

News release

Recognising needs early is key for firms helping disabled consumers

14 October 2019

New research [<https://www.sra.org.uk/sra/how-we-work/archive/reports/reasonable-adjustments/>] has revealed what solicitor firms could do to improve access to their services for people with mental or physical disabilities.

And it found that early identification of needs and adjustments was vital if those with disabilities were to access legal services via solicitors. Commissioned by the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA), the research was undertaken by YouGov.

It saw more than 3,500 disabled people sharing their views on the challenges they face, and the reasonable adjustments firms could make to help them overcome these. More than half of those interviewed said they found accessing legal services difficult, with only one in four ever remembering being proactively asked if they need any reasonable adjustments to be made.

This problem is particularly acute for those whose disabilities are not immediately obvious, many of who say they lack the confidence to make requests themselves for information or services to be offered in a different way.

Once disabled people had hired a solicitor, their impression of the service was generally positive, with the most important factor influencing this being the attitude and flexibility of frontline staff working for a firm.

Key improvements the research suggested firms could make to be more accessible to disabled people included:

- Proactively asking all clients if they need any reasonable adjustments to be made, with examples of what form these may take.
- Introducing easier-to-navigate and more accessible websites, with dedicated information for those with disabilities.
- Adding pictures of their offices on their website, to help people feel familiar with them and judge how accessible they will be before visiting.
- Train staff in supporting vulnerable clients, and actively promote any relevant expertise, partnerships or accreditations.

SRA Chief Executive, Paul Philip, said: "All solicitors will recognise that disabled people often have multiple, complex and varying needs, that may

not be immediately obvious. Accessing legal services can be complex enough without facing such added challenges, which is why it is so important that firms do all they reasonably can to help people overcome any difficulties.

"This research found that while some firms are clearly good at this, others have more to do. The insights should help firms to make the changes needed to support hundreds of thousands of people to access professional legal support when they need it."

In compiling their research YouGov surveyed more than 3,500 disabled people through a combination of online surveys, one-to-one interviews and online forums. A workshop was also held with charities and stakeholder groups, alongside a review of existing literature published in this area.

Solicitors and law firms have duties under the Equality Act 2010 and the Code of Conduct to treat people fairly and without discriminating against them on the grounds of characteristics including disability.

Read the research on Reasonable adjustments in the provision of legal services [<https://www.sra.org.uk/sra/how-we-work/archive/reports/reasonable-adjustments/>] .