

# The Impact of Alternative Business Structures on Access to Justice in the UK

*While legal services providers licensed as Alternative Business Structures (ABSs) are more productive and innovative, it is still too early to empirically determine if ABSs are improving Access to Justice in the UK*

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## INTRODUCTION

Access to Justice is a problem in Canada.

Some proposals call for deregulating law firm business structures.

Proponents for deregulation argue that outside investment could foster innovation and competition within the legal services industry.

In turn, there could be lower prices, new legal 'products' and services, and the targeting of currently unmet legal needs.

## OBJECTIVES

To study whether the UK, which recently allowed Alternative Business Structures (ABSs), was seeing an improvement in Access to Justice.

## METHODS

Research was accomplished by completing a media scan and a journal review.

Information was analyzed and synthesized into an annotated bibliography.

## RESULTS

It appears that it is still too early to tell if the deregulation of law firm business structures is improving Access to Justice.

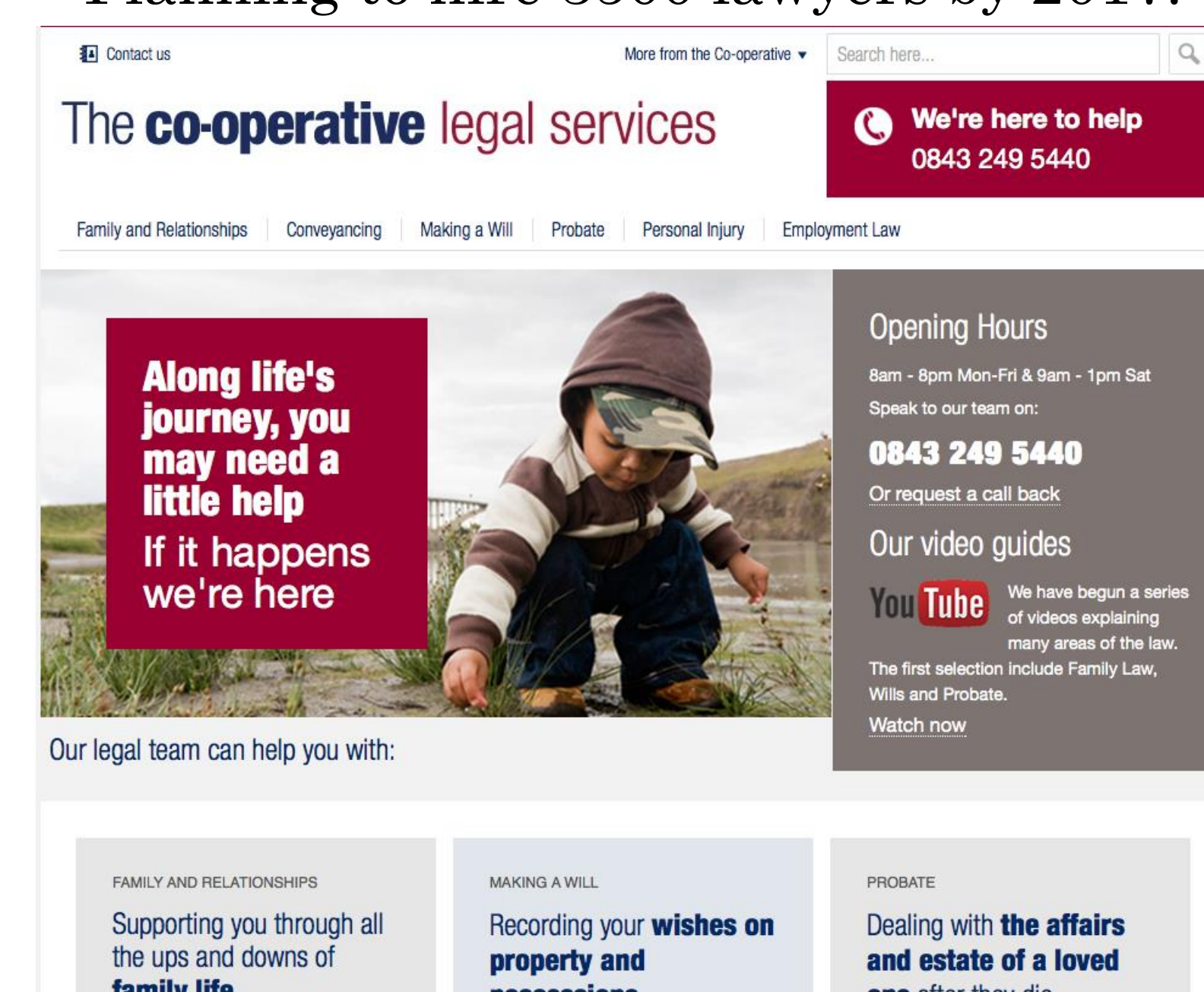
However, that it has only been two years since regulatory boards began accepting applications for firms requesting to be licensed as Alternative Business Structures.

