Training Quality Standard
One Year On: evaluation summary

October 2009

The Training Quality Standard is an assessment framework and a process for assessing organisations, to recognise their strengths and areas for improvement, and to celebrate the best organisations delivering training and development to employers.

The Learning and Skills Council for England led and invested in the development of the Standard, but its use as an assessment framework and accompanying process is made available to all organisations anywhere delivering training and development to employers.

Development of the Standard took place during 2006 and 2007, with assessments beginning in 2007 and the launch event for the first certifications in May 2008. This summary draws from a wider evaluation of available data, prepared to assess progress made so far and identify lessons learned. The report and this summary were prepared by Andrew Currie and Duncan Brown from CFE.

Note: The evaluation was compiled in the summer of 2009 using data sources available at that time. To reflect progress on the take-up since then, the management data presented on page 6 has been updated. Additional data on employer awareness and understanding, available in September 2009, has also been included at page 25 of this summary. All other data were current in summer 2009.

Introduction

Over 100 colleges and independent training providers, as well as seven major employer training units, are now certificated under the Training Quality Standard. The Standard has come a long way since its development started in 2006, and for this reason some reflection on progress made and future opportunities seems timely. This evaluation – summarising a more comprehensive report – draws on a range of evidence to identify where and how the Standard has been successful, and where and how it still has room to improve – especially amidst changing times.

The Standard takes time to have an effect – as an intervention, it does not give rise to immediate numbers; and even those numbers are about developing capability, not delivering final policy outcomes. It is likely that the full benefits the Standard aspires to achieve – in changing the culture of individual providers and of training delivery – will not be felt for some years yet.

But enough providers[1] have now engaged directly with the Standard to allow us to measure its benefits and impact, and its value to employers and government as a policy intervention. The Standard was developed to help make the employer training market more responsive, and by now we should be seeing some signs of this – and it is for that reason that this evaluation has been compiled, to review the progress that the Standard has made on its aims, and to identify how it can perform better, especially as times change for the economy and skills policy.

The origins of the Training Quality Standard

The 2006 White Paper on further education and training outlined a range of plans and commitments to raise quality, and to improve responsiveness to employers. One of the White Paper's commitments was to create a new national standard which could recognise those organisations able to respond effectively to employers. The standard would promote flexible and relevant training, and recognise those organisations offering training tailored to employers in specific industry sectors.

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[1] 'Providers' is used throughout this report in the general sense, inclusive of FE colleges and Independent Training Providers (ITPs).

How was the Standard developed and deployed?

Throughout 2006 and early 2007, the LSC led and invested in a process of research, design, development and testing for this new standard. The research phase was a significant undertaking, drawing in over five hundred employers of different sizes and sectors through interviews, focus groups and telephone surveys. Employers' views were sought on what made for a good training experience – and to prioritise those factors and distinguish the must-haves from the nice-to-haves.

The insights from employers were matched by knowledge from providers on how to deliver those factors in practice. These provided the basis for evaluating organisations, to which was added the final design element – leading practice in continuous quality improvement. The result was a prototype Standard which could evaluate organisations for both capability and performance, and could explore their general responsiveness and their sector expertise.

Testing of the prototype took place from autumn 2006 to spring 2007, involving nearly 70 organisations, including further education colleges, employer training and development units, independent training providers and others. The testing phase was subject to several months of evaluation to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the prototype and distil the lessons learned into a new, refined assessment framework, illustrated in Figure 1, which received Ministerial approval late in spring 2007.

Alongside the framework was a robust assessment process, developed to ensure rigour and make the Standard an exclusive, selective instrument. This operating version of the Training Quality Standard was then made available for organisations to seek assessment in June 2007, with a Ministerial launch event in May 2008 and the hundredth certificate issued at the start of 2009.
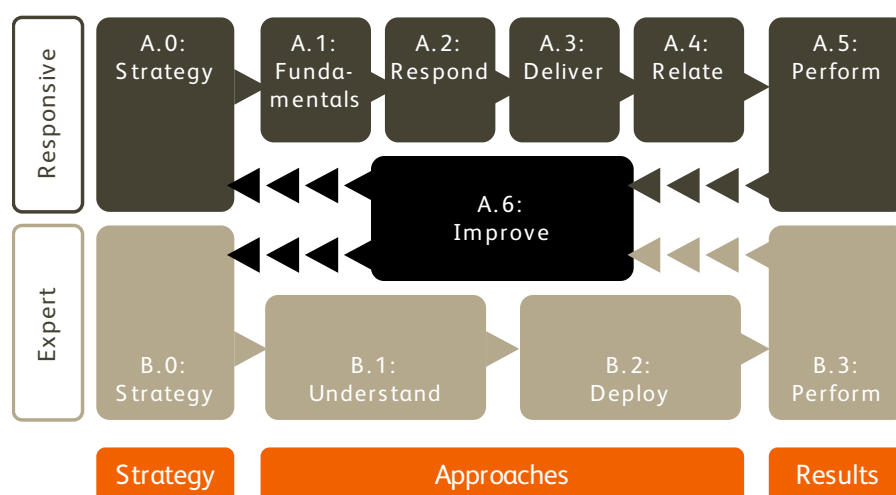

Figure 1: The Assessment Framework

Success for the Standard

To evaluate the progress of the Training Quality Standard, we have to look at it against the aims and goals it set out to achieve. The Standard's public statement of aims was that it would be able to certificate:

- Responsiveness to business need

- Excellence in delivering training

- Commitment to continuous improvement

- Sector expertise

The Standard's operation elaborated these aims in much greater depth, and especially to see them in terms of how well the Standard was being deployed. So, for the evaluation, we developed the model set out in Figure 2, which embraces two sets of goals. *Internal goals* are about excellence – how well the Standard performs on its own terms, according to its design principles. *External goals* are about effectiveness – delivering benefits to specific stakeholders; they are concerned with how the Standard is *useful.* A successful Standard needs to balance internal and external goals – a Standard which doesn't live up to its own principles won't be useful to stakeholders; but if it's not useful, it misses the point.

Internal goals: *Excellence*		External goals: *Effectiveness*
▪ Understands excellence in training delivery ▪ Celebrates excellence in training delivery ▪ Assesses organisations to high standards of rigour and robustness ▪ Makes assessment and excellence open to all types of training delivery	**Employers**	▪ Identifies training delivery which can meet employers' needs ▪ Identifies training delivery which can meet sector-specific needs ▪ Promotes better customer service when employers access training ▪ Promotes better impact when employers access training
	Providers	▪ Offers a responsive and valuable assessment experience ▪ Provides learning experience which changes thinking and practice ▪ Proves an advantage in gaining customers through the quality mark
	Government	▪ Develops a network of high-quality, high-impact training provision ▪ Improves the capacity and capability of training delivery to deliver on skills policy aims

Figure 2: Evaluation goals for the Training Quality Standard

Successful deployment

To be successful, the Standard had to ensure that it was open to every type of provider – to make sure that the content of its assessment framework and the workings of the assessment process did not bring with them prescriptive, exclusive requirements. Success would also be observed by achieving a significant number and variety of providers registering, applying and being assessed under the Standard.

Which providers have registered, applied and certificated?

