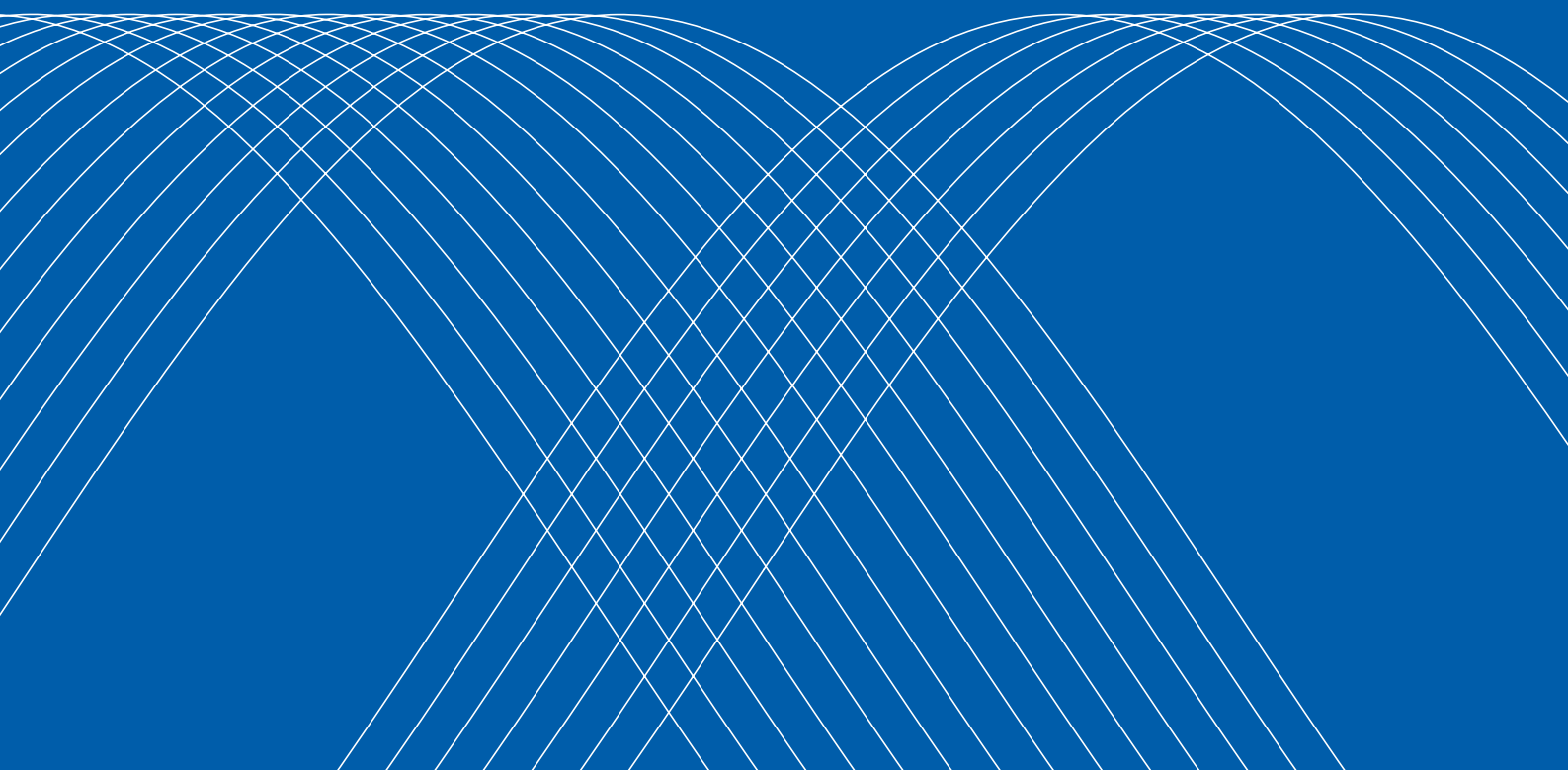




The Customer Voice in Transforming Public Services

Report Annexes

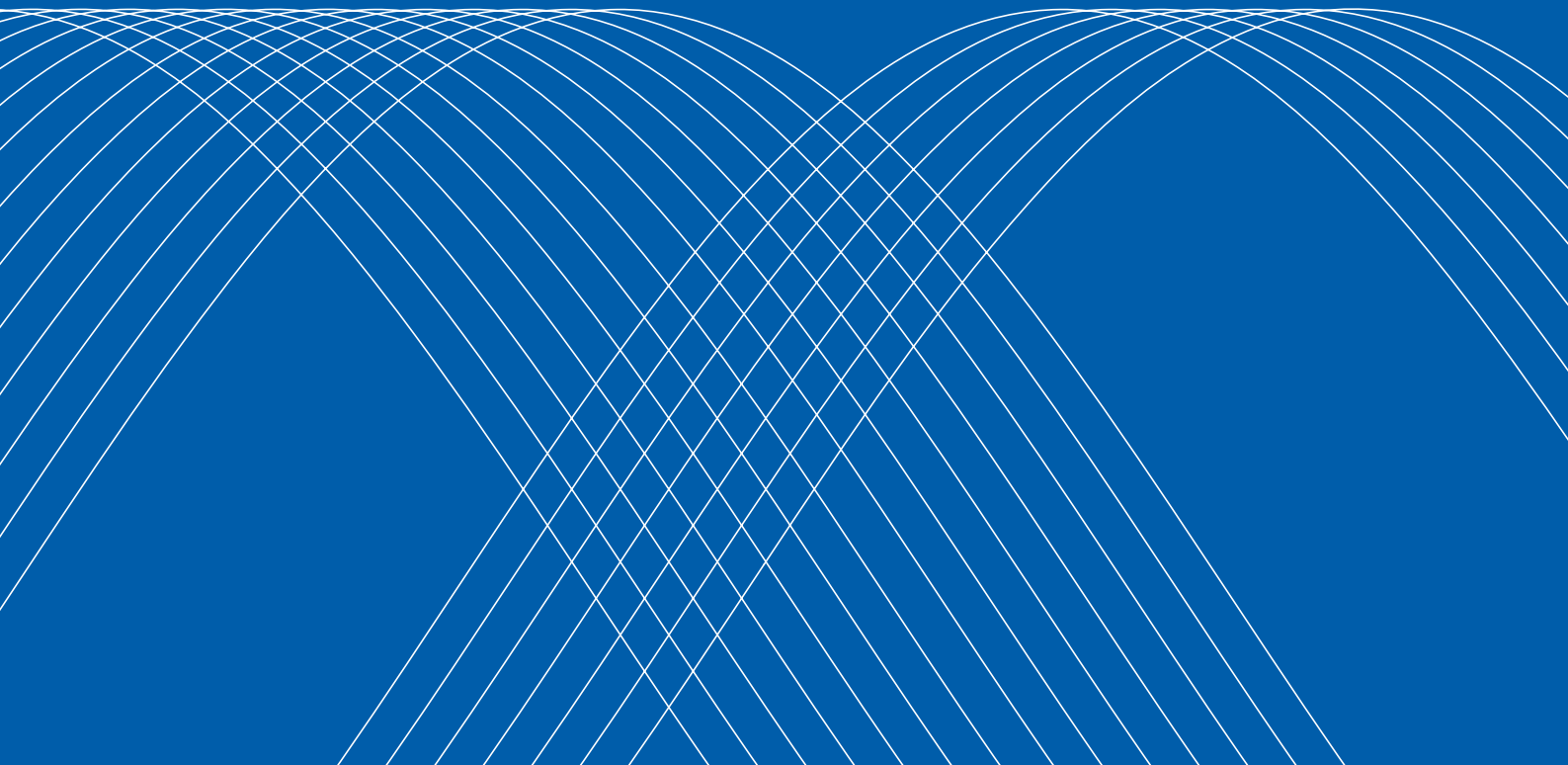


Annexes

1. Charter Mark Review Advisory Panel
2. One to One Interviewees
3. Participants in Stakeholder Events
4. Key Drivers of Customer Satisfaction – Mapped Against Existing Charter Mark Criteria
5. Existing Charter Mark Criteria
6. Award and Recognition Schemes
7. Charter Mark Review Research – Stakeholders
8. Charter Mark Review Research – Members of the Public

Annex 1

Charter Mark Review Advisory Panel Members



Neil Bentley

Director
Public Services Directorate
CBI

Harry Cayton

Director for Patients and the Public
Department for Health

Alan Cook

Former Chief Executive, National Savings and Investments
Managing Director, Post Office Limited

John Holden

Non Executive Director, Identity and Passport Service
Former Chief Executive, Companies House

Alan Hughes

Non Executive Director, Identity and Passport Service
Former Chief Executive, First Direct

Ed Mayo

Chief Executive
National Consumer Council

Adrian McMenemy

Head of Campaigns
Public Services Directorate
CBI

Christine Nickles

Head of Internal Communications and Events
Identity and Passport Service

Rachel Robinson

Group Business Development Director
MM Teleperformance

Nick Stace

Director of Campaigns and Communications
Which?

Graham Vidler

Head of Policy
Which?

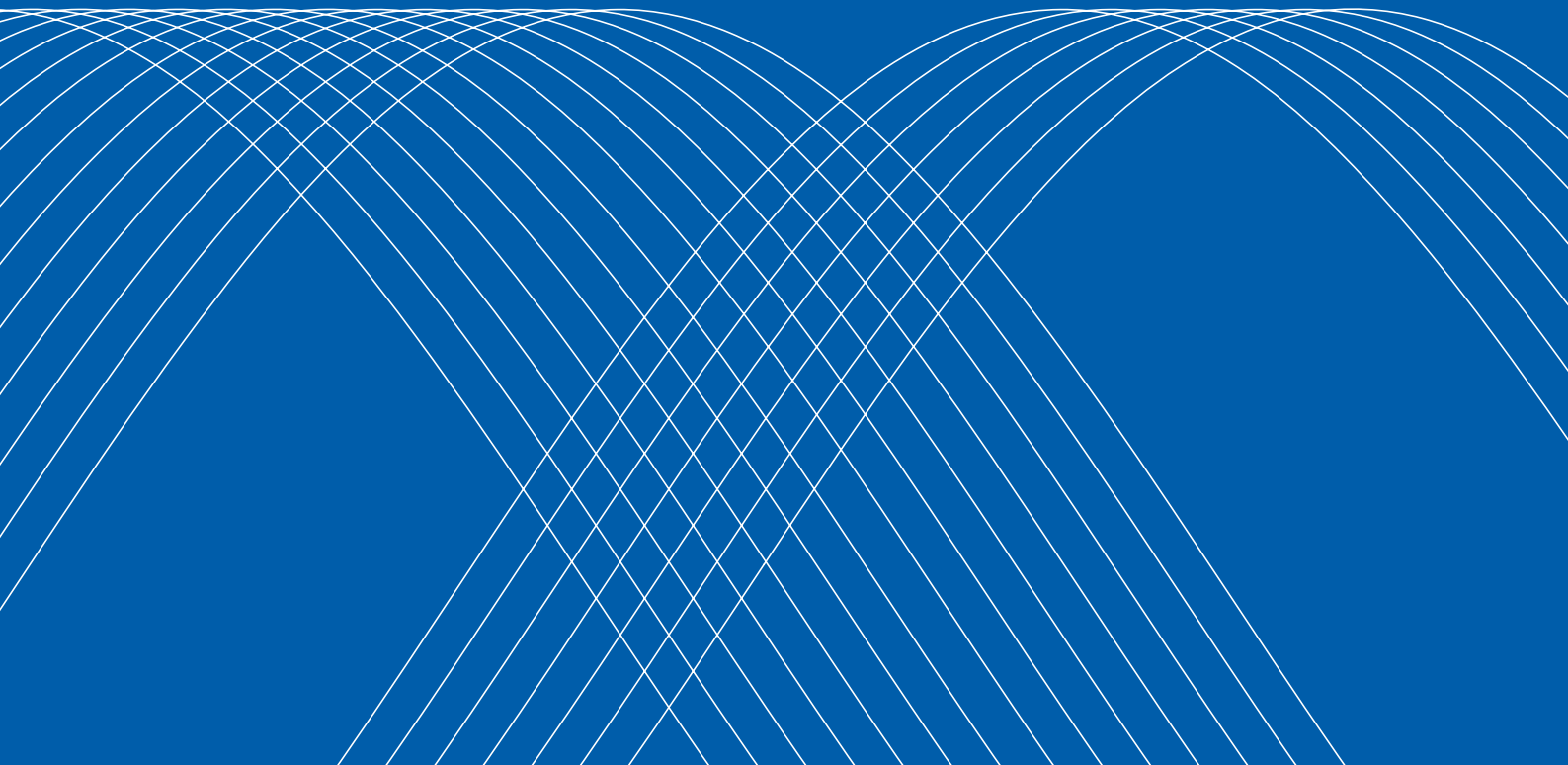
Peter Wanless

Director of Secondary Education
Department for Education and Skills

NB: CBI and Which? were represented by more than one member who attended on different occasions.

Annex 2

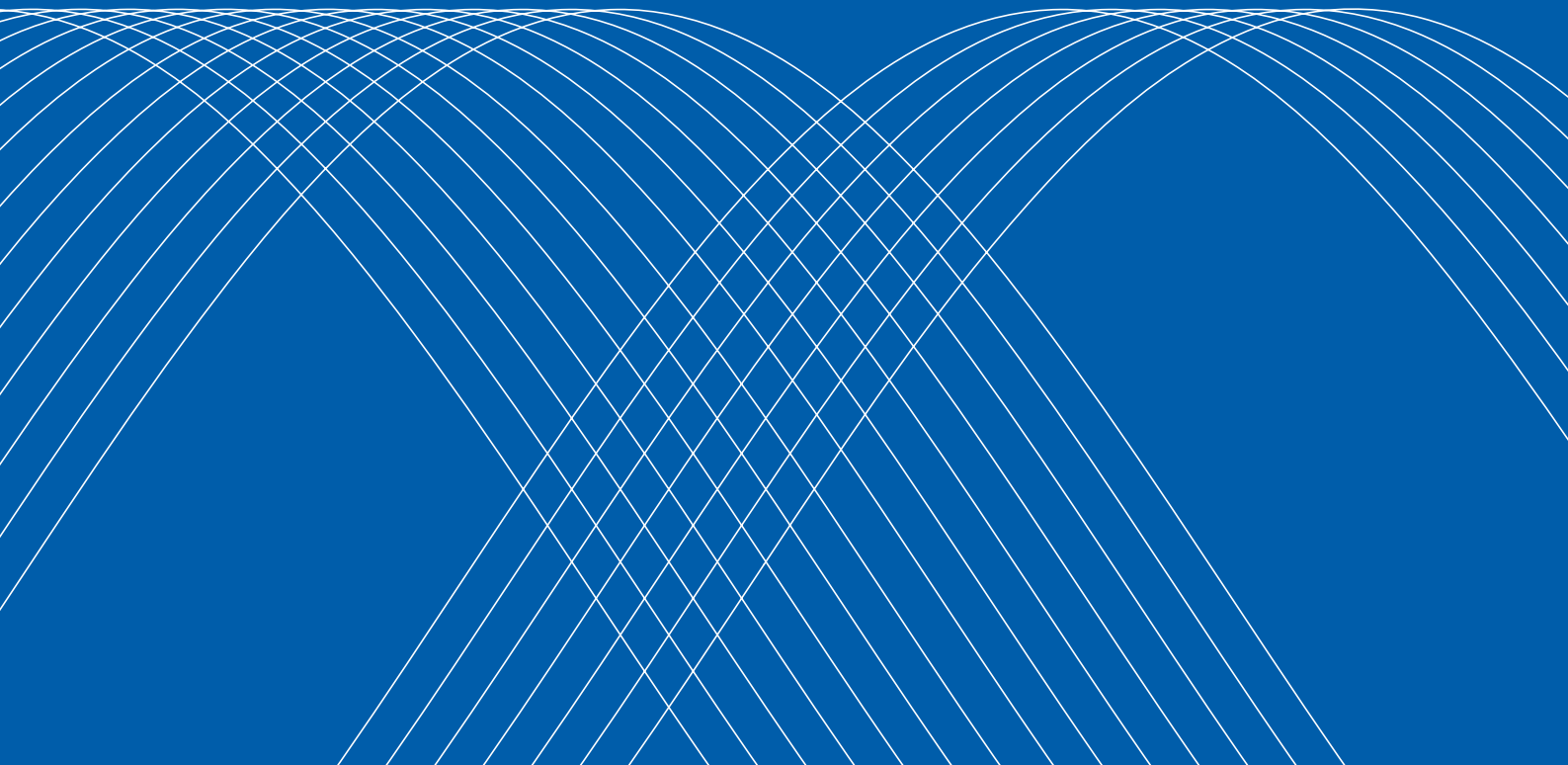
One to One Interviewees



David Anderson (Chief Executive, Cooperative Financial Services)
Jonathan Austin (Managing Director, Best Companies Ltd.)
David Bell (Formerly Chief Inspector of Education, Ofsted)
Steve Bundred (Chief Executive, Audit Commission)
Siobhan Campbell (Government Social Research Unit)
Claire Clancy (Chief Executive, Companies House)
Charlotte Copeland (Chief Executive, The Rent Service)
Chief Constable Cramphorn (West Yorkshire Police)
Kevin Curley (Chief Executive, NACVS)
Lucy de Groot (Executive Director, IDEA)
Sir Ronald De Witt (Chief Executive, HM Court Service)
Tom Drury (Managing Director, Vertex)
Graham Hardy (Head of Customer Service, Boots PLC)
Sharon Henderson (Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland)
Marianne Hood (Chair, Beacon Scheme)
Ossie Hopkins (Public Services Director, Institute of Customer Service)
Sir Robert Kerslake (Chief Executive, Sheffield City Council)
Liz Ketch (Team Leader, Prime Minister's Delivery Unit)
Alex Linkston (Chief Executive, West Lothian Council)
Stephen Locke (Locke Associates Consultants, former Charter Mark judge)
Anna Malley (Head of Company Secretariat, Post Office Ltd)
Simon Milton (Leader, Westminster Council and Chairman, Local Government Association Improvement Board)
Elisabeth Morris (HM Assistant Chief Inspector, HMIE Scotland)
Craig Mortimer (Quality Officer, Royal Marsden Hospital NHS Trust)
Matthew Nicholas (Director of External Communication & Marketing, Jobcentre Plus)
Ruth Spellman (Chief Executive, Investors in People Ltd)
Roxanne Sutton (Better Regulation Executive, Cabinet Office)
Michael Trickey (Director, Making the Connections Unit, Welsh Assembly Government)
Peter Unwin (Director, General Corporate Strategy and Resources, ODPM)
Anna Walker (Chief Executive, Healthcare Commission)
Richard Walsh (Public Service Reform and Efficiency Team, Scottish Executive)
Andy Wilson (Chief Executive, North Yorkshire Moors National Park Authority)

Annex 3

Participants in Stakeholder Events



Participants in Stakeholder Events

Stakeholder Meeting, 17th March 2006

Martin Armstrong (Director of Customer and Support Services, West Lothian Council)
 Hannah Brindle (Chief Executive, Customer First UK Ltd)
 Dr Siobhan Campbell (Government Social Research Unit)
 David Cook: (Chief Executive, Kettering Borough Council)
 Sir Ronald de Witt (Chief Executive, HM Court Service)
 Graham Hardy (Head of Customer Service, Boots PLC)
 Marianne Hood (Chair, Beacon Scheme)
 Alan Hughes (Charter Mark Advisory Panel: Non Executive Director, Identity and Passport Service and Former Chief Executive, First Direct)
 Steven Ing (Planning and Performance Manager, London Borough of Bromley)
 Ian Jardine (External Relations Executive, Aberdeen College)
 Laura Julve (Policy Analyst, Improvement and Development Agency)
 Marilyn Lister (Studies Manager, Audit Commission)
 Kate Lobley (Acting Head of Operations, Healthcare Commission)
 Stephen Locke (Locke and Associates Consultants; former Charter Mark Judge)
 Alison Miller (Improvement Team, Local Government Association)
 Elisabeth Morris (HM Assistant Chief Inspector, HM Inspectorate of Education Scotland)
 Craig Mortimer (Quality Officer, Royal Marsden Hospital NHS Trust)
 Christine Nickles (Charter Mark Advisory Panel: Head of Internal Communications and Events, Identity and Passport Service)
 David Parsons (Chief Executive, Institute of Customer Service)
 Leighton Phillips (Research Manager, Welsh Assembly)
 Lynda Rawsthorne (Head of Customer Services, Valuation Office Agency)
 Paul Reynolds (Head of Corporate Affairs, Companies House)
 John Smyth (Customer Service Centre Team Leader, Kettering Borough Council)
 Nick Stace (Director of Campaigns and Communications, Which?)
 Andrew Warren (Managing Director for Public Sector and Utilities Sector, Vertex)
 Ken Whetter (Customer Experience Product Manager, Jobcentre Plus)
 June Williams (Director of Quality and Delivery Partners, Investors in People UK Ltd)
 Sue Wilson (Project Manager, Charter Mark and liP, Sheffield City Council)

Meetings with Stakeholders in the Assessment Process

December 14th 2005

Synne Darwell (Centre for Assessment Limited)
David Harrison (Centre for Assessment Limited)
Simon Murphy (Charter Mark Assessment Service)
Gary Baker (SGS United Kingdom Limited)

