

# ECITB Customer and Stakeholder research report (2021)

ECITB

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# 1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 In 2020, 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, now in its second year, will run until 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 sets out the KPIs for 2021, and whether they were met.

**Table 1.1 ECITB Key Performance Indicators and whether these have been met (2020 and 2021)**

KPI	2020 target	2020 result	2021 target	2021 result	Change Y1>Y2
<b>Employers</b>					
The % of Employers who use ECITB products say they meet their needs (avg. across all products)	75%	86%	90%	89%	↑
The % of Employers reporting that ECITB support has helped address skills shortages and gaps	50%	73%	75%	58%	↓ *
The % of Employers satisfied with the quality, accessibility and affordability of training and assessment (across all 3 aspects)	50%	71%	70%	88%	↑ *
<b>Stakeholders</b>					
The % of Stakeholders who say they value ECITB's labour market intelligence >85%	60%	83%	85%	66%	↓
The % of Stakeholders who believe ECITB is contributing positively towards industry preparedness for net zero	60%	60%	65%	60%	→
The % of Stakeholders who believe ECITB is contributing positively towards the Industrial Strategy	60%	69%	65%	54%	↓
The % of Stakeholders who say ECITB is positively influencing skills Policy	60%	64%	70%	60%	↓

\* Indicates where the change between waves was statistically significant change between waves at a 95% confidence level

NB: there are no specific KPIs for Providers

- 1.6 Employers, Providers and Stakeholders generally expressed more positive views regarding ECITB's effectiveness in meeting objectives in 2021 compared to 2020. Although fewer KPIs have been hit this year, this is because the threshold scores have been increased since 2020. Had the KPI thresholds for 2021 remained the same as in 2020, five of the six KPIs would have been achieved (the exception is the percentage of Stakeholders who believe ECITB is contributing positively towards industry preparedness for net zero and the Industrial Strategy).
- 1.7 The rest of this Executive Summary details the key findings from the second wave of the research conducted in Autumn 2021, covering a year in which continuing Covid restrictions and the economic effects of lockdowns dominate. Findings are compared against those from the first wave in 2020 where the change is statistically significant.

### Skills and training issues

- 1.8 Skills and training issues remain problematic: over the last 12 months, 74% of Employers have faced skills and training issues, and 85% of Providers considered there to be skills and training issues for the industry as a whole.
- 1.9 For Employers, Providers and Stakeholders, the most commonly cited issues related to skills and training were persistent skills gaps and shortages (including fewer young / new entrants into the sector) and difficulties in accessing or providing training within the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. For example, Employers most commonly cited attracting applicants with the right skills for vacancies (27% cited this) and inability to access training due to Covid-19 lockdowns (26%) as the most significant skills and training issues they faced. Similarly, the most common issue affecting the Engineering Construction Industry (ECI) for Providers and Stakeholders was the persistence of skills gaps and shortages in critical occupations (cited by 36% of Providers and 54% of Stakeholders).
- 1.10 Employers were generally positive about the support provided by ECITB, and mentioned support relating to identifying, funding and organising training as the main type of support received. However, the proportion of Employers saying that ECITB had helped them to address skills shortages and gaps over the last 12 months fell significantly between 2020 and 2021 (from 73% to 58%), **meaning the KPI target of 75% for 2021 was not met.**

### ECITB's objectives and strategic goals

- 1.11 Employers, Providers and Stakeholders expressed similar views regarding the objectives they felt ECITB activities had been most effective in meeting. These included supporting the retention and development of essential skills, ensuring National Occupational Standards, qualifications and training standards reflect industry requirements, and helping address priority skills shortages and providing training solutions. Employers and Stakeholders were more positive than Providers regarding ECITB's effectiveness in improving access to quality and cost-effective training.
- 1.12 Overall, Employers, Providers and Stakeholders generally expressed similar views regarding ECITB's effectiveness in meeting objectives in 2021 compared to 2020. Changes between waves were not statistically significant, but included:
  - Employers being less likely to agree that ECITB had been effective in ensuring all Employers who should pay the ECITB levy do (48% in 2021, compared to 58% in 2020).

