

Solicitors
Regulation
Authority

Consumer research study 2008

A survey of public attitudes towards solicitors
conducted on behalf of the Solicitors Regulation Authority

February 2009

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Methodology

ComRes interviewed 1,553 adults in England and Wales between 5th and 21st December 2008.

The sample is split into three sections:

- a nationally representative sample of 1014 adults;
- a booster sample of ethnic minorities of 508 adults;
- a booster sample of 250 disabled adults (self-classified).

The data for the main sample of the public have been weighted to be nationally representative, whereas the two booster samples - among people in ethnic minorities and disabled people – are unweighted. There is some overlap whereby some members of each booster sample also make up part of the nationally representative sample.

The core sample is nationally representative for England and Wales; this means that the sample is representative demographically (by age, gender, region and social class) of all adults in England and Wales. The sample is selected using quotas so that it is generally representative and then it is weighted so as to be exactly representative.

The booster samples were identified by asking filter questions to identify people in ethnic minorities and people with disabilities. For ethnicity, the question was *“What is your ethnic background?”*: the disability question was *“Do you consider yourself to be disabled in any way?”*.

The table below details how each social grade is defined.

Social grade	Social status	Occupation
A	upper middle class	higher managerial, administrative or professional
B	middle class	intermediate managerial, administrative or professional
C1	lower middle class	supervisory or clerical, junior managerial, administrative or professional
C2	skilled working class	skilled manual workers
D	working class	semi and unskilled manual workers
E	those at lowest level of subsistence	state pensioners or widows (no other earner), casual or lowest grade workers

In the analysis of a number of questions, we calculate mean scores to aid analysis. In such cases, individual answers are assigned scores and an average score is then calculated for that group's answer to that question.

For example, if the question were "do you agree that the earth is flat?", a score of 1 would be assigned to the answer 'agree' and a score of -1 to the answer disagree. If all 1000 participants answer 'disagree', the mean score would equal -1; however, if half answer 'agree' and half answer 'disagree', the mean score would be 0.

Mean scores aid analysis of questions where there are multiple statements, and allow more effective comparison. They also elucidate the strength of opinion at the extreme ends of opinion scales – such as where the options vary from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'.



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ComRes is a member of the British Polling Council and abides by its rules (www.britishpollingcouncil.org). This commits us to the highest standards of transparency.

The BPC's rules state that all data and research findings made on the basis of surveys conducted by member organisations that enter the public domain, must include reference to the following:

- the company conducting the research (ComRes)
- the client commissioning the survey
- dates of interviewing
- method of obtaining the interviews (e.g. in-person, post, telephone, internet)
- the universe effectively represented (all adults, voters etc)
- the percentages upon which conclusions are based
- size of the sample and geographic coverage.

Executive summary

The questions cover a broad range of issues; from people's experiences of solicitors in general and the SRA specifically, to how people would find a solicitor if they needed one, and whether they believe other bodies – rather than just solicitor's firms – could provide legal services.

The SRA are keen to explore the experiences of different demographic groups; as such, particular attention is paid to differences between the nationally representative sample, and the two boosters (of people in ethnic minorities and people with disabilities), as well as distinctions within the main sample – between people from different regions, age groups, social grades and between genders.

Part 1: Your experience

- 41% of the general public have used a solicitor in the past 5 years, most commonly for property transactions and for formulating wills/probates.
- By contrast, just 28% of people in ethnic minorities have used a solicitor in the past 5 years; those in lower social grades are also much less likely to have had direct contact with solicitors recently.
- 83% of the general public who have used a solicitor in the past 5 years are satisfied with their performance; nearly a third (30%) of people with disabilities however were dissatisfied.
- Of those among the general public who were dissatisfied, the most common response was to take no action. For those who did complain, the Citizens Advice Bureau was the most common organisation to which people turned.
- Nearly a third (31%) of people of people in ethnic minorities believe having a solicitor who speaks their own language is important, however, 81% do not believe it is important for the solicitor to be the same ethnicity. Understanding cultural sensitivities is important to the majority of people in ethnic minorities (52%).
- 16% of people with disabilities have had trouble accessing a solicitor's office, and the vast majority felt they had been communicated to well. A small proportion of people with disabilities have been turned down by a solicitor in the past 5 years, none for reasons relating to their disability.

Part 2: The Solicitors Regulation Authority

- The vast majority of the public have not contacted the SRA before (84%); those who have are most likely to have done so by telephone.
- The vast majority of the general public who have contacted the SRA before are full of praise for the organisation; 84% agree that they responded promptly and 85% agree they were polite and helpful.
- More than half (51%) of the general public answer 'don't know' to the question of who is responsible for regulating solicitors. 19% of the public believe it is the Government, and just 9% identify the SRA from the list of responses given.
- The function the public are least likely to think is important for the SRA to perform is the one aimed at solicitors. Even this helpline for solicitors is seen as important however, and is seen as very important by half (50%) of the public.

Part 3: Using a solicitor

- If the general public were to look for a solicitor, they say they are most likely to use a telephone directory (27%), or internet search (26%), the family solicitor (26%), or ask for a recommendation (25%).
- 36% of the general public say they would be unlikely to search for information on a solicitor's background before employing them. The majority of these people believe this is because they would only use a recommended solicitor, but a sizeable proportion would simply assume the solicitor was reliable.
- In our analysis, we found a clear trend whereby the least well-informed about solicitors – the young, those in lower social grades and people in ethnic minorities – are, encouragingly, more likely to seek out information on solicitors. They are also more open to a wider range of sources for their legal advice, being more likely to turn to supermarkets or banks for their legal advice.
- However, the tendency among these groups to be more inquisitive about solicitors is not related to whether they had used a solicitor or not in the past 5 years. Indeed, those who had not are less likely to use sources of information than those who have used a solicitor.

These results provide an indication of which groups are less exposed to – and as a consequence informed about – solicitors and the work they do, and the impact this has on their views regarding solicitors in general. The conclusion to this report sets out ways in which these results might inform the development of the SRA's communications strategy.

Introduction

The Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) is the independent regulator of more than 100,000 solicitors in England and Wales. Its primary purpose is to protect consumers by ensuring that solicitors meet high standards of conduct, and that appropriate action is taken where risks are identified.

It regulates in the public interest, and as such seeks to engage with the public to understand the concerns and experiences of people using legal services.

In order to understand how to best achieve this and improve confidence for people in using legal services, it commissioned targeted qualitative and quantitative research in August 2007. In addition to providing information on consumer attitudes around the provision of legal services and to the SRA as a regulator, the research was designed to explore consumer attitudes and views about referral arrangements. The research took the form of an omnibus survey of almost 1,000 adults in England and Wales, and a series of focus groups.

Eighteen months on, it decided to conduct a follow-up research project, to act as a benchmark for some of the findings of the 2007 research study; however the follow-up project also introduced additional questions designed to explore further into the public's experiences when using solicitors. This project is more detailed and extensive than the research in 2007, and drills down into how different groups of the public perceive solicitors and the key issues facing them.

This report examines those results in some detail. Each question is analysed across the three different samples (general public, people in ethnic minorities and people with disabilities), and further trends are identified where present across other demographic factors.

ComRes is delighted to work with the SRA on this project, and if you have any questions regarding areas of the report, the data or the analysis, please contact Tom Black at tom@comres.co.uk or on 0207 340 9634.

Part 1: Your experience

Q1. This question is designed to identify the proportions of people within the different groups who have used a solicitor's services in the last five years, and disaggregate them into different groups – based on the service used.

- **Buying and selling property most common service among general public**
- **Most haven't used a solicitor in the last 5 years**
- **People in ethnic minorities *significantly* less likely to have used a solicitor**
- **Significant differences between services used by people with disabilities and people in ethnic minorities**

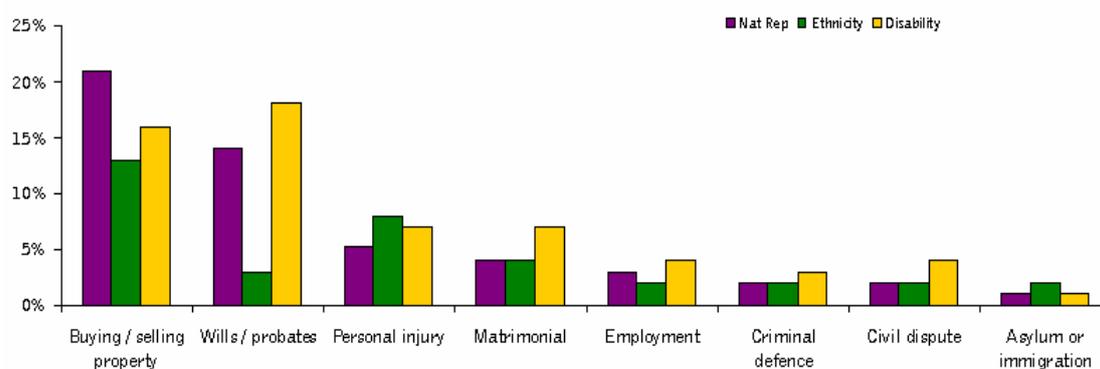


Fig 1i: Services used in the last 5 years.

Base: All respondents (Nat Rep 1014, Ethnicity 508, Disability 250)

This chart illustrates the services used by each of the respective groups, and there are notable differences in the respective proportions of each group using each service.

With the main sample of nationally representative adults in England and Wales, buying and selling property is the most common, with more than a fifth (21%) stating they have used this service. This is followed by wills and probates (unsurprisingly more common among older people) with 14% and personal injury on 5%.

The relatively low scores among ethnic minorities for buying and selling property (13%), and especially wills/probates (3%), indicate the importance of highlighting the availability and importance of these services to people in ethnic minorities.

For people with disabilities, the most commonly used service is wills and probates, whereas this is the fourth most commonly used service for people in ethnic minorities. These differences in the commonality of services are notable, as they likely reflect the different needs of each group. The fact that the general population is

nearly five times more likely than people in ethnic minorities to have used a solicitor for wills / probates in the last 5 years (14% to 3%) is of particular note.

People with disabilities are more likely than the general population to have used a solicitor in the last 5 years for all of these services, except buying or selling property. This is particularly true for wills / probates (14% for the general public versus 18% for people with disabilities), but also for employment claims (4% of people with disabilities versus 3% of the general public).

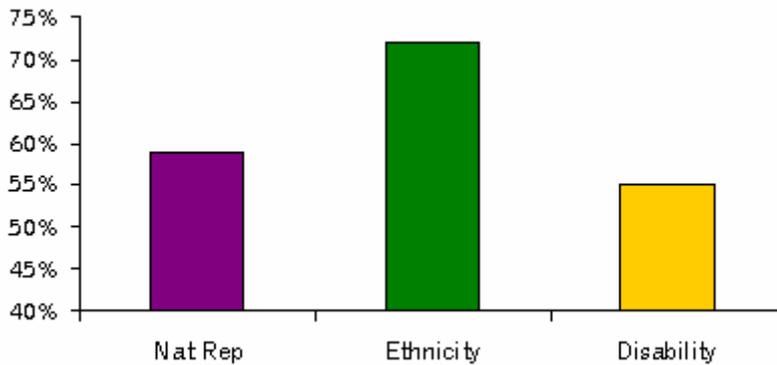


Fig 1ii: Proportion who haven't used a solicitor in last 5 years.
Base: All respondents (Nat Rep 1014, Ethnicity 508, Disability 250)

This chart illustrates the proportions from each sample who have not used a solicitor in the past 5 years, and delivers quite stark results. People with disabilities are least likely to have not used a solicitor in the past 5 years, scoring just 55% compared to 59% of the general public.

However, the most notable figure, is that nearly three quarters (72%) of people in ethnic minorities have not used a solicitor in the past 5 years, making them much less likely than the general public or people with disabilities.

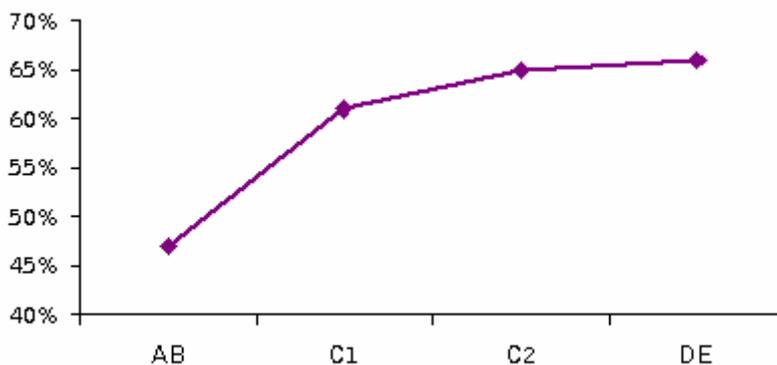


Fig 1iii: Proportion who haven't used a solicitor in last 5 years.
Base: Nat rep sample (1014)

There are other groups that are also highly likely not to have used a solicitor in the past 5 years. The graph above shows the proportions of the general public who have not used a solicitor in the past 5 years by social group, and perhaps unsurprisingly, a

trend emerges. Those in the highest two social groups (A and B) are actually more likely to have used a solicitor in the past 5 years (with only 47% answering that they have not). This compares to the two thirds (66%) of those in social groups D and E who have not, indicating a distinct trend by social grade.

There are also interesting regional trends on this measure, with those in the North-East far more likely not to have used a solicitor in the past 5 years than those in the South East (68% to 47% respectively).

Q2. This question is designed to determine what proportion of those people who have used a solicitor in the past 5 years, utilised legal aid to pay for that service.

