

Reasonable adjustments in the provision of legal services

A report for the Solicitor's Regulation Authority

October 2019



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Executive Summary

Background to this study

The Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) has commissioned YouGov to undertake research with disabled people in England and Wales. The aim of this research is to explore the reasonable adjustments that solicitors and law firms can make for legal services and information provision to be more accessible for disabled people¹.

In December 2016 the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA)² reported on their market study into the provision of legal services in England and Wales. The CMA suggested that the legal services market is characterised by high levels of information asymmetry, where people and small businesses lack the relevant information, knowledge and experience needed to make good choices³.

The CMA's report called on regulators to set a new minimum standard for price and information transparency⁴. In response to this, the SRA issued a consultation paper on regulatory data and consumer choice in legal services in September 2017⁵.

In response to the Better Information proposals, consumer groups and charities such as Citizens Advice and Age UK suggested that specific action

¹ Throughout this report we will use the term “disabled people” to refer to people who have a disability. Government guidance recommends the use of “disabled people” as the collective term, but as per the recommendations the context is taken into account and other descriptors may be used. ([Department for Work & Pensions/ Office for Disability issues, Inclusive language: Words to use and avoid when writing about disability \(Updated December 2018\)](#))

² [Competition and Markets Authority \(2016\). Legal services market study; final report](#)

³ [Competition and Markets Authority \(2016\). Legal services market study; final report](#)

⁴ [Competition and Markets Authority \(2016\). Legal services market study; final report](#)

⁵ [SRA \(2017\). Consultation: Looking into the future: Better information, more choice](#)

should be taken to make sure firms provide information in a clear and accessible way to those who are disadvantaged in communication, for example due to a disability⁶ .

The SRA implemented its Transparency Rules for firms in December 2018. Firms must display prices and service information on their website if they offer certain types of legal services. And firms must display an SRA-regulated clickable logo on their website by November 2019 to help the public see that a firm is regulated and has the protections that regulation brings.

Solicitors and law firms have the same duties under the Equality Act 2010 as any other service provider. They are also bound by the SRA's rules that states they must treat people fairly and without discriminating against them on the grounds of characteristics including disability⁷.

The need for reasonable adjustments within legal services is supported by previous evidence showing that disabled people report having legal problems more often than less-vulnerable groups⁸.

There is consensus and evidence that there are areas where solicitors and law firms can improve on making their services more accessible for disabled people. This research provides the SRA with information to help solicitors and law firms make these improvements, particularly in the information that they provide.

⁶ [SRA \(June 2018\). Better information, more choice consultation: analysis of responses](#)

⁷ [Finding and using a solicitor, what to expect, SRA](#)

⁸ [Civil Justice in England & Wales. English and Welsh Civil and Social Justice Panel Survey: Wave 1. Pleasance, P, Balmer, N, Patel, A, Cleary, A, Huskinson, T & Cotton, T \(2010\)](#)

Approach

Various data collection methods were adopted using a staged approach to collect data and insights from disabled people about their experiences of accessing professional services:

- A research review of published literature on the experiences of disabled people in accessing professional services.
- A consumer group workshop, which was attended by the SRA, YouGov and representatives from local and national charities.
- An online survey of 1,572 disabled people and carers of disabled people. To include those that may not have access to the internet, YouGov conducted fourteen qualitative in-depth interviews with disabled people.
- A consumer test with 1,270 disabled people choosing between two hypothetical solicitors' firm's websites, one being 'adapted' and one being 'standard' The adapted version was created using evidence drawn from the stage 1 research about what disabled people would find useful.
- A second consumer test with 1,023 disabled people. This tested how people perceived and responded to different ways of presenting information on how they could make a complaint.
- To include disabled people who are offline or less confident online, YouGov also held:
 - An online forum with 30 'online' participants.
 - Ten face-to-face in-depth interviews in two locations.

Key findings

The experiences of disabled people accessing services

Two thirds of disabled people surveyed in this research experience more than one type of impairment. But not all disabilities are “visible” impairments, and disabled people with “invisible”⁹ disabilities deserve and are entitled to the same reasonable adjustments as those who have a “visible” disability.

The evidence summarised in this report shows that people with less visible impairments, such as mental health and learning or social disabilities face a different and more challenging experience in accessing information and services to those with more visible impairments. For example, three in ten disabled people have difficulty accessing information about professional services. This difficulty is more common in those with mental health or learning/ social impairments.

A focus on disabled people accessing legal services

A third of disabled people who had a legal issue have used a solicitor in the last 4 years. A third of those said they first found their solicitor through a recommendation, which is particularly important amongst those uncomfortable with online information.

Overall, once disabled people have hired a solicitor, their impression of the service is positive and the majority are satisfied with the service they receive. The attitudes of the staff towards a disabled person is the key driver of overall

⁹ Throughout this report we will use the term “invisible disabilities” to refer to disabilities which may be less immediately visible to others (e.g. mental health, learning, social, or memory issues). The term is chosen over “hidden disabilities” to avoid the implication that less visible disabilities are deliberately obscured or hidden.

satisfaction. Flexible and understanding staff who make disabled people feel comfortable (in whatever way that might be) is highly appreciated.

Disabled people would like solicitors to understand that disability is a highly personalised experience and the impacts of a disability can change over time. In response to this, a flexible and modified service is highly valued by disabled people, including in relation to the timescales for returning paperwork.

When disabled people find it difficult to understand information from solicitors, the most common challenges faced were legal jargon, information not being explained in different ways and not receiving timely information.

Barriers and enablers to making services accessible

Almost three quarters of disabled people say they are rarely or never proactively asked if they need adjustments when accessing professional services. An issue that should more commonly be addressed.

The most common barriers to services being accessible for disabled people are unhelpful staff and the disabled person's own anxiety or lack of confidence.

Enablers for accessible legal services were varied, which demonstrates the complexity and the range of needs people have. For example:

- A third say having information on staff's experience and training would give them confidence a service was accessible.
- Key information which would be helpful included the practical accessibility of the service or building, such as step-free access or parking.

However, a number of key themes emerged which can be used by service providers to improve the accessibility of information they provide, these were:

- Having an easy to navigate and accessible website.
- Providing clear information that is easy to read.
- Being able to speak to staff if needed.
- Having a nominated/ dedicated person or part of the website to get information. specific to disabled people.
- Greater empathy and understanding from staff.

How legal service firms can provide better information to disabled people

Two thirds of disabled people preferred the adapted version of the solicitors' homepage. This shows that websites that signal that a firm offers reasonable adjustments can increase the likelihood to choose that firm.

People felt that the adapted firm would:

- Have more expertise in helping disabled people.
- Take their personal circumstances into account.
- Make adaptations for them.

Ultimately, people who chose the adapted firm felt more comfortable contacting the solicitor. A combination of elements on the webpage (language, charity kite mark, images) work together to give the overall impression of a more personable and disability confident service.

A significantly higher proportion of disabled people rated the adapted complaints page as being clearer and simpler to understand compared to the ratings of those who saw the standard complaints information.

The adapted complaints information was more likely to be viewed as useful to disabled people and more commonly considered simple, professional and trustworthy. The standard complaints page was viewed as overwhelming by some participants. Some people felt that because the tone and layout was difficult to digest this meant that the complaints procedure itself would be difficult.

Conclusions

This research has explored the views of a range of people with differing types and severities of disability. Disabled people represent a sizeable proportion of the overall legal services market, according to the ONS, ten million people in England and Wales had some form of disability in 2011 - that's 18% of the population¹⁰.

The presentation of information can sometimes be overwhelming and confusing to disabled people looking to work with a solicitor. We find that making adjustments to how information is presented to disabled people has the dual benefit of improving the experience for the service user themselves and for solicitors' firms in seeing greater uptake of their services and levels of satisfaction.

One of the standout findings, for solicitors and other professional service providers, is that many disabled people are not proactively asked if they need reasonable adjustments at first contact, or only receive adjustments once an issue has occurred. This research has therefore identified that the needs of disabled people should proactively be sought and assumptions not simply made about what help or assistance they might or might not need.

¹⁰ [ONS. 2011 Census analysis \(2015\)](#)

The attitudes of the staff towards a disabled person is a key driver of their overall satisfaction. Flexible and understanding staff who make disabled people feel comfortable are highly valued. Unhelpful staff who lack understanding and empathy are one of the most common barriers disabled people report to a service being accessible to them.

Recommendations

Our overarching recommendation is for solicitor firms to proactively ask all customers, at initial contact and appropriate intervals, if they need any reasonable adjustments. It is essential to ask all customers, as some disabilities are invisible, and people want to be treated equally.

Early identification and understanding of needs is very important to creating a positive experience for disabled people. Professional service providers need to recognise that disabled people often have multiple, complex and varying needs.

Staff training on understanding issues that people may face would help address the barriers some people face.

Recommendations for the presentation of information and communication materials are outlined below:

Information that firms can provide through leaflets, webpages and verbally:

- **Include the image of the office's interior and exterior.** This facilitates customers' planning and helps ease anxieties around what the office environment may be like.
- **Provide written or verbal information at first contact of the office buildings accessibility.** Such as if it has step free access, lifts and nearby parking spaces.

- **Communicate timeframes clearly and frequently** where applicable, for example, for the complaints process or for other standard processes.
- **Include contact details of someone in the firm for disabled people to discuss any issues.** Providing dedicated contact details of someone who specialises in disability issues is helpful, rather than a general email address or switchboard number.
- **Highlight if staff have any training in disabilities.** This information can help disabled people and carers to feel more confident to use a service. It gives them reassurance that the firm will be open, approachable, non-judgemental, professional and understanding.
- **Highlight on the firm's homepage if the firm has any disabled charity accreditation.** Recommendations are extremely important for all people when choosing a solicitor and a recommendation / accreditation from a disabled charity is considered reassuring.

Language, style and layout of information:

- **Keep sentences short and use bullet points to separate key points.** Where processes are outlined, numbered subheadings help readers to keep track of the procedural flow.
- **Use colour but ensure it is accessible.** When colour is used in images it makes the firm appear warmer and more inviting. When colour is used in copy it helps break up the text and draw the eye to key sections.
- **Use spacing to help break up dense text.** Spacing paragraphs out helps to reduce the likelihood of disabled people feeling overwhelmed when they first look at the information.

- **Use a clear font**, in a large enough size (min 14-point text) as possible¹¹.
- **Use images** in information but ensure they can be read by screen readers through adding alt text (alternative text for web images).
- **Avoid using jargon.** Many disabled people already struggle to concentrate on / digest detailed information. Using plain language helps ease anxieties around using a legal service.
- **Provide information in a range of accessible formats** such as Braille, Digital Audio, Electronic text.

¹¹ [DWP and Office for Disability Issues. Accessible communication formats \(2018\)](#)

The context

Purpose, aims and objectives

The Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) has commissioned YouGov to undertake research with disabled people in England and Wales. The aim of this research is to explore the reasonable adjustments that solicitors and law firms can make for legal services, and information provision, to be more accessible for disabled people.

The objectives of the research are to:

- Explore the experiences of disabled people finding, choosing and using legal services, including their experience of information provision and any challenges and barriers they have faced
- Identify and test how to make information more accessible for consumers with a disability.

Policy landscape

In December 2016 the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA)¹² reported on their market study into the provision of legal services in England and Wales. The CMA concluded that competition in legal services is not working well for individual consumers and small businesses. They found that there is not enough information available on price, quality and service to help those who need legal support to choose the best course of action.

The CMA suggested that the legal services market is characterised by high levels of information asymmetry, where people and small businesses lack the

¹² [Competition and Markets Authority. Legal services market study; final report \(2016\)](#)

relevant information, knowledge and experience needed to make good choices¹³.

The CMA's report called on regulators to set a new minimum standard for price and information transparency¹⁴. In response to this in September 2017 the SRA issued a consultation paper on regulatory data and consumer choice in legal services¹⁵. The proposals from the SRA were:

- To mandate regulated firms to publish prices on their website (or provide price information on request if they don't have a website) for particular areas of law
- That firms should publish additional information, such as a description of the services they offer and information about their regulatory status and protections
- To publish data about firms and solicitors to help consumers and small businesses make informed choices when purchasing legal services
- To make SRA information available to re-publishers, such as online comparison websites, as well as consumers directly.

A number of charities and consumer groups responded to the SRA consultation on its Better Information proposals. In their responses to their consultation, consumer groups such as Citizens Advice and Age UK suggested that specific action should be taken to make sure firms provide information in a clear and accessible way to those who are disadvantaged in communication, for example due to a disability¹⁶. The SRA implemented its

¹³ [Competition and Markets Authority. Legal services market study; final report \(2016\)](#)

¹⁴ [Competition and Markets Authority. Legal services market study; final report \(2016\)](#)

¹⁵ [SRA. Consultation: Looking into the future: Better information, more choice \(2017\)](#)

¹⁶ [SRA \(June 2018\). Better information, more choice consultation: analysis of responses](#)

Transparency Rules for firms in December 2018. Firms must display prices and service information on their website if they offer certain types of legal services. And firms must display an SRA-regulated clickable logo on their website by November 2019 to help the public see that a firm is regulated and has the protections that regulation brings.

Under the Equality Act 2010, all service providers must make ‘reasonable adjustments’ to ensure that disabled people are not at a substantial disadvantage when accessing services¹⁷. Service providers have a duty to make these adjustments to any element of their provision, criterion or practice – in short, to any element of their rules, policies, practices or requirements, whether formal or informal, written or unwritten. As is noted, the duty is ‘anticipatory’, obliging service providers to proactively consider accommodations that would equalise the standard of service for those with disabilities. These might include making physical infrastructure accessible with the addition of ramps, putting language into Easy Read¹⁸ or providing auxiliary aids and services¹⁹ where necessary.

Solicitors and law firms have the same duties under the Equality Act 2010 as any other service provider. They are also bound by the SRA’s rules that states they must treat people fairly and without discriminating against them on the grounds of characteristics including disability²⁰.

¹⁷ [The Equality Act 2010](#)

¹⁸ [Department for Work & Pensions/ Office for Disability Issues, Accessible communication formats guidance \(Updated December 2018\)](#)

¹⁹ [Citizens Advice. Duty to make adjustments for disabled people](#)

²⁰ [Finding and using a solicitor, what to expect, SRA](#)

Citizens Advice's guidance on reasonable adjustments for disabled people²¹ gives an example of how a solicitor can provide extra aids or services to help people access their services:

“A solicitor offers to come and meet you at your home as you have severe agoraphobia and find it difficult to leave your home. Normally, they only make appointments at the office. The solicitor provides you with an extra service under their duty to provide reasonable adjustments.”

The need for improvements in reasonable adjustment provision within legal services is supported by previous evidence showing that disabled people report having legal problems more often than less-vulnerable groups²².

A recent study found that, though law centres (such as the Disability Law Service) offer valuable services to disabled people, there still remains a general lack of accessible advice and information available for disabled people²³. This is reflected in the Legal Services Consumer Tracker survey²⁴, which found that disabled people are much less likely to have a conversation with their service provider about how the legal work will be carried out before it starts and are much less likely to know the cost of their legal service. Of those with a severely limiting disability, a third (34%) felt that they had very

²¹ [Citizens Advice. Duty to make adjustments for disabled people](#)

²² [Civil Justice in England & Wales. English and Welsh Civil and Social Justice Panel Survey: Wave 1. Pleasance, P, Balmer, N, Patel, A, Cleary, A, Huskinson, T & Cotton, T \(2010\)](#)

²³ [What happens when people with learning disabilities need advice about the law?](#) Norah Fry Research Centre and the University of Bristol for the Legal Services Board, Legal Services Consumer Panel and Mencap (July 2013)

²⁴ [Legal Services Consumer Panel Tracker Surveys 2011 - 2018](#): Annual survey of how people are choosing and using legal services (includes sample of people with a disability). The research in 2018 collected the views of over 3,000 people in England and Wales who have used a legal service in the past 2 years.

little or no choice about how their legal work would be carried out compared with 22% of people without a disability²⁵.

Poor communication channels are an inhibiting factor to people accessing services, especially for people with learning disabilities. People with learning disabilities are more likely to need help to communicate and understand their legal situation and are less likely to know their rights²⁶. Those who lack the capacity to make decisions themselves need further legal support to ensure that the Mental Capacity Act is upheld²⁷.

This research explores how disabled people choose and use a legal service provider, their past experiences of needing and requesting reasonable adjustments and how legal services can be more accessible, particularly in information provision. The research goes on to test different ways of presenting complaints procedures to disabled people and to understand the best way to make information clear and easy to understand.

Summary of issues faced by disabled people from available literature

What are the experiences of disabled people accessing information about services?

²⁵ [Legal Services Consumer Panel Tracker Surveys 2011 - 2018](#): Annual survey of how people are choosing and using legal services (includes sample of people with a disability)

²⁶ [Civil Justice in England & Wales. English and Welsh Civil and Social Justice Panel Survey. Wave 1.](#) Pleasance, P, Balmer, N, Patel, A, Cleary, A, Huskinson, T & Cotton, T (2010)

²⁷ [Mental Capacity Act 2005](#)

Disabled people are likely to have a below-average level of access to information. This may be due to financial reasons, limited mobility or because absorbing information can require extra effort²⁸.

Providing information in formats that people can access easily is important in making disabled people feel independent and informed about the services they are accessing. As one person outlined *"when organisations send me information in formats that I can read myself it allows me to be independent, feel informed and appreciated - just like every other customer"*²⁹.

There are a range of adaptations that can be made to ensure that information hosted on websites is accessible to people with a range of disabilities. A good starting point is to 'keep it simple' and ensure documents/information is written in plain English, is concise and as legible (min 14-point text) as possible³⁰.

Accessing information is key to many aspects of everyday life that people take for granted. In other sectors, not being able to access information/ services in an accessible format has had impacts on people's day-to-day lives. In the health sector 81% of blind people said they did not get information on their prescription (such as dosage warnings) in a format they could read and 48% said that it takes too much effort to obtain information in accessible formats³¹.

While keeping information simple is important, it should be recognised that in many cases when providing information to disabled people, other adaptations are needed to make sure information is accessible. These include:

²⁸ [UK Government \(2018\) Using a range of communication channels to reach disabled people.](#)

²⁹ [UKAAF, The provision of accessible format materials \(2012\)](#)

³⁰ [DWP and Office for Disability Issues. Accessible communication formats \(2018\)](#)

³¹ [RNIB, Losing Patients \(2009\)](#)

- Large print
- Digital audio
- Electronic text
- Braille
- Accessible images (tactile and large print)
- Easy Read, for people with a learning disability³².

Examples of reasonable adjustments that providers can provide in service delivery are:

- Disabled access (e.g. parking, ramps, lifts)
- Hearing aid loop
- Braille
- Sign language interpreter
- Home visits
- Skype/ video conferencing
- Extended opening hours³³.

What are the experiences of disabled people accessing legal services?

Vulnerable consumers report having more justice problems than non-vulnerable consumers – and are more likely to report having multiple

³² [UKAAF, The provision of accessible format materials \(2012\)](#)

³³ [The Law Superstore, I'm disabled. How will a legal service provider cater for my needs \(2016\)](#)

problems³⁴. To account for this, legal service providers have a duty to implement reasonable adjustments where disabled people are at a disadvantage³⁵.

Intermediaries and trusted organisations are important for disabled people accessing legal services. This relationship can help people use providers they trust. Many also use a provider known to their family and/or rely on a person they trust to help them³⁶.

Many barriers that disabled people face in accessing legal services are also faced by others in society. Anxiety about the legal process, fear of consequences arising from taking legal action and the potential costs involved in doing so, especially following changes to Legal Aid, are all cited as barriers by disabled people. The lack of accessible advice and information was also an inhibiting factor for people with learning disabilities³⁷.

What affects someone's experience of finding legal services?

When accessing legal services, being able to feel like they had a choice in a decision drives a more positive experience overall³⁸. A question arising from the literature is whether those with disabilities feel less able to have choices or less able to make an informed decision based on choices.

³⁴ [Pleasance, P., Balmer, N., Patel, A., Cleary, A., Huskinson, T., Cotton, T., Civil Justice in England & Wales. English and Welsh Civil and Social Justice Panel survey: Wave 1 \(2010\)](#)

³⁵ [Equality and Human Rights Commission. Using a service: reasonable adjustments for disabled people \(2016\)](#)

³⁶ [Swift, Johnson, Mason, Shiyab and Porter. What happens when people with learning disabilities need advice about the law? \(2013\)](#)

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ [People First Scotland and Animate, Does it matter? Decision making by people with learning disabilities \(2017\)](#)



An information disparity undermines consumers' power to make informed choices and weakens competition within the sector³⁹. Only a quarter of consumers "shop around"⁴⁰. Barriers to shopping around could be:

- Lack of information (only 18% of firms display any prices on their website⁴¹)
- Inaccessibility of information (many only find price information after contacting a provider⁴²)
- Lack of time (a majority spent over an hour looking for a solicitor⁴³).

There is consensus and evidence that there are areas where solicitors and law firms can improve on making their services more accessible for disabled people. This research provides the SRA with information to help solicitors and law firms make these improvements, particularly in the information that they provide.

³⁹ [Competition and Markets Authority \(CMA\), Legal services market study \(2016\)](#)

⁴⁰ [YouGov on behalf of Legal Services Consumer Panel, Legal Services Consumer Panel Tracking surveys \(2018\)](#)

⁴¹ [OMB research on behalf of the Legal Services Board, Prices of Individual Consumer Legal Services \(2017\)](#)

⁴² [YouGov on behalf of Legal Services Consumer Panel, Legal Services Consumer Panel Tracking surveys \(2018\)](#)

⁴³ [Economic insight on behalf of the Solicitors Regulation Authority, Price transparency in the conveyancing market \(2017\)](#)

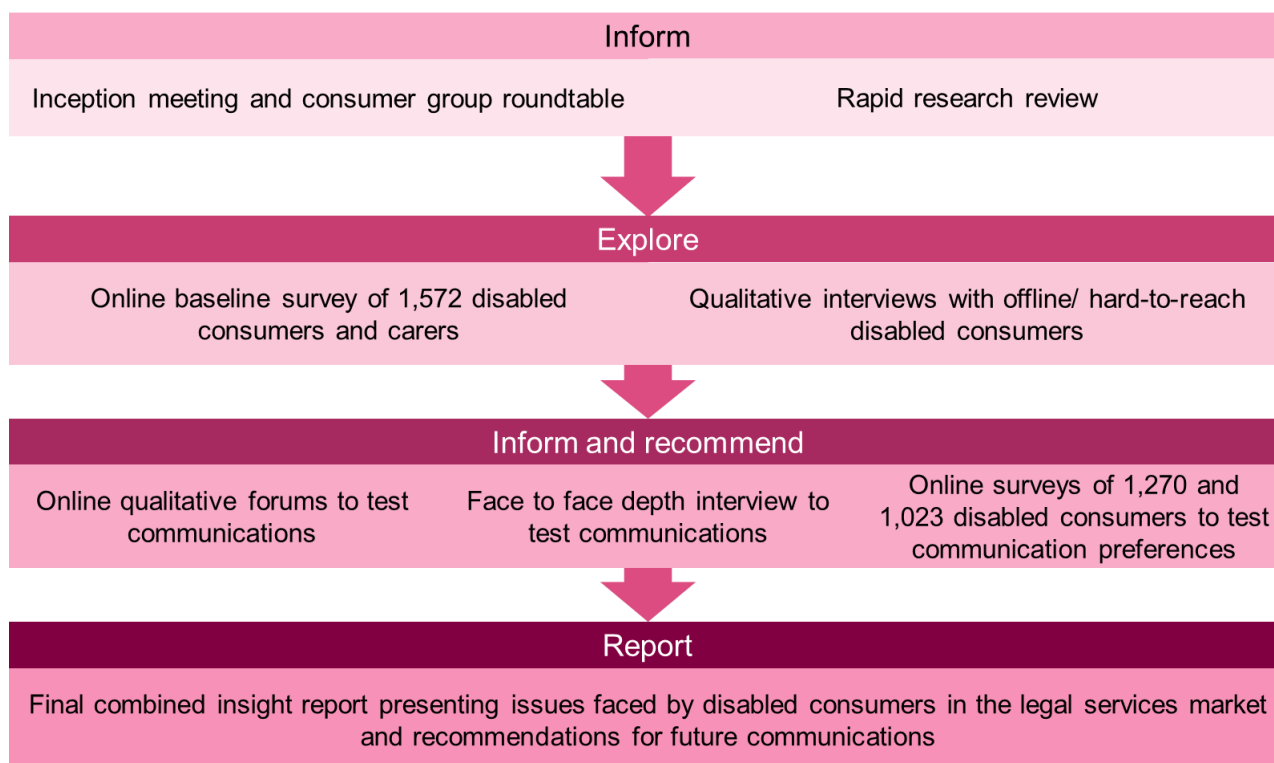
Method

Approach

Various data collection methods were adopted using a staged approach to collect data and insights from disabled people about their experiences of accessing professional services, as figure 1 shows.