December 20th 2005

Dave Allen (East Midlands Quality Centre): conference call

February 7th 2005

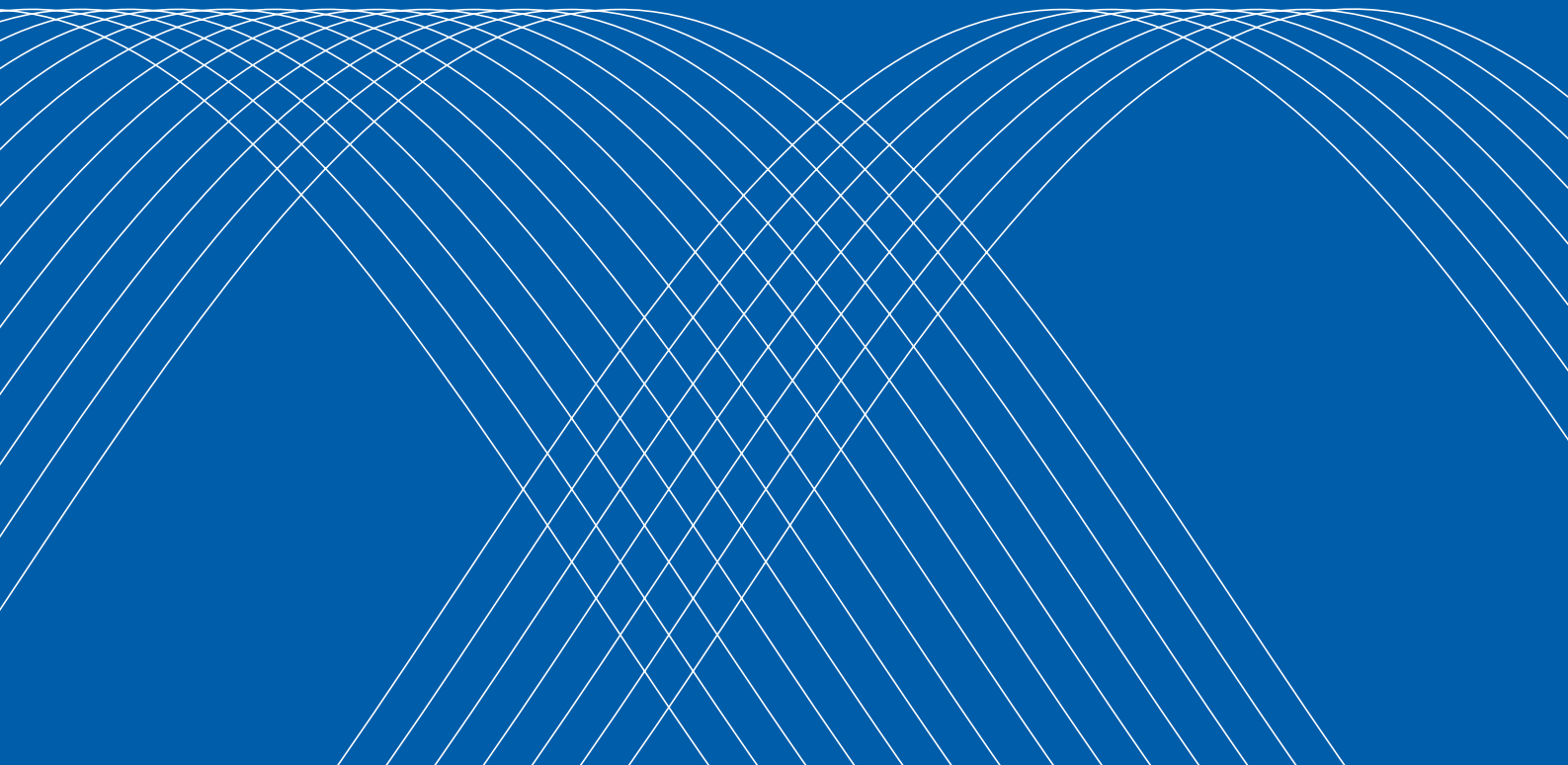
Jane Beaumont (Development Director, UKAS)

April 11th 2006

David Harrison (Centre for Assessment Limited)
Vicky Butler (Charter Mark Assessment Service)
Gary Swarbrooke (Charter Mark Assessment Service)
Sarah Rust (East Midlands Quality Centre)
Edwina Beech (East Midlands Quality Centre)
Gary Baker (SGS United Kingdom Limited)
Kirsty Newcombe (SGS United Kingdom Limited)

Annex 4

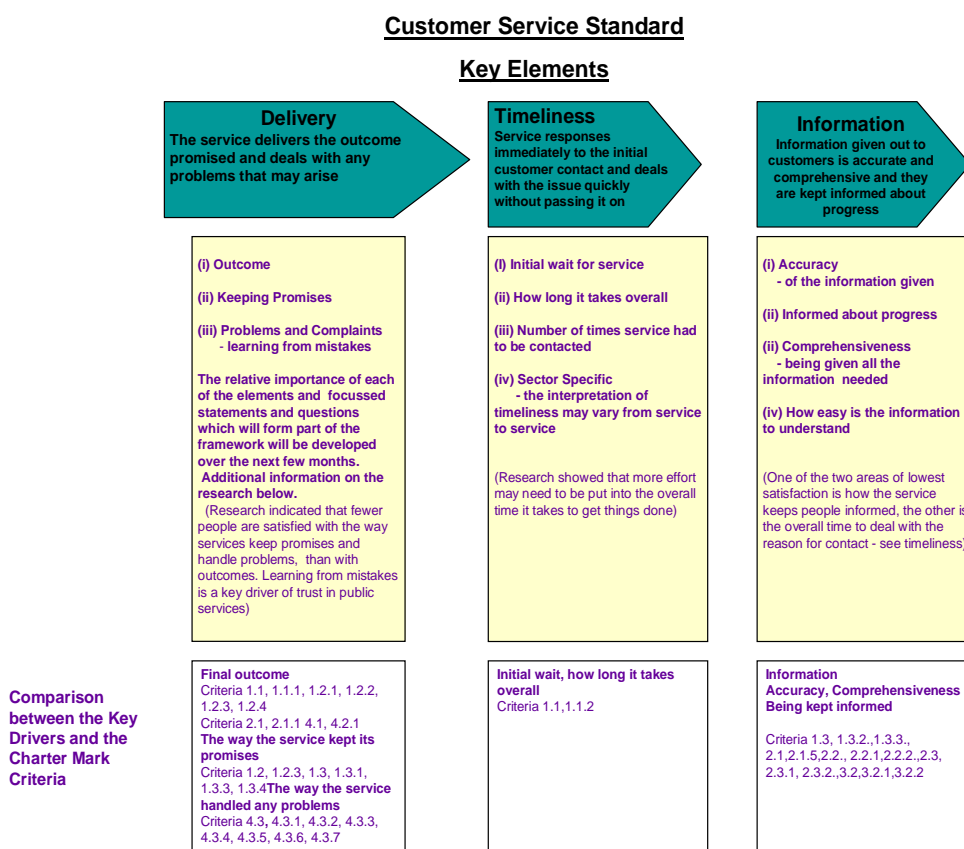
Key Drivers of Customer Satisfaction mapped against existing Charter Mark Criteria



KEY DRIVERS OF CUSTOMER SATISFACTION – MAPPED AGAINST THE CHARTER MARK CRITERIA

Recent research by MORI identified five key drivers of customer satisfaction and ranked the drivers in order of relative importance to the members of the public interviewed. The results suggested that adoption of the key drivers could be an important ‘tool’ to assist organisations delivering public services.

The diagrams below show the key elements within the drivers and a comparison between the drivers and the Charter Mark criteria.

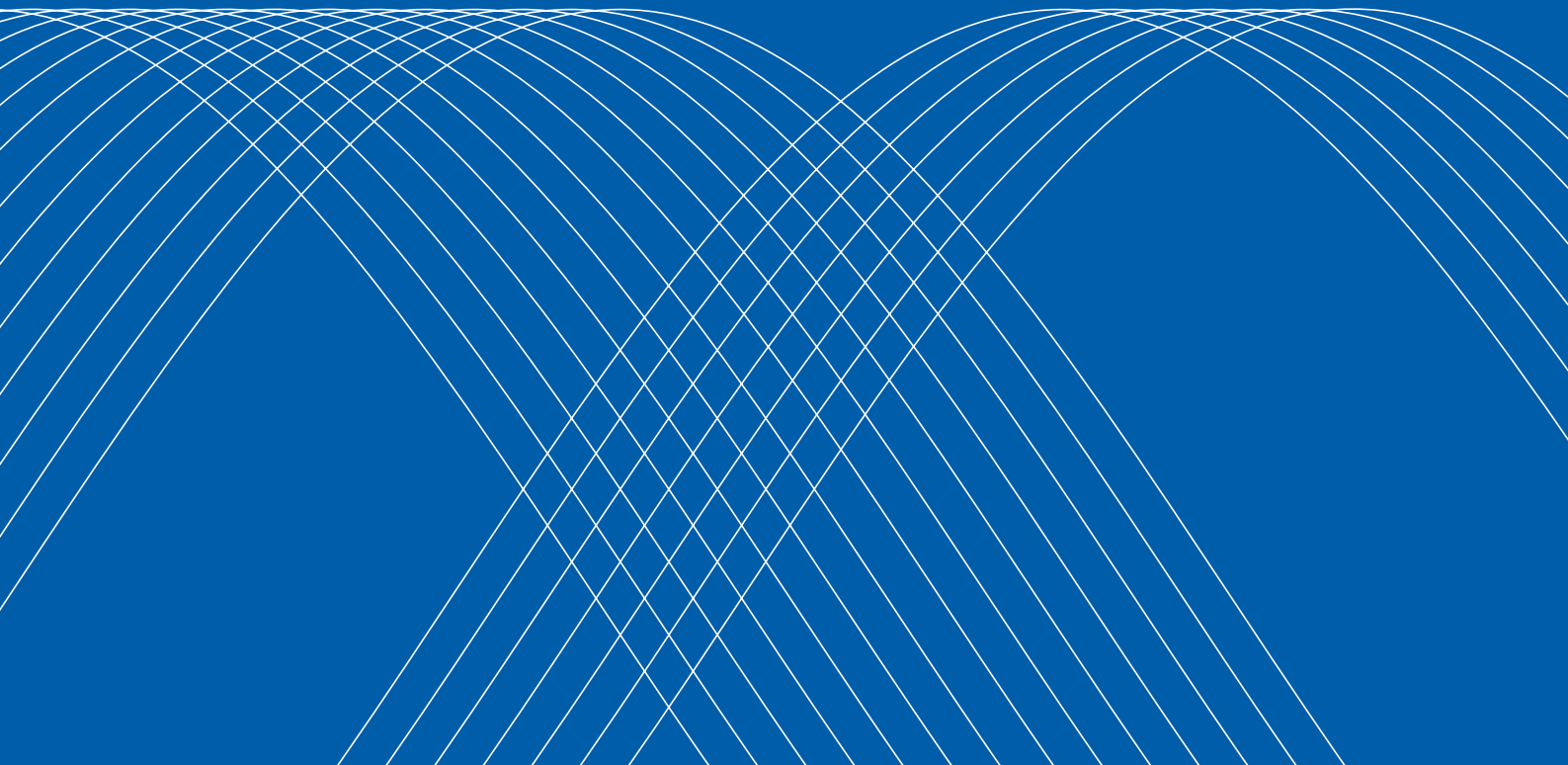


Customer Service Standard
Key Elements

Professionalism Staff are competent and treat customers fairly	Staff Attitude Staff are polite and friendly and sympathetic to customers' needs.	Physical environment Premises are clean and comfortable	Additional Driver Access Choice of ways to access the service and ease of access
<p>(i) Staff Competence</p> <p>(ii) Being treated fairly</p> <p>(iii) Privacy protected</p> <p>(iv) Reliability of the service</p> <p>(There is a high level of satisfaction with the competency of staff- slightly fewer people consider the service they received as reliable)</p>	<p>(i) Polite and friendly staff</p> <p>(ii) Staff sympathetic to customer needs</p> <p>(iii) The amount of time staff spend with the customer</p> <p>(Research showed that public service staff generally come across as polite and friendly- people are less happy with how sympathetic staff are to their needs)</p>	<p>(i) Physical Environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - cleanliness of premises - comfort of the premises <p>(ii) Staff appearance</p> <p>(General satisfaction with public service premises – some people are dissatisfied with staff appearance)</p>	<p>(i) Access</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ease of access - opening hours - choice of ways to access - Service Channels - Segmentation - (Linked with Service Transformation) <p>(Generally people find it easy to access public services, however there is less satisfaction with the choice of different ways to access the service and opening hours)</p>
<p>Competent staff, being treated fairly, How privacy is protected, reliability of service Criteria 3.3, and 3.3.4</p>	<p>Polite and Friendly Staff, empathy of staff, staff time spent with the customer Criteria 3.1, 3.2.1</p>	<p>Comfortable and clean premises, environment Criteria 4.2, 4.2.1</p>	<p>Choice of ways to access Ease of access Criteria 2.4,2.4.5,2.4.3, 3.1,3.1.1,3.1.2, 3.2,3.2.2,3.2.3,3.2.4,3.2.5,3.3,3.3.1, 3.3.2, 3.3.3.</p>

Annex 5

The Charter Mark Criteria



Criterion 1

Set standards and perform well

You need to show that your organisation:

- sets clear service and performance standards by consulting customers;
- meets those standards;
- monitors and reviews performance against standards and publishes the results; and
- designs, puts into practice and monitors standards with as little unnecessary paperwork and administration as possible.

<u>Sub-criterion</u>	<i>What the assessor is looking for</i>
1.1 You set precise and measurable standards for the main elements of your service that reflect the needs, expectations and rights of your customers and the general public.	1.1.1 You set precise, measurable and challenging standards for your main services which take account of your responsibility for delivering national and statutory standards and targets, and deal with local priorities.
	1.1.2 You set precise, measurable and challenging standards for customer service and these measure quality as well as quantity.
1.2 Your standards actively influence your organisation and you perform well.	1.2.1 You review and raise your standards regularly.

	1.2.2 You monitor your performance against standards.
	1.2.3 You meet your standards, and this is confirmed independently.
	1.2.4 Your organisation's performance compares well with others.
1.3 Your standards are relevant to the people who use your services, and your customers, potential customers, partners and staff know about the standards.	1.3.1 You consult customers, potential customers, partners and staff to set and review your standards.
	1.3.2 You tell your customers and potential customers about your standards.
	1.3.3 You make information on how you perform against all your standards widely available.
	1.3.4 Your standards are meaningful and relevant to all your customers, partners and key players.
	1.3.5 You identify any dips in performance against your standards and explain these to customers, together with action you are taking to put things right and prevent further dips in performance.

Criterion 2

Actively engage with your customers, partners and staff

You need to show that your organisation:

- actively works with (engages with) customers, partners and staff to make sure it delivers high-quality services;
- consults and involves present and potential customers of public services, partners and staff;
- is open, and communicates clearly and effectively in plain language and in a number of different ways; and
- provides full information about services, their cost and how well they perform.

Sub-criterion	What the assessor is looking for
2.1 Consulting customers, partners and staff is a central part of your organisation.	2.1.1 You consult people in a variety of ways, and regularly review these to make sure that the results are effective and reliable.
	2.1.2 You actively involve staff in planning services, particularly front-line staff who are in daily contact with customers.
	2.1.3 You encourage staff to make suggestions to improve services.
	2.1.4 You speedily process and analyse the results of consultations.
	2.1.5 You promptly tell customers, partners and staff about the results of consultations, including any action you plan as a result.

		2.1.6	Consultation has a direct effect on your organisation's services.
2.2	You provide reliable and wide-ranging information for customers about all aspects of your organisation and services.	2.2.1	You make information about all aspects of your services widely available to customers and potential customers, including how they are run and who is in charge.
		2.2.2	You tell your customers how much it costs to run your services, how much they will have to pay if appropriate and how that compares with similar organisations.
2.3	Your information meets the full range of your customers' needs, abilities and preferences.	2.3.1	You provide your customers with the information they need in plain, jargon-free language and in ways which meet their needs and preferences.
		2.3.2	Your organisation makes sure customers have received and understood the information, and you improve it using the feedback you have received.
2.4	You work effectively with other providers to improve access and services for customers from all sections of the community.	2.4.1	You have made arrangements with other providers to actively provide a co-ordinated service.
		2.4.2	You have effective arrangements for passing information and consultation between providers.

	2.4.3 Your arrangements are for the benefit of your customers.
	2.4.4 Your arrangements are cost-effective.
	2.4.5 Your customers know how to access co-ordinated services.

Criterion 3

Be fair and accessible to everyone and promote choice

You need to show that your organisation:

- makes services easily available to everyone who needs them, offering choice wherever you can; and
- treats everybody fairly in access to services and service delivery, and pays particular attention to people with special needs.

Sub-criterion	What the assessor is looking for
3.1 You widely publicise access to your services and their availability.	3.1.1 Your services are easily accessible to everyone.

	3.1.2 You use technology to provide information about, and access to, services where appropriate.
3.2 Your services meet the needs of customers.	3.2.1 Staff respond promptly and politely to customers, and they identify themselves where possible.
	3.2.2 You provide services flexibly to give people choice.
	3.2.3 You ask your customers and staff for their views on how to improve choices, and act on what they say, where appropriate.
	3.2.4 You try to make sure your services, and access to them, are affordable.
3.3 You have responsive equal opportunities and disability policies for delivering your service, and you put these into practice.	3.3.1 You consult customers with special needs about the information and access to services they need.
	3.3.2 You make information available to everyone, including people with special needs.
	3.3.3 You make reasonable changes to your facilities, policies, practices and procedures to help disadvantaged people, those with learning difficulties and members of minority groups who use or access your service.

	<p>3.3.4 You have customer care, equal opportunities and disability policies, procedures and training which relate to all your customers. Staff make sure that everyone is treated fairly and sensitively, and you ask your customers about their views on this.</p>
--	--

Criterion 4

Continuously develop and improve

You need to show that your organisation:

- always looks for ways to improve services and facilities, particularly when using technology;
- puts things right quickly and effectively;
- learns from, and improves as a result of, complaints, compliments and suggestions; and
- has a clear, well-publicised and easy-to-use complaints procedure, with the opportunity for independent review wherever possible.

Sub-criterion	What the assessor is looking for
<p>4.1 Continuous development is built into your organisation.</p>	<p>4.1.1 You plan and realistically work out the cost of proposed or future developments in your organisation.</p>
<p>4.2 Your services and facilities have developed and improved.</p>	<p>4.2.1 Your services and facilities have improved over the last three years, and you can measure or demonstrate the improvements.</p>
	<p>4.2.2 There are high levels of customer satisfaction, and levels of satisfaction are generally improving.</p>

	4.2.3 You actively involve customers in planning improvements, and they know about and appreciate the improvements.
	4.2.4 You assess, record and analyse satisfaction levels for the full range of customers for all the main areas of your service, and take action to deal with any problems.
	4.2.5 You make the most of technology to improve services or value for money.
4.3 You deal effectively with complaints, compliments and suggestions, and act on them to improve your service.	4.3.1 You have a well-publicised, easy-to-use complaints procedure, including a commitment to deal with problems fully and solve them wherever possible within a time limit.
	4.3.2 You give staff guidance and training to handle complaints and empower them to put things right.
	4.3.3 You actively encourage customers, partners and staff to comment on your service.
	4.3.4 You keep and analyse records of the number and type of formal and informal complaints, compliments and suggestions you receive, and how quickly they are dealt with.
	4.3.5 You publish details of the number and type of complaints, compliments and suggestions you receive, along with the improvements you made as a result.
	4.3.6 You ask people who use your complaints procedure what they think of it.

	4.3.7 You regularly review and improve your complaints procedure, taking account of the views of customers and staff.
--	---

Criterion 5

Use your resources effectively and imaginatively

For your organisation's main activities, you need to show that:

- your financial management is effective; and
- you use resources effectively and imaginatively to provide best value for taxpayers and customers.

Sub-criterion	What the assessor is looking for
5.1 You manage your resources effectively.	5.1.1 You have met budgets and financial targets, and analysed and explained any differences.
	5.1.2 You measure and monitor your efficiency against performance standards.
	5.1.3 Your organisation makes the most of available resources.
	5.1.4 You benchmark financial indicators or cost-effectiveness measures against similar organisations where relevant.

	5.1.5 Your use of resources is independently assessed for value for money.
5.2 Your organisation puts a priority on value for money.	5.2.1 Your staff are aware of the need for efficiency and value for money for the customer.
	5.2.2 You have plans to improve value for money and keep costs down.

