



Consumer Panel Briefing – Consumer Impact Report 2014

What is the Consumer Impact Report?

The Consumer Impact Report is the Panel's flagship report. Using a wide evidence base including our annual tracker survey, published data sources such as business plans, annual reports and board papers, and a qualitative commentary on key developments, five years on from when the legislative reforms began to be implemented, the report measures the direction of travel towards the Panel's five-point consumer vision for the market.

Key findings

Looking at each of element of our five-point vision in turn:

- **Responsive services** – some positive signs of consumers playing a more active role in driving competition and many examples of innovation following the liberalisation measures. However, making informed comparisons between providers remains hard due to a lack of data on lawyers' performance. A blurring of professional boundaries is creating tension over whether competition is working fairly.
- **High quality advice** – the technical quality of advice remains largely unknown and this evidence gap is a major concern. Service quality is unchanged and the decline in trust in lawyers has levelled off, mirroring trends in other parts of the economy. Sanctions and appeals processes have been criticised for system-wide problems.
- **A diverse workforce that serves its diverse clients** – there remain significant, although slightly narrowing, gaps in trust, confidence and satisfaction with legal services between population groups. DIY law, unbundling and paralegal businesses are emerging as market solutions to improve affordability, but require choices which balance access to justice and consumer protection. The diversity of the profession is getting better but progression and social mobility remain weak areas.
- **Quick, fair and cost-effective complaints handling** – there is low public confidence about complaining and too many consumers choose to suffer in silence, but there are signs lawyers are getting better at handling complaints. The Legal Ombudsman can accept a wider range of complaints. Our benchmarking report found a relatively new scheme seeking to improve its service as complaint patterns settle down.
- **Consumers placed at the heart of regulation** – independence from representative bodies is strengthened but a lack of cultural independence from the workforce is seen to have held back the pace of market reforms. Levels of transparency are inconsistent and consumer research by the approved regulators is still minimal. The wider regulatory architecture does not provide a sustainable model in the long term.

Key statistics

15 striking statistics from the Consumer Impact Report:

- 1 – the number of published consumer research reports by approved regulators in 2013-14
- 12 – the percentage of QCs who are women
- 22 – the percentage of consumers who shop around, up from 18% in 2011
- 43 – the percentage of the public which trusts lawyers
- 44 – the percentage of dissatisfied consumers who do not complain
- 46 – the percentage of fixed fee deals, up from 38% in 2012
- 67 – the percentage cases resolved by the Legal Ombudsman within 3 months
- 74 – the percentage of private law cases involving litigants in person
- 79 – the percentage of consumers satisfied with the legal service they received
- 305 – the number of ABSs on 31 March 2014
- 2,206 – the annual number of allegations about legal competence received by the SRA
- 8,320 – the number of cases allocated for investigation by the Legal Ombudsman last year
- 10,541 – the number of complaints made too early to the Legal Ombudsman in 2013-14
- 250,000 – the LSB's research budget in £ for 2014-15, the same as in the previous year
- 89,676,000 – the total combined annual cost in £ of the regulatory bodies

For more information:

[Consumer Impact Report 3](#)

[Tracker survey briefing notes and raw data](#)

About the Legal Services Consumer Panel

The Legal Services Consumer Panel is a central feature of a regulatory framework in England and Wales which is designed to transform the legal services market around the needs of its users. Created by the Legal Services Act 2007 we are an independent arm of the Legal Services Board. As a permanent, discrete champion for consumers we have an essential responsibility to ensure that regulators are able to consider and act on the user perspective.

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