

What do clients want **from the Bar?**



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Introduction

The legal industry in recent years has faced dramatic change. Increased client expectations and more-for-less demands coupled with market changes have led barristers to embrace a more client-centric approach.

But what do clients want from the Bar? And how have the best barristers and chambers responded? We surveyed solicitors in private practice and in-house, asking them what they look for in instructing counsel, their best client service experiences, and their go-to sets.

Overwhelmingly, respondents emphasised the importance of best-in-class client service, providing examples of what this meant to them. Barristers can no longer rest on their reputation as intellectual powerhouses. Service is frequently considered to be as important as – if not more important than – the quality of advice, which is taken as a given.

Encouragingly, although solicitors were happy to share with us examples of negative client service, they provided far more examples of positive best practice. They praised chambers and individuals around the country for their client-centric approach.

‘I am there to provide an excellent service in every respect. Proper client care inspires confidence’

CHRIS BADGER, 6 PUMP COURT CHAMBERS

Survey demographics

The survey was conducted with a sample of solicitors in private practice and in-house, as well as paralegals, trainees, and other professionals¹ instructing barristers as part of their practice. Respondents were based all around England and Wales. They came from the full range of practice areas, and were mainly looking to the Bar for dispute resolution expertise. We received **247** complete responses.

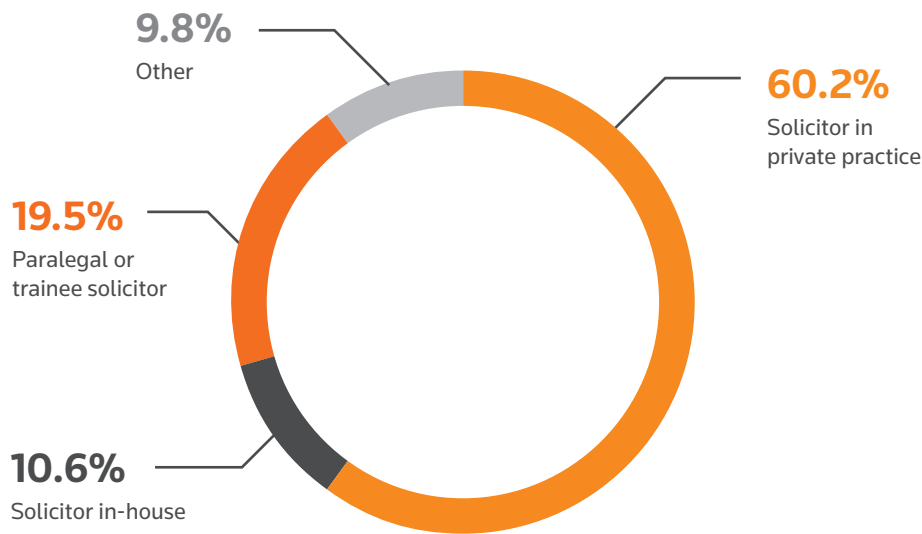
All but **7%** of respondents were involved in selecting counsel, with **38%** instructing occasionally, **32%** monthly, and **22%** weekly. **56%** of respondents were directly involved in instructing counsel and had the final say in selecting barristers, **34%** were involved and did not have the final say, and **8%** were indirectly involved in counsel selection.

Where respondents were involved but did not have the final say in barrister selection, they typically looked back at recent counsel selection and recommended barristers based on who the firm has recently used. This was based to varying degrees on performance. Alternatively, they suggested barristers based on personal experience. A good proportion also researched barristers, based on e.g. directory recommendations or chambers websites. **77%** of respondents who were indirectly involved in selecting counsel were mainly feeding back to colleagues on the service provided by counsel in order to input into who they continued to use. Other respondents were in-house solicitors leaving the end decision to external or panel firms, or drafting instructions and discussing fees.

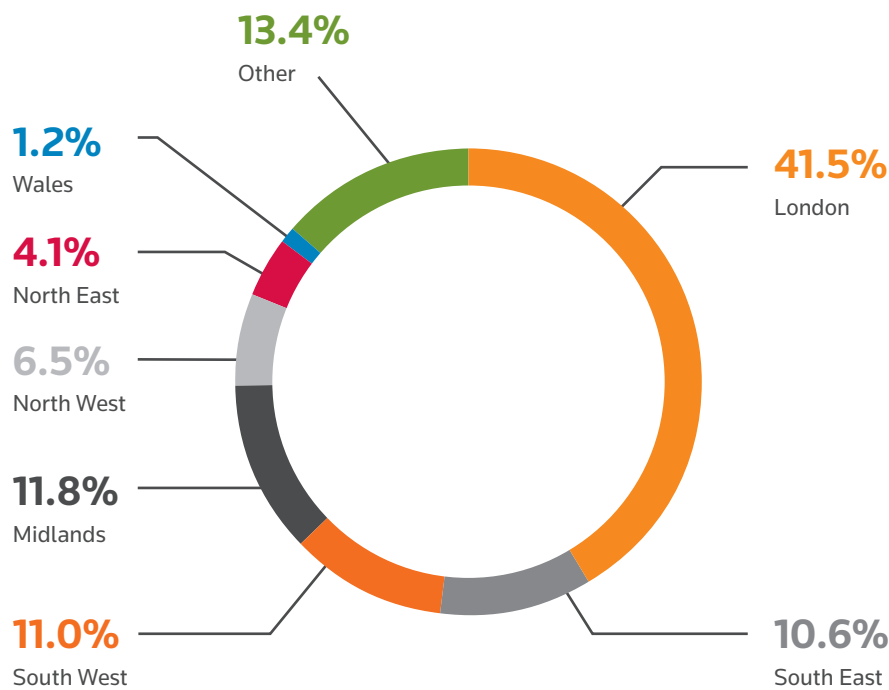
So while some barristers are selected based on the decision of one individual, the survey emphasises the range of factors taken into account in counsel selection. It also shows that barristers' need to form strong relationships with all in their client firms rather than just with the most senior solicitors and partners.

¹ The 9.8% classified as 'other' includes chartered legal executives, litigation executives, support staff, including legal secretaries, in-house barristers, chartered tax advisers, chartered accountants, trade mark and patent attorneys, and claims adjusters.

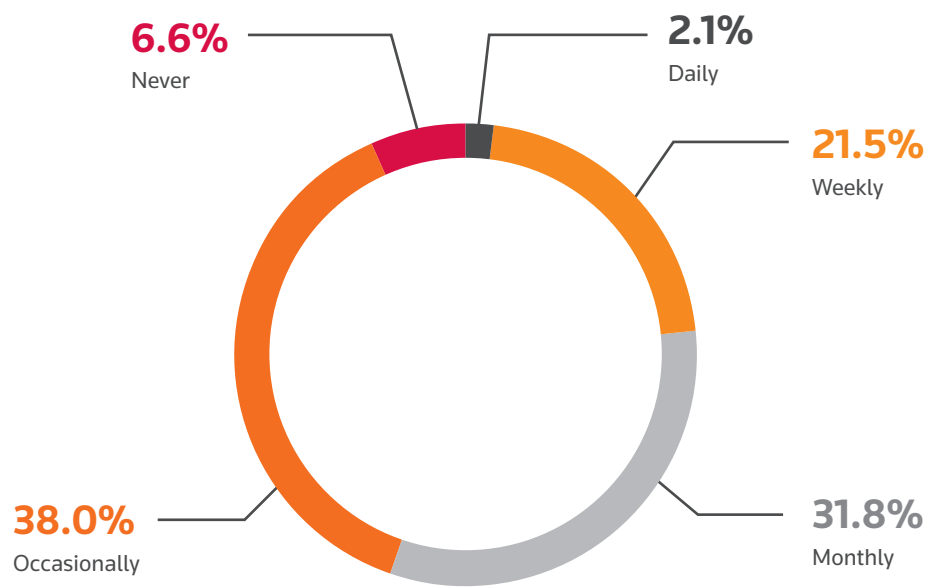
What job role did respondents have?



