Learning and Skills Council

Framework for Excellence: Evaluation of Benefits Realisation

Baseline Report

October 2008
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**APPENDICES**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

1. York Consulting Limited Liability Partnership (YCL) has been commissioned by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to undertake a five–year Evaluation of the Framework for Excellence Benefits Realisation. This Phase One summary presents the baseline findings. An interim report (Phase Two) will be produced in 2010 and a final report (Phase Three) in 2012.

2. The Framework for Excellence is a new performance assessment framework for colleges and providers. It is formed from a small, core set of verifiable indicators that give an overall picture of performance for all providers. These indicators are then combined to provide an overall performance indicator for each provider.

3. The Framework completed a pilot phase involving 100 providers in 2008. This pilot was in preparation for the launch of Version 1 of the Framework which is to be used by all colleges and work–based learning providers in 2008/09. Not all the results of this will not be published externally. Version 2 of the Framework will follow in 2009/10 and will apply to most other providers, such as local authorities and specialist colleges. All results will be published in 2010.

4. The main aim of the evaluation is to understand the impact of the Framework and to assess the realisation of the benefits of the new performance management system underpinned by the Framework as it develops over the next five years. This baseline evaluation phase took place between March and August 2008 and consisted of stakeholder consultations, a survey of 1,053 providers, the collation and analysis of baseline data and 15 in–depth provider case studies. The provider case studies also included consultations with a total of 90 learners and 22 employers.
Knowledge and Understanding

5. General awareness of the Framework for Excellence is high across all providers, although detailed understanding is relatively low. Similarly, not all staff at regional LSC offices currently have a detailed technical understanding of the Framework. The main gap in understanding amongst providers is in relation to the scoring system and the mechanism for calculating the OPR. In-depth knowledge of the Framework tends to be at senior management level and above within those providers that were involved in the piloting of the Framework.

6. Key findings which support these conclusions are as follows:

• the vast majority (97%) of baseline survey providers are aware of the Framework;

• detailed understanding and knowledge of the Framework is fairly low, with only 28% of baseline survey providers stating that they have a high level of understanding;

• in-depth awareness and understanding of the Framework tends to be at a senior management level and above. Teaching level staff have limited knowledge of the Framework;

• baseline survey providers perceive that the most important aim of the Framework for Excellence is to inform decisions made by key stakeholders such as funding and inspection bodies (72% ‘very important’). This is also seen as the aim most likely to be achieved (53% ‘very likely’);

• the use of the Framework as a source of information for potential learners is seen as being the least important aim by baseline survey providers (15% ‘very important’) and also least likely to be achieved (13% ‘very likely’).

7. There is clear articulation of the aims of the Framework for Excellence where understanding is high. However, a perception was that the aims and intended outcomes of the Framework were too ambitious and the Framework was trying to ‘satisfy too many audiences’.
Provider Performance

8. Providers recognise that a key aim of the Framework for Excellence is to provide a mechanism to measure, assess and improve provider performance. Whilst limitations and concerns with the use of the Framework for Excellence for this purpose have been highlighted, including that the information that informs the Framework is largely already being collected by providers, the Framework is seen as a useful mechanism for pulling together this information and presenting it in a different format. There is potential, therefore, for the Framework to provide a “shift in perspective” on practice that the provider is already engaged in, although providers themselves need to take actions to improve quality. The Framework for Excellence itself does not do that.

9. The Framework for Excellence is likely to be integrated within existing processes by providers with well-developed performance management systems in place. For these providers, the Framework is not seen as having the potential to contribute to a dramatic shift in performance.

10. Key findings in relation to the impact of the Framework for Excellence on provider performance are as follows:

- the use of the Framework for Excellence as a measure for assessing provider performance is recognised as being an important aim by providers (86% say important). 84% of providers feel that this aim is likely to be achieved;

- the majority (85%) of baseline survey providers thought that the Framework was important in providing a common framework for measuring performance. Four-fifths (81%) of providers felt that this aim was likely to be achieved;

- just over four-fifths (82%) of baseline survey providers state that driving up provider performance is an important aim of the Framework. A similar proportion (80%) of providers believe that this aim is likely to be achieved;
• the majority (84%) of baseline survey providers believe that the Framework will be important as a management tool for self-regulation and improvement. 81% think that this aim is likely to be achieved;

• some concerns with the Framework have been highlighted. These include: perceptions that it is complex, yet too simplistic; concerns over the ability to compare providers when there are exemptions from certain indicators, and the view that there is an over-reliance on the financial indicators.

Impact on Bureaucracy

11. The implementation of the Framework is not perceived as a significant additional burden for those providers who have well developed performance management systems in place. In such cases, the Framework is being encompassed within existing processes and, where possible is also being aligned to current systems to avoid duplication.

12. Providers do not see the Framework for Excellence as contributing to reduced bureaucracy in the FE sector. Three-quarters (76%) of baseline survey providers feel that the Framework will not result in reduced bureaucracy within the sector.

Benefit to Learners

13. Around half of providers believe that the Framework will have a positive impact on learner satisfaction and retention rates.

14. Providers are sceptical, however, as to the value of the Framework in assisting learner decision-making as to their choice of provider. This was also reflected in consultations with learners. The use of the Framework as a source of information for learners is seen by providers as being the least important aim, and also the aim least likely to be achieved.
15. Learners currently choose providers largely based on location, reputation and recommendation from friends. Almost all learners consulted make decisions about their choice of provider without having a detailed knowledge of how that provider performs. Some learners do recognise the value of the Framework in being able to compare performance across providers. However, the value of referring to the Framework scores is not strong enough to override the other factors involved in the decision-making process.

16. Key findings on the benefits of the Framework for Excellence to learners are as follows:

- just over half (53%) of baseline survey providers feel that the Framework will have a positive impact upon learner satisfaction rates (12% a ‘great deal’);
- just under half (45%) of baseline survey providers believe that the Framework will have a positive impact upon retention rates;
- two-fifths of baseline survey providers feel that the Framework is important as a source of information for learners. Around half (49%) of providers believe that this aim is likely to be achieved;
- two-fifths (44%) of baseline survey providers perceive the Framework to be useful for learners in making choices about providers;
- a third (33%) of baseline survey providers perceive that the Framework will have a positive impact on investment by learners in their own learning.

Benefits to Employers

17. Most providers feel that the Framework for Excellence will assist employer decision-making as to their choice of provider. The Framework is seen as being slightly more beneficial to employers than it would be for learners. However, this is seen as being less important than other Framework aims and less likely to be achieved.
18. Employer decisions with regard to their choice of provider tend to be based on an existing relationship, provider flexibility, provider responsiveness and reliability, location, cost, expertise and the quality of facilities. Employers suggest that there could be some value in the Framework when an employer has no prior knowledge, or experience of working with a provider, or in justifying their choice of provider. The Framework scores will not be used in isolation, however, in the decision-making process. Employers are unlikely to use the Framework if they already know the provider, or have an established relationship.

19. Key findings as to how the Framework for Excellence will benefit employers are as follows:

- three-fifths (60%) of baseline survey providers believe that the Framework will be important as a source of information for potential employer customers. Two-thirds of employers (68%) feel that this aim is likely to be achieved;
- three-fifths (59%) of baseline survey providers are of the opinion that the Framework will be useful for employers in making choices;
- over half (53%) of baseline survey providers perceive that the Framework will have a positive impact on employer satisfaction levels;
- a third (37%) of baseline survey providers believe that the Framework will encourage increased employer investment in training.

Commissioning and Intervention and the Reputation of the FE Sector

20. The most important aim of the Framework for Excellence, and the aim most likely to be achieved, is deemed to be that of informing decisions made by key stakeholders such as funding and inspection bodies. Providers anticipate that the Framework will support improved commissioning and more effective intervention.
21. Providers recognise that the Framework for Excellence has the potential to improve the reputation of the FE sector. The implications of the Machinery of Government changes and the notion of where the Framework will 'sit' in the future are seen as critical in this respect.

22. Key findings which support these conclusions are as follows:

- nearly all (95%) baseline survey providers feel that the Framework will be important for informing decisions made by key stakeholders. The vast majority (89%) of providers perceive that this aim is likely to be achieved;

- the great majority (79%) of baseline survey providers expect the Framework to result in improved commissioning by funding bodies;

- three-quarters of baseline survey providers expect the Framework to result in more effective intervention by funding bodies;

- three quarters (78%) of baseline survey providers feel that the Framework will be of importance in improving the FE sector generally. 74% of providers perceive that this aim is likely to be achieved;

- over half (57%) of baseline survey providers anticipate that the Framework will have a positive impact upon the reputation of the FE sector.
1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 York Consulting Limited Liability Partnership (YCL) has been commissioned by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to undertake a five-year Evaluation of the Framework for Excellence Benefits Realisation. This Phase One report presents the baseline findings. An interim report (Phase Two) will be produced in 2010, and a final report (Phase Three) in 2012.

Background – The Framework for Excellence

Context

1.2 The Framework for Excellence is a new performance assessment framework for colleges and providers. It is formed from a small, core set of verifiable indicators that give an overall picture of performance for all providers. These indicators are combined to provide an overall performance indicator for each provider.

1.3 The Framework for Excellence is a central feature of the new performance management arrangements proposed in the recent consultation document ‘Raising Expectations: Enabling the System to Deliver’. The Framework was first announced in the 2006 Further Education White Paper ‘Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances’ supporting its overall themes, including economic mission, employability, and learner and employer choice. It is a key element of the ‘2008–11 Public Service Agreement 2: Improve the skills of the population’, on the way to ensuring a world-class skills base by 2020.
Aims

1.4 The main aims of the Framework are to provide a single, unified framework for assessing and reporting achievement in key areas of performance. It is intended that the Framework will be used to secure the best outcomes for learners and employers, which in turn will contribute to the increased reputation of the FE system. To achieve these aims, the Framework seeks to:

- simplify and streamline quality and performance assessment across providers;
- provide information to learners and employers to help them make decisions;
- provide a management tool for providers to benchmark performance and help them improve quality;
- help Ofsted determine the timing and intensity of inspection, and inform inspection judgements;
- provide a transparent mechanism to enable Ofsted, the LSC and QIA to support and to challenge colleges and providers, in line with their respective remits;
- support moves towards self-regulation.

Structure of the Framework for Excellence

1.5 An outline structure of the Framework is provided in Figure 1.1 below. The performance of providers in a range of areas is assessed through a number of performance indicators (PIs), which are derived from performance measures (drawn from appropriate sources), combined with appropriate assessment criteria (which specify the standards for each indicator):

- the performance indicators are organised into seven key performance areas (KPAs);
- each college’s or provider’s performance in the KPA is aggregated to produce grades for three dimensions (Responsiveness, Effectiveness, Finance);
1.6 The Framework uses a four point scoring system, in line with the Common Inspection Framework. Grades are categorised as outstanding, good, satisfactory or inadequate.

1.7 This report does not provide an in-depth analysis of the appropriateness of the indicators contained within the Framework. A separate study was commissioned by the LSC to look into the extent to which the chosen performance dimensions and supporting indicators are appropriate for, and consistent with, the stated aims of the Framework and whether they are likely to give accurate, robust and discriminatory provider level scores.

**Timing**

1.8 The Framework has recently completed a pilot phase involving 100 providers. This pilot was in preparation for the launch of Version 1 of the Framework which is to be used by all colleges and work-based learning providers in 2008/09. Not all the results of this Version will be published externally.

1.9 Version 2 of the Framework will follow in 2009/10 and will apply to most other providers, such as local authorities and specialist colleges. These results will be published in 2010. By 2010/11 it is anticipated that the programme will be extended to other providers such as Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) with FE provision, and those that are only in receipt of European Social Fund monies. A pilot with School Sixth Forms will take place from September 2009.
Figure 1.1: Structure of the Framework for Excellence

Overall Performance Rating

Responsiveness Dimension

- Key Performance Areas:
  - Responsiveness to learners
  - Responsiveness to employers

- Performance Indicators
  - Performance measures & assessment criteria

Effectiveness Dimension

- Key Performance Areas:
  - Quality of outcomes
  - Quality of provision

- Performance Indicators
  - Performance measures & assessment criteria

Finance Dimension

- Key Performance Areas:
  - Financial health
  - Financial control
  - Use of resources

- Performance Indicators
  - Performance measures & assessment criteria
Evaluation Objectives and Methodology

1.10 The main aim of this evaluation is to understand the impact of the Framework and to assess the realisation of the benefits of the new performance management system underpinned by the Framework as it develops over the next five years.

