LEGAL SERVICES CONSUMER PANEL

# Tracker Survey 2017

## Briefing note: how consumers are choosing legal services.

**Key findings:**

- The overall proportion of consumers who shop around for legal services remains small at 27%.
- Reputation persists as the most important factor when choosing a legal service provider, but for areas such as conveyancing and will-writing price is just as important.
- The use of a quality marks to help consumers choose a provider has been consistently low over the past six years (4%).
- The use of fixed fees has declined amongst solicitors (2017:57%, 2016:61%) and barristers (2017:31%, 2016:37%).
- The use of free services has declined to an all-time low of 16%.
- Public trust in lawyers has increased to 45% from 42% in 2016. However, it is slightly lower than the peak of 47% in 2015.
- Confidence that consumers rights are protected when dealing with a lawyer has increased to 48% from 46% in 2016.
- Local firms remain the most used service providers in many areas of law.

**Note on methodology:**

*For the last seven years the Panel has commissioned YouGov to conduct an annual survey in two parts: a nationally representative sample (1,822 adults); and a sample of people who have used legal services in the last two years (1,625 adults). The two samples were weighted to be representative of each wider population. All the figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+). The results have been tested to the 95% confidence level – we are 95% confident that these findings are not due to chance. Fieldwork took place during 21 February and 27 March 2017.*

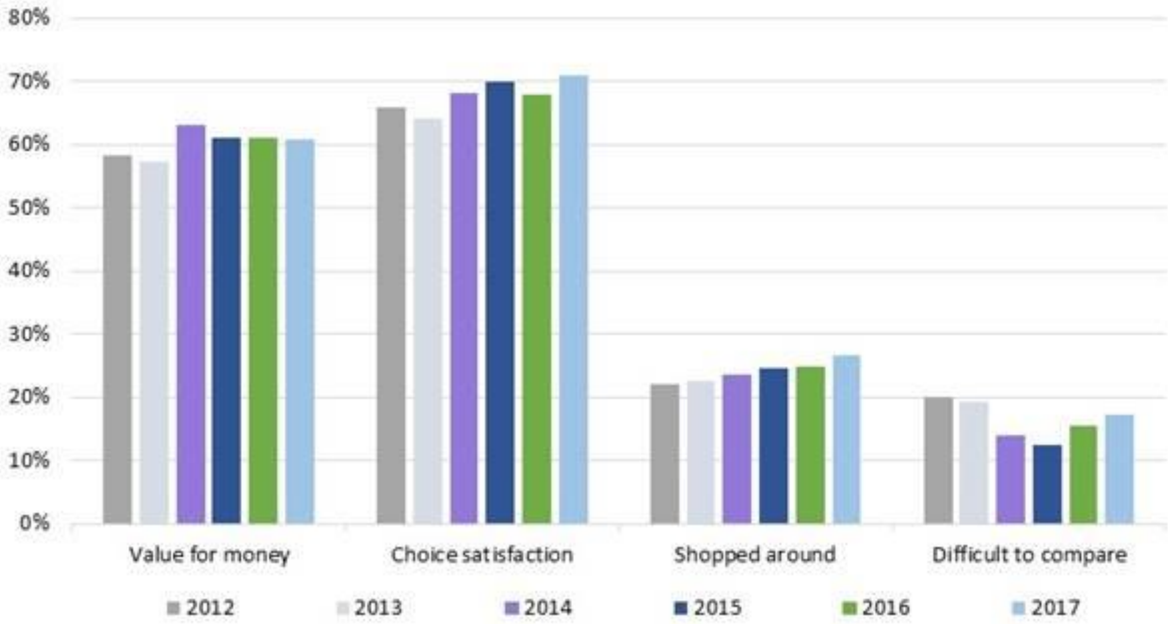
## Consumer behaviour

The proportion of consumers who shop around and compare services or prices before choosing their provider remains broadly the same as last year with a small two percentage points increase (2017:27%, 2016:25%) (see *Figure 1*).

