

NZ Law Society Poll Brings Good News

The NZ Law Society recently conducted a survey with the aim of finding out what the public really thinks of lawyers, and former Law Society President, Austin Forbes QC sees the results as providing "real encouragement for a profession hungry for direction and determined to forge ahead." Mr Forbes suggested that contrary to popular opinion, lawyers are seen in positive not negative terms and may, in fact, be responsible for their own bad press.

MRL Research Group, in running the survey, canvassed the public by telephone and also sent out a self-completing survey to over 200 law firms.

The results indicate that the public view lawyers as competent, reliable and trustworthy. Interestingly, survey respondents were more likely to rate their own lawyer positively than lawyers in general.

Part of the survey required lawyers to rate how they believed the public viewed them, and results of this indicated that, in general, the profession had underestimated the depth of positive feeling about it.

In their rating of other lawyers, 49% of members of the profession felt that lawyers kept up with the times, as opposed to 69% of the public. 62% of the public believed that lawyers kept their clients informed, while only 25% of lawyers agreed with this statement.

The constantly vexatious question of the cost of legal advice drew some more predictable results. Poll results indicate that one third of New Zealanders would have sought help from a lawyer, but of those, 56% were discouraged from doing so because of the cost. The surveyed lawyers agreed, with three quarters of lawyers believing that the high cost of lawyers' fees discouraged use of a lawyer, and 85% of lawyers feeling that the cost involved in going to court was a deterrent to potential clients.

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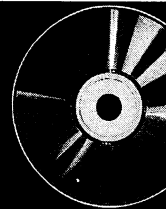
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