- Providers being more likely to report that ECITB activities had been effective in ensuring National Occupational Standards, qualifications and training standards reflect industry requirements (68%, an increase from 46% in 2020), and that ECITB had been effective in helping to address priority skills shortages and providing training solutions to tackle current skills gaps (51%, an increase from 34% in 2020).
- Stakeholders being more likely to agree that ECITB had been effective in addressing known skills shortages and providing training solutions to tackle skills gaps (64%, an increase from 54% in 2020), that ECITB had been effective in supporting the training and recruitment of new entrants into the industry (60%, an increase from 48% in 2020) and that ECITB had been effective in improving access to quality and cost-effective training (60%, an increase from 55% in 2020).
- Stakeholders were less likely to report that the ECITB had been effective in providing standardised assurance of the common competencies of the ECI workforce (40%, down from 58% in 2020).

1.13 Providers were less likely than Employers and Stakeholders to report that the ECITB has been effective in meeting its objectives (as was seen in 2020).

1.14 As in 2020, a relatively high proportion of respondents were unsure how effective ECITB had been at achieving certain objectives, suggesting there remains scope for improving the visibility of ECITB's activities. Objectives with particularly high proportions of 'don't know' answers for effectiveness included:

- Helping the industry develop more inclusive culture and encouraging workforce diversity (Employers 20%, Providers 21% and Stakeholders 26%).
- Enabling ECI companies to harness new technologies to improve productivity by having the right skills (Employers 23%, Providers 23%, and Stakeholders 42%).
- Enabling greater transferability of skills between sectors and projects, including through the Connected Competence Programme (Employers 29% and Providers 25%).
- Ensuring all Employers who should pay the ECITB levy do (Employers 33%).

### ECITB's strategic added value

1.15 Employers felt that ECITB provides most strategic value in terms of ensuring smaller companies can access training (80% agreeing overall) and ECITB contributing positively to government policies on skills (79% - a significant increase compared with 2020, when 64% agreed). Employers were also more positive in 2021 about the ECITB's contribution towards the industry's preparedness for net zero (65% vs. 48%) and the ECITB producing valuable labour market intelligence (65% vs. 50%).

1.16 Providers thought that ECITB adds the most value by ensuring smaller companies can access training who may otherwise not have been able to (68% agreed, a significant increase compared with 2020 – 48%) and by improving information exchange, knowledge transfer and coordination efforts (68% agreed). In 2021 Providers were more positive than they were in 2020 about how the ECITB contributes to government policy on skills (66% compared with 48%) and



how it leverages assets of organisations to the benefit of the industry (53% compared with 35%).

- 1.17 Stakeholders were most likely to cite the ECITB's strategic leadership (acting as the leading authority and voice on skills for the sector) as the area where it provides most strategic value (70% agreed). This was followed by 68% agreeing that the ECITB ensures smaller companies can access training who may otherwise struggle to access it, and the ECITB's influencing other Stakeholders to support the ECI. Stakeholder's views on strategic added value were consistent between 2020 and 2021, with no significant differences observed.

## ECITB's products and services

- 1.18 Employers' awareness of ECITB products and services was generally high, with nearly all (97%) aware of ECITB training grants. In comparison, awareness was lower for ECITB Technical Tests (50% - a statistically significant decrease from 69% in 2020) and ECITB Cards (68%). Almost all (98%) Employers had used ECITB training grants (and 89% had done so in the past 12 months). In comparison, less than half had used ECITB Technical Tests (42%, and 30% in the last 12 months) and half had used ECITB supervisor programmes (52%, and 41% in the last 12 months).
- 1.19 **Overall, an average of 89% of those who had used each product / service in the past 12 months agreed that it had met their needs, falling only slightly short of ECITB's KPI for 2021 (90%).** Employers who had accessed ECITB products and services all agreed that the Vocational Qualifications and Train to Retrain had met their needs, while almost all who had accessed grants (95%), technical training courses (91%) and technical tests (90%) had met their needs. Employers were only slightly less positive about the extent to which the cards (77%) and the project management products (76%) had met their needs.
- 1.20 Employers who had used an ECITB grant, product or service in the last 12 months were positive about the accessibility, quality and affordability of these, with 91% satisfied with accessibility, 86% with quality and 86% with affordability. Overall, 88% of Employers were positive about all three measures. **This exceeded ECITB's KPI for 2021, which aimed for more than 70% of Employers being satisfied with the quality, accessibility and affordability of training and assessment.**
- 1.21 The ECITB's products and services had been most effective in helping Employers give employees new knowledge and skills (86%), and validating the skills and knowledge of their workforce (75%).
- 1.22 By far the most common reason Employers had not used ECITB's products and services was that they were not felt to be suitable for the type of training/assessment required (53%, a significant increase compared with 2020 (31%)).
- 1.23 Providers were most likely to currently deliver the ECITB CCNSG card (53%), ECITB technical tests (43%) and ECITB training standards (40%), and were least likely to deliver the ECITB scholarship (9%) and ECITB supervisory programmes (13%). In terms of improvements to ECITB's products and services, the majority did not think any were needed, although some suggested modernising or updating the product, making improvements to the course content or structure, improving the examination process, or allowing tutors to add content to the product.