Each stage built on the previous stage and used desk research alongside quantitative and qualitative primary research methods including, online and face-to-face data collection. This ensured we gained the views of a range of disabled people.

Figure 1. Summary of research methods



To inform the design of the exploratory quantitative and qualitative research, a research review of published literature on the experiences of disabled people in accessing professional services was conducted. Alongside this, a consumer group workshop was held, which was attended by the SRA,



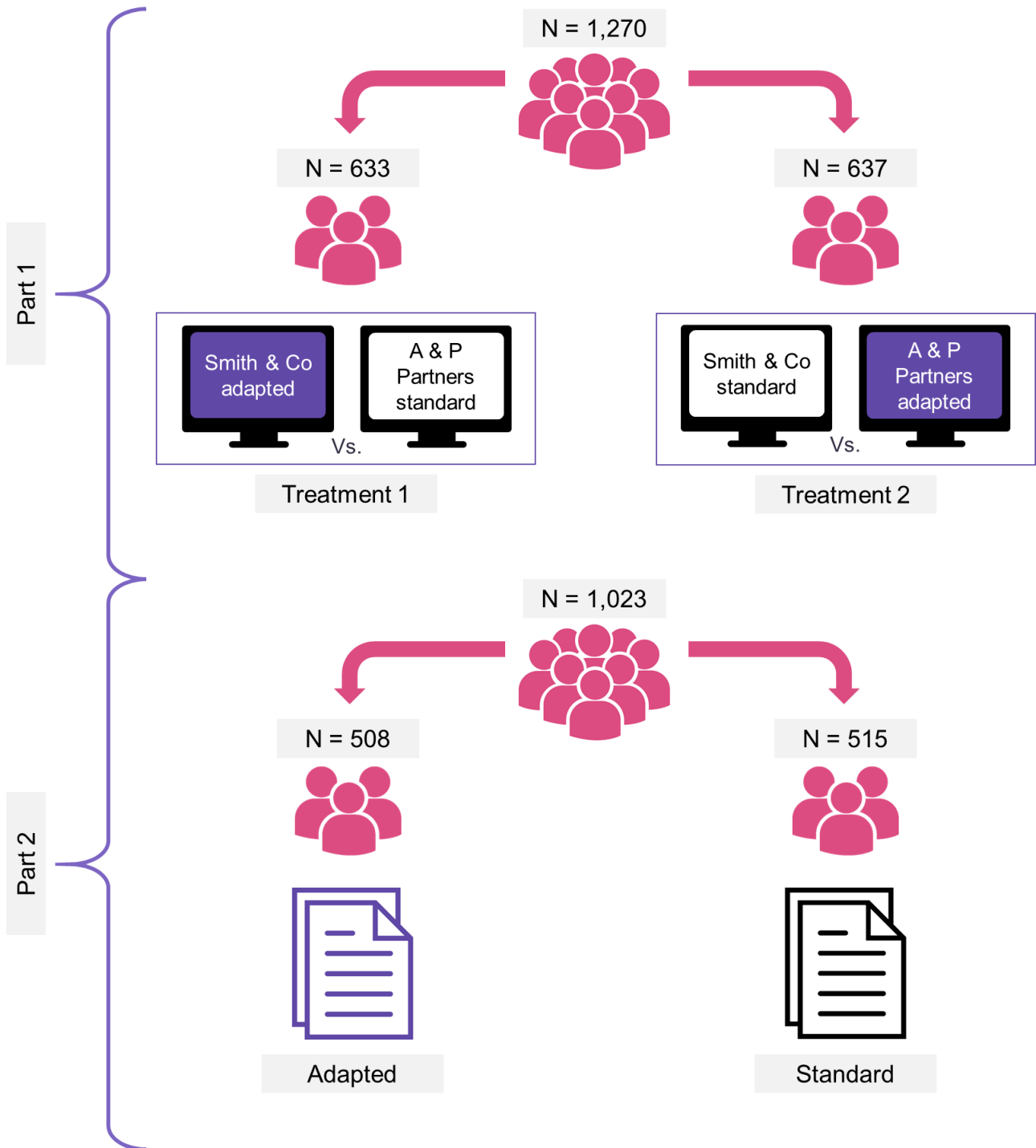
YouGov and representatives from local and national charities. The purpose of this was to explore first-hand the experiences of disabled people accessing legal services.

Following this, the first data collection stage consisted of an online survey of 1,572 disabled people and carers of disabled people. To ensure we covered the views of those that may not have access to the internet, YouGov conducted fourteen qualitative in-depth interviews with disabled people.

The literature review and the first data collection stage comprised the exploratory research stage of this research. This exploratory research then fed into the second stage of data collection. We designed and delivered an online randomised control trial to disabled people. The aim was to explore the effect of presenting solicitor website information in an accessible and disability confident manner on how disabled people choose solicitors and on their perceptions of solicitors.

There were two parts to the consumer test and each part was conducted with a separate representative sample of disabled people. Figure 2 displays how people were allocated across the treatments in each part of the consumer test research.

Figure 2. Allocation of participants across different treatments



The first part of the consumer test was completed by 1,270 disabled people and provided participants with the following scenario:

Scenario A: Imagine that you need to find a solicitor to help you make a will. You do not have a solicitor you have used before or know anyone that could recommend one.

You decide to search the internet for a solicitor and you find two firms that you read a bit more about on their website.

You will be able to look at two different homepages for will writing solicitors. When you have reviewed both websites, please select the option you think would best meet your needs in the situation described on the previous screen.

Please note that many features of the websites will be the same.

The sample was then randomly split into two groups that each saw the homepages of two different hypothetical solicitor's firms. Participants either saw an 'adapted' or 'standard' version of each firm's website (see figure 2, Part 1). Having two groups ensured that we could take into account any effects of the branding and ensure that our analysis focused on differences caused by the adaptations made to the content of the webpages.

The adapted version was created using evidence drawn from the stage 1 research about what disabled people would find useful. It included images of an actual office, information on the skills and experience of the team in working with people with different needs and details of an accreditation by a charity for their inclusive service provision.

The second part of the consumer test was completed by a further 1,023 disabled people and focused on complaints information. Participants were again provided with a scenario:



Scenario B: Imagine that you have used A&P Partners solicitors' firm to make a will. You have been unhappy with how the solicitor kept you up to date with progress in making your will and the length of time it took.

You are therefore considering whether to make a complaint to A&P Partners. You find information on their website about how you can make a complaint.

Participants were then shown the hypothetical firm's complaint information, which gives information on how they could make a complaint. There were two versions of the complaint information for each firm: a 'standard' body of text or an 'adapted' version. Each respondent only saw one version of the complaint information (see figure 2, Part 2).

The design of the adapted version was informed again by the stage one research and included simpler language, more headings, a clearer layout and the use of colour.

We have included full detail on each stage of the research process and examples of the stimulus that was tested with disabled people in our technical appendix.

The communication materials used in the quantitative consumer test were tested qualitatively as well, to fully explore people's understanding and comprehension of the materials, as well as their likes/dislikes and preferences.

To ensure we included disabled people who are online, offline or less confident online, we took two approaches to collect information from disabled people:

- An online forum with 30 'online' participants recruited via the YouGov Panel

- Ten face-to-face in-depth interviews - conducted in two locations (London and Leeds) with 'offline'/less confident online participants, recruited via an offline recruitment partner

In the qualitative testing for Part 1, participants only saw one version of an adapted homepage and one version of a standard homepage. This was because of the smaller sample size in qualitative research meaning that direct comparisons between different firm's websites are less relevant. This also made the process easier for the participants in the qualitative environment.

Considerations in designing research instruments for disabled people

We were conscious that the participants in this research were disabled people and that disability can take many forms which can affect how people engage with information. We recognised that some adaptations would be required in how the online survey and qualitative stimulus was presented.

Some key considerations for the design were:

- Questionnaire length and language (clear unambiguous English, short sentences, simple punctuation, active and personable language)
- Complexity (avoiding complex Likert scales or long questions with detailed information)
- Response scales (ensure scales are shown in words rather than just in numbers, and representing long response lists vertically rather than horizontally)
- Consideration of the audience (clarity, layout, font size, colour). Making text contrasts changeable by the respondent is an important feature



- Ensure screen readers operate effectively - YouGov programmers ran tests to ensure that the online stimulus worked effectively with screen readers.

The experiences of disabled people accessing services

Key findings

- Two thirds of disabled people experience more than one type of impairment. Professional service providers need to recognise that disabled people often have multiple, complex and varying needs.
 - Not all disabilities are “visible” impairments, and disabled people with “invisible” disabilities deserve and are entitled to the same reasonable adjustments as those who have a “visible” disability.
 - The evidence indicates that people with less visible impairments, such as mental health and learning or social disabilities, face a different and more challenging experience in accessing information and services.
 - A fifth of disabled people say they are limited when using services (e.g. banking, legal). This varies by impairment type, with those with more severe disabilities more likely to be limited in accessing services.
 - Many disabled people use either formal or informal carers to support them when looking for and using services.
 - Three in ten disabled people have difficulty accessing information about professional services. This difficulty is more common in those with mental health or learning/ social impairments.
 - Many disabled people report not being proactively asked if they need reasonable adjustments at first contact, or only experience adjustments once an issue has occurred. Early identification and understanding of needs is very important.
-

- It was noted that “customer-facing” services such as banks, airlines and airports are more proactive about asking if adjustments are needed than the legal industry.
 - The majority of disabled people who have used a legal service felt it was easy to use. This is on par with healthcare and financial advisers but falls below the more positive experience with banks.
 - Ease of accessing services differs by ethnicity. BAME disabled people are more likely than those from a White British background to report that they find it difficult to access legal services along with other types of services (banking, financial advisers, healthcare and benefits services).
 - While generally, disabled people have a positive experience accessing professional services, they are most likely to disagree that people take their needs into account and that people ask about their needs when they are accessing services.
-

Which types of impairments do disabled people experience?

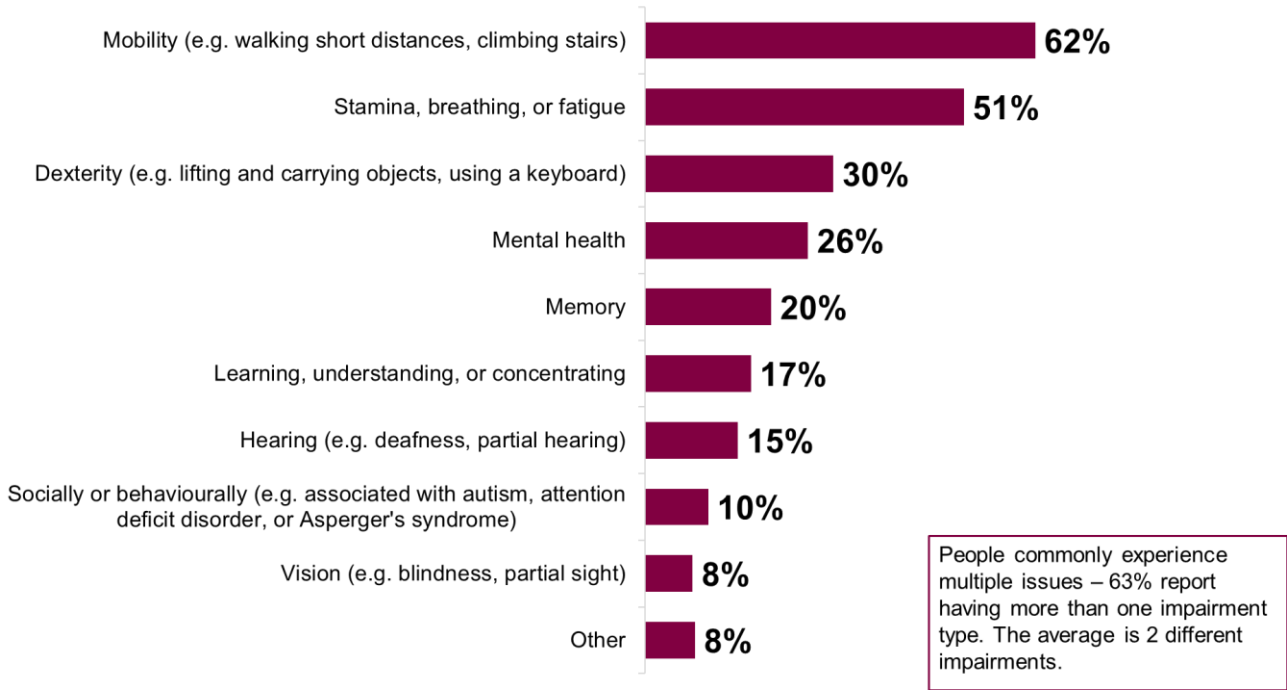
The most common impairments in our sample are mobility or stamina issues. In total, eight out of ten (81%) disabled people report being limited by mobility, stamina or dexterity impairment types.

Other impairment types that need to be accounted for in service provision are less immediately visible and cover issues around mental health (26%), difficulties in learning, understanding or concentrating (17%) or memory problems (20%).

Disabled people often encounter multiple impairments and it is not as straightforward as just considering one impairment type in the provision of information and services. Most commonly, disabled people cite having two

different impairments and two-thirds have more than one. One of the most notable areas of overlap is that over two thirds of those who have mental health issues also experience a mobility, stamina, or dexterity issue (68%).

Figure 3. Different impairment types that people experience



Base: All disabled people (n=1,572)

Insights from the qualitative research reinforced the point that many people have a mental health issue, as well as another disability.

“I have had bad mental health issues for 16 years. I have an anxiety disorder, bowel disease, and arthritis” (Mobility/mental health)

“I have arthritis, asthmatic, high blood pressure, clot on my lungs, severe migraines, conversion disorder and anxiety” (Mobility/mental health)

“My mum has brain damage...and bad anxiety.” (Carer, Mental health)

How are lives limited by a disability and what support is used?

Having a disability can limit people's ability to participate in different aspects of life. Disabled people most commonly mention that they are limited in their leisure activities because of their disability.

"I can get easily overwhelmed. I overthink things...Some days I can't leave the house" (Mobility/mental health)

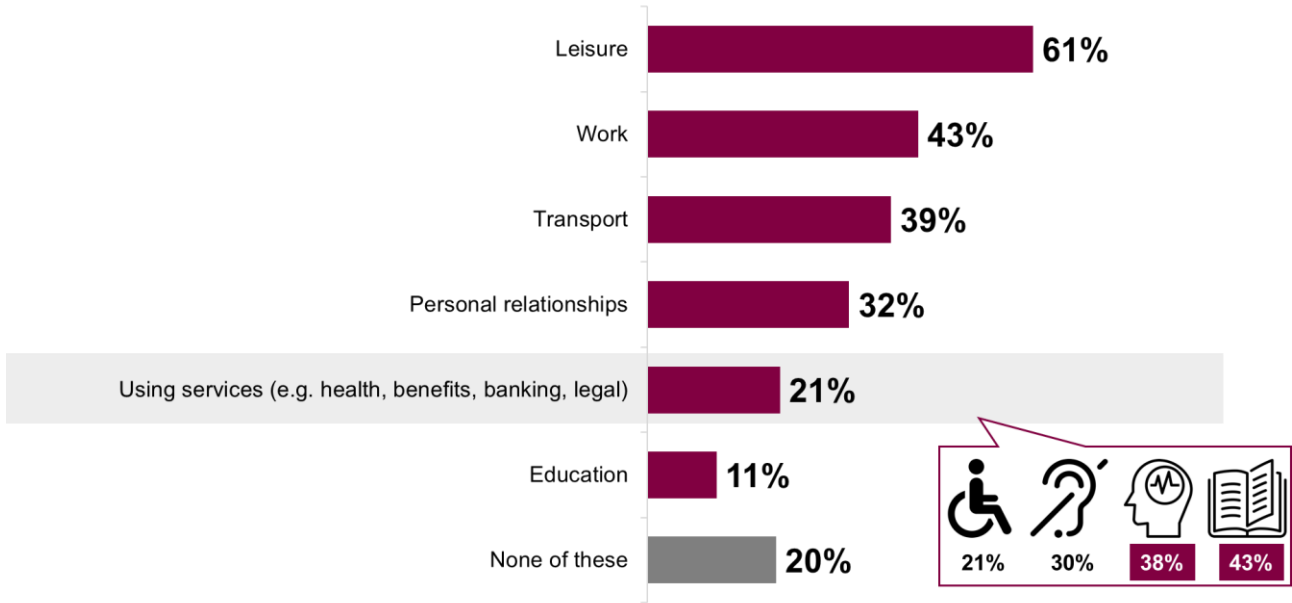
"There's two types of conditions. There's the physical condition and the mental condition...I don't really want to have to travel to places and worry about parking in a faraway place and then walking somewhere"

(Mobility/mental health)

In the context of this research, a fifth of disabled people feel that having a disability limits their use of services (such as banking or legal services). The feeling that they are limited in accessing services is higher for those people who report having a mental health or learning/ social impairment than those who report have a physical (mobility etc.) or visual/hearing impairment (see figure 4).

It should also be noted that people with more severe disabilities are much more likely to report that their life is limited in various ways. This includes accessing services, with 32% of those who say their disability limits their life a lot, reporting that they are limited in accessing services.

Figure 4. Areas of life that having a disability limits – quantitative survey findings



Base: All disabled people (n=1,572). The chart shows a breakdown for service use by people with a 1. Mobility, breathing, fatigue, dexterity issue, 2. A vision/ hearing issue, 3. A mental health issue, 4. A learning, social or memory issue.

Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) disabled people are more likely than those from a White British background to report that their disability limits their access to education (19% vs 8%) and services (26% vs 16%).

In the interviews, participants and carers spoke of the wide-ranging impacts: from difficulties in walking, communicating with others, writing and typing, to struggling to leave the house and socialise due to mental health issues. The impacts can vary day-to-day and are most often unique to the individual, not the condition.

“My mobility issues impact on everything; walking is very difficult even with a walking stick... My hand is poor to pick things up. I cannot play football with my children... I find it difficult to use the internet, due to my hand.”
 (Mobility/visual impairment)

“She cannot have conversations – her mind wanders a lot and she cries a lot. She has more or less zero leisure activities. I help her get up, wash, clean and cook.” (Carer: neurological/mobility)

The most common reason for being limited in certain areas of daily life is a lack of help or assistance (13%). One in ten cite financial reasons (9%), the attitudes of others (8%) or poor services (8%) as reasons for them being unable to take part in daily life as others can.

Those people with a mental health (12%) or learning/ social impairment (11%) are also more likely than those with a mobility (7%) or hearing/vision impairment (6%), to cite the ‘attitudes of others’ as a reason for being limited in some area of their life.

In the qualitative interviews, a few people with invisible disabilities, such as mental health issues, chronic pain and bladder conditions, also spoke of the negative impact from people’s attitudes who do not always understand their condition and needs. For example, one female spoke of a member of staff in a bank being annoyed with her son who has a learning disability because he was talking loudly.

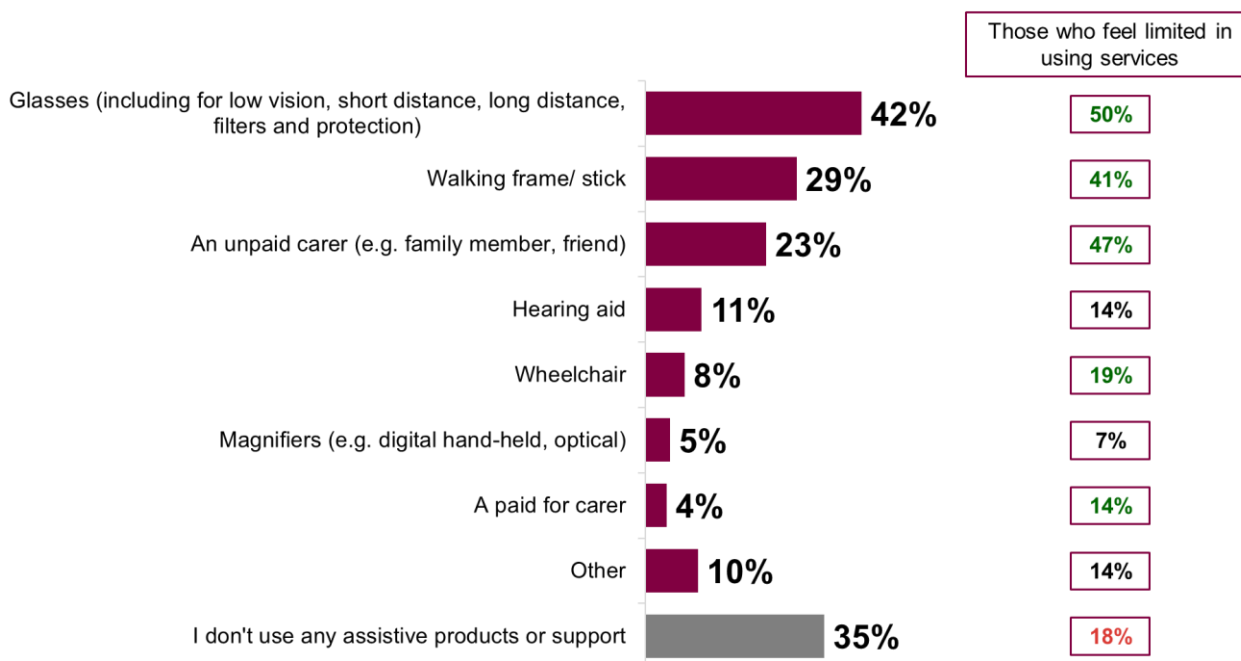
[Banks] “The banks always want me to use online even when in the branch. They are shocked when I say I don’t use online banking. Look at me like an alien!” (Mobility/Mental health)

“It makes you feel like you’re a fraud. I’ve got a bladder condition so I go to the disabled toilet. I was told by someone in a wheelchair, ‘You’re not disabled, get out.’” (Mobility)

It must be recognised that disabled people use a range of different forms of assistance to help them with their everyday activities. Most commonly, these are relatively basic forms of support, such as wearing glasses or using a

walking frame/ stick. However, over a quarter (27%) of disabled people draw upon the support of an unpaid or paid carer, which should be acknowledged in the provision of services (figure 5).

Figure 5. Assistive products or support used by disabled people – quantitative survey findings



Base: All disabled people (n=1,572). Figures in red show where there is a statistically significant difference between those who feel limited in using services and all disabled people.

The use of assistive products or support is not consistent across all different types of disabled people. Those with more severe disabilities and, in particular, those who feel they are limited in accessing services, are more likely to be using several different forms of support.

It should be recognised that not all people require or want assisted products or additional support. In the qualitative interviews, a few disabled people explained that they do not want to feel different or for people to know about their disability, so they do not always ask for or use any support. A few even

spoke of struggling to complete daily activities, but being determined to do them without any additional help.

*“I don’t want to be classed as disabled because you get looked at differently.”
(Impaired sight / mobility/dexterity)*

[When using a service] “I don’t want to be made to say ‘hi I am [name] and I have MS” (Mobility/dexterity)

As Figure 5 shows, those who are limited in accessing services are much more likely to need the support of a paid or unpaid carer (61%), use a wheelchair (19%) or use a walking frame/ stick (41%) than the average for disabled people.

Many of those interviewed have formal and informal carers who are typically a family member, friend or a professional carer. Carers often help the disabled person to do online research on professional services, choose between service providers, interact with professional services, attend meetings, fill out forms and explain contracts/terms and conditions.

