



Qualifications and
Curriculum Authority

Centre satisfaction with awarding bodies' customer service in vocational qualifications

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1 Executive summary

1.1 Introduction

As a regulatory authority, QCA has a statutory responsibility to monitor the performance of recognised awarding bodies. Since the provision of a customer service statement (CSS) by awarding bodies is a specific regulatory requirement, the level of centre satisfaction with awarding bodies' services is a key indicator of how responsive and effective that service is in delivering accredited qualifications through them.

Until now, QCA has not comprehensively measured the implementation of awarding bodies' CSSs for vocational qualifications provision, or their responsiveness to centres' needs. Independent research was therefore commissioned to establish the degree of centre satisfaction with awarding bodies' customer service, and to identify good practice for improving this service in the vocational education sector.

1.2 Methodology

A sample of centres was drawn up and used to provide feedback on a cross section of awarding bodies by vocational sector, qualification type and level. For inclusion in the study awarding bodies were identified by one qualification only (and where possible, the qualification was typical of an awarding body's overall provision). This was to ensure the survey included as many participants as possible. Contact details for centres to be invited to participate in the survey were provided with the assistance of the awarding bodies themselves. QCA then undertook a verification exercise to confirm, for research purposes, appropriate points of contact within the centres, and that the qualifications selected were still being offered by the centre and so on.

Following this exercise, the centres were contacted by an independent research agency and interviewed about their perception of the service offered by their awarding body. Interviews were conducted by telephone, with the exception of a small number of cases where respondents were offered the opportunity to complete the survey in writing. A total of 400 centres were invited to participate in the survey of which 298 completed an interview – a response rate of 75 per cent. Given the scale of this evidence, the findings of the survey should be taken as indicative.

Fieldwork took place during March and April 2006.

1.3 Key findings

In general, levels of centre satisfaction with awarding bodies are encouragingly high. There is no statistically significant evidence to suggest an imbalance in levels of awarding body service across different qualification or centre types. Among colleges, however, while levels of overall satisfaction are comparable with other centre types, the proportion claiming to be very satisfied tends to be slightly lower. In addition, the proportion of respondents among colleges actually able to comment on each of the service delivery dimensions under scrutiny tended to be lower, that is, they tended to have least depth of knowledge about awarding body services. This implies that a different approach to relationship management with colleges may be required.

Given that provision of a CSS is a statutory requirement, the proportion claiming to have seen one was low (less than half of centres said they had seen the statement). This appears to be as much through lack of awareness as lack of provision of the statement. Where centres had seen their awarding body's CSS there was high agreement that the service they received reflected the statement. Areas of relative strength in service provision of awarding bodies are in the areas of:

- providing sufficient information on how centres and qualifications would be supported
- response time to telephone queries
- quality of external verifier feedback
- usefulness of guidance materials and events to help develop centre staff.

No aspect of service was identified as being weak as a result of high levels of dissatisfaction being recorded. Relative weaknesses were only really identifiable by virtue of lower levels of 'very satisfied' (as opposed to just 'satisfied') responses being recorded. These areas of 'relative' weakness were in:

- providing material that suggests practical and manageable course management processes
- providing relevant guidance materials, updates and newsletters
- responding to queries with sufficient relevant information
- providing clear and user friendly registration/certification procedures.

A further area of relative weakness relates to the handling of appeals. This is specifically the case regarding thorough explanation and justification of decisions and the speed with which appeals decisions are turned around. It should be pointed out that those having had cause to appeal are in the minority, and absolute levels of dissatisfaction are low.

Only around half of the centres surveyed said they had been formally requested to provide feedback to their awarding body, or invited to suggest service improvements. This is the only key area where there appears to be failure in best-practice behaviour.

1.4 Conclusions

There is evidence of a relationship between awareness of the CSS and positive perception of the awarding body. Those who had seen the CSS were more likely to be very satisfied with their awarding body and its service delivery. Among those who had seen the CSS, the statement appears to be fulfilling its purpose of facilitating an understanding and expectation of service procedures. Given the positive association between the CSS and levels of satisfaction, awarding bodies should focus efforts in promoting their CSS among its centres.

Aspects of service having an impact on overall satisfaction but where delivery performance is less positive are in suggesting practical and achievable management procedures, providing relevant materials to support the centres and its courses, and providing sufficient and relevant response to queries. This implies that the awarding bodies should adopt a more flexible, or tailored approach when dealing with the specific needs of individual centres.

Clearly it is necessary for awarding bodies to operate within a statutory framework and that conformity should be an absolute pre-requisite of the process for recognition.

Beyond this framework it is evident that awarding bodies would enhance centre satisfaction by adopting a partnership rather than an overtly procedural driven approach. There is strong evidence to suggest that centre perception of awarding bodies is enhanced where the opportunity to engage in dialogue is presented. Currently, only half of centres claim to have been invited to provide their views on service delivery. Facilitating this interaction would allow both increased centre understanding of awarding body statutory requirements and awarding body understanding of its centres' needs, enabling the development of the best possible fit between both parties.

1.5 Recommendations

The following recommendations are highlighted for the benefit of all awarding bodies. They should contribute to the process of self-assessment and support the continuous improvement of customer services.

- In order to provide the platform for positive relationships, awarding bodies should do as much as possible to promote their CSS, drawing more attention to it in their communication with centres. (Criterion 34)
- While levels of dissatisfaction are low, adopting a more tailored or interactive approach to service delivery according to centre type would enhance the centre experience. Analysis of needs in relation to guidance materials for course delivery and management support, in particular, would yield quick improvements in satisfaction levels. (Criteria 8, 32a, 43d)
- In developing the theme of 'interaction', again there is evidence to support improvement in relationships by effectively fulfilling the statutory objective of providing formal feedback programmes. In addition, efforts should be made to provide a response to the feedback provided by the centres, which is not widely the case at the moment. (Criteria 32a, 33, 34)
- Centres most commonly state that effective support and communications is the most important characteristic of an awarding body. An example of how valuable proactive support is regarded can be seen in the area of awarding body checking on expertise of centre staff. Where continuing professional development (CPD) support is available, centres should actively be encouraged to take advantage of it. (Criteria 11b, 11d, 32a, 36, 59, 60, 61a, 61b, 61h)

While the relationship between awarding bodies and centres sits within a statutory and regulatory framework, the relationship should not purely be one of conformance but one of partnership. (Criterion 34)

2 Introduction

It is the statutory responsibility of the regulatory authorities to monitor the performance of recognised awarding bodies according to the criteria in the *Statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004)*. These requirements are used in carrying out monitoring activities, drawing conclusions about aspects of awarding bodies' work, and reporting.

Customer Service Statements (CSSs) are a specific regulatory requirement (criterion 32) and the level of centre satisfaction with awarding bodies' services is a key indicator of how responsive and effective this service is in the delivery of accredited vocational qualifications. The regulatory authorities assess awarding bodies' customer service intentions as part of their approval process. However, up to now this assessment has focused on the policies rather than the practical implementation of those policies and how they affect awarding bodies' responsiveness to centres' needs. Indeed, assessment has not been dedicated to direct feedback from learning centres about their experiences of awarding body service delivery but formed an indirect input to overall monitoring activity.

This report details the findings of a study commissioned by QCA designed specifically to establish the degree of centre satisfaction with administrative aspects of awarding bodies' customer service, and to identify good practice for improving this service in the vocational education sector.

3 Background

Beyond the statutory requirement to provide a CSS upon which awarding bodies are assessed as part of the approval process, further investigation of the levels of service provided to vocational learning centres and candidates was prompted by specific questions.

- What quality of supporting advice and guidance is provided to centres by awarding bodies?
- Do awarding bodies seek and use feedback from centres and candidates?
- How responsive are awarding bodies to queries from centres and candidates?
- Is the appeals service prompt?
- What is the level of awarding body contingency planning (what happens if something goes wrong with delivery and assessment)?

Key to answering these questions was how best to establish a systematic process with which to conduct awarding body performance assessment. A review was undertaken to establish the extent to which qualitative and quantitative data could be used to inform service delivery performance and regulatory risk evaluation. This resulted in a successful pilot study in 2004 testing the methodology for a survey of awarding bodies. In effect, a customer feedback survey measuring learning centre perception of awarding body service delivery.

After this pilot exercise, it was proposed that a full survey should be undertaken. It would result in a published report, identifying good practice for improving service in the delivery of vocational qualifications for the benefit of learners.

4 Objectives

The primary aim of the survey was to establish the degree of centre satisfaction with awarding body customer service, and to identify good practice for improving this service in the vocational education sector. More specifically the measurement programme was designed to meet the following specific objectives.

- To establish an overall indicative level of centre satisfaction with awarding body customer service.
- To establish the degree of consistency of various aspects of awarding bodies' customer services for centres in England, as required in the statutory criteria.
- To identify and rank the key elements for centres of good awarding body services.
- To determine centres' knowledge of, and access to, CSSs.
- To identify quantitative indicators of satisfaction levels for aspects of qualifications service against which awarding bodies could measure their own centres' feedback.
- To assess the content and presentation of CSSs published by awarding bodies for centres, as required in criterion 32 of the statutory regulations.
- To test the potential value of customer service surveys undertaken by regulators as a risk indicator in overall monitoring strategy.
- To identify useful service standards that could be included in CSSs.

It should be iterated – the purpose of the study was not to identify specific awarding bodies that might be deemed as under-delivering on their statutory obligations. The purpose was to identify areas of general weakness and to understand where centres thought they might benefit from more support.

5 Research methodology

The overall study comprised of two discrete elements.

Review of current status of customer service statements

The first phase of the study, conducted in-house by QCA, was a review of the current status of the CSS for all recognised awarding bodies. An inventory of common and distinctive features found in CSS contents was compiled, a summary of which can be found in appendix 3 of this report.

Survey of centres

The second phase was a survey of vocational learning centres themselves. Detailed work was carried out by the QCA to identify a representative sample from which to gain insight into awarding body service delivery performance. The main mode of data collection was via telephone interview. However, to ensure equal opportunity to participate in the study, some respondents (for example, those with impaired hearing) were invited to participate via an e-mail self-completion questionnaire.

With the purpose of measuring centre perception of customer service delivery, it would have been impractical to question respondents on all aspects of statutory criteria to which awarding bodies are required to conform. In the first instance, therefore, it was decided the survey should concentrate on administrative processes only. Even in this specific area it would have been impossible to cover all aspects of statutory criteria in detail within a single respondent interview. Survey questions, therefore, were designed to address key themes within the statutory regulations. The questionnaire used to measure centre perception of awarding body performance can be found in appendix 1.

Interviewing was conducted by an independent research agency, between 14 March and 6 April 2006.

In cases where the total sum of responses is marginally above or below 100 per cent, this is done to the proportions recorded for individual responses having been rounded up or down to the nearest whole number.

6 Sampling

QCA undertook a rigorous process of awarding body profiling prior to the survey of centres in order to make sure, as far as was possible, centre interviews would represent a cross section of awarding bodies. This was to ensure that the survey data would yield, within the limits of time, cost and sample size, an accurate picture of awarding body service performance for vocational provision.

Selection of awarding bodies for inclusion in the sample encompassed:

- qualification type – national vocational qualification (NVQ) or vocationally related qualification (VRQ)
- qualification level – 1, 2 or 3
- vocational sector – a complete range of qualification subject matter.

Awarding bodies selected for inclusion in the study were pre-notified of the project and asked to provide a list of centres offering the qualification that had been targeted to exemplify the quality of its customer service across the National Qualifications Framework.

QCA contacted each of the centres to confirm the specified vocational course was currently being offered and, critically, confirming an appropriate contact person for the purposes of participating in the research. Full details of the sample selection process can be found in appendix 2 of this report.

From the lists supplied by the awarding bodies, 400 centres were identified for potential inclusion in the study. All of these centres were independently contacted with an invitation to participate in the survey. In total, 298 centres were interviewed, representing a credible 75 per cent response rate.

The profile of interviewed centres was as follows.

Centre type	Qualification type		
	Total (%)	NVQ (%)	VRQ (%)
College	44	32	55
Training provider	39	53	25
Employer	6	10	2
Other	11	5	18

Base: 298 centres

7 Survey findings

7.1 Overall satisfaction with awarding bodies

To gauge general levels of centre satisfaction with awarding bodies, respondents were asked to rate how satisfied they were with the selected awarding body, taking everything into account.

Over 9 in 10 centres said that, at least, they were satisfied, with almost half (44%) saying they were very satisfied. This finding was consistent between centres offering NVQs and VRQs, and across centre type.

