

ACTION FOR BUSINESS COLLEGES
EMPLOYER SATISFACTION INDEX 2005

Crawley College

On behalf of:

Learning and Skills Council, Sussex

by:

STEP AHEAD RESEARCH

September 2005

Greenacre Court
Station Road
Burgess Hill
West Sussex
RH15 9DS
Tel No. 01444 259185

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- This report presents the findings of the 2005 Employer Satisfaction Survey, the main aim of which was to gather feedback from employers on their use of and satisfaction with training provided by Crawley College and to compare this with a Sussex benchmark for all 7 Action for Business Colleges (A4BCs)¹.
- Measuring employer satisfaction is a vitally important activity for A4BCs in order for them to be responsive to the needs of their clients over time and to recognise those areas in which they are currently providing best practice. It also gives Colleges a method by which they can identify opportunities and priorities for improving the service they provide to employers. This understanding can be used to develop and improve services, systems, procedures and staff.
- A total of 101 interviews were undertaken with employers that had engaged with Crawley College over the past year.
- On the whole, employers who had used Crawley College for training were 'quite satisfied' or 'satisfied' with the level and quality of service that they had received. 95% of employers felt that their expectations had been met and 95% would recommend the College to other employers. The aspects of the relationship that employers were most satisfied with were:
 - the efficiency of the enrolment and payment processes
 - the facilities provided by the College
 - the level of knowledge and experience of the staff
- Crawley College's Satisfaction Index score of 80.9 was the highest of the 7 A4BCs in Sussex and showed a marked improvement on 2004 of 13 percentage points (above the average 6 point rise for all A4BCs in Sussex). Only one of the 101 employers surveyed for Crawley College indicated that overall they were dissatisfied with the service provided and satisfaction measures across a variety of elements consistently showed Crawley College above the Sussex average.
- The aspects of the relationship that employers were least satisfied with were:
 - the College's understanding of issues facing the employer organisation
 - feedback provided by Crawley College on employee progress
 - the impact of training on business performance
- 'Feedback on employee progress' in particular was identified as a Priority for Improvement through an analysis of relative satisfaction levels and perceived importance by employers and by the specific comments of employers about improvements they would like to see.
- There were some differences in the satisfaction scores given by different types of employers across Sussex as a whole². Employers with 50 or more staff (78.2) gave a higher satisfaction score than micro-businesses, for example (72.7).

¹ For the purposes of this report all Colleges have been referred to as A4BCs. Currently four of the seven Colleges have been accredited

² Analysis by the type of employer is for Sussex as a whole, as the sample sizes for individual colleges are too small for robust analysis

Employers in the health sector (79.3) gave a higher score than the employers in the manufacturing and construction sector (71.8). There were only small differences between the satisfaction levels of employers who spent a lot on training (73.8) and those that spent a little (75.1).

- Micro-businesses were less satisfied than other employers with the ‘knowledge and experience of staff’ and the impact of the training. This may mean that colleges are better at understanding the needs of larger organisations and that they need to communicate more effectively with small employers both to find out more about their needs and to ensure that their expectations are realistic. Manufacturing and Construction businesses were also more likely to report lower levels of satisfaction across a range of factors than businesses in other sectors. This suggests that more targeted communication about the needs of businesses in these sectors may need to be undertaken.
- Despite generally high levels of satisfaction relative to all A4BCs in Sussex, there remain elements of service provision where improvements can be made at Crawley College. ‘Gap analysis’ identified that in particular, better-tailored services to individual businesses achieved through better engagement and communication with businesses before, during and after training are key areas for further improvement at the College. The College should seek to ensure that from the outset employers are informed what levels of feedback they should expect, how to use it, how the training can be applied, what impact can be expected from the training, and how to extract this impact.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary

1.0 Introduction	5
1.1 Aims and Objectives	5
1.2 Research Context	5
1.3 Methodology	6
1.4 Satisfaction Indices	7
1.5 Priorities For Improvement (PFIs)	8
1.6 Outline of the Rest of the Report	8
2.0 Employer Satisfaction Index	10
3.0 What Crawley College Does Best: Measures of Satisfaction	12
4.0 What is Most Important for Employers: Priorities For Improvement (PFIs)	14
4.1 What Matters Most to Employers	14
4.2 Satisfaction Gaps and Priorities For Improvement (PFIs)	16
5.0 Satisfaction by Type of Employer	18
6.0 Other Measures of Satisfaction	21
7.0 Conclusions	23
Appendix 1 Changes to the Methodology in the 2005 Employer Satisfaction Survey	24
Appendix 2 Calculation of the Satisfaction Index	25

INDEX OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1: Sample of Employers	6
Figure 1.2: Satisfaction Index™ League Table	7
Figure 2.1: Employer Satisfaction Index	10
Figure 2.2: Range of Overall Satisfaction Scores	11
Figure 3.1: Mean Satisfaction Scores – Key elements of the relationship	12
Figure 3.2: Satisfaction Scores – Business Focus	13
Figure 3.3: Satisfaction Scores – Customer Service	13
Figure 4.1: Importance Scores - Key elements of the relationship	14
Figure 4.2: Detailed Importance Scores	15
Figure 4.3: Priorities For Improvement – Gap Analysis	16
Figure 4.4: Suggested Improvements – direct question	17
Figure 4.5: Range of Satisfaction Scores – Feedback on Employee Progress	17
Figure 5.1: Mean Satisfaction Index by Size of Employer	18
Figure 5.2: Mean Satisfaction Index by Sector	19
Figure 5.3: Mean Satisfaction Index by Amount Spent on Training	20
Figure 6.1: Other Measures of Satisfaction	21

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Aims and Objectives

Step Ahead Research was commissioned by Sussex Learning and Skills Council to conduct a satisfaction survey of employers that engage with the 7 Action for Business Colleges (A4BCs) in Sussex³.

The aims of the survey were to:

- Understand better the training characteristics of employers that engage with the Action for Business Colleges in Sussex
- Find out what factors matter most to employers in terms of their relationship with the Colleges
- Explore how well the Colleges are performing on the factors that matter most to employers
- Produce an employer 'Satisfaction Index' that can be used by individual Colleges to measure the quality of their engagement with employers each year
- Identify priorities for improvement in the relationship
- Offer conclusions and policy recommendations

1.2 Research Context

Action for Business Colleges (A4BCs) is an accreditation process and is part of the Workforce Skills Programme. It is supported by the Sussex Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA). The A4BC accreditation process helps Colleges to improve their capacity to identify and meet the needs of employers. The A4BCs kite mark is awarded to demonstrate that they are meeting the workforce development needs of employers. There are currently 4 colleges in Sussex which have achieved accreditation and a further 3 which are on the path to achieving accreditation. For the purposes of this report, we refer to all 7 colleges as A4BCs.

Measuring employer satisfaction is a vitally important activity for A4BCs in order for them to be responsive to the needs of their clients over time and to recognise those areas in which they are currently providing best practice. It also gives Colleges a method by which they can identify opportunities for improving the service they provide to employers. This understanding can be used to develop and improve services, systems, procedures and staff.

In 2003, SEER Consulting (now **Step Ahead Research**) was asked by the LSC Sussex to devise a framework for the calculation of an Employer Satisfaction Index for the A4BC network in Sussex. This framework has since been refined and enhanced. The 2005 survey is the third such Employer Satisfaction Survey undertaken by **Step Ahead Research** for LSC Sussex.