“I have to read the information for him and decide what to do. He cannot read it alone as he cannot take the information in. I have to attend all meetings with him” (Carer: neurological condition)

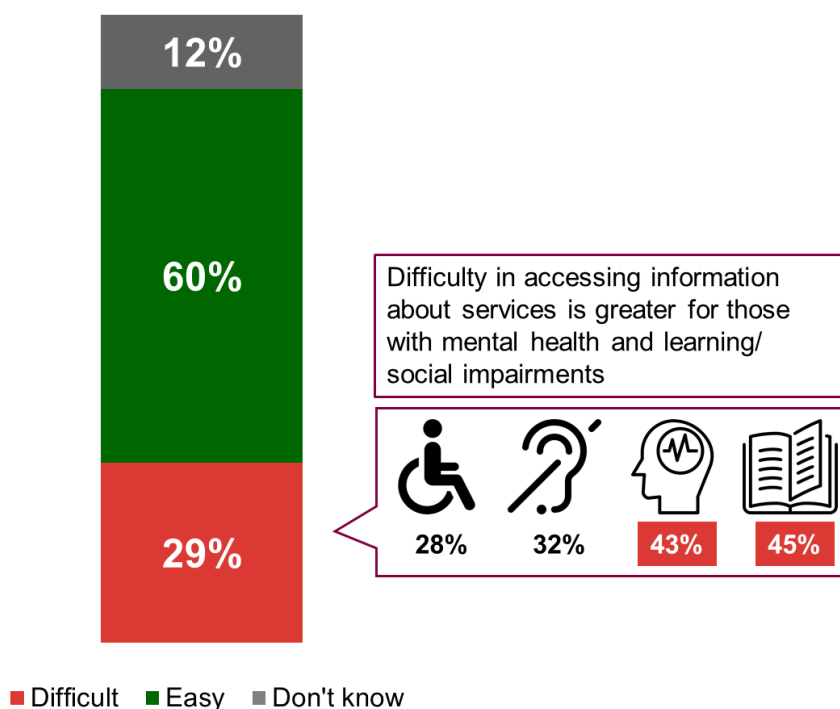
*“I would need my wife to read it for me. It is too overwhelming and confusing”
(Mobility/mental health)*

“I have a friend of mine who actually comes with me to certain places where I haven’t been, and just waits for me, while I’ve done my thing” (Mobility)

Ease and difficulty in accessing information

Six in ten (60%) disabled people find it easy to access information about professional services. Leaving three in ten (29%) who report having some difficulty in accessing services (figure 6).

Figure 6. Ease or difficulty of disabled people finding information about professional services – quantitative survey findings



Base: All disabled people (n=1,572). The chart shows a breakdown by people who report having any of the following issues; 1. Mobility, breathing, fatigue, dexterity issue (n=1,222), 2. A vision/ hearing issue (n=362), 3. A mental health issue (n=523), 4. A learning, social or memory issue (n=509). Note figures don't add to 100% due to rounding. Figures in red show a statistically significant difference from the other groups.

The ease of accessing information about professional services is not uniform. Difficulty is more likely to be experienced by certain types of disabled people. For example, those whose life is limited a lot by their impairment are more

likely than those just limited a little to find it difficult to access information about professional services (34% v 18%).

Difficulty in accessing information about services is greater for those with mental health and learning/ social impairments (figure 6). Maybe unsurprisingly, those disabled people who feel limited in accessing services in general are much more likely to report it is difficult to access information about professional services, with 55% of this group saying they find it difficult.

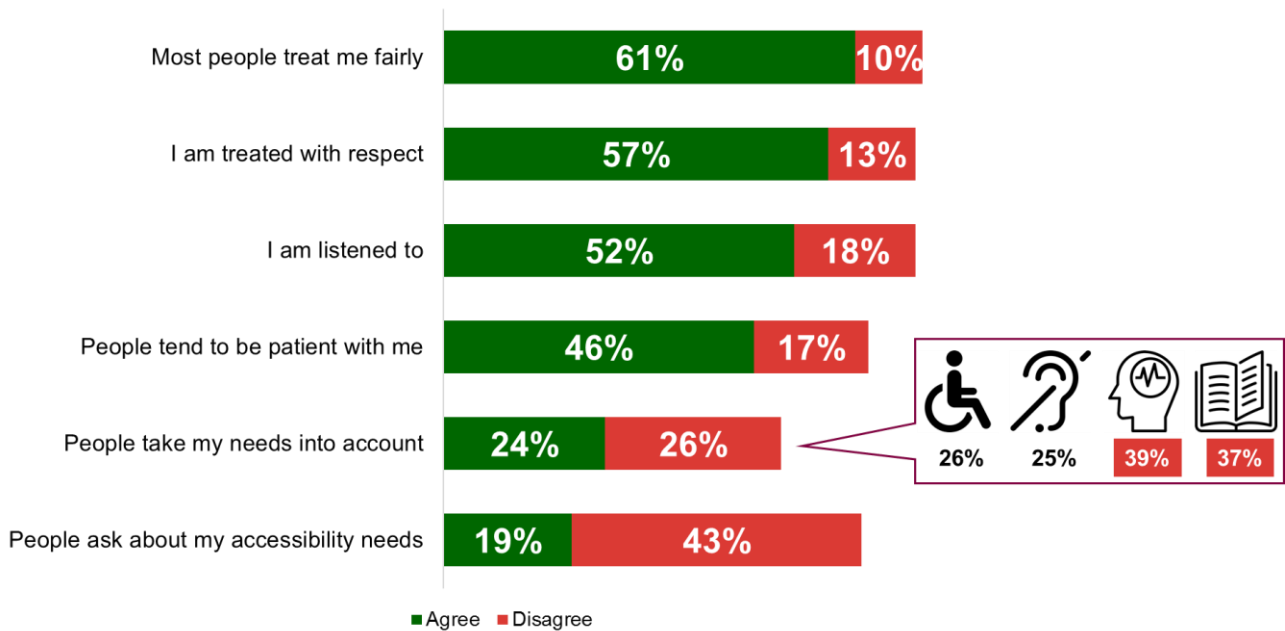
Finally, younger disabled people and those from a BAME background are more likely to feel it is difficult to access information about professional services than older and disabled people from a white British background:

- 18 to 29 years old – 30%
- 30 to 44 – 33%
- 65+ years old – 19%
- BAME - 37%
- White British – 23%

How disabled people feel about their experiences of accessing professional services

When thinking about accessing professional services, most disabled people feel that they are treated fairly (61%) and with respect (57%) (figure 7). In contrast, just a quarter (24%) of disabled people agree that when accessing professional services ‘people take my needs into account’ and just a fifth (19%) agree that ‘people ask about my accessibility needs’.

Figure 7. Disabled people’s views on their experiences of using professional services –quantitative survey findings



Base: All disabled people (n=1,572). The chart shows a breakdown for ‘people take my needs into account’ by people who report having any of the following issues: 1. Mobility, breathing, fatigue, dexterity issue (n=1,222), 2. A vision/ hearing issue (n=362), 3. A mental health issue (n=523), 4. A learning, social or memory issue (n=509).

There are though some differences in experiences for people with different forms of impairment. Disabled people with more severe disabilities, which limit them a lot, are more likely than those with less severe disabilities (limited a little) to disagree that when accessing professional services people take their needs into account – 32% of those limited a lot disagree compared with 19% of those limited a little.

We find that disabled people who report that they have a mental health or learning/ social/ memory impairment are more likely to disagree than those with mobility or vision/ hearing impairments that their needs are considered (figure 7).

These points were also raised during the qualitative interviews. Some participants, particularly with invisible disabilities (e.g. mental health issues and learning difficulties) mentioned a lack of understanding of disabilities by some staff. Many feel that staff struggle to understand how the impact of disabilities can change daily and from person to person.

“You need to be flexible on [the] day – if she isn’t having a good day then we may need to cancel. Solicitors need to understand mental health – so don’t believe her when she says I am stealing her money.” (Carer: mobility/ visual impairment/ mental health)

“In terms of that, unhelpful or inexperienced staff, when it comes to disability, it’s definitely worse. They don’t know how to deal with you. Just because I’m in a wheelchair, you can still talk to me normally, which they don’t” (Mobility)

[In a bank] “I said, ‘I can’t stand in this queue,’ and they said, ‘Well, come back when it’s less busy.’ They don’t get it really” (Mobility)

During the qualitative interviews, some participants also spoke about not being asked proactively if they require any reasonable adjustments. Not all disabled people will require or want adjustments, but many feel that it is important to be asked at first contact, and for any adjustment requests to be taken seriously. Not all disabled people feel comfortable, confident or are able to ask for adjustments themselves;

“You don’t want to shout about it [your disability] yourself – but if I’d been asked I would have said yes... I don’t like online and not having to go in. I would have been impressed if they had asked me my preferences.” (Mental health)

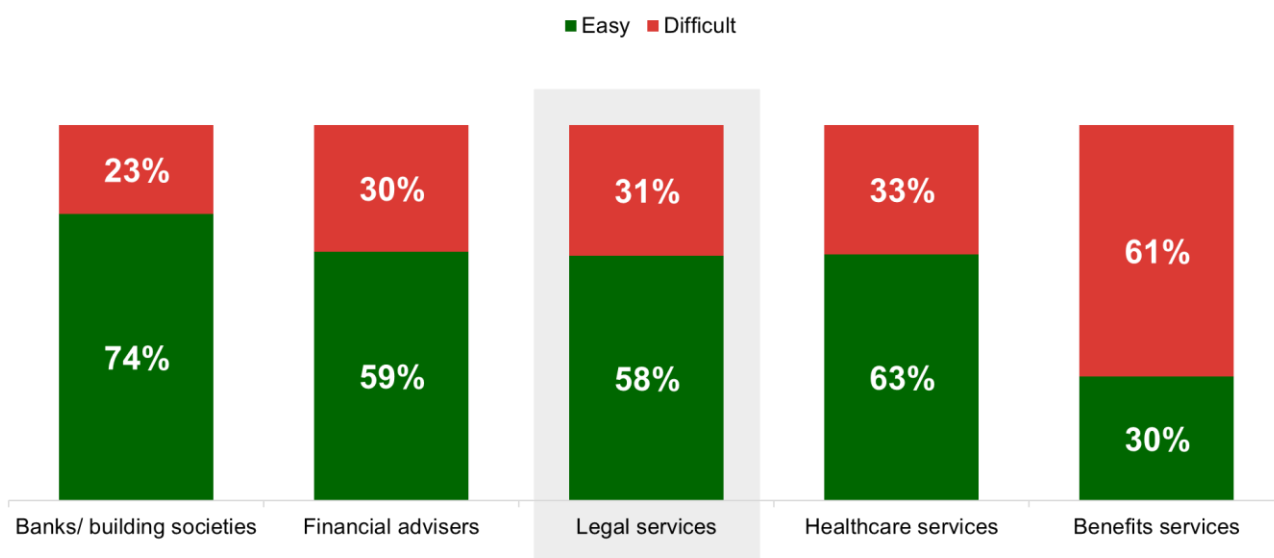
“[Solicitors] didn’t ask me about my issues or preferences. I had to tell them. He kept calling and asking me to go into the City – I can’t due to the stress of it. So he came to my house – really good of him.” (Mental health)

[Legal services] “No one asked me if I needed help. May be because is not obvious to spot. I would have wanted them to ask me.” (Mobility/visual impairment)

Benchmarking of legal services against other professional services

Most disabled people (58%) who have used a legal service felt it was easy to use. This is on par with those disabled people who have used healthcare services or financial advisers (figure 8). Disabled people rate banks and building societies the easiest services to use and benefits services the most difficult overall.

Figure 8. A comparison of how easy or difficult disabled people find it to access professional services – quantitative survey findings



Base: All disabled people who have used each service (Banks/ building societies n=1,526, financial advisers n=946, legal services n=1,172, healthcare services n=1,453, benefit services n=1,103)

BAME disabled people who have used legal services are more likely than those from a White British background to report that they found it difficult to access legal services, with 48% reporting they found it difficult compared to 27% of White British disabled people. However, this is a trend across all types of services, as noted earlier, with BAME disabled people more likely than White British disabled people to cite difficulties accessing banking, financial advisors and healthcare services.

When asked about the ease of accessing professional services in the qualitative interviews, many spoke of physical access issues. A number also spoke of the challenges in accessing online services (the sample was, however, skewed towards those less confident online) and in communicating with services over the phone, due to long call waiting times and voice automation systems.

In the interviews, many people who access benefit services explained how difficult the information from professional services is to access. Common reasons include: complicated and lengthy forms and assessments, uncaring and unhelpful staff, difficulties in organising home visits if needed and an inflexibility in communication methods (e.g. all forms to be completed online in some areas).

A few disabled people in the qualitative interviews praised health services for their communication tone and style when medical jargon was explained. There are mixed views on online medical services; a few spoke of not fully trusting GP telephone or online video appointments, whilst a few others rely on online or phone appointments.

“Then if you say like GP, they don’t do home visits. Some days I’ve been laying here ill, I can’t move, so I’ve had a phone interview with the doctor. She can’t see you, you know?” (Mobility)

Banks were noted by a few to have friendly staff who approach customers when they first enter the building to assess their needs, explain next steps and offer them a seat if required. For many disabled people online banking is accessible, however, a few people who are not comfortable online, noted the challenges in more and more banking services being online only.

“I don’t like online banking, so friends need to take me to the bank. [High street bank] staff are amazing – so lovely but they do want me to use online... Parking can be an issue, so I end up not cashing a cheque in – it is so stressful” (Mental health and mobility)

“My wife does my online banking as using a mouse with my hands is difficult. Banks can be hard to access if they ask me to go upstairs – it is not easy for staff to recognise my MS. I look ‘fine’, which can be challenging” (Mobility)

Only a couple of participants from the interviews instinctively spoke of accessibility of legal services when thinking generally of professional services. They perceived solicitors to be overly formal in their communication style and to provide customers with lots of information, which can be overwhelming and hard to digest. This topic is fully explored in the next chapter.

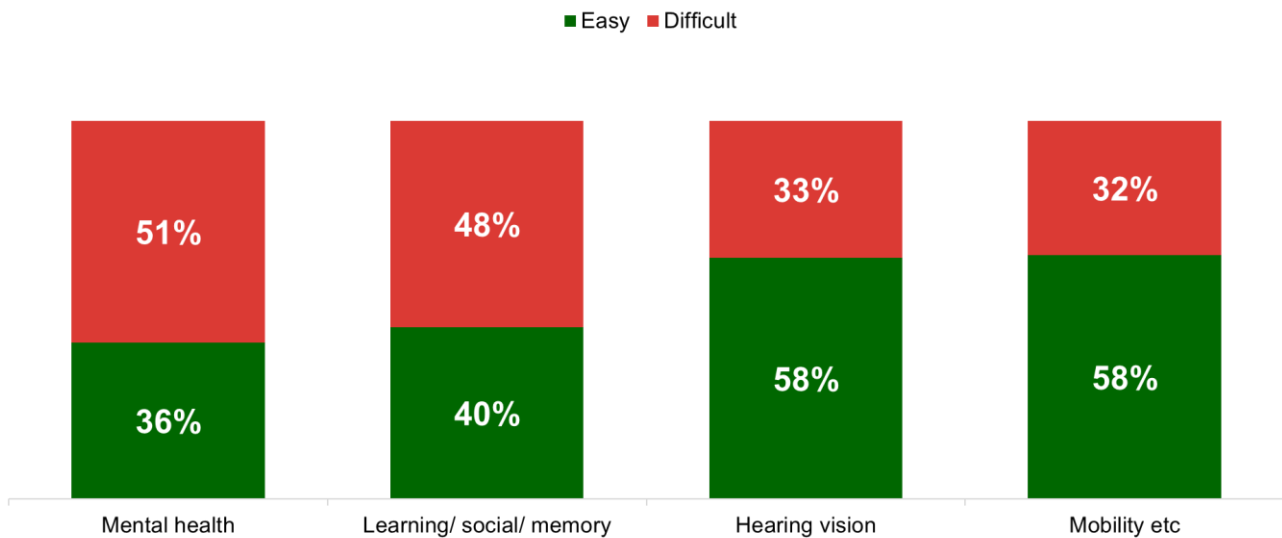
“A solicitor is quite formal, and they are like, ‘This is how it is,’ and you feel a bit overloaded with information.” (Mental health)

We also find that those disabled people with mental health or learning/ social/ memory impairments are more likely than those with mobility or hearing/ vision impairments to find accessing legal services difficult.

As Figure 9 shows, half of those people with a mental health (51%) or learning/ social/ memory impairment (48%) feel it is difficult for them to access legal services. In comparison, three in ten of this group feel it is

difficult to access banks and half feel it is difficult to access healthcare services.

Figure 9. A comparison of how easy or difficult disabled people find it to access legal services by impairment type – quantitative survey findings



Base: All disabled people who have used legal services (Mobility etc. n=1,134, learning/ social/ memory n=483, mental health n=500, hearing/ vision n=335)

The findings highlight that disabled people with different impairments have different experiences and perceptions when accessing legal services. We find that just a quarter (27%) of all disabled people are confident that legal services would be accessible to them and easy to use. However, that figure rises to 40% for those with a mental health impairment and 42% for those with a learning/ social/memory impairment.

The three qualitative case studies (Betty, John and Jackie⁴⁴) below demonstrate how disabled people handled encounters with members of the public and professional service staff who do, and do not, take their needs into account. This is related to staff not proactively asking people if they need any

⁴⁴ These are not the real names of the participants



support (but implementing them when requested), or not taking requests seriously from carers and disabled people.

Betty, 73, has COPD and atrial fibrillation

Treatment from Professional Services

Betty usually struggles in public places when moving around on her mobility scooter. She finds that people, especially staff members, often bump into her while she is out. These struggles also extend to using public transport, which Betty now tries to avoid because she finds people are “inconsiderate”.

Legal Experiences

Betty and her husband mainly had face to face contact with their solicitor. Overall they were very happy with the contact they had with their solicitor, they felt it was jargon free and that the solicitor was understanding that the ‘older generation’ are not as tech savvy. They felt both the solicitor and the receptionist had a great attitude and they were very happy with the service.

Their only issue was that the office was on the first floor, and so Betty was required to climb stairs to attend the meeting. While the solicitor did apologise for this, Stephen felt that in the future they would look to see if the solicitor had a lift if they needed to access a certain floor.

Whereas in other professional services, Stephen and Betty have experienced long wait times, they did not have this issue this time and felt that everything “ran like clockwork”.

Making it Better

Betty and Stephen value recommendations for services and will often look on Trust Pilot (website) and will speak to friends and family, especially those who are in a similar situation to them. They would welcome recommendations from charities and would like to know prior to using a service if they are a disability specialist.

Betty was medically retired following an accident at work. She was also diagnosed with COPD 15 years ago and suffers with atrial fibrillation. Her husband (Stephen) is her carer. Betty finds walking very difficult and has to be on oxygen for 16 hours a day. As a result of this her partner / carer does a lot of the housework such as cooking and cleaning.

Betty used a solicitor for equity release of her house. This was recommended to her by investors.

“It was [the solicitor’s] attitude more than anything [that was good]... you go into some places and they look at you as if to say, ‘What are you doing here?’”

“They did apologise that I had to climb the stairs, she said, ‘unfortunately, we are only a small office.’ I thought that was really good of them to explain and say, ‘we’re sorry about this.’ Not many people would have done that.”

“If we had to go through it again, I would probably have to look to see a solicitor in maybe a multi-office block where we’d have to have a lift access to a certain floor as opposed to stairs.”

“Yes, if we saw that, as a specialist in mobility issues, that would probably be something that we would pick up on because it is quite a long and involved process.”



Jackie, 48, psoriasis, psoriatic arthritis and rheumatoid arthritis

Jackie has psoriasis, psoriatic arthritis and rheumatoid arthritis. She is also a carer for her son who is autistic. Jackie's health varies depending on when she has taken her medication, sometimes she is unable to go to work as she cannot walk the stairs to the office.

When Jackie was refused PIP and carers allowance, she used solicitors' firm to take them to court. She was recommended the firm by a friend who knew they dealt with benefit complaints.

Treatment from Professional Services

Jackie feels she is often treated poorly by professional services. Because her and her son's disabilities are invisible she thinks people often assume she does not need any assistance. She struggles to be on her feet for longer periods of time and has found when she has asked for help in a bank that the staff responded with rudeness.

Legal Experiences

Jackie found that she had to ask for adjustments and information on accessibility from her solicitors, despite them knowing she had a disability. Other than this she was generally happy with the service she was given. Their offices were on the fourth floor of a building, without lift access, but her solicitor booked a meeting room on the ground floor for when she visited. Her solicitor was conscious of cost and so tried to communicate mainly through email to keep the price down, however Jackie struggles to respond to these and so found this difficult, especially when she was time pressured to reply. Despite this, Jackie felt her solicitor was understanding; he was reassuring and offered accessibility information regarding the court.

Making it Better

In the future, Jackie would prefer home visits from her solicitor, even if she had to book this a long time in advance. While it would not be a deal breaker to not have a company endorsed by a charity, she felt it would be good to see. Jackie thinks that more people need training on working with people with disabilities, but is sceptical at how useful training courses would be.

"People don't see you as disabled. They see you smiling and happy, but they don't see what's going on inside... out and about people don't see you as disabled. It's a hidden disability... No one really gets it."

"They [solicitors] should have asked me, because they knew what it was for. I'd already told them that I've got a blue badge, which obviously means I've got a walking difficulty."

"They [solicitors] were more understanding, because they knew I had a disability and my son had a disability. They tended to understand that there were issues going on."

"[Disability training for solicitors] How aware are they? What have they done? A 2-day course telling them that they can now look after disabled people, because you can't."



John , 31, has chronic pelvic pain and urogenital pain syndrome

Treatment from Professional Services

John finds it difficult to access professional services, both physically and mentally. Often, establishments don't have accessible entry ways, such as ramps or wide enough doors for a wheelchair. Because of this he usually relies on technology to contact services, including online banking and talking to his GP and consultant. He finds technology 'invaluable for disabled people'. He thinks that generally people are unaware of the difficulties disabled people face.

John is 31 and has chronic pelvic pain and a urogenital pain syndrome, which was in part caused by a surgery. He lives with his partner who is also his carer. He no longer works because of his pain, which causes him to be in bed 3 out of 7 days a week.

John relies on a mobility scooter, wheelchair and walking stick to get around.

Legal Experiences

While John never met either of his solicitors in person, for his injury claim he was required to attend a medical examination and physiotherapy sessions. He struggled to access these as there were stairs into the building and so he changed locations. He has found that he always has to ask for adjustments and this was not offered to him.

He found the information he was given easy to understand, but often felt as if he was not updated enough and so was often left 'wondering' about his case.

John has recently used two solicitors; one 'no win no fee' lawyer for a personal injury claim and one through a charity. He was recommended his no win no fee lawyer by a broker.

Making it Better

When first getting in contact with a solicitor, John would like them to ask if he considers himself to be disabled. He would also like to see companies actively offering home visits. John would be more likely to select a company which has a recommendation from a charity, or from someone with a similar condition to him and would like to read case studies about these on solicitors' websites. John thinks that the travel and tourism industry are best at working with people with disabilities.

"You get good people, but they're few and far between because generally people want to get their money at the end of the day... In terms of that, unhelpful or inexperienced staff, when it comes to disability, it's definitely worse."

"People just react differently to me having a disability. Some people will give me a really wide berth and, like, noticeably get out of the way... Some people just completely ignore it and look at me like I'm some sort of alien or stare at me or whatever."

"It's a digital age now and, for disabled people, [technology] it's just invaluable."

"[Using public transport] is difficult, it's stressful, I already suffer with anxiety and then for somebody to be shouting at me and putting me under pressure, it was more difficult."

*all names used are pseudonyms

A focus on disabled people accessing legal services

Key findings

- A third of disabled people who had a legal issue have used a solicitor in the last 4 years.
 - A third of those said they first found their solicitor through a recommendation and that having a good experience with a solicitor is fundamental to gain trust in that solicitors' firm.
 - Recommendations are particularly important amongst those uncomfortable with online information.
 - Overall, once disabled people have hired a solicitor, their impression of the service is positive and most are satisfied with the service.
 - The attitudes of the staff towards a disabled person is the key driver of overall satisfaction. Flexible and understanding staff who make disabled people feel comfortable (in whatever way that might be) are highly valued.
 - When disabled people find it difficult to understand information from solicitors, the most common challenges faced were legal jargon, information not being explained in different ways and not receiving timely information.
 - Disabled people particularly expressed desire for regular, clear updates from solicitors without needing to request them. Proactive communication, advice and adjustments are highly valued.
-

- Disabled people would like solicitors to understand that disability is a highly personalised experience and the impacts of a disability can change over time. A personalised service is highly valued.
-

What types of legal issue have disabled people experienced?

Over half of disabled people said they experienced at least one legal issue (59%) in the last four years. The most common issue experienced was around welfare or benefits - including issues with debt, benefits, or pensions - with over a quarter of disabled people cited experiencing this (29%). Other common issues experienced dealt with wills, trust, probate (19%); consumer issues, such as with utility providers or problems obtaining refunds (14%); and unfair parking fines (10%).

Those with mental health (67%) or learning/ social/memory (69%) impairments were more likely to say they had experienced an issue than those with mobility/breathing/fatigue/dexterity (59%) or hearing/vision (62%) impairments.

