

## SRA response

### Legal Services Board statement of policy: Empowering Consumers in the Legal Services Market

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#### Chair's Foreword

The SRA exists to drive trust and confidence in legal services. To achieve this we set standards, regulate the profession and the firms they work for, and give consumers the tools they need to find what they need. All of this creates a legal service market in which consumers can feel empowered. We know that as the largest regulator in the UK legal sector, we have a key role to play.

The SRA Board has led the organisation's approach to consumer empowerment since the publication of the CMA's market study in 2016. We have had regular discussions about how best to address the many policy challenges that exist, most recently we reviewed our work in the light of some new consumer research and agreed we should do more on price transparency in response. We also discussed our approach to this submission.

Our decision making has at every stage been informed by high-quality evidence, including from the consumer research we commission (such as that on price transparency), as well as from stakeholder engagement. This is in line with the approach set out in the Legal Services Consumer Panel's Consumer Focused Regulation in Legal Services report. The Board's understanding of the issues is enhanced by some direct engagement; we regularly meet with consumers and their representatives at Board dinners and related events and we observe consumer and stakeholder research activity when possible.

The SRA has engaged with over 9,000 consumers to inform our work on transparency and the provision of better information.

We have made specific efforts to reach under-represented groups to inform our priorities. For example, by partnering with third sector organisations to speak to those with learning disabilities, older people, and people who are facing homelessness.

In Public Legal Education we have taken an information at the point of need approach to delivery because the evidence shows that consumers prefer not to engage with information about legal services until they have an issue they need help with.

Legal Choices is the primary vehicle for this work. The SRA lead the development of Legal Choices and provide the majority of the funding and resource required to deliver it. We have also worked collaboratively with legal regulators in other ways, for instance piloting a code of conduct for digital comparison tools.

We have adopted a progressive approach to implementation, as recommended by the CMA. We use research to identify the best first targets for action and building in staged evaluations so we can learn and adapt our approach. Compliance with our efforts is not always good and so we have introduced a robust compliance programme, supported by practical guidance.

Some achievements of this work are:

- The number of people visiting the Legal Choices website rose from 130,000 in 2018 to more than 1.1 million in 2024, following re-launch and targeted marketing.
- The number of firms providing price information increased from 18% to 68% within the first-year post implementation.
- In 2023 the 3-year evaluation of our Transparency Rules found strong evidence that increasing numbers of consumers are using and comparing information on prices and services. The 2024 Legal Services Consumer Panel (LSCP) Tracker survey shows that 78% consumers of legal services feel that information on pricing is easy to understand, whilst consumers that used a solicitor find price information significantly easier (82%) to understand.
- One of the review platforms we worked with during our pilot to explore the use of online reviews, reported a 200% increase in the numbers of law firms engaging with their website.

We are clear that we are compliant with the Legal Services Board statement on consumer empowerment, but we know there will always be more work to be done.

Next year sees the 5-year evaluation of the price transparency rules. We want to understand better how our work has affected consumers' lives, so we will be focussed on the measurement of consumer

outcomes. We have a new consumer policy team, to drive forward this and other work, such as on First Tier Complaints.

We will continue to collaborate with the other legal regulators, the LSCP and the Legal Ombudsman (LeO) including on Legal Choices and the Regulatory Information Service. We will explore other opportunities for sharing insight and joint working with other regulators, including through the UK Regulators Network. The rest of this paper shows how we are meeting the expectations set out in the LSB's policy statement. We set out evidence we have used to shape our work, the actions we have taken and the impacts and learnings that have followed. We also set out our next steps, as part of the progressive approach we have adopted, including how we will learn and adapt, so we can deliver meaningful outcomes for consumers who have legal issues, enabling them to make informed decisions about choosing and using legal services.

**Anna Bradley, SRA Chair**

## **Introduction**

Following the CMA's review of the legal market in 2016, the SRA has been on a journey to revamp its processes and update its capabilities to help make sure the consumer interest is represented throughout our work.

We agree with the aims of the LSB's Statement on Consumer Empowerment and have taken a purposive approach to driving better outcomes for consumers. We have worked to ensure that our activities are grounded in robust evidence. This is true both in evidencing the specific decisions we have made, but also in prioritising our work programmes and focusing our attention on the things that have the most impact on consumers.

