Research was carried out among serviced accommodation establishments in England to inform the Common Standards review being undertaken by the National Tourist Boards. This was the first stage of a research programme which will also include qualitative and quantitative research among consumers to provide a complete picture of attitudes to the star rating system.

Methodology

The survey was carried out using a self-completion methodology, with all members of the VE grading scheme for self-catering accommodation invited to participate – in total, 5,649 respondents received an invitation. 25% of these completed the questionnaire – most (1,221) online, and the remainder (201) via a postal survey.

Fieldwork was conducted from 18th January – 29th January 2010.

Summary of Findings

Impact on Business

In general, owners agree that being a member of the VisitEngland Quality Assessment Scheme is good for business. 9-in-10 owners say that having a star rating improves business with 1-in-5 agreeing that it does so to a great extent. A similar proportion, 4-in-5 owners, say that awards like VisitEngland’s Gold award are not only helpful for consumers but are good for business too.

The Assessment

The vast majority of owners seem satisfied with the grading they were given having received the star rating they had expected. Only 10% of owners say that their businesses were rated lower than they had anticipated. Although most owners (3/4) agree that having an annual assessment is about the right frequency, ¼ feel that the assessment is too frequent. A large proportion of owners who would like the assessment to be less often say that their preference would be for it to be every two years. Around 8-in-10 agree that being assessed using common standards is a positive change for both consumers and businesses alike.
Rating Criteria

Overall, owners were divided over whether for a business to be awarded a 3-star grading, all areas (not “the majority”) need to be of that standard. Most owners think that a property offering sofa beds as part of the advertised letting should be awarded a maximum of a 3 star rating. Nearly half of operators think it should be mandatory to have a freezer at 3 star level and above. Just under a third of owners think it shouldn’t be requirement to have a separate bath and shower.

Although most owners (4-in-5) support the use of user reviews on the VisitEngland website, a smaller proportion (just over 3-in-5) support the inclusion of the establishment’s website in the quality assessment. Over half think that it shouldn’t be a requirement to have internet access as part of the quality assessment.

Sustainability / Accessibility

Most (83%) felt that it was important to conduct their business in a sustainable way. Just under half (47%) said that they thought that the current quality scheme took sufficient account of environmentally friendly practice but it should also be noted that 27% weren’t sure if it did or not. The same proportion (47%) said that if basic sustainability criteria were to be added to the scheme they would make the changes as long as the costs were within reason while a further 11% say they would not need to make any changes to meet sustainability criteria. However, 11% would refuse to make any changes and say they would leave the scheme as a result.

60% of owners say that it is important that their property is able to accommodate guests with accessibility needs. Nevertheless, over half think that accessibility should not be included in the quality standards. As a result, over 1-in-5 owners would leave the scheme if they had to make any changes to meet accessibility criteria.

Future “Wish List”

Around 1-in-3 owners want to see changes made to the grading scheme. However, a similar proportion say they ‘don’t know’ if they would like to see aspects of the scheme changed.

Among those requesting change, some of the most frequently mentioned concerns were around taking into consideration the individual character of the property (15%), having better consistency from assessors (12%) and including welcome as part of the scheme (11%). Other aspects which owners spontaneously mentioned included taking into account the location of the property and reducing the cost of membership.

Comparison between self-catering and serviced accommodation

VisitEngland has also conducted similar research amongst the serviced accommodation sector as part of the Common Standards review and there are some interesting differences in the results. For example, self-catering owners are significantly more likely than serviced accommodation providers to say that the quality assessment is too frequent (24% vs. 11%). Self-catering owners are also more likely than serviced accommodation businesses to say that having a star rating improves levels of business (89% self-catering vs. 77% of serviced).

Serviced accommodation businesses would be more willing than self-catering operators would to make changes to their business in order to meet basic sustainability and/or accessibility criteria were these to be added to the scheme.