

Question time

Q Why do you think the draft Legal Services Bill you published in May is good news for consumers?

A It provides a different sort of regulation for the legal profession. It makes sure

the regulation is focused much more on the consumer. It also allows lawyers to provide their services in a way that's convenient for the consumer. For example, the AA (Automobile Association) will be able to provide many more legal

services, the Co-op could provide legal services in connection with, say, a bereavement. And, finally, it provides a single, simple, effective complaints system.

have gone through the system feel frustrated by it. The Office for Legal Complaints is simple, clear – one body. It's independent of any of the law bodies, too, thinking only about finding the right answer in relation to each complaint.

Q You are planning to allow firms such as supermarkets to offer consumers legal services, so we could be signing a will as we do our shopping. Why?

A There have been restrictions in the way lawyers can provide legal services. These restrictions have been too much motivated by preserving the market for the suppliers and too little focused on what is good and convenient for the customer. What we are determined to do is to say to the legal service providers: 'You should work in a way which is convenient for the customer.' I'm quite sure the innovative ones will do that and that will be good news for the consumer.

Q Do you believe this draft bill will help to restore the general public's confidence in the legal profession?

A I do. I think lawyers have dropped in people's estimation over the years. We want to try to raise that estimation but it depends upon the lawyers responding to the opportunities that this bill gives them.

Q What are the problems with the way the legal profession currently handles complaints – and how will your plan to set up an Office for Legal Complaints help?

A Currently it is just too complicated. You don't know which body to complain to and there have been too many delays in the complaints system. People who

Q Which? readers complain that at present it is almost impossible to find a solicitor willing to take another solicitor to court. How will this new bill help to address this problem?

A By providing a straightforward complaints body, it will give people an opportunity to make complaints in a simple, uncomplicated way.

Q Finally, if you were 'king for a day' and could do one thing to make life easier for consumers, what would it be?

A I would create a system whereby complaints that the consumer has against a company or individual could all be dealt with within three months. It would be done in such a way that the consumer had complete confidence that their complaint was both understood and dealt with. If both providers and consumers knew that somebody would adjudicate the complaint very, very quickly, standards of service would improve across the board. Because our legal system is often too complicated and too expensive to use, consumers think they don't have a remedy when they get bad service.

HAVE YOUR SAY

Tesco boss Sir Terry Leahy will be answering your questions on this page soon. Email your questions for Sir Terry to: news@which.co.uk

Laying down the law?

Consumers want easier access to legal advice – and swift action if solicitors let them down. We ask the Lord Chancellor, Lord Falconer, if his new bill will really help



Lord Falconer: 'Lawyers have dropped in people's estimation'