

Certification Body Customer Satisfaction Survey 2016

Summary Report

Introduction

The Federation ran two online customer satisfaction surveys during February and March 2016 for its two key customers - Training Centres and Certification Bodies. These annual surveys are undertaken in order to provide the Federation's customers an opportunity to provide valuable feedback on the work carried out by the Federation, to rate their experience and opinions in a number of customer service and support related areas and to suggest how the Federation can provide a better service.

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 2016 Training Centre Customer Satisfaction survey.

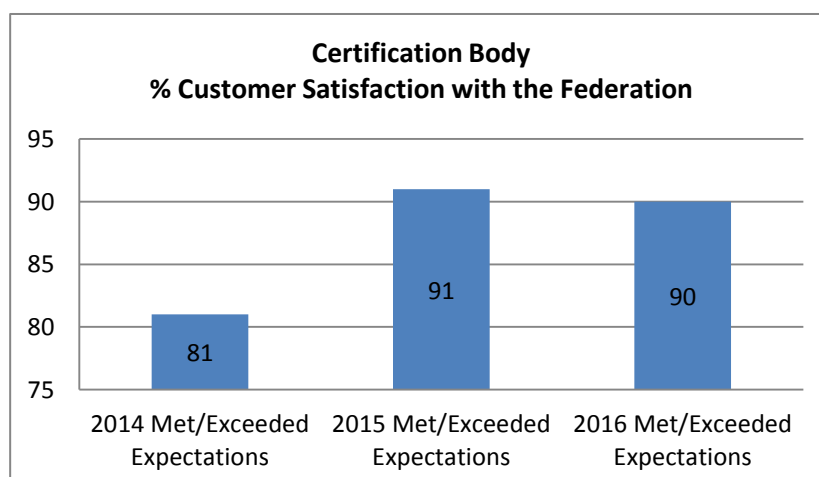
Certification Body Total Survey Responses

In total, we had **29 responses** with a number of these being multiple responses from the same Certification Body.

Customer Satisfaction Rates – with the Federation

In order to ascertain an overall opinion of the Federation support, offered during the past year, CB respondents were asked to rate the level of customer service and support, in the same way that Centres were asked to do in their survey. 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 90% (Exceeded 17%, Met 73%).

CB respondents were given the opportunity to provide additional information on any particularly good or poor service they had received from the Federation. Where good service was noted, respondents highlighted how helpful and friendly the Federation Support Team are,



specifying that staff are knowledgeable, respond quickly and explain the responses given. There were a couple of points raised relating to disappointing service which related to CB queries simply being answered by being told to refer to existing Federation guidance documents or that sometimes the response given wasn't definitive enough. Both of these issues have been raised with all Federation Support staff and will be areas where improvements will be made.

Certification Body Feedback on the Federation's Performance

The Federation specific questions, asked in the 2016 Certification Body Customer Satisfaction survey, focused on the key areas of Federation work over the last 12 months. These were related to: - **Communication, Guidance & Support, Federation Forum** and also the opportunity for **General Feedback** on our 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

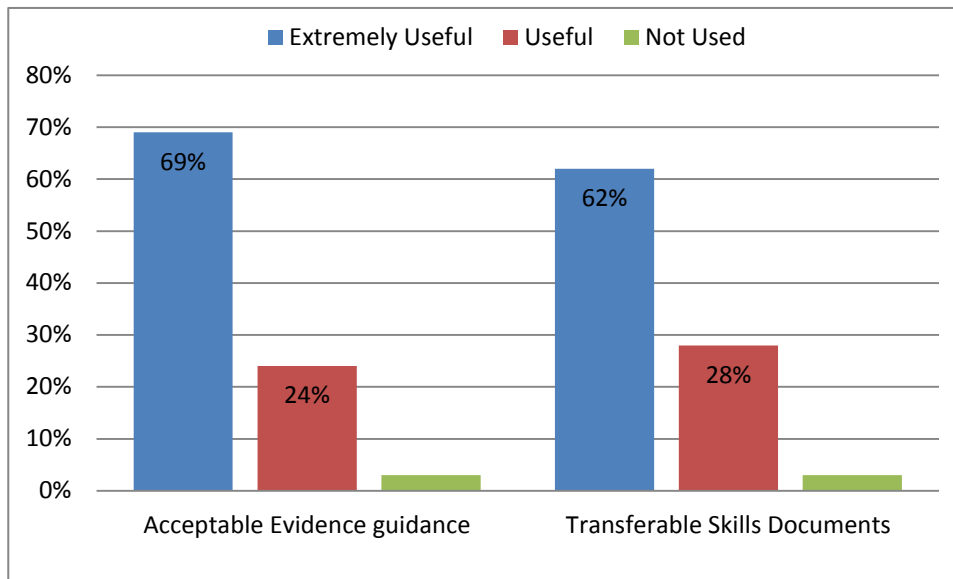
There are several key processes in place to ensure Federation maintains and improves its communication with Certification Bodies. One such initiative is the monthly checks, where a sample of the work carried out by each CB is checked for both regulatory compliance and our quality requirements. The results of these monthly checks are discussed with each CB on a regular basis. Account Management of the CBs has continued and resulted in improved working relationships between the Federation and Certification Bodies. In the latter half of the year, the Federation's newsletter was revamped and revived and includes a range of information relevant for both CBs and Training Centres. Where required, any CB only specific information is also shared via the newsletter. These initiatives, and others, have led to 79% of CB respondents feeding back that 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 suitable equipped and empowered to carry out Apprenticeship Certification, the Federation produces a range of guidance and support materials for users. In 2015, there were 2 major updates to some existing guidance - the Acceptable Evidence guidance documentation underwent a revamp and is now easily accessible in a new online format, whilst a second Transferable Skills guidance document was produced to reflect the changes made to SASE in April 2015.

