



Department  
for Business  
Innovation & Skills

BIS RESEARCH PAPER NUMBER 218

Evaluation of the effectiveness of the  
**matrix Standard**

FEBRUARY 2015

A report by CFE Research for the Department  
for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS)



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Research paper number 218

February 2015

# Acknowledgements

This research was commissioned by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and was undertaken by CFE Research in partnership with Qa Research and our associates Dr Deirdre Hughes OBE and Liz Reece.

The authors are grateful to Jenny Wallis and Lorna Robinson at BIS for their ongoing support with the research as well as to emqc Ltd, the stakeholder representatives, **matrix** assessors, external evaluator and organisations currently or previously **matrix** accredited who were kind enough to give up their time to participate in the telephone survey and in-depth interviews with the evaluation team.

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# Executive Summary

The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) commissioned CFE Research to undertake an evaluation of the matrix Standard between July and September 2014. The matrix Standard promotes high quality information, advice and/or guidance (IAG) on learning and work. Any organisation that manages, administers, and/or delivers IAG can seek accreditation. The quality standard is Crown Copyright and is the property of the Secretary of State for the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. A third-party organisation, currently emqc Ltd, is contracted by BIS to deliver the Standard. An external verifier (contracted by BIS) quality-assures the delivery of the matrix Standard by the third-party organisation. The matrix Standard was last updated in August 2013. As of August 2014, 2,207 organisations held the matrix Standard in the UK and overseas.

The four key aims of the evaluation are:

- To assess the extent to which current contracting, administration, assessment and external verification arrangements for **matrix** are effective in terms of delivering a high quality and cost effective service for BIS
- To assess the current fitness-for-purpose of the **matrix** Standard and the specific value added through accreditation and the continuous improvement checks in particular for IAG providers and their customers
- To identify areas in which the **matrix** Standard could be further improved to inform the future development of the Standard and ensure it remains fit for purpose
- To generate intelligence to inform future decisions about the requirement for providers to achieve **matrix** accreditation.

## Method

The research was undertaken between July and September 2014. The evaluation team held six semi-structured interviews with senior policy representatives from Government agencies in England and Northern Ireland. We undertook a fieldwork visit to emqc Ltd., which included face-to-face interviews with four staff. A face to face interview was also held with the external verifier. A total of 349 organisations that currently hold the **matrix** Standard completed a structured survey via Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI). In addition, 52 organisations that had formerly held the **matrix** Standard but where this had lapsed in the past three years completed the CATI survey. Follow-up telephone interviews were then carried out with 15 of the CATI survey respondents. 15 telephone interviews were also held with practitioners who work as **matrix** assessors and/or advisers. Desk research highlighted fifteen other quality standards which informed the context in which the **matrix** Standard is operating.

## Key Findings

- Across stakeholders, practitioners and accredited organisations, there is broad agreement that the **matrix** Standard is a good product; it is effective in achieving its aims and is a worthwhile investment.
- The Standard criteria are clear and easy to understand. Recent reviews and changes to the content of the Standard have improved it, creating a more streamlined but rigorous product.
- Although a major motivation for many organisations seeking accreditation is to secure funding or contracts, the Standard is also sought as a way to assess and improve the quality of IAG services.
- The **matrix** Standard is used by a variety of organisations and has the necessary flexibility to be adaptable to diverse information, advice and guidance sectors.
- Although there is a range of other provision for quality assurance that is relevant to providers of information, advice and guidance (IAG), the **matrix** Standard has qualities that make it distinct from this provision and particularly appropriate to IAG relating to careers, learning and work. Mapping **matrix** criteria to other standards and offering joint assessments benefits organisations seeking to achieve **matrix** and opportunities to do this should continue to be pursued.
- Organisations are generally satisfied with the **matrix** assessment experience. The professionalism and expertise of the assessors is a particular strength. Online resources could be further enhanced and improved.
- There is widespread agreement that the introduction of Continuous Improvement Checks has been a positive development; the checks ensure the ongoing quality and development of service design and delivery.
- The use of self-employed assessors is an effective way of delivering the Standard. There is evidence that management of assessments and assessors has improved over recent months, although there is scope to improve transparency in how work is allocated.
- The external verifier role provides a valuable independent view on the quality of delivery of the Standard and now appears to be working well. Communication of the role and remit of the external verifier to assessors would help to further develop positive working relationships.
- Organisations that hold the standard are generally positive about the benefits of the Standard, particularly in terms of improving service quality and reputation. Benefits of achieving the Standard include improved services, greater customer focus, greater focus on outcomes and improvements to staff competency.

- There is some evidence that cost may be barrier to accreditation for some organisations. Future contractors managing the Standard should be asked to consider strategies for enhancing value for money and supporting more small-to-medium-sized organisations and sole traders to access the Standard. Reviewing the size and scope of the assessment reports is one possible way of enhancing value for money.
- There are clear opportunities to promote and extend the reach of the **matrix** Standard, which would contribute to the overall sustainability of delivery as well as drive up and ensure quality in key sectors such as schools. The government is well placed to further promote quality assurance generally and the **matrix** Standard in particular. Any future contract for delivering the Standard should require an ongoing strategy for marketing and promoting the Standard and this should be monitored. Assessors are clearly passionate about the Standard and this could be harnessed to help promotion.

# 1 Introduction

The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) commissioned CFE Research to undertake an evaluation of the **matrix** Standard, the unique quality framework for the effective delivery of information, advice and/or guidance (IAG) on learning and work. A wide range of organisations that manage, administer, and/or deliver IAG can seek **matrix** accreditation. This report provides key findings and recommendations for the future development of the **matrix** Standard, based on primary and secondary research undertaken with stakeholders, including the organisation currently responsible for delivering the **matrix** Standard (emqc Ltd), **matrix** assessors, the external verifier, and current and former holders of the Standard. This chapter sets out the context for the evaluation, the aims and objectives and the methodology.

## 1.1 Background

The Government's Industrial Strategy<sup>1</sup> highlights the importance of stimulating business and entrepreneurial growth. A high quality education and training system is essential in opening up routes for all individuals to succeed in the labour market. Employers need to be able to attract the right talent for their businesses to maintain their competitive edge.

In response to recommendations made by Ofsted<sup>2</sup> and the National Careers Council<sup>3</sup> the Government published its *Inspiration Vision Statement*.<sup>4</sup> This recognises that more needs to be done to inspire young people in addition to supporting them in their decision-making, and it describes how employers, schools and colleges will work together to achieve this. In this context, the Government has an important role to play in setting out a strong framework for IAG. The National Careers Service with its local partners "should also play an important role in linking employers, schools, colleges, social enterprises and others, and in enabling young people to do independent research to inform their own decisions".<sup>5</sup>

The National Careers Service was launched in April 2012 to provide impartial IAG on learning and work through three delivery channels: face-to-face, telephone and online. The delivery of the National Careers Service was re-tendered during 2014. From October 2014, the Service will comprise area-based services delivered by a network of prime- and sub-contractors, a national contact centre and a national public-facing website. While there is a strategic framework within which the National Careers Service will operate, how the strategic delivery requirements will be met is a matter for each prime contractor.<sup>6</sup> Prime contractors have been encouraged by the Skills Funding Agency to be creative and innovative in their approaches. Under the new arrangements, prime contractors will be responsible for delivering telephone and face-to-face services for adults, providing significant opportunities to deliver integrated services on a 'digital by default' basis. From 2015, Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) will have an enhanced role in planning local National Careers Service delivery. Finally, a new system of payment-by-results will be introduced, placing a greater emphasis on the outcomes rather than outputs of IAG interventions. The changes give rise to new challenges as well as opportunities for prime contractors, and have implications for the way services are targeted, delivered and quality-assured.

## **1.2      The matrix Standard**

The matrix Standard was launched in 2002. It was originally developed to quality-assure the delivery of IAG. The matrix Standard is Crown Copyright and the property of the Secretary of State for the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS). The Department contracts with a third party organisation to deliver the Standard, currently emqc Ltd. They are responsible for managing and administering the assessment and accreditation process as well as for maintaining a register of self-employed matrix assessors and advisers. The contract emqc Ltd currently holds to deliver the matrix Standard is ‘no-cost’ to BIS in that it is required to be self-financing. An external verifier (contracted by BIS) quality-assures the delivery of the matrix Standard by the third-party organisation.

The Skills Funding Agency contracts with a range of organisations to deliver the National Careers Service. These contractors are required to achieve the **matrix** Standard, as are further education and Work-Based Learning (WBL) providers with Skills Funding Agency contracts.<sup>7</sup> Those services funded wholly or partially by the Department for Education (DfE) are not required to have the **matrix** Standard. However, many providers have achieved other quality kite marks for their information, advice and guidance (IAG) provision. In fulfilling their statutory duty to secure access to independent career guidance for students in years 8 to 13, schools can, but are not required to, engage a National Careers Service provider that holds the **matrix** Standard. Current guidance states that “schools need to assure themselves of the quality of the support pupils receive”<sup>8</sup> and although they are encouraged to use quality standards, such as **matrix**, as a guide, they are under no obligation to take this into account.

As of August 2014 2,207 organisations hold the **matrix** Standard. These include a wide range of organisations such as career services, colleges, work-based learning providers, universities, trades unions, prison services, charities and other community/voluntary agencies. The **matrix** Standard operates alongside a range of other national, government-owned standards and local and regional standards, as discussed in the next chapter.

## **1.3      Aims and Objectives of the Evaluation**

The **matrix** Standard currently operates within a rapidly changing education and employment landscape. At present, there is an increased appetite from employers and sector bodies to engage with careers information, advice and guidance provision; a number of educational institutions are now purchasing independent and impartial careers guidance; new players now operate in the careers marketplace across England; and Government has introduced a new set of Statutory Guidance and Guidelines for careers provision in schools and colleges. In this context, the drive for quality-assured provision acts a policy lever in a rapidly expanding and unregulated careers IAG marketplace. The **matrix** Standard has to be ‘fit for purpose’ now and in the future.

The four key aims of the commissioned evaluation are:

- to assess the extent to which current contracting, administration, assessment and external verification arrangements for matrix are effective in terms of delivering a high quality and cost effective service for BIS

- to assess the current fitness for purpose of the matrix Standard and the specific value added through accreditation and the continuous improvement checks in particular for IAG providers and their customers
- to identify areas in which the matrix Standard could be further improved to inform the future development of the Standard and ensure it remains fit for purpose in the new operating environment
- to generate intelligence to inform future decisions about the requirement for providers to achieve matrix accreditation.

**Key research questions** for the evaluation include:

- Does the **matrix** Standard meet customer needs?
- Have initial improvements to the **matrix** Standard (including the introduction of Annual Continuous Improvement Checks) added value?
- Does the current approach to contracting with a third party delivery organisation deliver:
  - an effective assessment process?
  - value for money?
  - a quality service?
- How effective is the use of self-employed assessors?
- How effective is the external verifier role?

## 1.4        Method

A mixed-method approach was adopted to address key research questions and to inform recommendations for the further development of the **matrix** Standard. The research was conducted between July and September 2014. Secondary research was initially undertaken consisting of a desk review that encompassed IAG quality standards as well as other more generic standards. Some organisations working towards the **matrix** Standard may also be working towards and/or have achieved a complementary Standard. Full details of the reviewed standards are provided in Appendix 1.

Primary research was undertaken with the following groups of people:

**Stakeholder representatives:** We undertook semi-structured telephone interviews with representatives from BIS, Skills Funding Agency, Department for Employment and Learning Northern Ireland (DELNI), Careers England, National Careers Council and Career Development Institute (CDI) to gain insights from policymakers as key ‘customers’ of the **matrix** Standard and broader sector stakeholders with an interest in the quality assurance of IAG provision.

**The organisation responsible for delivering the matrix Standard:** We undertook a one-day fieldwork visit to the premises of emqc Ltd. to interview key personnel. The purpose was to gain an in-depth understanding of how the matrix Standard is currently delivered, exploring the assessment, administration and contracting processes. We also examined plans for on-going development work.

**External verifier:** We met with the external verifier to ascertain how the verification process works and perceptions regarding the effectiveness of current matrix Standard arrangements.

**Assessors:** We interviewed 15 independent practitioners who work as matrix assessors and /or advisers to explore their perspectives on the matrix assessment process, the impact of matrix accreditation and barriers and enablers to accreditation within the current matrix Standard. The interviews also explored their views on the appropriateness of the Standard, satisfaction with assessor/adviser recruitment, ongoing support and development, the assignment of work and the extent to which arrangements allow assessors/advisors to operate effectively and efficiently.

**Organisations that currently or formerly held the matrix Standard:** We surveyed a total of 349 organisations that currently hold the matrix Standard via Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI). This represents 16 per cent of the total number of matrix-certified organisations as at August 2014. In addition, 52 organisations that had formerly held the matrix Standard, but where this had lapsed in the past three years, also completed a CATI survey. The surveys explored the organisation and workforce profile, motivation for seeking the matrix Standard, assessment experience, benefits of achieving the Standard, reasons for not continuing with the Standard (where appropriate), and overall satisfaction.

The majority of organisations that responded to the survey and which are currently delivering IAG have been doing so for more than 10 years (63.1 per cent), and around one fifth have been doing so for between 6 and 10 years (21.9 per cent). Nearly all respondents (97.7 per cent) deliver IAG services in England. Approximately 10 per cent deliver IAG services in other parts of the UK and only 3.9 per cent deliver outside the UK. Further detail of the respondent profile is provided in Appendix 2.

**Follow-up interviews with organisations that currently hold or formerly held the Standard:** We carried out 15 follow-up interviews with respondents from a cross section of organisations to supplement the predominantly quantitative data captured by the CATI survey. The follow-up interviews were conducted by telephone and added depth to the survey findings by focusing on the organisational journey through the process of achieving the Standard including preparation, assessment, feedback and continuous improvement. In addition, interviews sought to understand the motivations and benefits of achieving the Standard and reasons why some organisations decide not to continue with the Standard.

