



Report

**Evaluation of the first year of
PRIME**

November 2012



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Executive summary

Improving access to the professions is key to promoting social mobility. The legal profession is an aspirational career for many young people, but it is increasingly difficult to access for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Alan Milburn's 2012 report on progress in opening up the professions commended action taken by the legal profession, but concluded that there is still much to do.

Launched in September 2011, PRIME¹ is a commitment to ensure fair and equal access to quality work experience in the legal profession for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. It sets out minimum standards for whom work experience should reach and what it should achieve. PRIME as used here refers to the PRIME signatory firms.

The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) is undertaking a robust and independent evaluation of PRIME over the first two years of delivery. This report details the findings from an evaluation of the first year of PRIME work placements² delivered between January and August 2012. In total, 751 PRIME placements were offered to students in year one. 655 students completed a pre-placement questionnaire, and 478 completed a questionnaire at the end of their placement.

Key findings from the first year of PRIME

In 2012, 20 of the 22³ PRIME founding firms offered placements under the PRIME commitment between January and August. PRIME firms have each committed to providing a number of work experience places that totals not less than 50 per cent of the number of training contracts they offer each year. This year, the 20 firms exceeded this target as a group by offering PRIME placements equivalent to **60 per cent of the total number of training contracts offered**⁴. Of those on PRIME placements, **82 per cent of students met the PRIME criteria**. This means that they attended state schools, were eligible for free school meals or were in schools with above average free school meal rates, or would be of the first generation in their families to attend university. Other data on student characteristics showed that:

- Most students (58 per cent) were from black and minority ethnic backgrounds.
- Most students (84 per cent) were in Years 12 and 13 and had achieved at least 5 A*-C GCSEs.
- Prior to their PRIME placements, the majority of students (63 per cent) were interested in a legal career, but 54 per cent had little or no knowledge of the legal profession.

¹ More information can be found at www.primecommitment.org.

² The term 'placement' is used to describe the different work experience or work insight programmes offered to students under the banner of PRIME.

³ The original 23 founding firms became 22 with the merger of Pinsent Masons and McGrigors.

Students were satisfied with their placement

- The vast majority of students (96 per cent) said they were satisfied with their PRIME placement and would recommend it to others.
- Students felt they had gained a valuable insight into the legal profession, especially through contributing to real tasks or shadowing members of staff.

Students developed their confidence, skills and motivation

- Students' confidence on a range of skills increased by the end of their placement. For example, they were more confident in giving presentations, writing reports and being interviewed.
- Students had gained a better understanding of the legal profession, including the skills and qualifications needed to enter the profession and the different careers on offer.
- Around three quarters (76 per cent) of students said that their placement had made them more likely to want to enter the legal profession.

Firms offered high-quality experiences

- Most firms developed their existing work experience programmes to meet the PRIME commitment. Nearly all firms offered block placements lasting one or two weeks.
- Firms offered a mix of work shadowing or experience of real tasks with timetabled activities such as presentations and workshops. Many included visits to law courts, clients or universities.
- Most firms offered students post-placement contact and support.

Firms and schools identified best practice in designing work experience schemes, recruiting students, preparing students for their placements, offering challenging and varied content and providing on-going post-placement contact and support.

Conclusion

PRIME has made a very promising start towards achieving its long-term aim of increasing access to the legal profession. Firms are meeting their commitments and PRIME placements are meeting the needs of the students. PRIME now needs to focus on expanding its offer to reach larger numbers of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds while maintaining the quality of placements offered in the first year.

⁴ The total number of training contracts offered by the 20 firms was 1,254.

1. Introduction

Improving social mobility is vital to ensure that talent and potential, rather than a student's background, determines their ability to progress (HM Government, 2011).

“There is an overwhelming moral and financial case for continuing efforts to improve social mobility. It is not fair that the circumstances of birth should go on to dictate the opportunities available for the rest of an individual's life.” Milburn (2012, P.13)

Opening up access to the professions is a key aspect of improving social mobility. The final report of the Panel for Fair Access to the Professions entitled *Unleashing Aspiration* (2009) identified key actions for employers and professions to take forward. These included raising students' aspirations, especially in schools, and making work experience and internships more transparent and accessible.

But the evidence suggests that professions are becoming more socially exclusive. Although just 7 per cent of the population attend an independent school, a disproportionately high number of those in top level jobs across professions, including 70 per cent of high court judges, have been educated privately (The Sutton Trust, 2009).

Alan Milburn's follow-up report on progress in opening up the professions acknowledged that the legal sector was starting to make real efforts to address fair access but concluded that there was still much to do:

“Without further and faster action on the part of the professions, government and others, Britain risks squandering the social mobility dividend that growth in professional employment offers our country.” Milburn (2012, P.1)

This report presents findings from the first year of PRIME, a new commitment on behalf of law firms to offer work experience to young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. NFER is undertaking a robust and independent evaluation of the first 2 years of the PRIME commitment. The evaluation includes surveys of students at the beginning and end of their placements and best practice interviews with a selection of representatives from nine firms, brokering agencies and schools associated with the nine firms⁵.

⁵ Details of the methodology and remit of the evaluation can be found in Appendix B.

1.1 What is PRIME?

To help improve social mobility in the legal profession, the 22 founding firms of PRIME, supported by the Law Societies of England and Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland and The Sutton Trust, have created a commitment to ensure fair and equal access to quality work experience in the legal profession for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

PRIME⁶ sets out, for the first time, minimum standards which work experience should reach and what it should achieve⁷. This includes focusing eligibility criteria on disadvantaged students and outlining the minimum standards of what work experience should provide. PRIME was launched in September 2011, with 20 of the 22⁸ founding firms offering placements in the first academic year. It is run by a management team and overseen by a management board⁹. Over 80 law firms across the UK have signed up to the PRIME commitment in the second year.

