

**Not to be used before noon, 18 November 2014**

## **Major new report on future of legal services**

The Legal Services Consumer Panel is today publishing a major new report on legal services in 2020 and how regulators should prepare for the future. The Legal Services Board commissioned the report to inform the development of its next three year strategy covering the period 2015-18.

The report is being launched at the Legal Futures, Era of the Entrepreneur Conference, on 18 November, where an expert panel will debate the findings.

The report identifies four broad and interrelated developments that are likely to shape legal services in the period to 2020:

- **Self-lawyering** - consumers will seek alternatives to lawyers or use them in different ways, through technology-enabled DIY solutions, unbundled provision and new regulated and unregulated entrants. Reflecting the new funding realities, calls will grow for radical solutions, such as an inquisitorial style of justice and online dispute resolution that cut lawyers out altogether.
- **Influence of technology** - technology will go to the heart of all aspects of legal services in the future assisting consumers in lots of ways but also bringing new 'digital detriments' to contend with. It has the potential to greatly enhance access to justice, but it shouldn't be viewed as a panacea since many people aren't online and it can't always substitute effectively for the human touch.
- **Consumer behaviour** - strengthened consumer rights, transparency on provider performance and greater access to redress will make consumers more empowered across the economy, but the extent to which legal services will mirror these developments is unclear. We see a risk that vulnerable consumers won't benefit fully from the reforms as initiatives end up most benefiting those who are already empowered.
- **Market changes** – Legal services is likely to become a more business-like environment; this will deliver benefits but also bring sophisticated marketing and commercial practices seen in other markets that have caused detriment. As professional boundaries continue to blur there will be greater focus on whether competition between groups of lawyer is working fairly. Unregulated businesses are likely to become a greater presence in the market.

Elisabeth Davies, Chair of the Legal Services Consumer Panel, said:

*“The reforms can only be judged a success if by 2020 access to legal services is extended to people who are currently excluded from the market – this must be a key priority for regulators in the years ahead. There’s a danger vulnerable consumers will get left behind as competition benefits only those who are already empowered.*

*“Technology and a more business-like environment will benefit consumers, but also bring new types of problems to contend with. Maintaining a robust safety net will be vital and this will require regulators to update their toolkits, acquire new skills and forge new partnerships with national and local consumer protection agencies.*

*“The unregulated market is here – it’s not going away, it’s only going to get bigger. Regulators need to play their part in raising standards and extending routes to redress across the whole sector to deliver better services for consumers.”*

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**For more information, contact Steve Brooker, Consumer Panel Manager, on 020 7271 0077.**

### **Notes to editors**

1. The Legal Services Consumer Panel was established under the Legal Services Act 2007 to provide independent advice to the Legal Services Board about the interests of consumers of legal services in England and Wales. We investigate issues that affect consumers and use this information to influence decisions about the regulation of legal services.
2. The Panel’s report is here:  
[http://www.legalservicesconsumerpanel.org.uk/publications/research\\_and\\_reports/index.html](http://www.legalservicesconsumerpanel.org.uk/publications/research_and_reports/index.html)
3. A short summary of the report is here:  
[http://www.legalservicesconsumerpanel.org.uk/publications/policy\\_briefings/index.html](http://www.legalservicesconsumerpanel.org.uk/publications/policy_briefings/index.html)
4. Details of the Legal Futures Conference can be found here:  
<http://www.legalfutures.co.uk/conference-era-of-the-entrepreneur/full-programme-and-speakers>