



ECITB Customer and Stakeholder Research Report (2020)

ECITB

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1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Engineering Construction Industry Training Board (ECITB) commissioned IFF Research to conduct an annual survey of its Stakeholders and customers to understand and track perceptions of its performance, relevance and value, and satisfaction with its services. The study will run from 2020-2023.
- 1.2 The purpose of the research is to gather robust quantitative data and information that can be used to measure if ECITB is meeting its Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and corporate objectives, and to help see how and where it could improve.
- 1.3 The research covers the following three groups: In-scope employers (referred to as 'Employers'); Approved Training Providers and Approved Centres (referred to as 'Providers'), and; Stakeholders. The Stakeholders group included representatives of external organisations that do not fall into either of the other groups such as central and local government, clients, trade associations / federations, business groups, and academics in the field.
- 1.4 Questionnaires shared a range of similar questions around key areas of the customer and Stakeholder experience. These were primarily around views on ECITB's objectives, added value to the industry, communication and perceived value of the relationship with ECITB. Where questions differed across the three questionnaires, this reflected the different nature of the audience and their specific relationship with ECITB.
- 1.5 Table 1.1 below indicates the KPIs that were assessed through the research. Findings indicate that all six were met.

Table 1.1 **ECITB Key Performance Indicators and whether these have been met**

| | Employers | Met? | Stakeholders | Met? |
|---|---|------|---|------|
| 1 | Percentage of Employers who use ECITB products say they meet their needs: >75% in 2020 • For each product/service used by Employers, at least 75% said that the product/service met their needs | | Percentage of Stakeholders who say they value ECITB's labour market intelligence: >60% in 2020 • 83% agreed that ECITB provided valuable LMI | |
| 2 | Percentage of Employers reporting that ECITB support has helped address skills shortages and gaps: >50% in 2020 • 73% of Employers agreed that ECITB had done this | | Percentage of Stakeholders who believe ECITB is contributing positively towards industry preparedness for 'net zero' and the Industrial Strategy: >60% in 2020 • Industrial strategy: 69% agreed that ECITB did this • Preparation for 'net zero': 60% agreed that ECITB did this | |
| 3 | Percentage of Employers satisfied with the quality, accessibility and affordability of training and assessment: >50% in 2020 • 88% satisfied with quality • 80% satisfied with accessibility • 79% satisfied with affordability | | Percentage of Stakeholders who say ECITB is positively influencing skills Policy: >60% in 2020 • 64% agreed that ECITB did this | |

NB: there are no specific KPIs for Providers.

1.6 The rest of this Executive Summary details the key findings from the first wave of the research.

Skills and training issues

- 1.7 Employers, Providers and Stakeholders identified a number of common training and skills issues facing them as organisations and facing the engineering construction industry as a whole. For example, over two thirds of Employers (68%) and nearly all Providers (97%) had significant skills or training issues facing them as an organisation, often skills gaps in critical occupations, and the persistence of skills shortages with too few young people and new entrants joining the industry. The impact of Covid-19 was also prominent in all audiences' responses - both the ability of Providers to deliver, and Employers to access, training and the industry at large losing skills.
- 1.8 Employers were more positive than Providers on the support that ECITB had been able to provide on the skills and training issues they had faced. Three quarters of Employers (74%) felt that ECITB had provided support compared to just 40% of providers. Three in ten Providers felt that ECITB had offered no support. The most common sources of support from ECITB that Employers identified were all around the provision of funding, advice and support on training.

ECITB's objectives and strategic goals

- 1.9 Employers, Providers and Stakeholders held broadly similar views on the relative importance of ECITB's objectives and the effectiveness of ECITB's activities in meeting these.
- 1.10 The most important objectives for all audiences were those that concerned training and recruitment within the industry: ensuring National Occupation Standards (NOS), qualifications and training standards reflect industry requirements; supporting the training and recruitment of new entrants into the industry; improving access to quality and cost effective training, and; helping to address skills shortages and providing training solutions to tackle skills gaps. Perceived effectiveness at achieving these objectives varied slightly by audience, with Employers and Stakeholders more positive than providers.
- 1.11 Employers, Providers and Stakeholders tended to agree on those objectives with lower relative importance. These were often areas that are becoming increasingly important for the industry and society, but are less likely to have an immediate, short-term impact on customers' and Stakeholders operations': helping the industry to develop more diverse cultures and greater inclusivity; enabling companies to harness technology to improve skills and increase productivity; supporting the delivery of the industrial strategy and help the industry prepare for 'net zero', and; producing high-quality labour market intelligence (LMI). ECITB's activities in meeting these objectives were viewed as less effective than their activities around the objectives rated as more important. Further, a high level of 'don't know' responses when asked about ECITB's effectiveness indicates a lack of knowledge of ECITB's work in these areas.