1.2 Who is eligible for a placement through PRIME?

For students to be eligible for PRIME placements they must be attending a state-funded secondary school/college, be in Years 9 to 13¹⁰ and meet either of the following criteria:

- are or have been eligible for free school meals¹¹ (or where this information is difficult or sensitive to obtain, the participant attends a school that is significantly above the regional average¹² in terms of number of students eligible for free school meals); or
- would be of the first generation in their immediate family to attend university.

⁶ Details of PRIME can be found at www.primecommitment.org

⁷ The PRIME commitment that firms signed up to can be found in Appendix A.

⁸ Two firms did not offer placements within the timeframe of the evaluation but plan to offer places in the future.

⁹ Members of the PRIME management board are: Addleshaw Goddard – Monica Burch; Allen & Overy – David Morley; CMS Cameron McKenna – Dick Tyler; DLA Piper – Janet Legrand; Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer – Barry O'Brien; and Sutton Trust – James Turner.

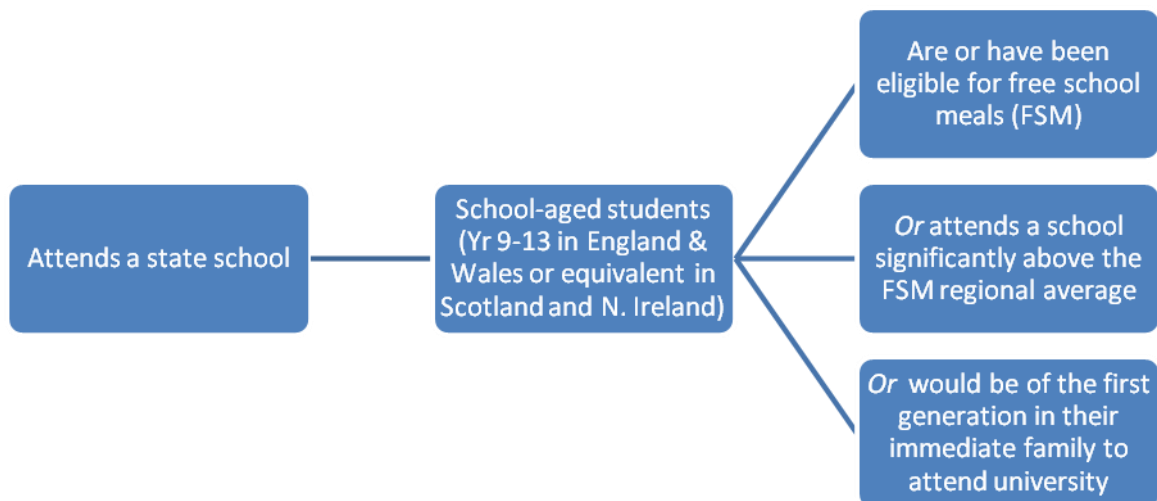
¹⁰ These English year groups are equivalent to S2 to S6 in Scotland; or Year 3 to 5, or Lower and Upper Sixth in Northern Ireland.

¹¹ In England, children are eligible to receive free school meals (FSM) if their parents are in receipt of any of the following benefits: Income Support, income-based Job Seekers' Allowance; income-related Employment and Support Allowance; support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999; the Guaranteed element of State Pension Credit; Child Tax Credit, provided they are not also entitled to Working Tax Credit and have an annual gross income of no more than £16,190, as assessed by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs.

¹² For the purpose of the evaluation, schools were judged to be above the average for their region (Government Office Region) if they were in the top third of schools in their region in terms of eligibility for free school meals.

Figure 1.1 below summarises the eligibility criteria:

Figure 1.1 PRIME eligibility criteria



Just 16 per cent of students in state funded schools in England are eligible for, and claiming, free school meals (Department for Education, 2012), while it is estimated that over half of students (55 per cent) in Years 10 to 13 in England are from families where neither of their parents have been to university (Smith and Brzyska, 2012).

The importance of targeting students who meet these criteria is well documented. High performing students at GCSE level who are eligible for free school meals (FSM) are less likely to attend university than their peers (National Equality Panel, 2010). Furthermore, students who are of the first generation to aspire to university have lower levels of expectation and aspiration compared to their peers, and are less likely to view university as a natural progression and have lower predicted grades at 'A' Level (Curtis *et al.* 2008).

2. What proportion of students met the PRIME criteria?

Key findings: In the first year of PRIME, firms offered the equivalent of 60 per cent of the number of training contracts in PRIME placements, and 82 per cent of those students met the PRIME criteria.

Between January and August 2012, 20 of the 22 PRIME founding firms offered work experience placements under the PRIME commitment. In total, 655 students across the 20 firms delivering placements in year one completed a pre-placement questionnaire¹³, which included questions on the PRIME criteria.

PRIME firms have each committed to providing a number of work experience places that totals not less than 50 per cent of the number of training contract places they offer each year. The 20 firms involved in the NFER evaluation offered a total of 1,254 training contract places and had 751 PRIME work experience placements between January and August 2012. This means that, as a group, the 20 firms exceeded the initial target, as 60 per cent of the number of training contracts offered were matched by PRIME placements.

The findings showed that most students (82 per cent) met the PRIME criteria (i.e. they were in years 9 to 13 in England (or equivalent in Scotland and Northern Ireland); and attended a school with a high proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals; or reported that they had personally received free school meals; or would be of the first generation in their immediate family to attend university).

The high proportion of students meeting the criteria in year one suggests that firms are successfully targeting students from disadvantaged backgrounds, who may not otherwise have the opportunity to undertake work experience within the legal sector.