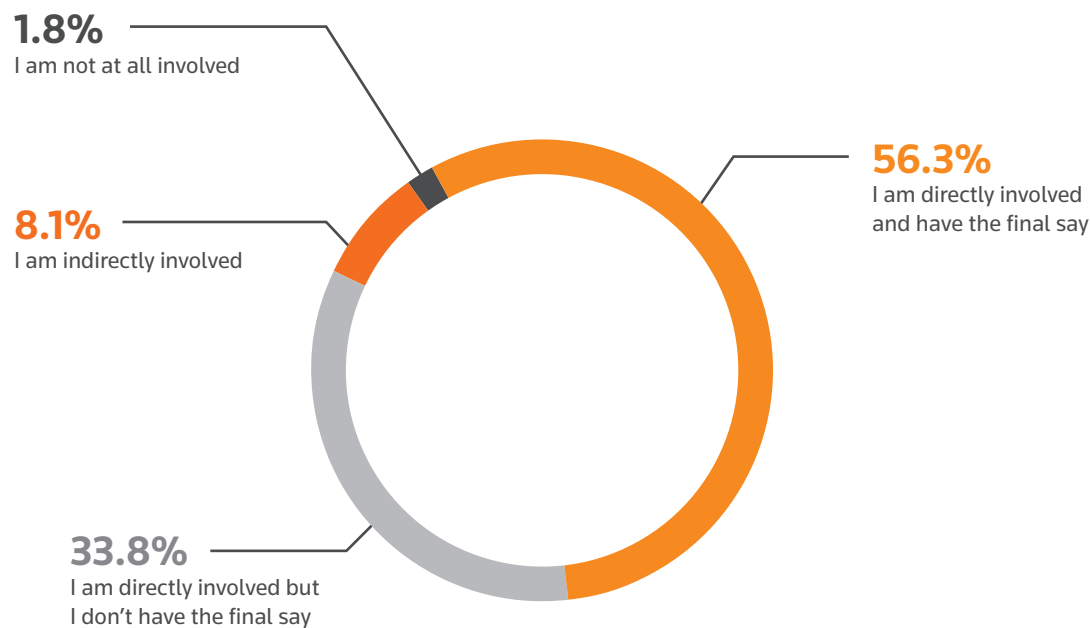
Where were respondents based?



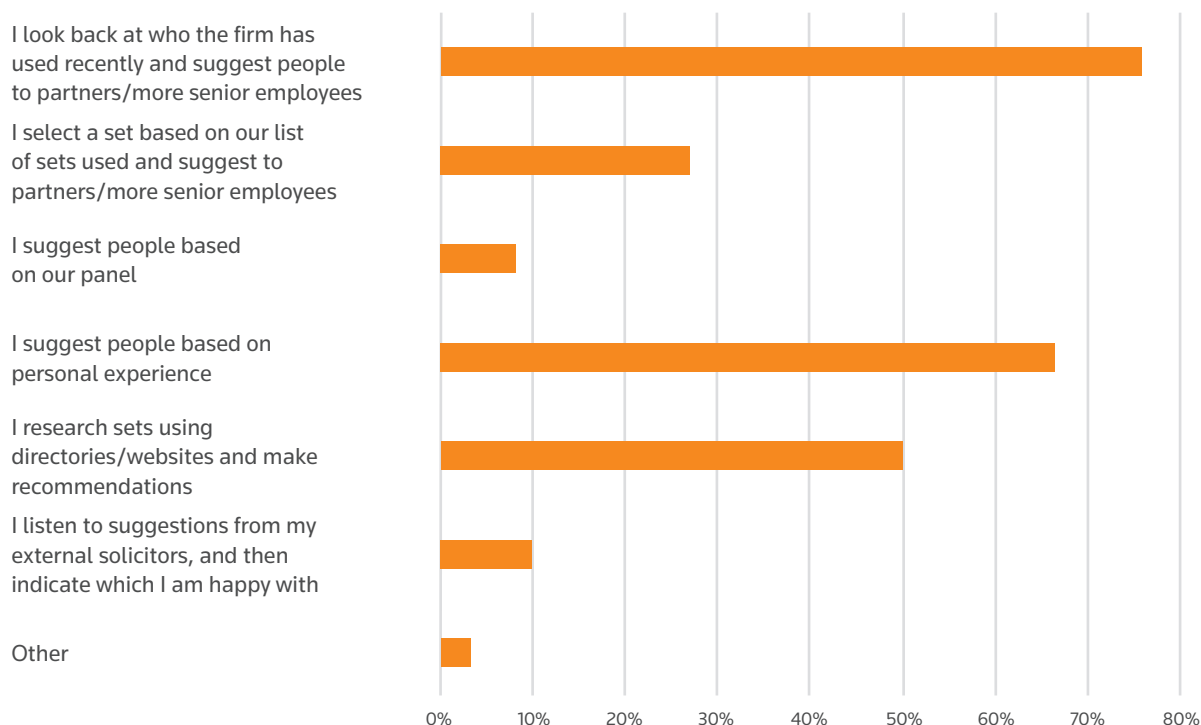
How often were respondents involved in selecting counsel?



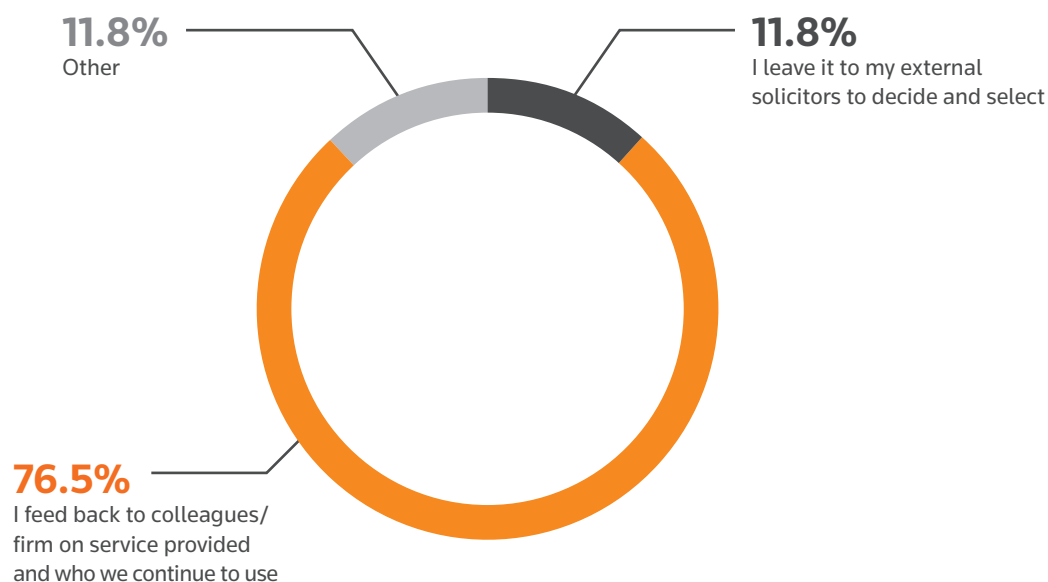
How far were respondents involved in selecting counsel?