Consumer perception of choice when choosing a provider remains broadly the same, with 71% of consumers reporting having a fair or great deal of choice (2016:68%). However, differences can be seen by service type. Consumers say they have more choice in will-writing (88%), power of attorney (83%) and conveyancing (79%) than in accident or injury claims (43%). Unsurprisingly, those who shop around say they have more choice than those who do not (87% against 67% respectively).

Perception of value for money remains at 2015 levels (61%). The highest score for value for money is in will-writing (78%), and the lowest scores are in probate (53%) and accident or injury claims (48%). There has been an increase this year in the perception of value for money in conveyancing (62%) following a sharp drop last year (55%).

**Figure 1: How consumers experience the legal services market.**



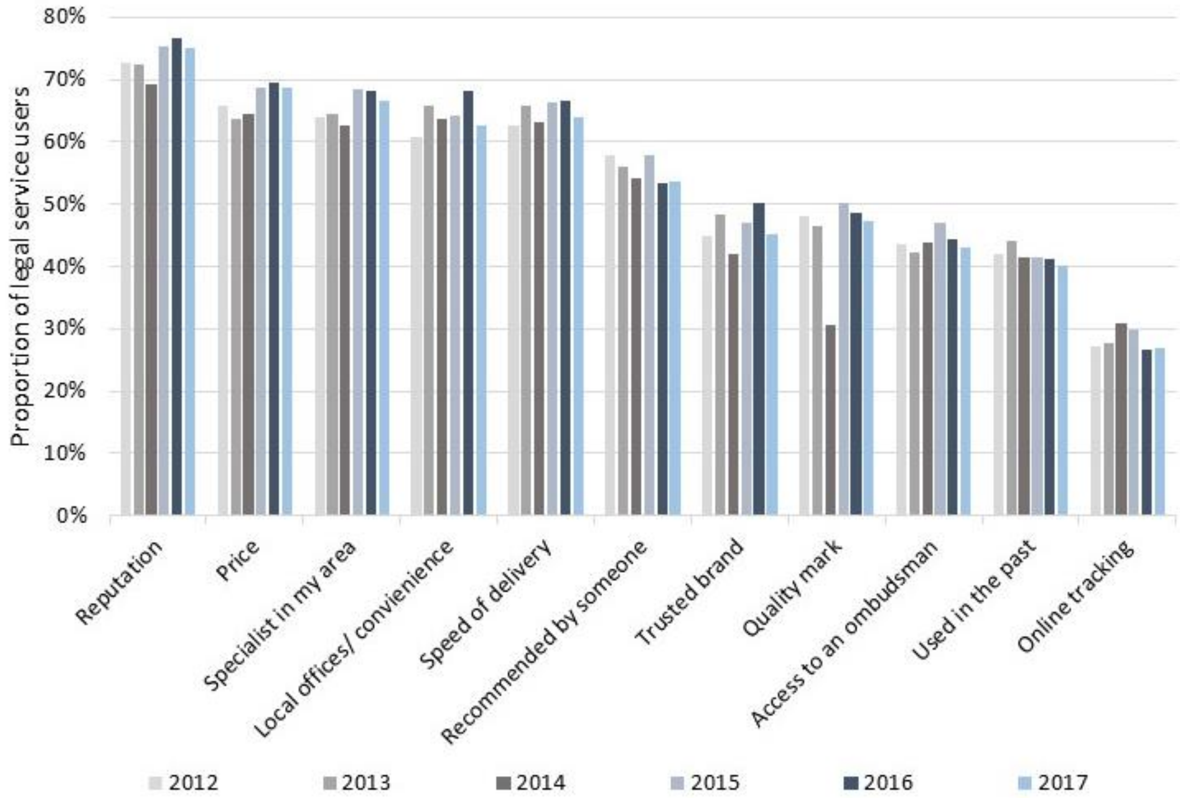

**Base: All legal service users (2012=1435, 2013=1484, 2014=1060, 2015=1067, 2016=1523, 2017=1625)**

## Drivers of consumer decision-making

Understanding what drives of consumer decision-making is important for both providers and regulators. Indicators such as key choice factors can be used to assess whether the market is responding to consumer needs or consumer empowerment with pertinent and readily available information to encourage informed decision-making. Overall, our research found that reputation is still the key choice factor when deciding which legal service provider to choose, (see *Figure 2*). However, price is equally as important as reputation in some areas of law, e.g. in conveyancing and will-writing (81% and 76% respectively) compared to reputation (81% and 79% respectively).

