

# Certification Body Customer Satisfaction Survey 2017 Summary Report

## Introduction

During February and March 2017, the Federation ran two online Customer Satisfaction surveys, one for each of their key customers. These annual surveys have been undertaken for the past four years and have provided the Federation's customers with an opportunity to provide valuable feedback on the work carried out by the Federation, rate their experience and opinions in a number of customer service and support related areas and to identify any areas for improvement.

This report summarises the results from the Certification Body survey, where Bodies were invited to give feedback on the services and support provided to them by the Federation. In addition, there is a section in this report that summarises the feedback, given by Training Centres, in relation to their customer service satisfaction levels with the Certification Bodies (CB) that they work with. This additional information has been taken directly from the 2017 Training Centre Customer Satisfaction survey. The full report is available on [ACE](#).

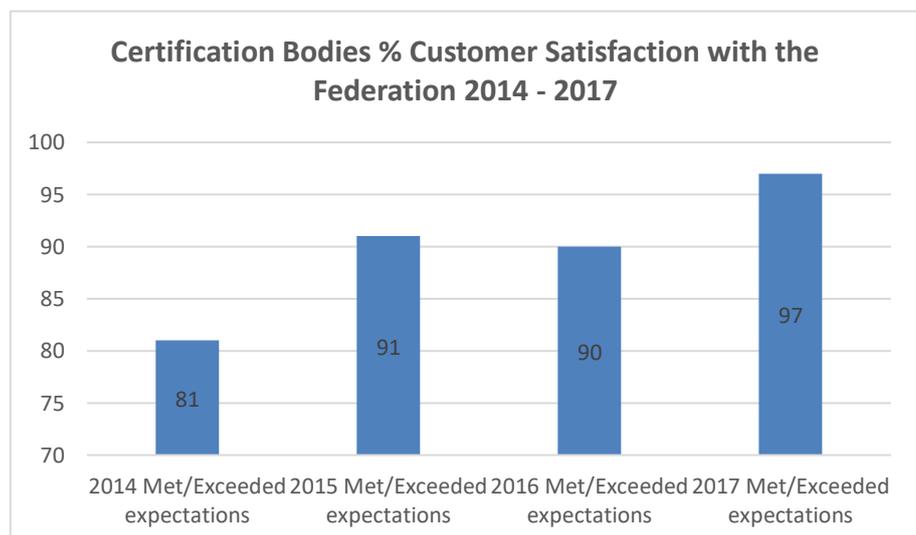
## Certification Body Total Survey Responses

In total, we had **31 responses** with a number of these being multiple responses from separate individuals from the same Certification Body.

## Customer Satisfaction Rates – with the Federation

In order to ascertain an overall rating of the Federation support, offered during the past year, CB respondents were asked to rate the level of customer service and support they received from the Federation. This was on a scale of Exceeded Expectations, Met Expectations, Somewhat Disappointed and Very Disappointed. The combined % Customer Satisfaction for **Exceeded and Met Expectations**, as rated by the Certification Bodies, was 97% (Exceeded 23%, Met 74%).

For comparison, the chart shows the same information for the previous 3 years.



CB respondents were able to provide additional information on any particularly good or poor service they have received from the Federation. 9 respondents noted good service either with the Federation as a whole or with individual team members and mostly respondents highlighted how helpful and friendly the Federation Support Team are. Specifying that staff are knowledgeable, respond quickly and explain the responses given. There was only one respondent who noted poor service which related to inconsistent advice received from different Federation staff or that tickets raised are not always answered in full. While it is important to us to act on all feedback, the majority of the feedback was positive. The issue regarding the inconsistent advice and incomplete responses to tickets has been fed back to the Support Team.

## **Certification Body Feedback on the Federation's Performance**

The questions asked in the 2017 Certification Body Customer Satisfaction survey, focused on the key areas of the Federation's work over the previous 12 months. These were related to: - **Communication, Guidance & Support, the Federation Forum** and also the opportunity for **General Feedback** on performance as an organisation. The majority of questions offered a pre-determined choice of options for respondents to choose from but there was also ample opportunity for feedback to be provided in a number of free-text fields.

