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SURVEY: TOO MANY 'SILENT SUFFERERS' STILL PUTTING UP WITH BAD SERVICE FROM LAWYERS

44% of consumers who are dissatisfied with legal services do not complain – according to new research released today by the Legal Services Consumer Panel. When compared to an average of 27% of disgruntled customers who fail to act in the services sector overall, this suggests that barriers to complaining to law firms are far higher than for many other types of organisation.

The Panel's latest annual tracker survey results show that overall service satisfaction has remained steady during the four years – now at 79%.

Mirroring trends in other sectors, previously falling levels of trust in lawyers and other indicators of consumer confidence have stabilised in 2014.

Key findings on trust and satisfaction in legal services, include:

- 43% of the public trusts lawyers to tell the truth – up from 42% last year, but still down from 47% in 2011
- 46% of the public feel their consumer rights would be protected when using lawyers – this is the same as last year, but still down from 51% in 2011
- Will-writing is the highest rated market for satisfaction with outcome, service and value for money – although as previous work by the Panel has shown, consumers are poorly placed to assess the technical quality of work
- Consumers who shopped around and felt they had a good choice of providers were more satisfied with their service they received than those who didn't shop around or who were dissatisfied with the choice available
- There is a social divide: ABC1s and White British consumers are more likely to trust lawyers, have more confidence in the market and are happier with the service they received compared to C2DEs and BME consumers

The Panel has also released a briefing paper on differences between consumers in England and Wales, reflecting our commitment to represent consumers in both nations. This appears to show consumers in Wales are more trusting of lawyers, have greater confidence their rights will be protected and are more satisfied with the service they received. However, it also suggests consumers in Wales tend to shop around less than those in England.

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

“Every time someone feels powerless to complain about a lawyer, confidence in legal services is dented and law firms miss an opportunity to learn from their mistakes, innovate and improve the service they offer. The Legal Services Board has challenged the approved regulators to do much better on first-tier complaints-handling – our data suggests they must work even harder than their counterparts in other sectors to break down barriers to complaining.

“We hope public trust and confidence in legal services has now bottomed out, but this news doesn’t mask what is far from an ideal state of affairs. Research has shown the link between customer service failings and low trust in lawyers – a relentless focus on transparency and good service would help to rebuild confidence in the sector and encourage more people to use legal services.

“Our survey data suggests consumers are benefiting from the competition reforms – but we need to avoid a situation where only already empowered consumers benefit while the vulnerable are left behind. Access to justice objectives will not be achieved if inequalities of trust and experience persist – this is a key challenge for everyone in the sector to grasp in the years ahead.”

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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. 27% of dissatisfied consumers who don’t complain – figure provided by Institute of Customer Service, UK Customer Satisfaction Index, January 2014
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmselect/cmpubadm/229/229.pdf>
4. The two briefing notes released today can be found here
http://www.legalservicesconsumerpanel.org.uk/publications/research_and_reports/index.html

5. Last week the Panel published a briefing note on the changing legal services market consumers, also at the link above.
6. The raw data from the survey can also be accessed at the link above.