Criterion 6

Contribute to improving opportunities and quality of life in the communities you serve

You need to show that your organisation:

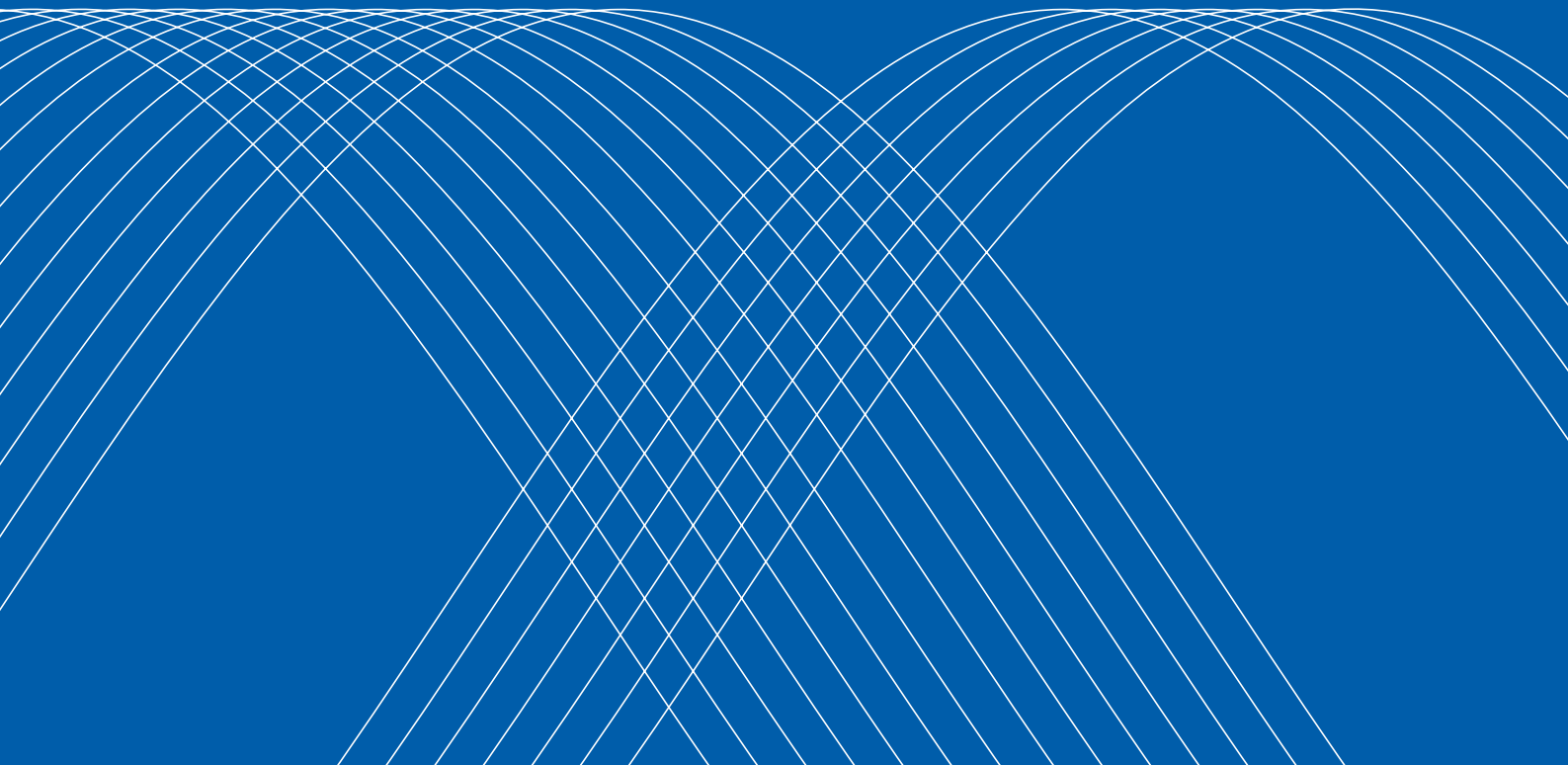
- has reviewed and is aware of its impact and potential usefulness in the local and national communities you serve; and
- has made some contribution to enriching the social or economic life of those communities, beyond the strict requirement of excellent service delivery, through positive, discretionary initiatives and imaginative use of resources.

Sub-criterion	What the assessor is looking for
6.1 You are aware of the impact and potential usefulness of your organisation in the communities you serve and you have explored opportunities to enrich those communities.	6.1.1 The senior-management team has identified and approved the commitment to make a contribution to the wider community.

	<p>6.1.2 You have reviewed the social, economic and physical impact of your organisation, and considered whether there are under-used or potentially useful resources for the community (or both).</p>
	<p>6.1.3 You have collected the views of customers, staff and other interested people or organisations, and used them to influence the contribution you make to the community.</p>
<p>6.2 You have achieved positive results from your involvement with the community.</p>	<p>6.2.1 Your organisation has given corporate support and invested appropriate resources for its involvement with the community.</p>
	<p>6.2.2 You have been positively involved with the community for six months or more.</p>
	<p>6.2.3 You monitor your activities and have evidence of their positive effect in the community.</p>
	<p>6.2.4 You have learnt from your involvement with the community and improved your plans as a result.</p>

Annex 6

Award and Recognition Scheme



Award and Recognition Schemes

ANNEX 6

Scheme	Type	Eligibility	Owner	Profile	Recognises	Assessment	Sponsor	Ceremony	Rew.
Charter Mark	Standard	All public sector, private subcontractors	Cabinet Office	M/H 1860 holders Govt. backing	Customer Service	Independent certification following visit. All UKAS accredited	No	Previously	Logo
Investors in People	Standard	Public and private sectors	IIP UK Ltd	H Wide use Logo well known	People Management	On site assessment via local Quality Centre. Independent Panel QA'd	No	No	Logo
ISO 9001:2000	Standard	Public and private sectors	BSI	M Wide use but unknown by public	Process Management	On site independent audit, some UKAS accredited.	No	No	Logo
Lexcel	Standard	Law Practices and legal departments	Law Society	M Growing	Practice Management	Written application and on site visit. Annual surveillance	No	No	Logo
Matrix	Standard	Organisations delivering info, advice and guidance	DfES	M Growing	Customer service, people and process management	On site assessment	No	No	Logo
The Beacon Scheme (formerly local Government Beacon Scheme)	Beacon scheme	Best Value Local authorities	ODPM	M/H Very high in local	Excellence in local government	Written application, on site visit and applicant presentations	No	No	Beacon status
Putting the Customer First	Standard	Business Support Services	Partnership of Government Offices, Dti	M Growing profile	Customer service	On site visit	No	No	Logo

Scheme	Type	Eligibility	Owner	Profile	Recognises	Assessment	Sponsor	Ceremony	Rew.
European Quality Award	Award	Public and private sectors	EFQM	H High profile, Influential	Business excellence	Written application and on-site visits by trained assessors.	Yes	Yes	Award
APSE Excellence Awards	Award	Local Gov	APSE	L	Performance and innovation	Unclear	Yes	Yes	Award
British Association of Communicators in Business National Awards	Award	Members of the CiB	British Association of Communicators in Business	L High in own sector	Individual and business performance	Written application, no on-site visit	Yes	Yes	Award
British Insurance Awards	Award	Insurance industry	Partnership of industry publications	L High within insurance	Excellence in the insurance market	Written application and supporting material	Yes	Yes	Award Use of logo in PR
The Butler Trust Award	Award	Prisons and related	The Butler Trust	L	Best practice in the care of offenders	Written applications and testimonials	No	Yes	Award
National Customer Service Awards	Award	Industry, commerce and the public sector	Customer Management magazine	M	Customer Service	Written application	Yes	Yes	Award
The e-Commerce Awards	Award	UK businesses (250+ employees)	Dti in partnership with InterForum	L	e-Commerce	Electronic entries	Yes	Yes	Award
Financial News Awards	Award	Investment Banks	Financial News	L	Business performance	Nominations voted upon by panel of judges	Yes	Yes	Award

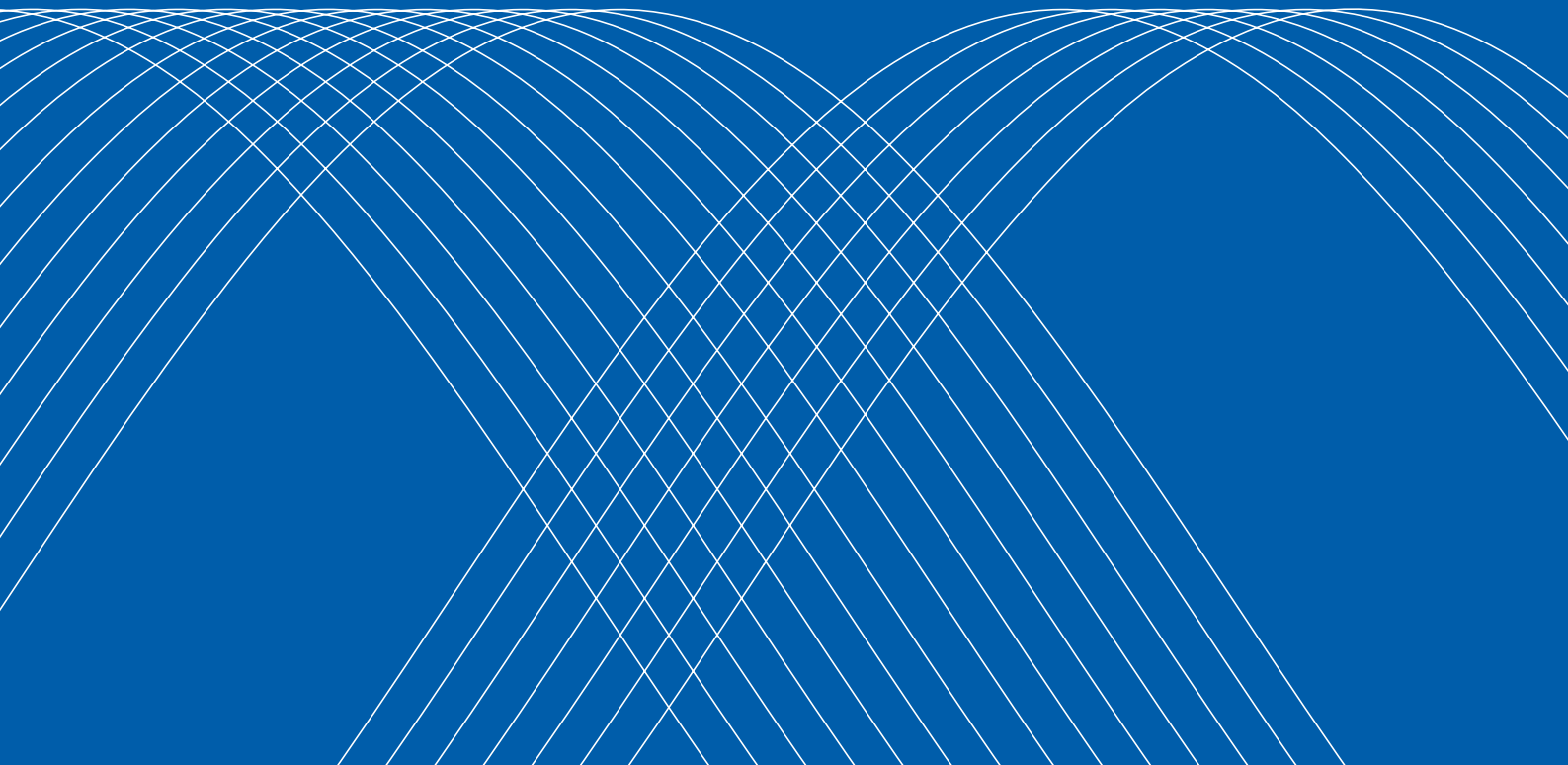
Scheme	Type	Eligibility	Owner	Profile	Recognises	Assessment	Sponsor	Ceremony	Rew.
The Health Service Journal (HSJ) Awards	Award	Healthcare sector	The Health Service Journal	M	Organisational achievement	Written application	Yes	Yes	Award
Learning and Skills Beacon Status	Beacon	LSC funded providers (colleges etc.)	DfES	L	Excellence in the Learning and Skills sector	Written proposal	No	No	Beacon status
Local Government Chronicle Awards	Awards	Local Gov	LGC	M	Excellence in local government practice	Written application and on site visit	Yes	Yes	Award
Management Today Service Excellence Awards	Awards	Commercial, not for profit and charitable organisations	Management Today	H	Customer service	Written application and on site visit		Yes	Award
Millennium Volunteers Award	Award	MV volunteers	Government Offices and Connexions Partnerships	L	Achievements through volunteering	Written application	No	Yes	Award
The Moneyfacts Awards	Award	Banking and finance services	Moneyfacts Group	L - High in financial sector	Best financial products	Unclear	No	No	Logo
National Business Awards	Award	All companies	Quest media	M	Business excellence	Written application	No	No	Award
National Transport Awards	Award	Local authorities and transport orgs	Aberdeen Business School	L	Transport efficiency	Unclear	Yes	Yes	Award

Scheme	Type	Eligibility	Owner	Profile	Recognises	Assessment	Sponsor	Ceremony	Rew.
The New Media Awards	Award	Orgs. using new media to enhance civic society	New Statesman	M Growing	Organisations that use new media to make a difference to public life	Online viewing of products		Yes	Award
Public Servant of the Year Awards	Award	All public sector	CIPFA	M High profile, low entries	Individual performance	Via panel of eminent judges following initial sift by CIPFA and CO. no visit	Yes	Yes	Award
Regional Police Authority Awards	Award	Varies – police officers, staff and public	Regional Police Authorities	L	Criteria differ – achievements within the community and bravery	Usually through nomination and judging panel	No	Yes	Award
Responsible Tourism Awards	Award	The tourist industry	Responsibletravel.com	L	Responsible tourism	Nominations judged by panel	Yes	No	Award
Retail Week awards	Award	Retailers	Retail Week Magazine	L High within sector	Excellence in retail	Written application assessed by judging panel	Yes	Yes	Award
Sunday Times Best 100 Companies	Survey	Organisations with 50+ employees	The Sunday Times	H	Best practice in HR and business	Questionnaire and research	No	No	Listing
Taking a Stand awards	Award	Individual citizens	Home Office	L	Individuals who stand up to antisocial behaviour	Written nomination, no visit	Yes	Yes	Award

Scheme	Type	Eligibility	Owner	Profile	Recognises	Assessment	Sponsor	Ceremony	Rew.
The Health and Social Care Awards	Award	Health and social care	DOH	M – Well supported by DH, low public profile	Team and individual performance	Written applications judged by regional then national panel. No visit but verification sought.	Yes	Yes	Grant to spread Good practice
The Guardian public Services awards	Award	Public Services	The Guardian	H	Excellence in public service delivery	Written applications assessed by judging panel		Yes	Award
The Celebrate Success awards	Award	Young people supported by the Prince's Trust	The Prince's Trust	L	Exceptional achievements of young people	Unclear	Yes	Yes	Award
The Queen's Award for Enterprise	Award	UK based companies	The Queen	H	Outstanding achievement by UK companies	Written applications, 'health checks' and scrutiny by PM's Advisory Committee	No	Yes	Award
The Teaching awards	Award	Education establishments	The Teaching Awards Trust	H	Excellence and best practice in education	Written application and on site visit	Yes	Yes	Award
UK Business Excellence Award	Award	EFQM users	EFQM	M	Business excellence	Written application and on site visit	No	Yes	Award
Which? Good Food Guide	Listings	All catering establishments	Which?	H	The best customer experience in the restaurant trade	'Blind' visits	No	No	Ratings

Annex 7

Charter Mark Review Research Stakeholders





CREATIVE RESEARCH

Charter Mark: Research among
the Public
Summary of Findings

Charter Mark: Research among the Public

Summary of Findings

22 February **2006**

Prepared for:
COI, on behalf of its client, the Office of Public Services
Reform

Prepared by:
Creative Research
43 The Broadway
London W13 9BP

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Background

A review of the Charter Mark scheme was initiated earlier this year by the then Minister with the objective of:

- Evaluating the existing scheme with regard to maintaining the current customer base whilst maximising opportunities for significant growth
- Involving current customers and stakeholders in the review through meaningful consultation
- Building on the evaluation and making recommendations for a new customer service standard.

As part of the review, primary research was commissioned amongst current, lapsed and potential Charter Mark holders, and assessors, and this report details the findings of this.

Aims and Objectives

The research objectives as set out in the brief are to assess:

- Awareness and understanding of Charter Mark
- Attitudes towards the current Charter Mark scheme including its:

aims and objectives

scope and format (criteria)

image and degree of value that resides in the brand

perceived value (benefits and weaknesses)

comparisons with other accreditation schemes such as those in the private sector

- The experience of applying for and actually holding a Charter Mark
- Barriers to participation in the scheme
- Suggestions for development / evolution of a new national customer service standard

- Response to broad proposals for development currently under consideration including an exploration of risks and benefits associated with any change.

Research Method

A qualitative approach was adopted based on a mix of group discussions and depth interviews. The latter were a mix of face to face and telephone interviews and were, in the main, with individual respondents although, on a small number of occasions, the interview was with two or three respondents. The research was conducted among current holders of Charter Mark, lapsed holders and potential holders. In addition, a series of interviews was conducted with assessors from across the four assessment bodies. We set out to conduct the research in the following way:

Current Holders	One group with public sector holders One group with private sector holders
Lapsed Holders	8 telephone interviews
Potential Holders	Two groups with public sector organisations 12 telephone & 6 face to face interviews with public sector 4 telephone & 2 face to face interviews with private sector

We encountered problems with convening the group discussions because of a reluctance to participate by many, and a lack of availability at the same time among those who were willing. The composition of the group would probably also have been weighted towards a particular sector. We therefore replaced the groups with more face to face interviews. A table summarising the sample that was achieved is shown below.

Current Holders	One group with public sector organisations 2 from courts 2 from educational establishments 2 from local authorities 3 from health One group with 'private sector' organisations 5 from housing associations 1 from a charity 1 from a museum 1 from a utility One paired depth with a local authority
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Lapsed Holders	9 telephone interviews; 3 from local authorities, 2 each from health, education and utilities
Potential Holders	<p>11 telephone & 11 face to face interviews with public sector</p> <p>4 from health</p> <p>9 from education (primary, secondary, Further and Higher)</p> <p>5 from local authorities</p> <p>4 from police and prisons</p> <p>5 telephone and 5 face to face interviews with private sector; five of these respondents were already eligible for Charter Mark on the basis that part of their operation provided services to the public sector. Others were from the financial sector predominantly, with one utility.</p> <p>It emerged that in a few cases organisations had achieved Charter Mark in part of their operation or were in the process of preparing for Charter Mark but they had not been directly involved themselves in this.</p>

In addition, five telephone interviews and one face to face interview were conducted with **assessors**. The individuals in question were selected so as to roughly reflect the gender mix among assessors (two women, four men) and to represent different assessment bodies and length of experience. The interviews lasted between 20 minutes (a few potential respondents) and two hours (assessors).

Each of the interviews was obviously tailored to the audience in question but common areas of coverage were awareness and experience of Charter Mark, perceived benefits and costs, spontaneously voiced ideas for improvement and responses to some initial ideas for developing the scheme. Lapsed holders discussed their reasons for not continuing with Charter Mark; potential holders discussed the factors that would come into play if they were considering pursuing Charter Mark and the assessors spoke from their wide and long experience of the scheme.

The two group discussions were conducted in London and Preston. The other interviews covered a variety of regions. Those conducted face to face were in the Midlands, South West, South, Home Counties and London. The telephone interviews also involved respondents in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales as well as the North of England.

Introduction

- This section pulls together the main findings of the research and offers our interpretation of them. The rest of the report provides the detail of the findings.

Research Method

- The study forms part of the review of Charter Mark being undertaken within the Office of Public Services Reform. It involved primary research in the form of face to face or telephone interviews with individual or groups of current Charter Mark holders, lapsed holders and potential holders, and with assessors. The sample was weighted towards representatives of organisations from the public sector but it also included those from private sector organisations that are currently eligible and ineligible for the scheme.

Awareness and Understanding of Charter Mark

- The general view was that Charter Mark had a low profile among the general public; they may have heard of it but were unlikely to know what it signified. Awareness was also thought to be patchy among organisations that were eligible for Charter Mark and the research suggested that indeed, those in the public sector were more likely to know something about it than those in the private, eligible or otherwise. The loss of profile was attributed to the Cabinet Office and the failure to demonstrate commitment to Charter Mark by promoting and publicising it, and taking it on within government departments.
- The majority saw Charter Mark as having a customer service focus but this was not unanimous; the breadth of the criteria and general 'accreditation creep' (whereby there are increasing overlaps between inspection and accreditation requirements), made it less distinct for some.
- Most respondents dated their achievement of Charter Mark from before the change to the standard; some had achieved it since. While some spoke of Charter Mark as a 'badge', most of the current holders thought they had used it and were using it as a management tool to drive attitudes and practices in a

customer-oriented direction. It seemed that the award and standard were not seen as mutually exclusive; Charter Mark could be a vehicle to bring about change that is also recognised externally by 'award' of the Charter Mark.

Attitudes towards and Experience of the Current Charter Mark Scheme

- While the establishment of a customer focus within organisations was seen as the prime motivator behind going for Charter Mark (especially by assessors and the very important 'champions' who often drive the quest for Charter Mark), some were more motivated by what they hoped would be external validation of systems that they felt were, by and large, already on track. Other hoped for by-products of the Charter Mark process involved internal impact (team building, improved morale) and profile building, both within the organisation's wider structure and externally, the latter to help secure funding and contracts.
- Current holders were not overly critical of the assessment process; they were getting to grips with it and felt that time was needed to allow it to become embedded within their organisations. Most had felt appropriately tested by the assessment and felt they had achieved something significant in Charter Mark. The pre-assessment had proven very useful for some while others had used an orientation session of some kind to point them in the right direction. Several had participated in a surveillance visit since, or were due to, and most recognised that an annual review kept them and their staff looking for continuous improvement. The assessors were seen as supportive and highly diligent.
- The issues that commonly arose among holders as areas they were less happy with were as follows:

the perceived higher cost of Charter Mark now that more frequent meetings with the assessor are necessary (the financial cost mainly but also the time commitment)

a lack of clarity about the different forms that the ongoing assessment process can take and a desire for the

associated costs to be made clear by assessment bodies to help with selection

given the great sense of achievement felt by successful organisations, there was some disappointment at the loss of the high profile, celebratory event in London

there was also disappointment that Charter Mark seemed to have lost some of the kudos that was seen as previously attached to it. This was seen as largely down to the loss of profile with the public.

- Charter Mark certainly was felt to have delivered many of the benefits that those going for it had hoped for; better working relationships, improved morale, an enhanced profile with stakeholders and as an aid to securing funding.
- A key issue that arose was in relation to the rationale for continuing with Charter Mark. If it has delivered in terms of providing a management tool to bring about change and an organisation feels that a customer focus is now embedded in its culture, why would it need to continue with renewal of Charter Mark, with its associated costs? The answer seemed to be that there needed to be a demand for Charter Mark from the marketplace (public and other customers) which convinced organisations that they must continue to be seen to have it.

