

Training Centres Customer Satisfaction Survey 2016 Summary Report

Introduction

The Federation has two significant, key customers and these are the network of UK based **Training Centres**, who use our online Apprenticeship certification systems, and the **Certification Bodies** who process Apprenticeship Certification claims, on our behalf.

During February and March 2016, the Federation ran two online Customer Satisfaction surveys, one for each of our key customers. 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.

The two surveys were well publicised on the ACE Website, via regular ACE notifications and also an automated pop-up for Training Centres, each time they logged into ACE, to remind them to complete the survey.

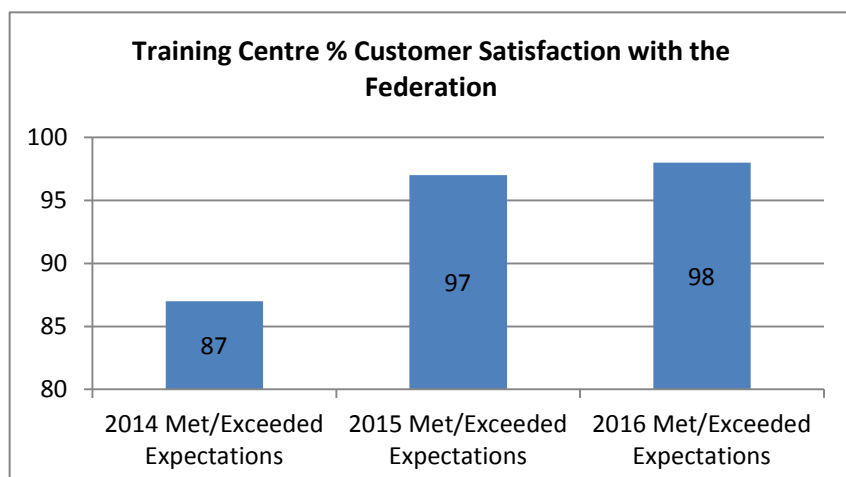
Total Survey Responses

We received an excellent response to both surveys with 853 respondents to the Training Centres Survey, a 5% increase on the number of responses to the 2015 survey.

Overall Customer Satisfaction Rates – with the Federation

Both surveys had a question relating to how the respondent rated the level of customer service and support that they received from the Federation. This was on a scale of Exceeded Expectations, Met Expectations, Somewhat Disappointed and Very Disappointed.

The combined % for Exceeded and Met Expectations responses from Training Centres was: 98%
(Exceeded = 14% & Met = 84%)



Additionally, respondents were asked if they felt that communication and guidance provided by the Federation has improved over the last 12 months.

- 76% of **Training Centre** respondents answered **Yes** to this question
(NB: 18% responded that they had been in post for < 12 months so couldn't adequately respond).

Training Centres Survey – Summary Findings

Federation Specific Feedback

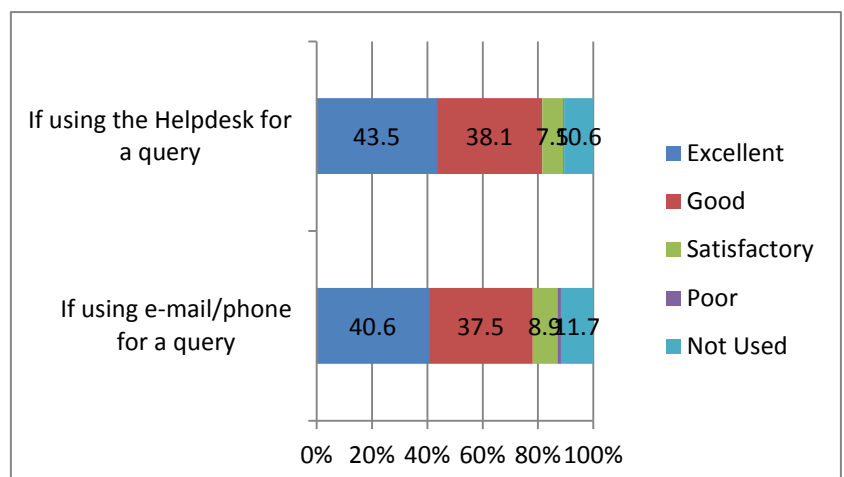
The Federation specific questions, asked in the 2016 Training Centre's Customer Satisfaction survey, focused on the key areas of work for the Federation over the last 12 months. The areas focused on were: - **Communication, Guidance & Support** and also the opportunity for **General Feedback** on our 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.