## Satisfaction with ECITB functions

### ECITB functions

- 1.24 Employers were positive about their account managers in general, particularly their level of knowledge of ECITB's products and services (97% satisfied) and their responsiveness to enquiries (95%). They were less positive about the account managers' ability to provide them with new connections (77%), although this had increased significantly since 2020 (51%).
- 1.25 In terms of ECITB's central administration and processes, Employers were most satisfied with the administration of training grants and the administration of the training levy (85% satisfied with each). They were least satisfied with the Member Services Portal (MSP) (72% satisfied), noting it needing to be modernised and more user friendly. However, this was a significant increase from 2020 where only 57% reported being satisfied with the MSP.
- 1.26 Approved Training Providers were most satisfied with the learner certification process (74% were satisfied), the registration of learner process (72%) and the licensing application process (68%). They were least satisfied with promotion and marketing support (41%). In terms of the services provided specifically by their Provider account manager, they were most satisfied with the relationship overall (77%) and their ability to set actions which are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound (76%). They were least satisfied with their account manager's efficiency (66%) and their understanding of needs (67%).
- 1.27 The small number of Approved Centres taking part in the research were most satisfied with registration and certification processes and about various aspects of their relationship with their account manager. As with Approved Training Providers, they were least positive about the promotion and marketing support and the understanding of their needs.
- 1.28 Stakeholders were most satisfied with ECITB's responsiveness to their enquiries (93% satisfied), but less so in terms of ECITB's understanding of needs and ECITB's ability to provide them with solutions or relevant input (both 71%).

### Communication

- 1.29 Methods of communication with ECITB differed slightly by audience. Employers and Providers most commonly had contact through their Account Manager, 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. The majority across all audiences thought the level of communication from ECITB was 'about right' and all audiences had a strong preference for email as a means of communication.

## Relationship with ECITB

- 1.30 When asked what ECITB were best at, Employers and Stakeholders felt it was providing advice and support on sourcing appropriate training (47% of Employers and 40% of Stakeholders). For Providers, the most common answer given was providing general support and advice to the industry (28%). This is a significant increase from 2020, where only 8% said the same. When asked to describe their relationship with ECITB, Employers were most likely (39%) to view the

ECITB as “*adding value to our learning and development aims and leading skills strategy for the industry*” when asked to describe their relationship with ECITB.

- 1.31 Employers most commonly felt that their relationship with ECITB had contributed to various skills and training outcomes; in particular, improving the competence of their workforce (76% agreed with this). In comparison, around half of Employers felt that their relationship with ECITB had improved inclusivity in their workforce (48%), contributed to increasing the productivity of their workforce (48%), or contributed to improving the competitiveness of their business or helped them win new business (47%).
- 1.32 Providers most commonly felt that their relationship with ECITB had enabled them to improve the quality of their offer to the ECI (70%) and to improve their reputation within the ECI (70%). Half felt their relationship with ECITB had enabled them to expand their product range (49%, up from 31% in 2020) or that it had helped them grow their business (49%). There is also evidence to suggest that the relationship between the ECITB and Providers has moved in a positive direction since last year, with the decline of 13 percentage points in the number saying that ECITB are like inspectors, and a 13 percentage point increase in the proportion of Providers reporting that they value ECITB highly.
- 1.33 Stakeholders were most positive about how the ECITB had helped them understand the skills needs of the ECI (80% agreed they had) and least positive about how their relationship had affected the way they made decisions about allocating resources or assets (52% agreed). They were most likely to describe their relationship with ECITB as one where they “frequently exchange information with ECITB and have a close dialogue on matters of mutual interest/importance”.