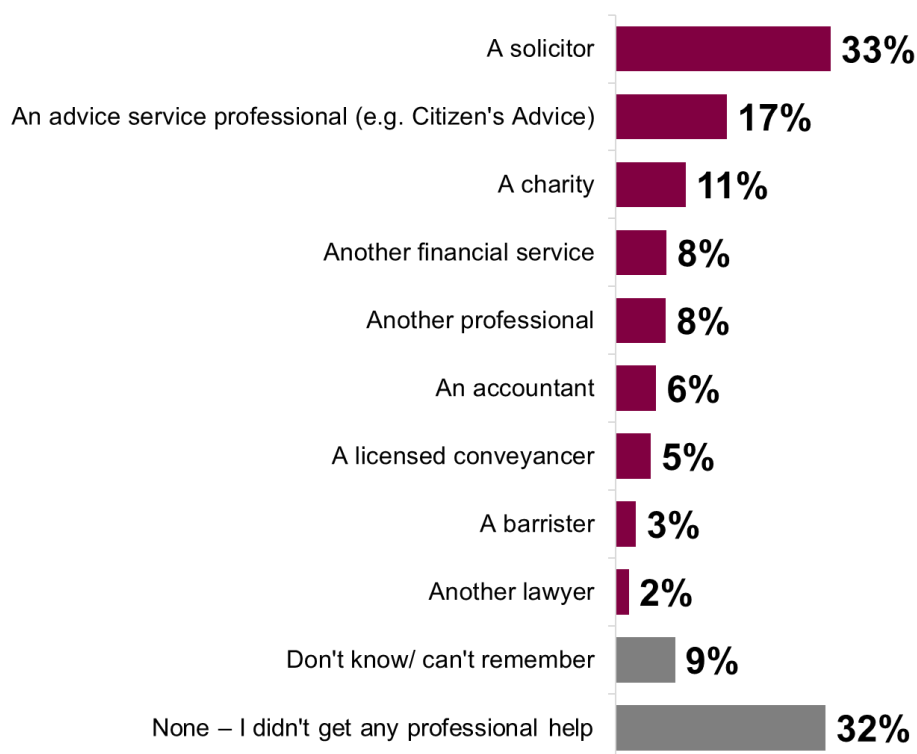
Who do disabled people seek help from for a legal issue?

When asked to think about the sources of help they did use, the most common source of professional help for people with an issue is a solicitor – a third said they received help from a solicitor in the last four years (33%), as shown in figure 10. Almost two thirds of those identified it as a small, local firm (64%), while only one in eight went to a large corporate firm (12%). However, almost a third (32%) said they had no professional help for their legal issue.

Other sources of help included advice services such as Citizen's Advice or a charity. Combined, a quarter said they sought help from an advice service or

charity (24%). One in six of those who had a legal issue in the last four years said they got help from a finance professional.

Figure 10. Types of provider used for help with a legal issue – quantitative survey findings



Base: All disabled people who experienced a named legal issue in the last 4 years (n=937)

Those with mental health (22%) or learning/ social/memory impairments (35%) were less likely to have got help from a solicitor than those with mobility/breathing/fatigue/dexterity (34%) or hearing/vision (37%) impairments.

Of those disabled people who had a legal issue, 14% were unable to successfully get help from a solicitor. This is the second most common type of professional help people were unable to get – with only “an advice service professional” higher at 16%.

In the following sections, we will discuss the specific barriers to accessing solicitors and how that varies with impairment type.

How do disabled people find and use legal services?

Disabled people who have received a solicitor's help with a legal issue are most likely to say that they had used that firm for something else previously (30%).

In total, a third of disabled people first found out about their solicitor through a recommendation (34%). This is on par with the proportion of people finding help from any type of professional adviser via a recommendation (35%). A fifth said the solicitors' firm was recommended by a friend or family member (20%), while one in ten had been recommended by someone else such as an insurance provider or other professional (10%). Just 4% had been given a recommendation by a charity. However, disabled people who are limited a lot are more likely than those who are limited a little to find their provider through a charity's recommendation (10% vs 4%).

Recommendations from others give disabled people assurance and a sense of trust. For some, especially those who lack confidence/ability to look online, this is the only factor they consider when looking for a solicitor and they would not do any other research themselves. Only a few participants in the qualitative sample, who did not have anyone to ask for recommendations, searched for a solicitor online.

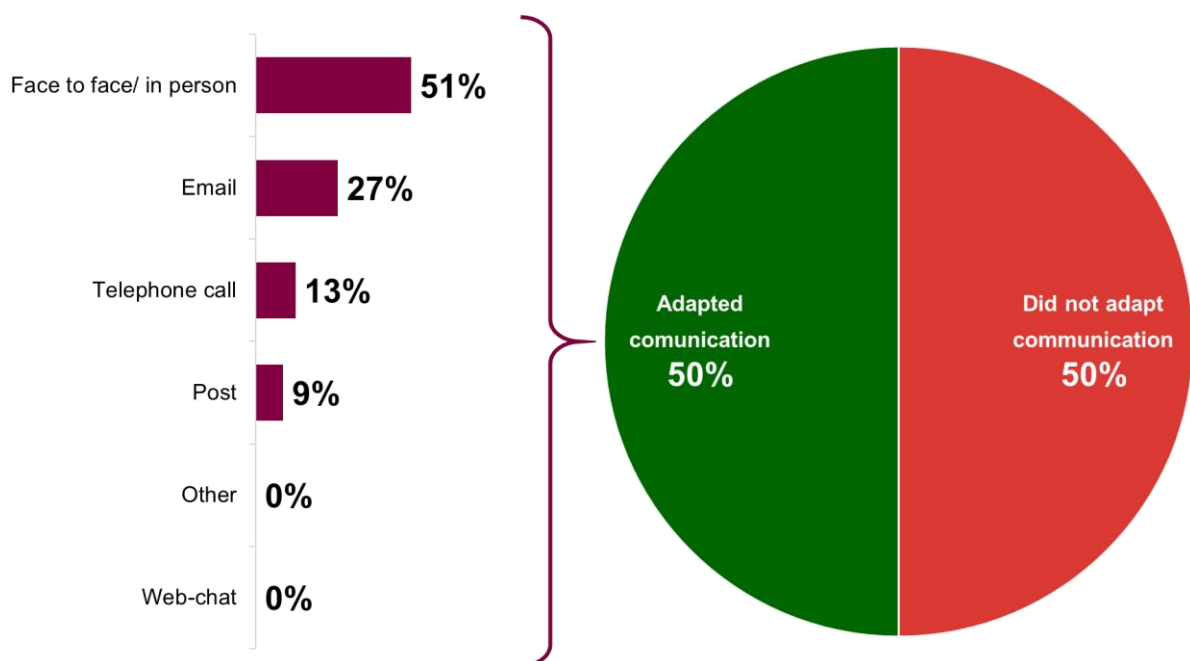
In the qualitative interviews we find that when reviewing firms, solicitor expertise and price are important factors for some disabled people, but less influential than personal recommendations. A few chose the firm based on their expertise in disability benefit issues, to which their case related.

“Spoke to a friend – recommendation is a big thing, trust. I don’t believe in yellow pages or advertising – don’t know who they are.” (Mobility)

“I think she [mum] gave me the number but I also made some checks myself with other people who did those things, close friends and family, who they've used. I think at the end of the day it came down to cost.” (Mobility/mental health)

Half of disabled people who used a solicitor said they mainly communicated face-to-face (51%) and they are evenly split on whether the solicitor communicated in additional ways or changed anything to meet their needs (50%).

Figure 11. Solicitor’s methods of communication and adaptations made – quantitative survey findings



Base: All disabled people who got help from a solicitor in the last 4 years (n=297)

Those with mental health (40%) or learning/ social/memory (42%) are less likely than average to report that their solicitor mainly communicated face to face. However, they were also more likely to say the way the solicitor communicated was not the way they would have preferred to communicate



(both 21% vs 13% average). There are no significant differences across impairment types for whether the solicitor adapted communication methods to meet the individual's needs.

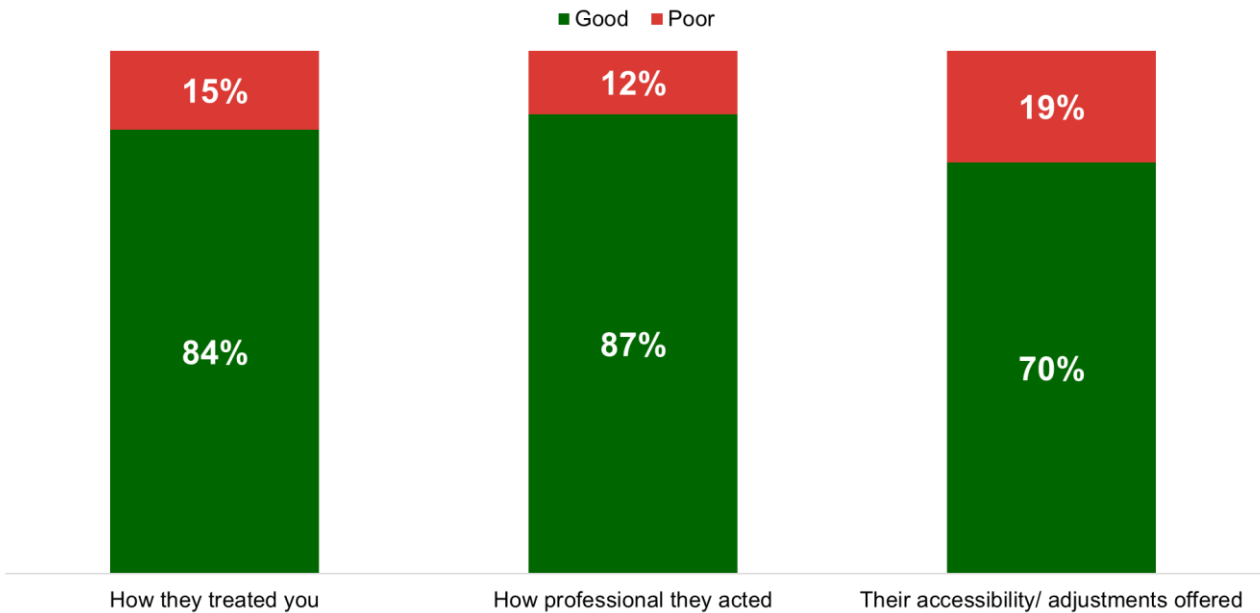
In the qualitative interviews, some disabled people, particularly those not comfortable using emails, reported that direct communication with solicitors (usually over the phone) was crucial for understanding all of the details of their cases. This direct communication is important to make them feel comfortable and assure them about the whole process. They also appreciate being provided with hard copies of the documents for them to keep and refer to, which they thought was a standard practice when dealing with legal matters.

“When you get documentation that is legal and binding, you physically want to have that, you don't just want an email saying you've got it.” (Mobility/Mental Health)

How do disabled people rate the quality of the experience/service provided by solicitors?

Disabled people who used a solicitor were generally positive about the overall experience with over three quarters saying how they were treated was “good” (84%), as shown in figure 12. Almost nine in ten rated the professionalism of the solicitor as “good” (87%), but less than three quarters (70%) said the same of the firm's accessibility or adjustments offered.

Figure 12. Ratings of solicitor service provision – quantitative survey findings



Base: All disabled people who got help from a solicitor in the last 4 years (n=297)

Those with mental health or learning/ social/memory impairments are more likely than the average of all who got help from a solicitor to say the treatment was poor (25% and 22% respectively) and the accessibility/adjustments offered were poor (34% both).

This is relatively consistent regardless of the professional service as, across all providers, those with mental health or learning/ social/memory impairments were more likely to say the accessibility offered was poor (30% and 29% respectively). Those who receive interpersonal support, such as through a carer, are also more likely to say the accessibility of their provider was poor (24%).

Many disabled people are satisfied with the service they have received from a solicitor. The qualitative research identified that the main driver of satisfaction is staff attitudes; in how they made them feel comfortable, provided clear explanations and took time when dealing with their queries.

“I found them very helpful, very welcoming, they didn’t look down on you or speak to you differently. You could sense it.” (Mobility/ visual impairment)

“She was very, very friendly and straight to the point [...] Professional, yes, she gave you the impression, to me, she was very unbiased...She explained it and she asked if you have any further questions, ample time to ask questions.” (Mobility)

“Polite, nice, calm, understanding, very good.” (Mobility/ Mental Health)

Flexible and understanding staff have the biggest impact on people’s perceptions of the quality of the service. Participants feel that staff should try to accommodate different needs by discussing people’s preferred communication modes at first contact. They also want staff to give them enough time to respond to any queries (particularly when they rely on support from others) and make them feel comfortable enough to ask questions. It was observed that solicitors should remember that disabled people’s needs can change over time due to changes in their health conditions and medication.

Personal preferences over communication modes also play a role, as not all disabled people with the same disability like to be contacted in the same way. Most would like solicitors to understand that disability types impact people differently, therefore a flexible and personalised approach is essential.

In terms of any challenges in accessing legal services, qualitative participants mainly spoke of physical issues initially, such as inaccessible buildings, lack of lifts and limited parking spaces. However, people said that most solicitors did seek an alternative solution when they realised the customer had difficulties, such as changing the meeting room or visiting them in their home, which participants highly appreciated. Firms with accessible buildings and nearby parking were praised by many participants.

“Honestly, the office was downstairs [but had] stairs going up, maybe half a dozen of steps and she [the solicitor] wanted me to go in but I said, 'Can we go here so mum doesn't have to walk up,' but it was me that didn't want to walk up.” (Mobility/mental health)

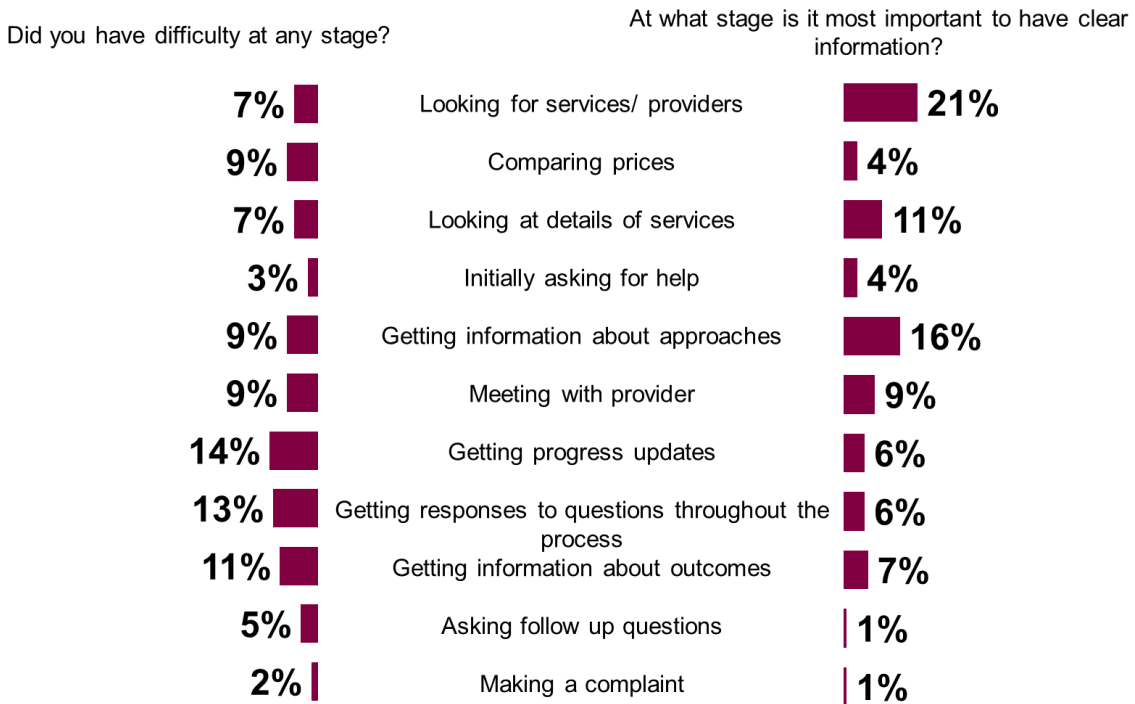
Issues accessing information was also raised by some participants and is outlined in the next section.

How easy or difficult is it for disabled people to access information throughout the process of using a solicitor?

Disabled people using a solicitor most commonly had difficulty in getting progress updates and getting responses to questions throughout the process (figure 13). Only 7% indicated they had difficulty looking for services/providers. However, one in 5 indicated that this was the main stage at which they thought it was most important to have clear information.

This informs the later stages of consumer testing discussed in chapter 7, where a home page of a solicitor’s firm was included in the experiment. The first interaction with a firm is clearly very important so we tested how changes in the information presented impacts individuals’ consideration and perception of that firm.

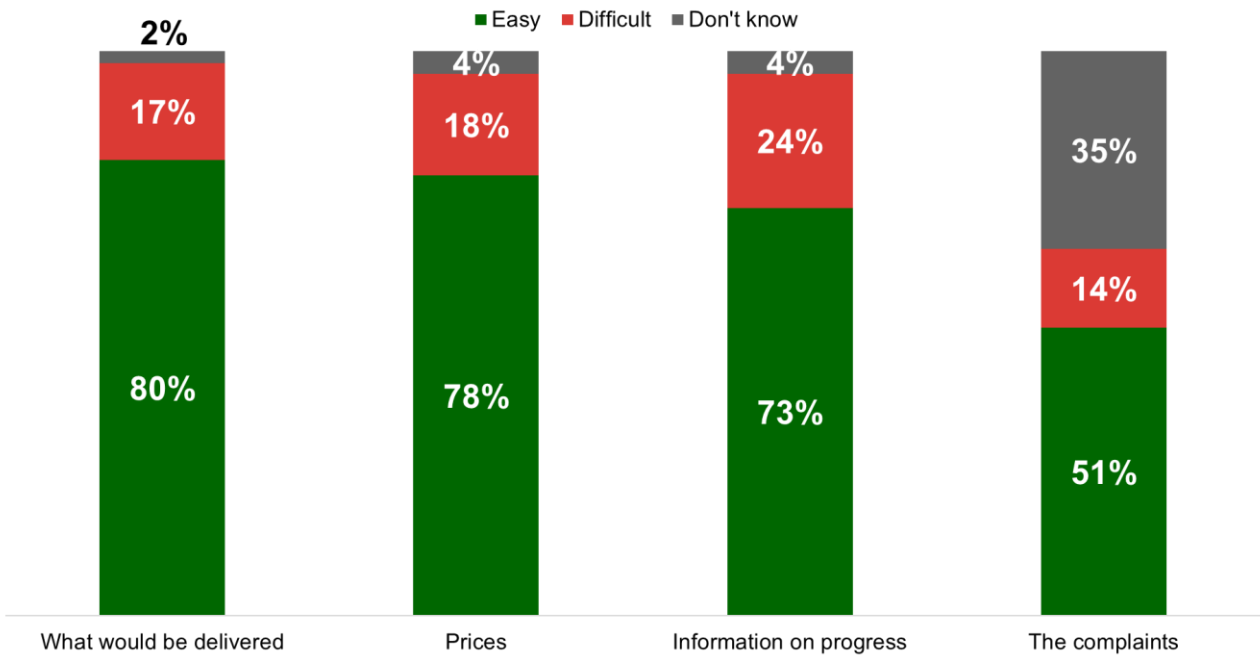
Figure 13. Difficulty with each stage of the process & desire for clear information – quantitative survey findings



Base: All disabled people who got help from a solicitor in the last 4 years (n=297)

Almost a fifth of disabled people who used a solicitor said they found it difficult to understand information about what would be delivered, such as what the solicitor would do for them (17%), or information about prices (18%). Almost a quarter said it was difficult to understand information on progress. Only one in seven found information around the complaints procedure difficult to understand (14%), but over a third are not sure (35%) – this is likely due to the lower proportion of people who would have direct experience of the complaints procedure.

Figure 14. Relative ease or difficulty understanding information about aspects of a solicitor’s service – quantitative survey findings



Base: All disabled people who got help from a solicitor in the last 4 years (n=297)

Overall, people with mental health impairments are more likely to report difficulty with understanding all aspects of information across all providers, excluding complaints procedures. Those with learning/ social/memory impairments were also more likely than others to report difficulty understanding information around prices and what would be delivered.

When those who had used a solicitor were asked what made information difficult to understand, over a third cited the overuse of legal words (figure 15).

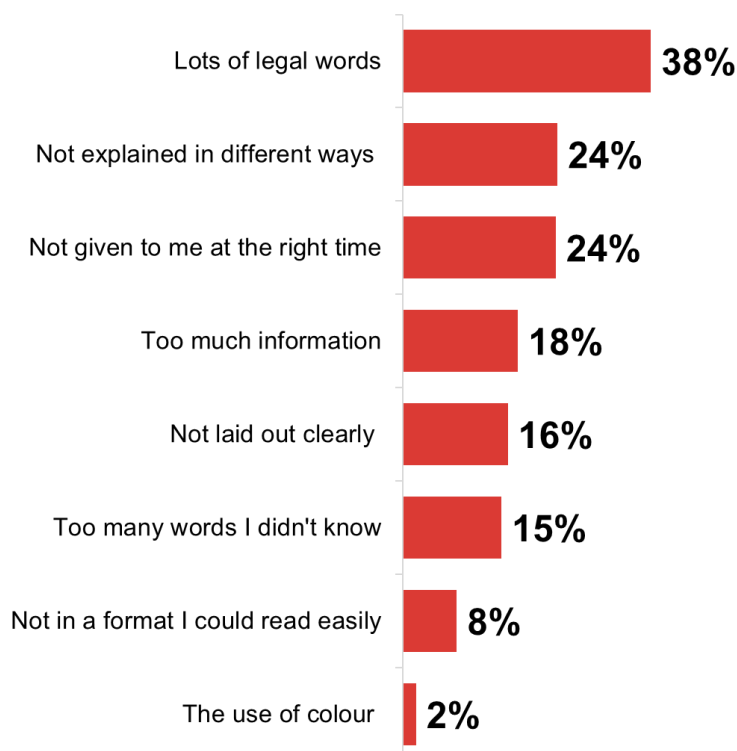
The clarity of information was a theme that emerged in the qualitative research. Overall, most participants thought the written and spoken language was generally easy to understand and had relatively little jargon, or the legal jargon was explained to them by staff. However, when an individual did struggle to understand information, they would often cite legal jargon as a main reason. When any participants did not understand something, most

would ask the solicitors or receptionists for clarification; therefore being made to feel they can ask staff questions is crucial. Clarification from staff was generally clear and well received.

“A lot of legal speak is ‘so intense’ not all laymans [sic] can understand, so when you can speak to them they can explain it better than reading it. Speaking leads to ‘clarity’.” (Mobility)

“[The solicitor used] All layman terms, terms we could understand. She [solicitor] said ‘If you don’t understand, just ask.’ She was so clear, there was nothing to ask [...] she made everything so easy.” (Mobility/ visual impaired)

Figure 15. Factors making information difficult to understand – quantitative survey findings



Base: All disabled people who got help from a solicitor in the last 4 years and found at least one aspect of information difficult to understand (n=102)

Across all providers, those with hearing/ vision impairments were most likely to say that “too much information” was a reason they found information difficult to understand (36%).

- In our qualitative research many participants thought that the information provided by the solicitors was lengthy and could be more concise. Lengthy information was overwhelming for some participants; this led them to not read everything and/or to not fully understand the information given.

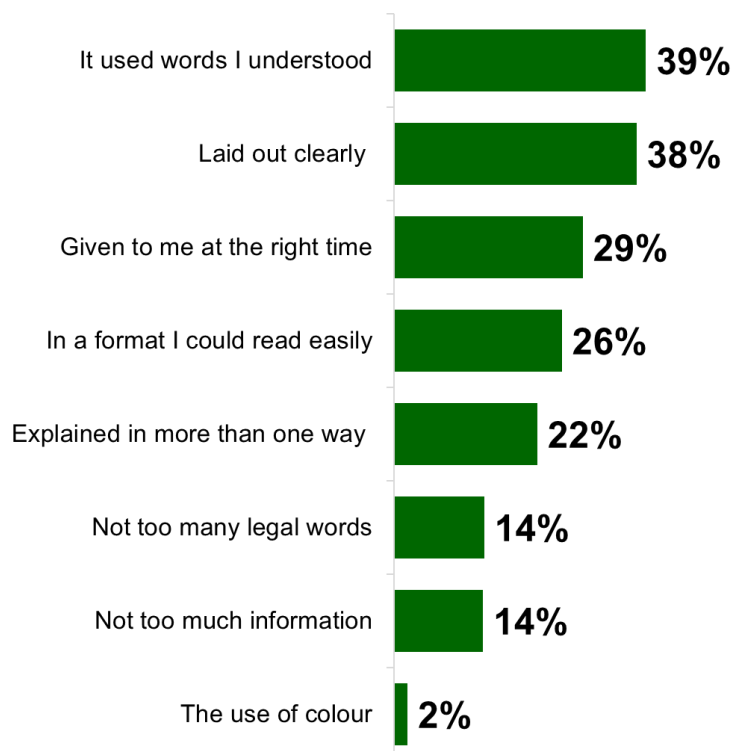
“Too much information. It’s like you can’t remember everything, and then when the solicitors deal with you, it’s a lot of words I’m not familiar with, and so it’s just difficult to understand.”(Mental health)

“There’s always a lot. They ramble. I hate to say solicitors ramble. They could do it in 5 minutes, but they have to make it last the half an hour.”(Mobility impaired)

On the other hand, when those who had used a solicitor were asked what made information easy to understand – two fifths said it was their use of understandable words and over a third said it was because the actual layout of the information was clear (figure 16).

