

<b>To:</b>	Legal Services Board	
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	22 May 2014	<b>Item:</b> Paper (14) 33

<b>Title:</b>	Consumer Panel Annual Report
<b>Workstream(s):</b>	Corporate governance
<b>Presented by:</b>	Elisabeth Davies, Chair of the Consumer Panel chair@legalservicesconsumerpanel.org.uk
<b>Author:</b>	Harriet Gamper, Consumer Panel Associate Harriet.gamper@legalservicesconsumerpanel.org.uk / 020 7271 0076
<b>Status:</b>	Protected

<b>Summary:</b>
The Consumer Panel's Annual Report is attached at <b>Annex A</b> . The Board is asked to receive and comment on the report.

<b>Risks and mitigations</b>	
<b>Financial:</b>	N/A
<b>FoIA:</b>	Annex A – Section 22: information intended for future publication
<b>Legal:</b>	N/A
<b>Reputational:</b>	The Annual Report is the Panel's key accountability tool and allows stakeholders to assess its achievements, impact and value for money.
<b>Resource:</b>	N/A

Consultation	Yes	No	Who / why?
<b>Board Members:</b>		✓	
<b>Consumer Panel:</b>	✓		The Annual Report was agreed by the Consumer Panel following its meeting on 7 May.
<b>Others:</b>	None		

<b>Recommendation(s):</b>
The Board is invited to: a) discuss the Annual Report

## LEGAL SERVICES BOARD

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### Consumer Panel Annual Report

#### Recommendation

1. The Board is invited to:
  - a) discuss the Annual Report

#### Annual Report

2. The Panel's terms of reference include a commitment to producing an Annual Report. The attached document reports on the Panel's work between April 2013 and March 2014.
3. The Annual Report is an important document as it gives the Legal Services Board and our stakeholders, including legal services consumers, a record of our activities during the previous twelve months and allows them to hold us to account for this work. It is also a key means for us to demonstrate our impact and value for money.
4. In order to reinforce the Panel's outcomes, the report reflects the five high level themes in the Panel's flagship publication, the Consumer Impact Report. This is the same format that was used last year. It consists of:
  - A one page overview of the Panel
  - A foreword by the Panel Chair, drawing out key areas where our work has had a particularly important impact
  - The five key themes which the Panel uses in the Consumer Impact Report to measure the direction of change in the legal services market: responsive services, high quality advice, diversity, complaints, and consumers being placed at the heart of regulation
  - Each theme sets out brief findings from recent research (including the Panel's tracker survey), followed by the action the Panel has taken, and our impact
  - Our priorities for 2014-15, referring to our Work Programme, which we publish separately
  - Transparency – financial information, attendance record and activity summary
  - Annexes – a comprehensive list of our activities: reports, research, consultation responses, speeches and presentations, events hosted by the Panel, news releases, membership of ongoing committees and working groups, and stakeholder meetings.
5. The main impacts are listed below for ease of reference.

**Next steps**

6. The Consumer Panel plans to publish the Annual Report shortly after the meeting.

**Harriet Gamper – Consumer Panel Associate**

09.05.14

## Summary of our key activities/impacts in 2013-14

<b>Area</b>	<b>Impact</b>
<b>Open data</b>	The Panel has long championed the principles of transparency and access to data. In 2012 the LSB accepted our recommendation that the professional registers should be opened up, but progress from the regulators has been slow. In March we co-chaired a roundtable with the LSB and secured a commitment from the regulators to put a core set of basic, reusable data into the public domain. We will now turn to making sure this is put into practice.
<b>Client choice in legal aid</b>	We successfully influenced an MOJ proposal that would otherwise have denied people accused of a crime the right to choose their own lawyer. The Panel was interviewed on the BBC Daily Politics Show and gave evidence to the Justice Select Committee. The Lord Chancellor said the Panel was one of the voices which convinced him to restore client choice.
<b>Review of accreditation schemes</b>	At the LSB's request we revisited progress made by accreditation schemes, which we had first assessed in 2012. We found many improvements, some of which had been driven by our work in this area, and two schemes met nearly all of our criteria in full. However, overall there is still a long way for schemes to go.
<b>WIQs accreditation scheme</b>	Following concerns about the quality will-writing by solicitors highlighted by mystery shopping, the Law Society set up the Wills and Inheritance Quality Scheme (WIQs) as a best practice mark. The scheme launched in July 2013 and we assessed it as part of our review of accreditation schemes, mentioned above.
<b>Consumers with learning disabilities who need advice about the law</b>	The Panel, in collaboration with the LSB and Mencap, commissioned a study looking at the experiences of people with learning disabilities and their carers. As a result of our findings the Law Society has developed best practice guidance for solicitors and is also rolling out a programme of training as part of their regional equality and diversity forums. Each training session is attended by a Mencap young ambassador who can talk about their experiences.
<b>McKenzie Friends</b>	Last year, and continuing into this year, we have been looking at the implications of the rise in litigants in person. Our initial focus has been on fee-charging McKenzie Friends and we published a ground breaking report with recommendations in April.

<b>Benchmarking the Legal Ombudsman</b>	We carried out an independent study to benchmark the Legal Ombudsman against nine other consumer redress schemes. Our report was cited at the Justice Select Committee hearing for the appointment of the Chair of the Office for Legal Complaints. It has also helped to keep the focus on reducing the average cost per case.
<b>Financial protection arrangements</b>	Following our advice to the LSB on the adequacy of regulators' financial protection arrangements, we are now inputting to various consultations and reviews which the regulators (especially the SRA) are carrying out.
<b>Lay Chairs of regulatory boards</b>	In November we responded to an LSB consultation on requiring lay Chairs of regulatory boards, after which the LSB decided to require chairs of the regulatory boards to be a lay person. We also supported the related LSB proposal that regulatory rather than professional bodies should be responsible for various aspects of appointments and reappointments process.
<b>Consumer principles toolkit</b>	The Panel has consistently urged regulators to engage more with consumers in order to inform the policy making process. In January we published an innovative tool, based on seven principles commonly used by consumer organisations, to help regulators do this in a more structured way. We worked closely with the Council for Licensed Conveyancers to make sure the tool would be of genuine practical use, and we are now rolling out training with other regulators – sessions have already been held with SRA staff and the IPS Board.
<b>Legal Choices website</b>	The Legal Choices website went live in January. This is a collaborative initiative between all the regulators, drawing together information to help consumers choose a lawyer. The website is a commendable start to releasing information, and showcases how the regulators can work collaboratively. The idea was first conceived following a consumer engagement workshop the Panel held back in 2010 so we are pleased this has now come to fruition.