

World Class Customer Service.... for 2012 and beyond

Research and recommendations regarding how best to raise customer service standards across the visitor economy in advance of the London 2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games

Summary Report

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How to use this document

This document presents a summary of the findings, conclusions and recommendations presented in the '*World Class Customer Service.... for 2012 and beyond*' report published in October 2008.

It is presented in four main sections:

- Section one: provides an overview of the research, including the importance of customer service in 2012 and an explanation as to how the research was conducted
- Section two: presents the key findings from the research, including an overview of the current state of customer service and how employers perceived as offering high standards of customer service train their staff
- Section three: sets out the report's conclusion and in particular outlines the factors that need to be present in the content and delivery of excellent customer service training
- Section four: presents the report's recommendations. These have been endorsed by all six Sector Skills Councils participating in this research.

Readers are advised to look under section four to understand how the research findings could be taken forward.

Recommendations at a glance

The following nine recommendations are made on the back of this research:

1. Establishing a high-profile customer service campaign
2. Providing branding to recognise excellence in customer service provision
3. Specific interventions to improve the customer experience for 2012
 - 3.1 Developing a destination-based approach to raising standards
 - 3.2 Developing collateral specifically for those working at 'Games-time'
 - 3.3 Accrediting a specific 'Games-time' training unit for a skills Legacy
4. Developing a best practice framework against which training, qualifications and trainers are assessed
5. Improving and rationalising existing provision, where appropriate
6. Taking a consistent approach to the development of new qualifications and modules
7. Improving training delivery through CPD for trainers
8. Working with employers to stimulate the demand for qualifications
9. Embedding customer service in pre-employment programmes

1. Overview

1.1 Winning hearts and minds

The London 2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games will provide the UK visitor economy with a fantastic opportunity to shine on the world stage. Key to the success of the Games for the visitor economy, and UKPLC as a whole, will be its people. It is generally acknowledged (and evidenced by this research) that customer service levels across the visitor economy are patchy and rarely exceptional. This timely piece of research not only serves as a wake-up call but seeks to showcase best practice and suggest bold solutions for change. Quick fixes and taking easy options are unlikely to achieve the step-change needed.

The research presented in this report, the conclusions reached and the recommendations made, are based on extensive consultation with a wide range of industry experts from within the UK and overseas. Experts consulted ranged from companies widely acknowledged to be leaders in customer service across all six sectors, such as John Lewis, the Four Seasons, KLM, The Tate Modern, the British Transport Police and DC Leisure, to the Institute of Customer Service, training professionals and academic commentators. Extensive research was also undertaken with over 2,000 businesses from across the UK, of all sizes, across the whole visitor economy (to identify current practices and attitudes), with employees undertaking existing training programmes and qualifications (to identify what works and where there is room for improvement) and with a wide range of public sector stakeholders.

When talking about poor levels of customer service within the UK, people frequently say, 'it's a cultural thing', 'people have the wrong attitude' or 'you can't change mindsets'. However, whilst changing behaviour is difficult, the research highlights that by focusing on changing organisational culture to embrace a customer-focused ethos and fostering good practice through supervisors and line managers down to front-line staff, behaviours can be changed to provide exemplary customer service.

Whilst much of the research focussed on training, improving customer service levels often requires much more than that, as one employer interviewed articulated:

"It's just not about training. It's about an attitude. It's about never giving up, always striving and always looking at what you can do better. Always being aware that you can't ever arrive, you've always got to keep going at it... If you focus on customer service it can make an incredible difference."

1.2 Background

Research undertaken on behalf of the Skills for Business Network in 2007¹ identified 'customer service skills' as the skills that were most in need of improvement across a wide range of customer-facing roles that regularly engage with tourists and other visitors.

To identify how best to raise customer service skills across the visitor economy in advance of the 2012 Games, the London Development Agency (LDA) and London Learning and Skills Council (LSC) commissioned a consortium of Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) to investigate the area in depth. These councils, led by People1st,

¹ Analysis of the skills needed to improve the visitor experience and sports presentation for the London 2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games, Impact Research, 2007

comprised Creative and Cultural Skills, GoSkills², SkillsActive, Skillsmart Retail and Skills for Justice / Skills for Security. They cover the key visitor economy areas of Hospitality, Leisure, Travel and Tourism, Creative and Cultural, Passenger Transport, Active Leisure, Retail and Justice and Security.

The main objectives of the research were to:

- Identify existing customer service training provision for front line staff
- Evaluate the effectiveness of different programmes
- Identify best practice (including in-house provision and international programmes)
- Make recommendations regarding the ideal content, method of delivery, time of delivery, and length of customer service training provision
- Make recommendations as to whether:
 - The public sector should direct funding to existing programme/s
 - Existing programme/s need updating/improving
 - New programme/s need to be developed

A key question was to identify what could be described as ‘world class’ service³. The definition arrived at was:

World class service is a consistently high level of service which meets and strives to exceed customer expectations.

Factors that could take average service to a higher level include:

- Creating a ‘wow’ factor
- Going the extra mile
- ‘Connecting’ with the customer
- Getting the basics right every time (consistency)
- Dealing effectively with problems and complaints

1.3 Methodology

In line with the ethos of the Leitch⁴ agenda, the research methodology predominantly centred on gathering employer views. The premise being that taking a ‘demand-led’ approach and representing employer views accurately will result in solutions that meet employer needs and are therefore embraced by industry. However, given the scale and scope of this project, it was also vital to draw on existing research and gather the views of customer service experts, training professionals, learners and other stakeholders. The research took place between October 2007 and March 2008.