1.11 The proposed underpinning benefits to this vision, to which the Framework for Excellence will contribute, are highlighted in Table 1.1 below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intended Outcome</th>
<th>Benefit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Improved levels of learner satisfaction, increased retention rates, greater investment by learners in their own learning | • Improved levels of learner satisfaction;  
• Value of reduction in wasted investment in learners who do not complete qualifications successfully;  
• Value of increased private investment by individuals in the cost of their education and training, enabling Government funding to be targeted on areas of market failure;  
• Increased proportion of learners progressing to further education and training or to employment. |
| Higher levels of employer satisfaction, more investment by employers in training | • Higher levels of employer satisfaction;  
• Value of increased employer direct spend in FE system, enabling Government funding to be targeted on areas of market failure.                                                                 |
| Improved provider quality                                                       | • Value of increase in life-time earnings associated with increase in qualification success rates (by increasing the success rates, the number of people achieving the qualification will increase the aggregate life-time earnings benefits for any particular course/college year);  
• Improved value for money to taxpayer and government arising from the increase of the proportion of providers which are outstanding or good (by increasing the success rates – more qualification for the same amount of funding). |
Table 1.1: Proposed Benefits of the new Performance Management System underpinned by the Framework for Excellence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intended Outcome</th>
<th>Benefit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improved commission and intervention</td>
<td>• Value of savings derived from prevention and early identification of problems, which would otherwise be devoted to recovering serious quality, planning or financial problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduced bureaucracy</td>
<td>• Value of provider staff time no longer devoted to unnecessary administration;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Reduction in the overheads intermediary bodies place on the FE system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raise the post-16 sector’s visibility and enhance its reputation</td>
<td>• Improvements in media coverage;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Improvements in public perception of education and training.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Framework for Excellence Business Case (ITT)

Methodology

1.12 Our methodology for this assignment is based on three distinct phases of activity as follows:

- Phase One: Baseline Assessment – March–August 2008;
- Phase Two: Interim Assessment – September–December 2010;
- Phase Three: Final Assessment – October/February 2012.

1.13 The benefits of the Framework for Excellence will accrue over a period of several years for learners. The methodology has therefore been designed to compare developments and report on benefits over a five-year period. This first phase of evaluation activity was important in order to set baselines from which to assess the realisation of benefits over time. The baseline methodology consisted of four key elements of activity:

- consultations with key stakeholders;
- survey of providers;
- provider case studies;
Stakeholder Consultations

1.14 A range of stakeholder organisations, as agreed with the LSC, were consulted as part of this baseline phase of activity. Interviews were held with internal LSC staff as well as a range of other national stakeholder organisations. The focus of these consultations was to obtain stakeholder perceptions on the purpose and benefits of the Framework for Excellence, the benefits of the Framework to providers, employers and learners, and the potential effect of the Framework on the approach to making commissioning decisions.

Provider Survey

1.15 A survey of 1,053 providers was carried out by our project partners, Ipsos MORI, designed to achieve a balance across different provider types. Around 7% (72) of sampled providers had been involved in the piloting phase of the Framework for Excellence. Provider contact details were supplied by the LSC. The survey covered the following issues:

- awareness and knowledge of the Framework for Excellence;
- perceptions on the importance of the aims of the Framework and the likelihood that they are to be achieved;
- perceived benefits of the Framework for Excellence;
- approaches to benchmarking and comparing performance;
- factors that influence learner and employer decision-making with regard to their choice of provider.
1.16 Prior to the main stage of fieldwork a pilot exercise was carried out with 22 providers. The pilot was used to test the length of the questionnaire and to improve the structure and wording of questions. Following this initial pilot stage four questions were removed from the questionnaire in order to reduce the overall survey length. The full final version of the provider survey questionnaire is included as Appendix A.

1.17 In line with the population of providers, the two major groups sampled were private providers and general FE colleges (Table 1.2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provider Type</th>
<th>Number of interviews completed</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Charities/voluntary</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General FE, inc tertiary</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local authority</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisation in business in it’s own right/other private organisation</td>
<td>552</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other public organisation</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sixth form college</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialist college</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data unavailable</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>1,053</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.18 The proportion of interviews completed in each region ranged from 6% to 15%, demonstrating a reasonable spread across the country (Table 1.3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Number of interviews completed</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North East</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yorkshire &amp; Humber</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East of England</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Midlands</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Midlands</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Case Studies

1.19 As part of this baseline phase of activity we carried out 15 provider case studies. The case study sample was drawn up to provide a good representation of different sizes and categories of organisation and to provide a good geographic spread. The case studies included 11 pilot and four non-pilot providers, broken down as follows:

- General FE – five case studies (of which four were pilots);
- Sixth Form College – three case studies (two pilots);
- Work Based Learning – five case studies (three pilots);
- Specialist FE College – two case studies (both pilots).

1.20 The case study process involved consultations with managers and staff in the provider organisations in order to obtain views of the Framework and its likely benefit/impact. This was important in order to establish the baseline behaviours for comparison in subsequent phases of the evaluation. The case studies also provided us with the opportunity to explore the issues covered by the survey in more detail.

1.21 As part of each case study, we also sought to carry out a focus group with learners and consultations with employers. The purpose of these interviews was to provide specific information in relation to how learners/employers make decisions about their choice of provider, the information used to support these decisions, and the potential value/use of the Framework in this process.
1.22 Learner focus groups took place in 13 of the 15 case studies involving a total of 90 learners. We did experience some difficulties in obtaining employer contact details from providers. Providers were sensitive with regard to passing on contact details, and in some cases wanted to speak with employers themselves, prior to them being contacted by YCL. Providers were also concerned about employers experiencing survey fatigue through other government studies. Four of the case study providers were, however, exempt from the ‘responsiveness to employers’ indicator. A total of 22 employers consultations were undertaken across six of the remaining 11 provider case studies.

1.23 Wherever possible we have distinguished between case study providers and baseline survey providers in our analysis. We use the term ‘providers’ to refer to views across both baseline survey and case study providers. We also highlight where these providers have been involved in the piloting of the Framework for Excellence.

**Collation and Analysis of Baseline Data**

1.24 The baseline phase also involved a quantitative analysis of in-house LSC data. This on-going data analysis will be used to assess the high level impact of the Framework for Excellence.
2 KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

Key Findings: Knowledge and Understanding

General awareness of the Framework for Excellence is high across all providers, although detailed understanding is relatively low. Similarly, not all staff at regional LSC offices currently have a detailed technical understanding of the Framework. The main gap in understanding amongst providers is in relation to the scoring system and the mechanism for calculating the OPR. In-depth knowledge of the Framework tends to be at senior management level and above within those providers that were involved in the piloting of the Framework. Key specific points are as follows:

- the vast majority (97%) of baseline survey providers are aware of the Framework for Excellence;
- detailed understanding and knowledge of the Framework is fairly low, with only 28% of baseline survey providers stating that they have a high level of understanding,
- in-depth awareness and understanding of the Framework tends to be at a senior management level and above. Teaching level staff have limited knowledge of the Framework;
- baseline survey providers perceive that the most important aim of the Framework for Excellence is to inform decisions made by key stakeholders such as funding and inspection bodies (72% ‘very important’). This is also seen as the aim most likely to be achieved (53% ‘very likely’);
- the use of the Framework as a source of information for potential learners is seen as being the least important aim by baseline survey providers (15% ‘very important’) and also least likely to be achieved (13% ‘very likely’).

Introduction

2.1 In this section we examine the level of knowledge and understanding of the Framework for Excellence. Specifically, we consider overall awareness of the Framework itself and the level of understanding of its key aims.
Awareness of the Framework for Excellence

2.2 The level of awareness of the Framework for Excellence is high across the baseline survey of providers, although detailed understanding is relatively low (Figure 2.1).

![Figure 2.1: Awareness of the Framework for Excellence](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Awareness</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Involved in the Piloting</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Understanding</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Familiar – don't know detail</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heard of it – understanding limited</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not heard of it</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: 1,053
Source: Ipsos MORI baseline survey of providers

2.3 The majority of providers (94%) have at least heard of the Framework. This breaks down as follows:

- two-thirds of providers (66%) state that they do not have a detailed knowledge of the Framework, or have a limited understanding of the concept;
- over a quarter of providers (28%) have a high level of understanding of the Framework, some as a result of their involvement in the piloting phase. These providers largely feel that they have benefited from this involvement which has raised their understanding ahead of full implementation. They perceive that they are now ‘ahead of the game’.
Awareness by Staff Level

2.4 Staff at senior management level and above tend to have the most detailed understanding of the Framework for Excellence, largely as a result of their primary responsibility for implementation. However, there are examples amongst individuals at a senior management level within non–pilot providers, who have low levels of awareness and limited familiarity with the concept and how the Framework will be used.

2.5 Staff at a teaching/practitioner level in pilot providers have generally heard of the Framework, although their technical knowledge and understanding of the underpinning detail is limited:

“Teaching staff probably know the term, but not the detail" (Case Study, Pilot FE College)

“Awareness at a staff level is patchy" (Case study, Pilot FE College)

2.6 Teaching staff in non–pilot providers generally remain to be briefed on the Framework, and so awareness is perceived to be very low. These providers say they are waiting until the Framework is more “concrete", before briefing staff, as they feel that the current version is likely to change.

Awareness by Provider Type

2.7 Detailed understanding of the Framework is highest among FE colleges. Two–thirds (65%) of FE colleges have a good understanding of the Framework as result of either being involved in the pilot or through general knowledge and awareness. Around three quarters of charity/voluntary organisations (77%), organisations in business in their own right (75%) and other public organisations (79%) state that they do not know much about the detail of the Framework, or have a limited understanding.
Awareness by Provider Size

2.8 Larger baseline survey providers tend to have a better understanding of the Framework for Excellence than smaller providers. Just under half (49%) of providers with 10,000+ learners have a good understanding of the Framework, compared to 16% of providers with between 50 and 249 learners, and 12% of providers with less than 50 learners.

Employer and Learner Awareness

2.9 Consultations with employers and learners reveal virtually no awareness of the Framework for Excellence at this point in time. This is unsurprising given that no external communication or marketing has taken place. Learners who have any awareness are most likely to be involved with the student union or act as course representatives.

Dissemination and Information Provision

2.10 Information sharing about the technical elements of the Framework and its implementation has tended to take place at a management level and above. This has taken place through a variety of means, including management team meetings, board meetings and annual management conferences.

2.11 Providers have generally adopted a ‘top–down’ approach to communicating information about the Framework, using mechanisms that they feel best suit the culture and size of their organisation. This includes sharing information via formal staff meetings, informal staff discussions, uploading information on the Framework on to the provider intranet and communicating details of the Framework via the staff newsletter. Providers are, however, unable to articulate at this stage which of these means are more effective in raising awareness of the Framework.
2.12 More specific examples of sharing information include the setting up of a Framework for Excellence ‘working party’ at one further education college, involving senior management, the finance manager, data manager and employer representatives. The whole Framework for Excellence process is managed through this working party, with all discussions/outcomes from the group disseminated to the rest of the college via the virtual learning environment.

2.13 At one work–based learning provider, they have set up a quality assurance group, which includes representatives from each department and area of learning plus members of the data team. The group receive regular presentations and updates on the Framework. This then provides the opportunity for members of the group to informally update other provider staff.

**Peer Learning and LSC Support**

2.14 Providers have been able to gain further information with regard to the Framework by attending peer–learning events. There were examples of case study pilot providers attending regional quality forums to inform non–pilot providers about the Framework, to discuss their experiences, and address specific queries, which are seen as beneficial.

2.15 Providers, particularly those not involved in the piloting process, are also positive about the benefits of attending the LSC–run Framework for Excellence regional provider forums. The events provide the opportunity for providers to obtain more detailed information on the Framework and to ask specific questions. Indeed, providers involved in the piloting of the Framework generally feel that the LSC is playing a supportive role. Activities such as providing information, listening to comments, taking on board feedback and responding to issues raised are appreciated, as demonstrated by the following views:
“The pilot felt like an iterative process” (Case Study, Pilot Special College)

“The LSC team are trying to make the Framework fit for purpose. They have been open and listened.” (Case Study, Pilot FE College)

2.16 Despite pilot providers having a largely positive view of the support from the LSC, they do highlight areas where they would benefit from further clarity. The main area is in relation to how the performance scores are derived, with some providers expressing confusion as to how the individual performance scores and OPR are derived:

“We received an A4 sheet (from the LSC) with numbers on it, but no explanation of where the numbers came from or how the scores were calculated.” (Case Study, Pilot Sixth Form College)

“The Framework still feels a bit like a ‘black box’, where numbers go in and scores come out.” (Case Study, Pilot FE College)

“It would be nice to know what you need to do to get an ‘outstanding grade’ and how the scores are calculated.” (Case Study, Pilot Sixth Form College)

2.17 These providers state that they would benefit from further guidance from the LSC on the combination rules and the mechanism for calculating overall scores. Some non–pilot providers also express confusion about the exact make-up of some of the indicators. They feel that they would benefit from further detail on whether the indicators would be tailored to different types of providers and the make up of the specific indicators.

Regional LSC Staff Awareness

2.18 Consultations with regional LSC staff (Partnership Managers and Provider Development Managers) reveal that regional staff have been quite heavily involved in the tests and trials side, but less so during the piloting stage of the Framework.
2.19 Some regional LSC office contacts state that the technical level of understanding of the Framework needs to be addressed if their staff are to provide appropriate guidance to providers as to how the Framework should be implemented. This is seen as being a particular challenge where there is a need to engage and support those providers that do not attend regional briefing events and have negative views towards the Framework. There are also examples of where information has gone out from national office to providers before regional offices have received the information, which is not deemed as being helpful when trying to resolve provider queries.

Aims of the Framework for Excellence

2.20 Over three-quarters (77%) of providers are able to articulate at least one of the specific aims of the Framework for Excellence (Figure 2.2). Two-fifths (39%) of providers are able to articulate at least two aims.

![Figure 2.2: Number of specific aims of the Framework Excellence articulated](image)

Base: 995
Source: Ipsos MORI baseline survey of providers
2.21 Performance measurement and improvement are the most commonly cited aims of the Framework for Excellence among baseline providers (Figure 2.31). Over three-fifths (62%) recognise the importance of the Framework as a performance measurement tool. The Framework is seen as having the potential to simplify the system, to create a consistent measurement system and to create a greater transparency around the sector in relation to provider performance. Around a quarter (27%) of providers suggest that the main aim of the Framework is to raise standards within the FE sector.