Our research shows that specialism, local offices and speed of delivery are also important to consumers. Being a specialist is highly sought after in the more contentious areas of law, particularly in family matters (80%) and housing, landlord or tenant problems (75%). However, we did not ask how consumers satisfied themselves that their provider was a specialist.

**Figure 2: Consumer choice factors.**




**Base: All legal service users (2012=1435, 2013=1484, 2014=1060, 2015=1067, 2016=1523, 2017=1625)**

Consumer awareness of quality marks in 2017 dropped to 68%, following an increase in 2015 (2013:68%, 2015:72%) (see *Figure 2*). In line with previous years, awareness levels of quality marks rises with age, peaking between ages 45-54 (80%) compared to 18-24 year olds (55%).

Recognition of quality marks continues to be lower among BME groups, with 62% noting their awareness of quality marks, compared to 72% of those from White British background. This figure drops further with Pakistani consumers (47%) and Black African consumers (50%).

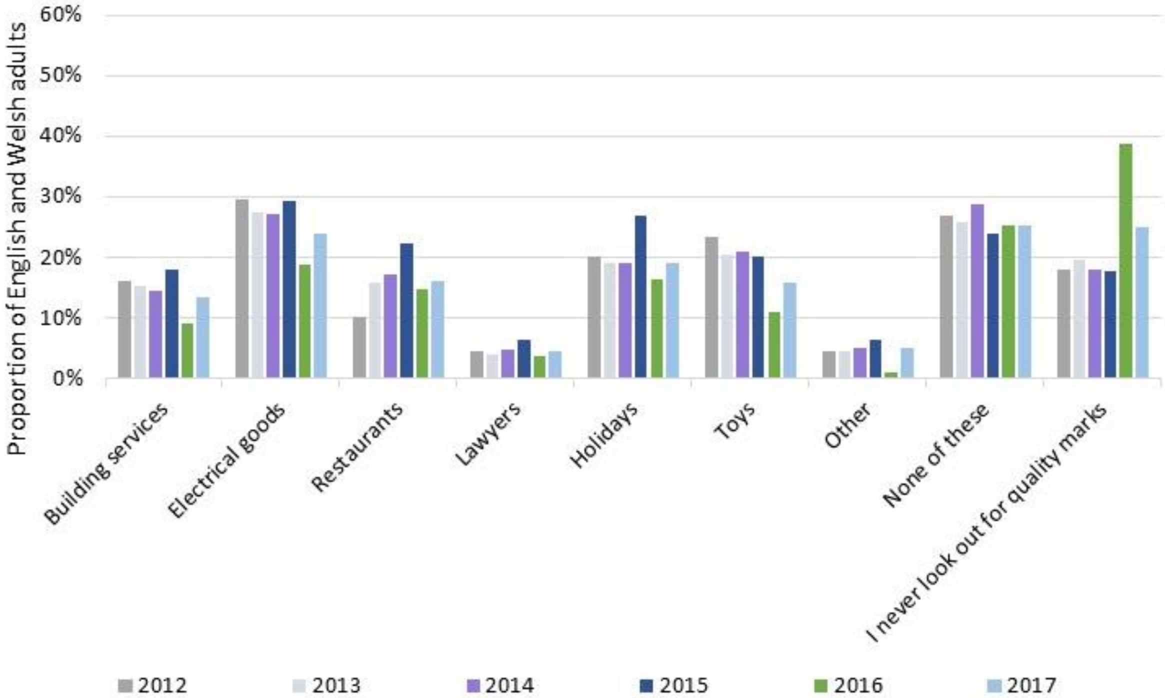
The use of quality marks to help consumers choose between different providers has been consistently low over the past six years. Only 4% of consumers used it this year. Although this figure is very low compared with other sectors, it must be noted that 25% of consumers across all sectors say they never look for quality marks, and another 25% say they do not use quality marks to choose between service providers (see *Figure 3*).

