

Press release archive for 2023

Consumers and law firms find reviews helpful, but more to do to enable easier comparisons

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While the public finds customer reviews and comparison websites helpful in choosing a legal services provider, barriers remain to making factual information on services and performance more readily available.

These are among the [report findings from a year-long pilot](https://www.sra.org.uk/sra/research-publications/quality-indicators-legal-services-report/) [https://www.sra.org.uk/sra/research-publications/quality-indicators-legal-services-report/] run by the Solicitors Regulation Authority, Council for Licensed Conveyancers, and CILEx Regulation exploring the use of quality indicators and comparison websites within the legal market.

Bringing together a range of leading digital comparison providers with 70 law firms, the pilot sought to understand and test how the two could better work together to benefit both consumers and the firms.

To support this the project also saw more than 6,000 members of the public and 250 firms take part in surveys and focus groups.

Key findings include:

- Engagement with customer review websites is far higher among both the public and law firms than for sites comparing price or other factual information about legal services providers.
- Barriers to comparison sites being more widely used within the legal market include a lack of public awareness, the complex nature of legal services and the relatively limited range of data available on firms profiled.
- Nearly half of law firms (44%) encourage existing clients to post reviews to third party sites and the majority who do this see it as providing a positive business benefit.

In terms of prices, many firms felt that their own websites, where prices could be set in wider context with background information, was a more appropriate place to make such information accessible. Introduced in 2019, our Transparency Rules require all SRA-regulated law firms to publish key price and service information online for specified legal services.

Participating comparison websites signed up to a voluntary code of conduct and agreed to provide insights and feedback throughout the pilot period. With sites including Trustpilot, ReviewSolicitors and Law

Superstore reporting a significant increase in the number of reviews submitted, visits to their site and number of firms taking active ownership of their profile.

Paul Philip, Chief Executive of the SRA said: 'The public increasingly expect to find readily available and comparable information online to help inform their buying decisions.'

'Easy access to the sort of information that allows consumers to compare the quality of the legal services they are looking for benefits both consumers and firms.'

'Our pilot demonstrated that while progress is being made in this area, there is clearly still some way to go in both identifying the most useful indicators of quality and working more closely with those who can help share this data.'

Sheila Kumar, CLC Chief Executive, added: 'We are pleased to have worked with the SRA and CILEx Regulation on this year-long research into the use of quality indicators and comparison websites within the legal market. Our independent Consumer Reference Group will now consider and comment ahead of a review by our Council on the options to build on the very considerable improvement the CLC has already delivered in the availability of information to aid consumer choice of specialist conveyancers and probate lawyers since we introduced our Informed Choice rules in 2019.'

Robert Morris, CILEx Regulation Interim CEO, said: 'We are pleased to have worked with the SRA and CLC on this valuable opportunity to gain an in-depth understanding of the world of customer reviews and digital comparison websites. We would like to thank the review websites and pilot firms for so openly engaging with the pilot and enabling us to improve our understanding of the services provided by CRL regulated individuals and firms.'

'This work will feed into our planned evaluation this year of our transparency requirements. We will now build on the pilot findings to identify how law firms, comparison and review websites can continue to improve in this area.'

The pilot also considered what further indicators of quality may be useful in helping consumers make more informed decisions. Areas explored included data on complaints, errors in conveyancing transactions and employment case outcomes. However in all these areas challenges exist in identifying data that consumers can readily compare without wider context.

While the pilot has come to an end, the regulators have committed to continuing to work with law firms and comparison websites to explore

further ways to expand the use and awareness of quality indicators to help the public make informed decisions.