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## **SURVEY: CONSUMERS BEGINNING TO RESPOND TO WIDER CHOICE**

There are some positive signs of consumer behaviour changing in response to the Legal Services Act competition reforms – according to new research released today by the Legal Services Consumer Panel.

The Panel's latest annual tracker survey results show that compared to 2011 data, consumers are happier with the choice available to them (65% to 68%), shop around more (21% to 24%) and are more satisfied with value for money (57% to 63%). Further, they find it less difficult to compare lawyers (28% to 14%) and are less likely to go back to the lawyer they used for their previous transaction (25% to 22%).

Less positively, use of comparison websites (2%) and quality marks (5%) is still low.

Other survey questions provide evidence of changes in the ways legal services are being delivered to the public:

- 46% of transactions are fixed-fee deals compared to 38% in 2012; less than 10% of all legal work for ordinary consumers is now billed by the hour
- Almost 1 in 5 transactions involve some degree of unbundling, where the provider and consumer share tasks between them. Probate, employment and immigration are the most common legal tasks where this happens
- Although the large majority of consumers still use small local firms, large corporates, national brands and online firms make up 20% of all providers

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

*“Active consumers who demand more of lawyers are key to a healthy market, so it’s good news that more consumers are responding to the wider choice on offer by shopping around. It also doesn’t surprise us that fixed-fee deals have become the norm for common legal work like will-writing and conveyancing. It’s what consumers have been calling for and it’s surely no coincidence that they’re now reporting getting better value for money.*”

*“These figures represent small steps in the right direction but there is no room for complacency. While consumers now have the appetite to compare lawyers on quality and price, low use of comparison websites and quality marks still limits the extent to which people can make informed choices.*”

*“In an effort to make legal services more affordable, there is evidence of large numbers of firms offering deals where tasks are shared between lawyers and consumers. Such ‘unbundled’ delivery is a welcome development, but these deals are no excuse for a second-rate service. The Panel plans to carry out research with the Legal Services Board later this year to look at this issue in more depth.”*

**-ends-**

**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. For the last four years the Panel has commissioned YouGov to conduct an annual tracker survey in two parts: a nationally representative sample (1,896 adults); and a sample of people who have used legal services in the last two years (1,060 adults). Booster samples were obtained for Wales and BME groups. 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 14 February – 12 March 2014.
3. The briefing note released today can be found here [http://www.legalservicesconsumerpanel.org.uk/publications/research\\_and\\_reports/index.html](http://www.legalservicesconsumerpanel.org.uk/publications/research_and_reports/index.html)
4. Next week the Panel will publish two further briefing notes – on trust/satisfaction; and consumers in Wales – along with the raw data from the survey.