Chart 1: Overall satisfaction with awarding bodies shown by level of qualification



Centres were asked to bear specific vocational qualifications in mind when giving their opinion of the selected awarding body. While the difference across level of qualification is marginal, satisfaction tended to be lower for level 1 qualifications (87% satisfied and very satisfied), progressively rising to the highest recorded satisfaction (97%) for level 3 qualifications.

Employers rated the awarding bodies the highest, with 56 per cent saying they were very satisfied. Regardless of subgroup (course type, qualification level and centre type), overall levels of satisfaction were high among centres in general.

Table 1: Overall satisfaction with awarding bodies

Numbers against responses given in percentages

	Total	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	NVQ	VRQ
Very satisfied	44	37	46	44	40	47
Satisfied	48	50	45	53	53	43
Not very satisfied	6	7	8	3	6	7
Not at all satisfied	1	4	0	0	1	1
Don't know	1	1	1	0	0	2
<i>Base:</i>						
<i>All respondents</i>	298	68	158	72	152	146

	College	Training provider	Employer	Other
Very satisfied	42	42	56	50
Satisfied	48	52	39	38
Not very satisfied	8	5	6	6
Not at all satisfied	2	0	0	3
Don't know	1	1	0	3
<i>Base:</i>				
<i>All respondents</i>	129	117	18	34

Among the small minority who expressed dissatisfaction (7%), reasons given tended to relate to slow responsiveness and slow or non-delivery of materials:

'Slowness of response and the awarding body is very small and cannot cope with the large number of entries from our centre.'

'Resources frequently turn up incomplete, late, wrong and to the wrong place.'

'It's taking a long time for our assignments to be given back.'

7.2 Likelihood of recommending awarding bodies

Advocacy is a proxy measure for satisfaction, in that recommendation reflects a positive disposition towards the awarding body and the service it provides. Accordingly, ratings given for this question were very similar to those for overall satisfaction, with 90 per cent saying they would be likely to recommend their elected awarding body to other centres. This was true of all qualification levels, types and centre types. The trend found at the previous question regarding the satisfaction across levels of qualification still held true for this question, but was slightly less pronounced.

Table 2: Likelihood of recommending awarding body

Numbers against responses given in percentages

	Total	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	NVQ	VRQ
Very likely	60	56	59	65	61	59
Quite likely	30	31	30	28	28	32
Not very likely	6	9	5	4	6	5
Not at all likely	1	3	1	0	1	1
Don't know	4	1	5	3	5	3
<i>Base:</i>						
<i>All respondents</i>	298	68	158	72	152	146

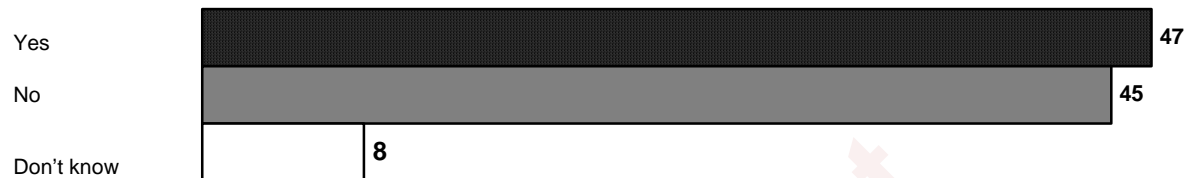
	College	Training provider	Employer	Other
Very likely	53	62	78	68
Quite likely	35	29	17	21
Not very likely	6	6	0	6
Not at all likely	1	1	0	3
Don't know	5	3	6	3
<i>Base:</i>				
<i>All respondents</i>	129	117	18	34

7.3 Customer service statement

The awarding body is obliged to publish a CSS that specifies the quality of service centres can expect to receive, relevant points of contact and communication processes, fee structure and so on.

When asked whether they had seen the CSS, only 47 per cent of respondents said they had. Those who were more likely to have seen it were employers (56% saying yes – possibly a reflection of their commercial orientation) and centres offering level 3 qualifications (58% yes). Colleges were least likely to have seen the CSS; just 43 per cent saying they had.

Chart 2: Overall whether seen customer service statement



Given that the publication of a CSS is a statutory criterion, this suggests that awarding bodies could do more to communicate their processes for service delivery.

Those who had seen the Statement were asked to rate how satisfied they were with it for explaining the service they should receive from the awarding body. Again, levels of satisfaction were high across all sample subgroups, as demonstrated in table 3, below.

Table 3: Satisfaction with awarding body's customer service statement for explaining the anticipated service

Numbers against responses given in percentages

	Total	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	NVQ	VRQ
Very satisfied	46	50	51	36	44	49
Satisfied	50	47	49	52	49	50
Not very satisfied	4	3	0	10	7	0
Not at all satisfied	0	0	0	0	0	0
Don't know	1	0	0	2	0	1
<i>Base: All who had seen the CSS</i>	141	30	69	42	71	70

	College	Training provider	Employer	Other
Very satisfied	55	41	60	25
Satisfied	43	51	40	75
Not very satisfied	2	7	0	0
Not at all satisfied	0	0	0	0
Don't know	0	2	0	0
<i>Base: All who had seen the CSS</i>	<i>56</i>	<i>59</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>16</i>

All but 4 per cent of centres who recalled having seen the CSS said they were at least satisfied that it explained the service they should receive from the awarding body.

In contrast to earlier questions, those ratings in regards to a level 3 qualification were least satisfied here, whereas 100 per cent of the level 2 centres rated the awarding bodies positively.

In addition, centres were asked how satisfied they were with the CSS for providing enough information about how the centre and qualification would be supported (table 4, below). Overall satisfaction was equally high in this regard.

Table 4: Satisfaction with awarding body's CSS for providing enough information about centre and qualification support

Numbers against responses given in percentages

	Total	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	NVQ	VRQ
Very satisfied	45	40	54	36	44	47
Satisfied	48	50	42	57	48	49
Not very satisfied	4	7	1	5	6	1
Not at all satisfied	1	3	0	0	1	0
Don't know	2	0	3	2	1	3
<i>Base: All who had seen the CSS</i>	<i>141</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>69</i>	<i>42</i>	<i>71</i>	<i>70</i>

	College	Training provider	Employer	Other
Very satisfied	57	37	60	25
Satisfied	34	56	40	75
Not very satisfied	4	5	0	0
Not at all satisfied	2	0	0	0
Don't know	4	2	0	0
<i>Base: All who had seen the CSS</i>	<i>56</i>	<i>59</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>16</i>

Looking at the overall satisfaction score, there is very little difference between the groups. However, breaking this down to look at how many said satisfied and how many said very satisfied, greater variance is apparent. Results for both questions regarding the content of the CSS show a similar pattern. Employers exhibit the greatest positivity, being more likely to say they were very satisfied than other centre types. Training providers and those rating a level 2 course tended to be the least likely to say they were very satisfied.

Overall satisfaction levels for centres classified as 'other' types were similar to other subgroups throughout the survey. However, the ratings for centres classified as 'other type' were more moderate and tended to fall into the 'satisfied' rather than the 'very satisfied' category. Those making up this group were a diverse set of centres, including universities, schools and adult education centres, community centres and charities.

Generally, centres believe that awarding bodies' service reflects their CSS (table 5, below), although, again, training providers tended to be the least positive, exhibiting the highest levels of dissatisfaction (although only 10% fell into this category).

Table 5: Satisfaction that the awarding body's service reflects their CSS

Numbers against responses given in percentages

	Total	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	NVQ	VRQ
Very satisfied	45	40	49	40	45	44
Satisfied	45	50	45	43	45	46
Not very satisfied	6	3	4	12	8	4
Not at all satisfied	1	3	1	0	1	1
Don't know	2	3	0	5	0	4
<i>Base: All who had seen the CSS</i>	<i>141</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>69</i>	<i>42</i>	<i>71</i>	<i>70</i>

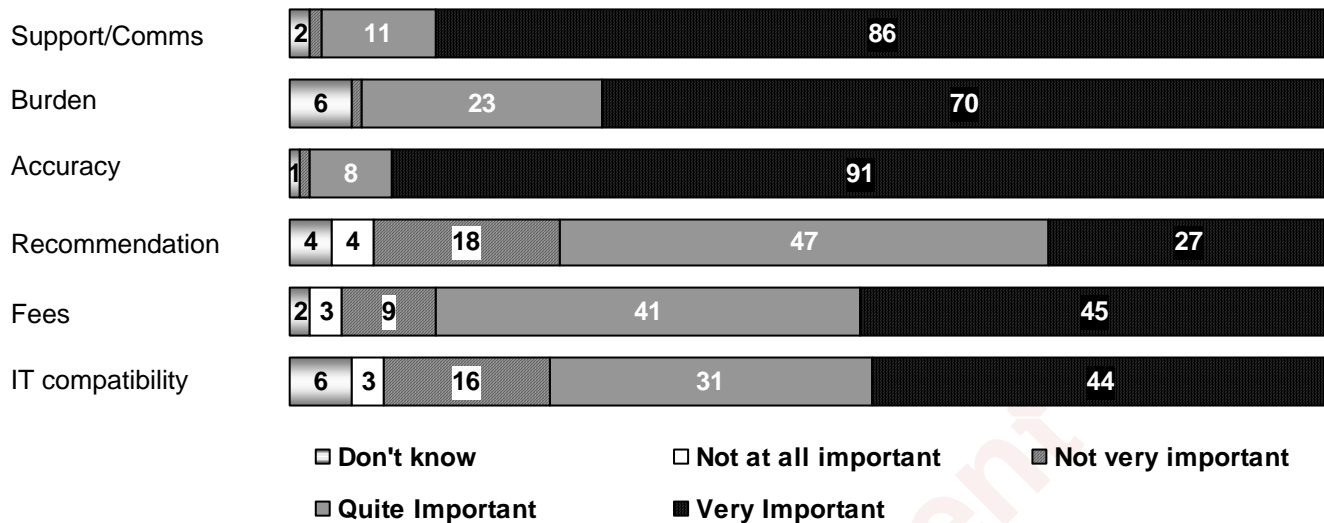
	College	Training provider	Employer	Other
Very satisfied	55	37	50	31
Satisfied	36	49	40	69
Not very satisfied	5	10	0	0
Not at all satisfied	4	0	0	0
Don't know	0	3	10	0
<i>Base: All who had seen the CSS</i>	56	59	10	16

7.4 Important service factors

Centres were read out a number of factors that might be considered when selecting an awarding body, and asked how important each was in choosing a qualifications provider. The factors were:

- effective support and communication
- assessment and verification burden
- awarding body's accuracy over registration and certification processes
- recommendation from other centres
- qualification fees
- compatibility of awarding body and centre IT systems.

A high degree of importance was placed on all factors, with three quarters of respondents to each aspect rating it as at least quite important in choosing an awarding body. Most commonly cited (chart 3, below) as being important was 'effective support and communications' from the awarding body, and 'accuracy over registration and certification procedures'. Nine in 10 centres said these aspects of the relationship are very important.

Chart 3: Importance of each factor in selecting an awarding body

Centres were also asked which of these factors they felt was the most important in choosing an awarding body. Although there was some variance in results by subgroup, the top three in rank order tended to be 'support and communications', 'assessment and verification burden' followed by 'accuracy over registration and certification procedures'. Only for centres in the 'other' category did qualification fees come through as being significantly more important.

