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## Interim Report

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# The Longer Term Impact of PRIME on Participating Students

## First Interim Report

National Foundation for Educational  
Research (NFER)



# The Longer Term Impact of PRIME on Participating Students First Interim Report

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# Contents

<b>Executive summary</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>1 Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 What is PRIME?	2
1.2 Who is eligible for a placement with PRIME?	2
1.3 The national evaluation of PRIME	3
<b>2 Progression of PRIME participants</b>	<b>5</b>
2.1 Where do PRIME participants progress to after leaving school/college?	5
2.2 What influenced students' progression routes?	7
2.3 Do PRIME students go on to do courses/jobs relating to the legal profession?	7
<b>3 Further contact with PRIME law firms</b>	<b>9</b>
3.1 How much further contact have students had with PRIME law firms?	9
<b>4 Impact of PRIME on students</b>	<b>12</b>
4.1 How has PRIME helped students?	12
4.2 What impact has PRIME had on students' future plans?	15
<b>5 Conclusion</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>6 References</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Appendix A: The PRIME Commitment</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Appendix B: About the NFER evaluation</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Appendix C Sample information</b>	<b>22</b>



## Executive summary

Improving social mobility is vital to ensure a fair society in which a person's talent and potential, rather than their background, determines their ability to progress (HM Government, 2011). The *State of the Nation* report (Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, 2014b) acknowledges that more employers have begun to take seriously the need to open up a career in the professions to a far wider pool of talent. Nevertheless, the report concludes that progress into professional jobs is still too exclusive.

PRIME (launched in 2011) is a commitment on behalf of law firms to offer quality work experience to young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, in order to inspire young people about the legal profession, and to help them on the path to their chosen career.

The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) is undertaking a robust and independent evaluation of PRIME. The evaluation of the first two years of PRIME found that firms were successfully targeting students who would not traditionally have had such an opportunity and that the quality of placements was high.

This report provides interim findings from a longer-term follow-up, examining the destinations and career choices of students who participated in the first two years of PRIME. The interim findings are based on data collected from 213 PRIME participants who completed an online survey and a sub-sample of 20 students who took part in a telephone interview.

Note that when interpreting these interim findings, it is important to consider the possibility that even though the sample of responding participants was broadly representative of those taking part in PRIME, the experiences of survey responses may be more positive than those of all PRIME work experience participants, due to response bias (as those who responded may have had a more positive experience of PRIME and be more engaged generally with education and their future) <sup>1</sup>.

## Key findings

### **Firms helped PRIME students learn about the legal profession and understand the relevance of university**

Firms signing up to the PRIME commitment agree to inform participants about the range of careers available in the legal profession and wider business and the potential routes into those careers, including the relevance of university education.

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<sup>1</sup> Further reports will help address this issue by drawing on national datasets, rather than relying solely on survey responses.



- Ninety-two per cent of PRIME students who responded to the survey felt that the work experience had helped them either a little or a lot (41 per cent and 51 per cent respectively). Interviews suggested that the main benefits were learning about the legal profession and the different aspects of law, and helping them to decide whether or not law was the career for them.
- Eighty-one per cent of the survey respondents went on to study a course at university or a higher education institution after they left school/college.
- There was evidence from the interviews that the PRIME work experience had helped students understand the relevance of university as a route to a professional career.

### **Over half of respondents planned to pursue a career in law**

- Most (86 per cent) of the survey respondents went on to do a course or job after leaving school/college. Of those, more than half (56 per cent) reported that it related to law or the legal profession.
- The survey findings on intention to study law is likely to be an underestimate of the proportion who intend to pursue a career in the legal profession, as some interviewees said that although they were currently studying a different subject, they intended to take a law conversion course at a later date.

### **Young people said that PRIME helped them to develop personal skills**

Another principle of the PRIME commitment is for firms to help students develop their personal and business skills.

- Interviewees gave positive accounts of having developed skills that are transferable to any future career, including communication, team-building, networking, and giving presentations.
- Interviewees also provided examples of how staff at the law firms had helped them to strengthen their CVs and applications for university or jobs.

### **Firms could improve their strategies to stay in touch with PRIME students**

Part of the PRIME commitment is for firms to provide a way for participants to maintain contact with the firm after work experience has ended (for example, through a structured mentoring programme or an annual reunion event).

- Sixty- seven per cent of the students surveyed said they had *not* had any further contact with the law firms since their work experience. Findings from interviews suggested that many had not wanted or needed further contact. However some interviewees said they would have welcomed such contact. Several had tried unsuccessfully to make contact themselves because they did not have a personal, up- to date contact.

- When young people had been in contact with the law firms, this was most often informal (for example, an occasional email or telephone contact). A minority of interviewees had benefited from further contact, providing them with mentoring, advice about career paths, and help with reviewing personal statements.

## Conclusion

The interim findings from the evaluation of the longer-term impact of PRIME indicate that firms have been successful in helping young people to learn about the legal profession. They have also helped young people to understand the relevance of university as a route to a professional career in the sector.

The next stage of the evaluation (spring 2016) will investigate whether the destinations of students reported in the survey are representative of PRIME participants more generally. The research team will compare the destinations of PRIME participants recorded in the Higher Education and Statistics Agency (HESA) dataset with those of a statistically matched comparison group. The analysis will also explore whether PRIME students who do go to university, go on to Russell Group institutions or other universities.

Young people responding to the survey reported that PRIME had helped to develop their personal and business skills. It had helped them to develop transferable skills relevant to any future career, including communication, team-building, networking, and giving presentations.

The interim findings do suggest that firms could do more to stay in touch with participants following their PRIME work experience. This is a challenge, given the resource implications of supporting increasing numbers of young people, as new cohorts of PRIME participants become involved each year. Therefore, firms need to consider manageable, yet effective, ways of maintaining contact with those who have completed work experience.







