

News release

Unbundling could improve access to legal services

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Solicitors providing 'unbundled' services could make legal help affordable for those whom it is currently too expensive, a new report by the SRA has found.

We conducted research into unbundling of legal services [<https://www.sra.org.uk/sra/research-publications/unbundled-services-pilot/>] to see how it can help potential clients and law firms, and if there were any regulatory barriers that stop the process. The research found that as well as potentially making more services affordable for those on low incomes, law firms could benefit too as it would increase their client base.

Unbundling is when the tasks that make up a service are divided between the consumer and provider. By carrying out some of the less complex areas themselves, clients reduce the overall cost and retain a certain amount of control over how quickly their matter progresses.

We conducted a survey of firms about unbundling, followed by a series of in-depth interviews, and a number of roundtables to discuss specific issues. It also commissioned a consumer survey via YouGov which compared respondents who have used unbundled services with those who have used end-to-end legal services.

We engaged with other legal regulators, technology innovators and professional indemnity insurers, along with a review of case law for negligence action arising out of unbundling.

The research found that as well as unbundling offering the opportunity for those who would not have otherwise engaged a legal service provider, most law firms had a positive attitude towards it.

However, there were concerns over the work that clients took on – solicitors worried that that they weren't always capable of doing it within the necessary timelines. Other issues raised related to insurance and negligence claims, and the need for new technology to help manage the process.

Other findings from the survey were that not all consumers or providers understood the concept of unbundling and therefore do not look for this type of service, nor offer it. Firms do not advertise unbundling as a matter of course - even when they say that they would like to expand their unbundled

services work - because they do not always have the resources to provide it.

Paul Philip, Chief Executive of the SRA, said: 'Our findings suggest that unbundling has the potential to make some legal services more affordable for those on low incomes, while law firms could benefit too as it would increase their client base.

'Unbundling won't work for everyone but raising awareness would help people to make good choices. We will also explore whether we can do more to address the concerns that may be stopping firms from offering this way of working.'

As part of our public legal education work we will look at what more we can do to improve the information available about unbundling and work with others to raise awareness of this option for firms and consumers.