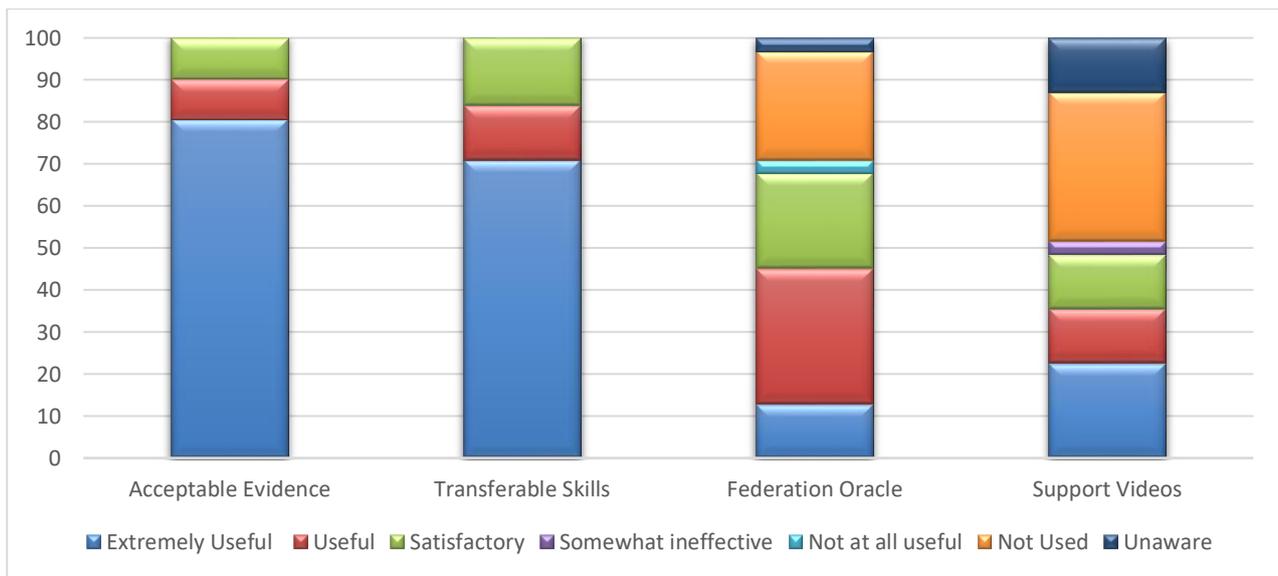
### **Communication**

The Federation works hard to both maintain and improve its communication with Certification Bodies. The continuation of the monthly compliance checks allows for regular discussions between the Federation and the CB Certification Teams, which is supported by the monthly contact with individual Account Managers. Both of these not only help maintain communication but also continue to build effective and collaborative working relationships. The Federation also aim to keep Certification Bodies fully updated with the ongoing changes within the world of Apprenticeships by communicating as and when the need arises. The Federation Oracle newsletter is issued on a quarterly basis and contains information relevant for both Certification Bodies and Training Centres and, where necessary, specific CB information is also shared via the newsletter. These initiatives, and others, have led to 90% of CB respondents feeding back that communication from the Federation has improved, or has remained consistent, in the last 12 months.

### **Guidance and Support**

To ensure that Certification Bodies are suitably equipped and empowered to carry out Apprenticeship Certification, the Federation produces a range of guidance and support materials for users. In 2015 there were major changes made to two of the guidance materials provided by the Federation; the Acceptable Evidence and Transferable Skills guidance. Since these changes, there have been no further significant changes made to the format of these 2 resources, although the Acceptable Evidence guidance continues to be regularly updated to include a wider range of acceptable evidence examples. Over the previous 12 months there were two new support materials issued; an Annotated Apprentice Consent Form and a series of "How to Make a Successful ACE Claim" videos. As part of the Federation's ongoing reducing rejections project, 7 short (2-3 minutes duration) videos were produced highlighting some of the key and common issues that result in an Apprenticeship Certification claim being rejected. As part of the survey, respondents were asked to provide feedback on the various guidance and support materials that are available.

Both the Acceptable Evidence and Transferable Skills guidance continue to be valued resources by the Certification Bodies, with 90% stating that these were either Useful or Extremely Useful. However, both the Oracle Newsletter and the “How to Make a Successful ACE Claim” videos have had less success. 13% of respondents were unaware of the videos and a quarter of respondents had not used either of these support materials. Whilst the guidance is predominantly aimed at supporting users at Training Centres, they are equally valuable information sources for CB users. It is possible that there could be a misconception that CB users do not need to use these guidance materials when, in fact, they have been designed to support all users of ACE and not just new starters or Centre users. The Federation will take this feedback on board and look to increase the awareness of all guidance materials and especially remind users of the videos and the newsletter. The chart summarises the CB feedback received on 4 key support and guidance resources.



Although it was not specifically included in this year’s survey, last year’s survey informed us that the ACE-IT tool is valued by Certification Bodies but that it required updating to match changes to SASE and quality guidelines on what constitutes robust achievement evidence. Since the launch of this year’s survey, an updated version of ACE-IT has been launched and initial feedback from users is very positive.

### **Federation Forum**

The Federation Forum is a quarterly meeting attended by Certification Bodies and members of the Federation. It is a key part of the Federation’s communication strategy. Federation representatives find these meetings extremely beneficial in maintaining and developing effective, collaborative working relationships with the Certification Bodies and are a good arena for information sharing and discussing any certification related issues.