- **Most of the public paid for their solicitor privately**
- **Proportions for legal aid are higher among people with disabilities and those in ethnic minorities**

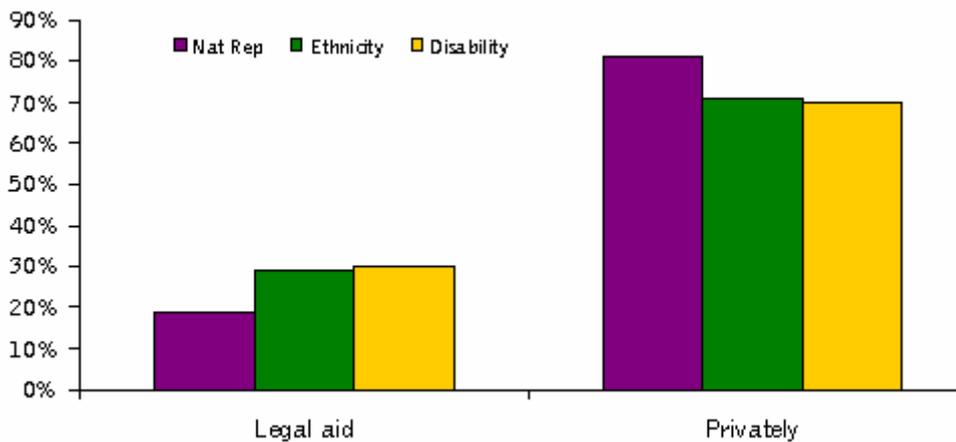


Fig 2i: Services used in the last 5 years.

Base: All people who have used a solicitor in the past 5 years (Nat Rep 412, Ethnicity 140, Disability 113)

The chart above illustrates the relative proportions of each sample that used legal aid and those that paid privately; the figures for both people in ethnic minorities and people with disabilities are notably higher than for the general public. 29% of people in ethnic minorities and 30% of people with disabilities used legal aid, compared to 19% of the general public, a marked difference.

There is something of a trend by age, where the young are more likely to have paid privately than the old, but there is no discernible trend by social grade. Counterintuitively, those in social grades D and E are almost exactly as likely as those in A & B to have used legal aid (both 22%).

Q3. This question is designed to assess how satisfied people who have used a solicitor in the past 5 years are with the service they received.

- **Satisfaction levels are extremely high**
- **Under a fifth are dissatisfied, but this figure is higher for people with disabilities**
- **Significant regional variation in satisfaction rates**

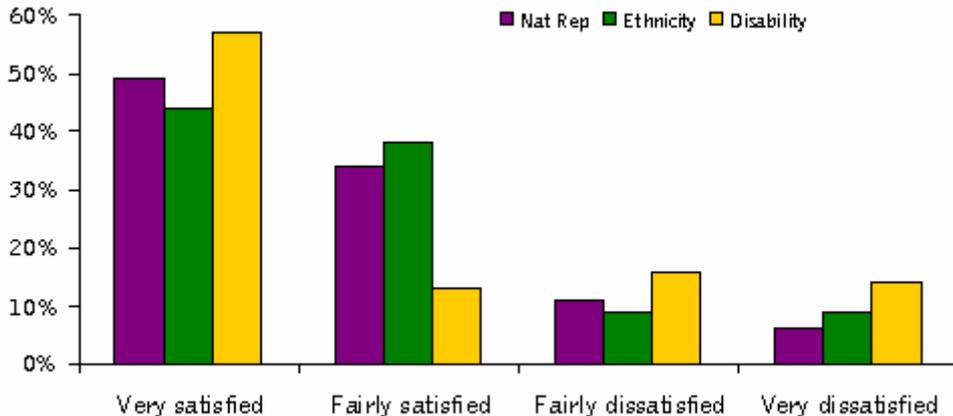


Fig 3i: Satisfaction with service.

Base: All people who have used a solicitor in the past 5 years (Nat Rep 412, Ethnicity 140, Disability 113)

Overall, levels of satisfaction are high. For the general public, 83% are either fairly or very satisfied with the service provided to them, and people in ethnic minorities are similarly satisfied, with 82% very or fairly satisfied. People with disabilities are slightly less satisfied, with nearly a third of those who have used a solicitor in the past 5 years (30%) answering fairly or very dissatisfied. They also return the largest proportion of 'very dissatisfied' answers (14%).

Of particular interest are the variations between different regions of England and Wales across the nationally representative sample. In order to elucidate these, we assigned scores to each response (very satisfied= 2, fairly satisfied= 1; Fairly dissatisfied -1; very dissatisfied -2), and calculated a mean score for each region overall – illustrated in the table overleaf.

North West	0.80
London	0.86
East Midlands	0.93
South East	1.05
North East	1.11
East of England	1.15
West Midlands	1.17
South West	1.27
Yorkshire and the Humber	1.46
Wales	1.62
National Average	1.09

Fig 3ii: Satisfaction with service.

Base: General public who have used a solicitor in the past 5 years (Nat Rep 412)

Certain regions returned relatively low mean scores, albeit still positive ones (indicating overall people were likely to be satisfied). London scores 0.86, and the North West scores 0.80. Other regions score much higher, such as Wales on 1.62 and Yorkshire and the Humber on 1.46, indicating there is a very wide spread of satisfaction across England and Wales. The table above lists all the regions with their respective mean scores in descending order.

Q4. This question is designed to identify what each solicitor did well among those who answered either fairly or very satisfied to the previous question. The question is an open one, and as such, answers are placed into agreed codes.

- **General public most likely to see their solicitor as generally supportive**
- **People with disabilities much more likely to cite clear communications**

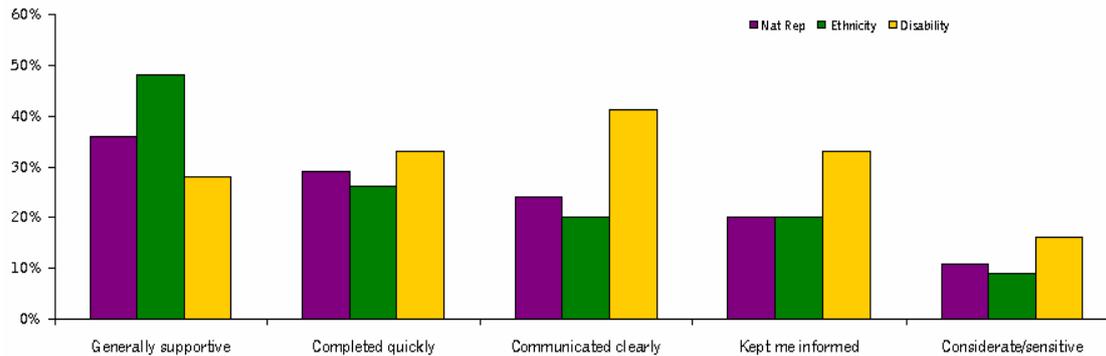


Fig 4i: What the solicitor did well?

Base: All people who are satisfied with their solicitor (Nat Rep 343, Ethnicity 140, Disability 113)

The chart above shows the relative proportions of those who were satisfied with their solicitor. For the general public and people in ethnic minorities, solicitors are most likely to be described as generally supportive (36% and 48% respectively), followed by 'got the work completed quickly' (29% and 26% respectively). Indeed, the ranking order of these positive comments is the same for the general public as for people in ethnic minorities, although the relative proportions differ.

For people with disabilities however, the rank order is quite different. The statement concerning clear communications scores the highest, with 41% (much higher than for either the general public or people in ethnic minorities). However, the score for generally supportive is 28%, noticeably lower than the other groups.

These results indicate that, on a communications level, solicitors are performing well for clients with disabilities. However, the fact that the score for 'generally supportive' is lower than for the population as a whole indicates that solicitors are perhaps unaware of the level of support people with disabilities would prefer, and that more could be done in this area.

Q5. This question is designed to identify what each solicitor did poorly among those who answered either fairly or very dissatisfied to question three. The question is an open one, and as such, answers are placed into agreed codes.

- **Time taken is the most often cited problem among the dissatisfied**
- **Lack of communication also noted by a significant minority**

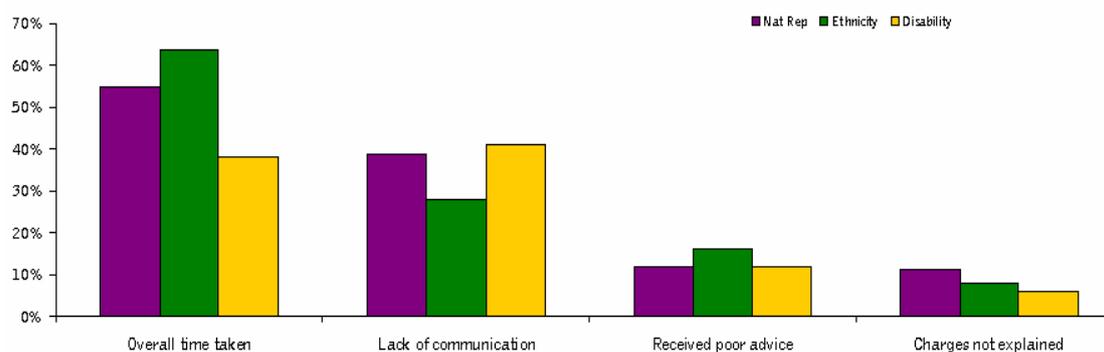


Fig 5i: What the solicitor did poorly.

Base: All people who are dissatisfied with their solicitor (Nat Rep 70, Ethnicity 25, Disability 34)

The chart above shows which are the most common complaints of the four listed, across each of the three groups. For the general public, the two most common complaints are with the overall time taken (55%) and a lack of communication (40%). There is then a significant drop off to the next two areas. Although the same two complaints are the most common for people with disabilities, there is a change in the order, with the lack of communication more common (41%) than the overall time taken (38%).

It is very encouraging to see the relatively low scores that the statements concerning both legal jargon and poor advice receive across all three groups: legal jargon scored 4%, 0% and 3% among the general public, people in ethnic minorities and people with disabilities respectively; poor advice scores 12%, 16% and 12% among these groups respectively. The figures for each of these statements should be viewed in the context of the results for question three, which illustrated that the majority of people in all three groups were satisfied with the service their solicitor gave them.

These results indicate that the nationally representative sample are more worried about expediency than other factors; this could perhaps be a useful message for the SRA to communicate to its stakeholders. With this question and later questions, given the number of filter questions the respondents have passed through, the sample size is relatively small. As such, the results are indicative rather than definitive, and the relative ranking is more significant than the overall percentages.

A small number of participants gave answers that fell into the category of 'other', most of which relate to a poor experience or an unsatisfactory outcome to the case.

One response was somewhat more esoteric, referring to the client taking a holiday shortly before a court appearance was due.

Q6. This question is designed to identify which groups those individuals who were dissatisfied with the service they received from their solicitor, complained to.

- **Most common reaction is to take no action**
- **Most popular organisations to complain to are the solicitor themselves, or the CAB**

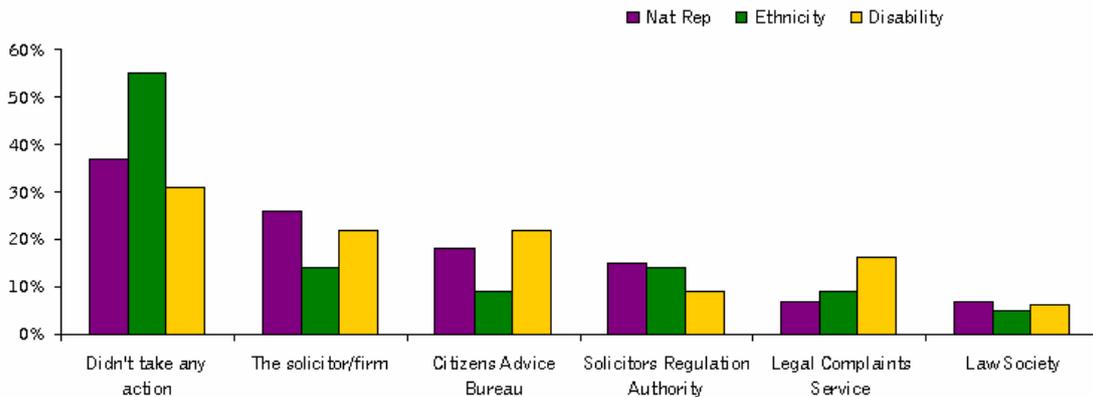


Fig 6i: Which groups did you complain to?
Base: All people who are dissatisfied with their solicitor (Nat Rep 70, Ethnicity 25, Disability 34)

The most common reaction across all three groups to feeling dissatisfied with the service the solicitor provided is, interestingly, not to take any action. 37% of the general public, a huge 55% of people in ethnic minorities and 31% of people with disabilities did not complain to anyone despite their discontent.

The most common group to complain to for those who did complain, is the solicitor or firm; more than a quarter (26%) of the general public who were dissatisfied complained to this group, with the Citizens Advice Bureau next on 18%. The SRA, Legal Complaints Service and The Law Society are next, on 15%, 7% and 7% respectively.

With this question and question seven, given the number of filter questions the respondents have passed through, the sample size is relatively small. As such, the results are indicative rather than definitive, and the relative ranking is more significant than the overall percentages.

Q7. This question is designed to identify the most common outcomes of complaints made by people dissatisfied with the service they received.

- **Most likely that the organisation they complained to resolved the complaint**
- **However, complaints from a significant minority are not resolved (higher proportion among people with disabilities)**

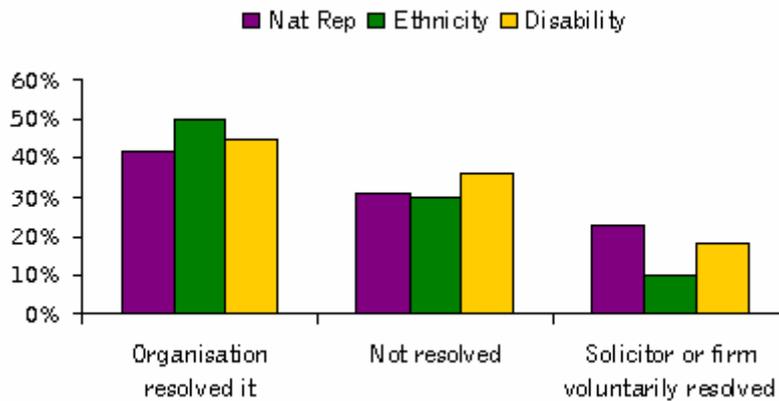


Fig 7i: What was the outcome of your complaint?