¹³ This represents a response rate of 87 per cent. Of these students, 478 went on to complete a post-placement questionnaire, representing a response rate of 64 per cent of all students on PRIME placements. Please see Appendix B for details of the methodology.

3. Recruitment and engagement

Key findings

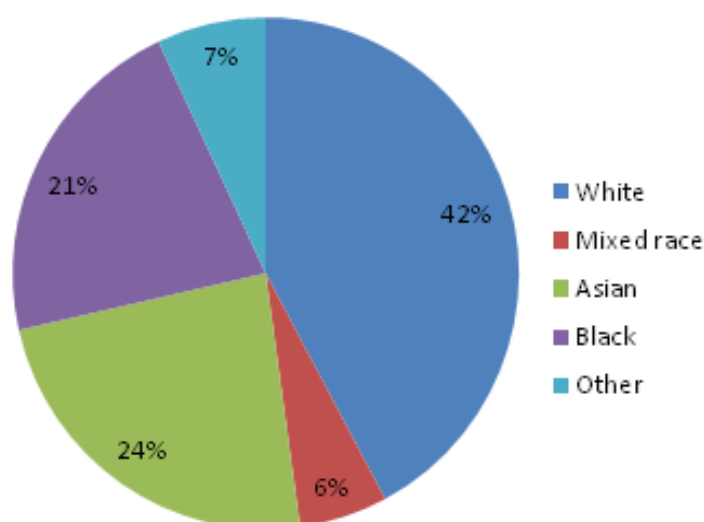
- Two thirds of students were female and a majority (58 per cent) were from black and minority ethnic backgrounds.
- Students were high performers at GCSE: 80 per cent had achieved 5 or more GCSEs at grades A* to C.
- Most students had no previous access to the legal profession through work experience or contacts.
- Firms recruited students either directly through schools or via a broker. Students had often heard about the placement through their teachers or via a presentation at school.

3.1 Who were the students on PRIME placements?

Students on PRIME placements had diverse characteristics.

- 67 per cent were female
- 58 per cent were from a black or minority ethnic background
- 42 per cent said that they were from white backgrounds (including white European)¹⁴
- 15 per cent of students had English as a second language.

Figure 3.1 Ethnicity of students



¹⁴ The ethnicity data has been aggregated: students were given the opportunity to select from a more exact list of ethnicities and these were grouped into broader categories.

Over two-fifths of students (42 per cent) identified their religion as Christian while 26 per cent were Muslim. Around a fifth of students (21 per cent) stated that they did not have a religion.

1 per cent of students on PRIME placements said that they had a learning difficulty or disability.

Most students who took part in PRIME placements were aged 17 or 18 and in post-compulsory education (77 per cent in Year 12 and 7 per cent in Year 13).

Most students attended schools in England (94 per cent). 4 per cent went to school in Scotland and 2 per cent in Wales. Less than 1 per cent of students attended school in Northern Ireland.

Students recruited to PRIME appeared to be high academic achievers. For example, 80 per cent of students studying in England had achieved 5 or more GCSEs grades A*-C.

3.2 Awareness and access to the legal profession

Most students (86 per cent) had not accessed any other work experience in the legal profession prior to their PRIME placement. Students were concerned that a lack of experience would be a barrier to them achieving their future career goals (20 per cent of students said that a lack of work experience would be a barrier and a further 38 per cent said it might be a barrier). Students felt other barriers included: financial worries (for example, the cost of studying at university); not achieving the right grades or qualifications; and a lack of opportunities where they lived.

Students did not have a strong understanding of the legal profession before their placements:

- Over half (54 per cent) of students reported that, they knew ‘a little’ or ‘nothing at all’ about the legal profession before their placement
- 49 per cent did not know anyone who worked in the legal profession, while 47 per cent said that they did (although we cannot ascertain the extent of these relationships).

Female student, London, aged 17

Why did you take part in PRIME?

I have an interest in the legal profession which I think will be aided by an experience in a highly regarded law firm.

What did you get out of your work experience placement?

It was very useful to see what day to day life is like in a law firm as opposed to the day to day life of a criminal barrister. The programme was extremely useful in giving information about various areas of law, particularly commercial/corporate/financial.

It was brilliant to be able to network with different people that worked within the firm and was also very enjoyable.

Nevertheless, just under two-thirds (63 per cent) of students expressed a desire to work in the legal profession before starting their PRIME placements.

3.3 How did firms, brokers and schools begin working together on PRIME?

From our initial interviews with participating firms, we found that firms worked in partnership with a number of organisations, including schools and brokers, to recruit students onto their placements¹⁵. Firms were motivated to get involved with PRIME to widen access to the profession and extend their reach to a wider group of schools or students. Some also wanted to work more closely with other firms involved in PRIME to inform and build on their current offer.

Firms recruited students for work experience either directly through schools and/or via a broker such as Pathways to Law or the Social Mobility Foundation.

Best practice interviews with a selection of firms and schools revealed that some schools had pre-existing relationships with firms and had been involved in other schemes.

“I was impressed by the firm’s [existing] programme which was so effective. I had found the firm very forward looking and very receptive to feedback.” (School representative)

For others, however, the PRIME programme offered an entirely new opportunity for their students to experience the legal profession.

“The opportunity of work experience is really, really difficult to get, especially somewhere like a law firm.” (School representative)

Firms working directly with schools tended to visit the school, meet the students, present information about the programme and discuss the approach to recruitment with staff prior to the placements.

Both schools and firms felt it was important to spend time building up their relationship. School representatives advised other schools to set aside dedicated time to manage this relationship. They also noted the importance of allowing enough time prior to the placement to carefully select students, and support them with applications and interviews.

¹⁵ Information in this section is drawn from initial interviews with all participating law firms, together with best practice interviews with nine firms, two brokers and eight colleges/schools.

