



Evidence for
Excellence in
Education

Evaluation of the second year of PRIME - executive summary



Improving access to the professions is key to promoting social mobility. Many young people aspire to a career in the legal profession but those from disadvantaged backgrounds face multiple challenges to fulfilling these aspirations.

PRIME¹ is a commitment to ensure fair and equal access to quality work experience in the legal profession for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Launched in September 2011, PRIME sets out minimum standards for work experience placements.

The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) has undertaken a robust and independent evaluation of the first two years of the PRIME commitment. The evaluation of the first year of PRIME highlighted that the quality of placements being offered was high and that firms were successfully targeting students who would not traditionally have had such an opportunity. This summary presents findings from the evaluation of the second year of PRIME, in which 1202 students from 52 law firms completed a pre-placement survey and 967 completed a post-placement survey.

Key findings

Firms exceeded their targets

When firms sign up to the PRIME commitment, they agree to provide no less than 50 per cent of the number of training contracts they offer each year as PRIME work experience placements². In the second year of PRIME, firms offered placements equivalent to 69 per cent of the total number of training contracts.

Firms offered placements to those students least likely to have the opportunity to access work experience in the legal profession

Eighty-four per cent of students met the PRIME criteria meaning that they attended a state school and were either eligible for free school meals (FSM), attended a school with a higher than average proportion of students eligible for FSM or would be of the first generation in their immediate family to attend university. This represents a small increase compared with year one and suggests that firms are continuing to be successful in reaching students who might not otherwise have access to such opportunities.

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.



Student satisfaction remains high in the second year of PRIME

- Ninety-six per cent of students were satisfied with their placement and a similar proportion would recommend it to others, mirroring the high satisfaction levels from year one.
- Students particularly valued gaining an insight into the legal profession and the different careers available, and learning about the day-to-day running of a law firm.

Students developed their skills and confidence

- Students' confidence in preparing a CV, presenting to others, being interviewed and networking with others had significantly increased over the course of their PRIME placement.
- Students furthered their understanding of the legal profession including the careers available and the skills required.
- Most students felt that their PRIME placement had made them more likely to want to enter the legal profession.

Firms offered a range of activities to ensure a quality experience

- Work experience comprised a mix of workshops, presentations, shadowing opportunities and enrichment activities.
- Most firms offered a one-week placement. Some firms provided pre-placement sessions or workshops while many offered contact or support after the placement had finished.

Conclusion

Findings indicate that firms continue to offer high quality placements and are committed to reaching their target numbers. Building for the future, it is important that firms maintain effective targeting of students who meet the PRIME criteria. The PRIME Board should now take steps to identify the longer-term impact of the initiative.

Clare O'Beirne, Kelly Kettlewell, Eleanor Stevens and Caroline Sharp, National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER).

Male student, London, aged 17

Why did you want to take part in PRIME?

I felt that acquiring work experience at one of the UK's leading firms would be pertinent to my future aspirations of one day becoming a lawyer. I felt [the experience], would provide me with an informative insight into the profession and the environment in which lawyers work.

What did you get out of your work experience placement?

I feel the work experience programme has benefitted me significantly. I have acquired a better understanding of the legal profession, contacts, invaluable advice on my CV and the way in which I should proceed with my legal studies in the future. I also feel that I have become more confident when networking, a skill that is pertinent in any profession.