![Figure 2.3: Main aims of the Framework for Excellence](image)

**Base:** 995

**Source:** Ipsos MORI baseline survey of providers

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1For the purposes of this analysis we have used three broad categories which encompass the specific aims of the Framework. *Performance Measurement/Improvement* (‘measure for assessing provider performance’; ‘common framework for measuring performance’; ‘drive performance within providers’; ‘management tool for self-regulation and self-improvement’), *Raising Standards* (‘raise standards’; ‘improve FE sector generally’) and *Information provision* (‘information to learners’; ‘information to employers’; inform decision-making by other key stakeholders’).
2.22 Analysis of provider views on the specific aims of the Framework highlight that providers most commonly see its purpose as being to provide a common framework for measuring performance (29%), or as a measure for assessing provider performance (26%). Just under a quarter of providers (24%) believe that the aim of the Framework is to drive performance within providers.

2.23 Use of the Framework as a measure for assessing provider performance (22%) and a common framework for measuring performance (22%) are also most commonly cited when providers could articulate just one aim of the Framework for Excellence. Driving performance improvements in providers is the most commonly cited aim when providers could articulate three or four specific aims of the Framework for Excellence.

2.24 Information provision to learners, employers and stakeholders (13%) is not seen by baseline survey providers as being a key aim of the Framework for Excellence. Analysis of provider views on the specific aims shows that fewer than one in ten providers believe that the main aim of the Framework is to provide information to potential learners (7%) or to potential employer customers (6%) to inform their decision-making. This is probably linked to general doubt amongst providers that these aims are likely to be achieved.

**Getting the Aims and Benefits in Perspective**

2.25 The intended aims and benefits of the Framework are perceived by some providers and key stakeholders as being too wide-ranging. In particular, they feel that the LSC needs to be more realistic about the scope of the Framework for Excellence. There is a perception that the Framework is trying to do too many things and 'satisfy too many audiences', as indicated by the following views:

"The vision statement is too grandiose. There appears to be an expectation that the Framework will produce miracles on its own. It can only contribute a limited amount." (Stakeholder)
2.26 It is felt that there is a need for the LSC to manage expectations about what the Framework can realistically achieve. In some cases, this could be as simple as clarifying provider understanding as to what the Framework is designed to achieve. For example, emphasising that the Framework is a performance ‘assessment’ tool, rather than a provider ‘development’ tool in order to ensure that providers have realistic expectations as to what the Framework has been designed to achieve.

Importance of Aims and Likelihood of being Achieved

2.27 Provider views on the importance of the aims of the Framework for Excellence versus the likelihood of them being achieved are shown in Figure 2.4. This shows perceptions as to whether these aims are ‘very important’ and ‘very likely’ to be achieved.

2.28 Figure 2.4 highlights the scepticism that exists among some providers as to whether the aims of the Framework for Excellence will be fulfilled. In all but one case (raising standards), providers are of the opinion that the specific aims are of greater importance than they are likely to be achieved. Generally however, the more important the aim, the more likely providers see this aim being achieved.

2.29 The most important aim of the Framework for Excellence, according to providers, is informing decisions made by key stakeholders such as funding and inspection bodies (72% ‘very important’). This is also seen as being the aim most likely to be achieved (53% very likely). We explore this in more detail in Section Seven.
2.30 The use of the Framework as a source of information for potential learners is deemed as being least important and least likely to be achieved compared with other aims. We examine the possible reasons for this in more detail in Sections Five and Six.
Learning and Skills Council

Figure 2.4: Importance of Aims and Likelihood of being Achieved

Base: 995
Source: Ipsos MORI baseline survey of providers
3 PROVIDER PERFORMANCE

Key Findings: Provider Performance

Providers recognise that a key aim of the Framework for Excellence is to provide a mechanism to measure, assess and improve provider performance. Whilst limitations and concerns with the use of the Framework for Excellence for this purpose have been highlighted, including that the information that informs the Framework is largely already being collected by providers, the Framework is seen as a useful mechanism for pulling together this information and presenting it in a different format. Therefore there is potential for the Framework to provide a “shift in perspective” on practice that the provider is already engaged in, although providers themselves need to take actions to improve quality. The Framework for Excellence itself does not do that. Key specific points are as follows:

- the use of the Framework for Excellence as a measure for assessing provider performance is recognised as being an important aim by providers (86% say important). 84% of providers feel that this aim is likely to be achieved;
- the majority (85%) of baseline survey providers thought that the Framework was important in providing a common framework for measuring performance. Four-fifths (81%) of providers felt that this aim was likely to be achieved;
- just over four-fifths of (82%) of baseline survey providers state that driving up provider performance is an important aim of the Framework. A similar proportion (80%) of providers believe that this aim is likely to be achieved;
- the majority (84%) of baseline survey providers believe that the Framework will be important as a management tool for self-regulation and improvement. 81% think that this aim is likely to be achieved;
- however, some concerns with the Framework have been highlighted. These include: perceptions that it is complex, yet too simplistic; concerns over the ability to compare providers when there are exemptions from certain indicators, and the view that there is an over-reliance on the financial indicators.
Introduction

3.1 In this section of the report we consider the impacts of the Framework for Excellence on provider performance. Specifically, we look at the following:

- the value of the Framework as a measure for assessing provider performance;
- the value of the Framework as a common framework for measuring performance;
- the ability of the Framework to drive up providers' performance;
- the use of the Framework as a management tool for self-regulation and improvement.

3.2 It is intended that improvements in adaptability, quality, and fitness for purpose by providers will lead to improvements in success rates, an increase in the proportion of providers that are outstanding or good, and improvements in value for money and returns on public investment.

3.3 It is also envisaged that the rationalisation and simplification of quality and performance frameworks in the FE system will lead to reductions of the budgets of intermediary bodies, and of the amount of resources devoted by providers to meeting the requirements of diverse and different frameworks. Government policy implies that such savings should translate into increased resources for teaching and learning.

Measure for Assessing Provider Performance

3.4 The use of the Framework as a measure for assessing provider performance is recognised as being an important aim by providers (Figure 3.1). A majority (86%) of baseline survey providers perceive that this is an important aim, with half (50%) of providers suggesting it is 'very important'.
3.5 There is a strong consensus that the Framework for Excellence will achieve the aim of providing a measure to assess provider performance (Figure 3.1). A similar majority of providers (84%) feel that this aim is likely to be achieved, with two-fifths (39%) indicating that it is ‘very likely’ to be realised.

3.6 Providers see the Framework as aligning to existing key priorities and standards, with links into existing performance management systems that are in operation. Some providers are proactively seeking to link the Framework into internal quality systems. This involves building the Framework into the self-assessment process by re-writing the self-assessment report structure in line with the Framework.
3.7 Further examples of how the Framework will be used to inform performance management alongside existing systems is demonstrated by one work-based learning provider. This provider operates a ‘Quality Squares’ performance/quality management system. ‘Quality Squares’ were developed to measure and improve staff member’s performance in each process in a business, with measurements of performance ranging from ‘outstanding’ to ‘inadequate’. The provider is seeking to link the Framework into the quality squares system.

3.8 Whilst awareness and understanding may be variable, use of the Framework as a tool for assessing provider performance is seen as being relevant to staff at all levels within a provider. At a Governors/Executive Board level the Framework may be used as another measure of quality assessment and as a mechanism for performance improvement. Providers suggest that the Framework scores will instigate debate and will create a duty on governors to reflect hard on the performance of the provider. Providers recognise that governors may want to use the Framework as an on-going monitoring tool, to manage staff and as an instrument for improvement.

3.9 Staff below this senior tier are also seen as likely to have a vested interest in the Framework performance scores. For example, Heads of Service/Departments have to report on and manage their budgets so this process will have a direct impact upon the financial indicators. Teaching staff will also be interested in the student success rates and learner satisfaction scores. This emphasises the importance for providers to raise awareness and knowledge of the Framework amongst staff throughout the organisation.
A Common Framework for Measuring Performance – Provider Benchmarking

3.10 One of the key aims of the Framework for Excellence is to provide a management tool for providers to benchmark performance in order to help them improve quality. The vast majority of baseline survey providers benchmark their performance against that of other providers (Figure 3.2).

3.11 Two-thirds (67%) of providers undertake benchmarking on a frequent basis. This is most prevalent among school sixth forms/sixth form colleges (93%), special colleges (91%) and general FE colleges (90%) by provider type. A fifth (22%) of providers ‘sometimes’ benchmark themselves against other providers. Only a tenth of providers rarely/never carry out benchmarking activity.

3.12 Benchmarking would appear to take place on a more regular basis in larger baseline survey providers than smaller providers. For example, around four-fifths of providers with 10,000+ learners (79%) and providers with between 5,000 and 9,999 learners benchmark on a frequent basis, compared to just over half (55%) of providers with less than 50 learners.

3.13 The main reasons given by the small proportion of baseline providers (4%) who never benchmark their performance against other providers was the perception of a lack of benefit of doing so (27%), insufficient resource/time (16%) and contentment with current performance (11%). Two-fifths (40%) of baseline survey providers who do not currently benchmark plan to do so in the future.
Provider Type

3.14 Benchmarking by baseline survey providers takes place against a range of providers (Figure 3.3) including local providers (71%), regional providers (71%) and providers outside the region (63%). Providers are far more likely to benchmark their performance against LSC-funded providers (81%) than private-funded organisations (32%).
Figure 3.3: Providers used to Benchmark Performance against

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provider Type</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other providers locally</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other providers in region</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other providers outside region</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LSC - funded providers</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private - funded providers</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: 999,
Source: Ipsos MORI baseline survey of providers

3.15 Provider case studies identified a range of approaches to benchmarking, with the approach adopted largely being dependent on the requirements of the individual provider. Approaches to benchmarking include the following:

- peer review groups;
- informal networking groups which provide the opportunity to share good practice);
- regional benchmarking groups;
- a National cycle of benchmarking on an annual basis, using Ofsted grades, success rates and equalities data;
- benchmarking with other similar providers (i.e. specialist colleges), or with similar cohorts of learners.
3.16 A third (34%) of baseline survey providers have commissioned their own external research, or paid for benchmarking services to compare their performance against that of other providers. This is most common in special colleges (82%), general FE colleges (67%) and school sixth forms/sixth form colleges (63%).

3.17 As would be expected, larger baseline survey providers are more likely to commission their own external research or pay for benchmarking services. Nearly two-thirds (65%) of providers with 10,000+ learners say that they do this, compared to 17% of providers with between 50 and 249 learners and 13% of providers with less than 50 learners.

**Benchmarking Information Used**

3.18 The vast majority (85%) of baseline survey providers use five, or more, types of information for benchmarking purposes (Figure 3.4). Over half (51%) of providers use at least eight types of specific information.

![Figure 3.4: Number of specific information sources used for benchmarking](image)

Base: 1,053
Source: Ipsos MORI baseline survey of providers
3.19 The range of information sources used for benchmarking are highlighted in Figure 3.5. Success rates (95%) and inspection grades (91%) are the most common information sources used.

3.20 In addition, a broad range of information is used by providers to benchmark themselves against other providers. For example, one non-pilot Sixth Form College shares detailed financial information and other data with other similar colleges in the country. One benefit of this was that they found out that one provider had significantly lower insurance costs. They were able to contact this other provider, find out who their insurer was and then switched their insurance, thus saving them a considerable amount of money. The Framework for Excellence is seen as being valuable in order to compare the financial performance of all providers. It could facilitate providers to contact those with strong financial performance in order to understand how they manage this.
Figure 3.5: Information used for Benchmarking Purposes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information Used</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Success rates</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspection grades</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Targets</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement of external quality standards</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Levels of learner satisfaction</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learner enrolments</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Levels of employer satisfaction</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range of qualifications offered</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial information</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learner destinations</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volumes of training delivered to employers</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: 999
Source: Ipsos MORI baseline survey of providers
3.21 The value of the Framework for Excellence for benchmarking purposes is emphasised by the significant proportion (85%) of providers who believe the Framework to be important in providing a common framework for measuring performance (Figure 3.6). Half (50%) of providers indicate that this is a 'very important' aim.

![Figure 3.6: Importance of the Framework as a Common Framework for Measuring Performance and Likelihood of being Achieved](image_url)

*Base: 995
Source: Ipsos MORI baseline survey of providers*

3.22 The Framework is seen as a useful mechanism for pulling together the information and presenting it in a consistent format. While it is recognised that the information informing the Framework is already being collected by providers, it is traditionally presented in a different format. The way that the information is presented in the Framework should therefore make it easier to compare performance against that of other providers.
3.23 There is a high level of agreement amongst providers that the aim of providing a common framework for measuring performance is likely to be achieved. Four-fifths (81%) of providers believe that this aim is likely to be achieved, with just under a third (30%) of providers stating that this is 'very likely'.

**Links to Inspection**

3.24 An issue raised by some providers is how the Framework for Excellence will operate alongside the current inspection regime. It is felt that there is potential for some 'blurring at the edges' between the Framework and inspection. In particular this is because the inspection grade, as an output of the inspection process, is used to inform the Framework, which is then used as an input to inspection. The revised inspection handbook for September 2008 includes information on how inspectors will begin to take account of performance scores from the Framework.