ECITB's strategic added value

- 1.12 Employers thought ECITB's main strategic value to the industry was in ensuring smaller companies, who may otherwise struggle, can access training (85% agreed they did this), followed by ECITB's levy and grant system encouraging training to take place that may otherwise not have happened (76%). Fewer Employers thought ECITB added value by producing valuable LMI (50%) or by making a positive contribution to the delivery of the Government's industrial strategy (50%) or towards the industry's preparedness for 'net zero'

(48%): in each of these cases it was not that large proportions disagreed that ECITB had these impacts for the industry rather many (a quarter to a third) did not know.

- 1.13 The area in which Providers thought ECITB added the most value was in improving information, knowledge transfer and coordination of effort to the benefit of the industry (55% agreed ECITB had this impact). This was the only statement for which a majority of Providers agreed that ECITB performed that role for the industry. As with Employers and Stakeholders, these results are largely the result of many Providers not knowing how ECITB is performing rather than Providers holding negative views.
- 1.14 Stakeholders were very positive about ECITB's strategic value to the industry (and ECITB met all their Stakeholder KPIs for strategic added value). The areas where Stakeholders thought ECITB added the most value were: providing strategic leadership and acting as the leading authority on skills for the EC industry (85% agreed); producing valuable LMI (83%), and; the levy and grant system enabling training to take place that would otherwise not have happened (81%).

ECITB's products and services

- 1.15 Awareness of ECITB grants, products and services was relatively high among Employers, ranging from 97% aware of ECITB Training Grants to 69% aware of ECITB Technical Tests. Awareness varied little by region, size or sector.
- 1.16 Use of products was more varied: 93% of Employers had used ECITB Training Grants (87% in the past 12 months) compared to 22% having used ECITB Technical Tests (19% in the past 12 months). Smaller businesses (with fewer than 50 employees) were less likely to have used certain products/services, including Project Controls Training Programmes, Technical Training, Project Management Products, and Vocational Qualifications.
- 1.17 The proportion of Providers who were licensed or approved to deliver ECITB products varied quite widely from 61% for CCNSG cards compared to just 19% for ECITB Project Controls training programme and 16% for delivering Supervisory Programmes.
- 1.18 Employers were generally positive about the quality of the products/services and how they met their needs (at least three quarters of users felt each had met their needs). The vast majority were satisfied with the quality, accessibility and affordability of the training and assessment they had accessed through ECITB in the preceding 12 months, particularly its quality (88% satisfied vs. affordability (79%) or accessibility (80%). The extent to which ECITB products had been effective in achieving outcomes was more mixed though. Employers tended to feel that ECITB products had given their employees new knowledge and skills and validated existing knowledge, but thought they had been less effective in boosting workforce productivity or raising the profile of their company as an investor in skills and people.
- 1.19 Employer and Provider views on why they did not access or offer training were fairly consistent. Half of Employers (49%) said that they did not access ECITB products because they had no requirement, and the most common reason for Providers not delivering products, cited by a third to a half of providers, was a perceived lack of demand, followed by the product not matching their particular specialism.

Satisfaction with ECITB functions

ECITB functions

- 1.20 Employers were typically very positive about their Account Manager, particularly regarding their knowledge of ECITB products and services (97% satisfied), their overall relationship (96%) and their responsiveness to queries (94% satisfied). Employers were least satisfied with their Account Manager's ability to provide them with new connections, although seven in ten (71%) were still satisfied with this function.
- 1.21 In terms of ECITB's central administration and processes, Employers were most satisfied with the administration of training grants (82% satisfied). They were least satisfied with the Member Services Portal (MSP) (57% satisfied), particularly its usability.
- 1.22 Approved Training Providers were most satisfied with ECITB's licensing application process (70% satisfied) and the learner certification process (69%) and least satisfied with the operation of the MSP (48%) and ECITB's promotion and marketing support (37%). Approved Centres were most satisfied with ECITB's post-approval monitoring, and relatively least satisfied with the promotion and marketing support.
- 1.23 In terms of their Auditor or Account Manager's, Approved Providers were positive about their overall relationship, particularly valuing their level of knowledge about ECITB products and their ability to set appropriate actions (75% agreed for both). In relative terms they were least satisfied with how well they understood their needs: 61% were satisfied - the proportion dissatisfied was similar to some other aspects of service (12%), one in four (24%) were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, and results suggests this is an area for improvement.
- 1.24 Approved Centres were positive about some aspects of their relationship with their External Quality Assurer (EQA), such as their understanding of their needs, but less so about their overall relationship and their EQA's level of knowledge.

