

# Training Centres Customer Satisfaction Survey 2017

## 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 2017, the Federation ran two online Customer Satisfaction surveys, one for each of its 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.

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

### Total Survey Responses

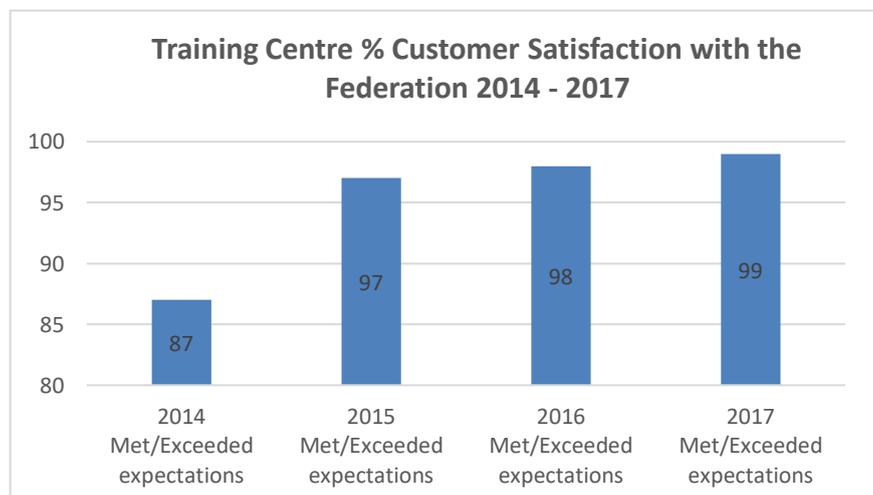
We received an excellent response to both surveys with 860 respondents to the Training Centres Survey, a slight increase on the number of responses to the 2016 survey.

### Overall Customer Satisfaction Rates – with the Federation

Training Centre respondents were asked to rate 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 was: 98.61% (Exceeded = 22% & Met = 77%) which is an increase of 1% on the previous year. For comparison, the chart shows the same information for the previous 3 years.

NB: The figures in the chart are rounded to the nearest whole number.



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

- 80% of **Training Centre** respondents answered **Yes** to this question  
(NB: 17% responded that they had been in post for < 12 months so couldn't adequately respond).

The Training Centre survey had 2 sections, the first was for Centres to provide feedback on their experience of working with the Federation with the second section focussing on their contact with the Certification Bodies and the customer service received. The first part of this summary report will look at the Centre feedback received relating to the Federation.

## Training Centres Survey – Summary Findings

### Federation Specific Feedback

In order to facilitate comparison with the results of previous year's surveys, the questions asked focussed on the same general areas of; **Communication** and **Guidance & Support** as well the opportunity for any **General Feedback**. 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.

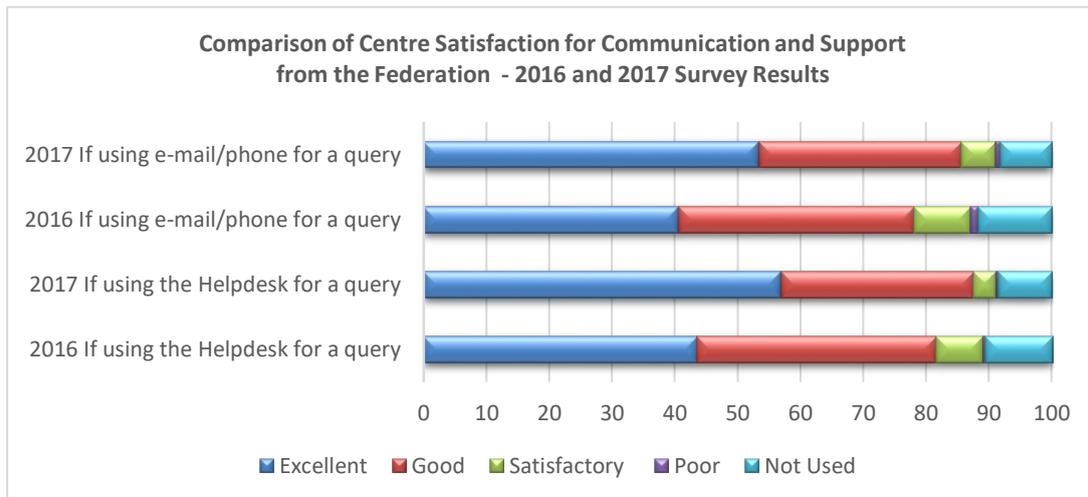
### Certification Support

In recent years, we have seen a shift in how Centres request support when submitting Apprenticeship Certification Claims. This year, 65% (562) of respondents stated that they make any initial contact directly with the Federation which is an increase of 38% from 2016. In previous years, survey results showed that Centres usually made any initial contact with the relevant Certification Body. This could be due to historic relationships that Centres had with individual CBs but in recent years there has been a more consistent and standardised approach to Apprenticeship Certification across the CB network which has been driven by the Federation. The change in initial communication that we are now seeing could be as a direct result of the numerous activities carried out by the Federation to improve their links with Centres. For example: running webinar/training sessions, regular communication with regards to reducing rejections and launching a quarterly newsletter. All of these contribute to increasing the presence of the Federation as well as raising Centre's awareness and understanding of the Federation's centralised role. As well as the increase in the number of respondents initially contacting the Federation, the satisfaction levels of Centres with the responses and support that they received from the Federation was 99% either Very Satisfied/Satisfied, of which 73% were Very Satisfied.