The UK legal services regulators continue to identify a need to assess the impact on Access to Justice.

## Examples of Alternative Business Structures in the UK

### Co-op Legal Services

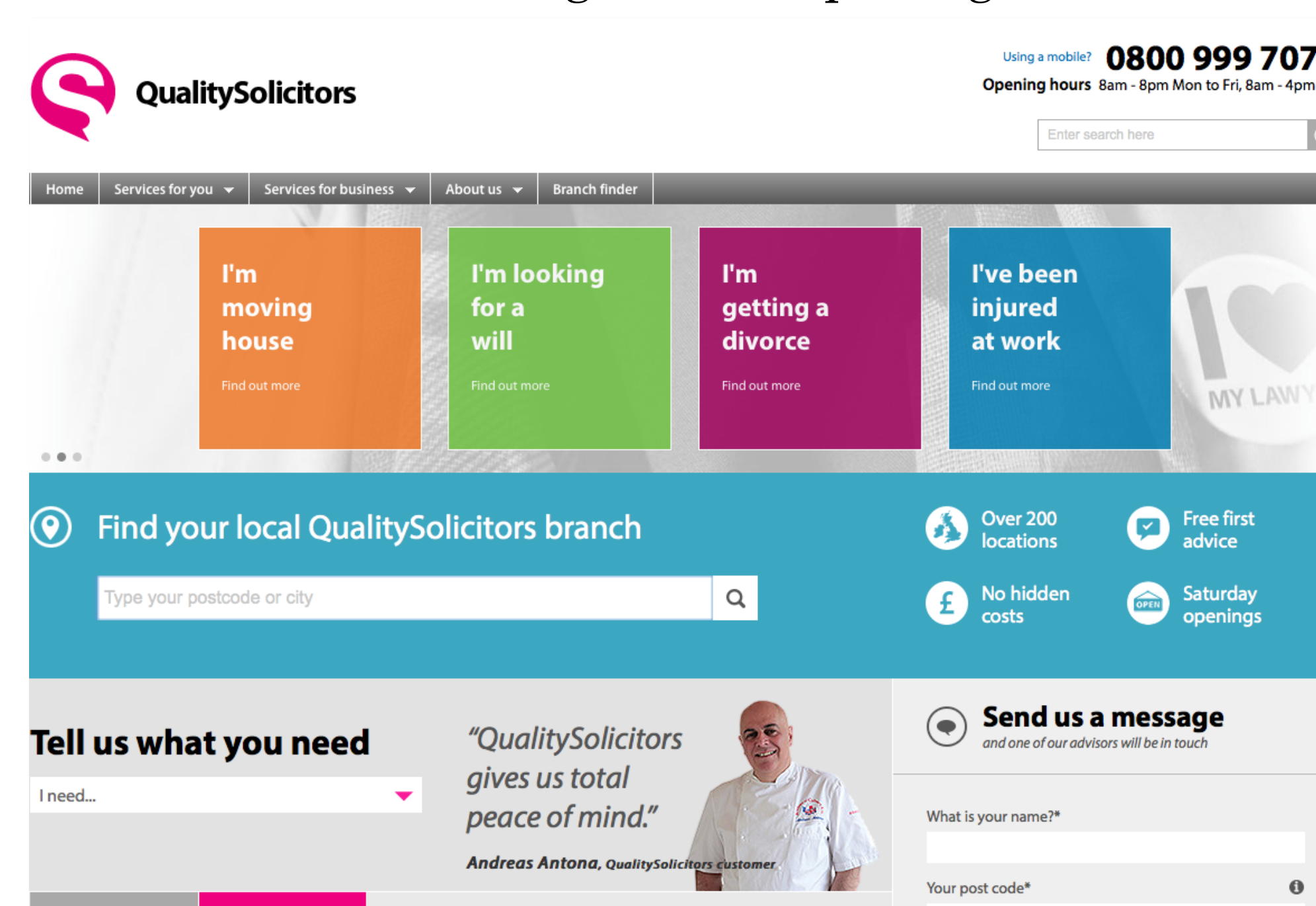
Planning to hire 3500 lawyers by 2017.