At 30th September 2009, Certification Bodies had taken 384 registrations – with a strong presence in every English region (plus 2 in Wales and 1 in Scotland). Those 384 registrations have so far flowed into 195 Part A completed assessments, 120 resulting in certification; 4 were deferred. 200 Part B assessments have been completed, resulting in 123 certifications across 73 providers. The flow-through from registrations into outcomes (including the numbers withdrawn and those currently in process) are shown as a pipeline in Figure 3.
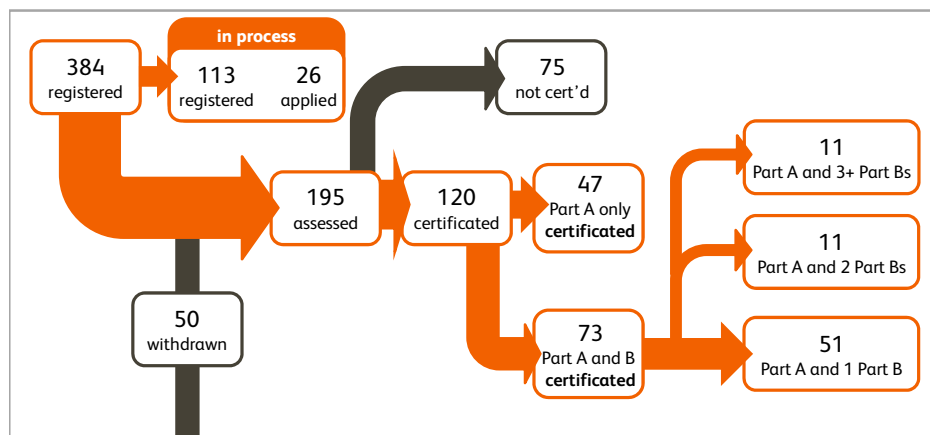

Figure 3: Current status/outcome of all registrations (at 30 September 2009)

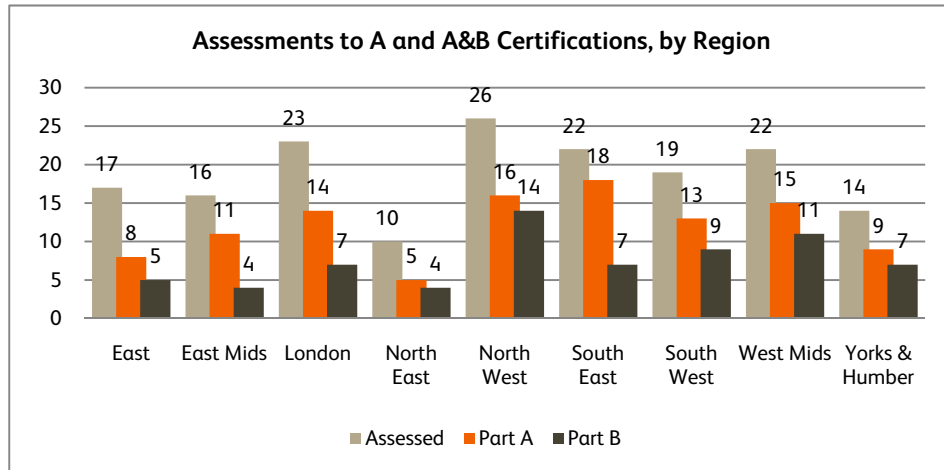**Assessments to A and A&B Certifications, by Region**

Figure 4: Assessments to A and A&B Certifications, by Region

Overall, we have seen a 55:45 split between FE college registrations and registrations from other provider types – but this reflects an initial bias towards FE college take-up during 2007, and has become more evenly balanced more recently. The number of providers so far assessed in each English region, and the number certificated with Part A or Parts A and B together is shown in Figure 4. The numbers point to a strong, sustained start to engagement, with registrations, applications and certifications achieved in all of the English regions.

Coverage across all parts of the provider market

The numbers of registrations, assessments and certifications, point to success in reaching beyond the mainstream, with significant presence from ITPs as well as FE colleges, and also successful engagement from those not closely tied to LSC delivery.

Of the 109 providers so far certificated, nine have no Train to Gain contract or previous CoVE status; a further 24 have only one of these two. Sure enough, the majority have both – but it is to be expected that many good providers do so; what is important is the ability to engage that group of good providers not involved in these developments, which the Standard seems able to do.

Figure 5 identifies the numbers certificated against those currently in process – those either registered (indicating their commitment to apply for assessment) or applied (and therefore waiting to be assessed). The data point to a market still continuing to develop, and with more potential – a maturing market would be indicated by high-certification regions consistently showing smaller queues of registered and applied providers.
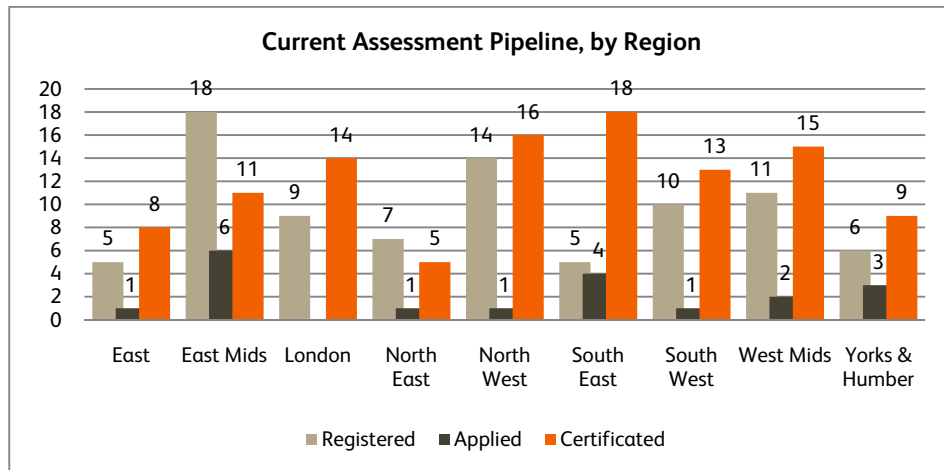
Current Assessment Pipeline, by Region

Figure 5: Current Assessment Pipeline, by Region

What drives training providers to seek certification?

Deployment of the Training Quality Standard and its ability to challenge thinking and drive improvements in practice among training providers will only be successful if training providers value the assessment and certification process, and believe the Standard offers them tangible benefits.

Through a telephone survey, conducted in May 2009 with certificated providers, we are able to offer a sample of responses on their satisfaction by drawing out a balanced set of positive and negative comments of the drivers of satisfaction (or dissatisfaction); the themes in Figure 6 are considered further in the full report.

Positives	Negatives
◗ "It makes us look more professional."	◗ "Not widely known, the LSC has backed [away] from it, and initial promises... Not materialised."
◗ "Gives us a commercial edge and advantage over competitors."	◗ "It's not really been advertised so everyone is fully aware of it."
◗ "It is seen as quite a prestigious award in the sector, recognised by awarding and funding bodies."	◗ "Still to see the benefits of external funding."
◗ "It has made us look as much at the employer as the learner."	◗ "The lack of recognition from LSC is disappointing."
◗ "The actual process itself is good – it drove discussion and debate, leads to changes in processes."	◗ "Disappointed by promotion... Are insisting they support people working towards it, not actually working for people who have it."
◗ "People know that we have excellence in their certain sectors."	◗ "Funding bodies aren't using it."
◗ "It focuses attention on improving the business and improving our clients' reaction to us, the other thing is it forced us to measure satisfaction."	◗ "The LSC fails to mention TQS in its current TTG tender – how can anyone else take account of it?"
	◗ "Lack of understanding from employers."

