Common Standards Review – Industry Survey
Research Summary

Topline Findings

- Overall, the majority of members are satisfied with the QA scheme, and welcome the change to common standards and consistent use of the star symbol, with 3 in 4 claiming that the scheme improves business levels at least to some degree.
- The principle of designators is thought to be helpful, but there is room for improvement – most feel that “Guest Accommodation” is confusing for consumers.
- There is a consensus that quality must be consistent throughout – 71% agree that to achieve a three star rating, all (not most) areas of a property must be of 3 star standard.
- Sustainability is widely felt to be important, and as long as costs were within reason, most would be willing to make some changes if this was included in the QA scheme.
- Accessibility is much more of an issue for hotels than GA establishments, and this is reflected in very different views about willingness to make changes if this was incorporated into the grading scheme.

Objectives

Research was carried out among serviced accommodation establishments in England to inform the Common Standards review being undertaken by the National Tourist Boards and the AA. 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 either the VE or AA grading schemes for serviced accommodation invited to participate – in total, 13,346 respondents received an invitation. 15% of these completed the questionnaire – most (1801) online, and the remainder (217) via a postal survey. The majority of respondents (88%) were from Guest Accommodation (GA) establishments, the remaining 12% represented hotels.

Fieldwork was conducted from 20th July – 12th August 2009.

Summary of Findings

Overall Impressions

Overall, respondents seem to be satisfied with the current system and its effects on their business. Three quarters believe that star ratings have improved levels of business (within GA, those with higher star ratings were most positive), and the majority see the switch to a common standard as having been positive for businesses and consumers alike. Over 80% feel that the frequency of assessments is correct, and that an overnight visit is essential.

Designators

While the principle of Designators is welcomed as being helpful to consumers, there is scope for improvement – over 70% believe that the term “Guest Accommodation” is confusing, and that consumers don’t know what type of accommodation to expect. Some 2/3 disagree that businesses should be able to use “Hotel” in their name if not in the hotel scheme, but there is less consistency around some of the changes suggested in the questionnaire – opinion is split 50/50 on whether small hotels should be assessed using the same criteria as large hotels, with around 2/3 believing that Restaurants with Rooms and Inns belong in the hotel scheme
Grading

Overall, 71% of businesses felt that for a business to be awarded a 3-star grading, all areas (not “the majority”) need to be of that standard.

Views about grading differed by establishment type..

• Hotels (84%) were more likely than guest accommodation establishments (67%) to agree with the statement “the quality of the interior should be graded in exactly the same manner, whether the establishment is a hotel or guest accommodation”.
• Hotels were also more inclined than guest accommodation to agree that “awards like the VisitEngland Gold & Silver awards or AA Red and Yellow Stars are helpful for consumers” (83% vs. 74%)
• Agreement with including the establishment’s website in the quality assessment was higher amongst hotels (66%) than guest accommodation (52%).
...though the idea that user reviews should appear on the VE/AA website was equally welcomed by all (80% agreed)

Within GA, opinions were divided about whether private bathrooms should be a mandatory requirement at three star or four star level.

Sustainability / Accessibility

Almost all those interviewed (87%) felt that it was important to conduct their business in a sustainable way, and if basic sustainability criteria were to be added to the scheme, 2/3 of hotels and 56% of GA establishments would be prepared to make basic changes as long as costs were within reason – less than one-in-ten would refuse to make the changes and leave the scheme as a result.

Accessibility is more important to hotels (85%) than GA (just 55%), and as a result, hotels are much more likely to agree that accessibility should be included in the QA scheme (64%) than those in GA establishments (31), and to agree that they would make changes (at reasonable cost) if accessibility became a QA requirements (64% vs 36%)

Future “Wish List”

A minority (37%) of those asked said that there were specific aspects of the scheme that they would like to see changed – the remainder had no wishes for change (33%) or weren’t sure (30%). Among those requesting change, some of the most frequently mentioned concerns were around making the scheme easier for consumers to understand (14% say that consumers are confused, 14% want accommodation types to be more clearly defined), followed by concerns about how assessments are carried out – 13% want more consistency in standards / evaluations, 10% demand better training for assessors. It is notable that cost was not a major concern – only 4% of those requesting changes raised the cost of the assessment as an issue.