

Paper (12) 72 – Appendix 2

ACTIVITY REPORT: JULY – SEPTEMBER 2012

Overview

The Panel published its second Consumer Impact Report – our basket of indicators approach to measuring the progress of the legal services reforms. This identified signs that consumers are using their buying power a little more, but levels of trust have fallen and people increasingly do nothing if they receive poor service. There remains a wide, although narrowing, gap in experience of using legal services across the population. The report also pointed to a continuing lack of consumer engagement by the approved regulators, although the SRA has made some positive steps. The Panel has started a review of the Impact Report starting with stakeholder and colleague workshops.

Scoping work in anticipation of the LSB’s formal requests for advice – on choosing and using legal services; risk and financial protection regimes – has continued. Vanilla Research has won the tender to conduct qualitative research on the theme of consumers and risk. The Panel has also written to the SRA, BSB and IPS offering to facilitate research on immigration advice and services following the LSB’s consultation decision document. As part of this, we have undertaken a review of existing research on consumer experiences of the asylum-seeking process.

The Panel met once over this period. The meeting in September received a presentation of data relating to complaints and considered actions in response to the Triennial Review.

Update on planned projects

Project	Activity
Choosing and using legal services	Commissioning letter received in September
Financial protection	Focus group research commissioned on consumers and risk
Complaints	Joint research with Legal Ombudsman to be published 11 October
Consumer Impact Report	Consumer Impact Report 2 published. Review exercise started including workshops with stakeholders and colleagues
Diversity	Scoping note on asylum-seekers prepared; exploratory discussions started with stakeholders on mental health
Quality assurance	LSB accepted Panel recommendations on voluntary quality schemes. Response to final QASA consultation submitted

Non-commercial providers	Response to LSB consultation submitted
Will-writing	Welcomed LSB consultation decision document

Update on unplanned work

Prospective licensing authorities have consulted on their draft applications and associated work. The Panel is a mandatory consultee once proposals are submitted to the LSB, but we have engaged now to try to make the plans more consumer focused. Our consultation responses in this period:

- LSB consultation on the regulation of non-commercial providers
- ILEX consultation on risk-based regulation
- ICAEW draft licensing authority application
- IPReg review of regulatory arrangements and plans to licence ABS firms
- IPS consultation on continuing professional development
- JAG consultation on Quality Assurance Scheme for Advocates

Elisabeth Davies addressed a GMC conference bringing a legal services perspective on issues relating to regulators operating fairly. Steve Brooker spoke at the first ever conference of international legal regulators, organised by the SRA.

Future activity

Our joint research with the Legal Ombudsman on first-tier complaint handling will be published on 11 October. This will be accompanied by useful guides aimed at consumers and lawyers.

Letters from the LSB commissioning advice on the financial protection and choosing and using legal services projects were finalised in September so work on these projects can now properly begin. On choosing and using, we are preparing two background papers: the first will introduce the theme of consumer empowerment and summarise relevant research; the second will summarise initiatives in this area in other sectors. On financial protection, we expect to receive the qualitative research findings on consumers and risk in December, while we will also begin an information gathering exercise on current financial protection regimes.

In October, the Panel will publish its first quarterly e-newsletter aimed at stakeholders; this responds to stakeholder feedback seeking greater visibility of our work.

Elisabeth Davies will speak at the International Bar Association conference on the theme of consumers and trust. Paul Munden will speak at a Westminster Forum event on the theme of ABS.

Steve Brooker
October 2012