Barriers to Participation in the Scheme

- Factors impinging on an organisation's interest in participating in the Charter Mark scheme were many and various and related to

the situation within the organisation – is there a need for change? is there a champion to drive the process? do the staff have the capacity to take it on? what are their competing priorities including statutory inspections and optional accreditations? will it require a lot of work or just a little because practices are already in place? does the cost make excessive demands on their budgets and

the 'marketplace' in which the organisation operates - is Charter Mark the norm or a differentiator? will it matter to customers and make them more disposed to using/funding the organisation? will Charter Mark have any impact in international markets?

- Apart from cost as a disincentive to staying with the scheme, the demands on staff time (especially if other accreditations come into the picture) and the need for continuous improvement were also factors.
- Taking these factors into account, and based upon what those in different parts of the public sector said, it seemed that local authorities (particularly with the increased use of corporate programmes) and the health service were most likely to have a clear rationale for using Charter Mark at present. In the education sector, primary and smaller secondary schools were likely to be too stretched by demands on budgets, staff time and numerous other changes, to participate, but tertiary and higher education might feel they could benefit from the scheme, especially in their non-academic activities, once students become even more demanding consumers. Similarly, once National Offender Management becomes embedded in the Prison Service, there may be a demand from this new marketplace for prisons to consider Charter Mark. Structural change was also raised as an issue by potential and lapsed holders in the police and health sectors. With the anticipated merger of certain police forces and PCTs and the associated uncertainty, now was not the time to commit to Charter Mark.

Suggestions for Development

- Improvements that were spontaneously suggested to the current Charter Mark by those who knew it included:

scrutiny of the existing criteria, sub-criteria and evidence required, to clarify what is meant by each and to remove overlaps or make their differences more distinct

further examination of criterion 6 to ensure organisations have a clear understanding of what is being sought, with some

guidance as to how they can achieve continuous improvement

revisiting of the content of the existing criteria; should they have a narrower focus on customer service? (ie. are they all necessary?) should they adopt a wider interpretation of the 'customer' (ie. are other sub-criteria called for?)

- Broader issues were also raised by Charter Mark holders and assessors:

Charter Mark is celebrated for its versatility but does this make it less relevant and useful for specific sectors?

does it measure the most important aspect of customer service, the customer experience, so that holding Charter Mark truly signifies excellent customer service standards?

can assessment be consistent and rigorous with different assessment bodies, styles and formats? Could this result in undeserved accreditations that might undermine Charter Mark?

with additional stages of assessment and associated costs, will the scheme be sustainable in the long term or will organisations decide that they have taken the standard on board and no longer need external validation?

is there the commitment to the scheme from Government to build its profile, both among organisations that are eligible to apply and their customers? Various suggestions were made as to how Charter Mark might be marketed within organisations and to the general public.

- It can be seen from such concerns that people want the best for Charter Mark; they feel that it has helped them to achieve improvements in customer service (although they may still be aware there is more to be done), it has entailed a great deal of staff effort to achieve the accreditation and they want it

to really stand for something credible and worthwhile. Only in this way can they continue to derive benefits for both internal and external stakeholders.

Response to Broad Proposals for Development

- Many potential holders, lapsed holders and some current holders could understand why a review of Charter Mark was being conducted and even, why the loss of the scheme might be under consideration. Its purpose needs clarifying, its credibility needs proving and its profile needs raising. Nobody was saying that Charter Mark had had its day, just agreeing it was a valid question to ask. Those current holders who had achieved Charter Mark more recently were concerned by the idea that it might disappear or even change; it was clearly serving many well and they felt time was needed to embed the standard.
- There were various responses to the idea of **extending eligibility** to the general private sector that serve the public; most positive of these was the effect that this would have on the public profile of Charter Mark; the public would come to know and appreciate it. The private sector could also see that their example might be helpful to the public sector.
- The potential downsides were that the private sector might not choose to participate (or did so in a way that was driven by the bottom line) which could undermine the scheme, and the public sector, with its more limited resources, could suffer from comparison with the private.
- The current meeting point of the public and private sector, where private companies provide services to the public sector, was thought by some to be an underexploited and highly relevant market for Charter Mark but one where a number of issues needed resolving. These included questions over which of the two partners would be seen as going for Charter Mark (and therefore who was the customer as opposed to end user) and the extent to which the private sector partner was empowered to make changes to practices and thus step outside the strict boundaries of its contract.
- The wider private sector knew very little of Charter Mark compared to a few in the currently eligible private sector. Having looked at the self-assessment

tool, they could see that it was potentially useful but they were pursuing other methodologies and for them, Charter Mark had yet to prove itself in the business arena. They could see that pursuing the Charter Mark badge (this was essentially how they saw it) in a large company would entail considerable investment and they would need to be convinced that it would deliver in such terms as staff engagement and increased market share.

- The idea of introducing **variations in Charter Mark** for different market segments also attracted different responses. Some raised the issue spontaneously, seeing it as the only way forward to make Charter Mark relevant to sectors such as the police or to different private industries if the scheme was opened up. Others were less sure; they felt that Charter Mark was sufficiently versatile to suit a range of industries and everyone benefited from cross-fertilisation of ideas between sectors. Others suggested a mid-way point; that is retaining a number of core criteria that are applicable to all sectors, allowing for cross sector analysis, but also introducing some sector specific criteria so that organisations were able to compare themselves to their peers.
- The issue of introducing **levels of achievement** was also not straightforward and opened up many questions. The analogy with IIP was not thought necessarily to be the right one either. An idea that was raised by a small number of current holders and assessors was that of there being a basic level and a distinction level. This would reward outstanding organisations and give others something to work towards.
- The prospect of a more **competitive element** appealed to some for its potential to motivate staff and develop the scheme's profile although making judgements between organisations was acknowledged to be difficult.
- There was clearly much nostalgia for the prestige that was associated with the awards **celebration** in London with ministers in attendance and occasionally the Prime Minister. While some understood that the change went with the creation of a standard, some form of public recognition of achievement was not seen as incompatible with the new regime. It was however also recognised that an event in which more staff could share, such as a regional

celebration, would benefit the scheme even more by enabling others to share in the success and attracting valuable local publicity.

- While **on-line tools** to help with self-assessment and the Charter Mark application are found useful, the general view seemed to be that these should not become the focus of an assessment. They do not, it was felt, reflect how all applicants work, and there certainly was resistance to them becoming a replacement for say, face to face contact with the assessors or becoming the tool that less experienced assessors came to rely on.
- With the increasing pressure and awareness of other inspections and accreditations, and the overlap between them, the **acceptance of evidence** collected for one, by others, was seen simply as common sense. In particular with optional schemes such as the ISOs, liP and Charter Mark, there was a feeling that there needed to be greater appreciation of the budget and time constraints on organisations and this should be reflected in the content of the schemes or how assessments are conducted.
- The issue on which there was most (but still not unanimous) agreement was that of the **ownership of Charter Mark** and the extent to which it might be distanced from the Government generally, and the Cabinet Office specifically, particularly if there was a need to outsource its administration as part of relaunching the scheme. Many did appreciate that outsourcing might be necessary and was not unusual. The majority view was that control and endorsement of the scheme by the Cabinet Office was however important as a signal of the Government's commitment to Charter Mark and to retain its position in the face of other accreditations.
- While some could see why a case could be made for **rebranding** Charter Mark, the need for a distancing from the current scheme came largely from the private sector. Those whose organisations were already eligible were less enthused by the idea, feeling that the name had some value and was still an asset if promoted effectively. The seal or stamp-like quality of the logo was felt to reflect something of the scheme's link with 'officialdom' in the form of the Cabinet Office but could be developed to bring it up to date and to convey more about customer service.

- If the Charter Mark scheme is to be relaunched, there are indications that April 2007 represents a window of opportunity, once various significant restructuring has taken place in different areas of the public sector.

Conclusions

- In what follows, we put forward our interpretation of what this research might suggest about taking Charter Mark forward. We are very aware that we do not have the benefit of the full picture but put forward these thoughts as part of the mix of inputs.
- Charter Mark undoubtedly needs to be revitalised; there was evidence of grumbles even from those who feel they have got a lot out of it and would like to continue with it. They need to be able to make a case for it and the Cabinet Office needs to help them. To grasp this opportunity, it is not just a case of promoting what is already there but of checking out what Charter Mark is trying to achieve and making sure everything is working towards that. This includes its positioning, target audiences, its offer and how this is marketed.
- The position of Charter Mark *vis a vis* other accreditations needs consideration especially if, as suggested by some respondents, there is evidence of increasing overlap. Organisations cannot see the sense of this and either expect a sharper focus or acknowledgement of the overlap and rationalisation of the assessment process to save time and money. The activities of the Institute of Customer Service were only touched upon peripherally in this research and its arena seems to be mainly (but not entirely) the private sector. Its developments need further looking at.
- If Charter Mark is to focus on customer service, then it really needs to take a fresh look at what it considers to be the customer – it already places the customer within the wider community, but many organisations and especially those in the relatively untapped area of public / private sector partnerships, have customers that are corporate stakeholders and this needs to be acknowledged in the criteria and evidence.
- The public sector and public/private sector seem to be where Charter Mark's current territory lies. We suggest these markets need consolidating before

extending Charter Mark to new markets where there is likely to be more resistance and risk, associated with higher levels of investment. The only exception might be if the investment and risk were to be shared with an organisation such as the Institute of Customer Service.

- The idea of progressing the public sector reform agenda ie. encouraging partnerships between the public sector and private and voluntary sector organisations could offer a clear rationale for Charter Mark. Assuming this continues to be a key part of the Government's agenda, then Charter Mark has the potential to demonstrate to partners and the public that the new arrangements are focused on customer needs. This research suggests the private sector companies in these partnerships have little power to affect the service that is offered to the end user. Charter Mark could be a way of addressing this although it would probably need to bring about new ways of working together eg. regular reviews of the contract and standard level agreements to take into account end user needs. This may be a rather naive view but perhaps incentives could be used for going the extra mile for end users rather than penalties for deviating from the conditions of contracts.
- So far, Charter Mark has been described as an 'award' and as a 'standard'. As we have pointed out above, most are happy to see it as a standard because they recognise that its value comes from its being used as a tool for continuous improvement towards excellent customer service. But they also want the 'award' element – the external recognition of their achievement and they want this to have lasting meaning for staff and customers.
- Charter Mark has also been referred to as a 'management tool', the basics of which, some respondents picked up in the form of the self-assessment tool. They quickly realised that perhaps they could make use of it in their organisations without having to then have the expense of external validation. This prompts the question, could Charter Mark be promoted as a flexible approach to improving customer service, and one that can be used in one or more way?
- For example, Charter Mark might be

a management tool available via the website, providing the means by which organisations can assess themselves and obtain some basic guidance to help them get started. This could be supplemented by training seminars and perhaps local or regional self-help groups could be established which actively encourage people to discuss their approaches and challenges and to generally participate in the Charter Mark scheme. The difference to the current system, is that here, organisations will be given the information and encouragement to be self-starters. They will not need to feel they are committing themselves to a long road of assessments and attendant costs but can still get something out of it. Even the private sector could be made aware of the tool. If they choose to make use of it, it would be interesting to see if there is any demand from them for formal accreditation.

organisations can then opt, when they feel ready, to go for external accreditation via the assessment bodies, but it is not essential. Once accredited, they can use the logo as they do now.

the performance of organisations is then checked in some way on an annual basis and if after, a given period, (say, the full three year cycle) they have achieved an exceptional level of customer service through consistent improvement or demonstrated a consistently high level of service (not everyone seems to have room for improvement), they can receive a Mark of Distinction (or whatever the award may be called).

perhaps the celebration of Charter Mark achievement comes not after the first successful assessment but after the full three year cycle ie. it is those who stick with the scheme and demonstrate this distinctive performance. Success in different sectors might also be celebrated and other awards

could be developed too, such as the 'Most Innovative Approach to Customer Service' or the 'Most Coordinated Customer Service Team'. The stories that lie behind these awards would not just attract publicity for Charter Mark but would also be used to share good practice. Either assessors could be asked to nominate outstanding candidate organisations or organisations could nominate themselves with the support of their 'customers' and have to put forward their own case.

Awareness of Charter Mark

The general opinion amongst current, lapsed and potential holders was that the Charter Mark scheme had a low profile among the general public. It was little known *per se* and few knew what it stood for. Some felt that at one time it was probably better known but had lost visibility. Among staff who had been involved with Charter Mark at the outset, there had also been some falling off where the impetus behind the scheme had declined. Most organisations saw a turnover of staff that meant that newer recruits may not be aware of the scheme.

Awareness among the potential holders varied. A few had been involved with the scheme in past positions in the public sector and may have considered whether it had a role to play in their current organisation. Others had been made aware of Charter Mark but decided against going for it and yet others, mainly in the private sector, had very little knowledge of Charter Mark until the letter from the Cabinet Office inviting them to take part in the research prompted them to think about it.

Understanding of Charter Mark

Role of Charter Mark

The current holders in the discussion groups ranged from those who had been recently assessed for the first time, to those who had been assessed several times. Some therefore knew Charter Mark as an award as well as a national standard, some only knew it as a standard and others among the lapsed sample only knew it as an award.

Many understood that, regardless of their own experience (or lack of it), the Charter Mark scheme, like other similar quality schemes, could be viewed as a badge to be 'won', sometimes as external validation of systems that were already in place. It could also be viewed as a management tool, something to be used to drive change in an organisation aimed at creating a more customer-focused ethos.

Others seemed to see Charter Mark as a mix of the two; a tool to bring about changes in attitude and practices that is then rewarded by external recognition.

Once achieved, its continuing role might differ – some might have so embedded the ethos in their organisation that they use it to strive continuously for improvement. Some others seem to feel that if the practices of Charter Mark are so well embedded, they may also no longer need to have the external validation of Charter Mark – it has, in effect, done its job. We found yet others who felt that there was little more they could do (often within severe financial and physical constraints) and either let their Charter Mark lapse or were considering doing so. This variable experience is covered further at 6.6

What Charter Mark is About

For the most part, Charter Mark was known to be a standard that focused on bringing about high standards of customer excellence

“It’s a customer focused standard – trying to engender a customer focus. Getting areas focused on the general public – why we are here, what service we are offering and how we take their needs into account.” (Current Holder, Public Sector)

However, this was not the unanimous view. One current holder thought it was about more than improving customer service, largely because of its financial and community components, others simply saw it as being concerned with ‘quality’ in the widest sense

“I had a vague awareness of it. I probably didn’t realise that it was about service – I thought it was around quality.” (Potential Holder, Private Sector)

Some of the potential holders found it hard to differentiate between it and other accreditations with which it seemed to overlap.

The issue of who constituted the ‘customer’ was raised in various discussions and is an issue for many organisations that either outsource part of their operations or are the company to whom the operation is outsourced. Some potential holders assumed that it would interpret ‘customers’ in the widest sense (including procurement bodies and other businesses).

Charter Mark and Other Accreditation

There is clearly an increasing number of mandatory inspections and optional accreditations that organisations need to consider and work with. A large number of these were mentioned in the interviews; in the public sector or among organisations serving the public sector, these included:

CPA

Healthcare Commission

Commission of Social Care and Inspection

Ofsted and in particular, the self-evaluation form (SEF) including the part that asks about the views of learners, parents/carers and other stakeholders

Learning Skills Council

Quality Assurance Agency

Various ISOs but especially ISO 9000 and 9002

Investors in People

Star Awards for Teaching

Work Life Balance.

Those mentioned by private sector respondents were:

Various ISOs but especially ISO 9000 and 9002 (also 1400, 1800)

Investors in People

Business in the Community (including Corporate Social Responsibility)

Business Excellence

BSC Five Star Audit

EFQM

BSI 600 in Complaints Handling

Methodologies/tools that were being used included:

Six Sigma methodology

London Benchmarking

Customer First training provided by the Institute of Customer Service.

In organisations made up of a group of businesses, there were often variations between the businesses in terms of which accreditations were sought; group management adopted a hands-off approach enabling businesses to select those they felt were right for them along with group-wide systems and methodologies.

Of the optional accreditations, ISO, liP and Charter Mark were those most commonly in the frame, with several mentions of EFQM also. Some were unsure about the degree of overlap while others felt they each had a distinct focus

“Investors is very different, you don't have to produce any, well they look at strategies and find out at top level what they are but then it's just sort of talking to staff and it's about staff, although there are staff elements in the Charter Mark and that's important, it actually focuses on the customer. So the two complement each other but they're very different systems as well really.” (Current Holder, Public Sector)

One respondent referred to having four standards including ISOs, liP and Charter Mark, each covering a slightly different aspect of his organisation's operation. He had found that some people were intrigued as to why they had gone for so many accreditations

“But the problem is that you could water down each one of those particular elements ...and you know, you could argue why have I got Investors and why have I got this and why have I got that. Someone mentioned ‘why do you need four standards, is there something wrong with you?’!!! (Current Holder, Public Sector)

An assessor also described helping some local authorities to design processes that link the three standards so they can work in a coordinated way to improve the quality of their service delivery. A self-assessment tool used in Scotland, the West Lothian Assessment Model combines EFQM, iIP and Charter Mark.

Charter Mark's Image

Given its low profile, it is not surprising that many felt that its image was indistinct. A few respondents suggested that Charter Mark was very much associated with the John Major government and some of the private sector respondents were unsure what had happened to it since, and whether the current Government was really behind it

“In John Major’s time, it was of a more substantial nature whereas it seems to have lost its way now. It was seen as something prestigious to have got whereas now, it seems to be ‘you can get it if you want but it is nothing special.’” (Potential Holder, Private Sector)

“It conjures up the image of the Cones Hotline. It’s sort of an era, and it may not now reflect the thrust of modern public service reform.” (Potential Holder, Private Sector)

For those in the private sector with little awareness of Charter Mark, the connection was also made with customer charters issued by Utilities and Transport companies. These were not always thought to have a good reputation.

This lack of a profile, particularly with customers, meant that it was sometimes difficult to justify going for or retaining Charter Mark (see 5.2). This current holder, for example, felt they had demonstrated through research that their customers knew and cared little about the accreditation

“As long as people recognise that and in our experience they don’t. We have put it on our leaflets and everything else but it doesn’t actually make any difference and when we ask customer they go, ‘Charter Mark, what’s that?’ Would it make any difference to you visiting a place like this whether you have the Charter Mark or not? No. That is almost 100%.” (Current Holder Private Sector)

Introduction

In this section, we look at perceptions of the process from deciding to apply to Charter Mark through to what happens afterwards. We also cover attitudes towards the cost and the benefits that organisations derived from it.

Deciding to Go For Charter Mark

Amongst the sample of current and lapsed Charter Mark holders a number had held the standard for several years.

Who Decided?

In almost all the interviews with current and lapsed Charter Mark holders it was notable that the personal championing of Charter Mark by individuals who had participated in achieving it in past roles was key to spreading its take-up. They may have participated in the scheme elsewhere (sometimes years beforehand), had seen it operate as an effective tool for change and then instigated it in their new position. As one assessor explained

“Either they [Charter Mark applicants] are former applicants and have applied or they are people who’ve come from an authority that’s got Charter Mark.” (Assessor)

These champions varied in seniority but typically were not the most senior person (although it was notable in some of the private companies that a new chief executive was the driving force behind a review of accreditations)

“I think it is rarely the chief executive that initiates, I think the best organisations have the support of the chief executive but quite often I think it comes from an active person in the organisation.” (Assessor)

For those without prior experience of Charter Mark, an event informing potential holders about the scheme run by the Cabinet Office or assessment bodies was often key to cementing their interest. In one case at least, a visit from a member of the Cabinet Office team had persuaded them that they should participate. In another case they had been persuaded to pilot the scheme in their sector. Assessors are also being used in a ‘selling role’ to visit prospective applicants and inform them about the scheme and, presumably, how the body can help them.

Motivation

The assessors emphasised the taking on of Charter Mark as a way of driving change in an organisation to develop a culture and practices that are more customer-focused

“[It] is to use the framework for improving their services, quite deliberate, it’s something they set out to look at, an ordered structure, the way they do things.” (Assessor)

“They are concerned about trying to make sure that they meet their customers’ needs in the way that they deliver services and

obviously Charter Mark is a tool that helps them to do that. It's an improvement that drives them forward and I guess there must be some, despite the fact that they don't tell me when I'm assessing them, that they are doing it for the business, the kudos and all the rest of it, there must be some kudos as well. The recognition must be important to some people. But more often than not if I ask people what they actually say is that it's not about the gong, it's about the process and how that process helps them deliver quality services within their organisation."
(Assessor)

Among the current holders, these themes were most likely to be voiced by those in local authorities. They clearly saw and were using Charter Mark as a tool to bring about change and as such, were working in the spirit of the standard. Such motivation was less evident elsewhere; in education, police and health, they often put the emphasis elsewhere.

Many felt, for example, that they were already providing a good service to customers and felt that Charter Mark would gain them external recognition for this.

Some were aware that while they thought they were doing the best they could for their customers, they had not validated this with their customers and Charter Mark gave them the reason to do so. As a result, they often felt that it showed they were working along the right lines although they also made some improvements.

