



Solicitors
Regulation
Authority

Consumer research study
Attitudes towards solicitors and legal services
June 2009

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Consumer research study

Who we are

The Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) is an independent body that regulates more than 100,000 solicitors in England and Wales – and the firms in which they work – operating as part of the Law Society but separate from the representative body.

Our purpose is to protect the public:

by ensuring that solicitors meet high standards; and

by acting when risks are identified

The solicitors' profession includes single-solicitor practices and huge firms with a global presence and thousands of lawyers. Solicitors also work in the justice system, in government and within companies. All solicitors follow the same professional principles and code of conduct. We provide advice to help them do so.

Our strategy is to set, promote and secure in the public interest standards of behaviour and professional performance necessary to ensure clients receive good service, and that the rule of law is upheld.

What we wanted to find out

In 2007 we commissioned a research study aimed at providing information on consumer attitudes toward the provision of legal services, and at profiling public awareness of our role as a regulator. In addition, the research explored consumer attitudes toward referral arrangements. You can view a summary of this project on our [website www.sra.org.uk/consumer-research](http://www.sra.org.uk/consumer-research).

18 months on we were interested in finding out how things had changed during that time and in other new issues, ranging from people's experiences of using legal services, through to how people find a solicitor when they need one, where they go for information, and what people really think about organisations such as supermarkets and banks starting to provide legal services.

We were also keen to explore the experiences of different demographic groups; in particular we decided to look closely at differences between the experiences of the general public in using legal services, and those of disabled people, and black and minority ethnic people.

A full list of the questions we asked can be found on pages 2 and 3 of the full research report, available from our [website www.sra.org.uk/consumer-research](http://www.sra.org.uk/consumer-research).

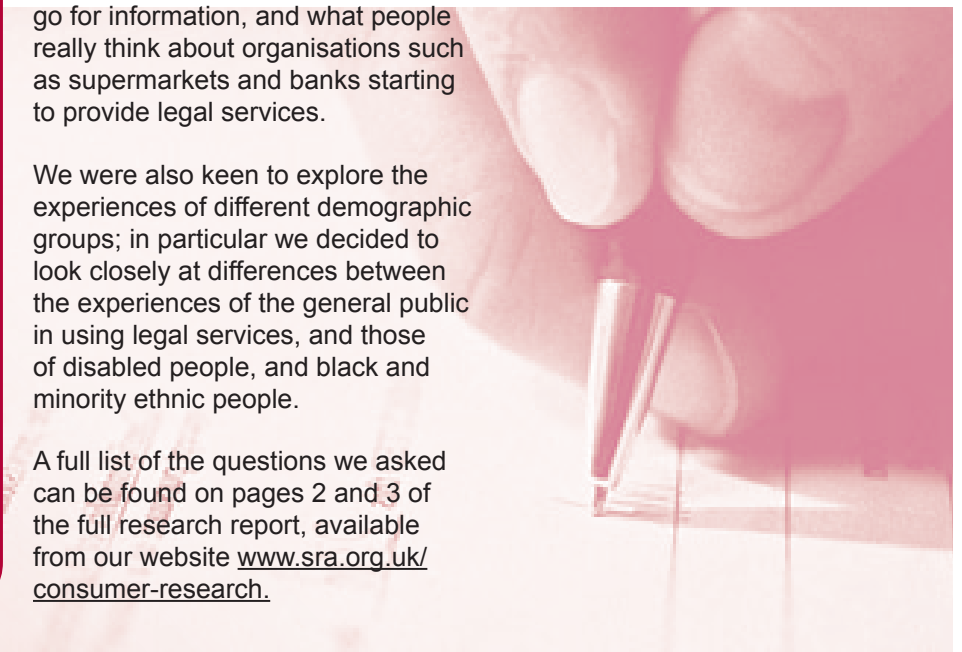
What we did

We appointed ComRes as our researcher, and between 5th and 21st December 2008 they carried out telephone interviews with:

1014 adults that were nationally representative of the adult population in England and Wales (by age, gender, region and social class);

508 black and minority ethnic adults; and

250 adults who classified themselves as being disabled.





What we are doing with the results

This summary document is being published alongside ComRes's full report. You can find these documents on our website - www.sra.org.uk/consumer-research. On Comres's website - www.comres.co.uk - you can find the information tables used in the study.

We are also publishing two short summaries specifically around the experiences of disabled people and black and minority ethnic people when accessing legal services. Again, you will find these on our website.

The results of the research study are being used as the basis to develop our work around supporting and protecting consumers - in particular toward achieving our strategic objective of providing information to help consumers make decisions about legal services, and understand the standards they should expect from their solicitor.

In particular, we will use the results to inform our work around how we communicate to our stakeholders, and strengthen our understanding of the information and support people require when accessing and using legal services.

Use of information

The methodology section of ComRes's full report sets out the circumstances for the use of the information found in our research study. The full report is available on our website.

The core sample used for the survey is nationally representative for England and Wales, and is representative demographically by age, gender, region and social grade. The sample was selected using quotas so that it is generally representative, and was then weighted so as to be exactly representative.



The key findings

Please note – this document is only a summary of key findings from our research. More detailed information on each of the key findings are available in ComRes's full report, available on our website www.sra.org.uk/consumer-research.

People's experiences

How many people use solicitors?