In line with the LSB's expectations and the CMA's reports, we have developed our organisational structure and internal processes to drive focus on evidence, impact, and evaluation. We brought our policy and research teams together, along with redeveloping the way our policy pipeline is prioritised, to ensure policy decisions are backed by robust data and evaluation processes. We changed our horizon scanning processes to support organisational decision-making and, in identifying and analysing information related to priority risks, we ensure impact on consumer harm is a key consideration. For example, last year, our programme included work to increase our understanding of the risks related to access to justice and vulnerability issues.

We have also invested in our research and evaluation capabilities:

- Since the CMA's initial report, we have grown our external research budget from c200k to over £1 million per annum.
- We brought in specific behavioural science and social research expertise to improve our ability to design and conduct the advanced types of research recommended in the CMA market study. This has allowed us to conduct research and policy impact assessments that reflect actual human behaviour.
- We developed our data science expertise, enabling us to build better models to predict both consumer and firm behaviour. This has also proven essential to our on-going compliance programmes.
- We invested in external advice to support the development of our evaluation programmes to ensure we had robust processes in place to understand the impact of our reform programmes. This allows us to determine the impact the changes we make have on consumers in the legal market, allowing us to identify and address unintended consequences of policy changes.

## **How we undertook this work**

In the areas of transparency and provision of better information, to inform our key policy changes, we conducted research with over 9,000 consumers, conducted randomised controlled trials where possible (in line with the CMA's recommendations for consumer testing and understanding behaviours), and developed our policy proposals based on what the evidence told us.

We tailored our policy proposals to make targeted interventions in some areas of the market, whilst applying other changes across the piece. For example, we made specific changes on price and transparency in more 'transactional' areas of the market where data showed these changes were practical. At the same time, we introduced different regulatory requirements, for example the SRA's Digital Badge, across the whole market. We require every firm to publish information on its website detailing its complaints handling procedure, including how and when a complaint can be made to the Legal Ombudsman and to the SRA. We also took into account what was practical for firms to provide and most beneficial for consumers to receive.

Since the overarching changes were made, our focus has been on evaluation and compliance, both of which are on-going. The reforms we introduced impacted a large number of firms and consumers in the

market, and our evaluation programme was put in place to allow us to monitor shifts in the market to give us the best picture of impact. We have already conducted evaluation work with almost 7000 consumers to help us understand the impact of our policy programme and adapt policies where necessary. The final stage of our evaluation programme is scheduled for next year. As part of this, we include a specific focus on greater measurement of consumer outcomes, the results of which, will feed into further policy changes where appropriate.

We have also focused on ensuring that firms are complying with our rules and have put in place a robust compliance programme. We recognise that interventions only make a difference if they actually change behaviour. We are seeking to shift behaviour using the full spectrum of tools at our disposal, ranging from improving understanding through to enforcement.

Whilst it is important for firms to be transparent with the information they provide, it is equally important for us to do our part to help grow the knowledge, understanding and capability of consumers. For this reason, we have invested in public legal education, both through renewed focus on the Legal Choices website, as well as in standalone information campaigns.

The rest of this response focuses on the specific actions we have taken, to meet each of the specific expectations, and in doing so, cover how we have acted in line with the wider expectations, before we outline our next steps.

## **The specific expectations of the LSB policy statement**

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### **Public Legal Education ('PLE')**

We have put in place an effective programme of activity focused on increasing public understanding of the citizen's legal rights and duties and have made meaningful contributions to cross legal regulator initiatives. These services are targeted at consumers who have an immediate need. We have chosen to do this because it is our view that it delivers the most impact: by providing content that consumers can use at the time they need it (and are actively searching for it), we can reach the most people, at the time the information is likely to be most useful.

A year after the CMA's December 2016 legal services market study was published, frontline legal services regulators and the Legal Ombudsman launched a programme of work that has run for seven years and included a re-design, re-build, and re-launch of the Legal Choices service. We have invested significantly in staff resource, developing new content, and digital marketing activity to promote the website with relevant audiences. As a result, the number of people visiting the Legal Choices website rose from 130,000 in the 12-month period ending 31 October 2018 to more than 1.1 million in the 12 months to 31 August 2024. In each of the past four legal years, more than a million people have visited the website.

To ensure the revamped site took account of consumer need, we partnered with a user research organisation to test the new service with individual consumers to maximise usability and ensure consumers are able to find the information they need. We also drew on the expertise of the [Legal Choices Advisory Panel](https://www.legalchoices.org.uk/about/about-the-legal-choices-website#:~:text=Members%20of%20the%20Legal%20Choices,of%20the%20public%20and%20businesses.) [https://www.legalchoices.org.uk/about/about-the-legal-choices-website#:~:text=Members%20of%20the%20Legal%20Choices,of%20the%20public%20and%20businesses.] to inform content and provide advice on issues faced by consumers and businesses. The panel included representation from AdviceUK, Citizens Advice, Law Centres Network and Which?