## 1.5      This Report

Following this introduction, the report is set out in five chapters. The next chapter, **The matrix Standard**, sets out in more detail what the Standard is, including its role and purpose, considers why organisations seek the Standard, and explores the extent to which **matrix** meets the needs of its broad customer base in the context of a diverse quality

assurance landscape. **The Assessment Process**, explores perceptions and experiences of the process of achieving the Standard from registration and preparation through assessment to feedback and continuous quality improvement checks. **Assessors**, examines the recruitment, initial training and ongoing development of **matrix** assessors and advisers, as well as the processes involved in quality assuring their work and verifying the delivery of the Standard by the third party contractor. **Effectiveness and Impact**, considers the effectiveness of the **matrix** Standard and the extent and nature of its impact for stakeholders and IAG service providers. The concluding chapter, **The Future of the matrix Standard**, considers lessons learned to inform the future contracting of the **matrix** Standard and draws together key recommendations.

# 2 The matrix Standard

This chapter sets out in more detail what the **matrix** Standard is, including its role and purpose. It considers why organisations seek to achieve the standard, and explores the extent to which the **matrix** Standard meets the needs of its broad customer base in the context of a rapidly changing and diverse quality assurance landscape.

## 2.1 Purpose

The **matrix** Standard is a quality standard for organisations seeking to assess and measure their information, advice and/or guidance services in a learning and/or work setting. It provides a benchmark of the quality of IAG services and acts as a performance improvement tool that promotes effective practice and continuous quality improvement. It quality-assures organisations delivering Government-funded contracts, including the National Careers Service. From the evaluation findings, its purpose is well understood by accredited organisations, assessors and advisors.

*The matrix is a path, so to speak. If you follow the path then the service improves. If the service improves [...] the customer gets better advice and guidance, and quality, and then that has a direct impact on the college because students are getting on the right course, based upon their goals and ambitions.*

Accredited organisation

## 2.2 Criteria

The **matrix** Standard currently comprises four key elements:

- Leadership and management;
- Resources;
- Service delivery; and
- Continuous quality improvement.

Each of these elements contains up to eight criteria against which organisations are assessed. The current **matrix** Standard builds on earlier versions developed as a result of formal reviews in 2005 and 2012. The changes implemented in 2012 reduced the number of elements of the Standard from eight to the current four outlined above. It also increased alignment with other quality standards and inspection frameworks, and led to a move towards greater self-assessment. Although the elements in the latest version of **matrix** Standard have been simplified, it is designed to be more rigorous and challenging to achieve than its predecessor. Information on the **matrix** website<sup>9</sup> indicates that a quarter of organisations assessed against the revised standard did not initially meet the Standard and needed to carry out further work before being ready for re-assessment. Annual Continuous Improvement Checks were introduced in August 2013 to further strengthen the commitment of accredited organisations.

The four elements of the Standard, along with a detailed explanation of the associated criteria and examples of what each might mean in practice, are provided online and in hard copy booklet form. The delivery organisation, emqc Ltd, has worked to improve the explanations of what the criteria might mean in practice, ensuring they are written in plain English and can be understood and applied across the wide variety of organisations that might consider working towards the **matrix** Standard.

The changes described above are perceived to have improved the Standard; four-fifths (81 per cent) of those surveyed agree that the **matrix** Standard criteria are clear and easy to understand. Organisations that were **matrix** accredited prior to the revisions of the standard in 2011, highlighted that the **matrix** Standard is clearer now and easier to understand. Assessors too were clear that changes to the content of the **matrix** Standard over time have improved the content and process, making this a more streamline product.

*As you look through the different elements and the different criteria that are contained within those elements, you can clearly see that they're all relevant to the service we provide. I don't think there's any criteria you look at and think, 'Actually, it's nothing to do with us.'*

**Accredited organisation**

*I think it's a lot more rigorous in terms of the specifics it wants. A good example I often use as an advisor is that under the previous version you had to have, for example, an equal opportunities policy. Under the new version, you have to be able to show how you've promoted equality and diversity.*

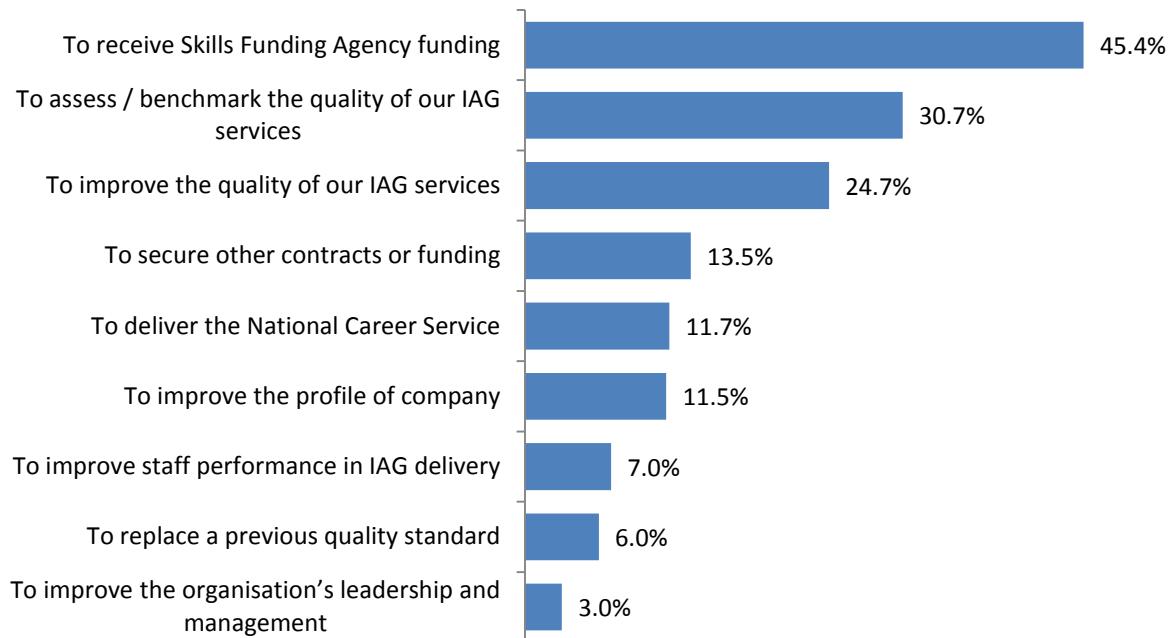
**Matrix assessor**

## **2.3 Motivation for Seeking the matrix Standard**

Achievement of the **matrix** Standard is a contractual requirement for providers of the National Careers Service and other Skills Funding Agency funded organisations. Although the opportunity to secure funding or contracts is the main reason why many organisations seek accreditation, a substantial minority of organisations are motivated to seek **matrix** accreditation by a desire to improve the quality of their overall service provision.

Figure 1 (below) shows that seven out of ten providers (70.6 per cent) report that the primary motivation for seeking **matrix** accreditation is to secure Skills Funding Agency, National Careers Service or other funding/contracts.

To provide some context for this, 67 per cent of survey respondents report that they currently receive funding from the Skills Funding Agency. 17 per cent of respondents said they currently hold a contract to deliver the National Careers Service, either directly or as a sub-contractor, and therefore must hold the **matrix** Standard. In this context **matrix** is regarded as a business development necessity.



**Figure 1: Organisations' main reasons for seeking matrix accreditation (base = 401).**

Further analysis suggests that for some organisations, being mandated to achieve the **matrix** Standard is not the only reason for seeking accreditation. Organisations, whose primary motivation for accreditation is contractual, recognise and value the wider benefits of the matrix Standard. A minority of interviewees, particularly from organisations that no longer hold the **matrix** Standard, say they felt 'pushed' into getting the **matrix** Standard and that there was little added-value for them beyond the opportunity to deliver Skills Funding Agency contracts.

The **matrix** is highly regarded by many as a valuable tool that can aid performance and organisational development. The ability to benchmark services against current best practice and have processes critically reviewed is regarded as a valuable investment of organisations' time. Younger organisations in particular highlight that working towards **matrix** helps to develop and implement appropriate systems and processes, and that it enables them to compete on an equal basis with established competitors who have already achieved the **matrix** Standard. Other respondents raised similar motivations for accreditation, looking to the Standard as product they sought to help manage business growth.

While recognising and accepting that some organisations work towards the **matrix** Standard solely because it is a requirement for contracting or funding, assessors and advisors consider that organisations that fully engage with the process are likely to get more out of this than those who do not. As a result, they seek to ensure that through the accreditation process providers understand the wider benefits of the **matrix** Standard for their organisation and their customers.

*I think some organisations [go for accreditation] because they are really, really proud of the fact that they're doing a good job [...] and they want to have a really rigorous audit of their IAG process. [...] Others of course do it because they've got to [...]. They're the ones that I find you can often bring round to realise that there's a benefit*

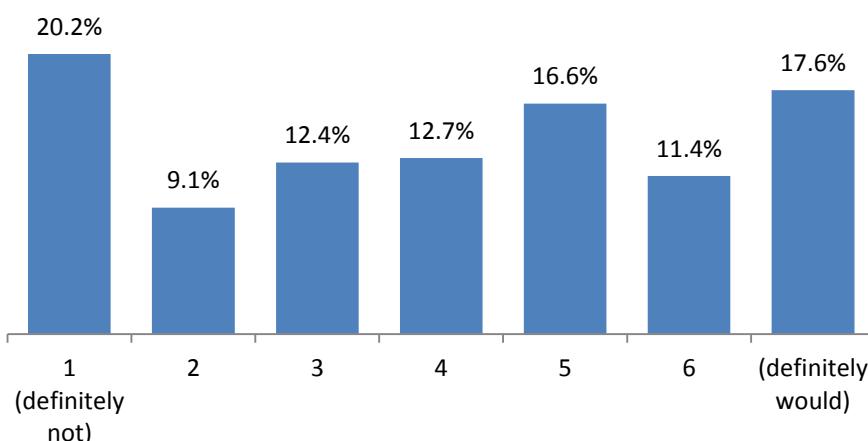
*of matrix, when they actually see the quality of the feedback and the suggestions that you're able to make.*

**matrix assessor**

Movement of staff across the IAG sector can fulfil an important role in terms promoting the wider value and benefits of the **matrix** Standard to organisations. We found examples of individuals who had moved from an accredited to a non-accredited organisation who had then encouraged their new employer to work towards the Standard. Individuals as well as organisations can, therefore, act as ambassadors for **matrix**, particularly within those sectors that are relatively new to developing quality assurance processes.

A useful indicator of the extent to which organisations value **matrix** above and beyond contractual requirements is whether they would seek **matrix** accreditation even if it were not a requirement. Figure 2 (below) shows that, overall, a slightly higher proportion of organisations that are currently required to be **matrix**-accredited state that they *would* be likely to seek accreditation, even if it was not mandatory (46 per cent), compared with the proportion who report they *would not be likely to seek accreditation* (42 per cent).

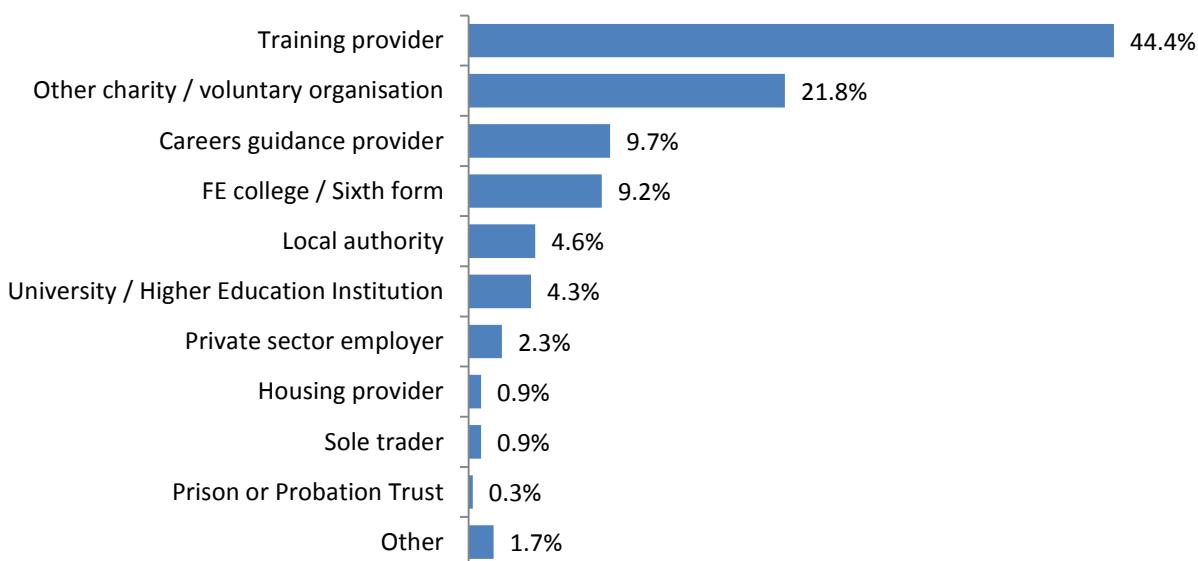
For those organisations that say they would be less likely to seek accreditation, this may be related more to perceptions of value for money, rather than the intrinsic quality of the Standard. By far the most frequently-cited reason why organisations who no longer hold the Standard let their accreditation lapse is because it is too expensive or unaffordable (44 per cent of surveyed organisations who formerly held the **matrix** Standard gave this answer). This and other evidence gathered suggests that perceptions of value for money and affordability are of greater concern than the belief that the Standard is not useful. We explore the issue of value for money further in the chapter on Effectiveness and Impact of **matrix**.



**Figure 2: Likelihood of matrix accreditation if it were not a requirement, for example, for National Careers Service or Skills Funding Agency (base = 307).**

## 2.4 Meeting the Needs of Diverse Organisations

The **matrix** Standard is designed for any organisation that provides information, advice and / or guidance (IAG) on learning or work. It is potentially of relevance to a wide variety of organisations and sectors. Analysis of data provided by the delivery organisation in August 2014 shows that 2,207 organisations currently hold the **matrix** Standard. Although comprehensive management information on the different types of organisation was not available from emqc Ltd at the time of writing, our survey of 349 accredited organisations gives some indication of the range. Figure 3 (below) suggests that a significant proportion of organisations with **matrix** are providers of education and training. This is perhaps not surprising, as many of these are in receipt of Skills Funding Agency funding and are mandated to have the **matrix** Standard. However, other organisations in the public, private and third sector also hold the Standard, many of which will not be mandated.