Broadly speaking, the research focused on understanding:

² GoSkills are the lead for customer service across the SSC network and have a partnership with ICS

³ The research initially aimed to examine ‘Gold Standard’ levels of service, but this was subsequently changed to ‘World Class’ to make a direct link with Leitch’s skills ambitions

⁴ In 2004, Lord Leitch was asked by Government to identify what the UK’s optimal skills mix would need to be in 2020 to enable the nation to maximise economic growth, productivity and social inclusion, and to consider the policy implications of achieving the level of change required. The Leitch Review of Skills - Lord Leitch’s final report - was published in December 2006. It recommended that we ‘raise our game’ on skills at all levels and called for a new world class ambition.

- Employer views (30 in-depth interviews, 8 focus groups, 2,000 telephone interviews)
- Expert views (20 in-depth interviews)
- Consumer views (review of existing research)
- Evaluating existing provision (observations, line manager interviews and tracking of employees)

2. Key findings

2.1 Current state of play

Research undertaken by VisitBritain indicates that currently, overseas visitors' perceptions and experiences of customer service and the overall 'welcome' offered by Britain are poor, whilst research by Visit London shows that UK visitors to London are less satisfied than their overseas counterparts.

Employers themselves acknowledge that some of their staff lack the required level of customer service skills and that this is in turn impacting on their ability to deliver excellent customer service. Employers attribute this to a paucity of skilled and knowledgeable staff (both front-line staff and supervisors/managers) with the 'right attitude'.

A survey undertaken as part of this research showed that 57 percent of visitor economy businesses believe the customer service skills of their staff could be improved. Across the visitor economy, the largest number of people with 'skills gaps' in customer handling work in the two largest sectors (in terms of workforce size): retail and hospitality, leisure, travel and tourism (HLTT), whilst employers in the Active Leisure and HLTT sectors are most likely to identify a need to improve the customer service skills of their workforce.

Across the sectors, verbal communication skills and welcoming skills are ranked by employers as being most important in terms of staff providing excellent customer service. These were followed by confidence, product knowledge, a professional looking appearance, the ability to resolve conflicts and complaints, English language skills, disability awareness and the ability to anticipate customer needs.

Some of these skills, knowledge and attributes will be best developed within businesses through managerial support whilst others are more suitable to being developed through formal training (whether in-house or external). Across the six sectors, two of the areas in which employers feel skills/attributes are particularly important but are lacking within the current workforce are 'the ability to deal with complaints and conflicts' and 'confidence'.

According to the survey undertaken for this project 80 percent of chains and 47 percent of independent businesses in the visitor economy currently provide customer service training for their staff. 87 percent of those who provide customer service training for their staff develop this training in-house, of which approximately a quarter also access externally developed training. Businesses that are part of a chain are more likely to access externally developed training than independent businesses. Most 'best practice' employers interviewed for this research use a range of internally and externally developed training to develop the skills of their staff, some of which leads to a recognised qualification.

Half of all visitor-economy businesses provide some customer service training within inductions for new staff. This is seen to be important as it highlights the importance

of good customer service as soon as someone joins a business. Much of the internally developed in-house customer service training used by best practice businesses is based around a few simple customer service values and standards.

Best practice employers advocate the importance of constantly refreshing customer service training. Refresher training tends to be delivered by supervisors and line managers and tends to take the form of coaching and delivering motivational team talks. In addition, employers believe that managers should act as role models and lead by example. However this presumes that managers *themselves* understand what exemplary service is and are able to demonstrate this. The extent to which this happens in most businesses is questionable and a potential gap.

In terms of training currently provided to supervisors and line managers, this tends to be generic management training which may include how to motivate staff, coaching skills or train-the-trainer courses.

Awareness of publicly supported customer service training provision is relatively low and does not vary greatly between large and small businesses. Just over a quarter of survey respondents said that they provided customer service training that led to a formal qualification. The main reason why businesses said that they did not use formal qualifications was 'a lack of awareness'.

The majority of barriers cited by employers as reasons for not providing customer service training are linked to the nature of employment across the sectors. Seasonality, high staff turnover and high proportions of part-time, voluntary and overseas workers were all given as reasons why training was difficult.

2.2 Raising skills

A clear finding from the research is that purely training front-line staff in customer service will have minimal impact on service levels if other factors are not in place. For customer service training to be effective, there needs to be a customer-focused culture within a business (driven from the top down), leaders and supervisors who have excellent customer service skills themselves and lead by example and need to have the skills to be able to coach and motivate their staff, processes and systems that are designed with customers in mind, the adoption of good people management practices to ensure staff are happy in their jobs, appropriate reward and recognition and mechanisms for relaying customer feedback to staff.

There appear to be two schools of thought regarding customer service training. One view is that training cannot change behaviour. Staff should be recruited purely on their attitude and personality and be provided with the knowledge they need to do their job well through training. The view is that when equipped with this knowledge (such as product knowledge), staff become confident and their personality and professionalism can shine through, enabling them to deliver excellent customer service. The other school of thought is that whilst some people may not be suited to customer service roles, many could improve their service skills through training and could learn how to change their behaviours.