Alongside this, we created a catalogue of resources that can be used both directly by individual consumers, but also as a tool for consumer representative groups, charities and law centres. These are focused on demystifying the experience of using legal services, to help people understand their legal issue and how to access professional help. This catalogue already includes over 100 podcast style videos dealing with housing, employment, immigration and asylum, and going to court. In doing so, we have recognised where different groups of consumers may have different needs. When developing information videos on renting a property for example, we took account of the difference in law in this area between England and Wales and filmed separate content for consumers in Wales. We also filmed Welsh language versions. In addition, we have developed and published specific content for potentially vulnerable consumers, such as asylum seekers and people with other immigration issues, to ensure they have a clear path to progress a legal need and mitigate some of the stress involved with being in such a situation. We partnered with a range of groups working with people using immigration and asylum legal services including Refugee Action, the Red Cross and Displaced People in Action to help inform our approach and test materials, learning and adjusting these based on feedback. This included speaking with individual consumers.

We have effectively built the reach of our messaging particularly through social media campaigns, recognising the importance of understanding where and when people look for information and

providing this in a way that is accessible for them. Over the past four years, Legal Choices web pages have been rated more than 8,000 times by users. On average, 60% of users rate pages as useful. As we are aware that these messages will not reach all consumers, we also partner with a range of charities through the Legal Choices Advisory Panel who have direct contact with consumers and can share the information and tools we provide when relevant to help consumers, especially those who may be considered digitally excluded.

We have designed Legal Choices with direct input from consumers and have increased its reach. For example, we recently worked with a range of consumer organisations on developing resources for people on immigration and asylum issues. We partnered with Displaced People in Action to speak directly to people with lived experience of using immigration and asylum legal services to inform and test these resources. The forum co-ordinator told us afterwards how talking to the group about their thoughts on these materials was very important, as they were able to contribute ideas of changes, informed through their lived experience. They felt the information provided, left them with the confidence to challenge when their adviser had not been meeting expected standards and the resources would be useful for others in their communities.

We are confident this work is providing meaningful benefit to consumers in helping them to make informed decisions about using legal services and meets the expectations of the LSB.

We continue to keep Legal Choices content under review, regularly discussing this and other key issues collaboratively with the other frontline legal regulators, the Legal Ombudsman and Legal Services Consumer Panel. The development of content is also informed by the views and experience of the Legal Choices Reference Group. Members are polled on a weekly basis about users needs, knowledge gaps and suggested content via the Legal Choices mobile app. The reference group has representation from private legal practice, support networks and specialist charities. We are continuing work to build the Legal Choices brand externally. We are piloting the use of short engaging videos using Instagram reels and curating our YouTube Shorts. We will evaluate this pilot and anticipate recommending an expansion to TikTok if successful to make sure PLE messages remain impactful and delivered to different types of consumers.

We have also collaborated with other agencies on information campaigns for specific consumer groups. An example of this would be the work we did with the Youth Justice Legal Centre and Just for Kids Law to develop [resources](https://update.sra.org.uk/solicitors/resources/continuing-competence/what-children-expect/) [https://update.sra.org.uk/solicitors/resources/continuing-competence/what-children-expect/] for young people who come into contact with the youth justice system about what they should expect from a solicitor. This has included an easy to read leaflet for young people about how solicitors can help them, which we tested with young people. We also developed a good practice guide for solicitors working in the youth courts.

## **Information about price**

To ensure a strong evidence base on which to build policy we conducted research with consumers and tested the likely impact of different policy options prior to their introduction. We conducted research with over 9000 [individual consumers](https://update.sra.org.uk/sra/research-publications/price-transparency-legal-services-market/) [https://update.sra.org.uk/sra/research-publications/price-transparency-legal-services-market/] and [small businesses](https://update.sra.org.uk/sra/research-publications/price-transparency/) [https://update.sra.org.uk/sra/research-publications/price-transparency/] specifically focusing on how to appropriately design our pricing policy using research methods recommended by the CMA in their market study.

Through this research and engagement with key stakeholders we were able to design and implement our [Transparency Rules](https://update.sra.org.uk/solicitors/standards-regulations/transparency-rules/) [https://update.sra.org.uk/solicitors/standards-regulations/transparency-rules/] in 2018. In doing so, we considered all of the factors that were suggested in the LSB's statement and mandated rules that cover each factor.