Table 6: Most important factor influencing choice of awarding body

Numbers against responses given in percentages

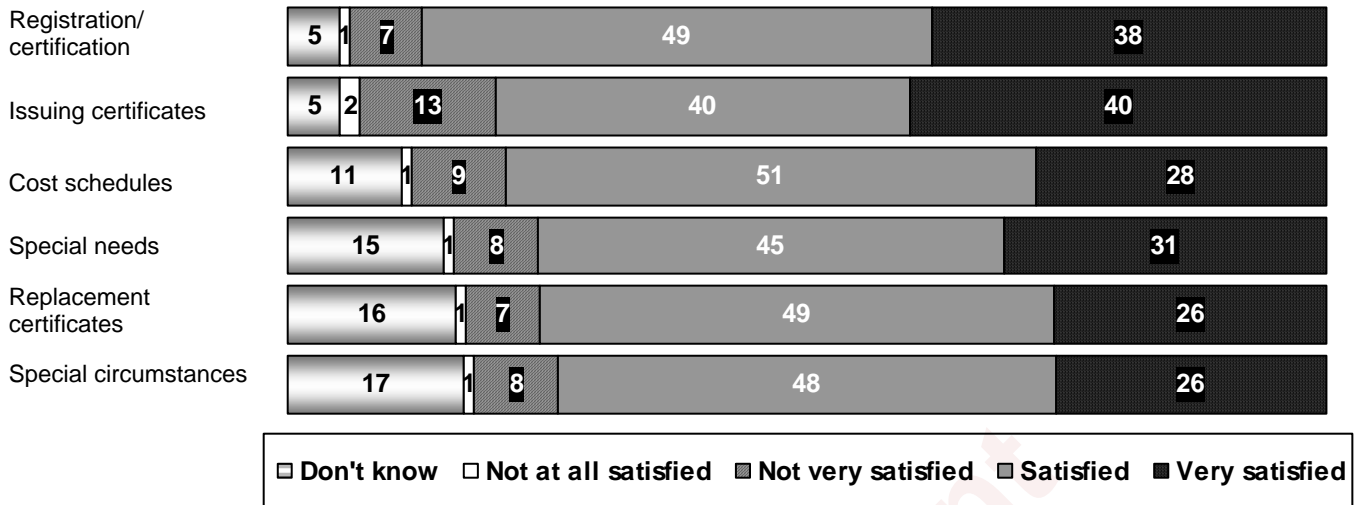
	Total	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	NVQ	VRQ
Support/Comms	33	37	32	31	26	40
Burden	24	25	21	31	34	14
Accuracy	21	19	23	18	20	23
Recommendation	7	7	6	8	9	5
Fees	7	7	8	6	4	10
IT compatibility	3	1	5	1	3	4
Don't know	4	3	4	6	5	3
<i>Base:</i>						
<i>All respondents</i>	298	68	158	72	152	146

	College	Training provider	Employer	Other
Support/Comms	32	38	28	21
Burden	25	25	28	18
Accuracy	22	15	28	35
Recommendation	5	10	6	3
Fees	6	4	0	24
IT compatibility	5	1	11	0
Don't know	5	6	0	0
<i>Base:</i>				
<i>All respondents</i>	129	117	18	34

7.5 Administration support

As previously iterated, the research focused on assessment of awarding body administrative and support processes. Six aspects of administrative services were examined (chart 4, below), with centres being asked to give their satisfaction with the awarding body for the following.

- Providing clear and user-friendly registration and certification procedures for candidates.
- Providing clear and user-friendly cost schedules.
- Providing clear guidance on requests for making reasonable adjustments to assessment of candidates with special needs or requirements.
- Providing clear guidance on procedures for claiming special considerations if, for example, a candidate suffers illness, injury or disruption during assessment.
- Issuing certificates without unnecessary delay.
- Providing clear guidance for claiming replacement certificates.

Chart 4: Satisfaction with aspects of administration support

Satisfaction with awarding bodies' administrative support was generally high among the centres. However, in some aspects of administration, levels of satisfaction tended to be more moderate. For example, fewer respondents used the 'very satisfied' rating in the areas of 'providing guidance on adjustment requests for candidates with special needs' and in 'guidance for claiming replacement certificates'. The level of 'don't know' responses recorded was also highest for these two aspects of the administration processes. In these cases, 'don't know' responses reflected a lack of centre need for investigating these circumstances rather than necessarily a lack of guidance provision by the awarding body.

Interestingly, while the process of 'timely issuing of certificates' (table 7, below) has the highest proportion of respondents rating 'very satisfied', it also has the highest proportion rating for 'not very and not at all satisfied'. This implies a considerable degree of annoyance on the occasions when this process does break down.

Table 7: Issuing certificates without unnecessary delay

Numbers against responses given in percentages

	Total	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	NVQ	VRQ
Very satisfied	40	40	40	39	40	39
Satisfied	40	35	42	39	41	39
Not very satisfied	13	10	12	18	15	11
Not at all satisfied	2	4	2	1	2	3
Don't know	5	10	4	3	2	8
<i>Base:</i>						
<i>All respondents</i>	298	68	158	72	152	146

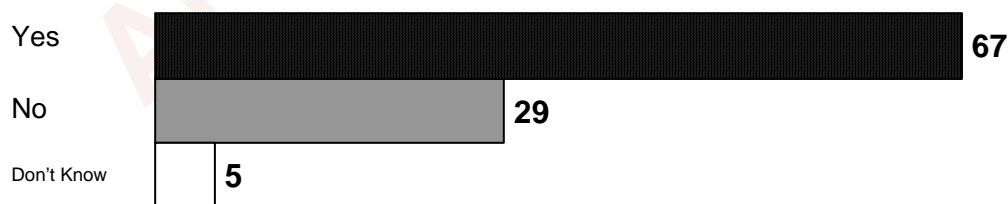
	College	Training provider	Employer	Other
Very satisfied	44	38	28	32
Satisfied	40	38	61	35
Not very satisfied	11	15	6	21
Not at all satisfied	0	5	0	3
Don't know	5	3	6	9
<i>Base:</i>				
<i>All respondents</i>	129	117	18	34

It can be seen from table 7 that dissatisfaction with the timely issuing of certificates is highest among training providers and those classified as 'other'. Employers and particularly colleges rated the awarding bodies far more positively for issuing their certificates promptly. However, there is little variance in the results between the level and type of qualification.

7.6 Communication

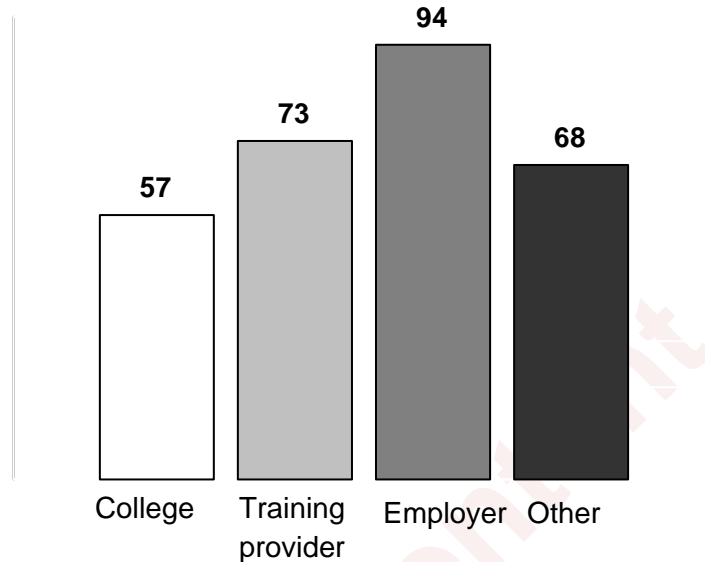
It is a statutory requirement that the awarding body must identify 'a single named point of accountability for the quality assurance and management of qualifications'. Two thirds of centres (chart 5, below) indicated that they had a single named contact at the awarding body. A third said they were unsure or did not have a single contact point.

Chart 5: Whether centre has one point of contact at awarding body



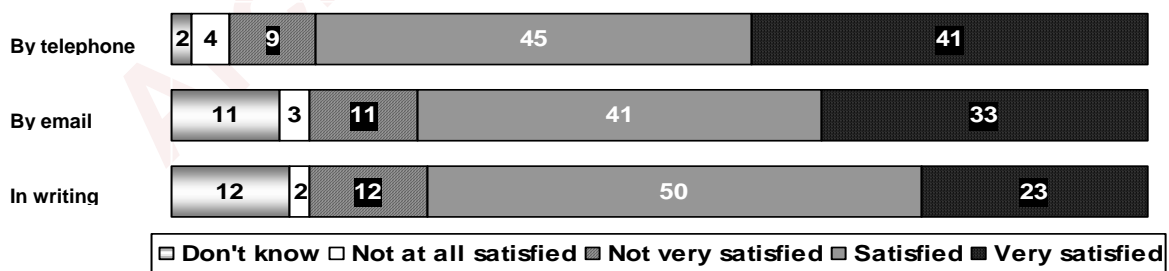
This varied widely between the centre types, as can be seen in chart 6, below, with colleges far less likely to have a single named contact.

Chart 6: Percentage of centres with a single named contact at awarding body



Overall, centres were satisfied that their queries are answered sufficiently and in a timely manner (chart 7, below). They were most satisfied with the response time for enquiries made by telephone, or by email. This suggests that often queries can be answered in one call or very shortly afterwards.

Chart 7: Satisfaction with response time to enquiries by different methods



Centres were also satisfied that information given in response to queries is both sufficient and relevant. This relates to the awarding body staff having the expertise to deal with such enquiries (chart 8, below).

Chart 8: Satisfaction that information given in response to queries is both sufficient and relevant



As part of the ongoing process of assessing candidates, awarding bodies must ensure procedures are identified regarding retaining evidence of candidates work. The vast majority of centres (87%) said they were clear about the data they needed to keep for 'monitoring and verifying candidates' work over time'.

Colleges were least likely to say they were clear about the candidates' data they needed to retain for subsequent monitoring; almost a quarter (22%) saying they were unclear or they did not know what candidate data they needed to keep. There appears to be some correlation in this lack of knowledge between centre type and qualification type: those responding in relation to VRQs also exhibited the least amount of knowledge in this area. The majority of respondents assessing VRQs were from colleges (table 8, below).

Table 8: Whether centre clear on the data retention over time

Numbers against responses given in percentages

	Total	College	Training provider	Employer	Other
Yes	87	78	95	89	94
No	7	9	4	11	6
Don't know	6	13	1	0	0
<i>Base:</i>					
<i>All respondents</i>	298	129	117	18	34

Those who said they were not clear, were asked to suggest things that the awarding body could do to help centres understand more. Ideas included a fact sheet, clearer information and guidance, perhaps including a section on the website, and sending examples of the data expected to be retained.

'There could be an example package, or they could send someone to assess your centre so perhaps a visit every so often by the awarding body.'

'Send us a nice big guide - something nice looking and clear to follow.'

'A small training session would not take too long.'

7.7 Training materials' guidance and centre manuals

To meet the statutory requirements regarding keeping centres informed and giving them the necessary information to run the qualifications, awarding bodies might send centres guidance materials, updates, bulletins or newsletters.

Most centres (73%) said they receive this type of information as appropriate when the need arises rather than necessarily on a regular basis. Just over 1 in 10 (13%) said they only receive such information when they request it. Just 4 per cent said they never receive any guidance information. The only marked difference in the frequency of receiving information was that colleges appear more likely to either never receive this type of information, or claim to never receive it at all. Again, there appears to be a correlation between centre and qualification type – those assessing VRQs were most likely to respond in this way, the majority of whom were from a college (table 9, below).

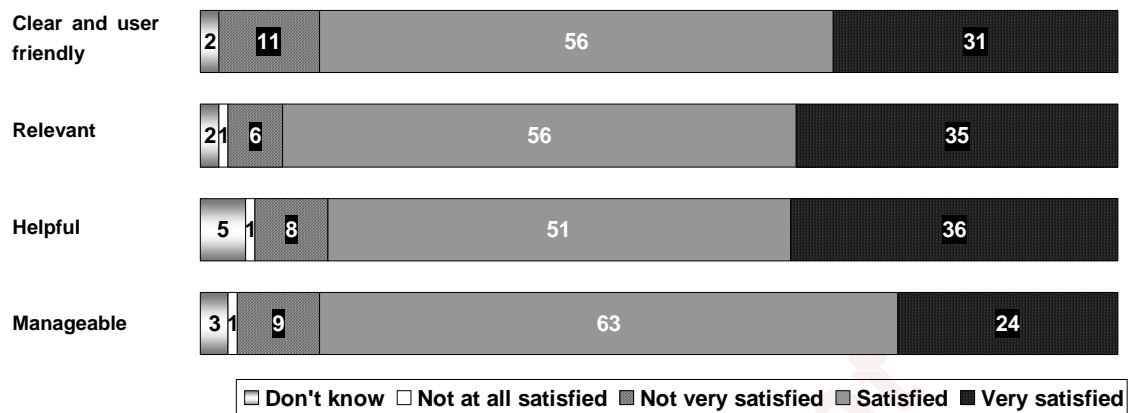
Table 9: Frequency with which centres receive guidance material

Numbers against responses given in percentages

	Total	College	Training provider	Employer	Other
As appropriate	73	62	80	89	82
Only on request	13	15	13	6	12
Never	4	6	1	6	3
Other	5	6	4	0	3
Don't know	5	11	2	0	0
<i>Base:</i>					
<i>All respondents</i>	298	129	117	18	34

The 96 per cent of centres in the survey who did receive guidance materials were then asked to rate their satisfaction (chart 9, below) with those materials using the following criteria.

- Being clear and user friendly.
- Being relevant.
- Being helpful in assisting centres with running the courses.
- Being manageable (that is suggested processes are practical and achievable).

Chart 9: Satisfaction with guidance materials

Consistently more of those rating level 3 courses felt satisfied with the information provided. In terms of guidance information being manageable, colleges were least satisfied (83% satisfied as compared to 87 per cent of training providers and 94 per cent of employers). Again, a correlation appears to exist within the survey sample. Colleges were less likely to be assessing level 3 qualifications.

