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PLEASE MIND THE GAP: LEGAL SERVICES IMPROVING BUT INEQUALITY BETWEEN USERS PREVAILS

The situation is improving for empowered consumers, says new research released today by the Legal Services Consumer Panel, but the rest are getting left behind.

The Panel's 2015 edition of its annual tracker survey shows that, over the last five years, more empowered consumers are taking advantage of what information is available to them. Using this information they are able to make better choices, which has led to increased satisfaction. There is still progress to be made however when it comes to opening up data to empower more consumers, as the numbers of consumers who are able to take advantage of developments remains stubbornly low.

Key findings:

- Nearly a half of all transactions are fixed-fee deals (46%)
- Reputation is the most important factor when choosing a legal service (75%), followed closely by price (68%)
- The most relied upon funding method is increasingly private funding (64%), and there is a continued decline in free services (down to 9% in 2015 from 11% in 2013)
- 70% of respondents indicated they were satisfied with the choice on offer to them, up from 65% in 2011
- Public confidence in lawyers has increased again and has returned to 2011 levels – a trend seen across much of the economy – but it remains low overall at 47%
- The number of silent sufferers has decreased slightly from 44% to 42% - however so has the number of those who made a formal complaint to their provider.

The Panel also looked at the trends in Wales. Consumers in Wales are less likely to trust lawyers, though feel equally confident in their ability to complain and that their rights are protected. They are also less likely to shop around, and tend to use small, local law firms with face-to-face service rather than using online services.

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

“The good news is that some consumers are taking advantage of new methods of service delivery – whether that’s unbundling some of the work or shopping around more. The problem is that these developments aren’t working for all consumers. Some consumers are still being left behind, and the gap between the empowered and disempowered is only getting bigger.”

There is no one size fits all approach to addressing this problem. What is clear is that those consumers who are better informed tend to have more trust in using a lawyer, and tend to see increased choice, ultimately leading to increased satisfaction. More information is needed to aid that choice.”

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For more information, contact Stephanie Chapman, Consumer Panel Associate, on 020 7271 0076

Notes to editors

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.

For the last five years the Panel has commissioned YouGov to conduct an annual survey in two parts: a nationally representative sample (1,794 adults); and a sample of people who have used legal services in the last two years (1,067 adults). Booster samples were obtained for Wales and BME groups. All the figures below 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 13 February – 13 March 2015.

The briefing notes released today can be found [here](#).