## Charging methods

Fixed fees give consumers a clear idea of what a service is likely to cost, and enables them to compare prices to make an informed decision. It is also an indicator of improved competition in the market. We have therefore tracked its usage over the years. The overall use of fixed fee arrangements is consistent with last year's results, they are used in 48% of legal services transactions (see *Figure 4*). The use of fixed fees increased for licensed conveyancers (2017:73%, 2016:70%), but decreased for solicitors (2017:57%, 2016:61%) and barristers (2017:31%, 2016:37%).

Access to free services remains on a downward trend. This should be noted, not least because

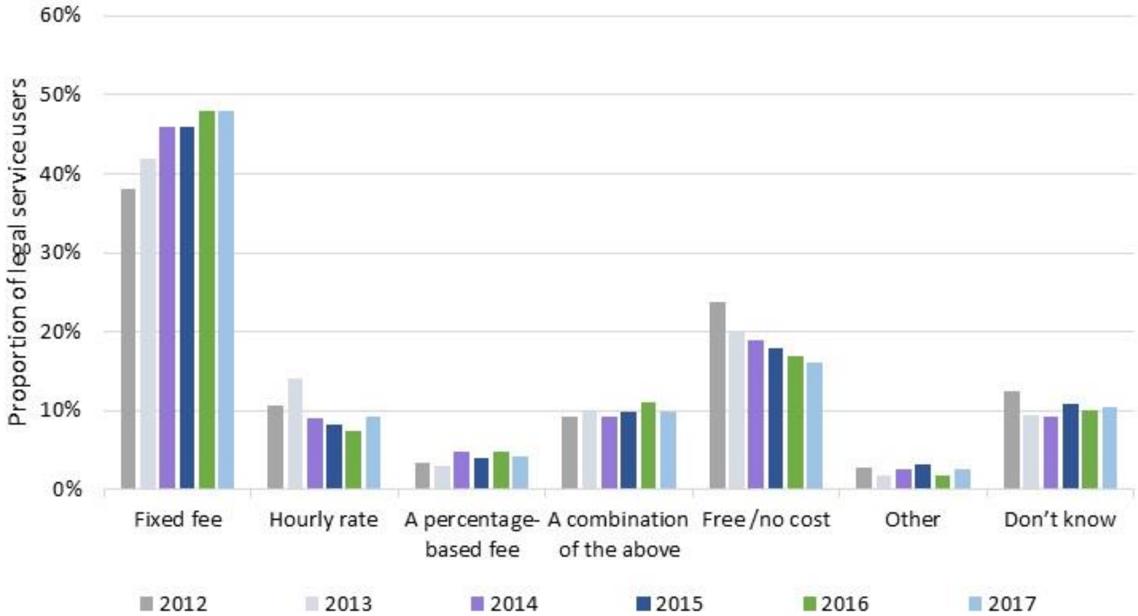
**Figure 3: How the general public use quality marks in different sectors**




**Base: All English and Welsh adults (2012=1796, 2013=1762, 2014=1896, 2015=1794, 2016=1864, 2017=1822)**

they are more frequently used by Black African or Black Caribbean consumers (29%) compared to White British consumers (15%), and users from lower social grades C2DE[1] (23%) compared to higher social grades users ABC1 (14%). 66% of consumers surveyed pay for their legal services themselves or with the help of family or friends. This is consistent with last year, and is a 10 percentage point increase since 2012.