# 1 Introduction

Improving social mobility is vital to ensure a fair society in which a person's talent and potential, rather than their background, determines their ability to progress (HM Government, 2011). The *State of the Nation* report (Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, 2014b) identifies indicators of whether a society is genuinely mobile, including the relative chances that someone from a less advantaged social background has of going to a top university<sup>2</sup> and/or getting a top job (Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, 2014a). The reports provide evidence that, alongside an increase in the overall number of young people entering university, the proportion of those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds has increased (an eight per cent increase in the entry rate of students eligible for free school meals in 2012/13). This is good news for social mobility, but there is still a large gap. While 40 per cent of all young people aged 18-19 entered a university in 2012/13, only 12.5 per cent of those eligible for free school meals did so (Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, 2014b).

The number of entrants from state schools to Russell Group universities actually fell by 4.5 per cent in 2012/13 (Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, 2014b). Young people who were not eligible for free school meals at age 15 were over four times as likely than those who were to progress to Russell Group universities. Research by the Sutton Trust (Jerrim, 2013) also found that children with professional parents are approximately three times more likely to enter a Russell Group university (rather than a non-high status university) than those with working class parents. Provisional destinations data for 2013/14, released by the Department for Education (DfE, 2015), shows that students eligible for free school meals were still less likely to attend a Russell Group university, although the gap appears to have decreased (five per cent of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds compared with 12 per cent of all other students).

Progress into a professional job is clearly related to obtaining a degree at a top university. The *State of the Nation* report (Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, 2014b) argued that progress into a professional job is still too exclusive. Among trainee barristers, 64 per cent were from Russell Group universities and over a quarter (28 per cent) were Oxbridge graduates. In addition, 71 per cent of senior judges had attended independent schools, compared to seven per cent of the public as a whole.

Qualitative research in law firms explored the non-educational barriers to elite professions (Ashley *et al.*, 2015). It found that although applications are welcomed from students from all higher education institutions and that all applications are treated equally, candidates from Russell Group universities had a significantly higher conversion rate from application to job offer compared to peers educated elsewhere.

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<sup>2</sup> Universities listed in the Russell Group.



The *State of the Nation* report (Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, 2014b) acknowledges that more employers have begun to take seriously the need to open up a career in the professions to a far wider pool of young people.

PRIME is an alliance of law firms and legal departments across the UK who have made a commitment to broaden access to the legal profession. Law firms offer quality work experience to young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, in order to inspire them about the legal profession, and to help them on the path to their chosen career (see Section 1.1 for more details).<sup>3</sup>

## **1.1 What is PRIME?**

PRIME<sup>4</sup> is an alliance of law firms across the UK who have made a commitment 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.<sup>5</sup>

PRIME was launched in September 2011, with 20 of the 22 founding firms offering placements in the first academic year. At the time of writing, over 80 law firms had signed up to the PRIME commitment.

The first PRIME cohort completed work experience in 2011-12. The majority of participants were in Year 12 and aged 17.

## **1.2 Who is eligible for a placement with PRIME?**

The PRIME commitment states that law firms will offer at least 30-35 hours of work experience to disadvantaged school-age students (see Figure 1 for a definition of eligible student). Law firms also commit to maintain contact with the student after the work experience has ended (e.g. through a structured mentoring programme or annual reunion event).

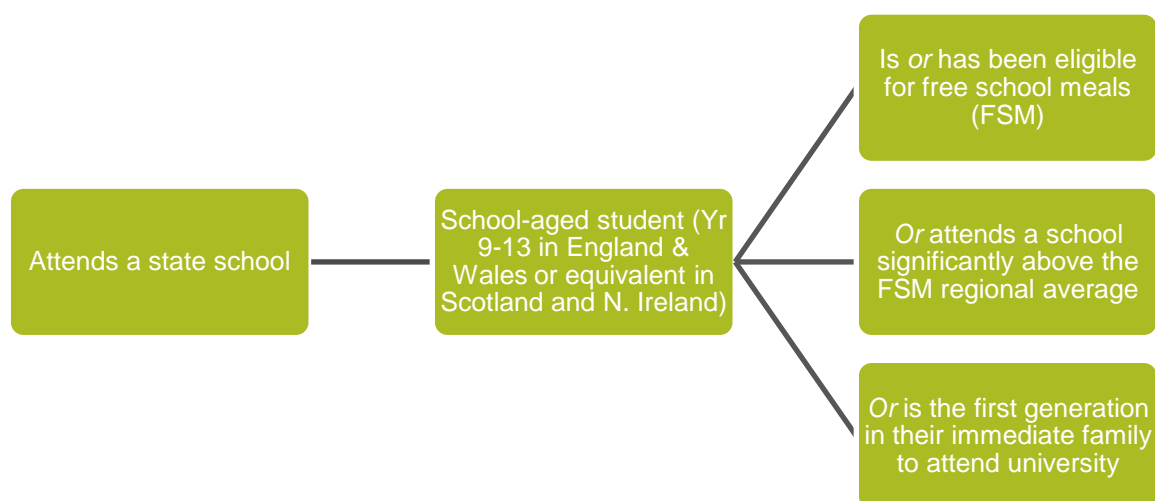
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<sup>3</sup> A similar work experience initiative, *Access Accountancy*, has since been launched in the accounting profession.

<sup>4</sup> Details of PRIME can be found at [www.primecommitment.org](http://www.primecommitment.org)

<sup>5</sup> The PRIME commitment can be found in Appendix A.

**Figure 1: PRIME definition of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds**



### 1.3 The national evaluation of PRIME

The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) is undertaking a robust and independent evaluation of the PRIME commitment.

The evaluation of the first year of PRIME (Kettlewell *et al.*, 2012) found that the quality of placements offered was high and that firms were successfully targeting students who would not traditionally have had such an opportunity. Most students were satisfied with their placement and enjoyed it. Students also felt that they had developed a wide range of business-related skills, made contacts within the firm and gained a much greater understanding of the legal profession.