Brokers participated in PRIME because it mirrored their organisational or charitable aims and they valued the existing relationships with firms. Given their expertise and experience in this field, brokers could help firms to manage their programmes.

Firms used brokers to provide greater access to schools and support them with managing student applications.

3.4 How did representatives use the PRIME criteria to select students?

School and firm representatives felt the criteria were useful in selecting students. But some suggested the criteria were challenging to monitor and were concerned that they might exclude students who could benefit from the programme.

If placements were being offered through access schemes such as Pathways to Law, additional criteria applied. Some firms also applied additional criteria themselves, such as high academic achievement or strong student motivation. This was particularly true of those firms wanting to support students over a longer period of time, with the potential for work experience students to build a relationship with the firm and eventually apply for employment.

“We try to be realistic and so for a firm like us we are really looking for high achievers academically... I know what a let-down it is when you have supported a student for a number of years and if the grades don't quite match our entry criteria what more can you do? And it is disappointing for the students.” (Law firm representative)

On the other hand, school representatives were concerned that by adding requirements for attainment or motivation, students with lower attainment or aspirations may be excluded from these opportunities.

Several firms expected students to complete an application form to assist with selection. One firm had introduced mini interviews which offered the opportunity to 'break down some barriers' and make sure students were better informed about the programme.

Students responding to the survey said that they had heard about PRIME through their teachers (42 per cent) or from a general talk about it while at school or college

**Male student, Leeds,
aged 17**

Why did you want to take part in PRIME?

I thought it would be a good insight into working in a law firm and would give me the chance to see if I wanted to carry on into a career in law.

What did you get out of your work experience/ work insight programme?

A lot of confidence and the ability to plan short term goals so I can finally achieve my long term goals.

(21 per cent). Most (60 per cent) were motivated to take part in PRIME because they wanted to gain experience or insight into the world of law. Other reasons included:

- because they had a desire to work in the legal profession in the future (26 per cent)
- they felt it would help them to make a career choice (19 per cent).¹⁶

“Work experience at a prestigious law firm will allow me to have the opportunity to gain knowledge of the basics of how law works. I aim to get a taste of work in a corporate environment... It will be an important achievement and distinguishable experience on my personal statement when applying for universities.” (PRIME student)

¹⁶ This was an open response question.

4. PRIME placements: content and satisfaction

Key findings

- The overwhelming majority of students were satisfied with their PRIME placement. 96 per cent of students would recommend their placement to others.
- Students valued receiving information and gaining an insight into the legal profession, which was mainly offered through shadowing and work experience.
- Nearly all firms offered students block placements which included a mix of shadowing or work experience and timetabled activities, typically over a one-week period.

4.1 How satisfied were students with PRIME?

Students' responses to the post-placement survey showed that 96 per cent were satisfied with their PRIME placements. The majority (96 per cent) said they would recommend their placement to friends interested in a career in the legal profession. Nearly all students enjoyed their PRIME placement and felt that it was well organised and worth doing.

To what extent do you agree with the following statements:	Strongly agree/Agree %
My work experience/work insight programme was well organised	97
I enjoyed my work experience/work insight programme	97
My work experience/work insight programme was worth doing	97
I was given worthwhile tasks to do during my work experience/work insight programme	91
I was treated like a member of a team	94
<i>Number of students = 478</i>	

Students particularly valued receiving information about careers in law and gaining an insight into the legal profession. This included learning about:

- the hours required
- the types of daily activities they would undertake in the job
- the environment and lifestyle.

Students also said the work experience helped them develop key skills, especially presentation, communication, writing and negotiation.

Most students did not think their experience could be improved. The minority who did suggest an improvement wanted a focus on shadowing or more opportunities to do real legal work.

Female student, Leeds, aged 17

Why did you want to take part in PRIME?

So that I could gain experience as I want to pursue this career in the future.

What did you get out of your work experience/work insight programme?

Now I know exactly what I would like to do and how I am going to get this. I have also gained a lot of self-confidence such as presenting in front of people. I would recommend this to students as it's a fantastic opportunity.

How satisfied were firm and school representatives with PRIME?

Staff we spoke to in firms and schools would both recommend PRIME to others. Firms believed it offered an opportunity to widen existing programmes beyond specific legal careers and introduce young people to the true scope of opportunities available in the legal profession. They also felt that there were benefits for staff.

"[It was] a valuable experience for our staff as well as the students. It gave us the opportunity to do something that we had wanted to do for a while." (Law firm representative)

School representatives said PRIME was a great opportunity for their students to access work experience in a professional environment and widen their horizons.

"It really gives them an insight into the world of work in a corporate firm ... They get the opportunity to meet people from completely different backgrounds... It really put students out of their comfort zone." (School representative)

All the school and law firm representatives we spoke to planned to continue their involvement in PRIME in the future.

4.2 How did firms structure their placements?

Most firms had well established work experience programmes. The majority of firms planned to provide a traditional block placement. The length of placements varied but typically lasted a week. An example of a block placement is given below. Ashurst offered PRIME placements in their London office:

Block placement delivery

Ashurst offered students a one-week long work experience programme called 'Access Ashurst' which included a mix of work shadowing and skills development sessions. Students attended sessions focussing on writing skills, presentation skills, CV development, UCAS preparation and a careers panel. Students were also taken on a walking tour of the Royal Courts of Justice.

An alternative model, used by Clifford Chance, delivered sessions over a much longer period of time.

Work insight programme

Clifford Chance works closely with a local school to help provide content and business context for a Year 10 BTEC Business Studies class. Over the course of 2 terms in 2012, staff from Clifford Chance worked with students, either at their school or at the firm, to provide business experience to complement the theory that students were learning in the classroom.