Figure 6: Satisfaction: comments on drivers of provider satisfaction

As well as looking at providers' motivations and satisfaction drivers, we were also keen to quantify what impact they think the Standard has had on their organisations and how well it has achieved against the benefits they hoped assessment and certification would deliver. Figure 7 looks at the net ratings[2], offered by certificated providers, which were attached to a series of potential assessment and certification benefits – with the first rating in each case identifying its importance, and the second how well achieved it was. Overall the responses suggest overall a good story, with positive ratings before and after assessment.

At the same time though, there are some important differences. Ratings are high for the Standard in raising providers' reputation within the training sector, engaging their staff in improvement and challenging their current practice of working with employers. Ratings fall significantly in terms of hopes of raising their reputation with employers (falling from +51 % to +15 %) and in raising their reputation with funders (falling from very high +95 % to +72 %).

However, we are able to unpack these concerns – especially the first one. Most certificated providers reported that the experience of assessment had left them managing their customer relationships better. But this has to be distinguished from providers' own improving business performance – while assessment may improve providers' capability, performance they see deriving from a range of sources. Additionally, this can also be linked to their disappointment relating to a lack of promotion to employers – as outlined in Figure 6, above.
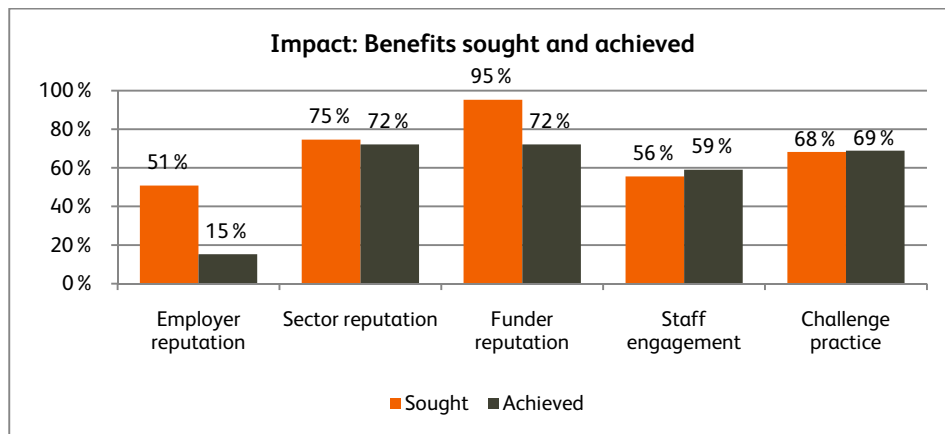

Figure 7: Impact: Benefits sought and achieved (n=63)

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[2] Net ratings are calculated for the 6-point scale used on most questions by subtracting '1' and '2' ratings from '5' and '6' ratings, expressed as percentage of the number of cases; so a positive net rating shows more high than low ratings. Findings should also be interpreted with an eye to potential error. As a rule of thumb for simple percentage responses, the satisfaction survey has a 5 % margin of error and the impact survey an 8 % margin of error at the time of writing.

Certificated providers' second concern, related to raising their reputation with funders, can be partly explained by their disappointment at certification under the Standard not being explicitly linked to funding policy in some form. Many providers had expected that the Standard would become a contractual requirement and this has been a motivation in seeking assessment.

The policy decision not to make the Standard a condition of funding was a conscious one – made to avoid the Standard becoming a compliance exercise in its early days. At this point in the Standard's development though, some providers seem to be confused that funding agencies endorse the Standard while at the same time not formally crediting it in their decision-making.

Evaluating deployment

The Standard is now established in the marketplace, with new registrations coming in each month, from different parts of the country and from different sizes and types of provider. The infrastructure for continued delivery is in place, with certification bodies about to seek accreditation from UKAS and with assessors operating under a licensing framework.

Early on in the deployment of the Standard, the decision was taken not to pursue a hard target for the number of certifications. The reasons for this remain sound – it's important to allow providers to choose for themselves when to register and apply, according to whether they are ready and the value they see in pursuing assessment.

The assessment experience

The experience of application, assessment and certification is the level at which the impact of the Training Quality Standard can most clearly be evaluated. When asked to measure how successful the Standard had been in achieving against their key motivations for seeking assessment, certificated providers reported a strong net rating of +36 %. The range of responses offered by providers is shown in Figure 8.

Any benefits the Standard has in challenging thinking and driving improvements in practice among providers will be limited if service delivery is poor. For this reason, satisfaction data – looking at providers' views of how well the assessment process is run – is an important indicator of the Standard's performance.[3] Figure 9 on the next page looks at net satisfaction ratings from providers, regardless of their assessment outcome, across a range of different questions – and overall, it tells a positive story, with high ratings for most stages of the process.

Impact: how well did assessment fulfil expectations in terms of key motivation

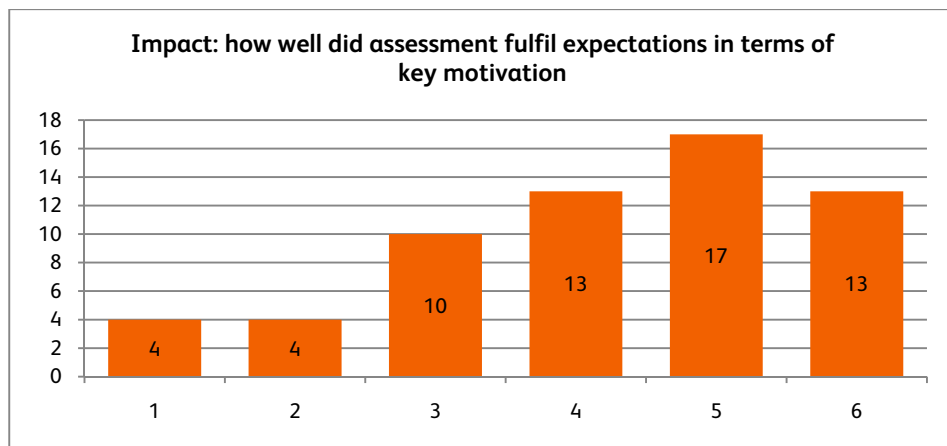| Category	Value
1	4
2	4
3	10
4	13
5	17
6	13

Figure 8: Impact: how well did assessment fulfil expectations of key motivation (n=63)