**Driving up Providers' Performance**

3.25 There is a high level of agreement amongst providers that the Framework will assist in driving up performance levels (Figure 3.7). The vast majority (82%) of baseline survey providers recognise driving up providers’ performance as being an important aim of the Framework. School sixth forms/sixth form colleges (67% said was important) see less importance in the role of the Framework in contributing to performance improvement than other provider types.
3.26 Two-fifths (80%) of providers stated that the Framework is likely to drive up providers’ performance, with around a quarter (23%) believing that this is ‘very likely’. School sixth forms/sixth form colleges also feel that this aim is less likely to be achieved than other provider types (64% likely to be achieved).

3.27 In-depth consultation with providers revealed that the potential main benefit of the Framework for Excellence in terms of performance improvement is the “shift in perspective” which the Framework has brought about, and the provision of a different viewpoint on practices that providers are already engaged in. This change in perspective can be focused on a variety of areas including; thinking about learner progress and learner satisfaction, developing relationships with employers, and providers being more outward-facing in relation to sharing good practice. The Framework is also recognised as having the capacity to provide early warning signals of severe risk to provider performance. In theory, it will enable providers to address performance issues earlier, without having to wait for an external assessment of their performance.
3.28 There is scepticism among some case study providers however as to the extent to which the Framework will influence performance improvement. This is particularly the case in light of some of the concerns highlighted previously. For example, concern that the Framework is making use of data that is already being collected, or that it is not seen as adding a great deal to the providers’ existing self-assessment process. Indeed, one non-pilot FE College questioned whether the Framework itself will contribute to performance improvement. They stated that their focus will always be on trying to deliver a quality learner experience, and they will only look at the Framework scores as a means of further examining areas of strength and weakness.

3.29 Overall, provider feedback suggests that the extent to which the Framework will be used as a performance management/improvement tool, will depend on how advanced providers are in relation to performance management. For those providers that have well developed, in-depth performance management systems in place, the Framework is likely to be encompassed within existing processes. Some measures may provide additional insight into performance, but the Framework is not necessarily seen as having the potential to contribute to a dramatic shift in performance.

Improved Provider Quality

3.30 Providers perceive that the Framework for Excellence will result in improved provider quality (Figure 3.8). Three quarters (76%) of baseline survey providers stated that the Framework is likely to influence this.

3.31 Half (49%) of providers believe that quality is likely to improve a ‘fair amount’, with a quarter (27%) suggesting that quality will increase a ‘great deal’. Specialist colleges are far less likely than other provider types to state that quality would improve (50%).
3.32 The potential for the Framework for Excellence to encourage perverse incentives is a key concern expressed by providers in relation to the issue of improving quality. It is suggested that providers may manipulate their behaviour in order to get a higher Framework score, to the detriment of quality.

3.33 For example, one inner-city FE College that was involved in the piloting of the Framework has a high proportion of students from ethnic minorities, whose first language is not English. These groups traditionally have low achievement rates. They feel that the Framework fails to capture their approach to social inclusion/community responsiveness and therefore there would be some value in having a metric within the Framework that reflects the diversity and make-up of the local community. Although it was not a policy that they themselves would adopt, they expressed concern that without this allowance, providers could be tempted to avoid recruiting students who are unlikely to succeed. This could result in a less inclusive culture.
3.34 Further examples of perverse behaviours highlighted by providers as a result of the Framework included providers dropping their lowest performing courses and over-surveying learners as part of the satisfaction survey and then removing the most critical/negative responses.

Management Tool for Self–Regulation and Improvement

3.35 It is anticipated that the Framework will provide the ‘foundation for self-regulation by demonstrating the maturity, high quality, adaptability and fitness of the sector against independent and objective criteria, and by providing a set of standards for institutions to manage their own affairs and, by exception, to intervene to maintain standards’.

3.36 A high proportion (84%) of baseline survey providers recognise the importance of the Framework for Excellence as a management tool for self-regulation and improvement (Figure 3.9). Half (50%) of providers state that this is a ‘very important’ aim.
3.37 Four-fifths (81%) of baseline survey providers perceive that the Framework is likely to be used as a tool for self-regulation and improvement, with a third (32%) of providers holding the view that this aim is ‘very likely’ to be achieved. There was a feeling amongst some providers that public assurance in relation to provider performance could therefore come through the Framework when Ofsted is ‘retreating’ from the sector.

3.38 There is, however, some scepticism as to the extent to which the Framework is encouraging a move towards self-regulation. Some case study providers feel that the Framework has been ‘imposed’ upon them and therefore query whether an externally driven and assessed tool is a move towards self-regulation. In these cases, working towards a Framework for Excellence score may not necessarily be a great driver towards self-improvement.

Raising Standards

3.39 Three-quarters (77%) of baseline survey providers believe that the Framework will be important in raising standards within their organisations (Figure 3.10). Two-fifths (39%) of providers feel this to be a ‘very important’ aim of the Framework for Excellence. This aim is seen as being of less importance in school sixth forms/sixth form colleges (58% important) than in other provider types.
Learning and Skills Council

Figure 3.10: Importance of the Framework in Raising Standards in Providers & Likelihood of being Achieved

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance</th>
<th>Likelihood</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very</td>
<td>Fairly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Very</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: 995
Source: Ipsos MORI baseline survey of providers

3.40 The vast majority (81%) of providers perceive that the Framework is likely to raise standards within their organisation. Two-fifths (40%) of providers suggest that this aim is ‘very likely’ to be achieved. School sixth forms/sixth form colleges also feel that this aim is less likely to be achieved than other provider types (67% likely to be achieved).
4 IMPACT ON BUREAUCRACY

Key Findings: Impact on Bureaucracy

The implementation of the Framework is not perceived as a significant additional burden for those providers who have well developed performance management systems in place. In such cases, the Framework is being encompassed within existing processes and, where possible, being aligned to current systems to avoid duplication.

Providers do not see the Framework for Excellence as contributing to reduced bureaucracy in the FE sector. Three-quarters (76%) of baseline survey providers feel that the Framework will not result in reduced bureaucracy within the sector.

Introduction

4.1 In this section we consider the potential for the Framework for Excellence to reduce bureaucracy within the sector.

4.2 The LSC aim is to keep the Framework as simple as possible, using existing data and systems wherever possible, with any new data requirements and assessment methods being kept to a minimum. The LSC state that they do not want to add to the burden on colleges and providers inappropriately.

Baseline Data

4.3 As part of the approach to monitoring the intended outcomes from the Framework for Excellence, two measures of reduced bureaucracy have been identified:

- value of provider staff time no longer devoted to unnecessary administration;
- reduction in the overhead intermediary bodies place on the FE system.
4.4 Both of these measures are informed by intermediary body budgets. This data will be available in due course.

**Impact upon Bureaucracy**

4.5 Providers are yet to be convinced that the Framework for Excellence will reduce bureaucracy in the sector (Figure 4.1). Over three-quarters (76%) of baseline survey providers predict that there will be little/no reduction in bureaucracy. FE Colleges (55%) and Sixth Form Colleges (60%) were more likely than other provider types to say that the Framework for Excellence will have no impact upon reducing bureaucracy within the sector.

![Figure 4.1: Extent to which the Framework will Reduce Bureaucracy within the Sector](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Reduction</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A great deal</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A fair amount</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very much</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: 995
Source: MORI baseline survey of providers 2008

4.6 Only a fifth (20%) of baseline survey providers anticipate that the Framework will result in reduced bureaucracy. Small providers are more likely to say that bureaucracy will be reduced in the sector. Just under a quarter (24%) of providers with less than 50 learners feel that the Framework for Excellence will help to reduce bureaucracy in the sector, compared to 9% of providers with 10,000+ learners.
4.7 More in-depth consultation with providers involved in the pilot revealed that although the Framework is not currently seen as reducing bureaucracy, nor is it seen as leading to a significant additional burden where providers have well developed performance management systems in place. This can be seen in the following views:

“It is not a significant amount of work. We just needed to tweak our systems.” (Case study, Pilot WBL Provider)

“The implementation of the Framework does not require a significant change in the way that the college currently functions.” (Case Study, Pilot FE College)

“The Framework is not a huge stretch in terms of implementation.” (Case Study, Pilot FE College)

4.8 The Framework is being encompassed within existing processes operated by these providers and, where possible is being aligned to current systems to avoid duplication. These providers are therefore confident that the implementation of the Framework for Excellence will not have a significant impact upon additional bureaucracy.

4.9 Case study providers that have not been involved in the piloting of the Framework are more wary of the potential impact upon bureaucracy and additional resource. There is concern that staff time will be taken up collating the information and coordinating the surveys that will inform the Framework. Raising their awareness of the Framework and the processes involved in implementation may help to reduce any concerns that providers have.
5 BENEFITS TO LEARNERS

Key Findings: Benefits to Learners

Around half of providers believe that the Framework will have a positive impact on learner satisfaction and retention rates. Providers are sceptical, however, as to the value of the Framework in assisting learner decision-making as to their choice of provider. This was also reflected in consultations with learners. The use of the Framework as a source of information for learners is seen as being the least important aim, and also the aim least likely to be achieved by providers. Key specific points are as follows:

- just over half (53%) of baseline survey providers feel that the Framework will have a positive impact upon learner satisfaction rates;
- just under half (45%) of baseline survey providers believe that the Framework will have a positive impact upon retention rates;
- two-fifths of baseline survey providers feel that the Framework is important as a source of information for learners. Around half (49%) of providers believe that this aim is likely to be achieved;
- two-fifths (44%) of baseline survey providers perceive the Framework to be useful for learners in making choices about providers;
- a third (33%) of baseline survey providers perceive that the Framework will have a positive impact on investment by learners in their own learning.

Introduction

5.1 In this section we consider the benefits of the Framework to learners. Specifically, we consider the following:

- baseline data measures of learner benefits;
- benefits;
- learner choice;
- use of the Framework as a source of information for learners.
Baseline Data

5.2 As part of the approach to monitoring the intended outcomes from the Framework for Excellence, four measures of improved learner choice have been identified:

- levels of learner satisfaction;
- value of reduction in wasted investment in learners who do not complete the course of study for a qualification;
- value of increased private investment by individuals in the cost of their education and training, enabling Government funding to be targeted on areas of market failure;
- increased proportion of learners progressing to further education and training or to employment.

Levels of Learner Satisfaction

Framework for Excellence Learner Survey Data

5.3 The Framework for Excellence Learner Views Survey was conducted with 79,049 learners. The purpose of the survey was to capture learner views on their learning experience.

5.4 The vast majority (91%) of learners are satisfied with their college/provider overall (Table 5.1). Three-fifths (61%) of learners are extremely/very satisfied.
Table 5.1: Learner satisfaction/dissatisfaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>College/Provider Overall (%)</th>
<th>Quality of teaching on their course(s) (%)</th>
<th>Level of support received (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extremely satisfied</td>
<td>16.40%</td>
<td>20.70%</td>
<td>17.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very satisfied</td>
<td>44.50%</td>
<td>45.80%</td>
<td>39.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly satisfied</td>
<td>30.10%</td>
<td>25.80%</td>
<td>29.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied</td>
<td>5.00%</td>
<td>3.90%</td>
<td>8.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly dissatisfied</td>
<td>1.40%</td>
<td>1.40%</td>
<td>2.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very dissatisfied</td>
<td>0.40%</td>
<td>0.30%</td>
<td>0.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely dissatisfied</td>
<td>0.30%</td>
<td>0.20%</td>
<td>0.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No reply</td>
<td>1.80%</td>
<td>1.90%</td>
<td>2.30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: LSC Framework for Excellence Learner Views Survey

5.5 The vast majority (92%) of learners are satisfied with the quality of teaching on their course(s) (Table 5.1). Two-thirds (67%) of learners are extremely/very satisfied.

5.6 Over four-fifths (86%) of learners are satisfied with the level of support you receive from their college/provider (Table 5.1). Over half (57%) are extremely/very satisfied.

5.7 The vast majority (85%) of learners think that the information and advice offered by their college/provider about their course during induction was good (Table 5.2). Over half (56%) think that the information and advice offered is extremely/very good.
Table 5.2: Learner Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information and advice offered by their college/provider about their course(s) during induction (%)</th>
<th>Information and advice offered by their college/provider about the different options available to them once they have completed their course(s) (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extremely good</td>
<td>16.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very good</td>
<td>40.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly good</td>
<td>28.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither good nor poor</td>
<td>7.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly poor</td>
<td>1.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very poor</td>
<td>0.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely poor</td>
<td>0.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No reply</td>
<td>4.50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: LSC Framework for Excellence Learner Views Survey

5.8 Three-quarters (76%) of learners think that the information and advice offered by their college/provider about the different options available to them once they have completed their course is good (Table 5.2). Just under half (47%) of learners think that this information and advice is extremely/very good.

5.9 The vast majority (88%) of learners agree that they are treated with respect by staff (Table 5.3). Over half of learners (52%) ‘strongly agree’ that this is the case.
Table 5.3: Learner Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Treated with respect by staff (%)</th>
<th>Treated fairly by staff (%)</th>
<th>College/provider asks for views on how it can improve its courses, teaching and facilities (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>52.00%</td>
<td>51.20%</td>
<td>25.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tend to agree</td>
<td>35.60%</td>
<td>36.00%</td>
<td>42.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td>4.70%</td>
<td>5.50%</td>
<td>20.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tend to disagree</td>
<td>1.50%</td>
<td>1.50%</td>
<td>6.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>0.40%</td>
<td>0.40%</td>
<td>1.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No reply</td>
<td>5.90%</td>
<td>5.40%</td>
<td>3.90%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: LSC Framework for Excellence Learner Views Survey

5.10 Similarly, majority (87%) of learners agree that they are treated fairly by staff (Table 5.3). Over half (51%) of learners ‘strongly agree’ that this is the case.