Other by-products that holders hoped would come from Charter Mark included:

A higher profile for their services within their wider organisations' structure

'[name of service] have always been the Cinderella service, we've never had large budgets and nobody really knows what we've done, it's like we look after people and I think it has really raised the profile with some senior managers who have really sat up and taken notice. We know what we do...but it didn't seem to be that the people managing us knew what we were doing...it put us in the spotlight really.' (Current Holder, Public Sector)

"We wanted to put ourselves on the map a bit." (Lapsed Holder, Public Sector)

A tool for bringing staff (often from diverse departments) together to work towards a common goal

"We looked at it shortly after an Ofsted inspection because I wanted something for us to work on together – so all the staff would be included and all of the governors....I thought it [Charter Mark] would involve the whole school community and it seemed important to do that after an inspection." (Lapsed Holder, Public Sector)

A means of driving up morale, largely from the independent recognition and acknowledgement of the quality of customer service they provided

“...to motivate the staff and make them feel we are delivering a good service and this is an independent body saying ‘yes, you are’.” (Current Holder, Public Sector)

Another motivation was the prospect of being able to attract customers or help secure funding.

Some of the holders admitted that their initial response to the idea of Charter Mark was rather negative (especially if they had had it imposed upon them), anticipating that it would involve lots of work and antagonism from staff. In fact, on the whole, they had found it a highly rewarding experience

“I was quite reluctant initially because I thought it was just going to be a load of extra work but actually I’ve been able to encourage and motivate the staff to become involved as well which has been really good.” (Current Holder, Private Sector)

Stages of Assessment

Use of the Self-Assessment Tool

A number of the individuals we spoke to had used the on-line assessment tool as a means of testing their eligibility for Charter Mark and assessing the amount of effort required in gaining and maintaining the award/standard. The tool was seen as being interesting but of variable usefulness. The point was made that it was difficult to make judgements about the extent to which one’s organisation fulfilled the criteria so that a meeting with the assessor might throw up large discrepancies

“On some of the things that I marked us down on...he [assessor] said ‘you’ve met that’ and then on one or two of the others where I thought we were all right he’d marked us down... that’s because we didn’t know what the scoring meant on the self assessment.” (Current Holder group, Public Sector)

A few of the eligible Charter Mark holders had browsed the Charter Mark website and found the assessment tool useful in helping them structure their customer service elements. However, when time, resources and cost were an issue it was not regarded as important to go for the accreditation. As one potential Charter Mark holder put it

“Due to the cost and scale of work, we felt that by interpreting the standards ourselves we could get the benefits of Charter Mark without actually going for the accreditation. We didn’t think that actually going through the accreditation process would deliver enough value to justify the time and costs it would take to do it.” (Potential Holder, Public Sector)

Choice of Assessment Bodies

Many of the current and former Charter Marker holders had been through the previous assessment process where they did not have a choice of assessment body. With the introduction of the four assessment bodies it was felt that a level of 'complexity' and 'confusion' had been brought in. In many instances, organisations did not 'shop around' for assessment bodies although a small number had at least spoken to them on the phone. The assessment body was largely decided by the individual championing Charter Mark in the organisation – and this decision was largely based on previous awareness and experience.

Not surprisingly, some disliked the fact that they now had to pay for assessment compared to the previous era and this had led to at least one choosing not to renew

"There were no charges when it first started but then they privatised out the running of it... and then there were all these other agencies you could chose from (assessment bodies) and it just got more and more complex and difficult and expensive."
(Lapsed Holder)

A number of individuals (current, former and potential Charter Mark holders) commented on the direct cost of participating in the scheme. Most would have preferred to have been informed about the costs of each assessment body upfront (on website or printed literature), particularly as they did not have time to call each body and compare quotes.

Pre-assessment

Not all the current holders had had a pre-assessment visit, some relying on the event that they attended as preparation. Some of these organisations were those that had gone through inspection or assessment processes with other bodies so they felt they knew what to expect and were at least, reasonably confident that they had their processes in place, or knew how they were working towards doing this.

In the main, holders said that they benefited hugely from the pre-assessment visits. They enabled them to prepare themselves and their teams for the forthcoming assessments and were generally described as 'supportive' and 'invaluable' visits that helped highlight gaps and weaknesses in their service. As a consequence, they were able to target their resources to those areas in greatest need.

This summing up by an assessor reflects this view

"It's really like a GAP analysis where you tell the client I've looked at it and these are the areas that you'd probably want to concentrate on. You don't tell them you know what to do but you say 'well you might need to look at X and Y' and what it does is give the client a much better idea for them to decide when they want to go for it and it gives the assessor a fair idea of the standard of the applicant and the applicant's application and I think that's absolutely first class and it's probably a much more transparent system." (Assessor)

Another assessor exercised some flexibility around the pre-assessment, describing it as the first stage of the assessment; if he found that an organisation was almost there with their application, he would treat it as the beginning of their assessment proper and if he found that an applicant for assessment was well below the standard, then he would suggest they called it a pre-assessment.

Assessment Process

Overall, current and former Charter Mark holders were very positive about the assessment process. While stressful, it was a far more positive and supportive experience than the mandatory inspections to which they were subject. They appreciated the fact that they received an indication of the outcome of the assessment straightaway rather than waiting a number of months.

Current and former Charter Mark holders spoke positively of their assessors. They were described as 'knowledgeable', 'sensitive', 'professional' and 'friendly' and were generally seen as 'on side'. These were traits that were seen as important to distinguish between 'assessment' and 'inspection'. One assessor described his approach

"As soon as I get there I say 'look, I'm not an inspector, I'm not here to sort of catch you out... I've come here, you and I are going to work as a partnership to actually achieve a positive role and that's how it is going to be'. What I say is, 'look, I know it's a bit like going to the dentist 'cos this is an important day for you but I'm gonna try and make it as easy for you as I can. I can't take the tension out of it totally but I can improve it'." (Assessor)

Furthermore, individuals felt that the assessors had, for the most part, familiarised themselves with the nature of their business in advance of their visit and read the evidence supporting their application thoroughly. They were impressed by their organisation, diligence and their desire to speak to as many people (staff and customers) as possible although they were sometimes thrown by their desire to talk to wider stakeholders such as funding bodies. There was also a view that organisations that were unsuccessful in their application for Charter Mark had also got something out of the preparation and application process because it was a far more testing and thorough assessment than in the days of the Award. As one assessor noted

"If I don't recommend them for the Charter Mark on the day...they usually comment that 'We knew we were pretty good but it's made us realise that we had some gaps and we've done something to fill them'." (Assessor)

Surveillance

Overall, the introduction of the surveillance aspect of the Charter Mark assessment was seen as a positive move. It enabled assessors to monitor the effectiveness of an organisation's service, and holders who were genuinely interested in Charter Mark as a tool to drive good customer service, recognised that it kept them on their toes. This meant that staff had to keep to the practices set down and maintain the supporting evidence showing they had done so.

One current holder who had recently had a surveillance visit had been surprised at its thoroughness; it had seemed like a mini-assessment. He had expected scrutiny of the partial compliances coming out of the assessment but the visit had required him to demonstrate ongoing use of his systems. He had been able to quickly lay his hands on the necessary evidence and was pleased that he had passed muster!

Assessors too, saw surveillance as an essential part of ensuring the rigour of the scheme because it enabled them to identify poor practices post-accreditation although they did not always agree with the lengthy and pedantic way that UKAS insisted on them following

“I was very much put off the notion of the surveillance. However, having done them I can see just how important they are... There are certainly three organisations who have dropped out as a result of cost and extra work, so that was a failure of the surveillance of course... However, I’ve been to another one, for instance, where the management structure’s just collapsed and they’re woefully below standard now, unless they actually produce a good report within a month then they’re going to have their standard taken away. We wouldn’t have discovered that with the old system without the surveillance so I think it is important to revisit but in a much simpler way without any overview.” (Assessor)

“It was three years the gap, you didn’t see an assessor for three years after being successful, there was a tendency for people to let things slip and not give as much attention to customer service issues... So I think the annual surveillance has made it much less likely that people will allow things to drift ...I’ve probably done about a dozen this year and I haven’t identified any trend to allow things to slip, much the reverse I’ve noticed that there’s been continuous improvement.” (Assessor)

On the downside, one assessor at least had noticed a drop in applications with the introduction of surveillance because of the additional costs involved. In one of the groups, there was a discussion about the cost of the surveillance visit and the lack of clarity between the different types of follow-up visit that were available. One current holder had felt ‘conned’ by her assessment body when a colleague had been persuaded to go for a particular approach

“There’s the Charter Mark surveillance and early reassessment and then early reassessment, continuous improvement... It is confusing because you have the assessment and you’re given the Charter Mark. With other standards, you will have surveillance visits...He [assessor] typed it out for me – the difference between the two – and I have to say I think we felt a little bit conned. I think it was bad advice... They are in it to make money. They have ridden on the back of this, my particular assessor was taken out of his quality world and given this task of going out and getting the Charter Mark customers, and that’s what he has done.” (Current Holder, Public Sector)

Achievement of Charter Mark

The resounding view amongst all those interviewed was that Charter Mark was not an easy quality award/standard to achieve and hence winning it was a great achievement that deserved celebrating.

Celebrations took various forms; some were quite muted - small office parties with Charter Mark cakes while others were very large and involved most of the workforce; one such was held in a football club. One highly emotional and inclusive event in a health service department took the form of a large party held for service users, staff and managers - those who had completed the questionnaires that formed part of the evidence! In fact one manager who attended compared it favourably to the earlier London event

“And the manager said, ‘oh, when we got it, we went to London’, and then she came out afterwards and said, ‘that was wonderful, I really felt part of that’. What we did when we did our celebration, it included everybody and she said that was much better.” (Current Holder, Public Sector)

Staff might also be congratulated at council meetings or in newsletters but occasionally, their achievement went without recognition from senior management.

Many first time Charter Mark winners also received a mention in the local press. However, for second and third time winners this publicity declined – it was no longer news. One lapsed Charter Mark holder who renewed the Charter Mark once said

“We had a big press release the first time but by the second time the novelty had worn off.” (Lapsed Holder)

While these local celebrations were deemed essential, the general feeling was that much had been lost in terms of reinforcing the importance of Charter Mark for winners and the general public by dropping the national event involving Ministers and on occasion, the Prime Minister. This is discussed further at 7.7.

Perceived Costs

When respondents considered the costs of achieving Charter Mark, they readily took into account both the direct costs of assessment (in all its stages) and the time taken up by staff in preparing for it. Their attitudes towards these and whether they were reasonable and worthwhile varied.

Those in large local authorities, large educational institutions and private sector organisations were not surprised by these (accepting that the direct costs were based on a day rate) and felt able to cope with them. Often, the high level of time commitment necessary in large organisations was possible because somebody could commit a proportion of their time to the task. In one college that was about to be assessed, the respondent thought the application had, to date, consumed 6-8 weeks over the course of a year.

The converse was true for those in the education sector (especially at the primary level) where budgets were often tight and there were not the ‘spare’ staff to take on the application. One small primary school headteacher found the £3,000 she had been quoted for assessment over three years had meant that she could no longer continue with the scheme

“Once we saw the prices for assessment £3000.... that’s out of the question and we can’t afford it....that is too much money for us to spend.” (Lapsed Holder, Public Sector)

This local authority department had similarly found the sums excessive

“Cost has gone up and up and up...and I didn’t think we could justify it... The cost of now you have to pay [because we are on two sites] for your inspections and your audit...the cost of when you actually win the award you have to pay for the privilege of putting up displays...so when we were tight on budgets we were having to earmark between 2 to 3 thousand pounds.” (Lapsed Holder, Public Sector)

Assessors did not express concerns about the cost to the applicants. Indeed, one assessor thought from responses to the questionnaire that her assessment body put out, many organisations felt that the cost, while sometimes seen as high, was justified

“On the feedback forms that I’ve received from one or two contractors, they actually were asked whether the cost was too much, low considering the process and benefits, reasonable considering the process and benefits, high but justifiably so considering the process and benefits or high and unjustified. And they all have come through with either reasonable considering the process and benefits or high but justifiably so, considering the process and benefits.” (Assessor)

Perceived Benefits

Almost all the current and lapsed holders spoke about some benefits from participating in the Charter Mark scheme, whether it be at the application, assessment or achieving the Charter Mark stage. Many of these benefits reflected what they had hoped to achieve from it originally in terms of changes in practices and culture, improved staff working and morale, greater confidence and an enhanced profile with stakeholders.

Most noted that the process of winning the Charter Mark made them reflect on their practices and how they addressed customers’ needs in ways they had not previously done; this was reinforced by the feedback an assessor had received

“The benefits that they perceive are increased customer focus, improved consultation with users, improved complaints handling, better internal processes and improved staff morale, which I think is not bad. If that is what quite hard nosed organisations are saying, then that’s not bad.” (Assessor)

One respondent felt that holding the Charter Mark had enabled his department to be able to fight its corner when it came to changes that would affect its customers

“Last year they were going to throw us off the hospital site, my organisation, lock, stock and barrel and stick us on an industrial estate, one of the patient user groups said, ‘what about the Charter Mark, how are you going to transfer the Charter Mark?’, I said ‘it will just naturally transfer’, he said ‘hang on a minute,

we're going to be stuck on this industrial estate with no bus routes, no access for the ambulance, doesn't really fit into Charter Mark does it?', and I thought 'you're absolutely right'. Again, it did have, the Chief Executive and all that, once this came to bear, again Charter Mark didn't go amiss to be honest with you and it was one of those issues that you probably face once in a lifetime, but it was the right place at the right time." (Current Holder, Public Sector)

Others felt that having Charter Mark had helped them in securing funding or business

"Having the Charter Mark, I suppose, does give us some kudos in dealing with the people we receive money from, the Lottery Fund and so on." (Current Holder, Private Sector)

"That's very helpful when you are bidding for extra funds through the DfES because it's a quality mark and we've got the Investor in People, I'm sure everybody's the same, so that is really helpful and we're going for further specialisms and development." (Current Holder, Public Sector)

"It would help us, well actually, it does help us, because we put tenders in for payroll contracts and on all the tender documents it says 'what quality awards have you got? So, if you haven't got liP and you haven't got Charter Mark, we are looking at ISO 9000 because those are the ticks in the boxes, to get you shortlisted, to be able to go and do the tenders so it does help us from that point of view." (Current Holder, Public Sector)

With respect to raising morale and bringing about effective partnerships between staff, this was clearly something that the Charter Mark process delivered for a number of organisations

"It was worth doing it. I think that one of the greatest things we got out of it apart from the improvements was the fact that it brought staff together, we really worked as a team and it was a great year." (Lapsed Holder, Public Sector)

Corporate Approach

The issue of the corporate approach to Charter Mark was not discussed in great detail, nor was it greatly in evidence among our sample. One of the assessors certainly felt that this was the approach for the future in terms of the cost savings and valuable outputs that it could deliver. It enabled large organisations, especially local authorities, to be able to compare individual departments because they are assessed by the same assessment body using the same format. She cited a local authority in which a piecemeal approach made this impossible.

Those in local authority departments were not always so convinced and felt that it depended where a department was in developing its systems to focus on customers. If they are down the track (perhaps because they are already facing private sector competition), they may not appreciate the top down approach.

For the majority of current and lapsed holders, there was no corporate push to go for Charter Mark although certain departments were encouraged to apply for it based on their having the greatest interface with the public. However, a number of participants suggested that Charter Mark should engage a complete organisation. For example, one potential holder said that he was aware that three of his departments that had previously held Charter Mark had let them lapse because it was giving out the wrong message about inconsistency of standards across the organisation

“The main problem that people had was the message it was sending out in terms of consistency. The big fear was that residents in [name in area] were actually getting a better policing service than if you lived elsewhere in the County. So we took the decision – the view was, it should be all or nothing. If we thought it was a good idea we should go for it for the whole force and not just have it in local areas.” (Lapsed Holder, Public Sector)

Another lapsed Charter Mark holder made a similar point

“I don’t think that I would ever allow one department to ever go for Charter Mark again. I think it should be the whole organisation. If it has something to say it should say something about the whole organisation...not bits... I don’t think they [Cabinet Office] take applications from bits of hospital...either a hospital is good or not...We didn’t go for it as an entire trust because of the workload...” (Lapsed Holder, Public Sector)

While attractive, it is clear that the corporate approach demands a high level of commitment from organisations (financial and resourcing) and there were some indications from this research that some are wary of going down this path. With the burden of statutory requirements that different departments have to meet, some are reluctant to impose an optional scheme on staff.

Introduction

In this section, we look more widely at the drivers and barriers to both setting out on the Charter Mark journey and deciding whether or not to stay with it. Whereas the previous section covered the experiences of those who knew Charter Mark (current and lapsed holders, and assessors), we have included below the views of the potential holders.

Factors Influencing Buy-in

- A **champion** to provide impetus for the scheme and sell it into an organisation; this might mean to the Chief Executive and senior management or into parts of the organisation to staff
- **Staff capacity** - having people who can take on the work to prepare for Charter Mark. This may be an individual responsible for 'Quality' or 'Customer Service' or to a number of people who take it on in addition to their usual workload (or a combination of the two)

"I think it depends on your resources, with keeping our Charter Mark group going, our service improvement group and they then take it back so someone who's good at doing database or whatever or analysing questionnaires back at base, it spreads out throughout the service, so it's really hard for all my managers every year or whatever to do all these questionnaires, so we've actually taken some of the workload off them and got this overarching bridge and somebody who likes to do it, can spare the time is going to do some of the work. For them we've actually reduced some of the work back at base and actually getting a better resource and better quality, but I've got the resource to do that and I appreciate that not everybody has."
(Current Holder, Public Sector)

- **Perceived effort** needed to attain it – how far are your systems already in place? If organisations feel they would like recognition of systems that they think work reasonably well already without having to do too much more work, this is very motivating.
- **Attitude to external accreditations** – how useful are they?

Some felt that if, as an organisation, you feel that you providing a good level of customer service already – why would you need to achieve external accreditation?

“I can’t rely on something like Charter Mark to make sure we have good customer service – that’s already part of my day job and I’m already doing it. Any self respecting Chief Executive of an organisation that has got thousands of customers would be asking whether we have the service environment correct. I shouldn’t have to have a Charter Mark submission to do that.”
(Potential Holder, Public Sector)

Others, particularly in industries not perceived as offering excellent customer service, could see that accreditation, if reflective of improved standards, could help change customer perceptions.

- **Industry Norms**

If competitive organisations are going for Charter Mark, do you want to be left behind? It is not that Charter Mark will make you stand out from the crowd, more that you won’t wish to be seen to be deficient in some way.

- **Competitive Advantage** - Will it differentiate you from the competition? Will it provide competitive advantage in terms of winning contracts, attract customers, secure funding, etc?

- **Customer Perceptions** - Will customers notice it? Will it make a difference to them?

Some potential holders in the public sector, who were aware of the Charter Mark, decided not to opt for it because they didn’t think it would make a difference to their customers

“To one set of customers, i.e. our students it wouldn’t make the slightest piece of difference at all.” (Potential Holder, Public Sector)

Others however, opted to go for it, despite believing that their customers would not care.

- **Cost and Perceived Return on Investment** ie. will it deliver?

We have seen that cost *per se* was important for many organisations with very stretched budgets but for others, Charter Mark needs to deliver in terms of staff engagement, changes in practices and attitudes, improvements in customer service, enhancement of reputation and ideally, an increase in ‘market share’. One potential holder went so far as to suggest it should be able to demonstrate an increase in share price

- **How Charter Mark compares to alternative accreditations** – organisations cannot go for everything and some are mandatory. What will Charter Mark ask of them and give them relative to other optional schemes?

“It helps us with the local authority commissioners to make a decision when they know about it but if it doesn’t do that, then what’s the point of having it?.” (Current Holder, Private Sector)

- **Does it reflect the scope of the business?** eg. ISO standards are international and therefore relevant to international organisations; does Charter Mark have the same reach or is it only for UK operations?

Factors Influencing Staying in the Scheme

- **Time** it takes to prepare for reassessment

If the person who was responsible originally for assessment has left, their successor can find the follow-up a real chore

“I had to do it at the beginning of this year and it was just horrendous, to collect it all ‘cos the problem was they were deciding they were going for it again, the person who started it had left at Christmas and it was taken to me to pick it up and I didn’t really know anything about it to be quite honest. You had to go totally from scratch, to collect all the evidence, to actually work out what you needed in the first place, so it was a hard process.” (Current Holder, Public Sector)

If many of the staff have changed, there may be problems with obtaining evidence both in showing it has been gathered continuously and persuading staff to participate

“We are currently doing three years and I am just doing our re-application and there has been quite a turnover of staff in those three years so it is trying to find proof that we are continuously doing things. In many cases we are but there are points which have lapsed from the previous application and obviously, if that was being assessed every year, we could keep that in check.” (Current Holder, Private Sector)

“It is expensive of staff time and money and that did relate to some difficulties within our organisation where some people said ‘we’re too busy at this time of year to do that, it is the end of the financial year.’ And some people were saying things like, ‘why do you want that from me, that’s nothing to do with Charter Mark?’ when actually it was.” (Current Holder, Private Sector)

- **Cost of surveillance / reassessment**

One lapsed holder in the private sector, who decided not to renew their Charter Mark after winning it three times, said that introducing the various elements (pre-assessment,

surveillance, reassessment), each with its own cost, was a 'huge retrograde step'

If going for other accreditations, then the combined cost of assessments may make organisations reconsider their commitments

"For our manual workforce we have the ISO 9001 and that was a more appropriate award to go for. It is an industry standard for that industry which means three-quarters of my Department have a separate award. ISO 9001 and Charter Mark are so similar that it felt over the top to have two." (Lapsed Holder, Public Sector)

If the scheme keeps changing, then it involves even more time and cost

"Every time you change, they come out and you have another workshop, you pay a consultant to come and talk to you." (Current Holder, Public Sector)

- **The Need for Continuous Improvement**

If there is a constant need for improvement against criteria and organisations feel they cannot achieve this. This can be especially daunting with Criterion 6 where organisations feel it is difficult for them to comply with its demands at the first assessment. This current holder had tried many approaches but found there just was not the interest from schools, different community groups or other audiences that they reached out to

"I think we're struggling with certain elements of criterion six, of the contract with the community, that could apply to all of us but particularly thinking of the nature of our business, it's got to be something you do in the community that isn't in relation to your business. For years we've had work experience students, we've had student visits to the courts and then suddenly the goalposts are moved, the benchmarks moved, so you're doing it but that's not enough anymore and you've got to improve." (Current Holder, Public Sector)

Others felt that it required resources they simply did not have to fulfil the criterion

"At times you're chastised for going outside the scope or the boundaries of your own organisation, in fact we're always under the spotlight with regard to the financial services, the moment you step outside that boundary, we get our fingers rapped." (Current Holder, Public Sector)

- **A Sense of Getting Something Back**

For those who felt the standard had 'done its job' in helping them bring about a change in their organisation, they now needed something more to motivate them to continue with it in the face of rising costs; tangible outcomes would be customer awareness and an increase in 'business'

"Unless the external profile, it raises, after we feel comfortable with achieving the standard we probably won't bother because we know we're achieving it and it comes down to cost so unless we are getting something new." (Current Holder Private Sector)

"Holding the Charter Mark didn't result in any significant changes in the way we operated...we generally operated in the spirit of Charter Mark... though in certain areas the evidence was not in place." (Lapsed Holder, Private Sector)

"Build up acceptance, understanding of it so if we're talking about empowered consumers then the success of Charter Mark should be that those that don't have it should be besieged by customers as 'you don't have it [Charter Mark] so you can't be good'." (Lapsed Holder, Private Sector)

This point was raised several times. The organisations that had gone for Charter Mark had done so because they wanted to show the public that they were committed to providing a high quality service for them. However, because the public had not reacted in a way that showed understanding of the Charter Mark, it had devalued it for them.