Certification Support

In general 40% (348) of respondents make initial contact with the Federation for Apprenticeship Certification related queries, which is an increase of 15% from 2015. This is also reflected in our Helpdesk statistics which show a 28% increase in the number of queries raised in the period March 15 to March 16. This could be as a result of an increased awareness and understanding of the role of the Federation as a result of us visiting a number of Centres and an increase in our one-to-one communication with Training Providers. As well as the number of respondents contacting the Federation showing an increase, the satisfaction levels with the responses and support received from the Federation was 96% stating they were Very Satisfied/Satisfied, of which 66% were very satisfied.

Communication

There are two main methods of contacting the Federation's Support Team, via the online Helpdesk or by calling the team directly. Respondents were asked to rate the communication and support they receive when contacting the Federation using either of these methods. Over 75% of respondents found the communication and support either Excellent or Good.



In addition to Centres directly contacting the Federation, we strive to communicate effectively with all ACE users in order to keep them updated with any changes to ACE itself, legislative requirements or our guidance and support materials. The main mode of communication used by the Federation is the inbuilt ACE notification functionality as this ensures that every registered ACE user receives the information. In addition, the Federation also uses the news page on our website to publish relevant and important information for our customers. We also produce a quarterly newsletter called the Federation Oracle. The Federation Oracle was first published in Autumn 2015 and is an additional way of informing all users of ACE of key updates to Apprenticeship Policy, information on Certification rejection rates and trends and other relevant Apprenticeship related topics and issues. When asked if they had read the Oracle, respondents were very positive with less than 5% saying that they felt that the information contained within the newsletter was not relevant to them.

When asked how respondents rated the level and methods of communication received from the Federation, 86% felt that it was Excellent/Good and 76% stated that communication from the Federation has improved in the last 12 months.

Guidance Materials

During 2015 there were two major changes to the guidance materials provide by the Federation; the Acceptable Evidence guidance was revamped into an online format and the Transferable Skills guidance was updated to reflect the changes made to SASE in April 2015. Within the survey respondents were asked to provide feedback on the updated guidance materials.

The change of format to the Acceptable Evidence guidance has allowed ACE users the ability to very easily search for evidence by specific Awarding Organisation and see examples of the range of evidence types that are either acceptable or not acceptable. On the whole the new format has been very favourably received, with 84% finding the guidance Very useful/Useful. There were also many positive comments left in the free text field saying things like: 'Its a brilliant idea' and 'The new format is a lot easier to navigate'. Some of the comments left make it clear that, for some, there is misunderstanding on how to use the new Acceptable Evidence guidance and we will pick this up as an action point from the survey and address it accordingly.

The changes made to SASE in April 15 resulted in an update to the Transferable Skills requirement of Apprenticeships, chiefly the removal of the "five year rule". As the new guidelines were not to be applied retrospectively, we produced a second Transferable Skills guidance document. The original document is for starts up to 5th April 2015 and the new one for starts 6th April 2015 onwards. When asked, 88% of respondents felt that this additional, updated document helped to clarify the SASE changes and assisted their understanding of the revised rules relating to Transferable Skills. 86% of respondents rated the two Transferable Skills documents as being Extremely Useful/Useful.

Although these two guidance materials, discussed above, were the focus of this years' survey please don't forget that there are a range of additional resource materials available on our website. 93% of respondents believe that by using these resources, both their understanding of the Apprenticeship Certification process and their Centre's use of ACE has improved. This has helped to reduce certification rejections.

General Feedback

Throughout the survey there were a number of questions giving respondents the opportunity to leave specific feedback in a free text field. Many respondents took the opportunity to do this and left some very useful and constructive comments which tell us that whilst, in the main, the Federation is both meeting and exceeding customer's expectations there are a number of areas where some further work is required and these will be picked up in our Action List resulting from the surveys. We are constantly striving to maintain and improve our service and support offering and respond to, and meet, our customers' needs.