5.11 Over two-thirds (68%) of learners agree that their college/provider asks learners for their views on how it can improve its courses, teaching and facilities (Table 5.3). A quarter (26%) of learners ‘strongly agree’ that learner consultation takes place.

5.12 There are mixed views from learners as to the level of response from their college/provider to learner views (Table 5.4). Less than 5% of learners say their college/provider always responds. Just under two-fifths (37%) say that they sometimes respond, with just over two-fifths (43%) suggesting that it is rare to get a response.
### Table 5.4: Learner Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of satisfaction/dissatisfaction</th>
<th>How college/provider responds to learners’ views? (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Always respond</td>
<td>4.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes respond</td>
<td>37.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely respond</td>
<td>42.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never respond</td>
<td>4.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>0.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No reply</td>
<td>10.20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: LSC Framework for Excellence Learner Views Survey

---

**Value of Reduction in Wasted Investment in Learners who do not Complete the Course of Study for a Qualification**

5.13 This indicator is informed by learner retention rates. This data will be available in due course.

**Value of Increased Private Investment by Individuals in the Cost of their Education and Training, Enabling Government Funding to be Targeted on Areas of Market Failure**

5.14 This indicator is informed by provider financial returns. This data will be available in due course.

**Increased Proportion of Learners Progressing to Further Education and Training or to Employment**

5.15 This indicator is informed by the Framework for Excellence learner destination data. This data will be available in due course.
Benefits to Learners

5.16 It is intended that the Framework for Excellence will lead to a number of benefits for learners. It is anticipated that more informed choices and decisions by learners will lead to improved levels of satisfaction, increased retention rates, greater investment by learners in their own learning, a sharper focus on economically valuable skills, and better and more relevant outcomes in terms of progression and employment.

Learner Satisfaction

5.17 There are mixed views among baseline survey providers as to whether the Framework for Excellence will result in improved levels of learner satisfaction (Figure 5.1).

![Figure 5.1: Extent to which the Framework will Result in Improved Levels of Learner Satisfaction](image)

Base: 995
Source: MORI baseline survey of providers
5.18 Just over half (53%) of providers perceive that the Framework will impact a great deal/fair amount upon learner satisfaction rates, with 12% stating that they will improve a ‘great deal’. Providers that were involved in the piloting phase of the Framework are less positive about the potential of the Framework in achieving this benefit (39%) than non-pilot providers (55%).

5.19 Two-fifths (43%) of baseline providers suggest that the Framework would have little/no impact upon learner satisfaction. School sixth forms/sixth form colleges (64%) and special colleges (68%) are the provider types that feel the Framework will have least impact on satisfaction rates.

Retention Rates

5.20 There are again mixed opinions among providers as to whether the Framework for Excellence will have a positive impact upon retention rates (Figure 5.2).

![Bar Chart](image)

**Figure 5.2: Extent to which the Framework will Result in Increased Retention Rates**

- A great deal: 9%
- A fair amount: 36%
- Not very much: 38%
- Not at all: 14%
- Don't know: 3%

Base: 995
Source: Ipsos MORI baseline survey of providers
5.21 Over two-fifths (45%) of baseline survey providers perceive that the Framework for Excellence will impact positively upon retention rates. Over half (52%) of providers believe that the Framework is likely to have little/no impact upon retention rates. School sixth forms/sixth form colleges (77%) in particular feel that this benefit is unlikely to be realised. Framework pilot providers also anticipate there to be less impact on retention rates (71%) than non-pilot providers (50%).

**Investment by Learners in their own Learning**

5.22 There is uncertainty as to whether the Framework for Excellence will encourage additional investment by learners in their own learning (Figure 5.3).

![Figure 5.3: Extent to which the Framework will Result in Greater Personal Investment by Learners in their own Learning](chart)

Base: 995
Source: Ipsos MORI baseline survey of providers
5.23 A third (33%) of baseline survey providers perceive that the Framework for Excellence could result in a great deal/fair amount of additional investment by learners in their own learning. Just under two-thirds (63%) of providers feel that there is likely to be not very much/no impact upon learner investment in their own learning. Providers that were involved in the piloting phase of the Framework indicate that this benefit is more unlikely to be achieved (81%) than non-pilot providers (61%).

**Learner Choice**

5.24 The factors that influence learners’ choice of provider are considered below from both a provider and learner perspective.

**Provider Perspectives**

5.25 A range of factors have been highlighted by baseline survey providers as being of importance in influencing learners' choice of providers (Figure 5.4).

5.26 It can be seen, however, that baseline survey providers perceive the following factors to be most important in influencing learner choice:

- convenience of timing of course and/or location (71% ‘very important’);
- provider reputation (64% ‘very important’);
- recommendation from friends (60% ‘very important’).

5.27 These factors were also confirmed in our in–depth consultations with providers as being the key influencers of learner choice.

5.28 It can be seen that use of quantitative performance information, including learner outcomes data (27% ‘very important’), inspection grades (20% ‘very important’) and learner destination data (13% ‘very important’) are seen by providers as being less of an influence on learner choice than the factors highlighted above.
Learning and Skills Council

Figure 5.4: Factors that Influence Learners' Choices of Provider

Factors

- Very important
- Important (very/fairly)
- Not important (not very/not at all)

Base: 1,053
Source: MORI baseline survey of providers
Learner Perspectives

Existing Research

5.29 The 2007 National Learner Satisfaction Survey states that learners on FE programmes delivered by colleges and adult learning providers (ALP) were most likely to have chosen their provider for its location (this was mentioned by 57% each of FE and ALP learners). This factor was less commonly cited by WBL learners (26%). Instead, three WBL learners in ten (30%) say they had no choice and that their employer chose the provider for them.

5.30 Around one FE learner in six and one ALP learner in six said that they chose their provider because it offered the course they wanted (16% of FE and 18% of ALP learners), falling to 13% of WBL learners. FE learners were more likely than their ALP and WBL counterparts to take into account the provider’s reputation in making their choice (this was mentioned by 16% of FE compared with 6% each of ALP and WBL learners).

5.31 These findings are corroborated by the evidence to emerge from this baseline study.
Learner Consultation

5.32 The key points to emerge from the consultations with learners are considered below.

Factors that Influence Choice of Provider

5.33 Learner views echo those of providers, in that their choice of provider largely depends on convenience of the location, overall provider reputation and recommendation from friends. The quality of teaching/facilities and “atmosphere” are also seen as factors that are considered in the decision making process.

5.34 However, learners involved in work–based learning don’t always have a ‘choice’ to make. In some cases, it is their employer that recommends that they should go a particular provider.

Factors that Influence Choice of Course

5.35 For students studying for A–levels/BTECS, personal interest in the subject area, ability, university requirements and career prospects are the key factors that influence the choice of course. For students on WBL programmes, potential job opportunities, future salaries, financial support and personal interest are the key factors.

5.36 There are mixed views as to whether the choice of a specific course, or provider, comes first. Some learners select the provider they want to attend first and then choose their course of study; other learners know what course they want to do and then select the provider second. This tends to depend on the individual themselves and their preferences.
Information Sources

5.37 Learners generally feel that they are able to access sufficient information on a provider in order to make an informed decision. The most valuable provider information source available to learners is to actually attend an open day. This gives learners the opportunity to speak to staff, ask questions, and generally get a 'feel' for the provider, which is seen as extremely valuable. The internet/provider websites and provider brochures are also used to seek information on providers.

Provider Performance

5.38 Most students make a decision about their choice of provider without having a detailed knowledge of how that provider performs. Learners tend to be aware that providers are subject to inspection, yet very few undertake background research into this. Generally, only learners involved in the student union, or those that act as course representatives, had an understanding of how their provider performs.

Use of the Framework as a Source of Information for Learners

Provider Perspectives

5.39 There is a degree of uncertainty as to whether the Framework for Excellence will be a valuable source of information for potential learners (Figure 5.5). This is viewed as being the least important aim of the Framework for Excellence by baseline survey providers.
5.40 Two-fifths (43%) of providers believe that the Framework is likely to be important as a source of information used by learners, with just 15% stating that this is a ‘very important’ aim. This is particularly the case in school sixth forms/sixth form colleges, with three-quarters (74%) of the opinion that the Framework is not important in this context.

Figure 5.5: Extent to which the Framework will Result in Improved Levels of Learner Satisfaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Satisfaction</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A great deal</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A fair amount</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very much</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: 995
Source: MORI baseline survey of providers

5.41 Less than half (49%) of baseline survey providers believe that the aim of the Framework in acting as a source of information for potential learners is likely to be achieved. We examine the reasons for this later on in this Section of the report.

5.42 There are mixed views from baseline survey provider views as to the usefulness of the Framework for Excellence in helping learners make choices about providers (Figure 5.6).
5.43 Over two-fifths (44%) of providers have the opinion that the Framework will be useful (very/fairly useful). The benefits identified by providers were related to the availability of information to enable learners to compare provider performance. The fact that the Framework for Excellence will provide one single benchmark to enable learners to understand who the best performing local providers are seen as key.

5.44 Providers who have been involved in the piloting of the Framework were less positive than non-pilot providers as to the value of the Framework in learner decision-making. 33% of providers who were involved in the piloting of the Framework deemed the Framework to be useful in this respect, compared to 45% of non-pilot providers. However, in-depth consultation with providers revealed that there was scepticism across both provider types.
5.45 Half of baseline survey providers (50%) perceive that the Framework will not be very useful (not very/not at all) for learners. Consultation with stakeholders and providers revealed that there is a high degree of uncertainty as to the benefit of the Framework for Excellence for learners, particularly in the short term. One pilot FE College for example has already carried out research with learners which revealed that they are unlikely to use the information contained within the Framework.

5.46 One of the main reasons highlighted by case study providers as to why the Framework may have limited value for learners was that other factors are seen as carrying greater ‘weight’ in relation to learner decision making. This can be seen in the following provider views:

“I don’t think it will help – ultimately word of mouth is more important than what we publish about ourselves.” (Baseline survey provider)

“General reputation (of the provider) is more important” (Baseline survey provider)

“The locality of the college overrides other factors” (Baseline survey provider)

“Learners go where their mates go” (Case Study, Pilot Sixth Form College)

5.47 It is felt that ‘word of mouth’, personal recommendation, location, and ‘where friends are going’ will be more influential factors than the Framework for Excellence in the decision-making process.

5.48 Case study providers generally believe that learners do not undertake detailed research into provider performance. The perception that learners may not actively seek out this information was again seen as reducing the value of the Framework for Excellence for learner decision-making. One baseline provider actually queried whether external indicators are used at all, suggesting that any change in their Ofsted scores does not influence their number of enrolments.
5.49 There is, however, an acceptance among some providers, that parents may be more proactive in researching provider performance than learners. It is felt that Ofsted information on schools is used more by parents than their children and so parents may well be more inclined to use the Framework for Excellence scores than learners themselves. This may assist the learner decision-making process indirectly.

Learner Perspectives

5.50 Learners generally had no awareness of the Framework for Excellence prior to participating in one of the focus groups. When the concept of the Framework was explained to them, a small number of learners did recognise the potential benefits of the Framework. They could see the value of being able to compare providers, particularly when they may have limited knowledge of the provider generally and overall performance. This can be seen in the following learner views.

“It is taking everything into account and bringing it all together. It is an easy way of getting all the information you need about the college.” (Learner)

“It would be great to be able to make comparisons across colleges” (Learner)

“You don’t want to go in blind when making a decision” (Learner)

“It is good to shop around. If it (the Framework) can help then it must be good.” (Learner)

5.51 A number of concerns/issues have been raised by learners however in relation to the Framework for Excellence. Learners are unsure as to their ability to understand and interpret the Framework scores, which emphasises the point made by providers. Having an overall grade on its own was not seen as being beneficial. Having some commentary on the scores, or background information, would help learners to contextualise the Framework scores and information.
5.52 Learners also recognise that choosing a provider is not as simple as choosing the ‘best’. Other factors highlighted previously, such as location and whether the provider offers a particular course was deemed as being important. Indeed, to be of real value, learners would want to see information presented on a course level. The value of the Framework in assisting the decision-making process will be reduced therefore if this information is unavailable to learners.

5.53 Learners are also unsure of the value of the financial indicators. In particular, there was some confusion as to how this information should be interpreted. For example, one learner queried whether a ‘good’ financial score would mean that the provider has funds to spend on facilities and equipment, or whether it means that the provider is ‘thrifty’.

Presentation of Information

5.54 Presenting the information clearly and effectively is crucial if the Framework for Excellence is to be used by learners. The internet was highlighted by learners as being the most obvious means of presenting the data. Provider brochures and printing the results in local newspapers were also suggested as potential sources.

5.55 In light of the limitations and concerns highlighted above, learners generally feel that the value of referring to the Framework scores would not be strong enough to override the other factors involved in relation to influencing the decision-making process.
6 BENEFITS TO EMPLOYERS

Key Findings: Benefits to Employers
Most providers feel that the Framework for Excellence will assist employer decision-making as to their choice of provider. The Framework is seen as being slightly more beneficial to employers than it would be for learners. However, this is seen as being less important than other Framework aims and less likely to be achieved. Key specific points are as follows:

- three-fifths (60%) of baseline survey providers believe that the Framework will be important as a source of information for potential employer customers. Two-thirds of employers (68%) feel that this aim is likely to be achieved;
- two-fifths (59%) of baseline survey providers are of the opinion that the Framework will be useful for employers in making choices;
- over half (53%) of baseline survey providers perceive that the Framework will have a positive impact on employer satisfaction levels;
- over a third (37%) of baseline survey providers believe that the Framework will encourage increased employer investment in training.