Not all businesses can purely recruit on attitude and personality. This is partly due to a shortage of people with these attributes looking for jobs in the service sector, particularly in areas where there is a tight labour market. Therefore, there is a strong argument that customer service training should focus on training the relevant behaviours.

2.3 Ensuring training has an impact

Initially, the research focussed on what customer service training should cover to enable staff to deliver 'World class' customer service. So, for example, how could staff be trained to be intuitive or 'go the extra mile'. However, throughout the course of this research it became apparent that there is very little difference between the content of the majority of customer service courses, but that some approaches to delivering the training are able to inspire learners and improve their customer service skills much more effectively than others.

The research found that the following factors have the greatest impact on whether customer service training improves service levels in the workplace:

- How inspiring the trainer is
- The ability of the training to tap into an individual's personal motivations and aspirations
- The effectiveness of different delivery methods in engaging learners and embedding key messages
- The extent to which training provides practical examples and tips that learners can put into practice in the workplace
- The extent to which training focuses on improving skills that individuals themselves would like to improve
- The extent to which training focuses on attitudes and behaviours
- The extent to which training is followed up in the workplace, particularly by:
 - Continuous refreshment and reinforcement by line managers
 - Coaching by line managers
 - Linking delivering excellent customer service to rewards (financial or otherwise)
 - Monitoring customer service in the workplace

In terms of content, employers and experts interviews suggested that customer service training should cover the following areas:

- What is excellent customer service?
- You make a difference
- What's In It For Me?
- Understanding the link between thoughts, attitude, behaviour and impact that your behaviour may have on others (your internal and external customers)
- Treating customers as individuals
- Intuitive service
- How to be flexible to customer needs
- Understanding the customer's journey
- The importance of communicating clearly (verbally and written)
- The language of service
- Listening skills
- Body language
- Image and grooming
- Importance of the welcome and farewell
- Marketing and upselling
- Complaint handling
- Creating an experience

Table 1 presents a delivery model that encapsulates the views of the experts participating in the research, as well as the ways in which companies perceived as delivering excellent customer service training are delivering it.

Table 1: Delivery model to front-line staff⁵

	Pre-course	Course	Post course (will vary depending on circumstances)
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion with line manager • Completion of pre-course form • Psychometric test (please note – there were strong opinions on whether or not this should be included – on both sides of the argument) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trainer-led discussion • Trainer-led group activities • Observation • Paired work • Scenarios • Writing planned actions about what they will do differently when they go back to the workplace 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting with manager to look at their action plan • Completing formal post-course self-evaluations • On-the-job observation by supervisors and situational coaching to reinforcing and embedding learning
Outcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learner understands what will be covered on course • Learner understands the importance of customer service to their business • Learner starts to think about their own customer service skills and areas they would like to improve 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learner understands the impact that their attitude and behaviour can have on customers • Learner appreciates how providing excellent service benefits them individually • Learner understands what World Class customer service is • Learners understand the importance of communicating clearly • Learners understand how to develop customer loyalty and generate repeat business • Learner takes away practical advice and tips 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learner applies what they have learnt in the workplace
Measure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psychometric test 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • End of course knowledge test (optional) • Observation by trainer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment of skill <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Observation by manager/assessor ○ Providing evidence of performance

⁵ Note: For courses that are being delivered as part of pre-employment programmes the ‘pre’ and ‘post’ elements will not apply

The research suggests that employers value customer service training that leads to a qualification. However, a qualification is not always a requirement and for many, bespoke, inspirational training could be equally as beneficial. Consultation with intermediary organisations who promote training to businesses found that government funding and subsidising training was essential to take up (especially for small businesses). Currently, mainstream government funding tends to be directed towards qualifications. This suggests that to encourage maximum take-up and impact qualifications should be part of the proposed range of 'solutions'.

Employers interviewed for this research have clearly articulated the need for supervisors and line managers to complete the same customer service training as the people they manage so that they:

- develop high levels of customer service skills themselves and are able to lead by example
- understand the training their staff have undertaken and are able to support, motivate and refresh the training effectively

It is therefore recommended that completion of the relevant training or qualification is a prerequisite for those wishing to undertake the related supervisory/line management training or qualification.

3. Conclusion

3.1 The role of training

Purely training front-line staff in customer service will have minimal impact on service levels if other factors are not in place. For customer service training to be effective, there needs to be a customer-focused culture within a business (driven from the top down), leaders and supervisors who have excellent customer service skills themselves and lead by example, processes and systems that are designed with customers in mind, the adoption of good people management practices to ensure staff are happy in their jobs, appropriate reward and recognition and mechanisms for relaying customer feedback to staff.

Common methods used by businesses (particularly larger ones) to raise and maintain customer service levels include the use of customer service standards and mystery shopping.

However, with the right mechanisms in place, the right training can play a crucial role in improving the customer service skills of individuals. It can:

- Provide individuals with an insight into their own behaviour and actions and the impact they have on others
- Teach practical tips that individuals can put into practice in the workplace
- Remind individuals of the importance of customer service, for them individually and their employers
- Motivate individuals to want to deliver excellent service

Effective training (and robust recruitment practices) can also ensure that line managers and supervisors firstly possess and demonstrate exemplary customer service skills themselves and secondly have the ability to motivate and coach their staff to deliver excellent service.

