against 7 per cent of the population). In the US, attending an Ivy-Plus college almost triples the chance of working at a prestigious firm. Class gaps in pay and progression persist after entry.

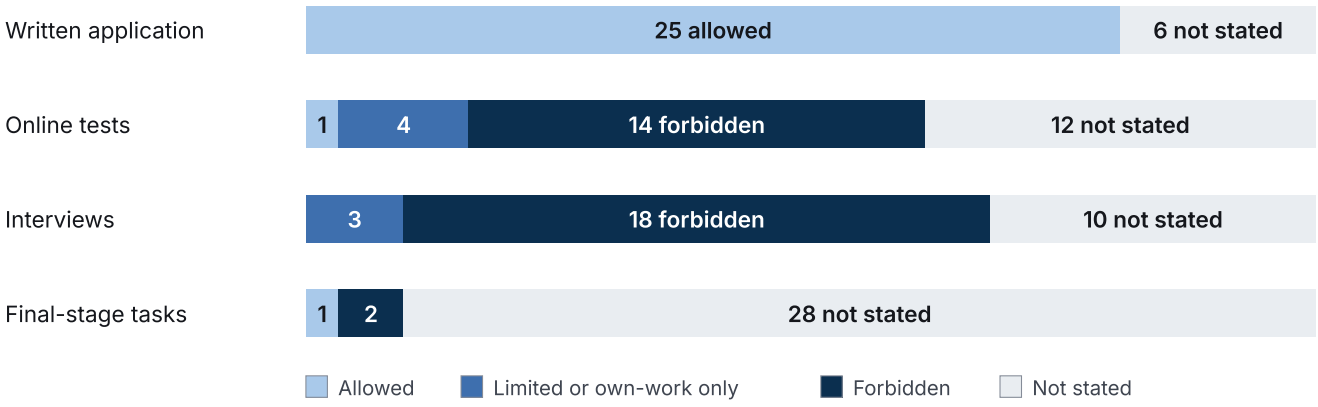
Weakly evidenced

What families know about specific selection processes, and when they learn it. How often families raise careers with private bankers, family offices or lawyers. Which preparation actually improves performance in employer selection, and for whom.

Where AI assistance ends

Of 31 selective employers that publish a rule on candidates' own use of AI, most allow help with the written application, and most that address interviews forbid it. Timed tests and interviews are the protected stages.

Exhibit A: Candidate AI rules by selection stage (number of employers, n = 31)



Source: Who Gets In? AI Rules Tracker v2.1, official employer pages, observed 23 October 2026. 31 of 67 employers checked publish a candidate-use rule. Purposive list, not a sample; published rules are not evidence of enforcement. "Allowed" includes allowed with limits; "Forbidden" includes forbidden unless authorised.

The perception gap. In a 2026 survey of about 5,000 students and graduates, 95 per cent believed employers use AI to shortlist them (ISE and Prospects). Of the 37 employers in the tracker with any AI statement, 11 disclose using AI somewhere in selection and 16 state that people make or check hiring decisions. The two figures describe different populations and are not comparable rates. The contrast suggests candidates may prepare for an automated filter while under-preparing for the human, timed stages employers protect.

Timing: the decisive application comes early

ROUTE (PUBLISHED BY EMPLOYER)	WHO MAY APPLY	WHY IT MATTERS
A&O Shearman, London Summer 2027 vacation scheme	Penultimate-year students; closed 9 Nov 2026	All participants considered for a training contract
A&O Shearman, London First-Year Programme	First-year students	Can fast-track to the vacation scheme assessment centre
Bank of America, London 2027 Summer Analyst	Penultimate year typical	Interns who perform well may be offered full-time roles; assessments often start before the deadline
BlackRock, 2027 Client and Product Summer Internship	Penultimate year	Deadline 30 Sep 2026 in London, 31 Jan 2027 in Abu Dhabi and Riyadh

Source: Who Gets In? register signals SIG-019, 126, 290, 292, 298, 370, 373, 376, 1246, observed September to October 2026. In the US, NACE reports a 63.1 per cent intern-to-full-time conversion rate for 2024/25 interns.

