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LAW FIRM COMPARISON SITES SIGN UP TO NEW STANDARDS TO HELP CONSUMERS GET A BETTER DEAL

Comparison website operators and legal regulators are already expressing their support for new good-practice standards for legal comparison websites, published today by the Legal Services Consumer Panel.

The [standards](#) describe how websites providing comparison services for legal consumers can achieve good practice. They include standards relating to website accessibility, the accuracy of information provided, and measures to help people make well-informed choices about their lawyers.

An initial [report](#) published by the Consumer Panel in February 2012 identified low take-up of comparison websites by consumers across England and Wales. It found that just 1% of people who had used legal services in the preceding two years said they had used a comparison site as part of that process. Just 22% of consumers shop around and of these only 57% find it easy to compare providers.

A mystery shopping exercise of 16 websites was also completed by the Consumer Panel which found varying quality of consumer experiences across the marketplace. The findings were used to develop 20 draft standards setting down how legal comparison websites could aim to deliver their services in ways that create maximum value for consumers.

The Consumer Panel has since worked alongside the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) to review the standards with comparison website operators. As a result they've been refined and published. A ['sign-up' area](#) has also been created for websites wishing to commit to achieving the standards. These websites self-certify that they adhere to the standards although compliance is not monitored by the Panel or any legal regulator.

Elisabeth Davies, Chair of the Consumer Panel, said:

"Comparison websites are well-established across many sectors and we expect legal services to catch-up soon. Problems with these websites in other markets have dented public trust and it's important to prevent these mistakes happening in legal services. The standards are designed to guide websites down the right path and enable them to demonstrate they are committed to treating their customers fairly."

It is really good news that the SRA and Council for Licensed Conveyancers are supporting this self-regulatory initiative as part of their efforts to empower consumers and promote competition. ”

Those two frontline legal regulators added their support to the standards.

Mehrunnisa Lalani, Director of Inclusion for the SRA, said:

“Comparison websites are the gateway for growing numbers of consumers into the legal services market, and many of the existing websites provide information about firms and lawyers that the SRA regulates. We think it's important therefore that consumers get everything they need from such websites to feel empowered to make well-informed choices about the legal service they are buying, as well as the firm that they wish to use. The standards should help websites to provide a good quality consumer experience while continuing to improve their offerings and online facilities, and we encourage comparison website providers to consider signing up them.”

Sheila Kumar Chief Executive of the Council for Licensed Conveyancers (CLC) said

“Comparison websites can be a useful tool for consumers, especially in relation to legal services which are an infrequent purchase. The CLC and the other legal regulators keep watch over lawyers but we don't regulate comparison websites, so the introduction of the Consumer Panel's standards should be a useful step forward to help consumers get a good experience right from the start of their legal services journey. We look forward to working with the Consumer Panel and others to improve consumer understanding of the choice of legal services and providers.”

Two comparison website operators that signed up to the standards from the start also expressed their satisfaction with the introduction of the good practice measures. Rosie Rogers, Director of [Reallymoving.com](https://www.reallymoving.com), said

“We want people using our online services to have the best possible experience and to get the right legal support for all of their conveyancing requirements. The standards will help to keep us on the right track in doing this, and Reallymoving.com is delighted to sign up to them. We have already broadened out the comparison tools we make available to consumers to align ourselves with the best practice identified by the standards.”

Lisa Beale, Head of [Checkaprofessional.com](https://www.checkaprofessional.com), said

“ One of the biggest barriers consumers can face these days with professional services is knowing where to begin their search. Websites like ours help consumers get past those barriers, and for legal services can help them to find the right lawyer for their particular situation. It's important therefore that we offer the right information, and make it available in the right format, to help consumers make the choices they need to. For this reason we've been happy to work alongside the legal regulators and the Consumer Panel to sign up to the standards for legal comparison websites.”

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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. It investigates issues that affect consumers and uses this information to influence decisions about the regulation of legal services.
2. The [Solicitors Regulation Authority](#) is the independent regulatory body of the Law Society of England and Wales. It regulates in the public interest, and oversees more than 110,000 individuals and 11,000 organisations providing legal services.
3. The [Council for Licensed Conveyancers](#) is the regulatory body for licensed conveyancers working across England and Wales. It regulates in the public interest, and oversees over 1,000 lawyers and law firms that provide legal services.
4. The Legal Services Consumer Panel's report and mystery shopping exercise on legal comparison websites from February 2012 can be viewed [here](#).
5. The standards for comparison websites can be viewed [here](#).
6. The Legal Services Consumer Panel lists comparison websites that have agreed to follow the good practices set down through the comparison website standards. You can view the list, as well as find more information about comparison websites, [here](#).
7. Websites signed up so far: www.contactlaw.co.uk; www.reallymoving.com; www.checkaprofessional.com; www.solicitor.info; www.comparelegalcosts.co.uk