### Communication

The Federation's Support Team have two main methods of contact, either 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 86% of respondents found the communication and support to be either Excellent or Good which is an increase of over 11% from last year. In addition support requests made to the Support Team have increased from 2015 with an average of 1,700 tickets being dealt with through the

Helpdesk and 1,300 calls received during each month in 2016/17 (April – March).



As well as the direct contact from Centres themselves, the Federation regularly communicate with Centres using a variety of other methods, namely the internal ACE notification functionality, ACE website news page and the quarterly Federation Oracle Newsletter. The ACE notification functionality is the main mode of communication used as this ensures that every registered ACE user receives the information at the same time. The Federation Oracle newsletter provides key updates on topics such as information relating to certification rejection rates and trends, Apprenticeship Policy changes and any other Apprenticeship related topics and issues. The newsletter is now into its second year of publication and whilst there were just over 100 respondents who were unaware of the newsletter and a further 150 who have not read the newsletter, although aware of its existence, 67% of respondents found the content of the newsletter to be both useful and informative.

When asked how respondents rated the level and methods of communication received from the Federation, 98% felt that it was Excellent/Good, which is an increase of 12% on 2016 and 80% stated that communication from the Federation has improved in the last 12 months.

## **Guidance Materials**

In 2015, there were major changes made to two of the key 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. Working closely with many Centres it had become apparent that in many organisations the Apprentice Consent Form is completed out in the field by Assessors and not by staff who work directly with ACE. This often meant that there were issues in the completion of the form which led to it being rejected. This led to the development of a clearly annotated, correctly completed Apprentice Consent Form which is available on the ACE website for easy reference. 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.

Whilst the Annotated Apprentice Consent Form has been well received, with 83% finding the resource useful and informative, with some very positive comments in the free text field saying things like: 'The Guide to the Apprentice Consent form was brilliant as a guide to make sure that the dates were correct', the videos have had less success. 34% of the respondents have watched some, or all of the videos and found them to be useful, nearly 40% are aware of the videos but have not watched them and a further 25% were not aware of the videos. The videos were designed to be used by all users of ACE and not just new starters but for a quarter of respondents to not be aware of the videos means that we need to increase awareness of them and this is one issue that will be picked up as an action point from the survey and addressed accordingly.

Although there has been less significant changes compared with previous years, the Acceptable Evidence and Transferable Skills continue to be a valued resource for many ACE Users. Over 90% of respondents find these support materials useful and informative. There were a few suggestions on how these resources could be improved further and these will be reviewed as part of our post survey action plan.

Overall 90% 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. In addition, this has also 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 improvements could be made and these will be picked up in the action list resulting from both 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, Training Centres work closely with Certification Bodies, often communicating directly with them for guidance and support. Therefore as part of the 2017 Training Centre survey, Centre respondents were also asked a number of questions specifically regarding the customer service and support that they received from their Certification Bodies.

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. 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. This is a great result and shows that CBs are giving high levels of support and guidance to Training Centres.

Since the introduction of ACE in 2012 a key area of work for the Certification Bodies is to improve the clarity and consistency of reasons given for rejections. 81% of respondents to this year's survey believe that Certification Bodies do this which unfortunately is a slight decline in this compared with the 2016 survey which was 96%. It is

important for both Certification Bodies and the Federation to not become complacent after all the hard work to improve clarity and consistency but to continue the high standard achieved in 2016. The Federation will work with Certification Bodies to ensure that clarity and consistency of reasons for rejections improves.

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 Training Centre Survey Outcomes and Federation Action Plan**

Whilst the survey was still open, Federation staff were reviewing the free-text comment boxes to pick up any feedback left that they 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, as well as individual summary reports that will be produced by the Federation's Quality Team. 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 survey feedback, both in terms of percentage ratings and the free-text comments, the Federation have identified a number of key areas of highlighted good performance and also some areas where there is scope for improvement.

### **Areas of good performance**

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

- Overall customer satisfaction was 99% - which is an increase of 1% from 2016.
- Feedback from those who have used our guidance materials find them to be beneficial with 98% of respondents finding the guidance, including the Acceptable Evidence and Transferable Skills resources, very useful/useful.
- 87% of Centre respondents who communicate with the Federation, via either email or Helpdesk, believe the communication to be Excellent/Good, which is an increase of 7% from the 2016 survey. Although 8.5% responded that they did not use either method of communication which is actually a 3% increase from last year. However, this decline in direct communication could mean that the Federation's range of online guidance and support materials are working well and, as a result, the need for direct communication has decreased.

### **Areas for improvement and Action**

On the whole, Centres acknowledge customer service improvements throughout the last year and are overall pleased with the Federation's guidance materials and support. However, there are a number of areas where it has been brought to our attention that the Federation could improve its performance. For example:-

- Centres have again noted that, on occasion, when asking for advice and support from the Federation the response received only signposts them to relevant online guidance materials and didn't sufficiently answer the question they had raised. As this is an area that has been highlighted previously it is clearly something that we need to address further. Although, it is good to note that the number of respondents raising this as an issue this year was less than in previous years.
- Several Centres noted concerns relating to rejections made by Certification Bodies. Whilst there are occasions when records are rejected in error, their concerns generally related to either a lack of sufficient information or clarity as to why a record had been rejected or that not all rejection reasons were captured in the initial rejection. This leads to unnecessary multiple rejections being made which delays the Apprenticeship Certificate being issued. This feedback will be discussed with all CBs at the next federation Forum meeting to ensure that, in future, instances of this type of issue are minimised.
- Although noted as being helpful, feedback this year suggests that the format of the Transferable Skills documents could be improved. With further SASE changes planned for later in 2017, the Federation will update these documents in line with the new SASE requirements and will action the feedback received relating to current formatting and see what improvements can be made.