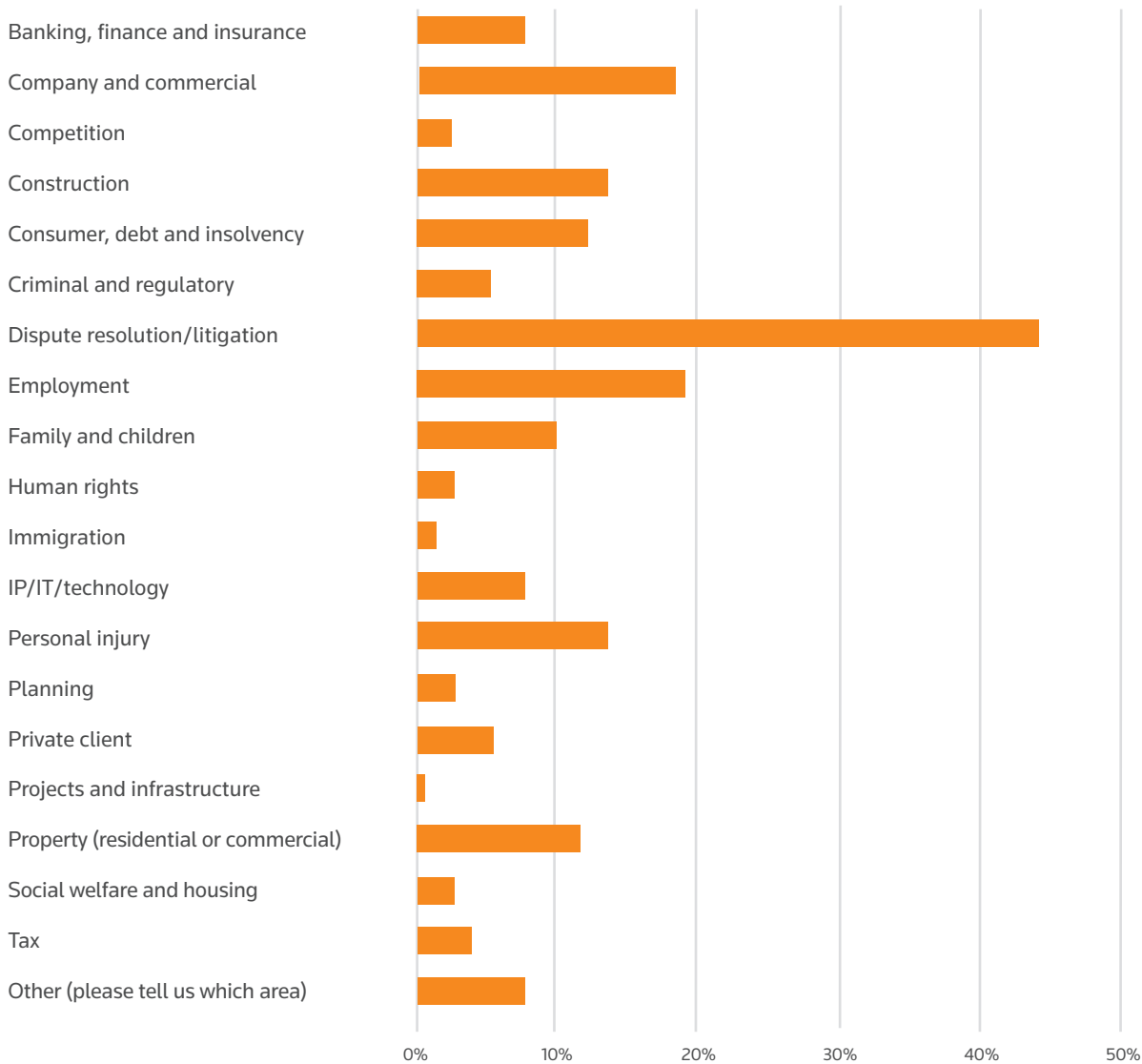
What involvement did respondents directly involved but without the final say have in counsel selection?



What involvement did respondents indirectly involved in counsel selection have in selecting barristers?



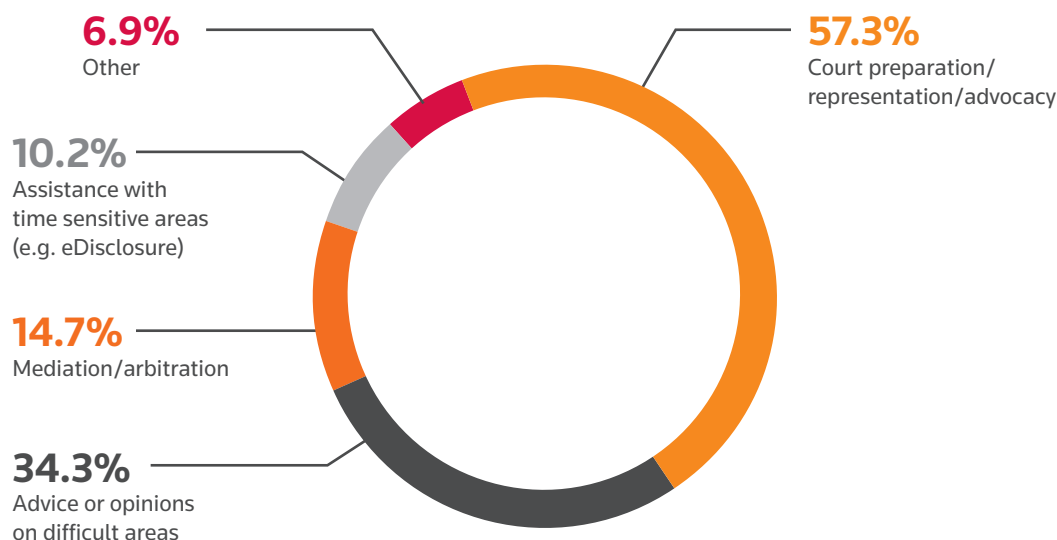
What areas of law were solicitors instructing counsel on?



What were respondents looking for when instructing the Bar?

The work respondents were instructing barristers to do were unsurprising. On average 57% of instructions related to either preparation for or advocacy in court, and 34% for advice and opinions on difficult areas of law. There was growing work in mediation and arbitration. Some firms used barristers to take on work where firms needed an overflow resource for labour intensive work such as eDisclosure. However, this varied according to practice area and nature of respondent.