**Figure 3: Types of organisation with the matrix Standard (base = 349).**

With such a diversity of organisations seeking the **matrix** Standard, we might expect that the standard is a better fit for some organisations than others. However, one of the key strengths of the **matrix** Standard is its flexibility. Although it was designed with IAG providers in mind, evidence suggests that it is seen as applicable to organisations in other sectors seeking to deliver high quality services.

Defining the purpose of a service is the first step in gaining the **matrix** Standard (criterion 1.1 – “The service has clearly defined measurable aims and objectives which link to any wider organisational strategic aims”). If an organisation is able to define their service clearly, the **matrix** assessment can be adapted to fit. It is perhaps, therefore, not surprising that over four-fifths of survey respondents (82.2 per cent) either agree or strongly agree that the **matrix** assessment criteria are appropriate for their organisation compared with only 5 per cent who disagree or strongly disagree with this statement.

There is some concern from a minority of organisations interviewed that the **matrix** Standard, in particular the language of the criteria, is geared towards larger organisations rather than smaller training providers and/or sole traders. For example, criterion 2.4 specifies “Staff are supported in undertaking continuous professional development and provided with opportunities for career progression”. Some felt this may be off-putting for organisations such as sole traders who may not employ staff.

*It seems the matrix standard, at the moment, still assumes you work in a large organisation, and you've got lots of people that work in that organisation delivering career guidance and information, and there's a structure to your organisation.*

**Accredited organisation**

Ensuring the **matrix** Standard is accurately interpreted and appropriately adapted to fit a specific organisational context is a key responsibility of the **matrix** assessors. On the whole, assessors are fulfilling this aspect of their role effectively, although our follow-up interviews with organisations highlighted occasional concerns that the **matrix** Standard did not fit their organisation well. Further exploration reveals that, in most cases, this perception was the result of a relatively narrow interpretation of the Standard and that further input from an assessor could have helped the organisations to understand and apply the criteria appropriately. This underlines the importance of allocating well-trained assessors with a good understanding of the type of organisation being assessed and the sector in which they operate. This will ensure that assessors are able to provide appropriate advice and support. If the target market for **matrix** continues to expand, the background, prior experience and training of the assessors recruited will be an important consideration. We return to the recruitment, training and continuous professional development of assessors in the chapter entitled Assessors.

## **2.5      The Wider Quality Assurance Landscape**

The **matrix** Standard is situated within a diverse quality assurance and IAG landscape. The 2009 review of quality assurance for careers guidance provision<sup>10</sup> identified 15 quality standards in addition to **matrix** that were of relevance to IAG providers; a similar number exist today. A total of 16 quality standards have been reviewed as part of this research in order to provide insight into other approaches, including the extent and nature of the competing or complementary quality standards available. The evidence suggests that the majority of organisations with **matrix** also hold at least one other quality standards. Just over two-thirds of the organisations surveyed (68.6 per cent) report holding at least one other quality standard in addition to **matrix**, most commonly Investors in People (37.4 per cent), ISO9000/14000 (11.2 per cent) and Positive About Disabled People (5.7 per cent).

The requirements of mandatory quality standards like **matrix** are potentially burdensome, particularly for smaller providers. The purpose of our analysis is, therefore, to identify areas of potential synergy between **matrix** and these other standards. A spreadsheet providing an overview of the Standards accompanies this report. Further details of our review can be found in Appendix 1.

Analysis of the evidence gathered highlights the **matrix** Standard is perceived by stakeholders, assessors and organisations to have qualities that make it distinct from this other provision and particularly appropriate to IAG relating to careers, learning and work. Indeed, organisations with **matrix** report that they selected it as the standard that most

closely fitted their needs. When organisations that are not mandated to hold **matrix** were asked why they had chosen **matrix** the most frequent response was 'because of its good reputation' (29.8 per cent) and 'was nationally recognised' (23.9 per cent).

However, there does appear to be scope for greater synergy, particularly with other Government-owned standards such as Investors in People (IiP), which would reduce the burden on organisations seeking accreditation against both standards. One organisation highlighted how the current **matrix** criteria map across to Ofsted, and the benefits of this.

*It almost mirrors the Common Inspection Framework. You've got leadership and management, your delivery, quality, continuous improvement. [...] I find that quite helpful when it comes to writing up your quality improvement plans for Ofsted, in preparation for Ofsted, because it just helps us. I can cross-reference more easily than before.*

#### **Accredited organisation**

Mapping and mirroring elements of other standards may be beneficial. emqc Ltd currently offer joint **matrix** and IiP assessments.<sup>11</sup> This entails a single visit, joint planning and a single report, resulting in direct and indirect savings in terms of cost, time and resources. Steps should be taken to ensure the joint assessment option is more widely promoted to organisations. In particular the information about the option on the **matrix** website should have a 2014 date to indicate more clearly this is a 'live' option. The IiP website could also point to the Government-owned **matrix** standard to encourage greater take up and increase the potential benefit of joint assessment.

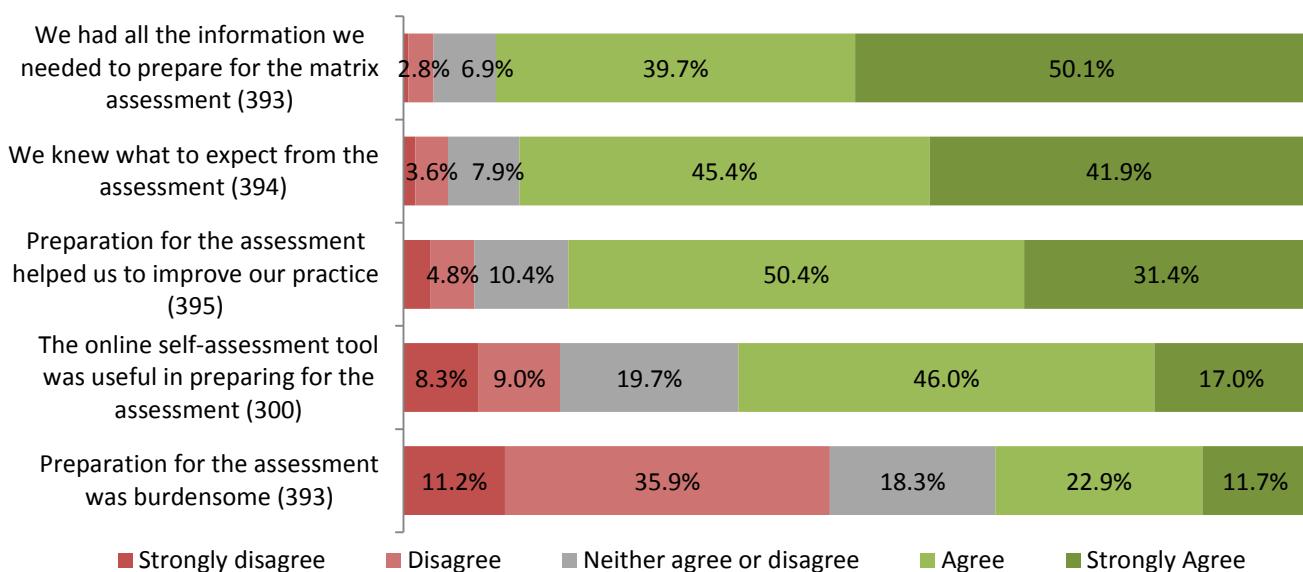
# 3 The Assessment Process

This chapter describes how **matrix** is delivered and explores perceptions and experiences of the assessment process from registration and preparation through assessment to feedback and continuous quality improvement checks. This chapter concludes by examining satisfaction with the key elements of the assessment process.

## 3.1 Registering with matrix and Preparing for Assessment

The **matrix** Standard follows an eight-step process from commitment, through assessment to review, on a three-year cycle.<sup>12</sup> After making a commitment to the accreditation process, organisations seeking accreditation for the first time are required to complete a Standard application form. Organisations that already hold the Standard are contacted by emqc Ltd approximately six months before their accreditation lapses. This provides sufficient time for organisations to prepare for re-assessment, or to notify emqc Ltd of their decision not to continue with **matrix**.

There are a range of online resources on the **matrix** website,<sup>13</sup> for organisations that already hold the Standard and organisations new to **matrix**, to help them prepare for assessment. These include the Self-Assessment Tool which allows organisations to benchmark current performance against the Standard's criteria. Our survey reveals that three-quarters (74.8 per cent) of organisations who have held **matrix** now or in the past have experience of the Self-Assessment Tool. Just under two-thirds (63 per cent) agree or strongly agree that it is a useful resource when preparing for assessment (see figure 4).



**Figure 4: Views on the matrix Standard assessment process amongst accredited and formerly accredited organisations (bases vary).**

The follow-up interviews indicate that the key strengths of the tool are that it provides an overview of what is required from organisations and an early indication of how near or far an organisation is from achieving the required level. It is also perceived to be user-friendly.

*It was quite straightforward and quick and easy to use. It didn't involve us in any lengthy and drawn out process. It linked quite well to the other guidance documents that are available on the website.*

#### **Accredited organisation**

A minority of organisations (17.3 per cent) do not regard the Self-Assessment Tool as useful. A number of interviewees report that the tool takes longer than expected to work through. One person describes the tool as “quite laborious” to use; another regards it as “too ambiguous” and as not providing “enough detail”. The views from organisations suggest that the tool could be improved to support those new to the standard by the addition of specific examples.

In addition to the Self Assessment Tool, there is an Accredited Organisations Search Tool that lists organisations that have attained the **matrix** Standard, and an Assessors and Advisers Search Tool which contains information about **matrix** Assessors. There is also a Cost Calculator providing an estimate of the cost for assessment for different types of organisation based on the overall size and complexity of the organisation and the number of people involved in the planning, management and/or delivery of services.

To accompany these online resources, the **matrix** Standard Guidance brochure covers each element of the Standard in detail. Organisations can register to attend a ‘Getting Started’ workshop, arranged by emqc Ltd to provide further information on the Standard and how to interpret it. Two of the accredited organisations we interviewed had attended workshops provided by National Careers Service prime contractors for their sub-contractors, to support them gain the **matrix** Standard.

Once an organisation has completed the application process, a financial risk check is carried out by emqc Ltd. If the organisation is determined to be low-risk then an assessor is assigned immediately; those that are regarded as high risk are required to pay before an assessor is assigned. While there are slight variations in the way assessors then engage with organisations, prior to their assessment visit most will look to speak to the relevant contact to understand more about the organisation, the scale of their IAG activity and the complexity of their operations. At this stage, the assessor will also establish the extent of the organisation’s knowledge of the **matrix** assessment process and the scope of the activity required, including the sample of individuals the assessor will need to speak to during the assessment.

Assessors regard it as good practice to gather contextual information about the organisation including, for example, organisational charts and relevant systems and processes for IAG delivery and wider business operations. This helps assessors to establish in advance where organisations are at in relation to the Standard and to make an initial judgement as to the organisation’s level of readiness for assessment. If assessors feel that an organisation is not quite ready, organisations will be signposted to additional support to help prepare them for assessment, such as the online resources, a ‘Getting Started’ workshop, a mock assessment or consultancy from an adviser. It is important to note that under the terms of their contract, the assigned assessor cannot provide advice.

*I have had occasions, when I've actually said to a client, 'You're not ready. I know from this conversation and the questions you've asked me. I suggest you seek some support' and I've referred them to the website and to an adviser or to an event.*

**matrix assessor**

The initial contact from the assessor is valued by organisations seeking to achieve the Standard and, as a result, the majority (89.8 per cent) report that they had all the information they needed to prepare for assessment and a similar proportion (87.4 per cent) knew what to expect from the process (Figure 4). Interviewees explain that the initial contact with the assessor provides an opportunity to address any queries or concerns they might have while preparing for assessment. It also enables them to begin to gather appropriate evidence and to prepare colleagues for the assessment process.

*As we were talking [to the assessors] I thought 'that's something that's missing, and that's going to be a problem.' You think you've covered things. [...] but it was little things that I may have missed that I thought, 'I must make sure I've got a statement that covers that.'*

**Accredited organisation**

In addition, the majority of organisations consulted sought advice prior to their first assessment from a range of sources, both formal and informal.

*Initially, when we went for the matrix accreditation we did do some work with a consultant who gave us a bit of advice and guidance and steered us in the right direction.*

**Accredited organisation**

*We're members of training provider networks, so we drew on the experiences of other providers. [...] We had a lot of support before we went through the assessment.*

**Formerly accredited organisation**

An assessment plan is sent to the organisation following the initial contact from the assessor. This includes an outline of the assessment process, a timetable for the visit and a list of people the assessor will need to speak to for example, staff, partners/other agencies and clients. Typically this will be accompanied by a copy of the guidance brochure. Assessments are typically carried out six weeks after the organisation has received this plan and signed up to the terms and conditions. As a result of this preparation, the majority of organisations consulted also report that the assessment process itself went very smoothly:

*Yes, it was very clear process. We had a very clear template on what information was required to be available for when the assessor came, so we knew exactly what groups we had to set up. We knew what information we had to have available. I think the assessor was very clear in what he needed, and also I could give him a call, and he could call me just to check if everything was okay.*

**Accredited organisation**

## **3.2 Assessment**

Although the assessment process is perceived positively by organisations on the whole, over a third (34.7 per cent) report that the preparation for assessment is burdensome (Figure 4 above). The follow-up interviews suggest that organisations that are contractually-required to hold **matrix** but do not perceive there to be any wider benefits of accreditation beyond access to funding may be more likely to regard the process as burdensome, particularly if they are small organisations and/or if IAG is not their main business. Those seeking accreditation for the first time may also be unsure of the extent of preparation required.