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[3] The data here refer to assessment operations under CFE, before the current Certification Body arrangements. Data on Certification Bodies is at present limited, but will be available for future evaluation.
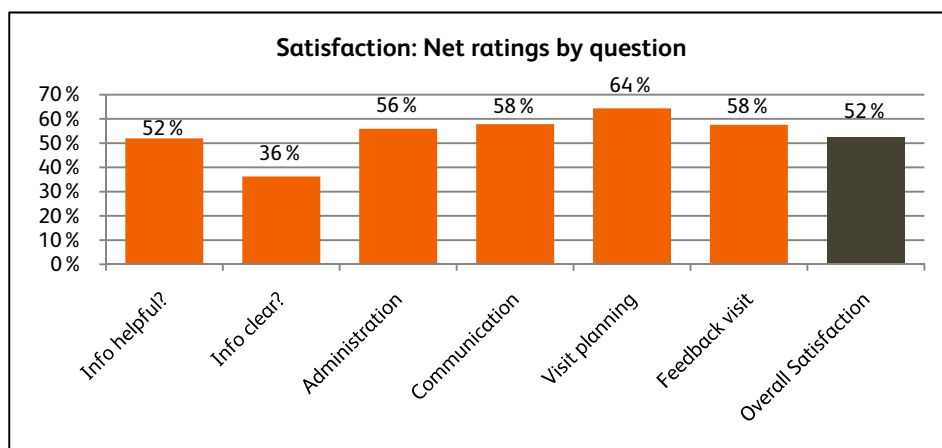
Satisfaction: Net ratings by question

Info helpful? 52%
Info clear? 36%
Administration 56%
Communication 58%
Visit planning 64%
Feedback visit 58%
Overall Satisfaction 52%

Figure 9: Satisfaction: net ratings by question (n=102)

One area which continues to have room for improvement is in the clarity of the information made available for providers – the Applicant Guide, the website, training courses – and indeed the website has been refreshed since this data were collected, and other work continues. But otherwise, generally perceptions seem strong. It is also worth noting that negative ratings (i.e. responses of '1' or '2') were not above 10 % on any of these criteria.

Providers also report very favourably on the thoroughness and professionalism of assessors. When asked to rate the thoroughness of their assessor team on a 6-point scale, providers gave an average rating of 4.9; when asked about professionalism, the average rating was 5.2. Figure 10 and Figure 11 show the range of provider responses, and highlight that while those providers unsuccessful in achieving certification were less generous, they still rated assessment quality fairly well – averaging 3.9 for thoroughness and 4.4 for professionalism.

Assessed provider ratings of assessor 'thoroughness', by assessment outcome

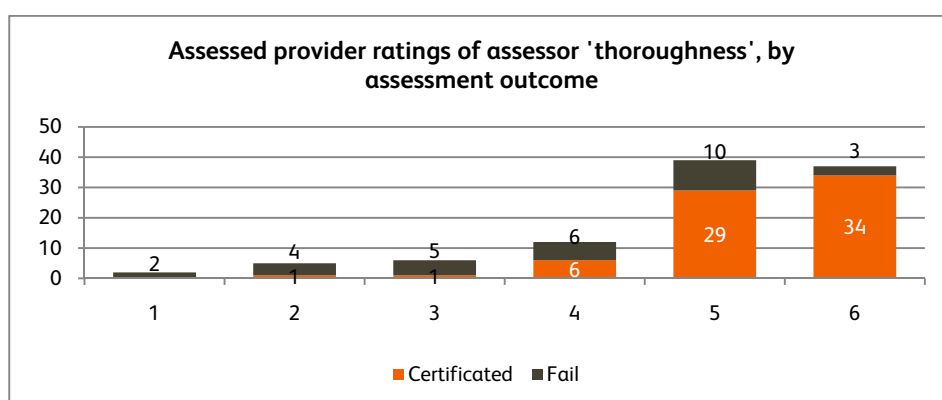| Rating	Certificated	Fail
1		2
2	1	4
3	1	5
4	6	6
5	29	10
6	34	3

■ Certificated ■ Fail

Figure 10: Providers' ratings of assessor 'thoroughness', by assessment outcome (n=102)

Assessed provider ratings of assessor 'professionalism', by assessment outcome
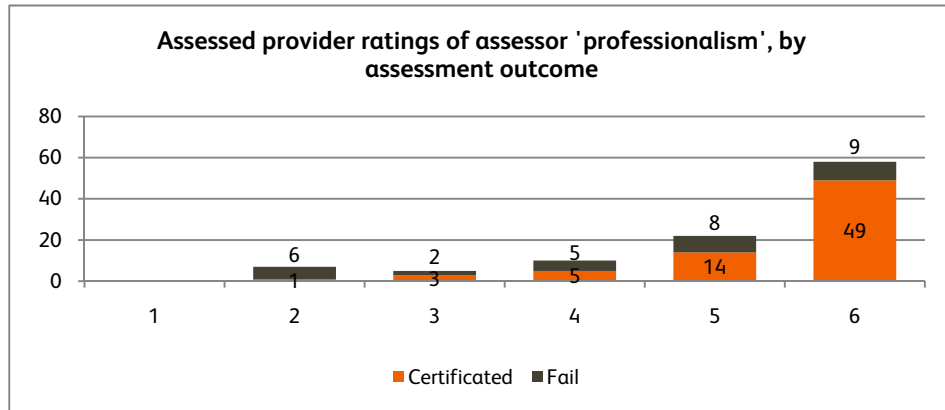

Figure 11: Providers' ratings of assessor 'professionalism', by assessment outcome (n=102)

This evidence validates the investment and effort in creating a robust assessment process for the Standard, and the value of the attention paid to quality assuring the work of assessors through the licensing framework and the role of the Certification Body in moderating their work.

Just as with validation, which forms part of the assessment process, our survey assessed providers' satisfaction used the Net Promoter Score measure. This asks for a response on scale up to 10 points for a willingness to recommend the service, and counts responses between '0' and '6' as 'Detractors' and '9' and '10' as 'Promoters'. Net Promoter Scores vary greatly by sector, and given that some assessment customers don't achieve certification, it's not surprising that the score is not as high as achieved in other contexts. Figure 12 sets out the responses from the Net Promoter Score question, and differentiates by Certificated and Not Certificated providers. The overall Net Promoter Score is -4 %; the NPS among certificated providers is higher at +15 % and much lower among non-certificated providers at -56 %.
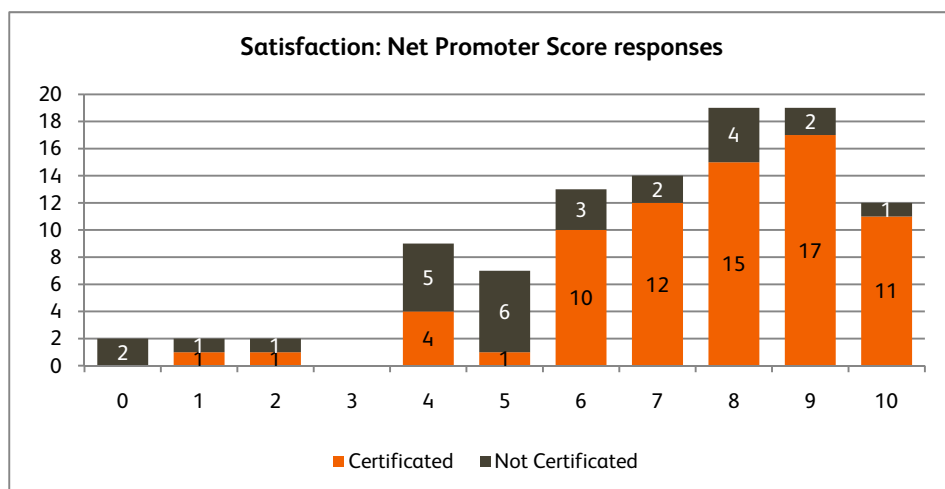
Satisfaction: Net Promoter Score responses

Figure 12: Net Promoter Score, Certificated and Not Certificated (n=99)

Changing thinking, improving practice

Success for the Standard can be identified by the benefits and changes providers recognise for their own operations. It was with this in mind that we sought to investigate what impact assessment and certification has had on training providers. Impact data allows us to access providers' own testimony on what the Standard has done for them (and to them, for that matter) and allows us an important insight onto its benefits in terms of challenging thinking and practice.