3.2 Content of training

The research leads us to conclude that the content of training for both line managers/supervisors and front-line should cover the importance of providing excellent service, the impact individual's attitudes and behaviours have on customers, how to be responsive to customer needs, the importance of clear communication, how to develop customer loyalty and how to deal effectively with complaints. In addition, the research suggests that training for line managers/supervisors should cover how to develop a customer service culture, coaching, team building, motivation and monitoring performance.

It was also concluded that additional modules were required to cover a number of other areas in more detail. These would also be embedded in the core module or qualification and include areas such as intercultural skills, disability awareness, foreign languages and conflict management. These could be delivered alongside the main training or as part of ongoing development.

The research demonstrated that English language skills need improving in specific sub-sectors to help improve service. This is a particular issue in London and the South East. It is important that this link (i.e. the direct impact that poor English language skills can have on customer service, and therefore repeat business, profit and reputation) is clearly articulated to industry and government.

The research also demonstrated that the vast majority of customer service content is generic in nature. However, what has also clearly emerged from the research is that employers believe that customer service training should be tailored to specific sectors, sub-sectors and, for larger companies in particular, individual businesses.

The conclusion reached is that:

- All scenarios, examples, activities and exercises used on training programmes should be tailored to ensure they are relevant to the industry in which the learner works
- Where learning is assessed, any evidence requirements should be linked to the business in which the learner works
- The marketing of courses should be tailored to specific industries/businesses

3.3 Delivery of training

It is clear from the research that the success of customer service training really does depend on how it is delivered. The term 'delivery' covers a wide range of aspects including:

- The format or structure of training
- The trainer
- The method of delivery
- The amount of time spent on different elements
- Methods used to embed learning

3.3.1 Format of training

In terms of the format or structure of customer service training, the 'best practice' employers and experts suggest the following.

Pre-course work

- To engage people before they undertake formal training to ensure they:
 - Understand what the training is about and what it will cover
 - Understand the benefits of attending the training
 - Understand how the training links to their role and the business aims and objectives of their employer (if applicable)
- An initial assessment of understanding and skill (to enable trainers to tailor the level of training and pitch it accordingly)
- An initial behavioural type test (to get people thinking about their own behaviours and the impact they might have on customers)

Formal training

- A 'motivational' element to engage participants from the start

Post-course follow-up

- To develop and embed new skills
- To refresh training
- To link training to individual and business targets (if applicable)

Employers clearly articulate the need for short (half or one day) customer service training for their staff. However, there are concerns with this. Firstly, short customer service training without any follow-up in the workplace will have little impact on customer service skills in the long term. Secondly, this is insufficient time to effectively improve customer service skills to enable individuals to deliver excellent service. Solutions could include ensuring that training is designed to be delivered in short bite-sized chunks and, with training that leads to a recognised qualification, elements back in the workplace could be mandatory.

3.3.2 Trainers

Customer service trainers, possibly more so than trainers of more technical or academic subjects, need to be inspirational, charismatic, engaging and able to draw from a wealth of industry experience to make training relevant to individuals. Trainers really need to be able to win the hearts and minds of delegates to ensure the training is effective and leads to improved customer service in the workplace.

3.3.3 Location of delivery

The general feeling from both experts and best practice employers was that initial customer service training should take place off-the-job. Some advocated training that is delivered away from the premises with an external trainer to demonstrate to staff that they are being invested in. Others believed that off-the-job training is best delivered on-site either by external or internal trainers. This may be a more practical and cost effective way of delivering training (for medium and large companies in particular) and the use of an internal trainer is likely to mean that the training is most closely associated with the company itself making it more meaningful for participants.

A common theme emerging from the best practice employer interviews across all sectors was the importance of off-the-job refresher training. Refresher training can take many forms and can range from 15 minute team talks delivered by line managers every morning focussing on a specific topic (such as dealing with certain types of customers) to more formal and longer sessions once or twice a year. Refresher training is important as it serves as a reminder of the importance of customer service and allows staff to take time out to reflect on their skills and refocus on providing consistently high levels of service.

The research suggests that on-the-job coaching is key to focusing staff on providing consistently high levels of customer service. High quality coaching can be extremely effective across all levels of a business or organisation. At the core of customer service coaching in best practice businesses is a culture of 'catching people doing things right'. This reinforcement and praise of good behaviour can be extremely motivating and help ingrain certain traits. Formal coaching (usually undertaken by a trainer, a line manager or supervisor) often involves asking staff to reflect on how they have handled certain situations and talk about how they might do things differently in the future.

3.3.4 Method of delivery

A fundamental finding from this research is the importance of using effective delivery methods for customer service training. Customer service is all about interacting with people and therefore training needs to be delivered in an engaging, interactive way for it to be relevant to people's jobs.

The main conclusions from the research regarding delivery are:

- A blend of delivery methods is likely to be most effective
- Delivery needs to be fun, engaging and interactive

- Certain delivery methods are more appropriate for certain elements of customer service training. For example, practical activities may be most suitable for disability awareness training, on-line tools could be used for training on company standards, customer journeys could be used in empathy training and new technology – such as the use of video mobile and e-learning, could be used for top up training/reminders.
- It is vital that the delivery methods allow for training to be tailored as much as possible. If training is delivered using examples and activities that are contextualised to specific industries and businesses, learners are much more likely to understand the key messages, engage with the training, and ultimately use what they have learnt to improve performance.
- Customer service training should be based around simple messages that are relevant and easy to remember.

