

ACTIVITY REPORT: APRIL – JUNE 2013

Overview

The Panel completed its advice on financial protection arrangements. Our report found that on most occasions these deliver redress against the key risks consumers face. A key recommendation was that a single scheme joining up professional indemnity insurance and compensation funds across the whole legal services market should be actively explored. Separately, we published a think-piece on the issue of how risk should be fairly shared between consumers and providers.

We published four briefing notes summarising the results of the 2013 Tracker Survey: on funding and usage of legal services; shopping around; satisfaction; and public confidence in the market. This approach helped to achieve a high external profile for the Panel this quarter, alongside reactive work on legal aid, will-writing and the LETR research report.

Our self-regulation initiative on comparison websites came to fruition. The SRA and CLC endorsed our 20 good practice standards and five websites have publicly stated they adhere to these.

The Panel met twice over this period. The meeting in May agreed the financial protection advice and signed off the annual report. The June meeting considered the Panel's role in the consumer landscape and on EU issues, reviewed the draft consumer principles paper and LSB research on behavioural economics, and discussed how best to manage the transition to new Panel members.

Update on planned projects

Project	Activity
Accreditation schemes	Due to start in Q3
Complaints	Field trip to Legal Ombudsman to examine third party complaints cases it has rejected due to scheme rules
Consumer Impact Report	Published 4 briefing notes on Tracker Survey plus raw data
Consumer principles	Draft report completed
Diversity	Learning disabilities research completed and promotion planned
Financial protection	Two reports published – see above
Litigants in person	Due to start in Q3
Self-help tools	Due to start in Q2
Trust event	Law Society withdrawn support due to need to focus resources on legal aid reforms. Article with Professions for Good planned.

Update on unplanned work

The Panel responded to the Ministry of Justice proposals to remove client choice of solicitor in criminal legal aid cases. Our submission attracted national as well as trade media interest and led to an appearance on BBC Daily Politics. We gave oral evidence to the Justice Select Committee.

We hosted the first Regulators' Forum meeting on the subject of sharing complaints data between the Legal Ombudsman and approved regulators. The Chair hosted a meeting bringing together the chairs of other consumer panels to discuss issues of mutual interest.

We met with Ministry of Justice officials to learn about their plans for the simplification exercise.

Our consultation responses in this period:

- CILEx application to become an approved regulator for probate and reserved instrument activities
- Ministry of Justice consultation on transforming legal aid

Elisabeth Davies posted blogs on Lord Chancellor's will-writing decision and DIY law. Neil Wightman blogged on the LETR report, which he described as a missed opportunity for consumers.

Meetings/attended events: Co-Operative Legal Services dinner, Legal Ombudsman annual report launch, Solicitors Regulation Authority, Ministry of Justice.

Future activity

We plan to make a detailed submission to the Ministry of Justice simplification review highlighting cost and complexity issues facing consumers. In addition, we expect to make a substantive response to the Legal Ombudsman's forthcoming consultation on a voluntary scheme.

As requested by the Board, we will begin a study to benchmark the Legal Ombudsman against comparable consumer redress schemes.

Our joint research with the LSB and Mencap on the legal needs and experiences of people with learning disabilities will be published.

Following an on-site trip to interrogate the Legal Ombudsman's case management system, we will write up case studies of third party complaints that the service was unable to accept under its scheme rules. This will inform the work of a steering group being established by LeO.

Steve Brooker
June 2013