

Employer Engagement – Colleges and Training Providers in Yorkshire and the Humber

Mystery Shopping Research
Executive Summary

April 2006

Introduction

Over the last two years the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) in Yorkshire and the Humber has worked closely with regional and sub regional partners and their supply chain to review and develop working practices to deliver the most effective services to employers.

As part of this work the LSC has, for example,

- signed up to and communicated the principles of “Better Deal for Business” – the regional strategic framework for delivering an improved service experience to business customers
- promoted skills as an integral part of business support
- funded and supported colleges and training providers in the region to work towards and achieve the Customer First Framework
- funded and supported frontline staff within colleges and training providers to use the SFEDI business support standards
- recently worked with colleges and training providers to develop and pilot an employer engagement toolkit to help providers to develop their capacity to work with employers.

To evaluate the impact of this approach the LSCs funded a piece of independent mystery shopping research to assess the extent to which providers in the region were effectively initially engaging and responding to the needs of employers. The LSC funded the research, Customer First UK commissioned the research and QA Research delivered the study.

Aims and Objectives

The overall aim of this project was to assess the progress LSC funded providers have made in engaging effectively with employers and to provide opportunities to support further the capability and capacity of these organisations in delivering really effective services to employers.

Specifically the objectives of the project were to

- better understand how employers experience service delivery through the college and training provider network in Yorkshire and the Humber – particularly initial engagement and responsiveness.
- identify where colleges and training providers delivered an effective customer experience to employers
- identify where colleges and training providers need to improve their approach to initial engagement and service delivery to employers.

Methodology and Sample

Through this research the LSC was particularly interested in exploring the employers' experience of contacting and accessing services from colleges and training providers in Yorkshire and the Humber. In particular the research explored:

- ease of access and contact
- professionalism of the staff involved in dealing with the enquiries
- how the customers expectations were managed – standards, timescales, promises made and the extent to which they were delivered
- how effective organisations were at diagnosing the customers needs
- how effective organisations were at identifying the best solution(s) – both inside and outside of the organisation
- how effective organisations were at providing relevant information about the service(s)
- the extent to which organisations follow up the customer to check they were happy with the information provided and that all their current needs have been met.

In total, 60 providers of training services to businesses were mystery shopped twice (120 calls in total) during the months of November and December 2005. In total, 58% of providers that were mystery shopped were training providers (35) and 42% were colleges (25). The largest proportion of providers were from West Yorkshire 18 (30%); 16 were from the North Yorkshire (27%); 14 from South Yorkshire (23%) and 12 from the Humber (20%). Just under half, 29 (48%), of the providers were compliant with the Customer First Framework.

The providers were marked out of 100 across elements of the 'employer customer experience', including areas such as: the number of transfers that were made, the tone and clarity of the speaker and the extent to which the provider tried to understand and help the customer.

Scenarios were created that would be typical of those asked by potential employer customers. Qualitative comments were also written down by each mystery shopper to ascertain how the providers made the customer 'feel' about their experience.

The results were analysed and cross-tabulations were made against: the location of the provider (North, South, West or Humber), the type of provider: college or training provider and whether the provider was compliant with Customer First or not.

Scoring Approach

The providers were marked out of 100 across a range of criteria which made up a total 'customer experience'. In order to understand and identify good or poor service delivery, the scores were sectioned into four categories:

1. Excellent
2. Good
3. Acceptable
4. Poor

A call that scored 86%+ was deemed 'excellent'; a score of 70-85% was rated 'good'; a score of 51-69% was 'acceptable' and any organisation scoring less than 50% was awarded 'poor'.

Headline Research Results

In total, 86% of **organisations** were rated as providing at least an acceptable level of service – of which

- 17% were excellent
- 54% were good
- 15% were acceptable

In total, 14% of organisations were rated as poor.

In total, 86% of all **calls** made were at least acceptable of which

- 31% were excellent
- 39% were good
- 16% were acceptable

In total, 14% of all calls made were rated as poor.

In total, 85% of training providers and 84% of colleges were rated as at least acceptable of which more training providers were rated as delivering excellent service (20% as compared to 12% of colleges). However more colleges than training providers were rated as delivering good service 56% as opposed to 52% of training providers.

When looking geographically –

- providers based in Humber and North Yorkshire are more likely to deliver excellent to good service (91% and 75% respectively)
- a higher percentage of providers in West Yorkshire and South Yorkshire were rated as delivering a poor service (28% and 14% respectively) as compared to Humber and North Yorkshire (0% and 13% respectively)

In total, 92% of providers that were compliant with Customer First were judged to be delivering at least acceptable service delivery as compared to only 77% of organisations that had not achieved Customer First.

Detailed Results

Ease of access to contact information

It took 10 minutes or less to find the exact contact details for 88% of the organisations surveyed – indeed it took 5 minutes or less in 83% of cases.