Base: All people who are dissatisfied with their solicitor (Nat Rep 70, Ethnicity 25, Disability 34)

The most common outcome for all three groups was that the organisation to whom the person complained resolved the matter. This was the case for 42% of the general public, 50% of people in ethnic minorities and 45% of people with disabilities.

However, around a third of each group did not have their complaint resolved; 31% of the general public, 30% of people in ethnic minorities and 36% of people with disabilities. This is a significant result, as it is much better for an individual to feel aggrieved at the result of their complaint than the process through which they attempted to resolve it. For nearly a third of those who complain to have their complaint left 'in limbo', leaves a large minority aggrieved at both the process and the outcome.

Q8. This question is designed to determine how likely those people who have used a solicitor in the past 5 years would use the same solicitor again.

- **Most people are very likely to use the same solicitor again**
- **Very unlikely proportions are similar across demographic splits**

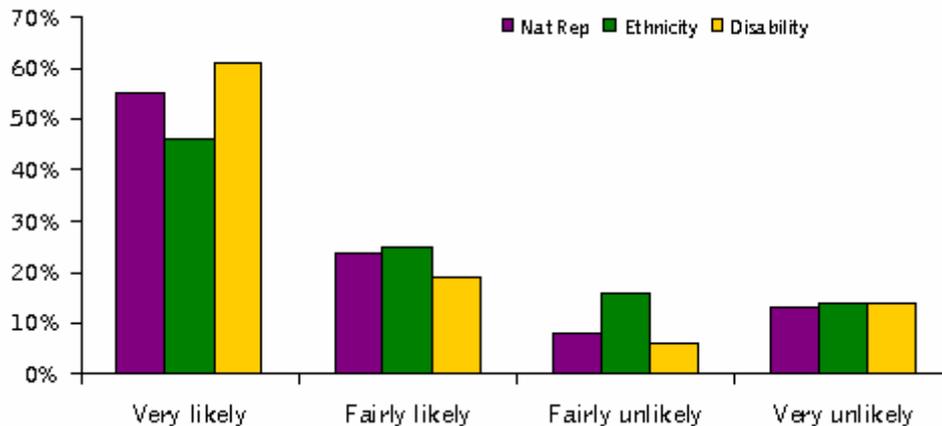


Fig 8i: How likely is it you would use the same solicitor again?
Base: All people who have used a solicitor in the past 5 years (Nat Rep 412, Ethnicity 140, Disability 113)

Overall, people who have used a solicitor in the past 5 years are highly likely to use the same solicitor again; indeed, the figures here are very closely related to the figures for question three, which asks how satisfied people were with the solicitor they used. This may well be a useful result for the SRA to communicate to its stakeholders, particularly in relation to potential repeat business.

For the general public, a huge 55% are very likely to use the same solicitor, with a further 24% fairly likely (a combined total of 79% likely). For people with disabilities, the proportions are just as impressive, with 61% very likely and 19% fairly likely (combined total 80% likely). Once again, people with disabilities are most likely to be very satisfied with their solicitor.

A greater proportion of people in ethnic minorities are unlikely to use the same solicitor than with the other two groups; nearly a third (30%) are either fairly or very unlikely to use the same solicitor again. This is notable, as the satisfaction rates (question 3) for people in ethnic minorities are very similar to the population as a whole.

As with question 3, we assigned scores to each response (very likely= 2, fairly likely= 1; Fairly unlikely -1; very unlikely -2), and calculated a mean score for each region overall. Intriguingly, those in the lowest social grade are more likely to use the same solicitor than those in the highest social grades; those in grades D and E scored 1.10, compared to 0.82 for grades A and B.

Part 1a: Disability booster only

i) This question is designed to assess the prevalence of barriers to people with disabilities using solicitors. The chart below illustrates the mean scores assigned to each statement.

As with previous questions, scores were assigned to each answer (strongly agree= 2, agree= 1, disagree= -1, strongly disagree= -2) and mean scores were calculated for each statement to aid analysis.

- **Nearly a third agree they were charged for adjustments due to their disability**
- **But big majorities agree that communications was clear and no problem physically accessing the solicitor's offices**

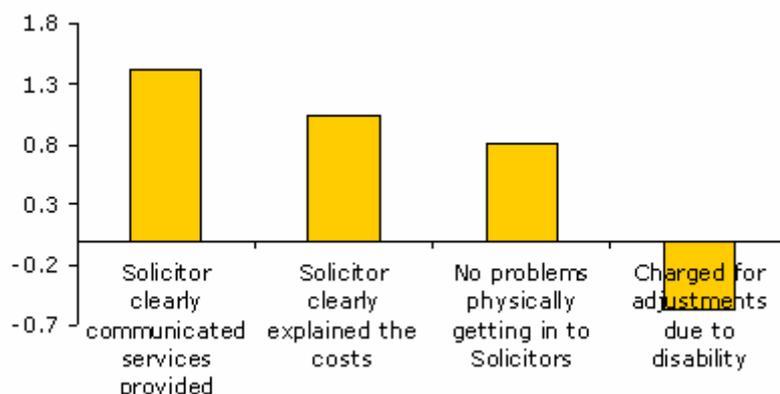


Fig 8d: Disability booster levels of agreement

Base: People with disabilities who have used a solicitor in the last 5 years (113)

Encouragingly, the three positive statements receive positive mean scores (indicating that there is a greater weight of agreement than disagreement), whereas the negative statement receives a negative mean score (indicating that there is more disagreement with this statement than agreement).

People with disabilities very much agree that their solicitor communicated with them such that they clearly understood the services provided; 94% agree or agree strongly with this statement, whereas just 6% disagree. People with disabilities were also very likely to agree that their solicitor clearly explained the costs, with 84% net agreement, compared to just 16% net disagreement.

Although the level of net agreement for the statement regarding physical access to the solicitor's offices is lower (at 70%), 16% disagreed with the statement, as a result of the 14% who answer not applicable. This indicates that the vast majority of solicitors' offices present no access problems for people with disabilities.

On first glance, it is also encouraging that 68% disagree with the statement that they were charged by their solicitor for adjustments made on account of the respondent's disability. However, nearly a third (32%) agree with this statement, with the proportion that agrees strongly outweighing the proportion who simply agree (17% to 15% respectively). This indicates that there is a sizeable proportion of people with disabilities for whom this is a key issue.

ii) Has a solicitor ever declined to represent you? What reason did the solicitor give for this?

Just 11 of the disability booster answered yes to this question, which is 10% of the number of disabled people who have used a solicitor in the past 5 years. Moreover, the reasons given made no reference to the person being turned down on the grounds of their disability; the list of reasons is copied below.

Divorce

Wanted more money

Did not give a reason

He felt he was unsuitable

I can't remember

Insufficient evidence/ said that he just dealt with a similar case and failed

Just declined

None

None

Personal issues

Rather not discuss

Solicitor from insurance and said I did not have a good enough pay, they just said it was not a good enough case.

There is an extremely encouraging aspect to this list; namely that it could quite easily be from the nationally representative sample. Perhaps counter-intuitively, this list of negative comments is primarily good news for the SRA in this regard.

Part 1b: Ethnicity booster only

a) This question is designed to examine in more detail the experience of those people in ethnic minorities who have used a solicitor in the past 5 years.

As with previous questions, scores were assigned to each answer (strongly agree= 2, agree= 1, disagree= -1, strongly disagree= -2) and mean scores were calculated for each statement to aid analysis.

- **Vast majorities agree communication was clear and costs were explained well**
- **Opinion split on whether a native language speaking solicitor was needed**
- **Those who used legal aid have differing opinions on key issues**

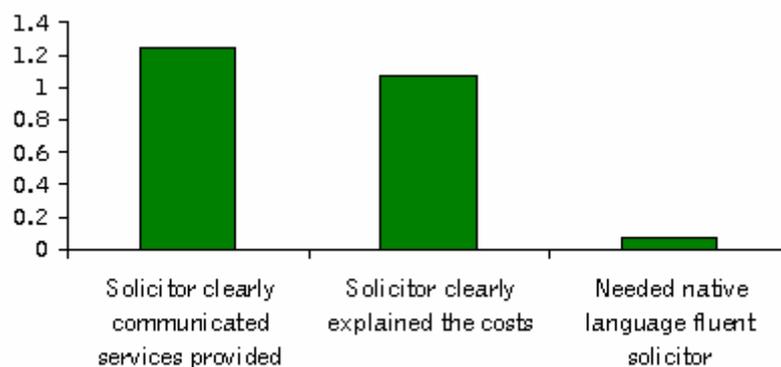


Fig 8ei: Ethnicity booster levels of agreement.

Base: People in ethnic minorities who have used a solicitor in the last 5 years (140)

There is agreement among people in ethnic minorities on all three of these statements, and for the first two statements, there are quite similar levels of net agreement and disagreement. A huge 93% agree that their solicitor communicated with them such that they could understand the services provided, producing a mean score of 1.24. The mean score is nearer agree (which is assigned a score of 1) than agree strongly (assigned a score of 2), because the majority agree rather than agreeing strongly; this is still a very high score however.

Likewise, 86% agree that their costs were clearly explained to them (mean score 1.08), which indicates that people in ethnic minorities agree that the solicitors communicated with them clearly, both on service details and costs.

The statement on requiring a solicitor who speaks a particular language produces interesting results, with a mean score of 0.07 – indicating the balance of opinions expressed. Nearly a third agree with this statement, with 16% agreeing strongly and 16% agreeing, indicating that this is an issue that is clearly important to a large minority of people in ethnic minorities. 33% overall disagree with this statement, but just 7% disagree strongly, with 26% simply disagreeing.

With this question, we also compare opinions among those people in ethnic minorities who used legal aid, and those who paid privately; this is illustrated in the graph below.

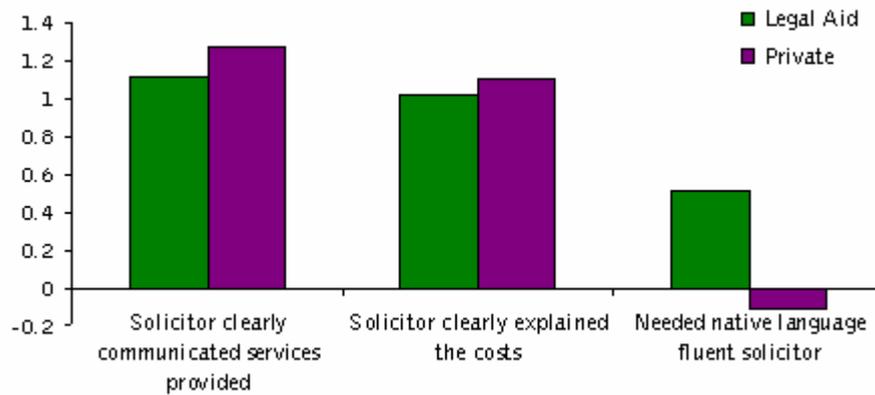


Fig 8eii: Ethnicity booster levels of agreement.

Base: People in ethnic minorities who have used a solicitor in the last 5 years (140), split by whether they used legal aid or paid privately

For the statements regarding communication, there is little variation according to whether people in ethnic minorities required legal aid or not. On clear communication of services, the mean scores are 1.12 for those who have used legal aid, and 1.28 for those who have not, indicating high levels of agreement with the statement from both groups.

For the statement regarding clear explanation of costs, the results are even closer; 83% of those who used legal aid agree with this statement, compared to 87% of those who did not use legal aid.

However, the results for the statement concerning requiring a solicitor who can speak a particular language are quite stark. The mean score for those who have used legal aid is positive (0.51) indicating broad agreement, but for those who paid privately the score is negative (-0.11) indicating broad disagreement.

To evaluate the results in a different manner, 54% of those who used legal aid agree with this statement, compared to just 22% of those who paid privately. This would indicate that the ability to speak a particular language is a significant issue for the majority of people in ethnic minorities who use legal aid solicitors, but not for the majority of those that pay privately.

It should be noted that the sample size for those who used legal aid is 41, so the results are indicative rather than definitive.

b) This question is designed to examine the importance of three key factors in the choice of solicitor of those people in ethnic minorities who have used one in the past 5 years.

As with previous questions, scores were assigned to each answer (very important= 2, quite important= 1, not very important= -1, not at all important= -2) and mean scores were calculated for each statement to aid analysis.

- **Broad agreement that local office is important, but most see the ethnicity of the solicitor as unimportant**
- **More of a balanced opinion on understanding culture and lifestyle**

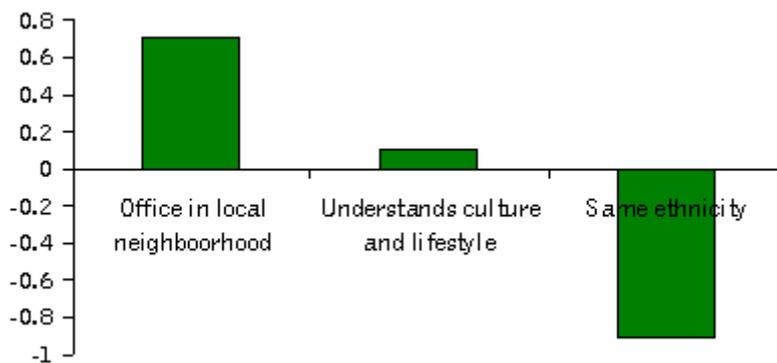


Fig 8eiii: Ethnicity booster levels of importance.

Base: People in ethnic minorities who have used a solicitor in the last 5 years (140)

The statement concerning the office of the solicitor being in the local area receives the highest mean score (0.71), indicating it is the statement people in ethnic minorities believe is most important. 71% believe it is either very or quite important, with just 29% answering not very, or not at all important.

The statement on understanding culture and lifestyle also receives a positive mean score (0.11) but the levels of importance are much more finely balanced. Nearly a third (30%) believe it is very important; however, the net score for importance (those who answered very or quite important) is similar to the score for those who answer not very, or not at all important combined (52% and 48% respectively). This would indicate that although they are a minority, there is a large proportion of individuals for whom this is a highly significant issue.

