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Online divorce... a practical choice

The LSB and the Legal Services Consumer Panel today publish jointly commissioned research comparing the consumer experience of online divorce with more traditional services. This is the first time that this aspect of online legal services has been looked at.

Online delivery of services is widespread in many areas of the economy, and is predicted to become more widespread within legal services. The advantages of online service delivery are clear: it offers more choice to and can make legal services more affordable for consumers and it can allow businesses to increase the scale of their operations.

Some of the findings from this research, entitled **Comparing methods of service delivery: A divorce case study** include:

- the market is working well: there are high levels of customer satisfaction for both traditional providers (79%) and online providers (83%)
- consumers are making choices to reflect their needs: those using online divorce services tend to have more amicable (86%) divorces compared to those using a traditional lawyer (56%)
- online divorce services are reported to be significantly cheaper and more likely to be quoted on a fixed fee basis. By contrast those choosing face to face providers tend to value the reputation of the provider and its location more so than cost, and
- the online experience has some differences. For example, online applicants go through the process faster than those seeking face to face advice (on average 83% within eight weeks) and more users of online services than traditional services felt that the process was easier than they anticipated and involved less effort.

Legal Services Board Chair, **Sir Michael Pitt**, said:

“The benefits of online service delivery are obvious. The regulatory risks however are less well understood and this research seeks to investigate whether there is any evidence of these risks translating into problems in practice for consumers.

I am pleased to say that this unique research shows no evidence of any such problems occurring. Rather, it underlines the high levels of consumer satisfaction with online service delivery. Clearly consumers’ needs are diverse. By allowing a range of services to be provided to meet those diverse needs, the market works better for the public as a whole.”

Legal Services Consumer Panel Chair, **Elisabeth Davies**, said:

“We're all aware that getting divorced can be a stressful experience so it's important that the legal process which supports this is as pain free as possible. Consumers taking part in the study and using online providers generally reported quicker, cheaper and less stressful experiences than those using face to face providers. For those going through a reasonably amicable and uncomplicated divorce with a high level of agreement about things like finances, our findings suggest the online route is certainly one to consider.

Crucially, the online model won't be suitable for everyone. In the study, more complex and difficult cases were handled face to face, allowing people to benefit from expert advice, and good levels of satisfaction were found for both online and face to face providers. However, it's reassuring that consumers are making meaningful choices about when to get expert help and when they can safely handle their legal needs alone. For those who can and want to, online services can empower people to take control of their legal affairs and contribute to improving access to justice.”

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For further information, please contact our Communications Manager [Vincent McGovern](#) or by calling 020 7271 0068.

Notes for editors:

1. The report and further information on this process can be found [here](#).
2. Background information on this research can be found [here](#).
3. The report was commissioned jointly by the Legal Services Board and the [Legal Services Consumer Panel](#) (LSCP).

4. The report's findings will allow the LSB to target future work looking at online legal services or suggest areas of interest for regulators wishing to respond to the challenges posed by online advice. It will help the LSCP define a consumer agenda and inform the debate on the benefits and risks of technology in legal services.
5. [The Legal Services Act 2007](#) (the Act) created the LSB as a new regulator with responsibility for overseeing the regulation of legal services in England and Wales. The new regulatory regime became active on 1 January 2010.
6. The LSCP was established under the Act to provide independent advice to the Legal Services Board about the interests of consumers of legal services in England and Wales. The LSCP investigates issues that affect consumers and uses this information to influence decisions about the regulation of legal services.
7. The LSB oversees nine approved regulators, which in turn regulate individual legal practitioners. The approved regulators, designated under [Part 1](#) of Schedule 4 of the Act, are the **Law Society**, the **Bar Council**, the **Master of the Faculties**, the **Chartered Institute of Legal Executives**, the **Council for Licensed Conveyancers**, the **Chartered Institute of Patent Attorneys**, the **Institute of Trade Mark Attorneys**, the **Association of Costs Lawyers** and the **Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales**.

In addition, the **Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland** and the **Association of Chartered Certified Accountants** are listed as approved regulators in relation only to reserved probate activities.

8. As at 1 April 2014, the legal profession comprised 138,243 solicitors, 326 alternative business structures, 15,279 barristers, 7,927 chartered legal executives and 5,404 other individuals operating in other areas of the legal profession such as conveyancing. The sector was valued at £29.2 billion in 2013 (total turnover).