Fifty-two firms (from just over 80 involved in PRIME) took part in the evaluation of the second year (O'Beirne *et al.*, 2014). Student satisfaction remained high. They 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' self-reported confidence had increased significantly in a variety of areas, namely: preparing a CV, presenting to others, being interviewed and networking with others. Most students felt that their PRIME placement had made them more likely to want to enter the legal profession.

The third stage of the evaluation, reported here, builds on these findings to measure the longer-term impact of PRIME on promoting social mobility, especially in relation to the law profession. It explores the later education and planned career choices of students from disadvantaged backgrounds who took part in PRIME work experience during the first two years, and whether students have had any further involvement with the law firms since completing their work experience placement. This report is based on findings from an online survey of 213 PRIME participants and interviews with a sub-sample of 20.



## The samples

A total of 1442 students originally completed the survey for the first evaluation of PRIME (Kettlewell *et al.*, 2012). Of those, 805 students provided permission to be contacted again *and* gave reliable telephone numbers and/or email addresses. In summer 2015, the NFER sent all 805 young people an email and/or text invitation to participate in a follow-up online survey.

As summarised in Figure 2, responses were received from 213 students who took part in work experience in the first and/or second year of PRIME (i.e. Cohort 1 from 2011-12 and Cohort 2 from 2012-13). The first PRIME cohort would have transitioned to higher education (if applicable) in 2013 and the second cohort in 2014. Further details about the evaluation approach can be found in Appendix B.

At the time of the survey, the first PRIME cohort will have been (on average) age 20 (at the end of their second year of higher education, if applicable), while the second cohort will have been age 19 (at the end of their first year of higher education, if applicable).

**Figure 2** Survey response

Total sample	Those who agreed to be contacted	Response overall	Response from Cohort 1	Response from Cohort 2
1442	N=805	N=213 (26% of those who supplied details; 15% of total sample )	N=74	N=139

The characteristics of the responding sample were broadly representative of the original 1442 respondents (see Appendix C). However, potential response bias should be considered when interpreting the findings in this report, as those who gave permission to be contacted again, and later responded, may have had a more positive experience of PRIME and/or be more engaged with higher education. Therefore, responses might not be representative of PRIME participants more generally. Future phases of the evaluation intend to investigate the destinations of PRIME participants by identifying the destinations of PRIME participants with those of a statistically matched comparison group using the Higher Education and Statistics Agency (HESA) dataset.

The following section explores the progression routes of the research participants once they had left school or college (following their PRIME work experience).

## 2 Progression of PRIME participants

### Key Findings

- The majority (81 per cent) of survey respondents went on to study a course at university or a higher education institution after they left school or college.
- Most (86 per cent) of survey respondents went on to do a course or job after leaving school/college. Of those, more than half (56 per cent) reported that it related to law or the legal profession.
- This could be an underestimate of the proportion of PRIME participants overall who intend to pursue a career in the legal profession, as some interviewees were currently studying a different subject, but intended to take a law conversion course at a later date. However, it could also be an overestimate due to response bias, as young people who were not interested in law may not have responded.

### 2.1 Where do PRIME participants progress to after leaving school/college?

One of the PRIME commitments is to inform participants about the potential routes into a career in the legal profession, including the relevance of university education.

The evaluation of the second year of PRIME (O’Beirne *et al.*, 2014) found that the majority (92 per cent) of PRIME participants who responded to the end-point survey (n=967) were planning to study a course at a university/higher education institution in the future.

Of the 213 students who responded to the latest follow-up survey, the majority (81 per cent) had gone on to university (see Figure 3). Almost all (99 per cent) of these students were studying for a Bachelors or undergraduate degree.

#### Female student aged 20, studying for a degree in law

##### Why did you decide to go to University?

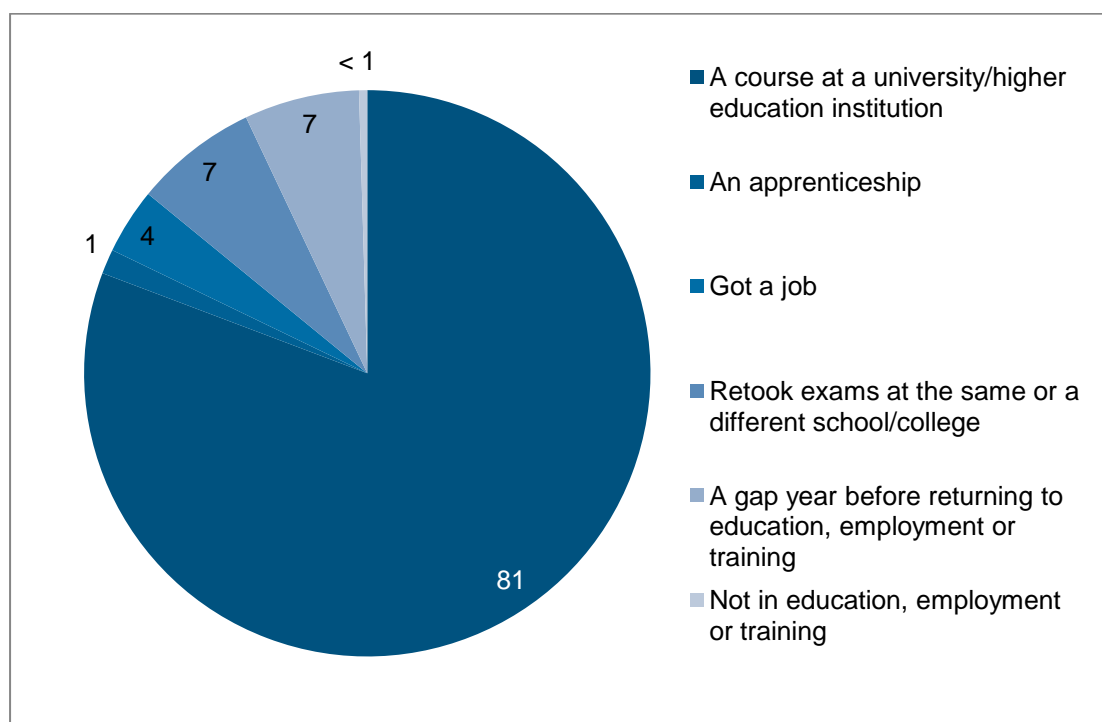
*I thought law was quite a broad degree. I quite liked studying, having a degree it is something to fall back on if I change career route.*