It took over 10 minutes to find the contact details of 12% of the organisations surveyed (some of which were not found).

For 96% of colleges it took less than 10 minutes to find the contact details and for 92% of colleges it took less than 5 minutes.

For 83% of training providers it took less than 10 minutes to find their contact details and for 77% of training providers it took less than 5 minutes.

It was harder to find the contact details of organisations based in North and West Yorkshire – 26% and 23% respectively over 5 minutes compared to 8% and 7% respectively for providers based in the Humber and South Yorkshire

Salutation

Only 7% of all providers scored poorly for the clarity and tone of their greeting. In total, 93% of providers were deemed to be acceptable with 78% judged to be good or very good.

No organisations based in North Yorkshire or the Humber scored poorly, whilst 17% of West Yorkshire providers and 7% of South Yorkshire providers were judged to be poor.

No Customer First organisations were deemed to be poor compared to 13% of non compliant providers.

Initial diagnosis

In total, 94% of providers were found to be at least 'acceptable' when initially diagnosing a call of which 37% were found to be 'excellent'.

In total, 9% of training providers were judged to be 'poor' in their initial diagnosis compared to 4% of colleges.

In total, 96% of Customer First providers were found to be at least 'acceptable' when undertaking initial diagnosis compared to 90% of non compliant organisations. Indeed 79% of Customer First providers were found to be 'good' or 'excellent' compared to only 58% of non compliant providers.

Only providers based in West Yorkshire and South Yorkshire were found to be 'poor' – 17% and 7% respectively.

The hold process

In total, 87% of organisations were good or excellent at managing the call hold process.

In total, 94% of organisations based in North Yorkshire were good or excellent at managing the hold process as compared to 93% in South Yorkshire, 92% in the Humber and 72% in West Yorkshire.

Organisations compliant with Customer First were more effective at the call hold process than those that were not compliant with 94% rated as good or excellent as compared to only 81% of non compliant providers.

The transfer process

In total, 83% of organisations scored good or excellent for effectively managing the call transfer process. Of these training providers scored better than colleges (89% as compared to 76% of colleges).

In total, 96% of Customer First compliant providers scored good or excellent compared to only 71% of providers that were not compliant.

Dealing with the enquiry

In total, 93% of organisations were at least acceptable when dealing with the enquiry of which 70% of providers were good to excellent at dealing with the enquiry.

In total, 100% of Customer First compliant providers were at least acceptable when handling and dealing with the customer's enquiry as compared to only 87% of providers that were not compliant with the framework

Only 4% of colleges dealt with enquiries poorly as compared to 8% of training providers.

Providers based in West Yorkshire were more likely to be less effective at dealing with enquiries, with 11% of West Yorkshire providers being rated as 'poor' as compared to 7% in South Yorkshire, 6% in North Yorkshire and 0% in the Humber.

Call ownership

In total, 70% of organisations were good or excellent at effective call ownership. Of which 77% were training providers and 60% were colleges.

In total, 79% of organisations compliant with Customer First were judged to be good or excellent at effective call ownership as compared to 61% of organisations that were not compliant.

Providers based in South Yorkshire performed less well in this area than providers elsewhere with 21% rated as poor compared to 12% in West Yorkshire, 8% in the Humber and 6% in North Yorkshire.

Follow up

In total, 70% of organisations scored good to excellent for effective follow up of which 74% of training providers were rated to be good to excellent and 64% of colleges were rated as good to excellent.

In total, 79% of Customer First compliant providers scored good to excellent as compared to only 61% of non compliant providers.

Organisations based in the Humber were much more likely to follow up customers than those in other parts of the region with 91% of providers rated as good or excellent as compared to 64% in South Yorkshire, 63% in North Yorkshire and only 44% in West Yorkshire.

Conclusions

In conclusion,

- the majority of providers give at least a satisfactory level of service to their customers – with 86% of calls made and 86% of organisations rated as providing at least an acceptable service
- training providers were more likely to be rated as delivering excellent service (20%) compared to colleges (12%), however, more colleges than training providers were rated as delivering good service 56% as opposed to 52% of training providers.
- although at a headline level there is little difference in the performance of training providers as compared to colleges – across different measures there are some significant variances.
- providers that are compliant with Customer First perform better across all measures as compared to providers that do not meet the Framework standards. Indeed, 93% of providers that were compliant with Customer First were judged to be delivering at least acceptable service delivery compared to only 77% of providers that were not compliant

- there appear to be a number of significant geographical factors that affect the customer experience of skills support with providers based in the Humber and North Yorkshire region performing consistently higher than those providers based in other sub regions
- there appear to be issues of consistency within organisations – with only a small number of organisations able to demonstrate consistently high scores across their two calls
- the stronger areas of service delivery appear to be around customer greeting and how providers dealt with the enquiry and provided an appropriate solution
- the weaker areas of service delivery appear to be around call ownership and customer follow up

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