In considering the principles set out in the statement, we decided to take a tailored approach to our reform programme and chose to implement rules in the areas of residential conveyancing, probate, motoring offences, employment tribunals, debt recovery, and licensing applications. We also later added immigration to the areas of law in scope, following feedback during the policy consultation. Consultation respondents pointed out that while asylum claims were passported for legal aid, other areas of immigration were not, and these services were commonly privately funded with vulnerable consumers. They also raised specific concerns about unexplained differences in prices for the same work.

We chose areas that were less 'contentious', more 'transactional', and where firms were likely to be able to give an accurate and smaller range in cost information. Therefore, making this information easier for consumers to compare between suppliers. The latest LSCP tracker survey highlights that, when choosing legal services, price in conveyancing is more important to consumers than in most other areas of law, also showing the value of focusing in this area.

One factor we have been keenly aware of throughout the reform programme is the potential unintended consequence of reducing access to justice through cost disclosure. In an area like

conveyancing, there are a large number of providers who process a large number of 'cases', where the service is relatively simple and standardised. It is therefore relatively straightforward for firms to give an accurate reflection of costs upfront. Equally, and importantly, because the service is a necessity following a decision already made, i.e. buying or selling a house – it is unlikely that the price of the service will dissuade a consumer from pursuing their purchase. Although there is of course scope for them to make a decision on the supplier they chose, as a result. In comparison, areas like family law can be more complex. If a person is considering separation for example, the price of that service, especially if there are children involved, could prove influential on their decision to purchase legal advice or not. In an area where the final costs are more difficult to establish before discussing the legal issue, firms may be required to advertise broad ranges of costs upfront, and if the consumer wrongly assumes they will be charged the top end of this range they may be less likely to proceed, thus creating an access to justice issue in itself and potentially leaving people in vulnerable situations.

We also wanted to be able to evaluate the impact of the reforms both in terms of scale and across different areas. We therefore chose areas that served both a large number of consumers, for example residential conveyancing, but also more bespoke services, such as probate. Equally, as set out in the LSB's principles, we felt it important to cover a range of services that were used both by consumers and small businesses. These areas also provided the opportunity to collaborate with other regulators to cover the wider regulated market and make the information available to consumers more consistent and comparable. This is intended to improve the scale of impact on consumers, as well as providing an extra level of feedback and evaluation from the experience from other regulated areas.

In implementing changes of this scale, we felt that these areas strike the right balance, both in areas of law used by a large number of consumers, whilst also minimising the risk of our rules leading to negative consumer outcomes. In short, they provide the best opportunity for us to create change at scale, whilst using this to learn about the impacts through our evaluation programme, before expanding into other areas. We have already conducted the one-year and three-year evaluation stages, which have included over almost 7,000 consumers, and will be completing our five-year evaluation in 2025. By this time, we will have a greater understanding of the long-term impacts of these changes. In addition, we will also seek to embed further consumer outcome metrics as part of this and plan to engage with the LSCP in doing so.

The changes we have made have undoubtedly supported greater provision of price information. In our first-year evaluation we found that before our reforms only 18% of firms displayed any information on price and services on their website. This compared to 68% within just the first-year post implementation.

The information is clearly useful to consumers. In 2023 the three-year evaluation of our Transparency Rules found strong evidence that increasing numbers of consumers are using and comparing information on prices and services. The research found that 55% of individual consumers and 60% of small business who instructed solicitors first compared the prices and services of providers. This is an increase on the 46% of individuals and 48% of small businesses who were found to have compared providers in the one-year evaluation of our Transparency Rules.

The 2024 LSCP Tracker Survey shows that 78% of consumers of all legal services find it easy to understand information about the prices of legal services, whilst consumers that used a solicitor find price information significantly easier (82%) to understand. The latest LSB and TLS Legal Needs Survey found that 78% of people found it easy to search for prices, although it is important to recognise this is dependent on levels of legal confidence.

Evidence indicates therefore that the changes we have made have had an impact, providing a significant contribution to helping consumers shop around and compare legal service providers, not only in the areas we have mandated but across other areas of law. The LSCP's 2024 tracker survey shows 41% of consumers are now shopping around, when doing so the greatest proportion of consumers compare three providers (42%). Those that shopped around were more likely to agree that they felt they had more choice (86%), and this is in line with those that shopped around in 2023 (86%). Those who were satisfied with the outcome of their legal matter, were also more likely to feel that they had a choice than the overall sample.