It is a statutory requirement of awarding bodies to ensure that centres have teaching staff who are competently able to deliver the qualification. This would normally involve monitoring the expertise of teaching staff at the centres, and where appropriate providing guidance to help maintain and develop this expertise.

Eighty-one per cent of centres said that the awarding body did check on the expertise of the teaching staff, although this figure varied widely by level, type of qualification and type of centre (table 10, below).

Table 10: Whether awarding body checks on expertise of centre's teaching staff

		<i>Numbers against responses given in percentages</i>				
	Total	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	NVQ	VRQ
Yes	81	75	80	89	90	71
No	11	18	11	4	4	18
Don't know	8	7	9	7	6	11
<i>Base:</i>						
<i>All respondents</i>	298	68	158	72	152	146

	College	Training provider	Employer	Other
Yes	72	91	94	74
No	12	6	6	24
Don't know	16	3	0	3
<i>Base:</i>				
<i>All respondents</i>	129	117	18	34

Those centres rating awarding bodies for a level 3 qualification were far more likely than those rating levels 1 and 2 to have had the awarding body check the expertise of their teaching staff, and likewise level 2 was more likely than level 1.

Centres responding in relation to VRQs were the least confident that the awarding body checks the expertise of teaching staff. It follows that colleges were the least likely to say they had had their teaching staff checked given the greater prevalence of VRQs among this centre type. It is also notable that a quarter (24%) of centres classified as 'other type' claimed never to have been checked by the awarding body.

A very similar pattern emerged when centres were asked whether the awarding body offered clear guidance (table 11, below) to help maintain and develop the expertise of the centre's staff.

Table 11: Whether awarding body gives clear guidance to help maintain and develop centre staff's expertise

Numbers against responses given in percentages

	Total	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	NVQ	VRQ
Yes	74	59	74	88	80	67
No	21	35	18	13	16	26
Don't know	5	6	8	0	4	7
<i>Base:</i>						
<i>All respondents</i>	298	68	158	72	152	146

	College	Training provider	Employer	Other
Yes	67	80	78	74
No	22	18	22	26
Don't know	11	2	0	0
<i>Base:</i>				
<i>All respondents</i>	129	117	18	34

Again, those assessing the awarding body in relation to a VRQ were among the least likely to say they received clear guidance to help maintain and develop staff expertise. In this instance, however, those responding in relation to a level 1 qualification were the least likely to receive guidance of this type. It could be hypothesised that qualifications at the lower level require less support from awarding bodies in the development of staff. However, this is contradicted by the finding that respondents providing feedback in relation to a level 1 qualification were the most likely to have found such guidance offered by their awarding body to be useful.

Of significance is the value that centres place on the guidance provided by awarding bodies in developing centre staff (table 12, below). At an overall level, just over 9 in 10 centres that had received this type of guidance found it to be useful; the majority found it 'very useful'. In particular, colleges were more likely to say they found the information very useful, even though a lower proportion had received such guidance.

Table 12: Usefulness of guidance given by awarding bodies on staff development

Numbers against responses given in percentages

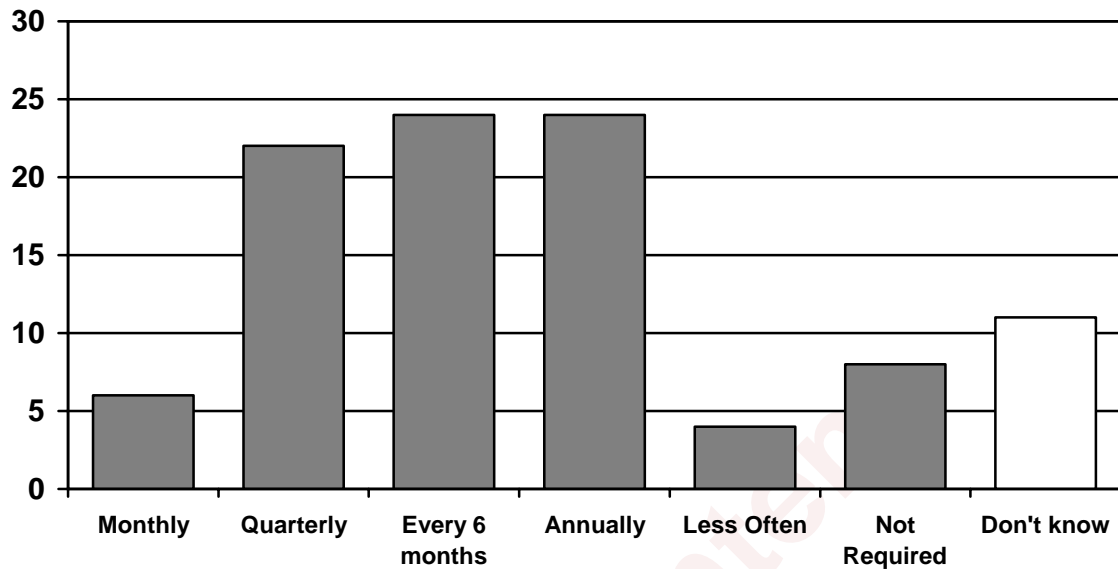
	Total	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	NVQ	VRQ
Very useful	59	68	57	56	56	62
Quite useful	33	23	32	40	38	27
Not very useful	4	8	3	2	4	3
Not at all useful	1	0	1	0	0	1
Don't know	5	3	6	3	2	7
<i>Base: Centres who receive guidance on staff development</i>	220	40	117	63	122	98
	College	Training provider	Employer	Other		
Very useful	63	57	57	48		
Quite useful	24	36	36	48		
Not very useful	3	4	7	0		
Not at all useful	1	0	0	0		
Don't know	8	2	0	4		

<i>Base: Centres who receive guidance on staff development</i>	87	94	14	25
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7.8 External verification and moderation

It is a requirement that the awarding bodies standardise external or independent assessment procedures to ensure results are reliable. Part of this process may involve visits from an external moderator or verifier to the centre. For 8 per cent of the centres this was not required. Seventy-seven per cent of centres were visited at least once a year (the split can be seen in chart 10, below).

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Chart 10: Frequency with which external moderator or verifier visits centre

Of those who were visited by external moderators or verifiers, 85 per cent were satisfied with the quality of the feedback on their findings. Those centres completing the survey in relation to level 3 courses were the most satisfied.

Colleges were slightly less satisfied with the quality of feedback, but again had a far higher number of 'don't know' answers. A possible explanation for this is that the nature of contacts within colleges may have been different to that of other centres, perhaps having less broad experience of interaction across various aspects of the relationship.

7.9 Appeals, complaints and malpractice

Of the centres surveyed, 84 per cent had been issued with complaints procedures and policies by their awarding body, although 7 per cent did not know whether they had been or not. This was fairly consistent across the sample subgroups. Of those who had received the procedures, 97 per cent were satisfied that they gave clear guidance.

Centres were also asked whether they thought the awarding body's published turnaround time for appeals and complaints is appropriate (table 13, below). While 30 per cent of centres said they were not aware of what the published turnaround time was, despite most having received the complaints procedures, only a small minority (2%) felt turnaround time to be inappropriate.

Table 13: Whether awarding body's published turnaround time for appeals and complaints is appropriate

Numbers against responses given in percentages

	Total	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	NVQ	VRQ
Yes	57	51	56	63	59	55
No	5	6	4	6	7	2
Not aware	30	32	30	28	26	34
Don't know	9	10	10	4	8	10
<i>Base:</i>						
<i>All respondents</i>	298	68	158	72	152	146

	College	Training provider	Employer	Other
Yes	59	59	56	41
No	2	8	6	3
Not aware	28	27	33	44
Don't know	11	6	6	12
<i>Base:</i>				
<i>All respondents</i>	129	117	18	34

Just 17 per cent of centres had ever lodged an appeal or complaint with the awarding body. There was some variance between the different groups (see table 14, below).

Table 14: Whether ever lodged an appeal or complaint with awarding body

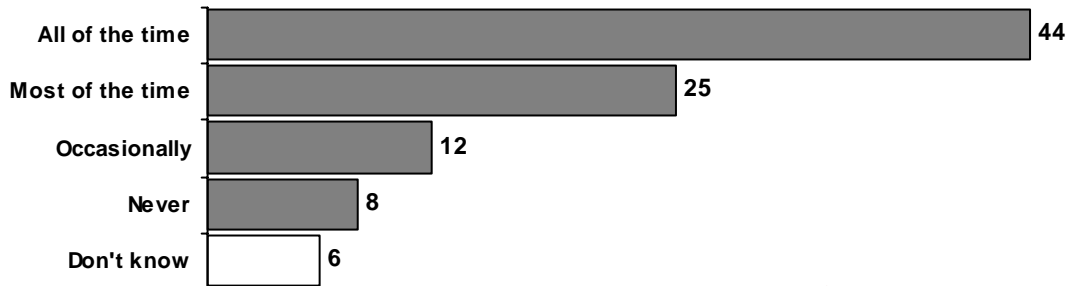
Numbers against responses given in percentages

	Total	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	NVQ	VRQ
Yes	17	12	15	28	23	12
No	82	88	84	72	77	88
Don't know	1	0	1	0	0	1
<i>Base:</i> <i>All respondents</i>	298	68	158	72	152	146

	College	Training provider	Employer	Other
Yes	16	23	6	9
No	83	77	94	91
Don't know	1	0	0	0
<i>Base:</i> <i>All respondents</i>	129	117	18	34

All those who had lodged a complaint or appeal were asked whether the awarding body met the published turnaround time, and whether the centre was satisfied that the awarding body's decisions relating to complaints were fully explained and justified (chart 11, below). As only 52 centres were asked these questions, it is difficult to draw meaningful conclusions from the results between groups due to low base sizes.

Among the centres who had lodged an appeal or complaint, the majority (69%) said that the awarding body met the published turnaround time. However, 1 in 5 (20%) claimed their awarding body never, or only occasionally managed to do this.

Chart 11: Meeting published turnaround time for complaints and appeals

While only a minority of centres interviewed had ever lodged an appeal or complaint against their awarding body, levels of satisfaction are the lowest in this aspect of the relationship. Almost a quarter (23%) of those making an appeal stated they were not very or not at all satisfied that the appeals decisions had been fully explained or justified (chart 12, below).

Given that less than 1 per cent of centres expressed dissatisfaction with the clarity of appeals guidance supplied by the awarding body, it would appear that dissatisfaction with decisions relates more to the outcome of the appeal, rather than to the process itself. Nevertheless, this is a significant cause for centres' concern. Transparency in justifications and processes would go some way to reducing dissatisfaction levels.

Chart 12: Satisfaction that awarding body's decisions relating to complaints are fully explained and justified

All centres were asked whether they had been issued with the awarding bodies procedures for dealing with malpractice (chart 13, below). Three-quarters (74%) confirmed they had. There was no significant difference in this result between centre and qualification type.

Chart 13: Whether awarding body has issued centre with malpractice procedures

Those who had been issued with the procedures were asked whether they were satisfied that they were fully and clearly explained. Again, satisfaction was generally high, (91% satisfied or very satisfied). Just 1 per cent claimed to be dissatisfied – the remainder (8%) saying they did not know.

Despite this, only 32 per cent of respondents reported being fully aware of the action the awarding body is required to take if malpractice is not reported (table 15, below). Almost half (45%) were somewhat aware, but as many as 19 per cent were not at all aware. This result is perhaps of concern. Should such a relatively high proportion of centres be unaware of the procedures surrounding malpractice, inadvertant or otherwise?

Table 15: Awareness of action awarding body must take if malpractice is not reported

Numbers against responses given in percentages

	Total	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	NVQ	VRQ
Fully aware	32	29	28	44	39	25
Somewhat aware	45	49	47	38	43	47
Not at all aware	19	18	22	15	16	22
Don't know	4	4	4	3	2	5
<i>Base:</i>						
<i>All respondents</i>	298	68	158	72	152	146
	College	Training provider	Employer	Other		
Fully aware	26	37	33	35		

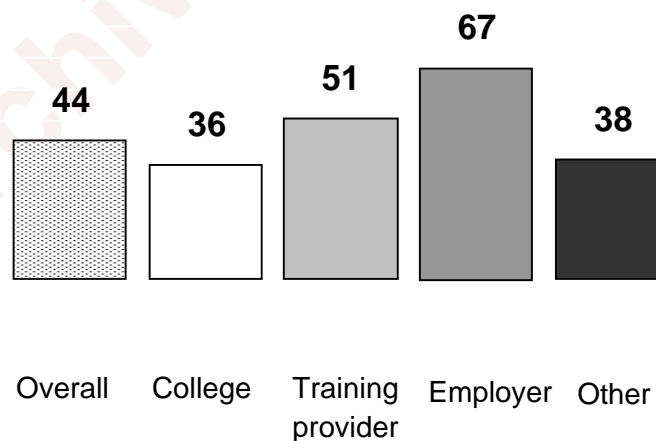
Somewhat aware	48	43	44	41
Not at all aware	22	15	22	18
Don't know	4	3	0	6
<i>Base:</i>				
<i>All respondents</i>	129	117	18	34

Those responding in relation to VRQs appear to be the least aware of malpractice procedures as were those from colleges (again a relationship existing between these particular sample subgroups).