The majority of people in ethnic minorities do not consider whether their solicitor is the same ethnicity as they are important; the statement receives a mean score of -0.91, with 81% saying it was not very or not at all important. However, just under a fifth (19%) believe it is important, with more answering very important than quite important. This mirrors the results from the previous question; although only a minority see this issue as significant, for those that do, it is likely to be highly significant.

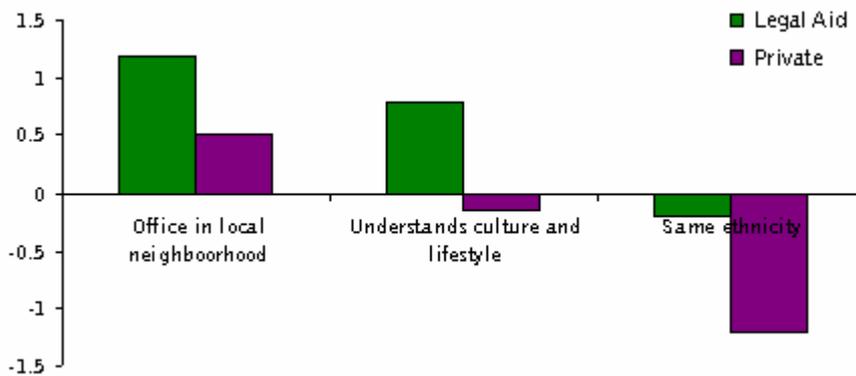


Fig 8eiv: Ethnicity booster levels of agreement.

Base: People in ethnic minorities who have used a solicitor in the last 5 years (140), split by whether they used legal aid or paid privately

As with the previous three statements put to the ethnic minority booster sample, we have split the results for those who used legal aid and those who paid privately. However, with these three statements, the differences in opinion are more pronounced.

Those who use legal aid are more likely to agree that it is important that the solicitor has an office in their local area, with 83% of this group stating it was very or quite important, compared to 67% of those who paid privately. It is also more important to the group who used legal aid that their solicitor understands their culture and lifestyle; more than two-thirds (68%) of the legal aid group see this as important, compared to a minority (45%) of the private group.

This discrepancy is even more pronounced for the statement regarding whether the solicitor is a member of the same ethnic group as the customer. A sizeable 39% of the legal aid group see this as very or quite important, compared to just 10% of those who paid for their solicitor privately. Nearly a quarter (24%) of the legal aid group see this as *very* important.

It is worth noting that, if solicitors are trying to engage people in ethnic minorities who require legal aid, each of the three factors listed above are more important for this group than for those who choose to pay for their solicitor privately.

Part 2: The Solicitors Regulation Authority

Q9. This question is designed to examine who the public believe is responsible for regulating solicitors in England and Wales. The question is an open one, and as such, answers are placed into agreed codes.

- **Majority of the public admit they don't know who regulates solicitors**
- **Those who think they know are more likely to choose the Government rather than the SRA from the list of responses**
- **Those who've used a solicitor recently are noticeably more likely to choose the SRA**

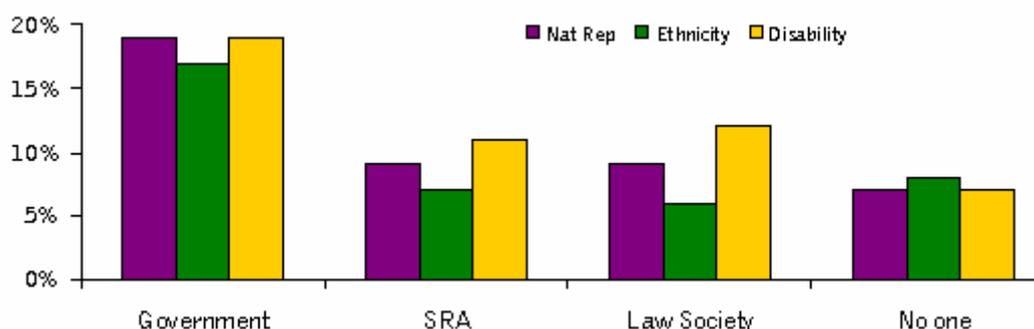


Fig 9i: Who's responsible for regulating solicitors?
Base: All respondents (Nat Rep 1014, Ethnicity 508, Disability 250)

With 51% answering don't know (55% for people in ethnic minorities and 46% for people with disabilities), most of the general population are willing to admit that they are unaware of who is responsible for regulating solicitors in England and Wales. There is obviously a huge information gap here, which the SRA would appear to be in an excellent position to fill.

However, for those that do offer an opinion, there are some interesting results. The Government is the most popular choice, scoring 19% among the general public, 17% among people in ethnic minorities, and 19% among people with disabilities.

The SRA is the next most popular among the general public, but the Authority scores almost exactly the same as the Law Society (both 9%), and not much ahead of 'no one' (7%). However, those in the highest two social grades are more likely to select the SRA than those in the lowest (12% for AB versus 7% for DE).

However, those in the higher social groups are less likely to answer don't know those in the lower groups, which means that the scores for the Government and the Law Society are also higher among ABs than among DEs. This would indicate that the higher social grades are simply more aware of the organisations listed than those in lower grades, rather than better informed about the SRA specifically.

Notably, the highest score for the SRA among the different regions is 14% in the South East; the disability booster returns a score of 11%, but people in ethnic minorities score just 7%. It would be fair to surmise that there is relatively low knowledge of the role the SRA performs among the general public. Most people do not know, but those that think they do are more likely to assume it is the Government and not the SRA that regulates solicitors.

For the remaining questions, we have performed a further set of analysis, based on the answers participants gave to the first question. All those who have used a solicitor in the past 5 years have been separated out from those that have not, allowing us to assess whether there are significant differences in opinions between these groups. These groups are referred to as experienced – for those who have used a solicitor in the past 5 years – and inexperienced – for those who have not.

With regard to this question, there are two notable trends that appear from this analysis, both of which are intuitive. Firstly, the inexperienced group are more likely to answer ‘don’t know’ (56%) compared to the experienced group (44%). The second, is that the experienced group are nearly twice as likely as the inexperienced group to think the SRA are responsible for regulating solicitors in the UK – 13% to 7% respectively.

This is particularly notable as for the other organisations, there is little change based on the experience of the participant. This would indicate that – whereas with social grades, the differences are replicated across all the organisations – the experience of an individual using a solicitor makes them markedly more likely to know the SRA and its primary function, but not other organisations. In short, recent use of a solicitor makes people far more likely to know both the SRA, and what it does.

This trend is replicated among both the booster samples, and the difference is particularly stark among people in ethnic minorities. It is clear therefore, that those who have used a solicitor in the recent past are much more likely to know who the SRA are and what they do.

Q10. This question is designed to ascertain which group the public would go to first, if they had a complaint about their solicitor. The question is an open one, and as such, answers are placed into agreed codes.

- **Most common response is ‘don’t know’, which is more common among the young and those who haven’t used a solicitor recently**
- **The Citizens Advice Bureau scores relatively highly, but the SRA score is low**

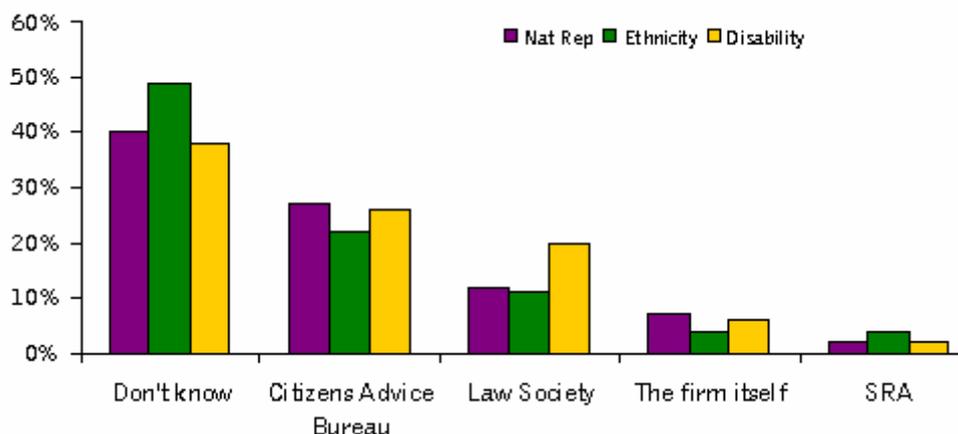


Fig 10i: Who would you complain to?
Base: All respondents (Nat Rep 1014, Ethnicity 508, Disability 250)

As with the previous question, the most popular option is ‘don’t know’ across all three groups; however, the proportions are lower, at 40% for the general public, 49% for people in ethnic minorities and 38% for people with disabilities. The figure for people with disabilities is noticeably lower, and this is probably due to the fact that they are more likely than either of the other two groups to have used a solicitor in the past 5 years (see question 1).

The Citizens Advice Bureau is the most popular choice of the options listed here, selected by more than a quarter of the general public (27%) and similar proportions of people in ethnic minorities (22%) and people with disabilities (26%). The SRA score quite low on this question, just 2% (which is a similar proportion to those who selected their local council).

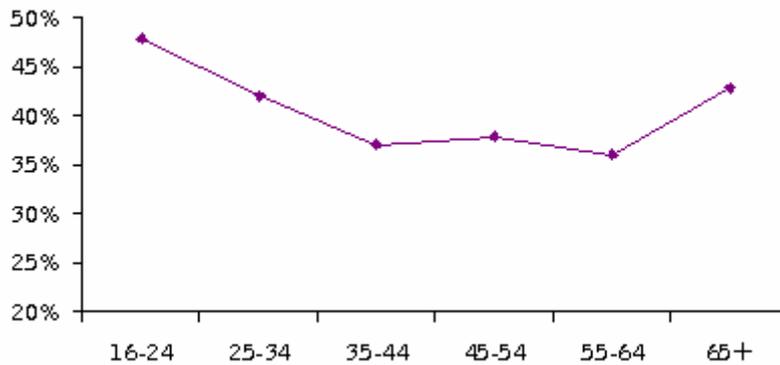


Fig 10ii: Those who answered 'don't know'.
Base: Nat rep sample (1014)

The chart above shows the proportions of individuals who answer don't know to the question, separated by age. There is a distinct trend where the younger members of the public are less likely to know who they would complain to than older members of the public. Removing the outlier of the over 65s, there is a fall in the proportion of don't knows from a high of 48% among 16-24 year olds, to a low of 36% among 55-64 year olds. There is a similar trend by social grade, where 34% of those in social groups A and B answered don't know compared to 46% among groups D and E.

The results for this question indicate that those who are young and those in lower social groups need far more information on who to complain to about a solicitor they are unhappy with. They also indicate that the SRA is quite far down the public's list of organisations they would contact if they had a complaint about a solicitor. Rather, they are more likely to go to a general – non-legal – body; namely the CAB.

When we analyse the experienced group versus the inexperienced group, the relationship becomes even more stark (see graph overleaf). Most notably, the figure for those answering 'don't know' is much higher for the inexperienced group than for the experienced group (44% to 35% respectively). However, the same is true for both booster samples also.

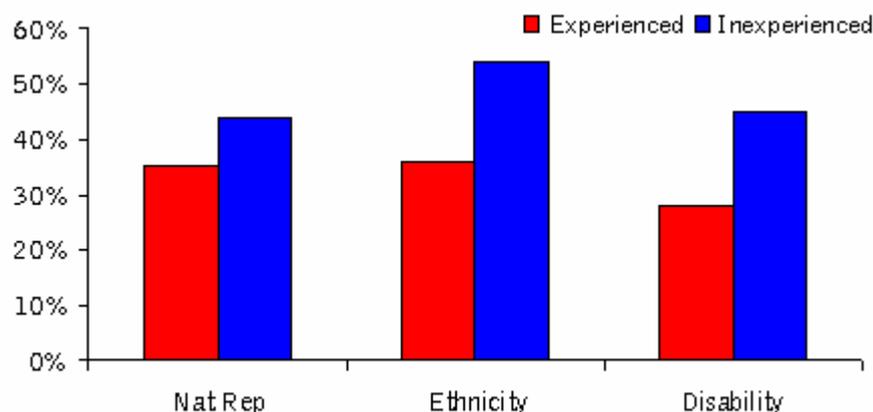


Fig 10iii: Those who answered 'don't know'.

Base: All respondents (Nat Rep 1014, Ethnicity 508, Disability 250)

The figures for those answering 'don't know' among the inexperienced groups in both boosters (a huge 54% of people in ethnic minorities and 45% for people with disabilities) are higher than the score for the same inexperienced group in the nat rep sample (44%). The case is particularly acute among people in ethnic minorities, echoing results to other questions and illustrating this particular group as lacking experience of solicitors and, consequently, adequate levels of knowledge.

This illustrates that the level of a person's experience in using a solicitor recently is clearly related to their propensity to offer an opinion on this question. This is replicated throughout a number of the following questions – particularly the last.

Q11. This question is designed to identify how likely the public would be to use a series of services that could be provided by the SRA.

As with previous questions, we assigned scores to each response (very likely= 2, fairly likely= 1; Fairly unlikely -1; very unlikely -2), and calculated a mean score for each region overall. This is represented in the chart below.

- **Website the resource public are most likely to use, most are unlikely to use events in cities however**
- **People in ethnic minorities are more likely than public to use each of these**
- **BUT significant differences between those in different social grades, age groups, and – crucially – level of experience of solicitors services**

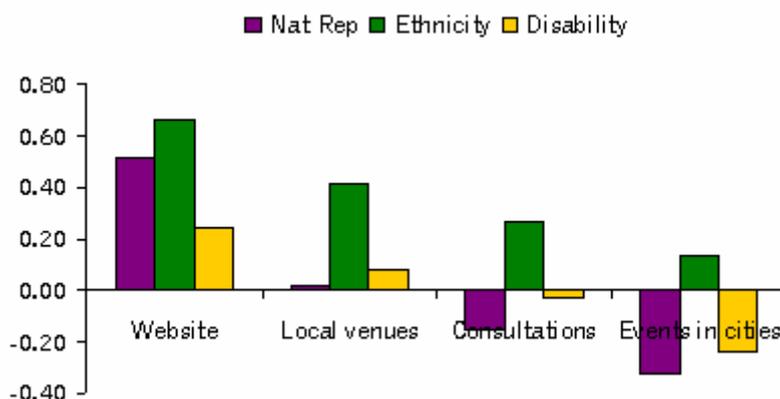


Fig 11i: Which services would you use?

