


# Introduction to Birketts' Social Mobility Insight into Law Experience (SMILE)

2024/2025



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# About Birketts

We are a full service, UK Top 50 Law Firm. With a heritage spanning 160 years, we have more than 500 lawyers and legal professionals based across our seven offices in Cambridge, Chelmsford, Ipswich, London, Norwich, Sevenoaks and Bristol. We have over 1,200 people involved in the business, all sharing a common commitment to deliver the best possible outcome for our clients. We are large enough to provide specialist expertise in most areas of the law, but not at the expense of maintaining a personal and tailored service. Our unrivalled reputation for providing high quality legal advice and client service has resulted in the firm regularly achieving high level legal awards.

## Summary

SMILE is a week-long programme for capable, interested students who meet prescribed social mobility related [criteria](#).

Students will be invited to apply to take part in SMILE by submitting an application form followed by an informal interview over Microsoft Teams. If they are successful in obtaining a place on the scheme, they will get the chance to shadow a lawyer in two different areas of law. In addition, colleagues from a variety of other departments will deliver practical workshops that will give the students a taste of what it is like to work in that practice area / department. From HR to Corporate, Litigation to IT, Family to Client Services and everything in between, we have colleagues from all over our firm who are keen to provide students with invaluable insight into what life is like within a Top 50 UK Law Firm.

We recognise that workplace skills are as crucial as academic knowledge. Our hope is that, after completing the insight experience, the students will come away with more than just an insight into a law firm. We want to empower students, firstly, by giving them a real understanding of what a career in the legal profession might look like and, secondly, with practical and transferable skills that will give them the confidence to reach their full potential and (if they wish) pursue such a career in law.

Upon completion of the scheme, each student will receive a £200 bursary to cover their day-to-day expenses during the week. Any inter-office travel will be arranged and paid for by Birketts.

# The criteria

SMILE is all about opening doors to a legal career, and giving students who may not have the opportunities that others have by giving them an in depth and meaningful experience at a Top 50 UK Law Firm. To take part in the SMILE scheme, students must meet one or more of the [PRIME](#) criteria and they must be attending a state school/ college with a below average A-Level and / or a low rate of progression to higher education. This is defined by the [PRIME Work Experience School Eligibility Criteria](#) – please review this in detail and make reference to the PRIME criteria when selecting the schools/ colleges and students.

# The 2024 pilot programme

In April 2024, we ran a pilot SMILE scheme, hosting four students – two in our Chelmsford office and two in our Ipswich office. The programme began with a full induction day in Chelmsford, including breakfast, lunch, an ice-breaker activity, an introduction to Birketts and how to make the most of the week ahead. The induction day was designed to set the students up for success and make them feel at ease whilst they were with us.

Throughout the week, students completed two seats in different practice areas, shadowing fee earners and working on legal based tasks such as drafting letters and researching legal issues. We also provided the students with workshops on alternative practice areas, presentations from some of our business services departments (Finance, HR, Client Services and IT) and practical skills workshops including CV and interview preparation.

The pilot was hugely successful receiving a 5-star rating from all students, who reported gaining valuable skills applicable to any job, legal or otherwise.

# The 2025 programme

## Summary

Building on the success of our 2024 pilot programme, the 2025 SMILE scheme will expand to six of our offices: Cambridge, Chelmsford, Ipswich, Norwich, London and Sevenoaks. Each office will host three students from Monday 7<sup>th</sup> April – Friday 11<sup>th</sup> April 2025.

The timetable format for the week remains the same, featuring a basic application and interview process, an induction day, two practice area rotations in the mornings, and afternoon practical workshops and talks.

## Application process

We want to give the students the opportunity to experience an application process which is similar to those they may come across as their studies and careers progress.

Applicants must have achieved an average grade of 5 or above at GCSE and meet the [PRIME social mobility criteria](#). We ask that schools/ colleges select up to three students who meet these criteria and invite them to apply. We will provide our application questions to each college to share with the selected students.

The students will need to apply via their college who will then pass applications to us for shortlisting. The application will be formed of three questions, designed to give the students the opportunity to express their articulacy and personality.

Following our shortlisting (conducted by our HR team) students will be invited for an informal interview via Microsoft Teams.

Based on the feedback from our students on the 2024 pilot programme, we will provide students with a basic 'how to guide' with tips about how to fill out the application form and prepare for the interview.