Changing the way providers operate

Figure 13 looks at two general questions and finds a clear majority (59 %) of providers perceive increased responsiveness since assessment and most providers stating that assessment had challenged their thinking about strategy for working with employers (84 % 'a little' or 'a lot'). Figure 14 continues with a positive story of benefits and impact, with majorities of providers, which have achieved Part B certification, reporting gains in improving their sector thinking (53 %) and sector working (62 %).

Impact: Has employer responsiveness increased since assessment?

No, less responsive 1 %

About the same 40 %

Yes, more responsive 59 %

Impact: has assessment challenged thinking about strategy?

No 16 %

Yes, a little 16 %

Yes, a lot 68 %
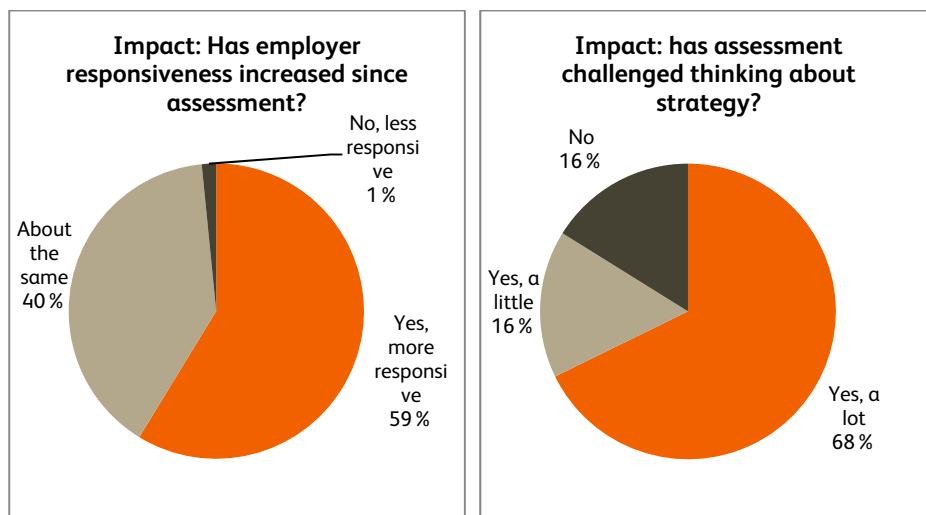
Figure 13: Impact: Employer responsiveness and thinking about strategy (n=63)

Impact: has assessment challenged your thinking about your expert sector?

- No 5%
- About the same 42%
- Yes 53%

Impact: has assessment challenged the way you work with you expert sector?

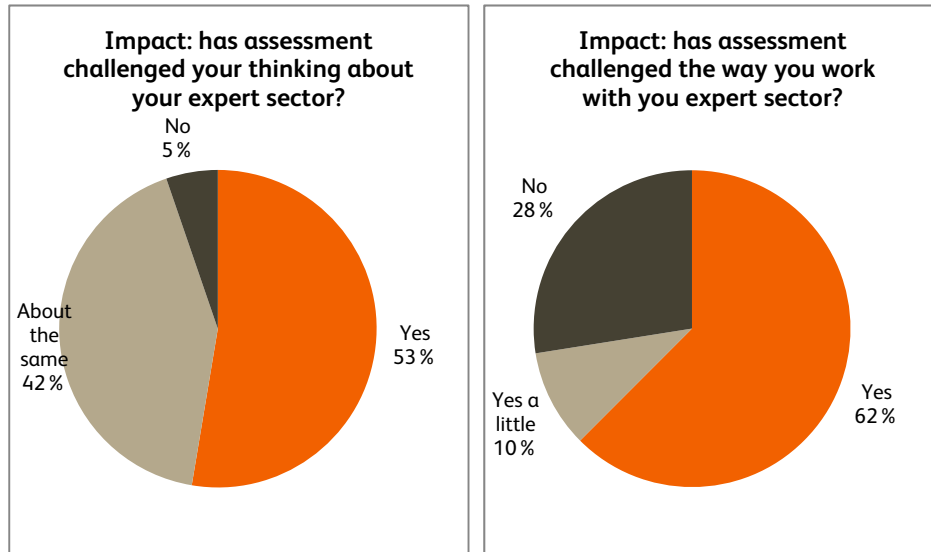- No 28%
- Yes a little 10%
- Yes 62%

Figure 14: Impact: sector thinking and sector working (n=40)

One of the biggest areas of poor practice the Standard set out to tackle is related to performance measurement. Indeed, the Conditional Concession was introduced after the testing phase in response to the inadequate approaches to performance management that is prevalent among providers of training and development.

Figure 15 shows providers reporting substantial improvement in their measurement practice following assessment. In measuring their customers' satisfaction with training service delivery, the net rating moves from +17% to +75%; in measuring the impact their training has had on employers' business needs it moves from -16% to +55%.

Satisfaction measurement: before and after

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Satisfaction measurement before TQS	3	8	16	14	16	6
Satisfaction measurement after TQS				16	32	15

Impact measurement: before and after

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Measuring employer impact before TQS	10	11	17	14	6	5
Measuring employer impact after TQS			6	22	24	11

Figure 15: Impact: changing satisfaction and impact measurement (n=63)

How has the Standard helped to improve your responsiveness?

- "Focus on our core business processes with employers... clarify ... what the company wants to get out of the training instead of just the qualification. Makes us work harder with our employers to assess benefits... and impact."
- "Really embedded our college approach... Rather than saying 'it would be nice to do this stuff' we are doing something different... Much better at measuring impact... More pro-active with employers."
- "Made us think more deeply about what we do and the way we do it – and made a significant increase in business."
- "We've been able to self-assess ourselves against the standard."
- ".. Was a really valuable experience in bringing [us] together. Almost seeing everything in one place."
- "Reaffirmed what we were already good at. So that has been rewarding for the team, it's also given the team more confidence, knowing that they are doing it right, and allowed us to polish a few areas."
- "It's allowed us to use the fact that we are a TQS provider in our initial sales pitch."
- "It made us focus more on satisfying the client's wants."
- "We understand employers better, had a lot of help from our assessors – all the staff know about responsiveness."
- "Certainly driven a culture change within the college, had an impact on every aspect of the work we do with employers."

Figure 16: Impact: how has the Standard helped to improve responsiveness?