³ Only 4 of the colleges are Action for Business College accredited but the A4BC term has been used for all colleges for the purposes of this report.

This report presents a summary of the findings for Crawley College and, where appropriate, benchmarks the College against the average for all A4BCs in Sussex.

1.3 Methodology

The 2005 Employer Satisfaction Survey sought the opinions of employers who had engaged with A4BCs over the 12 months prior to the survey and asked them about their level of satisfaction with the service they had received during that period. The survey also sought to discover examples of best practice and areas for improvement in service provision.

Each College was asked to provide a list of contact details for all the employers that had sponsored employees to undertake training (either full-time, part-time or distance learning) and employers who had taken on apprentices, in the last twelve months.

On the basis of the last two Employer Satisfaction Surveys (2004 and 2003), it was anticipated that around 600 'complete'⁴ contact details would need to be provided by each College to achieve the desired quota of 100 interviews per College⁵.

The sample of contacts provided by Crawley College and the resultant number of interviews achieved are shown in Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1: Sample of Employers

COLLEGE	Original Sample	De-duped Sample ⁶	Interviews
Crawley College	1101	708	101
Sussex Total	9063	3871	686

As outlined in footnote 3, [Step Ahead Research](#) applied a rigorous de-duping process to achieve the final sample of 708 employers for Crawley College. The accuracy of the Satisfaction Index and other results from the interviews presented in this report are highly dependent upon the quality of the data provided by the Colleges, hence the rigorous de-duping process that was undertaken prior to survey.

Crawley College provided an original sample of 1,101 contacts. This contained 15 duplicate entries from 7 organisations. This meant that 9 (1%) contacts were removed from the sample. Analysis of the original sample suggests that the duplicates were due to different contact names being provided for the same organisation or different courses being provided. 35% of the de-duped sample did not have both a contact name *and* a contact number. This was similar to the average for Sussex. To achieve the quota of 100, 203 contacts were made and of these 63 (31%) reported that no-one from the company had received training from the College in the preceding 12 months. This was similar to the Sussex average (30%).

Whilst there may be a number of reasons why employers reported that no-one had received training from Crawley College in the defined period, this may suggest that

⁴ i.e. including a phone number and named contact

⁵ The quota for Hastings College was set at 50

⁶ The de-duped sample figure does not include incomplete/incorrect data (i.e. wrong numbers, unobtainable numbers, no number, duplicates and those employers who had not used the College for training in past 12 months).

there could still be improvements in the employer database, both in terms of ensuring that the data is up to date and that it has full contact details. This will help to improve the way that the College communicates with its employers.

A total of 101 telephone interviews were undertaken and this represents an increase on the 65 interviews achieved in 2004.

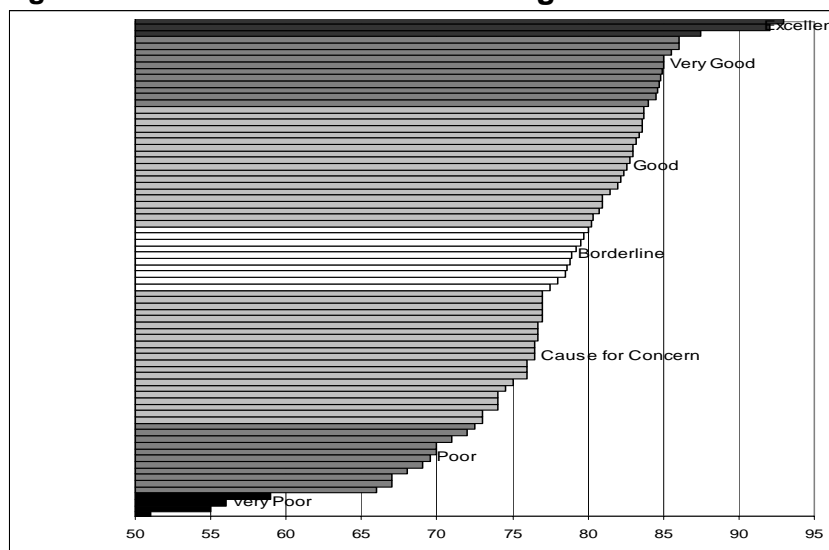
In response to feedback from the 2004 survey, a number of key changes were made to the survey structure and questions used. These changes were necessary to establish a robust benchmark that can now be used to assist Colleges into the future. For more information on how the methodology has been improved and how the Satisfaction Index has been calculated, please refer to Appendices 1 and 2.

1.4 Satisfaction Indices

As in 2004, we have created a **Satisfaction Index** both for each college and for the A4BC network as a whole. The Index combines employer's ratings of the College across a range of measures, from 'the knowledge and expertise of staff' to the 'efficiency of the enrolment system'. Furthermore, where employers view a measure as particularly important to their overall satisfaction, this measure is given more weight in the Index.⁷ An Index score of exactly 100 would mean that all interviewed employers gave a rating of 10 (very satisfied) to all of the satisfaction measures.

Hill, Brierley and MacDougall (1999) argue that when Satisfaction Indices are created in this way they are broadly comparable across different organisations and even different types of organisations. Through their experience of undertaking hundreds of satisfaction surveys over a number of years they have compiled a 'League Table' of Index scores. They argue that the precise nature of the questions in a satisfaction survey does not matter, only that they are on a common rating scale (1-10) and that they measure aspects of the service that customers feel are important.

Figure 1.2: Satisfaction Index™ League Table



Source: Hill, Brierley and MacDougall (1999) *How to Measure Customer Satisfaction* (Gower, London)

⁷ See Appendix 2 for more information.

The League Table ranges from a very small number of excellent organisations which can achieve a satisfaction index of 90.0 or more, down to a low of around 55.0. The median score is around 80.0, so a satisfaction index in the 80s is above average, and under 80.0 is below average compared with organisations generally.

The average Satisfaction Index score across the whole A4BC network in 2005 was 75.2. On Hill et al's League Table the A4BC network would be within the 'cause for concern' category. This suggests that improving satisfaction levels could have a significant impact on extending and deepening the employer base for the A4BC network. More satisfied customers are both more likely to bring repeat business to the College and to recommend it enthusiastically.

1.5 Priorities For Improvement

It is one thing to note that services need to improve, it is another to know where to focus scarce time and resources in order to do most good. Chapters 3 and 4 of this report seek to identify and prioritise the areas where resources could be focused most effectively. Chapter 4, in particular, highlights that it is not simply a question of looking at aspects of the service where satisfaction levels are low but rather where the gap between satisfaction level and perceived importance is highest. **Priorities For Improvement (PFIs)** are areas of relatively poor service that employers also report are important to their overall satisfaction, and by implication, their likelihood of repeat business and recommendation.

The analysis in this report highlights a number of PFIs for the College and for the network as a whole. However, it should be noted that *satisfaction surveys cannot give all the answers*. There is insufficient time in a quantitative telephone interview to explore *how to improve* individual aspects of the service in any depth. This is much more effectively achieved through detailed discussions with college staff and/or more qualitative discussions with smaller numbers of employers. Suggested improvements can then be piloted and reviewed.

Nevertheless, if improvements within a PFI area are effective, the College should expect not only rising levels of satisfaction but also significant improvements in employer engagement.

1.6 Outline of the rest of the report

The remainder of the report gives a detailed analysis of the findings of the Employer Satisfaction Survey for Crawley College using aggregated Sussex results as a benchmark.