Whilst we are seeing the benefits of our reform programme, we have also focused on compliance, for a number of reasons, in particular:

Firms need to comply with the rules we set to ensure a level playing field.

If we find that levels of compliance are low, it is hard to develop a true understanding of the impact reforms that are in place and build this learning into future policy decisions.

To this end we developed a distinct programme and have allocated substantial resource to ensure firms are compliant with the rules and that consumers are receiving the information they need.



In 2021 we required all firms in scope of the Transparency Rules to make a declaration they were compliant with the rules. Most firms declared they were compliant, but a significant minority either didn't make a declaration or declared that they were not compliant. We dealt with these groups through engagement, which escalated to enforcement action for those with persistent non-compliance. Following this, we took a sample of the firms who had declared compliance with the rules and found that most were not compliant. Again, we dealt with the non-compliant firms through engagement, which escalated to enforcement action for those with persistent non-compliance.

As many of the firms we sampled had declared compliance but were shown to not be, we took the decision to check the websites of all firms who declared compliance, around 2,500 websites. This programme has been ongoing since 2023 and requires significant resource. Where breaches of the rules are identified, we contact those firms to bring them into compliance. Where firms remain in breach despite our engagement and guidance, we issue them with a fixed financial penalty (we have issued 31 fixed penalties of £750 each as part of this exercise). We also check that they provided us with an accurate declaration in 2021, since they may have told us they were fully compliant with the rules when in fact they were not. Since February 2023 we have reviewed the websites of over 1,500 firms and brought most into compliance with the rules. We have used the intelligence gathered from engaging with firms around compliance to directly inform updates to our resources and pricing guidance for firms.

Since the introduction of these rules, and as we conduct our evaluation and compliance work, we have consistently reflected on their design and looked to update our approach to ensure they are positively impacting consumers. We provide guidance for firms on how to comply effectively with the rules and have updated this to make sure it works both for consumers and firms. We also updated our code of conduct which now requires that all firms provide consumers with the best possible information for all legal services about how their matter will be priced.

For the reasons above, we believe we have met the specific expectations of the LSB's statement. We also believe these programmes show how we have worked to incorporate the principles and general outcomes of the statement by prioritising testing policies with consumers, having processes in place to evaluate and learn from the impacts of changes, and programmes in place to tackle compliance. We are aware that some stakeholders would have liked to see the SRA go further and expand the pricing rules to other areas of law. Before doing so we are committed to understanding the 'true' impact of the reforms we have already made through our evaluation programme which is still on-going, as well as ensuring we can increase compliance in the areas where rules are already in place.

As we tackle these high-risk consumer areas, learn from our evaluation programme and work to increase compliance, there are a number of initiatives that we are progressing which will inform the next stage of our work on pricing information.

We are conducting further research on price information outside of the evaluation programme to supplement our understanding of transparency requirements in both areas of the market already within the scope of the rules, but also areas outside of the current requirements.

We also believe that third party digital comparison tools ('DCTs') can be useful tools in providing wider and more accessible information on pricing to consumers. We talk more about our work with DCTs in the next section.

## **Information about quality**

As highlighted in the CMA's report, producing accurate, usable information for consumers regarding quality is a key aspect but one in which there are substantial challenges. However, it is an area that has formed a key focus of our empowerment work.

We first focused on meeting the minimum expectations set out in the LSB's statement to provide a single place where consumers could access a provider's disciplinary records and published decisions by the Legal Ombudsman ('LeO'). To do so, we created our Solicitors' Register and our '[Check a solicitor's record](https://update.sra.org.uk/consumers/solicitor-check/1)' service which provides information about disciplinary and enforcement decisions and other records. At the beginning we also facilitated the re-publication of Legal Ombudsman records through the '[Disciplinary and regulatory records](https://www.legalchoices.org.uk/records/)' service on the Legal Choices website.

However, we wanted to ensure that all of this information was held in one place that was easy to access for consumers. We therefore more recently built the '[trust your adviser](https://www.legalchoices.org.uk/records/can-you-trust-your-legal-adviser/)' tool which provides access on the Legal Choices website to all regulatory decisions and Legal Ombudsman decisions in one place - across all regulated lawyers.