##### What impact, if any, did your PRIME work experience have on your decision to go to university and study law?

*Quite a big impact actually, I didn’t really know the process of how the law works and stages you go through. The people I met said how interesting and fun it was to study law. It had a big impact on my decision to study law.*



**Figure 3: Destinations of survey respondents after they left school/college (%)**



N=213.

As shown in Figure 3, small proportions of survey respondents reported re-taking exams (seven per cent), taking a gap year before returning to education, employment or training (seven per cent), getting a job (four per cent) or an apprenticeship (one per cent).

Seventeen of the twenty interviewees were currently at university (of whom six were studying for a law degree). The other three were working in sectors other than law.

**Male student, aged 19 studying for a joint honours degree in Spanish and Portuguese**

**Why did you decide to go to university?**

*I suppose it's just the next step. I wasn't entirely certain where I wanted to go and I thought university would be a place to broaden my views about what to do. These days you need to be a qualified candidate for any kind of job. For me it was an obvious next path to take.*

**What impact, if any, did your PRIME work experience have on your decision?**

*It made me realise I didn't want to study law at university. But it also made me realise I was right in that I wanted to pursue a career in law definitely.*

## 2.2 What influenced students' progression routes?

PRIME work experience is designed to inform participants about potential routes into professional careers, including university.

Most of the 20 interviewees said that the reason they had gone to university was because they felt that they needed a degree to succeed in the future, whether or not they wanted to pursue a career in law.

Some of those interviewed said that the PRIME work experience had helped them understand the relevance of university as a progression route.

*It was very necessary to go to university; if you want to work for a law firm you need a degree.' (Male student, aged 19.)*

Other reasons for going to university included wanting to learn about a subject they enjoyed and to have independence.

Reasons why three interviewees had gone straight into employment rather than university included: they wanted to build experience; they wanted to earn money; and because they enjoyed the work. One was considering going to university at a later stage.

## 2.3 Do PRIME students go on to do courses/jobs relating to the legal profession?

**Female student, aged 19 studying for a degree in accountancy and finance**

**Why did you decide to go to University?**

*A mixture of things really, if you don't have a degree it would be difficult to get a job in the corporate area.*

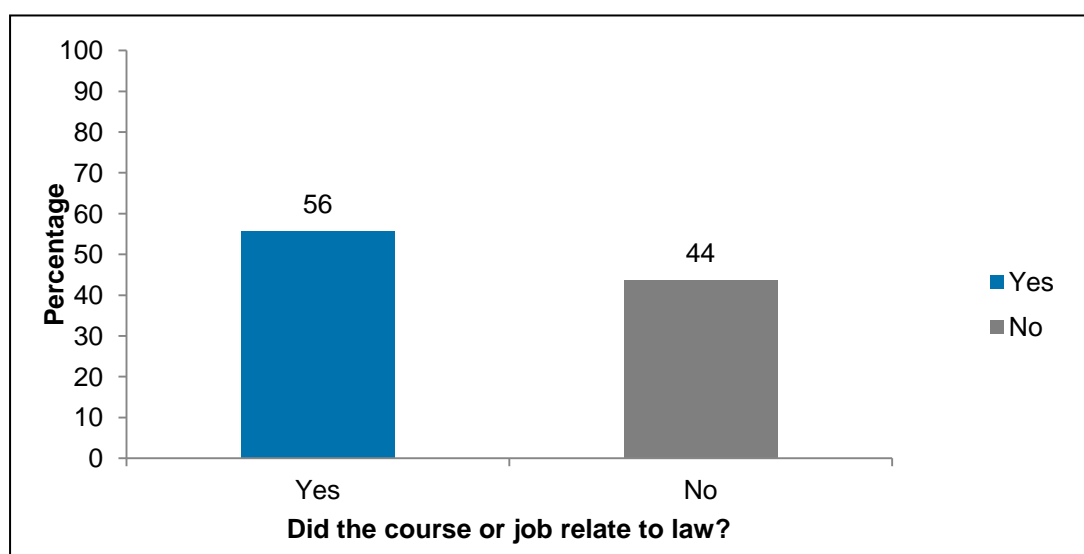
**What impact, if any, did your PRIME work experience have on your decision to do a degree at university?**

*It still made me want to go [to university]. It swayed my decision to not do law. If you want to do law then you need certain personal attributes... It made me think it was not for me.*

Most (86 per cent) of survey respondents went on to do a course or job after leaving school/college. Of those, more than half (56 per cent) reported that it related to law or the legal profession, while for over two-fifths (44 per cent) it did not (see Figure 4).



**Figure 4: Percentage of survey respondents who started a course/job related to law after leaving school/college**



*N= 183 who went on to do a course or have a job*

Of the seventeen interviewees who went to university, six were studying for a law degree and the others were taking a range of courses such as social policy with management, English literature, criminology, and history.

The telephone interviews revealed that the number of young people studying law may be an underestimate of the number who will go on to study law or work in the sector in the future. For example, six mentioned that they were still considering a career in law and four interviewees said they intended to do a law conversion course after their degree. One student explained why he wanted to study history instead of law at university even though he wanted to pursue a legal career.