Clifford Chance helped to deliver content relating to business structure, planning a workforce, CVs and job descriptions, interviews and marketing. All students got the opportunity to take part in a mock interview at the firm which also hosted an assessment day during which volunteers observed students working through a case study, assessed them and provided feedback to the students. The experience was positive for all involved and the firm will work with a new group of BTEC students in early 2013.

4.3 What activities did firms offer students?

The majority of placements had a focus on law but also had a wider remit to include other departments in the law firm such as marketing, finance or IT. Most students stated that they had been given the opportunity to take part in all of the following activities:

- Gaining careers information on the legal profession
- Networking
- Being mentored or working closely with someone in the law firm
- Observing the work of legal professionals

- Giving presentations
- Interviews for work experience/jobs
- Writing applications for programmes/jobs
- Writing reports
- Dealing with customers

The impact of these opportunities on students is discussed in Chapter 5. Most firms had a full timetable of activities, including a wide variety of elements, to ensure there was a balance of activities and to keep students engaged. Some of the most common elements were:

1. **Shadowing or work experience.** Students received insight into work roles through work shadowing or sitting with a team in the office and working on real, rather than simulated, tasks.
2. **Timetabled activities.** Workshops and simulated tasks allowed students to develop skills in a controlled manner and see a task through to completion. Firms offered workshops in a range of areas including: applying to UCAS, writing CVs, negotiation skills, presentation skills and simulated case studies. Firm representatives felt it was important to get the right facilitator or presenter in these activities as they needed to be able to be enthusiastic and communicate with the students at their level.

“The workshops were extremely relevant and taught and strengthened key skills that will be priceless for the future, especially when applying for universities and ultimately work.” (PRIME student)

3. **Elements that challenged the students.** Many of the firms offered students mock interviews or the opportunity to take part in a presentation at the end of their experience. These were both challenging and rewarding for students.

“I have learnt new skills like communication. I know what to write and what not to write on my CV and also how to present myself in an interview.” (PRIME student)

Challenging the students

Through Allen & Overy’s Smart Start Experience, students worked in teams to collect points for their performance in a variety of tasks and workshops. This introduced a competitive edge which helped to aid student engagement.

The top scoring teams at the end of the week were given the opportunity to present to a panel in front of an audience of peers and teachers, outlining the skills they had learnt over the course of their work experience and how they would use them in the future. The prize for the best presentation was two days of work experience at one of the firm’s key clients.

4. **Visits.** Many of the firms offering a block placement took students on visits to different organisations throughout their time at the firm. These included visits to clients, law courts and universities.

“This work experience opportunity was very informative and has given me a more honest glimpse of the legal profession... The chance to attend presentations for clients in other businesses was instrumental in helping me understand the daily workings within a law firm.” (PRIME student)

The use of visits in PRIME placements

Brodies' PRIME placements were based around sessions that enabled students to get a feel for law and the different support functions in a law firm. They decided to break up the week with visits to a number of different organisations to ensure students did not stay in the office all day.

Visits included a trip to the law department at Edinburgh University where current university students provided a personal tour of the university. PRIME students attended a court session and sat in on some cases. They then visited a key client of the firm to see how things work from the perspective of an in-house lawyer. The students also had a tour of the Scottish Parliament.

5. **Post-placement contact.** Most firms were planning to keep in contact with students after their placement. Where students were assigned mentors, contact was made on an on-going basis (often through email). Other firms continued with contact or offered extra opportunities to those students who were proactive in contacting them. Firm representatives felt this approach was important to ensure that students were supported and maintained their motivation and focus in reaching their desired goals.

4.4 How were schools involved in PRIME placements?

Most firms had provided schools or brokers with a detailed breakdown of what the students would be doing prior to their placement. In a number of cases, the firm and the school collaborated to develop the placements.

Schools particularly valued being able to give students pre-placement information, or having some contact between the firm and the students before they started their PRIME placement. Useful information included guidance on:

- office etiquette, including dress code and behavioural expectations
- start times
- details of a named contact
- timetable.

Schools and firms who offered a pre-placement orientation session for students felt this was extremely important as it allowed students to meet key people at the firm before they started. They felt this helped to remove some of the anxiety the students may have felt.

Most schools received feedback on their students after their placement through meetings with the law firm. However a small number of schools would have welcomed more formal feedback on their students, for example, a summary of how well they had progressed throughout the week, including any particular issues experienced.

Female student, London, aged 17

Why did you want to take part in PRIME?

To gain a further insight into the profession and be able to acquire the right skills for law... It will increase my chances of doing law in the future and further my ambitions of one day becoming a lawyer.

What did you get out of your work experience/work insight programme?

I gained experience on what solicitors do and being able to work alongside a trainee solicitor was a valuable experience which helped increase my confidence and knowledge. It increased my ambitions for doing law in the future... Overall, very very helpful! Thanks!

5. Impact on students

Key findings

- Students' confidence increased across a range of skills between the beginning and end of their placement.
- Nearly all students reported that they had gained a better understanding of the qualifications and skills needed to enter the legal profession and the different careers available.
- Around three quarters of students reported that their placement had made them more likely to want to enter the legal profession.
- Most PRIME students were interested in pursuing a career in the legal profession.