Across all providers, those with hearing/vision impairments were most likely to say that because the information was in a format they could read easily made it easy to understand (36%). Those with mental health (19%) or learning/ social/memory impairments were more likely to say it was because they were not given too much information.

Figure 16. Factors making information easy to understand – quantitative survey findings



Base: All disabled people who got help from a solicitor in the last 4 years and found at least one aspect of information easy to understand (n=268)

From the qualitative research, disabled people identified positive aspects related to the format and layout of information. Most people were happy with the format of written information, particularly when documents had clear sections, boxes of text and colours. One respondent even said that his solicitor used stickers on the posted materials for him to be able to easily refer to specific sections and to know where to sign.

During the qualitative research, some participants mentioned having issues with getting progress updates. With some having to contact their solicitor to learn about the progress of their cases, whilst others being given regular updates without asking. Nearly all disabled people in the interviews said they would like to receive regular updates from solicitors without needing to request them.

Another challenge can be when disabled people are given short timeframes for completing forms and sending back information to services. This issue is associated most often with benefit and legal services. This can be especially difficult for those who experience regular fluctuations in pain levels and symptoms, or for disabled people who need time to organise a carer to help them. A few spoke of not knowing until the day whether they can get out of bed or concentrate enough to complete forms.

“Their [Benefit services] paperwork, pages and pages of the stuff. It’s all got to be done with pen and paper. For me, writing is a complete nightmare. You only get 2 weeks, but I can’t get it done that quickly. They’re not that helpful.” (Mobility)

“When you take your medication, you’re alright for a few days...By the time you’re in the second week, you can’t walk properly, you can’t move and you can’t do everything you actually need to do” (Mobility)

Also a few people with mental health issues, such as anxiety, spoke of needing clear timeframes from solicitors to help them not feel overwhelmed and stressed.

“Very difficult to get a response out of them. They’re not telling me about progress.” (Mobility/ Mental Health)



In regards to transparency of information, most of the qualitative participants reported being presented with clear prices. Additionally, most either said that they were provided with clear information about how to make complaints, or that they could not remember what the information was like. Traditionally, this information was provided during the first contact with solicitors and/or in the welcome information pack.

“I phoned them and they sent me an email with their terms and conditions and prices, etc. It was quite simple... It told me what they charge, his name, that he was a Partner and all about them. I went onto the website and looked it up” (Mobility)

Barriers and enablers to making services accessible

Key findings

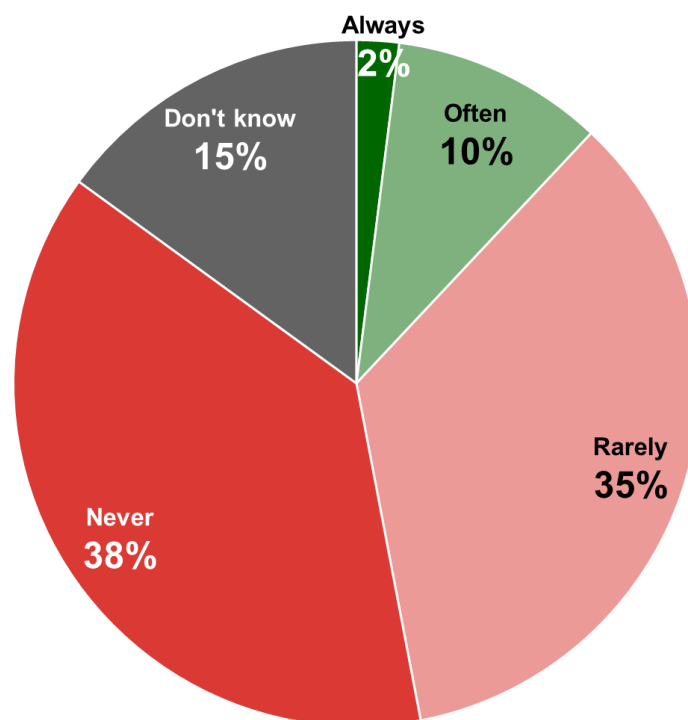
- Almost three quarters of disabled people say they are rarely or never proactively asked if they need adjustments when accessing professional services.
 - A service proactively offering adjustments is key as some people are not comfortable disclosing their specific health conditions or impairments at first contact. Being asked is key.
 - The most common barriers around services being accessible are unhelpful staff and the disabled person's own anxiety or lack of confidence.
 - Staff training on understanding issues that people may face would diminish this barrier; a third say having information on staff's experience and training would give them confidence a service was accessible.
 - A nominated/ dedicated person in firms for disabled people to contact to discuss any issues they may have is seen as a very positive provision.
 - Other key information which would be helpful included about the practical accessibility of the service or building, such as step-free access or parking.
-

Experiences of reasonable adjustments

When using or trying to use a professional service (such as banks, healthcare, legal services) three quarters (73%) of disabled people say that they are rarely or have never been proactively asked if they needed any adjustments in how information or the service was provided (figure 17).

This is a consistent experience across different severity of disabilities. With almost the same proportion of people who are limited a lot (37%) or limited a little (38%) reporting that they have never been proactively asked if they need any adjustments in service provision.

Figure 17. How often disabled people have been proactively asked if they need any reasonable adjustments by any professional services – quantitative survey findings



Base: All disabled people (n=1,572)

Having the experience of proactively being asked if any adjustments are needed is more likely to happen for those disabled people from a BAME background (23%) than it is for those people who are white British (11%)⁴⁵.

Of those disabled people who have used a solicitor, 16% said they were proactively asked if they needed adjustments by their solicitor. This is lower than the average for all sources of help (23%) and much lower than the experience of dealing with the charity/ advice sector, where 35% of disabled people reported being proactively asked if they needed adjustments.

Overall, most of the interview participants were not asked by solicitors if they needed any adjustments. Most of the participants would have liked to have been asked if they needed any support, e.g. home visits or alternative communication methods. A few, who had legal cases linked to their disability, were especially surprised that the solicitors did not ask them if they had particular needs/ preferences considering that the documents the solicitors were given stated their disability.

“No one asked me if I needed help. Maybe because it is not obvious to spot. I would have wanted them to ask me.” (Mobility/visual impaired)

“They didn’t offer it to me. They should’ve asked me, because they knew what it was for [PIP legal case]. I’d already told them that I’ve got a blue badge, which obviously means I’ve got a walking difficulty.” (Mobility impaired)

A fifth (19%) of disabled people have asked for adjustments to use a service or to understand information about a service they have used. Half (51%) of disabled people have never asked for adjustments, because they have never

⁴⁵ The BAME participants are less likely to have mobility impairments and use assistive products/support; and are more likely to have learning/social/memory impairments than those from a white British background.

felt as though they needed them. Interestingly, a quarter (27%) of disabled people have never asked for adjustments because they have never felt comfortable in doing that.

In line with other findings on the experiences of people with different impairment types, we find that those disabled people who:

- Are limited a lot are more likely than those limited a little to have never felt comfortable in asking for adjustments (35% v 19%);
- Have a mental health (41%) or learning/memory/ social (39%) impairment are more likely than those with mobility (27%) or vision' hearing impairments (32%) to have never felt comfortable in asking for adjustments.

A few of the participants who took part in the qualitative interviews also said that they do not feel comfortable disclosing their disability if they are not asked by professional service staff, as they do not want to be treated differently due to their health condition. Some others do not want to trouble staff or are worried that they will not be listened to especially if staff appear busy and/or they would struggle to explain their condition(s) to strangers.

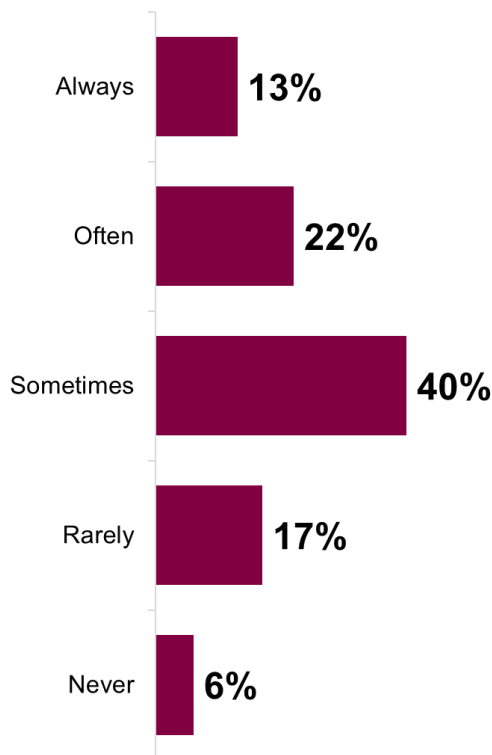
“When I was asked many questions about MS [in a bank it] made me feel as if I needed to prove that I have MS. The questions asked, they did not seem to collect information to help me but to ensure that I am having health issues. It was embarrassing and in the end I gave up and hung up.” (Sight/ mobility impaired)

Of those disabled people who have asked for adjustments in order to use/understand information about a professional service:

- 35% always or often received those adjustments
- 40% sometimes received them

- 23% rarely or never have received the adjustments they requested (figure 18).

Figure 18. When requesting adjustments whether disabled people receive them – quantitative survey findings



Base: All disabled people who have asked for adjustments (n=307)

Among the interview participants, those whose needs were accommodated by the law firm, felt highly satisfied and appreciated the adjustments provided. However, it was noted by a few that staff tend to only offer adjustments after an accessibility issue has arisen, for example the disabled person cannot attend a meeting or completes a form incorrectly.

“When we went to the office, I did phone and ask about everything, and they were very obliging. There was a lift and everything you could want, it was all very adapted to disabled users. I did ask and they were very adapted, so that was perfect.” (Mobility/dexterity)

“They asked the best timings for me to come in. I said, ‘It has to be within school times because I’ve got a child with a disability.’ That was fine, and if I needed to change it, he would move it around.” (Mobility/dexterity)

The following two case studies show two different experiences with being asked about whether they need any adjustments to the service. Edward was not asked proactively if he had any needs. He struggled to tell the solicitor that he did need some reasonable adjustments, such as meetings on the ground floor only.

And Louise was asked if she needed any adjustments, which made her feel cared for and left her feeling positive towards the solicitors.



Edward suffers with chronic pain in his back and sciatica in his legs, and also depression. He sometimes uses a stick as an aid and often struggles to move around in public places without support. He experiences anxiety when using his stick as he is concerned people might judge him why he needs it.

He used a solicitor for power of attorney that his mother had previously used. Although Edward asked friends for other recommendations, in the end he decided to use the cheapest option.

*all names used are pseudonyms

Edward, 52, suffers with chronic pain in his back and depression

Treatment from Professional Services

Edward often finds that there is poor disabled access in public places, especially in places like supermarkets, where he is expected to be on his feet for a long time, or when travelling on public transport. The lack of accessibility often deters Edward from going out. The only times he has experienced home visits was from the hospital when he was clinically depressed.

Legal Experiences

When looking for a solicitor Edward relied on recommendations from family and friends. His solicitor did not ask if he needed reasonable adjustments and Edward did not mention his needs either. When he realised their offices were across two floors, Edward asked if they could meet on the ground floor, using his mother as the reason - as he did not want to mention his own mobility issues. Edward had three meetings with his solicitor and in addition used phone calls and letters to keep in contact. He is uncomfortable online and prefers having letters for legal documentation. While he was happy with the level of contact he would have preferred to have had home visits.

Making it Better

Edward thinks it is vital to have information on the staff's qualifications and whether they have had training on health conditions. He also wants the location and access to the office to be easily available. He likes the idea of solicitors' websites to include images of their office and building premises and is also keen for them to display quality marks, which he thinks would give him assurance that they are part of a trustful organisation.

"But there's a sense of anxiety using [my stick], because people see someone like me and think, 'Well you're not that old, why are you walking around with a stick?' so it's that psychological thing, it's a touch of paranoia probably."

"The facilities in some places aren't adequate at all. The London Underground is not adequate at all, it is on certain stations, but if it's on certain stations, why isn't it on every station? That affects me there as well, up and down the stairs."

"I said [to the solicitor]... can we go here to the lady so mum doesn't have to walk up," but it was me that didn't want to walk up [the stairs]."

"It would be nice if the solicitor came round to see us both, rather than us going to them, that would have been perfect."

Louise, 55, has rheumatoid arthritis and osteoarthritis

Treatment from Professional Services

Louise feels she has to 'fight' for home visits from public organisations. Even when they do offer home visits, they are often inflexible and make it difficult for her to reschedule the visit when she is unwell.

Because of her limited mobility, Louise struggles to access buildings without step free access and has found in the past that companies have reacted negatively when she's said she can't attend meetings due to this. Louise is aware that she is treated differently by people because she is in a wheelchair.

Legal Experiences

Despite the above, she had a very positive experience with her solicitor.

Over the three years, they mainly communicated via post, which she found easy. Louise generally found the forms simple. Her solicitor asked her if any adjustments, such as transport, needed to be made in order to help with accessibility and also arranged health checks, which Louise thought were 'brilliant' as she felt well cared for.

However, Louise did find that she wasn't updated on her case often and found her solicitor hard to contact on occasion as she was very busy; she stresses that solicitors should be in contact regularly with their clients. Despite this, Louise was impressed with the solicitor's professional, polite and flexible approach, giving her trust and confidence in how her case was handled.

Making it Better

Louise thinks that there needs to be better education and understanding around disabilities, especially chronic pain conditions and would appreciate seeing a quality mark on websites to be assured of this. Step free access is integral to her future choices.



Due to her medical conditions Louise has had two hip replacements as well as surgery on her spine, which has caused her left arm to be partly paralysed. Her conditions cause her extreme pain and so she is reliant on pain killers. Because of her reduced mobility she has a live-in carer.

Following an accident Louise used a personal injury lawyer who was recommended to her by a friend.

"I don't like being labelled disabled. I'm still the same as other women my age, I just have problems with moving. You get labelled and looked down upon. Since I've gotten worse people look down at you."

"I was in a wheelchair both times. I found them [solicitors] very helpful, very welcoming, they didn't look down on you or speak to you differently."

"I think you've got to understand everyone's from all different walks of life and might not be educated. Stop with the legal jargon. Make it simple, make things simple."

"If they've [a solicitor] got a mark saying they're disability confident I think that's a good thing."

Barriers to services being accessible

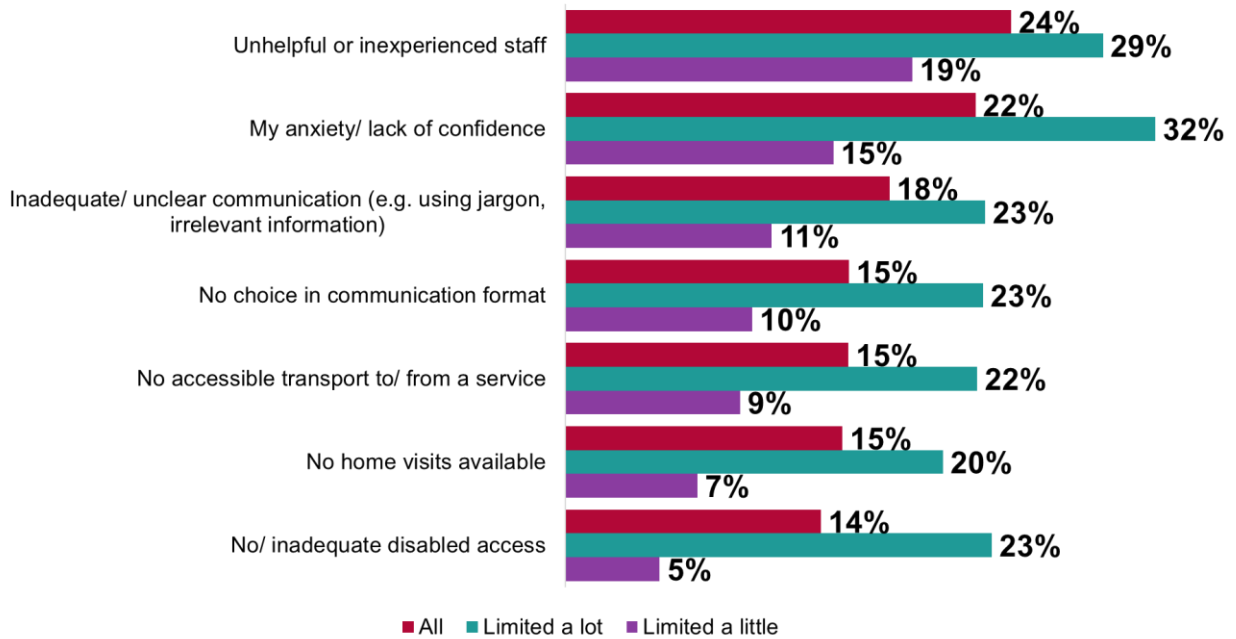
A third of disabled people (33%) reported that nothing prevents professional services (e.g. banks, healthcare, legal services) from being accessible to them. Only a fifth (22%) of disabled people who are limited a lot report that nothing prevents professional services being accessible to them.

The most commonly cited barriers to professional services being accessible are 'unhelpful or inexperienced staff' (24%), people's own 'anxiety or lack of confidence' (22%) and 'inadequate or unclear communication' (18%) (figure 19). These are issues that professional service providers should consider when delivering services.

Service providers need to consider the range of different disabilities that people can experience. For example those with a mental health impairment (54%) or a learning/ social/memory impairments (45%) are much more likely to reference that anxiety and a lack of confidence is a barrier for them. This was also mentioned by some of the disabled people during the interviews.

Those with more severe disabilities are significantly more likely than those who are limited a little to report that each of the issues shown in Figure 19 are barriers to them.

Figure 19. Perceived barriers to professional services being accessible to disabled people – quantitative survey findings



Base: All disabled people (n=1,572), all disabled people limited a lot (n=509), all disabled people limited a little (n=839). Sub groups do not add to total base as responses from carers are not included in sub group totals.

Many interview participants complained that staff from across professional services can be inconsiderate, which can put them off asking for help. For example, staff stare at them or ask/ behave inappropriately - making them feel uncomfortable. Some thought that more training is required for those working with the general public and disabled people.

During the interviews a number of participants mentioned the impact of jargon-heavy information, which they most associated with benefit, health and legal services. The information can be overwhelming for some, leading a few people to refuse to read the information; while others may read it but not fully understand it.

“Sometimes understanding the information that I get back is quite confusing, because I find it sometimes difficult to understand what the person’s saying. I

need someone to be there and clarify, 'No, this is how it is, this is what they've said.'" (Mobility/visual impairment)

"I feel that most legal papers, professional papers, they all tend to use legal jargon or medical jargon which we don't really understand" (Carer: mobility)

Some interview participants also mentioned lengthy and complex forms, phone calls and assessment meetings, which they most associate with benefit services.

"I've filled in a 24 and 18 page assessment [Benefit forms]. I had to get someone else to fill it out for me... It was upsetting and frustrating."
(Mobility/visual impairment)

"We've had to put a claim in for something, and you can only do it online. It's 500 pages, so many questions, but you can't do any of it on the phone, and there's no helpline. A lot of the government websites are horrendous" (Sight impairment/ mobility)

With regards to choice of communication format, interview participants mostly think of legal, benefit and financial services as being least flexible. It is important to offer a range of communication methods as not everyone is confident online or is able to physically visit a service. It is also important to be flexible over time, as communication preferences can change as a result of changes in people's health and treatment plans;

"I was attacked by a man, which triggered the post-traumatic stress disorder. That's why, I like to email, so I don't have to necessarily speak to someone. If it is a man, sometimes I just feel uncomfortable." (Mental health)

"I struggle with technology generally. It's all a bit hit and miss with me, I get going with it and then I forget things and it gets frustrating" (Mobility/mental health)

Also lack of availability of home visits and assessments is associated most often with legal, health and benefit services. Not everyone is able to, or would prefer not to, travel due to physical or mental health issues.

“Mum can’t walk or be in public spaces – we need the solicitor to come to us. We had to ring 4 – 5 firms to find one who would do home visits. They charge to come out – it is not cheap.” (Carer: mobility/visual impairment/mental health)

We needed a solicitor who could do home visits, as my mother cannot be in public as she screams. My brother had to ring around 5 firms to ask as it was not on their websites” (Carer: mobility/neurological)

“It would be nice if the solicitor came round to see us both, rather than us going to them, that would have been perfect.” (Mobility/mental health)

Qualitative participants often mentioned lack of information on levels of accessibility at first contact, particularly when accessing legal and benefit services. For example, when first accessing a service, many disabled people have experienced a lack of information on building access, what communication methods are available and whether home visits are possible.

“His [solicitor’s] offices are up on the fourth floor, which I can’t get to. There’s no lift” (Mobility)

Many participants believe that staff should be aware that disabled people have highly personalised preferences and needs, even within disability types, which they should try to accommodate. Some disabled people, for example, avoid online communication due to dexterity problems or feeling overwhelmed. Others, on the other hand, want more communication to be done online and heavily rely on technology in their daily life. And some may struggle to talk to strangers or attend meetings for example.

Flexibility is key; as even those who are comfortable using the internet may struggle to use it at times, for example when they are on strong medication or in pain. And some participants stated that they could have days when they are physically capable of using computers but might not feel mentally capable.

What would improve the accessibility of services for disabled people?

A variety of things could be used by professional service providers to help give disabled people confidence that the service was accessible to them. Disabled people most commonly said that information on the experience of staff in health conditions/disabilities (37%) and information about the providers' office or building (37%) would give them confidence that they could access that service (figure 20).

The disabled people who have used a solicitor were more likely to report that information on staff experience and information about the office or building would give them confidence they can access the service provided – with close to half (48% and 47% respectively) reporting those as important.

The participants who took part in the qualitative interviews also commented on the importance of providing details of the experience of the staff. They would like the companies to display information about staff training and experience in working with disabled people on their websites as it would give them confidence in the legal service being accessible.

They felt that staff training was especially needed on mental health and invisible disabilities. At the same time, a few of the participants thought that the staff should address customers' needs and make them feel comfortable



and respected by simply being polite, open, listening to customers and responding to their individual needs.

“Say on website that they understand dementia and mental health. Have [the staff] trained.” (Hearing/sight/mental health)

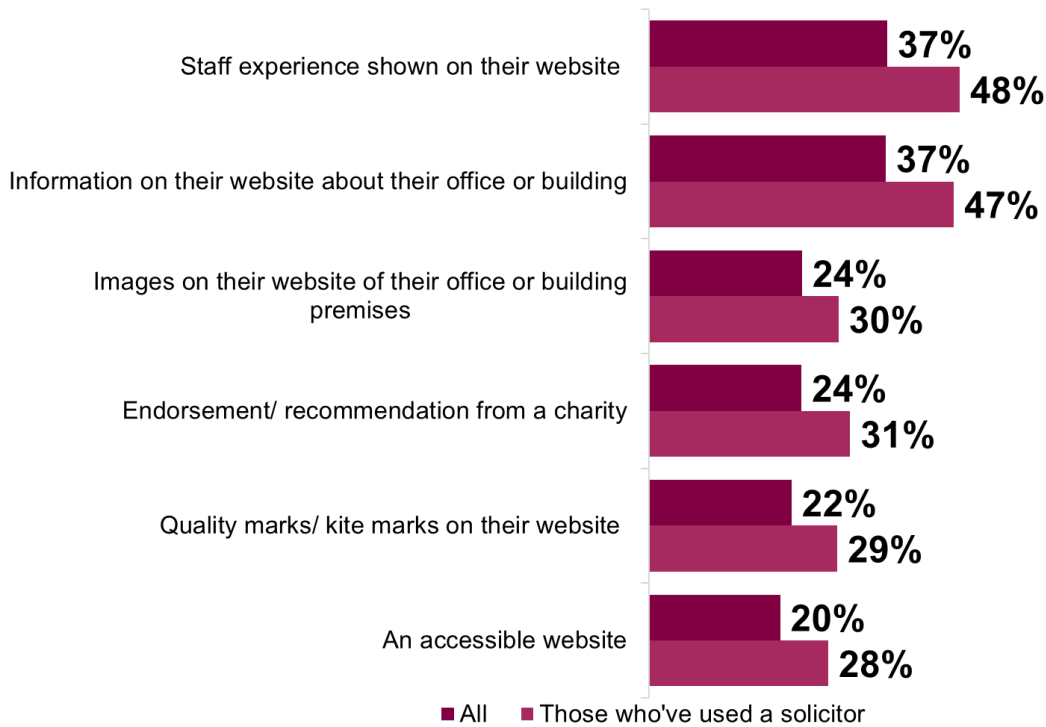
“If you’ve never experienced chronic pain condition, you will never know. If someone’s been taught about it, maybe, and taught about certain conditions and know arthritis can be good one day and bad another.” (Sight/mobility)

Information about disabled access and parking facilities on solicitor’s websites is welcomed. This information, even more than images themselves, is crucial for many to plan their visits. They also stressed that companies should be aware that disabled access should not be restricted just to the entrance and ground floor but that all floors are accessible.