Through this work we felt that we had met the minimum expectations set out in the statement. We then turned to the further information suggested by the LSB for regulators to consider, for example

complaints data, success rates, and customer feedback. One of the key actions we undertook on quality indicators is the pilot programme that we completed with DCTs in 2022. The pilot involved:

- Over 6000 consumer interviews exploring what information is most useful when comparing potential providers. We also looked at how users interact with online information and comparison tools.
- An in-depth survey of 264 law firms to get their views and experiences on using and interacting with comparison websites, alongside direct engagement and piloting activity with more than 70 law firms.
- Pro-active promotion of the potential benefits of customer reviews and comparison websites by the participating regulators. This included providing guidance to law firms and online tools for the public with links to, and information on, the ten participating DCTs, including Trustpilot, ReviewSolicitors, and the Law Superstore.
- Engaging with the Legal Ombudsman, HM Land Registry and HM Courts & Tribunals Service about data they hold on providers and how it can be accessed and used by consumers.

The research found that online reviews are valued by consumers. DCTs can be an important part of the solution to encourage consumers to use quality indicators as they have the resources and expertise to present information to consumers in a useful and accessible way, at speed. As a result, the promotion of online reviews and engagement with DCTs has been a key area of focus given the potential of this work to encourage changes in the market and improve consumer outcomes, particularly as the numbers of people using digital tools increases.

With this in mind, we published guidance for law firms and solicitors about engagement with comparison sites, and good practice for engaging with online reviews and the websites that host them. We also invested in programmes to drive consumers to these products through the use of targeted advertising via Google and Facebook.

We have developed products that promote engagement with online reviews and DCTs including a [resource](https://update.sra.org.uk/consumers/choosing/comparison-services/) [https://update.sra.org.uk/consumers/choosing/comparison-services/] that allows consumers to compare and find DCTs who are signed up to our voluntary code, calls to action to compare providers built into the digital badge's landing page and the Solicitors Register, and consumer information about online legal service reviews.

This work has helped to increase the numbers of providers starting to promote online reviews to their clients, and increased numbers of consumers writing reviews of their legal service provider. Within the pilot period Trustpilot recorded numbers of law firms engaging with it increasing by 32.6% and a 9% growth in numbers of consumers writing legal service reviews. Another of the review platforms we worked with during the pilot, ReviewSolicitors, reported a 200% increase in the numbers of law firms engaging with their website. The 2024 LSCP Tracker survey shows that 28% of people who shopped around for legal services used an internet search to help choose their provider.

We have also recently published a [permanent voluntary code](https://update.sra.org.uk/solicitors/resources/fees/voluntary-code-conduct/#:~:text=Websites%20are%20independent%20(not%20owned,relationships%20with%20legal%20services%20providers.) [https://update.sra.org.uk/solicitors/resources/fees/voluntary-code-conduct/#:~:text=Websites%20are%20independent%20(not%20owned,relationships%20with%20legal%20services%20providers.] for digital comparison tool providers and updated the [resources](https://update.sra.org.uk/solicitors/resources/fees/customer-reviews/) [https://update.sra.org.uk/solicitors/resources/fees/customer-reviews/] we publish about them to law firms. We also use opportunities such as our compliance conference and webinars to promote the use of these tools.

Whilst this has been our key focus, as the evidence showed it would have the greatest impact, we also looked at the other areas suggested by the LSB for regulators to consider. For example, we explored the further options for publication of complaints data, success rates, and error rates. We analysed options to publish our internal complaints data, however, given the disparity in firm size, number of employees, and number of cases, we did not find a way to publish this information in a manner that was digestible by consumers, and equally that was not unfair to small firms and sole practitioners. As noted by the CMA in their market study, whilst developing indicators of success, we came to understand that this was also a difficult area given the subjectivity of 'success' and the weight consumers are likely to put on the outcome of their case. Again, we found that attempts by a regulator to publish this type of information could unfairly harm a firm's reputation and was unlikely to be useful to consumers.

Requisition data, which is a good indicator of error rates in conveyancing, does have the potential to be used as a quality indicator. We tested this in our quality indicators pilot, and identified good levels of interest amongst consumers, but also problems in contextualisation and data integrity. This is something we are still working towards, and we have maintained an ongoing relationship with HM Land Registry (HMLR) and take part in its Digital Property Steering Group.

### **[Information about service, redress and regulation](#)**

In line with the expectations set out in the LSB's statement, our Codes of Conduct and Transparency Rules require solicitors and firms to provide all the necessary information for consumers to access the key information on service, redress and regulation. Based on this we confirm we have met the expectations of the statement.