What were respondents instructing the Bar for?



What factors did respondents consider most important when instructing the Bar?

Respondents considered a range of factors when deciding which barrister or chambers to instruct. Unsurprisingly, access to technical or specialist legal knowledge was the most highly prized reason for instructing the Bar. Equally important to this was the responsiveness of the barrister and chambers and the quality of client service. Many of the qualitative comments and responses emphasised the importance of these as decision-factors.

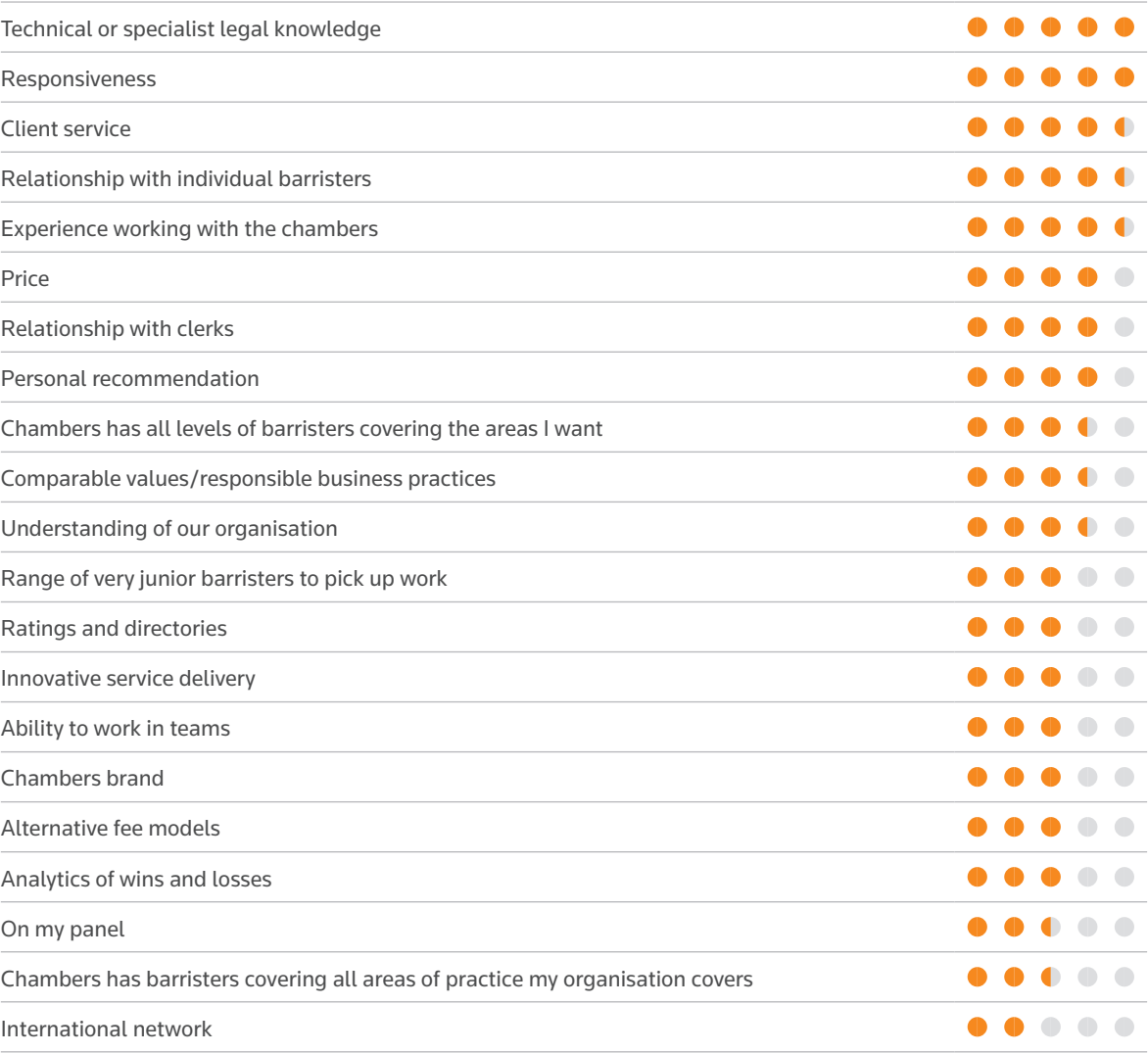
Relationships with individual barristers, and experience working with the chambers or set, were also critical factors in deciding who to instruct. This emphasises the importance of relationship building and networking skills for barristers. The ability to build a practice and market oneself is increasingly important in these competitive times.

Least important, possibly because of the respondent base of solicitors from England and Wales, was a chambers' international network. This was important for areas of practice with strong international elements, and for firms with an international or multinational client base. Sets developing international networks were typically looking to serve clients outside England and Wales, beyond our respondent base.

Some sets are pursuing expansion strategies to cover the breadth of their instructing firms' practice areas, with the aim of broadening and deepening relationships with firms. However, solicitors themselves valued this less highly as a factor. They had a clear preference for specialists in their area, irrespective of sets' relationships with other departments in their firm.

Some of the areas discussed as increasingly important at the Bar – ability to work in teams (with other barristers and solicitors), alternative fee models, and innovative service delivery – were of only moderate importance in a firm's choice of counsel. However, this varied by practice area. Likewise, firms generally did not consider analytics of wins and losses, or rankings and directories. It remains to be seen how quickly these areas increase in importance, given changing fee regimes and increasing acceptance, use, and development of analytics technologies.

What factors did respondents consider most important when instructing the Bar?
(answers in descending order of importance)



‘The barrister’s personality and how they are likely to get on with clients is important’
SOLICITOR, LONDON

‘Efficient clerking service is key’
SOLICITOR, LONDON

‘Excellent knowledge, good judgment, manner with clients, and reasonable fees are my main considerations’
SOLICITOR, NORTH EAST

‘It is vital that chambers, barristers, and clerks provide a top-notch service, and that they are understanding of my company’s objectives and internal requirements.’
SOLICITOR, IN-HOUSE, MIDLANDS

‘Response times are critical’
SOLICITOR, SOUTH EAST

‘The most important factors are availability, easy of working with, and client friendliness’
SOLICITOR, LONDON

Client service at the Bar

What were respondents’ best experiences with the Bar?

Many respondents were unable to name their standout experience, commenting on a number of positive experiences. While some experiences related to flexibility on fees, many related to barristers’ communication with them and their client, and to putting in discretionary effort to win the case.