## Continuous improvement

- 1.34 Employers were typically satisfied overall with the service ECITB provided to their organisation (89%, with 9% dissatisfied), but only 65% were satisfied with the service to the ECI industry as a whole (with 5% dissatisfied, and 24% stating ‘don’t know’). Providers were less satisfied with the service provided to their organisation (64%), while 60% were satisfied with the ECITB’s service to the ECI, a significant increase compared with 2020 (42%).
- 1.35 In 2021, Providers were significantly more likely to recommend the ECITB to others than in 2020, with the Net Promoter Score (NPS) increasing from -15 to +24. NPS for Employers (+39) and Stakeholders (+32) remained consistent between the two years of the research.
- 1.36 When asked what ECITB could be doing to improve going forward, Employers suggested improvements around better availability of training opportunities – such as e-learning (17%), followed by more tailored training options (11%). For Stakeholders, a quarter (24%) wanted to see a more collaborative or joined up approach. One in eight (12%) were also keen to see better availability of training opportunities. For Providers, more engagement with Providers about the industry’s training needs (26%) was the most commonly mentioned theme (up from 13% in 2020).



## 2 Recommendations for improvement

2.1 Overall, ECITB customers and Stakeholders speak positively of the service provided by ECITB. Across many indicators, they are more positive in 2021 compared with 2020. That said, the majority of ECITB's 2021 KPIs were not met (largely because of higher KPI targets in 2021 than 2020; had the KPI targets remained the same five of six KPIs would have been met). Customer and Stakeholder views suggest there are some ways in which the ECITB can improve the service it provides to the industry. This chapter provides recommendations for future improvement as follows:

- **Increased engagement and support for Employers:** The proportion of Employers who felt that ECITB had helped them address skills shortages fell significantly between 2020 and 2021, from 73% to 58%. This could reflect wider changes in a tight labour market, rather than a change in the support provided by ECITB. In addition, a higher proportion of Employers cited not accessing ECITB products or services due to them not being suitable for the types of training and assessment required in 2021 than in 2020. This suggests that Employers feel less well supported by the ECITB in some areas, or at least that they are not always being supported in the right way. ECITB may wish to focus on how they can better help Employers target skills gaps and shortages, the main skills / training issues for Employers in 2021. In addition, ECITB could consult with Employers to identify ways ECITB can better support them as recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic continues.
- **Engaging with Providers and Stakeholders to better understand their needs:** Providers and Stakeholders cited the ECITB's understanding of their needs as the least positive aspect of the service provided by ECITB. Further, only a very small proportion cited the ECITB having a good understanding of their/industry needs as the "thing that ECITB does best". However, the most common suggestion Providers made for improvement to ECITB's service was to engage more with them about the training needs of the industry (rather than specifically around improving understanding of needs). This suggests that the ECITB could improve engagement with Providers and Stakeholders to understand the issues they are facing, and how ECITB might be able to support them to overcome these.
- **Increasing visibility of ECITB's activities:** There is more work the ECITB could do to make customers and Stakeholders aware of their activities. Current levels of awareness are relatively low, as evidenced by the high proportion of 'don't know' responses when asked how effective ECITB had been at achieving its strategic objectives). Objectives with particularly high proportions of 'don't know' answers for effectiveness included:

  - Helping the industry develop a more inclusive culture and encouraging workforce diversity;
  - Enabling ECI companies to harness new technologies to improve productivity by having the right skills;
  - Enabling greater transferability of skills between sectors and projects, including through the Connected Competence Programme, and;
  - Ensuring all Employers who should pay the ECITB levy do.

- **Greater focus on ensuring ECITB are making a positive contribution towards the industry's preparedness for net zero and communicating this to the industry)** Across all three audiences, this measure receives relatively low scores in terms of the extent to which customers and Stakeholders perceive that ECITB is adding strategic value to the industry. In addition, the Stakeholder KPIs on these two measures have been missed in 2021. In the context of growing concerns about the impact of climate change (e.g., the COP26 summit) it is important that ECITB are seen to be making a positive contribution to reducing the impact the ECI has on the environment. Further, it is important that the work done by ECITB in this area is visible to ECITB's customers and Stakeholders.

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IFF Research illuminates the world for organisations businesses and individuals helping them to make better-informed decisions.”

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Whether Employer or employee, client or collaborator, we are all humans first and foremost. Recognising this essential humanity is central to how we conduct our business, and how we lead our lives. We respect and accommodate each individual's way of thinking, working and communicating, mindful of the fact that each has their own story and means of telling it.

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5th Floor  
St. Magnus House  
3 Lower Thames Street  
London  
EC3R 6HD  
Tel: +44(0)20 7250 3035  
Website: [iffresearch.com](http://iffresearch.com)

Contact details: