

[News story: Plans published to make it easier to shop around for legal services](#)

Legal services regulators have today published their plans to help people shop around more effectively, in response to the CMA's market study.

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) spent a year conducting a [thorough review](#), known as a market study, of the industry and found that there was not enough information available on price, quality and service to help those in need of legal support choose the best option.

The CMA has since been working with the Legal Services Board and 8 frontline regulators in England and Wales to drive the implementation of changes recommended by the study. Today they published their action plans for implementing our recommendations.

Each regulator represents a different profession or area of the market (for example, solicitors, accountants, licensed conveyancers) and these regulators, the CMA and the Legal Services Board have been coordinating their plans for implementing the [CMA's recommendations](#).

The CMA's recommendations were designed specifically to improve transparency from legal firms on price, quality and service and enable customers to navigate the market more easily and get value for money.

The CMA recommended that the regulators:

- revise their regulatory requirements to ensure that companies offering legal services display information on price, service and conditions of redress openly on their websites and in their publicity material
- improve and promote the existing Legal Choices website so that it becomes a starting point for customers needing help to navigate the market and purchase services
- make more regulatory data available to facilitate the development of reliable comparison sites
- encourage legal services providers to engage with feedback and review platforms to ensure that customers can benefit from the experience of previous consumers before making their choice

Note

1. The 8 frontline legal services regulators in England and Wales are:
 - a. Bar Standards Board (BSB) – Barristers
 - b. CILEx Regulation (Chartered Legal Executives and Legal Executives)
 - c. Council for Licensed Conveyancers (CLC) – Licensed Conveyancers
 - d. Costs Lawyers Standards Board (CLSB) – Costs Lawyers
 - e. Intellectual Property Regulation Board (IPReg) – Trademark and Patent Attorneys
 - f. Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW) – Chartered Accountants conducting probate
 - g. Master of the Faculties (Notaries)
 - h. Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) (Solicitors)
-

[News story: £15 million boost for 50 cutting-edge projects](#)

Funding will support UK businesses to take forward cutting-edge and game-changing projects leading to new products, processes or services.

Innovative businesses across the UK will receive up to £15 million through Innovate UK's latest open funding competition. It comes through round 2 of our regular series of open competitions, which support good ideas with market potential.

A total of 50 projects involving around 75 partners were successful with applications. They will receive funding ranging from £25,000 to £1 million for projects lasting up to 36 months.

Examples include:

- Biodice – a joint project between [JWA Racing](#) and the [University of Birmingham](#) – will support more sustainable transport by pioneering a scalable internal combustion engine that will lower fuel consumption, emission and costs
- [Petalite](#) is developing a technology platform to speed up and improve electric vehicle battery charging

- [OMass Technologies'](#) solution will more effectively assess and interface with membrane proteins. These are notoriously difficult to study, yet are important targets for drug discovery

Fionnuala Costello, Head of Open Programmes at Innovate UK, said:

I am very pleased that we have been able to fund such a wide range of innovative projects with great potential for return on investment for companies, both across the UK and across our major sectors.

Our next £15 million funding competition is now open for applications. These should have a similar potential to generate commercial impact and economic growth.

Press release: Ineos is granted environmental permit for exploratory borehole in Derbyshire

The Environment Agency has granted an environmental permit to allow Ineos Upstream Ltd to drill an exploratory borehole at a site in Derbyshire.

The 'Standard Rules' permit allows the company to carry out drilling, waste management, and low-risk testing at its Bramley Moor Lane drilling site, near the village of Marsh Lane. It does not allow fracking.

Standard Rules permits include fixed rules and conditions that cover common, low-risk industrial activities. They are issued to companies only after they demonstrate that they understand and can manage the risks to people and the environment.

If the firm wishes to carry out additional activities on the site in the future, it must submit a bespoke permit application that is tailored to those activities.

A spokesperson for the Environment Agency said:

Our regulatory controls for onshore oil and gas are in place to protect people and the environment. Standard Rules permits are common across industry and maintain high levels of environmental protection. They do not allow companies to carry out fracking – this activity requires a bespoke permit application which would be subject to a site-specific environmental risk assessment and

extensive public consultation.

As with all decisions on whether to issue environmental permits, we will assess a company's proposals to ensure they meet strict requirements. If an activity poses an unacceptable risk to the environment, the activity will not be permitted.

The public documentation relating to this and other permits of Ineos can be viewed here: consult.environment-agency.gov.uk/psc/ineos-upstream-limited-exploration-sites.

Press release: Ineos is granted environmental permit for exploratory borehole in Derbyshire

The Environment Agency has granted an environmental permit to allow Ineos Upstream Ltd to drill an exploratory borehole at a site in Derbyshire.

The 'Standard Rules' permit allows the company to carry out drilling, waste management, and low-risk testing at its Bramley Moor Lane drilling site, near the village of Marsh Lane. It does not allow fracking.

Standard Rules permits include fixed rules and conditions that cover common, low-risk industrial activities. They are issued to companies only after they demonstrate that they understand and can manage the risks to people and the environment.

If the firm wishes to carry out additional activities on the site in the future, it must submit a bespoke permit application that is tailored to those activities.