“That information would be really good in the ‘Contact Us’ part, where you can find out the address, and if they offer these sorts of services.” (Mobility/mental health)

“A lot of the time that information is not available, so it’s good to have that information. A lot of places, you go, ‘Accessibility,’ and it tells you how to get there by tube. That’s not accessibility. How do we get into the building?” (Mobility/mental health)

Figure 20. What would indicate to disabled people that a professional service was accessible to them? – quantitative survey findings



Base: All disabled people (n=1,572), those who have used a solicitor (297).

Providing some of the information listed in figure 20 could improve the confidence that people have in accessing services, particularly those who are most disadvantaged. Those disabled people who reported that they were limited in accessing services are much more likely to report that information on the experience of staff with disabled people (50%), information about the building (47%) and images on the website about the actual premises (34%) would give them confidence that they could access that service.

In the qualitative research, many participants said they would like recommendations from charities about different providers but a few were more sceptical and said this would not make a large impact on their choice.

“Recommendation [from a charity] would be great. If you knew they were disabled friendly and mental health aware [that] would make me want to use them more than others.” (Mobility/ mental health)

“It depends where that recommendation or endorsement came from... If it's just there, on the computer, that doesn't mean anything to me. They could put letters after and everything else, I want to reinforce the fact that I can cross reference it somehow and find out that they actually do what they say they do.” (Mobility/mental health)

There was also some recognition of the use of a quality mark on firm's websites explaining that they are disability confident. This would give them assurance that the staff has experience in working with disabled people.

“That would make me more inclined to use them. That, along with the case studies, those things together really cover a lot and would make me feel a lot more confident using that service.” (Mobility/mental health)

“I think that would actually catch my eye. It would make me feel more confident that I'm not going to get the treatment I've had from other people.” (Visual impairment and mobility)

Improving the accessibility of information

When asked in the survey and in the qualitative research to think about what would improve the accessibility of information provided about professional services, disabled people provided a range of different responses. This demonstrates the complexity and the range of needs people have.

A number of key themes emerged which can be used by service providers to improve the accessibility of information they provide:

- An easy to navigate and accessible website - This indicates to disabled people that the firm is accessible to them. Participants noted that improvements could be made to making information easy to understand, clearly signposted and housed on a website that is also accessible to people with vision impairments.

“A fully accessible website (alt text pics⁴⁶, formatted correctly etc.). Being able to let them know when you want it in an alt format whether by email or in Braille etc.” (Survey respondent, Hearing/ vision)

“A website that works with my current browser extensions/add-ons, plain English rather than jargon and overly-professional language, something that shows that they are disability friendly.” (Survey respondent, Mental health)

- Clear information that is easy to read - A number of disabled people stressed the need for information about professional services to be clear, easy to understand and with a minimum of jargon. Related to this, many participants also referenced the need for the presentation of the information to be clear. And that the font size and the use of colour should be considered in all information provision.

“As someone suffering from macular degeneration I have problems with phone numbers, etc., being too small or not bold enough - small numbers in pastel colours are dire.” (Survey respondent, Hearing/ vision)

“Being clear, big writing, easy to see.” (Survey respondent, Mobility)

- Being able to speak to staff if needed - Responses under this theme commonly related to disabled people getting confused or lost in automated telephone menus. Alternatively, the ability to speak to someone who understands and can recognise they have different needs to other people would be very useful to them.

“The ability to contact someone within that service who could understand my needs.” (Survey respondent, Learning/ social/ memory)

⁴⁶ Alt text (alternative text) is a word or phrase that has been inserted to describe the nature or contents of an image. The alt text appears in a blank box that would normally contain the image. This allows website readers/viewers, which are useful applications for people with visual impairments, to read aloud the description of an image.

“Face to face contact, plain language, slow clear speech and a smile.”

(Survey respondent, Learning/ social/ memory)

- A nominated/dedicated person or part of the website - Some disabled people said that professional service providers could identify a nominated person or adviser that disabled people could speak to and discuss their needs. Related to this, if a person wasn't available, then at least having a dedicated part of the website that provided information about how disabled people could be supported would be useful. Having a direct line to the solicitor or a member of staff to avoid a switchboard was also mentioned during the qualitative interviews.

“A link to a nominated person responsible for the provision to someone who is disabled so if you had concerns they could be addressed from the outset.”

(Survey respondent, Other disability)

“Dedicated areas on websites for people with disabilities showing what assistance/facilities are available.” (Survey respondent, Mental health)

- Empathy and understanding - Finally, many disabled people report that the attitude of the staff towards them was an important area that could be improved. There was a desire for their needs to be understood and for staff to be compassionate towards them. Many of the interview participants stressed the need for the staff to be flexible as disabled people may sometimes need home visits or to rearrange a meeting due to their disability. Most would like to have an open conversation at the start about their needs and preferences.

“You need to be flexible on day – if she isn't having a good day and then need to cancel.” (Hearing/sight/mental health - carer)



“A professional service that has knowledge and understanding. Or make it so I don’t feel I have to justify myself. A bit of care and empathy.” (Survey respondent, mental health)

“Compassion in understanding your needs and access ability.” (Survey respondent, hearing/ vision impairments)

How legal service firms can provide better information to disabled people – results from a consumer test

Key findings

- Two thirds of disabled people preferred the adapted version of the solicitors' homepage. This shows that giving signals that a firm offers reasonable adjustments can increase the likelihood to choose that firm.
- People who chose the adapted homepage felt more comfortable contacting the firm. People felt that the firm with the adapted webpage would have more expertise in helping people with special needs, and that the firm would take their personal circumstances into account and make adjustments for them.
- The combination of signals (language, charity kite mark, images) work together to give the overall impression of a more personable and disability confident service.
- People noticed the SRA-regulated clickable logo and it made them feel more confident the firm would offer a good service.
- When considering what was clearer to understand a significantly higher proportion of disabled people felt that the adapted complaints page was better on these measures.
- This adapted complaints information was viewed as more useful to disabled people and overall more professional.
- The standard complaints page was viewed as overwhelming by some participants. With some disabled people telling us that the tone and

layout being difficult to digest was interpreted that the complaints procedure itself would be difficult.

- The adapted complaints page was well received thanks to the use of headings, the shorter sentences and the layout. In particular, the spacing introduced by the headings and bullet points were appreciated.
-

Overview of approach

The second stage of the project was to test how signalling that a firm is disability confident, or provides reasonable adjustments, affects disabled consumers' legal choices and perceptions. We used quantitative and qualitative research to collect this data and these methods are summarised below. For more detail on our approach and information we tested, please see Appendix A.

Quantitative approach

Two parts of the consumer journey were tested with two separate samples of disabled people, with each part split into two treatment groups (see figure 2):

- In the first part, participants saw the homepages of two hypothetical law firms (Smith & Co and A&P Partners). The homepages had general information about that firm, their services, and the team. Participants were shown a standard version of one law firm's homepage and an adapted version of another law firm's homepage.
 - "Standard" homepage: No mention of reasonable adjustments, understanding of disabled people's needs, or the charity kite mark.
 - "Adapted" homepage: Signals were included to show consumers that the firm would provide reasonable adjustments, through a

combination of the layout, use of colour, information about staff experience working with disabled people, specific reference made to services adapted to client's needs, charity kite mark and accreditation, and "realistic" images of the office environment.

- In the second part, participants were shown the complaints procedure page of a hypothetical solicitors' firm. We chose complaints procedure as this information is widely standardised across different types of legal service. This testing particularly focused on the effects of adaptations to the language and layout of information on disabled people's comprehension, confidence and perception of the law firm and overall complaints procedure.
 - "Standard": Complaints procedure laid out with paragraphs of information, little spacing, and formal language.
 - "Adapted": Complaints procedure laid out with clear headings for each stage, bullet points, spacing in between sections, and simplified language.

As well as testing communication materials quantitatively, YouGov also tested reactions to the information qualitatively. This allowed for a better understanding of disabled people's understanding and comprehension of the materials, and what their likes/dislikes and preferences were.

Two qualitative methods were used, combining both an online and offline approach, as described in Chapter 3 and in Appendix A.

The following section presents the analysis of the consumer test.

Impact of presenting firms in different ways

Choice between firms

When asked which firm they would choose in a hypothetical will-writing scenario, the majority of disabled people chose the adapted version of the solicitor's website (65% vs 35%).

Looking at each firm individually, the trend remains consistent – 63% of those who saw the adapted A&P Partners' website chose that version, 66% of those who saw the adapted Smith & Co's website chose that version.

By type of disability, we find that people with two or more impairment types were more likely to select the adapted version of the solicitors' firm than those with only one impairment type (72% v 60%). This demonstrates that people with more complex issues felt more comfortable with the information they were shown. However, there was no difference between those people limited a lot or limited a little, with 65% of both having a preference for the solicitor with the adapted homepage.

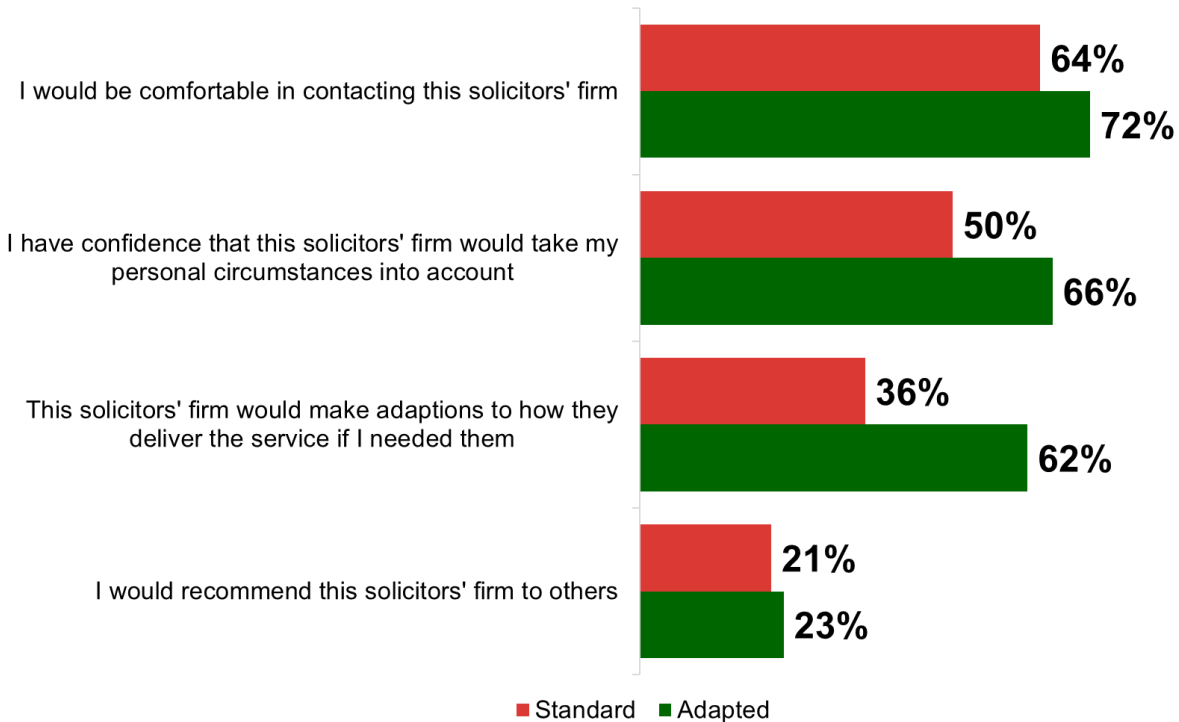
This indicates that when solicitors' firms provide information on their website that refers to how they accommodate people with different needs, the skills and expertise the staff and images of their offices they are more popular to disabled people.

Impact upon how firms are perceived

Participants who chose the adapted version were more likely to say they would feel comfortable contacting the firm than those who chose the standard version (72% vs 64%, as shown in figure 21). They were also more likely to be confident that the firm would take their personal circumstances into

account (66% vs 50%) and that the firm would make adaptations to the service if needed (62% vs 36%).

Figure 21. Reactions to the adapted and standard solicitors' websites – online quantitative consumer test findings



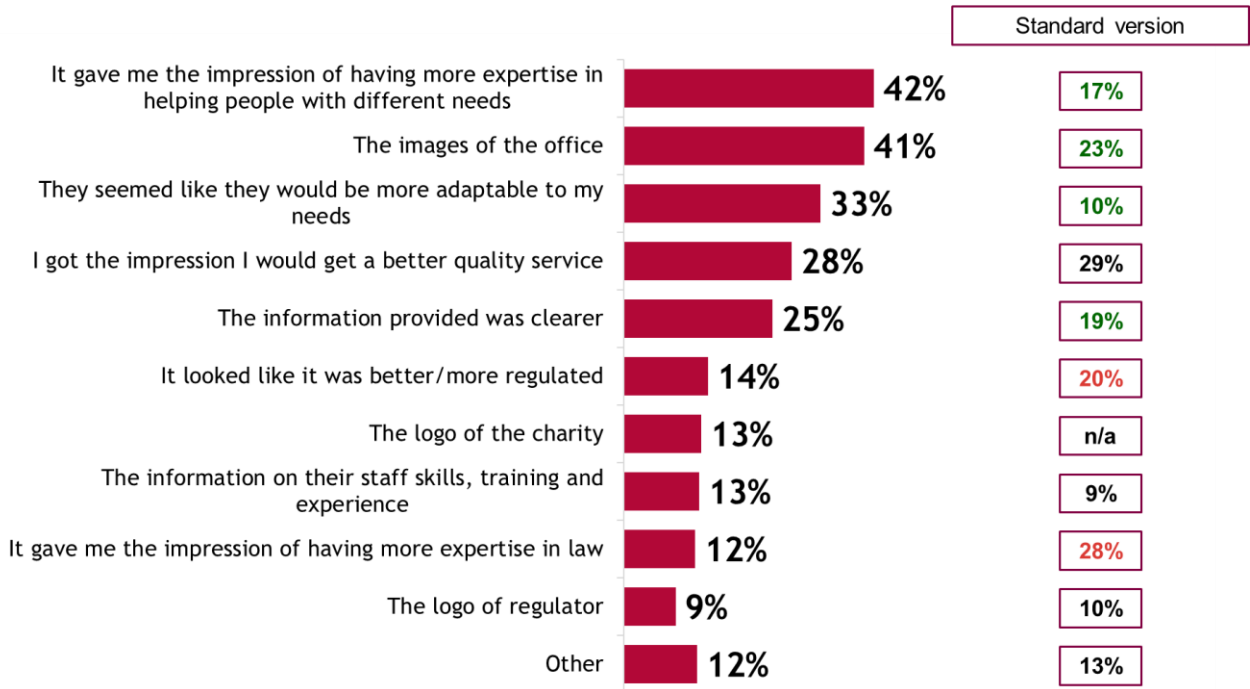
Base: All disabled people who chose the adapted version (n=808) or standard version (n=462)

Drivers of choice

The most common reasons for choosing the adapted version instead of the standard version, are the impression of having expertise in helping people with different needs and the images of the office (figure 22). On these measures the adapted version of the solicitors' firm's homepage strongly outperformed the standard version.

In comparison with the standard version of the solicitors' homepage, disabled people who chose the adapted version also felt the firm would be more adaptable to their needs and the information provided was clearer (figure 22).

Figure 22. Reasons for choosing adapted website/ treatment 2 – online quantitative consumer test findings



Base: All disabled people who chose the adapted treatment (n=808)

The only two measures on which the standard version outperformed the adapted version of the solicitors’ homepage are:

- Giving them an impression of having more expertise in law (28% vs 12%).
- It looked like it was better/ more regulated (20% vs 14%).

The standard version had less information on it and therefore more attention may have been drawn to the information about the legal expertise of the firm as this is the only information that was given on the homepage – therefore it is inevitable that a greater proportion of people focused on this in the standard version than in the adapted version. It should be noted though that a balance would need to be struck between portraying a firm as being regulated and having expertise in law as well as being able to provide an accessible

and inclusive service. And importantly, people were more likely to want to contact the firm with the adapted webpage.

Other significant findings include:

- Those who chose the adapted treatment and had mobility/ breathing/ fatigue/ dexterity impairments were more likely than average to say they thought the information provided was clearer (28%) and they liked the information on staff skills, training, and experience (15%).
- Those with a mental health impairment took particular notice of the SRA's logo (13% higher than the average of 9%) – the impact of which we discuss in the next section.

In the qualitative interviews and online forum, most disabled people preferred the adapted version. The image, language used and the fact that it had accreditation from a disability charity were key drivers in this decision. Below is a deep dive into the key drivers:

The image used strongly influenced firm choice:

Interview participants tended to rely heavily on visual cues to judge the solicitor firms. The image was often the first element that participants focussed on, and in many cases, it was cited as one of the main reasons for choosing the adapted over the standard version.

When reacting to seeing the image in the adapted version of the website, many liked this because it gave the impression of the firm being welcoming, friendly and accessible:

- Being able to see the inside of the office was reassuring; the office space looked modern and easy to get around. In comparison, some had

concerns that the traditional building shown in the standard version would have narrow corridors and many stairs.

- The wide exterior doors in the adapted version were perceived to easily accommodate mobility aids (e.g. wheelchair / mobility scooter).
- Many commented that the doors were shown 'open' in the adapted version, which they believed gave the firm an inviting feel. The colour in the adapted version also gave the impression of the firm being 'warm' and 'cosy'.

However, a minority did lean towards the image shown in the standard version; the historic large building communicated to them that the firm was established, sizeable, traditional, professional and had authority. For them, these were characteristics that they would look for in a legal provider. A few mentioned that the image was what they expected a solicitors' firm to look like, especially one in a large city.

"[I would choose the adapted version] because straight away it's showing the offices where you could meet... that for me is quite comfortable, I can see the setting... because I get nervous, I always think could it be like this, could it be like that, before I go..." (Mental health)

"I liked their [adapted version] images far better...by using colour and images of an open door and breezy looking office. It looks far more welcoming and not intimidating like the [standard version]..." (Mobility/mental health)

The language used in the adapted version resonates with most disabled people:

Many participants highlighted phrases in the adapted version that made them feel that the provider was people-focussed, caring and inclusive. This made them feel more comfortable in contacting this firm:

- The paragraph: ‘our dedicated team of 5 solicitors are experienced in working with people from different backgrounds and with varying needs. We are on-hand to guide you through the entire legal process’ reassured participants. Stating that they work with people from a range of backgrounds is effective at communicating that the firm is inclusive; people felt confident that the firm would be better at working with - and understanding the needs of - a wide range of minority and/or vulnerable audience, not just those living with disability. This paragraph also instilled a sense of hands-on support, which is helpful in easing the anxiety around what the legal process will involve.
- The phrase ‘our team understand that everyone’s circumstances are unique’ was received well and mentioned unprompted by many.
- The adapted website clearly communicated that the firm works with people from a range of backgrounds and made them feel more confident that they would receive a personalised service.

“[The adapted version] is more appealing, it understands everyone's circumstances are unique... everyone's different... this is more plain and simple and this is more warm...” (Mobility)

- ‘Provide practical and flexible advice adapted to your needs’ was another strong phrase identified by participants in the adapted version.

- This message gave reassurance that the firm would be able to make suitable adaptations and take their personal circumstances into account. It also created the sense that the firm would be doing these types of evaluation for every customer, which took the pressure off disabled people to self-identify as being ‘different’ and requiring specialist assistance in advance.

“Saying [in the adapted version that] they’re flexible to your needs it makes you think that they have a good understanding of what people need...they are offering good support...” (Mental health)

In contrast, many agreed that the standard version had shown no indication that the firm would take their personal circumstance into account and there was nothing to imply that they would proactively make adaptations to their service. As a result, a lot of people felt reluctant to contact the provider based on the standard version.

- Accreditation from a disability charity carries weight.

Although not all participants initially noticed the provider’s charity accreditation (shown in the adapted version), when prompted nearly all commented positively on it. Many agreed that it showed that the firm had gone to extra effort to be inclusive, which made them feel more comfortable about using the firm. However, a few struggled to fully comprehend what the charity accreditation meant and would want more information on what was required to achieve it/ what difference it would make to customers before they could fully support the initiative.

Most feel that it would not be necessary to know who the accrediting disabled charity was; for them the fact that the firm carries this badge would be enough. A few, however, felt that knowing who the disability charity was important, and needed to build trust.

“Knowing that they are accredited by a disability charity makes me think they have a good understanding of difference and disability. I would more likely to use this firm knowing that.” (Mobility/visual impairment/mental health)

“[That is a] major thing to show you are inclusive... It is good it is checked by someone else [a charity], a second opinion...that is a major thing. I don’t need the name of charity as long as it has been done...” (Mobility/dexterity)

In the qualitative interviews and forums, only a few disabled people showed a preference for the firm shown in the standard version.

However, it is worth noting that in the forum, some disabled people explained that they were not confident in either firm (shown in the standard and adapted versions), and that their choice in which firm to use was just the better of the two.

The effect of the SRA-regulated clickable logo

Overall, half of disabled people noticed the SRA-regulated clickable logo in either the adapted or standard version (54%).

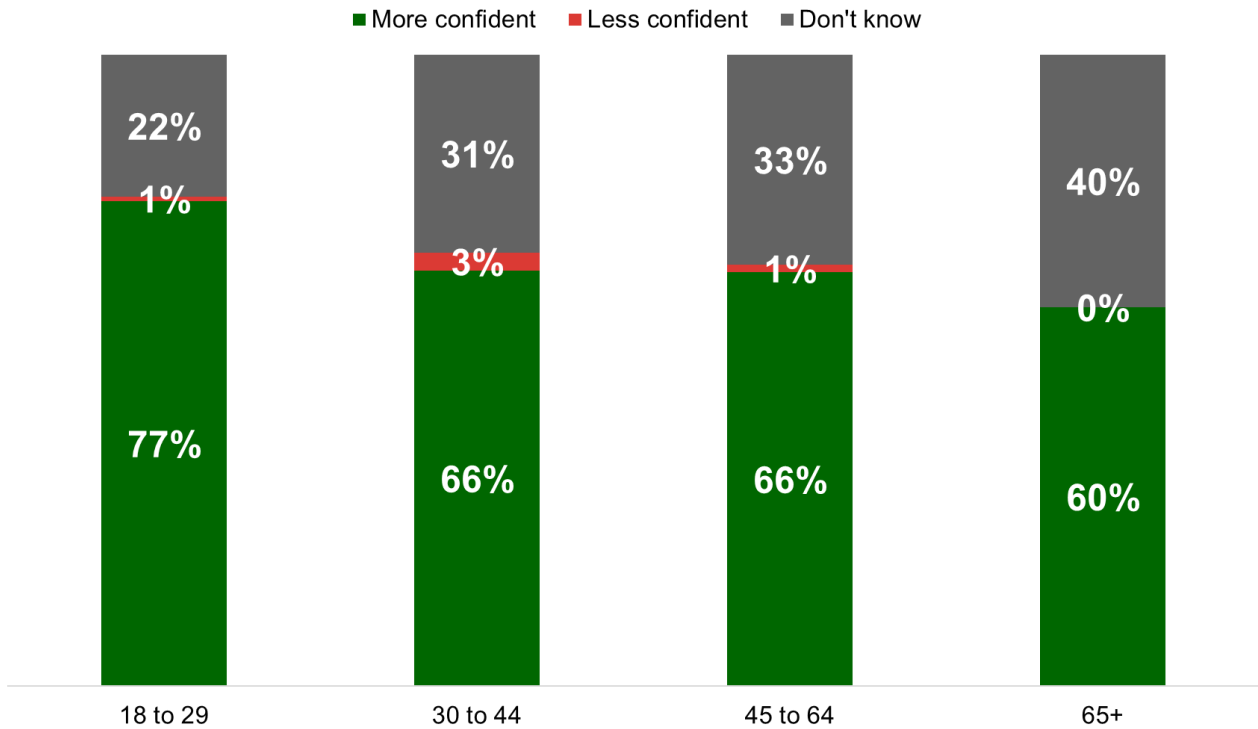
Of those who recall seeing the logo:

- Almost two thirds said it made them feel more confident that the firm would provide a good service (64%)
- A third said it would make no difference (35%)
- Only 1% say it makes them less confident that the firm would provide a good service

Those aged 18 to 29 are most likely to say the logo makes them more confident the firm will provide a good service, but confidence declines with age (figure 23). Those aged 65+ are significantly less likely than those aged 18 to 29 to say the logo makes them feel more confident. However, the figure

is relatively consistent across the middle ages – two thirds of those aged 30 to 44 or 45 to 64 say the logo makes them feel more confident.