*I think the build-up to it; you're stepping into the unknown. I was putting aside three hours a week away from the business. In between that you're pulling information together, there's the team meetings etc, so it took up more time than that. At the time, I would say maybe the first week of it, it felt like it was burdensome, but when you got to the second week and the third week, you realised how useful it was.*

**Accredited organisation**

This underlines the importance of the initial intervention from the assessors in terms of setting expectations and of organisations accessing the wider formal and informal support available. It also provides further evidence of the importance of communicating the wider benefits of achieving the Standard to those who are primarily motivated by funding/contractual imperatives.

The assessment is undertaken by an assessor during a visit to the organisation seeking **matrix**. The duration of the assessment visits differs depending upon the size and scale of the organisation's operation. Over the course of the visit, evidence is captured by the assessor through one-to-one or group discussions with senior staff and operational managers. Assessors also seek feedback from clients of the organisation. This element of the process is often the most problematic in terms of securing the co-operation and accessing clients on the day. Organisations are grateful for assessors' flexibility in this regard, sometimes speaking to clients by telephone rather than face-to-face or rescheduling the assessment timetable to accommodate clients' availability.

## **3.3 Decision-Making and Feedback**

Through their training, knowledge of the Standard and wider experience, assessors are tasked with making the judgement as to whether an organisation has met or not met the **matrix** Standard based on the evidence presented to them prior to and during the visit. Assessors maintain an ongoing dialogue with the organisation throughout the assessment so that the eventual outcome, positive or negative, is expected. Prior to the end of the site visit(s) assessors provide verbal feedback on the outcome of the assessment.

*I always say there should be no nasty surprises from closing these things, because your assessor should have made you fully aware of where you're sitting in relation to this. As I say, in all these years, I've never had anyone moan when they've got the bad news.*

**Matrix assessor**

Feedback from organisations suggests that receiving verbal feedback on the outcome of the assessment at the end of the site visit and prior to the written report is welcome:

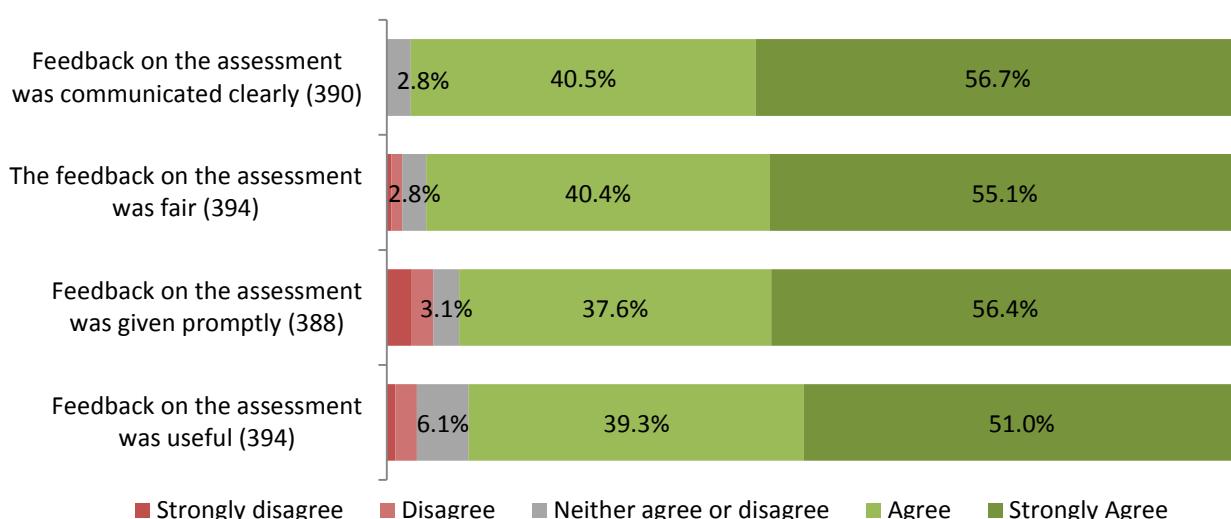
*I didn't want to go home and wait ages. They provided us with a short synopsis of what would go in to the report as they saw it there and then. That was brilliant, I'd keep that.*

#### Accredited organisation

Following the visit, the assessor submits a written report to emqc Ltd which is then forwarded to the organisation. The report confirms the outcome of the assessment, demonstrating in detail whether the organisation has met or has not met each component of the Standard. It also elaborates on the strengths and weaknesses of the organisation. As Figure 5 overleaf demonstrates, the vast majority of organisations consulted are in agreement that the feedback they received was clear (97.2 per cent), fair (95.5 per cent), prompt (94 per cent) and useful (90.3 per cent). Evidence from the interviews suggests that the report provides as a useful reference document which can be used to disseminate the outcomes to wider staff and to identify presenting issues which can be addressed through the process of continuous quality improvement.

*It gave us the information that we hadn't thought about, whilst it gives reassurances to the staff who deliver IAG.*

#### Accredited organisation



**Figure 5: Views on feedback provided to organisations (bases vary).**

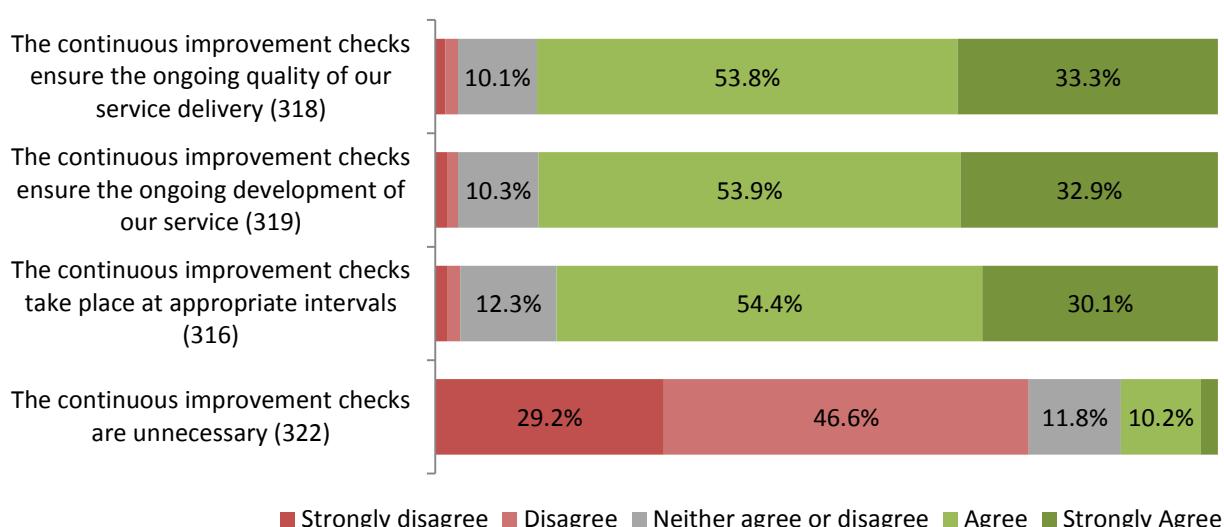
While organisations are positive about the feedback received, it is important that the training and CPD for assessors continues to ensure they are up to date with the latest thinking and understand the changing context for the delivery of IAG.

Some interviewees from organisations holding the Standard highlighted that the most useful elements of the report they receive are the strengths and suggestions for improvement. This was echoed by assessors who also felt organisations only really looked at these sections. There are potential opportunities therefore to reduce the length of the final report provided to organisations and we explore this in more detail on page 38.

### 3.4 Continuous Improvement Checks

Continuous improvement checks (CICs) were introduced for all organisations booking an assessment on or after 1<sup>st</sup> October 2012 that subsequently achieved accreditation. CICs are completed on an annual basis (12 and 24 months after accreditation or re-accreditation) to monitor an organisation's ongoing improvement activities post-assessment. To reduce costs, CICs are delivered remotely by the assessor who was originally assigned to the organisation. Organisations are asked to comment against the Areas for Continuous Improvement (AfCI) identified at their last assessment. Further details on the CIC process can be accessed on the **matrix** website.<sup>14</sup>

There is widespread agreement amongst survey respondents that the introduction of CICs is a positive development for the Standard and that the annual review checkpoints at 12 and 24 months are suitable intervals. Just one in ten (12.4 per cent) perceive that they are unnecessary. Figure 6 shows that most organisations regard CICs as ensuring the ongoing quality of service delivery (87.1per cent) and ensuring the ongoing development their services (86.8per cent).



**Figure 6: Views on the continuous improvement checks (bases vary).**

The follow -up interviews with accredited organisations provide further evidence that organisations recognise the benefits of CICs. The requirement to review progress against the development areas identified during the initial assessment helps to ensure organisational improvement is ongoing and the principles of the Standard become embedded in operational delivery as well as strategic plans.

[The continuous improvement check] was very useful, it was a big reminder, so it's like someone telling you, 'You said you were going to do that, have you done it?' and then us going back and, yes, we have done it, or no, we haven't done it. That was actually-, it was useful, yes.

Accredited organisation

*It keeps you continually on the ball. You're continually monitoring things throughout the year, rather than having to do it every three years. It does keep the quality up. It does keep you thinking about matrix, and possibly looking at what other organisations are offering, and how they're running it.*

**Accredited organisation**

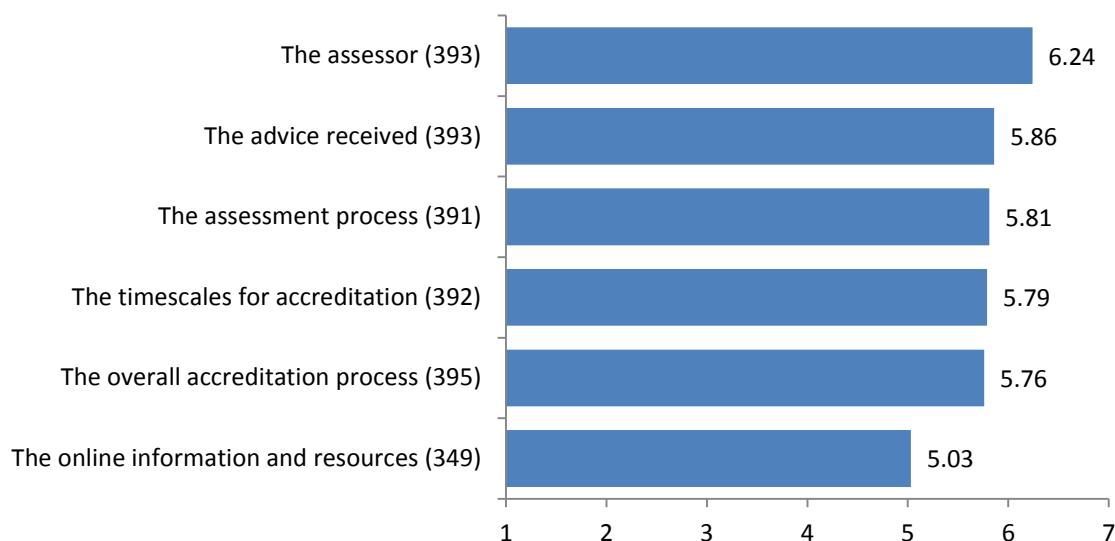
Assessors too regard the CICs as a way to maintain quality and support continuous improvement. They perceive in particular that the CICs encourage organisations to engage with their assessment report and develop a strategy to address areas of weakness immediately, rather than it being something that they return to some two and half years later prior to re-assessment.

*I was talking to an organisation this afternoon who are doing their continuous improvement check year two and oh boy it's so exciting the journey that they've been on [...]. Three years ago they had their first assessment then they did their CIC last year. "Gosh look, that's what you've done and this is what you've done now." [...] They're really excited to see the distance they've travelled based on suggestions that were made to them three years ago, or two years ago.*

**matrix assessor**

### **3.5 Overall Satisfaction with the Assessment Process**

To conclude, the survey asked organisations to rate their satisfaction with key elements of the assessment as well as with the accreditation process. The rating scale was 1 to 7, where 1 was 'very dissatisfied' and 7 was 'very satisfied'. Figure 7 indicates that, on average, organisations were satisfied with the elements of the process as well as the process overall. Respondents express the highest levels of satisfaction with their assessor (mean score = 6.24), and the advice received (mean score = 5.86).



**Figure 7: Organisations' satisfaction level with the matrix process (bases vary).**

Although respondents are, on average, satisfied with the online information and resources, this specific element of the **matrix** Standard is rated lowest of all areas surveyed. We noted earlier in this chapter that some organisations perceive that the online tools in

particular are time consuming and lacking in detail. This, along with the relatively lower levels of satisfaction expressed in relation to online resources, suggests that this may be an area requiring further development.

# 4 Assessors

**matrix** assessments are delivered by a team of self-employed assessors managed by the delivery organisation (currently emqc Ltd.) Assessors are recruited, selected and trained by emqc to become approved assessors and then pay an annual subscription to stay on the register. Individuals can also apply to emqc Ltd to become approved **matrix** advisers; the vast majority of advisers are also **matrix** assessors. This chapter examines the recruitment, initial training and continuing professional development of **matrix** assessors and advisers, as well as the processes involved in allocating and quality assuring their work and external verification of delivery.

## 4.1 Assessor Recruitment and Training

**matrix** assessors and advisers are primarily recruited by emqc Ltd through their existing networks of assessors. At least one of the current assessors sent a speculative application direct to emqc Ltd; this was kept on file until the next recruitment round when they were re-contacted. A new cohort of assessors recruited earlier this year comprises individuals from a wide range of backgrounds and sectors. The background of the assessors is becoming increasingly important as the demand for **matrix** from organisations outside the career guidance sector grows. This and the role that the assessors fulfil in terms of supporting organisations to interpret and adapt **matrix** to reflect the context in which they operate may have implication on future recruitment. With this in mind, opportunities could be advertised more widely, including in locations likely to attract people from backgrounds and sectors that the **matrix** is expanding into.

