

Embargoed until 00:01, 2 February 2016

REGULATORS MUST EMPOWER CONSUMERS WITH INFORMATION

The Legal Services Consumer Panel has today called for legal services regulators to rise to the challenge of providing useful and accessible information to help consumers make informed decisions. In its advice to the Legal Services Board, the Panel noted that the sector currently trails behind comparable sectors where information on quality, price, and first-tier complaints is already available.

The Panel believes that greater transparency through the availability of better information would serve as an important catalyst in empowering consumers and driving competition.

The Panel's main recommendations are:

The Approved Regulators should:

- Do more to bring together regulatory information in a meaningful way. A starting point would be to link basic and conduct information.
- Make the collation and publication of first-tier complaints a regulatory requirement and mandate for its publication.
- Commission research on quality of advice and publish this research in full. Lessons should be learnt from how other sectors have tackled comparable gaps in knowledge.
- Require the publication of the average cost of legal services on the websites of approved firms and individuals, and mandate that they provide this information on request. This should also include the average cost of disbursements.
- Carry out mystery or shadow shopping exercises on quality of advice in high risk areas and publish their research findings in full. This type of research has the potential to offer meaningful insight into quality of advice.

The Legal Services Board should:

- Be more vocal about price disclosure and transparency.
- Provide guidance on how the smaller Approved Regulators might gather and publish information on quality.

The Legal Ombudsman should:

- Publish a contextualised summary and analysis of cases decided informally.
- Publish all ombudsman decisions in full.

Elisabeth Davies, Consumer Panel Chair said:

“More needs to be done to empower consumers and encourage them to make informed decisions. Information, simply presented, at the time of need, is one tool that can be used by legal services regulators. We have seen this tool adopted in other sectors and although there are challenges, we hope regulators rise to the task and begin the journey towards more transparency, and effective engagement.”

-ends-

For more information, contact Lola Bello, 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. The Panel's report can be found here:

http://www.legalservicesconsumerpanel.org.uk/publications/research_and_reports/documents/OpenDatainLegalServicesFinal.pdf

3. The Panel's membership is drawn from a broad range of backgrounds with expertise including market research, law, competition, consumer advice, campaigning, and communications.