3.3.5 Assessment of learning and ongoing performance

The research suggests that whilst a written test is appropriate for assessing the knowledge a learner has gained by undertaking customer service training, it is not the most appropriate method of assessing the actual customer service skills of individuals.

The two main ways by which employers appear to assess the customer service skills of staff are through observations by line managers and via mystery shopping programmes, both of which are 'real situations'. Employers believe that ultimately the customer service skills of their staff are assessed through feedback from customers.

In practical terms, a conclusion of the report is that for assessment to work most effectively it should be undertaken by an individual's line manager and the assessment processes embedded in the organisational processes and procedures.

Assessment of skills through observation could be done by a trainer in a simulated environment for learners not in employment (for example the unemployed or those in full-time education).

3.4 Specific 'Games-time' requirements of customer service training

It is hoped that the 2012 Games will be a catalyst for improving customer service skills across the visitor economy as a whole.

Research⁶ previously carried out for the Skills for Business Network suggests that the Games will further increase demand for customer service skills, plus also suggest that there will be a need for specific 'Games' knowledge for those working in visitor-facing roles.

This view has been echoed by many of the employers and experts interviewed for this project, who felt that Games knowledge – including history of the event and destination knowledge - was needed by not just those working directly on the Games (which LOCOG has responsibility for training) but also by front-line staff. It was felt that training the wider workforce at key visitor destinations and touch points would help create a sense of pride in the Games and the city, as well as provide front line staff with knowledge that would benefit the visitor, providing a better quality visitor experience.

⁶ Analysis of the skills needed to improve the visitor experience and sports presentation for the London 2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games, Impact Research, 2007

This project also concluded that any specific Games-related training could be utilised for future major events (such as the 2014 Commonwealth Games) and could include:

- History of the event
- Key facts
- Visitor profile
- Requirements of different visitors
- Visitor journey
- Event knowledge
- Security awareness

3.5 Extent to which existing publicly supported provision is meeting employer and individual needs

The research suggests that whilst the NVQ in Customer Service and other Apprenticeships and NVQs which embed customer service elements are relevant for some sectors and businesses, for others they are too long and in some cases lack a motivational element to inspire individuals to want to change their behaviour and deliver excellent customer service.

The majority of other publicly supported customer service training provision is short (which is what many employers demand) but the research indicates that without managerial involvement and support, linking training to individual's motivations, tailoring training to a business and a robust means of assessment, 'sheep dip' type training will have minimal long-term impact.

The research has found that ultimately the way in which customer service training is delivered has an impact on individuals and gives them the tools and motivation to deliver excellent customer service follows generic good training practice. There are examples of how this approach is used in-house and by private consultants which could be used within the funded training system to help ensure that programmes leading to qualifications really inspire individuals and add value. There are implications here for publicly funded provision, for employers and learners to get the best value from the training, those delivering the training must be skilled to deliver it.

Given the rules about not placing units with a similar content on the Framework, the introduction of the Qualification and Credit Framework (QCF) across England, Wales and Northern Ireland in Autumn 2008 should address the problem experienced by some employers of unnecessary duplication.

3.6 Industry buy-in and promotion

Achieving employer buy-in is critical to raising the customer service levels across the visitor economy. Essentially, it will be achieved through the development of the right solutions (i.e. solutions which demonstrably improve customer service levels), but also critically by demonstrating the financial and tangible impact on a participating business, through activities like Quality Management Schemes, Public Sector Benchmarking, 'mystery shopping' and Return on Investment (ROI) models.

The size and type of business needs to be taken into account when developing solutions to ensure buy-in. For example, some of the practices adopted by large organisations may not be feasible for smaller organisations, also what works for one sector may not be as effective in another. Case studies and promotional activities need to be relevant and hints and tips need to be practical to implement this in reality.

Take up of qualifications by those working in the visitor economy is generally low, often because of the length of the qualifications on offer. For many businesses in the visitor economy, high staff turnover and seasonal employment can present barriers to both take up of qualifications and their ability to maintain high levels of customer service. As well as demonstrating the financial and tangible impact these qualifications are having on a business, public funding also needs to be in place to stimulate employers, especially smaller employers, to offer their staff these qualifications.

Marketing and promotion are obviously important means of raising employers' awareness of the framework. By undertaking a customer service campaign, or embedding the framework within an existing or planned customer service-related campaign the framework would be set in context. A campaign should also try and involve as many sector-specific and regional partners as possible to ensure that messages were receiving a wide audience and that employers were being encouraged to participate by their own industry organisations, as this will have more likelihood of increasing their participation. Employer champions should also be encouraged, particularly those involved with existing initiatives (where these meet the best practice framework). There is also a role for SSCs to work with, and support champions.

Organisations that will be important to the marketing include VisitBritain, Visit London, Regional Development Agencies (RDAs), tourist boards, industry groups, professional bodies, trade associations, Chambers of Commerce and Business Links.

4. Recommendations

Creating a momentum for change

R1. Establishing a high-profile customer service campaign

Ultimately change will be driven by business leaders and therefore a high-profile campaign is recommended to demonstrate the benefits of investing in improving customer service and create a momentum for change. VisitBritain, who lead the Welcome to Britain group⁷ is well placed to co-ordinate and drive such a campaign as part of the work of this group, possibly through a series of regional roadshows/events, across the country early next year. The campaign should also be channelled through industry (such as through trade and professional bodies) to ensure that it is perceived to be relevant to the whole of the visitor economy.