Changing the format of the Acceptable Evidence has been extremely well received and 93% of CB respondents noted how valuable they find this resource – rating it Extremely Useful or Useful. This is an increase of 11% on the 2015 survey response to the same question.

90% of Certification Body respondents felt that the 2 Transferable Skills documents are Extremely Useful/Useful in clarify the regulations both pre and post 6th April 2015.



Although the specific focus of this years' survey was on the above two guidance documents, it was also noted that ACE-IT is a valued tool for users but does need to be updated in line with both the new SASE requirements and also the Acceptable Evidence rules. There is a project well underway to bring ACE-IT in line with current regulations and also to enhance its functionality and directly link it with other existing documentation. The updated ACE-IT is planned for re-launch in July 2016.

Federation Forum

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

Most Certification Bodies regularly attend Forum meetings and 86% of survey respondents indicated that their organisation regularly attended Forum meetings. Of the respondents, 55% of them either regularly attend themselves or have done in the past. All of them responded that they find the meetings very useful. Many of the respondents took the opportunity to provide further feedback through the open text field and indicated that the meetings are; well organised, all questions raised are discussed and answered appropriately, the information given ensures that Certification Bodies are consistent in their approach to certification and also it gives them an opportunity to meet with their peers and discuss issues of common interest.

Where the survey respondent was not the main attendee at Forum meetings, we ask that the person who does attend to feedback to their colleagues and 92% confirmed that this is the case. This is an improvement on last year where 15% reported that they did not always receive feedback from their Forum meeting representative.

Feedback on Certification Bodies from Providers – from the 2016 Training Centres Survey

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

To facilitate comparison, the 2016 survey included the same questions that were asked in previous years' surveys. 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 CB staff. All of these areas either remained at 98% user satisfaction, or increased to 99%, for user ratings that were Excellent, Good or Satisfactory.

A key area of work that all Certification Bodies have focused on over the last 12 months was to improve the clarity and consistency of reasons given for rejections. This year, 96% of Centre respondents felt that there was now much greater consistency and clarity relating to rejection reasons. This is a massive increase from 3% in 2015. Additionally, there was an increase from 2015 with 96% of respondents confirming that all rejection reasons are now being captured in a single ACE rejection.

All Certification Bodies are required to work to agreed timescales for certification, with all submissions to be actioned within 10 days of submission. 91% of respondents thought that the speed of processing Apprenticeship claims was either Excellent, Good or Satisfactory and 94% of respondents also rated the speed of printing and despatching of Apprenticeship certificates in the same way. The 2016 survey also saw a 3% increase, to 94%, in the number of Centre respondents who felt that the customer service and support they received from their Certification Body had either Exceeded or Met Expectations.

It is clear from the free text fields that there are still some significant differences between the timescales that each of the Certification Bodies work to, although none exceed the agreed 10 day turnaround. Most of the comments about timescales relate to when initial applications have been rejected. Only 10% of respondents expressed concerns with one, or more, of their Certification Bodies performance. 20% of respondents felt that they had received particularly outstanding service from their Certification Body, leaving details of why they feel this was outstanding. This is an improvement from last year when less than 10% of respondents reported having received outstanding service from their Certification Body.

2016 Certification Body Survey Outcomes – Federation Action Plan

Within the CB survey were a number of questions giving respondents the opportunity to leave specific feedback in a free text field and many respondents left useful and constructive comments. On the whole, the Federation are meeting or exceeding the CB's expectations but some feedback has highlighted a few areas where the Federation could improve their service offering. These areas for action have been incorporated into our plans for 2016/17 as we continue to strive to both maintain and improve a high level of customer satisfaction.

Action Points:

- The recent Reducing Rejections project, undertaken by the Federation, has resulted in a number of new reports being produced from ACE. These additional reports have proved to be extremely useful and welcomed by users. CBs have requested access to similar reports in order that they can improve their support offering to their own Centre.
- When responding to queries from CBs, Federation Support staff to ensure that they give consistent, specific and clear responses and that simply referring users to online guidance materials is not sufficient.
- When providing information at the Federation Forum, Certification Bodies would find it beneficial to compare their activity with that of other similar sized Certification Bodies, allowing them to identify if they have common issues and/or to identify areas for improvement and sharing of good practice.
- A project to update ACE-IT is well underway with a planned relaunch in July 2016. This redevelopment work has addressed all of the issues previously raised by users and brings the tool in line with current regulatory and quality requirements.