

## ACTIVITY REPORT: JANUARY – MARCH 2011

### Overview

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The Panel and Legal Ombudsman published consumer research findings to inform the latter's consultation on publishing decisions. The research indicated consumer support for naming lawyers subject to three complaints where a remedy is involved; however, it also highlighted barriers to making a complaint – consumers fear they will be outsmarted by lawyers and suspect the profession will close ranks to protect its own. Unfortunately, the Legal Ombudsman decided to delay making a decision on naming lawyers for nine months whilst it tracks data – the Panel's widely covered media comment sharply criticised this decision.

The methodology for the Consumer Impact Report was finalised and the drafting stage started. As part of the evidence base, the Panel commissioned YouGov to carry out an annual tracker omnibus survey, which covers a range of issues including knowledge of lawyers, attitudes towards lawyers, choosing lawyers, satisfaction and complaints.

The Panel met once over this period. The meeting in January included guest appearances from the Chair of the Bar Standards Board and colleagues and the BIS official responsible for the consumer landscape review. The Panel also agreed the draft work programme for 2011-12 and the methodology for the Consumer Impact Report.

### Update on planned projects

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Project	Activity
Quality assurance	Completed in Q3
Consumer Impact Report	Methodology completed; drafting begun
Consumer engagement	January Panel meeting discussed the joint ARs' public network
Price comparison websites	Project postponed to allow for will writing investigation
Publishing ombudsman decisions	Findings of consumer research commissioned jointly with the Legal Ombudsman published
Work programme 2011-12	LSB endorsed draft work programme

## **Update on unplanned work**

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The major focus of unplanned work was in our role as a mandatory consultee on licensing authority applications and extensions to the scope of reserved activities. The Panel supported the CLC's application to become a licensing authority and to become an approved regulator for litigation and rights of audience. In addition, the Panel commented on the SRA's final consultation on its Draft Handbook in readiness for its licensing authority application.

The Panel was part of the project team which commissioned consumer and business research to inform the will writing investigation. The Consumer Panel Manager gave the keynote speech at the Institute of Professional Willwriter's annual conference.

In October, the Government announced that it was "minded to merge the Legal Services Consumer Panel with Citizens Advice, subject to an examination of the practicalities and details of such a move". However, in March the Government removed Schedule 7 (and so the LSB) from the Public Bodies Bill, which means new primary legislation would be required to effect such a move. The BIS consultation on the consumer landscape review, in which the Panel may still feature, has been delayed until after the referendum and local elections.

## **Future activity**

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The Panel will publish its first Consumer Impact Report – our initiative to measure progress on delivery of the legal services reforms from a consumer perspective.

The research phase of the will writing investigation will be completed; if delivered on schedule, this will enable us to provide advice to the LSB in early July.

The Panel will formally meet twice over the next period. In May, it will receive presentations on the LSB's rationalisation of regulation project and the LSB's research plans. In June, the Panel will hold a joint meeting with the Office for Legal Complaints in Birmingham.

The Panel will continue to press the Legal Ombudsman to identify lawyers involved in cases which lead to a remedy by responding to its next steps consultation.

The Panel will provide advice as a mandatory consultee on the SRA's application to become a licensing authority.

The Panel will publish its work programme for 2011-12 and its first annual report.

**Steve Brooker**  
**April 2011**