Chapter 2 outlines the 2005 Employer Satisfaction Index and describes the overall satisfaction levels of employers using Crawley College. It benchmarks the College's performance over time and against the average for all seven A4BCs.

Chapter 3 explores satisfaction levels in terms of a range of more specific criteria and highlights the areas of service in which Crawley College performs most highly.

Chapter 4 highlights the elements of the College's service that employers believe are most important and through a 'gap analysis' identifies broad Priorities for Improvement for the College.

Chapter 5 looks at how satisfaction levels vary between different types of employers using A4BCs across Sussex.

Chapter 6 outlines a number of other measures of employer satisfaction, including employers' own relative assessments of different training providers and whether they would recommend the College to others.

Chapter 7 concludes with a summary of the key messages for Crawley College from the 2005 Employer Satisfaction Survey.

2.0 Employer Satisfaction Index

The Satisfaction Index for Crawley College rose by 13 points from 67.5 in 2004 to 80.9 in 2005. While the College's Satisfaction Index was the highest of all the Sussex A4BCs in 2005,, it would be considered only marginally above 'average' according to the Hill, Brierley and MacDougall satisfaction benchmark.

Figure 2.1 shows the Satisfaction Index for Crawley College in 2005 was 80.9 compared with 75.2 across all A4BCs. The Satisfaction Index for Crawley College has risen by 13 points (from 67.5 in 2004) and by 6 points for all A4BCs (from 69.3 in 2004).

Figure 2.1: Employer Satisfaction Index

College	Weighted Index	
	2005	2004
Crawley College	80.9	67.5
All A4BCs	75.2	69.3

Sample sizes: Crawley College 2005 (101); 2004 (65); A4BC sample 2005 (686); 2004 (427)

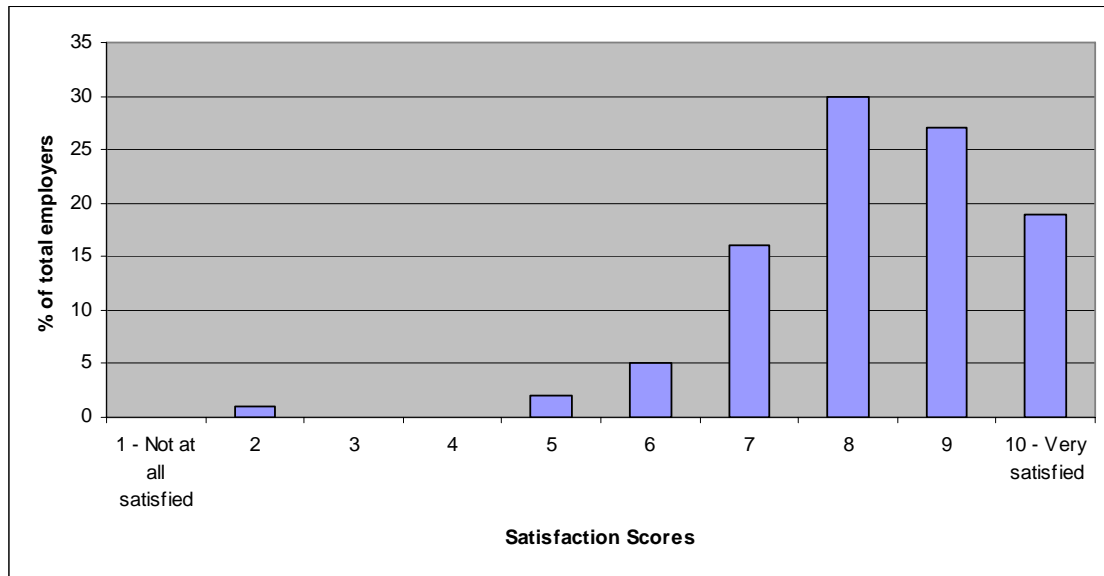
Crawley College's Satisfaction Index was the highest of the 7 A4BCs and represented a significant improvement on the results in 2004. However, an Index of 80 is considered to be 'average' according to the Hill, Brierley and MacDougall Index benchmark, suggesting that there is still room for improvement at Crawley College and across all the A4BCs.⁸

Employers were also directly asked how satisfied they felt with the College overall on a scale of 1 to 10 (from very dissatisfied to very satisfied). This showed that only 3 employers were dissatisfied with the service that they received from the College, but a high proportion of employers were very satisfied. This single measure is less reliable than the Weighted Satisfaction Index, however, because respondents find it difficult to consider all the aspects of a college's performance simultaneously

Figure 2.2 (overleaf) shows that just over three-quarters (76%) of employers gave Crawley College a satisfaction score of 8+ for 'overall good service' provided. In contrast, only 3% gave the College a score of 5 or below. The most frequent score given by employers was 8.0. This suggests a fairly consistent level of satisfaction with Crawley College overall.

⁸ Hill, Brierley and MacDougall (1999) 'How to Measure Customer Satisfaction'. Gower, London

Figure 2.2: Range of Overall Satisfaction Scores (Crawley College)



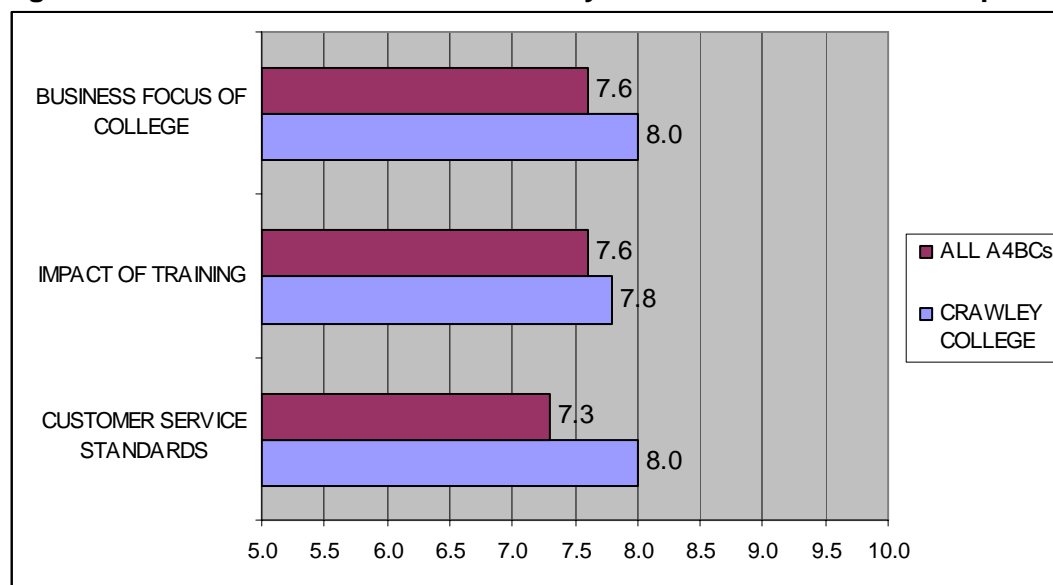
Sample size: Crawley College (101)

3.0 What Crawley College Does Best: Measures of Satisfaction

Employers using Crawley College were more satisfied with all aspects of the service that they received than the average for Sussex. On average, they reported marginally higher satisfaction levels on measures relating to the 'business focus' and 'customer service standards' of the college than with the 'impact of training'. Employers were most satisfied with the efficiency of the College's enrolment and payment processes and its facilities. The College had a much higher satisfaction index of 'feedback on employee progress' than the average for Sussex.