Communication

- 1.25 Methods of communication with ECITB differed by audience. It was most common for Employers and Providers to have contact through their Account Manager, or Auditor for some providers, and through the Member Services Portal (MSP). Without the formal channels of Account Managers and the MSP, Stakeholders were most likely to have direct contact either face to face, over the telephone or by teleconference.
- 1.26 Customers and Stakeholders are largely satisfied with the volume of communications received from ECITB. This is particularly the case with Employers (90% agreed), compared with three in four Providers (76%) and two thirds of Stakeholders (64%). Although relatively few Employers and Providers had a desire for more communications, one third (33%) of Stakeholders would like to receive more from ECITB.
- 1.27 Overwhelmingly the preferred method of communication was via email.

Relationship with ECITB

- 1.28 Nearly one in five respondents (18%) across all audiences were unable to articulate what they thought ECITB did best. This was particularly high for Providers (27%). Employers and

Stakeholders were more positive: both felt that their relationship had contributed positively to outcomes for their organisations; for Employers it was largely in identifying needs and improving the skills of their workforce, for Stakeholders it was in providing information on skills needs in the Engineering Construction Industry to help inform decision making. For example, 75% of Employers felt that their relationship with ECITB had increased worker competence, 73% agreed that it had helped them meet emerging skills needs, and 69% agreed that it had helped to identify and plan for future training needs. 74% of Stakeholders felt that their relationship had helped to provide valuable information to inform decision making, and 71% felt it had helped them understand the skills needs of the ECI. While Providers were generally less positive, they did identify how their relationship with ECITB had helped to improve the quality of their offer to the Engineering Construction Industry (58% agreed that their relationship with ECITB had contributed to this).

- 1.29 A slight majority of all respondents (53%) said that there was nothing they would not have been able to achieve without ECITB support (50% of Employers, 65% of providers, and 43% of Stakeholders). Among the remainder, there was little consensus on what ECITB support had helped them to achieve.

Continuous improvement

- 1.30 Employers were typically satisfied with the services ECITB provide to their organisation (81% vs 7% dissatisfied), although were slightly less satisfied about the services provided to the industry as a whole (65% vs. 4% dissatisfied with the service to the whole industry, though rising to 12% among medium sized firms). Providers' views about ECITB's services were significantly less positive than Employers', regarding both services to their organisation (55% satisfied vs 7% dissatisfied) and to the industry as a whole (42% satisfied vs. 3% dissatisfied). For both Employers and providers, only a small proportion were dissatisfied with ECITB's services to the industry; instead, a high proportion were unsure, suggesting low awareness of the impact that ECITB is having.
- 1.31 Stakeholders were the most likely audience to recommend ECITB to others (with a Net Promoter Score (NPS¹) of +43), followed by Employers (an NPS of +28). Providers were significantly less likely to recommend ECITB than either group, indeed more would be unlikely to recommend the organisation than would recommend them (an NPS of -15).
- 1.32 In terms of suggestions for improvement, the most common suggestions from Employers were concerning better availability of training opportunities (mentioned by 17%) and more funding or more flexibility in how they use their funding (12%). Providers and Stakeholders would like to see improvements in the way ECITB interacts with them: 13% of Providers would like to see improved communication and more consultation with them about industry needs, and 24% of Stakeholders would like to see improved communication, alongside a more collaborative or joined up approach (19%).

¹ The Net Promoter Score is derived from subtracting those that would not recommend the organisation from those that would. A positive score means more would recommend the organisation than would not recommend it.

2 Recommendations for improvement

2.1 This final chapter provides recommendations for improvement going forward, covering various aspects of ECITB's relationship with its customers and Stakeholders.