7.10 Awarding body customer satisfaction surveys and feedback

Awarding bodies are required to monitor formally the performance of their customer service standards. Just under half of the centres surveyed (44%) had been asked for feedback by the awarding body at some point in the past (chart 14, below).

Chart 14: Proportion of centres who have ever been requested to provide feedback to awarding body

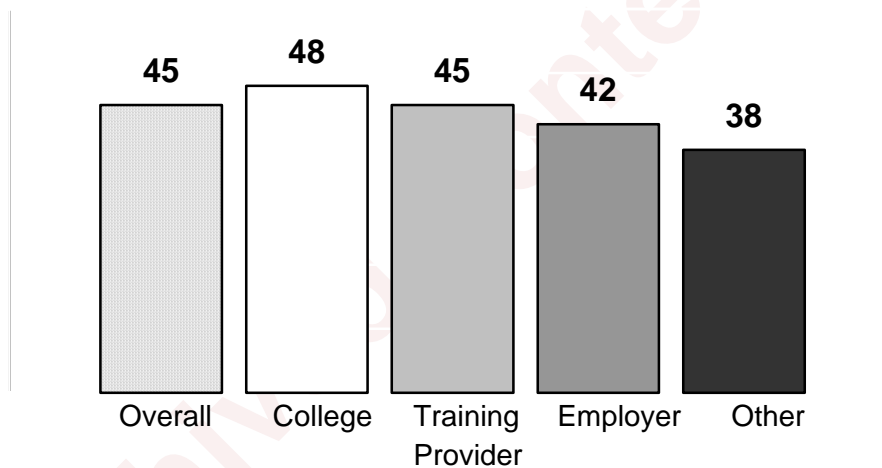


Survey results indicate that the extent to which centres are asked to provide formal feedback differs by centre type. This may be a factor of the sampling approach the awarding bodies are required to adopt. If a census approach is not required it is feasible that, coincidentally, some of the centres covered by the QCA survey have not yet been sampled by the awarding body in relation to their own feedback programmes, (absence of feedback from specific types of centre may be a reflection of sampling

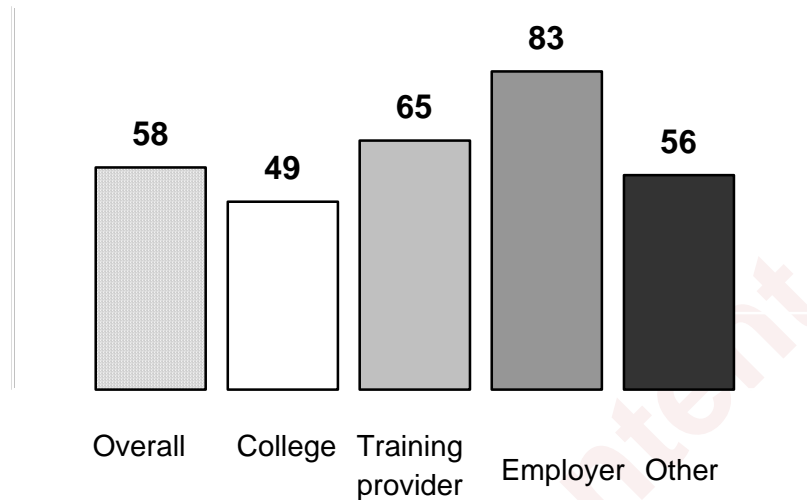
design rather than a lack of proactive feedback mechanisms on behalf of the awarding body). This is supported by the fact that among those having been asked to participate in an awarding body survey, there is little difference in the levels of satisfaction with feedback provided across the centre types. For all awarding bodies represented in the research, multiple centre interviews were conducted. For only one of those awarding bodies did all the centres interviewed claim not to have been asked formally to provide feedback about service delivery.

However, the fact that just under half (45%) of those who have taken part in a survey were provided feedback by the awarding body is perhaps disappointing (chart 15, below).

Chart 15: Proportion of centres provided feedback by awarding body after taking part in a survey for the awarding body



Fifty-eight per cent of centres reported that the awarding body invites suggestions for improvements in its service provision, but again this varied by type of centre (see chart 16, below).

Chart 16: Whether awarding body invites suggestions for improvement from centres

7.11 Suggestions for improving awarding body service

Centres were asked what one change they would like to make to the service provided by the awarding body. Nearly a third (31%) said that they thought no changes were necessary. Of those who did, however, a large variety of responses were given. It seems that responses were specific to individual centres' circumstances. Table 16 lists the changes suggested by 5 or more centres.

Improvement of online services came top. Within this category there is a common theme of centres wanting to be able to register candidates online.

Table 16: Suggestions by centres for improving awarding body service

Suggestion	%	Example
Improved online and internet services	8	<i>'I think if we could have a user-friendly online system that would be brilliant.'</i>
Quicker processing of certificates	5	<i>'I'd like to see certificates issued more promptly.'</i>
Better communication	5	<i>'I'd like more interaction between the awarding body and the subject teachers.'</i>
Less / simpler paperwork	4	<i>'You register a candidate with one form and then have to fill in 2 or 3 others. I think there should be a standard form for it all.'</i>

Quicker response time (phone)	4	<i>'The waiting time on the telephone is our biggest issue.'</i>
Improvement of customer service	3	<i>'I think the biggest problem is the customer service... the only way to get a response is to withhold payments.'</i>
Named contacts	3	<i>'I'd like to have a specific contact with specific responsibilities.'</i>
More information	3	<i>'We need feedback on the qualification - what difficulties may arise.'</i>
To be kept up to date	2	<i>'More updates as things are changing or advise us that things are on the internet.'</i>
Reduction of fees	2	<i>'Lower the fees for students.'</i>
Make things easier and simpler	2	<i>'Clearer instructions, simplified course structure.'</i>
The marking procedures	2	<i>'I would like feedback when the papers are externally marked.'</i>
<i>Base: All respondents</i>		<i>298</i>

Centres were also asked whether there were any positive things the awarding body does, which they would like to share to help other awarding bodies improve their services.

'The quality of the external verifiers.'

The external verifiers were a common theme among the responses. Centres really feel that if they can develop a good relationship with an external verifier it pays off, and many were full of praise for the verifier they had. Some centres whose external verifiers were full-time commented on how much of an advantage this was. The external verifiers written reports were also mentioned as key sources of support.

'Online registration and certification processes are very quick and user friendly.'

Another common theme was the ability to register candidates online. Those for whom it was available said the process was a lot easier than doing it manually. This relates to the previous question, where many centres who did not have online registration were saying it was the one improvement they would make to the awarding body's service. Special mention went to City & Guilds' 'Walled Garden' – the online administration service where centres can, among other things, register candidates, order publications, check their approval status for different awards and make candidate enquiries.

'They are an organisation that works in partnership all the time with you.'

A more general comment that was mentioned regularly was customer service. It seems that centres really do appreciate being able to get through to people, getting prompt responses and being treated as important.

'Candidates have a handbook for the duration of the course.'

Some centres also liked the resource material that was provided for candidates by the awarding body, whether handbooks, magazines, folders or other material. It was commented that providing such material made candidates feel that they were part of something professional.

'Their understanding of our industry is extremely valuable.'

Centres recognised the benefits of having a sector-specific awarding body. This affords an understanding and a desire to make the qualification workable and relevant, which might not be the case for more generalist awarding bodies.

'Their qualifications are very good and well recognised.'

Centres also found advantage in using a well-known, sometimes internationally recognised, awarding body. Some felt the prestige of the qualifications was helping increase their candidates' employability.

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8 Multivariate analysis

Straightforward analysis of the data identifies in absolute terms relative measures of service performance – in other words, aspects of service that record high and low levels of customer satisfaction. However, it is important to understand the impact that performance has on influencing overall perception or satisfaction with the awarding body as a whole. It is quite possible for there to be positive perception of an aspect of service delivery that is considered either a hygiene factor (where over-delivery does not enhance satisfaction but where under-delivery would have a negative impact) or of having little importance in influencing overall satisfaction.

To overcome this issue, a multivariate analysis technique is used to quantify a relationship between a single dependent variable (eg overall satisfaction) and one or more independent or explanatory measures – in other words, service delivery dimensions.

A multivariate analysis is conducted to identify strengths and weaknesses in the relationship with customers, and to identify improvement priorities that are most likely to enhance centre satisfaction. In summary, this analysis adopts a statistical approach to understanding the relationship between aspects of service delivery and overall satisfaction.

A point to note is that, in conducting this analysis, detecting associations between measurement dimensions is dependent on there being variance in the data. The first observation is that recorded centre satisfaction with awarding body service delivery was high for all aspects of the relationship being measured (satisfaction being referred to as the proportion of respondents having given a rating of 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied'). As a proportion of all respondents, satisfaction levels across the service dimensions tended to range from the mid 80s to mid 90s in percentage terms. Such high satisfaction levels among the sample as a whole indicate that no individual sample subgroup appears to be receiving particularly poor service. There were no statistically significant differences when analysing by course type, level, sector or indeed centre type.

The general observation is that, for the surveyed sample overall, extremely low levels of dissatisfaction were recorded. In a situation where customers appear to be 'happy', the difficulty arises as to where improvement can be made to best enhance overall satisfaction. Closer analyses of the data, however, showed that variation did exist between those who stated they were 'satisfied' with specific aspects of service and those who said they were 'very satisfied'. While multivariate analysis shows which aspects of service drive satisfaction overall, within a scenario where the greater majority of centres are satisfied with awarding body service, multivariate analysis shows which aspects of service improvement are most likely to move centres from being merely satisfied to being very satisfied. The outcome of this analysis is detailed as follows.