- **Perceived Credibility**; do other holders represent high standards of customer service?

Views of Charter Mark holders are influenced by others that they see 'in the club'. These lapsed Charter Mark holders made the point that their success was devalued by other organisations with poorer service that had also been awarded the Mark

"We did have to work hard to get Charter Mark but it was just devalued because of some of the other companies." (Lapsed Holder, Private Sector)

"What does it mean to a customer out there that there will be certain customer standards that will be achieved? ...If it is difficult to get as well...The [name of organisation] was one of the worst bodies to deal with in Northern Ireland and yet they had this! I think it's communication with the public to make sure it makes a difference...Our levels of service are a lot higher!" (Lapsed Holder, Private Sector)

Perceived Relevance for Different Sectors

With such a small sample, this research can only provide indications of sectors for which Charter Mark seems currently to have greatest relevance. In the public sector, it certainly seemed that **Local Authorities** had derived a great deal from Charter Mark and had seized upon it as a catalyst for change.

There was a feeling that many of the departments in the **Health Service** had also benefited from it but they were hampered by so many demands on them that they felt very overstretched. In fact, given the increasing voice of patient groups, some anticipated that they would be driven to go for Charter Mark or something similar

“But that’s the way the future’s going to go for the Health Service. The patient groups are getting very vocal, they expect these type of ... there is a standard, why aren’t we achieving this and we want to get involved, it was a very positive experience for us.” (Current Holder, Public Sector)

Amongst the potential and lapsed holders in the health sector a key issue that emerged as a barrier to participation in Charter Mark was the forthcoming merger of Primary Care Trusts. Of those we spoke to, the issue of preparing for the merger and uncertainty regarding the future of staff and resources, meant that buying into a scheme such as Charter Mark did not currently seem a priority. A similar point was raised by those in the police.

While assessors might talk of secondary, tertiary and higher education as prime targets for Charter Mark, there was not great enthusiasm in schools and colleges. Secondary school heads spoke of the demands made upon them by ‘sudden death’ Ofsted inspections, changes in status for schools, the emphasis in the curriculum on Mathematics and Science. Charter Mark assessment was very much secondary to Ofsted inspections with their potential to bring about resignations

“I think the actual process has been helpful for us but in some ways the focus now for us is self- evaluation as it is for everybody, all schools have got to do self- evaluation online so I think we’ve learned a lot from the Charter Mark process, but while we might not be concentrating on the six criteria, we’re doing the activity but to a different framework, ready for an inspection. I suppose you could say it is embedded, so the whole process of doing it has been useful to colleagues.” (Current Holder, Public Sector)

In many schools there simply are not the staff to take on the work required for Charter Mark; among the current holders in the sector, one had used an ex-deputy head to help them with their preparation and in two FE colleges, they had dedicated ‘Quality’ staff

“I think it’s very, very difficult to do in a school because there’s no time to be creative and we’ve not got the budgets to release a person to do this, so it’s quite a tortuous process...But if you can hit on a window when Ofsted are not around the corner, it is possible but it relies very heavily on the goodwill of the staff.” (Current Holder, Public Sector)

One of the potential holders in higher education suggested that, with the advent of top-up fees, students will be more demanding and universities will need to be more responsive. Non-academic operations that also serve the students will become more important and they may benefit from scrutiny to certain standards as they are not subject to anything at present.

The **Courts** and **Prisons** share some of the same problems in considering Charter Mark, those of defining who is their customer and getting their interest

in helping them define service improvements. Their 'customers' are often other professionals; the legal profession or people who transport prisoners. Prisons have been told that their customers are not the prisoners and the Courts find that their customers are not very interested and the end users (defendants, witnesses, claimants) are often antagonistic – they do not really want to use their service.

While the Courts have had Charter Mark imposed upon them and to an extent, have found it a useful tool, it has not been easy for them to use

"People are very transitory of course, we haven't got anyone apart from the solicitors and barristers who you can say are regular users, so people who you're interviewing as they're leaving court, this is perhaps the first and only time!..."

...Yes, to try and carry out the exit surveys, it's difficult and so the other users, other professional service providers which you've got service level agreements with anyway, so you're limited to how far you can take that." (Current Holder, Public Sector)

In the case of the prison included in the sample, their focus was on their staff and developing and motivating them, and they were following a directive to participate in a corporate application for liP. The respondent there suggested that in a couple of years, once National Offender Management was brought in, they would have a clearer customer in the Regional Offender Managers who would be making decisions about which services to 'buy in'. This might then create a greater need for them to think about what they were offering and how they differentiated themselves from 'competitive' prisons.

Introduction

In the main, the views on Charter Mark were similar across the organisations and sectors that knew it. The notion of a quality award/standard focusing on customer service excellence was viewed positively. The general consensus was that there is a place for Charter Mark and the practices that it introduces into organisations. However, in recent years, post-revision of the criteria (2001), the external value of Charter Mark was felt to have dipped significantly so that while the scheme was still valued for its role, once achieved, its ongoing value was questioned.

Respondents did not argue that the change in the number of criteria was not needed but they did have suggestions as to how the criteria warranted further scrutiny and slight revisions. They also had other areas of improvement to suggest.

Nature of the Criteria, Sub-Criteria and Evidence

Given the range of participants that took part in the review, there were a number of former and current Charter Mark holders who had been through the old system of addressing ten criteria to win an award. Interestingly, none of these participants said the move from ten to six criteria had reduced the amount of time, effort or resources they put into the application. Indeed, several were able to quote the number of sub-criteria – 63 - that they now had to fulfil.

Various points were made about the criteria; the need for clarity to help interpretation, the removal of duplication and there was some question over the inclusion of certain criteria. We have attempted to summarise these below although they are not intended as a full critique; that will come from far more considered work.

Clarity was felt to be needed in the evidence required since it can seem that the same evidence is being asked for by different sub-criteria

“It’s sometimes difficult for people to understand what one or two of the criteria are and why they are different from other areas of the criteria. They tend to put the same evidence in both and when I explain what the difference is, I can see why they are not actually... So a wee bit more clarity about the evidence requirements and how they could be met would certainly be helpful.” (Assessor)

This would help with interpretation of the criteria so that the applicant is not surprised when it comes to the assessment

“I think some guidance should be issued in relation to criteria because it seems like a lot of the time we are trying to second guess what the assessor understood by the criteria and obviously take his lead in terms of his understandings of the process you are in and it is only that we got through a couple of regions that we had clarity of how he understood the criteria, which doesn’t really seem to me should be part of the process. They seem a little bit reluctant in terms of being more specific because then it becomes much more like an inspection, there

should be more focus on the general principles of a customer based organisation.” (Current Holder, Public Service)

Another suggestion was to include a few examples on an application form for candidate organisations to look at so they can gain some idea of what type of evidence is required (but not too much so they can copy it).

The main **overlap** was seen between criteria 2 and 3

“The overlap really I find is between 2 and 3 which 2 is actively engaging with your customers and staff and 3 is being accessible to everyone and fair and promoting choice and there is a lot of that. And I think sometimes just a bit too much detail and people aren’t always sure what some of them mean.”
(Assessor)

and many of the points for clarification were in **criterion 3**. These included a tighter definition of the term, ‘treating customers fairly’ as, at present, it was seen as open to broad interpretation. One of assessors pointed out the problem with 3.3.3 is that the assessor should be looking for evidence of changes to meet the needs of disadvantaged people, those with learning difficulties and members of minority groups, but all the evidence cited has a Disability Discrimination Act focus and seems to ignore the needs of minority ethnic groups.

There were mixed views on **criterion 6** and it was recognised that depending on the service they provided, some found it easier to fulfil than others. Most of the Charter Mark holders saw this criterion as ‘too broad’ and open to interpretation, and hence suggested it needed tightening. A few were unhappy with it altogether, feeling that it drew unfairly upon the goodwill of their staff in doing altruistic activities in their own time. For some, it did almost seem to be a deterrent to continuing with Charter Mark because of the need to improve on this criterion when they found it very difficult to do anything that qualified (and not because they had not tried).

Many of the assessors also identified this criterion as the one most difficult to assess on its own even if they personally liked it. One assessor suggested it could be combined with 5

“It talks about sort of working with good partners and things like that so you could consider the thing, ok, we are working in a partnership with the community, so therefore, rather than have this whole community in criteria 6 you could maybe spread it around other criteria where that might be relevant.” (Assessor)

However, another assessor considered neither criteria 5 and 6 to be compatible with a customer focused standard.

By contrast, another assessor was particularly favourable towards criterion 6 but raised concerns over other assessors’ ability to assess under this criterion. He made the following points:

“I think criterion 6 is brilliant... wonderful... it’s about the community. There are quite a lot of assessors who have no idea about the community because they have never worked in the community so they don’t really understand it. They accept things which are like all this charitable stuff but it’s bigger than that. It’s about local strategic partnerships... how they are meeting corporate objectives in terms of safer environments,

better communities... and I think there are a lot of assessors who have not got their heads around that..." (Assessor)

A few participants also pointed out some areas that they felt the present criteria did not cover. There was a suggestion that criterion 6 could include something about working for the environment (the common good rather than local community?), for example, recycling, a commitment to becoming carbon neutral and so on

*"I think it is important, especially in public sector organisations where the government is committed to the environment."
(Current Holder, Private Sector)*

One assessor saw a need to introduce something that looked at whether members of staff were trained to deal with child protection issues. It was suggested that this could be included under criterion 3.

Versatility vs Relevance

While many would say that one of the merits of Charter Mark is its ability to be used in all kinds of organisations because the criteria are very general, there was some criticism of its lack of tailoring to specific sectors. A number of potential Charter Mark holders who had looked into the scheme, said that one reason for them not opting for Charter Mark was a seeming lack of relevance to their organisations. A few who had read about Charter Mark said that although the principles were sound, they did not feel that it reflected the way they worked

"If it was sector specific...let's talk about it as 'Police Charter Mark' and make the criteria sector-specific and link it to the policing improvement agency... then potentially you give me something that I can offer the forces in terms of benchmarking their continuous improvement... It would have more sector credibility. It would have core criteria that can be run across sectors like education and health so it would also do some cross-sector work."

*"The problem for policing is that the thing that talks about customer is a bit difficult because we have customers that we have to shoot... and we have customers that we have to restrain them so you're not responding to your customers need...clearly there is significant diversity element to the police sector which probably needs a stronger emphasis within Charter Mark."
(Potential holder, Public Sector)*

A lapsed holder made a similar point

*"Some of the criteria were more relevant to a school than others although I guess you could interpret the others in a schooley way."
(Lapsed Holder, Public Sector)*

Does it Measure the Most Important Thing – the Outcome for the Customer?

Overall, it was felt that the practices put into place as a result of the Charter Mark scheme were ultimately of benefit to the customers – the end users of

the service. But while the processes put in place to meet the criteria **should** ensure that the customer has a positive encounter with the service, some questions were raised about whether sufficient account was taken of the **actual** customer experience – do the processes actually deliver what they set out to do and is this of a high enough standard?

“A lot of the evidence is about improvement so you are telling your customers, you are improving your standards but it doesn’t actually say your standards have to be really good, do you know what I mean?” (Current Holder, Private Sector)

It was clear that assessors were trying to capture this by talking to customers but the concern is that the standard does not elicit the types of information that taps into what people really experience. It was felt that the credibility of Charter Mark could be undermined unless customers could be confident that their experience of an organisation’s service would match the Charter Mark’s promise of excellence

“It’s in there but it is called survey information which is all valuable and contributes towards that but I suppose it is the nature of the process and the amount of time you spend in discussion with customers etc, but it doesn’t sort of fully grasp the full customer experience, the service...I’m not saying I want it to be more rigorous but I’m trying to look at it independently and I would say, hand on heart, I would struggle to say we have excellent customer service as of today but we are focusing to do that and we have things in place to move us in the right direction.” (Current Holder, Private Sector)

An assessor described similar concerns over an organisation that would inevitably achieve Charter Mark because they have pockets of good service but it was likely that customers would also experience some very poor service at some point and this could damage Charter Mark’s reputation. His view was that this organisation, which had been judged to have moved from ‘poor’ to ‘fair with good prospects’ by the Audit Commission, should be deemed not to be yet ready for Charter Mark

“Now you couldn’t say that’s a tremendously well organised outfit there that achieved all the targets, they achieved some of the targets and therefore they get partial compliance ... but on balance they actually meet the standard. For someone who’s been on the receiving end of one of their poor services, that looks appalling and it brings it down but it’s about the complex nature of what they do and all the different elements and the totalling up of it and they’re actually set quite separate.” (Assessor)

We have noted the difficulty of some organisations being able to identify who are their customers as a first step and one assessor raised concerns around the ability of assessors to do this

“I think there are some assessors that are out of touch with reality... I do a lot of thinking about who the customer is so when I went to Employment Services for the first time it dawned on me that the employees were their customers. When I said this to them [other assessors] for the first time, they thought I

was stupid because they hadn't thought of them as customers...sometimes they become a bit mechanical...but you have to have an open mind." (Assessor)

Perceived Rigour and Consistency

The assessment bodies clearly adopt quite different styles in their procedures which some feel enables applicants to find one with which they feel comfortable. Others are less sure about whether this choice does not introduce such variation in assessments and standards that it is damaging Charter Mark.

In the previous section we reported that almost all applicants were positive about the assessment and the assessors, largely because they felt that the assessor was 'on side' and wanted to facilitate their success

"If we came across as weak in our application, the assessor would say 'come on... can't you demonstrate you do A,B and C?' and when they were on site we would say 'oh yeah, we do do that.' Most of the inspectors worked with us to make sure we got the standard by pointing out the evidence they had been shown". (Lapsed Holder, Public Sector)

Some assessment bodies see the present system as overly bureaucratic and inflexible and as preventing them using their years of experience to arrive at their own judgements. By deviating from a prescribed audit, they feel it allows them to really look for the gaps in the procedures and test the organisation ie. they see their methods as the more rigorous.

The assessor from another body feels this approach is far too subjective however and would like to see a more objective audit of evidence on which statistical analyses can be performed that enable comparisons to be made between departments (vital for corporate programmes)

"To my knowledge, three of the bodies work in the old way which is that they can provide a cosy sort of write-up against each criterion as they did before. Rather than this cosy evidence they need to be able to ensure, this is UKAS's problem obviously, but what the assessor is looking for and what counts as evidence in the Charter Mark guidance is an audit process. At least two out of the three are working in the pre-existing sort of way which provides an audit across each theme, across each element and that is not good." (Assessor)

While the latter thinks online systems will help when presenting evidence, another assessor questions how useful an evidence audit can be – it is what lies behind it and is working in practice that counts

"But, it's hugely bureaucratic and it may be that there's a case for allowing the assessor to use more of his judgement rather than actually seeing pieces of paper floating in front of his eyes you know." (Assessor)

Holders also questioned whether different assessment bodies and assessors were working to a standardised approach or whether different assessment bodies could assess a service and have two different outcomes.

Even the same body could produce assessors with different interpretations. In this example, the interpretation differed between assessment and surveillance and left the Charter Mark holders feeling rather disgruntled

“It’s the individual interpretation of the individual assessors. [Organisation’s name] just recently got theirs again and they’d had the surveillance and they’ve got a marking on that, and what they’d got when the actual assessor came in were partials or not. So it throws you into disarray because you’re looking to them for a benchmark and to point you in the direction, if you’ve got partials, point us in the direction and we’ll keep working. Let’s be honest, if you’ve got a fully met, you’re going to concentrate on your partials, to then be told on the day ‘I don’t think that is a met’, let’s run around like headless chickens...

...Not, ‘you should have improved on it’, but ‘I don’t agree with the decision of the previous assessor’.” (Current Holders, Public Sector)

In another example, an organisation was cited in which a small team had put together the evidence for the original assessment without any involvement of the staff; now that they are working towards a regional assessment, the same staff are questioning why they now need to be involved. To this holder, it demonstrates that the assessor had not picked up on the fact that Charter Mark had not been absorbed into the culture of the organisation

“I think they should perhaps change their focus and look more at our assessors and work towards better consistency... The xxx applied as an area, put a small team together, got the evidence together, achieved the standard; none of the staff knew anything about it. They haven’t embraced the culture. So now we’re working towards the surveillance in February and we’re having to launch Charter Mark to somebody who’s got the award, now they’re saying, ‘we’ve got it, why should we make extra effort, why should we ...?’, so an assessor’s come in and not noticed that.” (Current Holder, Public Sector)

Perceived Sustainability

Amongst the lapsed holders, a number said that they chose not to renew their Charter Mark simply because they felt that the learning had been embedded into their practices. The only attraction to staying with the Charter Mark would have been if it had the public profile that meant that they shone out as providing an exemplary service and for the sake of this, they needed to be seen to retain it. However, as few comments were made about the Charter Mark logo on letterheads, vans etc., allowing the Charter Mark to lapse did not seem likely to have severe implications

“After year one, we were carrying on as normal really, life goes on and people don’t think about it [Charter Mark] anymore.” (Lapsed holder, Public Sector)

Another commented

"[Prior to securing Charter Mark we were] slightly more haphazard in terms of who would respond to issues... it wasn't a huge thing... most of the things Charter Mark is about we were doing anyway... We just decided that it [renewing Charter Mark] wasn't worth the hassle, the practice was already in place and it really wasn't worth doing it all again." (Lapsed Holder, Public Sector)

One current holder expressed a degree of disappointment at the prospect of not renewing Charter Mark due to financial constraints. However, he also made the point that the learning from Charter Mark was integrated into their practices so renewing it would just be about holding onto the badge

"If the grant aid hadn't been cut we would have continued with it, I'm sure of that, in spite of the fact that, as I said, it doesn't actually attract visitors and I suppose our nearest rival in the field held Charter Mark and then lost it but they still attract more visitors than we do... so what I am saying is that we would do it if it wasn't the particular circumstances we have at the moment. It is just that we can continue to provide the standard that we are expected to." (Current Holder, Private Sector)

Given these comments, and others of a similar nature, it can be deduced that Charter Mark does introduce valuable practices into organisations but once these are bedded down, the value of Charter Mark declines. The only way to revitalise the value would be around raising Charter Mark's profile and making it a quality standard that organisations feel they should achieve.

Sharing Good Practice

Some holders described the time spent in preparing the application as a rather lonely one. Assessors are unable to give a great deal of help and they may not know anyone to ask whether they are on the right lines.

A small number had turned to the public sector benchmarking service that provides examples of past practice and is a forum for discussion between organisations in the public sector including on the subject of Charter Mark. One assessor felt this had not been promoted enough by the Cabinet Office even though people from the department compiled the database

"I've actually several times replied to people. Someone said 'has anyone ever done the Charter Mark before because I'm struggling?', 'has anyone got a portfolio of evidence that I can look at?', and I just sent mine off. That comes up religiously every month and it's pretty good, it takes you about two minutes to read through." (Current Holder, Public Sector)

A couple of other suggestions were also put forward. The first was mentoring by a comparable organisation that could help with guidance on the sort of evidence that would be permissible (one of the interviews suggested this might be happening already)

"I don't think we were encouraged to talk to other Charter Mark winners, we are not given a list but it would be useful to be able to do some work with another organisation on best practice perhaps." (Current Holder, Private Sector)

The second idea was to train ‘champions’ in an organisation to help departments prepare for assessment and make it easier for them. One council was following this approach for Investors in People

“What we’re doing is champions in-house really, so we can be advisors, we can go and look, we can start to look at evidence, look at other people, what they’re doing, not threateningly but supportively, offer advice, so that’s what we’re doing for Investors but I don’t see why we couldn’t do it for Charter Mark. Some basic training about understanding the standards of Investors really and what it means and how you meet it, and then showing that.” (Current Holder, Public Sector)

Another was to establish local support groups (the discussion group demonstrated how useful this could be)

“I think what would be good is to have local support groups, that we had on the web that we could keep in touch with or meet up, I think it would be really good, just to be able to ring somebody.” (Current Holder, Public Sector)

Meaningful Recognition

A small number of Charter Mark holders made the point that if Government was so keen to see the public sector use Charter Mark to reform and modernise public services, then their achievement should be recognised with more resources to help them improve further, both for staff to help drive the programme, and facilities.

