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IMPROVEMENTS TO LEGAL QUALITY MARKS ENCOURAGING BUT STILL ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT, SAYS CONSUMER PANEL

The Legal Services Consumer Panel has today published a review of progress by accreditation schemes in legal services since its initial assessment in 2011.

Overall, the direction of travel is encouraging and there is improvement in each of the 10 assessment areas. Two schemes – AvMA and APIL – nearly meet all the criteria in full. However, as a whole, many schemes still have a long way to go to become credible signals of quality. The five weakest areas are:

- Schemes continue to fail to incorporate consumer feedback in either their design or operation
- There remain few instances of lay input in the schemes' governance
- Complaints process are not clear or accessible enough in many cases
- Diverse and ongoing competence checks category have got better, but improvements here are still needed
- Some schemes have been reviewed or reviews are planned, but this needs to be more widespread

The Panel also urged scheme operators to consider independent accreditation to help improve consumer trust.

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

“Quality and specialist expertise continues to be important to consumers when they look for a lawyer, so accreditation schemes could be a real force for good. Yet our report shows they could still achieve much higher standards.”

“We’ve been encouraged by improvements made in the past two years, especially in the information which schemes provide to consumers. But this communication needs to be a two-way process – too many schemes still lack lay input in their governance arrangements and are failing to listen to feedback from consumers or investigate complaints about their members.”

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For more information, contact Harriet Gamper, Consumer Panel Associate, on 020 7271 0076. The full report is available on our website: www.legalservicesconsumerpanel.org.uk

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. The Panel started work in November 2009.
2. The Legal Services Act ('The Act') provides for the creation of the Legal Services Board as the oversight regulator for legal services in England and Wales. The new regulatory regime enacted by the Act became fully active on 1 January 2010.
3. Accreditation schemes are an optional allow lawyers to demonstrate they meet specific quality standards or have specialist expertise. 13 schemes are assessed in the report:
 - The Association of Personal Injury Lawyers (APIL)
 - Action against Medical Accidents (AvMa)
 - Queen's Counsel (QC)
 - Resolution
 - The Society of Trust and Estate Practitioners (STEP)
 - The Law Society Children Law
 - The Law Society Criminal Litigation
 - The Law Society Clinical Negligence
 - The Law Society Conveyancing Quality Scheme (CQS)
 - The Law Society Family Law
 - The Law Society Immigration Law
 - The Law Society Mental Health
 - The Law Society Personal Injury
 - The Law Society Wills and Inheritance Quality Scheme (WIQS)
4. The full report and the full assessment sheets for each selected scheme can be found on the Panel's website:
<http://www.legalservicesconsumerpanel.org.uk/ourwork/QualityAssurance.html>
5. The report follows a request for a progress review made by the Legal Services Board following a report published by the Panel in 2011. This first report is here:
<http://www.legalservicesconsumerpanel.org.uk/ourwork/QualityAssurance.html>