Chart 17: Impact of service versus performance

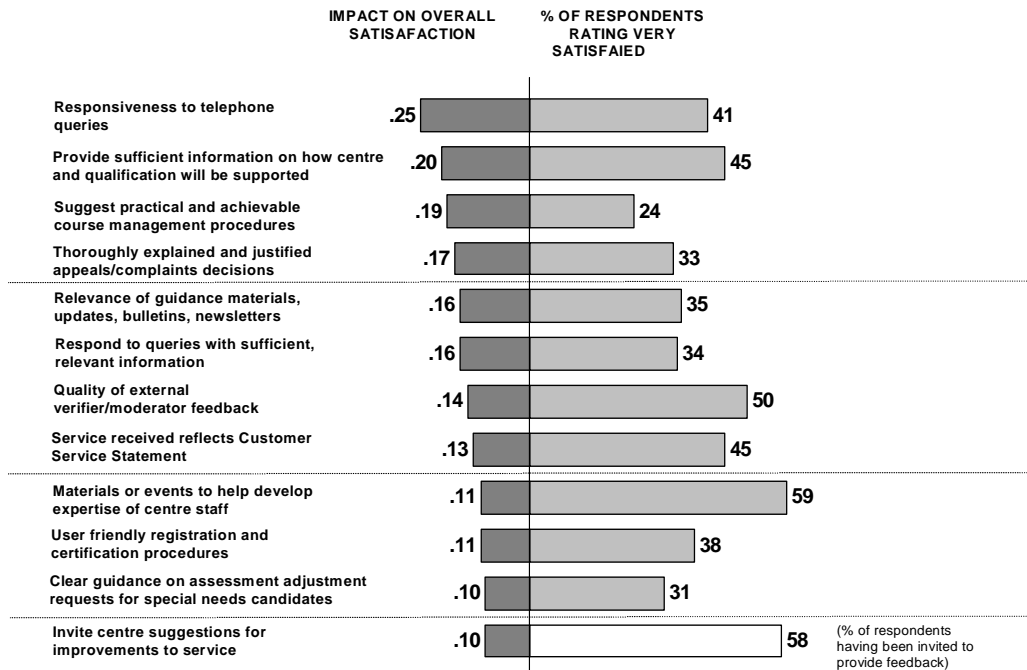
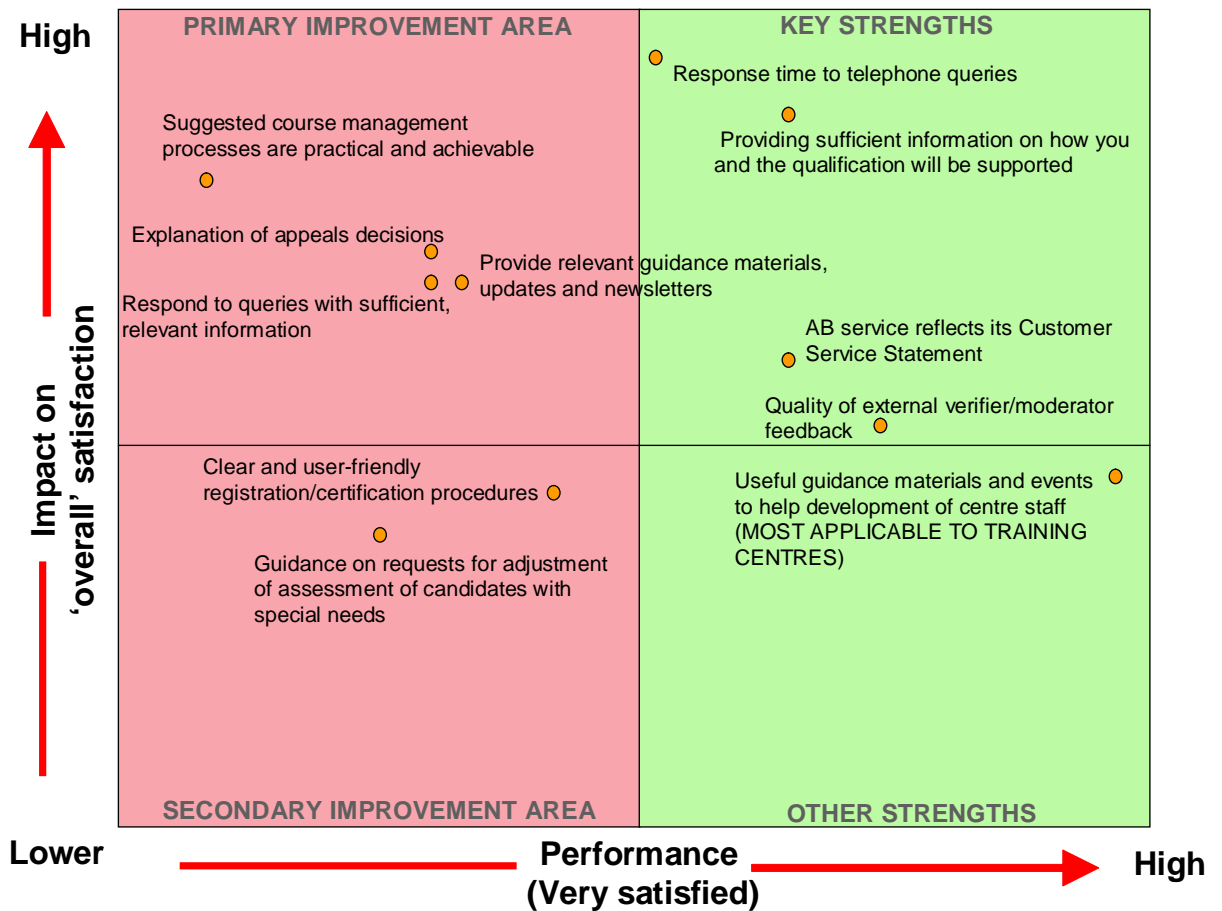


Chart 17 shows which aspects of service delivery have greatest impact on driving overall satisfaction with the awarding bodies, that is the point where there is greatest correlation between the dependent variable (overall satisfaction) and independent variables (individual aspects of service). This analysis yields a regression coefficient, or a statistical score, representing the level of impact individual aspects of service contribute to overall satisfaction. The scores provide a relative position, for example awarding body responsiveness to telephone queries (.25) is more than twice as impactful on driving overall satisfaction as providing user-friendly registration procedures (.11). Only aspects of service that have a significant impact on overall satisfaction are shown in the chart.

When we analyse performance against impact, we can see that there is no linear correlation between the aspects of service identified as having greatest impact (or importance) and the levels of satisfaction with service delivery in those areas. However, by plotting impact *versus* performance of each service attribute we are able to identify priority areas for improvement, taking into account the degree of impact on satisfaction and the level of current performance into account. We should bear in mind that levels of satisfaction with awarding body service are high in general. Differentiation exists between the proportion of respondents giving a 'satisfied' rating and those giving a 'very satisfied' rating. The following chart demonstrates where service improvement can be made to shift centres' experience from one of mere satisfaction to one of delight.

Chart 18: Improvement matrix



The upper right-hand quadrant in chart 18 shows aspects of service having higher impact on driving overall satisfaction, that is where delivery performance is strong or where high levels of 'very satisfied' ratings were given. These service dimensions constitute relative strengths in awarding body service delivery as a whole. The top left hand quadrant shows aspects of service having higher impact on driving overall satisfaction, but where service delivery is weaker in relative terms. These constitute the areas of service where improvement is most likely to enhance centre satisfaction as a whole. The bottom quadrants show aspects of service that have lower impact on overall satisfaction, and represent secondary areas for improvement or performance monitoring.

This analysis shows that in managing the relationship with centres, awarding bodies should focus on providing course management guidance materials that recommend processes that are practical and achievable for the centres. In addition, they should provide guidance materials (updates, bulletins and news letters, and so on) that are relevant and targeted specifically to centre needs in managing specific qualifications. In fact, 17 per cent of centres interviewed claimed to receive such information only on request or, indeed not at all.

Providing enough information on how the awarding body will support its centres and qualifications is important, and currently a criterion that is being satisfactorily met.

Response time to queries, particularly via the telephone (queries made by telephone are likely to reflect the urgency of the problem or issue) is another important aspect of service at which the awarding bodies perform well, in general. However, quality of response does not necessarily always match the speed, the proportion rating 'very satisfied' as opposed to just satisfied being among the lowest for responding to queries 'with information that is sufficient and relevant'. Nevertheless, it should be noted that levels of absolute dissatisfaction are extremely low in this regard.

Other improvements likely to enhance satisfaction overall are in the area of appeals or complaints – specifically in 'providing clear guidance on making assessment adjustment requests for candidates with special needs' and 'thorough explanation and justification of decisions'. Naturally this only tended to reflect the opinion of those having had cause to make an appeal or complaint.

Although of lower impact in influencing overall satisfaction, feedback provided by external verifiers or moderators is important to centres. In addition, the centres value being invited to suggest how the awarding body can improve service, although only just over half of those surveyed (58%) have been offered this opportunity. These findings support a need for the facilitation of dialogue by the awarding bodies between themselves and the centres.

9 Conclusions

Overall satisfaction

Centre satisfaction with their awarding bodies overall is encouragingly high. In total, 92 per cent of vocational centres surveyed said they were satisfied with their awarding body, and half of this number stated they were 'very satisfied'. Only a small minority (7%) expressed dissatisfaction.

Given these high levels of satisfaction across centres as a whole, little difference in results is distinguishable between the type of centre surveyed, qualification type or level and so on. Where some differentiation is apparent, it is in the proportion of respondents rating their level of satisfaction as being just 'satisfied' as opposed to 'very satisfied'.

When looking at levels of satisfaction for the various elements of service delivery in more detail, two patterns emerge. Firstly, those responding in relation to a lower level (level 1), VRQ-type qualification, together with respondents, from colleges tend to give lower 'very satisfied' ratings, although the satisfied/very satisfied ratings combined are not significantly different when compared against other sample subgroups. A relationship exists within the survey sample in that representation of level 1 and VRQ-type qualifications is highest among colleges. It follows, therefore, that the pattern of results across these variables is similar, but it is difficult to identify what exactly underpins this association. Is it the nature of VRQs that may lead to slightly lower levels of satisfaction, or is the awarding body relationship with colleges different in some way?

What does emerge is that respondents within colleges were slightly more likely to give 'don't know' responses than to offer an opinion on delivery performance across the different service dimensions. This suggests that the nature of the identified contacts within colleges may have been different to other types of learning centre – possibly a difference in job role perhaps meaning less exposure to all aspects of interaction between the centre and awarding body.

The second pattern that emerges is that, along with colleges, centres classified as 'other type' tended to give marginally lower 'very satisfied' ratings. However, given the diverse range of organisations falling within this category (schools, universities, charities, adult and community centres, government associations), it is difficult to draw conclusions as to why this might be.

What should be qualified is that these differences in results are indicative patterns only, rather than statistically significant findings.

Customer service statement

While provision of a CSS is a statutory requirement, less than half of centres (47%) surveyed claimed to have seen the statement from their awarding body. The remainder had not seen their awarding body's statement, 8 per cent of which could not actually remember whether they had seen it or not. It should be pointed out this does not necessarily reflect an absence of a CSS, but rather that respondents attention had not been drawn specifically to this among other materials or information they may have received.

Levels of overall satisfaction with awarding bodies are high regardless of whether or not centres had seen their CSS. However, those having seen the statement were considerably more likely to be very satisfied with their awarding body overall (53%) compared with those who had not seen the statement (33%). In addition, those having seen a statement were three times less likely to express dissatisfaction with their awarding body than those who had (4% and 12% respectively). Implicit in this is that bringing the CSS to the attention of centres has a positive influence on their perception of the awarding body. This would seem logical in that the purpose of the statement itself is designed to guide centres in their interaction with, and expectations of, their awarding body.

Although less than half of centres claimed to have seen the CSS, 9 in 10 of those who had were satisfied that the statement 'explained the service they should receive from the awarding body', that it 'provided enough information about how the centre and qualification would be supported by the awarding body', and that 'the awarding body's service reflects their CSS'. Again, implicit in this finding is that awareness of the CSS reflects a greater understanding of service delivery processes and standards, which in turn, leads to higher levels of satisfaction. In particular, multivariate analysis showed that providing information on how the centre and qualification would be supported demonstrated some of the highest correlations with overall satisfaction.

Important service factors

Centres were asked that, if they were to consider an alternative awarding body for a similar qualification, which of a number of factors would be most important in making that choice. While all factors were deemed important to a greater or lesser extent, accuracy over registration and certification procedures was most commonly considered to be 'very important' (91% saying very important). However, this in fact is identified as a minimum expectation. When asked which of a number of factors was the most important influencer of choice, the most commonly mentioned was 'effective support and communication' from the awarding body (33%). Next was 'assessment and verification burden' (24%), followed by 'accuracy over registration and certification procedures' (21%). Overall, 'qualification fees' and 'IT compatibility' were mentioned by only a minority as being the most important influencers of awarding body choice (mentioned by 7% and 3% respectively). This goes some way to support the view that the ability of awarding bodies to demonstrate customer focus is critical to learning centres.

Administration support

As with most aspects of service delivery, satisfaction with awarding body administration support was generally high. With regard to providing guidance specifically on making assessment adjustment requests for candidates with special needs, and procedures for claiming special considerations for candidate disruption during assessment, respondents were only able to comment on the quality of this information if their centre had experienced these circumstances. The same was true for providing clear guidance on claiming replacement certificates.

While fewer than 1 in 10 respondents expressed dissatisfaction with these aspects of administration, the proportion saying they were very satisfied, was among the lowest for these aspects of service delivery. Implicit in this finding is that awarding body service is perceived as being relatively less strong when required to react to the individual needs of centres.

While centres were most likely to be very satisfied with timely issuing of certificates by awarding bodies (40%), this aspect of service also received the highest proportion of dissatisfaction ratings. This suggests that while the issuing of certificates process generally works well, it is the cause of considerable annoyance when it breaks down.

Communication

Although a statutory requirement, only two thirds of centres (67%) claimed to have a single point of contact for the quality assurance and management of qualifications. Awareness of a single contact point was considerably higher among those who had seen the awarding body CSS (73%) compared with those who had not (53%). In addition, while in the minority, 41 per cent of those who did express dissatisfaction had no single point of contact, compared with only 27 per cent of centres who were satisfied overall. This, again, implies a positive connection between awareness of the CSS, specifically in relation to contact procedures, and positive experience of interaction with the awarding body.

Speed of awarding body response to queries, particularly via telephone, and the level of response in relation to 'being sufficient and relevant' is generally viewed positively. The quality of response, however, is another area in which the proportion of respondents rating 'very satisfied' tended to be lower. Again, multivariate analysis identified this aspect of service as having among the highest correlation with overall satisfaction.

Training and guidance

In general, awarding bodies appear reasonably proactive in providing centres with necessary information to help them run courses, such as guidance materials, updates, bulletins or newsletters. However, almost 2 in 10 centres (17%) claimed to receive this information only on request or not at all. This type of communication is a driver of overall satisfaction with the awarding bodies. Of most influence is providing information for centres that is relevant to them, and suggesting course management processes that are practical and achievable. Again, these are aspects of service where, while those expressing dissatisfaction are in the small minority, the proportion saying they were very satisfied tended to be lower than for other aspects of service delivery. This was particularly the case for awarding bodies' provision of 'information which suggests practical and achievable course management processes'. This is perhaps further evidence of where awarding bodies could demonstrate greater understanding of the individual needs of centres.