Before becoming approved, assessors complete initial training provided by emqc Ltd. This includes a process of support, assessment and observation. Potential assessors complete pre-course work including background reading, self-assessment against a competency framework and a case study exercise. Assessors then attend a two day training programme. This is led by assessors who lead on professional development and quality assurance on behalf of emqc. If after the two day course a potential assessor is not deemed suitable, or feels that the role is not for them, they can pull out and are not charged for the training course.

Following the two-day training course the trainee assessor is matched to a support assessor who is experienced and who performs consistently at a high standard. The trainee assessor shadows them on a live assessment. The trainee assessor is then expected to lead three assessments; the first is accompanied by their support assessor and the second and third solo but with the opportunity to seek guidance from the support assessor. On their fourth assessment, the trainee is observed by the support assessor, detailed feedback provided and any development needs recorded. Throughout the process the support assessor reviews the trainee's technical understanding of the Standard and judges their performance against a competency framework of behaviours expected of an assessor. If the trainee successfully completes the programme they are then added to the emqc Ltd register of approved assessors. The opportunity to shadow live assessments is clearly important, with one assessor suggesting this was more useful than the classroom training:

*At the end of two days of training I didn't feel competent. The thing that gave me the confidence and the competence was the shadowing. My feeling is that it could have been a day of training and then, the shadowing, and I think I would have got much more out of that.*

**matrix assessor**

Trainees are expected to meet the costs of their initial training. A number of those consulted perceive the training to be expensive (one interviewee contrasted it to his experience as an IIP assessor where he did not usually have to pay for training). One respondent suggested that the costs could be brought down by doing the training over one day rather than two.

It was suggested that trainees benefit by being able to tap into the wide pool of expertise and experience from other potential assessors during this initial training, complemented by a large number of practical examples to illustrate elements of the Standard.

The case study material that accompanies the training has been reviewed this year to ensure it remains current and up to date in terms of best practice. The training materials have also been adapted to reflect the increasingly diverse market for **matrix**. In particular, increasing demand from Skills Funding Agency-contracted providers and other training providers has led to a greater focus on the requirements of this sector.

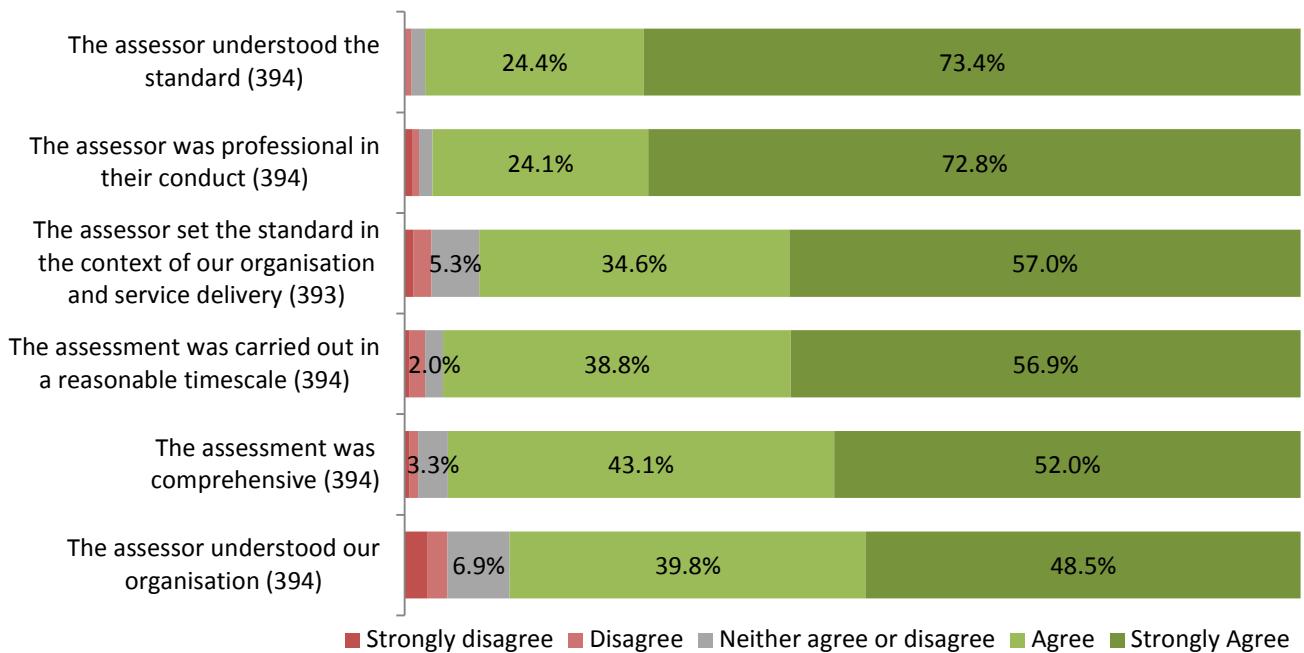
## **4.2 Perceptions of Assessors**

The use of a team of self-employed assessors is an effective way of delivering the Standard on a no-cost basis to BIS as it ensures overheads are kept to a minimum for the delivery organisation. It also provides the necessary flexibility to meet changing patterns in demand for assessments. Assessors also benefit from the flexibility to balance **matrix** assessments with other work commitments, although a regular income from **matrix** assessments is not guaranteed.

According to survey respondents, organisations seeking **matrix** accreditation are largely satisfied with the service they receive from assessors. We reported in the previous chapter that organisations regard assessors as the most satisfactory element of the accreditation process. Figure 8 (below) provides further evidence of the reasons why. A majority of organisations agree or strongly agree that their assessor understood the Standard (97.8 per cent) and was able to set the Standard in the appropriate context (91.6 per cent). A majority also agree or strongly agree that their assessor behaved professionally (96.9 per cent) and conducted a comprehensive assessment (95.1 per cent). Where organisations were daunted by the prospect of an assessment, the professionalism of the assessor put them at ease:

*I thought it was going to be a bit like an Ofsted, where they assess you and you basically pass or fail, and they [reprimand] you if you haven't done something right. [The assessor] wasn't like that, and right from the off I thought, 'Oh right.' He was working with me. That changed my opinion of the process and I quite enjoyed it. I enjoyed my assessment, which I didn't anticipate.*

**Accredited organisation**



**Figure 8: Organisations views of the assessor and assessment process (bases vary).**

Our interviews with accredited organisations affirm that assessors are commonly regarded as approachable, competent, professional and knowledgeable about the **matrix** Standard. Organisations particularly value the fact that many assessors have a strong background in assessment coupled with an understanding of particular sectors and client groups.

*We were slightly concerned about how it would fit into the actual work that we do, but the person who came and did our accreditation was very knowledgeable about the organisation and the services which we deliver. So, you know, that gave us quite a lot of reassurance.*

**Accredited organisation**

Assessors who demonstrate knowledge and experience of the type of organisation being assessed and the sector in which they operate have greater credibility with the organisation and are well-placed to offer advice.

*He understood our client group. He understood the changes that had happened in the Trust over the years in relation to us changing in size and dealing with things like that.*

**Accredited organisation**

This was also reflected in the survey findings which show that almost nine out of ten respondents (88.3 per cent) agree or strongly agree that their assessor understood their organisation (Figure 8).

There is a minority of organisations that report that their assessor did not have a good understanding of their organisation and/or sector and, as a consequence, did not fully

appreciate the issues and challenges that were potentially impacting on their ability to meet the requirements of the Standard.

*I don't think the assessor understood the complexities of our institution, with regards to the amount of different people that we see, and the different backgrounds that they come from. We serve a very deprived area. It's very difficult to get people to progress.*

**Accredited organisation**

Interestingly, assessors themselves are equivocal about the importance of assessors having direct experience of the sector of the organisation they are assessing. The evidence shows it is important to organisations seeking the **matrix** that their assessor understands their organisation, sector and relevant context. It is clearly not possible for assessors to have experience of all likely sectors and types of organisation however consideration should be given to the background of assessors when allocating assessments and ensuring future recruits bring experience of relevant sectors. Opportunities should be provided for assessors with experience of different sectors and organisation types to share this knowledge and keep fellow assessors up to date with good practice and changing contexts.

#### **4.2.1 Allocation of Work**

On receiving an application from an organisation seeking accreditation for the first time, emqc Ltd invites assessors to bid for the assessment; re-accreditations tend to be allocated to the assessor who conducted the original assessment. The bidding process involves assessors formally registering their interest. In allocating the assessments, emqc Ltd take account of the geographical location of the assessor in relation to the organisation (there is a cap of £100 per day for travel expenses) as well as an assessor's background and performance (see Quality assurance on page 34).

Assessors are notified of the outcome of the bidding process by emqc Ltd. Some assessors consulted perceive that there is a lack of transparency in relation to the decision making process or expressed puzzlement at how work is allocated. Further feedback on unsuccessful bids is required and would help contribute to development of open and trusting relationship between the delivery organisation and assessors.

*You never do see how judgements on assessment allocations have been reached, so perhaps it could be more transparent [...] Certainly if colleagues are bidding for pieces of work and not necessarily getting them, I think we need to understand what judgements are reached and why.*

**matrix assessor**

### **4.3 Continuing Professional Development (CPD)**

Once registered, assessors have access to ongoing professional development opportunities to ensure they continue to fulfil their roles effectively. Assessors are generally very positive about the ongoing CPD they currently receive and many of those consulted during this research recognised that there has been a noticeable step-change and improvement in the training provided by emqc Ltd over the past year.

Over the last 12 months emqc Ltd has reviewed its training provision for assessors and implemented a new training and development strategy designed to enhance assessor competence and improve quality assurance. At the centre of this strategy has been the re-introduction of an assessor competency framework. The framework has been simplified so that it is easier to understand

An area of the website has been developed specifically for assessors to use which includes a forum for sharing best practice. Feedback from assessors suggests that the site is well utilised and is regularly updated to keep pace with changes and other issues to do with **matrix**. Several assessors report that they proactively e-mail emqc Ltd with their assessment experiences, information, articles or updates that they feel other assessors would find valuable.

There has been a drive to introduce new technology into the assessor training and CPD offered by emqc Ltd. This includes the delivery of webinars specifically designed to improve the volume and take-up of the training opportunities on offer across the assessor network. Travel time and the associated costs have been identified as a barrier to training for self-employed assessors in the past. Webinars eliminate the need to travel and can be delivered flexibly around assessors' existing work commitments, including for example at a weekend or in the evenings or early in the morning.

*The webinars are really good at dealing with specific topics. I like those. I can sit and join in at home. I don't have to travel so a two hour webinar takes two hours, whereas a two hour meeting takes half a day.*

**matrix assessor**

Specific webinars have been designed to cover the fundamentals of the **matrix** Standard and ensure that assessors know how the Standard operates. In addition, assessors are consulted on possible webinar topics to ensure gaps in their knowledge are addressed. Sessions to date include coaching and mentoring and report writing. The sessions can be recorded and viewed again and the materials can be downloaded. Both these features are highly valued by the assessors we consulted.

*The webinar's are getting better and better [...]. They have them on the website so that you can go back and look at them, or a version of the webinar, to refresh yourself.*

**matrix assessor**

The introduction of webinars is designed to complement rather than replace face-to-face sessions which are still regarded as an important aspect of assessors' on-going CPD. Regional forums to facilitate interaction between assessors in a particular location and action learning sets led by appointed lead assessors have been established. In addition, emqc Ltd host an annual conference which provides further opportunities for networking and sharing good practice. Despite the costs associated with face-to-face meetings, several assessors value the opportunity to meet colleagues on a regular basis, and it is important that these opportunities continue given that assessors are self-employed and work remotely.

*A large benefit is the networking and catch up with colleagues. I think particularly for people who may be newer to the game because I obviously know a lot of assessors and advisors just because I've been around so long. I do think these regional forums where a few of us get together will be very positive.*

**matrix assessor**

#### **4.4 Quality Assurance**

The new training and development strategy is aligned with procedures to quality-assure the work of assessors and ensure the integrity of the Standard. A Quality Manager has been appointed at emqc Ltd to monitor the quality of the work of assessors. A key aspect of the Quality Manager's role is to critically review assessors' reports following their site visits. This role was previously undertaken by several individuals at emqc Ltd. The appointment of a Quality Manager has improved the consistency of the review process and enables emqc Ltd to identify any discrepancies or gaps in assessors' reports more effectively. In addition, assessor reports are now independently peer reviewed by another assessor. Evidence from our consultation indicates that these changes have improved assessor performance as well as quality assurance.

*It's certainly made me focus on the quality of my notes. I'd always thought were okay [...], but because I was aware they would be read by someone else, I took extra care.*

**matrix assessor**

The Quality Manager also holds annual contract reviews with each assessor to discuss their performance and their CPD requirements. Feedback from organisations that have been assessed by an individual assessor contributes to this process. A traffic light system has recently been put into place to measure assessors' performance. Those that are not performing at the required standard measured against the competency framework are offered mentoring. If their performance does not improve, they are removed from the register.

Quality assurance also includes peer-observations. Participating in one peer-review per year is now a contractual obligation for assessors. Overall, assessors welcome the introduction of the new strategy, irrespective of their level experience.

*I think you can always learn something from other people. I've been doing this job for twelve years now. I have worked with probably thousands of organisations in one way or another so I think I've got things I could share with my colleagues. Also with that sort of track record you get bad habits so I think it does help you with your professional practice and reflection to actually have another person observing or reviewing what you're doing.*

**matrix assessor**

#### **4.5 External Verification**

The work of the **matrix** Standard contractor holder, currently emqc Ltd, is overseen by an independent external verifier (EV). The EV fulfils an important function on behalf of BIS, reviewing the quality of delivery, internal evaluation and quality assurance processes, identifying areas for improvement and ensuring the integrity of the **matrix** Standard is protected and maintained.

The EV (an independent consultant) visits emqc Ltd every quarter and receives monthly management information on the volume of assessments, the number of organisations who have achieved the Standard and the number of organisations who have not yet met the Standard. Information on assessor performance is also provided along with a selection of assessor reports for review. The EV monitors the **matrix** website to ensure the information is up to date. The EV also distributes occasional online surveys to assessors and a sample of organisations seeking accreditation. The EV submits a report to emqc Ltd and BIS that summarises current performance and makes recommendations for improvements.

