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## **The legal services market is failing to support consumer engagement and low income consumers accessing justice**

The latest Tracker Survey shows a decline in the availability of free services from 24% in 2012 to 11% in 2019. Funding by legal aid, trade unions and employer payments over this period plunged from 14% to 5%. The implications of this decline in funding streams remain a serious concern for the Panel.

Our survey also shows that, nearly three years after publication of the CMA Report, consumers are not yet enjoying the benefits of clearly published pricing information. And information on quality is particularly hard for consumers to find. These findings continue to contribute to low numbers of consumers empowered to shop around (28%). More positively, those who do shop around say they have a wide range of providers to choose from, and report high levels of satisfaction with the legal service they receive and the outcome of their matter.

The Panel is also pleased to note that consumers' use of online services has increased from 21% in 2012 to 33% in 2019. Overall, consumer satisfaction with online services is higher than services delivered via telephone, which have decreased over the same period.

### **Key findings:**

- The proportion of consumers who shop around remains low at 28%. This is even lower in areas such as advice on criminal charges (10%) and advice and appeals about benefits or tax credits (17%).
- The proportion of consumers who say it is easy to make a price comparison plunged from 58% in 2018 to 38% in 2019.
- 62% of consumers find out the price through talking to the provider rather than from a website or other means.
- On information about services, only 40% of consumers recall seeing information about the staff, service and/or timings for delivery of services.
- 88% of consumers are satisfied with the outcome of their matter and 84% are satisfied with the legal service.
- Nevertheless where things do go wrong there remain gaps in understanding about how to make a complaint or seek redress. The proportion of silent sufferers (those who are dissatisfied but don't complain) is up to 37%, and 46% of legal consumers still do not know how to go about making a complaint.

Sarah Chambers, Chair of the Legal Services Consumer Panel, said:

*"I'm pleased to see a consistent uptake of services delivered online and that consumer satisfaction with legal services, including online services, is high. The uptake of new technology is a real opportunity to mitigate some of the gaps in access to justice caused by the severe decline in public and charitable funding streams. I therefore hope to see*

*regulators proactively promoting innovation, with adequate consumer protection to bolster consumer confidence and consequently the appropriate use of new technology.*

*Regulators should also continue to ensure that the CMA's recommendations on price and quality are implemented thoroughly by providers, as evidence so far suggests that not much has changed in these areas."*

**ENDS**

**For more information contact Lau Ciocan, Consumer Panel Associate, on 020 72710076.**

**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. For the last eight years the Panel has commissioned YouGov to conduct an annual survey of people who have used legal services in the last two years. This year we spoke to 3589 legal service users. All differences in the results between sub-groups and over time presented in this report represent statistically significant differences. 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 19 February and 26 March 2019. The briefing notes released today can be found [here](#).

3. The full data set can also be found [here](#).

4. [The CMA Legal services market study, December 2016](#).