The 'Business Focus' and 'Customer Service' Standards satisfaction measures are broad composite measures that have been constructed from a number of satisfaction questions. Figure 3.1 shows that employers using Crawley College were 'satisfied'⁹ with all the main elements of the service provided by the College. Crawley College scored above the average for all A4BCs in Sussex on all the measures. Satisfaction with the 'impact of training' (7.8 out of 10) was marginally lower than for the 'business focus of the college' (8.0) and 'customer service standards' (8.0). Crawley had slightly lower satisfaction levels than the other two measures. Crawley had a much higher index score for its 'customer service standards' than the average for A4BCs in Sussex as a whole.

Figure 3.1: Mean Satisfaction Scores – Key elements of the relationship



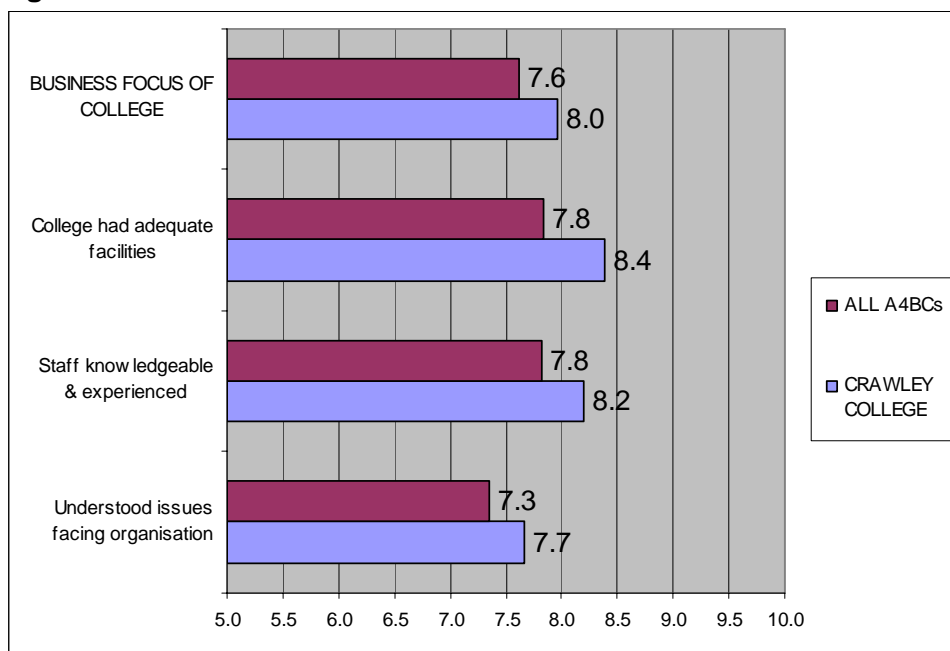
Sample size: Crawley College (101); A4BCs (686)

Figure 3.2 shows the factors included within the Business Focus measure. Employers using Crawley College were satisfied with both 'the facilities provided' (8.4) and the 'knowledge and experience of staff' (8.2). They were slightly less satisfied with 'staff understanding issues facing their organisation' (7.7). Despite this,

⁹ Average satisfaction scores above 9 show an extremely high level of customer satisfaction. A score of above 8 = 'satisfied'; above 7 = 'quite satisfied'; above 6 = 'borderline' or 'much room for improvement'. Scores of 5 or lower suggest a considerable number of dissatisfied customers. Source: Hill, et al (Op. Cit.).

the College scored above the average for Sussex for all the 'business focus' measures.

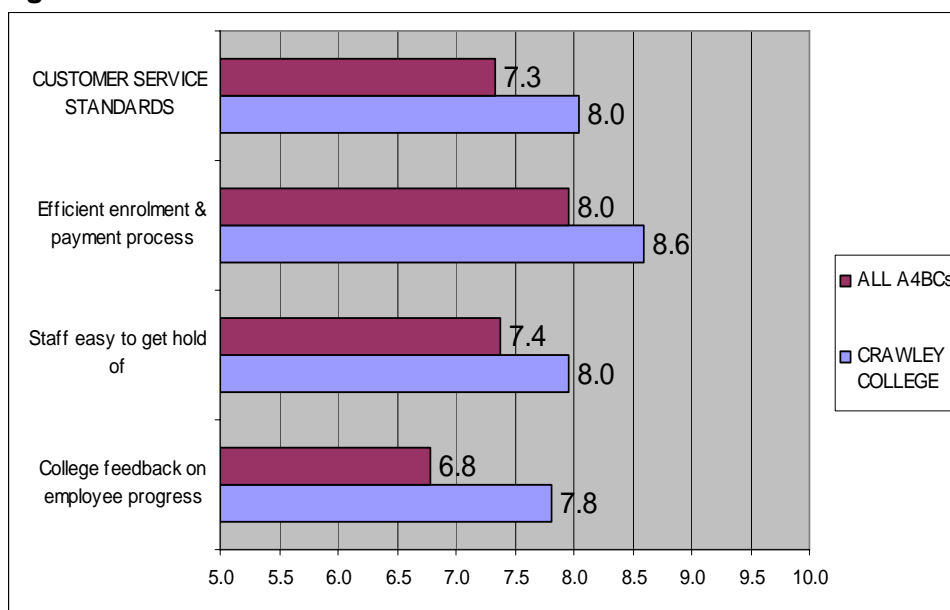
Figure 3.2: Satisfaction Scores – Business Focus



Sample size: Crawley College (101); A4BCs (686)

Figure 3.3 shows that Crawley College scored 8.0 on the composite measure for customer service standards. Employers were most satisfied with the 'efficiency of the enrolment and payment process'(8.6) and least satisfied with the 'feedback given by the College on their employees progress' (7.6). However, Crawley College had a satisfaction score that was significantly above the average for Sussex on the 'feedback on employee progress' measure.

Figure 3.3: Satisfaction Scores – Customer Service



Sample size: Crawley College (101); A4BCs (686)

4.0 What is Most Important to Employers: Priorities for Improvement

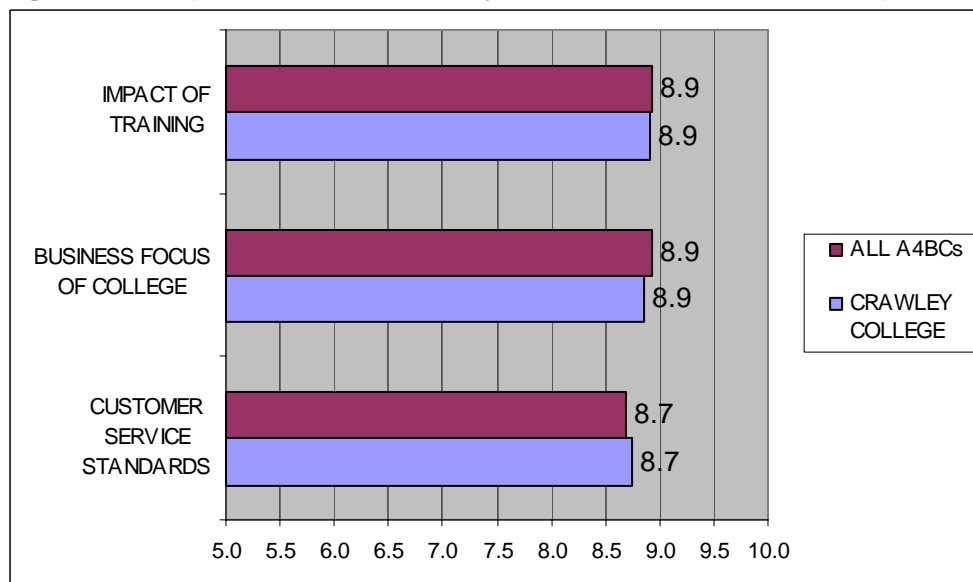
In order to significantly increase overall levels of satisfaction, Crawley College should look first to improve those aspects of their service that are both deemed important by employers **and** receive relatively low satisfaction scores.

