



Information Sheet

Title of Project: Alternative Business Structures in UK Legal Services Sector

Study aims

By permitting a new organizational form, Alternative Business Structures (ABSs), the Legal Services Act 2007 broke with normative tradition and removed historic restrictions concerning the ownership, financing and management of law firms. ABSs are challenging the legal profession to think differently about the organization and delivery of services. Indeed, the Legal Services Board recently identified them as pioneering the way in which law will be practiced in future. Our knowledge of ABSs, however, is limited and largely based on anecdotal evidence. This study seeks to address this gap.

Focusing on ABS firms that have raised significant amounts of capital investment or which are subsidiaries of quoted firms, the aim is to find out how external ownership may have impacted upon organizational and management practices such as decision-making, strategic planning, recruitment and skills. The research will also be interested in finding out how capital investment is being deployed to enhance internal efficiency and/or better meet client needs.

What it involves

The research will involve a series of interviews with partners and decision-makers within the firm. Typically, these will last about 60–90 minutes and will be audio recorded. Interviews will be arranged at times most convenient for study participants. Access to annual reports, organizational charts and relevant company policies will also be requested.

Anonymity, confidentiality and data protection

Data collected from this study will be confidential. All data files, including transcripts will be encrypted and password protected. Anonymity of both firm and respondent will be guaranteed when disseminating any results from the study. In short, procedures for data storage, respondent confidentiality and anonymity comply with University of Leeds' policy guidelines regarding the ethical conduct of research and the project has received ethical approval by a sub-panel of the University Ethics Committee.

Study risks and benefits

Participation in the study will not involve any physical, emotional or reputational risks beyond that of everyday life. The firm is unlikely to experience any direct benefit from participation, but there is an opportunity to explore whether you wish to receive feedback at the end of the study and what form would be of most value to you.

Even though participation may not be of direct benefit to the firm, the study findings will provide an objective assessment of the ways in which ABSs are seeking to transform the delivery of legal services and balancing the interests of clients, investors/providers, and the wider public. This will contribute to the evidence base about the impact of the Legal Services Act, influencing important policy issues.

Participants' rights

Taking part in this research study is completely voluntary and if you decide to take part, you may stop at any time. You also have the right to withdraw your data from the study after participation and should you wish to do so, you will need to contact Sundeep Aulakh.

Research funding

The research is being part funded by the Economic Social and Research Council (ESRC) and part funded by the University of Leeds.

Research monitoring

The study is being led by Dr. Sundeep Aulakh, who is responsible for data collection, analysis and project management. She is being supervised by Professor Ian Kirkpatrick, a leading, international academic with an expertise on professional services firms in law, accounting and management consulting.

Further information

If you require further information, please contact Sundeep Aulakh or Prof. Kirkpatrick. Their contact details are as follows:

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