Figure 23. Whether the SRA-regulated clickable logo makes them more/ less confident that the firm would provide a good service – online quantitative consumer test findings



Base: All disabled people who recalled seeing the SRA-regulated clickable logo (n=701)

When those who didn't notice the clickable logo on either website were shown it again and asked how it would impact their perception of the firm, over half said it would make them more confident the firm would provide a good service (55%).

Interestingly in the qualitative research, when prompted, some of those that did not have a clear understanding of the role of the SRA, still said that the firm appeared more trustworthy with the SRA logo. They felt that it was not essential to know who the regulator was in order to understand the concept of

them being regulated. Others' views were not influenced by the presence of the SRA logo as they didn't understand what it would mean for customers.

"I am not aware of who or what the SRA do, but seeing this image would make me feel more comfortable in using the solicitor and reassured that they are regulated and approved to an extent" (Mental health)

"I don't know anything about solicitor regulation and what it would entail, but it definitely makes it seem more trustworthy" (Hearing impairment/mental health)

Many expected that, if they saw the SRA logo on a firm's website, they would be able to click on the logo to discover more about the SRA, and what it means to be regulated. However, not all said they would click on it as they would just trust that it said the firm was regulated⁴⁷.

"If I saw this logo I may click on it just to read who they are and what they do. I'd expect to see information. About what it is. And what they do" (Mobility / mental health)

Likes and dislikes in the language and presentation of complaints information

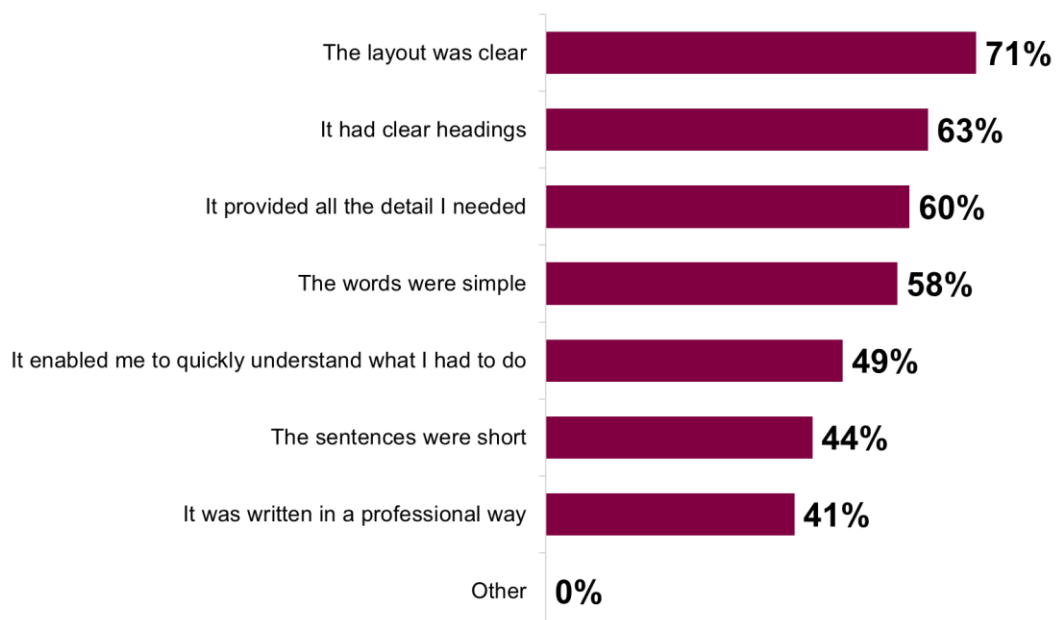
In the second stage of the consumer test (complaints procedures), those who saw the adapted webpage were more likely to say the information was easy to understand (78% vs 56% standard webpage). This is a clear indication that the change in presentation was an improvement.

⁴⁷ The SRA-regulated clickable logo shown in the stimulus was a draft version and could not be clicked on because these were hypothetical firms; the logo is still in development by the SRA (at the time of writing). However, it will be mandatory for all firms to display the clickable logo on their website in November 2019. Currently when someone clicks on it, it verifies whether the firm is regulated by the SRA so that the public can be sure that the firm is a regulated one. The information currently available when someone clicks on it is likely to change.

When asked why they thought the information was easy to understand in the adapted version, close to two thirds said that the layout was clear (71%). The qualitative insights mirrored the survey findings, with most disabled people describing the layout and style as user-friendly.

Over half noted the clear headings (63%), the level of detail (60%), and the simple language (58%). Those whose disability limits them a lot were more likely to note the short sentences (51%) than those whose disability only limited them a little (40%).

Figure 24. Reasons the adapted complaints procedure information was easy to understand – online quantitative consumer test findings



Base: All disabled people who saw the adapted treatment and thought it was easy to understand (n=395)

Disabled people in the qualitative research described the adapted complaints information as ‘professional’, ‘clear’, ‘helpful’ and ‘reassuring’. This was in comparison to the standard version, where the majority found the information to be ‘confusing’, ‘unclear’, and ‘frustrating’. Only a few described the

standard version as ‘professional’, ‘trustworthy’ and ‘reassuring’ as they liked that the process was described step by step⁴⁸.

Positively, disabled people were also more likely to consider the adapted information useful to them (44% vs 35%) and simple (51% vs 32%). The adapted information also elicited stronger feelings that the information was clear (56% vs 41%) and professional (55% vs 45%).

Disabled people who saw the adapted version were also more likely to say they would be confident in making a complaint to the firm (71% vs 58% of those who saw the standard version). This finding was supported by the qualitative interviews and forum. Many participants noted that the formatting made the content much easier to read and, because the steps involved in this complaints procedure were much clearer, many felt comfortable in knowing the options available to them. In turn, this made them more likely to describe the content as helpful and it increased their confidence in making a complaint.

Interestingly, many stated in the qualitative research that the complaints information presented in the standard version was intimidating and made them feel worried about making a complaint. A few felt unnerved by the idea that the ‘key individual’ handling the complaint would be the person with whom they were unsatisfied with.

When we checked their understanding by asking about the first step they would take in the process of making a complaint, seven in ten said they would contact the firm (71%), with no significant difference seen between those who

⁴⁸ When asked to tick up to 3 words, which best described their views when reading the information. The list of words to describe the information included: *helpful, unhelpful, confusing, clear, unclear, accessible, inaccessible, professional, unprofessional, frustrating, empowered, disempowered, overwhelming, worried, reassuring, trustworthy, untrustworthy.*

selected the adapted or standard versions⁴⁹. This was higher for those who have visible disabilities than those with invisible disabilities (75% vs 61%).

One in seven (15%) disabled people report that they would not know who to contact first if they were to make a complaint to a solicitors' firm after seeing the complaints procedure information⁵⁰. Not knowing who to complain to first was higher for younger disabled people (20% of 18-29 years old and 25% of 35-44 years old) than it was for older disabled people (12% of 65+ years old). Continuing the theme that people with less visible disabilities often have a different experience, 20% of those with an invisible impairment report they would not know who to complain to first compared with 13% of those with a visible impairment.

In the presentation of complaints information in both versions it stated that people would not be charged for the time taken to handle a complaint.

Despite this, almost a fifth thought that they would be charged for the time a solicitor spent on their complaint (17%). This rose to a quarter of those with invisible disabilities (25% vs 16% with visible disabilities). This may indicate that further work needs to be done to explore the barriers specific to those with invisible disabilities such as mental health or learning disabilities in understanding information given on webpages. It also supports the earlier finding that some people need alternative communication methods to help them to understand key information.

The final stage of the consumer test was a text-highlighter tool, where people could highlight sections of the text they felt were clear or unclear on the

⁴⁹ 69% who saw the standard version said they would contact the firm as their first step and 74% of those who saw the adapted version said this, but this is not a significant difference at the 95% confidence level.

⁵⁰ 17% who saw the standard version said they wouldn't know who to contact first and 13% of those who saw the adapted version said this, but this is not a significant difference at the 95% confidence level.

standard and adapted complaints page. Please see appendix A for a copy of the images that participants highlighted according to how clear or unclear they thought the words were.

It is evident that there are many elements of the standard version of the complaints text that are not clear to participants. In particular, complex terms such as “designated”, “Complaints Archive” and “redress” are unclear to readers. The paragraph discussing face-to-face meetings is consistently unclear.

In the qualitative research, many disabled people also thought that the small font, lengthy paragraphs and narrow spacing made the information difficult to read and digest. Additionally, the tone was judged to be too formal and the terminology used was too jargonised. Those living with mental health problems especially struggled to take the information in; one respondent explained how her ability to concentrate is impacted by the medication she takes for her anxiety.

Overall, the adapted version of the complaints information has fewer areas that participants flagged as unclear. The main areas that were unclear in the adapted version are similar to the standard version – technical or difficult terms such as “disadvantaged” and “resolve” – but there are considerably fewer of these unclear words than in the standard version. The phrase “soon after” is unclear which reinforces the need for information on clear timings and processes, which is discussed elsewhere in the report.

The sentences that are most notably unclear across both treatments are the Legal Ombudsman’s eligibility criteria – this was not changed between the treatments. It might be useful for firms to provide a link to the Legal Ombudsman’s website which further explains their eligibility criteria.

Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

This research has explored the views of a range of people with differing types and severities of disability. One of the standout findings, for solicitors and other professional service providers, is that the needs of disabled people should proactively be sought and assumptions not simply made about what help or assistance they might or might not need.

This research has identified that many disabled people report not being proactively asked if they need reasonable adjustments at first contact, or only experiencing adjustments once an issue has occurred. A service proactively offering adjustments is key as some people are not comfortable disclosing their specific health conditions or impairments at first contact without being asked.

For many the overall experience of accessing professional services and solicitors is a positive one. But it can be improved, and the biggest issues arise around disabled people not feeling that their needs are taken into account or even asked about in the first place.

Disability often covers multiple impairments and is a complex situation that can change over time and even from day-to-day. The different types of impairment and severity of disability affect people in different ways. There is though evidence that those disabled people who experience a mental health or social/ learning or memory impairment are more likely to encounter difficulties in accessing information about professional services. This may be because of the information itself, the staff they consult with or because of their own anxiety making the situation more challenging.

The attitudes of the staff towards a disabled person is a key driver of their overall satisfaction. Flexible and understanding staff who make disabled people feel comfortable are highly valued. Unhelpful staff who lack understanding and empathy are one the most common barriers disabled people report to a service being accessible to them.

We find that solicitors who signal that they provide reasonable adjustments, by giving more information on the experience of their staff in working with disabled people, accreditations of the accessibility of their service provision or simply images of their actual offices, are more likely to be chosen than their competitors.

The combination of signals (language, charity kite mark, images) work together to give the overall impression of a more personable service and accessible service. This leaves a disabled person with a greater feeling that the solicitors' firm would take their circumstances into account and that they would be comfortable in contacting the solicitors' firm. These are important feelings that ultimately resulted in a greater propensity to choose a solicitor that made them feel this way.

As we have discussed, the presentation of information can sometimes be overwhelming and confusing to disabled people (and in fact to any person) looking to work with a solicitor. In this research, through presenting disabled people with complaints information in two different ways, we find that there is a preference for the clearer presentation of information and that disabled people would be more confident in making complaints when information is presented in a clearer way.

The 'adapted' information we presented was considered easier to understand and simpler. But importantly the information was more likely to be considered

professional and useful to disabled people, which are feelings that lead to greater confidence that a person could engage with the firm.

We have focussed here on adapting information contained on a homepage and a complaints page and have explored the experiences of disabled people. There are many findings in this research on how to present solicitors' information in a way that people feel is clear, simple and accessible that can be applied to other areas of service provision and useful to many different types of consumers.

We find that making adjustments to how information is presented has the dual benefit of improving the experience for the service user themselves and for solicitors' firms in seeing greater uptake of services and levels of satisfaction.

Recommendations

Our overarching recommendation is for solicitor firms to proactively ask all customers, at initial contact and at appropriate intervals, if they need any reasonable adjustments. It is essential to ask all customers, as some disabilities are invisible, and people want to be treated equally.

Asking customers, rather than waiting for customers to request adjustments is important, as the research shows that not all disabled people feel comfortable asking for adjustments from professional services. It is important to note that not all disabled people want or need adjustments to be made, and people with a particular disability type will not necessarily have the same needs as someone else with the same disability type.

Reasonable adjustments need to be flexible and reassessed during the customer journey, as people's needs and communication preferences can change over time due to their disability and / or treatment. Firms should be mindful that some disabled people may need their carer to be the main

contact or part of the process; the carer may also require adjustments to help them support the disabled person they care for.

Recommendations for the presentation of information and communication materials are outlined below:

Content of firm's leaflets and webpages:

- Include the image of the office's interior and exterior - this facilitates customers' planning and helps ease anxieties around what the office environment may be like.
- Provide written or verbal information at first contact of the office buildings accessibility – such as if it has step free access, lifts and nearby parking spaces. This will once again help customers and carers plan their routes and assess if the service is suitable or not for them.
- Communicate timeframes clearly and frequently – to set expectations of the process and mitigate against perceptions of the processes being too laborious to start or progress.
- Include contact details to make people feel comfortable – being able to see that they have options for contacting the firm is reassuring and means that they can choose the option that suits them best. Providing dedicated contact details of someone who specialises in disability issues is helpful, rather than a general email address or switchboard number.
- Highlight if staff have any training in disabilities – this information can help disabled people and carers to feel more confident in using a service, and in explaining any adjustments they may need. It gives them reassurance that the firm will be open, approachable, non-judgemental, professional and understanding.

- Highlight on the firm's homepage if the firm has any disabled charity accreditation – recommendations are extremely important for all people when choosing a solicitor. Personal recommendations are most influential, however a recommendation / accreditation from a disabled charity is also helpful and reassuring. As with the previous point; this addition can help to show that the firm is caring, accessible and non-judgemental.

Language, style and layout:

- Keep sentences short and use bullet points to separate key points – this helps customers digest information and make sense of what is important to them. Where processes are outlined, numbered subheadings help readers to keep track of the procedural flow.
- Use colour but ensure it is accessible – when colour is used in images it makes the firm appear warmer and more inviting, and increases peoples' confidence in making contact. When colour is used in copy it helps break up the text and draw the eye to key sections.
- Use spacing to help break up dense text – spacing paragraphs out helps to reduce the likelihood of disabled people feeling overwhelmed when they first look at the information.
- Use a clear font, in a large enough size (min 14-point text) – this aids readability (especially amongst those with visual impairments / difficult concentrating).
- Adapt language to make it more approachable to disabled people – when customer perceive that they will receive a good level of service from people who care, understand their needs, will be flexible and are

open to making any suitable adaptations, it increases their confidence in contacting the firm (and their likelihood to recommend to others).

- Avoid using jargon – many disabled people already struggle to concentrate on / digest detailed information. Using plain language helps ease anxieties around using a legal service. This recommendation, as with many outlined above, is also extremely valuable for non-disabled people.

Appendix A – Detailed methodology

Stage one: exploratory survey and depth interviews

Quantitative survey

The purpose of this first stage of data collection was to explore how disabled people choose and use legal services. This allowed for benchmarking legal service experiences alongside other professional services, while providing insights on what the barriers and enablers are to improve the accessibility of information and the services themselves.

The survey, and interview discussion guide, gathered context about the participants to allow us to understand what types of impairments they have, the support they draw on and their previous knowledge and experience of accessing a legal service and other professional services.

Qualitative interviews

In order to include people with a wide range of disabilities in the research, alongside the survey, we conducted 14 in-depth interviews. The interviews covered the survey questions in a qualitative format, which provided a deeper understanding of people's personal experiences of accessing professional services information.

The interviews lasted between 45 – 60 minutes. Participants were given the option to take part over the telephone or face-to-face (in their own homes). Carers were invited to take part if required by the respondent.

YouGov worked with an offline recruitment partner to ensure participants were included who are less confident, less able or not able to take part in an online survey.

Thematic analysis was used to identify key themes and quotes. The insights are included in chapters four to six. A selection of anonymous case studies have been included in this report.

Stage two: Consumer test

Quantitative methods

The second stage of quantitative data collection took the form of a consumer test. The consumer test was divided into two parts with a separate sample of disabled people completing each part of the test.

To test the impact of signalling that a firm provides reasonable adjustments, we use the standard homepage as a baseline group in the first part. To test the impact of providing information in an accessible method, we use the standard complaint procedure information (Treatment 1) as a baseline group in the second stage. The key questions which we attempt to answer are:

- How do disabled people's perceptions and choices differ when a solicitor makes adjustments to the information they present?
- What makes information more accessible to consumers with a disability?

Part One

In the first part, there are two hypothetical solicitor firms, "Smith & Co" and "A&P Partners". For each firm there is an adapted and standard version of their homepage, the content of which is duplicated identically across the two firms. There are therefore a total of 4 webpages used in the test. 50% of participants saw the Smith & Co adapted version and the A&P Partners standard version, while the other 50% saw the opposite (Smith & Co standard version and the A&P Partners adapted version). This allows for participants to



choose between two firms, one that is adapted and one that is standard. And this ensures we control for any effect of the company name and that in the analysis any correlation found between perceptions and treatments across both firms are not due to statistical “noise” or chance.


% of Participants	Smith & Co	A&P Partners
50%	Adapted	Standard
50%	Standard	Adapted

The images presented in the consumer test for adapted and standard versions of the two firm’s websites are shown below.


Figure 25. Standard version of A&P Partners' website

A&P Partners

[HOME](#) [ABOUT US](#) [OUR PEOPLE](#) [OUR SERVICES](#) [CONTACT US](#)




We are a solicitors' firm with over 20 years of legal expertise. By offering unequalled service we have been able to grow as a practice building up expertise in a wider range of legal services. As a dedicated firm of 5 solicitors, you can be sure that our solicitors will be on hand to guide you through the entire legal process.



What we do


- Wills, trusts and estate planning
 - Family law
 - Conveyancing
 - Employment



Our team

You can rely on our team.

- Experienced in a range of law
- Provide practical advice and help



Our service

- Timely and efficient
- Quality assured and professional

A&P Partners is authorised and regulated by the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA ID 654123).
Contact us: Tel: 0400 722 6737 | Email: enquiry@appartners.com






Figure 26. Standard version of Smith & Co's website

Smith & Co

[HOME](#) [ABOUT US](#) [OUR PEOPLE](#) [OUR SERVICES](#) [CONTACT US](#)




We are a solicitors' firm with over 20 years of legal expertise. By offering unequalled service we have been able to grow as a practice building up expertise in a wider range of legal services. As a dedicated firm of 5 solicitors, you can be sure that our solicitors will be on hand to guide you thorough the entire legal process.



What we do


- Wills, trusts and estate planning
 - Family law
 - Conveyancing
 - Employment



Our team

You can rely on our team.


- Experienced in a range of law
- Provide practical advice and help



Our service

- Timely and efficient
- Quality assured and professional

Smith & Co is authorised and regulated by the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA ID 654123).
Contact us: Tel: 0400 722 6737 | Email: enquiry@smithandco.com




REGULATED BY
SOLICITORS
REGULATION
AUTHORITY
LEARN MORE

Figure 27. Adapted version of Smith & Co's website


Smith & Co

[HOME](#) [ABOUT US](#) [OUR PEOPLE](#) [OUR SERVICES](#) [CONTACT US](#)




Our offices, where we can meet and help you

We are a solicitors' firm with over 20 years of legal expertise. We provide a reliable and professional service that is flexible to your needs. Our dedicated team of 5 solicitors are experienced in working with people from different backgrounds and with varying needs. We are on-hand to guide you through the entire legal process.




What we do

- Wills, trusts and estate planning
 - Family law
 - Conveyancing
 - Employment



Our team

- You can rely on our team.
- Experienced in a range of law
 - Timely and efficient
 - Understand everyone's circumstances are unique




Our service

- Provide practical and flexible advice adapted to your needs

We are accredited for our inclusive service provision by CAPABILITY, a national disability charity

Smith & Co is authorised and regulated by the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA ID 654123).
Contact us: Tel: 0400 722 6757 | Email: enquiry@smithandco.com




REGULATED BY
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AUTHORITY
LEARN MORE

Figure 28. Adapted version of A&P Partners' website


A&P Partners

[HOME](#) [ABOUT US](#) [OUR PEOPLE](#) [OUR SERVICES](#) [CONTACT US](#)




Our offices, where we can meet and help you

We are a solicitors' firm with over 20 years of legal expertise.
 We provide a reliable and professional service that is flexible to your needs. Our dedicated team of 5 solicitors are experienced in working with people from different backgrounds and with varying needs.
 We are on-hand to guide you through the entire legal process.



What we do


- Wills, trusts and estate planning
 - Family law
 - Conveyancing
 - Employment



Our team

You can rely on our team.

- Experienced in a range of law
 - Timely and efficient
 - Understand everyone's circumstances are unique




Our service

- Provide practical and flexible advice adapted to your needs

We are accredited for our inclusive service provision by CAPABILITY, a national disability charity

A&P Partners is authorised and regulated by the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA ID 654785).
 Contact us: Tel: 0400 722 6757 | Email: enquiry@appartners.com



Following seeing the two firms' websites (one adapted and one standard version) participants were asked to choose which firm they think would best meet their will writing needs. And we asked a series of follow-up questions around why they chose the firm they did.

The second part of the consumer test focused on complaints information. A separate survey, to a different sample of disabled people, presented adapted (Treatment 2) and standard (Treatment 1) versions of the firms' complaints information as shown below.

Figure 29. Standard version of A&P Partners' complaints information

A&P Partners

[HOME](#) [ABOUT US](#) [OUR PEOPLE](#) [OUR SERVICES](#) [CONTACT US](#)

Our Complaints Procedure

A&P Partners strive to maintain high standards of client satisfaction with all aspects of our service. If you are unsatisfied with any element of our service, you should let us know to ensure we can resolve any issues. In the first instance, you should contact the key individual who has been handling the day-to-day matters of your case. You will not be charged for any time the solicitor spends dealing with your complaint. If they are unable to resolve the issue to your satisfaction, please contact Henry Andrews, our dedicated Complaints Handler.

Our complaints procedure informs you how we will deal with each stage of your complaint:

1. All complaints from clients are considered seriously by A&P Partners, as we strive to provide a high quality service to all clients. Within 5 working days, your complaint will be recorded in our Complaints Archive and we will send you a letter acknowledging your complaint.
2. The designated Complaints Handler will review your file and associated complaint in thorough detail, including any other relevant documentation. We will contact you within 7 working days of receiving your complaint to explain how we intend to process your complaint. This may include:
 - Suggestions around how we could put things right or some form of redress;
 - Requests for explanation or clarification around your complaint;
- Requests for a face-to-face meeting to discuss your complaint, where we would propose a meeting within 14 days of receiving your complaint. Within 2 working days of any meeting, we would confirm in writing what took place within the discussion and confirm any form of redress offered.
3. Regardless of how your complaint is addressed within the above options, you will receive our final decision regarding your complaint within 6 weeks of receipt.

If we are unable to settle your complaint within our internal Complaints Procedure, you do have the right to complain to the Legal Ombudsman (LeO), which is an independent complaints body, established under the Legal Services Act 2007.

To refer your complaint to the LeO, you must contact them within 6 months of our final decision being made, and:

- Within 6 years of the initial legal issue happening; or
- Within 3 years of you finding out about the legal issue if it initially occurred more than 6 years ago.

We are regulated by the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA). You can contact them at any time if your concerns relate to behaviour such as dishonesty, taking or losing your money, or treating you unfairly because of your age, a disability or other characteristic. You can contact them at any time and do not have to make a complaint to us first.