A model of the education-to-selection gap

"Elite education leads to elite careers" compresses five distinct stages. This is an analytical model for organising evidence, not a validated instrument.

Exhibit B: Five stages and the strength of the evidence

STAGE	EVIDENCE	WHAT WE KNOW	WHAT WE DO NOT KNOW
1. Educational attainment	Strong	Strong association with elite careers; Ivy-Plus attendance raises prestigious employment	Causal effects in UK and Asian systems
2. Career information	Weak	Parents are young people's first source of career advice; few report enough information	What families of professional ambition know, and when
3. Recruitment eligibility	Strong	Grade screens, degree-stage windows and one-application rules are published	How strictly screens are applied
4. Selection readiness	Moderate	Formats are published; human judgement retained at later stages	Which preparation works, for whom
5. Professional opportunity	Moderate	Internships convert at high rates; class gaps persist after entry	Long-run effect of first-employer choice

Who advises families, and where

Exhibit C: Advisers, scope and limits

ADVISER	TYPICAL SCOPE	LIMITS AND POSSIBLE CONFLICTS
School and university guidance	University and subject choice	Focused on admissions, not employer selection
Admissions consultants	Selective university entry	A different contest from employer selection
University careers services	Applications, employer events	Free but unevenly used
Private banks and wealth advisers	Wealth, succession, next-generation financial education	Careers outside core competence; referral incentives
Family offices	Governance, succession, family education	Rarely staffed for labour-market expertise (inference)
Specialist career advisers	Sector-specific selection preparation	Commercial interest; quality and evidence base vary

No adviser is positioned by default to cover stages 2 to 4 across several markets. Whether that matters depends on the family, the child and the route; many candidates succeed through free channels.

Next-generation advisory. UBS's Global Family Office Report 2025 (317 single family offices) found 53 per cent had succession plans, and only 26 per cent of those consulted the next generation from the outset. Published next-generation programmes focus on wealth, leadership and philanthropy. We found no research on how often families raise a child's career with their advisers.

What we still do not know

1. What families with professional ambitions for their children know about specific selection processes, and when they learn it.
2. How often clients raise a child's career with private bankers, family offices or private-client lawyers, and what happens next.
3. Whether published academic screens match practice.
4. Which preparation improves performance in employer selection, and whether its benefits are equally distributed.
5. How private capital firms weigh a candidate's first employer.
6. Whether recruitment timing is moving earlier, measured on the same programmes over several cycles.
7. What AI is changing in entry to these four sectors specifically.

Method

Desk research only; no interviews or surveys were conducted for this briefing. Employer evidence comes from the Who Gets In? register (1,387 signals from 494 official sources, read 9 November 2026, last updated 2 November 2026) and AI Rules Tracker v2.1 (67 employers, observed 23 October 2026). Each signal records one official source for one institution, programme, market and date. Samples are purposive, weighted towards London, banking and law; they cannot estimate prevalence. Published processes describe policy, not practice. External evidence is drawn from peer-reviewed research and surveys with disclosed samples; figures from different populations are never combined.

Key sources

Chetty, Deming and Friedman (2026), *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 141(1); Dale and Krueger (2014), *Journal of Human Resources* 49(2); Rivera (2012), *American Sociological Review* 77(6); Laurison and Friedman (2016), *American Sociological Review* 81(4); Ashley et al. (2015), Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission; Sutton Trust and Social Mobility Commission (2019), Elitist Britain; Sutton Trust (2026), Private Tutoring; Independent Schools Council (2025); Institute of Student Employers (2025, 2026); ISE and Prospects (2026); NACE (2026); Brynjolfsson, Chandar and Chen (2025), Stanford Digital Economy Lab; UBS Global Family Office Report (2025); Who Gets In? register and AI Rules Tracker v2.1. Full references and a source-verification register accompany the full paper.

Disclosure

Who Gets In? is a research programme run by Elite Careers Strategy, an international private advisory supporting individuals and families pursuing the world's most selective careers. Elite Careers Strategy is a paid advisory firm working in the field this research examines. This briefing uses public sources only and contains no client evidence. No affiliation with, or endorsement by, any institution named is implied. Data and charts from Who Gets In? are licensed CC BY 4.0. Contact: hassan@accessecs.com