4.1 What Matters Most to Employers

All the criteria that were selected for this study were considered to be important to employers. Using the broad measures, there was no difference between what employers using Crawley College considered to be important and what other employers considered to be important. 'Customer service standards' were marginally less important to employers than the 'impact of training' and the 'business focus of the college'. The more detailed measures show that the College's facilities and 'feedback on employee progress' were the two most important factors for employers using the College.

All elements of the service that were identified in this survey were considered by employers to be important. This does not mean that these are the only important factors for employer satisfaction, but it does suggest that the satisfaction survey and Index have a sound basis. Figure 4.1 shows that employers placed a slightly lower level of importance on 'customer service standards' than they did on the 'business focus of the College' and the 'impact of the training'. There were no significant differences between employers using Crawley College and those using other A4BC Colleges in what they viewed as important to the employer-College relationship.

Figure 4.1: Importance Scores - Key elements of the relationship



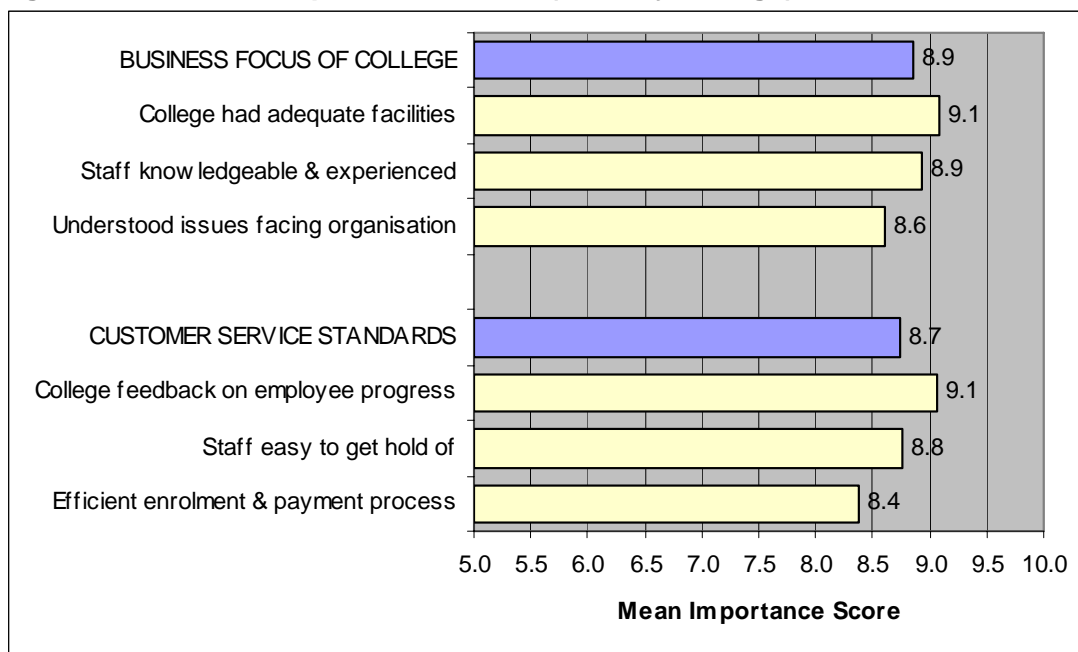
Sample size: Crawley College (101); A4BCs (686)

Looking in more detail at the factors contributing to the 'business focus' and 'customer service' measures, employers considered 'having adequate facilities' and 'giving feedback on employee progress' as the most important criteria in the relationship (see Figure 4.2). The average importance score on both these aspects

of the service was 9.1.¹⁰ All other measures were deemed to be 'important' (i.e. they scored over 8.0), although the least important of these was the 'efficiency of the enrolment and payment process'.

Interestingly, employers did not place the same importance on Colleges 'understanding the specific challenges facing their business' as they did the other elements of a business-focused service (i.e. knowledgeable staff and adequate facilities). Similarly, employers placed different levels of importance on elements of customer service standards, with the 'efficiency of the enrolment and payment process' considered less important than other elements of the customer service criteria.

Figure 4.2: Detailed Importance Scores (Crawley College)



Sample size: Crawley College (101)

Employers were also asked whether there were any other aspects that they considered important when selecting a College or training supplier¹¹. Nearly half (42%) reported that they did not take into account any other factors. Of those that did consider other factors, 31 (54%) reported that they took into account the location of the provision when making their choice and 12 (21%) mentioned the course content and structure. Course costs were less likely to be mentioned by employers using Crawley College than the average for the A4BCs in Sussex.

¹⁰ Satisfaction Survey Benchmarks suggest importance scores above 9 indicate factors that are extremely important to respondents. Factors scoring above 8 are important and above 7 are quite important (Hill et al, 1999 – Op.Cit.).

¹¹ The employers were not questioned specifically about the College they had used

4.2 Satisfaction Gaps and Priorities For Improvement (PFIs)

Crawley College's 'satisfaction gaps' were generally lower than those for most other colleges in Sussex, suggesting that the College performs relatively well according to different measures. However, there was a slightly larger 'satisfaction gap' for the 'impact of training' (1.1) than there was for the other two composite measures. The largest 'satisfaction gap' amongst the specific measures was for 'providing feedback on employee progress' (1.3). The satisfaction score for the 'efficiency of the enrolment and payment process' measure was actually higher than the 'importance' score.

By comparing the importance ratings and satisfaction scores given to different aspects of the College's service, it was possible to use 'gap analysis' to identify Priorities For Improvement. The largest gap and priority for improvement was also the area that employers identified as the being the most important – 'feedback on employee progress'.

Figure 4.3 shows that of the 3 *key criteria*, the satisfaction 'gap' was highest (i.e. a gap of 1.1) for the 'impact of training on business performance' element. The performance 'gap' for the 'business-focus' element of the relationship was lower at 0.9.

The 'gap' was smallest (0.7) for the 'customer-service' element of the relationship, suggesting that in this area the College appears to be 'getting it most right'. However, looking in more detail at the factors contributing to the 'customer service' measure reveals a mixed picture. While the College appears to be 'getting it right' in terms of an 'efficient enrolment and payment process' (-0.2), 'feedback on employee progress' had the highest 'gap' (1.3) suggesting this is a key priority area for improvement.

Although on average employers reported the highest level of satisfaction for the 'efficiency of the enrolment and payment process', this was also considered the least important element of the relationship between employers and Colleges. Despite there being some variation, gap analysis revealed smaller 'gaps' across all criteria for Crawley College, compared with the average for the whole of Sussex.

