

Flagging up the class ceiling

Lawyer 2B Careers Day attendees see social background as biggest barrier to profession

While social mobility has climbed the diversity ladder in the past year, Year 12 students who attended a careers day hosted by *The Lawyer's* sister title *Lawyer 2B* last week at BPP Business School believe the legal sector still favours those with privileged up-bringsings.

Only a third of students surveyed at the event believe gender and ethnicity are barriers to entry, but almost 60 per cent said the profession is more accessible to those from wealthy backgrounds.

Woolwich Polytechnic student Joe Jarvis said: "I see social class as the biggest barrier, along with the financial [side]."

Prime movers

But with almost 75 law firms across the country now signed up to Prime (the first profession-wide social mobility initiative) and a raft of firms supporting Nick Clegg's business compact and the new Pegasus Access Scheme at the bar, the profession clearly hopes to send social mobility the way of gender and ethnicity as barriers to access.

Now in its fifth year, the event attracted pupils from 25 state schools based in some of London's most deprived boroughs, with almost 250 students taking part in a range of presentations and workshops by top City law firms and barristers' chambers.

Over the two days, barriers to entry remained a hot topic for discussion. However, in contrast to last year's event, 68 per cent of students said the tuition fee hikes would not put them off a career in law.

Ayomide Abraham, a student at Christ the King College: St Mary's, said: "The cost is a worry, but it's the process of becoming a lawyer that scares me, as it's very long; I feel I might not be able to do all of it. It's not certain I'm going to get this career, but I'm willing to have a go."

When asked how they would fund their legal education, 57 per cent of students said they would rely on a mixture of family, work and loans.

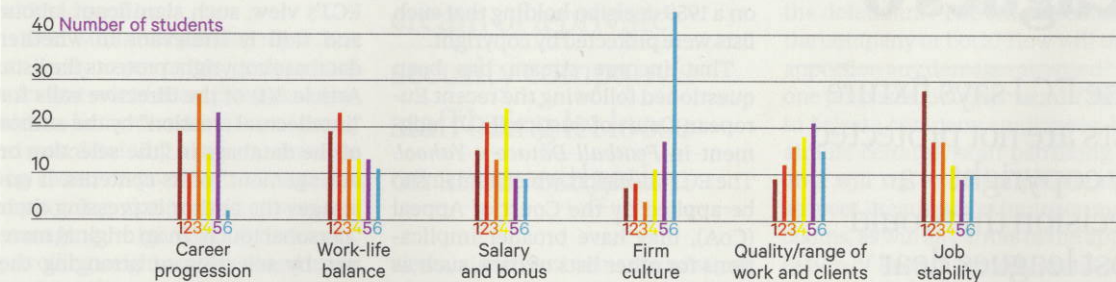
Bexley Grammar School student Alex Barnes said the only barrier to entry to the profession for him was the high competition.

"Finance isn't a problem for me," he stressed. "I'll take out loans to go to university and once I start working I'll pay them back."

Salary levels and grades were also



When choosing an employer, rank in order of preference (1-6) the most important elements



Source: Lawyer 2B

68%
Number of students
polled not put off law
by tuition fee hikes

popular issues, with several students bravely asking participants what they earned.

Workshops on the art of negotiation were held by barristers Ian Smith of 11 Stone Buildings and James Bowling of

4 Pump Court, who both presented on the first day, while Baker & McKenzie took over on the second day. Bircham Dyson Bell, BPP Law School, Clifford Chance, Forsters, Linklaters, Macfarlanes and Slaughter and May ran workshops and presentations on City law in practice and routes to qualification as a solicitor.

Forsters graduate recruitment partner Emily Exton said it is important to target students at a young age in such a competitive world.

"Part of the message we were delivering is that you have to get organised and get a head start in

applications, as there are so many people out there who want to do the same thing," she added.

Commenting on the day, student Fozia Farooqi of Lampton School said: "Before this careers day I was on the edge about doing law. But I now feel I have more of an insight about what a law career actually entails and I know I really want to do a law degree. I've found all the sessions to be really interesting – both learning about negotiation and about the route to becoming a lawyer."

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