Base: All respondents (Nat Rep 1014, Ethnicity 508, Disability 250)

The website for public use is the service people are most likely to use; this is true for the general public (score of 0.51), people in ethnic minorities (0.66) and the disabled (0.24). It is noticeable how much less likely people with disabilities are to use such a website; 10% are fairly unlikely to use this service, but nearly a third (30%) are very unlikely. This is despite 36% of people with disabilities who answer 'very likely'. This indicates the wide range of access issues that disabled people have to overcome; for some a website could be a valuable tool to access information (those who struggle with mobility for example), for others, it may be inadequate (those who are blind).

It is noticeable that people in ethnic minorities are more likely than either the general public or people with disabilities to use each option, producing positive mean scores for all four options (indicating a net likelihood of using each option). This is particularly true for public awareness events in city centres. 56% of people in ethnic minorities would be fairly or very likely to use this method, producing a mean score of 0.13; this compares to negative mean scores for both of the other groups. This echoes the desire expressed in the ethnicity booster-only question regarding the location of a solicitor's office.

This is exceptionally good news for solicitors in general. It is evident from responses to earlier questions that people in ethnic minorities are less likely to use solicitors than the other groups, but the results for this question indicate that this group is likely to use each of the services listed here. There is clearly an appetite for information on solicitors and the services they offer from people in ethnic minorities, to fill the obvious knowledge and experience gap that exists.

It should be noted however, that large proportions of the general public are unlikely to use the other services listed here. While the website enjoys support, both the general public and people with disabilities are unlikely to attend events in city centres (scores of -0.33 and -0.24 respectively) or to engage in consultations about how the service is regulated (-0.15 and -0.03 respectively).

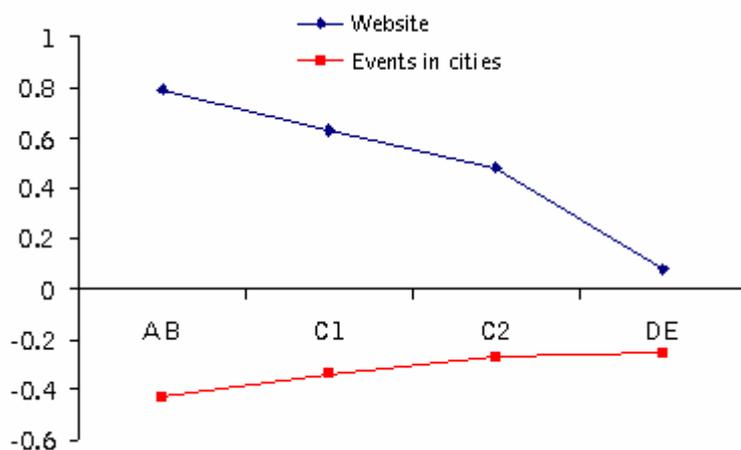


Fig 11ii: Likelihood to a) use a website and b) go to events in city centres
Base: Nat rep sample (1014)

The chart above illustrates the mean scores for the likelihood to use both the website (in blue) and events in city centres (in red) by social grade. It is most notable how much less likely those in social grades D and E are to use a website (mean score 0.08) than those in grades A and B (0.79), and this trend is evident through the intervening social grades. Fully 44% of those in the lowest social grades are either fairly or very unlikely to use this service, whereas just 24% of those in the highest grades answer this way.

The opposite is true for public awareness events in city centres, where 44% of those in social groups D and E answer fairly or very likely, compared to 39% of those in groups A and B. However, not only is the difference between social grades less stark (mean scores of -0.26 and -0.43 respectively), but all social groups are still more likely not to use this service than they are to use it.

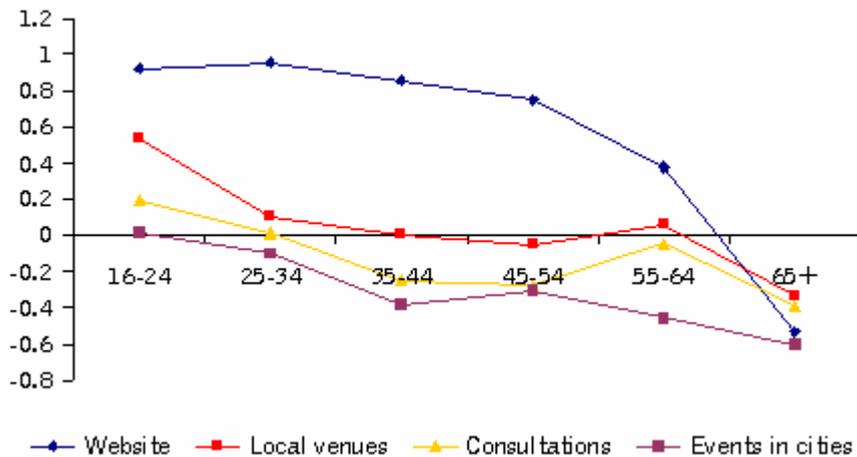


Fig 11iii: Likelihood to use each service
Base: Nat rep sample (1014)

Younger people are more likely to use each of the following services than those who are older; the negative gradient with each of the lines of best fit illustrates this. The discrepancy is more obvious for websites and accessing information at local venues, but in each case, the youngest group (16-24) returns a positive mean score, whereas the oldest (65+) returns a positive.

As with people in ethnic minorities, it is encouraging that this group – who are less likely to use a solicitor than others – are interested in finding out more about solicitors and the services they provide.

However, it should be noted that this eagerness to learn more about solicitors is indicative of each of these groups (young people and people in ethnic minorities), and *not* by virtue of them not having used a solicitor in the last 5 years. This becomes evident when we analyse the results for the experienced and inexperienced groups (see chart overleaf).

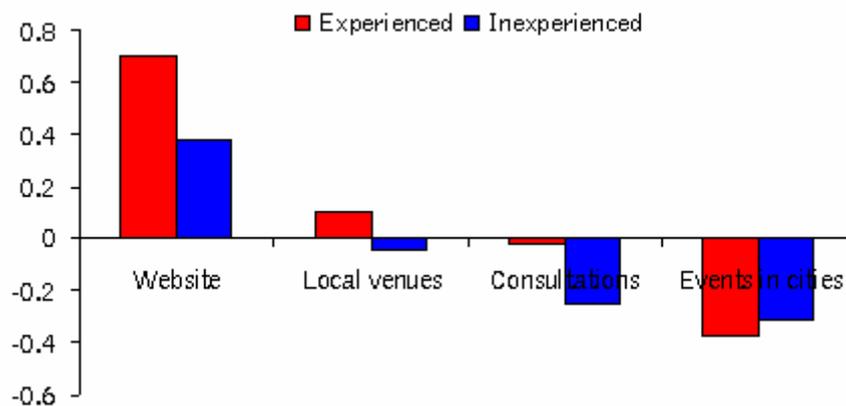


Fig 11iv: Likelihood to use each service
Base: Nat rep sample (1014)

For the top three options the public are most likely to use (a website, local venues and consultations), the experienced group is more likely than the inexperienced group to use each service. For example, the scores for the website among each group (experienced 0.70 versus 0.38 for the inexperienced) reveal quite a stark difference in likelihood to use the service, based on whether they have used a solicitor in the past 5 years.

This relationship is only reversed for events in city centres – with the experienced groups scoring -0.37 to the inexperienced groups -0.31. Even in this case, the inexperienced group returns a negative mean score, indicating that it is difficult to engage with the inexperienced group through any of these four methods.

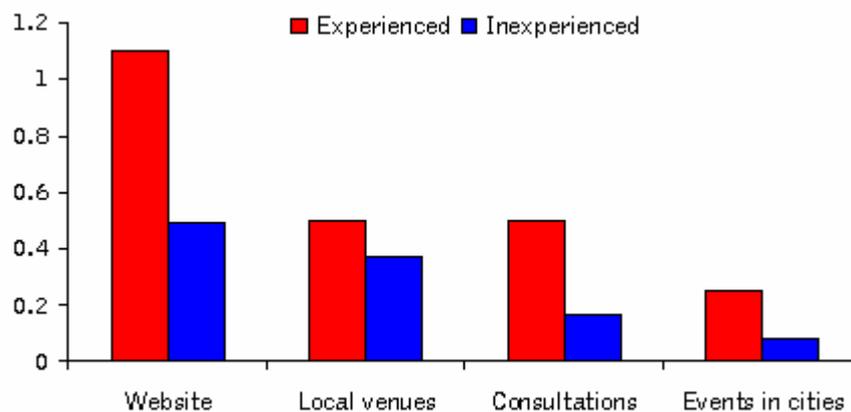


Fig 11v: Likelihood to use each service
Base: People in ethnic minorities (508)

This becomes even more apparent when we examine the ethnic minority booster split into the experienced and inexperienced groups (detailed in the chart above). In this case, the scores for likelihood to use all four services are higher among the experienced group than the inexperienced group; the same is true for people with disabilities (indeed, the differences are even more pronounced).

These results suggest that the SRA would have to work harder to attract the attentions and focus of those people who have not used a solicitor recently, than it would to attract those that had. However, certain groups are more likely to use each of these services (the young and people in ethnic minorities in particular), and this should be taken into account when targeting different groups.

Q12. This question is designed to illustrate what methods of communication people have used to contact the SRA in the past.

- **Vast majority of the public have not contacted the SRA before**
- **Those that have are most likely to have used the telephone**
- **Web-based communication is more commonly used by people with disabilities**

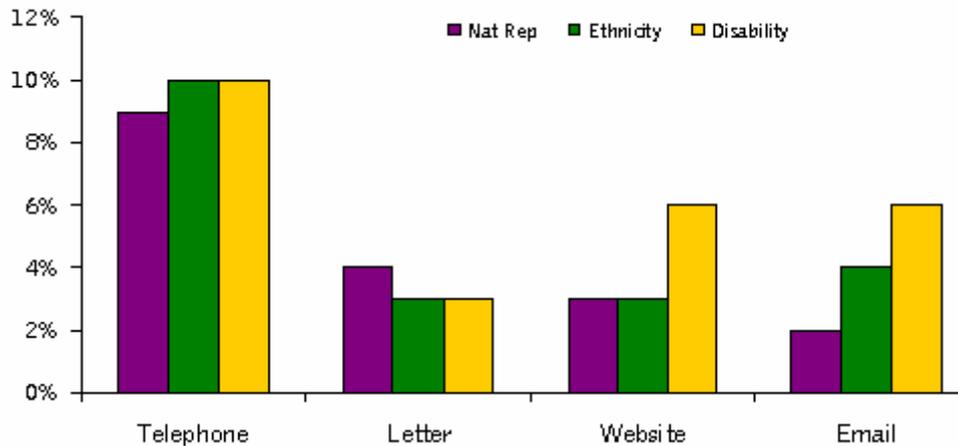


Fig 12i: Which method of communication have you used?
Base: All respondents (Nat Rep 1014, Ethnicity 508, Disability 250)

The chart above details the methods people are most likely to have used to contact the SRA from the three main groups; yet the most striking finding is that these are all low percentage scores. 84% of the general public, 83% of people in ethnic minorities, and 80% of people with disabilities have never contacted the SRA before, and this confirms other areas of this research that the SRA is not an organisation with whom the majority of people have had much contact.

Those that have contacted the SRA before, are most likely to have done so via telephone. 9% of the general public and 10% of both people in ethnic minorities and people with disabilities used this method of contact. If the SRA were looking to promote use of its website, these results would indicate that using the telephone service to do this may yield positive results.

The proportions for contact website via the website are much higher among the disability booster than for the other two groups (6% versus 3% for both Nat Rep and Ethnic minorities). This validates an earlier result that for people with some types of disability (but not all), the internet is a useful form of communication.

This is an important point, and one that plays into many of the results concerning the disability booster; namely, that people with disabilities are most likely to use a variety of methods given the breadth of forms that disability can take. The internet is clearly a good method for the SRA to communicate with a great deal of this audience.

It is interesting that there is no difference in the most common form of communication across social grade; the telephone is the most common method across social grade, gender, ethnicity and region, albeit by different proportions. It is also worth noting that men are more likely than women to have contacted the SRA across all four methods. Perhaps understandably, those in the inexperienced group are much more likely than the experienced group not to have contacted the SRA (90% versus 74%).

Q13. This question is designed to identify how those who have contacted the SRA before rate the Authority on four key metrics.

We assigned scores to each response (strongly agree= 2, agree= 1; disagree -1; strongly disagree -2), and calculated a mean score for each statement overall to aid analysis.

- **Those who have contacted the SRA before are full off praise for the organisation**
- **Some differences across demographic profiles, but all statements achieve very high mean scores**

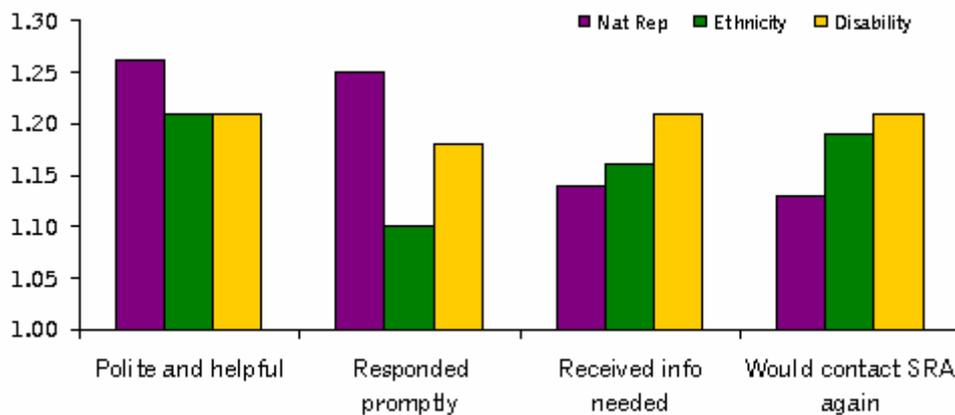


Fig 13i: How does the SRA rate?