Introduction

6.1 In this section we consider the potential benefits of the Framework for Excellence for employers. Specifically, we consider the following:

- baseline data measures of the benefits to employers;
- benefits to employers;
- employer choice;
- the use of the Framework as a source of information for employers.
Baseline Data

6.2 As part of the approach to monitoring the intended outcomes from the Framework for Excellence, two measures of improved employer choice have been identified:

- higher levels of employer satisfaction;
- value of increased employer direct spend in FE system, enabling Government funding to be targeted on areas of market failure.

Higher Levels of Employer Satisfaction

Framework for Excellence Employer Survey Data

6.3 The Framework for Excellence Employer Survey was conducted with 3,745 employers who had been engaged by 57 pilot providers. The purpose of the survey was to capture employers’ views on provider responsiveness.

6.4 The mean response for overall employer satisfaction levels was 7.7 (on a scale of 1 = highly dissatisfied; 10 = highly satisfied). Four fifths (80%) of respondents provided a response of seven or more (Table 6.1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 – Highly dissatisfied</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>570</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>1038</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>662</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 – Highly satisfied</td>
<td>717</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6.5 A breakdown of employer ratings on the training/service provided is provided in Table 6.2 below.

Table 6.2: Rating of the Training Provided
(on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 = very poor and 10 = excellent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean response</th>
<th>% rates 7 or above</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understanding your training needs as an employer</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>79.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tailoring the provision to meet your needs</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>74.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explaining the course objectives to you or the person organising the training</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>78.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivering the training/assessment at a time and place that meets your requirements</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>79.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping you suitably informed about the progress or the learner or learners</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>72.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General communication, including the frequency and quality of communication, and how quickly they have responded to any queries</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>73.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The professionalism and quality of the staff delivering the training</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>85.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The professionalism and quality of the person or people undertaking the assessment of your staff</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>87.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How up to date the course and its delivery is for your industry</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>85.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The accuracy and timeliness of invoices</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>81.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The accuracy and timeliness of other paperwork and documentation</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>79.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6.2: Rating of the Training Provided
(on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 = very poor and 10 = excellent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean response</th>
<th>% rates 7 or above</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The value for money of the training for</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>82.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>which you had to pay</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: LSC Framework for Excellence Employer Survey Data

6.6 It can be seen that employers rate the training/service provided at a mean of between 7.4 and 8.1 across all 12 factors. For each factor, 70% or more of all respondents provided a score of 7 or above.

Value of Increased Employer Direct Spend in FE System, Enabling Government Funding to be Targeted on Areas of Market Failure

6.7 This indicator is informed by provider financial returns. This data will be available in due course.

Benefits to Employers

6.8 It is intended that the Framework for Excellence will lead to a number of benefits to employers. More informed choices and decisions by employers are anticipated to lead to higher levels of employer satisfaction, more investment by employers in training and development, and better and more relevant outcomes in terms of improvements in business performance and productivity.

Employer Satisfaction

6.9 The Framework for Excellence is seen as having the potential to increase employer satisfaction levels (Figure 6.1).
6.10 Over half (56%) of baseline survey providers feel that there is potential for the Framework to result in higher levels of employer satisfaction. Views on the ability of the Framework to achieve this benefit are most positive among FE College respondents (64%), and least positive among sixth form colleges (30%). This is to be expected with sixth form colleges making limited direct provision to employers.

6.11 Just under two-fifths (37%) of providers are of the opinion that the Framework is likely to have little/no impact upon employer satisfaction levels.

**Increased Employer Investment in Training**

6.12 There is a degree of uncertainty among baseline survey providers as to whether the Framework will result in increased employer investment in training (Figure 6.2).
6.13 Over a third (37%) of baseline survey providers feel that the Framework is likely to have a great deal/fair amount of benefit in terms of increased employer investment in training. Over half (56%) of providers believe that this is unlikely.

**Employer Choice**

6.14 The factors that influence employers’ choice of provider are considered below from both an employer and learner perspective.
Existing Research

**LSC Northumberland**

6.15 A study by LSC Northumberland in January 2004 focused on how major employers in Northumberland buy learning services\(^2\). The study consisted of a survey of 38 private and public sector employers. In terms of choosing learning providers, the study concludes that:

- a number of factors influence the choice of learning and training provider, but the three key factors are compulsion, location and pre-existing relationships;
- employers want a mix of things in a good supplier, such as flexibility, reputation and value;
- local providers have the advantage of being cheap to access – and may also provide the best service;
- organisations choose providers based outside (their area) because the expertise is often very niche and organisations cannot access it locally.

**British Chambers of Commerce**

6.16 The British Chambers of Commerce report ‘UK Skills: Making the Grade\(^3\)’, included a question about how businesses choose where they go for training. The results are provided in Table 6.3 below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Specialism of provider</td>
<td>26.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Established relationship with local independent provider</td>
<td>16.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendation</td>
<td>16.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location of provider</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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\(^3\) [http://www.chamberonline.co.uk/policy/pdf/uk_skills_report.pdf](http://www.chamberonline.co.uk/policy/pdf/uk_skills_report.pdf)
### Table 6.3: How Businesses choose where to go for Training?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Established relationship with local college</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing by provider</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: British Chambers of Commerce

### Provider Perspectives

6.17 The findings from this study support those to emerge out of the previous research. A range of factors were highlighted by baseline survey providers as to how employers choose providers (Figure 6.3).

6.18 The most influential factors were deemed to be as follows:

- provider flexibility (84% ‘very important’);
- availability of appropriate course/training (82% ‘very important’);
- previous experience (78% ‘very important’);
- cost/financial implications (73% ‘very important’);
- reputation (66% ‘very important’).

6.19 These factors were also highlighted as being most influential in the more in-depth provider consultations.

6.20 It can be seen that use of quantitative performance information, including learner outcomes data (34% ‘very important’), inspection grades (22% ‘very important’) and learner destination data (11% ‘very important’) are seen as by providers as being less of an influence on employer choice than the factors highlighted above. However, these factors are seen as being of slightly more influence on employer choice of providers than they are on learner choice.
Figure 6.3: Factors that Influence Employers’ Choices of Provider

Factors

- Convenience of location
- Word of mouth
- Previous experience
- Availability of appropriate course/skill
- Advice from Careers advisor/skill
- Reputation
- Learner outcome data
- Inspection grades
- Learner destination data
- Quality of facilities
- Provider flexibility
- Overall financial implications

Very important
Important (very/fairly)
Not important (not very/not at all)

Base: 1,053
Source: MORI baseline survey of providers 2008
Employer Perspectives

6.21 The key points to emerge from the consultations with employers are considered below.

Factors that Influence Choice of Provider

6.22 Employer views echo those of providers in that decisions in relation to choosing providers are largely based on relationships, provider flexibility, provider responsiveness and reliability, location, cost, expertise and quality of facilities. However, a key issue to be raised was that employers do not always have a lot of ‘choice’, especially when, there are only a limited number of providers in the vicinity who offer the course that they are looking for.

Sources of Information

6.23 Employers access information on providers via ‘word of mouth’, attending provider open days, booking visits to providers to speak to staff members, and through use of the internet/provider websites. Many employers see the value of being able to visit the provider to speak to staff and get a feel for the service on offer.

Research into Provider Performance

6.24 Very few employers refer to national data on provider performance. Most employers have an established relationship with their provider, and do not see it necessary to undertake in-depth research in to how a provider performs. Smaller employers in particular would be unlikely to carry out such research.
6.25 The use of the Framework as a source of information for potential employer customers is seen as the second least important aim of the Framework for Excellence by baseline survey providers (Figure 6.4).

Figure 6.4: Importance of the Framework as a Source of Information for Potential Employer Customers and Likelihood of being Achieved

6.26 However, three-fifths (60%) of providers still recognise the importance of the Framework in achieving this aim. A fifth (21%) of providers state that this is a ‘very important’ aim. Sixth form colleges are again less likely to agree than other provider types with the importance of the Framework in achieving this aim (42% said it was important).
Learning and Skills Council  

6.27 This aim is also seen as the second least likely to be achieved. However, two-thirds (68%) of providers still recognise the potential for the Framework to be used as a source of information for employer customers, although just 14% feel that this aim is ‘very likely’ to be achieved. School sixth forms/sixth form colleges also feel that this aim is less likely to be achieved than other provider types (44% likely to be achieved).

6.28 Providers are more positive with regard to the usefulness of the Framework in helping employers make choices about providers than learners (Figure 6.5).

**Figure 6.5: Usefulness of the Framework in Helping Employers make Choices about Providers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provider Type</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very useful</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly useful</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very useful</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all useful</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: 995  
Source: Ipsos MORI baseline survey of providers

6.29 Around two-fifths (59%) of baseline survey providers perceive that the Framework will be useful (very/fairly) for employers in making choices. These providers feel that the Framework has the potential to enable employers to make more informed decisions based on a better understanding of provider performance. This is illustrated in the following quotes:
It will enable them to evaluate providers against the Framework” (Baseline survey provider)

“If employers look at success rates and performance then it should be useful to get the best outcomes.” (Baseline survey provider)

“It gives them some hard measures as to how providers are performing” (Baseline survey provider)

“Employers should be able to access information about providers and make an informed decision.” (Baseline survey provider)

6.30 The Framework is seen by these providers as providing standardisation across the board. It is perceived that employers generally want a simple mechanism by which to compare providers, so the Framework is seen as having the potential to deliver this.

6.31 Just over a third (37%) of baseline survey providers believe that the Framework would not be of use to employers (not very/not at all useful).

Employer Perspectives

6.32 Employer feedback is more positive than that offered by providers. Many of the employers consulted could see how the Framework could inform the decision making process. However, it should be noted that all employers stated that they would not look at the Framework scores in isolation when choosing a provider.

6.33 Use of the Framework for Excellence is deemed to be useful in two key situations. Firstly, when an employer has no prior knowledge or experience of working with a provider, the Framework could then be used to get an initial ‘overall picture’ of the provider and would therefore serve as a ‘pointer in the right direction’. This can be seen in the following employer views:
“It would stop you going in blind” (Employer)

“If it’s a national criteria that they’ve got to meet and display their rating, it would let you know whether or not the provider is worth taking a chance on.” (Employer)

6.34 Nevertheless, other factors such as cost and provider flexibility are seen as ultimately influencing the final decision as to which provider would end up being chosen.

6.35 The second situation where the Framework is seen as being of value is where an employer is considering using a provider based on ‘word of mouth’, despite having, no personal knowledge of that particular provider. The Framework for Excellence would then be used as a means of justifying their choice of provider, and as a way to confirm whether the reputation is accurate. Employers did indicate, however, that they would be unlikely to use the Framework if they already knew the employer and had an established relationship.

6.36 A small number of consulted employers were of the opinion that they were very unlikely to use the Framework to influence their decision–making process. Their view is that, if ‘the learners are happy, then they are happy’. The Framework scores are seen as being of very little value to this set of employers.
7 COMMISSIONING AND INTERVENTION

Key Points: Improved Commissioning and Intervention
The most important aim of the Framework for Excellence and the aim most likely to be achieved is deemed to be that of informing decisions made by key stakeholders, such as funding and inspection bodies. Providers anticipate that the Framework will result in improved commissioning and more effective intervention. Key specific points are as follows:

- nearly all (95%) baseline survey providers feel that the Framework will be important for informing decisions made by key stakeholders. The vast majority (89%) of providers perceive that this aim is likely to be achieved;
- the majority (79%) of baseline survey providers expect the Framework to result in improved commissioning by funding bodies;
- three-quarters of baseline survey providers expect the Framework to result in more effective intervention by funding bodies.

Introduction

7.1 In this section, we consider the potential of the Framework to result in improved commissioning decisions and intervention by key stakeholders and regulatory authorities. Specifically, we look at the following:

- baseline data measurements of improved commissioning and intervention;
- improved commissioning;
- more effective intervention.

7.2 It is intended that the use of the Framework to inform planning, funding, and commissioning decisions by public authorities will have the effect of encouraging outstanding and good providers to expand their services, at the same time it is assured that use of the Framework will prompt early intervention to ensure that satisfactory providers do not become inadequate.
Baseline Data

7.3 As part of the approach to monitoring the intended outcomes from the Framework for Excellence, one measure of improved commissioning and intervention has been identified:

- value of savings derived from prevention and early identification of problems, which would otherwise be devoted to recovering serious quality, planning or financial problems.

7.4 This is informed by two measures: ‘increase in the proportion of learners enrolled at good and outstanding providers’ and ‘LSC exceptional support expenditure’.

Increase in the Proportion of Learners Enrolled at Good and Outstanding Providers

7.5 This data will be available in due course.

LSC Exceptional Support Expenditure

7.6 Some colleges may receive exceptional support funding from the LSC in order to assist them in implementing a college combination, or the delivery of a strategic recovery plan.

7.7 During 2007/08, 17 colleges received exceptional support payments, totalling £26.3 million; an average of £1.5 million per college.