Marketing of Charter Mark

As mentioned elsewhere, there was an overwhelming view that the profile of Charter Mark had fallen short of what it deserved. Many felt let down by the Cabinet Office because they had failed to promote Charter Mark and its achievements and this failure had devalued the scheme and undermined their efforts. The assessors were very critical

“If I was critical of the Cabinet Office for anything, over time it’s their failure to recognise the value of the scheme that they’ve got and take it forward.” (Assessor)

“I think the marketing of Charter Mark has been absolutely awful... That’s reflected in the fact that the Cabinet Office staff of four people pushing.....Charter Mark whereas they had a whole industry before, when we were working in Cabinet Office and it was much more of a thrust there but I don’t think the Cabinet Office will ever be very good at marketing, they probably don’t know the art of marketing. They probably use some companies but it’s never really got across. 9 times out of 10 I’ve got to explain what Charter Mark is and as it’s been around since 1992, I think it’s absolutely disgraceful. You’re now looking at what, 13 or 14 years and you’ve still got to explain to people what it is. I mean I’m surprised, I’m shocked when people actually know what Charter Mark is.” (Assessor)

As we have seen, the lack of profile sapped ongoing enthusiasm for the scheme and potential Charter Mark holders said that they would be more likely to sign up to Charter Mark if it was promoted adequately and had meaning for the public.

The fact that a quality standard in customer service excellence exists and not all eligible organisations know about it, suggested that even the audiences who should be aware of it are not being reached. The point was specifically made that the voluntary sector should be targeted by any marketing drive. Various ideas for broad publicity were suggested including:

Press coverage

"I think there needs to be more material in the press, in the main press. It has to have the thrust from ministers as well, both cabinet office and the Prime Minister. I know he's been along and sort of.....people but it's never had the real impact and people have got to understand what it's all about. The benefits for them as customers and the benefits for the applicants, the people that are actually gonna put the applications together and seek Charter Mark. That's got to be the thrust and it's got to be on a regular basis." (Assessor)

"How much promotion of Charter Mark are the Cabinet Office doing? When was the last time Charter Mark was featured in Guardian Society or Times Public Agenda, those places? A profile on your organisation sounds great but when was the last time they did 'this is what it stands for and this is what we're doing'?" (Current Holder, Private Sector)

Press advertising

"I think the government could promote it more to the general public, full page adverts in the papers, things like that. Then there is more chance of people saying these people have got the Charter Mark, well done ...

...Then people would be looking at that, they would scan down and see the organisations and it would begin to give the Charter Mark itself more importance which we have said, it hasn't got at the moment in the eyes of the public who haven't heard about it and don't care about it...

...I have upped my standard of customer service and that is constantly improving...

It is about the experience isn't it, that you get a good experience." (Current Holder, Private Sector)

Other materials were needed aimed at current and potential holders:

Regular bulletins and seminars

“It’s got to be some you know, sort of bulletin or something about it or maybe something about the numbers that have gone for it and numbers that have been successful, that type of thing so it’s got to be a real thrust and maybe a seminar perhaps to invite people along who are holders and people who are thinking about it, a big splash. And it’s not got to be just once a year, it’s got to be on a regular basis. It’s got to be brought in to the public comprehension, the public understanding and public domain.”
(Assessor)

Material with which to ‘sell’ Charter Mark into an organisation, especially to the staff who will be directly involved

“So to help us along with that it would be helpful to have some sort of marketing tool from Charter Mark, maybe something on the website, Tony Blair talking about it or something. I can use that, it may be a bit cheesy, I guess, but it would be useful to have a proper training manual about Charter Mark, that it isn’t just people doing assessments, it is for everyone in the organisation to fully understand it. Just some marketing material that describes it. Once it is put in the wider context as well, you need to do the research to be able to say ‘it is held by so many organisations’ etc, giving the history of it and if you can give that to your staff it can make it flow a lot better.” (Current Holder Private Sector)

The desired effect of all these efforts was summed up thus

“What I’d like to see is something happen to raise public awareness of it so that our senior management team say we can’t afford to do without it, we’ve got to go with this.” (Current Holder Private Sector)

Introduction

This section considers responses to the various options that were put to respondents for the development of Charter Mark.

Retention of Charter Mark or 'Has it had its Day?'

The possibility of scrapping Charter Mark was handled with some delicacy – it was not brought up with the assessors, for example. On occasions, the issue was raised spontaneously.

Respondents could see why the question might be asked:

The profile of Charter Mark has waned so much that the Government's commitment to it is questioned

Its territory has been encroached upon by other standards and accreditations

"I was originally an advocate for it and felt it was a really good thing. But while I've really valued it, in the last couple of years, because it hasn't really got much Blair profile, the obvious question in my mind is does it really have any legs or has it been discredited? Plus things like ISO 9000, 1400, 1800, do compete with it. But I do believe these external validations are important."
(Potential Holder, Private Sector)

The cost of going for Charter Mark as well as other accreditations is becoming prohibitive

Does it offer the rigour that organisations increasingly look for and is it measuring the things that matter ie. the real customer experience?

It is not very clear what its purpose is.

In addition, a few mentioned that it would not surprise them if the Government decided not to pursue Charter Mark as other more ethical initiatives had been withdrawn (eg. the Operating and Financial Review). Alternatively, they could also see that the scheme might change its format and presentation - a private sector respondent suggested it was a little like the National Training Awards that seemed to metamorphose into liP or Best Practice Awards that became Beacon Councils.

It was recognised that such schemes had a certain life; while ISO standards might still be very much in evidence, it was suggested that their position as being essential for doing business in Europe has become eroded.

On the positive side, Charter Mark was often appreciated by current and lapsed holders for its flexibility, the fact that it was less dry and mechanistic

than other standards and, most importantly, that it had served their organisation well in acting as a vehicle to focus staff on customer needs and to change practices accordingly.

Its lack of profile was seen as providing an opportunity to relaunch Charter Mark in whatever new form was felt right although those who are working with the revised standard would prefer there not to be significant changes that impact on them while they are still embedding it in their organisation.

As we have seen, individuals' ideas about the pros and cons of Charter Mark and their suggestions for improvement varied greatly. Nobody was of the opinion that there was a clear case to terminate the Charter Mark scheme; everyone felt that if it was going to continue, then it needed at least to address the loss of profile among the public and eligible organisations.

Extension of Eligibility

The idea of giving private sector companies that serve the public the opportunity to achieve Charter Mark was, for the most part, met positively. The greatest enthusiasm was however in the public sector where there was a welcome for the ensuing prospect of a higher profile for Charter Mark, in particular among the general public.

Concerns were also expressed however. With wider eligibility, a comparison would be made between private and public sector organisations, the assumption being that the latter would perform less well against private companies that had the staff and resources to support improvements. They were also not constrained by the control that comes from local and central government

"If then we all end up in the same pot and it's the same benchmark for the private and public service organisations, we're crapped on again, aren't we?...I'm not sure, it's a question you've just thrown open to us, but we've already said that we struggle to resource it. Some organisations have dedicated staff, others, it's just another add-on job, private sector are going to have the resources ... if there's two benchmarks for private and public, fine, but ...

...Don't compare us...

...It's apples and oranges." (Current Holders, Public Sector)

Criterion 6, perceived as so difficult for some in the public sector, was seen as something that the private sector would have little problem meeting

"But lots of organisations now are going out and doing community work, there are banks that have projects and they are given time off work to go and renovate buildings and set things up...

...Corporate social responsibility is very high on the agenda isn't it?...

...Business in the community." (Current Holders, Private Sector)

The suggestion that came out of this was that there should be two standards. This would also allow the public sector to retain the sense of 'their' standard being about excellence in public service.

There was also considered to be a danger that if the scheme was opened up to the private sector and, for whatever reason they chose not to run with it, then it could damage its credibility

"If you open it up to the wider sectors you now become in competition with ISO 9000 and if it doesn't fit with the private sector – I don't know if it does or not, it probably does but it could be a venture that is ridiculed by the private sector, not taken seriously, and it is very, very important that they keep the criteria of assessment still as a serious reinforcement and as something worth getting." (Current Holder, Private Sector)

Those in the public sector who were less enthusiastic suggested that private sector companies were focused on the bottom line to the detriment of customer service or only pursued those aspects of customer service that would deliver profits rather than what the customer genuinely needed.

For the assessors, the idea of extending Charter Mark to the private sector was not entirely new; one felt that Charter Mark was useable by any organisation and many in the private sector would already qualify for it

"So anywhere in the private sector where they have to market something then I think they would be, they would certainly be relevant in... I mean I've seen most of the Charter Mark criteria being met when I go into supermarkets now. They know the better they make the customer service experience the more customers they are going to get. And they use, they wouldn't recognise them maybe as Charter Mark, but the principles are in there." (Assessor)

Another welcomed the challenge - genuinely interested in whether the private sector were as on top of customer service as is assumed in all aspects of their operation (he cited the example of the same supermarket as a fellow assessor – one saw it as exemplifying good practice, another poor)

"So I think that, you know, it would be a good thing to do to show whether in fact the private sector do deliver customer service to any large extent... They might get their staff to say 'good morning' and 'how are you?' and all that stuff but you know, do they really tell them how to handle themselves and telephone manner and all that stuff. Do they put proper standards in place?" (Assessor)

Yet another was very sceptical about the ability of private sector organisations to embrace Charter Mark fully. This was based on experience with an eligible private sector firm whose attitude ran counter to the Charter Mark ethos

"I had no end of problems in trying to reconcile some of the conflicts, like I suggested 'you do that'. 'Oh no, I can't do that', 'why?', and they were business reasons, not customer service reasons and we were up against the fact that they wanted to protect their profits and I tried to explain 'that's not what it's about'. 'Oh yes it is, that's everything'." (Assessor)

The research sample included both private organisations that were already eligible because they served the public sector but had so far done little or nothing with Charter Mark, and private companies that were currently ineligible. Their response to the idea of extension of eligibility are described below.

Eligible Private Sector

Private sector companies that provide outsourced services to the public sector expressed some interest in Charter Mark, in part stemming from operations within their organisation that were already holders and in part, from previous personal experiences in the public sector. Some (even those who did not appreciate they were already eligible) could see it as a natural step that they should go for Charter Mark. They were already working in partnerships with various parts of the public sector and felt they should be working to meet customer needs together.

With the erosion of the public/ private divide, it was suggested that Charter Mark could prove a useful vehicle for progressing the public service reform agenda, not just bringing in the private sector but the voluntary sector too

“It needs to be in the context of the Government’s wider programme of public service reform, choice, personalisation. Underpinning those, and contributing to those, rather than separate...the Charter Mark is for public services and those that deliver public services, irrespective of whether they are public, private or voluntary.” (Potential Holder, Private Sector)

They also felt that taking Charter Mark into the private sector *per se* could establish some good examples for the public sector, bringing new challenge and rigour that would take them through the transformation process that many industries had already had to go through

“I think they should do (extend eligibility) because I also think, it’s always seemed to me that the role for local government is as the arbiter of good customer service and therefore extending it wider is right...I think that’s good because it brings a bit more challenge and rigour to public service...It would broaden the scope of what is good...We need to get out of this public/private split and talk more about public services.” (Potential Holder, Private Sector)

While a few of the outsourcing companies had projects where the organisations in question had gone for Charter Mark, establishing this as a pattern of activity was not straightforward. They had to consider such issues as:

Who goes for Charter Mark in the partnership situation; the public sector contracting authority or private sector contractor?

To what extent is the private sector empowered to make a difference to the end user?

“The end customer may want change, they may relate that to us as the service provider, our client may or may not accept what

we are saying in terms of what a contractor is saying in terms of what their customer wants. It's not unknown for a contractor to be delivering 100% against the performance requirements of the contract, and find there's a great difference in what the service users want." (Potential Holder, Private Sector)

At present, the contracting authority may not be interested in the private sector engaging with customers – it involves risks to the contractor not least in terms of financial penalties if they do not meet the terms of their contract (it also represents opportunities for penalties for the authority).

The value of Charter Mark in improving the working of public/ private sector partnerships in delivering services to the public was borne out by an assessor

"There was one, it was amenity services, and they were actually run by a local authority but the street cleaning was done by an external, not street cleaning, waste collection, by an external body but I was assessing the amenity services. Obviously, how the dustbin collection works or doesn't work impinges on their targets so they were working very closely with the private sector, I mean they were training them with their own staff, they were ensuring certain quality standards; there was a lot built into their service level agreement so I think from that point of view, just in the interim between my initial assessment and the action plan review, they'd improved because they'd realised that they needed to sort of just work more closely to ensure that the standards were right across the board and the service. So I think that was a very good outcome." (Assessor)

Wider Private Sector

While there is a widespread assumption outside the public sector that private companies constantly review and try to meet their customer needs, it was evident from some of the discussions that there is an increasing focus on this aspect of their operations. Many companies in the private sector have come under a critical spotlight from regulatory bodies and the media that has prompted a more serious review of their customer requirements. However, for some, this is no longer about simply researching what customers want but examining the complete process from 'product' manufacture to delivery – root cause analysis, as it was sometimes referred to. Companies are deploying various methodologies and models to help develop practices and products. They are also participating in, or at least keeping a watchful eye on, what the Institute of Consumer Service is doing with respect to developing an Index for Customer Service.

While they could see that Charter Mark might have something to offer them, they had to be convinced of its value. A few had looked at the Charter Mark website and even the self-assessment tool and found them interesting. In one case, the tool had prompted them to think about elements of customer service

such as the importance of informing customers about changes that one makes in response to customer suggestions. Another spoke about how logical the requirements seemed, very much in line with recommendations set out elsewhere.

While some could see real potential for Charter Mark or something similar in establishing a national (preferably international) standard for customer excellence, it was unlikely to be in its present form. It had to be able to prove itself as a tool that could really deliver a significant difference and ideally, one that would impact on the bottom line.

Moreover, widespread take-up would depend on a few high profile companies that already had a reputation for excellent service, seeking accreditation. Virgin Airlines, Marks & Spencer (at an earlier time), ING, the AA and RAC were cited as such examples. In other words, in the context of large, successful companies, the role of Charter Mark seemed to be less about being the management tool that would be the catalyst for change than the external validation that they were offering high levels of customer service ie. a return to the 'badge'. They would not wish to be seen to be assessed for Charter Mark unless they were sure that they were going to achieve it. Indeed, several made the point that the feeling among senior management in their organisations was that external accreditations were something they should seek

“My senior guys are convinced by it. I'm not, I'm not sure. I'd like to think, certainly around some of the regulated products, like endowments, maybe, but once you get to a local branch, does it matter? Certainly, as a group, some of the retailing brands are starting to push for this.” (Potential Holder, Private Sector)

For such companies, the association of Charter Mark with the public sector (which some were unaware of until they looked at the website) was not especially appealing. While they were sure that there was much good practice going on in hospitals and local authorities with respect to customer service, they suspected that much of it was fairly basic. Based on their own perception of say, service from the NHS, they were not convinced that in the eyes of the public, their sharing of a Charter Mark with public sector organisations would be very positive. The fact that very small units within the public sector could achieve Charter Mark was also not seen as a positive comparison for very large multi-national organisations

“The work they are doing is fantastic but you sit there and think ‘that is probably what we were doing 5 years ago’. It would be really good if you had a few examples of exemplary public services that put the private sector to shame.” (Potential Holder, Private Sector)

The perception among some in the public sector that private sector organisations are dominated by the bottom line was borne out to an extent by the research. The idea that holding Charter Mark would somehow give them some commercial advantage was very attractive. This might be with the public arena where they are in competition with a number of other players but it could also be with other 'customers' such as local authorities in the case of partnerships.

The point was made by many from the private sector that if the Government were so sure that Charter Mark would improve public service, then there should be some degree of example setting and compunction. For example,
Government departments and agencies should achieve Charter Mark

The Office of Government Commerce could make it a condition of tendering for contracts that the applicant holds Charter Mark or insist that those who are successful in their bids are assessed for Charter Mark within a set time. This in itself should say something about your company, the management systems it has in place and its ethos.

Introducing Variations for Different Market Segments

While one of the merits of the Charter Mark scheme was thought by holders and assessors to be its adaptability to organisations of varying types and sizes, the idea of 'one size fits all' was felt to lack credibility by some in the private sector and those who felt a more rigorous tool was called for. We have noted at 6.3 that the idea of variations tailored to particular sectors had appeal for some.

Certainly, when looked at in combination with the idea of introducing competition between organisations in particular 'industry' sectors, then a case seemed to be credible for tailoring the standard to their needs, within a common framework. One private sector potential holder thought they would prefer to be compared to others in the financial sector than say, to a transport company.

This view was not held by everyone however. Another in the same sector expressed the view that they would not wish to see something that grouped the banks as this could be interpreted as their developing a cartel-like structure

"We would prefer to see a Customer Charter rather than something for all the retail banks". (Potential Holder, Private Sector)

A potential holder in the outsourcing industry thought that variation would be inevitable especially if Charter Mark eligibility was widened, because of the range of services under scrutiny

"There would be a common framework so that you could award a Charter Mark or its equivalent to a whole variety of services. How you judge for those may be different, and then if you normed for them in some way. I think you would need to do that anyway. If not, it would be a weakness in the system. Because customers' responsiveness, customers' views on service would differ, whether those services are regulatory, enforcement services personal services, community services." (Potential Holder, Private Sector)

It was pointed out that each sector has its own structure with respect to who its customers are and as described above, these are not always the general public. Variations that specified the relevant customer types could therefore prove useful

“The danger of course is that we are all very different organisations and it is very general and actually, because it’s general and because we are all so different, it is quite difficult to get your head round and as a housing association, we think what is a customer, is it our funder, the local authority or is it the service user who’s been there for ten years? It’s both so you have to have elements of both aspects or if you don’t then ... It’s a case of if you are going to get more prescriptive do you have a Housing Association Charter Mark, something more based around housing. Perhaps you can have organisations that have internal customers and also have long term relationships with customers rather than short term relationships because there is a different dynamic going on.” (Current Holder, Private Sector)

Most of the current holders in the private sector were less enthused by sector variations. They suggested that organisations seeking accreditation benefit from the transfer of practice from one sector to another, and the assessors also benefit from working in different sectors

“I have reservations about that because it is more powerful if you bring in experience from other sectors. The housing sector can be far too insular so if there is a Charter Mark or similar thing that can actually bring in experience from elsewhere that is very valuable so I think there is a danger that you can start talking to yourselves and you are not actually bringing in best practice from other organisations in a different area.” (Current Holder, Private Sector)

Introducing Levels of Achievement

This idea elicited a number of responses. Firstly, the public sector Charter Mark holders thought that Charter Mark already had four grades that depended on an organisation’s scores against each criterion (although this was not externalised). One of them who had a minimal number of partial non-compliances felt they were one of the higher scoring Charter Mark holders and would have welcomed an opportunity for external recognition as it was currently only acknowledged on their certificate.

Secondly, it was pointed out by another current holder of both Charter Mark and liP that levels are interpreted in a rather different way in liP and are referred to as Profiles

“There’s four levels, Level One is the basic standard and then above that, it’s if you’ve particularly good practice in certain areas, you can get a Level Two, Level Three, all depending what you do.” (Current Holder Public Sector)

One of the assessors agreed that it was a model that Charter Mark could adopt as long as applicants proved themselves at the basic level and then went on to show excellence in specific areas. Such a scheme would encourage Charter Mark to be seen as a continuous improvement tool.

The idea was raised spontaneously by a private sector holder

*“Ultimately you could **not** make it a challenge and it stops becoming a management tool and just becomes an evidence gathering exercise, to turn round and say we are a Charter Mark organisation and we do it well, which you do but then are you challenging your own organisation. So do you raise the bar and have one level and then another level above that so it becomes more of a management tool? If you have a compulsory element in it and you have something over and above that perhaps, which organisations like us could choose to take on or not.”*
(Current Holder, Private Sector)

But the wider group queried whether it was intended that you worked your way up the levels as you improved, or whether you were assessed and then given an award of the appropriate level.

One of the private sector potential holders rather liked the idea of a progressive award. If you had not met all the criteria to the level required, then you might be able to achieve a certain level plus be given an incentive to strive for the next level. A comparison was made with the BSC 5 Star Award by one company that had failed to achieve it by 2%. The respondent felt it would have been more motivating to have received a lower award and then worked towards the full award rather than failing.

If the levels were expressed as gold, silver and bronze, it was felt that this would firmly position Charter Mark as a badge again, and the only colour that people would be interested in would be gold

“But at the moment I don’t think you would have the value from having that badge, so the likelihood of getting gold, the value from that wouldn’t outweigh the risk of getting bronze, from the badge sense.” (Current Holder, Private Sector)

Moreover, such a system would be unacceptable because, if it were publicised, one organisation could be compared disadvantageously to others

“If you have gold, silver and bronze as a badge and you use it as a management tool but don’t get gold, you are there to be shot at then, aren’t you? Your detractors could say, ‘well, you only got bronze’.” (Current Holder, Private Sector)

Another felt that they would only wish to go for the highest level and then, would need to be certain of achieving it

“I can only speak for my organisation but I don’t think we would have gone for it unless we could have got gold. The danger is if you get bronze then you are doing other stuff too...”

...Nobody wants to come third do they?...

...There is a danger of dilution of the Charter Mark.” (Current Holder, Private Sector)

There was a feeling that it was rather unfair to compare very different organisations to each other; it might be easier to attain a higher level if you were a smaller, fairly simple operation compared with one that was larger and more complex. If the top level was expressed as ‘gold’, then it had to deliver in terms of supreme service quality.