<p>‘When barristers have gone the extra mile, e.g. learning complex contractual issues with a specific client to understand the issues not just within the litigation but from a business point of view’</p> <p>LITIGATION EXECUTIVE, NORTH WEST</p>	<p>‘When barristers are always ready to pick up the phone’</p> <p>SOLICITOR, MIDLANDS</p>	<p>‘Counsel once reduced fees to below par so that the client could finance a settlement agreement’</p> <p>SOLICITOR, LONDON</p>
	<p>‘Barristers who are prepared to come to our offices at very short notice’</p> <p>SOLICITOR, LONDON</p>	<p>‘My best experiences are where barristers can talk to clients in a way they understand’</p> <p>SOLICITOR, SOUTH WEST</p>
<p>‘The barrister went above and beyond at short notice and did some work free of charge as he felt so strongly about the case’</p> <p>SOLICITOR, MIDLANDS</p>	<p>‘On a difficult case with complex expert evidence, the barrister was able to plot a “long course” game which saw a great result and was exceptionally approachable and hands-on’</p> <p>SOLICITOR, MIDLANDS</p>	
<p>‘When you can chat about an issue without feeling like you are doing anything other than ringing an expert department, rather than another organisation’</p> <p>SOLICITOR, MIDLANDS</p>	<p>‘Quick turn around on a time-critical piece of work’</p> <p>SOLICITOR, MIDLANDS</p>	<p>‘My best experiences have been where barristers go beyond the call of duty and research matters outside their brief to bring an added edge to the case’</p> <p>SOLICITOR, SOUTH EAST</p>

What were the defining qualities of the most impressive chambers and individuals?

Respondents selected their top three individuals and chambers. It was encouraging to see the wide range of recommendations. Similar ideal qualities emerged across regions and practice areas. Some of these ideals related to the specialist quality of the advice, and the experience of the set or barrister. However, many of the defining terms related to the service on offer. Terms relating to responsiveness, client focus, relationships, friendliness, and approachability were key.



What chambers were solicitors most impressed with?

Respondents in different regions and practice areas recommended a wide range of chambers. Respondents who elaborated on reasons for their selection typically referred to service as a crucial differentiator.

Keating

'Great client service, always willing to help, even on non-instructed work, friendly clerks, and wide range of barristers'

SOLICITOR, SOUTH EAST

Park Square

'Extremely helpful clerks who develop a personal relationship, make you feel at ease, are very personable, and have great telephone manner'

**PARALEGAL/TRAINEE
SOLICITOR, NORTH WEST**

Fountain Court

'Always impressive, great specialist knowledge, easy to work with, and people I am happy to put in front of clients'

SOLICITOR, LONDON

St Philips Stone

'Fantastic service with clients and solicitors'

**PARALEGAL/TRAINEE
SOLICITOR, MIDLANDS**

College

'Reliable, competitively priced, and top-notch service'

SOLICITOR, SOUTH EAST

3PB

'Brilliant clerks and barristers who deliver'

**PARALEGAL/TRAINEE
SOLICITOR, SOUTH WEST**

1 Chancery Lane

'Great relationship with clerks and counsel, always responsive, always helpful, and go the extra mile to help'

SOLICITOR, NORTH WEST

18 St John Street

'Cost, turnaround, client service. All just perfect'

**SOLICITOR, IN-HOUSE,
MIDLANDS**

One Essex Court

'Great service from the clerks and I really enjoy working with several of their barristers'

SOLICITOR, LONDON

Hardwicke

'Excellent quality of junior construction barristers'

SOLICITOR, LONDON

Ropewalk

'A high standard of professionalism and advice'

SOLICITOR, MIDLANDS

St Ives

'Committed to client service and responsiveness'

SOLICITOR, MIDLANDS

Tanfield

'Individual barristers are very knowledgeable and personable'

SOLICITOR, LONDON

What barristers were respondents most impressed with?

Respondents praised barristers’ technical knowledge. And recommendations highlighted that this must be coupled with responsiveness to those instructing them. The following quotations highlight some of the barristers respondents were most impressed with. Additional counsel from four chambers who performed exceptionally well: Hardwicke, Ropewalk Chambers, Tanfield Chambers, and 3PB are highlighted in the profiles section of this report.

Alex Learmouth
(New Square Chambers)

‘Technically excellent
and great to work with’
SOLICITOR, SOUTH WEST

Andrew Smith
(Matrix)

‘Responsive,
great with clients, and
technically excellent’
**SOLICITOR, IN-HOUSE,
LONDON**

Nico Leslie
(Fountain Court)

‘Easily approachable, value for
money, breaks down complex
legal issues in a comprehensive
manner, very responsive, and
willing to get involved
in heavy drafting’
SOLICITOR, LONDON

Anneli Howard
(Monckton)

‘Manages a huge
workload and still
provides creative
representation’
SOLICITOR, LONDON

Brian Green QC
(Wilberforce)

‘Very responsive and
his advice is clear and
easy to understand’
SOLICITOR, OTHER

Alfie Weiss
(Exchange)

‘Amazing from
technical and
personable stances’
SOLICITOR, NORTH WEST

Chris Badger
(Six Pump Court)

‘Real skill in
building a brand’
SOLICITOR, LONDON

Nick Sidall
(Littleton)

‘Very good on his feet
in tribunal, good
with clients, and
works as a team with
instructing solicitors’
SOLICITOR, NORTH WEST

Angus Burden
(St Philips Stone)

‘Thoroughly prepared,
technically excellent,
communicates well
with clients to put
them at their ease’
SOLICITOR, MIDLANDS

Saima Younis
(QEB)

‘Very client
friendly, practical,
and supportive’
SOLICITOR, LONDON

Lucy Plumpton
(Pump Court)

‘Very patient with
difficult clients’
**LEGAL EXECUTIVE,
SOUTH WEST**

Paul Kirtley
(Exchange)

‘Very good negotiator
and advocate and also
very good at managing
clients’ expectations’
SOLICITOR, NORTH EAST

Phil Roberts

(One Essex Court)

‘So easy to work with,
a great strategic thinker, and
brilliant with clients’

SOLICITOR, LONDON

Watson Pringle

(Maitland)

‘Bright, commercial,
and easy to work with’

SOLICITOR, LONDON

Michael Davie QC

(4 Pump Court)

‘Unbelievable attention
to detail, delivery of an
argument coupled with
genuine approachability’

SOLICITOR, NORTH WEST

Rhys Taylor

(30 Park Place)

‘Good attention
to detail and excellent
client care’

SOLICITOR, SOUTH EAST

Thea Osmund-Smith

(No. 5)

‘Very impressed with her
specialist knowledge and
approachable manner’

SOLICITOR, MIDLANDS

Alex Barden

(Fountain Court)