---

4 LSC Exceptional Support Payments made in 2007/08
Informing Decisions made by Key Stakeholders

7.8 Informing decisions made by key stakeholders such as funding and inspection bodies is seen by baseline survey providers as the most important aim of the Framework for Excellence (Figure 7.1). This aim is also perceived by providers as being most likely to be achieved.

![Figure 7.1: Importance of the Framework in Informing Decisions made by Key Stakeholders such as Funding and Inspection Bodies and Likelihood of being Achieved](source)

Base: 995
Source: MORI baseline survey of providers 2008

7.9 Nearly all (95%) of baseline survey providers feel that the Framework will be important for informing decisions made by key stakeholders. Three-quarters (72%) perceive that this is a very important aim. The vast majority (89%) of providers state that this aim is likely to be achieved, with over half (53%) holding the opinion that this is ‘very likely’.
Improved Commissioning

7.10 The Framework for Excellence is expected to result in improved commissioning decisions by funding bodies (Figure 7.2). The majority (79%) of baseline survey providers anticipate that the Framework will result in improved commissioning by funding bodies.

Figure 7.2: Extent to which the Framework will Result in Improved Commissioning by Funding Bodies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Improvement</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A great deal</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A fair amount</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very much</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: 995
Source: MORI baseline survey of providers

7.11 Just under two-fifths (37%) of providers perceive the Framework to have a ‘great deal’ of benefit on commissioning, with just over two-fifths (42%) suggesting that there will be a ‘fair amount’ of benefit on the process.

7.12 A number of case study providers perceive that with the introduction of the Framework for Excellence, they are likely to be competing more in relation to quality, rather than price.

7.13 The Framework is seen as creating a platform to compare provider performance that can facilitate improved commissioning decisions. This can be seen in the following case study provider and stakeholder quotations:
“The main benefit of the Framework will be in making commissioning decisions.” (Case Study, Pilot WBL Provider)

“The only impact (of the Framework) will be in relation to the confidence of the LSC to contract with providers.” (Stakeholder)

“The Framework will influence decision-making. I can see providers being asked for the Framework grade.” (Case Study, Pilot FE College)

“The biggest users will be the funders” (Stakeholder)

“The Framework is entirely government facing” (Stakeholder)

More Effective Intervention

7.14 It is similarly felt that the Framework for Excellence will result in more effective intervention by funding bodies (Figure 7.3). Three-quarters of baseline survey providers state that the Framework will influence more effective intervention.

![Figure 7.3: Extent to which the Framework will Result in more Effective Intervention by Funding Bodies](image)

Base: 995
Source: Ipsos MORI baseline survey of providers 2008
7.15 Around a third (30%) of providers feel intervention will improve a ‘great deal’, whilst just under half (45%) of providers think intervention will improve a ‘fair amount’. Special colleges were the provider type to see most benefit from the Framework with regard to more effective intervention, with nearly all (95%) anticipating an improvement.
8 REPUTATION OF THE POST–16 SECTOR

Key Findings: Reputation of the post–16 sector

- Providers recognise that the Framework for Excellence has the potential to improve the reputation of the FE sector. The implications of the Machinery of Government changes, and where the Framework will ‘sit’ in the future, are seen as critical in this respect. Key specific findings are as follows:
  - three quarters (78%) of baseline survey providers feel that the Framework will be of importance in improving the FE sector generally. 74% of providers perceive that this aim is likely to be achieved;
  - over half (57%) of baseline survey providers anticipate that the Framework will have a positive impact upon the reputation of the FE sector.

Introduction

8.1 In this section we consider the potential of the Framework for Excellence to raise the reputation of the post–16 sector. It is intended that as high quality, responsive provision becomes the norm, and inadequate performance disappears, the FE system will ‘enhance its visibility and improve its reputation for outstanding public service’. Specifically, in this section we consider the following:

- baseline data measures for raising the reputation of the post–16 sector;
- improving the FE sector;
- machinery of government changes.

Baseline Data

8.2 As part of the approach to monitoring the intended outcomes from the Framework for Excellence, two measures of improvements in reputation have been identified:
improvements in media coverage;
• improvements in public perception of education and training.

The Status and Reputation of the FE System

8.3 The aim of the LSC survey, ‘The Status and Reputation of the FE system’, was to assess how key stakeholders, both within the FE system and externally, perceive the status and reputation of the system. The research was commissioned by Ipsos MORI. Key findings from this survey include the following:

• stakeholders are generally positive about the FE system, and believe that the activities of the FE system have a major impact on the national economy and productivity. The majority of stakeholders also feel that the system has made good progress in recent years;
• overall, more stakeholders are advocates than critics. FE and sixth-form colleges are key advocates of the system, while training providers and employers who have not used the FE system are its fiercest critics. The remaining stakeholder groups – schools, local authorities, other stakeholders and employers who have used FE – lie between these extremes;
• increasing stakeholder advocacy towards the system requires more than simply raising satisfaction levels. The top three priority areas are: ensuring that stakeholders have a detailed understanding of the FE system; ensuring that stakeholders are satisfied with their local FE provision; and ensuring that the system is perceived to be effective in identifying and responding to local needs;
• overall, the most commonly cited key priority for the FE system over the next two to three years is employer engagement, and ensuring that the system is demand-led;
• other key priorities identified by stakeholders include improving the range of provision on offer; reducing the number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET); and meeting local and national skill needs.
8.4 More detailed findings from this survey are presented in Appendix B.

**Improving the FE sector**

8.5 The Framework for Excellence is seen by providers as having the potential to improve the FE sector generally (Figure 8.1). Three-quarters (78%) of baseline survey providers think the Framework to be of importance in improving the FE sector. A third (32%) of providers perceive this to be a ‘very important’ aim.

![Figure 8.1: Importance of the Framework in Improving the FE Sector Generally and Likelihood of being Achieved](image)

**Base:** 995  
**Source:** MORI baseline survey of providers

8.6 A similar proportion of providers (74%) feel that the Framework is likely to achieve the aim of improving the FE sector generally. A fifth (20%) of baseline survey providers said that this aim is ‘very likely’ to be achieved.
8.7 The Framework for Excellence is also seen as having the capability to enhance the reputation of the FE sector (Figure 8.2). Over half of baseline survey providers (57%) anticipate that the Framework will have a great deal/fair amount of benefit on the sector reputation. However, a key issue highlighted in the qualitative discussions with providers is that a degree of uncertainty exists as to the future of the Framework for Excellence after 2010.

![Figure 8.2: Extent to which the Framework will Enhance the Reputation of the FE Sector](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Enhancement</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A great deal</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A fair amount</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very much</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: 995
Source: MORI baseline survey of providers 2008

8.8 A key issue emphasised by providers is that the Framework may help to generate trust in the FE sector through an open and transparent system that demonstrates and enables comparison of provider performance. This can be seen in the following quotations:

“The FE sector is in a process of reputation building. The Framework could be seen as an act of trust.” (Case Study, Pilot FE College)

“If we are going to get the trust that the sector is looking for, then the Framework is the quid, pro quo.” (Case Study, Pilot FE College)
8.9 Establishing this trust may help to enhance the reputation of the FE sector.

8.10 However, just over a third (37%) of baseline survey providers expect the Framework to have little/no effect on the enhancement of the reputation of the sector.
9 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

9.1 This study set out to establish some baselines against which to measure progress at future points in time. This has been achieved in both quantitative and qualitative terms. What follows below is a broad summary of the conclusions from this baseline phase of the evaluation.

Conclusions

Knowledge and Understanding

9.2 General awareness of the Framework for Excellence is high across all providers, although detailed understanding is relatively low. Similarly, not all staff at regional LSC offices currently have a detailed technical understanding of the Framework. The main gap in understanding amongst providers is in relation to the scoring system, and the mechanism for calculating the OPR. In-depth knowledge of the Framework tends to be at senior management level and above within those providers that were involved in the piloting of the Framework.

9.3 There is clear articulation of the aims of the Framework for Excellence where understanding is high. However, a perception was that the aims and intended outcomes of the Framework were too ambitious and the Framework was trying to ‘satisfy too many audiences’.
Improved Provider Quality

9.4 Providers recognise that a key aim of the Framework for Excellence is to provide a mechanism to measure, assess, and improve provider performance. Whilst limitations and concerns with the use of the Framework for Excellence for this purpose have been highlighted, including that the information that informs the Framework is largely already being collected by providers, the Framework is seen as a useful mechanism for pulling together this information and presenting it in a different format. Therefore, there is potential for the Framework to provide a “shift in perspective” on current provider practice, although providers themselves will need to take actions to improve quality. The Framework for Excellence itself does not do that.

9.5 The Framework for Excellence is likely to be integrated within existing processes by providers with well-developed performance management systems in place. For these providers, the Framework is not seen as having the potential to contribute to a dramatic shift in performance.

Bureaucracy

9.6 Providers do not see the Framework for Excellence as contributing to reduced bureaucracy in the FE sector. However, the implementation of the Framework is not perceived as a significant additional burden for those providers who have well developed performance management systems in place. In such cases, the Framework is being encompassed within existing processes, and where possible is being aligned to current systems to avoid duplication.
Learner Outcomes

9.7 Providers are sceptical as to the value of the Framework in assisting learner decision-making as to their choice of provider. This was also reflected in consultations with learners. The use of the Framework as a source of information for learners is seen as being the least important aim, and also the aim least likely to be achieved by providers.

9.8 Learners currently choose providers largely based on location, reputation and recommendation from friends. Almost all consulted learners make decisions about their choice of provider without having a detailed knowledge of how that provider performs. Some learners do recognise the value of the Framework in being able to compare performance across providers. However, the value of referring to the Framework scores is not strong enough to override the other factors involved in the decision-making process.

Employer Outcomes

9.9 Most providers feel that the Framework for Excellence will assist employer decision-making as to their choice of provider. However, this is seen as being less important than other Framework aims and less likely to be achieved. The Framework is seen as being slightly more beneficial to employers than it would be for learners.

9.10 Employer decisions with regard to their choice of provider tend to be based on an existing relationship, provider flexibility, provider responsiveness and reliability, location, cost, expertise and the quality of facilities. Employers suggest that there could be some value in the Framework when an employer has no prior knowledge, or experience of working with a provider, or in justifying their choice of provider. However, the Framework scores will never be used in isolation in the decision-making process. Employers are unlikely to use the Framework if they already know the provider, or have an established relationship.
Improved Commissioning and Intervention and Improving the FE Sector Reputation

9.11 The most important aim of the Framework for Excellence, and the aim most likely to be achieved, is deemed to be that of informing decisions made by key stakeholders, such as funding and inspection bodies. Providers anticipate that the Framework will result in improved commissioning and more effective intervention.

9.12 Providers recognise that the Framework for Excellence has the potential to improve the reputation of the FE sector. The implications of the Machinery of Government changes, and the notion of where the Framework will 'sit' in the future, are seen as critical in this respect.
Good morning/afternoon, my name is ........and I am calling from Ipsos-MORI, an independent research organisation. We are currently conducting a survey on behalf of the Learning and Skills Council, to better understand how learning providers manage their performance and quality improvement.

Can I speak to the person responsible for performance management and quality improvement at this organisation?

TAKE DOWN CONTACT NAME AND JOB TITLE.

WHEN YOU ARE TRANSFERRED TO THE RELEVANT NAMED CONTACT, PLEASE PROCEED WITH INTERVIEW

INTRODUCTION WHEN SPEAKING TO THE APPROPRIATE CONTACT:

Good morning/afternoon, my name is ........and I am calling from Ipsos-MORI, an independent research organisation. We are currently conducting a survey among learning providers on their views and approaches to performance management and the Framework for Excellence on behalf of the Learning and Skills Council.

We sent you a letter about this project about a week ago. Ipsos-MORI is working with another independent research organisation called York Consulting.

The survey involves a short telephone interview which usually takes about 15 minutes to complete. The survey is completely confidential, and no information about you or your organisation will be passed to the LSC or anyone else. Can I check that you are the best person to speak to?

Is now a good time to get your views?

Add if necessary: The Framework for Excellence will be a new approach to support performance management and quality improvement in the FE sector.

In-depth knowledge of the Framework is not necessary as some questions are not about the Framework specifically.
INTERVIEWER NOTE: If respondent has been involved in the pilot we still want to speak to them. If respondent says they do not know anything about Framework for Excellence check to see if there is someone else who would be in a better position to complete the questionnaire. Only proceed if no one else is in a better position and then explain that some questions are still relevant and we still want to speak to them.

Firstly, can I check, as part of your job, are you involved in performance management and quality improvement?
IF YES, PROCEED. IF “NO” ASK TO BE PUT THROUGH TO THE APPROPRIATE PERSON IN THEIR ORGANISATION

EXTRA INTERVIEWERS’ NOTES (PRINTED A SEPARATE SHEET):

- Survey participation is voluntary, although we are keen to ensure a comprehensive picture of providers’ views and experiences, to feed into our report to the LSC;
- Organisations have been chosen from LSC database;
- We would be happy to call back at a more convenient time to conduct the interview;
- Confidentiality — re-emphasise that no identifiable information about the establishment or the respondent will be passed on to anybody outside the research team.

If the respondent wants reassurance about the legitimacy of the survey, they can contact Kate Murphy from the LSC on kate.murphy@lsc.gov.uk
BACKGROUND

1. ASK ALL. Firstly, can you confirm your job title? (PROMPT TO CODE. CODE ONE ONLY.)

   1. Principal/Chief Executive/Managing Director
   2. Other Senior Manager
   3. Leader/Head of Curriculum
   4. Member of Teaching Staff / Tutor/Assessor/Trainer
   5. Operations Staff (e.g. Manager of Finance/HR/Facilities)
   6. Other, please state.....