Just over 8 in 10 centres (81%) acknowledged that their awarding body was following the statutory requirement of checking on the occupational or educational expertise of their teaching staff. Just over 7 in 10 (74%) confirmed that their awarding body provides clear guidance to help maintain and develop centre staff expertise although, again, this tended to be slightly less likely for those evaluating level 1 qualifications, VRQs and respondents from colleges. Of significance, among those who do receive this type of support, the vast majority (92%) found this information useful, indeed 59 per cent saying it was very useful. This is one of the most positively rated aspects of awarding body service delivery. In this case, even though colleges were least likely to receive this support, those that did were in fact the most positive among the different centre types. Interestingly, for training provider centres specifically, this aspect of service is a driver of overall satisfaction with awarding bodies.

Verification, moderation and appeals

Of the centres that have a requirement for external or independent assessment, 8 in 10 said they are visited by an external moderator or verifier at least once a year. Level of frequency of visit by independent assessors appears to have no impact on levels of overall satisfaction with the awarding bodies.

Just over 8 in 10 centres (84%) had been issued with their awarding body's complaints procedures and policies, and the vast majority of those who had (97%) were satisfied that these are clear. As may be expected, only those who had reason to lodge an appeal or complaint were really able to offer opinion on whether or not published complaints and appeals turnaround time is appropriate. Only 17 per cent of centres had ever had cause to lodge a complaint, and 30 per cent of centres overall were not actually aware of the turnaround time. Of those who were aware, 9 in 10 agree that published turnaround time was appropriate. However, among the minority of centres who had lodged a complaint, less than half (44%) said that their awarding body met their published complaints turnaround time all of the time. As many as 20 per cent said their awarding body managed this only occasionally or, indeed, never.

Although less than 1 per cent of centres expressed dissatisfaction with the clarity of the appeals guidance provided by their awarding body, almost a quarter (23%) of those who had lodged an appeal said they were dissatisfied that the awarding body's decision had been fully explained or justified. This possibly suggests that dissatisfaction on the behalf of centres is likely to be a result of disagreement with the awarding body decision, rather than due to a failure in its procedures.

Awarding body feedback

Although less than half (44%) of centres interviewed said they had ever been formally requested by their awarding body to provide feedback on its service delivery, for only one awarding body represented in the survey did all respondents claim they had never received a request of this type. What this shows is that among awarding bodies in general, formal feedback programmes appear to be in place, although they may not be being universally implemented across all centres. Among those who had participated in a process of this type, less than half again (45%) claimed to have received a response from the awarding body on feedback given about its service. Furthermore, less than two-thirds of centres had ever been invited by their awarding body to suggest improvements to its service provision.

Clear patterns emerge here. Those who had been invited to provide formal feedback were far more likely to be very satisfied with the awarding body than those who had not (53% compared with 37% respectively). Those who had provided feedback and had received a response from the awarding body were more likely to be very satisfied than those who had not (66% compared with 40% respectively). Centres who had been invited to suggest service improvements to their awarding body were far more likely to be very satisfied than those who had not (54% and 23% respectively). What this serves to prove is that providing a forum for dialogue between the awarding body and its centres enhances the relationship and promotes positive perception of the awarding body.

10 Recommendations

While overall satisfaction among centres with their awarding bodies is high in general, there is a clear association between the CSS and the extent to which centres are 'delighted' with their awarding body. **The issue, however, appears to be in the communication of the CSS rather than the content.** Of those who have seen their awarding body's CSS, the large majority are satisfied that its service reflects the statement. Those who have seen the CSS are more likely to give the highest satisfaction ratings for their awarding body overall as well as for the individual components of its service. This suggests a better understanding of awarding body procedures and processes, which helps to form a framework of expectation and facilitate smoother running of the relationship. However, less than half of centres claim to have actually seen the CSS for their awarding body, but probably as much through ignorance as through absence of it. **In order to provide the platform for positive relationships, awarding bodies should do as much as possible to promote their CSS, drawing more attention to it in its communication with centres.**

There is some evidence to suggest a 'one size fits all approach' in awarding bodies provision of service. Less positive service differentiation (lower very satisfied ratings) is evident in the areas of 'providing practical and achievable course management procedures', and also in 'relevance of supporting guidance and course update materials'. **While levels of dissatisfaction are low, adopting a more tailored or interactive approach would enhance the centre experience.**

In developing the theme of 'interaction', again there is evidence to support improvement in relationships by effectively fulfilling the statutory objective of providing formal feedback programmes. While it appears these programmes are widespread among awarding bodies to a greater or lesser degree of effectiveness, it seems they are not being implemented universally across all centres: not all centres are invited to provide feedback on service delivery. Where practical, a programme allowing all centres to participate should be implemented. **In addition, efforts should be made to provide a response to the feedback provided by the centres, which is not widely the case at the moment.** Of value to centres is a forum through which the centres can suggest improvements to awarding body service. Again this opportunity is not being universally offered, but could perhaps be managed through the instigation of a formalised awarding body-centre review meeting, the primary objective being engagement of the centres.

Centres most commonly state that effective support and communications is the most important characteristic of an awarding body. The importance of this characteristic is verified by multivariate analysis, which shows that 'providing sufficient information on how the centre and qualification will be supported' is highly correlated with overall satisfaction. **An example of how valuable proactive support is regarded can be seen in the area of awarding body checking on expertise of centre staff.** The aspect of service receiving the most positive results (the highest proportion of respondents giving the top rating) was in the usefulness of guidance materials, events and support in developing centre staff. This serves to show that awarding bodies should have systems for 'proactive' rather than simply 'reactive' support in place.

While the relationship between awarding bodies and centres sits within a statutory and regulatory framework, the relationship should not purely be one of conformance but one of partnership.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Survey questionnaire

Please note: references to requirements in *The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004)* have been included in italics alongside each question, where appropriate.

QCA Centre Satisfaction Questionnaire

Introduction

ASK TO SPEAK TO NAMED CONTACT ONLY

Good morning/afternoon. My name is..... We are conducting an independent study on behalf of QCA. The purpose of the study is to understand how qualification Awarding Bodies can improve the service they provide to learning centres.

QCA is particularly interested in your feedback and should have already contacted your centre to advise that this study is being done.

The study is being conducted under the strict rules of the Market Research Society code of conduct. Your responses will be combined with those of others and you will remain anonymous in the results of the research. The survey takes around 15 minutes. Would it be OK to go ahead now?

SCHEDULE APPOINTMENT IF NECESSARY

This survey focuses on your centre's relationship with the (insert name of awarding body from sample) awarding body, and specifically the service they provide in relation to their (insert from sample – Level i.e. 1,2,3/ Type i.e. NVQ, VRQ/ name of qualification) qualification. If possible, please bear this in mind when considering your answers.

Overall

Q1 First of all, taking everything into account, how satisfied are you with the service provided by the Awarding Body? Would you say you are.....

READ OUT

Very satisfied
Satisfied
Not very satisfied
Not at all satisfied
Don't know

IF NOT VERY/NOT AT ALL SATISFIED

Q2 Why do you say that? PROBE FULLY

Verbatim

Q3 And how likely would you be to recommend this Awarding Body to other learning centres? Would you say

- Very likely
- Quite likely
- Not very likely
- Not at all likely
- Don't know

Customer service statement

The Awarding Body is obliged to publish a Customer Service Statement that specifies the quality of service you can expect to receive, relevant points of contact and communication processes, their fee structure and so on.

Q4 Have you seen the awarding body's Customer Service Statement? (32a-e)

- Yes
- No [*Go to question 7*]
- Don't know / Can't remember [*Go to question 7*]

IF RESPONDENT HAS SEEN STATEMENT

Q5 Thinking about the awarding body's Customer Service Statement as it relates to the services provided to your centre, how satisfied are you with their Statement for

- Explaining the service you should receive from the awarding body in support of their qualification (32a)
- Providing enough information about how they will support you and the qualification (32a-e, 38)

REPEAT SCALE IF NECESSARY

- Very satisfied
- Satisfied
- Not very satisfied
- Not at all satisfied
- Don't know

Q6 How satisfied are you that the service you receive from the Awarding Body reflects its customer service statement? (32e, 33b, 34)

Would you say you are...

- Very satisfied
- Satisfied
- Not very satisfied
- Not at all satisfied
- Don't know

ASK ALL

Q7 If you were selecting an alternative awarding body, offering the same qualification, how important would the following factors be in influencing your choice of awarding body?

How important is (INSERT FACTOR). Would you say that is.....

READ OUT

- Very important
- Quite important
- Not very important
- Not at all important
- Don't know

READ OUT EACH FACTOR IN TURN

- a) Recommendation from other centres
- b) Qualification Fees
- c) Assessment and verification burden
- d) Awarding Body accuracy over registration and certification processes
- e) Effective support and communication
- f) Compatibility of awarding body IT systems with your own (8,10e, 12, 13, 11b)

Q8 Of those factors, which **one** would you rank as the most important in choosing an alternative awarding body?

READ OUT FULL LIST

- a) Recommendation from other centres
- b) Qualification Fees
- c) Assessment and verification burden
- d) Awarding Body accuracy over registration and certification processes
- e) Effective support and communication
- f) Compatibility of awarding body IT systems with your own (8,10e, 12, 13, 11b)

Administration support

I'm now going to read out some statements about the administration support offered by (Insert awarding body from sample). For each statement, please tell me how satisfied you are with that aspect of administration support using the scale 'Very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied.

If possible, when considering your answers, please can you think of the administration support as it relates to the (insert from sample – Level i.e 1,2,3/ Type i.e. NVQ, VRQ/ name of qualification).

Q9 How satisfied are you with the awarding body for (insert statement)? Would you say you are.....

READ OUT

Very satisfied
Satisfied
Not very satisfied
Not at all satisfied
Don't know

- a) Providing clear and user-friendly registration and certification procedures for candidates (9, 21, 22b-d, 32e, 60f)
- b) Providing clear and user-friendly cost schedules (32d)
- c) Providing clear guidance on requests for making reasonable adjustments to assessment of candidates with special needs or requirements (15, 16, 17, 23)
- d) Providing clear guidance on procedures for claiming special considerations if, for example, a candidate suffers illness, injury or disruption during assessment (18)
- e) Issuing certificates without unnecessary delay (22b)
- f) Providing clear guidance for claiming replacement certificates (22c-d)

Communication

Q10 Do you have a single named contact at (insert name of awarding body from sample) to assist you with issues regarding quality assurance arrangements and management of qualifications? (11a, 32b)

Yes
No
Don't know

Q11 If you need to contact the awarding body with queries, how satisfied are you with their response time from initial enquiry to complete satisfactory answer for (Insert query type)? Would you say you are.....(32a, 32b, 10b, 10e)

READ OUT

- Queries made by telephone
- Queries sent via e-mail
- Queries made by you in writing

REPEAT SATISFACTION SCALE

Q12 In following up any queries you may have, how satisfied are you that the awarding body responds with information that is sufficient and relevant? Would you say you are.....(10a-f, 39a)

REPEAT SATISFACTION SCALE

Q13 Is your centre clear about the volume and type of assessment data it needs to keep for monitoring and verifying candidates' work over time? (13, 61a, 61d)

Yes
No

Q13a What could the Awarding Body do to help your centre to understand more about the assessment data it needs to keep in order to monitor and verify candidates' work?

Verbatim

Training materials/guidance and centre manuals

The awarding body may send your centre course guides and manuals that give information on implementing qualifications. These may include the level and depth of knowledge or skills required for candidates to take the qualification, arrangements for assessing candidates, and so on.

Q14 Which of the following best describes how often your centre receives guidance materials, updates, bulletins or newsletters relating to management of the qualification? *(9, 11d, 17, 28, 39a, 49,, 53e, 57, 58f, 61f)*

READ OUT

- As appropriate, when the need arises
- Only on request
- Never
- Other (specify)

IF RESPONDENT RECEIVES GUIDES, BULLETINS ETC.

Q15 Thinking about updating materials from (Insert awarding body from sample), in general, how satisfied are you with these communications for being (insert statement). Would you say.....*(23, 32e, 34, 61f)*

REPEAT SATISFACTION SCALE

- Clear and user friendly
- Relevant
- Helpful in assisting you with running courses at your centre
- Manageable i.e. the processes they suggest you follow are practical and achievable

Q16 Does the awarding body ever check on the occupational or educational expertise of your centre's teaching staff? *(11d, 28, 36)*

Yes
No
Don't know

Q17 And, does the awarding body offer your centre guidance materials or events to help maintain and develop the professional expertise of centre staff? (10, 11b, 11d)

Yes
No
Don't know

Q18 How useful is this type of support to your centre?