Figure 4.3: Priorities For Improvement – Gap Analysis

	Importance Score	Satisfaction Score	Satisfaction Gap
BUSINESS FOCUS OF COLLEGE	8.9	8.0	0.9
Understood issues facing organisation	8.6	7.7	0.9
Staff knowledgeable & experienced	8.9	8.2	0.7
College had adequate facilities	9.1	8.4	0.7
CUSTOMER SERVICE STANDARDS	8.7	8.1	0.7
Staff easy to get hold of	8.8	8.0	0.8
College feedback on employee progress	9.1	7.8	1.3
Efficient enrolment & payment process	8.4	8.6	-0.2
IMPACT OF TRAINING	8.9	7.8	1.1

Sample size: Crawley College (101); A4BCs (686)

Employers were also asked directly what improvements in service they would most like to see. 46% of employers provided suggestions as to how the service could be improved, which was a lower proportion than the average for Sussex. Of those who made suggestions, 15 (33%) wanted to see was improved communication with employers. This reflects the pattern across the A4BC Colleges as a whole (Figure 4.4).

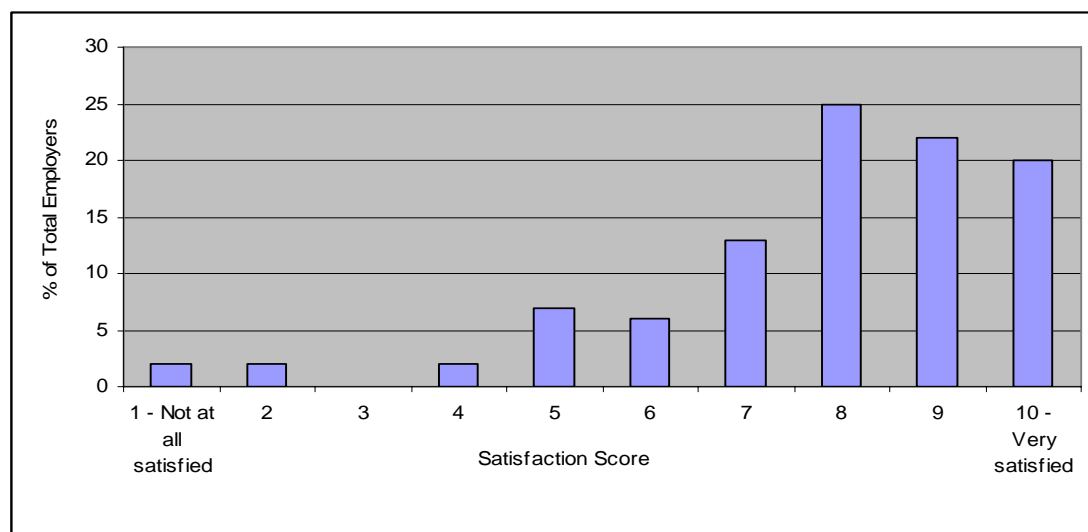
Figure 4.4: Suggested Improvements – direct question

	Crawley College		Sussex	
	n	%	n	%
<i>Respondents suggesting improvements</i>	46	46	409	60
Improve communication with employers	15	33	152	37
Provide better information about courses for businesses	7	15	58	14
Provide (more) courses relevant to businesses	6	13	42	10
Improve College/course facilities or equipment	4	9	22	5
Improve the quality of teaching/training	2	4	40	10
Increase course flexibility (i.e. times/mode of learning)	2	4	28	7
Improve course administration	1	2	32	8
Total	46	100	409	100

* Note: respondents could give multiple answers so the column may not add up to 46 / 409

Figure 4.5 shows the range of satisfaction scores given for the 'provision of feedback on employees' measure. Although Crawley College had a satisfaction score above the Sussex average for this measure, 13% of the respondents that provided a score gave it a low satisfaction score of 5 or below, while 67% of employers gave it a high score of 8 or above. This variation may suggest that levels of feedback to employers varied across different college departments or between college staff. This will require further investigation to identify the examples of best practice and to make sure these are adopted across the College as a whole.

Figure 4.5: Range of Satisfaction Scores – Feedback on Employee Progress (Crawley College)



Sample size: Crawley College (82)

It is possible that some employers are expecting a great deal more feedback than they receive and/or have unrealistic expectations. In which case, Crawley College needs to consider how to better manage those expectations from the outset.

5.0 Satisfaction by type of employer

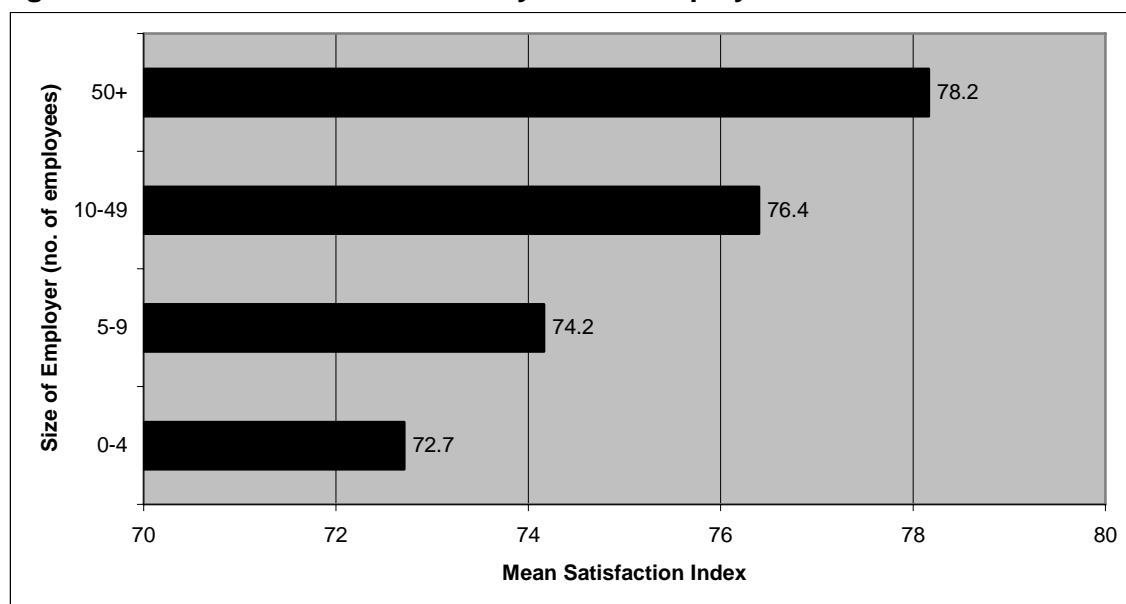
Exploring variations in satisfaction levels between different types of employer presents the opportunity to learn more about what employers are looking for from the A4BC network. Manufacturing and Construction sector employers, for example, appear to be much less satisfied with college equipment and facilities than health sector employers. Micro-businesses (0-4 employees) are much more likely to feel that the College staff need to update their knowledge and experience than larger employers (50+ employees).

In this section we explore the relationship between satisfaction levels and the key characteristics of the employers interviewed (i.e. size, sector, and spend on training) and some significant trends are identified. The key message however is not to chase business with employers more likely to give high satisfaction scores but to learn more about what matters to different employers.

It should be noted that this section reports on findings across the A4BC network as a whole as there was insufficient sample in the survey to permit this level of detailed analysis at a college level.

Figure 5.1 shows that, on average, the larger the employer the more satisfied they were with their college. The Weighted Satisfaction Index for employers with 50 or more employees was 78.2 compared with 72.7 for micro businesses employing fewer than 5 people.