How the Standard changes behaviour

Figure 16 expands on our analysis of impact and offers a sample of explanations as to how the Standard has helped to improve training providers' responsiveness. A range of benefits are cited, but some themes emerge – a focus on training for business needs and impact, creating a focus for culture change and process improvement, and for some, raising the credibility of the organisation.

The aspirations remain for the Standard to improve the way training is delivered, and the evidence here suggests that progress is being made. But we should be clear that the task here is large – there is a long tail of providers currently operating which work very tactically, are highly dependent on public funds and typically attribute all their own failings to others.

Recognising and raising standards

The 109 providers certificated at the time of evaluation represent the successful outcomes from 177 Part A assessments. That means an overall average 62 % pass rate from application through to certification outcome.

Pass rates: an exclusive, prestigious Standard

Figure 17 shows how the assessment pass rates varies between a range of different categories – FE colleges more likely to be certificated than Independent Training Providers; those with prior CoVE status more likely than those without; those holding Train to Gain contracts more likely than those without.

Overall, a 62 % success rate shows the assessment process is capable of giving bad news of 'no certification' – which is critical if the Standard is to be trusted as a quality measure. The Standard has been designed to recognise and celebrate the best organisations delivering high quality, high impact training and development solutions to employers – as a result only those providers that are able to demonstrate this achieve certification.
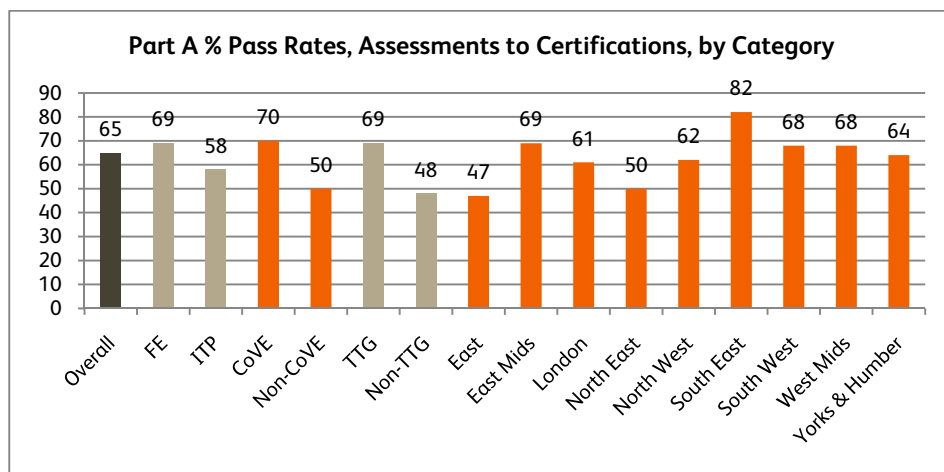
Part A % Pass Rates, Assessments to Certifications, by Category

Category	% Pass Rate
Overall	65
FE	69
ITP	58
CoVE	70
Non-CoVE	50
TTG	69
Non-TTG	48
East	47
East Mids	69
London	61
North East	50
North West	62
South East	82
South West	68
West Mids	68
Yorks & Humber	64

Figure 17: Part A % Pass Rates, by Category

Applicants passing at high-level minus number failing, by indicator, ranked high to low
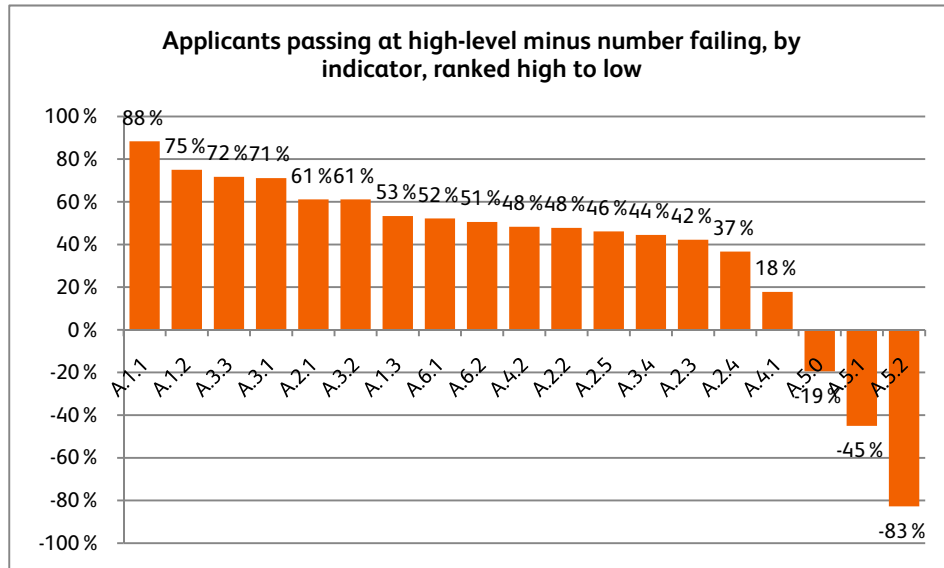
Figure 18: % Applicant Part A score 'fails' (<25%) and high-levels (55%+), by indicator

Insights from scoring

Figure 18 illustrates the degree of difficulty associated with each indicator of Part A assessment. It charts for each indicator how many providers were scored as 'fails' (with a score below the 25% threshold) subtracted from those scored at a high-level (above 55% and therefore contributing to certification), as a percentage of applicants.

The chart is ranked, so that the left-hand side indicators are those passed at high-level most, whereas those at the right-hand side are failed most. As expected, only the Results indicators (A.5.0, A.5.1 and A.5.2) tend to be scored as 'fails' routinely. However, there are also a large number of indicators which prove challenging for providers. Particularly A.4.1 but also those concerned with the journey from needs analysis through to agreeing a proposal for delivery (A.2.2 through A.2.5), keeping employers informed (A.1.3), improvement (A.6.1 and A.6.2), and relationship management (A.4.2 but especially A.3.4 and most of all A.4.1) present issues for many providers.

An analysis of Part B scoring data, illustrated in Figure 19, tells much the same story as Part A. B.2.2 stands out (as did A.1.1, which is also about people management) as the most regularly high scoring indicator. Part B results indicators (B.3.0 and B.3.1) again prove to be the most difficult indicators to score well against – especially B.3.1.
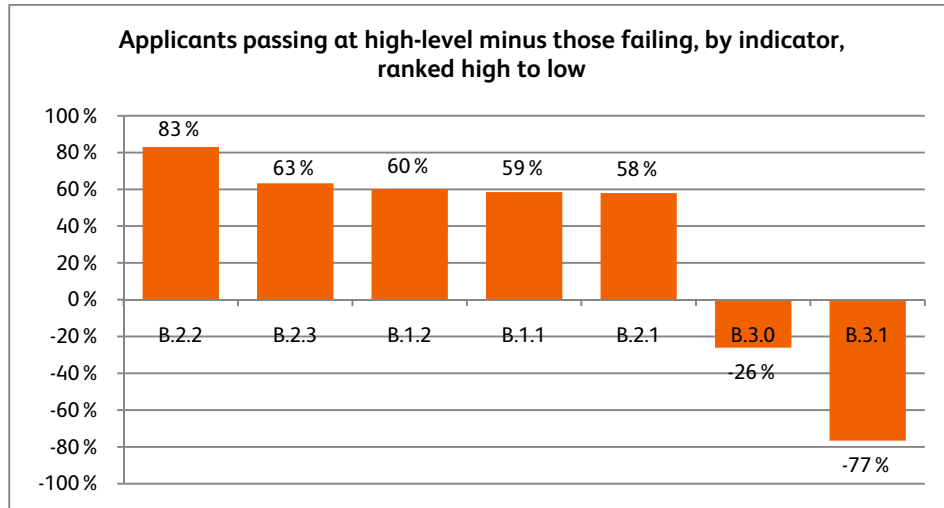
Applicants passing at high-level minus those failing, by indicator, ranked high to low