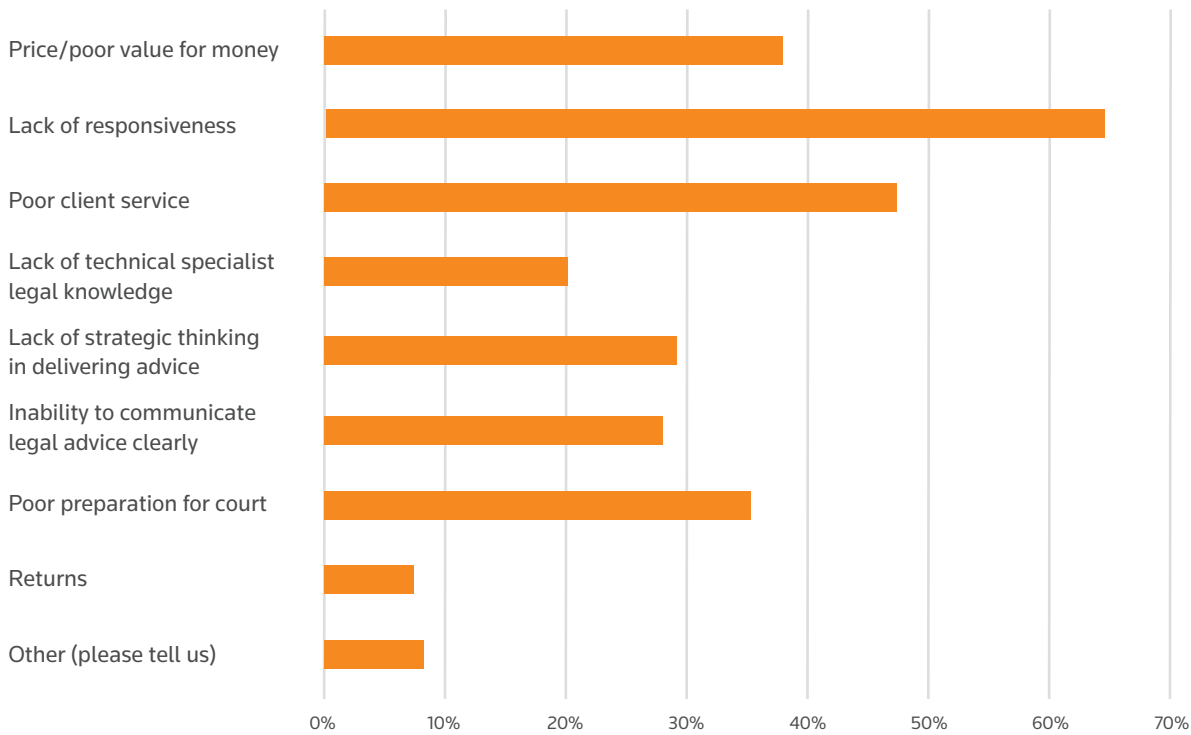
‘Good accurate advice
and very friendly and
easy to work with’

SOLICITOR, LONDON

What were respondents’ less satisfactory experiences with the Bar?

The greatest reason for lack of satisfaction with a barrister was lack of responsiveness (64%), followed by poor client service (46%), highlighting the importance placed on high quality service. Only after this was price/poor value for money a reason for less than complete satisfaction (37%). This suggests that barristers and those supporting them still have some way to go in improving their client service.

Specific anecdotal feedback also related to overcommitment, last minute work, poor deadline keeping, and lack of commerciality in providing advice. Other feedback also related to unwillingness to work in modern digital ways. While some barristers have traditionally been behind the curve with technology, solicitors’ responses suggest that barristers need to do more to embrace state-of-the-art technology.



<p>'Assisting with recovering all elements of a client's legal costs is a fundamental part of the barrister's role. Too often barristers are not competent at this'</p> <p>SOLICITOR, IN-HOUSE, LONDON</p>	<p>'Barristers' lack of responsiveness is my biggest bugbear'</p> <p>IN-HOUSE COUNSEL, LONDON</p>	<p>'Bad attitude, spelling out the black-letter law instead of thinking creatively about how best to serve the clients' wishes'</p> <p>SOLICITOR, LONDON</p>
	<p>'1. They lost the papers. 2. They gave incorrect advice. 3. They did not respond to contact and provided draft pleadings right before the deadline. 4. All of this was coupled with a large bill'</p> <p>SOLICITOR, NORTH WEST</p>	
<p>'Poor diary management – double booking and non-timely delivery of work'</p> <p>SOLICITOR, SOUTH EAST</p>	<p>'Inability to make use of technology that would make work more efficient'</p> <p>SOLICITOR, LONDON</p>	<p>'Some counsel take on more work than they can do and this leads to long delays.</p>
<p>'Briefs being returned last minute is a constant bugbear, as are delays in turning paperwork around and not responding to emails'</p> <p>SOLICITOR, LONDON</p>	<p>It is frustrating for clients who want to know what is going on'</p> <p>SOLICITOR, SOUTH WEST</p>	

Changing views of sets

The majority of respondents felt that their views of sets had remained broadly the same over the last few years. A few respondents noted **changes in perception** of particular sets, in some cases due to a perceived repositioning.

‘Matrix and Doughty Street are obviously trying to reposition themselves to take on more commercial work’

SOLICITOR, LONDON

Some respondents cited the **impact of the discovery of outstanding individuals** and the positive impact of chambers’ business development activity, such as talks and seminars.

‘My view of Hardwicke has improved because of Catherine Piercy and the quality of the talks they run’

SOLICITOR, LONDON

Sadly, a number of respondents named **chambers that have fallen below expectation in the last year**. Here poor experiences due to unresponsiveness, inflexibility, and inferior clerking were mainly cited, with only a few criticisms of the quality of the barristers’ actual work.

‘We have stopped using a few barristers as they take on more work than they can do and the delays are frustrating for clients’

SOLICITOR, SOUTH WEST

‘The clerking is not always first rate’

SOLICITOR, LONDON

Although chambers’ provision of **talks and seminars was generally positively cited**, a couple noted that some chambers try to use these to sell expertise that the barristers do not really have or are trying to reposition themselves to develop.

‘We have barrister networking events where barristers sell their expertise. It is disappointing when they tell you they are experienced in an area when they are not’

PARALEGAL/TRAINEE SOLICITOR, NORTH WEST

In the few instances where **people had developed negative perceptions of a chambers**, poor service, lack of availability, or a lack of responsiveness were cited. Changes to agreed fees or fee arrangements were also mentioned by a few respondents.

‘They have become impatient when chasing for papers, and they charge for every last bit of fees, without any movement’

LEGAL EXECUTIVE, SOUTH EAST

‘Only very junior barristers and pupils being offered by clerks’

PARALEGAL/TRAINEE SOLICITOR, NORTH EAST

‘Clerking and responsiveness is wanting’

SOLICITOR, SOUTH WEST

‘They take on more work than they can do’

SOLICITOR, SOUTH WEST

‘Some have gone up in my estimation and some have gone down. Primarily, this is due to lack of responsiveness’

SOLICITOR, LONDON

‘They tried to charge extra after the event despite agreeing a fixed fee’

SOLICITOR, SOUTH EAST

‘They failed to make sufficient notes of a hearing outcome which led to the client having extra work to clarify the issues, including asking the judge to look at her notes to sort it out’

SOLICITOR, MIDLANDS

‘Pricing and transparency is an issue. I am always surprised that the chambers I work with do not work to similar standards as the regulatory requirements and best practice standards my firm adheres to when it comes to pricing’

SOLICITOR, SOUTH EAST

Final insights

A number of individuals took the time to have a final word on key themes emerging in instructing counsel. In particular, they **highlighted the importance of not just pricing but transparency of pricing**, as well as the need for barristers to get to grips with modern digital ways of working.

‘It’s a bit like the old saying, “When they are good they are very good, but when they are bad they are horrid.”’