Screen shot: <http://www.co-operativelegalservices.co.uk>

### Quality Solicitors Network

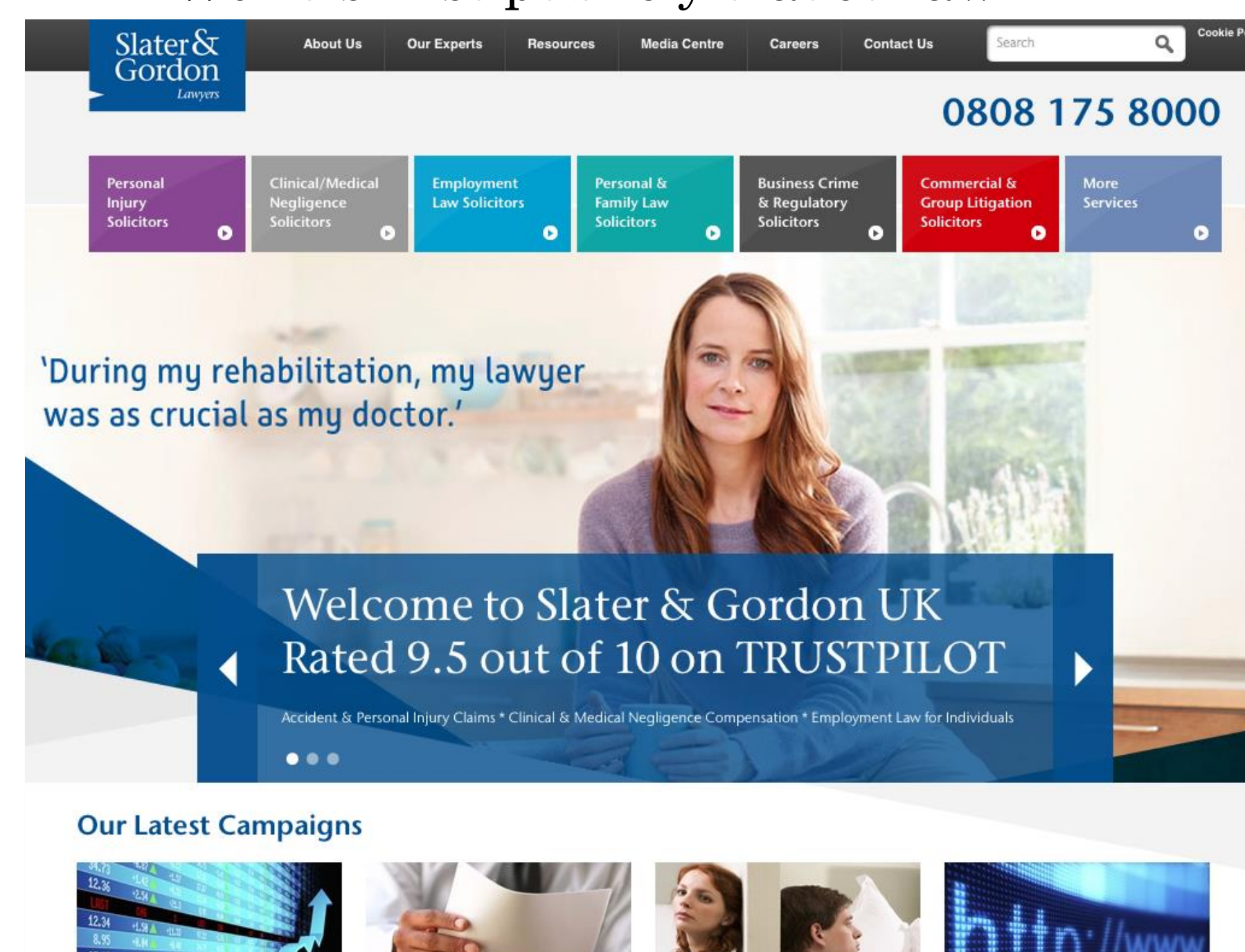
200 firms moving to "fixed pricing" in 2014



Screen shot: <http://www.qualitysolicitors.com>

### Slater and Gordon

World's first publicly traded law firm



Screen shot: <http://www.slatergordon.co.uk>

## RESULTS (continued)

Legal service providers registered as Alternative Business Structures are often more productive and innovative.

They also tend to be more consumer focused, often offering fixed-price services, free consultations, 24-hour call-centre helplines, and do-it-yourself legal products.

It has also been discovered that some entities are launching ABS initiatives with the specific aim of improving Access to Justice.

However, the introduction of ABSs has coincided with severe cuts to Legal Aid in the UK.

This has resulted in little media coverage of the introduction of ABSs.

For this reason, while ABSs show promise for improving certain aspects of access to justice, there needs to be more research to know for certain whether or not ABSs are improving access to justice in the UK, and whether or not ABSs can improve access to justice in Canada.

## CONCLUSION

Access to Justice remains a serious problem in Canada.

ABSs may be able to contribute to a solution by improving various elements of the broader Access to Justice issue.

Canada has a unique opportunity to explore what regulations and Alternative Business Structures are working in the UK.

The Canadian Bar Association can then tailor its regulations to allow both the business and legal communities to work together for a solution to Access to Justice in Canada.