Base: All respondents who have contacted the SRA before (Nat Rep 160, Ethnicity 86, Disability 51)

As the chart above illustrates, the SRA is rated highly on all four of these statements by all three groups. With mean scores for each all above 1, the average rating was somewhere between agree and strongly agree.

For all four statements, the agreement rate among the general public is at least 79%. The largest proportion of disagreement among the public is 9% for the statement regarding receiving the information needed. Such uniformity indicates that the SRA is held in consistently high esteem by those who have contacted them in the past.

The table below outlines the mean scores for each statement by the sample, and it is evident that there is not only widespread praise, but little variation by the three groups.

	<i>Those who've contacted the SRA</i>		
	Main	Ethnicity	Disability
<i>Polite and helpful</i>	1.26	1.21	1.21
<i>Responded promptly</i>	1.25	1.10	1.18
<i>Received info needed</i>	1.14	1.16	1.21
<i>Would contact SRA again</i>	1.13	1.19	1.21

Fig 13ii: How does the SRA rate?

Base: All respondents who have contacted the SRA before (Nat Rep 160, Ethnicity 86, Disability 51)

With this question, as with others previously, given the number of filter question the respondents have passed through, the sample size is relatively small. As such, the results are indicative rather than definitive, and the relative ranking is more significant than the overall percentages.

Part 3: Using a solicitor

Q14. This question is designed to investigate how individuals would most likely go about finding a solicitor. The question is an open one, and as such, answers are placed into agreed codes; importantly, individuals could choose more than one option, so the relative order is the most significant value here.

These results may well be another example of information the SRA could share with its members – particularly given the breakdowns by ethnicity, disability and social grade – as it will allow solicitors to target each of these groups in different ways.

- **Top four methods are notably higher than the others listed here; phone directories, internet searches, family solicitors and asking for recommendations**
- **People in ethnic minorities are much more likely to use internet searches and less likely to use family solicitors**
- **People in lower social grades less likely to use internet searches, but more likely to use a solicitor nearby**

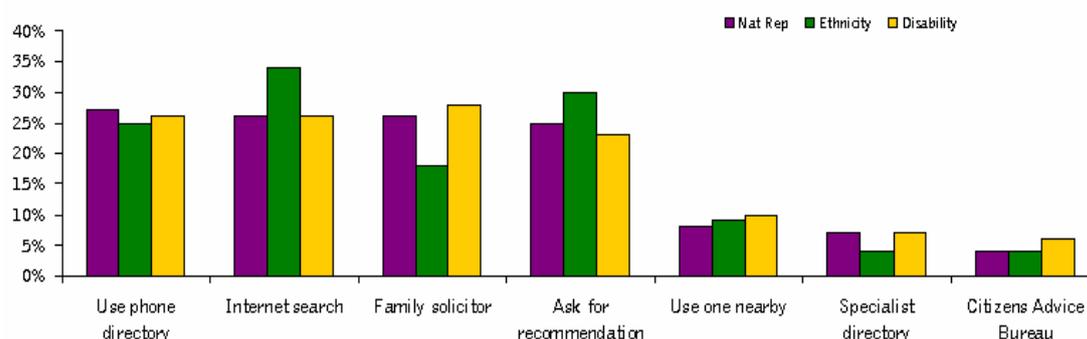


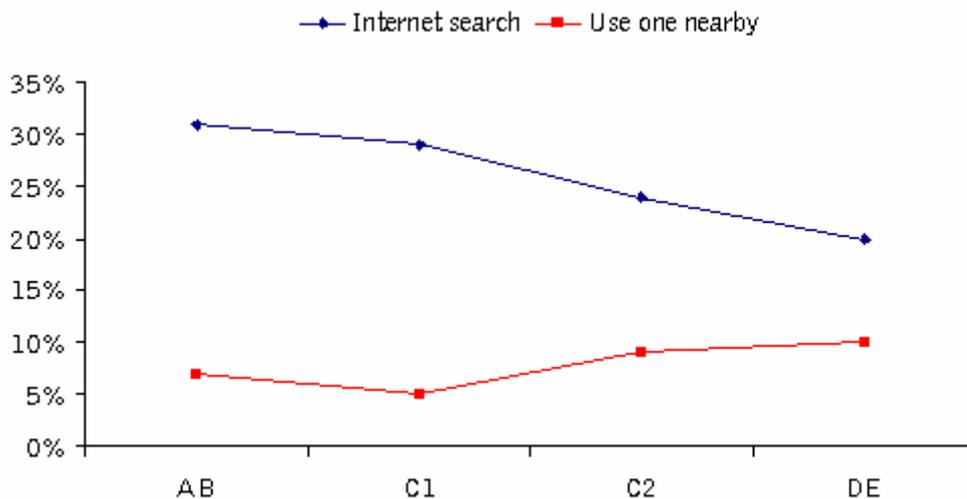
Fig 14i: How would you find a solicitor?
Base: All respondents (Nat Rep 1014, Ethnicity 508, Disability 250)

The chart above illustrates how people would go about finding a solicitor, and – incredibly in the age of Google – phone directory (or a directory enquiry service) is the most commonly mentioned method among the general public. The top four for the general public are the phone directory (27%), internet search (26%), using the family solicitor (26%) and 25% would ask for a recommendation. These four are by far and away the most common methods mentioned for both the general public, and for people with disabilities.

Intriguingly, people in ethnic minorities are more likely to use the internet than any other method (34%), followed by asking for a recommendation (30%). Using ‘the same one the family has always used’ is much lower among this group (18%), perhaps because fewer of this group have used solicitors before (as we saw in the first question).

Advertisements are extremely low on this list (scoring just 1%), and even the CAB (who ranked highly when considering who to complain to) score a lowly 4%. It is also worth contrasting the score among the general public for a specialist online directory (7%) with the scores for directory enquiries and an internet search (27% and 26% respectively). This would indicate that people are simply unaware that such a specialist directory exists.

Perhaps befitting the stereotype, women were more likely than men to ask someone to recommend a solicitor, with 29% of women selecting this option versus 21% of men. Men are more likely than women to go and search the internet, scoring 31% to 22% respectively .



**Fig 14ii: How would you find a solicitor?
Base Nat rep sample (1014)**

As the chart above illustrates, those in lower social grades are marginally more likely to use a solicitor who is nearby than those in the highest social grade (10% versus 7% respectively). It should be noted however, that even for those in the lowest social grade, other methods are much more likely to be employed.

There is a more notable trend for the option of performing an internet research. The score for social groups A and B is almost a third (31%), whereas the score for groups D and E is a fifth (20%). This echoes results from previous questions, and would indicate that, as might be expected, those in the lower social grades have less access to the internet than those in the higher brackets.

Those in the inexperienced group are much more likely to use a phone directory than those in the experienced group (31% to 20%). By contrast with each of the other top four sources (internet, locality and family solicitor) the inexperienced group is between 6% and 2% lower than the experienced group.

Q15. This question is designed to identify how likely members of the public would be to do four things when searching for a new solicitor; ask other users' opinions, search for information on the solicitor's background, perform an internet search, and use an online directory.

As with previous questions, we assigned scores to each response (very likely= 2; fairly likely= 1; fairly unlikely -1; very unlikely -2), and calculated a mean score.

- **Most people would ask other users' opinions**
- **People in ethnic minorities would be more likely than the general public to search for information in each of the four ways listed**
- **More than a third would not look for information**

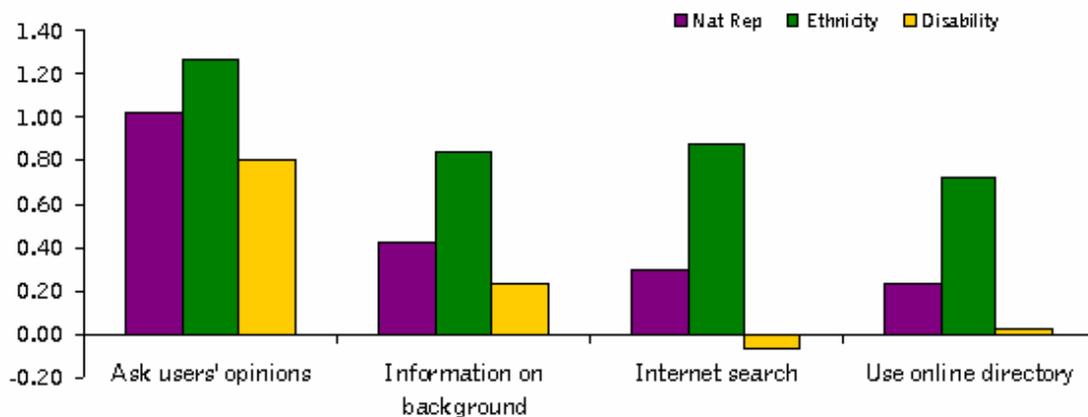
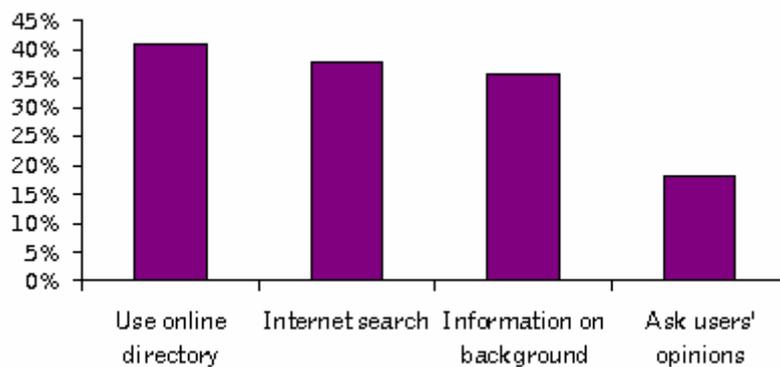


Fig 15i: Would you do the following?
Base: All respondents (Nat Rep 1014, Ethnicity 508, Disability 250)

The most popular option among all three groups is to ask the opinion of people who already use the solicitor or firm, with a mean score of 1.02 among the general public. Nearly half (49%) of the general public would be very likely to do this, and a further third (32%) would be fairly likely. This option is even more popular among people in ethnic minorities (with a mean score of 1.26), as indeed are all four of the options. This echoes the results of previous questions, where people in ethnic minorities are more likely to seek out information about solicitors and their work.

It is worth noting how much higher the scores for people in ethnic minorities are for both of the online options. This may prove to be an effective way to target this particular audience.

An interesting trend develops when we compare the experienced group with the inexperienced. For the nationally representative sample, those in the inexperienced group are slightly less likely than the experienced to do any of the four actions listed; for example, the experienced group scores 1.20 for asking the opinions of other users compared to 0.91 for the inexperienced. However, among the ethnic minority booster, there are options where the inexperienced group are more likely to take action than the experienced group (look for information on their background and use an online directory).



**Fig 15ii: Unlikely to do each of the following?
Base: Nat rep sample (1014)**

Returning to the sample overall, it is perhaps surprising how many people consider themselves unlikely to use these methods. The chart above details the net unlikely percentages (those very and fairly unlikely) for each statement.

On the statement regarding looking for information on a solicitor's background (mean score 0.42), more than a third (36%) of the general public would be fairly or very unlikely to do this. The proportions are even higher for using an online directory (41%) and performing an internet search (38%). Fully one quarter (26%) of the general public would be unlikely to use an online directory to check if they are a genuine solicitor, which reflects the lack of knowledge of such a tool outlined by the results to the previous question.

Q16. This question is designed to identify why those who answered very or fairly unlikely to the first statement in question 15, were unlikely to look for information on the background of their prospective solicitor.

As with previous questions, users were able to select more than one answer, and as such, the rank order is most significant.

- **Almost half of those who wouldn't search for information because they assume the solicitor is reliable**
- **Majority of this group would only use a solicitor recommended to them**
- **Less than a fifth don't know how or don't have time**

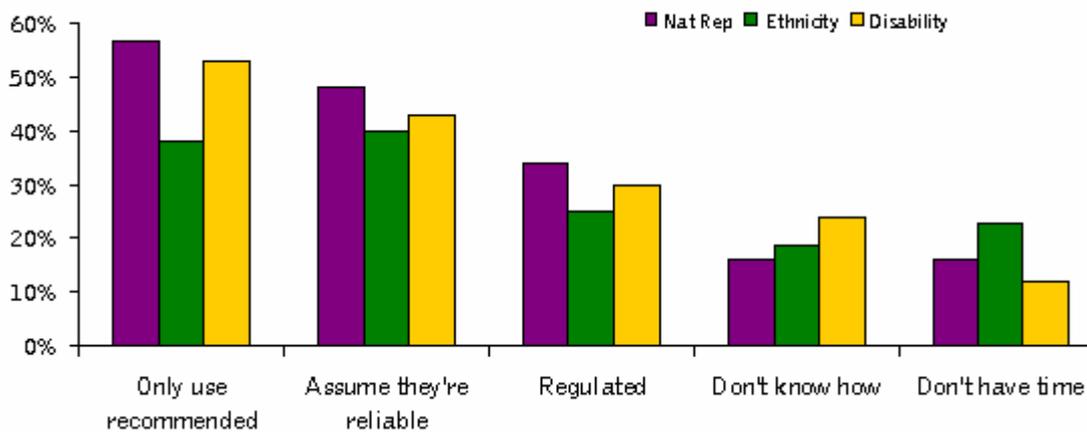


Fig 16i: Why would you not check?

Base: People who were unlikely to look for information on a solicitor's background (Nat Rep 360, Ethnicity 124, Disability 105)

Some of the concerns raised by the results to the previous question (where more than a third said they would be fairly or very unlikely to look for information on a solicitor's background) may be assuaged by the results illustrated in the table above. The most common result for the general public and for people with disabilities is that they would only choose a solicitor that was recommended to them by someone they trust (57% and 53% respectively).