Very Useful
Quite Useful
Not very Useful
Not at all Useful
Don't know

External verification or moderation

Q19 How often does an external verifier or moderator visit on behalf of the Awarding Body? (58g, 58h)

Monthly
Quarterly
Annually
Not required [Go to next section]

Q20 And how satisfied is your centre with the quality of the feedback on their findings? (56, 34, 32a, 32e)

REPEAT SATISFACTION SCALE

Appeals and complaints

Q21 Has the awarding body issued you with their procedures and policies for dealing with complaints, appeals and enquiries for information? (23, 24, 28, 32a, 32e)

Yes
No
Don't know

IF YES

Q22 How satisfied are you with the procedures for providing clear guidance on what to do in the event of, for example a complaint, an appeal, or candidate malpractice? (23, 24, 28, 32a, 32e)

REPEAT SATISFACTION SCALE

Q23 Do you think that the Awarding Body's published turnaround time for appeals and complaints is appropriate? (23, 24, 25c, 28)

Yes
No
Not aware of turnaround time

Q24 Have you ever lodged an appeal or complaint with (insert name of awarding body from sample)?

Yes
No
Don't know

IF YES (and if respondent has gone through the process on more than one occasion, please think about the most recent occasion).

Q25 Does the Awarding Body meet the published turnaround time for responding? Would you say.....(25c, 25e, 32a & e)

READ OUT
All the time
Most of the time
Occasionally
Never
Don't know

Q26 How satisfied are you that the Awarding Body's decisions relating to appeals and complaints are thoroughly explained and justified? (25c, 25b, 25e, 28, 30)

(If respondent has gone through the process on more than one occasion, please think about the most recent occasion).

REPEAT SATISFACTION SCALE

Q27 Has the awarding body issued you with their procedures and policies for dealing with malpractice, such as assessment cheating by candidates? (28, 29, 30, 31)

Yes
No
Don't know

IF YES

Q28 How satisfied are you that the Awarding Body's procedures for dealing with malpractice are fully and clearly explained? (28, 29, 31)

REPEAT SATISFACTION SCALE

Q29 Are you aware of the action the Awarding Body is required to take in the event that malpractice is not reported? Would you say you are..... (29, 35)

READ OUT

Fully aware
Somewhat aware
Not at all aware

Awarding body customer satisfaction surveys/feedback

Q30 Awarding bodies themselves are required to monitor formally the performance of their customer service standards. Has your centre ever been requested to provide feedback on service delivery by (insert awarding body from sample)? (27,32e, 33, 34)

Yes
No
Don't know

IF YES

Q31 How often does the Awarding Body ask for feedback on the quality of their services? (17b, 27, 32e, 33, 34)

READ OUT

- More than once a year, for example as part of External Verification visits or following other service delivery events
- Annually
- Less often
- Don't know

Q32 Has the Awarding Body provided you with any feedback from this activity? (61h)

Yes
No
Don't know

ASK ALL

Q33 Does the Awarding Body invite suggestions from you for improvements in its service provision? (32e, 33, 34, 61h)

Yes
No
Don't know

Q34 What change would you most want to make about the service given by the Awarding Body? PROBE FULLY

Verbatim

Q35 QCA will be publishing the results of this study in a report that will be publicly available.

Are there any areas of good practice or useful services offered by the Awarding Body that you feel set a good example and could be mentioned in the QCA report?

Verbatim

About you and your centre

We are now coming to the end of the survey. I just have a final few questions about you and your learning centre.

Q36 Can I just ask which of the following best describes your centre? Are you a.....

READ OUT

College
Training Provider
Employer
Other (Specify)

Q37 And, how long have you been in your current position?

READ OUT

Less than a year.
1 – 2 years
3 – 4 years
5 –9 years
10- 14 years
15- 19 years
20 years or more
Don't know

Q38 Approximately how long has your centre worked with (insert name of awarding body from sample) awarding body?

READ OUT

Less than a year
1-3 years
4-5 years
Over 5 years

CLOSE

On behalf of QCA, we'd like to thank you for participating in this study.

Appendix 2 – Sampling method

Centre sample selection methodology

To optimise relevance of the project and its final report for as wide an audience as possible – employers, candidates, centres and awarding bodies – the process for selecting centres began with the sectors and subjects framework set up on QCA's website.

The first tier of this framework subdivides sectors into 15 sections overall but of these only 13 offer vocational training and development. To achieve a balance of review across the sectors framework, the project began with the aim of identifying two qualifications / awarding bodies for each first-tier sector. This would give a maximum of 26 qualifications / awarding bodies. However, sector 12 has only one vocational area offering vocational qualifications so only one award was chosen for this sector, giving a total of 25 qualifications / awarding bodies to include in the final sample. This initial intention was amended as the process for identifying qualifications and centres proceeded.

- Using a printed list of all recognised awarding bodies and their accredited qualifications, the occurrence of qualifications offered in each second-tier area of the sectors and subjects framework (1.1 – 15.5) was noted on a grid.
- Where there were minimal qualifications provided in a first-tier sector, a qualification / awarding body was selected to include that sector area first.
- Where a second-tier sector area had many more qualifications than the others in that tier, a qualification was chosen from that subsector area to represent its high candidate take-up potential. For example, if there were several qualifications in area 1.3 by comparison with other second-tier subsectors then a qualification was chosen from 1.3 in the first instance (see model below).

First tier	Second tier
1. Health, public services and care √	1.1 Medicine and dentistry
	1.2 Nursing and subjects and vocations allied to medicine √
	1.3 Health and social care √ √ √ √ √ √ √
	1.4 Public services √ √ √ √
	1.5 Child development and well-being √

Exemplar model of spread of awarding bodies across sector 1 in the sectors framework.

- Awarding bodies were identified by one qualification only (where possible, typical of its overall provision). This was to ensure that as many awarding bodies as possible were included in the survey. For example, if three awarding bodies offered the same qualification in area 1.3 but one of them was the only awarding body offering a qualification in area 1.2 and the other was the only awarding body offering a qualification in 1.5, then the awarding body that would not otherwise be included in the survey was selected for its qualification in area 1.3, leaving the Awarding bodies with provision in area 1.2 and 1.5 to 'represent' those subsectors – ensuring the inclusion of all three Awarding bodies in the survey sample.
 - Accreditation dates for each qualification were checked on the national qualifications database (Openquals), on the QCA website, to ensure the sample qualifications were still valid. Where a qualification was due to expire shortly, a substitute was identified.
 - Small awarding bodies offering qualifications in popular sector areas with plenty of provision were added to the survey sample list first. Sometimes this also influenced the qualification type (NVQ/VRQ) to maintain an even balance across the centre sample.
 - Large awarding bodies with a diverse range of qualifications were left to the end of the selection process as they would very likely service a sector area or offer a qualification level that would keep the overall sample balanced by sector area, by qualification type (NVQ/VRQ), and by levels 1/2/3.
- A final check was done of the outcome and adjustments made to balance the sample evenly across awarding body, qualification type (NVQ/VRQ), and qualification level 1/2/3.
- Awarding bodies were notified by letter, on 6 June 2005, of QCA's intention to undertake the survey and were asked to provide the list of centres offering the qualification that had been targeted.
- As a result of the awarding body response to this letter, the sample was adjusted, either removing the awarding body / qualification altogether if it was not currently available or changing the target qualification for a specific awarding body.
- In cases where the awarding body centres list had fewer than 20 centres, all of those centres for that awarding body were contacted. Centre lists with shortfalls in numbers came largely from the smaller awarding bodies, and usually involved specialised qualifications.
- Where there was no take-up for a specific qualification, the centre was asked to suggest an alternative qualification (if possible at the same level and in the same first-tier sector area) offered by the same awarding body. Where there was no alternative provision at the centre for an awarding body the centre was removed from the sample list.
- For each awarding body centre list, centres were selected on an even geographical spread throughout England. The country was divided into north

east, north west, midlands, south east and south west. This revealed that some awarding bodies have most of their centres located in one region of the country.

- Some centres are offering qualifications on behalf of more than one awarding body. Where this was the case, the centre's views were sought on the smallest awarding body in order to maintain balance across the sample as a whole. The final sample was checked to avoid duplication of centres and additional centres were selected from larger awarding bodies to maintain the centre numbers.
- In order to bring the sample up to 400 centres and to ensure coverage of all vocational sectors areas, QCA decided to contact schools in England offering NVQs.
- QCA wrote to centres on 25 November 2005 and 6 January 2006, requesting that they confirm their contact details and take-up of the target qualification for the survey. Centres emailed their responses to QCA at css@qca.org.uk. The final sample for the survey comprised: colleges, training providers, schools and employers (in-house delivery).
- QCA contacted each centre by telephone (from 1-7 February 2006) to confirm the contact details for the survey project. This revealed that, although some centres were accredited for the target qualifications identified for the survey, they either did not have any candidate take-up or had not offered the qualification for some time. These centres were then taken off the sample list, and alternative centres added.

Appendix 3 – Summary of awarding body customer service statement analysis

Customer service statements – common and likely information

Common standards	Standards used by some awarding bodies but not others	Other
Despatch certificates within 30 days (six weeks) from receipt of results	Reporting within 1 month of results received	Give details needed in order to become an approved centre (3); Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Safe facility (Health & Safety) - Appropriately equipped (specialist i.e. gymnastics) and for hosting theoretical exams - Adequate library/information facility - Suitable admin support - Approved examiners
Responses to correspondence made within 10 working days	Confirm candidate's registration or results within 7 working days of receipt	Annual programme of examination dates
Centre License decision and visit within 4 weeks of application	Confirm candidate's registration within 14 working days	Provide centres with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - student answer sheets within 5 days - allocation of theory paper within 14 days - practice papers within 7 days
Initial acknowledgement to centre approval made within 7 working days of application	Confirm candidate's registration within 20 working days	'Approved centres commitments'
Responses to correspondence made within 5 working days	Issue results within 2 months of exam/assignment deadline	On-line service for registration and certification of candidates
Fees include (fees not necessarily given): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - candidate registration - centre approval - administrative & assessment materials - external assessment - candidate registration & certification - appeals 	Complaints answered within 5 working days of receipt	Dress code for exams
Investigate complaints within 10 working days	Overseas correspondence answered within 14 working days	Enquiries about exam results acknowledged for a fee and answered within one month of receiving the fee.

Provide assessment and training materials within 7 working days before start of course	Answer calls within 5 rings	Equal Opportunity Policy
Arrange accreditation visit to centre within 8 weeks from receipt of application	Allocate to the centre an EV within 6 weeks	Student membership benefits
'Appeals (results) answered within 28/32 days of appeal	'Undertake to use language (English, Welsh & Irish (Gaelige)) that is free from bias and appropriate to the qualification'	
Mission Statement		
Register all candidate's within 10 working days of receiving registration form		
Despatch publications within 5 working days of receipt		
Despatch publications within 10 working days of receipt		
An EV will contact centres applying for approval within 15 working days of receipt of application		
NVQ certificates issued within 2 weeks of receipt		
Exam certificates despatched within 40 working days		
Organisation contacts and details		
Customer feedback questionnaire		

It is common for awarding body statements to include the following structure:

Mission Statement / Role of awarding body
 Centre Approval/Induction / Training (Information for centres)
 Fee structure
 Exams/Qualifications/Certificates
 Customer support service (etiquette, communication response time, etc)
 Principal / subject contacts in the organisation (awarding body)
 Complaints/Appeals
 Feedback questionnaire form

Appendix 4 – Awarding body project participants

QCA wishes to thank the following awarding bodies and their centres that participated in this project.

ABC Awards
AMSPAR
Association of Accounting Technicians
Award Scheme Development Accreditation Network
Awarding Body Consortium
British Amateur Gymnastics Association
British Horseracing Educational Trust
CABWI Awarding Body
Chartered Management Institute
City & Guilds
Construction Industry Training Body/City & Guilds
Council for Awards in Children's Care & Education
Council for Advancement of Communication with Deaf People
Edexcel
Educational Development International plc/QFI
EMP Awarding Body
EMTA Awards Ltd
Engineering Construction Industry Training Board
Glass Qualifications Authority
Hospitality Awarding Body
Institute of the Motor Industry
International Curriculum and Assessment Agency
Lantra Awards
Food & Drink Qualifications
National College Open Network
NCFE
Oxford, Cambridge & RSA Examinations
Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons
Gemmological Association
Worshipful Company of Farriers
1st4Sport Qualifications