

Attitudes to comparison websites for legal services

8 June 2022

Our [Regulatory Objectives](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2007/29/part/1) [https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2007/29/part/1] give us a duty to increase access to justice and to protect and promote the interests of consumers. This is why better information for consumers is part of our current [Corporate Strategy](https://beta.sra.org.uk/sra/corporate-strategy/) [https://beta.sra.org.uk/sra/corporate-strategy/].

Part of this work involves giving potential clients the information they need to make proper decisions about their legal service needs. We have done this through our [transparency rules](https://beta.sra.org.uk/solicitors/resources-archived/transparency/transparency-price-service/) [https://beta.sra.org.uk/solicitors/resources-archived/transparency/transparency-price-service/] and will be further evaluating these during 2022, and reviewing their effectiveness.

However, showing consumers that solicitor firms are affordable options is providing only one piece of the puzzle. The key factor for many people when deciding which provider to use is the quality of the service they receive.

Since February 2021, we have been running a pilot on how to give consumers better information about the quality of legal services, working with law firms, comparison websites and other regulators.

As part of this work, we carried out research with 1,000 consumers to understand their decision-making process when looking for legal services, whether and how different firms are compared and how comparison websites can support this. We also collected views on and use of comparison websites for legal services from over solicitors via the Access Group's panel.

Key findings

Views of law firms

Our survey with 232 Access Panel members found that 44 per cent of participating law firms proactively ask clients to submit a review on a review website. because:

- Two thirds used them to attract new business
- Half used them to validate the quality of the services they provided

Around half of respondents said they routinely monitored review sites for comments about their firm. The main reason for this, cited by over three quarters of firms, was to look for ways they could improve. Examples of

changes made as a result of feedback included improved communication, client service and staff training.

The main reasons given by firms that do not ask clients to submit a review on a review website were as follows:

- They already had other feedback systems in place
- They had concerns about fake or misleading reviews
- They are concerned reviews will be based on outcome rather than quality
- They feared confidentiality issues would make it difficult for the firm to respond to client feedback if necessary

Just over half of respondents had concerns about managing online reviews and feedback, including the risk of inaccurate or fake reviews. The survey found very low levels of engagement with price comparison websites.

Respondents highlighted the difficulty of providing an accurate price for legal services at the outset of a case.

Views of consumers

Our survey with 1,000 members of YouGov's panel found that the vast majority, 88 per cent, said they generally used price comparison and review sites before buying something. Two thirds of these respondents said they used more than one site, and a half of them were inclined to leave their own reviews.

When asked specifically about legal services, 22 per cent said they had used a review website for legal services. Of those, more than three quarters found review websites helpful when looking for legal services. Fewer than 10 per cent of respondents had used a price comparison site for legal services, and again most found it helpful. The most common reason consumers gave for using a review or price comparison site was to check information they had been given by others.

A fifth of those surveyed asked a family member or friend for a recommendation, while another fifth would use a firm they'd used before.

The type of legal service needed influenced the way consumers initially looked for a provider. For example, the most common first action when looking for conveyancing, would be to contact a firm they had used before. For employment issues, the most common action is to contact their trade union or a professional body, and when it came to family law, searching online without outside help was the preferred option.

When it came to looking at law firm websites:

- One third of respondents only looked at one firm

- One quarter looked at two different firms
- One quarter looked in detail

Looking at more firms helped consumers understand the service they were buying and therefore the costs.

- More than a fifth (22 per cent) used online review sites for legal services
- 80 per cent of these found it useful
- 13 per cent were unaware that such services were available

The most common reason for using a site was to verify that which they'd been told by others.

Next steps

The insights we obtained from these surveys will inform our thinking about how to provide consumers with the information they need about the quality of legal services. The quality indicators pilot closed at the end of February and we are now moving into the evaluation phase. This will assess all the evidence we have gathered so far, along with the findings of further research, and consider possible next steps for us and the other regulators involved in the pilot. The findings and conclusions will be published in the second half of 2022.

Publications

[Consumer understanding and use of Digital Comparison Tools](#)

<https://beta.sra.org.uk/sra/research-publications/consumer-understanding-dct/>

[Law firms' views of customer review sites](#)

<https://beta.sra.org.uk/sra/research-publications/law-firm-access-panel/>