

These shoes weren't made for working—how brown shoes can stop you stepping into a career in investment banking

September 5 2016



These shoes weren't made for working; how brown shoes can stop you stepping into a career in investment banking. Credit: Royal Holloway, University of London

New research from Royal Holloway's Dr Louise Ashley, Lecturer in Management Studies has shown that investment banks are failing to hire talented young people from non-privileged backgrounds because they

recruit from a small group of universities and hire those who already fit in with established banking culture.

A step in the wrong direction for diversity

One finding showed that applicants who wear brown shoes with a suit will be at a significant disadvantage. This is because it is generally considered an unacceptable deviation from the standard 'dress code' as understood by the British [banking](#) establishment.

One industry source told the researchers that 'from my experience, [non-privileged students]...don't have a haircut ... their suit's always too big ... they don't know which tie to wear'.

Style over substance?

The research, conducted for the government's Social Mobility Commission, found that candidates who fit the typical image of an [investment](#) banker are favoured by managers, some of whom also place importance on an individual's speech, dress, accent and behaviour, among other characteristics.

The report, written with academics at the University of Birmingham, found that most investment banks still predominantly favour middle- and higher-income candidates who come from just 6 or 7 of the country's top universities.

Family gets a foot in the door

The researchers found that [young people](#) who want to get ahead in investment banking need to have done [work experience](#) in the industry, a policy which favours those with already-established connections.

This can present a significant disadvantage to candidates who were not brought up in more privileged backgrounds, who are more likely to understand the unwritten rules of working in the city and 'opaque' dress codes.

Is a step in the right direction afoot?

Dr Ashley, who led the research on investment banking, said "our research suggests students from less privileged backgrounds are less likely to get the top jobs - no matter how talented they are.

Banks are making good progress addressing these issues through outreach and work experience, but more needs to be done to understand the barriers to entry. This needs to be accompanied by changes to the way that [candidates](#) are recruited and selected."

More information: Socio-Economic Diversity in Life Sciences and Investment Banking. [www.gov.uk/government/uploads/...vestment_banking.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/484842/Investment_Banking.pdf)

Provided by Royal Holloway, University of London

Citation: These shoes weren't made for working—how brown shoes can stop you stepping into a career in investment banking (2016, September 5) retrieved 23 July 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2016-09-werent-workinghow-brown-career-investment.html>

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