These meetings are both valued and well attended by Certification Bodies with 90% regularly attending, an increase of 4% on last year. Of the respondents, 55% of them either regularly attend themselves or have done in the past, with only 2 noting that they were unable to attend as often as they would like due to workloads. All of those who attend the Forum responded that they find the meetings very useful. Some of the respondents also took the opportunity to provide further feedback via the open text field. Here they indicated that the meetings were useful because they; offer the chance for face to face meetings with the

Federation and also allow for peer to peer support between CBs, it is a friendly and welcoming environment where questions can be asked and answered without embarrassment and allows all Certification Bodies to be kept up-to-date with not only any changes to ACE but also in the wider world of Apprenticeships.

In cases where the survey respondent was not the main attendee at Forum meetings, we asked if the person in their organisation who does attend to feeds back to their colleagues and 80% confirmed that this is the case. This is a 12% reduction on last year and is something that the Federation need to be address to ensure that all Certification Body users are aware of the topics discussed at the Forum meetings and any agreed decisions/outcomes.

### **Feedback on Certification Bodies from Providers – taken from the 2017 Training Centres Survey**

As well as working with the Federation, Training Centres work closely with Certification Bodies, regularly communicating with them for guidance and support. Therefore, as part of the 2017 Training Centres survey, respondents were asked a number of questions regarding their satisfaction with the customer service and support that they receive from the Certification Bodies that they work with.

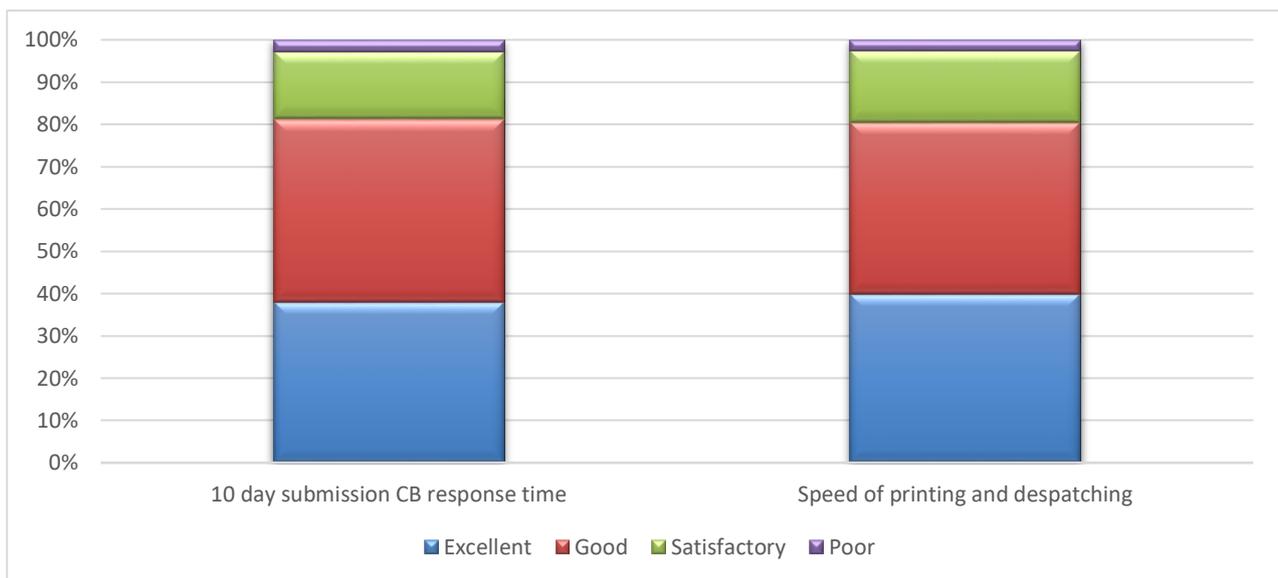
In order to monitor trends on an ongoing, yearly basis and to allow for direct comparisons, the same questions from the last two year's surveys were repeated this year. The first of these focussed on Certification Bodies' levels and methods of communication, the speed of their response to queries raised, the quality and clarity of advice and support provided and the attitude of the staff. Many of these areas either remained at 98% (as per 2015 results) or increased to 99% for responses which were either Excellent, Good or Satisfactory (see table below). This is a great result and shows that CBs are giving high levels of support and guidance to Training Centres.