*I heard law is a dry subject and very technical. You could study something you really enjoy for three years and then do the fundamentals of law [in a conversion course]'. (Male student aged 19.)*

However, the figure could also be an *overestimate* due to response bias, as young people who were not interested in law may not have responded to the survey.

Chapter 4 contains further information on respondents' views on their future career paths.



## 3 Further contact with PRIME law firms

### Key Findings

- Two-thirds (67 per cent) of the young people surveyed had not had any further contact with the law firms.
- Findings from interviews suggested that some young people had not wanted or needed further contact, but some said they would have liked to be approached by the firm, and a few had tried to make contact but were unable to do so.
- Twenty per cent of respondents had received informal contact from the law firm, such as an email or telephone call.
- A few interviewees had received more extensive contact from the law firm since their work experience, providing support such as mentoring, advice about career paths, and help with reviewing personal statements.

### 3.1 How much further contact have students had with PRIME law firms?

One of the PRIME commitments is to provide a way for participants to maintain contact with the firm after work experience has ended (for example, through a structured mentoring programme or an annual reunion event). The survey showed that two thirds (67 per cent) of the 213 survey respondents had *not* had any further contact with the law firms since completing their PRIME placement (see Figure 5).

**Female student, aged 19 studying for a degree in politics, economics and public policy**

**Why have you not had any further contact with the law firm?**

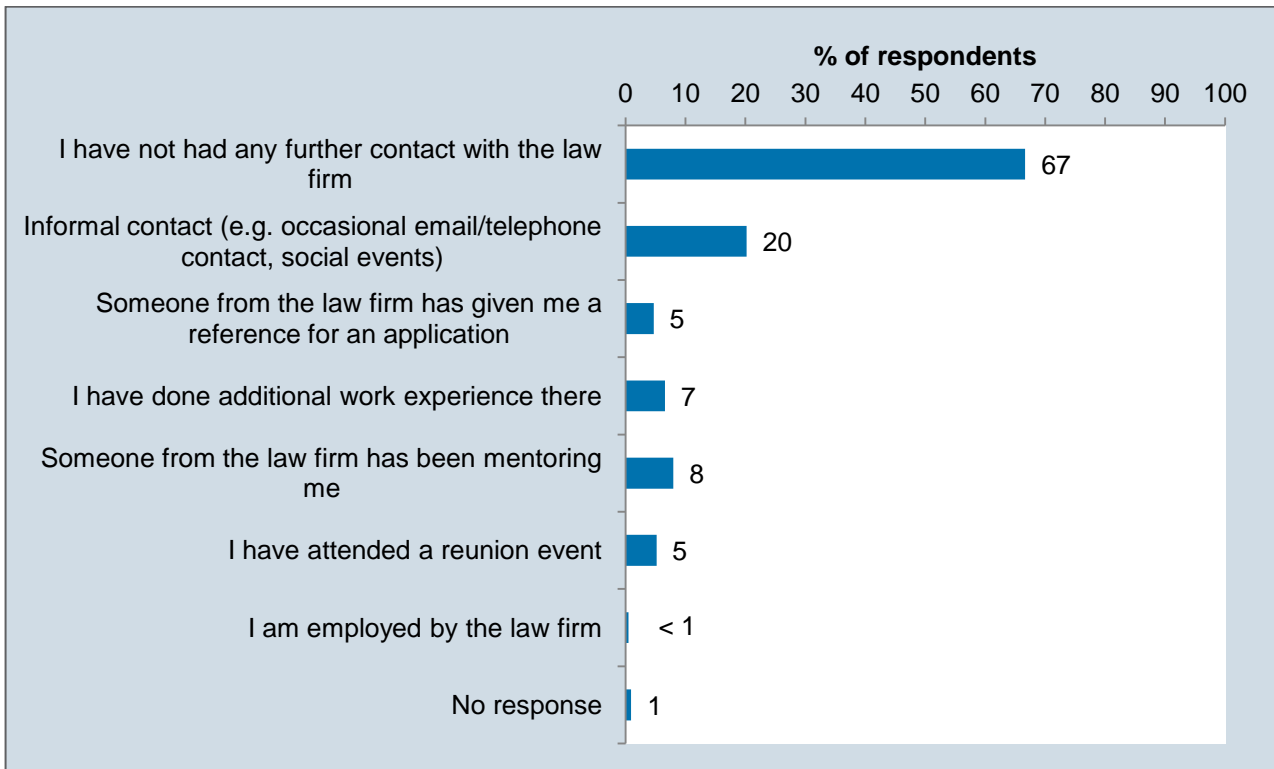
*In my week there I didn't really get many [phone] numbers, so the only number I would be able to contact is the company and not actually a direct person.*

**Do you feel you would have liked any further contact?**

*Yes I would have. It was not a problem though... I wouldn't know who to contact.*



**Figure 5: Percentage of survey respondents who had further contact with the law firm**



N=213.

The telephone interviews revealed that in some cases PRIME students did not want or feel the need for this ongoing contact. Ten of 15 interviewees who had not had any further contact with the firm said that they had not required any.

*If I need them, I'm sure they are there. (Female, working, aged 19).*

Several of the interviewees felt they might contact the firm in the future if they are looking for internships or work experience, or in need of advice about applying for jobs.

*I have been looking into internships and would like to get back in touch to ask about culture and advice - what the firm was looking for and whether I could match up with it. (Male university student, aged 20).*

However, five interviewees did want further contact but had not received any, either because they had tried to get in touch with the firm but had not received a reply to an email they had sent, or they were not familiar with how to network so were unsure of how to stay in touch.

*I didn't really know what I was supposed to do after [my work experience]... They didn't tell us... I didn't feel I was encouraged to keep in contact. I sent them [the law firm] a thank you email and didn't hear back so didn't feel like I was invited to say anything else. (Female university student, aged 19).*

The survey revealed that, for young people who had had contact with law firms this was mostly informal in nature, such as an occasional email or telephone contact. A minority of respondents said they had received other types of contact (see Figure 5).