However, we wanted to ensure that not only was this information available, but that it was also easily accessible to consumers in a single, recognisable place and format. Our digital badge therefore provides consumers with a simple way to access information about the firm and verify a provider's authenticity and regulated status. As with the requirements we placed on firms to publish price information, we extensively tested the digital badge with consumers prior to its introduction. Consumers are growing more aware of and are engaging more with the digital badge. Comparing our third-year evaluation of the transparency rules with our first-year report for example, awareness of the digital badge has increased from 15% to 55% for individuals and from 19% to 65% for SMEs.

As highlighted earlier in the document we are monitoring compliance with the rules to ensure this information is provided to consumers, and take appropriate enforcement action where necessary including through the use of fixed financial penalties.

We have also worked to ensure that consumers have a good understanding of what information to expect from providers. With this in mind, we created content for consumers on '[what to expect](https://update.sra.org.uk/consumers/choosing/what-to-expect/)' (<https://update.sra.org.uk/consumers/choosing/what-to-expect/>) - including [community language versions](https://update.sra.org.uk/consumers/choosing/what-to-expect/community-languages/) (<https://update.sra.org.uk/consumers/choosing/what-to-expect/community-languages/>) - '[what to do if something goes wrong](https://update.sra.org.uk/consumers/problems/)' (<https://update.sra.org.uk/consumers/problems/>) and other '[point-of-need](https://update.sra.org.uk/consumers/)' (<https://update.sra.org.uk/consumers/>) information.

We continue to develop our requirements with a view to making information easier to access and understand. For example, we are working to update our publication policy. As part of this, we have developed a new template for our regulatory decisions to improve readability and accessibility. This is in line with the LSCP's recommendation in its Consumer Focused Regulation report that enforcement decisions should be published in way that is accessible to consumers and allows them to use the information as an indicator of service quality. This will help consumers to more easily understand the decisions we have made and why. Furthermore, whilst our rules do already require firms to publish their complaints policies, together with LeO details, we are currently reviewing the LSB's updated requirements on First Tier Complaints to consider what changes we need to make to implement the LSB's requirements, including potential amendments to our rules.

We are also working on further independent research to identify consumers' preferred client money consumer protection mechanisms and outcomes when using legal services. We are conducting deliberative research with consumers (with a mix of ages, sex, ethnicity, location, household income, family and living situations and long-term health conditions, use of legal services and attitude to risk) to gather views on protections and redress if things go wrong, and how views on protections might interact with desired assurances on price, quality and choice.

## How information is made available to consumers

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### Clear, comprehensive, accurate and comparable information

How information is made available to consumers is an important factor that we consider in all of the requirements we place on firms. Our Transparency Rules require that the information that is published by firms is clear, comprehensive, accurate, and up to date. It is important to note that whilst we were testing policy designs prior to the introduction of our rules we found that there was no clear preference from consumers about how information should be presented, and there was varying preference for pricing models by consumers. We therefore chose to provide flexibility in how firms presented information to consumers so they could do so in a way that best suits their business model and client base.

We have however published a number of pieces of guidance and resources to be used by firms, to support them in meeting the requirements and to promote comparability across providers.

We are mindful of the fact that consumers who engage with the legal services market come from a variety of different situations and have varying levels of understanding and need upon entering the market. To progress our work in understanding consumers and the information they need, we conducted research to look into different segments of the legal market. We [commissioned independent research](https://update.sra.org.uk/sra/research-publications/consumer-segmentation-research/) (<https://update.sra.org.uk/sra/research-publications/consumer-segmentation-research/>) and engaged with almost 4,000 individual consumers and over 400 small businesses with the aim of developing our understanding of legal consumers. The research identified various types of information that different consumers value in the provision of legal services. We will consider the findings of this research in





future decisions about what requirements we may place on firms about how this information is presented. We also recognise that the LSCP's Consumer Tracker provides valuable insight as to the difficulties particular groups may have in finding information about legal services when shopping around, and we will continue to take account of this information to inform future work in this area.

Whilst we have met the LSB's expectations, we are taking forward work to further improve the clarity and comparability of information that we make available to consumers. For example, as part of the good practice resources we make available to firms, we have developed and published new [example pricing templates](https://examples.sra.org.uk/) (for conveyancing and probate), working collaboratively with CLC and Cilex Regulation to do so, to illustrate to firms how they can present pricing information in a more easy to understand way and support the greater comparability of information between regulators. This has incorporated learning both from our enforcement work and engagement with DCTs.