The Welcome to Britain road show 'proposition' is currently being scoped and would need to include a variety of organisations, including VisitBritain and the Regional Development Agencies and, on customer service skills (as well as skills in general), the Sector Skills Councils involved in this project and members of the steering group.

The campaign will need a suitable identity, such as a logo, which will allow consumer-facing organisations such as national and regional tourist boards to raise awareness of its benefits to consumers.

R2. Providing branding to recognise excellence in customer service provision

Employers and training providers who demonstrate excellence in customer service could use the logo and other collateral produced for the campaign.⁸

R3. Specific interventions to improve the customer experience for 2012

Some specific activities could take place in the run up to the Games to promote an enhanced experience for visitors and a successful Games.

R3.1 Developing a destination-based approach to raising standards in a particular geographic location

A targeted approach is recommended to raise the quality of the visitor experience for the 2012 Games. It is recommended that a destination-based approach to raising standards should be adopted by businesses operating at key tourist destinations (such as train stations, airports, Piccadilly Circus, Covent Garden, Oxford Street and areas around the Olympic sites). This could include:

- Undergoing a customer service benchmarking audit
- Participating in a common mystery shopping exercise

⁷ The 'Welcome to Britain' group was established in October 2006 with the aim of delivering a first-class welcome to all visitors to Britain through every stage of the visit by 2012, from first contact to departure, and ensuring that this world class welcome is recognised by the world in 2012. The group is chaired by VisitBritain, with representatives from BAA, inbound transport providers, and the Government departments responsible for visa, immigration, transport and other relevant issues.

⁸ In the Active leisure sector, this could be demonstrated through QUEST, FLAME or the David Bellamy Conservation Awards, British Graded Holiday Park scheme and England for Excellence Award for Caravan parks.

- A commitment to training

Albeit costly, such an approach is vital to help ensure that visitors receive an outstanding customer service experience during Games-time.

Links should be established with existing business groups to ensure that the solutions are industry-led. Business groups could include the Leicester Square Business Association, the Heart of London Business Alliance, the New West End Company and the East London Business Alliance. This could be led, co-ordinated and funded by organisations such as RDAs, Tourist Boards or local authorities.

R3.2. Developing collateral specifically for those working at 'Games-time'

It is recommended that the London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games and Paralympic Games (LOCOG) and/or the LDA produce a 'z-card' which is distributed to all visitor-facing staff in London and around other Olympic venues immediately prior to the Games. This should contain information that staff could use to answer visitors questions, for example:

- Local transport information (such as a tube map)
- Local tourist attractions
- The location of Olympic venues
- Estimates of the length of time it takes to get between key places

It is recommended that the feasibility of other potential solutions which could improve the experience of visitors are investigated, such as Olympic branded name badges for their staff which state the languages they speak and orientation visits for those working in the visitor economy. For example, taxi drivers could be given the opportunity to spend a day on a tour bus and given free access to some key tourist destinations to help them 'sell' the city to the passengers.

R3.3. Accrediting a specific 'Games-time'/major event training unit for a skills Legacy

The research recommended that a specific major events module/unit should be developed at a later date, including 2012 Games-related supportive information provided by LOCOG. Such a unit should be recognised as part of the customer service framework and be accredited on the QCF targeting those who work in the visitor economy. Further discussions will be taken forward with LOCOG during the implementation of this project's findings, to identify appropriate links between the training of Games-time staff and those working in the visitor economy.

Raising skills and creating a legacy

R4. Developing a best practice framework against which training, qualifications and trainers are assessed

The research has found that excellent customer service is underpinned by the right combination of content, delivery and assessment. It is recommended that the framework identified through this research outlining recommended content, delivery and assessment is operationalised to allow existing and proposed customer service provision to be mapped against it. This will allow programmes to adopt the practice undertaken by those employers and providers considered to be delivering excellent customer service training. It is recommended that the framework should be taken forward by SSCs and/or National Skills Academies.

3.1 Shorter courses that meet the best practice framework

Short, generic and transferable customer service qualifications are a priority in the Customer Service Sector Qualification Strategy Action Plan currently being developed by the Institute of Customer Service. This framework will be designed to avoid the old 'quick fix' courses that currently exist. It is proposed that courses on the framework will have an induction followed by staged progression and refresher courses all within an ongoing continuous professional development (CPD) context. The intention is that these courses will build on each other to give clear progression pathways.

3.2 Longer courses that meet the best practice framework

Whilst many employers wanted to see shorter programmes, there were a number of larger operators who were successfully using the NVQ in Customer Service. It was seen as being a good qualification as it can be embedded within a particular organisation and can be delivered in the workplace. Therefore, it is recommended that the NVQ in Customer Service continues to be made available to those employers who wish to offer their staff the qualification.

In the hospitality, leisure, travel and tourism sector it is recommended that the NVQ in customer service is matched against the framework to allow those employers offering it to their staff take part in the campaign.

3.3 Embedded customer service training that meets the best practice framework

There are a number of wider areas of provision, where customer service is embedded, such as cross sector provision e.g. supervisory and management programmes or sector-specific provision, or an explicit unit within a larger qualification e.g. Aviation Operations on the Ground, Level 2 Operational Services, Level 3 Leisure Management, Level 4 Managing Sport and Active Leisure. Customer service content should be matched by SSCs and/or the ICS against the framework to increase the quality and relevance of that provision.

