



Breakout Session - Key Takeaways

Breakout Session A – What will work experience look like in a post-pandemic world?

Facilitators: Katie Noonan, Forage and Deborah McCormack, Pinsent Masons

The pandemic forced law firms to rethink their work experience programmes at pace. The creation of virtual work experience has brought benefits in the form of increased reach to students and reduced costs. But, what makes a successful virtual work experience programme? Can a virtual experience ever replace face-to-face? And, as we navigate our way through this pandemic, what will work experience look like in the future?

In this session we shared successes and challenges and explored potential solutions.

Introduction: Of the conference delegates coming from law firms, 85% reported that their firm had run virtual work experience programmes in the past year.

There are two main types of virtual work experience:

- *Open Access – job simulations that contain bitesize learning modules here students complete hypothetical tasks that mirror the work that they would do within that firm. A ‘Day in the Life’. Open to all with no prerequisites to apply. Firms use them for the top-of-funnel approach, reaching more students, particularly from cold spot areas. [See Resource – PRIME’s Virtual Legal Work Experience Programme.](#)*
- *Closed Access – these are the for students that have been selected or invited to participate in a work experience programme. These programmes are more a replication of what would happen during an office-based work experience programme.*

Both types of programmes should aim to:

Inspire – by demystifying the roles and practice areas within a law firm. The programme should help candidates find an area that suits them. It is about building the language used in a workplace and building confidence.

Engage – by bringing a firm’s brand, mission and values to life.

Hire – virtual programmes change the way a firm can hire. Firms no longer have to travel to the same universities and recruit from the same pool of candidates. They are now able to search for and reach out to students on the platforms they enrol on for virtual work experience.

COVID has forced firms to adapt to a way of providing virtual work experience. The legal industry recognised the benefit straight from the start.

Feedback from Pinsent Masons:

Hiring managers are finding that when candidates have been immersed in virtual work experience, they are more informed and more confident of their knowledge of the business. They have been immersed in the firm’s culture, value and purpose and have heard from the people and have been immersed in the types of task they will undertake when a trainee. As a result, they tend to perform better at interview.



Questions:

1. *What are the pros and cons of virtual work experience, or a blended approach?*

| Pros | Cons |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can offer more opportunities as it's more efficient from a time perspective.• Opportunity to reach cold spots.• Data from Forage shows that the programmes are being utilised by students that might have otherwise had trouble accessing traditional work experience opportunities.• Can offer this opportunity to all – this can help with the friends and family conundrum.• Recruiters are able to see these virtual programmes on a candidates CV and understand their commitment. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tech poverty.• Feedback from students is that virtual is great but they're not getting the opportunity in the office to have a coffee with colleagues. They're not having the water cooler moments of getting to do the social side of work. The learning by osmosis is being impacted.• Virtual fatigue.• It can be harder to get feedback. Closed programmes are easier than open access. |

2. *How do we measure the success and impact of our virtual experience?*

The Forage platform captures feedback from students on the programme and the completion rate across different tasks. Through pre-enrolment and post-completion questions can view the changes in knowledge, confidence etc. Allows firms to measure their success.

Part of the feedback loop is looking at the conversion – seeing what your participants go on to do within your firm.

Completion rates: The industry standard is 3-4%. Forage is getting 18-20%.

Employers are encouraged not to hang too much on this as a number will be signing up from an exploratory perspective. They may decide that this career/firm isn't for them. This is just as useful for an employer rather than investing in them further.

Where does it sit?

Virtual work experience often sits across teams – from Responsible Business as a more general outreach programme, to targeted pipeline programmes withing graduate recruitment.

3. *What will work experience look like in the future?*

It wasn't felt that virtual can fully replace in person work experience. The future is hybrid. This flexibility allows more candidates to be reached and cater for them in the way they want.

Need to be clear about expectation setting – to both participants and from the staff members taking part.

With less people in the office, does that dilute the experience for those that come in because they don't have the buzzy office experience?



See Resource from the Sutton Trust showing the student perspective.

Key Takeaways

1. Virtual work experience is here to stay and will become an embedded part of a student's journey to educate and upskill on specific sectors and employers
2. As the pandemic eases, a hybrid approach, blending both virtual and office insight elements will evolve as the new norm
3. Virtual is helping to democratise access to specialist work experience, but we still need to be mindful of the impact of tech poverty and hope that schools and other education providers can support students with that, as well as the work law firms are doing to support tech poverty initiatives.

Additional Resources

[PRIME's Virtual Legal Work Experience Programme](#)

[The Sutton Trust – Student Survey – F2F vs Virtual](#)

[Forage – Voice of the Student](#)