**Figure 4: Breakdown of charging methods**




**Base: All legal service users (2012=1435, 2013=1484, 2014=1060, 2015=1067, 2016=1523, 2017=1625)**

[1] C2DE and ABC1 are drawn from a system of demographic classification originally developed by the National Readership Survey to classify readers, but now used as a standard for market research. ABC1 is classified as the highest social grade and C2DE classified as the lowest social grade.

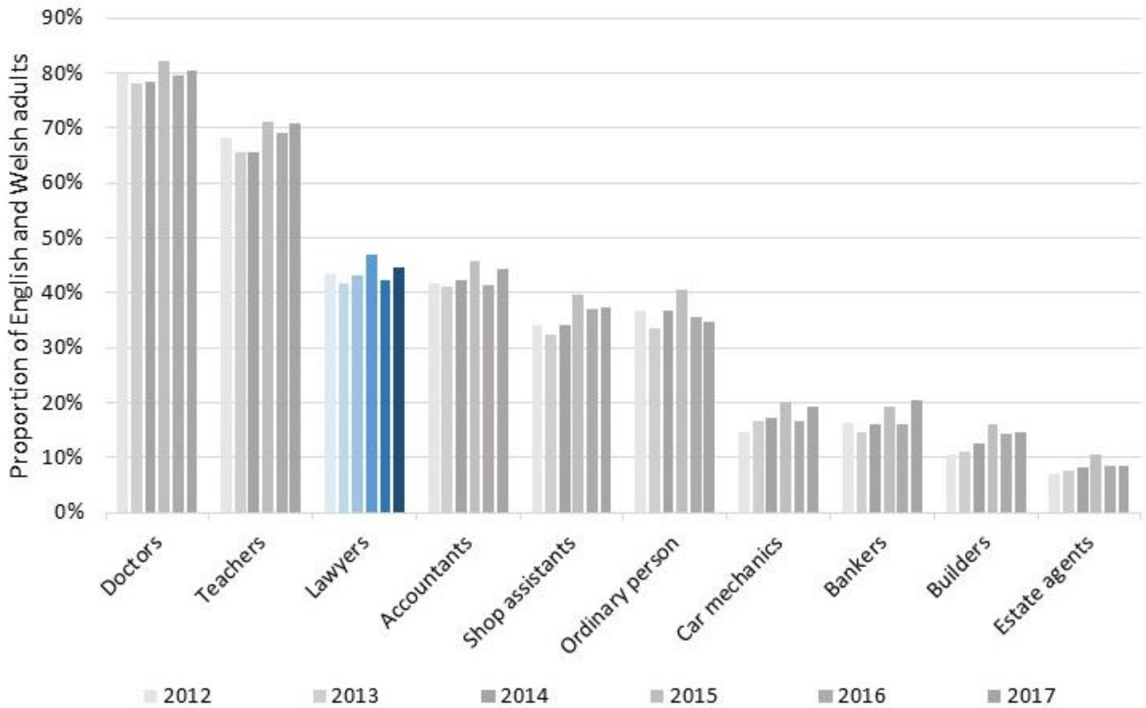
## Trust trends

Trust in lawyers increased to 45% from 42% in 2016 (see *Figure 5*). Respondents with prior experience of using a legal service provider trust lawyers slightly more (49%) than those who had not used one (43%). However, there is a persistent trend of lower levels of trust and confidence among BME groups, with 41% trusting lawyers to tell the truth, against 47% of White British. This figure dropped further still with consumers from a Mixed background (37%) and Black African (38%) having the lowest levels of trust within the BME groups. BME groups also have less confidence in their rights being protected (43%) than White British consumers (51%). This gap narrowed in 2014, but has slowly widened again.