SSCs should look to ensure that all relevant qualifications (such as the Personal Best qualification) that contain relevant sized customer service units should consider using the 'core' content described in this research.

3.4 In house provision that meets the best practice framework

There is increasing demand from employers to make qualifications more relevant and add value by matching their in-house training to them. Often larger operators have developed their in-house training mechanisms and work with a learning provider, awarding body or SSC to match their training against National Occupational Standards or specific qualifications. Once the framework has been operationalised

there is potential for SSCs and/or National Skills Academies to encourage employers to match their programmes to the framework. This will allow employers to understand how their training programmes match against best practice and help improve their practices if they fall short.

3.5 Trainers that meet the best practice framework in delivering training

The framework should also be used by SSCs and/or National Skills Academies to develop and accredit trainers delivering sector-specific customer service training. This would aim to improve the quality of provision, building on best practice and helping support a wider cohort of learning providers to increase their expertise.

R5. Improving and rationalising existing provision, where appropriate

The research suggests the need for rigorous short customer service courses and qualifications that effectively raise the customer service skills of supervisors/line managers and front-line staff. The research suggests that improvements could be made to existing short courses and qualifications to improve their impact.

Qualifications can add real value to training programmes. They provide an opportunity to make pre and post-course work mandatory and ensure rigorous assessment. Qualifications can also help reinforce the importance of customer service with individuals and help professionalise the workforce.

There are different opinions across the sectors regarding the need to rationalise or develop new short customer service qualifications. Whilst some Sector Skills Councils welcome a range of short customer service qualifications others would prefer rationalisation of qualifications with similar content.

In the hospitality, leisure, travel and tourism sector it is recommended that two short qualifications (one for front-line staff and one for supervisors/line managers) are developed based on the best practice emerging from this research. All awarding bodies operating in this sector will be invited to offer the qualifications. This type of arrangement is outlined in the Sector Qualifications Strategy for the hospitality, leisure, travel and tourism sector.

The Active Leisure sector is diverse and would need a wider provision of qualifications to meet the demands for contextualisation seen in this report. One recently approved qualification awarded by CYQ is: Certificate in improving the customer service experience in the Active Leisure sector (in the context of fitness instructing).

Key elements within some of the existing provision (work-based assessment in the NVQ in Customer Service and an audition processes for trainers delivering the 100k Welcomes programme for example) are examples of good practice and could be included within the guidance developed by individual SSCs for their sector.

R6. Taking a consistent approach to the development of new qualifications and modules

It is recommended that ICS works with Awarding Bodies to explore the possibility of standardising content of short qualifications/units.

It is recommended that:

- units are fully shared across all awarding bodies so that Sector Skills Councils can pick them up in other qualifications under Rules of Combination
- there is an adoption of a consistent cross-sector approach to importing units and developing qualifications with customer service elements.

At sector level, SSCs should use the framework (see figs: 1 and 2 for suggested framework principals at levels 2 and 3) to guide the endorsement and approval of new or existing customer service training and qualifications relevant to their sector. This will help ensure that these qualifications are taking on board best practice identified through this research.

As there are currently no short customer service qualifications aimed specifically at managers in the visitor economy therefore it is recommended that new provision is developed in this area. It is recommended that ICS works with MSC and SSCs to build on the findings from this research to identify the content of NOS and/or qualifications. Any new units should be developed as shared units on the Credit and Qualification Framework.

In the hospitality, leisure, travel and tourism sector, People1st will work with ICS and interested awarding bodies to develop provision at level 2 for front line staff and at level 3 for supervisors and manager contextualised to the hospitality, leisure, travel and tourism sector. These will be developed on the back of the framework and ICS National Occupational Standards, and will be used for the Train to Gain sector compact for this sector.

The developing National Skills Academies (along with other deliverers) for hospitality, sport and active leisure, retail and creative and cultural industries should pilot any new qualifications that are developed as a result of this research. These could be used as testing grounds for the potentially more innovative and costly customer service delivery methods (for example: using actors for scenario-based training, customer journeys, NLP, e-learning, trainer training and empathy training).

Fig.1: Suggested framework principles at level 2⁹

Content

- Customer service training should be geared to two distinct groups:
 - Supervisors and first line managers
 - Frontline staff
- Short customer service training provision for frontline staff working in the visitor economy should cover the following 'core' topic areas:
 - The importance of providing excellent service
 - Attitude and behaviours
 - Identifying and being responsive to the needs of customers
 - Clear communication
 - Developing customer loyalty/repeat business
 - Complaint handling
- Training should be contextualised for individual industries through effective delivery, assessment and marketing.
- Cultural awareness, disability awareness, product knowledge, foreign languages and local knowledge should be embedded within short customer service training provision.
- Complaint handling, cultural awareness, disability awareness and local knowledge also warrant more in-depth training so could be developed as additional specialist units.