This appears to be working well; although there have been some tensions between the EV and the delivery organisation in the past, the view from both parties now is that relations have improved. The EV described her role in relation to the delivery organisation, saying “I’m not there as an inspector but I’m there as a critical friend to support them”. However in the past the delivery organisation has clearly seen the EV as a threat and burden. There has clearly been a change in attitude with a greater willingness to be open. This should help ensure an ongoing productive relationship.

*She’ll get warts and all, and we want her input into how to reduce those warts and all, rather than to try and hide them from her.*

**Delivery organisation staff member**

Assessors generally understand the importance of external scrutiny and were positive about the contribution of the EV. Some assessors are aware of the EV’s track record and as a result they expressed great respect and faith in her ability, knowledge and passion for the Standard. One assessor observed that the EV has “an ability to be supportive of practitioners but firm enough to maintain the integrity of the Standard.” However some assessors are less clear about the exact role of the EV and the detail of what she does. Because assessors are self-employed and work remotely this can make it difficult for them to fully appreciate some aspects of delivery they are not involved in. Opportunities for all assessors to formally meet the EV and the provision of clear information about her role and responsibilities would help in this regard.

Most assessors interviewed had some experience of the EV survey, and many valued this. One assessor described the survey saying it is:

*...the only opportunity that we’ve got to give an independent evaluation of a whole range of things, including the way we’re treated and the way that emqc works as an organisation that supports us.*

**matrix assessor**

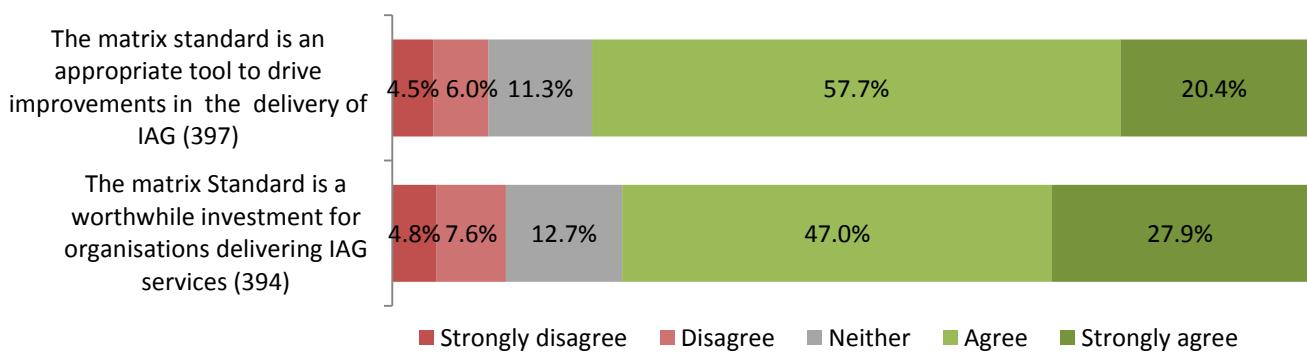
A few assessors felt that there was a lack of feedback in terms of the outcomes of surveys or other issues raised with the EV. Two assessors raised concerns about confidentiality of survey responses or information passed to the EV and as a result they are reluctant to engage. It is important to make clear to assessors the EV role, the correct channels for raising concerns or queries (through emqc in the first instance, and then through the EV) and assure them of confidentiality. This would help ensure assessors feel able to raise issues with the EV without fear that this could have a negative impact on the allocation of work. Similarly, providing regular feedback to assessors on issues that the EV is working on with emqc, how these are being tackled and the rationale for key decisions would help assessors feel more included in delivery processes and increase feelings of ownership.

# 5 Effectiveness and Impact of matrix

In this chapter we explore the extent to which the **matrix** Standard is effective in meeting the aims of quality assuring and driving the improvement of a wide range of information, advice and guidance (IAG) services.

## 5.1 Effectiveness

Across stakeholders, assessors and accredited organisations, there is broad agreement that the **matrix** Standard is a good product, effective in achieving its aims and a worthwhile investment. Figure 9 below shows the majority of organisations responding to our survey agree or strongly agree that the **matrix** Standard is an appropriate tool to improve delivery (78.1 per cent) and is a worthwhile investment for organisations delivering IAG (74.9 per cent).



**Figure 9: Extent of agreement that the Standard is appropriate and worthwhile amongst current and former accredited organisations (bases vary).**

In analysing these results, while organisations that currently hold the Standard were slightly more likely to agree with the questions presented in Figure 9 compared to organisations that no longer hold the Standard, we found no statistically significant differences in the responses.

Just over half of the survey sample (50.3 per cent) have no suggestions on how to further improve **matrix**. Some 14.7 per cent advocated for the assessment costs to be cheaper (see page 37), with 11.5 per cent recommending that the **matrix** Standard needs to be more specific to their organisation's needs. A small proportion from the survey requested more or better communication from assessors and/or emqc Ltd representatives (5.5 per cent).

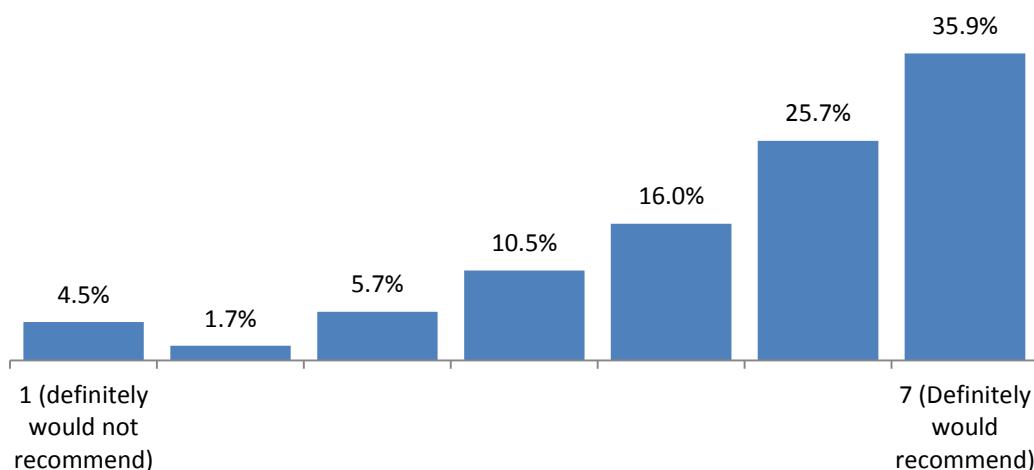
In the follow-up semi-structured interviews, organisations were asked what they perceived to be the most and least useful aspects of the **matrix** Standard accreditation process. Overall organisations had no specific views on the least useful aspects, rather indicating where the **matrix** Standard had been useful. Several organisations highlighted that the feedback from the **matrix** assessors was the most useful aspect of their accreditation

journey. Small training providers and sole traders were the most vocal in highlighting these benefits.

*I think it was an opportunity that provided us for somebody to come in from the outside and critique our service, if you like, and make recommendations where we could improve our practice, you know, and from an objective point of view.*

#### Accredited organisation

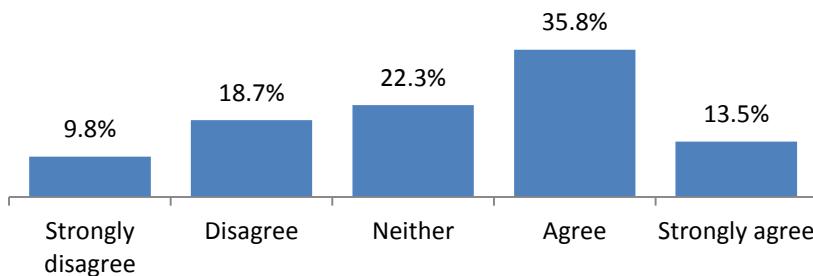
We also asked the extent to which organisations (including those who no longer hold the Standard) would recommend the **matrix** Standard to other IAG providers. As shown in Figure 10 below, the majority of organisations would recommend the **matrix** Standard. On a scale of one to seven, where one is definitely would not recommend and seven is definitely would recommend, just under two-thirds of organisations gave a score of this 6 or 7, with just 6.2 per cent giving a score of 1 or 2.



**Figure 10: Likelihood organisations would recommend matrix to another provider (base =401).**

## 5.2 Value for Money

There is evidence that the combined factors of cost and time to achieve the **matrix** Standard may be a barrier to accreditation for some organisations. Our findings indicate mixed views on the extent to which the **matrix** Standard offers value for money. In our survey, just under a third (28.5 per cent) of organisations disagreed, or disagreed strongly that the **matrix** Standard offers good value for money, but just under half (49.3 per cent) agreed, or strongly agreed (Figure 11 below). Our analysis suggests also that there is no significant difference between the views of organisations that currently hold the Standard and those that have decided not to continue with the Standard when it comes to the extent to which the **matrix** Standard offers value for money. Similarly, there are no meaningful differences when comparing the responses between different types of organisation.



**Figure 11: Views on the extent to which the matrix Standard offers value for money (base = 386).**

In our follow-up interviews with organisations, it was clear organisations that have decided not to continue with the Standard (particularly smaller training providers), charities and sole traders were more prone to highlight that the opportunity cost associated with preparing for and achieving the matrix Standard and the initial financial outlay for the assessment could sometimes be a problem.

As highlighted earlier, organisations delivering the National Career Service indicated that prime contractors offered free workshops to support and prepare their sub-contractors for **matrix** assessment. This was seen to reduce preparation costs for new contractors. Some of the organisations we spoke to were pragmatic in their views on the cost of the **matrix** assessment. They indicated the cost for a three-year term and the time spent by a **matrix** assessor to visit and write a detailed report reflects a fair price.

*It was a huge part of our cash flow to invest in so at the time it felt a significant investment. Does it represent value for money? I think in terms of a daily rate for an assessor I think that's a fairly legitimate rate.*

**accredited organisation**

One possible opportunity to improve value for money is reducing the time spent by assessors on compiling their detailed report. Interviews with organisations that hold the Standard and assessors indicates that organisations generally focus on those sections of their report that cover strengths, weaknesses and recommendations for action. The detail on the extent to which an organisation meets each of the criteria is of much less interest to organisations and is primarily used for quality assurance purposes by the delivery organisation and the external verifier. Assessors and organisations with the Standard highlighted ways the final report might be slimmed down.

*The only thing that I would like to change would be the way the feedback is written down. Like I say, just using a traffic light system would be good. That would certainly make it more efficient for us, to know exactly what we have to do.*

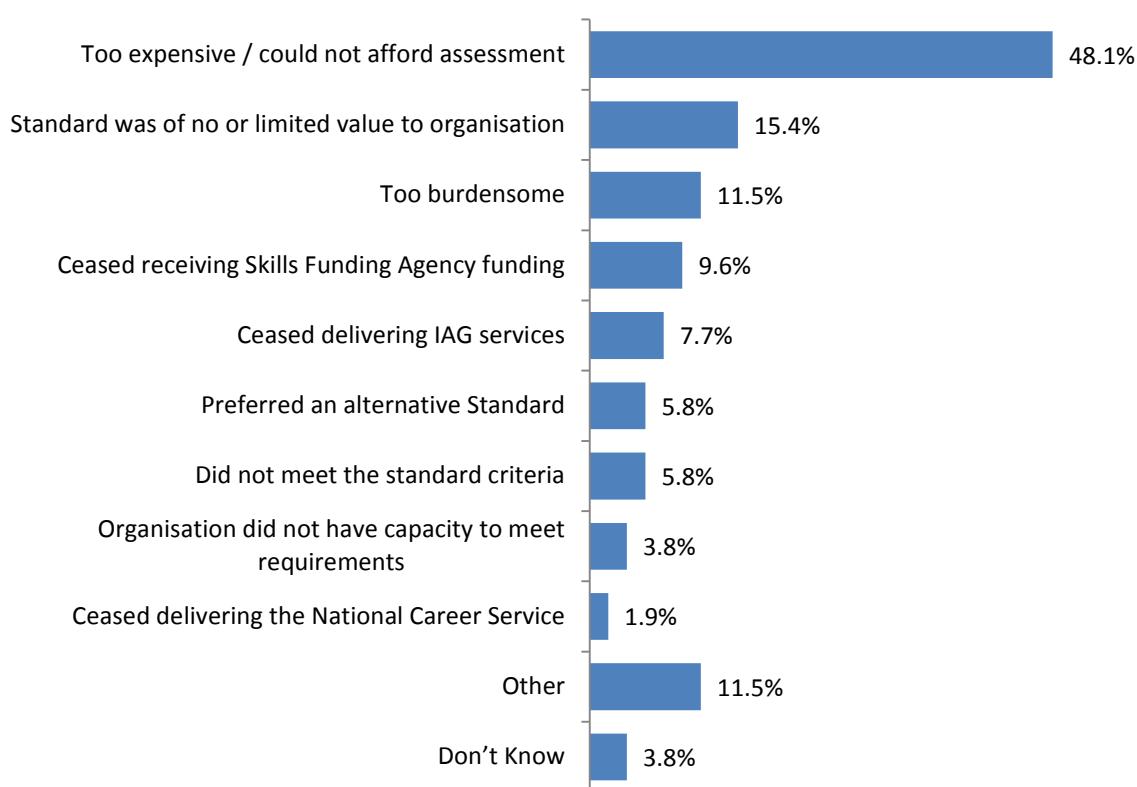
**Accredited organisation**

One assessor interviewed advocated for assessors to collect and record evidence in a consistent way in a grid against each criteria. This could offer an alternative method for reviewing the quality and consistency of assessments, and emqc has recently piloted carrying out quality assurance using assessors' notes and considering offering shorter

(and therefore less expensive) reports to organisations. This option should continue to be explored and further developed if viable.