|   | Excellent | Good  | Satisfactory | Poor |
|---|-----------|-------|--------------|------|
| The level and methods of communication you receive regarding guidance for ACE and the certification process | 47.1%     | 43.8% | 8.1%         | 1.1% |
| The speed of response to your queries when you contact them for advice and support                          | 49.5%     | 39.2% | 10.0%        | 1.2% |
| The quality/clarity of support and advice provided to you   | 46.0%     | 42.8% | 10.0%        | 1.2% |
| The friendliness/helpful attitude of staff that you contact   | 52.5%     | 36.8% | 10.0%        | 0.7% |
| Clarity and consistency of reasons given for rejections   | 40.9%     | 40.2% | 15.7%        | 3.2% |
| The extent to which all rejection reasons are captured in a single rejection                                | 39.3%     | 41.9% | 16.4%        | 2.3% |

Since the introduction of ACE in 2012, a key focus for Certification Bodies has been to improve the clarity and consistency of the reasons that are given for Apprenticeship Certification claim rejections. 81% of Centre respondents to this year's survey believe that, on the whole, most Certification Bodies do this. However, unfortunately this is a decline when compared with the 2016 survey which saw the figure considerably higher at 96%. This decline has been noted and will be raised with CBs at the next Forum meeting in July. While

there will always be the odd occasion when human error means that clarity may not be as good as it should be, it is really important that we all remain focussed on this issue. The Federation will work closely with all Certification Bodies to ensure that the clarity and consistency of rejection reasons improves and that all rejection reasons are captured in a single rejection.

Certification Bodies are required to work to agreed timescales for certification processing, with all certification claims submitted to be actioned (i.e. either certificated or rejected) within 10 days of submission. 97% of Centres respondents believe CB response times to be Excellent, Good or Satisfactory which is an improvement of 6% on 2016. Additionally, 97% rated the CBs speed of printing and despatching of Apprenticeship certificates in the same way which is another increase of 3% on 2016.



As well as these achievements, the number of Centre respondents grading the service and support that they receive from Certification Bodies as either Exceeding or Meeting Expectations, increased to a fantastic 98%. It is very evident that Certification Bodies are providing good customer service and continually improving their consistent approach to providing support and guidance to Training Centres.

Analysis of the free text fields in this year’s survey, does raise some areas for improvement. These include issues around rejection reasons which some respondents stated lack clarity and sufficient explanation. There was also a handful of respondents who reported that they had had multiple rejections for the same claim but for different reasons which, they believe, should have been dealt with as part of a single rejection. There continue to be some variances in the turnaround times that individual Certification Bodies work to, although none of them exceed the allowed 10 days. A few respondents commented on a lack of communication from some Certification Bodies, varying from “little” to “non-existent”. Whilst the Federation send out the majority of communications to Centres, to ensure information is centrally dispersed to all users and to reduce instances of duplication, some Certification Bodies may need to consider increasing their communication with their Centres. Again, this will be an issue that will be discussed with Certification Bodies at the next Forum meeting. It should also be noted that nearly 20% of Centre respondents felt that they had received specific instances of good service from a Certification Body and left specific feedback in the free text field. This is compared to only 4% who reported having received particularly poor service.

## **2017 Certification Body Survey Outcomes – Federation Action Plan**

Throughout the Certification Body survey, respondents were given the opportunity to leave feedback in free text fields. Many left useful and constructive comments. Overall, the Federation are meeting or exceeding the Certification Bodies' expectations but there were a few areas highlighted where the Federation could improve their service offering. These areas have been incorporated into our action plans for 2017/18 as we continue to strive to both maintain and improve our overall high levels of customer satisfaction.

### **Survey Action Points:**

- Throughout the year there have been issues relating to certificate paper being delivered with cases of orders being lost, blank paper being sent rather than certificate paper and damage to the boxes. Whilst these instances are in the minority, it is important to address this to ensure that there is no shortfall in certificate provision which may prevent timely certification.
- On the whole the Federation's Support Team are praised for the support offered to Certification Bodies. However, there have been occasions where Helpdesk tickets are not answered efficiently leading to further communication which is time consuming. Alternatively, the response given is merely a general one of directing users to online guidance resources, without actually answering the question asked. Although, instances like this have reduced over the last 12 months. When responding to queries from Certification Bodies, Federation Support staff will be told to ensure that they give consistent, specific and clear responses and that simply referring users to online guidance materials is not sufficient.
- With some projects undertaken by the Federation, CBs noted that there is a 'lack of follow through'. Respondents stated that there are sometimes delays in projects, which may be outwith the control of the Federation, but that this can cause some confusion and some degree of disappointment. In future, it is important that the Federation manage the expectations of all ACE Users appropriately and keep them informed of any delays and the reasons why.

To end on a positive note, in addition to the action points above, there were many positive comments left this year which reinforce the good working relationships between the Federation and the Certification Bodies. For example: -

- "Always receive good support and the Federation, in my experience, always follow up if they commit to do so. Friendly and welcoming by phone, online or through any Audit process we are engaged in. This applies to ACE, ACW and MA as well other aspects such as Finance and Quality Assurance."
- "Overall it's working well, no need to fix when it's not broken."