Figure 5.1: Mean Satisfaction Index by Size of Employer



Sample sizes: 0-4 (174); 5-9 (128); 10-49 (247); 50+ (98)

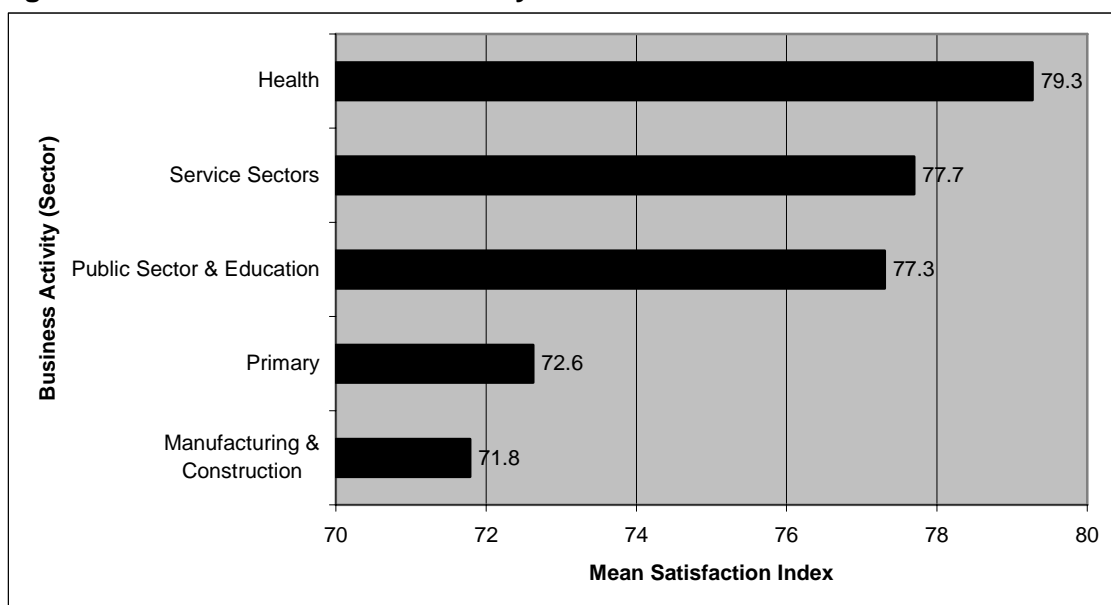
In terms of individual satisfaction measures, micro businesses gave lower satisfaction scores for the 'knowledge and experience of college staff' in particular (7.5 compared with 8.1 for larger employers). Satisfaction gap analysis reveals that measure also features as the second most important Priority For Improvement for micro-businesses. This may suggest that college staff are less knowledgeable about the needs of micro businesses and how they operate. However, it is interesting to

note that the difference between micro businesses and larger employers was less pronounced for the 'understanding of issues facing your organisation' measure.

The data also shows that micro businesses were much less satisfied that the training received had had the 'desired impact' (score of 6.9 compared with 7.9 for larger businesses). This could be a question of managing expectations. Sending an employee on a training course tends to be a much bigger relative commitment of time and resources for small businesses and it is possible that their expectations of business impact in the short term are unrealistic.

Figure 5.2 shows that there were also significant differences in satisfaction levels between employers from different sectors. Satisfaction levels were highest among employers in the Health sector (Index score of 79.3) and lowest in the Manufacturing and Construction sectors (71.8).

Figure 5.2: Mean Satisfaction Index by Sector



Sample sizes: Health (123); Service Sectors (285); Public Sector & Education (65); Primary (127); Manufacturing/Construction (134)

Manufacturing and Construction businesses were much less satisfied than Health sector employers in terms of 'satisfaction with facilities' (7.4 compared with 8.3), the 'knowledge/experience of staff' (7.3 compared with 8.4) and 'understanding of issues facing them' as organisations (6.8 compared with 7.9). Satisfaction gap analysis also suggests that improving the 'knowledge and understanding of staff' is the second most important Priority for Improvement for businesses in this sector (after 'feedback on employee progress').

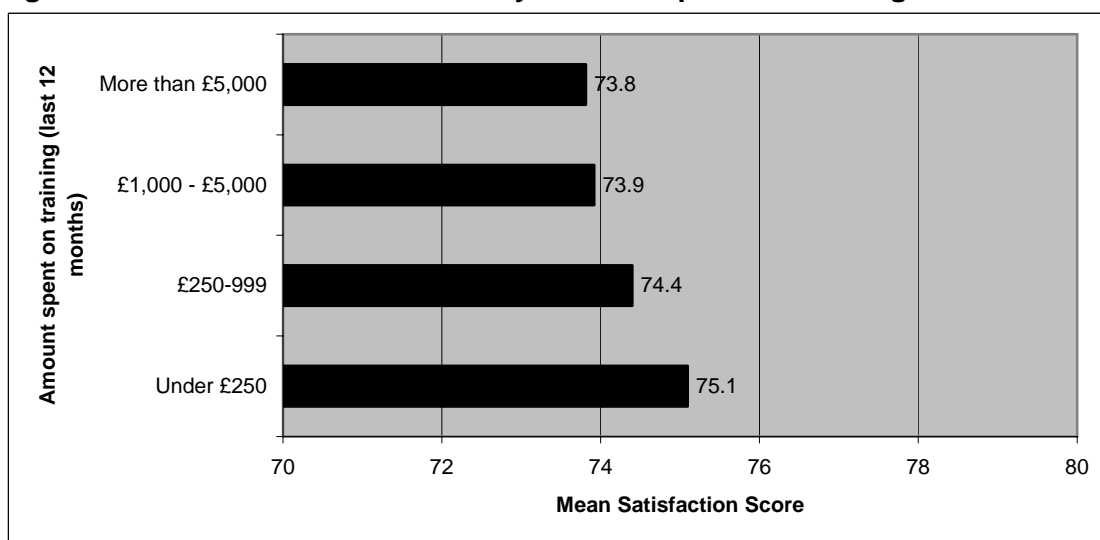
Assuming that most of these employers are sending staff on vocational courses related to their area of business (rather than on generic management courses for example), these findings suggest that colleges need to continue to update their facilities in Construction and Manufacturing. Colleges should perhaps also consider more frequent work placements/experience for staff in these sectors. However, further qualitative research with employers would help to understand these issues more clearly.

Satisfaction among Primary Sector employers was also relatively low with regard to the 'adequacy of college facilities' (scoring 7.5).

The study also looked at whether 'experience' in purchasing training has a role to play in determining employer satisfaction. The findings suggest that there is no clear relationship between the Satisfaction Index and whether employers were 'new' or 'existing' users of the College. Indeed, the Satisfaction Index score for employers who had used the College before (in previous years) was 75.1 and for new users was 75.2.

When we look at the amount spent on training (Figure 5.3), the data suggests a marginal relationship with satisfaction levels. Employers paying less than £250 for training had a Satisfaction Index level of 75.1. In contrast, the Satisfaction Index for employers paying more than £5,000 was 73.8. The precise reasons for this were not explored in the present study but one hypothesis is that employers paying nothing or very little for their training have lower expectations of the quality of the training offering and therefore demonstrate higher levels of satisfaction when those expectations are exceeded. Another hypothesis is that employers investing significant amounts of money in training are more experienced purchasers and therefore may be more 'choosy' and critical training users. These issues could usefully be explored further in qualitative research with employers.