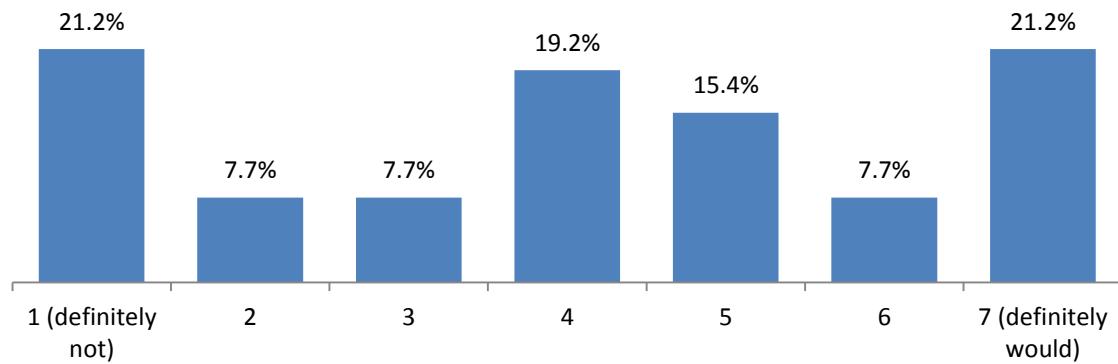
### 5.3 Reasons for Not Continuing with the Standard

Investigating the reasons why organisations that formerly held **matrix** decided not to continue with the Standard sheds further light on the cost issue. By far the most frequently cited reason was that the assessment was too expensive or unaffordable (44.2 per cent of formerly accredited organisations gave this answer). In contrast 11.5 per cent stated it was because they no longer delivered the National Careers Service or received Skills Funding Agency funding. This and other evidence gathered suggests that perceptions of value for money and affordability are of greater concern than a belief that the **matrix** Standard is not useful.



**Figure 12: Reasons why organisations decided not to continue with matrix accreditation (base = 52).**

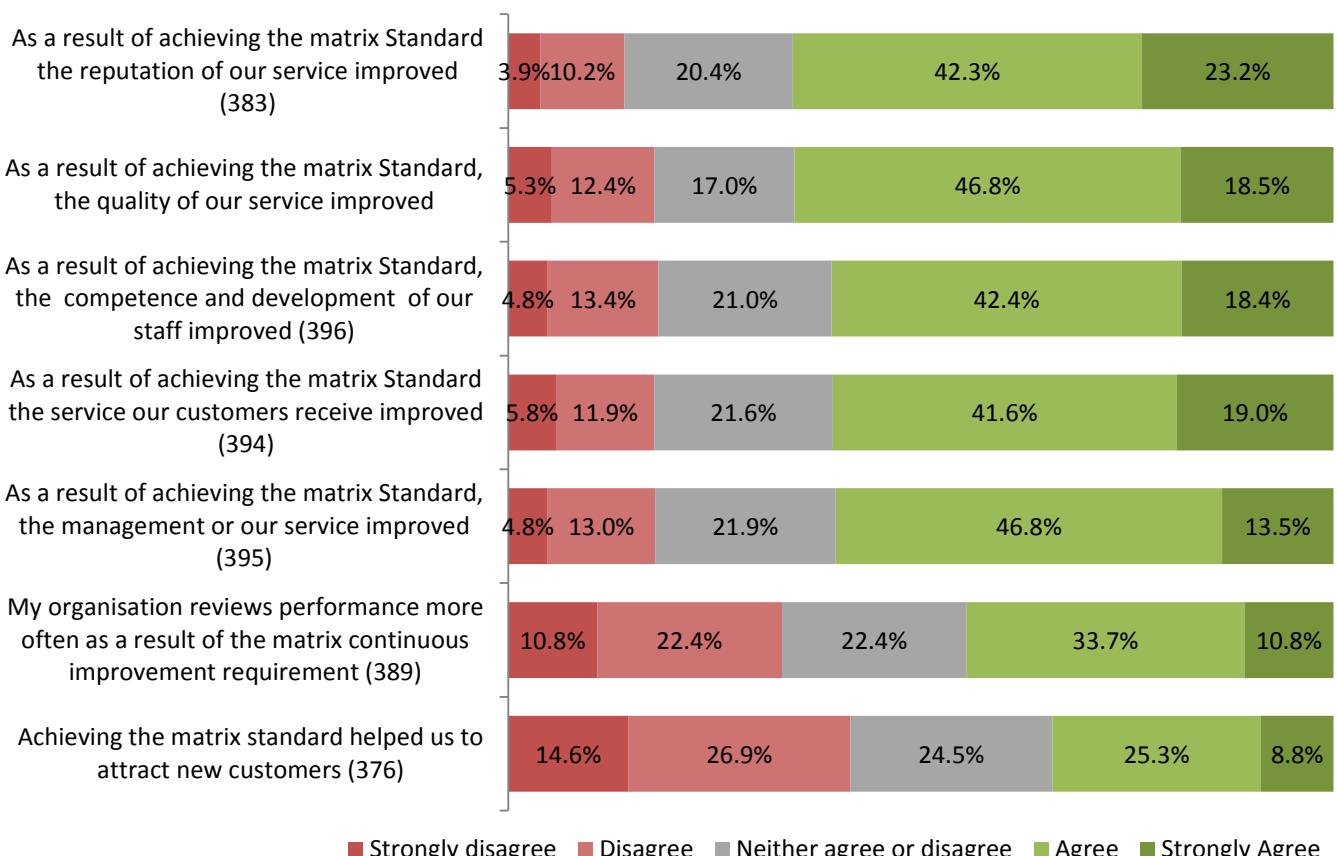
The survey also enquired about the extent to which organisations that currently do not hold the Standard will seek to achieve matrix in the future (Figure 13 below). While only a small sample (therefore the numbers should be treated with caution), the survey indicates a polarised view from these organisations with 28.9 per cent saying they definitely would or are highly likely to (score of 6 or 7) and the same proportion definitely would not or are highly unlikely to (a score of 1 or 2) seek to achieve matrix in the future. The remaining 42.2 per cent provided a more neutral response; however, there was a slight indication towards organisations considering being re-accredited in the future.



**Figure 13: Likelihood that formerly accredited organisations will seek matrix accreditation in the future (base=52).**

#### 5.4 Impact of Achieving the matrix Standard

Overall, organisations are generally positive about the benefits of the **matrix** Standard, particularly in terms of improving service quality and reputation. Figure 14 overleaf illustrates over half of survey respondents agree or strongly agree that **matrix** accreditation improved the reputation of the service (65.5 per cent), improved the quality of the service (65.3 per cent) and improved the competence of their staff (60.8 per cent).



**Figure 14: Views on the benefits of matrix accreditation (bases vary).**

All organisations interviewed that hold the Standard were able to describe the benefits of achieving **matrix**; the most frequently mentioned benefits are explored below:

#### **5.4.1 Improved service through a process of self-reflection and continuous improvement**

Organisations highlighted that the assessment is an engaging process that gets them to focus on how they are delivering their services and encourages them to reflect on their own processes and to further improve on these. Organisations welcome the assessment as an opportunity to gain external validation of their processes and use it to challenge their own delivery approaches and systems. Having their systems reviewed externally is valued as a way to identify gaps in delivery with the goal of improving their IAG services.

#### **5.4.2 Greater focus on customers**

Organisations highlighted that by following the **matrix** Standard they were now much better at collecting client feedback. Further education colleges and work-based learning providers interviewed cited improved services and improved retention rates as a result.

*Retention has improved, and as a result of that, results have improved. It's a whole journey.*

Accredited organisation

#### **5.4.3 Greater focus on outcomes rather than processes**

Organisations highlighted that by going through the process had made them more outcome focused and had prepared them for the changes to the National Careers Service from October 2014 onwards. They also suggested that **matrix** had improved their data management systems with improved record keeping and customer data being more accessible supporting better customer service.

*If customers are not happy we're able to assess it there and then rather than waiting for an annual assessment*

Accredited organisation

#### **5.4.4 Improvements to staff competencies**

Organisations regarded the **matrix** standard as a way to benchmark and improve staff competence by using the framework to ensure consistency and assess advisor performance. One organisation highlighted that staff had now moved away from making assumptions about customers and what they might want to do by working with them in an impartial way. Other providers highlighted that the **matrix** Standard had encouraged them to introduce review days with IAG staff on a quarterly basis. A small minority of organisations suggested that as a driver to improving staff development **matrix** had improved staff morale.

#### **5.4.5 Attracting more customers**

Organisations reflected upon the **matrix** Standard as a kite mark which was beneficial to their potential customers as it demonstrated and provided a level of assurance that the service on offer had achieved a recognised standard of quality. However organisations were less likely to agree that achieving **matrix** had enabled them to attract more

customers. In our follow-up interviews, organisations reported that the **matrix** Standard brand is not that well known among their customer base (regardless of size or stature of the organisation) therefore by having the **matrix** Standard would not have a direct impact on volume of work.

*I'd say overall yes it does help. Did I have instantly loads more clients? No. It wasn't like, 'Oh, they've got matrix,' and there's people queuing out the door. I would say that, in terms of commercially, it didn't make that much difference. It did to the quality of service that I offered, but not commercially getting a lot more work.*

**Accredited organisation**

# 6 Summary and Recommendations

Having established the **matrix** Standard is fit for purpose and that it is regarded as an appropriate mechanism with which to continue driving the improvement of IAG services, this concluding chapter considers the key lessons that can inform the future development of the Standard. There are eight areas for consideration by BIS, emqc Ltd. and other interested parties.

## 1. Continuation of the **matrix** Standard

The evidence presented in this report demonstrates that across stakeholders, practitioners and accredited organisations, there is broad agreement that the **matrix** is a good product, effective in achieving its aims, and a worthwhile investment. Refinements to the Standard over recent years have resulted in a streamlined, accessible and flexible set of criteria that can be adapted to a variety of organisational contexts and services.

*We recommend that BIS continues with the Standard. No changes are required to the Standard at this time, but it should continue to be reviewed periodically to ensure that it remains fit for purpose in an ever-changing environment and for a growing diversity of organisations.*

## 2. Quality assurance

The current delivery organisation (emqc Ltd.) undertake internal quality assurance, and this is supplemented by an external verifier (EV) contracted to BIS. The EV plays a valuable role providing an independent check on the delivery of the Standard. The experience and knowledge of the current EV means they are well placed to act as a critical friend to the delivery organisation. It is important that the delivery organisation recognise the potential value of the EV role and engage in an open manner. There is evidence that the role and activities of the EV could be made clearer to assessors.

*All assessors should have the opportunity to meet the EV formally, be provided with information about their remit, role and activities, when to raise issues with the EV and what will happen to this information. Regular feedback should be provided to assessors on quality assurance and other activities undertaken by the EV and emqc Ltd to improve the delivery of the **matrix** Standard.*

## 3. Promotion and growth of the **matrix** Standard

Over the last three years, the number of organisations achieving or working towards the **matrix** Standard has remained broadly static at around 2,000. However, there appears to be clear opportunities to extend the reach of the **matrix** Standard, particularly in the careers marketplace across England. The National Careers Council<sup>15</sup> recently highlighted that there is massive variation in the range of IAG services and products on offer, particularly to young people, parents and teachers. Given the **matrix** Standard is embedded in many further education colleges, work-based learning providers and universities, there may be scope to strengthen linkages with schools. In August 2014 Ofsted published its latest Inspection Handbook which refers to “the extent to which the school has developed and implemented a strategy for ensuring that all pupils in Years 8 to 13 receive effective careers guidance” as part of the Leadership and Management requirements.<sup>16</sup> However, no mention is made of quality standards that would assist with the required strategy. Government is well placed to encourage and stimulate demand for

greater use of quality standards, and in particular to promote the **matrix** Standard as an exemplar of good practice.

We identified that some training providers, particularly the smaller organisations, reported that **matrix** was not necessary for their primary purpose. There is more that could be done to promote the wider benefits of achieving **matrix** and thus enhance perceptions of value for money. Wider promotion of the benefits of **matrix**, in particular positive outcomes for training providers, would be worthwhile. **matrix** assessors and advisors are clearly passionate about the benefits and quality of the Standard and this could be better harnessed in promotional activities for example, more case studies and press releases. The marketing and promotion strategy should be underpinned by a robust management information system to ensure that the delivery organisation understands the characteristics of the current market and likely growth areas. Regular feedback from customers of the **matrix** Standard should also inform the ongoing development of strategy as well as the Standard.

*A requirement of any future contract for the delivery of the **matrix** Standard should be to develop and deliver a promotion and growth strategy working with national and local partners.*

#### **4. Illustrations of good and/or interesting practice**

Effectively communicating how **matrix** can be adapted to suit different organisational contexts and the wider benefits of **matrix** in terms of organisational improvements are key to extending the reach of the Standard and challenging prevailing misconceptions about the Standard and the role that IAG fulfils in organisations where career guidance is not the main business focus. There are currently some useful case studies on the **matrix** website which highlight the benefits for and advice from accredited providers. These examples could be extended to include a wider range of organisations, for example sole traders, and include examples of good and interesting practice. Case studies on the **matrix** website should clearly show which sector they relate to and include organisations of varying sizes.

*A requirement of any future contract for the delivery of the **matrix** Standard should outline how it will build an accessible resource bank of good and/or interesting case studies from a wide range of sectors and organisations and a clear communications strategy to extend the reach of **matrix** into emerging markets.*

#### **5. A self-financing model**

The **matrix** Standard is currently delivered by a third party on the basis that there is no cost to BIS. In the current fiscal climate, delivery of the **matrix** Standard has to be self-financing. We understand this is unlikely to change in the immediate future. The wider quality standards review in Appendix 1 highlights, for example, that Career Mark and the Prospect Award apply an initial ‘sign-up’ charge and upon payment of this fee the organisation can access extensive online guidance, examples and exemplars, best practice case studies, self-assessment documentation and evidence grid templates. **matrix** could further develop its current online guidance and resources in order to assist organisations that are interested in applying for the Standard. Our findings suggest there is demand for subsidised assessments for sole trader. While we appreciate this would be challenging within a wholly self-financing model, it is important to recognise that there is a growing number of self-employed careers advisers working with schools and colleges to provide impartial and independent guidance and it is likely that there will be a growth in

interest from sole traders in achieving **matrix** as a result. However, as identified in our research, the cost can be prohibitive for this group. To encourage and assist sole traders to undertake **matrix** assessment we suggest that further consideration is given to how charges are weighted or even subsidised between organisations of different sizes. The delivery organisation should also continue to explore options for providing shorter (and thus more affordable) reports to organisations, while maintaining the ability to quality-assure assessments.