An idea that was expressed by a few respondents was a two-tier accreditation; one that had a high but basic standard, and the other that was a distinction level. Two of the proponents of this were assessors who felt there were certainly some applicants that stood out as being qualitatively superior to others and who merited special recognition

“Personally, I think it’s nice if you can recognise a handful of organisations that have done so much that there is absolutely no doubt the moment you step in the door, that an organisation is successful. You can distinguish them from the people who have done very well and worked very hard and so forth.” (Assessor)

“There are some that in my own mind that stand out as exceptional organisations and I’d like to think... you try and flag it up in the report and make that come out and they can either quote that or whatever. I think there needs to be some recognition of the really top performing organisations.” (Assessor)

It should be said that while, in some ways attractive, it was felt that the idea of differentiating between quality of applicants would further complicate the assessment and it would therefore require very careful thinking through.

Introducing Competition

The first response to the introduction of a competitive element was that competition was often a healthy dimension that staff thrived on. Some organisations spoke of being accustomed to competition eg. The Top 100 in Business in the Community, the Sunday Times Top 100 businesses, and the Teaching Awards. Local Authorities as well as private business were thought to like such competitive opportunities (assuming if they did well). The association of competition with league tables was less attractive however. The prison service operates such a system but staff in one prison were told that the league tables meant very little, largely because of the differences between institutions.

References were made to benchmarking and league tables in the financial sector and while companies clearly followed their progress, support did seem to depend in part on their position in them.

If the decision was taken to develop variants on Charter Mark for different sectors and to find a way of comparing organisations fairly, then many felt that a competitive element could certainly attract publicity and help build Charter Mark’s profile.

Celebratory Event

Although many understood the reason why the major Awards event in London had been discontinued, there was still some nostalgia for it with its glamour and bevy of ministers. Some assessors also felt that it had a positive effect by pulling others into the scheme because they were aware of the fanfare that accompanied the achievement (although one made the point that applications were not so high during the period that the event was run)

“That trip to London and certainly, the meeting of a minister and that and the photograph, tremendously important, I think a lot has been lost.” (Assessor)

"I think that is one of the worst things that they've done away with, that annual get-together of winners because I've heard so many of my clients say 'why don't they do it anymore? We really looked forward to that, it was really special'."(Assessor)

There were also several mentions of the letter from Tony Blair that had been received and the positive impact this had

"We had it included as part of our scheme so everybody has got their own Tony Blair certificate..."

...And it is helpful in terms of staff who feel they have been involved in the process and they remember that. It is very helpful." (Current Holder, Private Sector)

The large scale event was however seen as having some disadvantages. Held in London, only one or two members of staff from an organisation could attend

"If it's a London event, then only so many people can go. As a department, it's costing you £100 odd for the return train fare plus can somebody afford to be out of the office for that long?" (Current Holder, Public Sector)

This meant that many more staff were denied the chance to share in the success. Suggestions to overcome this included a series of regional events that more staff could attend and the visit to the organisation of someone significant who would recognise their achievement. Ideally, any regional event would also include a presentation by a high profile figure (probably a Minister) although one applicant had been promised Matthew Pinsent by her boss!

"Regional ceremonies with regional winners, then you are more likely to get more publicity locally... What's different about Charter Mark is that it is an award for good public service and it's a way of demonstrating to Joe Public that you're providing a good service, which needs to have more recognition than the Charter Mark logo." (Lapsed holder)

One of the assessment bodies was known to be considering running their own regional event.

Greater Use of On-line Tools

There was a mixed response to the idea of the greater use of online communication to help with the assessment process, as one might expect from the comments described at 4.3. It was clear among current holders that some had selected an assessment body because they offered more online tools (indeed one thought the complete application was done online) while others had chosen an assessment body because it did not insist on online communication and seemed to be more personal. This was reflected in some assessor comments

"One of the things that I've found for xxx, for instance, is that applicants have gone with them because of a, what can I say, a simplified approach, quite often a paper based approach, a face to face approach. It's met their needs a bit more than a

computer and in fact, indeed, I do recall one applicant saying they were put off by the notion of doing things online.”
(Assessor)

Certainly, those in the private sector holder group seemed a little more disposed to such tools and felt this was the way forward. Similarly, some assessors with experience of the Charter Mark's online system, had clear preferences for and against it. Those of the latter view were not against online tools *per se*, but felt they could be used when appropriate rather than for driving an application.

One of the issues that was implied in what was said was that if the scheme is to be expanded, then will the new assessors who will necessarily be needed (the existing ones are fully committed already) have the same commitment to the scheme and take the same rigorous approach of those who knew the scheme of old? Using an online tool like the Charter Mark's approach could, it was suggested, be used as a way of bringing in less experienced and knowledgeable assessors.

One assessor was supportive of the application form being online because it could then be easily marked without needing to duplicate it. The idea of sending maybe 200 attachments with the evidence to support the application did not make for easy reference and comparison however.

Others, including some in the private sector, expressed uncertainty about how far an online tool could be taken. Many preferred not to gather and record evidence in this way, for example. There was also a concern that the intention should not be to replace more personal contact with the assessment body nor do away with the assessment visit, otherwise there could be a loss of rigour

“Having someone coming into one's office is far more frightening and keeps you on your toes. egov is good but you need the reality check of the inspector.” (Potential Holder, Private Sector)

Some of those who were familiar with the Charter Mark's online self-assessment tool spoke favourably of it, in part because they liked its precision. Its supporters seemed to be those who had a quality role in their organisation and therefore, may have been more predisposed to getting to grips with it.

Others found it more difficult to use although they admitted that this might have been to do with their lack of familiarity with such tools

“You can't see everything on the screen so you only get a screen dump which doesn't show you exactly what ...

... You can print it, you can print the whole lot...

... Can you? Perhaps that was my fault then...

... But it is a pain, you end up going through three things to print something...

... Well, it needs improving, it needs to be more user friendly.”
(Current Holder, Public Sector)

Other criticisms were voiced around having to input the same information on the self-assessment tool and the Charter Mark tool, and just getting in a

position to be able to access the Charter Mark tool. The idea that online means faster working did not hold true for these respondents. The self-assessment tool had been used by several current holders but some had found it frustrating to use. Some had created an excel spreadsheet but felt that such tools could be made available earlier (not just through the assessment body) so that organisations could go on using them

"I once used the assessment tool on the website which has extra notes against the criteria so what I did was put the information into a spreadsheet but it would be nice if that was available straight off. If you go on the website you just fill it in and click and then you've lost it, you don't have that information available on a regular basis to look through. It would be nice if you could keep it and add to it and look at the notes, to see how you fit the criteria and then carry that on, having it ongoing really..."

...I think the same, exactly the same...

...There must be a lot of extra work in creating it but it would be very useful to have that as a tool...

...It would be useful for re-assessment." (Current Holder, Private Sector)

Efficient Approach to the Overlap with Other Assessments / Inspections

While they might not know how it could be achieved, the idea of streamlining the meeting of the requirements for various inspections and assessments was seen as common sense. This might take the form of permitting the evidence produced for one to be directly used for another (eg. the self assessment report in schools). In fact one of the assessors thought this was already something that they did

"I think, as assessors, we were always told to take account of other reports, Audit Commission, Ofsted and the like, and not to reinvent the wheel. Actually, in some areas you can almost shorthand it and say, right, Ofsted have said, and accept them as their findings." (Assessor)

Another bid for efficiency was the combining of part of the assessment process for different accreditations where the same people are involved

"But if you are doing Investors in People, it would be nice if you could work with Investors in People to link up a bit because there are a lot of cross - well especially consultations with staff and it is just more evidence to be gathered, to be honest." (Current Holder, Private Sector)

"[Cabinet Office should] marry it up with other quality marks so you have one inspection and it allows you to have ISO and Charter Mark – the idea for me is two awards for one inspection. We are inspected to death in local authority, so if you can avoid another inspection/application going over the same ground it would be great." [Lapsed Holder, Public Sector]

The assessors were less enthusiastic especially about this idea, seeing that each accreditation has its own focus and should be kept separate and distinct

“I think if ISO and liP had a relevance to Charter Mark it would be useful to have that stated in the evidence in a Charter Mark application but my feeling is that Charter Mark is so different from liP, which is just training staff to do their job, and ISO, which is basically management principles and if you actually abide by them, that’s fine, but I think Charter Mark is a very different sort of animal and it is customer service per se. Certainly there are things you know that are mirrored a bit in ISO and liP but talking to some consultants who do liP and ISO ... they were thinking along the same lines but decided against it ‘cos there was too much difference.” (Assessor)

“I think there has been a tendency to try and make different standards look alike so that I think for good reason in as much as once an organisation can apply for one, they feel they can apply for another but I think that’s probably wrong, I think it’s probably better... I think its niche is really the customer focus. It’s the uniqueness of Charter Mark and I think getting into other areas like the EFQM and ISO is probably not right.” (Assessor)

Ownership of Charter Mark

The response was almost unanimous that Charter Mark needed the backing of Government, and for some, the Cabinet Office specifically. Only one or two hazarded a guess as to why Charter Mark resided in the Cabinet Office, some feeling that it was because it didn’t fit anywhere else

*“If you asked me where it should have come from, I don’t know. If I said to you ‘I’m not sure what the Cabinet Office is’.”
(Potential Holder, Private Sector)*

“My view, perhaps I shouldn’t admit to this, but I wouldn’t have actually known if someone had asked me the other week which government department it was.” (Current Holder, Private Sector)

However, the association with the Cabinet Office connoted something of importance that had government endorsement at a high level and this was viewed very positively. It also helped differentiate Charter Mark from other common accreditations such as ISO and liP

“Government is hugely important - if the Cabinet is saying we are about excellence in public service and this is how we are going to develop a standard that recognises that – then that will focus people’s minds.” (Potential Holder, Private Sector)

*“If the ICS said, ‘this is the standard you should aim for’, and someone else said ‘this is the standard you should aim for’ - we would probably go for something that is government backed.”
(Potential Holder, Private Sector)*

“If the person receiving the award meets someone pretty important, but it’s also, if the Government isn’t about good public

service, then who is? I wouldn't want it to fall into becoming just another quality management process such as Investors.”
(Potential Holder, Private Sector)

There were however a couple of respondents who dissented from this view. They were concerned that locating Charter Mark within a government department meant that it was vulnerable to the vicissitudes of politics. Even one of these respondents however, could see that pressure for organisations to take on Charter Mark could be exerted more easily by Government than another type of organisation (to the extent that they could even make it compulsory).

Another downside of the government connection was that it gave rise to an expectation that other government departments should be participating in the scheme and if they weren't, why not? One private sector respondent asked where Charter Mark stood in relation to the Beacon Award for Councils, for example.

There was an appreciation that if Charter Mark is to be 'relaunched' in some form, then expansion of the team administering it would be necessary. Respondents were more relaxed about this being done, to a degree, outside the Cabinet Office, as many were aware that this practice was not unusual. However, some concern was voiced that the relationship with the Cabinet Office should not become too distant; it needed to retain control over Charter Mark and to be seen to do so ie. not simply to be a figurehead for the scheme. Current holders in the public sector were notably more concerned about such a change

“It sounds as though they're sidelining it, if that's what they do...

...I agree with that, you would lose that very valuable prestige...

...It needs to stay at that top, near the top, I think.” (Current Holder, Public Sector)

“Having started off there, if it moved elsewhere it would seem like it was being demoted, that it is just routine, alongside all the other things you have to do which various departments require.”
(Current Holder, Private Sector)

One of their suspicions was that introducing another link in the chain (along with the assessment bodies and UKAS) would mean that the cost of Charter Mark would increase and be passed on to participating organisations

“You're putting an extra link which is likely also to be interested in making a profit, so the decisions that that link will make will not be quite as purely based as the Cabinet Office.” (Current Holder Public Sector)

This was a view that was anticipated by the assessors

“No matter how good a commercial company is in the mind of applicants, I think they'll always be the suspicion, 'oh, they're just out for the money and it becomes a commercial activity per se and not really what it is which is trying to improve customer service within that environment. And I think it keeps it official, it keeps it government. I mean, no matter what you think about the government you know it does have a certain respectable, mainly

respectable image and I think if you divorce it totally and gave it to some other large organisation or even create a quango, I think people would still think it's outsourced, it's just like anything else.” (Assessor)

Among the assessors, many of whom had worked for the Cabinet Office before the advent of the assessment bodies, there was a desire to return to greater overt commitment from the Cabinet Office, not merely in terms of attaching their name to the Charter Mark scheme and promoting it, but displaying a real interest in it

“The first issue is if the Cabinet Office are going to retain responsibility for it then they need to pick up the ball and run with it. They need more force than they've been provided with in the past.” (Assessor)

“It's already been put at arm's length with the assessors and I think the more that the Cabinet Office moves into the background then the less clout it will have.” (Assessor)

Rebranding of Charter Mark

There was no great enthusiasm for rebranding of Charter Mark as part of its revitalisation and relaunch. While many could see that rejuvenation was called for, most saw this as being about putting more promotional effort behind the scheme, encouraging organisations to participate and creating recognition of what it stands for among the general public. A few expressed concerns about money being spent on rebranding.

The name, 'Charter Mark', was felt to have some equity attached to it. It had been around for some years and enjoyed some recognition

“You've got to be careful you don't change for change's sake. Everyone recognises, I mean we have an issue over profile. but people do understand what Charter Mark is. When you say 'Charter Mark' to certain organisations they do understand what you're saying.” (Current Holder, Public Sector)

“I think in an age of change, something that retains its name like that, yes. I remember going to the doctors or the hospital and Charter Mark had been running about seven years and they asked me what I did and when I said, 'Charter Mark', 'oh, is that still going?' ... He clearly knew the name and I think it would be very important to keep it, it's a good brand name.” (Assessor)

The main downside of the name was felt to be that it says nothing about the focus of the scheme. 'Customer service excellence' appeared in the logo but was not an integral part of the name and some felt that there needed to be some sense of this in it.

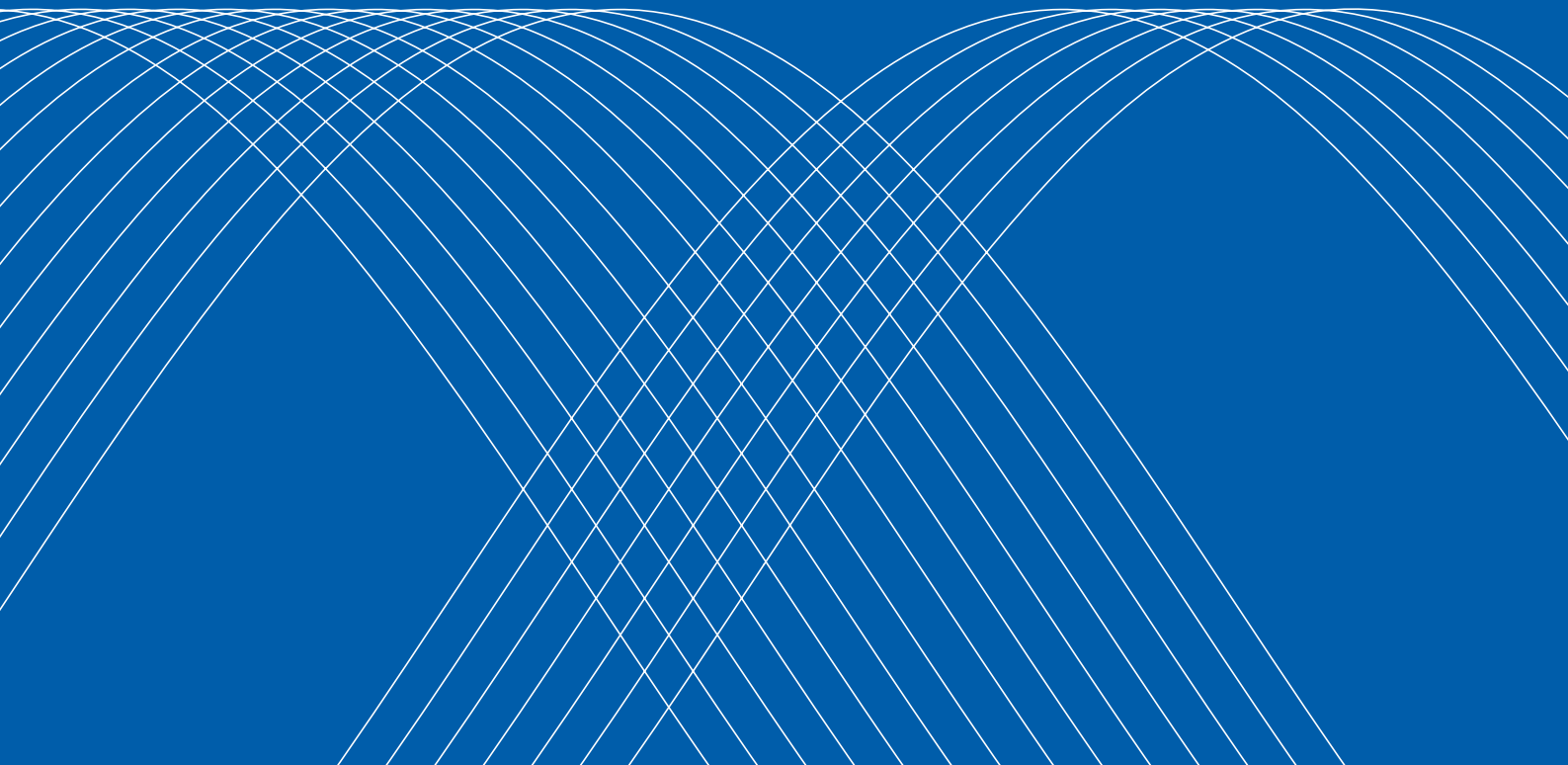
The logo had less attachment. Respondents were favourable to the stamp-like quality of its shape, in part because it suggested an official stamp or seal, but were less sure that the figurative element in its centre said very much about customers and service (it lacked the idea of an exchange, as one respondent put it).

A couple of private sector respondents felt that it was very redolent of the public sector and might need to be redesigned if its franchise was to be widened and there was a major drive to get it known among the public. Indeed, one private sector respondent suggested that perhaps there should be one Charter Mark for the public sector and one for the private. The point was made that any rebranding was pointless unless it was a signal of change and accompanied by a major marketing effort

"I think if you change the name then it is just a brand change. You have got to make sure people are familiar with it and know that it adds something, more than just changing the name and everything else remains the same." (Current Holder, Private Sector)

Annex 8

Charter Mark Review Research - Members of the public



Charter Mark: Research among the Public Summary of Findings

This research among the general public follows on an earlier programme of research conducted by Creative Research among current, lapsed and potential holders of Charter Mark and assessors of the scheme. It aims to address the following objectives:

Understanding of what constitutes good customer service

Awareness of, and attitudes to, quality marks

Experience of quality marks and their influence on 'purchase' decisions

Expectations of a quality mark in the public sector including the criteria it should meet

Ideas to ensure the credibility of the scheme.

Six discussion groups were held with the public structured by lifestage, socio-economic group and whether the person was working or had worked, in the public sector.

Key Findings

There was broad agreement on the **principal features of good service** across sectors and the relevance of these as **criteria for a quality mark in the public sector**. Some of these features related to how the service was delivered by individual staff members and others to how it was delivered as an organisation. They were as follows:

personal characteristics of staff at the customer interface; appearance, welcome, courtesy, communication skills, attitude, honesty etc.

'product' knowledge

a willingness to take ownership of a customer's request or complaint

efficient organisation of resources to address the customer's needs including accessibility and timeliness of response

consistency of service standards so that customers know the service they can expect

communication at all stages of the process in order to understand the customer's needs, keep them informed of progress, manage their expectations and check on satisfaction levels

well organised after 'sales' service and complaints handling.

Across the groups, there was some **awareness of quality marks and schemes** but this proved a catch-all for a wide range of statutory inspections and optional schemes, internal minimum service standards and quality control procedures. Awareness came from the workplace as employees rather more than the marketplace as 'customers'.

As 'customers', the marks that carried most weight were those that indicated a product or service was associated with a tangible level of quality and/or was backed by guarantees. More generally, there was **scepticism about the value of many 'awards'** based on their sheer number, a lack of knowledge about what underpinned them (reinforced by negative publicity about meaningless awards), questions about an organisation's motivation for 'acquiring' them, and most importantly, a lack of positive experience that suggested they offered a markedly better service.

While there was some support for quality schemes in the workplace, there was also a **high level of cynicism** based on experience of the manipulation of situations or figures to achieve targets, a sense that little changed or did so only temporarily, and a feeling that schemes could 'get in the way' of doing the job. These attitudes were compounded by the multiplicity of initiatives facing employees of the public sector in particular.

The **attitude to the further development of a scheme** to encourage excellent customer service in the public sector was obviously influenced by this experience but also by a perception that while the intention to provide high levels of customer service was laudable, very often other factors came into play that made this difficult. Most however, were willing to admit that it might have an influence on decisions where they had a choice of say, a doctor's surgery, but only as one of the influencing factors.

A number of suggestions were made for **enhancing the credibility** of any such award but central to these was the actual experience of the service, summed up as

Delivery of an excellent service by staff who care about the customer, day in, day out

The other spontaneously mentioned criteria (some by very small numbers) were as follows:

involvement of staff at all levels

bringing sub-contracted staff on board (individuals and outsourced service suppliers)

responsibility for customer service located at a high level in the organisation

involvement of the public in development of the service and ongoing feedback

information provided to the public about the award

design of the standard so that it addresses some of the factors that impact on customer service eg. staffing and resourcing, consistency across organisations

an awarding body with a reputation for expertise in the field

inspectors who are independent and spot inspections

the possible involvement of the private sector as eligible candidates, spokespeople, the awarding body

a cost to organisations that does not prevent them investing in the staff and resources needed to provide a good service.

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