Recommendations

1. **Increase visibility of ECITB's activities and successes:** a common finding across all audiences was the high instance of 'don't know' responses about ECITB's effectiveness at achieving its strategic objectives and the extent to which ECITB adds value to the industry. Similarly, many were unable to articulate what ECITB does best, and satisfaction was lower for ECITB's overall service to the industry than to each organisation (with many unsure of its service to the sector). This suggests a lack of awareness of what ECITB does for the industry and could be addressed by a focus on more and better promotion and communication of the organisation's services and its impact.
2. Improve communications with customers and Stakeholders
 - a) When asked about what ECITB could improve, both Providers and Stakeholders most commonly mentioned communications. Providers were largely satisfied with the volume of communication from ECITB, suggesting it's the way you communicate, whereas around **one third of Stakeholders would like more regular communication from ECITB**. All audiences indicated a strong preference for email communication. Ensuring phone calls are answered and queries and requests are responded to in a timely manner would go some way to improving views on ECITB's communication. Additionally, some Providers would like to see more engagement with them about industry needs, perhaps through a steering group, while Stakeholders would like more regular updates on ECITB's activities.
 - b) **Consider how the Member Services Portal could be improved or made more appealing** to Employers and providers: around one in six of each group were dissatisfied with the MSP, with comments often about it needing to be more user-friendly.
 - c) Almost all employers (94%) had used at least one ECITB product or service in the preceding 12 months. Of the 91% of Employers who reported that there was at least one of ECITB's range of products and services that they had not accessed in the past 12 months, nearly a third (31%) said that they did not access training through ECITB because it was not suitable for their requirements, and Providers pointed to a lack of demand for many products. ECITB may wish to explore how their products can better meet Employers' requirements, or be more actively positioned as being able to meet Employer needs. This may need to emphasise future skill needs and the importance of such issues as net zero and increased diversity of the workforce, where ECITB's work appears to be less valued by Employers than many of its other activities.
3. **Focus attention on ECITB's offer to providers.** A common theme across the research was that Providers are less satisfied overall compared with Employers and Stakeholders, and were less likely to recommend ECITB to others, to think ECITB effective at achieving its objectives, and less likely to feel supported on skills and training issues. Specific areas to focus on should include: more promotion and marketing support (as many as 44% of Providers were dissatisfied with this),

improving customer service support and guidance (30% dissatisfied) and improving the approval process (25% dissatisfied).

4. **Collaborate with Providers on shaping ECITB's offer:** Despite being less satisfied than other audiences with ECITB, Providers made few suggestions on how products or services could be improved. This suggests collaborative work is needed with Providers on ECITB's offer to increase their buy-in, supported by the fact that 13% of Providers spontaneously mentioning that more consultation with them about the industry's needs is needed.

Adapting the questionnaires for future waves

- 2.2 The length of the three questionnaires was longer than anticipated; ECITB received feedback from some customers and Stakeholders that that the length stopped them participating in the research.
- 2.3 Ahead of the next wave of research, in 2021, ECITB and IFF will conduct a review of the three questionnaires. This will confirm areas to remove or shorten, as well as ensuring the research is up to date and reflects current priorities and circumstances for ECITB, its customers and Stakeholders and the engineering industry as a whole. As a precursor to this, the following bullets set out areas identified by IFF to could shorten the length of the surveys, which should lead to increased participation and a more comfortable respondent experience:
 1. Across the audiences, there was a fair amount of overlap in the findings between the objectives that customers and Stakeholders thought ECITB were effective at meeting and the areas in which ECITB added strategic value to the industry. This is an area which is likely to feel repetitive to the respondent and adds considerable length to the survey. It may be worth considering whether it is necessary to ask both the effectiveness of objectives and ECITB's perceived strategic value.
 2. In the sections in the Employer and Provider questionnaires about awareness and use/licensing of ECITB products, there were a number of questions asked in a loop for every product or service used/licensed or not used/licensed. As a result of asking about each individually there were a number of questions with low base sizes with limited use for quantitative analysis. We'd therefore suggest reviewing questions asked in a loop to determine whether any can be asked at an overall level. This would do a lot to cut survey length and reduce the risk of irritating respondents with repetitive questioning.
 3. ECITB may wish to consider if there are any other questions which are considered lower priority, and can be removed from the research, or are not necessary to ask every wave and can be rotated out for the next wave.

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