## Last Year's SMILE Timetable

Below is an example timetable from the SMILE 2024 programme to give you an idea of what the week involves.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
<i>Arrival each day: 09:30</i>				
<b>ALL STUDENTS IN CHELMSFORD</b>			<b>ALL STUDENTS IN IPSWICH</b>	
<b>10:00 – 10:30</b> – Arrival breakfast	<b>09:30- 10:00</b> – Welcome to Home Office	<b>09:30</b> – Seat 1	<b>09:30</b> – Seat 2	<b>09:30-12:00</b> – Seat 2
<b>10:30-12:00</b> – Introduction to Birketts, ice breakers, how this week is going to run and tour of the office	<b>10:00 – 12:00</b> – Seat 1 <i>Agriculture, Employment, Family OR Commercial Litigation</i>	<i>Agriculture, Employment, Family OR Commercial Litigation</i>	<i>Agriculture, Employment, Family OR Commercial Litigation</i>	<i>Agriculture, Employment, Family OR Commercial Litigation</i>
<b>12:00 – 12:30</b> – IT admin and set up (confidentiality, MS Teams, Outlook and Practical Law)				
	<b>12:00 – 12:30</b> – UCAS Application tips, with University of Suffolk	<b>11:30-12:00</b> – Feedback discussion on Seat 1	<b>12:00-12:30</b> – Wellbeing Talk with the firms dedicated Wellbeing Nurse	<b>12:00-12:30</b> – Feedback discussion on Seat 2
	<b>12:30 – 13:00</b> – <b>University Law Course</b> , with Head of Law and Criminology, University of Suffolk	<b>12:00-12:30</b> – Introduction to Seat 2		
<i>Lunch to be provided</i>		<i>Lunch each day: 12:30-13:30</i>		<i>Lunch to be provided</i>
<b>13:30-15:30</b> – <b>Legal Workshop segment 1</b> – <i>Family, Corporate, Employment and Commercial Litigation</i>	<b>13:30-15:00</b> – <b>Introduction to Business Services, IT, Client Services, Accounts</b>	<b>13:30 – 15:30</b> - <b>Interview and CV Skills Workshop</b>	<b>13:30-15:30</b> – <b>Legal Workshop segment 2</b> – <i>Regulatory Corporate Defence, Public Sector and Charities</i>	<b>12:30-13:30</b> – Lunch with Graduate Recruitment Partners, Buddies, Trainees and Apprentices
	<b>15:15 – 15:45</b> – <b>Professional Image Workshop</b>			<b>13:30-14:30</b> - Pathways to Law and Careers with Q&A
				<b>14:30-15:00</b> – Feedback session from students and goodie boxes
<i>Finish each day: 15:00-16:00</i>				

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# Timeline

**Birketts to share application questions** (*schools/ colleges to decide which students they would like to put forward by this time*):  
6<sup>th</sup> January 2025

**Applications deadline:** 31<sup>st</sup> January 2025

**Contact applicants for interviews:** 10<sup>th</sup> February 2025

**Interviews:** 17<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> February 2025

**Application outcomes:** latest 28<sup>th</sup> February 2025

**Insight week:** 7<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> April 2025

# FAQs for schools/colleges

## **Why are you making the students apply and interview?**

We aim to provide students with a realistic view of a legal career, which is inherently competitive. The SMILE application process is simplified to build students' confidence while still reflecting a typical job application experience.

## **How will you support students who have never applied for a job?**

Based on feedback from our pilot, we created a simple guide with tips for applying and preparing for interviews.

## **If you are only taking three students in each office, why should they apply?**

This is a fantastic opportunity, and even if not selected, students will gain valuable experience in the application process.

## **How many other schools/colleges have you identified to take part in this?**

We will approach three to four institutions in each of our office localities that meet our criteria.

## **Will you come and do a talk about SMILE at our school/ college to the students?**

Whilst we'd love to visit all institutions, our schedules make it challenging. However, we work closely with Careers Hubs in each of our office locations to provide promotional materials you can use.

## **What are your expectations of us as a school/ college?**

To proactively promote SMILE, identify students and support them in applying.

## **What are the overall aims of SMILE?**

There are three key aims of SMILE:

1. To create opportunities for students within the PRIME criteria to explore legal careers.
2. To provide meaningful workplace experience reflecting life in a UK Top 50 Law Firm.
3. To empower students with confidence and transferable skills for pursuing a legal career.

## **What is in it for Birketts?**

SMILE aligns with our ESG strategy and our commitment to providing students with empowering and inspiring workplace experiences.



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[birketts.co.uk](http://birketts.co.uk)

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