5.1 What impact have the placements had on students' skills development?

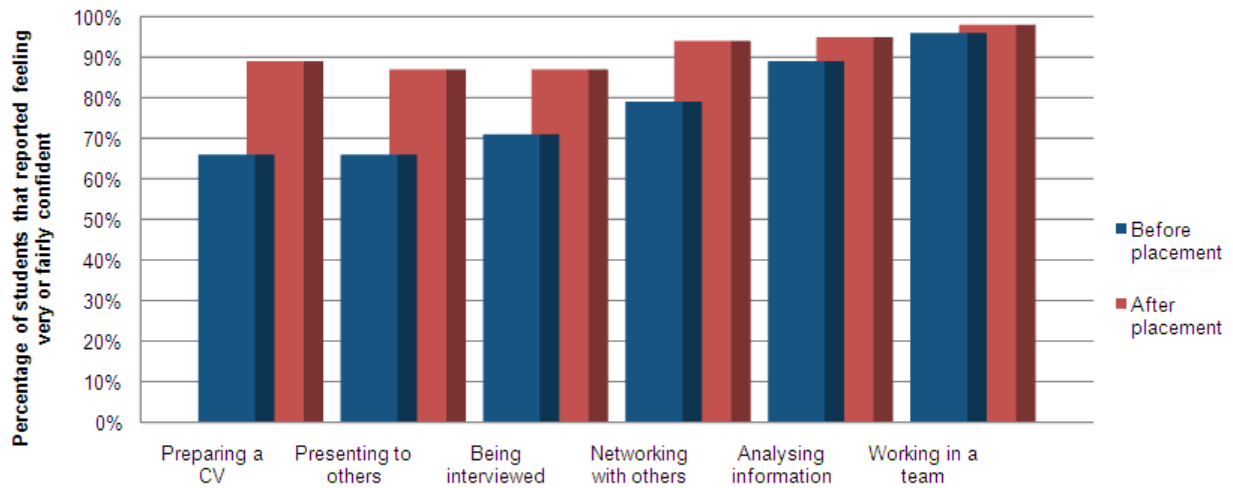
Students were significantly¹⁷ more confident in a range of skills after completing their placement, particularly in terms of:

- preparing a CV
- presenting to others
- being interviewed
- networking with others.

The largest increases in confidence between students' responses to the pre- and post-placement surveys came in those skills that students had less opportunity to develop within the school environment.

¹⁷ Findings identified as 'significant' are statistically significant at the 5 per cent level $p < .05$.

Figure 5.1 Student confidence across a range of skills



Nearly all students felt that they had benefited from their placement. For example:

- 94 per cent said that it had made them more motivated to achieve their career goals
- 93 per cent reported that it had improved their communication skills
- 90 per cent said it had improved their self-confidence.

Firm and school representatives reported that students' confidence had increased through new opportunities that challenged them.

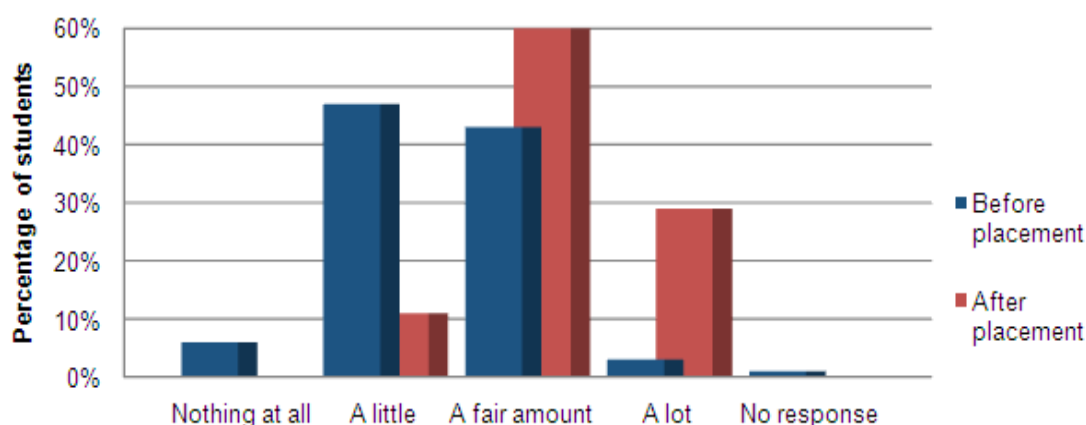
“They can be particularly anxious about the networking activity but then they do it and can be beaming at the end, they have enjoyed it so much.” (Law firm representative)

School representatives also said they observed a positive change in students' motivation towards learning.

5.2 What impact have the placements had on students' knowledge and understanding?

Students' knowledge about the legal profession increased significantly after completing their placement; 89 per cent felt that they knew a fair amount or a lot about the legal profession at the end of the PRIME placement, compared with 46 per cent before they started.

Figure 5.2 Students' knowledge about the legal profession



Representatives from law firms and schools also felt the placements had provided students with an insight into the legal profession which they would not have otherwise experienced.

“These students wouldn’t get the opportunity to walk into a firm like that or any firm really. It put them in an environment which they can aspire to.” (School representative)

Teachers explained that placements helped to confirm (or occasionally negate) students' thoughts of pursuing a career in the legal profession.

Nearly all students completing the surveys reported that they had:

- Gained a better understanding of the qualifications and skills needed to enter the legal profession.
- Gained a better understanding of the different careers available in the legal profession.

These improvements in knowledge were helped by firms offering placements in different departments across the law firm.

