



Welcome to the fifth edition of Research Roundup, the Law Society's publication highlighting recent research on the legal services market, published by legal sector bodies, the Ministry of Justice, academics and others interested in the sector.

Much of the material we have reviewed since January concerns private individuals' use of legal services and ways of improving market access for consumers. On the supply side, the implications of the technology age for providers is the main theme.

Consumers and consumer markets



Following the joint Law Society and LSB [survey](#) reported in issue 3 of *Research RoundUp*, further evidence that the approaches to dealing with legal issues vary according to the type of problem experienced, and that certain disadvantaged groups are more likely to experience legal problems, is provided by the MoJ's [legal problem and resolution survey](#).

The vast majority (86%) of consumers with [family problems](#) in recent SRA research found a solicitor easily, with half (52%) relying on personal recommendations to make a choice. The issues reported related to accessing information about cost and the experience of individual solicitors. Strategies used by firms to assist decision making included using telephone screening systems, providing longer start-up meetings and providing free initial sessions. Almost two-thirds of consumers (64%) thought their solicitor's costs were affordable, and 84% were able to pay the costs themselves rather than relying on friends or family, although other sources of credit were used. Nearly three in five (58%) consumers rated the overall quality of the service they received as either good or excellent.

[Asylum](#) seekers are generally well served, according to a review by the SRA of 52 large and small practices dealing with more than 14,000 cases. Best practice is typified by strong client relationships, good understanding of individuals' situations and tailoring support and communications appropriately. Areas where practices couple improve included: lack of clarity on costs, over-reliance on process or pro-formas, using unsuitable interpreters, poor communication about what clients can expect and lack of experience in carrying out appeals leading to poorly constructed submissions.

Supporting consumer access to services

Building on the growing evidence that consumers access the market in different ways, the Legal Services Consumer Panel (LSCP) has reviewed approaches to [consumer segmentation](#) taken in other sectors. Using examples such as the Financial Conduct Authority's focus on capability and vulnerability, the report encourages regulators and providers to use proportionate and practicable segmentation approaches in order to identify significant detriment and tailor solutions.

The LSCP's review of approaches to encouraging consumers to shop around in comparable sectors, by regulators, service providers, trade and consumer bodies, finds limited understanding of the use and effectiveness of information remedies within the legal sector and sets criteria for success in [designing information remedies](#).

In [What do we know about Legal Empowerment? Mapping the Evidence](#), Goodwin and Maru analyse existing evidence on global legal empowerment interventions, such as legal literacy, community-based paralegals, and use of right to information laws, finding little evidence of the impacts of such initiatives. Stronger willingness to act and increased legal knowledge are the most common positive impacts reported, but less clear are the effects on policy at the national level and of community-based paralegals on development outcomes.

Education and training



The Bridge Group, commissioned by the SRA, concluded that the wider range of choice of training providers in the market, likely to be stimulated by the new Solicitors Qualifying Exam, would be both an opportunity to [support diversity](#), since it will enable students to chart more flexible pathways, as well as a risk where it could make the system harder to navigate. The report suggests a need for collaborative efforts on diversity and education to build trust and shared solutions.

Prof. John Flood examines some of the challenges for legal education, such as technology, that will impact on legal practice and the rule of law, including access to justice in a chapter in the [Research Handbook on the Rule of Law](#).

Providers of legal services



Data on [cybercrime](#) analysed by the SRA shows that £1 billion was lost to UK businesses from online crime in 2015-16, and 43% of all cyber-attacks were aimed at small businesses. £7m of client losses through cybercrime were reported to the SRA in the year to November 2016. Email hacks of conveyancing transactions are the most common cybercrime in the legal sector, and three-quarters of reported cybercrimes were some form of 'Friday afternoon' fraud in which criminals hack into email systems and modify emails.

In [Legal Research in the Age of Social Media](#), Endia Paige provides insight into how lawyers can use social media to conduct legal and investigative research, underlining the need to understand ethics rules surrounding social media practices for different jurisdictions.

[Diversity in the bar](#) remains an issue as women account for 36.5%, an increase of 0.6% since 2015, of the practising Bar and account for just 13.7% of QCs. Black Asian Minority Ethnic barristers are also underrepresented as QCs.

Research in the pipeline



SRA

- Research into career progression amongst female and Black and Asian minority ethnic (BAME) solicitors to understand what is being done, and what more could be done, to improve the representation of female and BAME solicitors in senior roles at law firms. Due spring 2017.
- Criminal practice research and thematic review teams to learn more about practices and standards of service in this area of law and gain perception of the judiciary in advocacy. Due summer 2017.
- Transparency of legal costs: Surveys and interviews exploring how consumers can better compare providers, particularly on costs, to drive competition in the market, leading to better quality and lower prices.

Bar Standards Board

- Change of status, to ascertain the reasons why barristers change status and or exit the profession based on a survey of all those changing status.
- Delivery Models Research: Focus groups, surveys and interviews to gain a clear understanding of the current and trending market characteristics for barristers' services, with a particular interest on the development of non-traditional delivery models. Due spring 2017.
- Consumer research: focus group discussions and interviews to identify barriers and risks for consumers in family law, with particular focus on legal knowledge, comparing the experience of public access and referred clients. Due spring 2017

Legal Services Board

- Vulnerable consumers' experiences of legal services: Research to understand the experiences of consumers, and those caring for them, with mental health problems and with dementia when accessing legal advice. Due May/June 2017.
- Alternative Business Structures and investment in legal services: Research to understand whether there are any regulatory barriers to investment in legal services. Due May 2017.
- Understanding Changes in Prices of Legal Services 2017: A repeat of a 2016 survey, collecting 1,500 prices across a range of scenarios. Due summer 2017