*A requirement of any future contract for the delivery of the **matrix** Standard should be to consider strategies for enhancing value for money and supporting small and medium-sized organisations and sole traders to access the **matrix** Standard within the context of delivering a self-financing model.*

## **6. Linkages to other relevant standards**

Given some elements of **matrix** complement the government-owned IiP standard, there may be benefits in reviewing working links between the two standards so that a wide range of customers can potentially benefit from joint **matrix** and IiP assessment. Being assessed against the two government-owned standards in parallel can provide business benefits, economies of scale and reduce the overall on-site activity required. The synergy between the two standards could be further clarified and promoted, particularly since our research identified that IiP is the next most popular standard sought by organisations with **matrix** in our sample. We also noted information on joint assessment between the two government-owned standards has not been updated on the **matrix** website since 2012. In addition, there is significant scope to work more closely with overarching quality frameworks such as the Quality in Careers Standard (QiS) that support schools across England. Although there are differences in the QiCS approved CEIAG standards and the **matrix** Standard and their criteria, there are also considerable areas of overlap in the requirements and evidence provided. It would, therefore, seem reasonable and pragmatic for emqc Ltd to work with QiCS (Careers England) to include guidance on how the **matrix** Standard maps across to the CEIAG standard.

*A requirement of any future contract for the delivery of the **matrix** Standard should outline how the delivery organisation intends to work with other quality standards across the UK in a wide range of settings to ensure the customer benefits from joint assessment and accreditation, where desirable.*

## **7. Digital and on-line support from Assessors and Advisors**

Whilst face-to-face support can be costly, both in terms of time and travel, this has obvious benefits. However, technological advances now provide more digital options for the **matrix** Standard to be communicated and made readily available to both individuals and organisations, for example, through the use of webinars, skype and/or Google Hang Out. There are many different online mechanisms for **matrix** assessors and advisors to potentially provide more online support to the organisations they work with, particularly prior to applying for formal assessment. emqc Ltd are already providing CPD support to assessors using webinars. Currently the annual CICs are undertaken remotely and there are opportunities to learn from this experience. The **matrix** website suggests that emqc Ltd is moving from a face-to-face approach for the Getting Started workshops to online 'webinars'. This is to be commended as a cost effective way of moving forward. Currently there are very few workshops listed on the website and these are only focused on one

particular sector. There is scope for the emqc Ltd site to have a ‘register your interest’ section so that demand for training by sector is monitored and action taken in response.

*A requirement of any future contract for the delivery of the matrix Standard should outline how the delivery organisation intends to develop a digital platform and utilise social media to connect with more organisations in support of their application and assessment for the matrix Standard.*

## **8. Workforce succession planning**

The current workforce of assessors and advisors bring a wealth of experience of IAG and the **matrix** Standard. However, many of them have been in their role for over ten years and some will be approaching retirement. To ensure their experience is captured and shared with newly recruited assessors, some form of workforce succession planning is required. Furthermore, if the target market for **matrix** continues to expand, the background and prior experience of the assessors recruited will be an important consideration, along with their ongoing training and development. A strategy to ensure **matrix** assessors and advisors are recruited with an understanding of current and/or emerging sectors for the **matrix** Standard is, therefore, paramount.

*A requirement of any future contract for the delivery of the matrix Standard should ensure that the delivery organisation outlines how it intends to develop a strategy for addressing knowledge and skills gaps and the ongoing training and development needs of current and new assessors, including a workforce succession plan. The strategy should be linked to the promotion and growth strategy so that assessors with knowledge and experience of new growth sectors are in place to respond to demand from these sectors as it grows.*

# Appendix 1: Review of Other Quality Standards

The accompanying spreadsheet provides details of the 17 other standards that we reviewed alongside **matrix**.

Our analysis identifies a number of similarities between **matrix** and many of the other quality standards under review. All the standards share a high-level common purpose to assure the quality of service provision and support performance and organisational improvement. Although some have a relatively tightly defined target audience and geographical reach, others, like **matrix**, target a wider range of organisations and sectors nationally, and even internationally, for example, ISO9001 and the government-owned Investors in People (IiP).

Indicators are often written in such a way that an organisation can interpret them to fit their product or service (as is the case with **matrix**) for example, ISO 9001, Investors in Excellence, Customer Service Excellence Standard; or written with a specific occupational focus in mind for example, for health care with the CQC, for housing with the Quality Assurance Framework. There are a number of key features that are common across many of the standards reviewed; in particular management and leadership is a frequent area for assessment, as is service delivery (although the detail of what services are assessed varied), inputs or resources and evaluation, review and improvement.

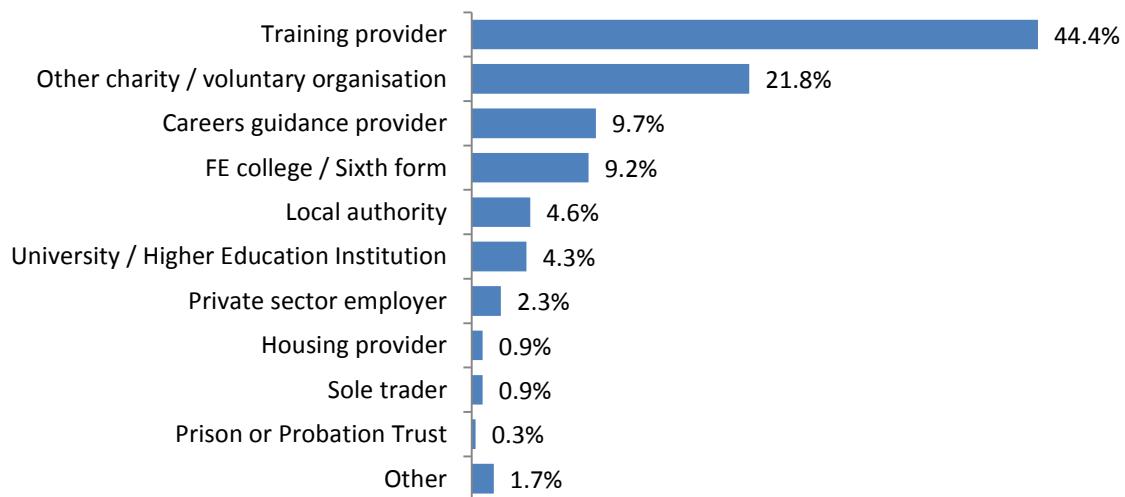
The assessment processes tend to follow a pattern of commitment, self-assessment, external assessment, judgement and report. Some standards have another assessment step which involves a validation or external verification process. Self-assessment is accorded a particularly high priority in Careers Wales Mark and Merlin but the organisation's audit is still checked by an external assessor. In contrast, in the QAF and IiP organisations can choose which standards to focus upon. Successful outcomes are usually based on a judgement of whether sufficient evidence had been provided to meet the indicators and standards, but there are standards such as IiP, Merlin and The Prospect Award with a differentiated level of outcome, for example, Gold, Silver and Bronze. Timescales for the process to be completed from commitment to assessment are seldom specified, although the **matrix** Standard expects organisations to undergo assessment within six months of commitment. It is understood that organisational demands vary considerably when working towards achievement of a set of indicators.

In most circumstances, once an organisation has achieved accreditation the review process is for three years across most standards. Variations on this are Career Mark, Customer First and Investors in Excellence which have a two year re-validation requirement, and Ofsted, which returns to re-inspect a school or college according to the outcome of the previous inspection. However, there is a sense of continuous improvement built into the Careers Wales Mark and ISO 9001 as well as the **matrix** Standard (with its annual Continuous Improvement Checks).

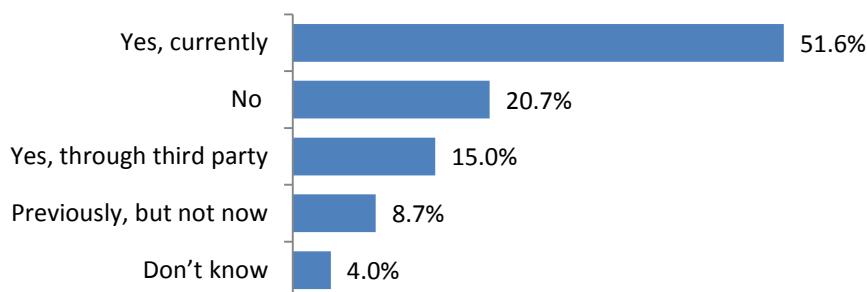
We were not always able to access information on the cost of undertaking different standards either because costs varied according to the size of organisation to be assessed

or because awards are competing for the same markets so the information is not freely available. Costs to those undertaking some of the careers education, information, advice and guidance awards and the Merlin standard are mostly set at a fixed price, although may be paid at different stages for example, upon buying the materials, upon assessment at different stages, and for re-validation. The costs to organisations undertaking standards (such as the **matrix** Standard, Customer Excellence, IIP and ISO9001) vary as these are differentiated according to the size of the organisation to be assessed. The charges made usually reflect the cost of providing and updating the standards and support materials, time required for assessment visits and reporting, and promotional materials e.g. a plaque. Some standards' costs and charges are covered by the public sector so are not obvious to the organisation that undertakes them, for example Careers Wales Mark, Ofsted, CQC, QAF.

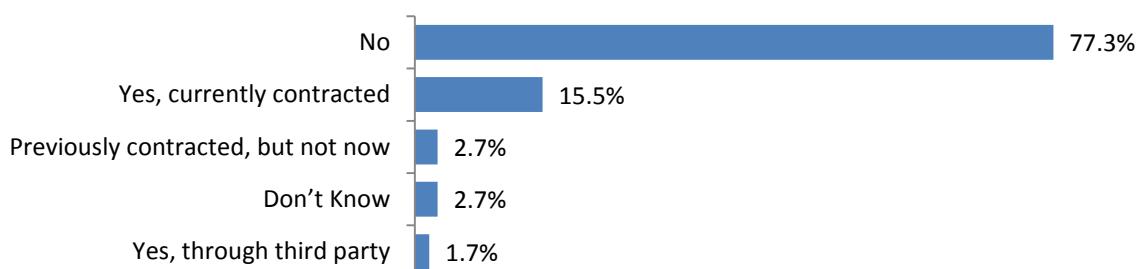
# Appendix 2: Profile of Survey Respondents



**Figure 15: Organisation type (matrix-accredited only, base = 349).**



**Figure 16: Proportion of organisations that receive Skills Funding Agency funding (base = 401).**



**Figure 17: Proportion of organisations that have a contract to deliver the National Careers Service (base = 401).**

# Glossary

BIS	Department for Business, innovation and skills
CEIAG	Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
IAG	Information, advice and guidance
iiP	Investors in People

# Notes and References

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<sup>1</sup> BIS (2013) *Using Industrial Strategy to help the UK economy and business compete and grow* Department for Business, Innovation & Skills

<https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/using-industrial-strategy-to-help-the-uk-economy-and-business-compete-and-grow>

<sup>2</sup> Ofsted (2013) *Going in the right direction? Careers guidance in schools from September 2012* <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/going-right-direction-careers-guidance-schools-september-2012>

<sup>3</sup> Hughes, D. & Chambers, N. (2013) *An Aspirational Nation: Creating a Culture Change in Careers Provision*, London: National Careers Council

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/354644/bis-13-919-national-careers-council-report-an-aspirational-nation-creating-a-culture-change-in-careers-provision.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/354644/bis-13-919-national-careers-council-report-an-aspirational-nation-creating-a-culture-change-in-careers-provision.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> BIS (2013) *HMI Inspiration Vision Statement*, London: Department for Business, Innovation & Skills : <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/careers-inspiration-vision-statement>

<sup>5</sup> BIS (2013) *Inspiration Vision Statement*, London: Department for Business, Innovation & Skills page 2

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<sup>6</sup> Skills Funding Agency (September 2013) *Invitation to Tender (ITT): The National Careers Service Area Based Contract Procurement*, p4

<sup>7</sup> Skills Funding Agency (2014) *The matrix Standard: guidance notes update 2* Skills Funding Agency

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/310053/The\\_matrix\\_Standard\\_guidance\\_note.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/310053/The_matrix_Standard_guidance_note.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> DfE (2014) *Careers guidance and inspiration in schools: Non-statutory departmental advice for governing bodies, school leaders and school staff*.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/careers-guidance-advice-for-schools>

<sup>9</sup> Emqc Ltd. (no date) *The National Careers Service FAQs* Accessed 30<sup>th</sup> September 2014  
<http://matrixstandard.com/the-standard/sector-guidance-materials/national-careers-service-faqs/>

<sup>10</sup> Furby, S. and van de Stege, C. (2009) *Quality Assurance arrangements for the Adult Advancement and Careers Service Tribal*

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<sup>11</sup> Emqc Ltd. (no date) *Joint matrix and Investors in People assessments* Accessed 1<sup>st</sup> October 2014 <http://matrixstandard.com/the-standard/joint-matrix-and-investors-in-people-assessments/>

<sup>12</sup> See <http://matrixstandard.com/process/>

<sup>13</sup> See <http://matrixstandard.com>

<sup>14</sup> See <http://matrixstandard.com/process/continuous-improvement-checks/>

<sup>15</sup> Hughes, D. (2014) *Taking Action: Achieving a Culture Change in Careers Provision*, London National Careers Council [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/355473/bis-14-1080-taking-action-achieving-a-culture-change-in-careers-provision.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/355473/bis-14-1080-taking-action-achieving-a-culture-change-in-careers-provision.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> Ofsted (2014) *School inspection handbook* Manchester Ofsted <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/inspection--forms-and-guides/s/School%20inspection%20handbook.doc>



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