SOLICITOR, SOUTH WEST

‘Counsel need to be more integrated in the solicitors’ e-File for access to documents given the move to paperless working’

SOLICITOR, LONDON

‘Customer service is key[#]... We are making a recommendation to our clients when instructing counsel, and we need their service levels to match our own’

SOLICITOR, SOUTH EAST

‘Price is usually key to clients’

SOLICITOR, LONDON

‘Pricing and transparency are needed’

SOLICITOR, SOUTH EAST

‘Considering the regulatory requirements and best practices my firm adheres to in pricing, I am surprised the chambers I work with do not adhere to similar standards’

SOLICITOR, SOUTH EAST

‘Some barristers still shun electronic working and cannot seem to keep files updated by themselves. This needs to change’

SOLICITOR, NORTH WEST

‘When I first started in practice, barristers’ chambers used to vaunt their value for money as being cheaper per hour than a comparable solicitor. As their overheads have increased and they have become more like solicitors’ firms that is no longer the case’

SOLICITOR, LONDON

However, while some respondents were critical about the Bar, most noted **the ability of barristers to respond to the changing needs of their clients**.

‘Overall the Bar is very responsive to the changing needs of clients and solicitors’

SOLICITOR, SOUTH WEST

Conclusions

The survey shows a positive picture of a modern Bar adapting to changes in the client base and solicitors' profession. Respondents from all over the country and a wide range of specialisms shared positive stories. Negative experiences, mainly around perceived unresponsiveness or price, tended to be outweighed by praise for specific individuals, clerks, or sets.

Responses emphasised that, for barristers, it is no longer the case that intellect and technical ability carry the day. Solicitors and clients expect responsiveness and user friendliness, barristers who can work with solicitors, in teams, and with technology, and who will go the extra mile to provide the desired result for the client. Service is a critical success factor. And barristers need to focus on ways in which they can provide meet and exceeds the demands of each of their clients, in order to grow their practices.

Although this survey focused on solicitor respondents, it is also clear from discussions with chambers that direct access work is having a positive impact on service culture at the Bar. Barristers have accepted that they need to adapt to non-legal or professional clients, communicating in a way lay clients can understand and collaborating, in order to mine the rich seam of work. This responsiveness has benefited the traditional solicitor client base.

In the attached profiles, we asked some of those chambers picked out as providing excellent client service to share some of their secrets. They and their barristers were repeatedly selected as the best of the best.

Profiles

Hardwicke

Barristers at Hardwicke were singled out and chambers as a whole was frequently mentioned as one of respondents' go-to sets. Particular praise was lavished on the excellent quality of junior construction barristers and high-quality seminars.

General feedback

'Competitive rates, friendly yet professional barristers'

SOLICITOR, LONDON

'Excellent quality junior construction barristers'

SOLICITOR, LONDON

'My view of Hardwicke has improved because of Catherine Piercy and the quality of talks they run'

SOLICITOR, LONDON

Individual barrister feedback

'Catherine Piercy – excellent knowledge, good attitude, personality fits well with clients'

SOLICITOR, LONDON

'John De Waal QC – excellent in all ways, approachable, unflappable, commercial, hardworking, knowledgeable'

SOLICITOR, LONDON

'David Lewis – tenacious cross examination and hardworking'

SOLICITOR, LONDON

'Laura Tweedy – great with clients, solution focused, and approachable'

SOLICITOR, LONDON

'Andrew Skelly – we have a great relationship'

SOLICITOR, LONDON

'John De Waal QC – excellent rapport with clients and very clear-cut advice'

PARALEGAL/TRAINEE SOLICITOR, LONDON

'Catherine Piercy – always very good, cost effective, and highly regarded'

PARALEGAL/TRAINEE SOLICITOR, SOUTH EAST

How do Hardwicke go about providing best in class client service?

Sally Wollaston, Business Development and Marketing Director, told us some of the initiatives that ensure strong client service.

- Hardwicke saw the change in the CPD regulations as an opportunity to provide training and the opportunity for barristers to develop their own practices. Individual barristers already had their own business plans, covering their profile, clients, and planned business development, but chambers used changes to CPD as a way of reinforcing the objectives in these plans, placing client service at the heart of barristers' development.
- A unique internal training scheme for barristers and staff provides extensive support in providing good client service and practice development, including topics such as working with clients and managing social media profiles.
- With a growing proportion of direct access work coming from professionals, barristers have to develop the ability to communicate clearly with other professionals and lay clients. This focus on client service benefits all clients including solicitors.
- As well as ensuring excellent internal collaboration between barristers and staff, Hardwicke create a culture of collaboration externally across the profession to agree and raise standards. In particular, chambers is currently working closely with external organisations including the Bar Council and Legal Practice Management Association (LPMA) on initiatives such as GDPR.
- Focus on wellbeing provides barristers with the tools to provide excellent client service.

Key quotes

'Hardwicke continues to lead the way as a modern, forward-thinking set of chambers whose clients are at the heart of the organisation. Its relentless focus on quality and high standards of service to clients is an integral part of its business plan. Barristers and staff alike take pride in their commitment to these shared goals: everything from first point of contact with clients; our communications and events; our appearance and corporate identity; through to the quality of the legal product and advocacy itself'

AMANDA ILLING, CHIEF EXECUTIVE, HARDWICKE

'Skill as an advocate and specialist knowledge is a given; what is required in order to be a success at the Bar is an ability to identify and empathise with the client's agenda and look for practical solutions to the problems that you are presented with'

JOHN DE WAAL QC, HARDWICKE

Ropewalk Chambers

Ropewalk Chambers won plaudits for their high quality of service and client care from new and long-standing clients alike – despite having a relatively small clerking team.

General feedback

‘High standard of professionalism and advice’

SOLICITOR, MIDLANDS

‘Great availability of barristers and client care’

PARALEGAL/TRAINEE SOLICITOR, NORTH EAST

‘Easy access to high level barristers who provide ad hoc advice when needed and have excellent cover available for hearings’

SOLICITOR, SOUTH WEST

‘A local set with great familiarity of the local courts’

SOLICITOR, MIDLANDS

‘Excellent to work with, quality barristers and clerks’

PARALEGAL/TRAINEE SOLICITOR, NORTH EAST

‘Great skills of the barristers and ease of contact with clerks’

SOLICITOR, SOUTH WEST

‘I instruct counsel regularly at Ropewalk ... They are diligent, approachable, and do not overcharge’

SOLICITOR, MIDLANDS

Individual barrister feedback

‘Jayne Adams QC – great for ease of contact, quality of advice, and flexibility’

SOLICITOR, SOUTH WEST

How do Ropewalk chambers go about providing best in class client service?

Tony Hill, Senior Clerk, shared with us some of the initiatives that have propelled chambers to recognition.

- Ropewalk hired external consultants for a full client service review, which was subsequently followed up by chambers staff. They used consultants to help define their value proposition and develop business development strategy, based around three pillars of excellence, service, and integrity. Ethics is central to the client service experience, and to all interactions with instructing solicitors and clients.
- Service level agreements are key with big clients such as insurers, as is continuous improvement on procedures such as ISO information security accreditation.
- Regular interaction between barristers and clerks and chambers' clients is important – repeat clients should be seen regularly to ensure full understanding of their requirements and complete satisfaction. Interaction need not always be formal, and a good tip can be to use, 'I saw this and thought of you' as a good way to keep in touch with clients.
- Chambers need to employ a wide range of initiatives to ensure client satisfaction and new business – it may not always be possible to draw a direct line from the instruction to any business development activity, and you may not know how the instruction came about, e.g. by being on the other side, tweeting, recommendation, or conference, but excellence in service and engaging with clients and potential clients in a number of ways is key. Ropewalk currently put on over 60 events a year, including joint events with clients. They also focus on the diverse strengths of different barristers as an activity that may work for one may not suit another – it may not be about training an individual to be their 'best self' at lunch but about them delivering seminars, or attending networking drinks to develop their following.