Five students who were interviewed were still in touch with the law firms and reported they had communicated with Human Resources (HR) departments or practicing lawyers who were acting as mentors. The contact they had received ranged from occasional emails to providing a more structured mentoring programme that involved meeting at the law firm, further work experience and the opportunity to apply for vacation schemes. They had also had help with writing personal statements and advice about applying for internships and career routes.

These students were very positive about their experiences. In particular, they valued the advice they got about their career paths.

*Hearing it straight from the recruitment team at such a big firm is reassuring. You know the information you are getting is what they are looking for... You can't really get any better (Male university student, aged 20).*

PRIME students felt that having such professional contacts would be an advantage in the future.

*It is really really, great as it is building up a professional network in a sense. When I am applying for jobs I will get in touch. I know my university will help too but it is different to have someone in the profession to help... it is like you are ahead.' (Female university student, aged 20).*

All of the interviewees who were still in touch with the law firms said they would continue to keep in contact and several mentioned that they would welcome an opportunity to apply for a job with the firm.

**Male student, at University studying Law, aged 19**

**Please can you tell me about the contact you have had with the law firm since completing your work experience?**

*I keep in contact with the HR manager regularly... I have been back twice for further work experience.*

**How useful was it?**

*Very useful. I am still in contact with my mentors as well within the firm. You can ask them questions about some legal issues and they are really helpful.*



## 4 Impact of PRIME on students

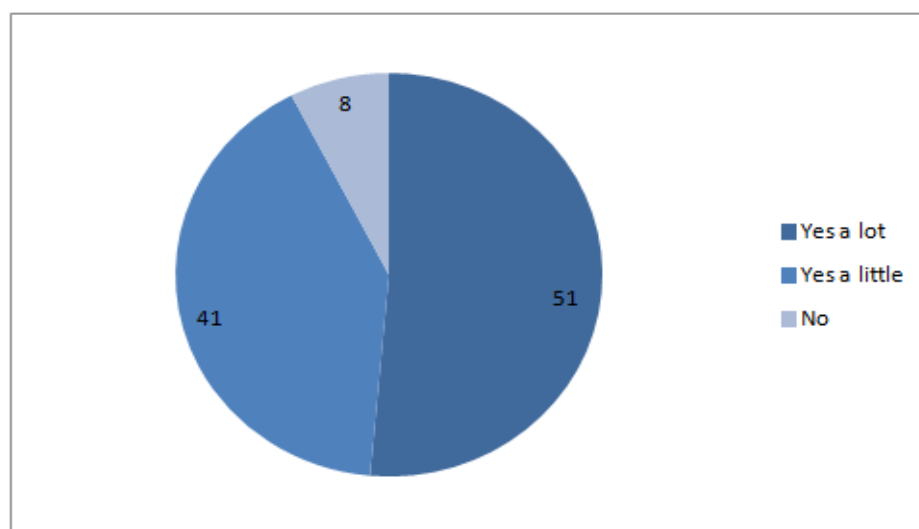
### Key Findings

- Almost all (92 per cent) of survey respondents felt that their PRIME work experience had helped them (51 per cent said it had helped them ‘a lot’ and 41 per cent said it had helped them ‘a little’).
- Interviewees gave examples of how the work experience had helped them gain a practical understanding of the law sector and the different legal professions.
- Respondents also gave examples of how PRIME had helped them in other ways not specifically related to law, such as strengthening their CVs or applications for university, or developing their personal skills.
- The majority of those interviewed (16 young people) were considering a job in the legal profession in their future and many of them mentioned that the practical experience of the PRIME work experience had confirmed their choice of career.

### 4.1 How has PRIME helped students?

Most survey respondents felt that the PRIME work experience had helped them (51 per cent said ‘a lot’ and 41 per cent said ‘a little’; see Figure 6). Only eight per cent did not feel that their placement was helpful.<sup>6</sup>

**Figure 6 Do you think your PRIME work experience placement helped you? (%)**



N=213

<sup>6</sup> The survey did not obtain information about why these young people did not find their work experience helpful.

Survey respondents<sup>7</sup> and interviewees provided examples of how the work experience had helped them gain an understanding of the law sector and the legal professions. The types of help mentioned most often are set out below.

Young people gained **practical experience in a real law firm**, which helped them to decide if they did – or did not - want to pursue law. Of those surveyed, 68<sup>8</sup> said that their PRIME placement helped them to learn about the legal profession and working for a law firm, and 40 young people said that PRIME helped them realise that law was definitely the career for them.

*It sparked an interest... It made me want to explore law as a profession further. (Male university student, aged 19)*

PRIME had also helped the young people **understand the routes into law** – that it is important for them to go to university, but that they do not necessarily need to do a course in law at first (but they can do a conversion course later).

*I was quite nervous about how respected the conversion course was. It put me at ease as they said they took 50/50 people who did law or did the conversion. (Male university student, aged 20)*

The work experience helped young people to **understand the different aspects of law**, and different career paths available to them. For example, the PRIME work experience had helped some students decide the *role* that they would be interested in pursuing within a law firm. As a result, five young people interviewed said that they wanted to be solicitor and one a barrister. Some interviewees mentioned that before their PRIME work experience they were not aware of the differences between the two roles and the placement helped increase their knowledge of what the jobs required.

*Prior to work experience I was always torn between being solicitor and barrister and at the work experience I asked a lot of questions about the differences. It made me realise my skills were better suited to a solicitor as opposed to a barrister. It has helped me make a big decision about what path to follow. (Female university student, aged 19).*

PRIME had also been helpful in informing young people that working in **the legal sector** can be both exciting and stressful. For some this **raised their aspirations**. As one said:

*It helped me achieving the grades I needed to get into university (Female university student, aged 19).*

While for others, it **put them off working in the sector**.