Figure 30. Adapted version of A&P Partners' complaints information

A&P Partners

[HOME](#) [ABOUT US](#) [OUR PEOPLE](#) [OUR SERVICES](#) [CONTACT US](#)

Our Complaints Procedure

We want to give you the best service possible. If you are unhappy or concerned about our service, you can tell us immediately so that we can correct the issue and improve.

It is free to complain to us.

If you need help making your complaint or if you feel disadvantaged in making a complaint (e.g. if English is not your first language or if you have a disability) please let us know and we will do our best to help you.

Step 1 – Get in touch

- Please email or write to our Complaints Handler Henry Andrews at: H.Andrews@APPpartners.co.uk
- If you prefer to call, please leave a message with A&P Partners reception at 0400 722 6737

Step 2 – We will investigate

- We will contact you within 5 working days to confirm we have received your complaint.
- We will discuss your complaint with the people who did your legal work.
- We might need to contact you for further details and might ask for a face-to-face meeting. Please tell us if you do not want to have a face-to-face meeting.

Step 3 – The outcome

We will contact you within 6 weeks with our suggestions for how to resolve your complaint. We will give you our final response soon after.

The Legal Ombudsman

If you are still unhappy, you can ask the Legal Ombudsman to look into your complaint. The Legal Ombudsman is an independent complaints service.

You will need to contact them within 6 months of our final response, and:

- within 6 years of the problem happening; **or**
- within 3 years from when you found out about the problem (if it took place more than 6 years ago).

The Solicitors Regulation Authority

The Solicitor's Regulation Authority can help you if you are concerned about our behaviour. This can include not being honest, taking or losing your money, or treating you unfairly, for example because of your age or a disability. You can contact them at any time and do not have to make a complaint to us first.

After seeing the complaints information, participants were asked a series of questions about their understanding of the information and how it made them feel about making a complaint to the solicitors' firm. Comparing the responses of participants who saw the adapted version versus those who saw the standard version demonstrates the impact of presenting complaints information in a more accessible way.



An exercise was also undertaken that allowed participants to highlight specific words that they found clear or unclear. Again, each disabled person was only shown either the standard or adapted version of complaints information.

The images overleaf show the output of this exercise. Anything mildly unclear is in orange text, while areas that were particularly unclear and which were highlighted by more people are in red. The solicitor firm names or contact details have not been included in these images.

Treatment 1

[FIRM] **strive** to **uphold** high standards of **client satisfaction** with **all characteristics of our service**. If you are unsatisfied with any **element** of our service, you should let us know to ensure we can **resolve** any **issues**.

In the first **instance**, you should **contact** the **key individual** who has been handling the day-to-day matters of your case. If they are unable to resolve the issue to your satisfaction, please **contact** [NAME], our dedicated Complaints Handler.

Our complaints procedure informs you how we will deal with each stage of your complaint:

3. All complaints from clients are considered seriously by [FIRM], as we **strive** to provide a high quality service to all clients. Within 5 working days, **your complaint will be recorded in our Complaints Archive** and we will send you a letter acknowledging your complaint.
4. The **designated Complaints Handler** will review your file and **associated complaint in thorough detail, including any other relevant documentation**. We will contact you within 7 working days of receiving your complaint to explain how we intend to process your complaint. This may include:
 - **Suggestions around how we could put things right or some form of redress;**
 - **Requests for explanation or clarification around your complaint;**
 - **Requests for a face-to-face meeting to discuss your complaint, where we would propose a meeting within 14 days of receiving your complaint. Within 2 working days of any meeting, we would confirm in writing what took place within the discussion and confirm any form of redress offered.**

3. Regardless of how your complaint is **addressed** within the **above** options, you will receive our final decision regarding your complaint within 6 weeks of receipt.

If we are unable to settle your complaint within our internal Complaints Procedure, you do have the right to complain to the **Legal Ombudsman (LeO)**, which is an independent complaints body, established under the Legal Services Act 2007.

To refer your complaint to the **LeO**, you must **contact them within 6 months of our final decision being made, and:**

- **Within 6 years of the initial legal issue happening; or**
- **Within 3 years of you finding out about the legal issue if it initially occurred more than 6 years ago.**

We are regulated by the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA). You can contact them at any time if your concerns relate to behaviour such as dishonesty, taking or losing your money, or treating you unfairly because of your age, a disability or other **characteristic**. You can contact them at any time and do not have to make a complaint to us first.

Treatment 2

We want to give you the best service possible. If you are unhappy or concerned about our service, you can tell us immediately so that we can correct the issue and improve.

It is free to complain to us.

If you need help making your complaint or if you **feel disadvantaged** in **making** a complaint (e.g. if English is not your first language or if you have a disability) please let us know and we will do our **best** to help you.

Step 1 – Get in touch

- Please email **or write to our Complaints Handler** [NAME] at: [EMAIL]
- If you prefer to call, **please leave a message with** [FIRM] **reception** at 0400 722 6737

Step 2 – We will investigate

- We will contact you within **5 working** days to confirm we have received your complaint.
- We will **discuss** your complaint with the **people who did your legal work**.
- We might need to contact you for further details and might ask for a **face-to-face** meeting. Please tell us if you do not want to have a **face-to-face meeting**.

Step 3 – The outcome

We will contact you **within 6 weeks** with **our suggestions for how to resolve** your complaint. **We will give you our final response soon after**.

The **Legal Ombudsman**

If you are still unhappy, you can ask the **Legal Ombudsman** to look into **your complaint**. The Legal Ombudsman is an independent complaints service.

You will need to **contact them within 6 months** of our final **response, and:**

- **within 6 years of the problem happening; or**
- **within 3 years from when you found out about the problem (if it took place more than 6 years ago).**

The **Solicitors Regulation Authority**

The **Solicitor's Regulation Authority** can help **you** if you are concerned about our behaviour. This can include not being honest, taking or losing your money, or treating you unfairly, for example because of your age or a disability. **You can contact them at any time** and do not have **to make a complaint** to us **first**.

Qualitative methods

The webpages used in the quantitative consumer test were tested qualitatively as well, to fully explore people's understanding and comprehension of the materials, as well as their likes/dislikes and preferences.

In part one of the qualitative research participants were asked to imagine that they needed to find a solicitor to help them make a will. They were asked to imagine that they had not used a solicitor before and did not know anyone who could recommend one. In a search they found information for two solicitor firms – A&P Partners and Smith & Co. They were shown an adapted version of one firm's homepage and a standard version of the other.

Participants were asked to evaluate each firm, decide who would best meet their will writing needs and then choose which firm to use. Follow-up questions explored how likely or not participants were to recommend the firm, how comfortable they felt contacting the firm and whether they believed the firm would take their personal circumstances into account/make any adaptations needed.

In part two participants were then asked to imagine that they had chosen Smith & Co solicitors to make a will and had been unhappy with how the solicitor kept them up to date with progress in making their will and the length of time it took. Therefore, they are considering whether to make a complaint and find information in their information about how to make a complaint. All participants were shown the standard version (treatment one) first, followed by the adapted version (treatment two).

To ensure we included disabled people who are online and offline, or less confident online, we took two approaches:



- An online forum with 30 'online' participants
- Ten face-to-face in-depth interviews.

The online forum (30 participants) was open for four days. Participants were invited to log in daily at any time to answer six to eight daily questions, as well as personal probes. The daily questions mirrored the quantitative consumer testing, with additional questions on understanding, appeal and improvement ideas for the communication materials. The webpages and questions were shown on an interactive whiteboard.

The forum participants were recruited from YouGov's online research panel. In line with the Market Research Society Code of Conduct, all participants were incentivised.

The face-to-face interviews (10 participants) were 35 – 45 minutes in duration. Five in-depth interviews were conducted per day. Interviews were conducted both in Leeds and London, in accessible and central venues. The participants were all offline or less confident online; their carers also took part when needed. The in-depth interviews covered the same questions as the quantitative consumer test and tested the same materials, however the materials were printed as handouts/leaflets rather than online webpages. All stimulus was presented on A3 paper.

As the interviews were with offline participants, we worked again with our offline recruitment agency, rather than the YouGov Panel. Participants were incentivised with cash in line with the MRS Code of Conduct.

Profile of research participants

The target audience was disabled people. Using the ONS Census 2011 definition we identified people as having some form of disability through the following question:

[disability] {single} Are your day to day activities limited because of a health problem or disability which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months?

<1> Yes, limited a lot

<2> Yes, limited a little

<3> No

Anyone self-reporting that their activities are limited a lot or limited a little were included in the samples for the quantitative and qualitative research.

A range of different impairment types and demographics were included in the research. The quantitative samples for the survey and consumer test were weighted to be representative of the disabled population by gender, age, region and impairment type. A full breakdown of the composition of the samples can be found in Appendix A.

The qualitative sample (apart from being offline or not comfortable online for the in-depth interviews and having all used a solicitor in the last five years so they could provide direct insight from their experiences) mirrored the participants recruited for the survey. For example, the participants represented a mix of ages, gender, working status, location, social grade, and range of disabilities experienced.

The data from the interviews and forum was analysed qualitatively, rather than being added into the quantitative survey analysis, due to the small sample size and variation in methodology.

Qualitative sampling

Stage one – Fourteen in-depth interviews (telephone and face to face)

Participants were recruited to reflect the survey sample frame in regards to a mix of demographics and disability types. The key difference was that the qualitative interviews were only with disabled people who do not feel comfortable/ confident online. Below is a summary of the participants who took part.

	Gender	Age	Region	Working status	Types of disability
1	Female	73	South East	Retired	Mobility and dexterity
2	Female	60	South East	Non-working	Mobility and dexterity
3	Male	52	South East	Full time	Mobility and dexterity, also clinical depression and anxiety
4	Female	55	South East	Non-working	Impaired sight, mobility and dexterity
5	Female	48	South East	Full time	Mobility
6	Male	34	London	Non-working	Mobility and mental health
7	Male	31	London	Non-working	Mobility
8	Male	40	Wales	Non-working	Mobility and vision
9	Female	76	Wales	Retired	Mobility
10 Carer	Female	84	North West	Non-working	Mental health, neurological, hearing and sight impairments

	Gender	Age	Region	Working status	Types of disability
11 Carer	Female	71	North West	Retired	Mobility and neurological
12	Male	67	North West	Non-working	Mental health
13	Male	53	North West	Part time	Mobility
14	Female	36	North West	Non-working	Mental health

The interviews were conducted in April 2019 by YouGov qualitative moderators. Participants were recruited by an offline recruitment agency.

Stage two, consumer test – Ten in-depth interviews (face to face)

Again, participants were recruited to reflect the survey sample frame in regards to a mix of demographics and disability types. The key difference was that the qualitative interviews were only with disabled people who do not feel comfortable/ confident online. Below is a summary of the participants who took part.

The interviews were conducted in April 2019 by YouGov qualitative moderators. Participants were recruited by an offline recruitment agency.

Stage two, consumer test – Online forum

30 participants were recruited from YouGov’s online panel. Participants were recruited to reflect the survey sample frame in regards to a mix of demographics and disability types.

Quantitative sample profile

In the online survey of disabled people all participants were drawn from the YouGov panel of c.1m people who live in the UK.

The research was completed between 15th March and 25th March 2019 and a final sample of 1,572 was achieved. Within the sample we obtained the views of 1,348 disabled people and 224 carers of a disabled person. The results for those two groups have been combined into one dataset that has been weighted and is representative of disabled people in England and Wales by age, gender, region and impairment type.

The sample composition of the stage one online survey was as follows:

	Unweighted base	Weighted base
Gender		
Male	575	607
Female	773	741
Age		
18 to 29	143	152
30 to 44	203	206
45 to 64	450	448
65+	552	543
Region		
North	399	377
Midlands	278	270
East	145	135
London	184	135
South	241	337
Wales	101	94
Disability		
Limited a lot	509	504

	Unweighted base	Weighted base
Limited a little	839	844
Impairment type		
Mobility, breathing, fatigue, dexterity	1037	1074
Mental health	426	361
Hearing/ vision	296	259
Learning/ social/ memory	387	376
Other	119	108
Ethnicity		
White British	1206	1217
BAME	132	121
Type		
Disabled person	1,348	1,365
Carer	224	207
TOTAL	1,572	1,572

The consumer test online sample was also drawn solely from the YouGov panel and was only targeted as disabled people. The first part of the consumer test research was undertaken between 25th April and 3rd May. The results have been weighted and are representative of disabled people in England and Wales by age, gender, region and impairment type.

The sample composition of part one of the stage two online consumer test was as follows:

	Unweighted base	Weighted base
Gender		
Male	536	572
Female	734	699
Age		
18 to 29	128	143
30 to 44	250	194
45 to 64	440	422
65+	452	511
Region		
North	313	356
Midlands	218	254
East	142	127
London	339	127
South	170	318
Wales	88	89
Disability		
Limited a lot	452	422
Limited a little	818	848
Impairment type		
Mobility, breathing, fatigue, dexterity	935	978
Mental health	436	345
Hearing/ vision	251	240
Learning/ social/ memory	363	254

	Unweighted base	Weighted base
Other	133	143
Ethnicity		
White British	917	989
BAME	340	269
TOTAL	1,270	1,270

The second part of the consumer test was undertaken between 14th June and 19th June 2019 and a sample of 1,023 disabled people was achieved. The results have been weighted and are representative of disabled people in England and Wales by age, gender, region and impairment type.

The sample composition of part two of the online consumer test was as follows:

	Unweighted base	Weighted base
Gender		
Male	462	460
Female	561	563
Age		
18 to 29	110	115
30 to 44	154	156
45 to 64	341	340
65+	418	412
Region		
North	286	286
Midlands	203	205
East	104	102
London	103	102

	Unweighted base	Weighted base
South	256	256
Wales	71	72
Disability		
Limited a lot	367	367
Limited a little	656	656
Impairment type		
Mobility, breathing, fatigue, dexterity	748	745
Mental health	325	324
Hearing/ vision	274	270
Learning/ social/ memory	372	375
Other	93	97
Ethnicity		
White British	937	936
BAME	72	73
TOTAL	1,023	1,023

Across the stage one quantitative survey and the stage two quantitative online consumer test differences between the views and experiences of disabled people have been analysed in this report. Differences have been reported between different types of disabled people based upon their demographics. All reported differences have been tested for statistical significance at the 95% confidence interval.

A qualitative deep dive into the standard complaints information

The image is a screenshot of the Smith & Co website. At the top left is the 'Smith & Co' logo. To the right is a navigation menu with links for 'HOME', 'ABOUT US', 'OUR PEOPLE', 'OUR SERVICES', and 'CONTACT US'. The main heading is 'Our Complaints Procedure'. Below this, there is a paragraph explaining the company's commitment to client satisfaction and a process for handling complaints. This is followed by a numbered list of three steps: 1. All complaints are considered seriously and acknowledged within 5 working days. 2. A designated Complaints Handler reviews the complaint in detail and provides an explanation within 7 working days, including suggestions for redress. 3. A final decision is provided within 6 weeks. Further down, it states that if a complaint is not settled internally, clients have the right to complain to the Legal Ombudsman (LeO) within 6 months of the final decision or 3 years of the issue occurring. The page concludes with a note about regulation by the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA).

Smith & Co

[HOME](#) [ABOUT US](#) [OUR PEOPLE](#) [OUR SERVICES](#) [CONTACT US](#)

Our Complaints Procedure

Smith & Co strive to maintain high standards of client satisfaction with all aspects of our service. If you are unsatisfied with any element of our service, you should let us know to ensure we can resolve any issues. In the first instance, you should contact the key individual who has been handling the day-to-day matters of your case. If they are unable to resolve the issue to your satisfaction, please contact Henry Andrews, our dedicated Complaints Handler.

Our complaints procedure informs you how we will deal with each stage of your complaint:

1. All complaints from clients are considered seriously by Smith & Co, as we strive to provide a high quality service to all clients. Within 5 working days, your complaint will be recorded in our Complaints Archive and we will send you a letter acknowledging your complaint.
2. The designated Complaints Handler will review your file and associated complaint in thorough detail, including any other relevant documentation. We will contact you within 7 working days of receiving your complaint to explain how we intend to process your complaint. This may include:
 - Suggestions around how we could put things right or some form of redress;
 - Requests for explanation or clarification around your complaint;
- Requests for a face-to-face meeting to discuss your complaint, where we would propose a meeting within 14 days of receiving your complaint. Within 2 working days of any meeting, we would confirm in writing what took place within the discussion and confirm any form of redress offered.
3. Regardless of how your complaint is addressed within the above options, you will receive our final decision regarding your complaint within 6 weeks of receipt.

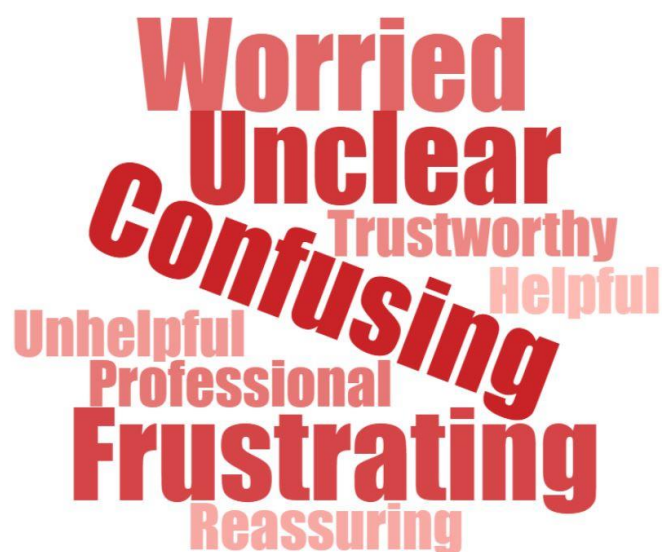
If we are unable to settle your complaint within our internal Complaints Procedure, you do have the right to complain to the Legal Ombudsman (LeO), which is an independent complaints body, established under the Legal Services Act 2007.

To refer your complaint to the LeO, you must contact them within 6 months of our final decision being made, and:

- Within 6 years of the initial legal issue happening; **or**
- Within 3 years of you finding out about the legal issue if it initially occurred more than 6 years ago.

We are regulated by the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA). You can contact them at any time if your concerns relate to behaviour such as dishonesty, taking or losing your money, or treating you unfairly because of your age, a disability or other characteristic. You can contact them at any time and do not have to make a complaint to us first.

The size of the word in the image below denotes how many times it was selected by participants from a set list of descriptors, which were all shown during the qualitative interviews. Participants were asked to select up to three words which best describe how they felt towards the complaints procedure information.



Whilst a minority described the complaints information presented in treatment one (the standard version) as ‘professional’, ‘trustworthy’ and ‘reassuring’ as they liked that the process was described step by step – the majority found the complaints information to be ‘confusing’, ‘unclear, and ‘frustrating’.

Many agreed the information presented in treatment one was overwhelming and some struggled to engage with the content; two participants interviewed face to face refused to read the information stating that they would not read it under usual circumstances. A few others showed resistance and said that their carer/family member would usually be the one that would read this content to help them understand what they would need to do next.

The small font, lengthy paragraphs and narrow spacing made the information difficult to read and digest. Those living with mental health problems especially struggled to take the information in; one respondent explained how her ability to concentrate is impacted by the medication she takes for her anxiety.

When people engaged with the information, however, some agreed that the steps were clear and the information thorough; most understood what was written from a technical perspective. But for many, understanding the complaints process is not enough to make them feel confident in making a complaint. Many stated that the complaints information presented in treatment one was intimidating and made them feel worried about making a complaint.

Not only did the layout and format give the impression of the complaints process being complicated and long-winded, some commented that the timeframes referenced also felt too long and drawn out.

The tone was judged to be too formal and the terminology used too jargonised. Words such as ‘elements’ and ‘first instance’ were felt to unnecessarily complicate the procedure and isolate the reader. Many agreed that the steps could have been simplified.

Some disliked the phrases ‘regardless of how your complaint is addressed’ and ‘you will receive our final decision regarding your complaint within 6 weeks of receipt’, as it was perceived to be unhelpful and uncaring. Some worried that the firm would not try to resolve the complaint successfully.

A few felt unnerved by the idea that the ‘key individual’ handling the complaint would be the person with whom they were unsatisfied with.

“The procedure is also quite complicated and confusing. Five working days, seven working days, 14 days (not working days?) and two working days. It all seems convoluted” (Visual impairments/mobility)

“I don’t think I would be confident at all in making a complaint with the firm, as judging by the information here it seems much too troublesome, confusing and with too much red tape involved...” (Hearing impairment/mental health)

“[I] wouldn’t even look at it... [I don’t read] small writing... It doesn’t benefit me reading it, I just want the outcome... [It just] looks like a standard letter / T&Cs. I just don’t bother reading it...” (Mobility/dexterity)

A qualitative deep dive into adapted complaints information (treatment two)

Smith & Co

HOME ABOUT US OUR PEOPLE OUR SERVICES CONTACT US

Our Complaints Procedure

We want to give you the best service possible. If you are unhappy or concerned about our service, you can tell us immediately so that we can correct the issue and improve.

It is free to complain to us.

If you need help making your complaint or if you feel disadvantaged in making a complaint (e.g. if English is not your first language or if you have a disability) please let us know and we will do our best to help you.

Step 1 – Get in touch

- Please email or write to our Complaints Handler Henry Andrews at: H.Andrews@SmithandCo.co.uk
- If you prefer to call, please leave a message with A&P Partners reception at 0400 722 6787

Step 2 – We will investigate

- We will contact you within 3 working days to confirm we have received your complaint.
- We will discuss your complaint with the people who did your legal work.
- We might need to contact you for further details and might ask for a face-to-face meeting. Please tell us if you do not want to have a face-to-face meeting.

Step 3 – The outcome

We will contact you within 6 weeks with our suggestions for how to resolve your complaint. We will give you our final response soon after.

The Legal Ombudsman

If you are still unhappy, you can ask the Legal Ombudsman to look into your complaint. The Legal Ombudsman is an independent complaints service.

You will need to contact them within 6 months of our final response, and:

- within 6 years of the problem happening; **or**
- within 3 years from when you found out about the problem (if it took place more than 6 years ago).

The Solicitors Regulation Authority

The Solicitor’s Regulation Authority can help you if you are concerned about our behaviour. This can include not being honest, taking or losing your money, or treating you unfairly, for example because of your age or a disability. You can contact them at any time and do not have to make a complaint to us first.

Reactions to the second treatment (the adapted version) were much more positive. Disabled people were more likely to describe the communication as ‘professional’, ‘clear’, ‘helpful’ and ‘reassuring’.



The layout and style of this complaints information was felt to be much more user-friendly. Some commented that the complaints information presented in the adapted version had been written for the customer (rather than another legal professional), which gave the firm a 'softer', more human feel.

The formatting made the content much easier to read and, because the steps involved in this complaints procedure were much clearer, many felt comfortable in knowing the options available to them. In turn, this made them more likely to describe the content as helpful and it increased their confidence in making a complaint.

A number of key elements emerged which made the complaints information more accessible:

- The short sentences and simplified text made the information much easier to digest.
- The use of bullet points and chunking of the text created more white space which was easier on the eye.

- Numbered subheadings made the steps distinct and clear. The use of colour reinforced the subheadings and was effective at breaking up the text.
- Information on the Legal Ombudsmen and SRA was easy to pull out and the roles of each organisation was outlined concisely.
- The inclusion of the contact details gave the firm a more personal feel, people liked that it would be easy to email/call a dedicated contact.

“[It is] fresh, really easy to understand [and] well laid out. [It has] good bullet pointing [and the] information on how to contact [the firm], including the relevant emails and phone numbers is really good. [The] use of colours to highlight the section headings is also good.” (Mental health)

“[It does] say get in touch in highlighted text. This entices me more to read it. I am drawn into the steps... they have done a [good] job on this one. I like the stages and timeframes...” (Mobility)

“This looks much better! Sections make it easier to understand, the step by step is easier. The 6 week delay looks better here funny enough. The Legal Ombudsmen stands out more... [The process is] clearer. It’s less confusing.” (Mobility/mental health)

Those few who found the information in treatment two to be confusing or unclear worried that because the complaints information lacked density, it may also lack substance. A few expected information from legal service providers to be verbose. Only one commented that the simplified language and use of colour made the communication seem childish.

A few were put off by the fact that the communication said it was free to complain; they would not expect to be charged for complaining initially – and

worried about any financial repercussion as a result. This information was included in both treatments.

Appendix C – Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the input and contributions to the following organisations that have helped shape this research.

- Legal Ombudsman
- Aspire: <https://www.aspire.org.uk/>
- Beacon Vision: <https://www.beaconvision.org/>
- BID Services: <https://www.bid.org.uk/>
- Focus Birmingham: <https://www.focusbirmingham.org.uk>