Figure 19: % Applicant Part B score 'fails' (<25%) and high-levels (55%+), by indicator

Performance linkages

The analysis on scoring data has allowed us to begin to explore the associations taking place between indicators through assessment. This examination is particularly important because it is through the linkages between indicators that high-quality, high-impact provision should make itself clear. The existence of clear associations between indicator scores and overall scores is the best indication that the Standard's underpinning rationality offers a coherent perspective on excellence in employer responsiveness.[4] Figure 20 highlights the four headline sets of linkages, explained below in more detail – it soon becomes clear that each set of linkages seem to be quite natural associations.
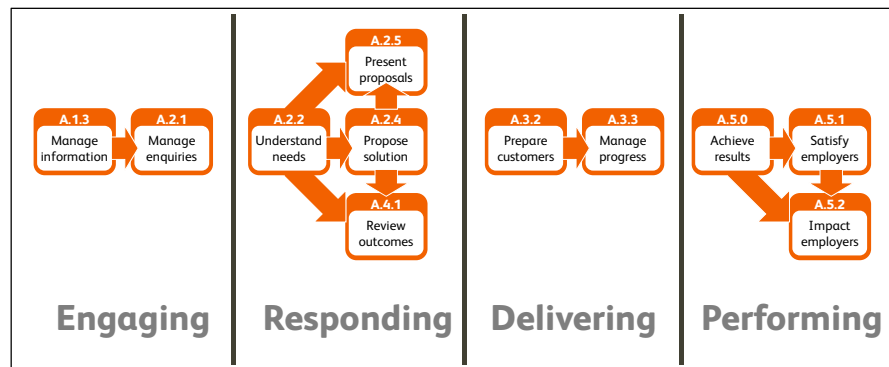

Figure 20: Linkages between indicators

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[4] Associations between indicators are biased by scoring weights – which enhance the power of many of the indicators. Between-indicator ratings are less biased; but it should be said they tend to have high levels of positive correlation but with high levels of error, and so at this stage all relationships should be understood as indicative and potential rather than proven conclusively – the exception here being the A.2.2-A.2.4 link which is strong. On the other hand, all of the associations do correspond with an intuitive, common-sense analysis of the different indicator linkages.

- **Engaging: A.1.3 drives A.2.1:** Providers making an effort to market their services intelligibly make sure that they have the systems available to capture employer customers' responses.

- **Responding: A.2.2 drives A.2.4 & together they drive A.2.5 & A.4.1:** Providers taking the time to understand employer customers' needs and then to design a solution to fit with them tend to be better at explaining them and closing off the assignment when complete.

- **Delivering: A.3.2 drives A.3.3:** The more care taken to prepare for delivery, the more care is taken during delivery.

- **Results: A.5.0 drives A.5.1 and together they drive A.5.2:** Providers concerned with measurement tend to be more likely to measure across-the-board.

Distinguishing "excellence"

Having a Standard which distinguishes between different providers as being worthy of certification is only valuable if in doing so it selects the right providers in a meaningful, understandable way. For that reason, we looked at available data sources to cast light on whether certificated providers can be seen as 'better' for employers and Government.

Would employers choose certificated providers?

The views held by employers, as customers purchasing training and development solutions, are especially important because an exclusive focus on employers' criteria for quality and impact was a key design principle in the Standard's development. The most direct evidence we have on employers' views comes from providers' submission to employer validation, a necessary stage of assessment to be considered for certification.

As a result, we have collected some 14,837 employer views, across 107 different providers[5], reporting their willingness to recommend providers' services to others. Validation data is gathered on a scale up to 10 points, in order to construct a Net Promoter Score (NPS) measure, which counts those scoring 6 and under as 'detractors' and those scoring 9 and 10 as 'promoters', and calculates the net percentage between the two categories.[6]

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[5] 107 validations completed because some providers were exempted as other data had been collected on a similar timescale for the LSC's Framework for Excellence performance framework, or because some providers had very small numbers of employer customers and were validated using depth interviews.
[6] See Reichheld, F (2003) 'The One Number You Need to Grow', *Harvard Business Review* for more on the background.

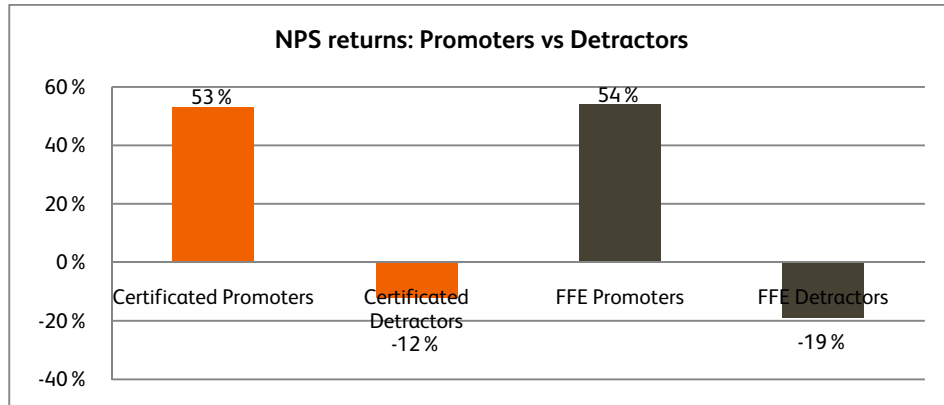**NPS returns: Promoters vs Detractors**

Figure 21: NPS returns: Promoters vs Detractors

For comparison we have used data collected through the LSC's Framework for Excellence performance framework. This fieldwork contacted some 35,263 employers for their views – the caveat here is that the subject providers represent a subset of those contracted by the LSC, which may not be representative of the whole.[7]

The headline finding is that certificated providers achieved an aggregate NPS of 40 %, while Framework for Excellence data suggests 35 %. Figure 21 shows the percentage totals of promoters (rating 9 or 10) and detractors (up to 6) for each exercise - the better performance of TQS certificated providers is accounted for by certificated providers having fewer detractors than those surveyed for Framework for Excellence. (Average ratings are 8.4 for certificated providers and 8 for Framework for Excellence.)

Can certificated providers contribute to policy goals?

After employers, funding agencies (and in particular, the LSC in England) were another key design stakeholder for the Standard's development. As well as highlighting the best providers to employers, it was always hoped that certification would also point to those providers best able to contribute to training policy objectives.