Figure 5.3: Mean Satisfaction Index by Amount Spent on Training



Samples Sizes: Under £250 (93); £250-£999 (118); £1,000 - £5,000 (169); More than £5,000 (116)

6.0 Other Measures of Satisfaction

Crawley College compares favourably with the average for Sussex against a number of other measures of satisfaction. More than nine out of ten respondents reported that their expectations had been met and that they would recommend the College to other employers. Employers that used other training providers were more likely to report that the College compared favourably than to report that it compared unfavourably. Respondents who had used the College previously were more likely to report that their satisfaction levels had improved than to report that they had got worse over the previous 12 months. The quality of teaching and communication were highlighted by employers reporting both favourably and unfavourably on their experience of the College.

Figure 6.1 shows the headline results for two other measures of satisfaction used in the 2005 Employer Satisfaction Survey. Employers using Crawley College (95%) were more likely to report that their expectations had been met than the average for Sussex (85%). They were also more likely to recommend Crawley College to another employer (95%) than the average for Sussex (88%). Of the 5 employers who felt that their expectations had not been met, 2 cited 'a lack of feedback or follow up',

Figure 6.1: Other Measures of Satisfaction

	Crawley College (%)	A4BC Sussex (%)
Whether Expectations were Met	N=101	N=686
Met	95	85
Not Met	5	15
Whether Would Recommend College	N=101	N=686
Yes	95	88
No	3	9
Don't Know	2	3

Of the 61 employers who had used the College the previous year, 19 (31%) reported that their levels of satisfaction had improved. This was higher than the average for Sussex (26%). Three (5%) employers reported that their levels of satisfaction had got worse, which was lower than the average for Sussex (13%). For the 3 employers that said their level of satisfaction had got worse, two cited poorer communication and the other information and advice about the course or College as reasons for their response.

For the 31% of employers who reported that their level of satisfaction had improved, the most frequently cited reason was also better communication, followed by the quality of teaching and the administration at the College.

Forty-nine employers reported that they had used other Colleges/training providers in addition to Crawley College. Eight (16%) compared Crawley College favourably in comparison and 5 (10%) compared the College unfavourably. Of the 5 employers, who thought that Crawley College performed relatively poorly, the two employers giving reasons reported that this was because of poor communication and flexibility of courses. Half of those employers who thought Crawley College was better than other providers highlighted the quality of training as an important factor.

The comments of employers who thought Crawley College compared favourably with other providers or who had seen an improvement in their relationship with the

College over the last year suggested that its key strengths were the quality of its teaching and training and its level of communication with employers.

The high proportion of employers reporting that their expectations were met by Crawley College suggests that the College is providing the type and quality of service that is required by employers and that its clients are given realistic expectations of this service at the outset.

7.0 Conclusions

In the main, employers who had used Crawley College for training were quite satisfied or satisfied with the overall level and quality of service they had received. Some 95% of employers felt that their expectations had been met and 95% said that they would recommend the College to other employers. Employers were most satisfied with the 'efficient enrolment and payment process' at the College, the 'facilities provided' and the 'level of knowledge and experience amongst the staff'.

Crawley College's Satisfaction Index score of 80.9 was the highest of the 7 A4BCs in Sussex and showed a marked improvement on 2004 of 13 points (compared with a 6 point rise for all A4BCs). Only three of the 101 employers surveyed for Crawley College gave an overall satisfaction rating of five or below, suggesting that the level of dissatisfaction with the College is low. Satisfaction measures across a variety of elements of the service to employers consistently showed Crawley above the average for Sussex A4BCs. Compared to the Sussex average, there was more consistency in satisfaction levels, both across different elements of service and between different employers. In contrast to some other Colleges, this suggests that good practice is shared throughout the College and between departments to provide a consistent level and quality of service.

Satisfaction gap analysis shows that the College is 'getting it right' (i.e. where the gap between perceived performance and importance is narrowest) with its 'efficient enrolment and payment process' and is closer to 'getting it right' across a range of measures than a number of other A4BC colleges.

The aspect of the relationship that employers were least satisfied with was the College's 'understanding of issues facing the organisation', but 'feedback on employee progress' and the 'impact of training on business performance' were also highlighted had slightly lower satisfaction levels than other aspects of the service. The 'satisfaction gap' analysis highlighted that the main area for improvement was providing better feedback on employee progress. Although Crawley College scored well on this aspect of the service compared to the average for Sussex, employers using Crawley College ranked this as the most important aspect of the service that they received. This suggests that there continues to be room to improve this aspect of the service.

Despite generally high levels of satisfaction compared to all A4BCs in Sussex, there remain elements of service provision where improvements can be made at Crawley College. In particular, tailored services to individual businesses achieved through better engagement and communication with businesses, before training (through better understanding needs and establishing the potential for impact), during training (with regular and useful feedback) and after training (through assistance in implementing and benefiting from the training provided).

The College should seek to ensure that from the outset employers are informed about the type and level of feedback they should expect, how to use it, how the training can be applied, what impact can be expected from the training and how to extract this impact. Some form of training 'contract' or agreement may be appropriate. Crawley College may also wish to consider reviewing their 'aftercare' services, providing employers with advice and examples of how they might apply the training in the workplace.

Finally, the data sent to Step Ahead Research for this survey suggests that there could still be some improvements made in ensuring the College's employer contact details are kept up to date and accurate. This is likely to help the College to improve its communication with its customers.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Changes to the Methodology in the 2005 Employer Satisfaction Survey

There have been a number of minor changes to the A4BC Employer Satisfaction Survey since 2004. Firstly, there has been a change in the number of relationship measures used to calculate the Satisfaction Index. In 2004, the Index was calculated on the basis of employers' responses to 10 key relationship measures. However, three measures were removed from the 2005 questionnaire because they were deemed to be too similar to other measures in the list to represent different facets of A4BC service.

As part of the analysis, two amalgamated variables were also created to simplify the feedback and highlight key aspects of the satisfaction with College performance. These measures were 'business focus of the College' and 'customer service standards'. They were calculated as weighted means of the following ratings questions.

Business-focused elements of the relationship

- They [the College] understand the key aspects and issues facing your organisation
- The staff are knowledgeable and have relevant experience
- The College has adequate facilities to meet your needs

Customer service elements of the relationship

- The enrolment and payment processes at the College are efficient and straightforward
- The staff are easy to get hold of if you need to speak to them
- The College gives you feedback on how the employee is progressing during the course

In addition, the 2005 survey has seen the inclusion of six new questions to further explore employer satisfaction and to determine the experience of employers in purchasing training.

APPENDIX 2

Calculation of the Satisfaction Index

For each aspect of the relationship, the employer was asked to rank its importance using a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being very important and 1 being not at all important) so that it is possible to identify what matters most to employers in their relationship with the colleges (i.e. the 'importance rating')¹². Employers were then asked to rank their satisfaction on each of the same key aspects, again on a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being very satisfied and 1 being not at all satisfied), in order to identify what areas of the relationship they are most satisfied with (i.e. the 'satisfaction score'). The importance score was used to produce a 'weighting factor' which was applied to the satisfaction scores. A two stage process then created weighted means first for the broad composite measures ('Business Focus' and Customer Service Standards') and then for a Satisfaction Index, incorporating the composite measures, the impact measure and overall satisfaction.¹³ This two stage process was adopted so as to give the impact of training equal weight to the two composite measures..

¹² The order in which the list of options was read out was rotated each time to avoid loading/skewing of responses.

¹³ The measure of 'overall satisfaction with the provision of training' is given a neutral weight