*I found them all [solicitors] to be quite stressed... I'm not sure if I'd be able to handle it... I'm not sure if I'm smart enough' (Male university student, aged 19).*

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<sup>7</sup> The survey included open questions about how PRIME had helped participants.

<sup>8</sup> Percentages are not presented here as responses were given from fewer than 100 young people.



Respondents also reported how the PRIME work experience had helped gain transferable skills that are not specifically related to the legal profession. For example, it had helped **strengthen their CV or application for university** (43 survey respondents). Some interviewees had benefited from practical sessions to develop their CVs.

*The session I found most useful was the CV session that HR ran for us. You had the opportunity to print off your CV and they talked us through them. We worked in groups and looked at what worked and didn't and asked questions and covered interview techniques. It was not just about law (Female university student, aged 19).*

PRIME had helped others with job **applications**.

*When I was applying for gap year jobs it gave me an experience to talk about. I pushed myself into doing lots of presentations... It gave me things to talk about if I was asked specific skills questions in interviews. (Female university student, aged 19).*

The work experience had also helped respondents to **develop personal skills** (39 individuals) – including confidence, presentation skills, team work, networking skills, and critical thinking. In the interviews, PRIME students talked about how these skills were helpful to them in university and work.

*Before, when I was at school, I never really had confidence when talking to people. I was always shy. Doing the work experience helped me with that. ... Doing group work and team exercises... getting up in front of people and talking, doing presentations and things like that... helped me in my interview for the job I have now. (Female, working, aged 19).*

Some respondents mentioned that their experience had helped them **learn about the world of work** and had given them an insight into a corporate and professional environment (14 survey respondents). One interviewee explained how it had given her an insight into what working in an office was like:

*[It gave me] experience of being in an office, of having colleagues... a huge thing you need to learn... that was the most valuable thing. (Female, working, aged 19).*

**Male student, aged 20, studying for a degree in history**

**How, if at all, has your PRIME work experience helped you since leaving school/ college?**

*It gave me drive and motivation and also skills I could talk about. It taught me about conducting myself in a workplace environment and remaining professional.*

**How, if at all, do you think your PRIME placement might influence your decisions about what you do in the future?**

*It swayed me towards the solicitor route. Any experience is a good experience to see if the profession could work for you.*

## 4.2 What impact has PRIME had on students' future plans?

The majority of those interviewed (16 young people) were considering a job in the legal profession in their future and many of them said that the practical experience of the PRIME work experience had confirmed this for them.

As mentioned above, PRIME had helped some young people decide which role they wanted to pursue in the future, but others were still weighing up a career in law as one of their options.

*It's something I might want to do in ten years. If I wanted a career change it [the legal profession] is something I would think about. (Female, working, aged 19).*

Other careers that interviewees were considering as well as law included: administration; teaching; finance; HR; management; and consultancy.

Six interviewees said they definitely *did not* want a career in law. They said that learning more about working in a law firm in their work experience had made them decide that law was not suitable for them.

*It didn't do enough to persuade me... I don't see myself going into law now. (Female, working, aged 19).*

**Female student, at University studying English literature, aged 20**

**How likely are you to pursue a career in the legal profession in the future?**

*Before the work experience I had a rough idea that's what I wanted to do but being in the work environment and learning about the different sectors confirmed it for me.*

**Why do you say that?**

*I think the work experience has pretty much shaped most of the activities I do.*





## 5 Conclusion and next steps

The interim findings from the evaluation of the longer-term impact of PRIME indicate that firms have been successful in helping young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to learn about the legal profession. They have also helped them to understand the relevance of university as a route to a professional career in the sector.

The next stage of the evaluation (spring 2016) will investigate whether the destinations of students reported in the survey are representative of PRIME participants more generally, when the research team compare the destinations of PRIME participants recorded in the Higher Education and Statistics Agency (HESA) dataset with those of a statistically matched comparison group. The analysis will also explore whether PRIME students who do go to university are studying at Russell Group or other universities.

Young people responding to the survey reported that PRIME had helped to develop their personal and business skills. It had helped them to develop transferable skills relevant to any future career, including communication, team-building, networking, and giving presentations.

The interim findings do suggest that **firms could do more to stay in touch with participants following their PRIME work experience**. This is a challenge, given the resource implications of supporting each new cohort of PRIME participants who become involved each year. Therefore, we suggest that firms consider manageable, yet effective, ways of maintaining contact with those who have completed work experience. This could include on-going formal support, such as mentoring, but also more informal modes of contact to keep students interested in the sector and inform them of any further opportunities. This could be done by circulating a newsletter or sending email alerts.

Some students found that their main contact had left the firm, so it might be valuable to set up a generic contact email address (for example [PRIME@lawfirm.co.uk](mailto:PRIME@lawfirm.co.uk)) so that someone will respond to contacts from PRIME 'alumni'. Firms could also give participants more than one contact at the firm (for example, a number of interviewees said they had found it useful to contact staff in HR contacts as well as legal professionals).

The next phases of the evaluation will provide additional information on the experiences and destinations of PRIME participants. In 2016, the NFER will request HESA data to explore the destinations of PRIME participants. A further online survey of PRIME participants will be carried out in the summer, as will further telephone interviews with 20 young people in the autumn, resulting in a second interim report. The team will continue to gather data in 2017, with a final report expected by early 2018.



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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. The headline target for the wider profession is 2,500 places by 2015.
9. Provide at least 30-35 hours of contact time per student (not necessarily on consecutive days).

## Appendix B: About the NFER evaluation

NFER was commissioned by PRIME to undertake an evaluation of its longer-term impact on promoting social mobility, especially in relation to the law profession. The evaluation commenced in April 2015 and will be completed in December 2017. This report presents interim findings from a survey and interviews with participants in the first two years of PRIME.

The aims and evaluation approach are outlined below.