Here we compared the performance of certificated providers with other providers in turning learners starting programmes into successful qualification completions. Figure 22 shows this comparison using 2007/08 data, for the LSC's Train to Gain programme, and suggests that certificated providers achieve higher average success rates than those without certification.

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[7] In principle, it seems likely that those able to participate were those more likely to be more savvy at working with employers. Experience in managing the validation process for the Standard was that many poorer providers could not offer robust employer data to conduct validation against.
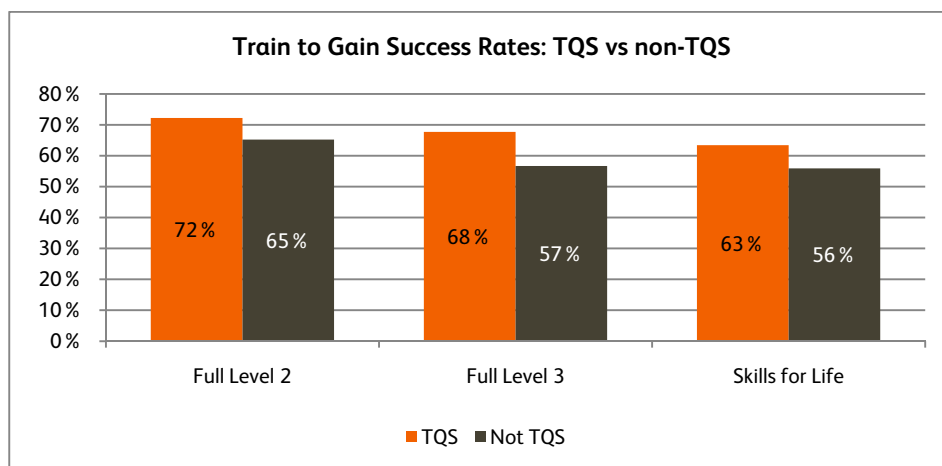
Train to Gain Success Rates: TQS vs non-TQS

Figure 22: Train to Gain Success Rates: TQS vs non-TQS (n=63 vs 607)

The higher levels achieved by certificated providers show the benefits of greater selectivity. If Train to Gain could be delivered consistently at the success rates achieved by certificated providers, the service would have delivered over 15,000 additional qualification outcomes in 2007/08. This number of additional qualifications would have been a substantial gain to the achievement of policy goals.[8]

Another source of data we have used to compare providers is concerned directly with educational quality – we compared grades arising from OFSTED inspection between certificated providers and those not certificated. Figure 23 shows the distribution of providers by grade, in terms of Leadership and Management. Certificated providers are not among those scoring 4 because of eligibility, but rather than cutting off the distribution there, there is a clear bias towards the higher grades – in contrast to other providers, certificated providers are more likely to have a grade 1 than a grade 3.
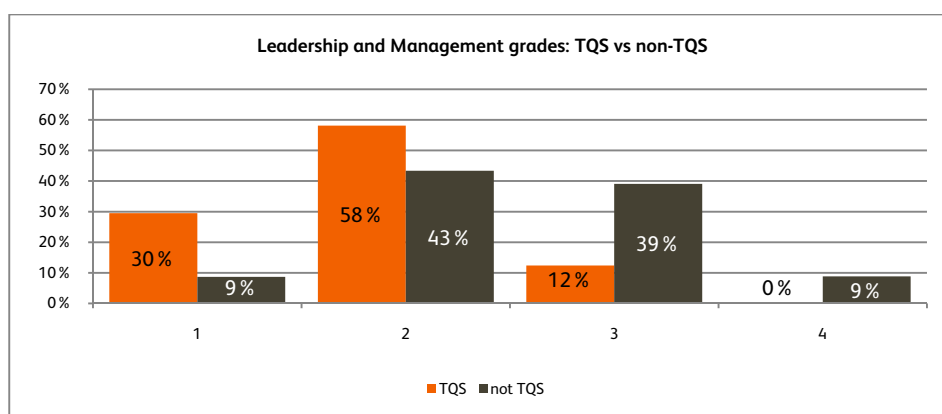
Leadership and Management grades: TQS vs non-TQS

Figure 23: Leadership and Management grades: TQS vs non-TQS

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[8] It's worth noting that the data points to certificated providers being larger, on average, than other providers. But plenty of small providers achieve high success rates and plenty of large ones struggle – and that there is a size distribution in each category.

A lot achieved, more to come

Reflecting on the Standard's goals – summarised in Figure 2 on page 6 – it has on the whole performed well so far. The Standard's full potential though will only be realised by continuing its work over the years to come.

Internal goals

The Standard's ability to help understand and celebrate excellence in training delivery has been demonstrated. The Standard is tough, and is recognised by providers as rigorous and robust. Evidence from the internal operations of the Standard's assessment process points to the quality safeguards designed into the process doing their job.

Evidence from our scoring analysis highlights the way the Standard casts light on good practice in delivery and the testimony of certificated providers points to a sense of distinction associated with achieving certification.

The Standard achieves well in being open and achievable for all types of providers, and all different sizes. The Standard has also been very successful in expanding to types not anticipated in the design stage – employers, HEIs, local authorities.

External goals: employers

The available data suggest that the Standard is accurate in certificating the providers employers would want to work with – picking out providers which stand out for better quality of service, backed by employers' willingness to recommend them

As the successor to the LSC's CoVE programme, the Standard was designed to ensure that it could create a network of certificated expert providers. Already, there are 108 Part B certifications achieved in a wide range of sector

areas; if growth continues then the Standard will be tracing a similar path to that achieved by the CoVE programme in its early years.[9]

The Standard also holds out the prospect of *better* training for employers. Success rates data show certificated providers better able to take learners through to achievement; provider testimony also shows the Standard challenges providers' thinking and makes real inroads on providers' attention to impact from training.

External goals: providers

The Standard has achieved well for many providers which have engaged – especially those going on to achieve certification. Overall, the feedback from the assessment process points to it being a valuable and positive experience, with high ratings for the quality and thoroughness of assessment and assessors' feedback found to be valuable.

The Standard is also successful in driving improvement among providers. Certificated providers – already those working at higher standards of quality than many – report significant benefits from assessment. The most mentioned benefits concern the ability of the Standard to challenge and change thinking and practice.

Anecdotally, the Standard's impact on provider practice has been much wider – although many providers have not yet registered, feedback from those working to develop providers' capacity suggests that improving readiness for assessment is a top priority for many.

External goals: Government

The Standard offers a tool which can better bring skills policy aims into line with employer demand. Employers reported low trust in previous schemes to recognise and improve provider practice, but many providers record that employers buy into the Standard's aims and rigour when it is explained to them.

Another aspect of this theme is that the Standard's demonstrable rigour can rebuff any suggestions that it is a soft option for Government's preferred providers. Not only do 38 % of providers assessed not achieve certification; 30 % of providers previously recognised under the CoVE programme have not met the requirements set by Part A of the Standard. The Standard's proven commitment to excellence makes it a saleable proposition to sometimes sceptical employers; but much more work needs to be done to promote the Standard and increase employers' recognition.

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[9] CoVEs grew in number from 18 to 166 in their first operating year. LSC (2003) *Measuring progress: The impact of the Centres of Vocational Excellence Programme*, Learning and Skills Council.

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