

EMBARGOED UNTIL 00:01 WEDNESDAY 30 DECEMBER:

68% OF CONSUMERS HAVE ‘LITTLE OR NO’ KNOWLEDGE OF WHAT LAWYERS DO

DESPITE LEGAL SUPPORT NEEDS ARISING AT MOST VULNERABLE TIMES,
ONLY 14% ‘SHOP AROUND’ FOR THE RIGHT LAWYER

EXTENT OF KNOWLEDGE GAP ON LEGAL SERVICES REVEALED AS HISTORIC
CHANGES TO LEGAL PROFESSION ENACTED ON 1 JANUARY 2010

New research released today reveals the extent to which the public in England and Wales feel uninformed about their options when they need legal services.

Although the services of lawyers are needed at some of the most critical times in people’s lives – including buying a home, separation and divorce, defending criminal charges and dealing with disputes – **less than a third** of respondents felt they knew at least a ‘fair amount’ of what it is lawyers do.

This is despite the fact that **over 60% of those polled** had personally used legal services, with 53% having used them at least once over the last five years.

Whilst consumer choice is taken for granted in other areas of the economy, the figures suggest that the public feels disempowered when it comes to comparing services and choosing their lawyer – with **only 14% having ‘shopped around’** for the right lawyer.

Despite this, **three-quarters of people were satisfied** or very satisfied with the legal advice they had received.

The findings come as the legal profession is poised for historic change on 1 January 2010, as a new regulatory regime affecting all lawyers in England and Wales is activated by statute.

The new regulatory framework was enacted by Parliament to create a new focus for consumers in the delivery of legal services, with new oversight of regulators, greater choice for consumers and more effective redress when things go wrong.

For the first time, a single body – the Legal Services Board – is empowered to oversee the entire legal services sector – with a remit to reform and modernise the market place by putting the interests of consumers at the heart of the system, including in such areas as accessibility of services, entry routes and planning for the diverse legal workforce of the future.

Chairman of the Legal Services Board, David Edmonds, said:

People's contact with lawyers tends to be at the most sensitive and vulnerable times of their lives. This research shows that consumers do not have the information or, sometimes, the skills to choose a lawyer based on their own assessment of quality or cost.

The reforms to be brought about by the new regulatory framework have the potential to change the relationship between lawyers and the public. Our goal is to enhance the interests of consumers through effective competition and more innovative ways of delivering legal services.

Notes for editors:

1. 2,033 individuals aged over 18 were surveyed online by YouGov over the first two weeks in December 2009 in a nationally representative survey.
2. The Legal Services Act ('The Act') provides for the creation of the Legal Services Board as the oversight regulator for legal services in England and Wales. The new regulatory regime enacted by the Act becomes fully active on 1 January 2010.
3. The legal profession currently consists of some 16,455 barristers, 112,246 solicitors and 12,200 individuals authorised to operate in other aspects of the legal profession such as conveyancing. The sector has been valued at £25.97 billion per annum. In total the legal sector employed 323,000 individuals in 2008. [ONS]
4. Section one of the Act defines the following regulatory objectives that guide the work of the Legal Services Board and its partners the Approved Regulators:
 - Protecting and promoting the public interest;
 - Supporting the constitutional principle of the rule of law;
 - Improving access to justice;
 - Protecting and promoting the interests of consumers of legal services;
 - Promoting competition in the provision of legal services;

- Encouraging an independent, strong, diverse and effective legal profession;
- Increasing public understanding of the citizen's legal rights and duties;
- Promoting and maintaining adherence to the professional principles;

5. The 2009/10 LSB business plan can be found at:

http://www.legalservicesboard.org.uk/news_publications/publications/pdf/business_plan_2009_10.pdf

6. The LSB oversees eight "Approved Regulators", which in turn regulate individual lawyers and organisations. The eight approved regulators, designated under Part 1 of Schedule 4 of the 2007 Act, are the Law Society, the Bar Council, the Master of the Faculties, the Institute of Legal Executives, the Council for Licensed Conveyancers, the Chartered Institute of Patent Agents, the Institute of Trade Mark Attorneys and the Association of Law Costs Draftsmen.

7. The Lord Chancellor has laid an Order that will, subject to the necessary Parliamentary procedures, see two further professional bodies from outside the traditional legal services sector designated formally as approved regulators from 1 January 2010. Those bodies, which will both be listed as approved regulators in relation only to reserved probate activities, are:

- Institute of Chartered Accountants in Scotland (ICAS);
- Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA).

8. The full results of the research can be found [here](#).