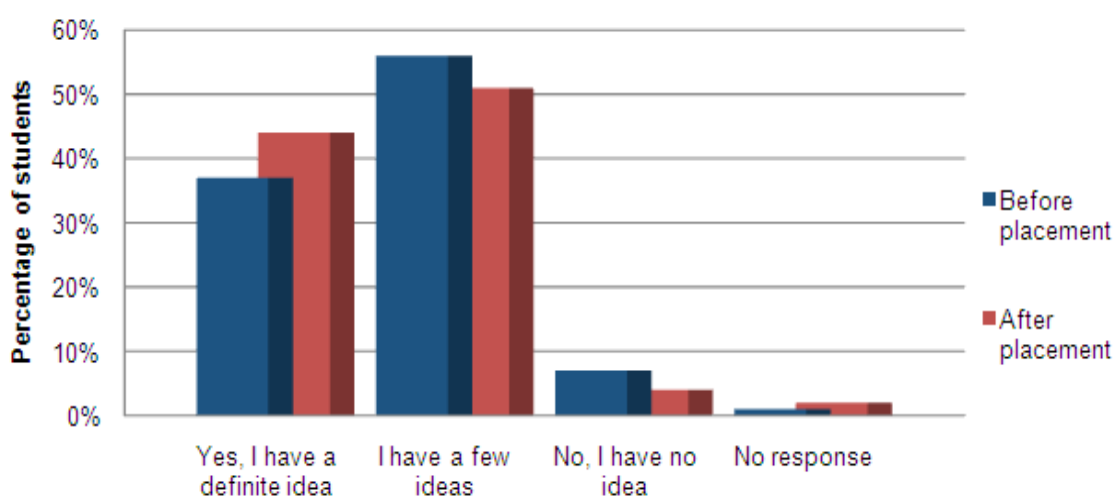
“It’s not just about shadowing a lawyer, or working in a law department, it’s about making students realise that there are hundreds of different job roles within a corporate company such as a law firm.” (School representative)

5.3 What impact did the placements have on students' future plans?

Most students had some idea of their future career choices prior to starting their placement.

Despite this, by the end of the placement, the number of students who had a *definite* idea of what career they wanted to do in the future had risen from 37 per cent to 44 per cent. This increase was statistically significant.

Figure 5.3 Extent to which students had an idea about their future career choices



The majority of students identified a first choice of career related to law. The types of jobs that were most interested in were¹⁸:

- Lawyer - 23 per cent
- Solicitor - 18 per cent
- Legal profession (role not specified) -13 per cent.

Other students specified a wide range of largely professional careers not related to law (including banking, finance, medicine and teaching) although only a small number of students identified each of these other career choices.

Students were significantly more confident about reaching their desired career goals at the end of their work experience. For example, 27 per cent felt *very* confident that they would achieve their goals at the end of their placement compared with 15 per cent before the placement had started.

¹⁸ Responses to an open-ended question in the post-placement survey.

Most students (93 per cent) agreed that their PRIME placements had given them a positive opinion of the legal profession and just over three quarters (76 per cent) reported that it had made them more likely to want to enter the legal profession.

Many students were actively considering pursuing a career in the legal profession. Two in five reported that they *definitely* wanted to pursue this, while a similar proportion were thinking about it.

Of the 193 students who said they were *definitely likely* to pursue a career in the legal profession, 91 per cent felt that their PRIME placement had helped them to make this decision.

Nearly all students were planning to attend university prior to their placement and this remained unchanged at the end of their placement.

Female student, London, aged 17

Why did you want to take part in PRIME?

I believe that work experience is a vital part of finding out whether a certain career (in my case law) is the right job for the future.

What did you get out of your work experience placement?

A beneficial insight in the law profession... Furthermore this programme made me realise that the law profession is truly the right career path for me and so motivated me to want to do extremely well in my AS/A-Levels in order to get into a top university and achieve my goal.

6. What can we conclude from the first year of PRIME?

Findings from the first year of the evaluation are extremely positive. Law firms appear to be targeting students who meet the PRIME criteria and might not otherwise have had access to such opportunities.

Students felt that they had gained a lot from the experience, including the personal and business skills essential for entry into the legal profession, increased confidence and motivation. Students had gained a valuable insight into the legal profession through their placement which helped to inform their thinking about future careers.

PRIME has made a very promising start towards achieving its long-term aim of increasing access to the legal profession. Firms are meeting their commitments and PRIME placements are meeting the needs of the students. In the longer term, PRIME may wish to consider:

- Expanding its offer to reach larger numbers of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, either by recruiting other firms or by extending the programmes currently on offer, while maintaining the quality of placements offered in the first year.
- Continuing to improve their targeting of students who meet the PRIME criteria.
- Offering an increased number of placements to students under 16, thereby promoting social mobility at an earlier stage and helping to raise the aspirations of students who are not yet reaching their full potential (intervening early was recommended by the Panel on Fair Access to the Professions, 2009).

In addition, the PRIME Board may wish to consider:

- Establishing the longer-term impact on students through a follow-up study of the first and second cohorts of PRIME. This will help to identify the sustained impact of PRIME on students' academic and career choices.

What facilitates effective delivery of placements under PRIME?

The evaluation has identified a range of factors considered important to the effective delivery of PRIME. Firms should consider the following elements when developing their work experience programme

Designing the placement

- Consult the school in the design of or discussions about the content of the placement.

- Include a combination of activities such as work shadowing, timetabled activities and visits. This ensures that students have a well-rounded experience and remain engaged in the placement.
- Ensure that tasks challenge students to help to increase confidence, develop skills and maintain engagement.
- Identify staff who are enthusiastic and can communicate effectively with young people. If possible, identify role models amongst staff, for instance, colleagues who were the first in their family to go to university.
- To monitor the success of PRIME it is essential to collect feedback from students through pre- and post-placement surveys. When designing placements firms should ensure that those students who have not completed a pre-placement survey have the opportunity to do so on their first day. Similarly, firms should build time into the final day of the placement for students to complete a post-placement survey (students are less likely to fill in a post-placement survey once they have left the placement).

Recruiting students

- Where appropriate, visit the school participating in PRIME to gain an insight into the types of potential students involved in the placements and develop relationships with school staff.
- For less experienced firms, you may wish to consider working with a broker who can help ensure students meet the criteria, support applications and design their placements.