Certification Body Specific Feedback

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

To ensure that trends can be monitored on a yearly basis, the same questions from the 2015 survey were repeated in this year's survey. The first of these focussing 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. All of these areas either remained at 98% (as per 2015 results) or increased to 99% for responses which were either Excellent, Good or Satisfactory.

A key area of work the Certification Bodies have focused on, over the last 12 months, is to improve the clarity and consistency of reasons given for rejections. The result from this year's survey showed that 96% of respondents felt that they did now do this – compared to only 3% in 2015! This is a great result and shows that the work done by Certification Bodies has clearly had a positive impact. Additionally, there was an increase on the 2015 results with 96% of respondents this year confirming that all rejection reasons are now being captured in a single rejection by the Certification Body.

All Certification Bodies are required to work to agreed timescales for certification with all submissions to be actioned within 10 days of receipt. 91% of respondents thought that the speed of processing of Apprenticeship claims was either Excellent, Good or Satisfactory and 94% rated the speed of printing and despatching of Apprenticeship certificates in the same way. The 2016 survey also saw an increase in the number of 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 differences around the turnaround times that individual Certification Bodies work to, although none of them exceed the required 10 days. Most of the negative comments relating to turnaround times relate to cases where records have been rejected. This does, of course, result in a delay in Certification. Only 10% of respondents expressed concerns with the performance of one, or more of their Certification Bodies. 20% of respondents felt that they had received particularly outstanding service from their Certification Body leaving specific comments on why they felt that this had been outstanding. This is double the score from 100% improvement on last year, when less than 10% received a rating for providing outstanding service.

Actions Required

Whilst the survey was still open, we were reviewing the free-text comment boxes to pick up any feedback left that we felt needed an immediate, and personal, response from the Federation. These were then followed up with a phone call made from a member of the Federation's Apprenticeship Services management team. The individuals contacted were grateful for the call and the time taken by us to follow up on the issues that they had raised. Following the contact made, all were satisfied with the responses and explanations that they were given.

Feedback relating to specific Certification Bodies will be identified and discussed with the relevant Certification Body, as part of their regular, contact with their named Federation Account Manager. A summary report on the findings of the 2016 Training Centres survey will be shared with both Centres and Certification Bodies.

By reviewing all of the feedback, both in terms of percentage ratings and free-text comments, we have identified key areas of good performance and also some areas where there is scope for improvement.

Areas of good performance

There are many areas that have been highlighted by respondents, where the Federation has improved or has maintained a high level of customer service and support: -

- Overall customer satisfaction was 98% - an increase of 1% from 2015.
- Guidance materials that we produce have improved with 84% finding the new online Acceptable Evidence guidance Very Useful/Useful and 86% finding the Transferable Skills documents Very Useful/Useful. Overall 93% of survey respondents find the guidance that the Federation makes available improves their knowledge of the Certification process and also their organisation's performance in terms of making successful certification claims.
- 96% felt that responses to their support requests are both prompt and efficient.
- 86% of the CBs responding attend the quarterly Federation Forum on a regular basis and all of those who regularly attend find these meetings beneficial and are viewed as a good platform for sharing information and good practice. Some believe that these meeting have reduced the previous inconsistencies between CBs.

Areas for improvement

Whilst it is acknowledged by both Training Providers and CBs that there have been improvements in our customer service and support during the last year, they did identify some areas where improvements are required: -

- Although less than in previous surveys, it is clear that some Providers still, on occasion, receive a response that simply directs them to guidance materials. This is not what is requested and more specific assistance should be given. Most Providers have already checked available guidance prior to contacting us for help. Clearly it is essential that Providers are aware of what resources there are to support and guide them but when responding to direct support requests we will work to ensure that all queries are answered in full and then signpost them towards relevant guidance materials.

- The new online Acceptable Evidence format has been well received. However, when asked, some respondents still find it confusing and as a result go straight to the Support Team to ask for guidance. Whilst seeking our advice should not be discouraged, a notification detailing how to use the guidance would clearly be beneficial and is something that we will action.
- Provide further/clearer information on certain aspects within the Acceptable Evidence resource including IGCSEs, Pre-2006 evidence and unacceptable information (i.e. why it is unacceptable).
- Ensure that the ACE Support Team, along with CBs, give consistent responses to user support requests.

Add a concluding paragraph to say that all of the points raised as areas of concern or for improvement will be captured in an action plan which we will use to improve our service offering.