We have also designed an [example template](https://examples.sra.org.uk/example-3) which can be used by firms to adapt to their own circumstances and can be adopted for different areas of law.

We have reviewed our pilot voluntary code of conduct for DCT's ahead of its relaunch as a permanent code. We have made changes to this to ensure we give greater consideration to what would benefit consumers in their use of DCTs, to support a positive consumer focused experience. For example, ensuring that the DCT provides information in a transparent way including providing being clear about any costs to consumers of using the service, any referral arrangements between the DCT and firms and also a clear route for complaints.

As a regulator who produces information for and engages with the public, it is essential that our communication is clear and inclusive for consumers, as outlined in the LSCP's Consumer Focused Regulation report.

We think carefully when conducting research with consumers to ensure that the materials we provide are accessible and appropriate for the groups of consumers we speak to. For instance, when we conducted a focus group with people with learning disabilities, we worked collaboratively with a consumer organisation to ensure the language and materials we used were appropriate.

In developing our 2023-2026 Corporate Strategy we produced an [easy read version](https://update.sra.org.uk/globalassets/documents/sra/sra-corporate-strategy-2023-2026.pdf?version=4960d3) of the document to make this easier for people with low levels of literacy, for whom English or Welsh is not their first language and anyone else who may find an easier to follow document useful.

Ensuring that our website is accessible for people with disabilities is an everyday priority for the SRA. We are working to satisfy all relevant AA-level success criteria in line with the World Wide Web Consortium's international standard on web accessibility, the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.2.

## **A single online location**

As noted previously, we have taken the necessary steps to ensure that the information set out in the statement is available in one single online location, namely through the Solicitors Register and 'trust your adviser' tool. We have also used our digital badge as a through-line to the Solicitors Register to ensure consumers have easy access to the information in a recognisable and trustworthy way.

We have made information about our regulatory decisions easier for consumers to understand and we are now publishing these decisions in a more accessible way, to help inform the choices they make about legal services. We tested these changes with consumers during design to inform our final product. We are also leading the development of the Regulatory Information Service (RIS), in collaboration with the other legal regulators and investing heavily in staff resourcing in doing so. The resource aims to provide a single portal for consumers to access information about legal service providers – linking to existing resources where necessary – so that people and small businesses can be better informed about services offered and quality before engaging a provider. This includes regulatory information.

We have built several stages of user testing into the design of the product to ensure that any resulting tool that is developed is accessible to consumers. We will also test its value to consumers as we develop and adapt the design. The intention is that the Regulatory Information Service will be made available via the Legal Choices platform.

## **Facilitating the use of third-party tools and centralised databases**

As we have set out throughout our response, we have engaged extensively with key third party providers and collaborated with other regulators to support the entry of digital comparison tools (DCTs) to the market. We have also worked to build a better understanding, as well as raise awareness and trust of the use of digital comparison tools in the legal market, both with consumers and law firms. This

includes helping them to build distinct products, investing in targeted ads that drive consumers towards their service, and developing voluntary codes of conduct for DCTs to use. We also provide information on an open data basis through our API tool. For these reasons we believe we have met the expectations of the LSB in this area.

## **Next steps**

We believe that we have met the expectations set out in the LSB's statement. Our approach has been iterative – we have implemented policies, evaluated progress and made changes, and evolved new approaches where needed. In order to meet the specific expectations, set out in the statement, we have worked in a way that incorporates both the general outcomes and principles set out by the LSB, along with the approaches suggested in the CMA's market studies.

Although delivering against the LSB's Statement of Policy is an important milestone, we recognise it is by no means the end of the story. We are committed to building on our approach and ensuring that delivering positive outcomes for consumers really is at the heart of everything we do.

We continue to invest and work with other legal regulators to ensure we remain consistent in our approach and reach as many consumers of legal services as we can. For example, we are leading the development of the Regulatory Information Service (RIS) which will bring together even more information for consumers in one place. We also recognise the value of engaging with regulators in other markets to share knowledge and learning, such as through the UK Regulators Network and will pursue this.

We have established a new consumer policy team which will continue to drive forward our work. Alongside our forthcoming evaluation exercise, we are conducting standalone research projects to better understand the consumer interest. We will continue to engage with a wide range of stakeholders, including consumer groups and individual consumers to ensure we keep up to date with the issues consumers face, test our understanding and shape our work. This will allow us to better understand the challenges that different groups of consumers face and how these can be best taken account of and addressed.