Confidence that consumer rights are protected when dealing with lawyers remains broadly the same this year, 48% compared with 46% in 2016. Confidence in consumer rights being protected remains higher for those with direct experience of using a legal service provider, 55% are confident that their rights are protected, compared to 44% of those who have not used a legal service.

49% of consumers who represent themselves in court say they have confidence that their rights are protected compared to 48% of those who had representation in court, demonstrating no significant difference in levels of confidence. Consumer confidence in knowing how to complain about the services they received, if dissatisfied, remains virtually unchanged (2017: 51%, 2016: 50%).

**Figure 5: Trust trends across different sectors**



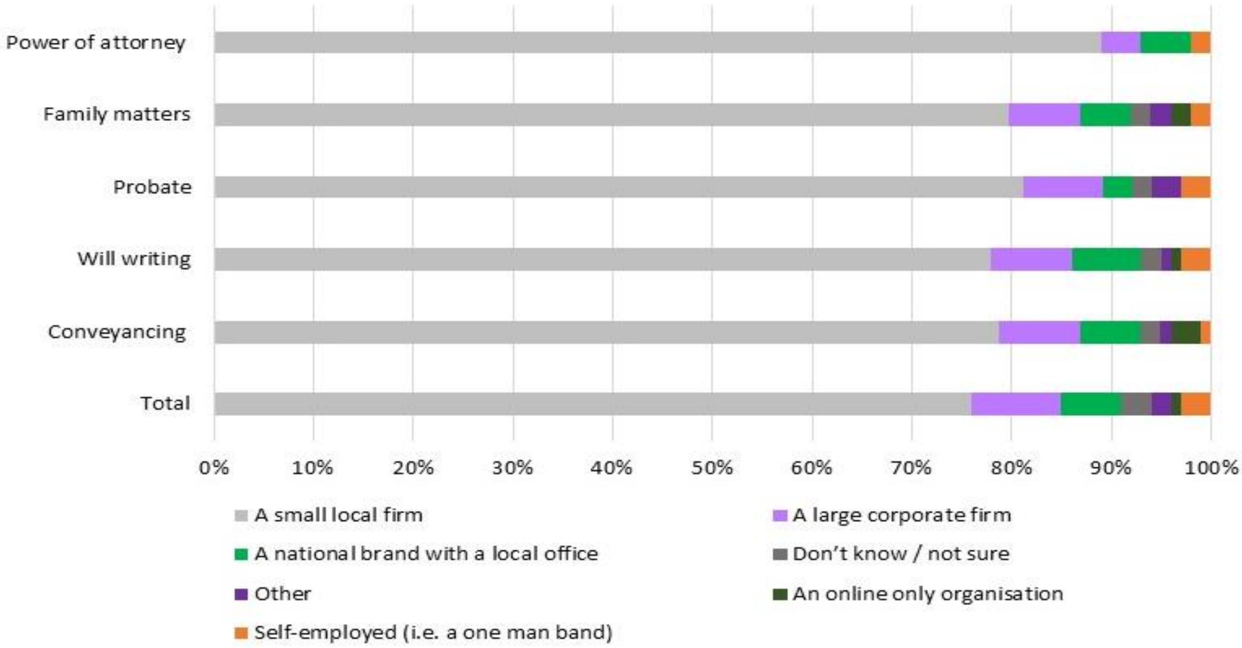

**Base: All English and Welsh adults (2012=1796, 2013=1762, 2014=1896, 2015=1794, 2016=1864, 2017=1822)**

## Types of firms

We asked consumers who used a solicitor what type of law firm they chose to use. These results offer indicative findings only as respondents may not have accurately identified the type of firm consistently or correctly (see *Figure 6*).

59% of legal service consumers had used a solicitor. Amongst this group local firms are the preferred option (76%). This is perhaps understandable considering consumers rely on recommendations of friends and family when choosing a provider, as well as face to face advice.

**Figure 6: Type of solicitors firm used by type of legal service accessed**




**Base: All legal service users, 2017=1625**