- 41% of the general public in England and Wales have used a solicitor in the past five years.
- **Changes since 2007** - this represents a slight decrease since our previous consumer survey in 2007, when 43% of those surveyed had used a solicitor in the past five years.
- The figure is lower for black and minority ethnic people, with just 28% having used a solicitor in the past five years; people at low subsistence levels such as manual workers and state pensioners are also much less likely to have had direct contact with solicitors recently.

How do people pay for their legal services?

- 19% of the general public use legal aid to pay for their legal services. This compares to 30% of disabled people, and 29% of black and minority ethnic people.

What legal services do people use most frequently?

- 21% of all those using a solicitor in the last five years did so in order to process property transactions. Wills and probate matters are used by 14% of the public, with the next most common being personal injury services (5%). The remaining services, in order of most frequently used, are matrimonial matters, employment claims, criminal defence, civil disputes, and asylum / immigration issues.
- Disabled people are more likely overall than the general population to have used a solicitor in the past five years. The exception is using legal services connected to property transactions, which disabled people are less likely than the general populations to have used.

Are people satisfied?

- 83% of the general public who have used a solicitor in the past five years are satisfied with their performance. Over a third felt their solicitor had been generally supportive, with similar numbers feeling satisfied with the speed at which their solicitor completed the work.
- Satisfaction rates are generally high across England and Wales, with people using legal services in Wales being the most highly satisfied clients. The region with the highest satisfaction rates in England is Yorkshire and the Humber, although rates across the country are generally high in all regions.
- 82% of black and minority ethnic people in England and Wales feel satisfied with the performance of their solicitor.
- Nearly a third (30%) of disabled people however feel dissatisfied in some way with the performance of their solicitor.





What do people do if they are not satisfied with their solicitor?

- The most common response of those who were not satisfied was to take no action; however, 26% firstly approached the solicitors firm to try and resolve the issue, and a further 18% approached a Citizens Advice Bureau for information. 15% sought information from the Solicitors Regulation Authority, 7% approached the Legal Complaints Service, and 7% contacted the Law Society.
- **Changes since 2007-** In 2007 we asked which organisations people would go to, and the most popular choice then was also Citizens Advice. 18% said they would approach the Law Society, 6% chose the Legal Complaints Service, and just 4% said they would approach the Solicitors Regulation Authority.

How important is cultural and language when using legal services?

- Nearly a third (31%) of black and minority ethnic people believe having a solicitor who can speak a language other than English is important.

- 52% of black and minority ethnic people place importance on their solicitor being able to understand cultural sensitivities, such as beliefs and values.

Experiences for disabled people

- 16% of disabled people have trouble accessing a solicitor's office, and a small proportion state that a solicitor has declined to represent them in the past five years – however the reasons given did not relate directly to their disability.
- The majority of disabled people state their solicitor communicated well with them.

See also – 'Experiences of disabled people using solicitors in England and Wales (June 2009)', available at www.sra.org.uk/consumer-research#download.

The Solicitors Regulation Authority

What happens when people contact the SRA?

- The vast majority of the general public have not contacted the SRA before; the small number that do are most likely to do so by telephone.





- 84% of the general public who do contact the SRA agree that they are responded to promptly, and 85% agree the SRA is polite and helpful.

Do people know who regulates solicitors in England and Wales?

- 51% of the general public answer ‘don’t know’ when asked who they think is responsible for regulating solicitors; a further 19% of the public believe it is the Government, with 9% choosing the SRA from a list of possible responses.

What do people think are the most important functions of the SRA?

- 50% of the public believe it ‘very important’ for the SRA to provide a helpline for solicitors to get advice on standards and on their conduct (as the SRA provides through the Ethics Helpline service).

Using a solicitor

Where do people turn when looking for a solicitor?

- 27% of the general public are still most likely to use a phone directory when looking for their solicitor, and 26% would instead search for one on the internet.

Do people research the background of their solicitor?

- 49% of the general public would

ask other people’s opinions about a particular solicitor before employing them.

- However, just over a third (36%) of the general public feel they would be unlikely to search out information on solicitor’s background, such as any regulatory decisions made against them, before employing them. The majority of these people say this is because they would only use a solicitor that was recommended to them, but a proportion says they would assume the solicitor to be reliable by virtue of how they perceive the profession generally, or because they know solicitors are regulated.

Are people well informed about using solicitors?

- The least well-informed people about solicitors are the young, people from low subsistence levels such as manual workers and state pensioners, and black and minority ethnic people. However, people in these groups are also more likely than the rest of the population to actively seek information on solicitors if they needed to.

Are people happy with the concept of buying their legal services from places like banks or supermarkets?

- On the whole the public is currently open-minded about organisations like banks and supermarkets providing legal services – 68% of people agree they might use a

supermarket to buy basic legal services (such as standard legal documents), although 69% felt they would have some level of concern about the quality of legal services provided by such organisations.

- A significant majority of people would prefer to be able to use somewhere like a bank or a supermarket for accessing their legal services, particularly young people, black and minority ethnic people, and people from lower subsistence levels such as manual workers and state pensioners.
- People who have not used a solicitor recently are much less likely to have an opinion on alternative providers of legal services, than those who have used a solicitor recently.

More information

You can find ComRes’s full report on our website - www.sra.org.uk/consumer-research.

alongside our previous research study from 2007.

If you would like any further information on the findings of our research study, please get in touch:

By email: richard.silver@sra.org.uk

By telephone: 01926 439749