However, the second most popular response is that people would assume the solicitor is reliable, with 48% answering this way; indeed, among people in ethnic minorities this is more popular than only using a recommended solicitor (40% to 38% respectively). It is crucial that the SRA addresses this opinion; equally it is a very sensitive area. These results illustrate that the public has a high level of latent trust in solicitors, which is a boon. However, it also means that a large proportion of the public are unlikely to search for information on a solicitor's background because of an assumption. In addressing this issue, the SRA should mitigate against undermining the high level of public trust in solicitors that evidently exists at present.

Of particular note, is that the inexperienced group are more likely to assume a solicitor is reliable than the experienced group (51% to 43% respectively). They are also more likely to say that they do not know how to look for such information than those people who have used a solicitor in the past 5 years (21% to 9% respectively).

Intriguingly, there are not discernible trends by age, social grade or gender on each of these measures; there is however, great variation when split by region (as detailed in the table below on the left).

Region	%
Wales	70.9
North East	65.7
North West	54.6
West Midlands	53.1
South West	49.3
East of England	46.2
East Midlands	45.7
Yorkshire and the Humber	40.8
South East	39.6
London	30.5

Fig 16ii: Proportions that would assume they are reliable, versus mean scores for levels of satisfaction.

Base: Members of general public who were unlikely to look for information on a solicitor's background (Nat Rep 360)

This would indicate that there is no consistency (geographically) in the proportions of people who assume solicitors are reliable.

Q17. This question is designed to identify where individuals would turn first if they were owed money due to their solicitor. The question is an open one, and as such, answers are placed into agreed codes.

- **Most common option is don't know, more common among people in ethnic minorities**
- **Citizens Advice Bureau is the most popular organisation listed**
- **SRA is the third most popular choice**



Fig 17i: Who would you turn to?
Base: All respondents (Nat Rep 1014, Ethnicity 508, Disability 250)

The most common response to this question across all three groups is 'do not know', reflecting the lack of knowledge indicated by previous questions; 30% of the general public, 27% of people with disabilities, and a huge 42% of people in ethnic minorities give this answer. This response is also more likely among the inexperienced group (35%) than the experienced group (22%), reflecting their lack of knowledge.

However, close behind this answer is the Citizens Advice Bureau, which scores 29% among the general public and 26% among people with disabilities. However, for people in ethnic minorities the percentage is much lower (just 19%), indicating again their relative lack of experience with solicitors and lack of knowledge here. The SRA scores a creditable 14% among the general public, compared to 13% for the Law Society, and just 2% for the Legal Complaints Service.

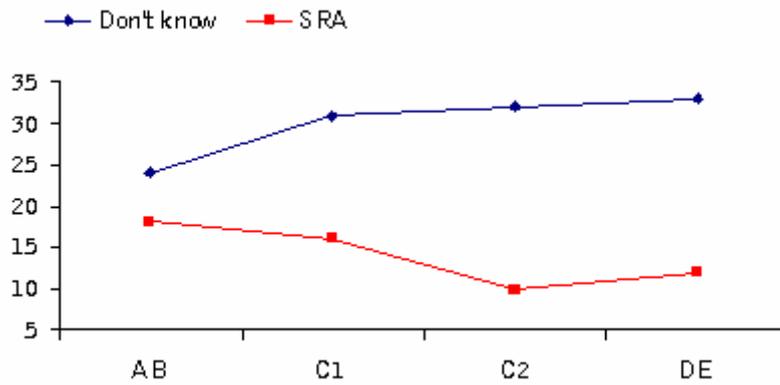


Fig 17ii: Who would you turn to?
Base: Nat rep sample (1014)

The chart above illustrates both that those in higher social grades are more likely to go to the SRA in this situation, and less likely to answer don't know. For social grades A and B, less than a quarter (24%) answer don't know, compared to fully a third (33%) of social grades D and E.

It is a recurring – if lamentably predictable – theme of these results that those in the lower social grades are generally less informed regarding solicitors as a whole, as well as how to access such information: the results to this question reinforce that.

Q18. This question is designed to outline how important people believe it is that the SRA provide four specific functions.

Scores were again assigned to aid analysis (very important= 2, quite important= 1, not very important= -1, not at all important= -2) and mean scores were calculated. These are used in the chart below.

- **Huge support for these functions, vast majority support all four**
- **Function focussed at solicitors receives less support, but still majority in favour**

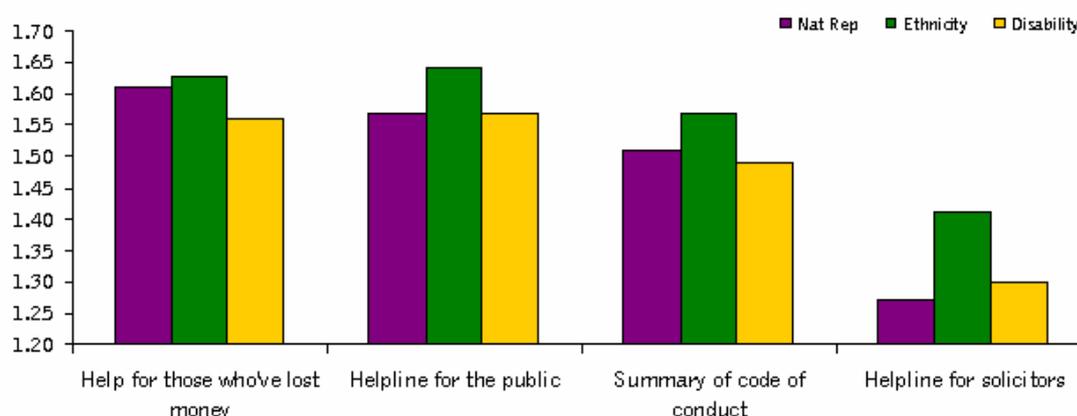


Fig 18i: What should the SRA provide?

Base: All respondents (Nat Rep 1014, Ethnicity 508, Disability 250)

For the general public, it is most important that the SRA provide help for those who have lost money. More than a third (69%) of the general public believe this is very important (same for people in ethnic minorities and 68% for people with disabilities). People in ethnic minorities return higher mean scores for each of these functions than either the general public or people with disabilities.

This corroborates the data from earlier questions that in spite – or because – of their limited knowledge and experience of using solicitors, people in ethnic minorities are more likely to seek information on it. However, it should be noted that the scores are high across all these four functions for all three samples; furthermore, there is little variation across gender, region or social grade.

Perhaps unsurprisingly given the participants, the function seen as least important is the one aimed at solicitors rather than the public. The helpline for solicitors is still seen as important however, receiving a mean score of 1.27 and seen as very important by half (50%) of the public.

It should be noted that each of these four functions receives exceptionally high mean scores across all three audiences (between 1.27 and 1.64). Indeed, the proportion of the general public who rate the three highest rated statements (help for those who've lost money, a public helpline and a code of conduct summary) as quite or very important, is between 93 and 94%. This would indicate two things; first, that the SRA

should concern itself with each of these, and second, that the rank order here is the most important part of the data.

The public are more inclined to see the SRA's functions as focussed on their needs directly, in helping them recoup lost moneys, learn more about the code of conduct, and providing general advice – rather than indirectly by helping solicitors working on their behalf.

Meeting these demands will help ensure that the SRA increases both its public profile, and its favourability.

Q19. This question is designed to determine levels of agreement with eight separate but related statements, concerning the provision of legal services by groups other than firms of solicitors (such as banks and supermarkets).

As with previous questions, scores were assigned to each answer (strongly agree= 2, agree= 1, disagree= -1, strongly disagree= -2) and mean scores were calculated for each statement to aid analysis.

The first chart deals with the five statements that the public agrees with most; the second, with the three remaining statements. There is then further analysis beyond the headline figures.

- **On the whole, public is sceptical about banks and supermarkets providing legal services**
- **Strongly in favour of statements concerning a lack of specialist services and a concern about quality**
- **However, support for basic services statement illustrates the public have an open mind towards alternative providers**
- **And a significant majority would prefer alternative providers, particularly among people in ethnic minorities**
- **Those who've not used a solicitor recently are much less engaged on these issues, and are less likely to have an opinion**

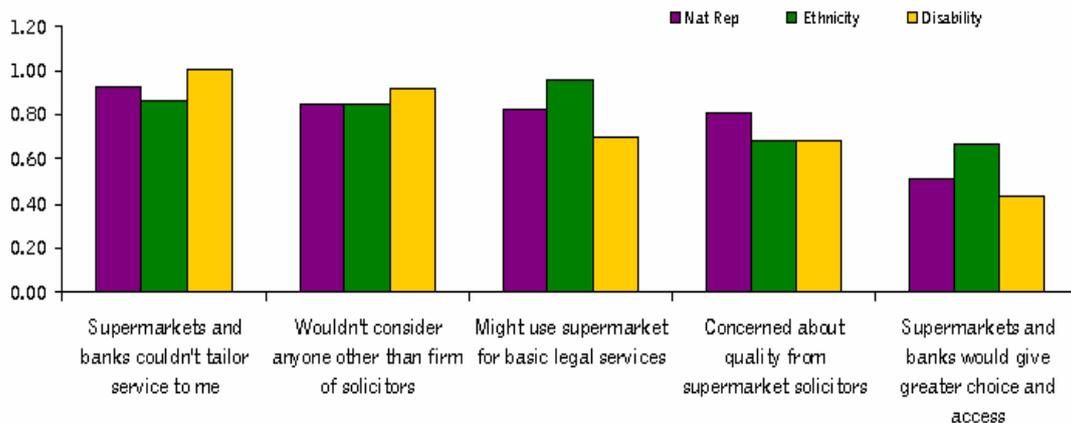


Fig 19i: Agreement with statements.
Base: All respondents (Nat Rep 1014, Ethnicity 508, Disability 250)

The statement which receives the highest mean score from both the general public and people with disabilities, relates to the tailored service offered by firms of solicitors that supermarkets may find hard to replicate (0.93 and 1.01 respectively).

Notably, the second highest mean score for both groups is generated by the statement that people wouldn't consider anyone other than a firm of solicitors (0.85 and 0.92 respectively). Although there is some agreement among the general public that they might use banks and supermarkets for basic legal services (68% either

agree strongly or agree), around the same proportion (69%) agree they would be concerned about the quality of service offered by these organisations.

These reflect the scepticism of both of these groups towards the provision of legal services from supermarkets and banks. There is an overall view that banks and supermarkets cannot provide the same level of service as a firm of solicitors, but equally, the public are not averse to provision of certain services by alternative providers. Wherever the SRA stands on this issue, it will be crucial in the upcoming debates to understand that the public has a nuanced opinion of alternative providers of legal services, and opinion is not entrenched either for, or against.

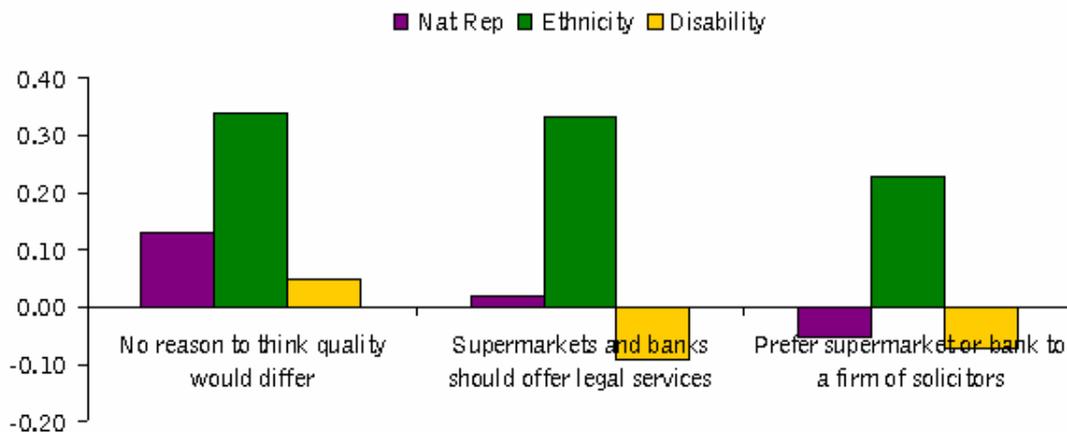
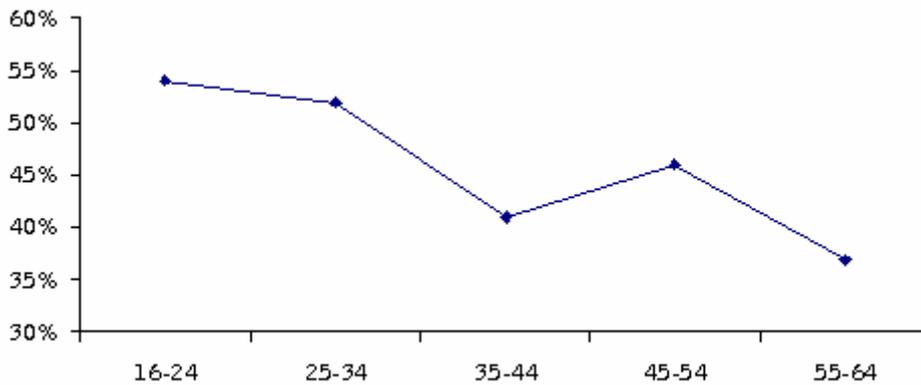


Fig 19ii: Agreement with statements.
Base: All respondents (Nat Rep 1014, Ethnicity 508, Disability 250)

This scepticism is not as apparent among people in ethnic minorities however. As we can see from the chart above, people in ethnic minorities are much more positive towards supermarkets and banks offering these services than the other groups. Indeed – in contrast to the general public and people with disabilities – people in ethnic minorities return a positive mean score to the statement that they would prefer to use a bank or supermarket that they have used ‘for years’, rather than a solicitor they know nothing about (0.23).