Delivery

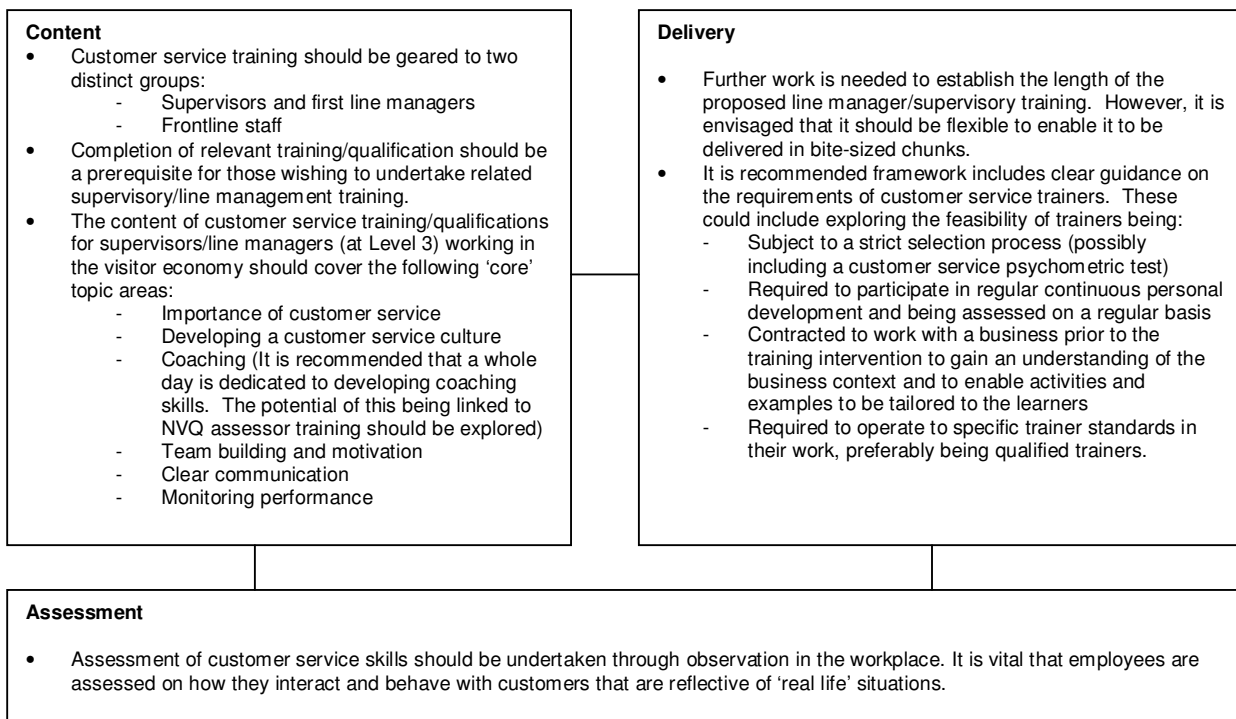
- It is suggested that 'short' customer service training that leads to a qualification for frontline staff should be 10 hours in length, at Level 2, and will be a single unit on the Qualification and Credit Framework. This should be flexible to enable learners to complete in bite-size chunks.
- The core element of training should be delivered as follows:
 - Pre-course activities (to be signed off by line managers)
 - Off-the-job activity-based training
 - Post-course activities (to be signed off by line managers)
- Short customer service training that does not lead to a formal qualification could potentially be delivered in a shorter timescale
- Delivery of the training should be motivational, get the message across, be interactive and based around group activities.
- It is recommended framework includes clear guidance on the requirements of customer service trainers. These could include exploring the feasibility of trainers being:
 - Subject to a strict selection process (possibly including a customer service psychometric test)
 - Required to participate in regular continuous personal development and being assessed on a regular basis
 - Contracted to work with a business prior to the training intervention to gain an understanding of the business context and to enable activities and examples to be tailored to the learners
 - Required to operate to specific trainer standards in their work, preferably being qualified trainers.

Assessment

- Assessment of customer service skills should be undertaken through observation in the workplace, if the candidate is employed. It is vital that candidates are assessed on how they interact and behave with customers that are reflective of 'real life' situations.

⁹ Within delivery of the framework, the stand-alone units or qualification will be banked on the QCF so that other sectors will be able to use them

Fig.2: Suggested framework principles at level 3



R7. Improving training delivery through CPD for trainers

The Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) funded Catalyst programme, being delivered by Lifelong Learning UK, should be expanded to meet the needs of those delivering training funded by the LSC to improve their ability to deliver customer service training.

R8. Working with employers to stimulate the demand for qualifications

Whilst many employers are training in customer service, the take up of qualifications is low in some sectors of the visitor economy, with employers preferring more informal development and training activity.

It is recommended that funding is made available to act as a stimulus to encourage employers to offer their employees the opportunity to gain a qualification. The LSC and DIUS should continue to work with SSCs to put in place sector Compacts that embed these qualifications in the Train to Gain offer. Including shorter customer service provision in the Compact could also encourage the participation of those employers who would not traditionally engage with initiatives such as Train to Gain.

It is also recommended that ICS and SSCs measure the financial and tangible impact that qualifications and training matched to the framework have on a business, in order to stimulate other employers to use them to address their own customer service needs. This work will build on existing analyses of return on investment on training.

R9. Embedding customer service in pre-employment programmes¹⁰

Customer service is an important component of many pre-employment programmes. Whilst the framework outlines the content and outputs of customer service training, the way in which it is delivered will naturally be different.

SSCs should work with organisations like the Employer Accord in London and Local Employment Partnerships to ensure that a longer delivery method for sector-relevant customer service within these programmes can be developed to support jobseekers reach excellent standards of customer service.

¹⁰ This recommendation does not apply to the retail sector where Skillsmart has successfully established a pre-employment programme called 'Retail Works'