### Aims of the evaluation

The aims of this study are to:

- establish the later education and planned career choices of students from disadvantaged backgrounds who took part in PRIME work experience (note that the first PRIME Cohort would have transitioned to higher education (if applicable) in 2013 and the second Cohort in 2014).
- find out whether students have had any further involvement with the law firms since completing their work experience placement. If so, whether they feel they have benefited from this further involvement.

### Methodology

In order to answer the main research questions, the longer-term evaluation adopts a three stage design:

1. Longitudinal quantitative survey of PRIME students (summer 2015, 2016 and 2017)
2. Qualitative interviews with PRIME students at key transition points (autumn 2015, 2016 and 2017)
3. Statistical analysis of higher education destinations for PRIME students and a statistically similar comparison group (using the National Pupil Dataset and Higher Education and Statistics Agency 2013/14 data to explore destinations of year 1 PRIME students<sup>9</sup>, and 2014/15 data for destinations of year 2 PRIME students<sup>10</sup>).

The interim findings in this report are based on the activities outlined below.

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<sup>9</sup> Available from January 2016 and reported at a later date.

<sup>10</sup> Available from January 2017 and reported at a later date.



## Quantitative survey of PRIME students carried out in August September 2015

A total of 1442 students who met the PRIME criteria originally completed the survey for the first evaluation of PRIME (Kettlewell *et al.*, 2012). Of those, 805 students provided permission to be contacted again *and* gave reliable telephone numbers and/or email addresses. An invitation to participate in a follow-up online survey was sent to all 805, by text and/or email.

As summarised in the table below, responses were received from 213 students who took part in work experience in the first and/or second year of PRIME (i.e. Cohort 1 from 2011-12 and Cohort 2 from 2012-13). This is a response rate of 26 per cent of the 805 who gave their details (or 15 per cent of the original 1442 respondents). Note that the characteristics of the responding sample were broadly representative of all PRIME students (see Appendix C), although they were less likely to have parents who went to university and less likely to have attended a school with the highest proportion of students eligible for free school meals.

The 213 survey respondents represented 33 different law firms which had provided work experience. Potential response bias should be considered when interpreting the findings, as those who gave permission to be contacted again, and later respond, are likely to have had a more positive experience of PRIME and be more engaged generally with education and their future.

Note that at the time of the survey, the first PRIME cohort will have been (on average) age 20 (at the end of their second year of higher education, if applicable), while the second cohort will have been age 19 (at the end of their first year, if applicable).

**Table B1**      **Survey response**

Total sample	Those who agreed to be contacted	Response overall	Response from Cohort 1	Response from Cohort 2
1442	N=805	N=213 (26% of those who agreed to be contacted; 15% of original sample )	N=74	N=139

The survey gathered information on:

- what students went on to do when they left school or college
- whether their course or job related to law or the legal profession
- whether they felt their PRIME work experience had helped them and, if so, how
- what further contact, if any, they have had with the law firm where they did their PRIME work experience.

Of the 213 respondents, 188 (88 per cent) agreed to take part in a further follow-up survey in summer 2016.

### **Qualitative interviews carried out in October 2015**

Amongst the 213 survey respondents, 152 (74 per cent) agreed to participate in a follow-up telephone interview in October 2015. The team selected a sample of 20 students who had just commenced their second year of higher education (if applicable). Interviewees were selected on the basis of their survey responses (for example, to include some who had gone on to university after leaving school or college and some who had not). Everyone taking part in an interview received a £10 Amazon voucher.

The interviews gathered more in-depth information on:

- the impact, if any, that the PRIME placement had on young people's educational/career decisions so far and on their future plans
- how likely they are to pursue a career in the legal profession in the future
- the nature of any contact they have had with the law firm where they did their PRIME work experience, and whether they would welcome further contact.

### **Ethical conduct**

The research was carried out in accordance with NFER's Code of Practice (2012). 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 survey participants for their active consent to take part.
- The research team has produced findings and judgements based on sound research evidence.
- All NFER staff that had access to the system and the data held within it have undergone Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks.
- All 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.



## Appendix C Sample information

The table shows that the characteristics of the responding sample were broadly representative of all PRIME students, although they were less likely to have parents who went to university and less likely to have attended a school with the highest proportion of students eligible for free school meals.

		Students eligible for PRIME (responded to first survey in 2012)		Responded to follow-up survey in 2015	
		N	%	N	%
Gender	Total	1442	100.0%	213	100.0%
	Male	476	33.0%	61	28.6%
	Female	966	67.0%	152	71.4%
Ethnicity	White British	464	32.2%	67	31.5%
	Other white	77	5.3%	11	5.2%
	Mixed race	84	5.8%	14	6.6%
	Asian	390	27.0%	66	31.0%
	Black	302	20.9%	41	19.2%
	Other	88	6.1%	12	5.6%
	Missing/Prefer not to say	37	2.6%	2	0.9%
Is English the first (main) language you speak?	Yes	1172	81.3%	168	78.9%
	No	242	16.8%	42	19.7%
	Missing/Prefer not to say	28	1.9%	3	1.4%

		Students eligible for PRIME (responded to first survey in 2012)		Responded to follow-up survey in 2015	
Do you have, or have you ever had, free school meals	Yes	674	46.7%	104	48.8%
	No	695	48.2%	105	49.3%
	Missing/Don't know/Prefer not to say	73	5.1%	4	1.9%
Did parents go to university?	One or both parents went to university	175	12.1%	13	6.1%
	Parents did not go to university/Don't know/Missing	1267	87.9%	200	93.9%
School free school meal rate, per region	Highest 1/3	523	36.3%	52	24.4%
	Middle 1/3	304	21.1%	49	23.0%
	Lowest 1/3	290	20.1%	59	27.7%
	Missing	325	22.5%	53	24.9%





**NFER provides evidence for excellence through its independence and insights, the breadth of its work, its connections, and a focus on outcomes.**

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