

ACTIVITY REPORT: APRIL – JUNE 2011

Overview

This period has seen the culmination of a series of projects and the start of new ones.

Most notably the Consumer Impact Report was published. This is a first-of-a-kind for consumer bodies, using a basket of indicators approach to measure the progress of the legal services reforms against the Panel's vision for the market. The Report found that consumers have benefited in many ways from the reforms, but the key area where we wish to see improvement is empowering consumers in their dealing with lawyers. A separate write-up of the Tracker Survey, prepared on our behalf by the LSB Research Associate, was also published.

The Panel met twice over this period. The meeting in May signed off the text of the Consumer Impact Report and the Annual Report and included discussions involving staff colleagues on the special bodies project, rationalising the scope of legal services regulation and research plans. The June meeting included a joint session with the OLC discussing various issues related to complaints and agreeing our policy position on regulating will-writing. Sadly, the Panel Chair announced her resignation in order to concentrate on other commitments.

As alluded to above, the Panel has agreed its policy stance on will-writing which it is sharing with the Board at its July meeting. This concludes an investigation based on a rich evidence base including a call for evidence, case studies, and research with consumers and providers. The Panel's advice will be published once the shadow shopping exercise is fully complete.

Update on planned projects

Project	Activity
Consumer Impact Report	Published 24 June
Annual Report	Published 29 June
Publishing decisions	Response submitted 29 June
Will-writing	Policy position agreed (awaiting completion of research)
Quality schemes	PID completed and stakeholder workshop organised
Small charities	Research tender issued

Update on unplanned work

The Panel is a mandatory consultee on licensing authority applications and commented on the Law Society's application during this period. We also issued a short welcoming response to the SRA's proposed Equality Framework and Engagement Strategy for 2011/12.

The Panel responded to the Legal Ombudsman's latest consultation on publishing decisions reiterating our support for identifying firms with more than three complaints where a remedy is awarded in a twelve month period. Also on the subject of complaints, the Panel wrote to the approved regulators to highlight our concerns at the findings of the LSB's first-tier complaints research, including the practice of charging for complaints.

BIS has finally published its consultation on the consumer landscape review. The preferred policy is to transfer as many sectoral advocacy bodies as possible into Citizens Advice, but leaving it to individual departments to decide. The Panel Chair received a letter from BIS following the removal of Schedule 7 from the Public Bodies Bill confirming that there were no plans to transfer the Panel into Citizens Advice or anywhere else.

Future activity

The Panel's advice on will-writing is due to be published in July.

Consultation activity will include engaging with the LSB's regulation discussion paper and the BIS consumer landscape review.

The groundwork will be laid for new projects, including commissioning research with small charities, developing the methodologies for the quality assurance and price comparison websites projects, and setting up the vulnerable consumers project where we are hoping to partner with the SRA and Action on Hearing Loss (formerly RNID).

Neil Wightman will represent the Panel on the reference group for the joint regulators' education and training review, which holds its first meeting in July.

Steve Brooker
June 2011