A spokesperson for the Environment Agency said:

Our regulatory controls for onshore oil and gas are in place to protect people and the environment. Standard Rules permits are common across industry and maintain high levels of environmental protection. They do not allow companies to carry out fracking – this activity requires a bespoke permit application which would be subject to a site-specific environmental risk assessment and extensive public consultation.

As with all decisions on whether to issue environmental permits, we will assess a company's proposals to ensure they meet strict requirements. If an activity poses an unacceptable risk to the environment, the activity will not be permitted.

[Press release: CMA accepts commitments offered to address online auction concerns](#)

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) has today [accepted final commitments](#) offered by the company, which it believes will enable more competition between online auction platforms. It consulted on ATG Media's proposed commitments [last month](#).

ATG Media is the largest provider of live online bidding platforms in the UK, including 'The Saleroom' – an arts and antiques platform. These platforms are used by auction houses to facilitate online live bidding without bidders having to attend in person.

Last November the CMA launched a Competition Act investigation into 3 practices used by ATG Media which it considered may breach competition laws by preventing or discouraging its customers from using rival platforms.

The 3 practices under investigation were:

- obtaining exclusive deals with auction houses, so that they do not use other providers;
- preventing auction houses getting a cheaper online bidding rate with other platforms for their bidders – through contract clauses known as most favoured nation (MFN) or price parity clauses; and
- preventing auction houses promoting or advertising rival live online bidding platforms in competition with ATG Media.

The CMA considers that these practices may have prevented ATG Media's rivals from being able to compete effectively in the market and prevented consumers from getting a better deal for online bidding.

ATG Media has today given legally binding promises to the CMA (known as commitments) to stop carrying out any of these practices for a period of 5

years.

Following acceptance of these commitments, the CMA has closed its investigation into whether ATG Media has abused a dominant position or entered into anti-competitive agreements.

The CMA no longer needs to take a decision on an application from a third party for 'interim measures' directions, to halt the practices pending the outcome of a full investigation, as the commitments fully address all its competition concerns and bring a halt to those practices. The CMA had given serious consideration to the application for interim measures but shortly before it was to make a final decision on this, ATG Media made its commitments offer.

Michael Grenfell, Executive Director of Enforcement at the CMA, said:

We are pleased that ATG Media has given commitments which address all our concerns. Now these previous restrictions have been removed, we believe alternative platforms or new entrants will be able to compete more easily and offer cheaper commission rates to bidders.

Online and digital markets represent a large and growing part of the economy and we must ensure that these often fast-moving markets do not evolve in ways which may harm consumers.

Reaching a swift outcome in this case demonstrates our ability to ensure that potentially anti-competitive practices are ended quickly.

Further details about the CMA's investigation can be found on the [case page](#).

Note for editors

1. The CMA is the UK's primary competition and consumer authority. It is an independent non-ministerial government department with responsibility for carrying out investigations into mergers, markets and the regulated industries and enforcing competition and consumer law. For CMA updates, follow us on Twitter [@CMAgovuk](#), [Flickr](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [Facebook](#). Sign up to our [email alerts](#) to receive updates on Competition Act 1998 cases.
2. The Chapter I prohibition in the Competition Act 1998 (the Act) prohibits anti-competitive agreements and concerted practices between businesses which have as their object or effect the appreciable prevention, restriction or distortion of competition within the UK. The Chapter II prohibition in the Act prohibits the abuse of a dominant position by one or more companies which may affect trade within the UK or a part of it. Articles 101 and 102 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) contain equivalent provisions applicable

where there may be an appreciable effect on trade between EU Member States.

3. On 22 November 2016, the CMA launched an investigation into suspected breaches of competition law in respect of the supply of auction services in the UK. The investigation is under Chapters I and II of the Act, and Articles 101 and 102 TFEU. The investigation relates to suspected anti-competitive agreement(s) or concerted practice(s) and suspected abuse of dominance in the supply of live online bidding auction platform services in the UK, in particular, suspected exclusionary and restrictive pricing practices, including most favoured nation provisions in respect of online sales.
4. Where the CMA has begun an investigation under section 25 of the Act, it may accept commitments to take such action as it considers appropriate for the purposes of addressing the competition concerns it has identified. When the CMA has formally accepted commitments, it must close its investigation into the conduct that was the subject of the investigation.
5. The decision by the CMA to accept commitments does not amount to or imply any finding as to the legality or otherwise of the conduct by the parties under investigation either prior to acceptance of the commitments or once the commitments are in place.
6. The CMA may reopen its investigation and take other action in certain limited circumstances (for example, where it has reasonable grounds for suspecting non-compliance with the commitments or believing that there has been a material change of circumstances since the commitments were accepted).
7. Any businesses or individuals that have concerns about compliance with the commitments can contact the CMA by email (general.enquiries@cma.gsi.gov.uk) or by phone (020 3738 6000).
8. The CMA also received an application under section 35 of the Act for interim measures in connection with this case. As a result of acceptance of commitments and closure of the investigation, the CMA will not reach a decision on whether or not to issue interim measures directions.
9. Media enquiries to the CMA should be directed to press@cma.gsi.gov.uk or 020 3738 6798.