

KEY FINDINGS

Trust and transparency in the legal system are incredibly low

The general public has lost faith in the justice system, with only 24% believing it to be 'fair and transparent' and less than half of all respondents affirming that they trust those working in the legal profession. This is felt most acutely in Scotland and the North East where only 15% of people agree with the statement 'the justice system is fair and transparent'. The justice system appears to the general public as a bewildering place - 73% of people believe that ordinary people have little understanding of how the legal process works, while 81% regard the justice system to be intimidating to the general public. This is echoed by legal professionals, 87% of whom also perceive this to be the case.

Lack of wealth and increased court fees are severely limiting access to justice

A large majority of people (67%) feel that wealth is now a more important factor in accessing justice than it has previously been, with 63% of people believing that professional legal advice is not affordable for all. This can be at least partially attributed to recent changes in the law: two thirds of respondents (66%) feel that changes to court fees are making it harder for people to bring cases to court, and legal professionals feel this even more strongly (79%). In addition, more than half of

the public (54%) believe that the introduction of fees in employment tribunals obstruct access to justice, as do a clear majority of legal professionals (59%).

A modernised system, yet with accessible channels for all is needed – technology is not the sole answer

The public has demonstrated that it is not content with how the system currently operates. 71% of people across the UK agree with the statement 'the justice system requires faster modernisation' and are actually far more critical of preserving traditions than those working within the profession. For example, only 17% of legal professionals believe that tradition comes at the expense of an efficient system, in comparison to half of the public. Whether access to technology itself necessarily makes the system more accessible is less certain. 63% of people believe that moving to a solely digital process of communication and hearings would risk isolating some sections of society from justice. In the rush towards digitalisation, there is a concern the most vulnerable might be left behind.

The public have a clear thirst for better education around the system

Achieving an improved understanding of the system through better education was a popular idea, regardless

of education or background; 75% of people with a degree agreed they had a thirst for legal knowledge, as did 71% of people without further education – a finding that is unsurprising given self-representation is on the increase. 69% of respondents affirmed that an understanding of the law and the legal process should be taught in primary and secondary schools. This view was also backed by the legal profession, 72% of whom agreed that the law should form a component of young people's education. Over three quarters (76%) of people believe improved access to, and general understanding of, the legal sector could be achieved through simplified technical language.

Legal professionals even more alarmed than the public by the state of the current system

In many cases, legal professionals - including lawyers, barristers and judges - are more alarmed about the state of the justice system than the public. Comparing the data from the general public, with the data gathered from those within the legal profession, a trend clearly emerges: legal professionals often answer more negatively to questions around the most pressing issues (including accessibility, importance of wealth, impact of recent policy developments). This suggests that those with the greatest knowledge of how the system functions are also those with the most significant concerns over its

efficacy. Interestingly, and sadly, this cynicism is not just rooted in the present day, but stretches into the future. Although a majority of the public (71%) agree that they would be proud if a child or a young relative aspired to work within the legal profession, only 16% of legal professionals would recommend a career in the sector.

Race, religion and income are critical in public perceptions of the justice system

Broadly speaking, more affluent members of the public feel more informed about the legal system and are more trusting of those who work within it. 55% of those owning three or more cars in their household answered yes to the statement 'if I was faced with a legal situation I would know who to contact/what to do' compared to 35% that owned none. Similarly, those that have been on a foreign holiday in the last three years felt more trusting of legal professionals than those who had not – 41% versus only 31%. Race and religion also affects perceptions of the justice system, with only 28% of the black community, 17% of the Sikh community and 20% of the Muslims surveyed believing that they could trust legal professionals – in comparison to the national average of 37%.