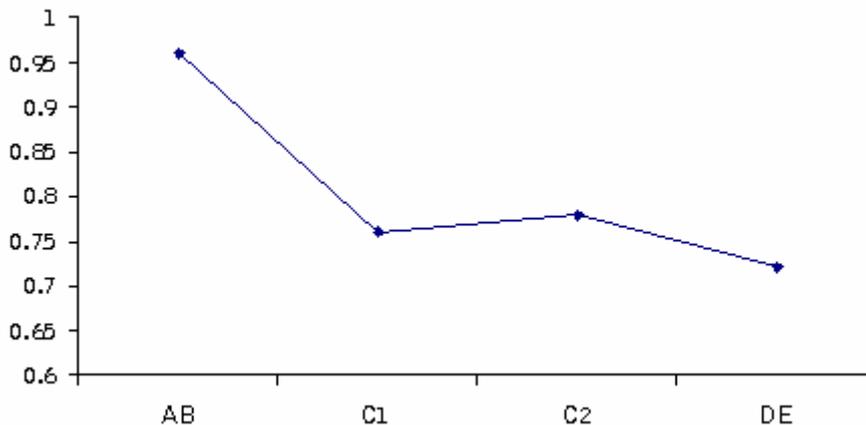
This reflects responses to the other statements, where people in ethnic minorities are consistently more positive towards supermarkets providing legal services than the other two groups. People in ethnic minorities are much more likely to think the quality of service would not differ between supermarkets and firms of solicitors than the public are (mean scores of 0.34 and 0.13 respectively).



**Fig 19iii: Net agreement that supermarkets and banks should offer the same legal services as firms of solicitors.
Base: Nat rep sample (1014)**

As the chart above shows, there is a trend by age on the statement regarding whether supermarkets and banks should offer the same legal services as firms of solicitors, whereby the young are more likely to agree than the old. The proportion of 16-24 year olds who either agree or agree strongly is more than half (54%), but proportion of those who are aged between 55-64 who agree is nearer a third (37%).

Although the trend is not absolute – with those in the mid-age range temporarily reversing the trend – it is notable that young people are less likely to have experience and knowledge of legal services, and this is corroborated by findings in previous questions.



**Fig 19iv: Mean scores for statement that people would be concerned about the quality of legal services available from somewhere like a supermarket.
Base: Nat rep sample (1014)**

Those in the highest social grade are much more likely to be concerned about the quality of legal services offered by organisations such as banks and supermarkets than those in lower grades; ABs return a score of 0.96 compared to 0.72 among DEs. However, it should be noted that even among those in the lowest social grades (DE).

It is still the majority position (63%) to agree with this statement, reflecting a widespread concern over the quality of legal services offered by alternative providers of legal services.

When we look at the differences between the experienced group and the inexperienced group, there is little difference between the mean scores for each statement. However, as we can see from the chart below, the less experienced group is less likely to offer an opinion on each statement.

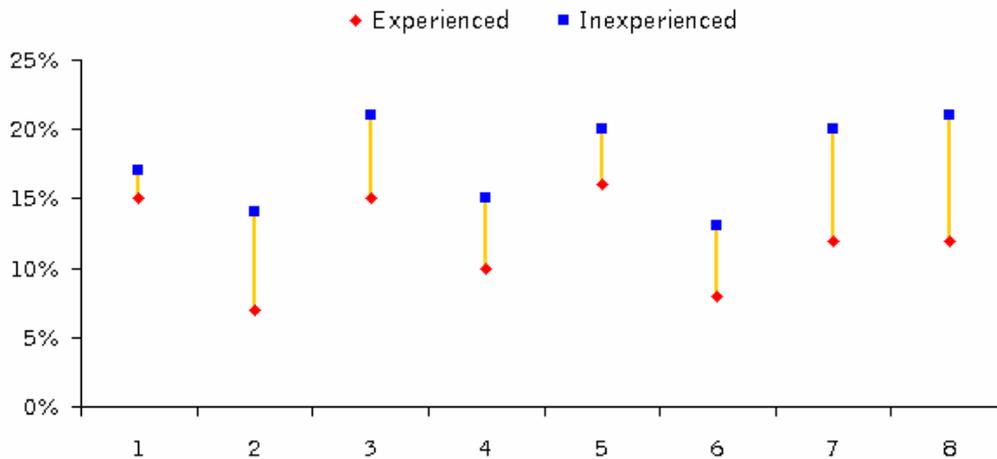


Fig 19vi: Mean percentage answering don't know across all eight statements. Base: Nat rep sample (1014)

This chart illustrates how, with every single statement, the less experienced groups are more likely to answer don't know than their experienced counterparts. On the first statement the difference is just 2%, however, for the eighth statement there is a 9% gap between the scores for each statement. As with previous questions, there is clearly a trend where the experienced group is more likely to hold an opinion on issues relating to solicitors and their work.

Overall, question 19 indicates that the general public and people with disabilities are highly sceptical about the possibility of supermarkets or banks offering solicitors' services. However, the young, those in lower social grades and those people in ethnic minorities are more open to this diversity of provision.

Interestingly, this does not appear to be related to whether or not they have used a solicitor in the past 5 years; rather, they appear to be related to other factors at play with each of those groups. However, those that have used a solicitor in the past 5 years are much more likely to have an opinion on these issues, with larger proportions of the inexperienced group failing to offer an opinion on each point.

Although they favour firms of solicitors for their legal services provision over banks and supermarkets, the general public is overall (just) in favour of supermarkets offering these services (44% to 40%). The key to the future of this debate, is the more people know about solicitors and their work, the more likely they are to place their faith exclusively in firms of solicitors to provide specific and complex legal services.

Conclusion

In much of the reputational work ComRes undertakes for its clients, one maxim tends to ring true across sectors, audiences and issues; *familiarity breeds content*. In other words, the better known an organisation is to the audience, the higher that audience's opinion is likely to be of that organisation.

This research would indicate that principle applies to solicitors in general, and the SRA specifically. The vast majority of those members of the public who have used the SRA before would use it again; furthermore, those groups who are most likely to have used solicitors in the last 5 years are also most likely to resist the move towards widening the providers to supermarkets and banks.

There is clearly an appetite among people in ethnic minorities for information on solicitors and the services they offer. This is particularly encouraging, as this demographic group is much less likely than either the general public or people with disabilities to have used a solicitor recently.

Ultimately, if the SRA aspires to public renown, then there is a desire among the public for more information – particularly from those who are, at present, less well-informed (such as the young or those in lower social grades). Even if the SRA does not, there is a clear indication that the public do not yet feel they have a body to which they can turn in relation to legal services – with the Citizens Advice Bureau closest to filling the gap.

Whether the SRA decides to assume this role, it should be noted that those who are not as well-informed are much less reluctant to go to Sainsbury's (or its equivalents) for that advice if no one else fills the gap. There is an opportunity here for an organisation to assume the role of thought-leader in the public's mind as regards solicitors and their work. As long as this continues, those who do not use solicitors on a regular basis will remain ignorant about solicitors, their work, and key issues that affect them.

APPENDIX – Question List

Part 1: Your experience

Q1. Which of the following solicitor services, if any, have you used in the last five years? (Please choose all that apply)

Buying or selling property; Wills / probate; Matrimonial; Personal injury or disease claim; Employment claim; Criminal defence; Civil dispute; Asylum and immigration services; Other service; None, I have not used a solicitor in the past five years.

Q2. Was your solicitor provided to you through legal aid?

Yes; No, I paid for them privately.

Q3. How satisfied or otherwise were you with the service you received when you used a solicitor?

Very satisfied; Fairly satisfied; Fairly dissatisfied; Very dissatisfied.

**Q4. What, in particular, did your solicitor do well?
(Open response, code by the following)**

Was generally supportive at all stages of the process; Was considerate and sensitive to my personal circumstances; Kept me well informed about what I had to do; Communicated in a clear and straightforward manner; Got the work completed for me quickly; Other.

**Q5. Why were you dissatisfied with the service you received from your solicitor?
(Open response, code by the following)**

The overall time it took; Lack of communication from the solicitor; Used legal jargon when communicating with me; Their charges were not explained properly; I received poor advice; Other; I didn't have cause for complaint with my solicitor.

**Q6. Which, if any, of the following groups did you complain to about the service you received from your solicitor?
(Please choose all that apply)**

The solicitor / the firm setting out my complaint; The Citizens Advice Bureau; The Law Society; The Legal Complaints Service; The Solicitors Regulation Authority; Other (please explain); Didn't take any action.

Q7. Which of the following best describes the outcome of your complaint?

The solicitor or their firm voluntarily resolved the matter to my satisfaction; The organisation I reported my complaint to resolved it on my behalf; My complaint was not resolved at all; Don't know.

Q8. In the future, if you required a solicitor how likely would you be to use the same solicitor that you used before?

Very likely; Fairly likely; Fairly unlikely; Very unlikely.

Part 1a: Disability booster only

Thinking about when you last used a solicitor, how strongly would you agree or disagree with the following statements:

Strongly agree; Agree; Disagree; Strongly disagree

- I had no problems with physically getting into my solicitor's offices.
- My solicitor communicated with me in a way that meant I could clearly understand the services they were providing for me.
- My solicitor clearly explained all their costs to me.
- I needed my solicitor to make certain adjustments because of my disability and I was charged for these.

Has a solicitor ever declined to represent you? What reason did the solicitor give for this?

Part 1b: Ethnicity booster only

Thinking about when you last used a solicitor, how strongly would you agree or disagree with the following statements:

Strongly agree; Agree; Disagree; Strongly disagree

- I needed a solicitor that could speak to me in a particular language.
- My solicitor communicated with me in a way that meant I could clearly understand the services they were providing for me.
- My solicitor clearly explained all their costs to me.

Thinking about the qualities you looked for in your solicitor, how important were the following to you when you made your choice?

Very Important; Quite Important; Not very important; Not at all important.

- The solicitor has an office in my local neighbourhood.
- The solicitor is a member of the same ethnic group as me.
- The solicitor understands my culture and lifestyle.

Part 2: The Solicitors Regulation Authority

Q9. Who, if anyone, do you think is responsible for regulating solicitors in England and Wales? (Open response, code by the following)

The Solicitors Regulation Authority; Government / Justice Department; Solicitors themselves / self regulation; Other; No one; Don't know.

Q10. If you were unhappy with the service you had received from your solicitor, what organisation would you go to first? (Open response, code by the following)

Citizens Advice Bureau; The Law Society; The firm of solicitors; The Solicitors Regulation Authority; The Legal Complaints Service; My local council; The Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC); Other (please state); Don't know.

Q11. The Solicitors Regulation Authority sets the rules and regulations for solicitors in England and Wales, monitoring how well these are met and taking action where any breaches are identified. How likely would you be to use each of the following services, if it were provided by the Solicitors Regulation Authority?

Very likely; Fairly likely; Fairly unlikely; Very unlikely.

- A website for the public to access information they may require when using solicitor.
- Public awareness events in city centres and at public exhibitions.
- Accessing information about using solicitors at venues like libraries and council offices.
- Consultations about how the legal services profession is regulated.

Q12. Which of the following methods, if any, have you used to contact the Solicitors Regulation Authority (known as the SRA)?

Telephone; Email; Website; Letter; Not contacted the SRA before.

Q13. Thinking about when you contacted the SRA, how strongly would you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:

Strongly agree; Agree; Don't know; Disagree; Strongly disagree.

- They responded promptly to me.
- I received the information I needed.
- The people I dealt with were polite and helpful.
- I would happily contact the SRA again if I needed to.

Part 3: Using a solicitor

Q14. If you needed to contact a solicitor today, how would you go about finding one?

(Open response, code by the following)

Do an internet search and see what comes up; Use a specialist online directory to find one;

Ask the Citizens Advice Bureau to recommend one; Look one up using a phone directory or a directory enquiries service; Use the same one I or my family always uses; Ask someone I trust to recommend one to me; Use one I saw advertised recently, for example on TV / billboard; Use one located near to me geographically, for example on my local high street; Other, please specify.

Q15. If you were thinking of using a solicitor, how likely would you be to do each of the following?

Very likely; Fairly likely; Fairly unlikely; Very unlikely; Don't know (not prompted).

- Look for any information about their background or previous conduct.
- Do an internet search on their name or their firm's name.
- Use an online directory to check they are a genuine solicitor.
- Ask opinions of people who already use the solicitor or the firm.

Q16. Which of the following, if any, might be reasons why you would not look for information about a solicitor's background or previous conduct before using them?

(please choose all that apply)

I assume that they are reliable as they work for a reputable firm; Solicitors are regulated so they have to treat me fairly; I only use solicitors that come recommended by someone I trust; I don't have the time; I don't know how to; Other, please specify.

Q17. Occasionally members of the public are owed money if their solicitors firm is closed down, or where dishonesty on the part of a solicitor has led them to lose money. If you were to find yourself in this type of situation, who would you turn to first?

(Open response, code by the following)

The Citizens Advice Bureau; The Law Society; The Legal Complaints Service; The Solicitors Regulation Authority; Other, please state; Don't know.

Q18. How important or unimportant do you believe it is that the SRA provides each of the following?

Very Important; Quite Important; Not very important; Not at all important; Don't know (not prompted).

- Help for members of the public who have lost money owing to their solicitor's firm being closed down, or where dishonesty on the part of a solicitor has led them to lose money.
- A summary of the solicitors' code of conduct so I can understand the service my solicitor should be providing me with.
- A helpline for the public to call if they needed advice about their solicitor or the code of conduct.
- A helpline for solicitors to discuss the code of conduct.

Q19. To what extent do you agree, or disagree, with each of the following statements?

Strongly agree; Agree; Don't know; Disagree; Strongly disagree.

- 1 Organisations like supermarkets and banks should be able to offer the same legal services that solicitors' firms currently offer.
- 2 I would be concerned about the quality of legal services available from somewhere like a supermarket.
- 3 There is no reason to think that the quality of legal services from a supermarket chain or a bank would be any better, or any worse, than services provided by a traditional solicitors' firm.
- 4 I might use a supermarket or bank's solicitors for basic services, like writing a will, but if it involved something more serious, like going to court, or a personally sensitive matter, I would go to a traditional solicitors' firm.
- 5 I would prefer to use legal services from my bank or a supermarket I've used for years than those provided by a solicitor's firm that I know nothing about.
- 6 I would not consider using legal services offered by anywhere other than an actual solicitor's firm.
- 7 If supermarkets and banks sold legal services, this would give consumers greater choice and access to legal services.
- 8 A traditional solicitors firm provides a service that is tailored to me as an individual, which supermarkets and banks may not be able to achieve as effectively.