

Reshaping legal services

An East of England discussion event

29 November 2021

The Legal Services Board hosted a virtual event in the East of England to explore the *Reshaping legal services* sector wide strategy. Thank you to those who attended and shared their thoughts and experiences.

Below we set out some of the comments made by those who attended. These will help increase our understanding of how the profession and third-party organisations are impacted by the challenges identified by the strategy and can contribute to achieving our shared ambitions.

Consumer-focused legal services

Points raised by participants included:

- Reflections that the East of England has been an advice desert for a long time, and long term funding cuts have not supported the local community.
- The LSB was challenged to show the benefits of regulation to consumers and of collaboration across the sector. There was an ask to keep access to justice at the forefront of everything we do, and to be an example for the profession.
- Many ordinary people are not getting the legal support they need. Attendees noted that accessing legal representation is harder for ordinary people than for corporates.
- Legal Expenses Insurance (LEI) prices would increase if people used it more to address their concerns. The Legal Services Consumer Panel is hesitant about the amount LEI will impact access to justice.
- Digital change isn't always compatible with access to justice, and it can create barriers for people in vulnerable circumstances.
- Attendees were interested in ongoing programmes of public legal education (PLE), and the role representative groups can play in that. We need to support people to understand when they have a legal issue. The LSB is focused on the role that regulation can play in supporting and advancing PLE.

Pressures on the profession

Points raised by participants included:

- Attendees expressed concerns at cuts to legal aid funding, and the impact on access to justice is impacted. Another knock-on effect is that it is difficult to attract new lawyers to the profession.
- Some shared their perception that the burden of regulation on the profession is too great and too expensive and asked regulators to reduce the burden and red tape to take pressure off small businesses.

- The LSB is small and it regulates proportionately in the public interest. Its budget today is lower than it was in 2015/16 (adjusted for inflation). Its resources are focused on improving legal services for consumers.
- The challenges in the PII market are disproportionately affecting small businesses.
- While there is a demand for a law degree and places at university, it can be seen as a flexible degree with fewer law students moving into legal practice after qualification.
- The impact of changes to regulation on pro-bono clinics was noted.

Collaboration

Points raised by participants included:

- The LSB has a unique position to bring different groups together to work to address issues.
- Need to turn words into action – cut backs in funding regularly.
- LSB can be more vocal in sharing evidence-based concerns shared across the sector. LSB needs to be sophisticated in the approach to consumer/profession/society interplay from an oversight viewpoint.
- Attendees discussed the issue with access to redress, particularly for those who use unregulated services. LSB explained the work being done on consumer empowerment and mapping the unregulated sector.
- Make access to legal services more approachable – everything online causes barriers for those who do not have online access.
- The legal services sector can work more with other sectors to support consumers, particularly ‘soft-advisors’, like healthcare professionals.
- Ongoing competence of lawyers and tertiary education will need to evolve side by side – ethics and obligations to the courts and clients.
- There is space for the profession and wider sector to promote Legal Choices.
- Collaboration does require some regulation, but also more visible leadership, which doesn’t need to sit with regulators.
- Collaboration is worth the hard work to achieve results for the consumer/wider public.