Preparing students for the placement

- To break down initial barriers, consider holding a presentation at the school outlining what the placement involves and what students should expect when they attend. This will also help provide students with a familiar face on the first day of their placement.
- Provide students with orientation information prior to their placement, including office etiquette, dress code, behaviour expectations and a timetable of activities. If possible, hold an orientation session at the firm to put students at ease.

Post placement

- Offer students opportunities to keep in contact with the firm after their placement (for example by providing a mentor) to maintain their motivation and focus in reaching their desired goals.
- Provide feedback to schools on individual students. This is not only useful for schools but will help to ensure that any potential issues can be addressed.

Next steps for PRIME

As of November 2012, over 80 firms have signed up to PRIME which suggests a strong commitment across the sector to improving fair access to the legal profession. The NFER will continue to monitor the progress and impact of PRIME during its second year.

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Appendix A: The PRIME Commitment

Signatories of PRIME commit to the following principles:

1. Target work experience at school age students who have the least opportunity to access it otherwise.
2. Support participants by providing financial assistance to ensure they can attend work experience.
3. Properly prepare participants in advance of work experience.
4. Inform participants about the range of careers available in the legal profession and wider business (for lawyers and non-lawyers) and the potential routes into those careers, including the relevance of university education.
5. Develop in participants the key personal and business skills that are essential to entry into the legal profession and wider business world (e.g. team working, communication, presentation/impact, negotiation, and networking).
6. Provide a way for participants to maintain contact with the firm after work experience has ended (e.g. through a structured mentoring programme or an annual reunion event).
7. Monitor on a firm by firm basis and share and publish best practice and data. Agree to fund and participate in an externally commissioned evaluation to develop and assure the quality of the commitments made under PRIME.
8. Each provide a number of work experience places that is not less than 50 per cent of the number of training contract places that the firm offers each year and will achieve this by the end of the academic year 2012/13. The headline target for the wider profession is 2,500 places by 2015.

Appendix B: about the NFER evaluation

The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) was commissioned by PRIME to undertake an evaluation of PRIME in years one and two. This section sets out the aims of the evaluation and the approach used.

Aims of the evaluation

The aims of the evaluation are to:

- Monitor the implementation of the programme to ensure that PRIME is reaching its intended beneficiaries
- Identify and share information on best practice amongst firms around the implementation, recruitment of participants, programme content, preparatory and follow-up work
- Assess the impact of PRIME (e.g. benefits of engagement) on its participants.

Methodology

The evaluation of the first year of PRIME gathered 'baseline' and 'follow-up' data on students offered a placement through PRIME.

- Baseline data on participants was gathered via an online pre-placement survey (January-August 2012).
- Follow-up data was collected via an online post-placement survey once students had completed their placement (January-August 2012).

Firms were responsible for sending out links to the surveys to their students when they recruited the students for PRIME placements and for ensuring completion of the surveys. In total 655 students completed a pre-placement questionnaire (representing a response rate of 87 per cent of all 751 placements) and of these 478 completed a post-placement questionnaire (a response rate of 64 per cent of all students on PRIME placements).

The surveys gathered information on:

- Student characteristics (age, postcode, academic qualifications to date, subjects being studied, ethnicity, whether English is an Additional Language, levels of parental education) (pre-placement survey)
- Aspiration measures, including career intentions (pre- and post-placement surveys)
- Reasons for applying (pre-placement survey)
- Benefits of the work experience placement, both actual and predicted (e.g. insight into law careers, understanding about how to secure a career in law, confidence

- to enter the legal profession, development of key skills and likelihood in progressing into the legal profession) (post-placement survey)
- Improvements to the placement and satisfaction (post-placement survey).

NFER undertook data verification to check that PRIME participants met the eligibility criteria. This was done through analysis of the pre-placement survey responses which were matched to the NFER's Register of Schools (which holds the latest data on school characteristics) to verify the state school status of participants and the percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals compared with the average for schools in the same region.

Initial interviews were completed with all law firms in order to collect details on the types of placements on offer and how firms were planning to meet their PRIME commitment.

In order to explore the best practice taking place across PRIME, qualitative telephone discussions were held with nine firms involved in year one. These took place after the completion of the PRIME placements so that interviewees could reflect on success, identify best practice and consider potential improvements to the individual programme or collective commitments. The nine firms were selected based on negotiation with key stakeholders of PRIME, and were representative of the size of the firms involved in year one and had a national geographic spread.

Telephone interviews were also undertaken with two third party providers and eight schools who had been involved in the identification and recruitment of PRIME participants for the nine firms.

Evaluation of PRIME in year two (academic year 2012-13)

In year two, the evaluation will continue to provide:

- An online pre-placement survey to gather contextual data.
- An online post-placement survey for continued identification of impacts on the benefits for young people of participation and insight into what elements of the programme are most effective in bringing about impacts.
- Data verification to monitor the extent to which the PRIME access criteria is being met.

A report on the second year of PRIME will be available towards the end of 2013.

Ethical conduct

The research was carried out in accordance with NFER's Code of Practice (2011). In particular, the team used the following procedures:

- Research participants were fully informed about the purpose of the research and were informed of how their data would be used and stored.

- The research team asked all participants (both survey and best practice interviewees) for their active consent to take part.
- All NFER staff that had access to the system and the data held within it have undergone Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) enhanced checks.
- Interviewees were asked for their consent to audio-record interviews.
- All information identifying participants (personal data) was kept confidential and not divulged to anyone outside the research team. The data is located in a secure hosting facility that undergoes regular security audits and has full backup and redundancy policies in place.
- Law firms did not have access to information identifying the responses of individual PRIME students.
- We informed interviewees that we may name law firms, but not individuals, in our report and the team sent the draft content to law firm interviewees to verify and sign off prior to publication.

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