



Evaluation of PRIME Year 1 Results

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 already 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 NFER is undertaking a robust and independent evaluation of PRIME over the first two years of delivery. This summary presents findings from an evaluation of the first year of PRIME work placements delivered between January and August 2012. In total, 751 PRIME placements were offered to students in year one.

Key Findings

In 2012, 20 of the 22² 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**³. Of those on PRIME placements, **82 per cent of students met the PRIME criteria**⁴. 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 five A*-C GCSEs.
- Prior to their PRIME placements, most students were interested in a legal career, but had little knowledge of the legal profession.

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.

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

² The original 23 founding firms became 22 with the merger of Pinsent Masons and McGrigors.

³ The total number of training contracts offered by the 20 firms was 1,254.

⁴ 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.

“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)

Students developed their confidence, skills and motivation

- Students’ confidence in 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.

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 placement?

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!

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.

Kelly Kettlewell, Clare Southcott, Gill Featherstone, Eleanor Stevens and Caroline Sharp, National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER). For all media enquiries please contact: Guy Nicholls, Allen & Overy. Telephone: 020 3088 4176 Email: guy.nicholls@allenoverly.com