- Focus on understanding your client base is key. What solicitors' clients were demanding of them a few years ago, solicitors now demand of their barristers (e.g. moves from hourly rates to fixed fees and flexible arrangements). Chambers need to follow these developments to ensure premier service.
- Relationships are key – chambers need to focus on building long-term relationships with solicitors who may then use them throughout their career.
- Barrister wellbeing is at the heart of good client service, and Ropewalk focus strongly on this, with wellbeing officers trained by the Samaritans.

Key quotes

'Flexibility, integrity, and communication are key'

TONY HILL, SENIOR CLERK, ROPEWALK CHAMBERS

'If there is a choice between two barristers, solicitors will pick the one who is easy to deal with'

TONY HILL, SENIOR CLERK, ROPEWALK CHAMBERS

'It is key to match the right barristers with the right clients'

TONY HILL, SENIOR CLERK, ROPEWALK CHAMBERS

'The most important factors when choosing counsel are their ability to do the work and then their ability to provide good service. Lawyers generally don't lose work by being bad lawyers but by providing bad service'

TONY HILL, SENIOR CLERK, ROPEWALK CHAMBERS

Tanfield Chambers

Tanfield Chambers was repeatedly singled out for excellent client service. Respondents heaped lavish praise on its property and family teams, and on the quality of barristers at all levels.

General feedback

‘Very helpful clerks – and the barristers have very good client care skills and talk clients through every step of the process’

PARALEGAL/TRAINEE SOLICITOR, MIDLANDS

‘I have had consistently good results using them’

SOLICITOR, LONDON

‘Barristers are very knowledgeable and personable. They also offer good and regular seminars’

SOLICITOR, LONDON

Individual barrister feedback

‘Tim Hammond – Very responsive, generous with time, and knowledgeable in a range of areas. Considers costs issues for individual clients’

SOLICITOR, LONDON

‘Diane Doliveux – Very responsive and helpful’

PARALEGAL/TRAINEE SOLICITOR, LONDON

How does Tanfield Chambers go about providing best in class client service?

Tanfield Chambers aims to lead the way in modernising the bar, creating a collaborative culture that places service at the centre of its ethos. Priya Mistry, Marketing Manager, notes that various initiatives help place the focus on client satisfaction.

- Tanfield Chambers has created a modern, collaborative culture between barristers and clerks, with a free flow of information, and regular informal networking to foster strong professional and personal relationships. An informal intranet provides a social network for sharing information between clerks and barristers.
- A unique internal training scheme for barristers and staff. Focus on growing the public access work has fostered the emphasis on service. Tanfield has a dedicated direct access manager, and barristers are trained to see situations from the lay client's perspective. This emphasis on understanding the client's perspective also benefits all areas of work, for both direct access clients and solicitors.
- Another new initiative this year has been a monthly seminar programme, which has been very well received and acts as a means of providing comprehensive training to solicitors. It helps to maintain a good working relationship with solicitors and showcase the depth of knowledge from the barristers within the set.

Key quotes

'Tanfield adopts a flexible and "unfussy" approach, putting our clients' needs at the centre of everything we do. All members, from our Silks to our junior juniors, pride themselves on being open, friendly, and approachable, and are complemented by a responsible and helpful practice management team'

PHILIP RAINEY QC, HEAD OF CHAMBERS

'We have a holistic approach to client care, meaning that the feedback received is reviewed and used to enhance and develop our current approach to client care. This method takes into consideration feedback from clients, the directories, and from seminar and training feedback forms.'

EAMONN KELLY, CHIEF EXECUTIVE

'When advising either lay or professional clients, I always aim to put myself in that person's place to physically pinpoint exactly what I would want and need to know in their situation. Client care is generally inextricably bound up with the work we are instructed on as barristers, at every stage in litigation'

DIANE DOLIVEUX, BARRISTER

3PB

General feedback

'I wouldn't put anyone else in the same league. The clerks are outstanding ... The barristers are knowledgeable, good with clients, and approachable ... My work with 3PB is a daily team approach in which client service is consistently outstanding'

PARALEGAL/TRAINEE SOLICITOR, SOUTH WEST

'Value for money and quality'

SOLICITOR, SOUTH WEST

'Great all-round service ... very responsive'

SOLICITOR, LONDON

'I tried alternative chambers and found that barristers appeared poorly prepared and not really 'in touch' ... I have been rather spoilt' by 3PB'

PARALEGAL/TRAINEE SOLICITOR, SOUTH WEST

'Brilliant clerks and barristers who deliver'

PARALEGAL/TRAINEE SOLICITOR, SOUTH WEST

'More local and not London prices. We have a great relationship with them'

PARALEGAL/TRAINEE SOLICITOR, SOUTH EAST

'Great training'

SOLICITOR, SOUTH EAST

Individual barrister feedback

'Colin McDevitt and Craig Ludlow are personable experienced counsel who work with me as a team for the client'

SOLICITOR, LONDON

'Paul Newman – extremely helpful, wise, willing, and knowledgeable ... flexible and stepped in last minute a number of times.'

PARALEGAL/TRAINEE SOLICITOR, SOUTH WEST

'Vanessa Meachin – continually gives a first class service to clients'

SOLICITOR, MIDLANDS

'Amy Lush – Competent, great manner with clients and court staff alike'

SOLICITOR, SOUTH WEST

How does 3PB go about providing best in class client service?

Simon Astill, Chief Executive, told us about the 3PB approach to excellent client service.

- 3PB positions itself as a dynamic, growing multi-site and multi-regional set close to clients, so ensuring consistently high service levels in all centres has been a key area of focus. Placing teamwork at the centre of the ethos is essential to ensure consistent, premium-quality service.
- Focus on consistent client service has been central as chambers has grown to six sites, and expanded with high-profile new tenants, including Elizabeth McGrath QC.
- Growth of direct access work, led by Chambers Director, Matthew Wildish, has placed service at the heart of chambers culture.
- The key thing is to inculcate team spirit between the staffing and clerking. This may necessitate rethinking the way chambers does things and incentivising staff to prioritise teamwork.

Key quotes

‘Organisations need to be client-centric, not just talk about it. Professionals must understand that this is a service industry’

SIMON ASTILL, CHIEF EXECUTIVE, 3PB

‘With such a large number of barristers, 3PB prides itself on the ability to bring specialists together in major regions. It takes the essence of a common law multi-site set, playing to its strengths in bringing together specialists and providing clients with convenient unified solutions in all areas. Client service is at the heart of this’

SIMON ASTILL, CHIEF EXECUTIVE, 3PB