Section 1: Awareness of the Framework for Excellence

I would like to begin by asking you some questions about the Framework for Excellence......

2. ASK ALL. Which of the following statements best describes how much you know about the Framework for Excellence, prior to this interview? (READ OUT. CODE ONE ONLY. REVERSE SCALE)

   1. I have been involved in the piloting of the Framework
   2. I have a good understanding of the Framework
   3. I am familiar with the framework but don’t know much about the detail
   4. I have heard of the Framework but my understanding is very limited
   5. I have not heard of the Framework (GO TO Q11)
   6. Other (please state)

3. ASK IF RESPOND 1, 2, 3, 4 OR 6 to Q2. What do you think are the main aims of the Framework for Excellence? (DO NOT PROMPT – CODE RESPONSE. PROBE THOROUGHLY. MULTI-RESPONSE OK)

   1. As a measure for assessing provider performance
   2. As a common framework for measuring performance
   3. To drive performance within providers
   4. To act as a management tool for self-regulation and improvement
   5. To raise standards in your organisation
   6. To provide information to potential learners
   7. To provide information to potential employer customers
   8. To inform decisions made by other key stakeholders, e.g. funding & inspection bodies
   9. To improve the FE sector generally
   10. Other (please state)
   11. Don’t know
4. ASK IF RESPOND 1, 2, 3, 4 OR 6 to Q2. The Framework has been developed with a number of aims in mind. (a) How important do you think the Framework for Excellence will be . . . READ OUT? and (b) how likely do you think that each of these aims will be achieved? (READ OUT ALL AIMS. CODE Q(a) and (b) FOR EACH AIM. ROTATE STATEMENTS)

(a) IMPORTANCE
- Very important
- Fairly important
- Not very important
- Not at all important
- Don’t know.

(b) HOW LIKELY TO BE ACHIEVED
- Very likely
- Fairly likely
- Not very likely
- Not at all likely
- Don’t know.

1. As a measure for assessing your performance
2. As a common framework for measuring performance
3. In driving up providers’ performance
4. As a management tool for self-regulation and improvement
5. In raising standards in your organisation
6. As a source of information for potential learners
7. As a source of information for potential employer customers
8. In informing decisions made by key stakeholders such as funding & inspection bodies
9. In improving the FE sector generally
Section 2: Benefits and Impact of the Framework for Excellence

5. ASK IF RESPOND 1, 2, 3, 4 OR 6 TO Q2. To what extent do you think that the introduction of the Framework for Excellence will result in the following benefits for your organisation (READ OUT ALL. SINGLE CODE FOR EACH)

- A great deal
- A fair amount
- Not very much
- None at all
- Don’t know

1. Improved levels of learner satisfaction
2. Increased retention rates
3. Greater personal investment by learners in their own learning
4. Higher levels of employer satisfaction;
5. Increased employer investment in training
6. Improved provider quality;
7. Improved commissioning by funding bodies;
8. More effective intervention by funding bodies;
9. Reduced bureaucracy within the sector;
10. Enhanced reputation of the FE sector

Section 3: Approaches to Comparing Performance

I would now like to ask you some questions about how your organisation measures and compares its performance.

11. ASK ALL. How often, if at all, does your organisation benchmark its performance against that of other providers? (READ OUT. REVERSE SCALE. CODE ONE ONLY.)

1. Frequently
2. Sometimes
3. Rarely
4. Never
5. Don’t know (GO TO Q18)
12. ASK IF RESPOND 1, 2 OR 3 TO Q11. Which of the following providers do you use to benchmark your performance against? (READ OUT. REVERSE SCALE. CODE MULTI-RESPONSE OK.)

1. Other providers locally
2. Other providers in your region
3. Other providers outside your region
4. LSC-funded providers
5. Private-funded providers
6. Other
7. Don't know

13. ASK IF RESPONSE 4 to Q11. Why does your organisation not benchmark your performance against that of other providers? (DO NOT PROMPT – CODE RESPONSE. PROBE THOROUGHLY. MULTI-RESPONSE OK.)

1. Happy with current provider performance;
2. See no benefit;
3. Lack of resource/time
4. Other, please state
5. Don't know.

14. ASK IF RESPONSE 4 TO Q11. Does your organisation intend to benchmark your performance against other providers in the future? (READ OUT. CODE ONE ONLY)

1. Yes;
2. No;
3. Don't know

15. ASK IF RESPONSE 1/2/3 TO Q11. Which of the following information does your organisation use to benchmark itself against other providers? (READ ALL. ROTATE. MULTICODE)

1. Inspection grades
2. Success rates
3. Learner enrolments
4. Learner destinations
5. National targets
6. Levels of learner satisfaction
7. Levels of employer satisfaction
8. Range of qualifications offered
9. Volumes of training delivered to employers
10. Financial information
11. Achievement of external quality standards ie Matrix or Training Quality Standard etc
12. Other, please state......
13. Don't know

16. ASK ALL WHO GAVE MULTIPLE ANSWERS AT Q15. Which one of these is the most important source of information that your organisation uses to benchmark its performance against that of other providers? (SINGLE CODE)

17. ASK ALL. Has your organisation commissioned its own external research or paid for benchmarking services to compare its performance against that of other providers? (SINGLE CODE) (Note: Examples would include Value Added proprietary systems such as ALIS or ALPS; Learner, employer and staff satisfaction surveys; and cost benchmarking surveys such as the one run by Tribal)

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don’t know

I would now like to ask you some questions about your perceptions of how learners make decisions about providers.

18. ASK ALL. How important do you think the following factors are in influencing learners’ choices of provider? (READ ALL. ROTATE. – SINGLE CODE FOR EACH)

1. Convenience of timing of courses and/or location
2. Advice from Parent, family member or carer
3. Friend’s recommendation
4. Advice from careers professional
5. Where friends are attending
6. General reputation of the provider
7. Learner outcome data, e.g. success rates, achievement rates
8. Inspection grades
9. Learner destination data (eg progression to University)
10. Quality of accommodation and equipment
11. Cost/financial implications
12. Views of current or past learners
13. Promotional and marketing materials
14. Other, please state........................

• Very important
• Fairly Important
• Not very important
• Not at all important
• Don’t know

19. ASK ALL WHO SAYS “IMPORTANT” MORE THAN ONCE AT Q18. What would you say is the single most important factor (FROM THOSE IDENTIFIED AT Q18) in influencing a learner’s choice of provider?

20. ASK IF RESPOND 1, 2, 3, 4 OR 6 to Q2. Based on your knowledge of the Framework for Excellence, how useful do you think the Framework will be in helping learners make choices about providers? (READ OUT. CODE ONE ONLY.)

1. Very useful
2. Fairly useful
3. Not very useful
4. Not at all useful
5. Don’t know

21. ASK IF RESPONSE 1/4 TO Q20. Can you tell me why you think it will be useful? OR Can you tell me why you think it will not be useful? WRITE IN VERBATIM

I would now like to ask you some questions about your perceptions of how employers make decisions about providers.

22. ASK ALL. And how important do you think the following factors are in influencing employers’ choices of provider? (READ ALL. ROTATE. – SINGLE CODE FOR EACH)

1. Convenience of location
2. Word of mouth recommendation
3. Previous experience
4. Availability of appropriate course / training
5. Advice from Careers adviser/ skills broker
6. General reputation of the provider
7. Learner outcome data, e.g. success rates, achievement rates
8. Inspection grades
9. Learner destination data
10. Quality of facilities
11. Provider flexibility
12. Cost/financial implications
13. Other, please state..........................

• Very important
• Fairly important
• Not very important
• Not at all important
• Don’t know

23. ASK ALL WHO ANSWER Q22. What would you say is the single most important factor (from the above list) in influencing an employers’ choice of provider? WRITE IN VERBATIM (INSERT CODES AFTER PILOT)

24. ASK IF RESPOND 1, 2, 3, 4 OR 6 to Q2. Based on your knowledge of the Framework for Excellence, how useful do you think the Framework will be in helping employers make choices about providers? Would you say it would be (READ OUT. CODE ONE ONLY.)

1. Very useful
2. Fairly useful
3. Not very useful
4. Not at all useful
5. Don’t know

25. ASK IF RESPONSE 1/4 TO Q24. Can you tell me why you think it will be useful? OR Can you tell me why you think it will not be useful? WRITE IN VERBATIM

26. ASK ALL. The Learning and Skills Council will be doing a follow-up survey about provider performance and the Framework for Excellence in 2010. Would it be OK for Ipsos MORI to contact you again in connection with this? PROBE & CODE ONE OF THE FOLLOWING.

• Yes
• No

THANK FOR YOUR INVOLVEMENT IN THE SURVEY
APPENDIX B
THE STATUS AND REPUTATION OF THE FE SYSTEM
Stakeholders are generally positive about the FE system, and recognise that it is a key factor in meeting the Government’s wider goals on economic competitiveness, social inclusion and community cohesion.

Two-thirds (64 per cent) of respondents believe that the activities of the FE system have a major impact on the national economy and productivity. A similar proportion – 67 per cent – believe that the FE system has a major impact on improving local communities. Three in five (57 per cent) regard the FE system as well respected.

The majority of stakeholders also feel that the system has made good progress in recent years: over three in five believe that the quality of provision and the general estate and buildings have improved (63 per cent and 61 per cent respectively).

Half of stakeholders (50 per cent) believe that choice of provision has improved – more than twice as many as say that it has got worse (18 per cent). An identical proportion – 50 per cent – believe that the quality of leadership within the FE system has improved. Again, this compares favourably against 6 per cent of respondents saying it has got worse.

Overall, stakeholders tend to be more positive about FE provision locally than nationally – 69 per cent are satisfied with local provision compared with 54 per cent for national. (Research on public services conducted by Ipsos MORI has demonstrated a similar pattern.)

There is a general consensus that while users of the system are generally satisfied, on a national scale the system is invisible to the general population. Stakeholders attribute this low national profile to the absence of a sector champion; the complexity of the system and the lack of clear pathways for learners; and a general perception that the system is non-aspirational and ‘second class’ to higher education (HE).

Key Driver Analysis shows that, in order to raise stakeholders’ satisfaction with FE provision nationally, the system needs to ensure that (in order of significance):
- stakeholders are satisfied with their local FE provision;
- the FE system is achieving employer engagement;
- the FE system is perceived to be well respected;
- choice of provision is perceived to be good.

Furthermore, CHAID analysis highlights the important role that is played by local LSCs in promoting the FE system to external stakeholders: where stakeholders have a relationship with the local LSC, they are more likely to be positive about the FE system generally. The LSC plays a crucial role in acting as a champion for the FE system.

In focusing on these drivers, the system needs to pay attention to all stakeholder groups. Currently, there is a ‘perception gap’ between FE and sixth–form colleges (which are significantly more positive about the system’s performance) and the rest of the stakeholder population.

This gap clearly needs to be brought to the attention of FE and sixth–form colleges, so that they can address it.

However, it is advocacy rather than satisfaction that is the key measure – the extent to which stakeholders will speak up for the system, without being asked.

Overall, more stakeholders are advocates than critics: 28 per cent are spontaneous advocates and 19 per cent would speak highly about the system if asked. By contrast,
The Status and Reputation of the FE system

18 per cent would be critical (13 per cent would be critical if asked and 5 per cent would be critical without being asked).

- **FE and sixth-form colleges are key advocates of the system**, while training providers and employers who have not used the FE system are its fiercest critics.
- The remaining stakeholder groups – schools, local authorities, other stakeholders and employers who have used FE – lie between these extremes.
- **Training providers are generally critical about the FE system** and do not perceive themselves as part of it. However, these providers work extensively with employers and learners, and it is crucial that the system is perceived to be cohesive by those that it comprises as well as by those whom it seeks to engage.
- Key Driver Analysis shows that increasing stakeholder advocacy towards the system requires more than simply raising satisfaction levels. The **top three priority areas are**: ensuring that stakeholders have a detailed understanding of the FE system; ensuring that stakeholders are satisfied with their local FE provision; and ensuring that the system is perceived to be effective in identifying and responding to local needs.
- Overall, the most **commonly cited key priority for the FE system** over the next two to three years is **employer engagement and ensuring that the system is demand-led**. The system currently attracts a mean score of just 5.6 out of 10 from stakeholders for its performance in this area. This is consistent with findings that 36 per cent of employers – both users and non-users of FE – say that they have little or no understanding of the FE system.
- **Other key priorities identified by stakeholders include improving the range of provision on offer; reducing the number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET); and meeting local and national skill needs.**
- The system is making good progress, but more needs to be done to raise its national profile. The system needs to be clear and consistent about its role, and it needs to present a united front. This means ensuring that training providers are ‘on message’ and that there is greater collaboration between key players such as the LSC, Association of Colleges (AoC), Association of Learning Providers (ALP) and others.
- The system should also **seek the involvement of senior stakeholders to act as ambassadors**. Forty-seven per cent of stakeholders are advocates of the FE system, and research conducted by Ipsos MORI has consistently found viral advocacy to be the most potent form of communication.
- There is a need to **simplify the system** so that it is more easily understood by the target groups – young people, adult learners, parents and employers – as well as by those in positions of influence. Linked to this, work needs to be done on developing a clearer pathway for learners.

**Source:** Ipsos MORI, July 207